

TODAY'S CHICAGO WOMAN

WORKING MOMS REDEFINED

FASHION
WILD WEST WET

MAN OF
THE MONTH
BILL DALEY

WINE
FIT YOUR TASTE
& YOUR BUDGET

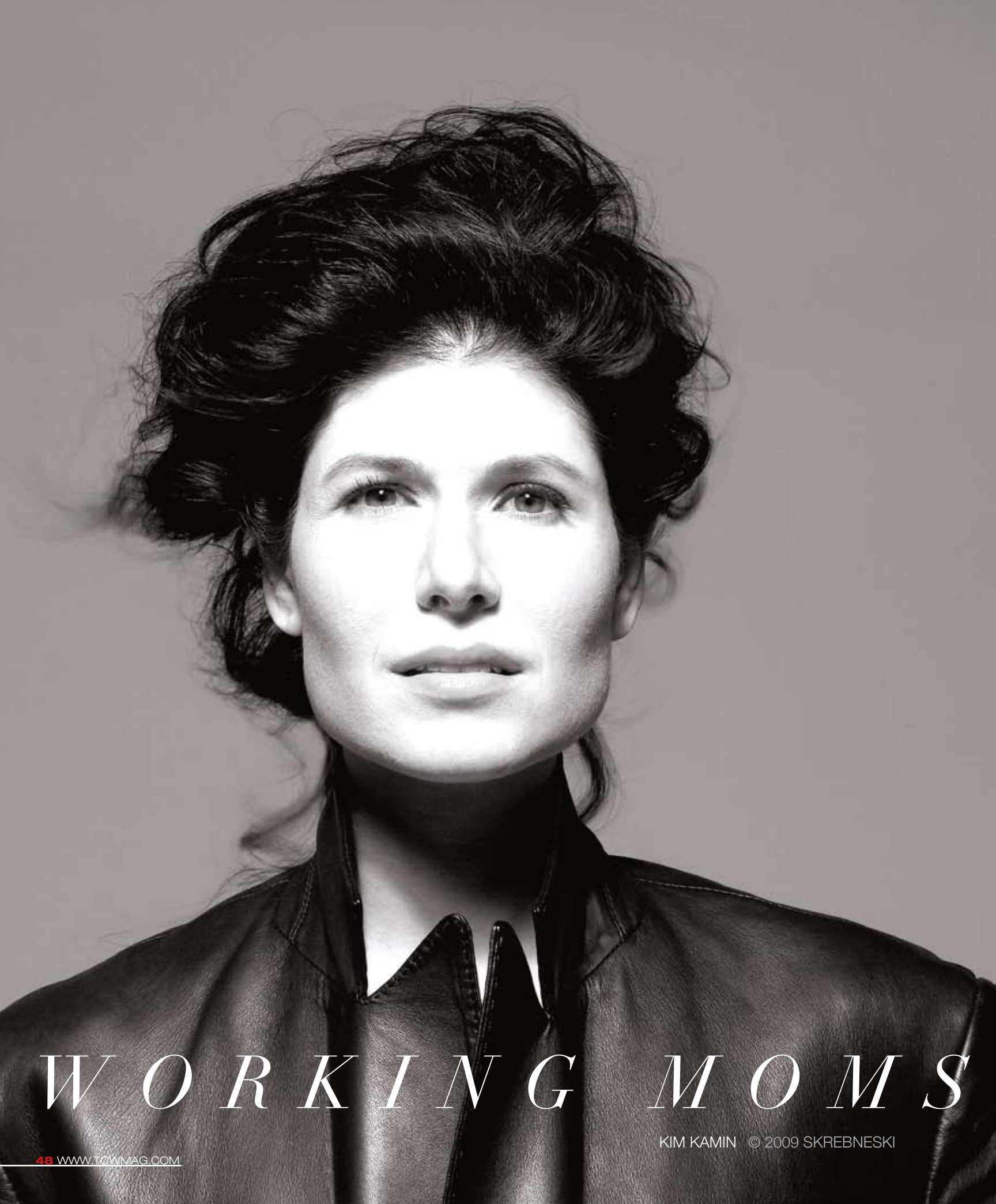
**WHY WOMEN
WILL SAVE
THE WORLD**

BY MARTI BARLETTA



KIM KAMIN

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WORKING MOMS

KIM KAMIN © 2009 SKREBNESKI

We've all heard the adage "the more things change, the more they stay the same."

Plenty of things have changed since women started heading back to work in the 1970s, about the time the Equal Rights Amendment was passed in Congress and sent to the states for ratification. Ironically, it never passed; at the 1982 deadline it was still three states shy of the 38 needed to become law.

Despite the defeat, women's wages went up proportionally. In 1975, women earned 59 cents to every dollar men did. Today, that figure has risen to 77 cents, according to Anne Ladky, executive director of Women Employed in Chicago.

But other critical advances many women sought were far more personal, like getting husbands to help with the housework and kids. Back then, most women with children did not work outside the home. In 1975, eight percent of women with school-age children (6-17) and 15 percent of women with children under six worked, according to Bureau of Labor Statistics data.

I got my first professional job in the late 1970s, and back then, most of my friends – even those with medical degrees – took time off to raise families when they had their second child. This may explain why more women with young children worked than those with school-age children in the statistics above. Today, we call the practice of taking employment breaks the "mommy track."

But many of us didn't have the luxury of being on that track. In my own case, my income was a necessity; yet at times, it was also a wash because of childcare costs. And for me, and many of my peers, the issues of working full time weren't necessarily the high childcare costs. The real problem was what to do when the kids got sick...stay home, or go to work? The same thing happened with school programs. How often could we steal away from the office midday for assemblies and report card conferences?

Today, according to figures Women Employed culled from government data, 77 percent of all mothers with school age children (6-17) and 67 percent of all women with children under the age of six work. With such numbers, things should be easier for working moms.

That's not necessarily so, as we can confirm after talking to a roundtable of Chicago mothers. The numbers have changed; more moms work and earn higher wages. But many fundamental issues have remained the same, from childcare to stretched schedules. Perhaps not surprisingly, over half of our moms are lucky enough to be able to rely on their own mother, or other family members, to help out. Or, they're successful enough to be able to spend what it takes on childcare. Even Michelle Obama cleaves to this paradigm. According to myriad news accounts, her mother, Marian Robinson, 71, cared for Malia, 10, and Sasha, seven, while their parents campaigned, and has since moved to Washington, D.C. with the First Family.

Here's how modern moms cope with work, packed schedules, childcare issues and more.

BY LISA SKOLNIK

SKREBNESKI PHOTOGRAPH

R E D E F I N E D



Kim and Grayson in the River Room at East Bank Club

KIM KAMIN, 37

"My BlackBerry is my best friend," quips Kim brightly when we meet at Starbucks, where I found her scanning it for messages and emails while returning calls on her flip-phone. A wispy beauty in spare slacks and a sleek sweater set, she looks like a 20-something law student rather than a partner in the prestigious Chicago law firm Schiff Hardin LLP, where she practices estate planning. "To be efficient, you need both, since you can't read the BlackBerry and call on it at the same time," she explains.

Kim is warm, animated and always multi-tasking on both gadgets simultaneously – when not directly engaged in a face-to-face conversation. They allow her to keep up with her workload, stay in touch with clients and check in on son Grayson, now five and in kindergarten. "I work a lot," she admits. And her husband, UGL Equis real estate executive Greg Schementi, "works a lot too, and also travels."

Being a partner in a top-ranked law firm, and having a full life, is tough – and Kim has major loads in both arenas. Besides doing about 100 hours of pro-bono work yearly, she's also an adjunct professor at Northwestern University Law School, serves on the Board of Trustees of Francis W. Parker School and is on the Professional Advisory Council of The Chicago Community Trust.

But here's the real kicker: Grayson has severe food allergies and asthma – issues that require constant vigilance and have landed him in the hospital frequently. "We've spent a lot of nights at Children's (Memorial Hospital)," Kim observes.

How does she cope? Kim has worked hard, made thoughtful life decisions and is an efficiency expert in every aspect of her life.

After earning a BA from Stanford University, she came home to attend The University of Chicago Law School because "my family was here."

She married Greg Schementi right out of law school (whom she met while vacationing in Hawaii), and within a year they moved to a Gold Coast townhouse across the street from her parents.

Kim joined Schiff Hardin after "shopping the legal market" and deciding it was the best place for her. "They don't force associates to pick a practice area immediately, so I tried everything," she explains. She gravitated to estate planning. "It's complex, stimulating and involves so many areas of the law," she explains.

Kim also planned to have Grayson at an optimal time in her career. "I wanted to master my subject matter and be well established. It's not good to juggle a family when you're low man on the totem pole," she observes. And since Grayson came along, Kim has arranged a work/life set-up that is exacting yet carves out together-time for mother and son. "I see him every morning, at least four nights a week and usually pick him up from school on Friday afternoons. It's our special time together," she notes. They often consist of visits to Costco, the zoo, the nature museum, the playground or the East Bank Club, a frequent family destination for food, exercise and relaxation.

Having her parents nearby allowed Kim to hire a come-and-go nanny when Grayson was a baby. "They're anchors for me," she says. Today, she uses a primary sitter when he's not in school, and relies on back-up sitters and her parents for emergencies.

"Being able to keep up things at this pace is all about your support system," Kim observes, then quickly amends the comment to include one more critical point: "You have to make the most of technology." Besides mining her sidekick gadgets, she buys everything possible online to give her more precious hours with Grayson.

Photo by Joseph Storch