

The Life and Times of the Thunderbolt Kid, by Bill Bryson

The only downside of my mother's working was that it put a little pressure on her with regard to running the home and particularly with regard to dinner, which, frankly, she wasn't very good at anyway. My mother always ran late and was dangerously forgetful. You soon learned to stand aside about ten to six every evening, for it was then that she would fly in the back door, throw something in the oven and disappear into some other quarter of the house to embark on the thousand other household tasks that greeted her each evening. In consequence, she nearly always forgot about dinner until a point slightly beyond way too late. As a rule, you knew it was time to eat when you could hear potatoes exploding in the oven. We didn't call it the kitchen in our house. We called it the Burns Unit.

'It's a bit burned,' my mother would say apologetically at every meal, presenting you with a piece of meat that looked like something – a much-loved pet perhaps – salvaged from a tragic house fire. 'But I think I scraped off most of the burned part,' she would add, overlooking that this included every bit of it that had once been flesh.

Happily, all this suited my father. His palate only responded to two tastes – burned and ice cream – so everything was fine by him so long as it was sufficiently dark and not too startlingly flavourful. Theirs truly was a marriage made in heaven, for no one could burn food like my mother or eat it like my dad.

As part of her job, my mother bought stacks of housekeeping magazines – *House Beautiful*, *House and Garden*, *Better Homes and Gardens*, *Good Housekeeping* – and I read these with a certain avidity, partly because they were always lying around and in our house all idle moments were spent reading something, and partly because they depicted lives so absorbingly at variance with our own. The housewives in my mother's magazines were so collected, so organized, so calmly on top of things, and their food was perfect – their lives were perfect. They dressed up to take their food out of the oven!

EXAM FOCUS Multiple choice

5 Read the text again. For questions 1–6, choose the correct answer, A, B, C or D.

- 1 Nancy B. Mavity
 - A believed both husbands and wives should work.
 - B worried about women who were ambitious in their work.
 - C wondered how couples would share housework.
 - D thought that gender roles should not be changed.
- 2 The writer's family
 - A were sure that their home furnishings were up-to-date.
 - B came from a better socio-economic background than most people.
 - C had a more comfortable lifestyle thanks to their dual income.
 - D knew a lot of people with large houses in a good part of town.
- 3 In paragraph 4, the writer
 - A sympathises with his mother's situation.
 - B complains that his mother was always late.
 - C suggests that his mother was overworked.
 - D recommends that women shouldn't work.
- 4 How does the writer's mother feel about the food she cooks?
 - A upset that her food is burned
 - B uncaring about the family's reaction
 - C aware that it is not perfect
 - D confident that the family will enjoy it
- 5 What does *this* refer to in line 62?
 - A the lack of meat on the plate
 - B his wife's way of cooking
 - C his wife's apology
 - D the appearance of his meal
- 6 The writer liked reading the magazines because
 - A they showed a different way of living.
 - B he didn't have anything else to read.
 - C he wanted to learn about his mother's job.
 - D he envied the lifestyle they portrayed.

6 Think about your grandparents', your parents' and your own generation. Discuss how family/working life has changed.

WORD STORE 5F

7 **CD-2.30 MP3-83** Complete WORD STORE 5F with the phrases in the box. Then listen, check and repeat. Find and underline examples in the text on pages 72–73.