

five minutes with...

Tiffany Gilmour

Tiffany Gilmour juggles part-time jobs singing and storytelling for her local library network, and being administrator for her local church. Her story is in a new book about working mums, writes Julie Houghton.

HOW MUCH OF A SHOCK WAS MOTHERHOOD?

When our newborn baby appeared in our lives, the depth of love we felt was gut-piercing, breathtaking and heart-stoppingly divine. But alongside that earth-shattering love was intense sleep deprivation, feeding issues, anxiety and the fear of not doing it right, isolation, loss of friends and feelings of abandonment. As our kids grew, some of these issues stayed and some have morphed into new fears and anxieties, needs and issues. I lost my old identity, my career path, confidence, friends, my waistline and my memory!

TELL ME ABOUT THE CONFLICTS WORKING MOTHERS FEEL.

Societal expectations and workplace realities collide when it comes to working mums. Many working mums have a constant whirlwind of emotions whizzing around in our heads. I feel guilty when I'm working in case I'm somehow neglecting our children. I'm torn when I leave my children, I miss them when I'm not with them and I worry the children are not being nurtured or attended to closely enough.

When I'm working I feel guilty that I haven't done enough at work and I'm letting the team down. I panic if one of my kids is sick and I can't go to work. I feel guilty that I'm not earning enough money for the household. I feel bad that my husband has to suffer the financial burden of being the main breadwinner... the list goes on.

WHAT DO YOU THINK IS A WORKABLE COMBINATION OF WORKING AND MOTHERING?

I'm a lucky mum who has a part-time job with fixed hours, along with a second part-time job with relatively flexible hours. My employers are compassionate and accommodating. It takes flexibility and understanding on both sides to make a job workable. Having a plan B, C and D in case your kids are sick can lessen the stress. So could having octopus arms.

WHY DON'T WE SEEM TO PUT FATHERS THROUGH THESE DILEMMAS?

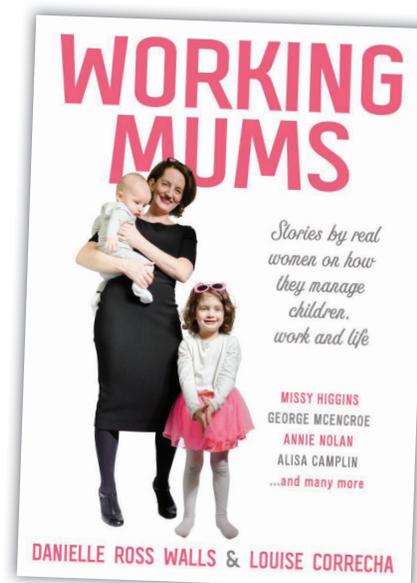
I think society is slowly changing. Many of our peers are inspiring stay-at-home dads who face similar conflicts with the added stigma of being seen as effeminate or 'not man enough' or just 'not being career-focused'. Having said that, many men's jobs and employers simply do not have flexibility or family-friendly hours and a lot of fathers are faced with little choice as to their role in child rearing.

HOW DID THE CONCEPT OF FAITH ENTER YOUR LIFE?

From ever since I can remember I've always felt there is something bigger than us, bigger than our material world. I searched throughout my life and eventually met Megan, pastor of our local church, who taught me about Jesus and answered so many of my questions.

HOW IMPORTANT HAS FAITH BEEN TO YOU?

As a newbie Christian I feel like I've discovered a fundamental part of me. Faith answers a whole bunch of questions I've been asking all my life. It's super-important to me. It's not a Sunday church thing. It's an all-week,



every-day thing. It informs my choices, my interactions, my life. Becoming more mature in my faith is a big priority.

WHAT GIVES YOU MOST JOY IN YOUR LIFE?

That's easy! My kids.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU HAVE FOR OTHER WOMEN GRAPPLING WITH THE MULTI-SKILLING THAT IS WORKING MOTHERHOOD?

Working Mums, by two Australian mums Danielle Ross Walls and Louise Correcha, is great for inspiration, motivation and practical tips. If you are a person of faith, let your faith guide your work and family priorities and what you commit your time to. And get a really big calendar!

Working Mums: Stories by real women on how they manage children, work and life is reviewed on page 13.