

A constant juggling act

Work/family balance is an ongoing dilemma examined in a new book.

Elizabeth Allen reports

FOR every woman, motherhood comes without a map. She has the example of how her mother lived her life but that's a generation out of date.

She can look around at the mothering-work choices of her friends and colleagues, but they're not her.

Only she can decide how to combine — or not combine — paid work and mothering.

And it's easy to feel lost.

When Brisbane management consultant Diane Evans first confronted the work-mothering dilemma after the birth of her daughter Alannah, she found the return to full-time work overwhelming.

"When I had Alannah I had just finished my MBA and people just assumed I would go back to the 60 to 70-hour job," she said this week.

"But I thought there has to be another way to do it."

Evans tried part-time work but found it did not offer the same level of work satisfaction as she had previously enjoyed.

So she began looking around for "inspiration" and a different perspective. How were others managing? Were they? How did they do it?

Evans scoured magazines and bookstores for stories about women in a similar situation, and talked to other mothers. She was delighted to discover there were options and choices about work and family that she hadn't even considered.

But still it hasn't been easy.

Evans, 40, now a mother of three, has set up her own consulting business, working from her Wavell Heights home on Brisbane's north-side, and describes her business as a "work in progress".

But she also decided other mothers might like to read about the choices made by fellow Australian women as they navigate the often rocky terrain of combining work and family.

The result is *Mother Who?: Personal*

stories and insights on juggling family, work and life, written in collaboration with her Sydney-based sister and mother-of-one Sharon Evans, 35.

Some of the women are well known: Olympic athlete Nova Peris, ABC radio presenter Madonna King, singer Kate Ceberano and Democrat Senator Natasha Stott Despoja.

All of the stories are very different. The women include a single mother-of-two who is also a foster mother-of-five, a sheep farmer, a blind mother of two, an ex-lawyer turned full-time mum, a lesbian part-time detective and wives and mothers working full and part-time.

When athlete Nova Peris had her first child at 19, many wrote her off. But four months later the then-single mother was back at work and in training to qualify for the Olympic hockey team.

"I had no social life," she says in the book. "You're committed first to your child, then your sports and your work."

Mother and daughter slept on a mattress on the floor in a fellow athlete's house in Perth while in training.

Peris won gold at the Olympics and Commonwealth Games but daughter Jessica was "always part of the package", travelling to 15 countries by the time she was 11.

Now married to runner Daniel Batman, Peris has had two more children, combines motherhood with work on indigenous health for the Federal Health Department, and hopes for another child.

"I've seen the view from the top of the mountain," she says. "I don't need to go back there. I'd represented Australia at a senior level for 11 years. I was happy I had Jessica, Destiny and Jacky boy. And you can't ever trade your kids in for a sporting event."

An executive assistant with a large accounting firm, Tracey Keliher returned to work full-time after the birth of her first son but as a mother of two she now works four days a week and studies at night.

Teamwork with husband Matt, who holds two jobs, is the key to their household.

Matt picks the boys up from child care, cooks dinner and runs the boys' bath before leaving for work at 6.30pm. Keliher makes the next day's lunches, cleans up and puts the boys to bed before hitting the books. "The boys are great, everything is organised and the family/work balance is starting to work," she says.

But time together is limited and

they haven't been out together for three years.

"A lot of mothers, including myself, can put the children before the relationship," Keliher says.

Journalist and broadcaster Madonna King began writing books after daughter Madison was born and had completed two books by the time Siena arrived 14 months later.

"I had it so much easier than most new parents," King recalls. "I was lucky enough to have had access to care in my home, and if all hell broke loose I could pop upstairs and help out."

Today the girls, 3 and 2, are looked after outside the home two days a week and in their home the other three days while King is at work at the ABC.

Parenting duties are shared equally with husband David Fagan, *The Courier-Mail* editor.

Ros Martin has never seen her sons aged 16 and 14. But she lives with them, cares for them and works three days a week despite being blind.

It's been a hard road. She went blind at 24; her boys were born extremely premature; and her marriage ended. She also underwent a kidney and pancreas transplant. But her sons have lived with her for all but three years when she was ill. Martin considers being a mother a privilege.

"It was important to prove to people that I could be a mum, even with my health problems and disability," she says. "They bring me absolute joy. We have fun. We just enjoy each other, and I think that's what makes it work."

At age 30, Rebecca Edwards was a lawyer going places. Today, at 35, she is a stay-at-home mother of three.

Edwards returned to work part-time after her first child was born but after the second she resigned.

"It did take me a couple of years to develop the view that, as a mum, I'm actually doing what I should be doing," she says.

"I hate the cliché of 'oh, don't you need the mental stimulation?' Coming from what I've done in law, being a mother may not be intellectually hard but it is really draining physically, emotionally and in a way intellectually. I had more solitary moments or boring moments when I was at work."

Edwards believes we live in a selfish society. "The focus has been too much about what the mother needs or how the mother copes, while it's assumed that the kids will do whatever the parents decide. And they do. They

have to.

"But I think you need to look at it from both points of view. What do the kids need too?"

Edwards intends returning to paid work when her children are older.

***Mother Who?*, Diane Evans and Sharon Evans, Big Sky Publishing, \$29.99.
Available from bookstores or at**



FAMILY affair ... authors Diane Evans, *back*, and Sharon Evans, with Kyle, 4, Blake, 2, Alannah, 6, and Ziggy 1, and Diane's husband Barry Schramm, *left*, and Sharon's partner Denny Neave, *right*.