



# *Exponent II*

*Volume 27*

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## Coming Attractions

Future issues of *Exponent II* will include articles on Mormon women quilters; the effects of pornography addiction on families; women and power; dealing with life changes; and making sense of suffering. If you are interested in writing on any of these subjects, please contact us.

### Submissions to *Exponent II*

We welcome your personal essays, articles, poetry, and fiction. We focus on—but do not publish exclusively—manuscripts that are women and Mormon Church-related. Please e-mail submissions to [ExponentII@aol.com](mailto:ExponentII@aol.com) or mail disk or hard copy to *Exponent II*, Box 128, Arlington, MA 02476. Double-space manuscripts and write on one side only with your name, address, and e-mail address, if available, on each page. Keep a copy of your work; manuscripts will not be returned.

We are also looking for artwork and photography. Send samples of your work for consideration. If you are interested in illustrating articles, please contact us for specific assignments. When sending photographs via e-mail, be sure the resolution is at least 300 DPI.

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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Cover: Replica of *Joyful Moment* by sculptor Dennis Smith. Photograph by Lena Dibble.

# Meet Our Contest Winners

Carol Joan Bennion Quist, whose essay "Of Clue and House Cleaning" was this year's Helen Candland Stark essay contest winner, sold her first piece of writing to the former *Children's Friend*, the second to *Vogue*, the third to *Good Housekeeping*, the fourth, fifth, and sixth to *Ensign*, who lost the sixth but said, "Keep the money and



sell the piece elsewhere." She did. She has proofread at *Ensign*, taught basic composition at LDS Business College in Salt Lake City, and taught human-

ities, communication, business English, and technical writing at Salt Lake Community College.

Carol has won prizes for poetry, light verse, fiction, and non-fiction and teaches grammar, humor, and essay writing seminars. She's currently editing a friend's autobiography.

Now associate editor at *Sunstone* magazine, Carol has an A.B. in radio-TV production/writing from

Stanford and an M.A. from the University of Utah in women's history and literature.

Carol has lived many places in the United States and in Al Khobar, Saudi Arabia, with her now retired engineer/attorney husband William Woodbury Quist. They have four living sons and fifteen grandchildren. Their eldest son Will died of brain tumors in October 2004.

Besides writing, reading, and gardening, Carol enjoys traveling with Bill and has been in every U.S. state and nearly two dozen nations so far. She covets trips to South America and Antarctica.

Rebecca Clarke, whose essay "Dogwood Trees" won an honorable mention in this year's essay contest, has the following to say about herself:

"When I turned seven, I got a blue plastic typewriter for my birthday. It really worked. I have tinkered with writing ever since. I currently teach writing at BYU, write periodically for *Meridian Magazine*, and edit *The Restored Gospel and Applied Christianity: Student Essays*

in Honor of President David O. McKay, a journal that publishes the winning essays of the country's highest-paying personal essay contest.

"I served a mission to Guatemala in 1994-1995.

"While I deeply enjoy my outside-of-home pursuits, I find myself wanting more and more to simply spend time with my family.



I love to watch six-year-old Eliza play soccer and love to watch four-year-old Emme show me with huge sweeping arm motions how 'Heavenly Father created the world.' When Sam, Eliza, Emme, and I are together in idyllic family moments – which thankfully aren't too rare – we enjoy taking walks, playing on the tire swing in our front yard, and reading books out loud to each other. When I have moments free and alone I love to read and write and garden."

## Sisters Speak

In many ways and settings, the Church has been addressing the problem of pornography addiction and how it affects the lives of LDS families. We, too, would like to acknowledge this problem and discover how women, in particular, are dealing with it. Therefore, if you or your family struggles with this issue and would like to write—or know

someone who would like to write—about your experiences in order to help broaden the understanding of other sisters in the Church, please consider the following questions:

Have you had a relationship that has been affected by pornography? How would you describe its impact? Why do

you think it affected your relationship the way it did? What have you learned about dealing with the temptation pornography holds either for you or for someone who is close to you?

All letters will be published anonymously. Please have your contributions to us at [exponentii@aol.com](mailto:exponentii@aol.com) by October 1.

# A Radical Life Blooms in Becket

## Aimee Hickman

From an early age, my grandma Sylvia took me on outings to the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers Museum in Salt Lake City. There I glimpsed the personal details of our early saints as I wandered through rooms full of textiles, hair art, and hidden gems of what are the closest things we have to Mormon reliquaries. It was there in a glass case devoted to a few of the worldly possessions of “Zion’s Poetess” — lace gloves she made herself, poetry written in her own hand, the elaborate golden pen given to her by Joseph Smith — that I first met Eliza R. Snow.

Throughout my life, Eliza R. Snow has been a dignified old woman in a black bonnet, matriarchal without being maternal. She has stood as the preeminent symbol of strong, traditional Mormon female righteousness. She was, for me, every bit an “Eliza,” with all the queenly elegance, rendered quaint by the passage of time, that such a name connotes. But this last May, I was able to glimpse another Eliza R. Snow, the Roxcy part, a spunky side obscured by that intriguing middle initial.

Having heard whisperings of a recently erected monument in the town of her birthplace, I headed with friends to meet others paying tribute to this early Mormon heroine in the small western Massachusetts town of Becket. In every way, Becket is the quintessential New England village — white clapboard churches, a smattering of local shops, and an Athenaeum (otherwise known as a library) nestled into the green

wooded landscape on the border of the Berkshire Hills. The contrast between the barren desert landscape of Salt Lake that Eliza would find in her late forties could not be more distinct from the land of her birth.

Fittingly, Eliza’s monument sits on the lush green Athenaeum lawn. After an enlightening talk by Colleen Wiest about how the monument to Eliza came about, our group of some thirty women and men sang a stirring rendition of “O My Father.” We then headed up to the town cemetery and read the headstones of other members of the Snow family who had not embarked on such wild western adventures. The fragrance of thyme and mint was vivid — it



made that place smell a thousand years old, which made me wonder if Eliza remembered it in hot, dry Deseret as she thought about childhood graveside mourning and the Snows left behind in Becket.

Entering the structure that Eliza is believed to have been born in, I was overcome with the moxie, or Roxcy, of this remarkable family, who left their quaint New England home to head into the uncharted West, not only to join

an upstart religious group in which their daughter, Eliza, would marry first one and then the second of that group’s two charismatic leaders, but where she would eventually become one of those leaders herself. Eliza was a woman bold enough to be a priestess, bold enough to be a poetess, bold enough to abandon convention and live what was by any standard a radical life. Walking across the wide pine planks that comprise the floor of the late eighteenth-century cabin that now exists as two small rooms of a much larger house, I imagined a family who told stories by firelight, parents who encouraged their daughter’s penchant for education and religious fervor, a little girl so close to her Heavenly Mother that her poetry would inspire millions to find Her.

Bound up together in our shared wonder of that inspired life, Claudia Bushman led our group of disparate admirers through a series of Eliza’s poetry put to song. Singing exuberantly, and maybe a little irreverently, into the dimming New England sky, my homage to Eliza came full circle. In my mind she is no longer the austere, traditional Eliza R. Snow I knew from daguerreotypes. From this moment on, I’ll call her by her full name — there just wouldn’t be an Eliza R. Snow without the Roxcy.

☒  
*Born and raised in the shadow of Utah’s everlasting hills, Aimee is a Westerner at heart who loves antiquing in New England and cheering religiously for the Red Sox with her husband Jared and son Leo from their home in Somerville, Massachusetts.*

# A Visit to Eliza R. Snow's Birthplace

## Colleen Wiest

Following the conclusion of the Mormon History Association Conference on May 29, thirty-three historians from across the country left Sharon, Vermont, to make a pilgrimage to the birthplace of Eliza R. Snow in Becket, Massachusetts. The weather had been threatening all day, but as the group gathered in Becket the skies cleared.

On the 24th of July last year, a monument was placed on the grounds of the Becket Athenaeum to commemorate the bicentennial of Eliza's birth. The idea for the memorial began with Sharon Vasicek. Working together in the Stake Young Women's program, she and I were hoping to incorporate the memorial idea into a youth activity. When this activity did not work out, I felt we could not let the opportunity to commemorate Eliza's birth slip by. I approached the bishop of the Pittsfield Massachusetts Ward to see if the ward would support the placement of a memorial plaque. He was pleased with the idea and put me in charge of the committee.

Margorie Conder of the Church History Museum staff and I worked closely together, especially on the text of the plaque. I felt strongly that we should include a few lines from the epitaph Eliza had written for herself:

*For friendship holds a secret cord . . .  
Like far off echoes of the night  
And whispers softly through my soul  
I would not be forgotten quite.*

The owner of a local memorial business and I designed the



plaque together. I was pleased to see in his collection of images a drawing of the Salt Lake Temple, which we used as the centerpiece on the plaque. After both the Church and the Athenaeum Board of Trustees approved the text and design, the bronze plaque was prepared and then mounted on a piece of local granite. Becket is known for its beautiful granite. The piece used for mounting the monument was found near the home of Eliza's family and was donated and placed on the grounds of the Athenaeum by a member of the Church, who wishes to remain anonymous.

This project received a great deal of support from the people of Becket—from the town leaders to the Historical Commission to the Athenaeum staff and board of directors. The townspeople had questions about Eliza and the project but were always positive and supportive of our efforts to place this monument.

A community pancake breakfast, hosted by the fire chief, and a short program were held on the morning of the 24th of July 2004 to unveil the memorial. The day had begun cloudy and cool, but as the group gathered for the commemorative service, the clouds parted

and the sun broke through—a fitting tribute to the dedicated life of Eliza R. Snow. The townspeople were impressed with Eliza's accomplishments and leadership, including her many hymns, poems, and much dedicated service to the Church.

Sunshine seems to accompany events commemorating Eliza's work. Once again the clouds parted while the MHA group gathered to honor this great woman. After visiting the memorial at the Athenaeum, the group traveled to the Snow family plot in the local cemetery and then on to the Fred Snow house, where tradition says Eliza was born. Participants speculated about the original design and layout of the house. More research is needed to find answers to the many questions that arose regarding the origins of the house, which is known to have been built in the latter part of the eighteenth century.

Bill and Jennifer Darger hosted a delightful picnic dinner for the group at their wonderful colonial home in Otis. Bill accompanied Claudia Bushman's enthusiastic leading of the group in many of Eliza's poems, which the group sang to familiar tunes. A large, threatening cloud arrived to signal the conclusion of the event, and the celebrators fled quickly as the deluge that had held off so long began in earnest. ☞

*Colleen lived in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, when the plaque was placed and has since moved with her husband Joel to Manhattan. Together they have four wonderful children.*

# Of *Clue* and Cleaning House

Carol B. Quist

1940-50

The eldest of eight children, my sister and I had the most housework to do. We thought it unfair although, as Mom often reminded us, being older also meant more privileges. Besides being paid a bit for chores, as we kids all were, Judy and I could stay up later, bike all around the neighborhood (when her leg wasn't in a cast), and bus downtown to shop or see movies. Neighbors, who paid more, sometimes hired us, too.

We were also board game addicts — *Monopoly*, *Sorry*, *Scrabble*, and our favorite, *Clue* — the fictional mansion with nine possible murder rooms, six suspects, six weapons. We developed two more weapons — poison (crushed pyracantha berries in perfume bottles) and death rays (fired from cigarette lighter and squirt gun parts). Later on, we created a law firm — Hook, Rook, Swindle, and Dodge — to defend the accused.

As for the chores, we fairly promptly dusted and vacuumed. We were so-so with the laundry, which included hanging it on backyard lines in the summer and bringing it in when dry. Winters we used the lines in the basement. With a sprinkler head on a root beer bottle, we “dampened” the clothes to be ironed. For flat fabric, we learned how to use the mangle, a fancy roller ironing machine Dad bought. He always bought updated appliances such as automatic washers and dryers to help Mom run the house and care for the kids.

But he never got an automatic dishwasher. We had to wash in dishpans in the sink, a soapy pan for washing and a clean one for rinsing. I washed, rinsed, and set dishes in the drainer on the counter at right. Judy wiped. Sometimes while she wiped, my body blocking her view, I took from the top drawer at left clean utensils and put them through again. I enjoyed tricking her, so I didn't argue much about doing dishes. Of course Judy would plunk back into the dishwasher anything that was still goopy. Or was it? She dumped them too fast for me to be sure. Sometimes I said, “Oh, just wipe it off!” Sometimes we “forgot” to sweep the floor. Sometimes we did wet-rag swipes instead of scrubbing thoroughly.

We didn't mind washing windows a few times a year, one of us outside and the other in, a pane at a time. We sometimes pretended the other had missed or made a smudge. And made faces at each other.

But we always tried to duck the Saturday bathroom job by sneaking out the back door while Mom's attention was elsewhere. Escape was fairly easy during the after-breakfast exodus of our ultimately six brothers. It might be helped by arguments between the brothers assigned to clear the table, wash dishes, and sweep the floor.

After we got outdoors, we could inch along north under the dining room window. Then we could squat-waddle fifteen feet west alongside the pyracantha bushes and leap the front walk. Then we

could squat-waddle twenty-five more pyracantha feet to the northwest corner of the house and crawl around into the screened French porch. If we set the *Clue* board north of the chimney next to the house, no one could see us from indoors. We'd tested it.

Because neighbors or passersby could easily see us, we usually avoided this route. Instead, we would dash across the driveway, leap the Perkins retaining wall, and crouch behind our lilac bushes. This scramble could also be seen, and often was, by Mrs. Perkins. Opening her kitchen window, she would say, “Hello, girls; I'll call your mother for you.” Despite knowing our antics, Mrs. Perkins still hired me to scrub her floors each Wednesday. We might also be spotted by friends — how embarrassing — who'd finished their Saturday work or hadn't any. Also unfair.

Usually we went the third way. We crouched beside the back porch and inched below the sewing room window to the southwest corner of the house. Usually, as we loped west across the backyard toward the French porch, Mom would call from a back window, “If you had cleaned the bathrooms first, you would be free to go play now. It would have taken much less energy and not weighed on your conscience all the time you're playing *Clue*.”

I wondered about this as we silently, grudgingly trudged inside. And pondered while we played odds and evens fingers to decide who would do the upstairs bath and who would have to do the main. “Better than arguing,”

Mom said. She'd bought all the games and always did her work first—we knew that. We also knew she must have too much work. She hardly ever seemed to have time to play. Whenever she played what she called “warm-ups,” though, she won.

The main floor bathroom was biggest and had the most mess. It was kind of interesting to pick toothpaste dots from the mirror but not to scour Vaseline and mystery stains; sweep lint, dust, and sand left by brothers' shoes; deal with diapers and varied colors and quantities of hair.

Outdoors, two-fingered, I shook who knew what from the bath mats and tossed them down the laundry chute. Gingerly, I scraped gray scallops from the shower curtains and scoured black-edged tile. Often I gave the floors only a wet-rag swipe and ignored the smudged wall under the basin. We prayed nobody had left any underwear; we rarely touched the fuzz behind the toilet.

## 1980

My family has moved from New Jersey back to Utah; Judy's family has moved from Utah to Washington state.

Now Mom, a cancer survivor and pacemaker owner semi-restricted to home, no longer needs to call. I come almost daily while my sons are in high school and college and my husband's at work. But I haven't cleaned the bathrooms for eons. Yesterday, I took Mom and her cousin Eleanor to lunch. The day before, we went shopping. The day before that, we'd sorted

and labeled closets full of photos. Before that, I forget. I think someone else had visited. Four of my brothers live in town.

So today I must clean. Quietly using my key, I enter the outside basement door and do the lower bathroom. Installed when the basement had become an apartment, it's used only by visitors and rarely needs more than



wet-rag swipes and soap, towel, and tissue updates.

Climbing the inside stairs, I throw a kiss and a “Hi” at Mom, who's propped up on her bed and says, “Oh, Carol, I heard you sneak in around the back!” I'm already going upstairs where I pretty much follow the same routine as I had downstairs. This bath is used only when Dad does accounting in his office or when my unmarried brother sleeps upstairs between here and his apartment. Mom never goes up or downstairs. Dad's working at the temple today, so I banish dust and replenish the supplies.

Down on the main floor again, I call, “Yell whenever you want in here” and begin by polishing mirrors. Meticulously, I dust the coved tile wainscot and windowsill. At the counter, I thor-

oughly wipe each container and move it out to a towel I've laid over the living room carpet. I dust and wipe walls, towel bars, and bar supports, and then wash and dry the basin and counter, including underneath. I carry out the step stool, scale, extra chair, and laundry hamper. I wipe the bottoms of everything.

Kneeling at the tub, I try to create a zippy advertising slogan for Zud, the yucko-looking new cleanser some fast-talker persuaded my folks to buy. “Zud! Zud! Zud for crud! Zud! Zud! Zud for crud!” I chant while trying to think of other rhymes for Zud.

“Carol, Carol? Wait. Stop. Come in here. What are you doing now?” Mom calls.

I'm grinding a scrubbing brush around inside the recessed tile soap tray, but I don't say that. I tease. “I'm cleaning the bathroom first. Before playing. But I'm also playing. Remember, you always said to do our work first and make it a game. Judy and I were supposed to sing and be happy.”

“Well, singing was a big, big improvement over your arguments about everything,” Mom said firmly and clearly from the bedroom.

“Zudz, Zudz, Zudz your crudz daily down the drain.” I sing it over and over to the tune of “Row, row, row your boat.”

Mom giggles. I hear it when I take a breath. So I try a hillbilly accent.

*continued on page 13*

## The Dogwood Trees

**Rebecca Clarke**

*The “art” of pruning seeks to create a mature form over the course of several seasons – or several decades. It is not an art to be hurried.*

I should have kept a list of all the things I have killed. Off the top I can name a yew tree, two peach trees that were barely hanging on, and the wisteria – a purple flowering vine that grew up the trellis by our back porch. Other plants stand as misshapen monuments to my bungling efforts: the struggling lilac by the driveway, the deformed forsythia bush, and all the mangled roses in the front garden. Even with all of the carnage and crippling, I still continue to try my hand at pruning; practice is the best way for me to grow, if not my plants. I put all of the clippings in a pile where quail make their home. We burn the pile once a year, and the quail run.

When we were first married, we moved into my parents’ basement. At that time, I saw gardening in the same way I saw doing laundry, cooking, and other home and family work: a necessary drudgery that stood in the way of really living.

It was while we lived in my parents’ basement, during that first year of marriage, that I was accepted to Bryn Mawr for graduate school in social work. I was accepted in large part because I am Mormon. During my interview, which I opted to do by phone because I didn’t dare invest in a longshot, the

woman asked me extensive questions about the eighteen months of volunteer work I had done for my church. I paced the basement floor in my stockinged feet the entire time, gripping the receiver with one hand, using my free hand to alternate between pulling nervously at my bangs and stretching out the collar of my t-shirt. I paced and turned and paced and answered her cheerily, brightly. And I ached for it.

My desire to go to Bryn Mawr came as much from wanting the adventure of it as I did the education. I wanted to drive on different roads than I had for most of my life. It sounded romantic to me to live in a cramped apartment with outdated fixtures and bookshelves made out of cinderblocks and plywood. I pored over maps and thought about day trips we could

take to see Amish communities, weekend trips we could take to Washington D.C. and even New York.

My husband worried that going away from family would be a bad idea for our fledgling marriage, not to mention the difficulty of leaving the first job where he was paid a salary instead of by the hour. Heading off to Bryn Mawr in Pennsylvania at \$16,000 a year certainly wouldn’t be a good financial move, not when I had been accepted into graduate school at BYU less than two miles away and, by comparison, free. So he prayed alone and I prayed alone and we prayed together. *And the rib which I, the Lord God had taken from man, made I a woman, and brought her unto the man.* (Moses 3:22)

We waited to see if Bryn Mawr made any financial aid offer, figuring if they offered half or more, we would go. I carried the envelope downstairs one sunny afternoon before Sam came home from work. I was nearly as transfixed with it as I had been with my mission call. I opened it, shaking and alone, sitting on our bed by the window. I pulled out the duplicate copies on tissue-thin sheets of yellow and pink and breathed in: a half-tuition scholarship.

But Sam still worried. *And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it became pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make her wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and also gave unto her husband with her, and he did eat.* (Moses 4:12-13)



SL

Sam and I flew to Pennsylvania to look at the campus: slate roofs; wooden benches; gothic architecture; dark, cavernous lecture halls. It was our first trip as a married couple, our first time together outside of Utah. We took turns taking each other's pictures in front of the buildings. I had Sam take my picture in front of a blossoming dogwood tree, white flowers perched on limbs behind me like hesitant butterflies.

We traveled into downtown Philadelphia, where we called my parents collect from outside Independence Hall and let them down by still being undecided. We looked at the Liberty Bell, pressed the button to hear the recorded message that went along with the exhibit, and then went to McDonald's where we tried to act casual about the kaleidoscope of people eating and talking around us. On our way back to the motel, I drove us down a street where people looked greedily at our rental car and slowly sauntered out of the way to let us by. Sam commanded me urgently, "Turn around. Turn around."

I brought home a dogwood blossom, a Bryn Mawr key fob, and a few postcards featuring the picturesque campus landscape.

We kept on praying. It was the first real decision we had ever made together, if you don't count the one about how soon after our wedding reception we should leave for our honeymoon. We each took turns creating a "Pro and Con List" in a little green notebook, where we ranked items in categories like "Sam: Job," "\$," "Fun," and "Experience." We talked to people we trusted to give us good advice. But even with each of us wanting to do what was best for our marriage, the columns

in the notebook did not come up equal.

*And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.* (Genesis 3:7) One night, after I'd sent my acceptance letter to Bryn Mawr to save my spot, Sam stayed up and prayed for hours. I was partially aware of his form at the side of the bed and wandered between sleep and wakefulness, envisioning what I was sure to be the outcome of our deliberations, the answer I'd received to my prayers: We should go because it would be good. I could see me walking into the gothic buildings. I watched myself sitting in the lecture halls, studiously intent, and saw myself making my way up tight stairways to speak with a professor. I pictured our thirteen-year-old Volkswagen actually making the 1,800 mile trip. I could even imagine the inner-city families at the Episcopal Community Services Center where I had been assigned to do my internship. When Sam rolled into bed, I sat up, put my back against the headboard, and looked at him. He said in the darkness and the quiet, "I don't think we should go." In that moment, I knew. My eyes were open for a long time that night.

*Each individual tree or shrub has its own, unique pruning needs, depending on variety, soil type, exposure and desired result.*

I've read that dogwood trees don't need a lot of pruning but know from experience that many plants, like forsythia and butterfly bushes, will flourish if they are cut back hard.

I went to BYU for graduate school—two miles away and paid for in cash. Because we didn't go

to Pennsylvania, we used our savings account to buy a little house with a big garden. I appreciate the chance I have to work in this particular garden; the plants are established enough to be forgiving.

Sometimes my two daughters work with me in the garden, muddy fingers and chubby arms helping me to plunk down plants in graceful disorder. *And it came to pass that after I, the Lord God, had driven them out, that Adam began to till the earth, and to have dominion over all the beasts of the field, and to*



*eat his bread by the sweat of his brow, as I the Lord had commanded him. And Eve, also, his wife, did labor with him.* (Moses 5:1)

Sam explained to me, seasons later—when I finally got to the point that I could hear it—that when he prayed he envisioned a drained savings account and no decent job for him. He said that he replayed scenes of the several apartment owners who turned us away promptly at the doorstep based on the fact I would be a student. Most worrisome to him in his vision of us at Bryn Mawr was that he saw a wife more interested in her schoolwork than in her marriage.

I continue to attempt to prune. I continue to take away the

*continued on page 19*

# Are you there God? It's Me Heather

## Heather Sundahl

I have always envied women who get revelations from God as regularly and clearly as I get phone calls from AT&T. Women who go to the Lord with questions and have to whip out paper and pencil to record the actual words they receive in reply. One friend literally has this huge notebook filled with God's answers to her prayers, her very own spiral-bound personal scriptures. I don't even have a Post-it note worth of oral revelation. Mostly this doesn't bother me because I am a firm believer that the Lord communicates to us in many ways. Our lives can be guided and directed with nary a burning bush in sight. But there are some times when a girl could really use some heavenly direction. At this point in my life, the question I cannot resolve regards family planning. Are you there God? It's me Heather. Am I done having kids?

The fact that I don't get an answer to this question really irritates me, especially in light of an article I read in grad school. A sociologist who studied Mormon families was trying to figure out which parent, in general, received revelation for the family. She found that one area was almost exclusively dictated by the wife. Over and over, she found that the women would have visions and revelations about another child that needed to come to the family. Even if the husbands did not want more children, the promptings of the wives were always the deciding factor. The article made it seem like it was the right of every Mormon mommy to see her unborn kids. And I have plenty of friends who've thought

they were done and then had that dream about a little red-head or seen a vision of a green-eyed boy and just known that was their child-to-be.

I listen to these stories with equal parts skepticism and jealousy. Why shouldn't I be entitled to such clarity (assuming their tales are true)? A few years ago a visionary friend of mine told me I needed to pray for revelation. So I did. I mean, why not me? I'm a believer. I don't roll my eyes that much in testimony meeting when someone says God made them get a flat tire which made them late thus saving them from getting hit by a piano that fell out of the sky onto the exact spot their car would be if they hadn't gotten the flat. And I did have a vision, a moment of absolute clairvoyance. But not what I had hoped for. It was a week after the birth of my second child, and I woke up at 7 A.M. and could see my used breast pads and other feminine products being blown down the street. I put on a robe and slippers and went onto the front porch. Sure enough, there were my unmentionables all over the road. Garbage went out that day and the trash can had tipped over and the wind had strewn my post-partum pads up and down the street. As I scrambled to collect the stuff, I felt spiritually gypped. What purpose had the vision served? Enlightenment? Hardly. Embarrassment? Yes. I had become the neighborhood "crazy," waddling in the road, shoving used pads into bathrobe pockets.

So I do believe that people get all kinds of revelations, including those about family size. And I wonder if the sociologist could

have written another article about the mothers who received revelation that their families were complete. I know I don't hear stories of women saying, "I prayed and prayed and God said I should not have any more children" or "I saw a vision of my mansion on high, and the nursery was empty so I know my family is complete." My point is this: It is hard for Mormon mothers of childbearing age to find peace in the decision to stop having kids. Now, some people will say it's because we are programmed to "multiply and replenish the earth." True, but I've known women with ten kids who still weren't sure if they were done. I used to think perhaps it was that some women felt unfulfilled and used kids to give them purpose. And that can be true. Yet I know lots of really grounded, accomplished, happily married moms who can't bring themselves to say "This is it." Several of my friends find it so hard that they decide to not decide until eventually going through menopause. Somehow it's easier to let biology close the door than it is to do it ourselves. Why is it so hard to find kid closure?

Sometimes I blame it on the Mormon musical *Saturday's Warrior*. How many times did I listen to the soundtrack as a girl and cry as Emily, up in heaven, begged her brother Jimmy to "remember [his] promise" to make sure she came to their family? I wonder if those of us raised in the '70s aren't somehow haunted by the idea of welching on some pre-mortal contract if we don't have more kids. Perhaps our confusion is not the "stupor of thought" induced by God to guilt us into having more, but rather our own

ambivalence about children who are both the source of our greatest blessings and greatest pain.

On days when my own three are demonic, I dream up bumper stickers that capture my conflicting desires to both reclaim my life and to add more madness to it. One would say, "Why did I have kids—and why do I want more?" I think I'd be delighted to wake up one day and find a baby in a basket left on my door step. But most of us expand our families more conventionally. While the actual act of conception is pleasant enough, for me pregnancy is nasty. I puke the first trimester and have sciatica for the last. And during my most recent pregnancy, I suffered from severe depression.

Yet I can't even put myself in the "hard pregnancy camp." I made that mistake during pregnancy #2. A grandmother in my ward asked how I was doing. I complained about my back aching and my tree trunk ankles. I was not prepared for her response. She went on a tirade about how young people today are so spoiled. How her son was the bishop in a Cambodian-speaking area, and one Hmong member of his ward had escaped the Khmer Rouge and had given birth while crossing a piranha-infested river with her three other kids on her back and who was I to complain about fat ankles? So I am selective with the "bad pregnancy" label. My friend who chronically goes into premature labor at thirty weeks and has to be on meds and bed rest can claim it. As can my other friend whose kidney ruptures with each pregnancy. She has four kids. Learned the gender and intended names for each in dreams before she's even peed on a stick. Damn her. Sometimes I wonder if trading an organ for a little spiritual clarity is

such a bad deal.

As for Dave, my husband, he is both amused and baffled at my second thoughts over his impending vasectomy. "You don't even like the ones you have," he teases me. "Why would you want more?" And he has a point. So many things about children make me crazy. For instance, I can't even go to the bathroom without someone trying to join me. When Jonah was two, he'd routinely pound on the door and I'd say, "Mama needs her privacy, honey." To which he'd reply, "No! I need your privacy." So now I sneak into the bathroom while they are distracted by *Scooby Doo*, a Barbie, or in the case of the one year old, her very own box of Kleenex to empty. So they watch too much TV, so Barbie is a horrid role model, so the baby eats tissue. The point is I have figured out how to relieve myself without an audience. I call that progress.

In fact, the best thing about my evolution as a parent is that I've made peace with the fact that not only am I not a perfect mom, I don't want to be one. Another mental bumper sticker: "Mediocrity is Underrated." This shift has been liberating. It's part of why I might want more. I feel like I've finally learned how to enjoy my kids. Three is literally easier for me than one was, or as I heard it put so eloquently on NPR, "Motherhood expansion is easier than motherhood acquisition."

Even Mother's Day is no longer a day of guilt, though I do dread



hearing again that scripture about "her price being far above rubies" because I know my price is more in the neighborhood of the semi-precious stones. Take your amethyst, aquamarine, or garnets, for instance. Now those are jewels one can more easily live up to. Recently a friend said that I was a "really good mother," and I had to stop her. "No," I said. "I'm a really good writing teacher, a fine maker of Tollhouse cookies, but I am just an okay mom. Good enough but not good in the way that many moms are." I was not being self-deprecating, just honestly assessing where I am in this whole parenting ladder.

Truth be told, I'm more nurturing and long-suffering and "maternal" with my friends than I am with my kids. If one of my friends came over and peed on the carpet, I would never say, "Now look what you've done, you naughty girl!" Of course, unlike with my kids, I've never had a friend come over and get so engrossed with an activity that she forgets to visit the proper receptacle, but I'd like to think that if she did, I would be kind and utter non-shaming phrases like, "That's okay, I'm sure you'll make it to the potty

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## Are You There God? continued from page 11

next time" or "Don't worry, a few wipes and some baking soda will make that wet spot good as new!"

But as a mother, I lack many of the skills I have in spades where my friends are concerned.

Yet despite my short fuse, my high maintenance kids, our cramped quarters, and my loathing of pregnancy, I am unsettled at the thought that this is it. It's not that I want another child per se, but I am not sure I *don't* want one. So I keep revisiting the "why" of it since it seems irrational to have another kid, especially when my husband wanted to stop at two. Am I trying to fill some need better addressed through a creative outlet—or therapy? Am I so in the baby groove that I can't imagine leaving it? Do I think it will make me more righteous? I don't know. But I do know that the older my kids get, the more I love them. Or perhaps it has to do with *my* getting older.

So I turn to God for insight, for guidance. Maybe I want God to send me a vision of some cherubic baby that will allow me to say, "This is the last." But I think I'd settle for a dream where I see Dave and me and our three kids eating at McDonalds and know that we are all there, that our family is complete. In short, I want peace.

I looked over my journal recently and find I keep writing the same thing over and over: While I never want to be pregnant again, the thought of not having another baby is disturbing. This is what I wrote on September 15, 2002: "I went to visit Lisa in the hospital on Saturday. Driving over there, I kept thinking, I hope this is the

last for her. Her pregnancies are miserable and her health isn't great under the best circumstances. Four is enough, I thought. Four is plenty. Four is too many. But when I got there and held that little creature, I knew why she'd had this baby and why she'd probably have more despite all the sane reasons to stop. I took some photos of him to try to capture the newness, the just-hatched aura, the slow struggle to lift his head that always reminds me of a turtle, those tiny toes, the dark eyes that seem to look right into your soul."

I take millions of pictures of my own kids, and sometimes I remember periods of their lives more by the photo than by the reality. The summer Jonah was a year old, I picture the photos of him at the beach, giant belly sticking out over his too long trunks; reclining in a mini lawn chair wearing mirrored sunglasses; smiling on his father's shoulders in a green gingham romper. With Jonah, I spent so much time wishing him older, willing him to roll over, to walk, to talk, to potty train. And I think I still do this with him (I am currently wondering when my kindergartener will learn to tie his shoes and recognize all the letters of the alphabet).

But almost three years later when Georgia came along, I knew better. With her, I live in the present. I soaked up her babyhood, knowing it would be short lived. I know she will potty train when she's ready, so I shrug and let her do her thing. While I take tons of pictures of her, too, lots of my Georgia memories are based on mental photographs, still moments in time. Last summer she was walking on the wall that edges the

church lawn. It is low and wide and relatively safe for kids to play on. She was wearing these tiny pink sandals that showed her chipped magenta toenail polish. Her sun-bleached hair was in two pigtails, and she had on a floral cotton dress that she loves because it has a matching sweater with tiny roses embroidered on the sleeves. The evening sun was behind the church and the sky was glowing with a butterscotch light, and she turned to me and held out her hand. I instinctively knew she wanted to run on the wall and wanted my hand — not for stability — but companionship. I don't remember where Jonah was or who had Camille, but I held Georgie's mini hand and ran on the grass at her side. This, I thought, is how I will remember Georgia at two, beautiful and brave and fun.

If I had my foot on the accelerator with Jonah and coast with Georgia, with Camille I am definitely stepping on the brakes. As she may be my last child, part of me does not want her to grow up. My pride at her milestones is mixed with other emotions: I was alarmed at her first tooth; bummed when she rolled over; distraught when she cruised; and my heart aches with pride and pain with every Frankenstein step she takes. I take tons of pictures of her, hoping it will preserve not just a moment — but her whole babyhood. The more I enjoy her, the more it breaks my heart to see her moving away from me.

And yet I do feel a selfish joy each time my kids acquire a bit more independence. I can be suffocated by their neediness and breathe easier as they figuratively and

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Of Clue continued from page 7

"Scruh-uh-ud, Buh-uh-ud, Zuh-uh-ud's no duh-uh-ud."

Mom laughs. I pinch my nose. "Blue-blood Jud says, 'Zud's for studs.'"

Mom groans. She says, "Carol, stop it, and come in here."

"Zud scrubs mud from each spud!" In the mirror, I strike the pose of a home show gadget pitchman.

"Oh, no, Carol. Please stop. Help! I guess it's too soon after lunch." Mom starts coughing.

I run to bring water to follow her nitro pill, but I don't hover like a hawk. I neaten odds and ends in the room. As I gather leaves fallen from the poinsettia, I notice the old board games on the nightstand. On top rests a brand-new *Clue*.

"From your sister," Mom says, "in today's mail. I just got the padded mailer off before you came, and I thought . . ."

"No missing pieces, then," I laugh as I restack Mom's library books in the cloth bag, empty the wastebasket, and bring Mom the pills she'd forgotten to take after lunch. Mom says something I don't hear as I leave again.

As I angle the broom around the toilet, I almost fear to look. Of course my mind knows that nothing will have petrified there. No fuzz will have been resurrected and re-deposited to punish me. I do notice that Dad has had to replace a bolt with one too long to hide under the original porcelain knob. That's all. Still, I scrub every cranny (reaming with toothpicks just in case) and the tops and

bottoms of doors, frames, cupboards, and vents. And I call, "Distant Early Warning! The floor will soon be awash."

"Oh, go ahead, Carol," Mom loudly exhales.

So I call, "Scrub-bucket blast-off!" After sensibly soaping and rinsing the familiar clusters of tiles, I buff them with a dry rag. I reposition furniture and, just in case, vacuum where the towel had lain.

Upon reentering Mom's room, before Mom even hears me, I see our garage at left, the neighbor's garage at right, and in between, the yard where Mom may be staring at ghosts of children on the swing or in the sand pile. The rosebushes are gone, too. I could easily inch unobserved along outside the back wall now. And I know, even without turning, that through the west window I could see the southwest corner of the French porch, maybe the steps. The sheltering screens are long gone, and the new low shrubs couldn't hide even one AWOL daughter.

I look at the worn old games and the shrink-wrapped new one, the pillows behind Mom's head, two books overturned on the spread, a partly-written letter to Judy, a box of tissues, a sweater, and the knitting bag. The TV is now on.

I don't know why I cry, but Mom senses it. Looking unblinking at me, she fumbles up the remote and clicks off the game show.

I say an odd thing. I say, "Probably the only decent job I ever did." Unaccountably, I add, "Sorry it took so long." She says, "I'm sorry you cleaned at all."



Carol and sister Judy with their father

I gulp. I wonder if she looks that way whenever any of us come to help. I wonder if Mom has been sorry for some things all of our lives but, for our sakes, dared not give in. Certainly I'm already sorry for some past decisions and actions within my own family. Yes, sorry. But I'll think about them both ways from now on.

I bend to kiss Mom. I sit down and hug her, again and again, my throat making noises. Finally she straightens back.

I stand, jam my hands on my hips, and whine, "Okay, okay, okay, I cleaned your old bathrooms! Now can we go play?" But I also smile.

Mom smiles, too. She closes the books and puts them on the headboard. She reaches *Clue* from the nightstand and puts the half-finished letter there. She directs me to sit opposite on the comforter, plumps pillows, sits higher, says, "Maybe a warm-up or two?"

Call it what she will, she'll skunk me even before we move to a card table and get serious. But for the moment, I settle cross-legged on the bed. As I pick blindly at the shrink-wrap, I suppose Mom's eyes are filling too. ■

# The Begonia Monologues

## Emma Shumway

From Mother's Days of yore, you will probably remember the award ceremony for superlative mothers. In my ward, it was the presentation of a begonia. Now don't get me wrong — we also had the deacons pass out carnations. But carnations were the prize for having reached adulthood with two X chromosomes intact.

Everyone got them, including the unmarried, the barren, and those whose children would have been more at home in the zoo than a church pew (and I mean behind the bars). But the begonias were another thing entirely. Six potted plants sat across the ledge on the stand, and during the meeting six mothers were called up to receive them. They were prizes for the Oldest Mother, Most Recent Mother, Mother of the Most Children, and three others which I have been able to sublimate. (What else could they have been? Mother of the most missionaries? Mother whose children have the most last names? Mother who succeeded in spite of the crummiest husband? I cannot imagine what they were.) The bishop read out the names and the awards in the closest thing we enjoy to the Oscars in the LDS Church.

Interestingly, we did not hold corresponding Monkey Wrench awards for the biggest and best fathers the next month. Either fatherhood was not something to be done in the superlative, or fathers didn't show the necessary interest in receiving — or guilt at being passed over — such an honor.

My mother, a therapist, was the

first woman I ever heard blow the myth of Mother's Day. Mom's sacrament meeting address was something like a call to arms against the hearts, flowers, and syrupy sweet talks that covered up a lot of pain. She revealed that there were many women who dreaded the holiday and some who even stayed away from church just so they wouldn't be reminded of shortcomings in their parenting. These were divorced mothers, working mothers, women dealing with infertility, and just plain average mothers who felt as if their investment in caring for their progeny were brought out annually, weighed, and found wanting in the begonia balance.

It was quite a Sunday. Mom was beset with weeping women afterwards, and the poor Sunday School president was left with four buckets of carnations to pass out to disinterested women. I cannot remember if the superlative begonias were awarded or put away privily in the ensuing melee.

My mother also had a theory about the doctrine of the three kingdoms and stay-at-home mothers. She claimed that encouraging women to come away from their typewriters and teaching them about the Telestial, Terrestrial, and Celestial kingdoms had brought forth a race of monster mothers. These Uberwomen turned all of their attention and considerable energy to raising the art of stay-at-home-motherhood to new heights.

She claimed that the faithful women of the Church who did as they were told and stayed home raising children still wanted to

succeed and excel. In the realm of parenthood, that means going for the begonias. Women tried to outdo each other as stay-at-home moms by having the most kids, by having superkids, or by taking housewifery to extremes. They wore themselves out by competing, and in the process they alienated the very people who should have been their supports: their stay-at-home colleagues.

At the time, I thought mom was a raving lunatic. Who can complain about the doctrine of three heavenly kingdoms? I love the good/better/best idea of heaven as opposed to a good/bad heaven and hell. The concept always reminded me of reading groups in the first grade, where we had been divided into slow, medium, and fast readers. I thought it would be lovely to spend the rest of eternity with my reading group.

But then, I was a fast reader.

Two things have changed for me since I first heard Mother's rant. One, I've had two children and become a stay-at-home mother myself, which was a fearful fall from the ideal to the actual. And two, I moved to Utah Valley, where the ideal still actually exists. And multiplies. And replenishes. Now I find I could add quite a litany to my mother's observation.

You see, good, better, and best are lovely, but implicit in the concept is that if you want to be better or best, you must be better than someone else. I've found that, at least in Utah Valley, that someone is essentially me! Since moving here, I could almost take out a patent on telestial parenting.

# or My Adventures in the Valley of the Ubermoms

For example, a woman in the ward stopped by for an impromptu visit. Inviting herself on a tour of the house, she checked even behind the sliding bathtub doors. Was this a grout spot check? Was she checking for stashed laundry baskets? Perhaps she was the chair of the Ward Housekeeping Committee? I don't know—I've never been subjected to it before; but true to my status as Extra-Telestial, I think I got low marks on it. Legend has it that when you visit this sister in her house, she has your footprints vacuumed up by the time you're ready to leave.

Another woman in my ward has six children who all come dressed in matching outfits for church. I asked her once if she sewed the girls' dresses herself, and she replied, "Yes, but I don't knit the boys' Sunday sweaters." As if getting a family of eight fed, bathed, dressed, and transported to church weren't already a logistical feat in and of itself! I imagine that if she ever does begin to knit her sons' sweaters, she will apologize for not cobbling their shoes as well. I would love to get to know this woman better, but she doesn't have time for it.

A third was my visiting teacher, who privately admitted that she was getting over a canning addiction. She used to have to be The Woman Who Put Up The Most Concord Grape Juice. I am all for grape juice and all for food storage, but I wondered if it wasn't just a way to prove that she was superlative.

My visiting teacher was currently falling behind another woman in the ward who was out to can her entire food supply. She cans every kind of fruit and vegetable and sauce and condiment you have ever thought of and some that shouldn't even be considered. She is embarrassed if she ever has to put store-bought bread on the table, though her husband con-

that bread machines are only good for pizza dough, and that's why you'll find so many now down at D.I. But I digress. The truly celestial mother in Zion doesn't just bake her own bread, she grinds her own wheat. I have a growing suspicion that she actually does the entire Little Red Hen bit, from sowing and harvesting to milling and baking, but I am only a novice in this order and am still trying to decode the rules.

Cards are a similar item. Where a simple trip to the Hallmark store has covered it in the past, Mothers In Zion Who Excel seem to have agreed that cards should be homemade. Baby announcements, invitations, thank you notes, and Christmas cards are all crafty little creations one concocts at home. I don't mean to malign a true hobby, but it sometimes feels like there is a vast conspiracy afoot trying to make things harder than they need to be. I maintain that motherhood is hard enough as is, and I wasn't really looking for ways to raise the bar. In the meantime, I am at least making the begonia hopefuls look good.

Everything about me is telestial by these standards. From my small, dark, and foreign car to a certain paucity of creamed soups in my cooking, I flout the norms. I also hadn't realized that in home decorating, there is only one proper color to choose: the obligatory celestial high gloss white. True to my Utah Valley status, I was oblivious to the rule and painted our kitchen red. When people first see it and take a

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fided once to mine that he actually likes the store-bought kind better. Bread, for example, isn't supposed to be difficult. You can pick up two loaves for \$3. But only the telestial parents, I'm finding, do it that way. Terrestrial types bake their own, and to suggest that they used a bread machine is akin to heresy. Everyone here knows

# A Day in the Life of the Cannon Family

**Judy L. Cannon**

*A Day in the Life of the Cannon Family – a very short play in one act by Judy Cannon*

*Cast of characters:*

*Zach Cannon – husband of Judy and father of Drew and Mason, graduate student in English at the University of Chicago, teaching a course on Shakespeare and early morning seminary*

*Judy Cannon – wife of Zach and mother of Mason and Drew, graduate student in immunology at the University of Chicago, trying to finish her degree*

*Drew Cannon – dog child of Judy and Zach, high energy, needs exercise*

*Mason Cannon – son of Judy and Zach, six months old and cute*

*Setting:*

*Living room in an apartment late at night, toys and furry dust bunnies drifting across the floor*

*Judy: Let's talk about tomorrow. What's your schedule like?*

*Zach: I've got class from 9–10:30 in the morning, then office hours 3–4.*

*Judy: I've got a seminar at 4, and I need to do a six-hour experiment before that.*

*Zach: OK. I will go into school after seminary ends at 7:30, then come home right after class at 10:30. That should give you enough time to finish the experiment at 5.*

*Judy: I would like to get in a little earlier than that. How about I walk Mason and Drew to meet you outside your class. This way, I can go straight*

*in to lab at 10:30. An added advantage is that you only need to "pee" Drew before you go to seminary instead of giving him a full walk.*

*Zach: This means I'll get an extra 10 minutes of sleep. After only averaging about 5 hours the last few nights, I can really use it. Actually, why don't you walk Mason and Drew in with the Baby Jogger, and I'll run with them and Mason can take a nap while I run. Drew hasn't run in a couple of days and he's going crazy.*

*Judy: Sounds good. So you will have Mason from about 10–3?*

*Zach: Yes, but I need another hour or so of work before office hours.*

*Judy: I have a one hour incubation in my experiment, probably at about 12:30. I'll call you when I know; you can come in with Mason so I can watch him in your office while you prep. I'll breastfeed Mason for lunch and I won't need to pump today.*

*Zach: I'll have Mason until 3; you can drop him off at 4 and go to your seminar. When will you be home?*

*Judy: I'll come home right at 5 after the seminar ends.*

*Zach: Then maybe I'll go in for an hour or so until 6:30 to get a little more work done.*

*Judy: Well, I have a little more to do afterwards, too, but I can do that once Mason is asleep. It seems like I never get quite enough time to do what I need to lately. But, considering the fact that we are both in school and are trying to juggle a baby and a dog, it's surprising that we get anything done!*

*Zach: At least now I have a good excuse for not making any progress towards finishing my degree.*

## **From Theory to Practice**

Two years ago, as a project for *Exponent II*, I became interested in the debate of whether to work or stay home full time with children, sparked by the fact that many friends had struggled with the decision. For me at that time, the question was only theoretical since I had no child of my own. But I wondered: Once I had a child of my own, would I fall in to the camp that felt that I could not leave my child, leading to stay-at-home status, or would I want to continue to pursue outside interests through work?

I had my first child in August 2002, and I took three months off for maternity leave. I enjoyed the time at home tremendously, recovering, relaxing, and bonding with my new baby. After about two months, I started finding



myself bored at times at home, watching bad daytime TV, wishing that I could go back to my lab and do some experiments. I started going in a couple of days a week, working a few hours each day. This provided a welcome distraction from caring for my new baby. However, when the time came for me to go back full-time, I realized that I didn't really want that either. I did not want to be apart from my baby for eight or more hours at a time. I realized that I did not want to stay home or work full-time. I wanted to do some of each.

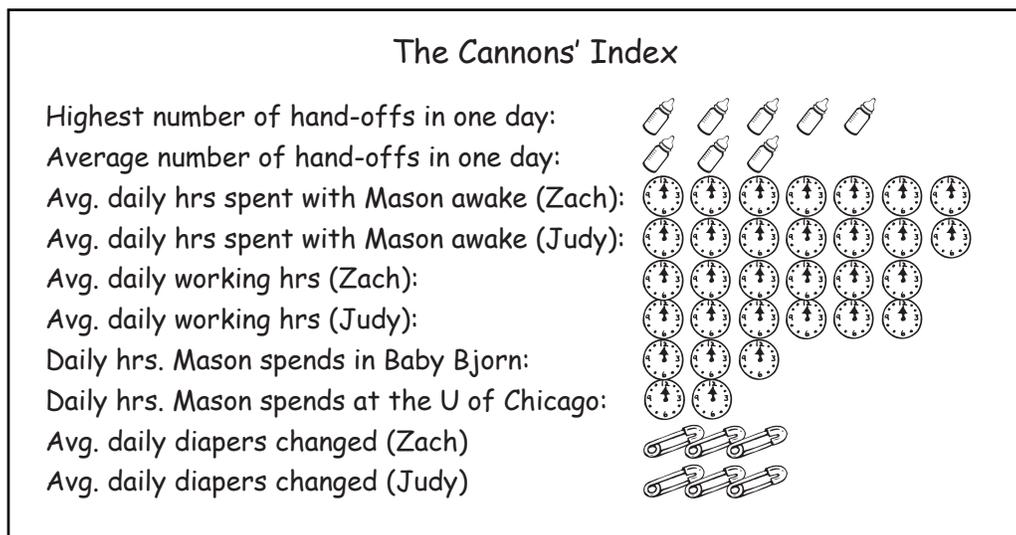
It was clear from the moment that my husband Zach and I had Mason that we were uncomfortable with the thought of full-time childcare where we would drop Mason off and work for eight hours a day. But, neither of us wanted to give up our career goals to stay home full-time. To accommodate these seemingly conflicting interests, Zach and I formulated a way for us to have some of the best of each of the worlds of staying home and working. A typical day we plan for ourselves is illustrated by the play above.

Our scheme allows both of us to continue our professional interests and share the care of our baby. We each work about two-thirds time, 20-30 hours a week. To accommodate meetings, office hours, seminars, and presentations, we do a lot of juggling and baby handing-off in the process.

We began to implement this plan with no outside childcare help. Eventually, to give each of us a little more time for work, we hired undergraduates to babysit for us for three to four hours at a time, two to three times a week. With the addition of these babysitters,

the schedule became truly crazy, reconciling our two schedules and accommodating the constant fluctuations of undergraduate life. Our babysitters cancelled when they had an exam or special office hours, and so Zach and I would split those hours. We also had to stay flexible with each other. For example, during the time that I was writing my dissertation, Zach got more hours with Mason, while I took more time with Mason when Zach taught two courses in the same quarter.

I've compiled a few statistics about our newly changed life with a child, modeled on the Harper's Index:



Zach and I were fortunate to be in circumstances that allowed us the flexibility to accommodate our family and professional goals simultaneously. We were both in graduate school, which meant that we had access to health insurance without the need to work forty hours a week. I had a very understanding and sympathetic advisor who let me set my own schedule and work my own hours. Zach's work mostly consists of reading, which he did with the baby napping on his chest for much of the first six months of Mason's life. Mason was also a very cooperative

baby who could sleep on the go and loved being outside and interacting with other people.

Some of the advantages of our arrangement are clear. First and foremost, Mason has the opportunity to interact with both of his parents, rather than full-time with one and much less with another. We as parents benefit from the opportunity to interact closely and individually with Mason and feel that we are both full participants in raising our child. We also continue to pursue our professional interests, and we have noticed that with decreased time devoted to work, our interest in work actually increased. We value the time we

spend doing work since we never get quite as much time to work as we would like. An additional advantage for our relationship is that the particular way that we have chosen to work out childcare between us necessitates an incredible amount of communication and compromise. We have to discuss our schedules in detail each day and work out what meetings, experiments, and social events we can and need to sacrifice in order to accommodate the other person's schedule. We have both had our moments of accusing each

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## Begonia Monologues continued from page 15

moment to (to what? Collect their thoughts? Readjust their expectations? Say a prayer?), I am always reminded of the character from the film *Miss Congeniality* whose mother wouldn't buy her red underwear because they were "Satan's panties." People must think we dine with the devil!

I am wishing my ward held a class for Utah aliens (perhaps we could call it Enrichment Essentials). Initial topics would include how to make that ten-layered rainbow Jell-O dish; handwriting with dots on the ends of your letters; Tole Painting for the Celestial; Cool Whip 101 – with recipes for the salads containing cookies and candy bars. Subsequent monthly meetings would focus on finer points like permissible jobs to hold as a stay-at-home mom; appropriate hobbies; the One True Stoneware; and stylish mother-of-the-bridal maternity dresses. I think just knowing the basics would keep me from future faux pas like the kitchen.

But most importantly, I wonder: Are the begonias worth it? It seems that if your husband likes store-bought bread, you don't need to feel embarrassed about

putting it on the table. If your kids want Harry Potter Valentines, then you've just saved yourself an afternoon's work and a mess. I don't think that a pot of begonias means you are allowed to rest on your laurels; it works to the contrary, I expect. I believe that adding canning and scrapbooking to the list of Essentials for a Celestial Home doesn't bring us closer to the goal, but rather distracts us from our true priority and creates obsessed perfectionists instead of inspired parents. Speaking from the celestial corner, simplifying motherhood allows me to spend time with my children and my friends, and I maintain that women are creatures of connection.

Talking with other mothers lets you know that you're not the only one who has ever run out of diapers and stuck a pair of socks in your daughter's pants while you ran to the store. They help you to maintain perspective when your little boy only wants to play Mary, mother of Jesus, or Jane from Tarzan. Other mothers help you brainstorm about colic, teething, biting, dyslexia, curfews, high school sports, dating, and college applications. Other mothers taught

me what to do with bored toddlers in a grocery store; that toilet training is easier done late than too early; how to strengthen snaps at the crotch of kids' overalls; and what to do when you vacuum up a pen and spread blue ink across your living room carpet.

It is unfortunate that these mothers, doing so much more and doing it better, don't allow themselves the time for friendships (not that they have any time – when do you fit it in between daily devotionals, homeschooling, canning, sewing clothes, baking, and making Happy Memorial Day cards?). They seem more isolated and less sure of themselves than women I know who have messy homes and microwave dinners and a support group of likeminded mothers. The Ubermoms probably live in fear that someone else is doing it all and that next they will have to churn their own butter and make their own detergent in order to keep up. After all, it is stiff competition to win a begonia. ☒

*Emma Shumway graduated from BYU, served a mission, got married, and had three kids. She is now in the throes of living happily ever after in Provo, Utah.*

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## Are You There God? continued from page 12

literally loosen their grasp. Yet when Dave said he had to wait six months to get his vasectomy, I felt I'd been given a stay of execution. Is it biology? Am I genetically programmed to want to breed? Is it my Mormon upbringing? Is it the "Saturday's Warrior Syndrome"? Do I really want another baby, or do I just want to prolong a phase of life I am just starting to appreci-

ate? Sometimes I think it's the simply the clothes. When Millie outgrew her tiny leopard ballet slippers, I just about broke down.

Whatever the root cause, I am ambivalent about getting rid of the baby clothes in my basement. Though it feels as if I am giving away my heart along with the tiny jammies and sneakers and rose

embroidered sweaters, I also feel that, in return, I am getting pieces of myself. Not a bad bargain. ☒

*Heather Sundahl lives and writes in the Boston area. After much thought and no visions, she and her husband are expecting their fourth child around Thanksgiving.*

## The Dogwood Trees continued from page 9

branches that grow toward the center and tangle into the rest of the plant. I continue to get rid of dead wood. I read books and ask more experienced gardeners detailed questions about planting and pruning, the stuff of life. Sometimes Sam and I work together on the same plant, and he helps me prune the places up high that I cannot reach. At this point, I am still merely a “functional” pruner. It will be seasons before I can shape and prune artfully.

The postcards I brought back from Bryn Mawr are in the basement filing cabinet in a folder entitled “Trip: Pennsylvania”; the key fob is hanging from a pin on my parents’ kitchen bulletin board with a key to our house attached; and Sam took the flat, dried, cream-colored dogwood blossom off the windowsill seasons ago and put it in an envelope he sealed and then labeled: “Rebecca’s Special Flower.” ❏

*The gardening quotations are from <http://www.411homerepair.com/garden/Ideas/TheArtandScienceofPruning.shtml>*



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## A Day in the Life of the Cannon Family continued from page 17

other of working more than his/her share or carrying a greater burden at home. But overall, we have learned to value each other’s time and trust in each other’s judgments. One final advantage to shared childcare—equal numbers of diaper changes. As the poopy diapers get more nasty, sharing the load becomes more meaningful!

The disadvantage of our decision to completely share childcare is that both of us have had to slow our progress professionally. Although I do not think this will hurt us in the long run, certainly we are not making the progress we would like or our advisors would like. In fact, I’m sure that we have both frustrated our advisors during the past year with our decrease in productivity.

Furthermore, the crazy schedule does affect Mason, especially as he gets older. Our schedule sometimes requires Mason to be awakened prematurely from a nap or delays his nap past his preferred time. At times, I have felt selfish about forcing Mason to be on our frenetic schedule. But I hope that

the advantages will outweigh these disadvantages for him as well as for us in the long run.

The final disadvantage is that the house is a complete disaster—housework often falls by the wayside in our hectic lives. Although Zach continues to cook because he enjoys it, the frequency of prepared foods has increased dramatically. My standards for a clean house were low to start with, but with our current schedules, the standards have only sunk lower: If I get around to mopping the floor once a month, I am satisfied.

Overall, both Zach and I have been extremely happy with this arrangement. We are keeping it up for at least two years with the future unknown. We realize that this schedule was possible with one baby and most likely impossible with more. I have now finished my degree, and it is hard to tell what the job market will force us to do for financial stability and access to health insurance. But this past year has allowed us to figure out that it is a priority for both of us to have professional lives that give us adequate time with our

children. For now, we are enjoying life with the best of both the worlds of “staying at home” and “working.” ❏

*A Day in the Life of the Cannon Family took place about two years ago, and life has certainly changed for our family since then. We have added another child, Symmes, now six months old, and Mason is almost three years old. We were able to keep up with the dual parenting for Mason until Symmes’ arrival, but now we are more of the traditional non-traditional family model. Zach is mainly the stay-at-home dad while I work, providing both income and benefits. Our situation is still nice in that my hours are limited, freeing up time for Zach. Zach has put his career on hold, looking for part-time teaching jobs flexible enough to accommodate child care responsibilities until the children are in school. This does not mean we have given up our ideal of more equal parenting. We have moved our ideal from the 50–50 split with Mason to 2/3 Zach, 1/3 myself. We feel fortunate to have had that idyllic time of equal parenting. Now I think the kids are fortunate to have so much time with dad and still quite a bit of time with mom.*

# Unraveling

Tally S. Payne

I squeeze into a third-grader's chair and focus as Mrs. Swingle starts her presentation to a room filled with "prospective parents." Because my town has an open school choice system, schools hold regular orientation sessions and refer to parents as "prospective parents." This label rankles me because I feel that dealing with my particularly precocious and sassy daughter for four and a half years has earned my husband and me the title of "parents" minus the "prospective." The local elementary schools, in my opinion, are "the prospects" while we are parents who possess the power to select the perfect kindergarten for our daughter.

After my indignant burst of energy about my parental power, I settle back into the small chair. Mrs. Swingle flashes up a classy mission statement for Park Elementary School. My eyes wander to the chalkboard filled with homophones written in perfectly-coifed cursive (*there, their, they're*) during the pitch about Park's vision for well-rounded child development. I take in the colorful student artwork adorning the east wall while the presentation progresses to "pods" and multi-grade classroom benefits. The ill-fitting chair, the homophones, and the worn, padless indoor/outdoor carpet beneath my feet are like a snag on my sweater. But as I pull at the snagging memories of times when I rightfully belonged in a third-grader's chair, the whole sweater begins to unravel. I feel exposed as memory diffuses my parental pride into an eerie uneasiness. I am worried.

*Can I be trusted to ferret out all the Mrs. Kings from my daughter's future?* I fret. During second grade, Mrs. King taped a little paper with five empty squares to the tops of our desks each Monday—five squares for five weekdays to potentially earn a red dot sticker for good behavior. I had stacks of papers with five red dots in a row, and I aimed for personal perfection—measured by red dot stickers. I know my daughter will want to have rows of red stickers and will be eager to please her teachers, also. But what if, like me, a day comes for her when there is some fracas on the playground at noon? Maybe I teased Nick Rohrbach or started something—it's hard to remember now—but I am positive the actual fight had nothing to do with me. Though I protested my involvement during the stern inquisition after the fight, Mrs. King showed no mercy. She seemed to revel in my misfortune as she passed by my desk slowly, deliberately leaving my sticker strip horrifyingly blank—dotless.

And what will I do if my daughter comes home to me with another story of a run-in with a "Mrs. King-type" in the third grade? I am quite sure I cried to my mother that time. A year older, I was reporting to my third-grade teacher about the latest stack of books I had read for a school-wide reading contest. We were in the hallway when Mrs. King passed by, obviously tuning into the conversation. She interrupted, pulled my new teacher aside, and told her I was lying about reading the books, intentionally commenting loud enough for me to hear. "Lying," she repeated, marching down the hall.

But I wasn't. My teacher grilled me rigorously, but my vast knowledge of Ruth Chew's *Witch's Broom* convinced her I had read the book, so the pages were counted. From my new perspective as a prospective parent, I wonder how my mother listened patiently to my story that evening. I do not trust myself to be a ready-with-a-hug-and-reassurances mother if a Mrs. King wrongfully accuses my daughter of lying.

Mrs. Swingle clicks the mouse, and the snazzy PowerPoint presentation displays a tidy schedule of school start times and programs on the screen. What? Kindergarten spans from 8:30 A.M. until 3:20 P.M. Suddenly awkward in my seat, I agonize as a more recent scene unravels in my thoughts. *Why was I impatient playing I Spy with my daughter this morning?* I chasten myself. The 8:30 start time will at least cramp if not trump my treasured morning outings with my "little lady." I resolve to play *I Spy* as much as my daughter wants for our last few months of walks.

I wipe the repentant almost-tear from my eyes just before another mom whips her hand into the air with a question about after-school programs for K-4, which are excluded from the PowerPoint slide's schedule. I see right through her articulate question, however. Shielding my sadness about the masked inquiry into free day care, I make Resolution Number Two: I will let my daughter crack all the eggs into the cookie dough we will make the afternoon of her first day of school next September. I will pick out the little pieces of shell when she gets distracted reliving exciting kindergarten exploits, and she will know

that she is loved. Her mommy is not interested in free day care.

My more rational self is appalled at my outlandish and rude thoughts. I quickly denounce my hypocritical stay-at-home-mother holiness. It has only been a few weeks since the Wal-Mart fiasco when my four-year-old daughter tumbled her little sister out of the cart and onto the unforgiving tile. I had been willing to debt-finance the priciest daycare while I dabbed at the bloody mouth and mumbled to the onlookers and nervous Wal-Mart employees, "She's fine, thank you." But tonight it is my mothering self that is unraveling and exposed in the squeazy chair.

The presentation progresses, but I regress with a new worry about floor hockey. I steal a glance over my shoulder and cluck my tongue; the other prospective parents do not look like their children will have athletic prowess and be floor hockey stars. And while this is not a top criterion in my school choice, I think my daughter should have a glorious floor hockey championship game in her future. It felt fabulous to be cheered and admired the year my teammates and I outfoxed the other school's goalie and sent the puck sailing into the net for the winning goal. I jolt away from my cheering K-6 fans as I hear one mom commenting about which medication her four year old is on for ADHD. She is concerned about what types of discipline/therapy this school uses to control ADHD. I feel a little apologetic about my selfish floor hockey thoughts. But is it selfish to aspire for the perfect school with a selection of amazing classmates/friends for my daughter? I ponder this and conclude I do not know.

Another teacher, the one who shapes and molds the gifted-and-talented student group, steps into the presentation. This Mrs. Maguire gives us prospective parents some helpful tips about how to determine whether our child is a good "fit" with Park Elementary School. I am impressed as she relates an example of coercing her more "bossy" students into learning to work together. I concede that my best efforts have not solved the "bossy" streak in my daughter and think this particular method of teaching may be a "must have" in her development. But it will be impossible as I weigh my school choices to predict how my daughter will score on a gifted-and-talented screening. In college, I mastered decision trees, probability science, and game theory, but I am incapable of constructing a model that will spit out where my daughter should go to kindergarten.

Yet I feel a bond to Mrs. Maguire because she has methods for dealing with bossy kids, no small thing in my estimation. I can picture her secretly allowing half of her students to be the pirates attacking Treasure Island; she would know she should bend the school rules a bit—just as Mr. Smith, my fifth grade teacher, did. He understood that as fifth-graders, we pirates actually needed to breach the school perimeter and cross the street so that our way-off-Broadway rendition of the pirate attack could include climbing a high chain-link fence, wooden swords threatening the islanders. Our celebration of finishing Stevenson's *Treasure Island* would not have been complete without that crazy fence-climbing afternoon. My daughter would want to role play as a surly street-crossing, fence-climbing

pirate for an afternoon. And I yearn for her to experience those kinds of mind-searing, impressionable moments of true joy in learning. But I'm not sure how to provide them.

Maybe I *am* only a prospective parent. I feel unqualified and decidedly un-parental about my school choice responsibility. I feel powerless to stack my daughter's future with blissful school days and steer her free from Mrs. Kings, accusations of lying, and the inevitable rudeness of elementary-school divas. Mostly, I feel nervous about patting little blond curls and sending them bouncing innocently through huge kindergarten doors next fall

*I feel unqualified and decidedly un-parental about my school choice responsibility.*

while I sit in my car, frantically searching for Advil tablets to assuage my headache. And I wonder suddenly if buying new sunglasses will hide my tear stains and convince others I am a chic new kindergarten mom when I return for curbside pick-up next fall—well ahead of 3:20 P.M.

As the very professional Principal Waddell summarizes the busing opportunities in the school choice system, I am inwardly perplexed by my extremely dramatic, almost overprotective musings. The last four and a half years have held a few very un-picturesque mother-daughter moments, I admit. I cringe as I replay her impolite interplay with my lovely mother that ended with a sarcastic, "Whatever, Grandma. You're wrong." I confess that all-day

*continued on page 23*

# I Am Emma's Mother

## Kamia Walton Holt

When my best friend was thirteen, her name was the first word to come out of her baby sister's mouth. Since then, my friend has looked forward to the day that she could be a mother and confided to me that she had few other goals besides this one. I knew she and I would be good friends because, as they say, opposites attract. You see, I had rarely thought of being a mother and was rather petrified.

When I became college age, I knew I had to avoid BYU because I equated attending BYU with getting married and getting married with having babies. But Dad was paying, and his money was going to BYU. A deal was struck, and off I went to BYU-Hawaii, followed by the Y's study abroad programs in London, Italy, and Jerusalem. My idea that I could avoid the Provo campus altogether was dashed when I learned that I couldn't graduate from the Y without spending some time on the main campus.

With much apprehension, I enrolled at the Provo campus. Within two months, I met Gary. I resisted him, but he withstood the abuse I heaped on him and waited for me to fall in love with him. Which I did. And so we were married.

The question of children immediately arose: When, where, and with what money? For a while, we ignored the question, pursued our education goals, and remained childless in a BYU ward—quite a feat! I was happy being a graduate student in geography, working as a teaching assistant, and trying to figure out how to be a wife. When

Gary began dental school in Maryland after our graduations, we both felt strongly that we should not go into debt and that I should work to support our family.

To say that I worked doesn't really describe what I did because I adored teaching college geography. To think I could talk about places and ideas that I find interesting and people listened! I mulled over lectures; told stories to spark interest; and traveled to Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and Central America, returning with greater knowledge to pass along.



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Thus, the thought of parenthood was pushed further and further away.

However, we would soon be leaving Maryland and this dream job. Could I start over at a new college after four years? That clock thing was ticking. Was it time for a child? What were these thoughts I was having!

The answer to prayers came, and it seemed to be time. I became afraid. Would I be any good as a mother? Would I find as much joy in motherhood as in teaching? Would I have to stay at home all day long? Would I lounge on the sofa and watch soaps? Isn't that

what moms do?

Maybe I could do just some of the mom stuff—like go on long walks with her; read to her; sing "Simple Gifts" to her; dance around the room with her in my arms; stroke her face as I breastfeed her; and teach her, always teach her, about everything good. Maybe I could do just those things.

Emma entered my life one January morning, and suddenly I wondered what I did before her arrival. When her newborn eyes locked on mine, I was hooked. She is the essence of my being as a woman. I grew this perfect life inside my body; I sustain her with my breast; I teach her about love by pouring it over her like honey. I was given the gift of a life. In the first few weeks, I would often cry over her crib at the thought of it all—overwhelmed, overcome. Now I am here with her at home, all day long. I would rather be nowhere else. Not in the classroom, not in a foreign country, not anywhere but here. I will go back to teaching, yes, but now is a different season.

I have come full circle in my thoughts and beliefs about having a baby in my life. I have found myself, and what I believe is the reason I am here: I am Emma's mother. ■

*Kamia comes from Overland Park, Kansas. She writes: "Travel and teaching continue to interest me but not nearly as much as Emma, who is now three and a half years old. My husband and I settled in Colorado after his schooling and are happy with our quiet little lives here."*

# The Perpetual Reproduction Society

**Julianna Berry**

If Relief Society ever did me a disservice, it was in forming the impression in my young mind that motherhood — that sanctuary of feminine fulfillment — would place me in a cottage of joy with roses blooming beneath my feet. Four boys later, I see it differently. However, Relief Society has compensated me, at least in part, for damage done by serving as a support group, a safety net, and indeed a society where relief is administered at every phase of my voyage through motherhood.

In each pregnancy, as I've bobbed along on waves of nausea and fatigue and whining depression, a lifesaving ring of women has surrounded me, called me, visited me, commiserated, laughed, and helped me with chores. They've been there the day before I gave birth, helping me feather my nest, maniacally scrubbing floors and sanitizing bathrooms beside me. When I actually produced babies and swelled with rapturous infatuation for my new infant, those

women have been right there agreeing he's the cutest, bearing thoughtful gifts and comfort foods with extra cheese. When the first blush of at-home-motherhood has worn off (again and again) and found me clawing at the windowsills, Relief Society sisters have popped over to visit, invited me to their homes for a change of scenery, given me rides when I had no car. Their only shortfall is that they haven't done it daily.

When we entered the toddler years, where we seem eternally stuck, Relief Society sisters reassured me that they, too, had felt those homicidal feelings and had yet avoided prison, and they knew I could, too. When my children looked like grubby, snot-nosed street urchins, Relief Society sisters brought me garbage sacks of attractive hand-me-downs.

Sisters whose active duty phases are behind them do me the great service of assuring me that today, really and truly, they like their kids and have warm relationships with them, including actual conversations. They dangle the carrot

before me: grandchildren! Like free love: all pleasure, no responsibility!

So to my Relief Society sisters, I say, if I snarl at you in class when the words "haven" or "nurture" escape your lips, know that it's more a visceral reaction than anything personal, and that I really appreciate the role you've played in keeping me afloat.

Time will eventually carry me to that opposite shore where I, through sentiment, forgetfulness (or malice?) will testify of the bliss of motherhood, sending some other starry-eyed young woman blithely paddling her canoe down the same stream. But she'll have Relief Society to buoy her, so my conscience will be clear. ☒

*Julie lives in Maynard, MA, with her husband and four sons. She writes a regular humor column for a suburban Boston newspaper and works in marketing communications for a family-owned software company. She can be reached at [julie@jbwriter.com](mailto:julie@jbwriter.com).*

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Unraveling continued from page 21

kindergarten sounded like a dream the day she stood up on her chair in the fancy restaurant and yelled at the angelic visiting teaching luncheon attendees, "I am not eating anything!" And when she teased her little sister for the forty-fifth time last Tuesday, a chain gang seemed just as viable a solution as kindergarten.

Yet, the orientation tonight is so disorienting that I can easily overlook the un-picturesque moments. I know when I get home and try to explain my awkward melancholy,

my husband will say, "It's just kindergarten, honey." I will feel silly, but I cannot back down about my evening journey in a third-grader's chair: It is my child's future. A majority of the county school board members voted for me to have school choice, and that empowerment has made me responsible for my powerlessness. Parental power and school choice seemed splendid before my odd replay of memories exposed the bewildering truth.

Tonight I will tuck my little lady

into bed and wonder if other moms know how to secure their babies' futures. Because tonight I discovered that I don't. ☒

*Tally and her husband Brad are currently relocating their family of two daughters, Emelyne (6) and Eliza (3), to Cody, Wyoming, and are looking forward to the arrival of their third child in September. Tally enjoys teaching American government, reading, and writing and loves all of Wyoming's outdoor activities. She welcomes comments at [tally\\_payne@juno.com](mailto:tally_payne@juno.com).*

## Return to the Chilean Homestead



When we're in the States our kids are buckled,  
 strapped, belted, harnessed in their seats  
 if we so much as drive to the corner store.  
 But here, where Orion's sword tips from his hilt  
 and the Southern Cross oversees the rising rate  
 of exchange and a new trade accord, we toss  
 the priceless flesh of our flesh in the back  
 of a white utility truck and hit  
 the road. The baby rides in my arms,  
 her auburn curls describing sweaty runes  
 on her forehead's guiltless pane. Has she grown less dear  
 that we fling suddenly wide the doors of fate?  
 Or is this mere acquiescence to nature's law  
 graffitied here with bolder strokes upon  
 the bared adobe of life, where newborn pups  
 creep and writhe in the littered dirt beside  
 the road, and strays whose eyes drain ceaselessly  
 the matter of privation are allowed  
 to keep the only life that is theirs?  
 My husband's mother, Silvia, says such dogs  
 were once harvested from the streets and fed  
 to lions at the zoo; but this barbarity  
 was deemed too cruel for civilized folk.  
 Even neutering, my father-in-law opines,  
 makes dogs ashamed to show their faces among peers.

So here, in the land of the Disappeared,  
 God's lowliest creatures are not consigned  
 to the shelters of euthanasia:  
 they must live out their lives and die before  
 our eyes. Still . . . is this not the fate of us all?  
 Could this be why, with the truth ever fleshed  
 in a starving dog's hide, we risk the fruit  
 of our loins on the road to a town  
 called Hospital? It's a strange name  
 for there was never a hospital here,  
 no pediatric or maternity ward,  
 although here, right here, these living sparks were struck  
 (my husband, his brother, these tameless kids)  
 when Silvia was born (and before her, María,  
 and before her, Inés, and so on back  
 until the names themselves disappear)  
 in the crumbling, whitewashed adobe house  
 barred to us now by the new highway ramp.

There were eight besides her, Silvia says,  
but only four survived. No medicine  
or doctor near, just five liters of milk  
per day from the patron whose land they rimed  
and harvested; she walked far on bare hard feet  
to fetch the milk and dense rounds of bread  
solid and dear as a baby's warm flesh.  
Her father was an itinerant butcher  
of the neighbors' stock; he'd come home bearing  
a bloody shank across his shoulder and say,  
"Eat up, for he who keeps till next day doubts  
God's ways." (Under the arbor in Santiago  
where cool rustling, like wings, move above  
our heads on even the hottest days,  
Silvia showed me the long knife he used  
to cleave sinew from bone, hew the entrails.)

The man had no patience for priests: "Let them work  
as I work, with their hands"; would not permit  
his own final unction. Silvia rode  
on his back across the dewed fields; she breathed  
three A.M. dark in the ox cart's bed on long trips  
to the mountain for wood. The river we crossed,  
the truck crammed with our lives, was the same one  
he traversed a thousand times by cart before  
she was born, before María's red hair  
caught his eye and he left the *carretero* life  
— the endless hauling of corn cobs or coal —  
and sank soles into soil never his own.

María's beauty, we are told, flamed quietly  
but bright. Roberto, twice her age, was snared  
in middle age by that auburn hair  
and a glimpse of her half-averted face.  
Sweet-natured, subservient, unschooled,  
she relinquished each dead child without complaint,  
for each one was safely baptized, was rocking  
contentedly in celestial cradle.  
I met María when she was old, bald,  
nearly blind, propped in bed at Aunt Rosa's  
house. We have a photo: I'm holding her hand.

A ramshackle truck beeping loud at dawn,  
piled high in kids, carried Silvia to school.  
I've seen her report card, pliable  
as lambskin, bearing its rows of sevens  
like a vineyard's vertical twinings spreading  
sideways into a communal roof.  
On Christmas Eves, The Good Nights, she walked  
in utter darkness, save candles in hand,  
to midnight mass down dusty, rose-lined roads,  
the stars so bright, so warm. Her father's death  
spelled the end of those sevens and stars.  
At nine she rode the train to Santiago,  
a burlap sack beneath her feet, an address  
in her fist (the concrete house of employment)  
and twining ever quieter among her synapses,  
her father — on whose warm back she had ridden —  
these fields never his, by whose breath  
she had timed her own, the rise and fall of it,  
one ear pressed against his thrumming flesh.

My son, my own small son sweating unbuckled  
unshielded from harm on the plastic seat  
of this tin-can truck, this son will return  
to the ice of a New York winter and board  
a school bus in his bright snow parka marked  
indelibly with the name of this man  
who never learned to read and was gentle,  
grim, kind, and preferred to get drunk at home,  
with friends, had a saying for everything  
and called María his Doña Mariquita  
as he slapped her rump each time he passed  
her place before the wood burning stove.  
The baby on my lap and my oldest son  
(the one hunched atop the wheel well in back)  
wear María's auburn hair, inherited  
from Inés, who was raped and killed one night  
by bandits after María escaped  
by flinging open wide to the deep Chilean night  
into the dust and thorns of salvation.  
Of this, María never spoke at all.  
But when she died, she owned a cardboard box  
containing her mother's skull.

Lisa Rubilar



## Chocolate Chips & Exponent: Contributing to the Real World

### Linda Hoffman Kimball

My first collection of essays by LDS authors, *Saints Well Seasoned: Musings on How Food Nourishes Us – Body, Heart and Soul*, didn't exactly fly off the book store shelves. Not like another collection released at the same time did – Tom Plummer's essays *Eating Chocolates and Dancing in the Kitchen*. I moaned to Louise Plummer about my book's languishing. She gave me sage advice. "Next time you write a book, put *chocolate* in the title, and everyone will buy it."

I took her advice. *Chocolate Chips & Charity: Visiting Teaching in the Real World* (published by Cedar Fort in 2004) is a slim little pleasure lots of Mormon women seem to be gobbling up. Thanks in large measure go to the Exponent women and *Exponent II* itself.

The idea for *Chocolate Chips & Charity* (hereafter referred to as CC&C) sprang out of the hope, consolation, inspiration, and practical help I got listening to a variety of women's opinions in such settings as Exponent retreats, Midwest Pilgrims' retreats, DAM (Denver Area Mormon) retreats, in Relief Society meetings, and even across the back fence, which more and more these days means the Internet.

In my earliest days as a Church member, back in my college years, the Relief Society president explained the concept of visiting teaching to me. The whole idea of it struck me as divine genius. Over the years of my membership, I

have experienced the down and dirty as well as the high and mighty of visiting teaching. It struck me that such an important concept should be looked at candidly, acknowledging the pitfalls and difficulties so that its broken parts could be mended and its strengths enhanced. A fool's quest? Perhaps.

I wanted women from all over America (and one faithful British contributor, Harriet Bushman) from a wide range of visiting teaching and Church experience to share their thoughts. Calling on many articulate, thoughtful, candid women I knew, I collected a great array of short anecdotes, vignettes, inspiring gems, straight scoop, tips, and cautionary tales.

Some of the contributions were from women with a natural knack for writing. Others were by women who had never tried such a thing before. By careful sequencing, gentle editing, and the bite-size entry feature, even the less confident writers' parts sound just right. This is a feature I learned from my years working with *Exponent II*. Letting women have a voice should not require them to have an especially dramatic, gifted, or savvy voice. It's like a patchwork quilt – all the bits together make the whole piece work.

Another important element in creating CC&C was anonymity for the contributors. My associations at various retreats and Relief Society meetings have taught me that "safety of expression" is something that we value. It is still

something we are learning. What feels "safe" to one sister feels "threatening" to another. We need to get over that hurdle right at the beginning so we can begin the work of really listening to one another.

In CC&C, I list all the contributors at the beginning but don't attribute their sections to them by name. (This also hides the fact that at least a hefty third of CC&C is made up of my own experiences and perspectives. When a topic seemed missing or a transition needed easing, I slid my own little nuggets in between.) We can hear the voices better – or in this case read them better – without the assumptions or labels we all subconsciously make. How would it help us to know that the parts we most resonate with were contributed by "an orthodox fifth generation conservative" or "a radical leftie" or "a desperate Mormon housewife"?

CC&C hit the teeny tiny niche market of LDS women's non-fiction and was well-received. Granted, being on the Cedar Fort bestseller list is not exactly the same as being on the *New York Times* bestseller list, but it indicates a hunger out there. When the numbers looked good, Cedar Fort asked if I could put together a similar compilation about Enrichment.

I didn't have the same soul-deep convictions about Enrichment, but sure, why not! Again, smart, thoughtful ladies filled my email and snail mail boxes with their fascinating, heartwarming,

heartbreaking, hilarious, poignant stories, and a new collection came together. When I gave Cedar Fort my working proposal for this volume, I thought I'd continue with a food and alliteration title again. As I worked on the project, I tossed the food part aside, kept the alliteration, and decided on *Home, Heart & Hands: Enrichment in the Real World*. I was worried that the book would be perceived as some kind of cookbook, a marketing problem that plagued *Saints Well Seasoned*. I also liked the idea of having the "home" part of the old name "Homemaking" pop up in a product search if someone forgot the new name for the monthly meeting. (I learned some retail know-how writing my humorous novel *The Marketing of Sister B*, published by Signature.)



Imagine my surprise when I heard that Cedar Fort had assumed my proposed food/alliteration title was a keeper, that they had already designed a cover for it, and that it would show up in the catalogue that was going to the printer in a matter of hours! The title was *Raspberries & Relevance: Enrichment in the Real World*. I processed that name change in my head but realized that there were no pieces in the book that had even the most remote connection to raspberries! I sent out an SOS to the contributors, and Laurel

Madsen produced a wonderfully evocative piece and Janet Stowell shared a back-to-basics entertaining tip with a raspberry-related recipe!

While working on the Enrichment collection, I became impressed with the powerful potential this monthly meeting has. Time and again the writers shared how much connection and sisterhood blossomed out of these meetings, often in unexpected ways. It ain't just about the glue guns, ladies! Scoffers beware, this night has enormous possibilities for great growth and genuine "enrichment."

In conversation with the marketing director at Cedar Fort as the Enrichment collection was about to hit the stands, she suggested I use the title I'd come up with (which they hadn't used) for a motherhood collection. Oh, that would be fun . . . but I thought that with the first two having food related titles, the third one should have one, too. On the spot she and I came up with *Apple Pies & Promises: Motherhood in the Real World*. \*

I started getting contributions (primarily from contributors to the previous books). At the Exponent

retreat in September 2004, I made a request to the attendees there for submissions. Many remarkable selections came from that group. I found I wasn't getting short, punchy paragraphs, but longer, more literary essays. This time, each writer seemed so personally invested in their thoughts about having a mother or being one. It no longer seemed right to simply list contributors separately and keep the essays anonymous. Each author's name is with her essay.

There is one section, however, which is still "names withheld." This is the section called "In the Quiet Heart is Hidden . . ." after the lovely hymn whose lyrics continue with "sorrows that the eye can't see. Who am I to judge another? Lord, I would follow Thee." (Hymn 220 by Susan Evans McCloud) The short contributions in this section are representative of what therapists hear in their practice. These little anonymous segments express some of the heartbreaking, unremedied, darkest sides of motherhood.

When I sit at book signing tables promoting these books, I represent them as women's voices sharing their experiences with "the uplifting lowdown" on the topics of Visiting Teaching, Enrichment, and motherhood. Trained as a new convert by the original founding mothers of Exponent, I believe Mormon women's issues should be voiced and heard this way in this real world—with faith and candor, with safety and support, and with charity which "never faileth." ■

\*see review on page 28

## Help for Moms is Here

Apple Pies and Promises: Motherhood in the Real World, *Linda Kimball, ed., Cedar Fort, Inc., 2005*

by **Kimberly Burnett**

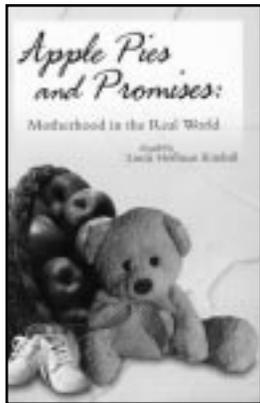
I was still stinging from a Mother's Day disappointment when I read *Apple Pies and Promises: Motherhood in the Real World*, compiled by Linda Hoffman Kimball. My oldest, a brand-new Sunbeam, had refused to join the rest of the Primary on the stand to sing, "Mother, I Love You." I found a friend in Ardith Walker's essay, "A Mother's Day Sunbeam." If my son wouldn't sing, at least he didn't stand in the front row and put both his hands down his pants.

Several of the writers represented in this collection of essays may be familiar to members of the *Exponent II* community. Among others, these include Heather Sundahl (associate editor), Ann Stone (poetry editor), Claudia Bushman (founding mother), Kristine Haglund Harris, Jeanne Griffiths, and Sue Gong (sometime *Exponent II* retreat workshop presenters and contributors to the paper), and Linda Hoffman Kimball, a regular *Exponent II* columnist.

As a mother of two, I found something of a support group for many of my experiences and struggles with motherhood in these essays. The familiarity of the writers adds to the feeling of being among friends. Many mothers, like Lael Little in "The Reluctant Mother," fell in love with their newborns despite a seeming lack of maternal instinct; have felt sheepish over

tendencies to compare their own kids to others like Heather Sundahl in "Competitive Mothering"; and found a vast gulf between imagined frolicking and picturesque images of outings with children and reality like Lisa Ray Turner in "The Hunt."

Women further along in their motherhood than I am will find plenty of companionship here as well. Laurel Madsen and Connie Susa both write about parenting grown children, and Jeanne Decker Griffiths describes the evolution of her relationship with her daughter, now a senior in high school. And after reading Marci McPhee's description of the anxiety she felt awaiting the birth of her first grandchild in "Birth of a Grandmother," I finally understand what my mother was going through while I was in labor.



Despite the book's promise of real-life motherhood, however, most of the experiences recounted are the happy-ending variety – struggles resolved, successful adoptions, rosy reflections on the writers' own mothers. Real-life motherhood is not always happy, and it can be difficult to believe that things will turn out in the end without the perspective of hindsight.

Women still looking for the happy ending in their own story may find comfort in the section, "In the Quiet Heart is Hidden." The emotions expressed here are the most honest and raw of the book, although the section's anonymity betrays the distance we still have

to go before we can truly be honest about all aspects of motherhood. These first-person reports describe women feeling depressed and incompetent as mothers; disliking child-rearing; grieving for children who have died, for childlessness, for wayward children; and expressing the misery of divorce and spousal abuse.

There are lots of happy endings in motherhood. I, for one, need to hear more uplifting stories than honesty about the disappointments and pain of motherhood. Still, the three-page section feels too short. All mothers experience disappointment and pain even if some of us are lucky enough that this aspect of motherhood is fleeting. These experiences deserve full-length essays, although perhaps they are simply too painful for women to write about.

Some essays feel a little unfocused and rambling and could have been more tightly edited. The benefit of the light-handed editing of these essays is that the writers' true, if slightly unpolished, voices shine through. The best are those that describe in vivid and sometimes painful, sometimes humorous detail the everyday experiences of motherhood.

Motherhood can be isolating. The essays cover a broad enough range of experience and demographics that at least a couple of them are likely to make women in nearly every stage of motherhood feel a little less lonely. ■

*Kimberly is a full-time mom and part-time public policy researcher in Lexington, Mass. She enjoys playing with Mr. Potato Head and Buzz Lightyear and watching Teletubbies.*

# The Tsunami—Up Close and Personal

*The following are excerpts from a letter written by Jeanne Decker Griffiths to her missionary son in the Ukraine following the tsunami that devastated many areas in Southeast Asia in December 2004.*

Jan 25, 2005  
Beijing, China

We flew to Thailand the day after the tsunami hit, having booked our plane reservations six months before. A fair number of ex-pats from Beijing had traveled to Thailand to escape the cold of China. At home, our school was trying to account for all the teachers and families that had traveled to the area. We all held our breath the first day back to school, waiting to see if everyone had returned. Fortunately, no one from our school was harmed.

The French school in town was not so fortunate. Two French diplomats, one of their wives, and three children from the school died in the tragedy. One seven year old is now orphaned, having lost both parents and siblings. At our old school in Thailand, a teacher lost both of his seven-year-old twins. At our old school in Shanghai, at least four students died, as well as two sets of parents.

I teach English with a woman whose psychologist husband was dispatched to give grief counseling and support to the Shanghai ex-pat community. Shanghai American School opened a day late just so they would be better prepared to deal with the students' deaths.

One family that we know were in Phuket when the tsunami hit. The young girl's dad helped her to the third floor of the hotel where they were staying and then went back down to help his wife. Neither he nor his wife survived. It was

several months before they were able to identify their bodies through DNA.

Another friend, Lynn Thornton, was in Phuket when the tsunami struck. He wrote to us the following: "Just back from Phuket and Patong Beach tonight . . . survived being very near the beach road when the waves hit . . . truly terrifying . . . cut a leg but that's all . . . Patong Beach and road were totally destroyed. Phuket airport was a zoo . . . took twelve hours to get home to Hong Kong. . . . As I was making my way back from the beach area, I came upon the body of a young woman my daughter's age lying amongst the debris. I've thought a lot about both of them since then."

Our friends the Wildens told us about a Thai friend who owns a convenience store right on Patong Beach. He was sleeping in his third floor apartment when he heard a loud, thunderous noise. He rushed downstairs in time to see the water washing through his store. After it receded, he went back downstairs to start cleaning up the mess along with some of his employees. A bigger wave then crashed into his store. He made for the stairs again, grabbing a small boy on the way. He held onto the banister and the boy as the water tried to suck him out. It went over their heads for about ten seconds before it again slowly receded. He put the boy upstairs in his apartment and went down again to his store. There he found twelve dead people, including several employees, in his destroyed store.

The Wildens also have a Thai friend who is their scuba diving instructor in Phuket. He was far out in the ocean giving scuba lessons when their boat went over a mountainous wave. They watched as the wall of water continued inland, crashing onto the beach with waves up to the second floor of the hotel.

Other friends were vacationing in Penang, Malaysia. Fortunately, they had driven into town just before the tsunami hit. On their return to their hotel, their first indication that something was wrong was seeing a jet ski in a tree.

While in Thailand, I read the *Bangkok Post*. Some foreign families had written to the newspaper, asking for help in locating their missing loved ones. One foreign family wrote an open letter to the *Post*, thanking the Thai people for their gracious kindness and generosity. They especially thanked the Thai hotel staff who risked their lives to come warn them as they sun bathed on the beach. Another Swedish family was not so fortunate. When some Thais told them to get off of the beach quickly, the Swedes misunderstood them and retorted, "We don't have to get off the beach. We can stay right here just like everyone else." That misunderstanding cost them their lives.

Sweden, by the way, had 300,000 of their nine million people vacationing in Southeast Asia. Of the fifty-two nations that lost people in the tsunami, the Swedes had the highest percentage of deaths.

*continued on page 30*

Thai TV reported on a nine-year-old Thai boy who was washed out to sea, washed back to shore, and washed back out to sea again. He was able to grab onto an uprooted tree, which he clung to for the next two and a half days, hoping that he would be found. He spent that time surrounded in the water by dead foreigners. Thais, like many Asians, are very superstitious. They are afraid of spirits and dead bodies. What an ordeal for that little boy, surviving the tsunami and then having to spend two nights alone with those dead bodies.

Fortunately, one ten-year-old British girl had just finished learning about tsunamis at school. When she saw how far the waters receded, she immediately recognized its significance and told her mother. They were able to warn about fifty people on the beach, who all escaped to safety.

A group of Thai children were not so fortunate. With the deep retreat of the water, they rushed out to the beach now empty of water to collect all the fish stranded on the sand. One nine-year-old boy

didn't want to join them. He stood on higher ground, watching his friends, first casually and then in horror as the tsunami

before. After they calmed down, they again began to wail an hour later. This time they would not be comforted and ran for the jungle-clad hills behind the resort. Only then did the *mahout* turn and see the tsunami that was rushing towards them. Around a dozen tourists had also started to run for the hills. The *mahout* managed to get the elephants to pluck the tourists up with their trunks and deposit them on their backs. They then charged up the hill to safety. Because of their early warning, the elephants saved the lives of several dozen tourists.

Buffalo also sensed the approaching danger. About a hundred buffalo were grazing near the beach. The entire herd suddenly lifted their heads, looked out to sea, ears standing upright. They then turned and stampeded up the hill. The bewildered villagers ran after the buffalo, fearful they would be lost. Only after reaching the hilltop did they see the tidal wave slam into their fishing village below. Not a single one of them sustained even a scratch, due to the early warning of the animals.

We lived in Thailand for six years and have so many sweet, wonderful memories of our time there. I still have fond memories of Phuket and the Muslim fishing village built on stilts out on the water south of Phuket. When the tide was out, one could see a type of fish "walking" in the mud. It's so sad to realize it is all gone.

It may sound odd, but I was really glad to be in Thailand at this difficult time, just as I was very glad to be in the States during 9/11. I just wish I could have done something to help

*continued on page 31*

*" . . . the waves of the sea heau[ed] themselves beyond their bounds. " D&C 88:89-89*

The newspaper told of a pregnant woman who was found at sea after clinging to a tree for five days. She ate the fruit from the tree to help her survive. Although sunburned and dehydrated, she and the baby were fine. Another woman was dragged to safety into the jungle, where she gave birth that night. They named the baby boy Tsunami.

In Thailand, the government's head meteorologist got the ax for not warning the country of the impending disaster. Of course, there was little he could have done since no warning system was in place. From the ocean itself, the only clear indication is the sudden retreat of the waves. One newspaper account said the water retreated 3,000 feet. Your life would certainly be in danger if you were unaware of that important information or if you were not looking.

engulfed them. It was such a shocking sight that he just stood there, unable to run. A man in quick retreat rushed by, grabbed him, and carried him to safety. When the devastating waves had finished, the boy pleaded for the man to take him back to his village to be with his family. He returned to find everyone in his family and village had been washed out to sea. He is one of the few survivors from his town.

Everyone was quite surprised that no dead animals were found in a wildlife preserve in Thailand that was hit by the tsunami. A fascinating Reuters newspaper article gives an explanation. In Phuket there was an elephant business giving rides to tourists. Close to the time of the earthquake, which was almost 2,000 miles away, the elephants started crying. In all his years working with elephants, the *mahout* (elephant handler) had never heard them cry like this

# Letters

I thoroughly enjoyed the "Being Single in a Married Church" issue. Great! Please tell Barbara Openshaw that I particularly loved her article. I found it very insightful.

Suzette Smith  
Salt Lake City, UT

The recent "Singles" issue was outstanding. Even though I'm not a mother with children at home, I suffer the same juggling act with house, yard, church, volunteering, a modicum of social life, and a 50-60 hour work week. But I also identify with the idea of being content with my singlehood and living well. It was reassuring to read that others struggle with the business of being single at any age.

Thanks for all your efforts. You enrich my life's experience.

Leona Mattoni  
Beverly Hills, CA

Thank you for producing such a great magazine. I have been a subscriber for a few years and like to share the *Exponent II* with my sister and friends. We have always found the articles, columns, fiction, and poetry relevant to our lives.

Trisa Martin  
Bountiful, UT

Just finished reading Volume 27, Number 2 about Being Single in a Married Church and applaud the varied viewpoints included.

Curiously, the cover drawing of mainly high-heeled shoes shows well some of the dumb stuff we women put on our feet that impairs our skeletal alignment and function. Thanks for not showing the actual stupid pointed toes but for showing sneakers in which we might be able to run away from or to, as the panic warrants.

The word "employed" appears on page 20 without a qualifying phrase such as "outside the home." On page 18 is the term "non-working woman" also without any qualifier. Let's always remind each other in every venue that "Every woman works, no matter where she is." I do so in every class, including once in high priests'.

Anyone who has cleaned up a broken bottle of honey while keeping a toddler out of it and nursing the kid who cut fingers in the smash and trying to calm the one who faints or vomits at the sight of blood . . . works. I forgot to mention the background music of a dishwasher grinding up something that escaped the rack, the washer leaking, the doorbell and phone ringing, and the oven timer buzzing. And the baby with diarrhea.

One point missing in these and like articles is that no matter how much she is word-praised by Church and other leaders, the stay-at-home mom piles up no pension from those words nor accrues credit in the Social Security system. We all know who does.

Carol B. Quist  
Salt Lake City, UT

## Extra! Extra! Get Your Extra Single Issues!

We have received many requests for extra copies of the "Being Single in a Married Church" issue, which women have passed along to friends, bishops, Relief Society presidents, and stake presidents. If you would like additional copies

of this issue, we would be happy to send them to you for a this-issue-only price of \$2 each to cover handling and postage. You can mail or e-mail your requests to the addresses in the subscription form on the back cover.

Tsunami continued from page 30

make a difference.

Perhaps this is a wake up call for all of us. One way to make a difference is to be prepared for the last days. That little British girl knew about tsunamis, recognized the impending doom, and then quickly acted to save lives. If we too know the signs of the times

and are more observant, we can be in a position to help others and make a difference. This tsunami certainly appears to be a latter day fulfillment of D&C 88:89-90, where ". . . the waves of the sea heav[ed] themselves beyond their bounds."



Jeannie has wandered the world for the past twenty-two years as the wife

of a U.S. diplomat. Jeannie's three kids were born on three different continents. Having always lived overseas, her kids think it's normal to use squat toilets and not drink tap water. Currently living in Beijing, China, Jeannie teaches English at a leading hospital in town, as well as teaching early morning seminary.

# JOIN US AT THE RETREAT

This year's Exponent retreat will be held the weekend of September 23-25 at Camp Jewell, a YMCA camp in the northwest corner of Connecticut (near Colebrook). Camp Jewell sits on the banks of a private lake in the beautiful Berkshire Mountains.

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 women and power. 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 other 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 \$155 for sub-



scribers and \$175 for non-subscribers (that is, their retreat registration includes a four-issue subscription). 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.

Mail this form with check or money order to: Exponent II, P.O. Box 128, Arlington, MA 02476 or sign up on-line (for either print or electronic subscription) at [www.exponentii.org](http://www.exponentii.org)

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