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From Diapers to Derivatives.... And Beyond

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My three year-old son needed to go to the bathroom. We were on a roll with our toilet training, so with one hand, I deftly unzipped his jeans, pulled them down, and guided him toward the bowl.

No big deal, you might say. However, I was doing this with a six-month-old on my hip and a phone against my ear, talking to a very important hedge fund manager about growth in the credit derivatives market.

"Is this a good time for you?" the hedge fund manager asked. He was at JFK Airport in NY on a cell phone, with only ten minutes to spare before he boarded a flight to Hong Kong.

I looked around the bathroom.

"Sure," I replied as smartly as if I were sitting at a desk in Manhattan.

As a financial journalist, I am no stranger to credit derivatives. However, there's a difference between trying to understand them in a newsroom and a bathroom – with two small children in close proximity. But with a magazine article due in two days, I had to try my hardest to recall all my carefully thought-out questions on credit derivatives, then make a mental note of what the hedge fund manager was saying, all the while urging my son not to flush and repeatedly sticking a pacifier in the baby's mouth.

In the end, the story turned out fine, as, by some miracle, have most of the others I've written in three years as a financial freelancer.

I've figured out how to work relatively efficiently from home, and to parcel out my reporting and writing so I can get stuff done while I have a babysitter and my now-six year-old son is in school.

Of course, the important phone calls have an uncanny ability to come after my babysitter has left for the day, and I scurry around trying my best to take good notes and keep the kids quiet.

Despite these challenges, I am still lucky to be in the position I'm in, to be able to earn a living with my home life around me. I was home, for instance, when my daughter said her first word, and when my son stuck a small Lego piece up his nose and the babysitter went into a state of panic. I was able to bake seven dozen cookies for a Christmas cookie exchange at 2:00 in the afternoon, when the other working women in the group could only get to their kitchens at night after their kids were in bed.

Working freelance has given me the opportunity to travel around the world and live in different places. Still, my system isn't perfect. I would like to be able to make a complete separation between work and home while "working from home," but as yet, I have been unable to get out of the space where derivatives meet diapers. No matter if I lock my door and post a big sign saying "Mummy is working." Either the kids or the babysitter comes knocking. Friends with and without jobs call at any time to chat, and I'm often up into all hours of the night, trying to finish up my assignments. Because I'm home, I also feel more responsible for the household administration than perhaps I should.

No doubt, I'm overextending myself at times, but while there is no perfect formula for working from home, I would not want to be in any other position for now. I know women who commute into an office every day and do exactly what I do – if not more. I did it myself for several years, and I now know the difference.

Sometimes it isn't necessary to separate my work world from my home. Just ask the two MBA students I met in a New Jersey park one day who were struggling to understand what a collateralized bond obligation was. I may have been in sweatpants and sneakers, bouncing up and down on a see-saw, but because I earn my living through writing about such topics, I was able to help them out. – *Savita Iyer*