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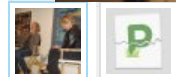
## Literary Powerhouses Crosstalk about Juggling Career and Family in Katonah

Both NY Times writer Lisa Belkin and book agent Molly Friedrich manage to keep both balls in the air, but not without a few moments of thinking "Something's gotta give."

Posted by [Stephanie Susnjara](#), September 21, 2010 at 03:41 PM

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"Eleanor Roosevelt said you should do one thing every day that scares you." said Molly Friedrich. She paused before adding, "Public speaking scares me."

Luckily, fear of bad weather didn't deter a crowd from heading to the Katonah Museum of Art on Thursday night for its CrossTalk

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lectures series featuring a discussion between NYC literary agent Molly Friedrich and *New York Times* writer Lisa Belkin, both of whom reside in Westchester.

The series is a joint program sponsored by the Katonah Village Library and the Katonah Museum of Art.

"This is a conversation you need to come out to hear even on a rainy night," said Pat Eisenmann of Pleasantville, who attended the talk. "These are smart women who always have a tremendous amount to say, and I am sure that will be the case tonight."

With three decades experience as a literary agent, Molly Friedrich is president and owner of the Friedrich Agency located in Manhattan's Flatiron district. She represents writers in the categories of literary and commercial adult fiction, narrative non-fiction and memoir. Her stable of authors includes five Pulitzer Prize winners—Jane Smiley, Elizabeth Strout, Annalyn Swan, Mark Stevens and the late Frank McCourt.

Lisa Belkin, is a contributing writer for *The New York Times* magazine who focuses frequently on family life. She also writes the blog Motherlode for the paper's website; hosts "Life's Work With Lisa Belkin," on XM satellite radio; and has authored three books including "Life's Work: Confessions of an Unbalanced Mom."

In addition to their high-powered careers, both Friedrich and Belkin are married with children. Friedrich is mother to four children who range from elementary-school age to in their upper 20's. Belkin has two teenage sons.

Much of the discussion focused on the challenges both women have faced balancing their work and family lives.

Friedrich kicked off the discussion describing how she struck her first big book deal 29 years ago. She was living in Park Slope and had just returned home from the office.

Friedrich had scooped up her 6-month-old baby Julia and bid the babysitter goodbye when suddenly the phone rang. Bantam publisher Linda Gray was calling to offer Friedrich \$600,000 for client Elizabeth Forsythe Hailey's book, "Life Sentences."

"You're not supposed to react in these moments," said Friedrich. "So I didn't scream. Instead, baby Julia slid down my leg onto the floor and started sobbing. As Linda Gray began talking about marketing the book, I picked up crying Julia and placed her on the other side of these pocket doors we had separating the kitchen from the living area and left her there until I finished the conversation."

Friedrich called this her "something's gotta give moment." Afterward she set about working fewer hours. "Ten to four with my first child. Then no Fridays once I had my second. No Mondays when I had my third."

And with her fourth, Friedrich cut down even more hours and is now training her eldest daughter to take over the business.

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Belkin took the conversation reins, commenting on how her own career story was similar to Friedrich's.

"Life as you're living it is one disaster after the next," said Belkin. "I've lived the life I now write about."

Belkin described how she arrived at *The New York Times* fresh out of Princeton and viewed her path as very linear.

"I wanted to become editor. So I started answering phones, which is how they started all of us smug kids from these Ivy Institutions."

Belkin was promoted to consumer reporter but quit her "dream job" when she married a medical resident who held a position in Houston. Her hiatus from the *Times* did not last long. She soon started freelancing for the paper from Texas.

"I learned an important lesson in Texas—they don't need to see you to edit you."

Belkin and her family moved back to New York and settled in Westchester. Soon she was on Metro North every day bound for the *Times*' office. Then in 1994, when Belkin's first son was three, she told the *Times* she wanted to work at home.

"Them were fighting words back then," she said.

Like Friedrich, Belkin experienced her own "something's gotta give" moment. It happened while she was closing a *New York Times* Magazine story on Governor Christine Todd Whitman. Belkin was at the pediatrician's office with her son who was scheduled for shots. Belkin talked on the cell phone with her editor while her son bawled. Another mother gave her withering looks, which struck Belkin's core.

When the *Times* asked Belkin to write the Life's Work column, she immediately took it. "I realized it was the story of a generation of women who struggle between the realm of life and work." She wrote the column for over ten years.

"What I've realized is that nobody can do it perfectly."

A collective sigh of relief could be heard from the audience.

*The next CrossTalk will be held at the Katonah Village Library on November 18th. The wine reception begins at 6:30 p.m. Tad Friend, a staff writer for The New Yorker who focuses on the entertainment industry, and the playwright, screenwriter and theater director Craig Lucas will be speaking. Tickets are \$20 in advance and \$25 at the door and reservations are recommended. For more information, click [here](#).*

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