

# Brooklyn Daily Eagle

## Part 3: Brooklyn moms share how they manage careers and families

### A THREE-PART SERIES ABOUT AMAZING WOMEN

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Photo from the days when Jocelyn Greene was both directing and parenting.

Photo courtesy of Jocelyn Greene

*This is the third article in a **Three-Part series** about amazing women in Brooklyn.*

The challenges of raising children in this city are daunting. Working full-time can leave moms feeling stressed out and guilty about being neither a good-enough mother or good-enough worker. Sometimes the task seems impossible.

How do Brooklyn moms balance life and career?

The Brooklyn Eagle spoke to a dozen moms who have gone through the struggle of finding a balance that works for them. Some have kept their nine-to-five jobs, dealing with all the issues of daycare and schedule-juggling that entails. Other have left the corporate or nonprofit worlds to strike out on their own. Some have cobbled together a combination of part time jobs, consulting or flexible side hustles.

#### **Part 1: Brooklyn moms share how they manage careers and families**

We heard stories about moms closing real estate deals during labor; losing jobs during supposedly protected maternity leave; leaning on their friends and faith; and creating new businesses during the pandemic. We found these women's stories to be frankly remarkable, and the advice they offer to other parents is inspirational (even for folks with no kids at home).



Patrice Poltzer, mother of three children, started her own business as a video coach. Photo courtesy of Patrice Poltzer

### **Patrice Poltzer: From producer to video coach**

Patrice Poltzer, award-winning producer turned video coach at [Patrice Poltzer Creative](#), lives in Cobble Hill with her husband and three boys ages 9, 6 and 1 ½ years old.

"Before I had the kids I worked in the New York media world, so I was a producer at Bloomberg TV, then I got a job at NBC and I worked in branded content space, and then I ended up getting a job at The TODAY Show as a producer," she said.

How did she manage her work after her first child?

"I'm a worker — I loved my job, I loved being in there, and I didn't know how much I was going to like being a mom," Poltzer told the Eagle. "And it turns out I really loved being a mom. I was like, 'Oh my God, this just isn't working.' I hated that I didn't have autonomy over my life. I hated that some days I wanted to leave at 2 to get my kid from daycare and I couldn't do it.

"So I started picking my brain," she said. "Just for fun, I started doing a side hustle — not even a side hustle, it was just for creative purposes. I launched a website called First Bites, and I started taking video of us eating at restaurants all over New York and rating them from a parent's perspective.

"This little website started to take off. It was the first time I had ever built anything and executed, and I had a newsletter, and I was like, 'Oh my God!' I started seeing a different way." That little side hustle would come into play a few years later, she said.

"I left my job at the TODAY Show after I got recruited to go to a media startup in 2016, and it was like a dream job," Poltzer said. "My boss said, 'You have to get out of here, this is an amazing opportunity!' And this particular dream job ended up being the worst professional experience of my entire career. It was horrible, so soul crushing, so toxic. It was one of those jobs that really knocks you off your feet. I literally lost all sense of self in a very short time because, you know, you think you are good at something. And then I had this experience and I was just like, 'Oh my God, I'm worthless.'"

### **Part 2: Brooklyn moms share how they manage careers and families**

"I was very low. I just had a baby and I had a toddler," Poltzer said. "I was feeling so low confidence and I was so embarrassed to even go back to my old boss."

"My husband was like, 'You gotta get up! We live in New York, you have to work,'" she said.

"So I thought, I will just try to make money. I wasn't thinking about starting a business, I was just, literally, 'I need to pay a bill, I need to put my kid in daycare and I have another baby.' So I ended up getting a client to hire me to make video for their new business, and I had no idea what I was doing. But I never went back to Corporate America. I got a client, and then you know how it goes — all of a sudden I have another client, and all the sudden I was like, 'Wait a minute, do I have a business?'"

"Had I not done that website on the side when I was working at the TODAY Show, I don't think I would have even considered starting my own business," Poltzer said. "But because I had done that website and people knew I was at the TODAY Show and I could shoot and edit video, I actually got clients from that. So it was like a full circle moment."

"I started my business, Patrice Poltzer Creative, at the top of 2017, and my business has grown," she said. "During the pandemic, like most people, I had to pivot because all production was stopped, so I was making no money. Then in 2020, I was pregnant with my third baby and I started adding coaching. So now I do a lot of online coaching and courses, and I teach entrepreneurs how to tap into their own founder story in order to grow their business. Amazing, that's the bread and butter of my business now, and I love it. If you would have told me I would have been a coach or a teacher I would have said, 'Are you kidding me?' But it's one of the most unexpected joys of my life, actually."

While she coaches both men and women, she mostly attracts female entrepreneurs, Poltzer said.

"I'm actually kicking off another program called the Founder's Fire. We write your story and then I teach you how to put it to video. Then my team edits the video so you get a beautiful piece of content for your website," she said.

Poltzer said she accomplishes her work with the help of her husband and a regular babysitter.

"I have an amazing husband! You can't all do that and not have help," she said. "My husband has a big job too, but we do all that stuff together — he pulls a ton of weight.

"My older two are in school and my little one goes to daycare, and then I also have a regular babysitter that comes 15 hours a week. She does my grocery shopping, she does all my errands," she said. "I couldn't do it if I didn't have the help."

Poltzer has some advice for other moms.

"Number one, you see all these people and you think it's an overnight success story. But everything takes time," she said. "I've had a business for five years and I feel like I'm just getting my foot in. That's why I always say, if there's something you want to do, you got to just keep with it. There's going to be times when maybe you can't do it full throttle. But you've got to keep yourself and your ideas in motion because it takes so much longer than you would think, and a little motion is better than no motion.

"And the second thing, I don't struggle with mom guilt. I love what I do, I love working and I always have. So my kids see me now, they call mom 'the boss.' When my oldest introduces me, he says, 'Mom is her own boss,' and he's so proud. They know that mom runs her company and there's times where I'm working on the weekends and I have to miss some of their stuff, but I'm looking at the long-term. There are weeks and months when I'm not as involved with them but there are other months — I took two months off this summer just to be with my kids. It's the long game.

She added, "If you feel inspired to try something or write or to start doing video or have a business idea, don't ignore that. You owe it to yourself to explore that because ultimately — well, you've heard, 'Happy wife, happy life?' It's like, 'Happy mom, happy life.' You have to do things that make you happy and get you fired up to get out of bed in the morning."





Emily Meyer Steinberg, currently a full-time caregiver, has worked in the clean energy field. Photo by Lindsey Turner

### **Emily Meyer Steinberg: Caregiver and clean energy**

Brooklyn Heights mom Emily Meyer Steinberg has two boys ages 5 and 7. With an MBA from Stanford, she was working in the solar power industry, but left her job about six months ago to do full-time caregiving.

"Before my kids were born, I had just finished business school to transition from the sports and entertainment industry into the renewable power industry. So I had only worked for maybe six months before my first child was born," she told the Eagle. "I was working in sales, operations and strategy for solar companies."

After her first son was born she continued working full-time. "My partner also works full-time. We had a full-time, reliable nanny, and we made it work. It felt fine," Steinberg said. "I'm sure there was stress here and there but we had a good arrangement. We would get time with our son before work and after work, so with one child it worked out pretty well."

But it wasn't so easy when the second child came, Steinberg said.

"When you have a 2-year-old and an infant, the 2-year-old wants all of your time. And so I found that all the sudden, I have this brand-new baby who I was spending almost no time with, because when I was home and not working it was just so hard to break away from my 2-year-old. And I wanted to spend time with him, too," she said.

"So that was the point when I felt like continuing to have a high pressure, full-time job with this 2-year -old and this infant just wasn't going to work for me, at least in the way that I wanted to be a parent. And so that was when I decided that I needed to scale down to three days a week," Steinberg said. "My employer at the time was totally understanding, but they said, 'Look, the role that you are in cannot be a part-time role. And so if you want to be part-time we will give you a long runway to find something new.'"

"I was comfortable with having to leave that job if it meant that I got the schedule that I felt was necessary for my own well-being and for my family in general," she said.

"So I ended up leaving that company and I thought that I would become a consultant, find clients and do projects for them for a given amount of time," Steinberg said. "I ended up talking to someone who I thought would be able to give me ideas for potential clients, but he ended up just offering me a part-time job. He knew I had a good reputation, he knew I had experience in the industry, and he was willing to trade off the hours for everything else that I brought."

She had to leave that job six months ago, however, due to a family issue that required her to stay at home, she said. She has been caregiving since then.

Steinberg says she is a bit up in the air about what she will be doing next. "It might be consulting for other companies or going back into a corporate role. I do want to stay in the clean energy or energy efficiency area."

Her advice for other moms?

"I would advise them to build a list up front of what their priorities are and what they are willing to be flexible about, and then look for opportunities brd on that list," Steinberg said. "Is income most important? Schedule flexibility, career title, industry, etc? There will always be trade-offs so make sure you're making the trade offs you want."

She added, "For me, I knew that I needed a 3-day-a-week schedule and I wanted to stay in the clean energy industry, and so those became my priorities when sourcing my former position four and a half years ago."





Photo from the days when Jocelyn Greene was both directing and parenting. Photo courtesy of Jocelyn Greene

### **Jocelyn Greene: Theater; Child's Play NY**

Actress Jocelyn Greene, born in Brooklyn, comes from a theater family. Her parents, now in their 80s, are both working actors. When she was young, the family traveled the country on tour and settled in LA, where her dad taught her Shakespeare soliloquies while the plying the highways. When Greene was learning to read, she would run lines with her mom.

So it was natural that Greene would earn an MFA in acting from NYU and become an actress herself. She performed in plays at The Public Theater and other lauded New York City venues.

But theater is an especially challenging field for those who want to raise kids. (Just picture missing bedtimes six days a week.) And especially so when both parents are in the business. Greene's husband is the actor [Glenn Fleshler](#) (Joker; Boardwalk Empire; Billions).

"I left the career because I knew I wanted to raise a family and have more stability, and never looked back," Greene told the Eagle. She founded [Child's Play NY](#) in 2009, when she was in her late 20s. Her son is now 10-years old.

Child's Play NY offers acting classes, in-school programs, theater-themed camp programs, parties, vocal and audition coaching and other services. (The Eagle covered her work regarding [Social and Emotional Learning Shakespeare](#) back in 2017.)

"It isn't without its grind," and the pandemic was challenging for arts-brd and child-centric companies, she said. "But it has been a labor of love and has allowed me to use my training and still be a working mother on my terms. I now have 40-plus teaching artists who run classes, residencies and shows in more than 20 schools. Ultimately, I'm able to affect change and provide enriching arts experiences for hundreds of kids— and even myself and the teachers who work with them.

"Most importantly, I can raise my son without doing work on a schedule that feels punitive or for New York theater wages, which, for off-Broadway, means that you are often living below the poverty line," Greene said. "I am grateful that I found my own business to give me joy and stability."

Since her husband is a career actor, "'the business' is still very much a part of my life," she said.

Greene described her journey from working actress to theater teacher and business owner.

"I started as a teaching artist myself," she said. "During and after my graduate training, I sought out experiences where I could teach what I was learning, too, and I found those to be so rewarding, more so even than acting.

"I did work at the Harvey Milk School and Epic Theater in NYC, at Will Power to Youth in LA and Oddfellows Playhouse in Connecticut. The teaching artists there were really inspiring. I was a solo teaching artist at various schools in Brooklyn before founding Child's Play NY, but totally self-taught as a business person," she said.

We asked Greene how long it took her to become successful.

"Success is relative — it has been a gradual and rewarding climb for sure," Greene said. "Within the first year of founding the company it felt triumphant just because I was able to put profits back into growing the company's reach. Every year I look to expand the number of partnerships we have and the kinds of classes we offer.

"If I saw a time-lapse of the company, I'm sure it would feel fast, but when you are inside this kind of growth that is very bootstrappy — no outside investors, etc. — it feels good and organic. I guess the numbers tell a pretty nice story."

Being a mom helped her expand the business, she said.

"When I became a mom, I noticed a shift in what mattered and it actually accelerated my growth, since my son's influence and interests fed the work directly," she explained. "With the help of developmental psychologists, I started making videos for parents with tools from the theater classroom that could be applied to that amorphous 'playtime.'" ([childsplayinaction.com](#)).

For example, one demonstrates [how to use puppets](#) to help children solve problems themselves by suggesting to the puppet ways to solve its own similar problem. Other videos share games you can use to talk to kids about "big stuff;" games to help kids write; techniques to help kids focus and much more. "I'm working now with classroom teachers in upper elementary to develop curriculum for schools that is brd on SEL (Social Emotional Learning) and NY State Standards," Greene said.

Greene shared her advice for other moms interested in starting their own businesses.



"Learn all aspects of your business at first," Greene said. "As you grow, pay attention to what you love working on, and get help with the rest. Outsourcing to talented people whose expertise is something like web design, bookkeeping, graphics, etc, is essential!"

She added, "Stay on top of what your customer needs by being super curious and communicative. Be flexible enough to pivot when something isn't working. Use the parent-community to your advantage, no matter the business. Child's Play NY had a very specific and clear tie-in with families, but many other businesses can be supportive as well. Use that world to learn about and grow your customers, offer discounts or ask for help — the Brooklyn family network is truly amazing."

### **Marie: Hospital therapist**

Marie, a therapist at a hospital in New York City, returned to work after her second child. She says she is now re-evaluating her situation. (Marie asked that her full name not be used for professional reasons.)

"My oldest child will be five in November, and my youngest turned one about a month ago," she told the Eagle. "We have a good maternity leave program at the hospital, so I was able to take nine months for the first son and then with my daughter I took a year."

Marie lives in Clinton Hill and works five shortened days a week so she can drop her kids off in the mornings and pick them up in the afternoon. Managing childcare has been difficult, she said, especially since she doesn't have any nearby relatives who can help out.

"I actually tried to get back to work in April, but I ended up prolonging my maternity leave for maybe three or four months just to deal with the kids' progressive illnesses of Covid, stomach viruses and hand, foot and mouth disease — they were out of school and daycare continuously. But finally we just decided it was time for me to come back and we kind of crossed our fingers and jumped back in," Marie said.

Luckily, things have been going well, she said. "My son was at camp, and my daughter started daycare. And my job was nice enough to help me adjust my hours because my husband works very long hours. He works from about 8 a.m. until 6, 7 or 8 at night."

"The difficult thing with any job is they don't follow a school schedule," Marie said. "That has caused a lot of scheduling anxiety. It really wasn't much of an issue when my son was in daycare, because daycare was a full year program. But schools take the major holidays off, a winter break, a spring break, a summer break."

In addition, the traditional 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. school day doesn't line up with most job hours, she said. "It's just a crazy thing where a child's schedule does not match with their parents' work schedule ... So I was looking at maybe moving towards a more school-brd program so that we would have holidays in common and save on child care." However, most of the jobs she has looked at either don't have the salary the couple needs or the right hours, Marie said.

Marie shed light on another issue affecting her family. "We are slightly older parents, so our parents — the children's grandparents — are too old to be able to take care of the kids, so we are in that sandwich generation," Marie said. "We're caring for my parents and being available for them in case anything happens, in addition to being there for the kids. So there's a lot of family pressure."

She has considered consulting or starting a practice, but she is daunted by the prospect of finding affordable office space and then marketing herself. "For me, I don't know if it's really the right fit. And also, health insurance is huge. Because the kids are on my plan, and health insurance for a family is a crazy amount every month — it's an extra maybe \$10,000 out of a paycheck. I do have a good health insurance plan at the hospital. At this point I think I'm going to sit tight with what I have."

Marie offered advice for working moms.

"Have a frank conversation with your manager about what is needed to balance having a family and working," she said. "I really hope employers understand the difficulty. Have that frank conversation that my kids are going to get sick, or the nanny is going to call out sick one day, so there's no surprise."

Help from a partner is "very important," she said. "Having an extra set of hands, an extra set of eyes, and an extra body around is huge, it really is." There was a time when her husband was working late into the night, she said. "I was doing it by myself and it was absolutely draining. Because it's nonstop."

When Marie was approaching labor with her second child, "We didn't have anybody to care for my son and the daycare offered some of their teachers who we love, and they were our on-call people," she said. "So you have to try to find the community of people you trust in all kinds of places."