

OFF THE CUFF



Susan Swartz

## 'Mommy oldest' pushes limits of baby-making

SANTA ROSA, Calif. — You look at these new mothers, the ones having babies while their contemporaries are considering a chin tuck or a second degree and you wonder, "Do you know what you're in for?"

And of course, the answer is yes. If age is experience and experience makes you wise, then a pregnant 40-something should know what they're doing more than someone half that age.

Karen, age 42, is the mother of two — Elena, 6 months, and Rob, 24 years.

Here's how she weighs two decades of difference. She had Rob when she was 17 and relied on her grandmother, mother and mother-in-law to help out. Now her support comes from friends, many who are her age and with tiny kids, and her husband, Ralph.

Both Karen, a nurse, and her husband, a musician, can fashion their work schedule around Elena to avoid child care. Karen sees one drawback in her age. She probably won't be dangling from as many jungle gyms with this one as the last.

"I DON'T HAVE the energy level. My neck and back hurts. I need more sleep."

But the trade-up is greater willingness and patience to be a mom than she had 20 years ago.

"I'm so much more settled with her. With Rob I was unwilling to give up much. It was like he was an appendage. You come along with me. But I'm much happier to sit with her than go anywhere.

"Rob was always proud of me that I was the youngest mother. We are like peers. We know the same songs, the same dances. With my daughter there will always be a 42-year age difference. I'll have to learn about computers just to help her with homework.

"When she's 20 I'll be eligible for Social Security."

So, OK, but what about Paris?

"I thought I couldn't wait for Rob to get out of high school. Then I'd move on, do everything I said I couldn't do because I was a mother. But he moved out six years ago and I didn't go anywhere.

"I GUESS IT'S not important to me. What I love is to take Elena out to the garden. I look forward to going to little puppet plays and taking her to 'The Nutcracker.'"

Karen worried about the medical risks of a late pregnancy, but said the only difference in the two was more nausea the first time and "my feet hurt more this time."

Elena was born two hours after Karen got to the hospital. "I felt my body must have remembered. I did it like a teen-ager."

Late childbearing, associated with women in their mid-30s, was a trend first reported 10 years ago. Now it's the 40s. One magazine's report on pregnant 45 to 49 year olds was titled "Mommy Oldest."

With greater converts, the average childbearing age might eventually move to 35 to 45. Consider the impacts.

There would be more demand for daycare since older mothers often postpone childbearing because of their career, which they will likely return to. More silver streaks in the PTA but older parents may have more community clout and political know-how to affect schools and teachers. Less stereotyping about age.

ONE REPORTER suggested that pushing baby-making to the limits is one more way the baby boom generation has found to push back the limits of old age. You used to be able to estimate a woman's age by adding 25 years, give or take a few, if you knew how old her child was. That doesn't work anymore.

But what about this? If mothers wait until they're 45 to reproduce and their offspring do the same, what's the future for grandmas and grandpas?

It's not new for women to get pregnant at 40-something but when Aunt Shirley did it, the response usually was "Poor thing. Change of life baby, you know." It was generally considered unseemly, but for no apparent reason, that a woman in her 40s should get pregnant. Maybe they didn't think she should be having sex. Or should at least "know better."

Now, for Uncle George, it was different. For a man to have a midlife crisis and begin a second family wasn't rare. And for a man older it was darned near heroic. Old dads were rewarded with a wink, a cigar and Stud of the Year trophy. No one worried how he'd fit in at Back to School night.

"I know I'm more mentally ready today to raise a child than before," says 43-year-old Diane. She has a son and daughter, ages 20 and 24, but with her new husband, 16 years her junior, she wants to have a baby.

"My son thinks it's great. He always wanted a brother."

— Commentary by Susan Swartz, distributed by The New York Times News Service, appears each Friday in the Journal-World.

EDUCATION

## Show business tutor

Child star does his homework under guidance of KU grad

By MARSHA HENRY GOFF  
Special to the Journal-World

It was a homecoming of sorts for one of the staff members of Michael Landon Productions when Landon brought his crew to Lawrence to film "Where Pigeons Go to Die."

And although a smiling Landon jokes falsetto-voice, "She keeps saying, 'There's no place like home. There's no place like home,'" Helen Naylor Minniear, a 1934 Kansas University graduate, hasn't visited Lawrence for 21 years.

Mrs. Minniear, now of Burbank, Calif., tutors Robert Gorman, the 9-year-old child star of the movie, in his school subjects, working hard to squeeze lessons in between the rehearsal and filming of scenes.

A break of only 10 or 15 minutes allows her to work with her young student on his lessons in order to fulfill the three hours daily mandated by the California State Board of Education.

During her 30 years as a show business tutor, Mrs. Minniear has learned to make the minutes count. When Robert is working, she remains on the set, reading or working crossword puzzles until he is available for a lesson.

"SOME CHILD ACTORS are quite ordinary," she said, "but Robert is extremely bright. He doesn't require too much outside help."

The child's mother, Dee Gorman, agrees. "He likes books and reads a lot when he's not working," she said.

Mrs. Gorman travels with her son and, like Mrs. Minniear, stays on the set when he is working. By law, minor actors are required to have either a parent or guardian present while they work.

Like most of the film crew, Mrs. Minniear has worked with Michael Landon Productions for many years. She first tutored on the set of Landon's "Little House on the Prairie" in 1974 and watched Melissa Gilbert (Laura), Melissa Anderson (Mary), Alison Arngim (Nellie), Matthew Laborteaux (Albert) and Jonathon Gilbert (Willie) grow up under her tutelage.

Mrs. Minniear handled all their teaching needs — she even gives French lessons — until Melissa Gilbert studied trigonometry, at which time the tutor herself called for the help of a tutor.

MRS. MINNIEAR SAID Alison Arngim was absolutely nothing like the nasty Nellie she portrayed so well, noting "I never had any trouble with her. She was a delightful child."

Mrs. Minniear's own child — who now produces program promotional tapes for ABC — had opportunities to



Helen Minniear, a 1934 Kansas University graduate, serves as tutor to 9-year-old actor Robert Gorman between rehearsals and filming of "Where Pigeons Go To Die," a TV movie filmed in the Lawrence area.

(Staff photo by Mike Yoder)

act as a child, but she and her late husband, Harold, also a KU graduate, decided against letting him perform.

"You have to consider what's best for a particular child," she explained.

Mrs. Minniear met her husband at KU when he was a graduate student, and her English instructor. He received his bachelor's degree from KU in 1928 and his master's in 1933.

Moving to California in 1934, he worked as a tutor himself, a profession he continued for 44 years — 19 as a resident teacher for RKO Studios.

In 1939, Mrs. Minniear moved to California, and in 1945, the couple married.

"HE DIDN'T COME back to get me, so I guess I just went out and got him," she recalled.

Mrs. Minniear began tutoring in 1959, when their son was 9 years old, and she credits her husband's sense of professional duty for the fact she "never turned down the opportunity to work, although some tutors did if

the call was too early or the travel too far."

Her first full-time job was tutor to the three elementary school-age girls who played Tom Ewell's daughters in his 1960 television series.

Mrs. Minniear said she is pleased to be visiting the city and campus where she met her husband, and the state where she grew up. Her father worked for the Santa Fe Railway in Kansas; she was born in Topeka and also lived in Chanute, Wellington and Kansas City.

Relatives who remain in the Lawrence and Ottawa areas anticipated Mrs. Minniear might be working with the Landon crew in Kansas.

SHE SAID WHEN she returned to her California home after a short trip, she found letters from three Kansas relatives who had read in their local papers that Michael Landon was scouting locations around Lawrence for his film.

Also waiting was a message to call Landon's production manager, Kent McRae, who wanted her to be the tutor.

The trip back to Lawrence is bittersweet, though. Mrs. Minniear's husband, who had maintained his Journal-World subscription to keep up on KU activities, died last April, but her son flew in recently and together they visited some of the old landmarks she recalled from college days.

Mrs. Minniear said her years of tutoring child stars have been pleasing, particularly since she found a home with Michael Landon Productions.

"It is more lucrative than regular classroom teaching," she said, "but basically, I like the fact that there's always something new to do. Mike is so good with children, and he rarely asks a child to work even 30 minutes of overtime."

"Not all directors are like Michael Landon."

## Retired military officers find new careers in classroom

By JEAN MCNAIR  
Associated Press Writer

NORFOLK, Va. (AP) — Chip Hutton has retired from a 27-year Navy career that included the command of two ships, but he's still giving plenty of orders.

"You can't do anything now but sit in your seat."

"I want everything off the desk."

"Listen to me. If you're not listening, you're not going to do well."

The orders are directed at fourth- and fifth-graders at Larchmont Elementary School. Hutton, 50, became their teacher this year after completing an Old Dominion University program that offers a master's degree and teaching certification to retiring military personnel.

"I believe that I can help these kids," the former Navy commander said of his 16 students, all of whom have failed a grade and have difficulty learning.

Between commanding a destroyer and a salvage ship, Hutton spent much of his career teaching ROTC courses. Fed up with administrative work, he chose his new career because it lets him work with a small number of students all day long.

Hutton is one of the first graduates of the Old Dominion program, which has attracted 162 military personnel nearing retirement. All but four are men.

Robert H. MacDonald, professor of educational curriculum and instruction at Old Dominion, has no trouble recruiting students or finding schools

for them.

"The school divisions are calling and asking for these guys," said MacDonald. Their military backgrounds make them good planners, counselors and negotiators, and "all those are teacher skills. They also bring to education just extensive life experiences."

MacDonald has found the retired officers are no more authoritarian than anyone else. They are unfamiliar with young children, though, so the program sends them into the schools to talk with students and teachers before they decide whether teaching is right for them.

A half-dozen have done their student teaching at Indian River Junior High School in Chesapeake, where Assistant Principal Kathy DuLaney

said, "They're wonderful. They come in with a lot of experiences that we can use. They're used to dealing with the public. They've got lots of managerial skills."

One Indian River mother wanted to know if her son could have a retired military officer for his teacher again this year because the one her son had last year was the only teacher who ever made him work, Ms. DuLaney said.

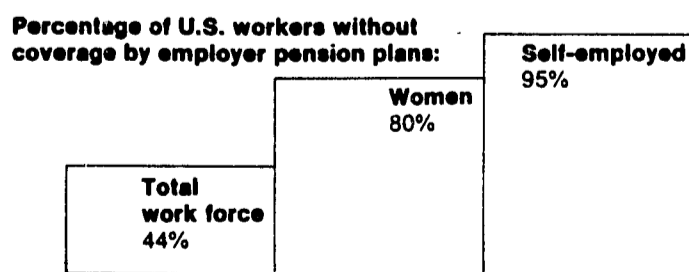
The military retirees also provide good role models for teen-age boys, she said. "For so many of our kids the father figure is absent."

Similar programs are offered in Florida, California and North Carolina, which have large military populations, but Old Dominion's is the largest, said MacDonald.

## Trends & tips

### High numbers of Americans are not covered by pensions

Many U.S. workers are not covered by employer pension plans. Women-retirees and entrepreneurs are especially hard-hit by not having pensions and retirement plans.



(NOTE: Many women divorcees and widows are cast into the work force at too late an age to amass an adequate pension. Fewer than 5 percent of Keogh-eligible self-employed individuals actually invest in one.)

SOURCES: Employee Benefit Research Institute; Long Island University; Sylvia Porter's Personal Finance magazine

Copley News Service/Ken Marshall

## CURRENTS

### Middle-age fathers feel more prepared to parent

OXFORD, Ohio (AP) — who became fathers when they are middle-aged feel better prepared for parenthood, but those who were better off financially said they were less satisfied with the experience, according to a new study.

"I think the reason is because men at the higher socioeconomic status... have had good jobs, probably traveled and had the better things in life," said Deborah Ulrich, a researcher who studied 210 Ohio fathers. "When they compare parenthood to those experiences, it just doesn't rate as high."

Ms. Ulrich, an associate professor of nursing at Miami University, chose her study subjects from among 5,000 men between ages 40 and 55 after examining birth certificates to find those who became

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fathers in 1986. Nearly 71 percent said they had at least one year of college, and average annual income was about \$25,000 to \$30,000.

"The advantages of being a father at mid-life were that they felt they were more responsible, more ready to father a child and to be an important part of the child's life," Ms. Ulrich said.

Nearly 90 percent of the men in the study reported being as fulfilled with fatherhood as they had anticipated. The same number said they had more money to spend on a child and had reached a point in their professional lives where they could spend less time at work and more with the baby.