

Exponent II



Southern California

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The purpose of *Exponent II* is to provide a forum for Mormon women to share their life experiences in an atmosphere of trust and acceptance. This exchange allows us to better understand each other and shape the direction of our lives. Our common bond is our connection to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and our commitment to women. We publish this paper as a living history in celebration of the strength and diversity of women.

Exponent II

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Letter from the Guest Editors

Caroline Kline

Last summer, Jana and I volunteered to be guest editors for a Southern California issue of *Exponent II*. As young Mormon women—Jana has two children and I am just beginning to think about starting a family—we were trying to find ways to deal with the expectations and roles placed upon us by the Church and by society. As we talked together at church, during visiting teaching, and at our UC Irvine graduate student Institute class, we discussed the needs we saw among the young Mormon women around us, who seemed to need a forum to reach out to other women and learn from each other's stories and insights. We saw editing our own issue of *Exponent II* as the perfect vehicle to gather these women's insights and perspectives and to join the powerful community of women already supporting and empowering each other through the *Exponent II* readership.



Last fall, during election time, as Jana and I worked on gathering articles and organizing our feminist panel, I couldn't help but think of the women who so inspiringly fought for women's rights in our nation's history: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. As we compiled and edited articles in our own attempts to empower the women around us, I began to identify with Anthony—the childless, intense woman of action, organizing and dealing with practical issues. Jana took the role of Stanton in my mind—thinker, writer, idea-generator, a mother balancing her own pursuits with the needs of her family.

In putting together this issue, we were inspired by the first issues of *Exponent II* that came out in the 1970s—fiery, frank attempts to reconcile the gospel with current societal theories and concerns. Like these issues of the past, you may notice the bold, forthright tone of many of the articles in this issue. With many of the contributors in their twenties and thirties, this issue primarily reflects the concerns of women dealing with the expectations of the Southern California communities we live in, as well as the expectations the gospel places upon us women. Articles dealing with feminism, body image, and gender roles dominate this issue, tempered with the stories and insights of a previous generation of women who dealt with similar concerns.

Jana Bouck Remy



One of the greatest gifts I've ever received from my mother is the stack of yellowed *Exponent II* papers that she gave me when I was a freshman in college. The articles I read inspired me, and the women who wrote them became

my heroines. Among that group of papers was the 1979 Southern California issue that Lael Littke edited. What a privilege it is to be following in her footsteps with this issue! I look forward to the day that I'll pass a copy of this paper on to my daughter. Perhaps she will find some joy in reading about what her mother and other women thought about in the early years of the twenty-first century. Perhaps she will identify with the issues and challenges we face. Perhaps she will see that many things have changed. Hopefully, she will herself be a subscriber and contributor to *Exponent II*.

The most significant lesson that I've learned in putting this issue together is that Mormon women have so much to share with each other. We may think we are so different—in age, in color, in marital status, in education, and so forth—but I think we too often let these differences divide us. However, these differences give each of us a unique voice and perspective. It's my hope that this issue, with its many voices, will inspire each of you to create a dialogue with the sisters in your own community.

Lael Littke: A Lifetime of Writing

Author Lael Littke is perhaps best known for her books for adolescent girls, which include a number of nationally popular suspense novels, such as *Haunted Sister* and *Lake of Secrets*. She has also produced numerous novels for Deseret Book Company that center around young Mormon girls, among which is the successful *Bee Theres* series. More recently, Lael worked with current Church historian Richard E. Turley Jr. to co-author the children's book, *Stories from the Life of Joseph Smith*. Altogether, Lael has published thirty-nine books.

Lael Littke grew up on a farm in Mink Creek, Idaho. After graduating from Utah State University, she moved to Denver to pursue a career. There she met George Littke. They married and moved to New York City, where Lael worked full time and studied writing by night. When her husband was hired to teach political science at Cal State Los Angeles, Lael turned her full attention to writing once again, eventually teaching fiction writing at Pasadena City College and the University of California, Los Angeles.

In 1979, Lael guest edited the previous *Southern California* issue of the *Exponent II*. We felt it was particularly appropriate for her to be a presence in this current *Southern California* issue since she was so instrumental in bringing about the first one.

Lael, now widowed, has one daughter and currently lives in Pasadena with five cats.

You grew up in times when it was somewhat unusual for a Mormon woman to have a career. How did you decide to become a

writer? What or who influenced your desire to write?

I think the desire to become a writer came in the package that was me; it was included in my DNA. As soon as I learned to read, I knew I wanted to write stories. I don't remember anybody influencing this desire except my seventh and eighth grade English teacher, Emil Larson, who told me I definitely had an ability to write. I think he was sent to our tiny town just to teach me how to use that marvelous tool, the English language. He had us diagram sentences endlessly, for which I've always been grateful because it taught me structure. He loved my tales of dogfights and family oddities and neighborhood games.

What effect, if any, did growing up in a small Idaho farm town have on your desire to write?

Growing up in my small Idaho farm town influenced my desire to write because I saw so many stories that needed writing—not only about people, but animals as well. One of the first stories I sold was titled "The Departure of Old Dammit," about an old horse we had. Our school went through ten grades, and then we had to go to Preston (where *Napoleon Dynamite* was filmed!) for the last two years of high school. In our tiny two-year Mink Creek High School, which boasted twenty-six stu-

dents, I had the opportunity to be the newspaper editor and get a start in writing.

How did you reconcile the desire for a writing career with other roles for women emphasized by the Church?

The only role we were encouraged to pursue in my little Mormon town was that of wife and mother. I wanted that, too, but I wanted more, and I just went my own way about achieving it.

You attended Utah State University. How did family and friends react to your

decision to move away to attend college? In what ways did you grow and develop both academically and personally during your college years?

My parents definitely encouraged education, although I don't recall that they ever came right out and said it. We kids just absorbed their general attitude, which was that we should do all we could educationally—something they had never had the opportunity to do. Neither of them went past the ninth grade although both would have liked to.

At that time, more and more women were starting to attend college, so my determination to receive a higher education was not so unusual. Three of my growing-up girlfriends were my college roommates all four years. We lived off campus in dumpy, affordable apartments. We had



already had experience being away from home because we'd had to rent rooms in Preston for the last two years of high school. We did a great deal of growing and developing, not only in being on our own but also in the domestic arts since we had to cook and clean for ourselves. The four of us were able to help one another a lot. Since we had grown up together, we knew one another so very well. We were all fairly studious, but we also always had dates for the dances. One or more of us was always in love with some cute boy!

The encouragement of that junior high teacher gave me the courage to take every writing class available at Utah State, which made my ability to write grow. The classes taught by Moyle Q. Rice were especially influential. He loved my Mink Creek stories of the Relief Society "bizarres," the gossip at the general store, and the woman who fell asleep while dying her hair and almost died from shock over the results.

What happened after you graduated from Utah State?

I graduated with a teaching degree but didn't want to spend my life in a small Utah or Idaho town, so I went to Denver to join a girlfriend and get a secretarial job. I met George Littke at the Denver First Ward. I was music director in MIA and needed a tenor for a show we were producing. Somebody pointed George out to me and said, "That new guy is a tenor." So I introduced myself, and the rest is history. I was attracted to him because he was highly intelligent and ambi-

tious. So maybe it was his brain rather than his beauty that first attracted me — although he was tall, blond, and good looking, too! I think what we appreciated most in each other was our common interest in the Church and the fact that we supported each other in our individual ambitions.

What special insights have you gained through your experiences as a wife and as a mother? Have these experiences influenced your writing?

I guess you always learn a lot about human nature by living closely with someone else. I learned that you can't change a husband. You'd better accept him as he is or else not marry him. I learned to accommodate. As for being a mother — motherhood is an infinite and unending education. The main thing I've learned, I guess, is that you must let your children go. I've used ideas like this as themes in short stories.

Tell us the writing project that you are most proud of.

Perhaps I am most proud of my first major magazine sale, a short story titled "The Day We Lost Max," which came right out of early family observations although the story itself is fiction. It was first published in *The Ladies' Home Journal* and then went on to be republished something like forty-five times in textbooks, anthologies, and foreign publications.

Which of your writing projects is the most personal?

Probably my first Young Adult

novel for a major publisher. It's titled *Trish for President* and is set in my hometown of Mink Creek, Idaho. (I used a different name for the town in the book.) Although the story is total fiction, a lot of its action happens at my old high school, and it reflects a lot of my teenage thoughts and my later philosophies.

How has your faith affected your writing?

Probably in that my heroines always have a lot of integrity. Several of my novels have a Mormon background and the characters act accordingly. These novels are mostly light-hearted and don't deal with heavy material. However, one titled *Blue Skye* is about a little girl abandoned by her mother, who rides off into the sunset with her new husband on twin Harleys. The girl finds out what true family is through the people of the town.

Do you feel that your Mormon-ness is reflected in your non-Deseret writing?

Yes, definitely. The novels mentioned above are not Deseret publications. Even my weird mystery/suspense novels reflect my Mormon-ness, I think. *Lake of Secrets* starts out with "Families are forever," which becomes the theme in a different kind of way.

What works of Mormon literature have inspired you the most?

Probably two novels — *Added Upon*, by Nephi Anderson, and *The Giant Joshua*, by Maurine Whipple. I read *Added Upon*,

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Pondering the Proclamation on the Family

Lori F. Smurthwaite

“The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” more commonly referred to by LDS people as “the proclamation on the family,” is considered scripture or “near scripture” by many members of the Church. Its language seems straightforward and simple, but as with other scripture, when I study and ponder it, I discover ideas in it that I do not fully understand. When I’ve shared my thoughts about the Proclamation with other LDS men and women, I’ve found that I am not the only one with questions, but many of us are not sure how to go about asking them. So I want to raise two questions, offer tentative answers in response, and invite continued discussion.

First, I’ve encountered a number of Church members who are confused by the seeming contradiction in the following lines:

By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners. (emphasis mine)

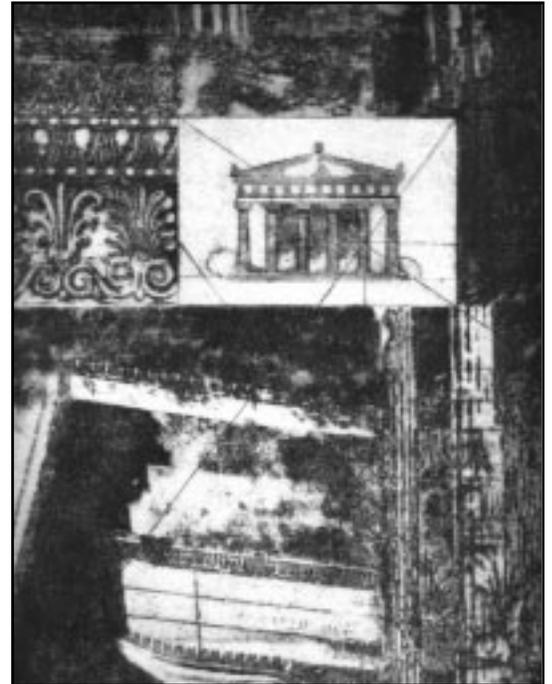
By conventional definition, someone who presides occupies a place of authority or control. The word *preside* seems to set up a hierarchy in the family with men at the top. It is hard to reconcile that definition of *preside* with the word *equal*. The words seem to contradict each other and suggest two different relationships between men

and women. (Of course, the idea that men preside in the home is not new to the Proclamation, but the Proclamation provides a good example of that idea being linked with an emphasis on equality.)

I’d like to suggest a different definition of *preside* that is supported by the Proclamation as well as by other counsel given us by Church leaders. This definition is much closer to that of the Latin root word *praesidere*, one meaning of which is “to guard” or “to sit at the head of” in order to protect. A guard is one who serves and protects others. A father who guards his family serves and protects family members by fulfilling their physical and spiritual needs. The concept of presiding as guarding is clear in the admonition to fathers that immediately follows the word *preside*—“to love, protect, and provide the necessities of life” for their families. This definition is also supported by Church counsel, which consistently describes *presiding* as serving and caring for the family, not controlling it.

This definition may seem too general because it makes no useful distinction between the roles of fathers and mothers; however, LDS fathers serve and care for the family in ways that differ from what mothers do. LDS fathers who hold the priesthood are given the authority to act in the name of Christ, using Him as their example. The Savior’s life was one of service; His highest priority was to fulfill the spiritual and physical needs of those around Him, cul-

minating in His greatest gift of service, the Atonement. If fathers take seriously their assignment to “preside over their families in love and righteousness,” their greatest priority will be to live



worthily so that they can use their priesthood to provide service in the home and to strengthen and protect family members spiritually through priesthood ordinances and blessings.

Because *preside* suggests service rather than hierarchy, fathers who do not hold the priesthood also preside over (or guard) their families when they address the spiritual and physical needs of family members so that the important work of rearing children flourishes. By this definition, fathers can simultaneously preside in the home and be equal partners with mothers.

The second apparent contradiction of the ideal of equal partnership arises in the traditional

division of labor (fathers as breadwinners and mothers as nurturers) suggested by the statement that fathers provide for their families while women are “primarily responsible for the nurturing of their children.” The phrase “primarily responsible for” seems to exclude by definition the idea of equal partnership. In my observation, this assignment of responsibilities is interpreted by some LDS people to mean that fathers do not need to be as active in the daily tasks of child rearing as mothers. But if she is doing most of the work, he is not an equal partner.

Here I’ll borrow words of wisdom from a former bishop and counselor in a stake presidency who reminded me that, as with all callings or roles in life that have a spiritual component, it is essential to remember the concept of stewardship. One who has stewardship oversees the work but does not necessarily work alone. If we apply the concept of stewardship to the proclamation, we might conclude that mothers oversee the rearing of children while fathers oversee the provision of necessities, but nowhere is it suggested that either should do the bulk of the work alone. In fact, quite the opposite is true.

An earlier paragraph of the proclamation reads, “Parents have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness, to provide for their physical and spiritual needs, to teach them to love and serve one another . . .” The statement continues, “Husbands and wives – mothers and fathers – will be held accountable before God for the discharge of these obligations.” Note that in

these lines parents are equally charged with both responsibilities: to nurture their children and provide for their needs. When the idea of accountability is introduced, no differentiation of roles is made based on gender. This suggests that the concept of shared stewardship is more accurate than the idea that mothers and fathers have separate responsibilities.

In fact, the concept of shared stewardship makes for healthy family relationships because it leaves room for women to have interests and commitments outside of the home and for men to be actively involved in the lives of their children. I think it is dangerous to suggest that men can afford to be less involved in any aspect of child rearing than their wives because this assumption may lead men to fail to prepare themselves for their most important eternal role: Father. In a world where men are already too often uninvolved in the daily lives of their children, it makes no sense to downplay the role of father in the lives of LDS men. Once a woman or a man becomes a parent, that role is most important.

That truth is clear when we look at the example of our Father in Heaven. He does not assume He has less capacity than women to nurture, as is sometimes assumed of mortal men, nor does He leave His parenting responsibilities to His partner. It seems a little strange to me that we continue to emphasize the woman’s role as nurturer when it is apparent that

God’s foremost role is that of a nurturing Father. Perhaps we should not assume, then, that nurturing capacities are either inherently stronger in women or more important for them to develop. We do not yet know much about the specific roles of men and women in the eternities, but we

...[T]he role of parent is the most important eternal role for which both genders are preparing.

do know that both men and women will be nurturers of children. We know this because, through revelation, we have learned something of the eternal nature of family relationships, including our identity as spirit children of Heavenly Parents. If our Heavenly Father acts as both nurturer and administrator, it is logical to wonder whether our Heavenly Mother does as well. Although I hope we will yet receive revelation that teaches us more about the roles of and relationship between our Heavenly Parents, we have already received sufficient revelation to know that the role of parent is the most important eternal role for which both genders are preparing.

I hope that my ideas will encourage continued discussion, but I don’t pretend that they are anything more than partial and subjective answers. I’ve always taken great comfort in the ninth Article of Faith, which emphasizes our LDS faith in the reality of ongoing

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Family Home Evening and Our Forever Family

Ruth Hathaway Mauss

A very long time ago—in fact, more than half a century ago—my husband Armand and I decided to get married and start our family. Like most other young couples, we thought we knew enough about life to deal with whatever we might encounter. Not surprisingly, after having the first of our eight children, we soon became aware that children do not come with an instruction manual and perhaps we didn't know as much as we thought we did. The expert on raising children in those good old days was Dr. Benjamin Spock, who mostly told parents how to keep children alive from day to day but not how to deal with the emotional ups and downs and daily unexpected events that challenged our social equilibrium and good tempers. Our secondary resource was well-meaning friends and relatives, whose advice, of course, varied widely in reliability.

Although "Home Evenings" had been recommended by the First Presidency as early as 1915, the need for them was not very widely appreciated until the post-World II "baby boom," when Latter-day Saints, even more than other Americans, produced relatively large families in proliferating suburbs. These demographic changes strained the bonds between generations and left many new families without the social and religious supports that small towns had earlier provided. Finally, in response to President McKay's dictum that "No other success can compensate for failure

in the home," the Church launched a comprehensive weekly family home evening program in 1965, complete with a manual of lessons and activities for the guidance of parents. (See the account in Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1992: 495-97.)

As early as November of 1959, however, we had already decided to bring a semblance of order out of the chaos in our family with a regular schedule of family meetings in accord with the emphasis Pres. McKay was beginning to



stress on their importance. Our recollections of these memorable times are taken from four volumes of Family Home Evening (FHE) minutes that we faithfully recorded across two decades. We started these meetings on the last Friday of every month at 8 P.M., which allowed me to put the two younger boys in bed so that Armand and I could engage the four older children in a constructive discussion.

At our first meeting, Armand stated with great confidence that

he would soon write a Family Constitution, specifying the exact rules of conduct that we would all vote to uphold. The children were impressed with the importance of the occasion, and there was a lively exchange of ideas for finding solutions to the endless array of family problems. Our oldest children were so excited that they ended this portentous occasion by voluntarily singing rousing renditions of their favorite Primary hymns. They were rewarded with ice cream and cookies for such attentive behavior. That first meeting lasted almost one hour and was duly recorded by me.

During the following year, we introduced a rotating chore chart with a system of merits and demerits. Armand and the boys would take care of outside tasks; the two girls and I would be responsible for household jobs. We also set up a suggestion box for depositing requests for discussion of problems and reporting achievements

and other items of historical importance. Our children once again responded with enthusiasm, but our two daughters expressed their concerns that issues would be settled in a fair and equitable manner, given the predominant male majority in our home.

By 1962, Armand had abandoned his intention to write a formal constitution and announced that henceforth we would abide by the British constitutional system—that is, a series of precedents. After all, we now had a written

record of more than two years of discussions and agreements about rules and policies. We also decided that the age for participation by our youngest child should be age five, after the civilizing process acquired from Primary and Sunday School attendance. Our suggestion box was now realistically referred to as the “gripe box,” and with the increase in the range of problems being considered at each meeting, we resolutely moved forward with a decision to have two meetings each month, on the first and third Sunday evenings.

Our oldest son was now age ten and asked if he could take a paper route as some of his friends were doing. This request led to regular discussions about financial matters – what tasks called for compensation and how to deal with money in general. We also agreed to give an allowance to our older children based on a sliding scale, according to their ages and needs. This decision led to a series of discussions about the importance of learning to be reliable and responsible workers, savings accounts, paying tithing, deferred gratification, accepting consequences for one’s actions – in general, learning to be responsible citizens in the home and larger community.

By the end of 1963, we had been blessed with the births of two more sons, which significantly changed the family dynamics. We reverted to delaying the start of family meetings until the two youngest could be put in bed. Because of predictable interruptions for me having to do with the younger children, our three older children eagerly agreed to share

in the task of recording the FHE minutes. The increased work involved in caring for two infants prompted our second daughter to inquire if there was a distinction between boys’ work and girls’ work, as there seemed to be a lopsided balance in chores assigned to the girls compared to those for the boys. Since neither Armand nor the boys could adequately justify the existing arrangement, tasks were assigned thereafter without regard to gender.

In 1966, a much-needed Family Home Evening manual – with its weekly lessons, songs, and suggested activities – was provided by the Church. According to the new instructions, no competing Church meetings or activities were to be scheduled on Monday evenings, with the express intent of allowing time for Family Home Evenings. This welcome instruction came at a crucial juncture for our family because we were moving into an intense period of interaction – namely, the teenage years. The manual’s comprehensive and adaptable material was designed to include appropriate lessons for various age levels. Of course, some topics and issues were not covered in these manuals, but we were resourceful and creative in finding additional books with appropriate information for our family. We forged ahead with a meeting schedule of Monday evenings as suggested.

The year of 1966 was a year of achievement and increasing maturity for our older children. Our first son, age fourteen, received his Eagle Scout award; our two daughters completed a seven-week “Modern Mormon Miss”

charm-school (!) course; the three middle boys were progressing dutifully through the scouting program; and our bonus boys, at the ages of four and three, were enjoying these years as indulged family pets. The six older children were benefiting from the musical education they had begun at age eight, which included piano, flute, trumpet, clarinet, and violin lessons. All eight were enthusiastic vocalists, and our family home evenings were often rather raucous and boisterous.

In April, 1967, Armand accepted a faculty position at Utah State University in Logan, Utah. Moving from an urban area in California to a smaller, more rural town in Utah prompted several FHE lessons on the cultural differences between Utah and California and what we might encounter in attitudes and acceptance. Contrary to comments we had heard from some LDS friends that the Church was “always the same” wherever they went, we soon found that our Church communities had distinct differences as well as the usual commonalities. The advance preparation served us well because our entire family – including Armand and me – had to make adjustments. Because the children’s social skills and musical talents were valued, and thanks to their years of FHE verbal exchanges, our older children found acceptance readily in high school and middle school. Our next three sons were not so fortunate and were constantly sparring with schoolmates about the lifestyle in California compared to that in Utah.

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Armand did not find a comfortable fit at Utah State University and, just two years later, we again prepared our family for a move, this time to Washington State University in Pullman, Washington. We would be going to a similar small college town but one that was drawn from a greater range of religious communities. We were hopeful that life in southeastern Washington would be far enough from the strife and social upheaval that was taking place at that time in more urban settings, especially in California.

Pullman proved to be a secure and relatively stress-free environment during the next ten years while our family navigated its way through rapidly changing circumstances. The flexible and consistent material in the FHE manuals contributed to the structure and stability we were striving for. With all the children in school, I was able to find pleasant employment, first with a franchise for the newspaper being delivered by our sons, then as a police dispatcher, and eventually on the university staff, which enabled me finally to finish my college education. By 1973, our oldest son and two daughters had graduated from high school, found employment, started college, and moved away from home. By 1975, our oldest son had returned from a mission and was married, our second son was serving a mission, the third son was working and living on his own, and our fourth son was now a senior in high school.

By the end of 1979, when we recorded the minutes of our last official Family Home Evening, our

family now consisted of Armand and me and the two youngest boys. We continued to have informal family meetings but no longer recorded them, probably because our family had arrived at a more agreeable and peaceful stage and our two boys had thoroughly absorbed the family rules and traditions they had learned from us and their siblings.

In the process of reviewing our Family Home Evening minutes in this sentimental stroll down memory lane, I recognize several themes that constitute some lessons learned from our shared experiences. These thoughts, as set forth here, might seem idealized because they are distillations that do not include all the rough-and-tumble experiences along the way.

Teaching Basic Values—Milk Before Meat

The FHE lesson material is designed to be flexible in presenting concepts for a range of ages and maturity levels. A basic understanding of gospel principles, starting with the Articles of Faith, acceptance of an openness to spirituality, developing empathy, and expressing and showing love for each other were just the beginnings of simple but bedrock values within our religious framework. If we had paused to consider the immense task ahead of us of instilling sound principles in our children, we may not have been so courageous, but as the old saying goes, “We didn’t have to consume the whole elephant in one day!” As our family went through the usual stages of development, we gradually introduced

flexibility and relativity in considering the more abstract values, absolutes, and ambiguities. After an occasional lengthy and informative sermon from Armand, the children would ponder what they had heard and then come to me to try out their thoughts and conclusions. Of course, Armand and I were closely connected to the scholarly community and had access to an increasing number of books and articles about Church history, doctrines, and policies, which with varying success we encouraged our children to consult in order to get a wider perspective beyond our basic FHE lessons.

The Importance of Opportunities for Expression

Our family members relished the opportunities to share ideas and perspectives about a wide range of issues, and there were frequent arguments. As parents, we realized that each child had a distinct and unique disposition and personality. The children’s learning patterns were different, as well as their emotional responses to rules and discipline, but all were encouraged to bring up topics that mattered to them. Especially when the children were quite young, there were outbursts of anger, many instances of yelling and even tears with hurt feelings, but also many moments of humor as somebody would break the tension with a well-timed quip or joke. Through it all, we tried to help one another find better and more constructive ways to interact. The process of repentance and the act of giving and receiving forgiveness were especially important in creating bonds of

trust and loyalty in our family. All of us learned to be less judgmental about ourselves and others. We all made mistakes, but we would not share this information outside the family. Armand and I especially made progress in adjusting our attitudes and becoming more adept and flexible in accommodating the variety of opinions and viewpoints.

To this day, our favorite activity is arranging a family gathering to celebrate birthdays, share reports of achievements and mishaps, and engage in animated discussions.

... [G]iving and receiving forgiveness were...important in creating bonds of trust and loyalty in our family.

Armand and I try not to give unsolicited advice to our now middle-aged children.

Paradoxical as it might seem, we learned that frank and vigorous argumentation, even contention, across the years in Family Home Evenings eventually produced the love and respect now so apparent in the frequent interactions of our adult children. None of us would claim to have arrived at perfection yet, but it is obvious that our children all enjoy each other enormously and frequently reflect on our FHE encounters.

The Importance of Example, Tradition, and Family Rituals

FHE lessons stress the importance of setting good examples for others. Regular attendance at

church, serving and sharing with others, paying tithing, participating in church and community events, respecting and not imposing on others, taking pride in hard work, setting and striving to reach goals, making clear distinctions between good and bad choices were all attributes we continued to incorporate into our lives. Since we were living in the information age and received so many examples of negative behavior from the media and other sources, we had many examples to discuss, both good and bad. Unfortunately, we found that sometimes

the bad examples occurred within our Church communities and even in our family. Since it was not our responsibility to make judgments about others, we felt sympathy for those

who were struggling to achieve repentance and forgiveness.

Creating enjoyable family traditions through family activities was another positive influence for us. Many of our family traditions centered on the musical talents cultivated by Armand and most of our children. Our children enjoy immensely sharing their musical skills in church and community performances. A favorite Christmas Eve activity every year is for the family to gather for a rousing performance of Handel's *Messiah*, singing until all are hoarse.

Male and Female Perspectives are Not the Same

I was always convinced divine intervention brought our two

daughters into the family in the birth order of numbers two and three. In my daughters I had two allies to share and promote a female perspective in a predominantly male household. Our daughters and I contributed alternative viewpoints about how to make decisions, solve problems, make compromises, and show compassion. In general, we were more inclined to use gentle persuasion than were Armand and the brothers. This female influence had positive results on our sons, who were highly regarded as missionaries not only for their domestic skills, but also for their kinder, gentler ways of dealing with their companions. Our younger daughter, who was once accused by her older brother Mike of "thirsting for power," found in later life opportunities for power in different paths. At the start of every school year, she now gets a completely new group of kindergarten students to mold into competent first-graders and possible future leaders.

In conclusion, to paraphrase another author, "Almost everything we needed to know, we learned in Family Home Evening." The trip with our family continues and we are enjoying the journey. ☺

The mother of eight, grandmother of twenty-one, and great-grandmother of three, Ruth lives in Irvine, California, with Armand, her husband of fifty-four years. Ruth writes family history, is an avid consumer of the literature in Mormon Studies, and is regularly sought out by her husband as his most incisive critic of his own writing.

Feminism and Mormon Women Today

A Panel and a Cross-Generational Roundtable Discussion

In 2003, Peggy Fletcher Stack, in her now famous article in The Salt Lake Tribune (4 October 2003), asked "Where Have All the Mormon Feminists Gone?" This question was of great interest to a group of Mormon feminists who had noticed what seemed to be a generational disconnect between us and the women who were writing and speaking about feminism twenty-five years ago. Where were these women who had worked so hard to empower us a quarter of a century ago? Had their views changed? How well did their ideas reflect the concerns of their younger counterparts? How do the two generations reconcile their faith and their feminism?

With these questions in mind, we set about organizing a panel and roundtable discussion, which took place on November 13, 2004. Sixteen Mormon feminists from Southern California met together at a common room on the UC Irvine campus to open up an inter-generational dialogue about Mormon women's issues. Four panelists gave short personal presentations: Lael Littke, author, and Lorie Winder Stromberg, Mormon feminist activist, represented the voices of older women who had lived through the era of ERA feminism. Amelia Parkin, UC Irvine graduate student in English, and Jana Bouck Remy, UC Irvine graduate student in history, spoke as younger Mormon feminists. A roundtable discussion, in which audience members were invited to raise questions and make comments, followed each panelist's presentation.

The following are excerpts from the four panelists' presentations and the roundtable discussion, which we have grouped into categories.

Lael Littke

I grew up on a farm in Mink Creek, Idaho. One of my daily tasks when school was out was to take the cows to a summer pasture. I herded them along, making sure they all stayed together and that none of them wandered off to follow her own fancy and then funneled them all through the gate to the same destination.

I mention this because I used to ponder life as I rode along on my horse, and one day it occurred to me that, as a Mormon female, I was being herded along, too, to the same "pasture" as all the other young women I knew. That "pasture" was called "wife and mother." It was obvious from what we were taught that this was the only acceptable destination.

I had nothing against going there. I wanted to get married. I wanted children. But I wanted to visit other pastures first. I wanted to find out what I could do with whatever talents I had. I wanted to get an education.

The conventional wisdom coming down from the pulpit, in my ward at least, was that women should seek an education but only to make them better wives and mothers. As far as going off to see the world, that was dangerous. Dark things were lurking out there. As for fulfilling my destiny — developing my talents — that was selfish unless it contributed to my being a better wife and mother.

When I was a Beehive girl, one Mutual night our teacher asked the six of us girls in the class what

we wanted to be when we grew up. The other five obediently said, "Wife and mother." I said, "I want to be a writer."

Sister Anderson blinked. "Don't you want to be a wife and a mother?" she asked.

"Of course I do," I said. "But I also want to be a writer."

Many years later, when I was engaged to be married, I remembered that Beehive teacher, and I wondered if I could really be a good wife and mother if I followed my own fancy like those old cows used to try to do. When my fiancé George and I went home from Denver to meet each other's parents, I made an appointment with a former Institute teacher I had especially enjoyed. I spoke with him, laying my dilemma out for him and telling him how much I wanted to become a writer. He leaned back, steepled his hands, smiled beatifically, and said, "Oh, Lael, when you hold your first baby in your arms, you'll forget all about that stuff."

Out of that remark, a feminist was born. I became a women's advocate. I have never put down being a wife and mother because I believe that is where the great warm heart of womanhood is. But for many of us, there must be more. Contrary to what that Institute teacher said, I did not forget all "that stuff" when I held my baby in my arms. I loved her as completely as any mother ever loved a child, but I also knew that I would continue to pursue a writing career. And I would encourage other women who had

dreams not to abandon them.

I spoke my mind for the twenty-two years that I taught Relief Society. Then I was released and asked to be a counselor in the YW. The bishop said he wanted me there specifically because I was the kind of woman I was.

I've learned to accommodate. I've learned to be a Mormon on my own terms. I've learned to love the people of the Church—not only the women but also the men, especially those who are like my husband was—not the problem but part of the solution.

I think things are better these days. At least women are allowed to pray in sacrament meetings! Young women are told to “be everything that you can be.” In her article (“Where Have All the Mormon Feminists Gone?”), Peggy Stack quotes President Hinckley as saying, “. . . study your options. Pray to the Lord earnestly for direction. Then pursue your course with resolution. The whole gamut of human endeavor is now open to women.”

I have always felt empowered, maybe because I took whatever power I was given and “magnified my calling,” not always staying within the prescribed boundaries but never being shrill about it. A good friend told me I got away with it because I did it gently. Quietly.

I have had both a lovely family life and also a career as a writer. Nobody gave me permission. I just did it.

Lorie Winder Stromberg

I've been a Mormon feminist activist for over thirty years. I date



Lael Littke laughs at a comment Lorie Stromberg makes.

my feminism from 1973, when I was invited by a BYU Family Home Evening sister to attend a meeting of the Utah Valley Chapter of the Women's Political Caucus. The discussion focused on the Equal Rights Amendment, which had passed through Congress in 1972 and was being ratified by the states. I was converted. However, it took me a few years to take my newfound feminist sensibilities from the secular to the religious arena.

When the Church came out against the ERA, I initially questioned my commitment to the controversial amendment. However, after reexamining all the arguments, I decided I could not in good conscience support the Church's position.

When the issue of power and influence arises, Mormon feminists are derisively accused of being power hungry, as if wanting power were necessarily a bad thing. And it is, if it is only seen as coercive and controlling. But I've spent too many years on the defensive about this subject. It's

time I took the offensive and owned the term. Perhaps I am power hungry . . .

If by power hungry you mean I believe women must have a voice in the Church, then, yes, I'm power hungry.

If by power hungry you mean I desire the ability not only to accept responsibilities in the institutional

Church but to be part of defining what those responsibilities are, then, yes, I'm power hungry.

If by power hungry you mean I believe that women should not only be represented but should be an integral part of every major decision-making body of the Church, then, yes, I'm power hungry.

If by power hungry you mean I would welcome a heightened ability to bless the lives of others, then yes, I'm power hungry.

Finally, if by power hungry you mean I want the ability to participate in a model of power based on partnership rather than patriarchy, based on empowerment

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rather than submission, then, yes, I'm power hungry. UCLA professor Scott Bartchy gave a presentation at a Sunstone symposium in which he declared that Christ came to overthrow traditional models of power that were based on domination, coercion, and control. In their place, he offered a model of power in which power is only used to empower. Power used to coerce or dominate will always burn itself out, suggested Bartchy. Only power used to empower is everlasting.

Just as by power I do not mean domination or coercion but rather voice and influence and empowerment, so by hungry I do not mean gluttony. I'm talking about sustenance. I'm talking about a soul-deep yearning for a life-sustaining, sacramental meal to which all are invited.

[For the full text of Lorie Winder Stromberg's remarks on women and power in the LDS Church, see "Power Hungry," Sunstone, No. 135, December 2004, pp. 60-61.]

Amy Parkin

I have identified myself as a feminist for almost ten years. My feminism began at BYU, where I found myself frustrated with the lack-a-daisical acceptance of male and female roles. Men and women there were equals.



Amy Parkin

And women did pursue education. But in my major—English—many of them were in my classes because English was a good, pleasant major—a nice thing for a cultured woman to do. And really, there was no need to prepare for a future.

I became frustrated with the role that had been assigned to women. Wife. Mother. Period. My primary concern when it comes to Mormon feminism is the issue of female identity formation, of allowing female individuals the opportunity to become that which they will become, rather than merely that which they, by definition, already are.

I am not a quiet feminist. I have talked and written about these ideas a lot. So I was surprised when I found myself a bit at a loss as to how to respond to Peggy Fletcher Stack's article. I don't have a problem with the perceived power imbalance. In the world of disappearing Mormon feminists alluded to by Stack feminism is equated with protest. And I do not protest. I believe

protest to be counterproductive. Protest doesn't speak to the Mormon masses. It pushes them away.

My brand of feminism has to do with taking very seriously some key Mormon doctrines. I believe Joseph Smith when he says in the King Follett Discourse that "the mind of man [and

woman!]

—the intelligent part—is as immortal as, and is coequal with, God Himself." I believe that Jesus Christ is my exemplar and I am to become everything that he is. Everything. Not just the nurturing, gentle parts of what He is. I am also to be powerful. To learn to create life. To love perfectly. To stand in passive but powerful resistance to the inequalities and injustices of this world. Because I believe these things, I can't simply be a wife and mother. I will be a wife and a mother and many things beyond. Good things. Strong things.

But how does one become these things if there is a structure in place that prevents that? I don't have an easy answer to this problem, but I believe that structural change will only come after individuals change. Women must first show that they are intelligent and strong as well as loving and gentle. Women must become all that they know they can become. As we are accepted as individuals, others will necessarily change. Policies will change. New opportunities will open themselves.

Jana Bouck Remy

When I married at age twenty-one and soon became pregnant, I was in the final year of my studies as a pre-med student. At that time, I hit a wall and lost my desire to pursue a career. I wanted to quit my jobs and create a cozy nest for my soon-to-be-born child. I wanted to greet my husband at the door each evening with a kiss; I wanted to be nothing more than a stay-at-home mom. This desire was applauded on all sides by my family and my church friends.

Oddly enough, it was in those first years of at-home-ness that I discovered Mormon feminism. I read through my Mom's old issues of the *Exponent II* from the 1970s and 80s. I logged on to the Mormon Internet world and learned that several Mormon women had been excommunicated for their writings. I read *Mormon Sisters*, *Mormon Enigma*, and *Mormon Women Speak*.

It was after the birth of my second child that I began to feel dissatisfied with being a stay-at-home mom. After serving in several Primary presidencies and spending several winter months indoors with small children while my husband pursued graduate studies, I realized that more than anything I wanted a second chance at my academic career, and I didn't want to wait eighteen years until my kids were grown to pursue my studies. As I talked to other young mothers, I learned that few of them felt entirely satisfied with a domestic role. Few felt that the Church's urging for women to "be in the home" was fair. We talked about nineteenth century Mormon women who fought for suffrage; we started meeting in book groups, in writers' groups, in playgroups—wherever we could find space to discuss our feelings.

In some ways our issues were different from those that we read about from the 1970s and 80s. As historian Jill Derr has said, young

Mormon women today "take equality between men and women on a personal and professional level as a given." She says, "It's not even a question . . . [Mormon women] expect to balance family and career and presume the Church's approval." We grew up in an era of greater social equality for men and women, and so we expected the same in our lives.

I expect that my husband will choose a job where he will be available to care for our children as needed. I expect that he can cook, clean, and nurture just as well as I can. I expect him to



Jana Bouck Remy, holding up the first Southern California Exponent II issue.

support me through school just as I have him. I expect to be treated as an equal by men at church. I expect that no one can tell me how to plan my family or how to plan my career. I expect to finish graduate school and have my kids

cheer me on as I get my diploma—just as I will for them when it's their turn. I expect to work as a team with my husband as we make choices for our family's future together.

Just as I expect all of these things, I also expect to make meaningful contributions to each of the wards I live in. Even if the Church is slow to make large-scale changes

for women, I expect that we can create networks of Mormon feminists within our own spheres to forge relationships with each other that transcend ecclesiastical or institutional organizations.

Roundtable Discussion: Women's Issues Changing Over Time

Caroline: Sophia, as a feminist, how did you handle things during the time of the ERA?

Sophia: I lived here in Southern California at the time. I had two or three girlfriends who were of my opinion, so we just didn't get involved in the debates. I remember one woman who came to talk against it who said, "If the ERA passes, we'll have unisex bathrooms." And I thought, "If that's the worst thing that will happen, will that really bother anybody?" We just distanced ourselves from the frenetic behavior around us and were looked at as weird.

Judy: There was a time when I thought the Church just lagged twenty-five years behind in terms of women's roles, but now I see more of a retreat. Do you really think that there will be any change in women's roles in the Church?

Sophia: You young women should be able to answer this much better than we older ones. Don't you see a change in women's lives compared to what we experienced? The whole gamut of things to do is open to women now, which really wasn't the case when I was a child.

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Brooke: I was just in a Young Women's presidency. I think what direction young women are pointed in all depends on individual wards and leaders. I could emphasize the part of the lesson that says go out and get an education and have a career and you can still be a mom but put less emphasis on other parts of the lesson. I'm encouraged.

Sandra: I think there is a progress. When I was in Young Women's, all of the lessons were about being a righteous young woman, getting married in the temple, and that was the end of the story. Then when I started going to college, I heard, "Oh, it's good for women to get an education because that way you can be a better mother." So it's a progression, but it's still limited, held in place by the culture of what men expect from us and what we as women have come to expect because we learn these things from the men.

I remember going to a General Relief Society Conference recently and being angry that the leaders were talking about motherhood and being a wife and that was the limit. And I thought, "Why am I here? I don't need to hear this." Then Sheri Dew spoke about being a disciple of Christ. It was so refreshing to hear that it didn't have anything to do with being a mother and wife. She just focused on being a disciple and how that doesn't depend on our relationship with others; it only depends on our relationship with God.

Sue: I'm delighted that so many younger women are here — that we have fresh faces going in a

fresh direction because obviously what we did didn't work.

Shannon: It did work! I'm a convert to the Church. I didn't have mentors or positive influences in my own family. But Young Women's made me a feminist. My leaders weren't career women — they were moms — but they taught me that I could do what I wanted. I found my experience at BYU to be radically feminizing. I don't feel silenced at church. I feel silenced in other areas of my life, but for me it's always been the Church that's given me voice. I can't abandon that. So there is a generation like me that has found empowerment.

Lorie: There appears to be a growing gap between Church and societal norms for women. Will the Church eventually change, or will it become increasingly more conservative by comparison?

Jana: I think it is becoming more conservative, but over the pulpit there's an acknowledgement of working women and there's absolutely acknowledgment of women who aren't married. This acknowledgment constitutes an accommodation at an institutional level.

Roundtable Discussion: The Disconnect

Judy: There is a real disconnect between my professional life and my church life, so essentially what



I've done at church is disconnect. I don't speak out anymore. I go to church and I take what I want from it. But it's also that disconnect that's made it okay. The peace between the two is that I no longer feel that I can change the situation in the Church.

Mary Ellen: It wasn't until I physically and emotionally disconnected myself recently that I found power within myself. This was when Proposition 22 (Defense of Marriage Act) was on the ballot in California. I got so sick of hearing about it at church that I wrote letters to leaders saying, "I don't agree with this proposition. I've come to a different conclusion after my own soul-searching, and you are messing with my spiritual equilibrium by talking about it every Sunday. I'm not going to church until after the election." I just left it at that, and there was no repercussion.

Roundtable Discussion: Male and Female Roles

Judy: My husband and I are both professors. It's been a great combination for our kids. Since they were born we've both had jobs and we have shared the responsibility for the kids. My husband

took my baby daughter or son to department meetings, or sometimes I did. To them, it is perfectly normal that they have as much association with their dad as with me. He really knows everything about our kids. Sharing this nurturing role really works for us. I think it's a fabulous model for our kids.

Lorie: What happens when they hear conflicting stuff at church?

Judy: That's part of what we're trying to figure out. I thought Primary was the safe place to be, but recently a leader got up and said, "What do mothers do? What do fathers do?" and I thought, "Oh, no, Primary isn't even a very safe place to be."

What I see in my own life is the difference between the principle and prescription. I see the Church leaning more and more towards prescription. So I would ask, "Don't you feel that in your choices you are following the principle that the family comes first?" I'm not doing it as the Church prescribes, but in our family, the family definitely comes first. I think that that's a really important distinction.

Jana: I've received some criticism as a result of my decision to go to school full time, but my husband has received much, much more. The reason for this is that we left a suburban ward and moved to an apartment on campus so I could go to school. My husband took a pay cut by getting a job on campus with flexible hours so he could be home more with the children. Everyone said to him, "Why would you move down the

ladder?" — the assumption being that the husband is going to keep moving up his career path, and if the wife wants to do something, like go to school, she has to mold her life to his. Yet, looking at the Proclamation on the family or anything that prophets have said, to have two parents in the home on a regular basis is far superior in every way to having an absent father and a nurturing mother.

Judy: But the men can stand up at the pulpit and say, "I have done nothing in parenting my children; my wife deserves all the credit" and they're applauded for doing so. If a woman stood up and said, "I've done nothing for my children; it's my husband who deserves all the credit for what they are . . ."

Shannon: It's important to remember, though, that it's not the fault of the Church that it is difficult when both parents work. It's the way that American society is set up that makes it hard for us to have those choices. It's been this way for so long that change is difficult. This problem really doesn't have anything to do with the Church.

Judy: Whatever women choose in equal partnership with their husbands is fine. I think the problem is when women don't have a choice or they choose a role for certain reasons and then they're criticized.

Jana: The Church reinforces the model of separate spheres for men and women. And if the higher model is parents' working together, then why is that not at least being encouraged at any level?

Hilda: When my husband comes back from Priesthood meeting, he always says they tell the men that they have to let their wives go out and seek education or whatever. So I think it's happening.

Mary Ellen: It's in men's interests to support women and what we want to do and for us to attain our potential. And some of them don't get that. It's an educational process. But think how much more it would enrich your family if you were able to learn and grow as your own person. That's good for you, for him, and for your kids.

Trista: If a woman wants to do something outside the home, there is often a sense of judgment from other women. I think that the greatest impetus that we can have for change is the support of other women. A destructive force enters in when women choose to judge each other vis à vis whether they're not feminist enough or too feminist. This judgmental attitude is defeatist to the women's movement, to us, and to any sort of spiritual growth. ❧

Red Moon and Metaphor

Rosalynde Frandsen Welch

I remember an afternoon, lit from below by the barren whiteness of a lake bed, my mother and three sisters around me, the shifting patterns of our pace, conversation. A certain pressure is generated by the gathering of one's beloved females, a surface tension that binds women together as if with the threads of our collective stories, protecting and confining. I do not remember that afternoon's shared conversation, however; it was my mother, years later, who furnished my memory with words.

We must have been talking about what we girls wanted to be when we grew up. By that summer, I already had dreams of Boston and graduate school and tenure; Gabrielle planned to be a teacher, I believe; and Naomi a writer. Rachel was still too small to have seriously considered the issue. But maybe that wasn't the conversation at all; maybe we had been retelling my mother's story—how she'd graduated from BYU with honors and then stored her degree beside unopened wedding presents and gone to work at the telephone company to support my father in law school.

My mother recounts my contribution to the conversation. "It just seems like such a waste," I said. My mother asked me what I meant.

I would have walked faster, becoming passionate, kicking at the coarse, glittering sand beneath my feet. "It's not worth it. You go to college, you're smart and work

hard, graduate, have all these great plans—just to give it all up to raise daughters who go to college, they're smart and work, they graduate and make great plans so that they can . . . what? Have babies too. It's a waste. Why go to college at all? Or else why raise daughters to do the same thing? What's the point?"

The questions were laced with a sarcasm even eleven-year-old Naomi could taste. I don't think I had worked the sentences over in



my head before that afternoon, but they poured out quickly, as if I had.

My mother has never told me how she answered. I think I can remember, though. And I'm sorry that my fifteen-year-old self was too blind to see that she was crying—or too heartless to care.

A moment comes in every young woman's life when she begins to understand the paradox of female

economy. We're trained in the bracing ethic of frugality: we save and make do; we clip coupons, mend clothing, launder diapers; we reuse decorations from Enrichment Night for Standards Night. We are not extravagant; we do not waste. And yet our prodigal monthly blood flaunts nature's own extravagant waste. Twenty-eight days of costly preparation, twenty-eight days of meticulous alchemy, elements distilled from our own bodily springs—flushed out in a flagrant issue of blood.

Outrageously profligate, our bodies recycle nothing, reuse nothing, reabsorb nothing, month after month, year after year. It seems senseless; what's the point?

It is tempting to see women's lives as so much somatic plagiarism; it is poetic to claim that from the body's unthrifty text we must take the stories of our lives. Early we're taught to prepare our minds with the same meticulous care that monthly prepares our

wombs—the dreams and plans, the acts of imagination and effort that infuse the mind are no less precious than the red blood that infuses the womb. But we’re also taught to release our plans with the same exorbitant disregard for cost modeled in the abundance of our monthly flow of blood.

Our stories come in a thousand different shapes, but if they are stolen from our bodies’ loss they will all bear the same tidings. I’d heard the news hundreds of times by my sixteenth year when I walked with my mother and sisters across the asphalt by that dry lake. “You’re a daughter of God destined to stand tall. You’re equal to all and inferior to none in the eyes of your Father, who is a King. So be equal to your birthright; educate your mind, develop your talents, realize your individual potentials, find creative and important ways to serve, cultivate dreams and preparations and plans.” This was the first page of the story, and it was read to me—and I learned it by heart—without cynicism or caveat or compromise. When I’m asked now to attribute any accomplishments, I full-heartedly credit the Church and my parents for giving me the implements that underlie any achievement.

But a second page of the story always followed, though not always immediately. “You are a daughter of God destined to become a wife and perhaps a mother. You’re still equal to all and inferior to none in the eyes of your Father, but now your birthright requires something different of you. Now you are required to let go of your dreams

and preparations and plans (unless you’re one of the lucky ones who’s only dreamed of being a wife). You are required to leave it all behind you and press forward without looking back (remember Lot’s wife). Moreover, you must do it cheerfully and gratefully without counting the cost.”

At fifteen, I knew both pages of the story well enough to grasp its implication; when I was nineteen, I determined that I could change it, at least for myself. A sophomore at BYU and at my most militantly idealistic, I’d gone to the annual women’s broadcast in the Marriott Center one Saturday evening in the autumn of 1993. I remember the evening well. I was seated near the floor beside my roommate, both of us listening closely to the speaker, an articulate woman and a dynamic speaker and, to my great delight, a law school graduate. She spoke about the importance of education for women, the fulfillment she had found in her profession, and the importance of not judging women who choose or are compelled to work outside the home. As I watched the dark-haired figure at the podium before me, I felt that I had encountered, for the first time in my life, words from the pulpit on this topic with which I could fully and legitimately identify. Into her experience I projected my own plans: a mission, graduate school in Boston, a career as a professor of literature bridging the gap between my communities of faith and reason.

I whispered to my roommate, “Isn’t she great?”

“Shhh. Listen.” My roommate didn’t whisper during meetings.

I looked back up at the oversized screen on which the image of the speaker was projected and realized that the narrative had changed direction. The speaker was explaining her resolution to marry and have a child later in life and her consequent choice to abandon a successful law career in mid-stride. She spoke of her joy in motherhood, which I did not doubt, and her wholehearted, seemingly effortless decision to leave behind her other life. Her plans, I thought, her achievement, all her preparation and hard work. Was it all for nothing? Could it be she’s telling me that, in the end, none of it will go anywhere? Is she telling me to cultivate my dreams now simply to abandon them later?

A nineteen-year-old dreams and mourns ardently, and I felt genuinely devastated—first with what I felt was a blunt betrayal and then with the energy of grief. I had been wounded, I felt, and I was not ready to let my wounds be salvaged. This will not be my story, I told myself. This will not be the story I tell myself, my daughters, my MIA Maids. I will revise, rewrite. I will not permit my life to plagiarize my biology, no matter how much poetry in the symbolism.

There is a lovely temporal relapse in the body’s twenty-eight day season, and I find similar respites in this story: the summer I am fifteen, the autumn I am nineteen, and then the winter I am twenty-three.

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Transformations

Susan Layton Freitas

I get out of the car, turn around, and push the big door shut. Daddy drives off. My big sister has already bounded up the steps and into the chapel. Cripplingly shy, incredibly uncomfortable in social situations, I'm just grateful that I know that I'm supposed to sit with my Sunday School class. I slip into the pew as a safe haven and try to make myself invisible.

The safe haven's over, though, when I get to class. Brother Love. What an ironic name for an abrasive, demanding personality. He never asks, just tells, and puts us on the spot with his questions. I never know the answers, probably because I'm so preoccupied with how uncomfortable I feel. The worst is when he assigns talks. "You will give the two and a half minute talk two weeks from now." Abject terror. Me, in front of a whole chapel full of people, opening my mouth? Not likely! On those occasions I pull out the ultimate weapon and fake illness to my mother, who, miraculously, lets me stay home.

"Why do I have to go to church when you and Daddy don't?"

"Because children need to learn about religion. We had to go when we were your age. When you're grown up, if you don't want to go anymore, you don't have to."

Ah! Salvation! Can't wait for the day!

MIA. I go sometimes but mostly not. Probably three people in the ward know who I am, and one is

the beautiful MIA Maid teacher who picks me up and then takes me home, which is nowhere near her house. On the way she tells me about her conversion and how much she values her temple marriage over the earlier church ceremony she had. Though I won't be taking her advice, I learn to be grateful that she cared enough to tell me.

Another person who knows me is the MIA secretary, who diligently comes to my house now and then to ask me to attend. I always tell her, "I'll try," knowing full well that I'm not going to go. Years later, I have a good laugh when I hear the same words from a young woman I'm hoping to activate.

College. At long last, I'm grown up. I don't have to go to church anymore. I don't have a car, and only now and then does someone offer to take me. Hallelujah. But there's a hitch. Darn. Through the haze of my growing up years, something's gotten through. Now I know it's true. I can't just walk away.

Marriage. I realize I've chosen the male equivalent of my high school friends. He's not LDS, but he pretty much lives the way we do. I've loved having a few church friends, but I never feel as if I fit in with them. They know stuff I don't know. With one foot in the Church and the other in the world, my best friends are always non-Mormon non-smokers/non-drinkers.

Motherhood. My first baby has just been born, a new stake has just been formed, and I'm called to what? The Stake Relief Society Board? What a hilarious idea! That's for old ladies. I've never even been to Relief Society. It meets days, and I've been teaching school. I call my sister and we laugh and laugh.

Who knew they were such an incredible group of women—that they truly follow the Savior. They give and give, taking care of everyone else. So lovely, loving, and kind. My mentors, my role models, my friends. I don't want to let them down. I want to learn to be like them. I've never met



people for whom I have more admiration and respect. We go to Relief Society Conference together, and I sit in a tabernacle filled with LDS women and feel such a part of something good, important, and

satisfying. It feels wonderful. I belong. I fit in. I'm becoming something better.

Relief Society is where I feel the Spirit the most. I feel loved. I learn to give talks without terror, feel like I can contribute something, get emotional and spiritual support and great ideas. I make true, fast friends.

My non-member husband joins the Church. Now he's in a bishopric, now in a stake presidency. I'm having a General Authority to lunch. Good grief, I'm part of the establishment. Who, me? The

bishop's wife? That can't be me. It's always been someone else. It all seems so strange.

Christ's big tent welcomes all who'll come. Step by step we forge ahead, helping each other. Join the happy throng. ☞

Susan is a wife, mother of three sons and two daughters, and grandmother of four living in Newport Beach, California. She enjoys reading, writing, teaching adults, traveling, and time with family members and friends. She can be reached at susan@freitas.org.

revelation from above. Whenever I have questions about doctrine, it's comforting to be reminded that there are answers even though we may not have them yet. However, as much as I believe that members of the Church have to be patient and at times put some of our doctrinal questions on the "back burner," so to speak, I also believe that it is easy for us to become complacent about the doctrine we do have. Complacency indicates that we do not desire to learn more or even that we reject discussion of revelation we already have. The Lord has made it clear that a desire for

more understanding is a prerequisite for more revelation. If we desire to understand the doctrines in the Proclamation on the family in greater depth, it is possible that our earnest seeking and prayer will lead to greater revelation. ☞

Lori is a native Oregonian who was surprised to find that she loves living in Southern California. She teaches American Literature and Writing at California State University, Long Beach, and the gospel doctrine class in her ward.

Red Moon and Metaphor continued from page 19

It is Monday. It is early March. I stand at my kitchen window facing the veiled monochrome mountain to the east. The clouds, heavy and threatening, manage temporary restraint; it is my eyes that overflow. I have recently returned from San Diego engaged to be married, and I am unnaturally aware of the band on my left hand. After three days, it still feels unfamiliar on my finger.

I stand with two white envelopes before me on the kitchen counter, each torn open hastily. I can't help feeling that it is myself on the counter in front of me, straddling two white roads to the future—two white envelopes reflecting twenty-three years of preparation and planning. I cannot give the envelopes to another woman—not to my daughter, not to my friend. They will be wasted, the lifeblood of my dreams until now—yes, the metaphor is careless—like my red blood is wasted every month. I

sense that I am over-dramatizing the situation, but I cannot help mourning my loss.

One envelope is postmarked San Diego: We're sorry but you have not been admitted to our graduate program. The other envelope is postmarked from Boston: We are pleased to offer you admission and a five-year fellowship. My story has been written in spite of myself, it seems.

Postscript

I am less inclined now than I was that March morning seven years ago to read my story as menstrual metaphor. The sacrifice turned out to be slighter than I had expected. For one thing; I was admitted to graduate school in San Diego the next year and completed my PhD when my second child was ten months old.

I am less susceptible now to the

charms of metaphor, particularly metaphor that comes perilously close to naturalizing women's social possibilities in biology. However, the choices and stories that faced me at fifteen, at nineteen, and at twenty-three are substantially the same as those that will face my eleven-year-old sister; indeed, my daughter's choices will probably resemble mine more closely than mine resembled my mother's. And in this way, in the intractable and inconclusive questions of personal cost and social benefit, our stories bring us together as surely as our bodies bleed. ☞

Rosalynde lives in Webster Groves, Missouri, with her husband John and her children Elena, three, and Jack, one. Most days she mothers, reads, writes, sings, and runs.

No Swans Allowed

Catherine Vaughan

When I was in elementary school, there was a week when my mom had to brush another woman's teeth. She explained to me that my best friend's mom was too sore from her recent surgery to do it on her own. Each afternoon I would play with my friend at her house while my mom put a casserole in the oven, tidied up, and looked for other helpful things she could do. My friend's mom was too sore to give hugs, but you could see the gratitude in her eyes. I learned an important lesson that week: nothing beats a sincere friend after you've gotten your breast implants.

As far as I know, none of my mom's other friends were doing this sort of thing. I found it bizarre, but not much more bizarre than other things adults did, like making their beds or going to all the sessions of General Conference.

Fast-forward to last year. I've moved from Washington state to Utah, to Indiana, and finally to Southern California. I've settled into my own adult life, which revolves around constantly trying to distract a two-year-old from sharp objects and electrical outlets. (Don't you want to listen to classical music and read this science book instead, honey?)

My husband is working late, and I've just put my son to bed. I grab my bonbons and head for the couch in time to catch the opening credits for a new series called *The Swan*. This is the show where each week two lucky women are surgically transformed from ugly ducklings into beautiful swans.



As a feminist, I am disgusted. As an exhausted, brain-dead mother, I am fascinated.

The surgeons explain why each patient will be almost impossible to salvage. This one will need chin implants, cheek implants, a new nose, and lipo all over, and that's just for starters. The other will need her forehead raised, her

underarms tucked, and her kneecaps reconfigured among other drastic changes. At the end of the show, the women will be judged on how well they cleaned up. The winner goes on to the final "beauty" pageant at the end of the series. The loser drags her crushed ego back home.

My temperature is rising, but I'm unable to turn the channel. Is political correctness really this dead? Why aren't they pushing the message that a woman's self worth should come from an inner understanding of her status as a daughter of God? Clearly this program is a tool of the plastic surgery industry, which is clearly a tool of Satan — trying to keep women from realizing their inherent divine worth.

I'm still worked up about the show the next day when I'm talking to my neighbor in the courtyard between our apartments. We are watching our sons chase each other with toy shopping carts and fling baby dolls at each other.

I'm so proud. Surely they'll never buy into the gender stereotyping that leads to voluntary surgical mutilation of women.

"I will never, ever understand how anyone could pay all that money just to make their boobs bigger or their nose smaller," I shudder. "It's major surgery. You could die from it. And after the

surgery, you spend weeks all puffed up and sore from it all." My flat-stomached, busty, beautiful, mother-of-four neighbor laughs at me. "The recovery is a lot quicker than it used to be," she replies. "I was only sore for a couple of days, and it's getting to be a lot cheaper."

"Pardon?"

"People do it all the time," she continues. "Practically a third of the ward has had something done, and the other two thirds are men and kids. Haven't you noticed Dana, Tiffany, and that lady who wears all the hats and makes weird comments about Catholics?"

A lot of things suddenly make sense to me. I had always found it strange that the women I'd met at church revealed their age to be ten years older than what I would have guessed. And there are an unusually high number of women in the ward who I'd considered "genetically blessed." I'd previously assumed they were all thin because they were motivated to exercise in the California sun.

But now I know the truth. I am surrounded by vain women with low self-esteem.

The subject of plastic surgery comes up in daily conversation for about a month after the big revelation from my neighbor. My informal poll of everyone I talk to reveals that plastic surgery isn't considered vile anymore by anyone but me and, surprisingly, my mom. One friend, who wouldn't dream of allowing

Barbie dolls in her house because of the body image issues they could create, looks forward to treating herself to new breasts in a few years.

Another friend confides that it was either new breasts for her or a boat for the family. The breasts won out since those last longer. She also got a nipple lift—I'm still gagging over the concept.

One of my sisters admits that when she gets together with her girlfriends, they fantasize about when they'll get their plastic surgery done. She's a size zero. She had a flat tummy five days after her son was born. Five days after my son was born, I could finally fit into her full-size maternity clothes.

... [S]omewhere
inside this ugly
duckling is a
swan waiting to
be set free.

"I feel like a boy ever since I stopped nursing," she confides to me over the phone. "I wouldn't go too big, but I think I deserve a B or maybe a C."

All my energy goes toward fighting the urge to tell her how nuts I think the whole thing is. How could she even consider spending thousands of dollars to undergo a

surgery she doesn't even need to fix something that isn't even broken? This is the same woman who goes pale when you mention having blood drawn, who nearly refused an epidural because of the needles.

With so many otherwise reasonable people accepting, even embracing, plastic surgery, I've been forced to do some real soul searching. Maybe there's something I haven't considered, some unexamined prejudice that blurs my understanding.

I confront my bias. Is it fair to believe that the plastic surgery industry promotes unrealistic ideals of so-called beauty at the expense of women's physical and emotional health? Is it fair to believe that women send an ugly message to future generations by putting their bodies at risk in order to achieve the look of a pin-up model? Is it fair to believe that plastic surgery TV shows exploit vulnerable women by objectifying their insecurities, turning them into light entertainment for a mass audience that grows dumber by the day?

Yes.

Yes, but . . . if I'm really honest with myself, I have to admit that I've done a few things to make myself look a bit more Hollywood-ish. I never pluck my eyebrows, but I do shave my legs about twice a year. Sometimes I wear makeup. I had braces for seventeen months when I was in middle school. My favorite jeans aren't comfortable, but they make my butt look smaller. I do work

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outs I find in magazines that promise to zap my flab for fab abs. I've been on the Suzanne Sommers diet. Aw crud, I'm superficial.

Is it fair to believe that my vanity and body image issues are less extreme because my method for dealing with them is less extreme?

No, probably not.

Then why is it that plastic surgery is so fundamentally appalling to me?

"Cleavage" is not a word that anyone would use when talking about me. I used to be an A until I had a baby. When I was nursing, I was promoted to a B, but when I stopped after seventeen months, my breasts were so tired that they retreated into my body for an extended hibernation period. There is no longer a letter to describe me. One of the first things my mother said when she saw me after weaning was, "Hey, where'd they go?"

Being small-chested was more of an issue for me when I was a teenager, desperately interested in attracting attention from the slower-to-develop gender. In high school, I bought two padded bras that quickly got lumpy in the dryer and made me look like I had marshmallows stuffed down my shirt. I never tried actual marshmallows, but only because it didn't occur to me at the time. It wasn't until I was in college and took up running that I realized what a blessing a small chest could be. No backaches, no

bouncing around, and no double-bra wearing. When I'm not exercising, I don't even need to wear a bra if I don't feel like it.

Until this whole plastic surgery thing came up, I hardly thought about my breasts at all. Maybe that's what irks me so much about the idea. It's not just the feminist in me getting riled up for the

with our friendship. That's not too much to ask.

Maybe these women I love do think of their new bodies as wings. Maybe their new bodies help them experience the world in a way that is more fulfilling to them. Maybe their decisions to alter their looks have nothing to do with me.

Maybe their new bodies help them experience the world in a way that is more fulfilling to them.

I feel good about my choices, and my friends feel good about theirs. There will probably always be a part of me that believes they would be happier if they thought more like me, and there must be a part of them that thinks it's sad that I don't want to look my best. Really, this

future of society, but it's also my defense to a perceived attack on my own appearance. I'm afraid that there are people who can't help but think it's a shame how genetics mistreated me. That I could look so much better if I would just get over my self-righteous aversion to surgical intervention. That somewhere inside this ugly duckling there's a swan waiting to be set free.

I am not a bird.

I'm as likely to sprout boobs as I am to sprout wings.

In my more rational moments, I realize that the people I want to have as friends either don't think about me like that or are smart enough to keep their opinions to themselves. If we can't help being judgmental, at least we can keep our judgments from interfering

is just one of millions of differences between us, most of which nobody cares about. Besides, if all my friends were exactly like me, I'd get sick of them pretty quickly.

In the end, I think that my mom had the right approach. The next time any of my friends go in for some nipping or tucking, I'll be waiting with a toothbrush. ☹

Catherine watches bad reality TV from her home in Redondo Beach, California, with her husband and son. She still has all her original body parts but has been known to dye her hair flaming orange and wear control top pantyhose.

considered to be the first Mormon novel, when I was fourteen. Since Anderson attempts to encompass the whole gospel plan in his book, I found it compelling. *The Giant Joshua* taught me a whole lot about creating conflict and tension in a novel. I was also inspired and influenced by two collections of short stories by Donald R. Marshall – *The Rummage Sale* and *Frost in the Orchard*. I'd also like to mention a novel titled *The Broken Covenant*, by Carroll Hofeling Morris. It starts out with an LDS woman committing a grievous sin, and then goes on to explore what happens to her and her family as a result of it and deals with how she puts things back together again.

What non-Mormon authors do you admire? Which have influenced your writing?

First of all, I have to mention my Lunch Bunch colleagues with whom I've met together twice a week for over thirty years. All successful authors, they have my great admiration and have all influenced my writing through their sage criticisms. (Eve Bunting, one of the group, has over 250 titles.) We were all taught writing by Helen Hinckley Jones, a fine writer and the world's best writing teacher. (She was LDS.) The author who has probably most influenced my style was Betty Smith, author of *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, which I read when I was fourteen and which I re-read every few years. I was captivated by her writing, and my first short stories were attempts to copy her way of writing. Later, I developed my own style.

Tell us about your writing habits.

Oh, mercy me. My writing habits. Some days I clean out my refrigerator to postpone going to the computer. Some days I'm glued to my chair for six or seven hours at a stretch when I get caught up in a plot. I try to maintain a schedule of at least three hours a day Monday through Thursday, and then take the weekend off.

What role have female friendships played in your life? Can you tell us about a time in which your friends or sisters in your ward influenced/impacted you significantly?

My female relationships grow more important every year, not only those within the Church but also my non-member friends and writing colleagues. As for how they've influenced me, I have to cite my girlhood friend Arthella Moosman Basinger, with whom I shared an intense desire to see the outside world; my career girl roommate Dorothy Stuart Hall, who was (and is) an outstanding cook; my long-time friend Mary Ellen MacArthur, a former high school English teacher and department head, who sets a high intellectual standard that I'm always struggling to measure up to; and Geni Williams, my long-time friend and visiting teacher, who has taught me a whole lot of psychology from her experience as a nurse, as well as from life in general. She was the one who held me together when my husband died.

What changes in the Church with regards to women have struck

you as most important in the last forty years?

I assume you mean in the Church itself rather than in the women, who when they weren't given a voice simply created one for themselves in *Exponent II*. In the Church, a major change was when women were allowed to pray in Sacrament Meeting. I found that significant on many levels. Another major change has been the correlation arm of the Church, which has had both positive and negative ramifications. I wasn't happy, for instance, when the Relief Society lost its autonomy – and its voice, *The Relief Society Magazine*, which is where I first sold a story. I understand why the changes are necessary, but I still mourn what was lost. But the pluses include a truly international church. The church I knew as a child was provincial and clannish. Now we find it reaching out all over the world and becoming a major influence for good everywhere.

In what direction would you like to see the Church go with regards to women?

I would like to see women giving more conference talks and being quoted in manuals more so that our beautiful young girls will know that women, too, have important things to say. I think the Church will face a major challenge in keeping the young women in the fold if the profile of women is not raised.

Tell us about the project you are working on right now.

I'm working on three novels at
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Then and Now: Erna Wong

In the Summer 1979 issue of Exponent II, the first-ever Southern California issue, Erna Wong was a young Mormon third-year medical student at USC. Erna, then pregnant with her first child, was asked about her choice of profession and her hopes for balancing family with her chosen career path. She said, "I will meet the problem of combining a family and a medical career as it comes." Now a mother of a large family and a practicing physician, Erna tells us a little bit about how she's continued to balance her life as her family has grown.

What led you to pursue a career as a physician?

I had a strong interest in biology at a very young age. I was very curious about how living things work. My ninth grade biology teacher was very inspiring, and I excelled in the sciences. It was on a trip back to my country of birth, Taiwan, when I was thirteen that I decided I wanted to be a doctor and help my people. It was sad to see my mother's aunt dying of liver cancer in only a cot in a small two by three yard hospital room. The medical staff gave her nothing for her pain; we could only offer her a bottle of Excedrin we had brought with us from the U.S. We sent some more after we returned home. I believe she lived four more months after we left. The medical level there was far below ours at that time.

Do you ever feel conflict between your role as a mother and your career as a doctor?

I have occasionally had second thoughts about being a physician



because of the fear that I am neglecting my own children's needs and well-being. Also, the prophet and general authorities repeat often that a woman's place is in the home and that no greater work is done than in the walls of our home.

No one ever directly made me feel I had made the wrong choice to work outside of the home. On the contrary, I always heard words of admiration and amazement from Church members. My sense of guilt or doubts about what I was doing would come up when I would hear the prophet's counsel.

However, I have many times had confirmed in my heart the idea that each of us is unique and that the relationship I have with my husband and the way we have worked out our roles has allowed us to provide care from both parents. I have seen families where the father is rarely home because he's busy working to provide for the family. My children have always had the attention of both parents—not to mention that they are my best

friends since I don't really have any social life outside of the Church. My life doesn't involve television or other distractions that do not include my family. Where there's a conflict between the children and work, I have most every time resolved it in favor of my family. My children have had to learn to help a lot and be self-sufficient. All my children, including my oldest daughter and her husband, live in our home.

What advice would you give to an LDS woman considering a career as a physician?

I would advise a young woman to make sure she's choosing a career in medicine because she really loves the challenge of helping others. It can be draining to be constantly giving at work and then turn right around and continue to give to a family clamoring for her service and attention. She needs to have a strong sense of balance to provide herself support and care.

I went to medical school at USC and then did my training in pediatrics at Kaiser at Los Angeles. The fact that my path was made very easy is a testimony to me that the Lord intended for me to pursue this career. In addition, my patriarchal blessing states that I should not fear to give advice because many would seek it from me.

How have your children adapted to your dual roles of mother and doctor?

I have had ten pregnancies, one of

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Resurrected Thin

This is new
because I made it up:
Faith without fat is merely thin.

This is how we'll lose those extra inches.
We simply won't talk about it.
We'll just believe.

And later on we'll slap our thighs
and wiggle our arms.

As if we didn't know.

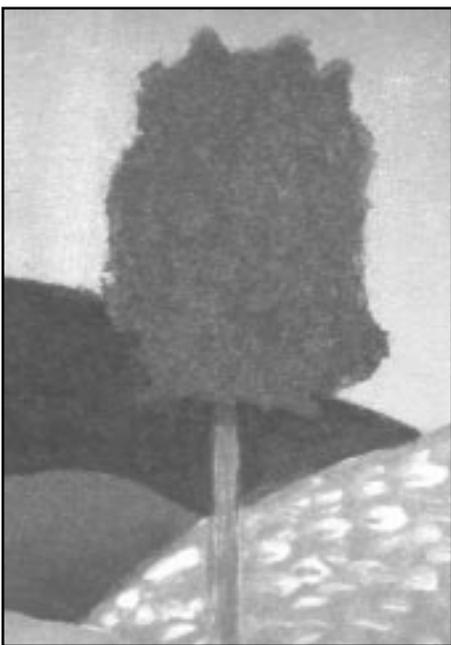
As if we loved us "just the way we are"
with seemingly masking-taped chests
and free handles for love.

Independently heavier
together, flailing and
quietly fishing for the reassurance

that really we have the upper swollen foot
of a lack of faith in thin.

Although our mirrors stay skinny,
our shoes ever-slender.

B. Jean Williams



The Fidgeting Ghazal

That's me sitting with head bowed,
my hands in my lap, crisp shirt and skirt.

Still and reverent, but not quite still.
Very, very reverent.

Third pew on the left, right
behind the Sorenson's grandsons.

The Holy Spirit speaker on her third main
point, I make an asterisk next to

the word in my head: longsuffering.
My fingers, not long (my hands are tiny),

But suffer from my habit of absently concentrating
on cuticle, hangnail, dry fraying callus, while I listen.

Intensity in listening heightens the picking level,
but it almost never comes to biting.

Brooke Williams

Some News About the Soul

In my solitude I speak
to the other side of myself:
quiet lark of heavy wings,
oh, supple remorse.

If you sit still enough
the birds of your body
will settle on one dark branch
and rest in chords of ceremony.

The fluttering behind our shoulders
throwing light
as from dusty lanterns
we mistake for birds.

The mackintosh tree
my father pruned last April
has now two branches that extend
toward the sparrows
like arms.

Sunni Brown

Negotiating Identity: Keeping My Name

Amy Hoyt

Being Mormon, married, and keeping your own last name presents particular challenges. When Kevin and I decided to get married, we began negotiations: where to get married, where to live, how many children we wanted, and so on. Among the debated issues was whether I would hyphenate our two last names or take his name. I reluctantly agreed to hyphenate. I had every intention of actually doing it, but when it came time to sign the paperwork, I couldn't. I felt such a sense of identity loss that I couldn't bring myself to do it. I was afraid that by changing my name I would somehow be lost within the marriage.

Understandably, Kevin was disappointed and hurt. He felt that somehow my attitude was a

reflection on how I felt about him and his extended family. Over the past several years, I have tried to reassure him that my individuality, and not his family, are at the heart of my decision. Technically, we are still in negotiations over this issue, and I suspect they will last many more years as we attempt to forge a marital relationship that is representative of both of our expectations.

Because the issue is still muddled for Kevin and me, it is not surprising that it is even more so for members of our ward. Although they are kind and warm to our family, I'm sure that we are a puzzle to them. If there are judgments or criticisms, I am unaware of them, for which I am grateful. If anything, there is confusion. They don't know where to put me in the ward directory, they aren't sure what to call me, and they

aren't sure what to call my husband. Last month in Sunday school, Kevin and I were asked to give the opening and closing prayers. The teacher, who is new to the ward, asked us our names. "Amy Hoyt and Kevin Dearing," we each replied. When she started class, she mentioned that the "Hoyt-Dearings" would be giving the prayers. At the end of class she called on "Brother Hoyt."

Sometimes when we introduce ourselves at church, it's easier

simply to say our first names.

We have lived in four wards since we've been married. Twice, upon moving in, the ward clerk has changed my church records to reflect Kevin's last name, assuming it was an oversight by the last ward clerk. I know it is inadvertent because when we have approached the clerk, he is apologetic and embarrassed and worried that he has somehow offended me. The ward directory lists us as the Dearings, but I sometimes worry that those who don't know Kevin's last name won't be able to get in touch with me. Our old ward directory listed us in both the D's and the H's, which worked better.

A few years ago, a high councilman in charge of visiting single sisters came to visit me. He was gracious and kind but a little confused when we explained why I was probably listed as a single sister, as well as being listed as Sister Dearing. The overwhelming emotion he showed was relief when he realized that I was married to Kevin and not simply cohabitating with him!

Kevin and I had our first child last year. At my baby shower, I was asked what we had named him. "Jackson Preston," I said. "And his last name?" they asked. I guess it was a fair question. "Dearing." I wanted Jackson to have my maiden name as his middle name, but after more negotiations we decided to use his middle name as a way to honor male relatives on both sides of our families.

Over the last few years, I've tried



...AND THE NAME BY WHICH SHE SHALL BE KNOWN ON THE RECORDS OF THE CHURCH UNTIL SHE IS MARRIED... UH... OR IF SHE KEEPS HER MAIDEN NAME EVEN AFTER SHE'S MARRIED, THEN HER ENTIRE LIFE, IS...

to convince Kevin to change his name or suggested that we both hyphenate our last names. He is resistant to these ideas; he likes his last name and feels a strong affinity to it because of his familial ties. I can certainly relate. Men in the ward have asked him if it bothers him that I kept my name. "Yeah, sometimes," he replies. I wish it didn't, just as I'm sure he wishes that becoming a Dearing wouldn't be difficult for me.

There are days when I wish we shared a last name, but I feel that this feeling is part of my compromise. I give into tradition at times and Kevin gives into innovation at

times. Neither of us are completely content during these compromises, but we manage to stretch ourselves towards each other's perspectives.

For me, having different last names is a powerful example of how two autonomous individuals can carefully craft a marriage that is based on partnership, shared responsibilities, and values—not a marriage that is perfect or trouble-free, but one that is based on a commitment between two people to develop a marriage that is egalitarian, equitable, and rewarding in the midst of constant negotiations. I understand that forging

new models of marriage and partnership will take time, and I am sure that being impatient with those who hold fast to traditional models will not produce quicker results. Being Mormon, married, and keeping your own last name presents particular challenges—none of which is insurmountable. ❧

Amy is a doctoral candidate in Women's Studies in Religion at Claremont Graduate University. She and her husband, Kevin Dearing, and their son, Jackson Dearing, currently live in northern California. Amy enjoys gardening, cooking, and anything related to travel.

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once. Two of them are intended for the Young Adult age group (11-14). One of them is a new mystery-suspense for a national publisher. The second is a novel that takes place in Nauvoo at the time of Joseph Smith's death. The third, aimed at LDS women, I'm writing with two writer friends about three Mormon women from different parts of the country who meet at BYU Education Week in 1975. Their lives become entwined as they go about raising their families, and we get to discuss a lot of problems faced by Mormon women in general.

What interests do you have in addition to writing?

Cats, of which I have five. Travel, which has taken me all over the world, most recently to China. I love plays and musicals. And movies. And, of course, books. ❧

Then and Now continued from page 26

which ended in a miscarriage. I had six girls and three boys. My second daughter died at almost three months of crib death, which was very difficult. It was a challenge having children while in medical school and residency, but it was all worth it. We love our children very much and have no greater sense of joy and accomplishment than them. My husband has always supported—even encouraged—my pursuit of a career I loved because of my being able to help others.

Our children have been very understanding of what I have chosen to do with raising them while working part time and occasionally full time. I'm blessed to work for Kaiser, where I can have some flexibility in my schedule and the great advantage of working at night while the children are asleep or on weekends when they don't need as much help with homework. It helps also that most

of our families, parents, and siblings live in Irvine, too. They have helped to raise the children. I can't deny that there have been times when the children at a very young age would cry for me to be at home, despite the good care their dad gave them. There's still no substitute for mom!

Do your church responsibilities balance with your other duties?

I have been married for almost thirty years. I was a convert to the Church at age twenty-one, one year after marrying David, who had joined the Church about six weeks before we met. Currently, I'm a Webelos den leader. I believe so far my greatest and most satisfying calling has been a ward missionary. ❧

SO I MARRIED A MORMON FEMINIST . . .

Mike McBride

It's not like she didn't warn me. Six years ago Caroline went out of her way to let me know what I was getting into. Like when she told me over and over she had something important to tell me, something that could make me stop dating her. The funny thing is that when she made her "big" announcement during a dinner date—that she was going to keep her name when she got married—I didn't even blink. She was disappointed because she was hoping for some sort of reaction, but I already knew about this decision since her brother, who had introduced us, had hinted at it weeks earlier. This information did not deter my pursuit of her. To be honest, I wasn't even pursuing her then. I told my brother at the time that I was only going out with her because she was fun and interesting and not because I considered her "wife material."

That changed of course. Our courtship, once it began, was fun and romantic but also unique. We were in school on opposite sides of the country, but thanks to declining long distance telephone rates and the proliferation of e-mail, we communicated frequently. Progression in the relationship meant discussing more and deeper topics. It was during this time that I got to know her desire to be her best by stretching and challenging herself, her ability to feel others' pain, and, most prominently, her feminism. Surprisingly, aspects of her feminism attracted me to her. She is smart, she cares about real world issues, and she is not afraid to engage in difficult conversations.

On the other hand, because I do not consider myself a feminist, her feminist views have presented difficulties for me in our marriage, some of which were unexpected. Take having different last names, for example. The only two advantages are the shock value we sometimes get when new acquaintances do not know how to treat us once they find out and the fact that I always know it's a telemarketer on the phone when I'm asked if Mr. Kline is home, thus allowing me to quickly develop my exit strategy. The biggest disadvantage is that she sometimes is hurt when people—especially Church members—who know she kept her last name still intentionally refer to us as the McBrides. In each ward we've lived in, her church records have listed her by my name.

This is not a profound example of how my marriage is different than expected since I married a Mormon feminist. But it actually hints at some of the more difficult issues that have come into my life. Often, as with her last name, she feels misunderstood and frustrated with Church members who do not exhibit respect for her ideals about gender equality. Her innate feminist beliefs and thinking were finely honed while attending a women's college, which means she is particularly sensitive to Church leaders' language, thoughts, and theories about women and their roles in the family, the Church, the temple, and the eternities. Because I am not as sensitive to these issues, I often react differently than she. For example, I often take a somewhat impersonal or analytical approach, focusing on what we do

not know and on how Church leaders teach or emphasize different things at different times, all the while trying to maintain faith in the reality of inspired Church leadership. While I can successfully separate my own personal feelings (for example, about various "folk" doctrines that circulate in Sunday School classes and are offensive to her) from the realization that much is unknown despite what is said, she cannot so easily separate her passions from the cold realities of proof burdens. These different approaches sometimes prevent us from engaging in beneficial conversations.

Similar stumbling blocks exist in many marriages, but the fact that it takes place within the Church context poses unique complexities. For one, many Mormon doctrinal or historical issues often lead to questions of ultimate truths and moralities, and these may impact the way we conceptualize our relationship and our future. For example, does a woman have to "hearken unto" her husband because of some eternal female characteristic that makes her inferior to a man? Would I take a second wife in the next life if God personally asked me to? Ultimately, our feelings about these issues are more similar than different, but our different approaches to discussion often lead us to talk past each other.

A second difficulty revolves around the ideal of being a supportive spouse. For example, if the treatment of women in the endowment ceremony bothers her so much that she dislikes attending the temple but I still want to

go, am I being unsupportive? More commonly, the issue of being supportive arises when something is said at church that she feels is insensitive to women. Her critical reactions are often warranted and ones I agree with, but sometimes I do disagree with the tone or content of her concerns and criticisms. It is difficult to be sensitive to her feelings when I disagree with her. I feel obligated as an individual to express my disagreement, but this is difficult to do in a respectful manner.

I hope these examples give a sense of some difficulties in being married to a feminist, but I also hope they do not give the wrong impression. Our day-to-day life is not as stressful as the above examples might suggest. In fact, to me the most stressful aspect of our marriage her messiness.

The truth is that I am a much better person today because I

am married to her. She demands the best from me, and I do my best to comply. Moreover, Caroline is aware of the many good things the Church brings to people throughout the world, and she often gives the Church and its leaders the credit they deserve.

To marry Caroline was the smartest decision of my life. In fact, I can pin down three, among many, important ways she and her feminism have made me a better person. First, and obvious-

ly, she has raised my awareness of the concerns of many LDS women. I am a better person because I have a better, even if not complete, understanding of issues confronted by many LDS women. If I am ever needed to help women who have similar concerns, I will be a much better tool in the Lord's hands.

Second, she demands that I do what is right not just because it is right, which is easy for me to do, but for the right reason. In essence, she has raised my own awareness of my own desires about living the gospel of Jesus Christ.



Third, I have learned more about Jesus' Atonement in my years married to her than in all the combined years of my pre-married life. I have never so strongly felt the desire to take another person's pain. In our most intimate moments, her emotional and spiritual burdens become mine, and I feel closer to her when I manifest this pure love. I never ascribed to the belief that each person has "one true love," but if I have a soul mate, then she's the one.

As I meet more Mormon feminists, I find that many of them share Caroline's feelings but each is unique. I'm sure *Exponent II* readers are familiar with the fact that there are different types of feminists. One of Caroline's textbooks classifies, among others, socialist feminists, radical feminists, liberal feminists, and cultural feminists. Even though "feminist" is a label used in derision by many Church members for various reasons, many types of feminists remain in the Church. What role they will have in our Church is not for me to decide, but I know that Caroline has an important place that she is still searching for. Her journey of finding it is more hers than mine, but I am along for the ride. And I am glad for it.

In all honesty, I believe I have the best marriage in the world. I am continually challenged, edified, and exhilarated. In Mormon lingo, I am progressing.

Actually, she has

told me that I *am* a feminist—just not a very good one. I tell her that she's crazy to call me a feminist, as anyone who knows me would agree. But I secretly hope she still believes it since it could reconfirm to her my (albeit limited) ability to journey with her. ☺

Mike McBride has been Caroline Kline's husband (she likes him introduced as her possessed object) for five years. He enjoys reading hard-boiled detective novels and teaches game theory at UC Irvine.

Fall Retreat

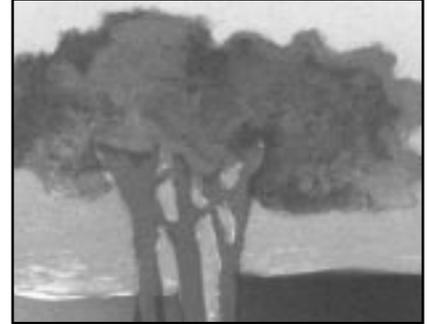
Please save September 23-25 for this year's Exponent Retreat to be held at Camp Jewell in the north-west corner of Connecticut (near Colebrook). Camp Jewell sits in the beautiful Berkshire Mountains on the banks of a private lake.

This year's keynote speaker will be Pandora Brewer. Pandora has been a popular workshop presenter at various Exponent retreats over the years, the most recent one being on female socialization and empowerment. A manager in the Boston area of

the inventive and upscale chain of Crate and Barrel stores, Pandora was recently transferred to Chicago with her husband Mark and sons Alex (14) and Walker (11) to be the company's Midwest Area Trainer. Pandora's interests include medieval history, myth, and religion.

To accommodate the camp, we must have your retreat registration by September 7. The fee, which includes all meals, lodging, and a tee shirt, is \$140.

To reserve your place, e-mail Barbara Taylor at saige3tb@yahoo.com or call her at (508) 478-4469. Let her know if you have a talent you'd like to share in our annual talent show.



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