EXPONENT II
SPECIAL GUEST EDITION BY THE MIDWEST PILGRIMS

LOOKING FORWARD, LOOKING BACK
30 YEARS OF MIDWEST PILGRIMS

A PILGRIM’S PROGRESS
Charlotte Cannon Johnston

REINVENTING EMMA SMITH
Jana Riess with Linda King Newell

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PUBLISHING THE EXPERIENCES OF
Mormon Women
SINCE 1974

WHAT IS EXPONENT II?
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.

FEATURED STORIES

ON THE COVER:
Silesian Women, 18x24, mixed media. This work portrays a Silesian custom: the size of a woman's bonnet indicated her marital and social status.

Sally Marsh Haglund
Glenview, Illinois

Visit Sally's website to see more of her beautiful artwork at www.sallyhaglundart.com

A PILGRIM’S progress
BY CHARLOTTE CANNON JOHNSTON

I have always felt that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is my church, and I want to have an effect on the direction it goes. Certainly, the institutional church has its shortcomings, but just as we go to great lengths to give individuals who have made serious mistakes a second chance, I think we should be willing to forgive the Church for its errors, too.

REINVENTING
BY JANA RIESS WITH LINDA KING NEWELL

The way Emma's story is carefully sculpted reveals as much about gender expectations and religious norms in our own era as it did when Brigham Young declared her moronta non grata.
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When We Gathered at the River
The 2013 Midwest Pilgrimage in Nauvoo

Shall we gather at the river
Where bright angel feet have trod;
With its crystal tide forever
Flowing by the throne of God?

Ere we reach the shining river
Lay we every burden down;
Grace our spirits will deliver,
And provide a robe and crown.

Yes, we'll gather at the river,
The beautiful, beautiful river;
Gather with the saints at the river
That flows by the throne of God.1

Yes, we'll gather at the river,
The beautiful, beautiful river;
Gather with the saints at the river
That flows by the throne of God.

Soon we'll reach the shining river,
Soon our pilgrimage will cease,
Soon our happy hearts will quiver
With the melody of peace.

The not-so-crystalline Mississippi River, swollen by heavy spring rains, was threatening to spill over the levy only a few feet from Nauvoo House when women began gathering there for the annual Midwest Pilgrimage the weekend of 19-21 April 2013. From all over the country we came, eager to lay our burdens down amid the footprints of bright angels like Eliza R. Snow, Lucy Mack and Emma Smith.

Since 1983, the Midwest Pilgrims have been gathering for retreats—sometimes at the river, sometimes in the woods, sometimes in the city, but always listening for the melody of peace. Grace attends as we minister to one another with open arms, open ears, and open mics.

Much of what you will read in this issue of Exponent II originated at this year’s Pilgrimage in Nauvoo, Illinois. Following the theme of “Looking Forward, Looking Back,” we reviewed our history as a diverse group of Mormon women striving to hear as well as to be heard, and evaluated the progress of LDS women in general over the past thirty years. Then, donning our “prophetess” mantles, we tried to discern what the future may hold for the next generation of sisters. Most important, however, the retreat gave each of us the opportunity to stop and look at where we stand now, to determine the path we want to take from here, and to find companions to help us along our way.

In addition to the articles first presented as talks at the retreat, this issue also includes more fascinating, funny, and thought-provoking work by women who identify themselves as Midwest Pilgrims. We invite you to gather with us at the next Midwest Pilgrimage, to be held 21-23 March 2014 in Rockford, Illinois. Check our website (www.midwestpilgrims.com) and the Midwest Pilgrims Facebook group for further information. No ties to the prairie? No worries! Our definition of “Midwest” is expansive enough to include like-minded women the world over. Together, we may draw closer to the throne of God.

Nancy Harward and Linda Hoffman Kimball
Cincinnati, Ohio • Evanston, Illinois
Guest Editors - Midwest Pilgrims

1 Words and music by Rev. Robert Lowry
Midwest Pilgrims often seem to feel like pelicans of the wilderness—gregarious birds temporarily separated from our flock, flying around in search of food and water in the desert, stopping occasionally to tear out bits of our hearts to nourish others but not always nourishing ourselves.

By Ganie DeHart, Geneseo, New York

At the first Midwest Pilgrimage in 1983 I was a young, married but childless graduate student trying to figure out how I fit into the Church and the professional world. Thirty years on, I’m a not-so-young, no longer married but still childless professor and academic department chair, puzzling over updated versions of the same questions. Through all the changes in my life over those years, Midwest Pilgrimage has been one of the few constants; it’s been with me through the end of my marriage, multiple moves, varying levels of Church involvement, the loss of both parents and a brother, and my entire professional career. It’s seen me through spiritual struggles and an ongoing reassessment of how I relate to the Church. More than anything else in my life, it’s what has kept me Mormon.

I have pretty much always been an outlier at church, and I think this is true in one way or another for most of the women who are drawn to Pilgrimage. One of the joys of Pilgrimage for me is that I don’t feel like quite such an outlier there. I’m still the divorced professor with no children or grandchildren, but it doesn’t matter as much at Pilgrimage as it does in my home ward. It’s like the famous New Yorker cartoon in which one dog assures another that “On the internet nobody knows you’re a dog”; at Pilgrimage nobody knows or much cares about your family situation, employment status, educational background, church calling, or political views unless you choose to tell them. Other points of commonality are more important.

Psalm 102 in the King James Version contains the striking image of “a pelican of the wilderness”—a water bird out of its element, wandering and alone. Pelicans are described as gregarious birds, making a lone one a particularly poignant image.
pelican is probably better translated as vulture, but “vulture of the wilderness” doesn’t have quite the same ring to it, so in this case I’m happy to embrace the poetry of the KJV. I probably wouldn’t even know about this wonderful turn of phrase without Pilgrimage; I came across it as a result of a session led by Jana Riess on praying the Psalms that inspired me to explore way, way beyond Psalm 23.

I’d always thought of pelicans as sea birds, so I was startled when I spotted some at a reservoir in the high desert of western Colorado. I subsequently learned that American white pelicans breed on inland rivers and lakes and head to the coast only in winter. In fact, one of the largest breeding populations of white pelicans happens to nest on Gunnison Island in the Great Salt Lake, a short distance as the pelican flies from the center of Zion. (California gulls also hang out on Gunnison Island. This makes me wish that the pioneers had suffered from a plague of frogs, so that they could have been rescued by pelicans. How amazing would it be to have a Pelican Monument on Temple Square? And back in the olden days, Primary girls could have been Larks, Bluebirds, and Pelicans!)

It also turns out that pelicans have rich Christian symbolism as self-sacrificing mothers who tear at their own breasts to draw blood for nourishment of their young when no other food is available. (Not that pelicans actually do this, mind you, but in medieval times they were thought to. Still, does this remind you of anyone?) A pelican feeding her young in this way is even found on the title page of the original King James Version of the Bible. Pelicans were a common medieval symbol for Christ and for the Eucharist—feminine, maternal symbols, interestingly enough.

For a variety of reasons, Midwest Pilgrims often seem to feel like pelicans of the wilderness—gregarious birds temporarily separated from our flock, flying around in search of food and water in the desert, stopping occasionally to tear out bits of our hearts to nourish others but not always nourishing ourselves. Coming to Pilgrimage is a bit like landing on Gunnison Island, suddenly finding ourselves surrounded by other pelicans, all with tales to tell about their wanderings in the wilderness. We huddle together, share our stories, express amusement or outrage or a bit of both, eat bushels of M&Ms washed down with gallons of Diet Coke, offer each other emotional and spiritual sustenance, and then, revitalized, head back into the wilderness—in twos and threes or in some cases all alone. (According to Wikipedia, to get to Utah Lake, about 100 miles from Gunnison Island, “large flocks of adult pelicans ride thermals to a great height, then coast down to their destination.” This is actually a pretty good description of what returning to everyday life from Pilgrimage feels like.)

We huddle together, share our stories, express amusement or outrage or a bit of both, eat bushels of M&Ms washed down with gallons of Diet Coke, offer each other emotional and spiritual sustenance, and then, revitalized, head back into the wilderness—in twos and threes or in some cases all alone.

Pilgrimage is different each year, in part because of the constantly changing cast of characters and in part because each year we bring different needs and offer each other different gifts in return. I can think of years when I arrived so filled with anger I could barely breathe and found understanding, acceptance, and calming wisdom from my fellow Pilgrims. Blessedly, there have been other years when I was among the calm, wise ones. What remains the same is the sense of Pilgrimage as a refuge, a place where it’s safe to be our authentic pelican-like selves, to express doubt and anger, to tell stories of faith and redemption, to raise our own questions and listen to others’ questions that hadn’t even occurred to us, to “bear one another’s burdens,” if only for a couple of days. In short, to do what Lucy Mack Smith suggested in an early meeting of the Nauvoo Relief Society: to “cherish one another, watch over one another, comfort one another and gain instruction, that we may all sit down in heaven together.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Ganie DeHart is a professor of psychology at the State University of New York at Geneseo, where she teaches developmental and cross-cultural psychology and collaborates with students on a labyrinthine study of children’s sibling and friend relationships. She mostly relishes being an outlier and is sad that there are apparently no wild pelicans in upstate New York.
A PILGRIM'S progress

Significant changes are difficult to make whether they involve the direction of our lives, personal relationships, or institutional structures. | By Charlotte Cannon Johnston, Chicago, Illinois

As a founding member of the Midwest Pilgrims and a participant in many of the events that gave rise to it as well as to Exponent II, I would like to tell my story because I think it's representative of what many Mormon women were feeling as the larger women's movement was unfolding. Perhaps by describing my thoughts and experiences during those tumultuous years, I can help you understand what some of your mothers and grandmothers might have thought and felt.

I grew up in Idaho, the oldest of six children in a family whose life was closely intertwined with the Church. When my mother died, we children chose the scripture "Choose you this day whom you will serve; but as for me and my house we will serve the Lord" to print in her funeral program, because it captures her convictions and priorities. My father's program included his oft repeated advice: "Remember who you are." My parents' convictions became my convictions, so whenever I've chosen to look at the Church through a more liberal lens than the one they provided, a very basic part of me has felt threatened.

The expectation always was that I would graduate from college, marry in the temple and have a family, which is exactly what I did. In college I was a student body officer and received several honors. After graduating from BYU in 1951 with a degree in English, I earned a living by teaching, a profession that brought me satisfaction and recognition. When I married the following year, I had trouble adjusting to my new status. I felt I had lost my identity as a separate person. For instance, I remember being conflicted about whether to sign my name Mrs. Peter B. Johnston, Charlotte C. Johnston, or Charlotte Cannon Johnston. It didn't even occur to me to keep my maiden name.

When I became a mother three years later, I felt that I had shifted even further into the background and had less control over my life. I sometimes resented staying home with my children but felt I should follow Church counsel. It seemed I carried the entire load at home—and, given the fact that Peter was working his way through college and medical school, that was largely true. Daily survival required our joint efforts, but I often felt that my needs weren't taken into consideration.

In 1959, we moved to Chicago for Peter's residency, two children in tow. (We also had lost a stillborn only five months earlier.) Moving so far away from my family and the center of the Church felt to me like jumping off the edge of the earth. Peter's choice of psychiatry as his specialty felt like another leap into the unknown because, at the time, many Mormons regarded the field with suspicion. Over the next few years I had two more children—and was grateful that my husband encouraged me to get some therapy.

During the 1960s, most women were leading very isolated lives, taking care of our homes and our children, with little opportunity for interaction with other adults. As a result, we full-time homemakers identified ourselves, and others saw us, simply as our husbands' wives or our children's mothers. Once, I was asked to represent full-time homemakers on a panel discussing career options for LDS women. After pointing out the joys and responsibilities of being a stay-at-home mom, I blurted out, "But no woman should be a doormat!” I may have been as surprised by that outburst as the audience.

Ironically, although I was aware of the women's liberation movement, I didn't see it as relevant to me. This was the era of bra-burning militants, who seemed to reject all the traditional
family values that I had been taught to uphold. One day in 1969, however, something clicked, and I realized that wanting to have an identity of my own was what feminism was about.

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In 1970, our family spent a school year in Boston. Through a friend, I was invited to join the group of committed LDS women from the Boston area who were then working on the famous "Pink" Dialogue, and who eventually would found Exponent II. All but two of us were married and had children. Interestingly, none of us who had children were working outside our homes, but all of us were reading and talking about the issues raised by feminists such as Betty Friedan and Kate Millet. We had many heated discussions about feminism and its place in our lives. One member of our group, Cheryl May, was in graduate school and had written a paper entitled "Twentieth Century Changes in the Role and Functioning of Relief Society," which described the diminishing power of women within the LDS Church from its early days to the 1960s. The issues Cheryl raised were unsettling, but we felt that they were too important to ignore. We talked about how we saw the subtraction of the Relief Society's autonomy as a symptom of a larger loss of empowerment of women. As a group, we were very concerned about what we would say in that issue of Dialogue regarding our relationship to feminism, and what others would say in response. Reading it now, the articles we wrote seem very tame, but at the time they were very provocative for us. One positive outcome of our experience is that the women of the "Pink" Dialogue group were able to provide emotional and intellectual support for LDS women in other areas of the country.

I had planned to go back to school when I returned to Chicago after my heady year in Boston, but changed course when I was called to serve on the Naperville Stake Relief Society board. Two years later I became Relief Society president of the newly formed Chicago Heights Stake. I served in that position for six years, and as stake Young Women president for four years. These callings were very important to me because they gave me the sense of empowerment that I had been missing. I valued having the authority to speak and being recognized as someone worth listening to. I relished the opportunity to articulate women's issues and to influence the lives of women and girls.

During my tenure as Relief Society president, we initiated a number of innovative programs. We held workshops on topics that are old now but broke fresh ground then, such as financial planning, career education, women's health issues, celebrating diversity, and acknowledging and preparing for different stages in our lives. We also had to deal with the flaming issue of the Equal Rights Amendment. As you may recall, Illinois was a key state in the battle for ratification. Although members were divided over its merits and the effect it might have on women and families, Church leaders had identified the ERA as a moral issue and pressured local stakes to participate in protests against its passage in Springfield, the state capital. It was a very uncomfortable time. Together, the stake president and I chose not to organize the women in our stake to join the protests; instead we gave women information on both sides of the issue and encouraged them to make up their own minds.

Personally, I felt that the Church had made a serious mistake in its handling of the ERA. I felt the same way about its treatment of Sonia Johnson, the LDS feminist who was sanctioned for publicly opposing the Church's official stance on the issue. Sonia's case was tragic for her, her family and the Church. I remember wishing that she had been able to work out her issues within the Church rather than before the world. Her 1979 excommunication made every Mormon woman who had supported the ERA feel vulnerable, and as a result, a groundswell of protesting murmurs began to arise from women all over the country.

Sensing the need for a forum where LDS sisters could freely speak about women's issues in general and their relationship to the Church in particular, Lavina Fielding Anderson organized the historic 1982 gathering in Nauvoo. She invited sixty women from a variety of places and backgrounds, including the Exponent II group from Boston. I was invited because Lavina had visited Chicago six years earlier on assignment for the Ensign, and she had been impressed with the innovative programs our stake Relief Society was implementing.

The atmosphere at that meeting in Nauvoo was electric. In the room above Joseph Smith's store, we heard a presentation about the founding of the Relief Society that had taken place in the same room 140 years earlier. We learned that, according to minutes taken during one of the Society's early meetings, Joseph Smith had turned the key "to" the sisters rather than "in behalf" of them, as later publications put it. Doctrinal issues regarding a Mother in Heaven, the temple ceremony, and women's relationship to the priesthood were discussed with intensity. Most important, Nauvoo not only furnished a place for us to talk, but it began a time of healing as we shared our experiences and felt a growing appreciation for our sisterhood. It was clear to me that the sixty women who attended represented many others with similar concerns who were not there.

Out of that gathering grew the Midwest Pilgrims. Our first retreat—or "pilgrimage"—held in St. Charles, Illinois, the
Joseph Smith’s study upstairs, Red Brick Store

Charlotte Johnston and Jean Bell in Nauvoo House. Photo by Nancy Harward

The Smith gravesite overlooks the Mississippi River

Midwest Pilgrimage in Nauvoo, Illinois, April 2013

Kirsten Campbell and Aimee Hickman emulate Dennis Smith’s virtuous Woman. Photo by Heather Sundahl

Nauvoo Temple

Photos by Linda Hoffman Kimball, except as noted
following spring, was organized by sisters from the Hyde Park Branch in Chicago, with strong support from women in the North Shore Ward. Susan Rugh was at the helm and I oversaw the selection of workshops. We were very concerned about the direction our group would take. Many possibilities, some quite militant, had suggested themselves at Nauvoo. We decided that we wanted our discussions to be stimulating and honest, while remaining within the context of allegiance to the Church. I believe that we have achieved those goals; thus the Midwest Pilgrims has developed a more moderate identity than some of the other groups that spun off from the Nauvoo gathering. The various committees who have organized Midwest Pilgrimages since 1983 have largely been successful in creating a safe place to talk about issues of general interest to Mormon women, as well as personal concerns. It has been gratifying to see our leaders act with quiet but definite authority and to feel the growing sense of empowerment among the women who participate.

Mention must be made of Ann Stone, who became the glue that held the Midwest Pilgrims together for many years. With her warm, accepting manner, sense of humor, questing mind, and devotion to the Church as well as to the advancement of women, Ann became the mother of the group. Maraley Rasmussen was by her side, keeping track of finances and other administrative duties. (We joked that if Ann was our mother, Maraley was our father.) Ann always encouraged open exploration of issues in the context of the gospel. She died in 2006 after a lengthy battle with cancer. We sorely miss her.

Over the years, I’ve seen many positive changes in the national women’s movement as well as in the Church. Nationally, we hear fewer strident voices, and more that emphasize the need to balance career with family responsibilities. In the Church, we hear more voices acknowledging diversity among women, explaining that marriages should be equal partnerships, and directing priesthood leaders to listen more carefully to the women in their councils. I’ve appreciated the encouragement we’ve received to look for service opportunities beyond our own wards, and to seek personal inspiration to meet our own challenges. During the 1990s, Elaine Jack, who was then general president of the Relief Society, visited Chicago to learn more about the issues facing urban units. I told her how good it felt to hear her say that, as local leaders, we were entitled to receive our own inspiration to solve local problems. She looked me straight in the eye and said, “Charlotte, I really believe it.”

While serving as stake Relief Society president, I decided to return to school. Two years before the gathering of women in Nauvoo, I completed a master’s degree in reading education from the University of Chicago and began a career as a reading specialist. After twenty-two years as a full-time homemaker, working outside the home added an important dimension to my life. I valued the stimulation of my field and colleagues, enjoyed having control over money that I earned, and became more connected to my racially integrated community. My job, as well as the relationships I developed with students, made it easier for me to let go of my children. Peter and I shared household tasks more evenly and had a more equal appetite for outside activities. In 1997, a year after I retired, Peter was diagnosed with colon cancer. We were able to press many meaningful events into the last eighteen months of his life. I have many happy memories of all our years together.

I have always felt that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is my church, and I want to have an effect on the direction it goes.

Significant changes are difficult to make whether they involve the direction of our lives, personal relationships, or institutional structures. Much prayer, study, and faith are needed to gain insight and personal revelation when we want to implement changes not just in ourselves but in our institutions. I have always felt that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is my church, and I want to have an effect on the direction it goes. Certainly, the institutional church has its shortcomings, but just as we go to great lengths to give individuals who have made serious mistakes a second chance, I think we should be willing to forgive the Church for its errors, too. I feel strongly that we can have more effect if we are working from inside the Church rather than from the outside. A favorite scripture that has helped me take initiative is 2 Timothy 1:7: “For God hath not given us the Spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” Another that has guided me is D&C 112:10: “Be thou humble; and the Lord thy God shall lead thee by the hand, and give thee answer to thy prayers.” I pray that once we have gained assurance of the worth of a given course, we will be able to act on that assurance to bring about positive change.

Based on a talk given at the Midwest Pilgrimage in Nauvoo, Illinois, 20 April 2013.

About the Author:

For the 1971 “Pink” issue of Dialogue, Charlotte Cannon Johnston wrote a review of A Mormon Mother: An Autobiography by Annie Clark Tanner. The project inspired her to learn more about polygamy in early Church history. She is currently writing a book, edited by her daughter Mary, about the history of plural wives among their own ancestors.
In the fall of 1972 I did not yet qualify as a Mormon, but I was definitely becoming a feminist.

By Heather Symmes Cannon, Bloomington, Indiana

In the 1981 "Orange" Dialogue, the second issue assembled by and devoted to women, Laurel Ulrich defines a feminist as "a person who believes in equality between the sexes, who recognizes discrimination against women and who is willing to work to overcome it." She goes on to say, "A Mormon feminist believes that these principles are compatible not only with the gospel of Jesus Christ but with the mission of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints."1

In the fall of 1972 I did not yet qualify as a Mormon, but I was definitely becoming a feminist. I had been attending LDS Church meetings since 1969, but because my feelings about the Church's organization were still uncertain, I couldn't commit to baptism. Fortunately, my nonmember status didn't discourage members of the Cambridge (Massachusetts) Ward from inviting me to participate in a lecture series on Mormon foremothers for the local LDS Institute. Associating with that group of "Mormon feminists"—the same group who had put together the "Pink" issue of Dialogue the previous year—convinced me that I could be a member of the Church without sacrificing my intelligence, independence and liberal leanings (though I do keep my liberalism quiet most of the time). I often felt a bit out of sync with the group because so many of the issues discussed were either irrelevant to me because I hadn't grown up in the Church or, more often, because I recognized that the concerns others felt to be "Mormon" issues actually were issues for all women. Still, I happily participated in the study group and lecture series, out of which came the book Mormon Sisters, edited by Claudia Bushman, which presented Church history from a female perspective and openly discussed polygamy. This was a rather radical departure at the time. Although many pioneer stories described the feats of heroic women, little attention had been given to the role women (and polygamy) had played in Utah's economy and politics. Mormon Sisters would inspire Sister Saints and several other thought-provoking collections by and about LDS women in the coming years.

While preparing for the Cambridge lecture series—as has been often told and retold—Susan Kohler discovered a set of the original Women's Exponent in the stacks at Harvard University's Widener Library. This publication by early Utah women led us to feminists among the founding mothers of the Church, and with that came a desire to pick up where those pioneer sisters had left off so many years before. The idea took hold at a two-day retreat in western Massachusetts, and in July 1974 the first issue of Exponent II appeared. The years following the introduction of Exponent II were some of the darkest for Mormon feminists, who endured the anti-ERA campaigns, the excommunication of Sonia Johnson, and the resurgence of the radical right. But those years also saw the first general women's broadcasts, the first women's conferences at BYU, and an increasing feminist presence in Dialogue, Sunstone, and the Mormon History Association. Writing about that period in the "Orange" Dialogue, Laurel Ulrich commented that the Church had "simultaneously enlarge[d] and diminish[ed] women."2 I would maintain that this mix of enlarging and diminishing continues today.

When I consider how women's lives have changed in the fifty years since The Feminine Mystique launched modern feminism, and how the attitudes of women in the Church have shifted in response, I realize how much my own life reflects those changes. In the early 1970s, when I was an aspiring domestic diva, I had seen the Church as a place to learn how to be a good mother. My own mother had not been the type of role model I wanted to emulate, so I was fortunate to have the impressive women of the Cambridge Ward as exemplars. In 1982, after my marriage had ended and I had obtained an MBA, I moved back to the area of Illinois where I had been raised to begin a new career. During that period, I saw the Church as a support system for my children, who were growing up with no father and a workaholic mom. But the North Shore Ward didn't just sustain me as a parent; it also connected me to more remarkable sisters who shared my concerns about the place of women in the Church. These women, along with a like-minded group from the Hyde Park Branch on Chicago's south side, would form the nucleus of the Midwest Pilgrims.

Today, as a retired corporate director and a grandmother, I find in the Church a spiritual resource and a community with many positive values. However, I am still trying to reconcile my feelings about the roles women are expected to play in the Church and in the larger world. While I think women have more say and have gained more respect than we had thirty or forty years ago, progress has come at a halting, two steps forward, one step back pace. The Church has addressed some major issues and has opened up more opportunities for women to be seen and heard. The initiation of
new leadership positions for sister missionaries and their inclusion on mission councils could be a huge step forward—but the influence that women have on any Church council is still very dependent on the willingness of the presiding priesthood authorities to listen to them. We still have a long way to go.

“While I think women have more say and have gained more respect than we had thirty or forty years ago, progress has come at a halting, two steps forward, one step back pace.

In 1974, when Exponent II began, women who had attended graduate school were still rare; they were our heroes. Last March, at the Relief Society birthday party of the North Carolina ward, they had a “Get to Know You” bingo game. One of the squares on the bingo card said “Has a Master’s” and another said “Has a Doctorate.” True, only two of us had master’s degrees, and there were no doctors in the house, but that these categories were even included on the card says something powerful about our expectations as Mormon women and the assumptions we make about each other. It says we’ve made another step forward, and we’re not looking back.

2 Ibid., p. 37.

Based on a talk given at the Midwest Pilgrimage in Nauvoo, Illinois, 20 April 2013.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Heather Cannon is happily retired from a 30-year career in corporate marketing research. A native Midwesterner, she moved to Boston in 1962 to attend Wellesley College and stayed for 20 years. After receiving an MBA from Boston University, she moved back to Chicago and became part of the Midwest Pilgrims. Heather’s most recent relocation took her from North Carolina to Indiana.
A view from the Bridge

Rarely do I feel fully accepted or part of the groups on either side of the divide between feminists and traditionalists, so I try to span the gap, reaching out to both sides.

By Hilary Cannon Anderson, Bloomington, Indiana

Frequently I find myself uncertain about the definition of feminist, and even less certain if the title applies to me. My mother, my daughter, and many of my friends define themselves as feminists, or feel so comfortable with their position as feminists that they prefer to focus on other titles for themselves. Defining the role of Relief Society president is easier for me, but I cannot readily define the people who fill that role. Currently it is my turn to fill the role in my ward, but I am as uncomfortable using the title of Relief Society President to define myself as I am using the word feminist. Hence, I felt surprised and insecure when invited to share thoughts at the 2013 Midwest Pilgrimage on the topic of the responsibility of Mormon feminists to the Church and to the world from the perspective of a Relief Society president. When the feminist friends I invited to replace me were unable to attend, I gathered their thoughts, frustrations, and ideas for change. Through the process I referred to myself as a bridge, one who connects. Rarely do I feel fully accepted or part of the groups on either side of the divide between feminists and traditionalists, so I try to span the gap, reaching out to both sides, and saying aloud what I hear muttered in each group.

Midwest Pilgrims likely do not share a single definition of feminist, but I have gained a richness of information and understanding about the term by listening to the variety of ideas and experiences they share. When I was called as Relief Society president, I thought about Ann Stone, one of the original Midwest Pilgrims, and the excitement other Pilgrims and ward members felt when she was called as RS president. I remembered another Pilgrim, Barbara Dixon, seeking out Ann to ask advice and to share her burden during the Pilgrimage soon after Barbara was called as RS president. I hovered at the edge of that conversation for the first few minutes, wanting to hear any advice Ann had to share on any topic. Ever since, I have referred to the advice I heard then, especially since being called as RS president myself. As I began my turn in that role, I looked back to Midwest Pilgrimages, pondering how to represent sisters who spend much of their time in Relief Society feeling out of place, and how to help those sisters feel welcome without alienating other sisters. As I have spoken with sisters through the years, and especially since becoming RS president, I have learned that all sisters want to feel welcome, included, respected, and listened to. We need to offer these courtesies to each other. We need to help create a safe and honest environment, even when—perhaps most especially when—we do not feel welcome, included, respected, or listened to.

For months I have been hand-writing "listen more" on the top of every agenda I create or receive. I try to make phone calls when I have the time to listen more. By listening I am becoming more aware of people and their needs. More importantly, I am learning that frequently people's biggest need is for someone to listen to them, regardless of whether the listener can provide any other service or action. When feminist sisters reach out to and support all women, they provide an example of the support, respect, and inclusion so desperately needed throughout both Relief Society and the world. Listening is a good place to start.

As RS president, I have the added responsibility to function not only as listener but also as a voice for all women, including feminist women, in ward council. I have learned the value of wisdom Chieko Okazaki shared when she attended the 2002 Midwest Pilgrimage. She encouraged maintaining credibility when working on committees by bringing concerns and solutions—not just complaints—to the table, as well as a willingness to negotiate and compromise. She emphasized the importance of keeping one's seat at the table by not allowing one's voice to become too shrill. Having participated in ward councils in various wards led by various bishops while serving in various callings, I have seen council that function at various levels of success. One bishop considered my voice "too shrill" when I commented on an issue related to the youth program that included two of my children. He shut me down, explaining that the issue had nothing to do with me because my calling was not in the youth program, and therefore my comment was inappropriate. It was clear that I had lost my voice at the table, so to help focus my thoughts and avoid making unappreciated comments at future meetings, I knit my way through ward council for the rest of his tenure as bishop.

Currently, I work very well with our bishopric. When my bishop asks where I think a particular sister might best serve and make a useful contribution, he specifically asks me to consider any organization in the ward, not just Relief
Society. I feel comfortable sharing my thoughts about where they might thrive, based on what I learn from or about sisters regarding their abilities, their current situations, and how they feel about their callings. Not all my suggestions are put into action, but the bishopric has repeatedly said the information is valuable and useful as they consider the bigger picture of the whole ward. I have a responsibility to speak on behalf of all sisters, whether they love their callings, are insecure but growing in their callings, are burned out in their callings, or are miserable or nonfunctional in their callings. I do my best to represent sisters whether or not I am personally present in meetings. In addition to giving advice about callings, I have been asked by a member of the bishopric to share potential sacrament meeting topics that would benefit sisters. Now whenever I think of such a topic, I email the bishopric.

I believe that feminist sisters also have a responsibility to observe and share their observations in ways that benefit all sisters and all members of their various communities, both within and beyond the Church. As Relief Society president, I am especially focused on ways to work with the church hierarchy within the established system. Many women prefer to work from outside the system, but we are more likely to become a force for change when we remain active participants in the Church.

As I walked around the historic homes in Nauvoo during the recent Midwest Pilgrimage, I noted that some had belonged to individuals who made significant contributions to the Church and community in Kirtland and Nauvoo, but who did not make the trek west. I wondered why they chose not to continue their association with the Saints, and what additional influence they might have had if they had continued their association. I was reminded of Chieko Okazaki begging the Midwest Pilgrims to stay in the Church, because each time someone from the periphery leaves, the circle gets smaller. Feminist sisters need to be there for others like themselves. It is important to speak boldly enough to let others know who we are and where to find us. This can be done while still being friendly to those who do not share our point of view.

Even when we create a supportive community among our friends or within a ward, it can be challenging to find our place within the broader church context. Although we believe the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is led by revelation, it can be frustrating when we feel Church-wide revelation comes at too slow a pace. At such times I attempt to view the Church with a global perspective, considering how various issues affect sisters in Germany (where I was a missionary), South Africa (where my daughter spent a semester), Italy (where my son is a missionary), Japan (where my husband and brother were missionaries), Guatemala (where a young friend is a missionary), and all other areas no matter how populous or remote. I try to identify ways the Church benefits individual lives. Then I consider how issues that frustrate me may impact others. How would changes I desire affect others around the globe? Could such changes be implemented with sufficient flexibility to adapt to local needs over time? I generate more questions than answers.

As I struggle to increase my global understanding, I focus on the process of personal revelation to help me better comprehend Church-wide revelation. In addition to seeking personal revelation to guide my own decisions, I am learning to request increased understanding of others’ needs. Through this process I realize the importance of understanding others and their situations before taking action. I also realize I can begin to implement changes through my personal actions. As we seek personal revelation to guide our decisions and actions, we need to offer others trust and support in their revelation-guided decisions. Hopefully, as we come to understand and support the process of personal revelation, we will be better able to understand, participate in, and support Church-wide revelation that affects all individual members of the Church.

As we work to welcome, include, accept, respect, support, and listen to each other, we can find guidance in Christ’s example. Though he was often surrounded by crowds of people, he was frequently isolated, teaching a point of view that differed from the traditions and norms of the culture in which he lived. Yet he exemplifies understanding, mercy, and patience, as well as dedication, determination, and strength. He led multitudes while also serving individuals. He accepted all people where they were without compromising his standards, by reaching out to assist them in their journey with him. He instructed Peter to take the gospel to all people, exemplifying not just tolerance but acceptance of all people. The atonement is the greatest demonstration of the depth of Christ’s love. The atonement brings to mind words like believe, forgive, repent, love, communicate, and apply. As we apply our belief in the atonement to offer forgiveness and seek repentance, we develop and communicate Christlike love. Guided by revelation and charity, we have the potential and the responsibility to make a difference not just in the Church and the world, but especially in the lives of individuals.

Based on a talk given at the Midwest Pilgrimage in Nauvoo, Illinois, 20 April 2013.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Hilary Cannon Anderson joins her passions for art, art history, and teaching as an art instructor. Additional titles she embraces include mom, spouse, daughter, sister, friend, hiker, gardener, and fiber artist.
As more sisters answer the call to serve, their stories will be written and shared all over the world—stories about women who are not only cheering and blessing in humanity’s name, but who are leading and teaching in the name of the Lord. | By Erika Anderson, Berkeley, California

There is a medley sung at Especially For Youth, in which the girls sing “As Sisters in Zion” and the boys sing “We’ll Bring the World His Truth,” first separately and then simultaneously. The piece ends with a final chorus of “We are as the army of Helaman...” sung by the boys and girls together. According to arranger Michael Hicks, the music has “touched hearts across the world” (though personally I am EFY-agnostic). As a feminist, however, the gendered message makes me uncomfortable.

The second verse of “As Sisters in Zion” includes the lines: “This is a gift that as sisters we claim: to do whatsoever is gentle and human, to cheer and to bless in humanity’s name.” It seems ridiculous to assert that one half of the population is uniquely endowed with the ability to be human. Being gentle, cheering and blessing others are difficult goals for any teenager; but giving young men the idea that they are at a disadvantage—or worse, that they are excused from even trying to achieve these aims because they do not have this “gift”—needlessly makes things harder.

In the medley, the boys enter with the line: “We have been born as Nephi of old...” As a woman, I sometimes wonder whether I, too, can be like Nephi. Because our books of scripture and General Conference addresses are primarily written by and about men, I have heard feminist women lament that they can’t see themselves in scriptural heroes, and call for more teachings and stories about women. Being a graduate student in the sciences puts me in a somewhat similar situation: nearly all of the foundational discoveries in molecular biology were made by men, and even though the gender ratio of scientists is changing quickly, it seems that keynote addresses at the academic conferences I attend are more likely to be given by men than by women. So I often ask myself: Do I need female role models to show me how to be a
disciple of Christ? Do I need female role models to show me how to be a scientist? Is being a female Christian or a female scientist fundamentally different from being a male Christian or a male scientist?

Do I need female role models to show me how to be a scientist? Is being a female Christian or a female scientist fundamentally different from being a male Christian or a male scientist?

When I read stories about important developments in science, I attribute the dearth of female protagonists to the prevailing culture of the time period in which those discoveries were made. I recognize that I can still learn from the data, no matter what the demographics of the authors. I hope that a similar approach can be applied as we read the scriptures. In the EFY song, the boys sing “We are as the army of Helaman. We have been taught in our youth, and we will be the Lord’s missionaries to bring the world his truth.” These lyrics suggest that in the same way Helaman’s stripling warriors could go to battle with confidence because of the faith they learned from their mothers, young people today can serve as missionaries with similar confidence and faith. I hope that fathers reading the story will aspire to be like the mothers who so effectively shared their testimonies with their sons, and that young women singing the song recognize that they, too, have been prepared to share the gospel with the world.

If we can learn from scriptural or historical figures who are vastly different from ourselves, do we need living role models who look like us? As a scientist who hopes to eventually be a parent, I yearn for examples of people who successfully balance career and family. I have realized, however, that female scientists do not necessarily make the best role models for me simply because they are female. Watching male labmates who plan experiments to fit around their children’s schedules is much more useful to me than the example of women who choose a work-life balance that is all work.

Looking for role models within the Church can seem more constrained. When I was a teenager, my typical Young Women leaders were young wives who stayed home with their children while their husbands went to graduate school. I loved, respected, and admired these women and their choices, but I never saw myself fitting into their mold. Many of the Young Men leaders were probably just the sort of role models I am now looking for—people working to balance their school, family, and church demands—but because those men were never the ones who taught my lessons and planned my activities, it didn’t occur to me to look to them for examples of how to live my own life. As the gender roles of my generation become more flexible than those of our parents, I hope that every young person will be encouraged to seek good role models of both sexes.

With the recent lowering of missionary age for women, increasing numbers of sisters have been “hear[ing] the words our prophet declares: ‘Let each who’s worthy go forth and share.’” Suddenly, thousands of women are having life-changing spiritual experiences in which they feel called of God to go out and serve in a way completely unrelated to their gender or child-bearing capabilities. The first 19-year-old sister missionary in my ward arrived this summer. As the Relief Society president, I recently met with her and her companion. They described a lesson they wanted to present to help ward members focus more on missionary work. I suggested that they would reach the largest audience if they gave this lesson in Relief Society and Elder’s Quorum rather than as an evening fireside, assuring them that the Elders Quorum president (who is a friend of mine) would be fine with them teaching. I hope they follow through with their plan so that those young women can return home with the experience of teaching Elders Quorum, feeling empowered to say things to men when they need to be said.

I can see that increased gender parity in missionary work is already having an effect on the relationship between men and women in the Church. As I listen to the testimonies of men who are the newest converts in my ward, I see that there is now a growing generation of converts who learned the gospel from women, and who view those women as authorities on doctrine and spirituality. Every week I receive emails from three of my female friends who have recently begun their missions. It is wonderful to see these inspiring narratives by and about women being broadly disseminated. As more sisters answer the call to serve, their stories will be written and shared all over the world—stories about women who are not only cheering and blessing in humanity’s name, but who are leading and teaching in the name of the Lord.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Erika Anderson is a graduate student studying cell biology and is currently serving as the Relief Society president in her YSA ward. She is grateful to be from a family of feminists, including her mom and grandma, Hilary Cannon Anderson and Heather Cannon.
THE LABYRINTH

It isn't difficult to see my experience with the labyrinth as a metaphor for the journey of life. Only by walking the labyrinth could I know where it would lead. | By Ann Barrott Wicks, Oxford, Ohio

Though I have lived in Ohio thirty years—arriving the same year Midwest Pilgrims was founded—I didn't learn about the organization until 2012, just in time for the Pilgrimage in Dayton. I had read Exponent II since the late 1970s and wished very much for a community of like-minded friends, so I was thrilled to finally have found this group. I drove to the retreat straight from teaching my classes at Miami University on Friday afternoon, arriving about thirty minutes into the get-acquainted party.

I felt complete acceptance within that diverse, warm group of women, and could describe many wonderful moments at the retreat. But I would like to write about something I experienced alone: a quiet walk through a labyrinth.

The labyrinth at the Bergamo Center, a Marianist retreat on Mount Saint Joseph in Dayton, is near the Our Lady of Lourdes grotto, just beyond the garden. Plain and undecorated, it is a flat circle cut from Midwestern grass. The pattern's perimeter is less than a foot high, so that one can easily see the entire circumference of the maze. The intricacies of the interior pattern, however, cannot be understood without physically following the path. To achieve the meditative benefits, one must take the physical journey.

The path is orderly, but because it is filled with unexpected twists and turns, it must be followed with eyes open. Though the entire circle is visible from start to finish, during the walk it is impossible to predict the directions the path will take.

It isn't difficult to see my experience with the labyrinth as a metaphor for the journey of life. Only by walking the labyrinth could I know where it would lead. Similarly, walking the unpredictable path of mortal life is the only way we come to understand our full existence.

As I moved toward the center of the labyrinth, another Pilgrim was making her way back toward the perimeter. We could see each other, even converse and touch each other. Our paths veered within inches at various points, but they never crossed. I couldn't help but reflect on this oddity. Though others can guide us, reassure us, and describe their feelings, each of us is nonetheless on a singular journey through life.

My experience with the labyrinth did more than afford a comparison to life, however. Walking to the center of the labyrinth required such complete focus that my mind was unable to wander. Time and direction became irrelevant; without realizing it, my everyday anxiety lifted and a feeling of peace and freedom took its place. This came as a complete surprise to me! Emerging from the circle after methodically completing my journey, I felt deep joy.

The concept of the labyrinth is centuries old and has multilayered symbolism across many cultures. It is used in spiritual quests, imaginative literature, and even video games. I have read about it in Greek mythology, seen it on the floors of European cathedrals, and talked to students about the use of mazes in meditative pilgrimage in a Buddhist context. In a recent class, I discussed photos of contemporary artist Cai Guoqiang seated in the center of an exploding labyrinth. I have approached the subject of labyrinths in so many ways, read about them, talked around them, and thought I understood them. But I had never actually walked through one! Now, after my experience at the Bergamo Center, the labyrinth has personal meaning for me. That solitary walk gave me added insight into human thought and the universal yearning for order.

During my first Midwest Pilgrimage, I not only met new friends and had fun; I also learned a new way to find peace.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:
Ann Barrott Wicks was raised in a small Idaho town in the 1960s. Now a professor of Asian art history at Miami University, she is continually surprised that she has the privilege to teach in a field she loves. She and her husband, Bob Wicks, have three grown children and are expecting their third grandchild in February.
PLENTY GOOD ROOM

I never found very good role models in my specific field of study, but the Midwest Pilgrims I’ve met have shown me what it looks like to be a thoughtful, faithful Mormon woman.

By Emily Parker Updegraff, Skokie, Illinois

I moved to Chicago from Provo in the summer of 2000 to start graduate school. I was 22 years old, married less than a year, with a lot to figure out. In my conservative Mormon family, what you do after you marry is have a baby, not start a Ph.D. I don’t mean to overststate my uniqueness; many people have cut a path through new or forbidden territories whose stories make mine seem tame. But it is true I didn’t have any role models. I didn’t personally know any women scientists, and the women professors in my graduate program seemed so different from me. They were mostly childless, and not religious, while my extracurricular life revolved largely around church. As a married person, I also felt like an outsider among my cohort of Ph.D. candidates. But I was able to make a few friends in my new ward, and they invited me to a Midwest Pilgrimage in Rockford, Illinois.

The retreat was a revelation to me. I considered myself a Mormon feminist, but had no idea there were enough of us in the Prairie State to fill a room. Here were dozens of women ranging in age from their 20s to 70s, some from my stake but mostly new to me, who got together every year to be feminists! It wasn’t until I heard these women start speaking that I realized how careful I was about what I said at church. Not inauthentic, just careful. But here, you could say whatever you really felt and no one would judge you for it. Here you could complain if you wanted to and no one would question your faith or your character. It was also okay to just sit and listen.

One important moment for me came at the second retreat I attended. Chieko Okazaki was the keynote speaker, and I was quite in awe of her. She was beautiful and graceful, a former general authority, a published author, and had been a working mother. I was too afraid to go speak to her, but I listened carefully to what she said to the group. Her comment that has stayed with me longest was that if you feel you don’t fit in at church and you leave, the circle gets smaller and less diverse, and it becomes more difficult for the remaining people to feel they have a place there. I am paraphrasing, of course. I wish I had written down her exact words. They were important to me because it was the first time I’d felt that it mattered whether I stayed or not. I mean, of course it would matter to me personally where I chose to live my religious life, but it was the first time I’d heard the idea that my presence or absence could matter to my community. I have since learned that it’s pretty normal to at times feel lonely or that you don’t fit in at church, but in the moments when you do feel that way, it seems like you’re the only one. I’ve thought about Chieko’s words many times.

“Chieko said that if you feel you don’t fit in at church and you leave, the circle gets smaller and less diverse, and it becomes more difficult for the remaining people to feel they have a place there.

I never found very good role models in my specific field of study, but the Midwest Pilgrims I’ve met have shown me what it looks like to be a thoughtful, faithful Mormon woman. Although attending the annual retreat is difficult for me now that I have kids and a husband who works every weekend, it does me good just to know this community of women exists. Whenever I can attend, I know I’ll feel at home there.

A spiritual we often sing at Midwest Pilgrimages goes like this:

Plenty good room, plenty good room,
Plenty good room in my Father’s kingdom.
Plenty good room, plenty good room,
Just choose your seat and sit down.

Sometimes in the Church it feels like there is a seat for the one with the orthodox beliefs, the rock-solid testimony, the spouse and children, or the right ambitions—but not necessarily one for me. But with my sisters at the Midwest Pilgrimage, I know I can always, always find a seat.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Emily Parker Updegraff works full time in university administration and occasionally teaches evening biology classes. She serves her ward as a compassionate service committee member and as the Relief Society pianist. She and her husband have two children, ages 6 and 2.
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The streets of Port au Prince

The peaceful chapel at St. Damien's Hospital in Port au Prince

without breaking into tears. More than four months later, I am still scratching my head trying to make sense of it all.

While it might be fun to share stories of driving through the river, or being yelled at by a guard with a semi-automatic weapon, or being scared by the rats that ran across our path at night, or being served champagne at the convent up in the mountains, I would rather spend the time exploring the question of why was this trip so hard for me. At least, that is the question I have felt it important for me to ponder.

First, a brief background. Haiti, about an hour's plane ride from Miami, occupies the western, smaller portion of the island of Hispaniola, which it shares with the Dominican Republic. It was the first independent nation of the Caribbean and Latin America, the first black-led republic in the world. It was the second republic in the Americas, gaining independence in 1804 as part of a successful slave revolution lasting nearly a decade. These facts most Haitians will recount with pride. Haiti is the most populous full member-state of the Caribbean Community, with a population of just under ten million. It is the poorest country in the Americas as measured by the Human Development Index. Political violence has occurred regularly throughout its history, leading to government instability. Most recently, in February 2004, a coup d'état forced the resignation and exile of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. A provisional government took control with security provided by the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti. Michel Martelly became the current president following a general election in 2011.

The island has had a history of destructive earthquakes. As most of us recall, a 7.0 magnitude earthquake struck Haiti on 12 January 2010 and devastated the capital, Port-au-Prince, where nearly half the country's population lives. The highest reliable death count was estimated at 220,000; Haitian government estimates were higher. The presidential palace, Parliament and many other important structures were destroyed, along with countless homes and businesses, leaving hundreds of thousands of people homeless. The country has yet to recover from that earthquake due to both the severity of the damage and the failures of a government that was ineffective well before it occurred. United States aid organizations have donated $2 billion toward the rebuilding of Haiti. Other organizations from around the world have contributed as well, but sadly, to date few of these promised funds have actually been spent on rebuilding.

Haiti is the poorest nation in the Americas, with a per capita gross income of US$660—less than half the per capita income of Nicaragua, the second poorest country. More than half the population of Haiti subsists on less than US$1 a day. The average Haitian can expect to live for 61 years or less. Over 7 percent of Haitian babies die at birth, and of every 1,000 that survive, 80 will not live to see their first birthday. For every 100,000 births, 523 Haitian mothers die; in Europe, only 8 mothers per 100,000 die in childbirth. Only 50 percent of primary-school age children attend school; approximately 30 percent of those who begin school will not make it to third grade; 60 percent will abandon school before sixth grade. One-third of girls over six never attend school at all. Nearly 40 percent of the population of Haiti can neither read nor write.1

So those are some of the grim statistics. But I will tell you that it is one thing to hear that 50 percent of children are malnourished, and quite another to stand in a room full of babies who are literally dying before your eyes. It is one thing to hear the numbers on childhood and maternal death, but another to stand in the hospital chapel at the funeral of eleven people, three of whom where unnamed babies, all of whom have died since the previous mass. Yet as heavy as the sadness of witnessing such extreme poverty was, it didn't seem to end there. Most of us know about the earthquake that hit Haiti in 2010, but do you know that when I visited three years later, it was still hard to go anywhere without
seeing piles of rubble? Thousands of homes and businesses still have not been rebuilt. We drove past miles of tent cities, tent after tent after endless tent as far as the eye could see. Add to that mix the political instability and extreme violence. During much of my visit, my protection was secured with a semi-automatic weapon. And one doesn’t have to read very much to sense the uncomfortable truth that our nation’s policies have played a not insignificant role in today’s political and economic turmoil in Haiti.²

Since my week in Haiti was to be an immersion trip, we were instructed that we were not there to solve problems or offer solutions. Our “tour guide,” if you will, the nun who lives in Port au Prince, was the mastermind behind the trip. Sr. Judy repeatedly told us that her goal was to see to it that we felt helpless. (She succeeded!) She wanted us to experience what the Haitians experience. She wanted us to come as learners, not as problem solvers. This is a difficult task for any American, but especially for me; as an engineer, solving problems is what I do. I was quickly reprimanded just for suggesting that the hospital open a breast-milk bank! At many times throughout the trip I felt like a voyeur. It was difficult to witness so much suffering and yet feel helpless to alleviate any of it. I think when we see suffering, often we are tempted to react with one of the following two extremes: Either we think of ourselves as saviors, insisting that if they would just let us in there to fix things, we could make it all better; or we choose to close our eyes, stick our heads in the sand and ignore it. After all, how does one live in peace after seeing such suffering?

Problems so vast and so deep lead one to wonder where God is in the midst of it all.

Problems so vast and so deep lead one to wonder where God is in the midst of it all. Indeed, the nuns leading the trip liked to ask us to reflect each night on the question, “Where did you see God today?” By the third night, I was greatly relieved when a fellow traveler seemed to be reading my mind and blurted out, “You know, sister, that is the question I have been asking myself all day. Where is God? Because it sure doesn’t seem to me like God is here!”

As I have wrestled with this since I have been home, I have looked to Fr. Rick Frechette, who is both a Catholic priest and a medical doctor. He has lived and labored in Haiti for over 25 years. We spent several days at St. Damien’s, the children’s hospital he opened. While I am not one for hero worship, I will say that this man truly moves me. He was the recipient of the 2012 Opus Prize, which “acknowledges individuals and their organizations that are largely unsung yet provide exceptional and unique responses to difficult social problems in the world’s poorest communities.”³ If you can, take a moment now while reading this to visit http://bit.ly/17sYVFQ, where Fr. Rick recounts with vivid humility an incident in which he saw God at work in a particularly desperate situation. He attests to the pain, power and change of the atonement. In sharing his wrenching story he reminds all Christians:

[T]his is really the point of our faith. That that terrible thing that happened to our Lord, that an assassination, a brutal assassination, that terrible thing, as burdensome as it was, became a blessing. . . . When God finds situations intolerable, that is what God does. If you do your best to bring God into it, which is God’s way, it has to be our own free will. For some reason it is really important to God that we help God to do it. When we will go to the place of someone’s burden and when we are not afraid to face our own burden with somebody else, then God knows what to do from there. It becomes a place of blessing.

Since then we always call that the “counter sign.” If it is wrong, you do the right thing and you do it immediately. Because it unleashes power in people and you don’t know what change of thinking or change of heart it might start.⁴

I believe I saw this principle at work in my own ward earlier this year. It’s not a secret to anyone who knows me that fast and testimony meetings are not my favorite Sundays. As I have wrestled with my own “earthquake” of faith, I find it far less than helpful to hear bold claims of certainty when the tremors of life have left me searching for solid footing. But I am glad I didn’t choose to stay away from fast and testimony meeting this past January, because I felt privileged to be in my ward that day. The meeting began with a husband and wife sharing their feelings about the recent health scares with their newborn son. Then a more seasoned sister shared a tragic story about her neighbor’s twenty-year-old daughter. Another young mother, whose sister had just given birth to a stillborn (the second in their extended family in under a year), cried as she bore witness to the fact that she knows “Sunday will come,”⁵ despite how very far away it seemed to her at the moment. And then a brother shared how, in his own sadness, he had turned to the Lord to ask for help when he was directed to serve those he home taught. While it might have been easy to allow the sadness of the meeting to overwhelm me, I did not experience the meeting as burdensome at all. Instead, I was touched by the raw honesty of those who stood at the pulpit. I was moved by their willingness to share their suffering. I was inspired by their trust that this was a safe place for them to do that. It was clear that they felt embraced by their community and that somehow they knew that it was in their willingness to face their burden with us, that God would be present.
No words could have said what their broken hearts spoke to my spirit. There is pain and suffering in our world. It is all around us. At times the suffering is so immense that our hearts cry out in anguish, echoing the words of the Savior, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" But we must believe in the ending of that story: that even our darkest hours can be transformed into blessings, that when together we lay our brokenness on the altar, somehow, God will make us whole.

This experience reminded me of a journal entry I wrote several years ago, after attending a Catholic mass:

For the thousands of masses I have sat through, I have never been so struck by the "breaking of the bread." I mean obviously I have seen it many, many times. But this time it was as if that was the only thing that seemed to happen. Even the sound of it. I don't ever remember hearing such a crystal clear snap before. But each time the priest broke the wafer, with each cracking snap, I was painfully aware of the symbolism of breaking something. And I am not sure where that leads me. Am I broken? Am I to remember Christ broken? Is being broken requisite to being shared? This is the altar where we make our sacrifice. And what was whole is now broken. So I am feeling pretty broken. OK, what do I do with this? We never see it made whole again. Is that just what we are to hope for in the resurrection? That we will be made whole again, but for now, we are just broken. I don't know. No matter what I decide there is loss. Maybe that was the point today. This is a broken mess and there is no way to put it back together again. All I have left to do is put it on the altar.

This is the true religion that I believe St. James tells us about. At least for me, this is the beauty that Christianity offers to the world: that somehow in this shared brokenness we will be redeemed. I am grateful that I was able to be at my ward that Sunday to experience church in such a real and living way.

Actress Madeline Stowe received an award from the Passionists, Fr. Rick's order, for the work she had done in Haiti. In her acceptance speech, she shared an email exchange she had had with Fr. Rick. She had written: "I don't know about things like God. But I have seen things. Faith at work in surprising ways. Maybe we see the intangible by being with one another and reaching out to needful strangers and by taking their strong hands. They rid us of our own aloneness and give us much in return. I think of the dead in the morgue and of the living all around us and how we are all woven together."

Fr. Rick replied: "The light radiated by this mystery is subtle but you know it. The bonds of the invisible world are very deep and very mysterious. And you are already bonded to the people in the morgue in a real way. And you are giving them strength and they are pointing you to a deep reality and keeping you focused on it. That margins and exclusions and loneliness produce hell. And friendship and solidarity produce heaven. Even in the most unbearable circumstance. This is heaven. You know it already. And heaven is only God's light."

Many of us will never visit Haiti. None of us holds the magic bullet to solve the magnitude of troubles around us. None of us is capable of avoiding suffering even in our own lives. As I have faced my own helplessness, my solace is that each of us is capable of easing one another's burdens. It starts right now with those closest to us, but it ought to extend to those outside our comfort zones.

In doing so we are not merely mirrors of God's love but bearers of His torch, so that not only His light, but the warmth of His love may drive away the cold and darkness in our world. I lean on Jesus Christ, through whose very life and death is our perfect example of suffering turned into blessing.

Based on a talk given at the Midwest Pilgrimage in Nauvoo, Illinois, 21 April 2013.

2 Google Bill Clinton's apology to Haiti to learn how even a well-intentioned U.S. policy destroyed Haitian rice farming.
3 Learn more about Fr. Rick and the prize at www.opusprize.org/winners/12_Frenchette.cfm. You will be inspired.
4 Transcribed by the author from www.youtube.com/watch?v=KWyJ066xxXc.
5 She was referring to a conference talk about the resurrection given by Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin, October 2006 (see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zlz5RvmWN4s).
6 I credit Steve Barwick, a member of my ward, with this eloquent image.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Lynn Ameen Rollins lives in the suburbs of Cleveland, Ohio, with her husband and four children. She loves to travel, cook, eat, read, learn, run, coach middle school kids for science Olympiads, and of course, attend Midwest Pilgrimages!
A TOUCHING STORY

It was hard having unrighteous parents. It was my burden to carry. But I was trying to be like Jesus, so I forgave them and, invoking free agency, finally extracted a promise that if I still wanted to take seminary when I got to Provo High, I could. | By Barbara Hart Dixon, Lafayette, Indiana

In 1965, most Mormon kids living in Provo started seminary in ninth grade. But most kids didn't have my parents. Yes, Daddy was a BYU professor, but he was also a forward-thinking liberal. Once, when I asked why he was the only one in his large family who was a Democrat, he responded with unexpected heat: “People were starving, Barbara, and Herbert Hoover didn't want to do anything about it!” Mommy, a convert to the Church who was trying her best to squeeze into the role of faculty wife, would have been happier living in Berkeley or New York than in conservative Provo. And it wasn't just their politics that were liberal. My parents questioned doctrine, debated what they heard in conference talks, and protested on my brother's behalf when the bishop wouldn't let him pass the sacrament unless he wore a white shirt.

Any teenager worth her salt wants to rebel, so since my parents leaned so far to the left, I rebelled by choosing the "right." How I longed for a quiet, docile mother who never questioned anything from the pulpit, or a father who didn't read Agatha Christie mysteries in church when he didn't like the talks.

As I looked forward to ninth grade, I also longed to take seminary. Jane, Marjean, and all of the other girls in my Beehive class were signing up, and I was aching to go too. The seminary building was right across from Farrer Junior High, and I dearly wanted to join the students who crossed the street every day to hear Brother Farley or Brother James preach the orthodox religion.

"Not on your life!" Mommy pronounced as soon as she saw the permission slip.

"But why not? It's what I'm supposed to do! The prophet wants it."

"Well, if the prophet wants it, he should have the Church stop hiring kooks," she retorted.

"Eleanor!" Daddy said from across the table, with a frown.

"You know it's true, Ed. I've heard stories about what they do in those classes. Some of the teachers are certifiable."

It didn't help that neither of my older brothers had attended seminary. But I was undeterred. I figured I was quite a bit more righteous than they were.

"You may not take the class," Mommy insisted. "I won't sign the paper. And neither will your father," she said, giving him a significant look.

It was hard having unrighteous parents. It was my burden to carry. But I was trying to be like Jesus, so I forgave them and, invoking free agency, finally extracted a promise that if I still wanted to take seminary when I got to Provo High, I could.

How I envied my ninth-grade classmates who retold their seminary teachers' stories of teenagers who killed themselves after playing with a Ouija board; bad girls who got pregnant out of wedlock and had to be sent away until their babies were born and safely adopted by nice couples who could raise them in the Church; or visitations by long-dead relatives who led them to documents showing their birthplace or marriage date so that they could have their temple work done. One day that year I heard that Brother Farley had prophesied that my classmate, Jeffrey Ochoa, would one day be an apostle, if he lived worthy! Hard to believe, considering what a bad life Jeffrey was leading at the time. Could he change that much, I wondered?

Obviously, I was missing a lot of useful information, so it was with great anticipation that I looked forward to tenth grade at Provo High School and studying the Old Testament with Brother Wright. Brother Wright was a youngish man, still in his twenties. I didn't know what to expect, but I was taken aback when the whole first class period was taken up with a discussion of whether Adam had a belly button. I guess it was important to Brother Wright to know whether God had just created him out of nothing, or if he was somehow created by being born. It didn't make much sense to me, and I really didn't care either way, but it seemed to interest other people in the class.

I knew that telling my parents anything at all about what we did in seminary would earn me a first-class ticket right out of there, so I kept my mouth shut and hoped they wouldn't inquire about Brother Wright's lessons.

Of course they did. "What did you talk about in seminary?" Mommy would ask, so often I had to make up lengthy stories about class discussions. "Oh, we just covered the basics," I would insist. "You know, God is great and good, we're supposed to be nice and go the second mile—just that kind of stuff." For good measure, I frequently added something about the importance of helping the poor or improving the plight of the worker.

"Well, okay," Mommy would sniff, "but let me know if they start in on any of the funny stuff."

As it turned out, the "funny stuff" was Brother Wright's bread and butter. And like bread and butter, it was served every day. He regaled us with stories about the Three Nephites, still wandering the world helping people who had flat tires in the desert. I tingled when he told us about the missionaries who kicked the dust off their feet in front of a house that wouldn't let them in, and then found out that everybody in the house came down with a mysterious ailment that killed them. I thrilled when he told us about Satan lodging in some poor unsuspecting body, and the priesthood blessing that finally commanded him to depart. Brother Wright always seemed to know the person who knew the person these things had happened to. It was exhilarating stuff.

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One day Brother Wright went a different direction and spent most of the class period talking about the evils of masturbation. It polluted your mind, he said. It soiled your thoughts, and generally was a practice that would lead you straight to hell. There was only one problem for me: I had no idea what he was talking about. Masturbation was a word I didn’t know. I could tell it was a terrible thing, and I was horrified that I might be doing it and not even realize it. (Despite the fact that I read all the time and had free access to any book in our house—including Lady Chatterley’s Lover—I was still incredibly naïve.) So what did this new word mean? I had to know.

I timidly raised my hand.

“Brother Wright,” I said. “What is it?”

“What is?” he responded.

Hesitating, I managed to say, “Masturbation?”

The whole class tittered.

“Barbara Hart,” he said, looking at me sternly, “you know perfectly well what I am talking about, and don’t try to get everyone laughing. Being class clown is not appropriate for a young lady—or for any child of God.”

The class was silent, and I was humiliated. I turned a deep shade of purple and tried not to cry. I didn’t know it then, but more than twenty years would pass before I would be able to say the word masturbation out loud.

In spite of my embarrassment, I had to find out what that word meant. If I didn’t even know whether I was committing this grievous sin, how could I repent?

I started my quest for knowledge in Daddy’s office after school. I wasn’t sure how masturbation was spelled, but when it wasn’t m-a-s-t-e-r, I went down the page and there it was. Our 1946 edition of Webster’s had not let me down—or so I thought, until I read the two-word definition: “Self-pollution.” What? That made no sense to me—particularly because I read it so fast that I thought it said “Self-pollination.” How did you pollinate yourself? Did it have something to do with bees? I was totally stuck, and more confused than ever.

It took me two more days to get up the courage to approach Mommy. “Brother Wright was talking about something we’re not supposed to do,” I said, “and I don’t know what it is, so I’m not sure if I am doing it.”

“Brother Wright should go soak his head,” she responded. “I knew I didn’t want you taking those classes from fanatics who can’t get jobs anywhere else. What was it he said you shouldn’t do?”

I tried to say the word, but the embarrassment of the classroom washed over me, and I couldn’t bring myself to form the sounds.

“Try,” Mommy said.

“I can’t,” I responded tearfully.

“Barbara, I’m your mother—just tell me what he said,” she said earnestly.

“I can’t.”

“Do you think you could write it on a piece of paper?”

I thought I could do that—I now knew how to spell it, after all. And I was desperate to know what it meant!

Finally I agreed. I would write the name of the horrible sin on a piece of paper, put it under my pillow, and take a walk around the block. While I was gone, Mommy would read it, and tell me what it was when I got back.

So off I went to write down that word. That word.

I walked around the block in a haze of misery, embarrassed beyond what I thought was humanly possible. When I came back to the house Mommy was clearly angry—but I was quickly relieved to see that she wasn’t angry at me.

“Who does he think he is?” she kept repeating.

She sat me down in the dining room and began.

“Barbara, masturbation means touching your own body for pleasure, and it’s normal. Brother Wright is a jackass and he has no business talking about that in a Bible class. I’m going to call Salt Lake and complain.”

“No, no, no!” I begged. My problem had suddenly gotten worse. If I got Brother Wright in trouble, the other kids would know, and they would hate me because everybody loved him!

“Please,” I said, “don’t call.”

“All right,” she finally agreed when she saw my agony. “But remember—it’s normal; you don’t have to be ashamed if you do that.”

At that point in my life, I had not yet heard the term cognitive dissonance. Neither had I already written a dissertation chapter on ambiguity, nor could I possibly have imagined the adult me who would tell my bishop that if he asked my children about masturbation he could no longer have personal interviews with them. All that was in my future. So when I heard my mother’s words that day, the teenage me simply nodded, doing my best to pretend to agree. But I was pretty sure that once again my parents were on the fringe. Brother Wright was, like his name, absolutely right, and Mommy was dead wrong.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Barbara Hart Dixon is associate dean for administration in the College of Liberal Arts at Purdue University. She has a BA from Brigham Young University and an MA and PhD from Purdue University, all in English lit. Her hobbies include stalking her three children on Facebook, looking up words in dictionaries, playing competitive Scrabble, and finishing In Our Lovely Deseret, a memoir about growing up in Utah.
At the recent Midwest Pilgrims retreat in Nauvoo, Illinois, I had the opportunity to listen to a fascinating talk by Linda King Newell, co-biographer of Emma Smith, first wife of LDS founding prophet Joseph Smith, Jr.

In 1984, Linda wrote, with Valeen Tippetts Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith*, which has stood for nearly three decades as the definitive biography of Emma. Until that time, Emma had been largely written out of official LDS history. In the early 1970s, when the two authors began piecing together Emma’s life, there was only one small manila folder about her in the entire LDS Archives.

One item in that folder was a photograph of Emma’s adopted daughter Julia, mislabeled as Emma herself. Other than a few other references to her being Joseph’s wife and first president of the Relief Society, that was it.

One book about Emma was in print, a biographical novel by RLDS writer Margaret Gibson, *Emma Smith, the Elect Lady* (1954)—truly a work of fiction, according to Linda. In 1978 another publication appeared, a pamphlet by Erwin E. Wirkus, *Judge Me Dear Reader*. This sympathetic view of Emma excused her actions by suggesting that she had lost her mind and should be forgiven.

So, before Linda and Valeen published their book, existing materials about Mormonism’s First Lady were unfair or inaccurate. The real Emma had disappeared. Why?

We all use history to suit our purposes, and Emma simply did not suit the purposes of the LDS Church in the years following her husband’s death.

It wasn’t just that she was the mother of a boy whom many Saints felt to be Smith’s rightful prophetic heir, rather than Brigham Young.

It wasn’t just that she clashed with Young so severely that he once claimed that “more hell was never wrapped up in any human being than there is in her.”

And it wasn’t just that her son became the leader of a rival church, coalescing the support of many former Mormons who had stayed behind in the Midwest.

It was that she hated polygamy and flatly refused to countenance its presence among the Mormon people.

Emma’s disappearance from LDS history was so total that Linda says when she and Val co-authored an article about her for the *Ensign* in 1979, it was the first writing about her to appear in any official church publication in 113 years.
It’s a beautiful article, but it’s not a complete one; polygamy is not mentioned once anywhere—but Linda and Val were told in advance that Church policy did not permit that no-no subject on the pages of its official publications. That, nearly a century after the Church began distancing itself from polygamy.

The biography Linda and Valeen published with Doubleday several years later detailed Joseph’s many polygamous alliances, his repeated lies to Emma about those marriages, and her conflicts with his plural wives—including a much-debated stair-pushing catfight with Eliza R. Snow. It’s an outstanding and award-winning biography that was the product of countless hours of primary research.

The biography was an instant commercial success, selling out its first two printings. At the time of the third printing, however, Linda received word that the bishop of a friend’s ward had received a call from a higher-up in Salt Lake who said that “two girls” had written a book about Emma Smith, and they were not to encourage the sale of the book by inviting the authors to speak in their ward. When pressed, Linda’s bishop admitted that he, too, had received a similar call. The authors were alarmed, though Linda was comforted by her stake president, who told her, “You are my parishioner, and I will see you through this no matter how long it takes.”

It turned out that such calls had gone out to bishops and stake presidents in Utah, Idaho, and Arizona, where Val lived. Within three weeks, the press got wind of the authors’ ecclesiastical silencing and began to report about it—thereby tripling sales of the book.

Linda requested and was granted a meeting with some general authorities, including Dallin Oaks, to discuss the ban and discover what aspects of the book had been found objectionable. According to Linda, when they asked Elder Oaks if he had read the biography, he said that he had read the chapters containing paragraphs that others had complained about, and had read some other chapters in the middle. He found that the authors’ views of Joseph Smith were “nontraditional.”

Nontraditional. Which is another way of saying that a particular view of history does not suit institutional needs in the moment.

In the past three decades, more has been published about Emma Smith in official Church channels, including Daughters in My Kingdom (2011), which mentions her very positively as the founder of the Relief Society, and the Gospel Doctrine manual for Church history, which holds her up as an example—somewhat reproachfully—of how to support one’s spouse.

It’s an improvement that she’s discussed at all. But the way Emma’s story is carefully sculpted reveals as much about gender expectations and religious norms in our own era as it did when Brigham Young declared her mormona non grata. For example, in the support materials for the Joseph Smith manual, polygamy is once again nowhere mentioned. If that were the only document people used to learn about Joseph Smith and his life, they would naturally assume that he was married once, to Emma, and not to approximately three dozen other women.

The way that current Church materials deal with Emma’s conflict with Brigham Young is . . . to ignore it entirely. According to the official narrative, Emma stayed behind in Nauvoo rather than joining the majority of the Saints in Utah because she was a widow caring for five young children and Joseph’s aging mother, not because she believed that, as she expressed it at the time, “the Twelve have made bogus of it.”

Although she never lost her faith in the Mormon religion and in the sacred nature of the Book of Mormon, she had no testimony of Brigham Young and other polygamous LDS leaders.

What’s especially interesting to me about the unfolding historiography of Emma Smith is that she herself would have been happy with the disappearance of polygamy and Joseph’s other wives from Mormonism’s official party line. This is exactly what she had tried to institute herself as a theological agent in her own right, so much so that when the Reorganization was founded in the 1860s she declared that Joseph had never been married to anyone but herself. Emma knew better, but she also knew that a polygamous history would not serve needs of her son, Joseph III, in his role as president and prophet of the Reorganization.

In a remarkable twist of irony, her version of history is increasingly the LDS Church’s as well.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

JANA RIESS is the author of the memoir Flanking Sainthood as well as The Twible: All the Chapters of the Bible in 140 Characters or Less . . . Now With 68% More Humor! and several other books. She holds degrees from Wellesley College, Princeton Theological Seminary, and Columbia University. She currently serves in the Primary in the Cincinnati (Ohio) Ward.

LINDA KING NEWELL graduated from Utah State University. She has authored or coauthored four books, including the prize winning biography Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith, and written over two dozen articles. She and Jack have four children and nine grandchildren.
GETTING MY ARTIST’S LICENSE

My assumption that everything had to be perfect flew out the window and into the sky. I started letting go. I became more confident as I began trusting my instinct and eye. I felt so free! With no design client to consult, I used my “artist’s license.” | By Sally Marsh Haglund, Glenview, Illinois

Spending the day with my father at “the shop,” the family-owned silk screen printing company, was a multisensory adventure for me as a child. Smelling emulsions in the cavernous dark room, hearing the percussive sounds of the large printing presses, handling the different weights of paper, and watching my dad carve out “negative space” around lettering with an X-Acto knife fascinated me. As did the “morgue,” a resource file cabinet bursting with typeface styles and images.

Playtime at home consisted of cutting, pasting and coloring: creating new ensembles for a Hayley Mills paper doll, complete with shift dress, hat, gloves and bag; adorning little felt hats for a Mary Poppins doll with feathers, colorful posies and ribbons; furnishing cardboard-box doll houses with small boxes and other objects I “upcycled” into beds, chairs and tables. Another favorite pastime was configuring dominoes over and over to create different house plans, and using small plastic furnishings (that showed signs the dog also liked playing with them) to establish rooms.

Later, when I needed to declare a major at Brigham Young University, my affection for X-Acto knives, typefaces and paper prompted me to study graphic design. My passion for space planning (with dominos, my first design tool), as well as for the limitless colors, patterns and textures inherent in fabrics, eventually led to a bachelor of arts degree in interior design.

Chicago, a mecca for lovers of architecture and design, became my home after I was married. Being able to attend the Merchandise Mart’s presentations and design seminars was a definite perk. Fabric manufacturers distributed gorgeous full-color brochures that enticed designers to specify their chintz or mohair—I kept them all. Years later, I found that I couldn’t purge those collections of color, pattern and textural images on heavy paper from my files.

I stopped working as an interior designer to be home full time with my children. An ovarian cancer diagnosis when I was a young mother required me to slow almost to a halt. Quilting scratched my color, pattern and fabric itch during that time.

When my oldest child approached her senior year in high school, an alarm sounded in my mind and pulsated in my heart. What next? A local life-planning class geared for “women at turning points” helped me resolve the feeling that I should return to design, even though I didn’t feel the same level of interest in it as I once had. Introducing myself the first day of class, I said, “My first love is art!” I realized that it was a true statement, but art was something I never considered pursuing—until then.

The life-planning class provided two hours each week, in a quiet place with no distractions, to think about what I really wanted—a rare opportunity for most women. Most of us in the class felt uncomfortable at first. Figuring out what we wanted to do with our lives was much harder than we had imagined. Establishing our values was the very first exercise. We were given an unlimited supply of butcher paper and told to list every single thing we
valued. In the next class, each of us had to reduce that list to the ten things we valued most. Then five. Then three?! Such soul searching and personal excavation brought tears and anguish to some. The refining process was painful.

Having decided to explore my love of art by creating rather than just appreciating, I signed up for a painting class. After my first session, the thought, “What was I thinking?” almost put an end to that pursuit; however, my passion for color, pattern and art moved me to continue studying. I read books. I viewed every “how to paint” video in the library. But all the notes about different art techniques, terms, and tools that I carefully wrote and alphabetized by topic eventually accumulated dust, because I found the only way to learn was by doing. I also sought out and found excellent teachers who taught me to first see, then draw, then paint.

My early paintings were representational; faithfully portraying the scene or image which inspired my work was the top priority. Gradually I began to see more. My skills improved. While studying with an artist who became my mentor, I finally internalized the words he kept repeating: “There are no rules,” and “Don't think, paint!” I got it. My assumption that everything had to be perfect flew out the window and into the sky. I started letting go. I became more confident as I began trusting my instinct and eye. I felt so free! With no design client to consult, I used my “artist's license.”

Reaching beyond perceived rules, I painted shoes deep violet; a hat: Prussian blue and vat orange, with a few strokes of medium magenta.

I began painting more intuitively. My mentor encouraged me to create more texture on the canvas. He suggested using paper. My mind immediately went to the file cabinet and all the fabric brochures. I used them, tearing and pasting, to first build a collage on the canvas. Inspired by historical subject matter, I began painting women in period dress with a bright color twist. I applied thick paint in some areas and glazed others so print and images could peek through. Interesting patterns emerged. My passions were cohabiting one surface, and they seemed comfortable and happy together! I felt happy and stunned. My life was making sense. And saving cool paper for years (not hoarding it, of course)—that was brilliant!

The combination of all of my passions on canvas appealed to people. The positive comments I received about my compositions, color palette and subject matter amazed me. When a friend said she was happy to see that my women had bodies—“even hips!”—I realized that I had unwittingly painted my own classic pear shape. It’s not uncommon for artists to unintentionally paint themselves. My unconscious departure from depicting the perfect body continues to empower me in painting real women.
About a year ago, I was drawn to a photo in National Geographic of a real nineteenth-century woman, Jean Pond Miner (who may or may not have been a “pear”—crinoline and empire waists are so kind to pear shapes!). In the photo, she is sculpting a piece for Chicago’s 1893 World Columbian Exposition. That a woman in that era would receive a commission to create something for such an epic event astounded me. I painted Ms. Miner sculpting this monumental statue of a woman, entitled “Forward.” Months later, I learned of a juried show at a Chicago gallery. Submissions of work “inspired by” another artist were requested. My painting was completed, even varnished, so I submitted it as my entry. “Jean Pond, Forward” was accepted into the show.

I am amazed that my “I love art” statement at a life-planning class is what moved me out of my comfort zone. Though my first steps were apprehensive, I kept moving forward. I am amazed that my “I love art” statement at a life-planning class is what moved me out of my comfort zone. Though my first steps were apprehensive, I kept moving forward. I learned to paint from my internal organs and not from my brain. I learned that doing is better than reading about doing. Painting hours every day, I found my “voice.” It resonates with echoes of my past experiences: The awareness of negative and positive space I learned at my dad’s shop. The hours of unplugged playtime, using my hands to cut and paste. The dominos. Art history study. Interior design work. Travel. All are reflected in my personal “art form” as my interests develop and passions flourish.

When you venture out of a comfortable and predictable place to try something your heart inspires you to do, people unexpectedly appear to help you. And as you work to define and refine the dream, you will discover a happy, strangely familiar place.

Jean Pond, Forward, 48 x 24, mixed media

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Sally Marsh Haglund’s favorite family members are her husband, two children, and two dogs. Baseball stadiums, art museums, and dog parks are among her favorite places.
Imagine with me some of the workshops we might choose from at a future Mormon women’s retreat.

By Libby Potter Boss, Belmont, Massachusetts

My oldest daughter, Beth, was baptized last spring. She has never known a world without cell phones, without Google, or without TV shows that can pause. She has never known a world without Feminist Mormon Housewives, and for nearly as long as she has been able to read she has seen *Exponent II* in our stack of magazines. In April, she watched two women act as voice for the entire Church in prayer.

I’ve promised her that she can come to a Mormon women’s retreat with me when she’s eighteen. So I’m going to invite you to come with me ten years into the future, when Beth comes to her first Midwest Pilgrimage in 2023. Imagine with me, if you will, some of the workshops she’ll have to choose among:

1. **Do Girls Really Have to Wear White Dresses to Pass the Sacrament?**
   Exploring some of the inexplicable issues in Mormon culture.

2. **Out of the Mountains and Onto the Web**
   Now that all Church archives are online (though there are rumors that a few things have still been held back) an assistant Church historian will talk about the process of transparency and the value of really looking at our past.

3. **Equalizing Budgets**
   What to do when one ward’s combined youth go rock climbing and another ward’s youth get a video game marathon in the church gym.

4. **Deborah and Barak: How Women’s Church Leadership Roles Inform Political Roles**
   Should you run for state representative before becoming a bishop—or at least a PTA president?

5. **Open Your Mouth!**
   Giving blessings that come from the lord, not from your mother heart.

6. **Divinity Studies for a Lay Ministry**
   A panel discussion about how graduate studies in religion can help women and men better serve their wards, featuring a Catholic priestess, two female Protestant ministers, and of course our keynote speaker, Sister Jana K. Riess of the Seventy.

7. **Shadow Leadership**
   Sister Tania R. Lyon, recently returned from Russia where she’s been serving as the first acknowledged female mission president, will lead a discussion on unofficial or “shadow” leadership and how her very capable husband was able to contribute in the field, despite not speaking the language when they arrived in-country.

8. **Petitioning for a Woman Apostle: Will It Do Any Good?**
   A look at the successes and failures of Mormon feminist activism.

9. **Sealings and the Glass Ceiling**
   Theologically, is there room for gay and lesbian couples to be married in the temple, and what does that mean for the future?

10. **Discovering and Worshiping Our Mother in Heaven**
    (Because in 2023 we will still be talking about Mother in Heaven.)

Thank you for all being here to welcome Beth as a fellow Pilgrim. By the way, she has already received her mission call—though I have to say that I think sending missionaries at age eighteen is really too young; even for girls, who are usually a little more mature than the boys. I’d like to see the mission age raised to twenty, as was just done for Elders at the last general conference.

*Based on a presentation given at the Midwest Pilgrimage in Nauvoo, Illinois, 20 April 2013*

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

Libby Potter Boss writes for the Exponent blog and looks forward to a future when her two gifted and capable daughters are able to contribute as much to the kingdom as her brilliant and creative son.
THE INCIDENT

This three-part story in two-part harmony is the clearest example I have of how our being honest about our parenting failures helps us all. | By Kelly Merrill Austin, Loveland, Ohio

Even now, fifteen years later, I’m still unsettled by The Incident. While not criminal, it is clearly not my finest parenting hour. And it still stings. The shame. The horror. The Mother Guilt.

Last summer, I was forced to revisit this moment. I had reconnected via Facebook with one of my former Young Women. (After serving as YW president for two and a half years, they will always be “my” girls.) We’ll call her Lizzie. She’s grown now, has served in the military, married, had two children, has divorced, and is now a single mom. Life has been good to her. It has also been hard—like it is for all of us.

I noticed Lizzie had been posting about the struggles she was experiencing with her three-year-old. So I sent her a piece I wrote over a decade ago about The Incident. At that time, Lizzie’s family had suddenly decided to move to another state, right at the end of the school year. In an effort to make sure Lizzie could attend girls’ camp, youth conference, and high adventure, my family had invited her to live with us—six weeks, all told. I was glad to do it—I still am.

Her stay with us was quite a learning experience. And that is the story I tell: from me then, from me now, and from Lizzie now—in both of our voices. This three-part story in two-part harmony is the clearest example I have of how our being honest about our parenting failures helps us all.

It had been a rough day, to say the least. Actually, it had been a rough summer. I was then the mother of two boys, ages nine and four. We had living with us at the time one of my young women. Lizzie was fourteen, and the only member of her family to attend church. Each week, leaders drove her to church and to midweek activities. Her testimony and determination were amazing to behold. She inspired all of us.

When her family decided to leave so suddenly, I jumped at the chance to give her a stable place to stay for a few weeks. But I knew we were in trouble when, on the way to my house, she confessed: “I’ll be so glad to see what a ‘normal’ family lives like.” I tried explaining that her expectations were too high, that normal families still had conflict, trial, even contention. She said she understood, but I knew she didn’t. I also knew it was the one lesson she would inevitably learn from us.

My point began to be made on one of the first nights of her stay. Bedtime was not pretty. As usual, I don’t remember the particular conflict now, but I do remember it ending with raised voices, frustration, doors slamming, and maybe a few tears. After I tucked the boys into bed, I found Lizzie on the couch, looking a bit stunned. I reassured her, “Welcome to a ‘normal’ family!” She was not amused.

A week or two later, she spent the afternoon babysitting at another YW leader’s house. The older kids were doing homework—but mostly tormenting, arguing with and annoying one another—around the table when their mother came home. Lizzie looked at her and exclaimed, “Between you and the Austins, my idea of the perfect family is ruined!” We were progressing, I thought. But still Lizzie clung to hope.

Another day, we were talking in the driveway to another leader. She was confessing a horrible day with her children, and her not-so-perfect parental response. Lizzie, stunned, turned to her and said, “You mean YOU yell at your kids, too?” Her last hope for The Perfect Mormon Mom had crumbled.

Kelly, I’m both laughing and crying as I read this. Laughing because I can clearly picture my fourteen-year-old self, with all of my “castles in the air” fantasies about normal LDS families. Sadly I did NOT learn this lesson at fourteen.

But the pinnacle of her education, the crux of my unavoidable lesson to her, came on the day of The Incident. I had spent the morning cracking the whip over my oldest son, Alex, who was supposed to be cleaning out the van. Each time I went to inspect it, I strained to see signs—any signs—of progress, though he assured me he had worked hard. I finally became so exasperated I slammed the kitchen door to the garage and locked it. He rang the front doorbell a few minutes later, sheepishly, finally having finished his task.

Almost immediately, my youngest son, Drew, and his two friends erupted upstairs. I was babysitting a friend’s two daughters so she, pregnant with her third, could rest. Drew threw something and accidentally hit Maggie. In his desperation to apologize to the sobbing girl, he was screaming “I’m sorry!” at the top of his lungs, crying, and finally pounding his head on the wall. After making sure Maggie was okay, I tried to calm him, but he was inconsolable as long as Maggie was. I know Maggie pretty well, and I knew that
she has a good deal of the dramatist in her. I turned to address (and hopefully squelch) Maggie’s theatrics, only to find that she had climbed up on Lizzie’s lap for sympathy—which Lizzie was willingly lavishing.

I sat Drew on a chair to keep him from banging his head on the floor or walls, amid cries of “I’m sorry. I’m SORRY!” Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Maggie’s younger sister Emma climb onto Lizzie’s lap, hoping to cash in on some of this attention. Lizzie obliged, stroking both girls and cooing softly.

That was it. I turned away from Drew (big mistake) and snapped, “Lizzie, you’re not helping. Maggie, you’re fine.” True to form, Maggie nodded, sniffed, and immediately stopped crying. Both girls climbed off Lizzie’s lap and ran off to play.

I turned back to Drew—a moment too late. He had climbed behind the chair, was rearing his head back, and let it fly just as I turned to him. I suppose he thought the upholstery would be soft, but his face hit the chair’s wooden frame with a painful thud. Now genuinely hurt, Drew’s screams escalated. I reached behind the chair and picked him up by the arms (they were all I could reach). All the while, Lizzie was watching to see what this “normal” mother would do. I quickly assessed that there was no blood and exclaimed, “THAT was a STUPID thing to do!” I didn’t even turn to see Lizzie’s probably horrified reaction. (I gave Drew ice and hugs after that, I promise.)

How grateful I am that you wrote this, so that today when I’m so disheartened about my own parenting failures with my own temperamental three-year-old, I don’t feel like a failure! How grateful I am that you wrote this, so that today when I’m so disheartened about my own parenting failures with my own temperamental three-year-old, I don’t feel like a failure! Somehow that picture of the ideal mother had still flourished and I just knew that I wasn’t measuring up.

Maybe it’s to assuage any guilt over my behavior—shame at behaving so childishly myself, embarrassment at my impatience—but I like to think we Young Women leaders—okay, I especially—provided Lizzie a great service. Maybe when she’s a mother she’ll remember those moments and realize that she is “normal.” Maybe we disabused just one future Mormon mother of the notion of perfect parenting early. Or maybe she won’t have such imperfect moments. But I doubt it—after all, such is mortal parenting.

I lay in bed last night unable to sleep because I knew that I’m not a good mom. I snap and yell. Who loses their temper and yells at a toddler? Aaaagghhhhh (light bulb)! Everyone does! Thank you again for writing this! I have no doubt it was inspired. Thank you for the lesson, even if it was learned eleven years late.

So there it is: one of my worst parenting performances in all its honest ugliness. Fortunately, my sons and I seem to have survived each other. And now The Incident, in writing, after all these years, finally is helping a grown-up Lizzie come to terms with her own expectations as a parent. The story also has entered our family folklore: “That was a stupid thing to do!” has become a routine saying—one that clearly applied to my own misbehavior as much as to my child’s tantrum. But the memory of that day still makes me cringe.

And I write it down anyway. For me. For my kids. For moms. I want to be honest about my own parenting, about the failures and the successes. About my limitations, my imperfections. I want to be real. Because I know how much I, submerged in the parenting of young children, needed to hear about those real moments from other moms. Because I know how “normal” it felt when other moms shared their struggles. Because I know that when I share this—and any other less-than-stellar parenting moment—it helps other moms. They sigh in relief. They sheepishly admit their own Epic Mom Fails. And then they laugh—and have the courage (however feeble) to dive back in. I wish I had reacted differently that day. But I didn’t. And ultimately, that’s okay.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:
Kelly Austin teaches English at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio. Lately, she’s been rediscovering the joy of reading and writing for herself—and in the process remembering why she chose her field in the first place. Her husband and children agree that this is good for everyone.
Looking back can be useful. We can see where we've come from. We can see how much progress we've made, how we've grown. | By Kirsten K. H. Campbell, Granger, Indiana

Two of my favorite books when I was a child were Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*. In the first book, Alice falls down a rabbit hole and almost loses her head. In the second, she steps through a looking-glass and plays an enormous game of chess. Alice spends the entirety of both novels looking forward through mazes of confusion, while simultaneously looking back on what her life in the "normal" world was like.

Lately I've felt a bit like an Alice—unexpectedly changing sizes, running here and there trying to find my way—so I made a quilt inspired by her adventures. For this essay, as well as for the quilt, I pieced together words and images from these beloved books to express some of my own thoughts about looking forward and back while trying to make sense of this Wonderland we live in.

"There's no use trying," [Alice] said: "one can't believe impossible things."

"I dare say you haven't had much practice," said the Queen. "When I was your age, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."

Sometimes you need to have faith in what seems impossible.

When my daughter was young, she loved reading the *Beetle Bailey* comic strip. Once there was a series about all of the soldiers getting mail—all except Sarge. This bothered Katie. She thought Sarge deserved mail just as much as the rest of the guys. So, she wrote him a letter. My husband and I thought it was just a cute idea, but Katie was convinced that Sarge would get her letter. A few weeks went by. Then one day a letter came for Katie from Mort Walker, the artist who draws *Beetle Bailey*. Inside was a personalized comic with Sarge, a tear falling down his cheek, saying, "Aw, I got a letter!" Katie had faith in the impossible. Well, she didn't see it as impossible—she had faith enough for things to work out.

Paul wrote: "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things" (1 Corinthians 13: 11). I get this. You gotta grow up sometime. However, I think that too often we put away having faith in the impossible, thinking that it is childish. How would our perspective change if we occasionally went for the impossible? What miracles could we perform if we believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast?

"I want a clean cup," interrupted the Hatter; "let's all move one place on."

Sometimes you just need a fresh perspective.

There have been times when a project or perhaps a relationship has stumped me. I sit looking at it, thinking about it, and just don't
know what to do. I have learned that when I am at a standstill, a change of scene can work wonders. Often I'll go for a walk, read a book, or start another project. Or I'll try to get out of my head and look at things from another's point of view. I find that prayer can help me focus in a way that nothing else can. Sometimes something as simple as a clean cup can make all the difference.

"Why is a raven like a writing desk?"

Sometimes the riddles don't make sense.

When I was little and had questions, I sometimes got the answer: "Because that's just the way it is," or, "Because I said so." Most of the time that would quiet my persistent questioning. As I grew older, however, that answer ceased to be enough. When I asked, "Why weren't black men allowed to have the Priesthood?" the answer I got was: "Because that is what God says." This one never sat well with me. It was a riddle without an answer that satisfied. I am grateful that the language in the new preface to Official Declaration 2 in the Doctrine and Covenants declares that "all are alike unto God," and that the prohibition was not doctrinal. This is what I feel deeply.

Other riddles still await answers: What is the true nature of the priesthood? Is there a place within it for women? What about our LGBT brothers and sisters? What if what I feel in my heart doesn't completely mesh with what I've been taught? Why does the desire to have one's voice heard seem to threaten some people so much?

"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"
"That depends a good deal on where you want to go," said the Cat.

"I don't much care where—" said Alice.
"Then it doesn't much matter which way you go," said the Cat.

"—so long as I get somewhere," Alice added as an explanation.
"Oh, you're sure to do that," said the Cat, "if you only walk long enough."

Sometimes the direction you want to go really matters.

The Cheshire Cat says that if you don't know exactly where you want to go, you could end up just about anywhere. This might not be all that bad. Wandering around, looking at new vistas can be interesting. But if all we do is wander directionless, we will never get to the place we want to be.

All of us are headed in a common general direction: back to our heavenly home. However, the pathway we take to get there is, for the most part, an individual choice. This is the joy, and sometimes the heartbreak, of living in a world with free agency. I admit that sometimes my path is filled with brambles, snagging at my clothes and scratching my flesh. Other times my path shines like the yellow brick road, and I want to sing and skip my way to the Emerald City. I can relate to the lyric from a current rock song,

"The path to heaven runs through miles of clouded hell." It is during those dark times that I am grateful for wonderful friends who remind me of the direction I want to go. I am grateful for a Savior who continually reaches for my hand and walks on the path with me.

"Now, here, you see, it takes all the running you can do to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!"

Sometimes what you're doing is getting you nowhere.

In Through the Looking-Glass, the Red Queen and Alice try to get to different squares on the chessboard and have a terrible time doing so. Do you ever feel that you are running and getting nowhere? Do you want to change, but keep doing the same things over and over again? Sometimes I find myself complaining about the very things I chose to do—but for some crazy reason, I keep on doing them. Perhaps it's inertia; maintaining the status quo is just easier and more comfortable. It can be scary to venture out and try something new. But if what I am doing is not working for me, I need to enact a change.

In a recent homily, Pope Francis said, "To speak plainly: The Holy Spirit annoys us." The Spirit "moves us, makes us walk, pushes the church to move forward." He explained that the Spirit wants to move us beyond our comfort zones, but people think it's better to be comfortable. "The Holy Spirit pushes us" to live the gospel more seriously, but too often, one's response is resistance.

"...it's no use going back to yesterday, because I was a different person then."

Sometimes looking back is not what you need.

Looking back can be useful. We can see where we've come from. We can see how much progress we've made, how we've grown. We can smile, remembering the good times of the past. However, constantly looking back can impede us from looking forward. In Luke 17:32, Christ says, "Remember Lot's wife." That's all that verse says. The story of Lot's wife must have been a very familiar, powerful one to Christ's listeners if all he needed to mention was that one phrase. They would recall that Lot and his family had to be convinced—prodded to leave Sodom and Gomorrah—to save their lives from destruction. They were told to leave and never look back. Lot's wife, longing for her life back in the city and not willing to follow the Lord, looked back and turned into a pillar of salt. Elder Jeffery R. Holland said of this story:

To yearn to go back to a world that cannot be lived in now, to be perpetually dissatisfied with present circumstances and have only dismal views of the future, and to miss the here and now and tomorrow because we are so trapped in the there and then and yesterday are some of the sins of Lot's wife.
Sometimes we crane our necks backward to sigh at the road behind us, rather than wonder at what lies ahead. But this kind of looking back robs us of hope.

"Off with her head!"

Sometimes forgiveness is the most powerful thing of all.

Lately I've been really trying to keep perspective when rotten things happen. Instead of crying, "Off with her head!" when someone steps on my toes, I'm trying to subscribe to the "Nobody's Mad" philosophy that my friend Heather has introduced to me.

- In my final year of what seems a lifetime of PTO leadership, my Staff Appreciation chair emails to say that she just doesn't have the time to plan the SA week activities. Luncheons, desserts, treats... Sure, I can handle it! Nobody's mad.

- The bishop schedules a trip to Nauvoo for the youth this summer without consulting the YW president (me) or the YM leaders. It happens to be when I cannot go, and he wants me to fundraise for it, plan the meals for it, and... I'll do my best to help where I can and see that this is a great opportunity for my YW! Nobody's mad.

- My hormonal, teenage son changes from sweet and kind to the Exorcist kid without any warning, all of the time... Have a nice day, son, I love you! Nobody's mad.

It's hard not to give in to the anger and hurt that come when someone disappoints or injures you. Sometimes yelling is so much easier and more satisfying—at least in the moment. As I've tried to keep my cool, I find that my reaction can diffuse a difficult situation and actually create a peace that wasn't there before. Everything's okay! Nobody's mad.

"Dear, dear! How queer everything is today! And yesterday things went on just as usual. I wonder if I've been changed in the night? Let me think... Was I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I'm not the same, the next question is 'Who in the world am I?' Ah, that's the great puzzle!"

Sometimes finding out who you really are is the greatest challenge.

We've been put on this earth to be tried and tested, to learn and have experiences that will shape us into better people. I am me. You are you. We have similarities but are not the same. I have always felt encouraged by the fact that each day is new and I can change and become more of who I want to be.

When I was a child, one of my favorite TV shows was Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood. I just loved that man. He said:

When I say it's you I like, I'm talking about that part of you that knows that life is far more than anything you can ever see or hear or touch. That deep part of you that allows you to stand for those things without which humankind cannot survive. Love that conquers hate, peace that rises triumphant over war, and justice that proves more powerful than greed.4

The week of the 2013 Midwest Pilgrimage was an emotional one for me because it also was the week of the Boston Marathon bombing. Although I now live in Indiana, I spent some of the very best years of my life in Boston. I lived a block from Beacon Street, where I would take my kids to watch the marathon and cheer on the runners. What happened that day was truly madness. I kept checking Facebook and my email for news of my Boston friends and those I knew running the race. Even though they were all okay, it didn't feel okay to me. It was as if we all were thrown down the rabbit hole, and chaos ensued.

Another quote from Fred Rogers: "When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.'" That day in April, when the news was filled with scary scenes, the people of Boston became the helpers. From those offering places to stay for runners and their families, to the firemen and police, to those runners who, after finishing the race, ran two more miles to Mass General to donate blood—the day was filled with helpers.
“You’re nothing but a pack of cards!”

Sometimes you need to see things as they really are.

We try to present ourselves to others in the way we want to be seen. Some people can put on an act, but at some point they won’t be able to keep up the façade. Pretending to be something you’re not or worrying about what others think of you can be exhausting. I must tell you that I am so over this! I am to the point in my life where I am comfortable with who I am and have no time for pretense. On the other hand, I am not always so good at recognizing pretense in others. I have let people take advantage of my kindnesses and willingness to help, and then tried to convince myself that it was okay because I was doing that “turn the other cheek” thing.

Maya Angelou teaches an important life lesson: “When people show you who they are, believe them.” If someone shows you that she’s compassionate or a great listener, you need to be mindful of this. If someone shows you that she’s selfish or unkind, you need to be mindful of this as well. We can love one another without allowing ourselves to be unnecessarily abused if we will listen to the Spirit. “For the Spirit speaketh the truth and lieth not. Wherefore, it speaketh of things as they really are, and of things as they really will be...” (Jacob 4:14). To me it is comforting to know that there is a way for me to know truth and see things as they really are.

“We’re all mad here!”

Sometimes it’s okay to be mad.

A few weeks ago my 17-year-old daughter told me about an encounter she had had at school that day. She and her friends were talking in the cafeteria before school, when somehow the subject of feminism came up. Katie chimed in that her mom was a feminist, and in fact the president of a Mormon feminist group. One of the boys scoffed and asked if I burned my bras, and which cause I was currently protesting. Katie calmly tried to explain that I was not that type of feminist, but to no avail. She told me I would have been proud of her for not losing her cool, but she was exasperated at her friend’s narrow view of the subject. I’ve had similar encounters of my own. When I’ve told friends not of my faith that I’m a Mormon feminist, some joke and say, “Hmmm… how does that work?”

I found the Exponent II community at a time in my life when I needed it most, when I felt much like Alice, crying until I was struggling to stay afloat in a pool of tears. These were tears of questions, of contradictions and of doubt. The life raft this community of women offered me was more vital than I can ever express. That magazine spoke to my soul. Here were the stories, the voices of women like myself, trying to make sense of a mad world. I realize that my feminist views put me in the minority among those of my faith. Recent research has shown that 80 percent of Mormon women are fine with things the way they are. They are not agitating for any kind of change. Should I leave the Church because I feel differently? No way! I know that within my Mormon feminist community there are those working for changes more sweeping than I feel comfortable with right now. Should I leave that community because I feel differently? No way!

In the letter from the editor in the Spring 2013 issue of Exponent II, Emily Clyde Curtis talks about letting people know her real self when she has a safe space to do so. I readily relate to this. For Emily and for me, Exponent II has provided that safe space. I am happy that I can add the Midwest Pilgrimage to that safe space as well. When I’m there, I feel it’s okay to be mad.

I look back in gratitude for those women who have made these safe spaces for us to meet and to share our stories.

Based on a talk given at the Midwest Pilgrimage in Nauvoo, Illinois, 21 April 2013.

1 Imagine Dragons, “It’s Time,” 2012.
4 Fred Rogers, commencement address, Dartmouth College, 9 June 2002.
5 Maya Angelou, interview by Oprah Winfrey, O, the Oprah Magazine, December 2000.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Kirsten is the Insurer of Domestic Tranquility at The Campbell Center for Familial Bliss. She also serves as president of Exponent II. When not going back and forth between her many volunteer positions, she can be found quilting up a storm in her sewing studio.
The recent Exponent II issue on temple worship was beyond fabulous. The layout and visuals are gorgeous, the tone is respectful, the range of experience broad. You walk the finest of lines with deliberateness and grace. Thank you for this labor of love. It blesses me.

- Dana Cattani

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