

# 20 SOMETHINGS

## then & now

A LOT HAS CHANGED FOR CAREER WOMEN SINCE THE 1980S. AND NOT JUST THE SHOULDER PADS.



**J**une 20, 1988. This was the day *9T05* first landed in readers' hands, dubbed "the magazine for your future".

My, how things have changed. Flipping through a musty copy from the archives, I found the usual glam celebrity cover girl replaced by an image of yachts in the water (greed is good), black-and-white print, and "receptionist wanted" ads calling for nonsmokers of specific ages (18+ or 23+?).

There was also an article on "becoming a top woman manager", with advice from Leonie Still's book of the same name. Her tips included to "decide whether or not you want a career; forget about the 'nice' jobs; and if careers are thwarted, find another organisation, which will allow further room to move".

It was the same year a heavily-shoulder-padded Melanie Griffith appeared in the cult film, *Working Girl*, about a secretary who steps into her boss's shoes, and Madonna released a remix compilation, *You Can Dance*.

Demographer Bernard Salt, also a commentator on the new SBS documentary series on Gen Y, *Nest* (starting June 28), says the '80s career women were a very different breed from those today. "They were certainly making forays into the workplace – they were completing degrees and becoming partners in law and accounting firms. There were female premiers and ministers. The women were paving their way, but they certainly had a long way to go. It was an uphill battle, but at least it was a battle."

Salt says typically women would remain in the workforce only until they had children – and then it wasn't so acceptable for them to come back. "They might have come back in the '90s or this decade, but it would be half-hearted [like, part-time] or in another career altogether."

Those who did juggle careers and families were painted somewhat negatively as "supermums" or "superwomen" and would feel guilty about their return to work – often culminating in them overindulging their children with material things. (Hello, *Material Girl*.)

Their predecessors don't have the same angst, according to Salt: "Twenty years later, the Gen X and Y women don't feel guilty about working. I don't think it really occurs to them that they can't achieve anything they want to. Though, there's still the battles and



photos: wireimage

# 20SOMETHING THINGS

continued from page 23  
conflicts with the odd dinosaur male."

University of Sydney media and communications lecturer Megan Le Masurier, who has written a thesis exploring feminism themes in *Cleo* magazine, agrees: "The reality is that living a tolerable life in Sydney today requires two incomes and, without adequate and inexpensive child care, losing one income for a few years can make life stressful and intolerable. Women understand this."

While sexual harassment didn't even have a name in the early '80s, it seems some things stay the same. Le Masurier says: "Maternity leave was an issue in the '70s, in the '80s, in the '90s and remains so. It is a scandal that Australia still penalises women financially – and emotionally – for having children."

Marriage was pretty much the 'done thing' for women in the '80s, still. "There was a lot of discussion about the point of marriage and

much talk about 'living together' – the idea of 'living in sin' disappeared in the late '70s. It seemed the 'liberated' thing to do. But until the law caught up with social practices – until de facto were recognised as legally entitled to a share of the assets in a break-up – most women still saw marriage as a far more sensible option."

Salt says the Gen Y-ers are more cautious about tying the knot, with the average marriage only lasting seven years and about 50 per cent ending in divorce. "Gen Y tend to 'hook up', dismantle and re-hook up in a series of sequential monogamous relationships. It's serial monogamy. Gen Y don't make commitments until the end of their 20s, instead 'road-testing' relationships. Alternatively, the Boomers may have been promiscuous for a few years, but they were still married by 21 and 22."

Sexual awakening was slow-coming in the

'80s – an era that said hello to AIDS. Le Masurier says: "In 1982, the G-spot became news. For women, it was both a blessing and a curse. For those women who did manage to orgasm through vaginal penetration, the G-spot explained everything. For the majority who didn't, the G-spot became an elusive cause of much anxiety."

Things are different today, she says. "There is no question that young women know more about sex, their bodies, and their potential for sexual pleasure than 20 years ago. There is also much less shame about masturbation, which remained a subject of intense privacy and guilt, even in the '80s. The other very positive change in the past 20 years is the accessibility and acceptability of vibrators. A girl's best friend. And most men are no longer threatened by this third partner in the bed. Technology has solved the orgasm issue for a lot of women. Men should be grateful."

For trailblazing, pin-up '80s girl Madonna, the reverse has been true. She has swapped the overt sexuality of her *Erotic* and *Bedtime Stories* days for a more subdued, sophisticated persona. Even mothers would love her:



## MUMS & THEIR 20SOMETHING DAUGHTERS, THEN AND NOW

DAUGHTER DIONNE MOSKOW, 26,  
AND MUM KARYN, 51 (PICTURED)

**DIONNE MOSKOW, 26, DIRECTOR  
OF POLKADOT PR**

**HOW EASY WAS IT FOR YOU TO GET  
A JOB STARTING OUT?** I was fairly lucky  
to find a job once I graduated from  
university. However, I think that this is  
because throughout my studies I did  
plenty of work experience, so I had a fair  
understanding of where I wanted to work.

**YOUR FIRST SALARY?** My first real job  
salary was \$28,000 but I negotiated to get  
it to \$30,000 a year, including super.

**MOST IMPORTANT THING IN YOUR  
LIFE?** My family (including my fiance), my  
business, Polkadot PR, and my friendships. I  
work equally hard at maintaining them all.

**THOUGHTS ON MARRIAGE?** Bring it  
on – I'm engaged and get married in  
February 2009.

**KARYN MOSKOW, 51, RETIREE**

**HOW EASY WAS IT FOR YOU TO GET  
A JOB STARTING OUT?** I didn't find it  
hard as I worked as a secretary in the  
morning (having learned to type at school)

and taught dancing in the afternoons.

**YOUR FIRST SALARY?** I earned \$140 a  
month working half days as a secretary,  
and \$150 a month teaching dancing four  
days a week.

**MOST IMPORTANT  
THING IN YOUR LIFE  
THEN?** My relationship  
with my husband, and  
friends.

**YOUR THOUGHTS ON  
MARRIAGE THEN?** I got  
married when I was 20! It  
didn't seem young at the  
time.

DAUGHTER MINKA  
ROSARIO, 24 AND  
MUM CARMELA, 48\*

**MINKA ROSARIO, 24,  
JOURNALIST**

**HOW EASY WAS IT FOR YOU TO GET  
A JOB WHEN STARTING OUT?** I was  
fortunate because I happened to know  
somebody in the media industry, who  
helped me get my foot in the door.

**FIRST SALARY?** It was a sobering

experience – \$28,000. (Secretly, I was  
expecting to earn at least \$40,000.) After  
all, I'd just spent the last four years slogging  
it out at uni.

**MOST IMPORTANT THING IN YOUR**

**LIFE?** My family and  
friends. However,  
career comes in a  
close second!

**YOUR THOUGHTS  
ON MARRIAGE?** The  
reality is I'll probably  
never get married and  
I'll probably never  
have kids, but that's  
OK. I don't feel  
marriage is the 'be all  
and end all'.

**CARMELA  
ROSARIO, 48,**

**CUSTOMER SERVICE OPERATOR**

**HOW EASY WAS IT FOR YOU TO GET  
A JOB STARTING OUT?** There were  
plenty of employment opportunities for  
anyone who had completed Year 12. There  
really wasn't a big focus on tertiary  
qualifications though, even for the

academically gifted. My best friend blitzed  
her HSC and was told she could be  
anything in life, but instead she sat for a  
public service exam and went on to work  
for a call centre – she's still there today!

**FIRST SALARY?** I was on about \$25,000,  
which was an average wage. My husband  
worked as a fitter and turner. He did shift  
work, plus overtime, and earned about  
\$39,000 a year. This was considered a  
good income back then!

**MOST IMPORTANT THING IN YOUR  
LIFE THEN?** It wasn't my career. Friends  
and relationships came before anything  
else. Our 20s was all about having fun. We  
were living the life Cyndi Lauper sang  
about in *Girls Just Wanna Have Fun*.

**YOUR THOUGHTS ON MARRIAGE  
THEN?** Most couples I knew didn't live  
together before marriage. There was a  
courtship, an engagement and a big focus  
on marriage and children. If you didn't get  
married in your 20s and fall pregnant soon  
after, I think you were looked upon as 'left  
on the shelf' and there was this awful  
mentality of: 'What's wrong with her?'

\* Names have been changed.

