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"Give me a place to stand and I will take you somewhere else."

Erma Bombeck – The Suburban Housewife

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Through the second half of the 20th Century, Erma Bombeck captured – and lit with humor – the daily life of a new American phenomenon: the suburban housewife.

Sometime between 1910 and 1920 the majority of the places that people in the U.S. called home shifted from rural to urban. During the war years 1941-1945 millions more moved to the cities for well-paying jobs. However, a different kind of migration followed the war. In the quarter-century following World War II, some thirty million Americans left their urban homes, settling nearby land masses collectively dubbed Suburbia. This flow did not slow in the decades that followed. By 1990 suburbia accounted for nearly half of the nation's dwellings – and voters – outpacing both city and rural populations. Suburban living now dominates the economic, social, and cultural American pie chart.

What caused this suburban explosion? In the years following World War II, some twelve million men came home, discharged from the military (including Erma's husband-to-be, who signed up at in 1945 at age 18 and was discharged in 1948). They wanted jobs – some of which were relinquished either eagerly or reluctantly by the women who held them. The veterans married (Erma and Bill Bombeck in 1949) and started families (their kids came in 1953, 1955, and 1958), launching the baby boom. These families wanted and needed housing. Anyone who lived through that time remembers the housing shortage. My own mother (born in 1924, three years before Erma Bombeck) told me, "In 1950 you didn't give notice on your apartment unless you expected to die within the week." A building boom ensued through the 50s and 60s in the land surrounding the cities, to house families that were generally supported by a bread-winner commuting into the city for work.

This left the housewives, like Erma, on the suburban frontier, to negotiate a brave new world rife with innovative if indecipherable time-saving technologies (including blenders, crock pots, electric can openers, and toaster ovens) and heretofore unimagined responsibilities (such as: Tupperware® parties, Little League® carpools, Girl Scout cookie drives, ballet recitals, PTA committees, and garage sales.) Erma Bombeck, of Dayton Ohio, believed you had to be able to laugh at life to get through it. She captured the essence of the housewife's daily struggles in her column "At Wits End" three days a week eventually appearing in 900 newspapers across the country and in books such as "The Grass is Always Greener Over the Septic Tank" and "If Life is a Bowl of Cherries, What Am I Doing in the Pits?"

Erma Bombeck made the middle-class American housewife an American Legend – ironically by building a career as a writer, to document the lives of women like herself who made a career of homemaking. She brought to our awareness the frustrations, ironies, and triumphs of women whose lives otherwise often felt invisible and taken for granted. She let wives and mothers across America know: You are not alone. In fact, we number in the millions. I, too, am an American housewife, and I will laugh by your side.