Qualitative studies, including participant-observation and in-depth interviews, offer valuable opportunities to understand how social life works. These methods also focus on the meaning of events. Still, there are important challenges in the development of such studies. For example, the focus of the study only unfolds over time, yet numerous institutional practices require researchers to offer clear and confident explications of the purpose of the research in the early stages. This talk discusses the realistic challenges of doing ethnographic work including ethnographic studies of family life. In addition to offering a reflection on enduring challenges, the talk discusses issues of quality and rigor in ethnographic work.