

INSIDE STORIES: A HISTORY OF THE NEW ZEALAND HOUSEWIFE 1890-1975

“Why is it I can teach my husband to drive the car, cook a three course meal, appreciate Oscar Wilde and do Assisi embroidery, yet he can’t learn to clean the high tide mark off the bath!”

— Glasmuir of Fielding, *The New Zealand Woman’s Weekly*, 1965.

Glasmuir was one of a legion of women who marshalled her considerable skills and managed her whopping disappointment in the home, and told her sisters all about it in the pages of women’s magazines and pages from 1890 until 1975. It was a period in which women gained the vote and the right to a legal abortion, but lost faith in the job of housewifery.

In her enlightening book *Inside Stories*, author Frances Walsh has rifled through women’s media, collecting reports from and of the domestic front. The miscellany reveals that while housewives’ circumstances changed drastically in the 20th century (let’s hear it for electric appliances), their preoccupations were perennial, their humour was a necessity, and their resourcefulness was eye-raising. And their magazines were lifelines.

In 1932, a journalist asked readers of one magazine: “Is a woman duty bound to subordinate all her natural mental gifts to the conduct of a household? ... I love my man and my children and I would die for them if necessary, but I don’t see that I am called upon to stultify my brains for them, or wrap my one talent in a napkin so that I may always be on hand when hubby needs a clean collar or Sonny cuts his finger.”



Inside Stories

Author: Frances Walsh

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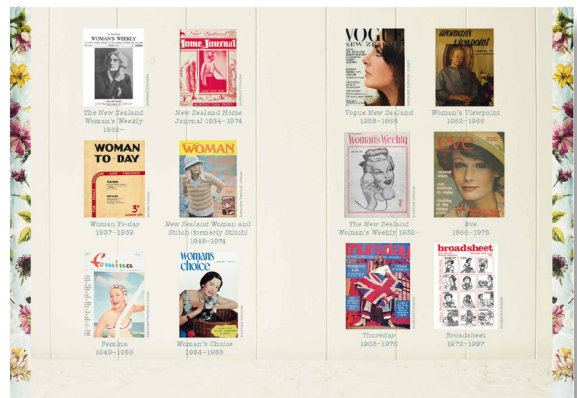
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For more information, please contact Sarah Thornton at Thornton Communications Limited on 021 753744 or sarah.thornton@prcomms.com



Drawing from her sources, Walsh also offers instruction on: removing water stains from furniture (wield a brazil nut); hastening a divorce (buy him floral shirts); home brewing (ferment pumpkins); staving off the Black Dog (drink gin and chant); curing insomnia (read Plato); dispatching dandruff (apply brandy); and displaying good taste, which according to *The New Zealand Tablet* in 1907 necessitated observing the following edict:

“Oil paintings and water colours should never be allowed to become intimate companions, but the latter may hobnob with etchings, pastels, drawings, photographs, and even engravings without losing their dignity...”

Walsh's lively social history is both affectionate and wry. It spans subject matter grouped into chapters as diverse as a housewife's sphere was (and still is), including *The Filth*, *The Husband*, *The*

Servant, *The Tub*, *The Child*, *The Shopping* and *The Neighbour*. *Inside Stories* features historic aprons as well as magazine covers, advertisements, photographs and illustrations.



Frances Walsh lives in Auckland and is an award-winning journalist and writer. She currently works as a trade unionist.

FRANCES WALSH IS AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEW



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