

Material 1960s Family

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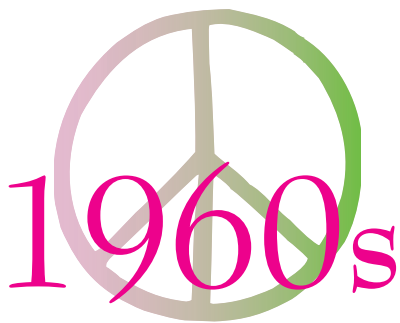
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Backdrop

The decade of the 1960s was one of turmoil and change. The country was jolted by the assassinations of one president, two civil rights leaders, and one presidential aspirant.¹ Nuclear war was barely averted.² The country was less willing to tolerate social inequities, and major legislation was passed to initiate change. Women's salaries were woefully below men's in every occupation; this was addressed by the Equal Pay Act of 1963, although 40 years later women's salaries still lagged behind men's in most fields.³ The Civil Rights Act of 1964 addressed discrimination in employment, lodging, and schooling on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. As the decade wore on, the war in Vietnam became increasingly contentious, with protest marches growing in frequency and participation. The birth of the Internet passed unnoticed by all but a handful of scientists. At the beginning of the decade, one man orbited the earth, and at the end, two men walked on the moon.⁴



A protest at the University of California-Berkeley during a time of turmoil



Backdrop



Backyard BBQ
 Courtesy of Advanced Auto
 Parts, Inc.

Despite the social upheaval, the 1960s were a time of increasing economic affluence. Inflation-adjusted per capita disposable income increased by 36 percent over the decade. Women’s participation in the workforce rose from 38 percent to 43 percent.⁵ Unemployment fell steadily throughout the decade, declining from 5.5 percent in 1960 to 3.5 percent in 1969.⁶ The introduction of Medicare in the mid 1960s provided health care coverage to all senior citizens.

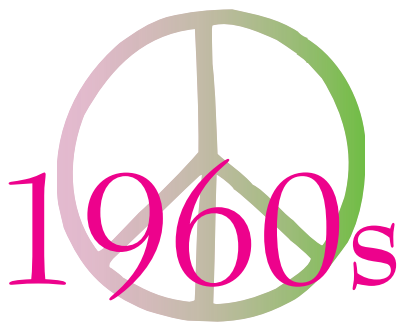
As historian Ruth Schwartz Cowan states in *More Work for Mother*, “By 1960 the numbers of Americans who could afford to live at a ‘decent’ and ‘healthful’ standard of living had become the average American; decency, cleanliness, rudimentary nutrition, and rudimentary healthfulness were no longer the privileges of the elite. The minimum subsistence budget that was used to determine welfare payments in New York City in 1960 would have been regarded as luxurious in 1910 or in 1930. A four-person family was permitted to rent a five-room flat so that each member could be ‘alone in a room’ — a luxury inconceivable earlier in the century. The flat was to be outfitted with a complete bathroom (hot and cold running water), a complete kitchen (. . . refrigerator, gas or electric range), and central heat. The diet . . . was not to contain luxurious foods such as steak, but did allow meat, milk, fresh fruits, and vegetables to be served at least once a day.”⁷

Our “Average” Family and Their Home

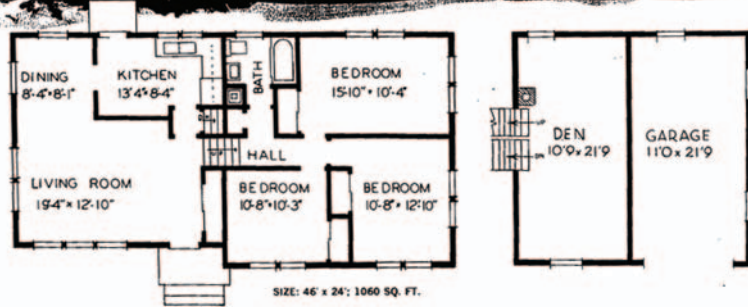
Our hypothetical family lives in a suburb of Hartford, Connecticut. Suburbs boom as cars make it possible for people to live at greater distances from their place of work. Our family reflects the trend toward smaller families — an average of four people⁸ — and larger homes.



There is more leisure time for families in the 1960s.



The Average Family



A 1960s Arbor Homes ranch style house and floor plan
 Courtesy of Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities

Family members include father, mother, a teenaged son, and a 12-year-old daughter. Our family’s 1,150-square-foot house is part of a development built in 1960 on what was formerly a large farm. Each house sits on its own half-acre lot and differs from its neighbors only in exterior color and landscaping.

The word “household” now means the nuclear family. Grandparents or relatives

may come for short visits, but not extended stays. And paying “boarders” are uncommon in the suburbs, unlike during the 1810s or the 1890s.

More space (living, storage, and outdoor) and modern appliances and conveniences characterize the 1960s home versus those of previous eras. Our family’s home has an open floor plan with a “command post” style kitchen and dining area. This layout – kitchen and dining/living area separated by a galley – allows mother to work in the kitchen “command post” while she interacts with those in the dining/living area. Both children have their own bedrooms that are jammed with clothes, “45s” and “LPs” (records⁹), stuffed animals, gadgets, books, and sports equipment. Parents and kids share the full bathroom. There is also a half bathroom off the kitchen. The garage is used for storage since the basement has been made into a recreation room. The family car and the son’s “heap” sit in the driveway.

Electricity powers the lights and household appliances, while a gas burner provides warmth in the winter. Every home in the family’s suburb has heat, running water, and indoor plumbing.

Family Possessions

The family purchases virtually everything – food, home items, and clothing. Many items that they buy are produced overseas, including Japanese electronics equipment. Generally speaking, homemade items now showcase the skill of the daughter, a hobbyist, and these are made for pleasure, not from necessity.

The family has all of the following labor saving devices: vacuum cleaner, refrigerator, stove, iron, blender, toaster, electric frying pan, and washing



Family Possessions

machine. (Microwave ovens have just begun to be manufactured but are still out of the financial reach of the family.) The family also saves on labor by using wrinkle and stain resistant materials as much as possible for their clothing, upholstery, and carpeting. Many of their possessions are made of plastic – from toys to

toothbrushes to the drainpipes in their house. Like their neighbors, the family has a nonstick Teflon® coated pan in their kitchen.¹⁰

The family expects instant access to local, regional, national, and world news. The daily morning newspaper, *The Hartford Courant*, keeps them abreast of local and New England events, while the radio provides news flashes and entertainment. But television – merging sound and imagery on a small screen in the home – is the family’s preferred, exciting new method of communication. While only 9 percent of U.S. households had a TV in 1950, 87 percent have one in 1960.¹¹ (By 1970 virtually every household has a TV.¹² Even in 1965, however, almost all TVs were black and white. Color did not become affordable until the early 1970s.¹³)

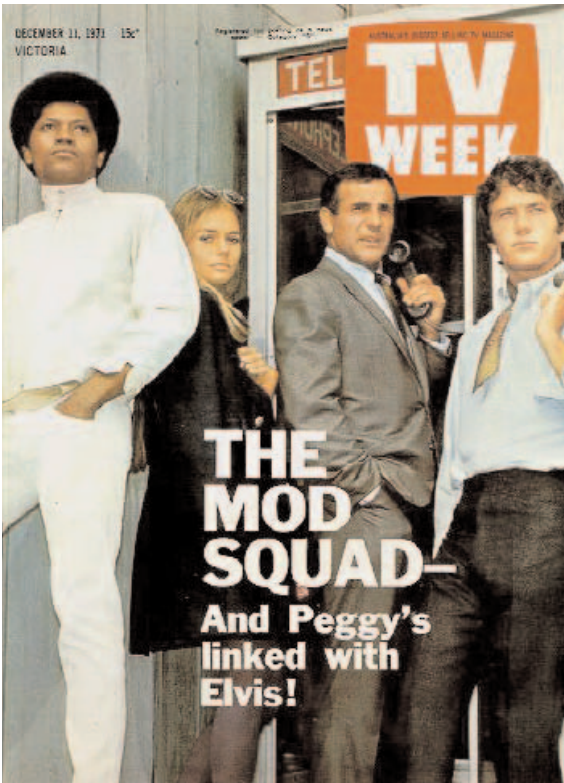
The family’s favorite prime-time television shows are three sit-coms: *The Lucy Show*, *I Dream of Jeannie*, and *The Beverly Hillbillies*. These are in sharp contrast with the tumultuous civil rights and antiwar demonstrations in Washington DC, New

York City, and the South.

Television sets are still very expensive items. A large stationary Sears TV costs \$580 (\$3,374 in today’s dollars); a portable TV costs \$299 (\$1,743 in today’s dollars). By comparison, major household appliances, which can be categorized as necessities not luxuries, are less expensive: electric range, \$199 (\$1,160 in today’s dollars); refrigerator freezer, \$259 (\$1,510 in today’s dollars); two-speed automatic washing machine, \$189 (\$1,100 in today’s dollars).¹⁴

Despite the popularity of television, the family still owns several radios. A pocket-sized transistor radio, developed in the late 1950s, is a big hit with the family’s teenaged son, who values its portability.

In addition to *The Hartford Courant* newspaper, the family subscribes to sever-



TV Week magazine cover featuring the popular television show “The Mod Squad.”
Courtesy of TV Guide



Father

In a 1964 *Atlantic Monthly* article, Professor Martin Greenberger noted that over 20,000 computers were in use in the United States. He wondered what would happen in coming years. Had computer usage reached a plateau? To Professor Greenberger, 20,000 computers seemed like a vast number. Would there be enough data to compute?

Apparently so — the Census Bureau reports that in the year 2000, 54 million U.S. households had one or more computers for home use. In 1964, computers for home use were nonexistent; uses were strictly scientific and business.

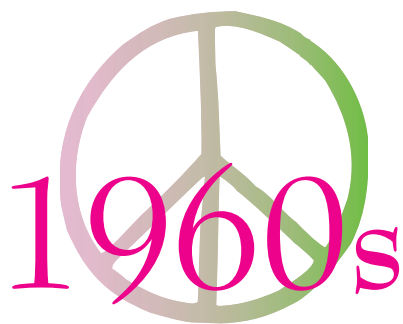
al weekly and monthly magazines. Everyone looks forward to the weekly edition of *Life Magazine*. Mother gets *Good Housekeeping*; father, *U.S. News and World Report*. Mother picks up the weekly *TV Guide* at the grocery store. On their birthdays, the son was given a subscription to *Sports Illustrated*, and the daughter, to *Seventeen*.¹⁵

Father

Father is a junior-level auto and casualty underwriter earning \$8,000 per year at an insurance company in downtown Hartford. He carools to work with three neighbors, leaving his wife home with the car on most days. His workweek is officially 40 hours, but occasionally he will stay late or work on a Saturday morning. The management track he is on requires him to take college classes in business administration, which he does at night school. So far, he has completed one and a half years toward a bachelor of arts degree. He is the first person in his family to take college level classes. As time permits, he plans to continue his education, since he is well aware that his studies have propelled his career and increased his salary.¹⁶

Businesses are just starting to use computers. Father's company is one of the first insurance companies to purchase one, an IBM 1401, which is used to calculate insurance premiums and automate certain payroll and accounting functions. While father can see the results of the computer's speedy calculations, the machine seems mysterious, intimidating, and removed from his day-to-day life. The computer has its own room — kept at a very low temperature — and is worked on only by a select, highly trained group of people. The phrase "user-friendly" will not come into existence for another two decades.

The most common way to find a job in the 1960s is through the "help wanted" section of a newspaper. Like other newspapers of the time, *The Hartford Courant* categorizes jobs by gender. Women's jobs are typically clerical/support staff. Among the jobs advertised for women in 1963 are clerk typist (\$1.50 to \$1.75/hour), secretarial with shorthand (\$90 per week), accounts payable clerk



Father



S & H Green Stamps were very popular among homemakers.

(\$70 per week), confidential secretary, receptionist, advertising assistant, fashion demonstrator, sales clerk, hostess (\$90 per week), cook, and gal Friday (\$75 per week). Women's salaries are most often stated in dollars per hour or week, while men's are in dollars per year. Men's jobs listed in the same newspaper include sales

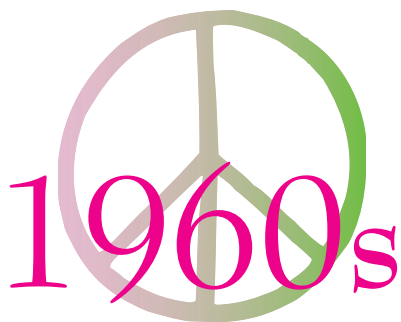
trainee, bricklayer, auto parts manager, delivery person, entry level chemist (\$5,700 per year), industrial salesman (\$6,600 per year plus commission), and engineer (\$10,000 per year).

Mother

Like 30 percent of married American women at the time, mother spends some time working outside the home. Her primary job is housewife, but two mornings a week she works at a dentist's office doing secretarial work. She earns \$1.75 per hour.¹⁷ Her main reason for working is to be able to buy "extras" for her family and home, but she also enjoys getting out and being with other adults.

Looking after the house, food shopping, meal preparation, chauffeuring her daughter to lessons and friends' homes after school, cleaning, doing laundry, and her job keep mother very busy. As Ruth Schwartz Cowan points out in *More Work for Mother*, modern appliances definitely cut down on the drudgery of housework, but a concomitant rise in standards of cleanliness means that there is still a lot of work for mother to do.¹⁸ Since the average housewife in the 1960s does not have outside help, caring for the family and home consumes considerable time, despite modern conveniences.

The S&H Green Stamp collecting frenzy is in full force in the mid 1960s,¹⁹ and mother and her neighbors are enthusiastic participants. They try to arrange grocery shopping on double and



Mother

Help Wanted, Female 32

HOUSEWIVES
Opportunity to earn money, does not interfere with home duties, good income, permanent. Call

AVON
287-4722 OR BA 1-1572

HOUSEWIVES PART-TIME
Monday through Friday
NIGHTS 6 TO 10 P.M.

We currently have openings for

- **Transcriptionists**
(Machine Dictated Letters)
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(Machine Record Operations)
Qualified typists will be given special training in the use of modern office equipment.

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Qualified applicants must be high school graduates with some experience in these areas.

Visit our Personnel Department Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. or call 277-2944 for more information.

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(At the center of transportation—In Downtown Hartford)

An Equal Opportunity Employer

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In
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B.S. Degree preferred. Experience in maternity nursing required. Co-ordinate with the Nursing of Children instructor for total program in maternal and child health. Liberal benefits.

Apply:
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THE SPRINGFIELD HOSPITAL
759 Chestnut Street, Springfield, Mass.

Hartford Courant ad

In 1964, the S&H catalog became the largest single publication in the United States. S&H printed three times as many stamps as the U.S. Post Office and enough catalogs to circle the earth one and one-half times.²¹

triple stamp days. Now mother is just one book away from getting either a new Corning Ware® casserole set or an electric frying pan.²⁰

Son

Son is a senior in high school. He plans to attend the University of Connecticut next year. He will be the first in his family to attend college full time. His tuition, room, board, and expenses will be \$1,200 per year — equal to \$6,620 in 2003 dollars.²²

Son’s high school guidance counselor uses the newspaper want ads as a tool to inspire students to think about their education and future. One exercise is to go through the Sunday help wanted section and list the types of jobs, number of times advertised, and pay. The next exercise is to find out what education and other skills are necessary for those jobs. The son discovers that the want ads are filled with jobs for different types of engineers. Since he is good in math, he is thinking about electrical engineering as a possible college major.

Leisure Time

Each summer, the family drives to New Hampshire for a week’s vacation on the shores of Lake Winnepesaukee. Since the time when the kids were small, the family has rented a cabin in a compound with several other Hartford families. While some of the families have since moved away from Hartford, everyone still goes on the annual outing to New Hampshire.

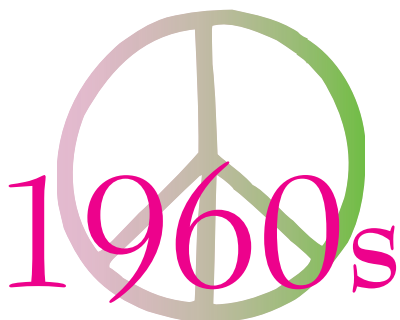
During the school year the family attends the high school football games. In the summer, they enjoy backyard barbecues. In the winter, they enjoy ice-skating together.

The daughter’s public school has “summer camp” programs that she attends for several hours a day during the summer to enjoy crafts, play volleyball, and learn to sew.



Skating is one of many leisure activities families have time for.

Courtesy of The Boston Globe



Son



The GTO was a dream car of teenage boys in the 1960s.

Courtesy of General Motors Corporation
Used with permission, GM Media Archives

During the school year, the son works at a hardware store stacking shelves, sweeping, cleaning, running errands, and, in general, being helpful to the owner. He started saving most of his earnings for college several years ago. He has used some of this money, along with gifts from his parents and grandparents, to buy an old heap of a Chevy. Fixing up the car is one of his chief sources of pleasure. His dream car, however, is a red convertible GTO.

Endnotes

¹ John F. Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963; Malcolm X, on February 21, 1965; Martin Luther King Jr., on April 4, 1968; and Robert F. Kennedy Jr., on June 4, 1968.

² President John F. Kennedy and Russian Premier Nikita Khrushchev faced off over missiles in Cuba during several tense days in October 1962.

³ After hovering at about 60 percent since the mid 1950s, the ratio of women's to men's median pay began to rise in the late 1970s. It reached about 70 percent by 1990 and 75 percent by 1997. The gap narrowed much faster for younger women — perhaps because the younger women made choices similar to those of men and/or did not face as much discrimination as the women before them. *Explaining Trends in the Gender Wage Gap, A Report by the Council of Economic Advisers*, June 1998.

⁴ In 1962, an American, John Glenn, orbited the earth three times in the spacecraft *Friendship 7*. In 1969, two of Glenn's colleagues, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrich, were the first to walk on the moon.

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau.

⁶ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

⁷ Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother* (New York, 1983), p. 194. Cowan continues: "The flat was to be outfitted with a complete bathroom (hot and cold running water, toilet, bath, shower, and sink), a complete kitchen (sink with drain, hot and cold water, refrigerator, and a gas or electric range), and central heat. Plain but adequate furnishings were allowed (each person was to have a bed and a complete set of eating utensils) as well as annual replacement clothing for the children (shoes that fit, dresses that were new and not made over from hand-me-downs). The diet for such a family was not to contain luxurious foods such as steak, but did allow meat, milk, fresh fruits, and vegetables to be served at least once a day. The family was allowed an iron and a vacuum cleaner (although not a washing machine or a dryer) and linoleum, not carpeting, to cover all floors. That set of material conditions is doubly significant: first, because it was regarded as a deprivation in terms of the general standard applying throughout the country in 1960; and, second, because it was luxurious in comparison with how people had lived in earlier decades."

⁸ According to the 1960 decennial census, the national average was 3.31 persons.

⁹ Records were made out of vinyl. "45s" (45 revolutions per minute, or rpm's) usually had one song per side; "LPs," (long playing, 33 revolutions per minute) had 10 to 20 songs on them. Both types of records were played on a phonograph or record player. Most phonographs in the 1960s could still play "78s," which were considered Mom's and Dad's records by teens.

¹⁰ The November 2003 issue of *MIT Technology Review* has an article on the development of new uses for Teflon®, including as a waterproofing agent. A DuPont scientist who was studying refrigerants discovered this slippery product "by mistake" in 1938. It became wildly popular in the 1960s as a coating for cooking pans. <http://heritage.dupont.com/>

¹¹ Thus, most U.S. households had a TV in time to view the Kennedy-Nixon presidential debates, a milestone in this medium. Richard Nixon was far less photogenic, graceful, and relaxed on the small screen than was John Kennedy. TV placed people under a microscope in a way that "voice alone" did not.

¹² Stanley Lebergott, *Pursuing Happiness: American Consumers in the Twentieth Century*.

¹³ <http://www.museum.tv/archives/etv/C/htmlC/colortelevis/colortelevis.htm>

¹⁴ Prices for the 1960s are from the *Hartford Courant* for July 16, 1965. For conversions to today's dollars, see *What Is a Dollar Worth?*, on the web site of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis.
<http://woodrow.mpls.frb.fed.us/research/data/us/calc/>

¹⁵ *Seventeen* was first published in 1944.

¹⁶ In 1960, 41 percent of the total U.S. population had graduated from high school, and 8 percent had completed four years of college. By 1970, the high school graduation number had risen to 55 percent, and those who had attended four years of college, to 11 percent of the population (aged 25 years and over). National Center for Educational Statistics.

¹⁷ The minimum wage in 1961 was \$1.15 per hour. In 1963, it was \$1.25 per hour.
<http://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/wgwkstnd/history.htm>

¹⁸ Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother* (New York, 1983), pp. 196–200.

¹⁹ Many stores gave customers S&H Green Stamps equal to the dollar amount of their purchase. Customers filled up stamp books and then chose an item from the popular S&H Green Stamp catalog. The catalog displayed and described items and noted how many stamp books were required to redeem (“purchase”) each item. Here is one assessment of the popularity of S&H Green Stamps:

“Sperry & Hutchinson, distributor of S&H Green Stamps, was probably the most popular of quite a few competing stamp companies. Sperry & Hutchinson began offering stamps to retailers back in 1896. The retail organizations bought the stamps from S&H and gave them as bonuses with every purchase based on the amount you bought. The more you bought, the more stamps you got. S&H made their money by selling the stamps to retailers. The tradeoff to the retailers was in customer loyalty. Customers flocked to stores that gave stamps. It was an extremely successful program. . . . It was estimated that 80 percent of U.S. households collected stamps of one sort or another, creating an annual market for S&H alone of about \$825 million.”
<http://www.straightdope.com/mailbag/mgreenstamps.html>

²⁰ Both of these items are in the 1960s section of the Material Life exhibit in the Economic Adventure at the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston.

²¹ http://www.greenpoints.com/account/act_default.asp

²² http://www.eh.net/hmit/ppowerUSD/dollar_answer.php and University of Connecticut catalog for 1966–67.