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A Day in the Life of a Woman Free Lance Accountant

Barbara H. Blagg F.C.A.

7.30 a.m. The phone ringing by my bed awakens me (why did not the alarm clock do so?), and when I give a sleepy number a client's voice says "Can I bring those papers to you on my way to work?" "Yes, certainly" say I. "Right! be with you just before 8 o'clock". So started another busy day. Out of bed and into the bathroom—the water's not very hot: hope the boiler hasn't gone out! —and all ready to see the client at 7.55 a.m. "It's so useful having someone who works at home" she says, "because it does mean you are available out of normal office hours". How very much you believe that, think I, as I shut the front door, remembering that she had been with me from 9 to 10.30 p.m. the previous evening.

Oh well! Now let's look at that boiler. Yes it is out! Put on a large overall and a duster over my head, and get out the dead ashes, clean the flues, relay and relight. In the midst of doing so the phone rings again (how fortunate there is no sight attached to the phone; I couldn't have answered it in this "fancy dress").

A new client this time. "Your doctor gave me your name and thought you might be able to help me. Could I possibly come along this morning please, about 11 o'clock?" A quick glance at my diary, then "Yes certainly" I say, "You know your way? Good! Don't worry, I'll do what I can." I put the phone down in thoughtful mood. She sounds very distressed, but there must be some chance that I can help, or Doctor would not have sent her to me!

By now it is 8.45 a.m. and I haven't had even a cup of tea, so on with the kettle and out with some food for breakfast, going through the post, which has just arrived, whilst I am eating it. An hour and three-quarters of routine work, clearing client's and Inspector's queries, and I am ready for my new client. No wonder Doctor wanted someone to help her: her husband walked out on her, her seven year old daughter has shock asthma in consequence, and, having gone out to work to have something to live on, income tax is being deducted at the standard rate from her total earnings, because of course she has not completed a tax return. So there really is something I can do for her, but she is in such an emotional state that it has taken an hour and a half to extract the story and the requisite information from her.

Now prepare the vegetables and get lunch cooking—re-check the casts of a set of Accounts

and try to find the difference while it cooks! —, lunch (wash up while I drink my coffee), then off on a regular fortnightly visit to a chemist whose books I write up. When I get there, what a mess! Burglars paid a visit last night, and, in searching for money (which wasn't there), had thrown the books and vouchers, etc. on to the floor and left them. They did take away quite a bit of stock; so my client, who had left the books and papers for me to sort out, because he knew that I was coming today, asked me to work out the insurance claim. A hard afternoon's work, and back home to hear the telephone ringing.

An elderly married client who cannot understand why, when people whose combined total income does not exceed £575 are exempt from tax, he is not entitled to £575 free before starting to calculate his tax; and he is quite certain that he is being overcharged, and I do not seem to be doing anything about it for him! I patiently explain the provisions of the Finance Act in regard to elderly persons again—I must have done so in different ways at least six times before—and he rings off to "look up his information".

Now for a quick snack—no time to wash up—, and I just catch the train and reach a committee meeting with one minute to spare. What a terrible chairman; he lets people digress and waste time, instead of keeping to the business of the meeting and getting on with the job. The meeting closes at 10.15 p.m. and I am very grateful to be given a lift home by another committee member. And so 11 p.m., make up the boiler, do that washing up, get a hot drink, and into bed.

And what does it all add up to? Financially very little; but I hope I have smoothed the cares of at least two people, and kept a small part of the clockwork of business ticking over. Would I change? I don't think so. There are times when I think it would be nice to have a job in a large firm and work regular hours, leaving office cares behind me when I leave work at the end of the day. On the other hand I can occasionally take a week-day off (some compensation for working on Saturdays and often part of Sundays) and go to visit an elderly aunt, or even, very occasionally, join a friend for a day trip to the coast or to some place of interest. Even on the question of taking a long time over a job it is a relief to know that there is only myself to lose by it; I haven't got to account to a boss for the
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A Woman CPA in Holland

Drs. F. J. de Winter-Otto

Accountant Lid V.A.G.A.

I would like to give you some particulars about my living and my work so that you may get some idea about it. Perhaps it is interesting to you.

My husband and I are both CPA's. He is working in an accounting firm; I am administrator at the Municipal Social Service in The Hague. I've been doing this job for eight years now; I have to manage the total administration and internal control of the service, and therefore I have a staff of about 150 persons. It is a rather interesting but very busy job.

We are living in a very comfortable house in Wassenaar (very near The Hague) and both of us use our car to go to our work (my husband a big one, and I a very small one). I believe that is just like you in the U.S.A. do. We have 4 children, the oldest 11 years, the youngest 1½ years old. So perhaps you can understand that, although I have a capable girl who lives with us and takes care of the children and the housekeeping, there always are many things resting to be done by me. Sometimes it seems to be too much, even to me; and then I try to take some holidays of 1 or 2 weeks, to relax!

This way of life, as I described to you, is here in Holland rather extraordinary and most people, especially men, don't like it. The general opinion here is that a married woman should stay at home with her children and should not take a job which keeps her away all day long. Fortunately, my husband and I fully agreed about my taking a full-time job, and I did so after graduating from the Rotterdam Economic University in 1947.

I think here in Holland it is really a problem to girls who wish to get a university degree and afterwards take a job and continue that after her marriage. I know that married wives of about 30 or 40 years old with little children seldom can obtain a good responsible job because the men that have to employ someone most often chose men instead of a married woman.

Therefore you can perhaps understand that I read with very much interest your booklet "Mapping Your Future?" and that I was a little jealous reading the figures stated therein. In the U.S.A. it must be a working paradise for married graduated women compared with here in good old Holland. Perhaps it will be changing slowly in the future, but we Dutchmen are rather conservative people!

About women in accountancy I can tell

you that here in Holland there are no more than about 20, most of them working as administrators or other internal jobs. Only 2 or 3 of them are public accountants in a firm.

I hope I gave you a slight idea about our living and working; if you might be interested in some more particulars, please write me and I really will try to send you my answer as soon as possible.

A Day in the Life

(continued from page 9)

length of time spent, and as I am, unfortunately, a slow worker that used to happen frequently in the old days. Also being freelance I probably get to know my clients in a more personal way than I should do otherwise; in fact several of my clients have become friends; and one can never have too many friends in this life.

Is that the marmalade burning? If so it serves me right for trying to write this and make the marmalade at the same time, on a Sunday morning instead of going to church. But there is always evensong!

Miss B. H. Blagg F.C.A.

Born in the house next to the one I now occupy, and never having lived anywhere else, means that I am fairly well known (for good or bad!) in this area, although my life has been very ordinary.

After a not very clever school career, I was Articled to the first woman Incorporated Accountant, who died during the term of my Articles, and I finished training under the first woman Chartered Accountant, Miss Ethel Watts, who was at the New York Congress, and whose passing in November 1963 left us so much poorer. After qualifying in 1937 I gained wider experience by working, for various lengths of time, during the next 12 years for several large firms of Accountants. By the end of 1949 however, I was needed at home, and so I started building up my own practice, thankful that I had a calling that I could follow from my own home. And being known in the area was an asset. After my parents' deaths a colleague kindly looked after my practice for 5 months and I went to New Zealand and Australia with thoughts of emigrating, but found that I was too old for this and so returned home and carried on as a freelance accountant.

In addition to the International Congress in New York in 1962, I attended the International Congress in London in 1952, when I was one of the liaison officers for both the New Zealand and the Burmese delegations; and in 1963 I attended the European Congress in Edinburgh, where I met again several people who had been at the New York Congress the previous year.