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## INTERVIEW WITH *Wendy Walker*

By Allison Huyck

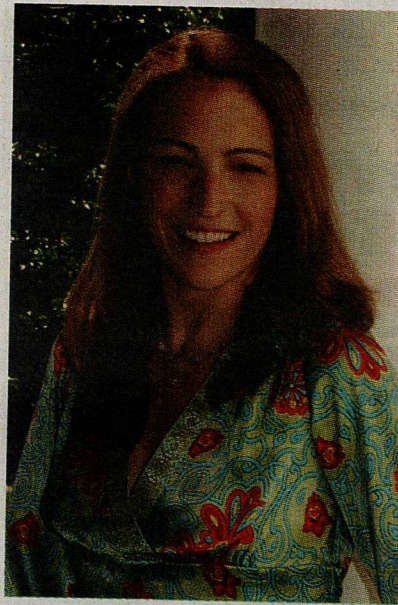
Wendy Walker's first book, *Four Wives*, may seem at first glance a typical story of suburban housewives (may we call them desperate?) who are dissatisfied with their lives. I'll be the first to admit this was my initial reaction – sorry Wendy. As it turns out, this book is no *Desperate Housewives* knockoff. It's an honest and insightful look at real issues that real women face every day, yet somehow it's still entertaining. Walker was quick to mention the book has both substance and appeal; it's suspenseful and raises issues in an enjoyable way. "I hope it has enough of both to appeal to all audiences," she said during our interview.

*Four Wives* focuses on the strain many women feel as they struggle with the precarious balancing act that is common to all homemakers. How does a woman maintain sense of herself while devoting all her time and energy to her children, her husband and their home? If a woman gives up her career to raise her children, how can she still maintain her autonomy? It's no coincidence Walker writes about these issues: she is an 11-year veteran of stay-at-home motherhood.

Whatever image you may have in your mind of the stay-at-home mom, Walker is sure to challenge that idea. She has an undergraduate degree in economics and political science (*magna cum laude*, of course) and a law degree (also *magna cum laude*). She's worked as a financial analyst and a lawyer for a number of years. Then, once she and her husband started their family, Walker decided to stay at home and raise their children. She recalls nursing a baby at 3 a.m. and just thinking to herself "I can't believe this is my life. I love my children deeply, but something is missing inside of me... Love (one of the main characters in *Four Wives*) is the epitome of that. She is confronting the ending of her career and that nagging sense of loss, of internal loss of personal fulfillment." Walker said she used her writing to climb out of that dilemma herself.

At some point Walker began thinking of ideas for a novel. Eventually she decided to use these experiences as a stay-at-home mother to create four different characters and stories; "these issues are so real for so many women," she said. After months of musing over her ideas, Walker "sat down and the book poured right out of [her] in nine months."

Walker mentioned Betty Friedan in our interview. Friedan's 1963 book, *The Feminine Mystique*, captured in full the loss of identity many homemakers experienced, the nagging feeling that told them there must be something



Author Wendy Walker

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more to life than raising children, caring for husband, cooking dinner. "Even though women have choices when Friedan wrote that book they really had no choice; women were predestined to be homemakers. That is now; women can choose a career path, and it's embarrassing when you do choose this path, the things Betty Friedan wrote about are still true, like the loss of a self," Walker said. "This is what I was thinking about sitting in a rocking chair at 3 a.m. *I'm a case study for that book.*"

Walker talks about "perfecting motherhood," that desire many mothers have to be absolutely the best mother ever. Her example of the kitchen drawer stuck with me. The point being that when maintaining a household is your job, it's easy to become overwhelmed. "The kitchen drawer: that's your job. You reorganize and everyone digs through it. Before you know it, it's messy again. You can become obsessed with doing it well because it's endless. It's like a gerbil on a wheel; day you get up and run the wheel, run the wheel, run the wheel, and you never really get anywhere."

Walker later read my mind and mentioned the doubt working mothers often have. I asked her where she would be if she was working today, if she hadn't decided to leave her job and stay at home to raise her children. "I really can't say," she said, "If I hadn't had children, I would have stayed as a lawyer, gravitating toward criminal law and not profit work. If I had had the children and kept working, I probably wouldn't be doing the most lucrative work; I probably wouldn't be on the partnership track."

"Even given all those things, I don't regret anything about staying at home with my kids. I enjoy the time with my kids. It was never a solution for me to go and go back to work. There really is no easy answer for women. People ask a lot, and I think... you have to look at your options and build a life that's best for you and your family." Walker admits she got lucky with writing. "This is a wonderful career to have with children." Her website goes into more detail about how she is able to write while being a stay-at-home mother. Walker mentions again how lucky she is. "Many people just don't have that luxury of opting out of the workforce). For them, it's not even a choice."

To end on a positive note, Walker talked of how her dream of writing a book became reality. "When you have these dreams and go to work on them, it goes by so slowly. The dream becomes your life; it's not less gratifying, but you realize it's the step by step, page by page that really matters. Life is sort of slow-moving, day by day, building of dreams."