

All the work and no glory

My wife just earned her MBA. I should get an MBA-sp (for spousal support)

Studying for an MBA is hard work. I know, because for the past year my spouse has been a business student.

When Susan graduates in a few weeks, it will feel as though I have earned a degree as well.

MBA schools advertise that their students learn how to become both team players and leaders. From my experience, much of the learning about teamwork, negotiation, delegation and leadership happens with the student's significant other.

Susan has learned to manage her support staff: me. The terms in-house editor, courier, taxi, secretary and personal assistant all have a new meaning for me. As do just-in-time, on-call and you'll-fit-it-into-your-schedule.

The MBA program at York University, where Susan studied, makes it clear that the support and encouragement of significant others motivates students to succeed. In fact, there is an association for MBA spouses and significant others on campus that meets regularly for mutual support and to share strategies about how partners can survive the educational experience.

I wish I could have attended more meetings, but I was too busy in my many helper roles.

The past year has tested our marriage in ways that traveling around the world and being parents of twins never did. For instance, who knew that debates about the placement of a comma in a report could get so heated and personal?

Not only has our relationship deepened in unpredictable ways, but I've also bonded with people I have never met – Susan's professors and fellow students. Many of them now seem like dear old friends whose habits and foibles are well known to me. I shall miss the daily updates on their lives.

As I got to know Susan's

school colleagues, they also grew to know me, although our paths never crossed. Given that some weeks she would be with her colleagues seven days a week, often into the early-morning hours, I know she must have mentioned me.

Sometimes in fulfilling my secretarial duties I would get calls for Susan that began with, "Oh, you must be **Thomas**. I've heard so much about you."

I was always afraid to ask exactly what the caller had heard, and exactly how my role had been described by Susan.

In addition to altering our relationship, the MBA dramatically shifted our daily routines. For several weeks each term, around crunch time, Susan would stay up until 6 a.m. and then sleep until noon, or skip sleeping altogether.

It was not uncommon for her to be on the phone with her classmates at 3 a.m. working through an accounting problem or preparing for a group presentation later that day.

I'm not sure how this schedule enhanced productivity, but it got the job done for her while turning our home into a 24-hour operation and leaving me in a zombie-like state.

Increasingly as the academic year progressed, meals became haphazard, with breakfast sometimes in the early afternoon and dinner at midnight. Like her colleagues, Susan seemed to think that coffee was a recognized food group under Canada's Food Guide. I am convinced that without Tim Hortons she would not have completed her degree.

The MBA took over not only our daily schedules, but our very home. Every room, including the washroom, housed piles of books, journals, reports, spreadsheets and newspaper clippings.

I enjoyed browsing through

some of these, which was a good thing because being an editor – particularly under tight timelines and a demanding boss – is much easier if one has some general knowledge of the subject matter.

I was even able to apply some of what I read to my MBA-related duties. Take supply and demand. When Susan needed me to look over an assignment an hour before it was due, the demand was high and I – as the only easily available supplier – had considerable market power to extract payment.

The textbooks stated that Adam Smith's invisible hand of the market would operate to settle on a price agreeable to both parties.

However, the anonymity that the textbooks espoused did not apply, and I now fear that retribution is coming for some of my actions as a monopolist.

I don't pretend to have learned as much about strategic management and international business as Susan has, but I sure know enough now about IPOs, NGOs, the ISO and WTO to carry on an intelligent conversation.

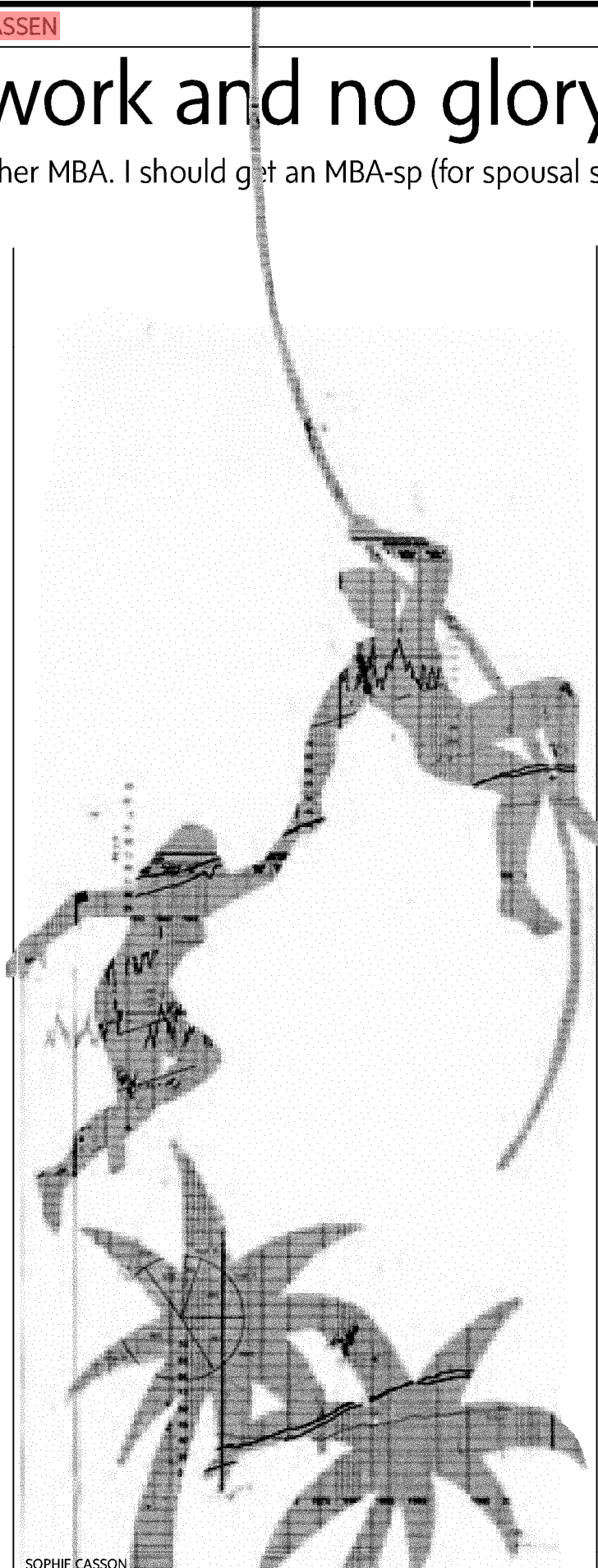
In a fair world, given the knowledge and skills that I acquired during Susan's MBA studies, York University would grant me a degree during this month's convocation: a ½ MBA, or maybe an MBA-sp (for spousal).

As this seems unlikely, I plan to demonstrate my newly attained expertise of entrepreneurship and management by starting a company that, in a few short years, will dominate the global market. That will certainly show them! But then, isn't that what Susan is supposed to do now?

» **Thomas Klassen** lives in Toronto.

globeandmail.com/life

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SOPHIE CASSON