

**I** undertake the assignment of writing for this issue with some trepidation, with respect and an understanding that there is much a man can never know, and with reverence and love for nine extraordinary females—my mother, maternal grandmother, three aunts, wife, mother-in-law, daughter, and granddaughter. Having been significantly and positively influenced every day of my life by these strong women of serious intellect and unbending character, I speak not in their place but on their behalf.

Clearly, women's roles have changed dramatically in the past 65 years. Some would say World War II initiated much of that change. After women by necessity or by choice in 1941 took on roles traditionally left to men, they never desired to return to prewar limitations.

That resulted in serious differences of opinion, reflected in the movie *Mona Lisa Smile*, in which young, affluent, intelligent women at Wellesley struggle to define their futures when faced with previously unavailable options. Some choose more traditional domestic roles, some more modern roles, and some are moved by circumstances from what they thought they wanted to different roles.

Certainly in my professional lifetime there has been considerable change. For example, when I was a young accounting instructor at a southern regional university, relatively few women majored in accounting, and women graduates found it difficult to get good jobs.

Accounting graduates were primarily prepared to enter the profession via public accounting practice. Many schools, including Murray State University, focused on producing personnel for the "Big 8" firms. Among the entry-level requirements was a fair amount of travel, and there was con-

cern about hiring women since they would have to travel with men. This seriously limited the careers of many talented women in the late '60s and early '70s.

Today about 60 percent of MTSU accounting majors are women. I no longer hear such arguments about hiring them.

The numbers of women in Tennessee aged 16 and up, in the labor force, and employed have all increased since 1981. The raw data do not clearly indicate the change. During the 1980s the number of women in Tennessee grew 8.4 percent, women in the labor force 16.4 percent, and women employed 21.2 percent. Those trends continued in the 1990s with growth rates of 9.1, 20.9, and 22.4 percent, respectively. So far, this decade indicates some change. The female labor force is not growing faster than the female population, but the employment growth rate is considerably faster. Yet the unemployment rate was higher for women than men in Tennessee for 18 of the 23 years from 1981 through 2003, and that trend continues.

In Tennessee, the distribution of employment by occupation shows some categories with a higher percentage of women than men: professional specialty, sales, technicians and related support, service occupations, and especially administrative support including clerical. These categories do not, however, tend to be the highest paying, so in Tennessee women still make less money than men. Data from 2004 continue to show this trend.

So what do I conclude? Employment options have been somewhat better for my wife and daughter than for my grandmother, mother, aunts, and mother-in-law. They are still not good enough for my granddaughter—but then, I'm not sure I will ever think anything is. ■

### Tennessee Women: Population, Labor Force, and Employment (in thousands)

Year	Pop. 16+	Labor Force	Emp.	% Un. Wom.	% Un. Men	% Diff.
1981	1,836	926	837	9.6	8.7	0.9
1982	1,860	930	811	12.8	11.1	1.7
1983	1,874	962	849	11.7	11.3	0.4
1984	1,900	1,000	916	8.4	8.6	-0.2
1985	1,918	1,022	929	9.1	7.1	2.0
1986	1,935	1,052	957	9.0	7.2	1.8
1987	1,947	1,062	985	7.3	6.1	1.2
1988	1,965	1,058	992	6.2	5.3	0.9
1989	2,000	1,085	1,025	5.5	4.8	0.7
1990	1,990	1,078	1,019	5.5	5.1	0.4
1991	2,005	1,082	1,010	6.7	6.8	-0.1
1992	2,060	1,147	1,067	7.0	5.9	1.1
1993	2,100	1,183	1,108	6.3	5.2	1.1
1994	2,095	1,262	1,196	5.2	4.5	0.7
1995	2,129	1,284	1,218	5.1	5.3	-0.2
1996	2,136	1,298	1,227	5.5	4.9	0.6
1997	2,176	1,286	1,223	4.9	5.8	-0.9
1998	2,215	1,312	1,255	4.3	4.0	0.3
1999	2,238	1,336	1,287	3.7	4.4	-0.7
2000	2,187	1,294	1,236	4.5	3.5	1.0
2001	2,256	1,309	1,244	5.0	4.0	1.0
2002	2,346	1,367	1,293	5.4	4.9	0.5
2003	2,354	1,362	1,278	6.2	5.5	0.7

### Percentage Growth

Year	Population 16+	Labor Force	Employed
1981-1990	8.4	16.4	21.2
1991-2000	9.4	20.0	22.4
2001-2003	4.3	4.0	28.2

### Median Earnings 1999 by Work Experience

Full-time, year-round	
Total	\$28,595
Male	\$32,313
Female	\$23,978

### Tennessee Distribution of Employment by Occupation (%) 2002

	Executive Employment (1,000)	Administrative Managerial	Professional Specialty	Technicians Related Support	Administrative Support, Including Clerical	Service Occupations	Precision Production, Craft, Repair	Machine Operators, Assemblers, Inspectors	Transportation Material Moving	Handlers, Equipment Cleaners, Helpers, Laborers	Farming, Forestry, Fishing	
Women	1,293	13.2	15.5	4.2	13.5	24.6	15.7	2.1	6.2	0.9	2.9	1.3
Men	1,483	15.7	10.8	2.4	11.2	5.6	8.4	20.2	8.4	7.9	6.0	3.4

### Median National Usual Weekly Earnings of Full-Time Wage and Salary Workers Age 16+ by Quarter

	2004(IV)	2004(III)	2004(II)	2004 (I)
Men	\$722	\$704	\$714	\$711
Women	\$578	\$571	\$572	\$567

Sources: Census 2000, U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics, Geographic Profile of Employment and Unemployment