This programme was first broadcast in 1997

Sue: In Private lives today we meet Debbie Davies. She lives with her three children in Huntingdonshire - in the east of England. Debbie is the “chief reporter” - the main reporter for a local newspaper. Most places in Britain have free local newspapers where you can read about what people are doing in the area. We’ll be hearing about people in Huntingdonshire, as Debbie shows us a copy of ‘The Hunts Post’ newspaper. And we’ll hear about Debbie’s life, her interests, and how she combines a successful career as a journalist with being a mother. Debbie had her children before becoming a reporter. Why was studying to be a journalist a difficult time for her? Listen.

Clip  Debbie Davies
I came into journalism quite late. I was 29 when I started college. I had 3 young children - they were all at school then. It was a very difficult time for me - I’d sort of finally found something that I really wanted to do in life, but there was a price to pay, I guess - it was very tiring. My marriage had just split up at that time, and so I had just moved house. The house was a lot smaller than what we’d been used to. We only had 2 bedrooms - there were 3 children sharing one room - and I had an old, battered Ford Fiesta as well, which was very unreliable and I would often go out in the mornings and it wouldn’t start and sometimes I’d be late for college.
or I’d have to get the bus. So it was a real struggle and I think I would have given up had it not been something that I really wanted to do.

**Sue:** Studying to be a journalist was a “real struggle” - it was difficult - for Debbie because it was just after she had just “split up” - separated - from her husband. And because of this, she and her three young children were living in a much smaller house. To make things worse, her car was “unreliable” - it didn’t always work. Debbie didn’t “give up” - she didn’t stop. Journalism was something she very much wanted to do and, something she’s good at. She moved very quickly from being a junior reporter to becoming the chief reporter at ‘The Hunts Post’ newspaper. Life isn’t such a “struggle” for Debbie now, but the day begins early, and she does a lot of things before she leaves the house. Listen and try to catch some of the things she does.

**Clip Debbie Davies**

It’s five past eight in the morning. I’ve just finished listening to the breakfast news. I’ve listened to the local news to find out if there’s anything which the paper needs to be covering, maybe later today. I’m just finishing a piece of toast - that’s all I generally have in the morning - I cook for the boys, but I tend to make do with a piece of toast and a cup of tea. I’ve already polished the coffee table in the living room, and put the Dust Buster round and put some washing in the washing machine, and I’m currently writing a shopping list. I’ve got soap powder, washing-up liquid and mince on the list at the moment.
Sue: So Debbie is writing her “shopping list” - she’s writing down all the things she has to buy today. She’s already done some of the housework; “polishing” and “dusting” - cleaning, and she’s put some washing in the machine. She’s also listened to the news to check if there’s anything the paper needs to “cover” - to report, today. Debbie is thinking about the day’s work ahead and preparing her children for school. Her youngest son, Russell, is 12 years old and goes to the local secondary school. Debbie checks he has everything he needs, including his “kit” - his games clothes - for cricket.

Clip Debbie Davies talking to Russell
Russell’s just about to go to school - aren’t you? Have you got everything? Have you got all your games’ kit? And it’s… What is it today? Cricket - well, looking at that weather out there I don’t think you’ll be playing, will you? Have you got your dinner money? No. Right then, I’d better give you that in a minute then. OK?

Sue: Debbie gives Russell his dinner money and he leaves to catch the bus. She then goes upstairs to say good-bye to Aaron, her middle son, who is preparing for important exams. Now Debbie leaves for work. It’s a 12 mile drive. It’s Wednesday and ‘The Hunts Post’ newspaper is published on a Wednesday. This means that Tuesday is Debbie’s busiest day, as a new edition of the paper has to be ready for printing. So the first thing she does when she arrives at work is to “tidy up” - to organise her desk again.
Clip   Debbie Davies
I’m at work now, and my desk is very messy because I had a very busy Tuesday. So, normally the first thing I do on a Wednesday is to tidy up my desk! I’m just going to put my computer on and start opening my mail.

Sue: Next, Debbie shows us a copy of ‘The Hunts Post.’ The front page story is one she’s very proud of. With the story, there’s a large photograph of a local girl, Christina Hance. She looks very similar to Diana, Princess of Wales. She works as a Princess Diana “look-a-like” - so she might be hired for things like parties or to appear in advertisements. Christina has made it to the front page because her job has made her as unhappy as the Princess is reported to have been. Christina, a single parent, has felt “depressed” - sad and unhappy, and even “suicidal” - she’s thought about killing herself. Debbie talks about this front page story:

Clip   Debbie Davies
It was a good story because she’s a 36 year old single mum and she said that her role as this Princess Di look-a-like had made her depressed and suicidal, and it really meant that her life had more or less run along the same tracks as the Princess herself. So this probably isn’t a typical week’s newspaper, because of the front page story - these sort of stories happen maybe 2 or 3 times a year - you get a story that is of national, and with this story, international, interest.

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Sue: A story like Christina’s which is of worldwide interest doesn’t happen often in Huntingdonshire. Generally the stories are only of local interest. Debbie knows from all the letters she receives that she is covering the right stories. She explains that people want to read about local “issues” - local subjects and problems. And they want to see themselves in the paper! Getting married is one way to get your photograph in ‘The Hunts Post.’ Or you might be in the paper because you have done something different, like the man on page 3. He “raised” money - he got people to give him money for charity, in an unusual way. He sat in a bath full of baked beans!

Clip    Debbie Davies

The picture we have on page 3 is a local man who sat in a bath of beans. That was to raise money for Comic Relief. That’s the kind of thing that local people get up to - that’s the kind of thing that the community’s all about, and the kind of thing that we cover week in week out. On page 4, we always have our weddings - have lots and lots of weddings, because we use them in colour as well, our paper is very popular. Everybody wants their wedding in The Hunts Post! And we have 2 pages of letters - we get lots of letters which is a really good sign that we are a good paper, because how else do we know really? We’re a free paper - we don’t sell it - so we know by our letters page that people are actually reading the paper, and also that they actually care about the issues that we’re writing about.

Sue: Something in the paper which Debbie has started is a page for children called “WicKid!” It covers topics of interest for children and it’s “interactive” - the children are involved. There’s a column called ‘Word on the Street.’ A “column” is a section of a newspaper usually written by the same person, but
Debbie invites a different child each week to write their opinions in this column. The issue in “WicKid!” for next week is going to be about “pocket money” - the money some parents give their children each week. Are children in Huntingdonshire “worse off” - do they receive less pocket money than children in other parts of Britain? This afternoon Debbie is going out to interview some children to find out.

**Clip Debbie Davies**

I’ve just received this press release and it’s about children’s pocket money. It’s actually saying that children in this area are worse off than those in other parts of the country - they get less pocket money apparently - so what we’re going to do today is to go out onto the High Street in Huntington and find some children and ask them how much pocket money they get and what they spend it on. The article will go on the children’s page in The Hunts Post which we call ‘WicKid!’ and that has lots of information for children - lots of leisure items and tells children where they can go, clubs they can join, and it also is quite interactive - it has a column which we call ‘Word on the Street’ - and we get a child each week to write in and tell us about what they think is going on, and they talk about music and films, and clubs and videos they’ve watched.

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**Sue:** When Debbie is not working, she enjoys being with her children. This time is particularly important to her as she knows it won’t last forever, because her children will soon want to do other things. To relax, Debbie likes to read, to garden and decorate her home.

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Clip  Debbie Davies
I like to read, and I like to garden - my garden’s a real mess at the moment so that’s a bit of a challenge and I want to get that sorted out. And I like to decorate, I find that quite relaxing - even the sort of - the strokes of the brush going up and down the paintwork. And I like to do things with the children, I really enjoy doing that, especially now, because they’re getting older, and I do feel that time is running out really, that they won’t always want to come and do things with me or shop with me or have days out - so it’s important to sort of fit all that in now.

Sue: And to end the programme, we leave Debbie planning an evening of decorating the hall - so it will be a quick dinner for the children tonight!

Clip  Debbie Davies
I don’t have to think too much about dinner tonight because we’re going to have a pizza!