

Days of Our Lives

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The day begins with coffee. Depending on which of her selves is dominant at the time, Datan is wakened by a cup of coffee and the friendly domestic murmurs of her mate, or, in the uncomfortable throes of the creative process, she awakens early and alone and drinks her morning coffee in the company of a yellow pad of paper and the coffeepot.

In either case the coffee has been prepared the previous night. The members of this household do not awaken in a state of coordination, and entire cans of coffee have slipped from numb fingers in long-ago efforts to fix the coffee in the morning. Nowadays nothing more trying than pressing a button is required. Although she has constructed intricate introductory paragraphs by the dawn's light, Datan's fingers are less facile than her mind at this hour.

The several selves which walk through Datan's day are not yet awake either: the primitive creative substrate works happily and without interruption at this hour. Students have not yet begun to knock at the door, and neither have social issues. Her identity is still intact. Before long, the peculiar pressures of the workday will fragment it; but meanwhile — for today is one of the dawns of creation — she drinks her coffee and writes.

"Women and the Liberal Arts" — a peculiar seminar subject for a workshop on the liberal arts, and one which has nagged at her ever since she was asked to do it. She is herself the product of a great academic vision, the Hutchins liberal arts curriculum, and she can still remember the moment soon after her first classes had begun, thinking, "I've come home," and sighing like a fox which had found its den. Her new task, however, has not only robbed her of the peace of mind which she still — more than two decades later — associates with academic inquiry, but it is also irritating the raw nerves which she suspects are the new job hazard

James Redfield's paper, "A Day in the Life," presented in 1970 to the Danforth Associate Program National Conference, is the point of departure for my own. I am indebted to him for his remarkable portrait of the several selves who inhabit the academic day, which provoked my conviction that a woman's day would not look quite like his. This conviction festered inside me and finally found expression in my own paper, "Days of Our Lives," its title an acknowledgement of my debt as well as a hint that the incremental difference I suggest between the lives of women and men, the taste of soap opera, may not be incidental to the study of the academic day. This paper is adapted from a presentation to the Lilly Endowment Summer Workshop on the Liberal Arts, Colorado Springs, 1979.

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of the academic woman, whose constituency grows more complex each day.

Despite her misgivings, she accepted the task, for between the phone call of inquiry and her letter of acceptance, her graduate class in family development had its weekly meeting, and looking round the classroom she saw no married women at all. Divorce was the rule; one woman was widowed, and two were single. Only one male student was married; his wife had come back to school — a phrase which seemed to her just then to be made for women, and slightly pejorative too — just in the past year. “The Liberal Arts Can Be Lethal To Your Marriage,” she mused, and decided to accept the opportunities and the aggravations of the summer seminar. The demography of her classroom, she felt certain, was not coincidence. It was worth exploring.

In the morning of today’s day, the sun has risen into the dawn fog. The children in incomplete states of consciousness are moving around. “How could you fall asleep during ‘Scared Straight?’” her daughter asks, and immediately the Mother comes to life.

“Was it good?” responds the Mother. The film is a documentary of a program at Rahway Prison in which convicts shout abuse at young delinquents in an effort to scare them off the road to crime. Its merits have been questioned since the publication of studies showing that its success rate is much lower than has been claimed; there is even some suggestion that exposure to prison eases the road to prison, according to an article the Mother has recently read. By contrast, the long-established counseling program carried out by convicts at San Quentin has had considerable success; but a documentary on this program, also nominated for an award, was passed over.

The Feminist awakens and wonders: Are we so irrevocably dedicated to “masculine” toughness that we exalt it even in prison, at the expense of “feminine” gentleness, patience, nurturance? Must kindness always lose out to sensation and violence? The Feminist has just learned that a Housewife’s Bill of Rights was recently proposed to a congressional subcommittee. The Bill would divide income equally between a working husband and a homemaking wife, recognizing childrearing and housework as contributions to the economy; it would grant reentry women special privileges in higher education and the labor market, on the premise that a woman who has reared a family has made the same contribution to the country as a soldier who has defended it. I doubt if that premise has a chance, the Feminist reflects silently, while aloud the Professor is beginning to crowd out the Mother. “Studies have shown that the program at Rahway Prison doesn’t really work anywhere near as well as it’s been claimed to do. For some kids the experience really seems to bring prison closer.”

“I don’t see how that can be true.” Her daughter is sixteen, and beginning to need elbow room. “Those kids were really scared. You could see they had really changed by the end of the program.”

Damn it, listen to me — I'm a social scientist! says the Professor, but the Mother manages to keep her quiet and digs out *Newsweek*, leafing through the irregularly numbered pages of text and advertising.

"I could find that article faster than you — I know all about the numbering in *Newsweek*. Don't forget I work in the high school library," declares her daughter, whose own Professor is beginning to thrust out some buds.

"You probably could," says the Mother, but she finds the article by herself anyway, and hands the magazine over, open to the correct page. Her daughter reads the article, but there is no time for comment, for her son — eleven, teetering between childhood and manhood — has come downstairs. From his pocket he produces the most recent in a six-year series of accordion-pleated school announcements.

She reads the announcement of an impending field trip. "I *told* you it was called Camp Muffley, not Camp Muffey," says a voice which could be either the Mother's or the Professor's.

"Well, the teacher calls it Camp Muffey and the principal calls it Camp Muffley," observes her son, who has more than a little of the academic tendency to substitute citations for declarations.

"Well, it *is* Camp Muffley." Definitely the Professor speaking.

"Well, my teacher called it Camp Muffey," says the youngest Professor in the family, and turns with a Child's smile for a goodbye kiss from the man he has made into his "blood father," through a ceremonial mixing of blood from pinpricked fingers, her son's inspired effort to replace genetic ties with chosen fatherhood.

Remembering that ceremony, the Feminist thinks: I shall be spilling some blood today myself, in the creation of new kin ties: as one of us put it, we have married each other sentence by sentence of the marriage vows, tending each other through flu, allergy, bad moods, writer's block, speech fright; we have moved inch by inch to where we are going today, to apply for a marriage license. And to get blood tests.

"I guess I'm still young enough to believe in happy endings," Dean told her two and a half years ago, when he was only twenty-one and she a perplexed thirty-six, believing her friend James Redfield to be wrong when he declared, "When teacher and student get wrapped up in each other, learning stops," but not yet certain. She is more certain of that today. She read with interest Jessie Bernard's *Self-Portrait of a Family*, where the sociologist who had won renown for her indictment of the inequitable bargain between the sexes in *The Future of Marriage* observed of her own marriage to her own teacher: "The distance between a mentor-student relationship . . . and bona fide courtship is not great."

And now, after Dean's first year in the graduate program of her department, she has more confidence in the durability of the learning process. Indeed, of all the students, he is the only one at whom she can openly rage: "Look, shithead, it isn't enough to call introductory paragraphs your biggest weakness — you have to learn to write them

well.” The same message to other students, since it is not buffered by the rhythms of day-to-day living, comes buffered by diplomacy. It’s been a long year, though. It began when one of her students told her, “Be sure to thank Dean for bringing the carpets for us,” and the Professor stopped herself just before she asked, “Dean who?”

Soon it will be Dean my Husband, thinks the Feminist, and I shall be a Wife . . . a role she considers with no small dread. Professor, Mother, Friend, Lover — at all of these she excels. She has been told she was a terrible Wife. She burned with revolutionary fervor, although she believed it to be a combination of democratic beliefs and a lazy disposition, long before the bras of the late sixties burned: housework, childcare, and salaries split fifty-fifty, not always amicably. “You need to marry someone who will let you use your brains,” she was advised in the late fifties; in the late sixties, he tried quite literally to beat her brains out.

“What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life? The world would split open. . . .”

So writes the poet Muriel Rukheyser; here is one of those truths, and the source of the Professor’s swift professional rise, after the career of ex-wife struggling for child support was rejected. No, the Feminist is not surprised by the absence of married women in the Professor’s graduate classes. She knows too many stories too similar to her own.

She is very surprised, therefore, to find herself in the county clerk’s office, applying for a marriage license. She had forgotten how easy it is to marry, easier than getting a driver’s license or a passport or a mortgage, immeasurably easier than getting a divorce. “Like applying for a library card,” says Dean, whose hand didn’t shake when he signed the application; hers did.

Now I am eligible to be inducted into the ranks of women who discover after a dozen years of marriage that their husbands really do care about the softness of the bathroom tissue, or prefer Stovetop Stuffing instead of potatoes, and have been concealing these bitter household truths in grim silence. What am I doing? thinks the Feminist.

The reassuring image of Rosalyn Yalow, the Nobel Laureate in medicine, lights her memory. “One of the silliest questions I ever heard,” she is telling a group of participants at an interdisciplinary conference, “is, ‘How does your husband feel about your getting the Nobel Prize?’ Now, what kind of question is that? What kind of husband wouldn’t rejoice to see his wife receive the Nobel Prize?”

Listening to her, the Professor remembers the first convention trip she took with Dean, to the 1977 meetings of the American Psychological Association. “This might come as a shock,” she warned him: “I’m a national figure in psychology.” “It’ll be good to see you at your best,” he smiled.

But one of the conference participants turns to Rosalyn Yalow and

says, "That isn't always true. There are a lot of men who would be very threatened by their wives' achievements."

Rosalyn Yalow turns to her. "And you don't think," she says rather sharply, "that this is one of the most important responsibilities a woman has — whom she chooses to marry and live her life with?"

Ah. The Professor, the Feminist, and the Mother sigh in unison. A breath of air, a candle in the darkness, one woman at least who does not believe that women are programmed into helplessness. The Professor, the Feminist, and the Mother all distrust those aspects of feminism which displace the sources of personal unhappiness from individuals onto social processes. They are all wary of any strategies which help the individual to evade responsibility — they have developed enough of these strategies on their own, and consider them to be unhealthful. And they have a firm preference for free will over determinism. The Professor shudders when the young women in her Sex Roles class claim they have been programmed to nurture men.

One day a student in her class asked the Professor how she, personally, had escaped the pressure to conformity. She isn't sure, she told the class; she is probably an example of a failure in socialization. But in her heart she knew this statement to be false, an invention of the Mother's, intended to keep the Professor from intimidating the students. For of all her selves, the Professor wakened first, and was in trouble by kindergarten, when she could read and others could not, and for it was banished from the reading exercises. If her teacher had given her a copy of Richard Hofstadter's *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, she is certain there are passages which, at four years old, she would have understood without difficulty. She has always objected to the peculiar imagery attached to intelligence: "special" for "retarded," for example; but until she entered college — and every so often, ever after — she has believed in her heart that "gifted" meant "cursed." She thinks of the isms which have attached themselves to her like bumper stickers: intellectualism, Zionism, feminism. She has begun to think that each of these is simply another way of saying, "Let me *be!*"

Feminism (like Zionism and so many other revolutionary isms) is uncomfortable with intellectualism. The Mother wonders if the maternal struggle to value each child individually has anything to do with the feminist hostility to questions of individual merit and to the implied aristocracy of excellence. Each one of the selves of Nancy Datan embraces intellectual elitism, and there is no argument against it which has persuaded her. Not even the observation — with which the Feminist agrees — that all women have categorical rights, including pregnancy by choice and protection from domestic violence — has moved her. No, the Professor readily concedes that if all women were like herself they would not yet have obtained the vote; but she also argues that without "elitist" advances in contraception, obstetric medicine, and the freedoms gained through technology, women would not survive to vote.

This paradox seems to surround her. The first page of the 1979 Conference Program of the Association for Women in Psychology named the Professor as one of the conference highlights, and then, a few sentences later, noted that in keeping with the organization's egalitarian principles, titles would not be used. Highlights, thinks the Professor, but not titles. Karl Weintraub spoke some years ago of the peculiar tension in a university between the democracy of persons and the aristocracy of excellence. Perhaps what disturbed the Professor in the AWP program was that the tension was left unstated. But how would one acknowledge this tension? In a footnote? "We have Karl Weintraub to thank for first articulating the tension between . . ." No, it is better left unstated.

The Professor is as self-conscious today about what women do as the Zionist was, twenty years ago, about what the Jews were doing. For the Jews the problem was relatively simple: How will it look to the *goyim*? — a burden the Zionist escaped when she fled to Israel in 1963. And since her return to the United States in 1973, she has been wondering where a woman can go to escape *her* burden of self-consciousness.

"How will it look to the . . ." — who? Men? Other women? Family? Feminists? Who is the *goyische* referent for women? The Professor rejects as dangerous the frequent claim that women are a minority. They face many of the hazards of minority status without the solidarity of minority identity, and their lack of solidarity is compounded by the multiple audiences for whom they perform.

When did my plumbing get to be my ethnic identity? her several selves wonder crossly. "It never was and cannot be," declares the Professor, while the Feminist observes sadly, "It always has been, and you never knew it." Not for the first time, not for the last time, she listens to her warring selves construct the arguments on both sides, and she wishes, irritable and depressed, that she had been born into a different time, when the Equal Rights Amendment, like the Emancipation Proclamation, had become history. "And both had come true," adds the Feminist slyly.

The odd conjunctions in the academy of 1979 cause women a strange "ethnic" salience, thinks the Professor. Most of the academic women she knows are badly overcommitted, serving their own career trajectories, the multiple needs of women students and colleagues, and the many miscellaneous administrative and professional chores that one of her colleague calls "overhead." Overwork is more often true of the women than of the men, she thinks; the women are a hardy crop of survivors, who have made it past the obvious hurdles of family, friends, and perhaps even teachers, voices declaring that academic striving is unfeminine. These women have also got past the hurdle which the Professor considers to be far more dangerous: the soft seductive soothing voice which says, "Women don't really need a career." The Professor is absolutely certain there is not an academic alive who has not heard a voice within saying, "You don't really need this!" — after a faculty

meeting, or a long session over a garbled discussion chapter in an embryonic dissertation, or a disappointing convention, or a futile committee meeting. If these private voices within her male colleagues found cooperative echoes outside, the universities would be half empty, the Professor is convinced. It is unfair, she thinks, that men can never quit; unfair to tempt women to quit so often.

But, though this process tends to ensure that only the best, the brightest, and the toughest women remain on the job, heated feelings over affirmative action have created some strange embittered conversations between the sexes, and she has had her own. Some years ago, a male colleague from another department asked her, "Don't you think you'll be a little bit afraid if your promotion does go through that it's because you're a woman?" The Professor has a very small storehouse of tact under any circumstances, and this conversation was one which had already depleted her reserves; she answered, "With my record, my qualifications, and my potential, I'd be reasonably certain I was superior to any other candidate." But she wishes now, as she wished then, that the academy were as ready to accommodate her equally gifted but less outspoken women colleagues as it has been to accommodate her.

Neither the Professor nor the Feminist share a more common hope, that the day will come when an incompetent woman can be promoted as quickly as an incompetent man. The Feminist considers this to be a perversion of the principle of equal opportunity, and the Professor wishes heartily that incompetence in any form would perish from the face of the earth.

The Mother, however, is deeply troubled by the dilemmas in which she find herself as a consequence of this notion. The Professor's students, if they can tolerate her at all, take to her with deep affection and a desire for similar accomplishments of their own. More and more often recently she has found herself asked for career advice by young women students whose intellects are no match for their ambitions. She has never had difficulty counseling young men with unrealistic goals — she thinks of one who wanted a career in aerospace medicine, whose grade point average was 1.9 — but she is afraid that a realistic perspective on unrealistic career goals may throttle completely the ambitions of women who are perfectly well suited to achieve upon some more modest trajectory than the one now in their sights.

And the Mother has other concerns. She fears that any discouraging word will cause these young women to stop in their tracks and reroute themselves along the path which has been made so easy for them, toward an exclusive concern with husband, home, and babies, and the apparent security of an established role. But she does not believe all women are naturally mothers; she feels this job is more demanding than any other, though it is taken on with no consideration at all of aptitude or qualification. Moreover, the Mother and the Professor know that women who have never worked are a disadvantaged population in today's

demographic climate. The sociologist Alice Rossi uses the phrase "the new poor" to describe the women who, after desertion by a husband, make a sudden transition from a \$30,000 a-year marriage to poverty and part-time jobs, and often to welfare. Statistically, widowhood and economic privation are the probable fates of women who marry and never work. But how can the Professor tell this to a student of twenty, who may not believe in life after thirty, and certainly does not care to have her fortune told up to the age of sixty-five?

The Mother is even more troubled by the apparently universal conviction that "work" is performed in an office and punctuated by paychecks. We are masculinizing everyone in the service of equality, she thinks with distaste. "Women's work" — an unattractive phrase for any work which is unpaid and uninspiring, as though working for wages assembling a transmission on a Ford Motor Company assembly line must be more elevating and enriching than rearing a child or managing a home. "A man's job" — another phrase with many meanings, but none at all which suggest triviality or pretentiousness. One of the Professor's women colleagues recently remarked, dryly, "He told me I think like a man, and I was supposed to consider that statement a compliment!"

Thought is asexual, say the Mother, the Professor, and the Feminist in unison; the only real question is whether we have achieved equality of opportunity for women and men in the various ways in which thinking can be employed. And they know that this has not been accomplished. The Professor can run a conference, and indeed she has just done it for the third time, recruiting speakers, preparing a budget and a program, timing presentations and coffee breaks, organizing arrivals and departures, enforcing the deadline for the completed manuscript, negotiating the book contract with her publisher. But the only member of her household who can manage to orchestrate the timing of a multiple-course meal is her husband-to-be.

The Mother has never underestimated the significance of women's work for she has done it; the Professor has no illusions at all about the value of a man's job, for she has done that too. But the Feminist wonders, on behalf of both of both of them, how long it will be before the world ceases to discriminate between them. And the Professor sighs. She does not want to spend her energy on these questions. They were settled for her once and for all when she was sixteen, by Margaret Mead's *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies*. Oh! — sex roles aren't inherited, they're learned: information to be filed along with the knowledge that left-handedness is not learned but inherited. The nature-nurture war has heated up on the sexual frontier since the time she read Margaret Mead; certain contemporary schools of sociobiology now argue vigorously for the natural limits imposed on women by their biology. Photographs of spokesmen for this position show many wearing glasses, but the Professor is reasonably certain not one of them ever believed even briefly that the natural limits imposed on them by their

biology should keep them from reading a telephone directory or driving a car.

The Professor pauses to think. Twenty years ago she was on a different road, with a job offer from Argonne National Laboratory for more money than anyone has offered her since then, a fellowship through a Ph.D. in biophysics, and a peculiar feeling in her belly that she did not want her ovaries near a cyclotron. She walked out of Argonne and into the social sciences, and has sometimes looked back with longing for the simplicity and sexlessness of partial differential equations.

The Professor has just missed a meeting of the University Council for Women's Concerns while she was running the Gerontology Conference; the car is due at the garage for a comprehensive checkup on Tuesday, the day a student needs to meet with her on the outline for the literature review for a Master's thesis; the Professor is due at a special session of the Gerontology Center Executive Committee next week, only two days after she marries; and she has just been appointed to a University committee to select an untenured woman scholar for nomination to a special fellowship program, with the first committee meeting scheduled for the day after she is to leave for the Liberal Arts workshop in Colorado. Not an unusual set of conflicts for the first three weeks of the summer vacation; and perhaps the job at Argonne would be just as lively by now, with the public debates on the role of science and technology, the future of nuclear energy, and the public responsibility of scientists robbing her of peace of mind.

And after all, the Professor reflects, her own is the more vital arena. The shortage of fossil fuel and the problems of nuclear reactors will be overcome in time; but the allocation of energy for the tasks of love and work, by which Freud defined the healthy adult, is a problem in every generation. I shall try to speak for my generation, say the Professor, the Mother, and the Feminist, briefly united once more as the car pulls into the Oglebay Hall parking lot. Datan and Dean enter the psychology building and steal the last three quick kisses of the morning which mark the beginning of the working day.