

Exponent II

Am I Not a Woman and a Sister?



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Exponent II

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

Cover:
Cherry Blossoms,
Washington DC

Threads of Courage

by Kimberly Burnett

A few weeks ago on the first Sunday of the month, our relatively new Relief Society president stood to teach the lesson. She was clearly nervous and uncomfortable. She stumbled several times, lost her place, and forgot to ask for comments. She was honest about how she felt, though—she told us she was nervous, that she'd struggled to choose the right topic, that she wasn't feeling well. Ten minutes into her lesson, the sisters in the room took over to carry her lesson, initiating a discussion that was thought-provoking and instructive.

The brief testimony meeting that followed this nervous Relief Society president's lesson was one of the richest I've ever attended. One woman stood up and asked us to pray for her son who was using drugs. Another spoke about how she felt about turning fifty. Another, a visitor, talked about how she'd been affected by the spirit she felt during that meeting.

At the end of the short testimony meeting, I thought about the many Relief Society lessons and testimony meetings I've attended that have lacked the spirit and openness that were present that day. My conclusion is that the Relief Society president's courage to be honest about how she felt and the love and support shown her by the members of the class created an atmosphere that allowed the women there to be authentic.

Although the articles in this issue weren't collected with a theme in mind, the thread that connects them for me is courage. The Helen Candland Stark Essay Contest winner's courage is manifest in the author's helping her elderly mother nearing the end of her life to let go of her cherished home and possessions. (Full disclosure: This essay is by my mother about my grandmother. And Mom, as much as you'd like to give me credit, I had nothing to do with the decision to select your essay!) Those same possessions bear testimony of my grandmother's courage and endurance in living a life of service.

One of the honorable mention awards is for an essay about a woman's courage to fulfill the desires of her heart to bear children, even while taking the potentially harmful drugs necessary to manage her bipolar disorder. Another sister writes about her need—and courage, I think—to speak about her experience of having been the victim of sexual assault. Linda Hoffman Kimball reflects on her trip to Tanzania and the meaning of her name—*guard*—in Swahili and the courage necessary to fulfill her role

In almost every issue of Exponent II, you could find a thread of courage running through the lives of this sisterhood.

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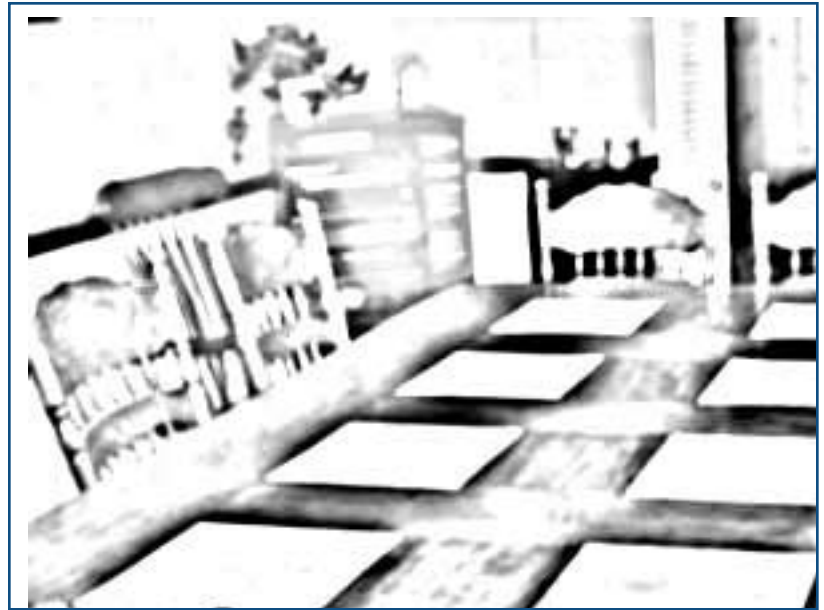
Who Got My Dining Room Table?

by Sheryl Smith White

"Who got my dining room table?" Mother asked out loud during Sacrament meeting at the Terrace Grove Assisted Living Center. It was another one of those days when she refused to wear her hearing aids because they "weren't working," and she clearly assumed she was whispering. She was not whispering. "It was such a wonderful table," she pronounced loudly. Wheelchairs turned and walkers were shuffled as residents strained to hear the conversation.

I dared not tell her the fate of her dining room table, so I hesitated. When her home of forty-two years was sold three weeks earlier, family members helped to clean it out and to deliver furniture, pictures, freezer jam, bottled peaches, 50-pound sacks of wheat, and sentimental objects to the designated recipients. Mother, ninety-one and living in Terrace Grove for three months at her own request, had been meticulous in labeling items years ago; the thought of anybody fighting over her possessions turned her stomach. I traveled from Oregon to assist with the clean-up and sorting and found the process heart wrenching. When I came across her 72-hour emergency kit, I burst into a long crying jag as I reflected on mother's life of obedience and preparedness.

Almost everything had a family member's name on it—everything, that is, except the oval dining room table. It was given to her secondhand and was at least sixty years old.



Nobody pined for her dining room table.

"I don't know who got your dining room table, Mother," I whispered truthfully, clasping her hand a little tighter.

My brother insisted on hauling odds and ends out to the curb with a "free" sign on them: desks, lamps, computer chairs—and the dining room table. He even invited two college students walking by to peruse our home and look around for anything they might want. I stayed inside and watched the parade of passersby maul through the furniture, upset at the indignity of it all and positive that Mother would have been humiliated that her worldly possessions were on the curb.

Nobody salvaged the dining room table and

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the eight upholstered chairs, so we loaded them in the truck and joined the Saturday-afternoon rush to Deseret Industries on South Main.

Mother's dining room table, which had been very respectable and high quality many decades ago, permanently tilted downward at one end, the end where Uncle Bruce ate three square meals a day for nearly twelve years. "His only enjoyment in life is eating, and I'm going to make sure he eats well," Mother said. She and Uncle Bruce, a deaf mute who weighed about 250 pounds, were the "last leaves on the family tree," she often said, and she welcomed him to her home after he retired from his custodial position at D.I. in Pocatello. Mother drove him to his doctors' appointments, included him in all family trips and activities, took him to a ward for the deaf for church, accompanied him to the temple, did his laundry, called the fire department to help him get back into bed when he fell out at night, showered him when he could no longer do it for himself—and fed him outstanding meals at the dining room table. I'm not sure when his end of the table began to sag, but it surely did.

The dining room table was also the spot where Uncle Bruce reigned over the *Sorry* game whenever a willing grandchild or visitor would respond to his written invitation to play. He loved the game but was a lousy sport. "Dammit!" was one of only a few words he was able to enunciate well. It slipped out, accompanied by his banging his fist on the tilting end of the table whenever a player got the best of Uncle

Bruce. But he said it with a twinkle in his eye, and we all chuckled over his expletive.

Before Uncle Bruce came to live with Mother, during the time he lived with Mother, and after his death, literally countless people surrounded Mother's dining room table. If anybody needed a place to stay overnight or for a few weeks or for months, word was out around the ward that Mother welcomed strays. Everybody came and ate at her dining room table. When we would go home to visit, we children were never sure how many bedrooms would be vacant or how many people would assemble for meals. It was always a topic of speculation, and not always a cheerful one.

My brother invited the entire Aggie football team to Thanksgiving dinner one year, and they filled up the oval table and many more. At my brother's team reunion this summer in Las Vegas, they still talked about the best homemade rolls they had ever eaten—at Mother's dining room table. Another Thanksgiving, a student from Hawaii sledding on Old Main Hill mentioned to my sister he had no place for dinner; he was welcomed at the dining room table and returned many more times during his years in Logan.

When she was Relief Society president of the Utah State University single stake, Mother invited her board members to make candy every Christmas. English toffee, nougat, divinity, turtles, fudge, and chocolates

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On Motherhood

by Amanda Olson

It is spring 2001. I am twenty-three. I am in my final semester of an MA program that has changed my life by giving framework and voice to all the thoughts flying around my head. I am “put together.” I am a “critical thinker.” I wear knee-high boots and short skirts when I teach my classes. I’ve quit pretending to be married. I am full of opportunity. I write this in an essay about motherhood:

I have carried a child on my left hip since I was nine years old; the oldest girl is often times the mother before she has her own children. I have never given birth to anything but an idea, so I tell my mother when disaster strikes with my sister: “Let it go with Rachel. We cannot be in charge of her anymore. We cannot force her to choose us, to choose God. There isn’t any rescue left in me, and I have had enough. I love her, but I am tired of it, Mother. I am done with this for a while.”

I used to think I knew what it was like to love a child, since now I have crooked hips from fourteen years of perched babies.

And then my mother responds: “You do not understand. She is my *child*. I will not let it go. I cannot allow these bones and blood that I have borne to forget their obligations, to forget themselves.

I will run in to rescue my children even after my legs refuse to run and my arms cannot embrace or carry. I did not know what it was to love until my children came. I refuse to forsake these things that I love.”



It is winter 2005. I am twenty-seven. I have given birth to my first child. He is fierce in his independence even as a premature infant. I am nursing every two hours in the first two weeks. I offer desperate prayers of fear and exhaustion. (“Please bless Samuel to not be lonely in his bed down the hall. Please don’t let anyone judge him unfairly. Please help me know how to not be frightened.”) I wear my blue bathrobe every day after taking my mother to the airport. I leave detailed instructions with my mother-in-law before leaving my son with her for one hour. I fail to remember that she has been a mother nine times. She listens carefully. I write this in my journal:

My child is everything I could have been because he is the moment I can no longer be. I am not thinking of this as a death but as a refining. Regardless, my son will bear my refining as my firstborn child. He will not know what he is feeling; he will just know that he feels it—the way it asks him to live his life out as a debt. I have felt it from



my mother's subconscious. I bear her sacrifice of time and possibility; I bear it even when she did not know she was making an offering.



It is autumn 2006. I am twenty-nine. Today, Thursday, Samuel and I are at the sailboat pond in Central Park. We are wearing sweaters. We are not holding hands. Samuel

cannot quack strongly enough in response to the ducks. He is distracted by a toy sailboat that cuts sharply away from the wall near his feet. He begins to walk quickly, his hands raised and bouncing in time with his steps. The pond's edge is too interesting to avoid, and he is trying to maintain his speed while negotiating the ledge's uneven surface. He'd like to meet the sailboats. He walks a bit and then turns back to glance at me, meeting my eyes before marching on.

Moments later, I am scolded by a woman and her nanny. They inform me that I am not watching my child closely enough. They are not convinced of my assertions that he is safe, that I am aware of him.

"It's really very frightening," the mother

says to me, eyes narrowed. I do not respond. Samuel is on his way again.

"It is very frightening," I think. "This being a parent is frightening enough for you to employ assistance. What am I to do? I have a child who needs to be free. I am mitigating my role as his tether because I know what the collapse looks like when a mother cannot save her child from himself. Of course it is frightening."

Samuel has found that two men are controlling the boats. He stops respectfully in front of their spot on the bench, leaving much space between them. His oration is then beautifully dramatic as he bends at the waist and points his finger, spouting a collection of important thoughts. The sailboat men stop their navigations to hear them all.

"I see," one man says to the other, his eyes wide. He pauses. "This boy's going to be a captain."

"Without question," replies the second man, who then looks at me. "He is not afraid."

The first man salutes my son who raises his arm soberly in return. Samuel then turns to run along the path, stopping for a moment to look back at me.

And then I understand.

My child *is not* afraid, and my child does not mind that I am. He cannot give me a guaranteed life of submission and obedience

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Exposure

by Jenifer Sweeney

All medications diffuse readily across the placenta, and no psychotropic drug has yet been approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for use during pregnancy. When prescribing medications during pregnancy, one must consider the following risks associated with prenatal exposure: risk of teratogenesis, risk of neonatal toxicity, and risk of long-term neurobehavioral sequelae. (<http://www.womensmentalhealth.org/topics/pregnancy.html>)

The first time I read this information, I decided that I did not have a mental illness. And if I did, I wasn't going to treat it with psychotropic drugs. I wanted to be a mother more than anything else in my life. I didn't have a husband, nor was I pregnant. I had decided in advance that if I couldn't safely carry a child and simultaneously take medication to treat my mental symptoms, I'd rather suffer. Or so I thought.

I was nineteen years old. Withdrawing from my university classes seemed like the best option for me because of my severe depression. Now at home, my mom and I spent most of our time together, including my weekly visit to my psychiatrist. My psychiatrist's office was about a thirty-minute drive from our house. I came each week with high hopes that he might say or do something during our hour session that would cure me. My mom and I sat in the waiting room among juvenile delinquents

and those with mental problems. It felt unreal, and I refused to acknowledge that I was like them. Feeling vulnerable and sad, I scanned the faces in the office, making assumptions about other people's problems. The pictures on the wall were less interesting than those patients' faces.

Dr. Goates opened the door to his drab office and invited me to sit on a small brown sofa. His bushy grey eyebrows distinguished him, along with his intimidating and sometimes overbearing presence. He drew a lot of messy pictures and diagrams on a yellow legal pad, which he sent home with me as homework. Much of the medical jargon he used I didn't even understand. But, after a few months of therapy, Dr. Goates casually handed me a prescription for Lithium. My diagnosis was bipolar disorder.

I was shocked. Lithium was a street drug, I belligerently told him. Dr. Goates warned me that if I didn't take medication, I could harm myself or someone else. Even so, I refused to fill the prescription. My determination, coupled with my hopes of someday having children, led me to refute my diagnosis. I scoured medical journals about bipolar disorder and Lithium.

Depression is a scary experience, a way of viewing the world that is dark and unbelievably painful. It's strange, upon reflection, how when I was depressed

Depression is a scary experience, a way of viewing the world that is unbelievably dark and painful.

I could recall almost any happy event from my past and my brain would very creatively twist the information into a

sad and distorted memory. One of the worst parts about my depression was that I blamed myself for all of my pain. I would lie in bed for hours, trying to figure out why this was happening to me and what event in

my past caused my current sadness. When my mom would come into my bedroom and shake me to get up, I felt as if she hated me for what I had become. I was afraid that she would give up on me. I recall wishing that I could disappear. This sense of despair affected everyone around me; I could perceive the stress and worry that I brought to others. I would watch the hours in each day pass and wish them away, like I had done at my first monotonous, boring job as a receptionist.

Mania, on the other hand, has a way of deceiving even the most clever and intelligent person. From my perspective, mania was simply an elevated mood. It might manifest itself by my exercising more frequently, at a heightened pace, or talking faster, sometimes slipping into profanity. It was subtle. I enjoyed having more energy. I

lost weight. I felt exhilarated about life. I had more confidence. Since the mania followed such a bleak and miserable five months of depression, I was just happy not to be feeling sad. I didn't see anything unusual about myself. Naturally, I didn't think to report these feelings to anyone. Now enrolled in classes, I struggled to focus on my reading and homework. My social life picked up, and I hoped I wouldn't lose my scholarship. I had a small savings account of about \$2000. I jubilantly went shopping and spent my hard-earned cash. I recall coming home almost every day after my classes and showing my roommate another new outfit that I had purchased. Quickly my account dwindled down to almost nothing. The rush I got from spending money with no regret was addictive. My parents detected this exhilaration, which annoyed me. Dr. Goates caught on, too. Damn!

I can still picture the orange prescription bottle on my bathroom shelf that seemed to have a voice of its own. Each time I opened it, it seemed to speak to me, stirring up a series of emotions. First, it reminded me to feel guilty that I was on "drugs," and then it seemed to stop me from swallowing the pill. I could faintly hear it tell me that I didn't really need them. Taking my pills could take up to ten or fifteen minutes as my brain vacillated between what I should do and what I wanted to do. Most days I took them.

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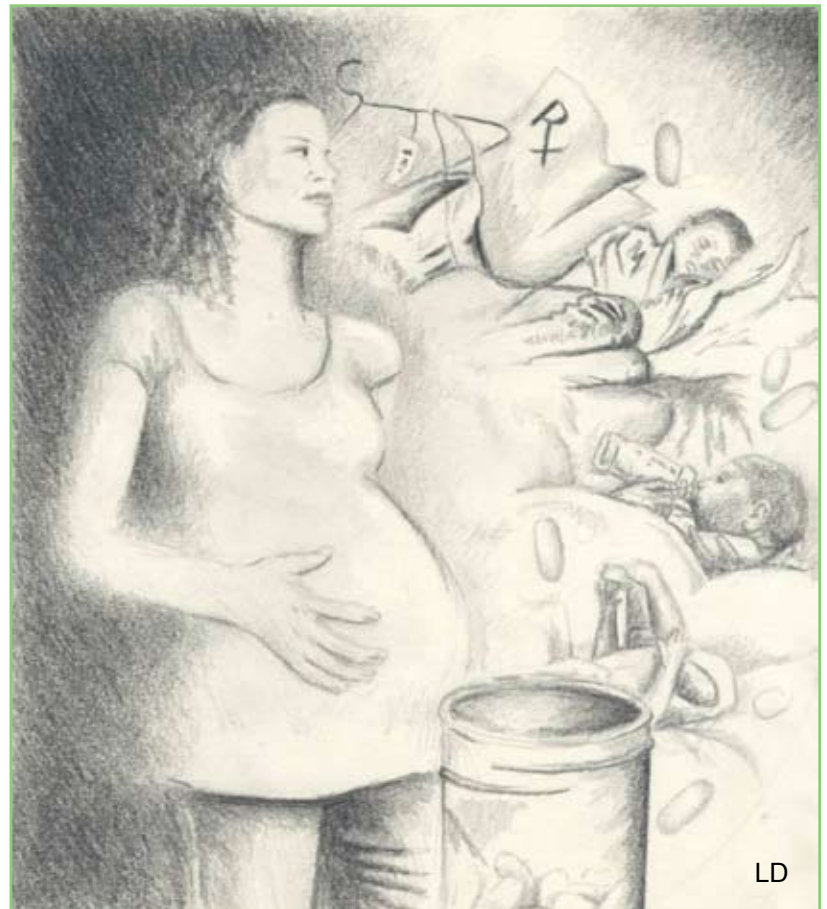
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I would remind myself that it was both a legitimate prescription and a deterrent to future depressions. However, I maintained the hope to keep Lithium a secret from most people who knew me. I never brought it up. I became an expert at talking about myself without referring to the gaps in my life that included living at home with my parents, being in the hospital, or not being able to work.

And then there were the side-effects: diarrhea, dry mouth, thirst, hand and facial tremors, slowed thinking, and a bitter taste in my mouth. All of them bothered me, but they diminished or disappeared over the years. Yet, I chose to stop taking Lithium repeatedly because I could function just fine without it for periods of time, which reinforced the idea that I didn't need it. However, both times I stopped taking Lithium indefinitely, I ended up in the hospital.



I was pregnant at age thirty two. Although my husband Brian was extremely kind and compassionate and accepted my mental illness as part of me, he didn't know a lot about it. We both wanted children. When we saw the two pink lines on the pregnancy test, we celebrated. Privately, I feared for myself and for our unborn baby. I had stayed on my Lithium for five consecutive years, the longest period since my diagnosis. During those five years, I hadn't relapsed.



My current psychiatrist, whose bushy eyebrows reminded me of Dr. Goates's, strongly advised me to stay on my Lithium during the pregnancy. I asked him for the most recent research on the topic. We made an appointment to discuss the matter with both him and my husband.

My psychiatrist gave me several articles about reproductive psychiatry clinical research. After reading about the effects of Lithium on an unborn fetus, I paused. I had to protect my child from exposure to Lithium. Lithium exposure posed a risk of having a child with Ebstein's Anomaly, a cardiovascular malformation. If our baby had this malformation, it would be my fault.

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Because the heart forms at approximately nine weeks of gestation, I went against the better judgment of Dr. Nineberg and the research and went off Lithium during the first eight weeks of my pregnancy. My husband stood by my side and gave me encouragement. I cried before leaving for work most days. My twenty-two second-graders helped the days go by quickly. I constantly felt anxious and stressed, but I felt that I needed to give our baby the best chance possible.

Our son Conor was born healthy and beautiful. Although I really wanted to breastfeed him, I bottle-fed him since Lithium passes into breast milk. When friends and even strangers asked why I wasn't breastfeeding, I fumbled for an explanation. Caring for Conor also aggravated my general symptoms of mental illness—lack of sleep and heightened anxiety. I spent hours staring at Conor's perfect features. Some days I stroked his soft skin and touched his warm head, feeling nothing but love for him. Some days I resented his constant needs. At times when he'd scream, I just endured.

When Conor was about thirteen months old, we began trying to have our second child. I felt as if I had an improved capacity for motherhood. I had a new doctor, this time a female, whose specialty is psychiatric patients with fertility issues. When I became pregnant, her counsel echoed the advice from my previous doctor—to stay on my meds. Although I was scared, I agreed that I needed Lithium to make it through

the pregnancy. I needed it to be capable of caring for our active two-year old. Even so, during my first trimester of pregnancy, I began having depressive symptoms, so my doctor added an anti-depressant to the Lithium. It helped. For the first time, I understood that my good health outweighed the risks of medications. At our sixteen-week ultra-sound, the heart looked great, which was our biggest concern. Unexpectedly, we learned that my baby girl had a risk of having Down syndrome. I couldn't believe it; it was entirely unrelated to exposure to Lithium. I silently told God that I didn't know if I could handle a child with special needs and still deal with my bipolar disorder.

In January of 2006, when Megan was born, I lay in the delivery room overcome with anxiety about her health. When the nurse handed her to me, I stared closely at her eyes to see if they were almond-shaped or if I could see any visible sign of Down syndrome. But I didn't know for sure. When they moved me to my private recovery room, my husband went home to sleep. I lay there alone, waiting for someone to walk into my room at any moment to inform me of her condition. I sobbed uncontrollably. Not only was I afraid that Megan had Down syndrome, but I was also concerned that I couldn't stop crying. I wondered if I already had postpartum depression. I questioned my ability to handle two children.

A pediatrician walked into my room and found me in tears. We began a conversation

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Tell the Devil To Go to Hell

by Emma Lou Thayne

A friend of joy and affirmation and great good works, Lowell Bennion, answered a student stalled in getting on with life because of concerns about Satan: "Tell the devil to go to hell."

What if the first question on my mind when I woke up was "What might the devil have in mind for me today?" Instead, in a giant sigh of well-being, I take in the beauty of a morning with time to look: at an October sky with pale clouds playing across its pale blue, aspens twittering their gold ducats into the soft wind, autumn haze graying the foothills like my eighty-plus years taking on a luscious time of no deadlines, not a list in sight, no appointments or arrangements or obligations to answer to. Only for this moment, time to look. And smile. And be perfectly lazy. What preposterous indulgence simply to sit here appreciating. Think of all you could be accomplishing. You know how "an idle mind is the devil's workshop." Yes, and how *enduring* to the end means *doing* till the end, being anxiously engaged and even exhaustively engaged.

Well, what about *appreciating* till the end? Being totally *un anxiously* engaged in the wonders of breathing, seeing and feeling, smelling and listening, just absorbing the miracle of what's there, of your own self and your ability to appreciate? Also to absorb what someone else has written that informs,

warms, and enlightens you? Something non-obligatory, not assigned, not even perhaps approved by those who might like to outline expectations with fulfillments not to be expected until another lifetime? What's the matter with this lifetime?

So much authoritative talk there has been lately about the devil, about his power and influence, about what to watch out for, about how to stay away from activities and even people that might invite his presence. Oh my. A world of "don'ts" to deal with. What about being so full of fear and concentrating so on temptations that being alive and well and full of happy anticipation might be impossible.

Shel Silverstein's imaginative poems for children have delighted now two generations, parents as well as their young.

LISTEN TO THE MUSTN'TS

Listen to the MUSTN'TS, child,
Listen to the DON'TS
Listen to the SHOULDN'TS,
The IMPOSSIBLES, the WON'TS
Listen to the NEVER HAVES
Then listen close to me—
Anything can happen, child,
ANYTHING can be.

Shel Silverstein, *Where the Sidewalk Ends*, Harper and Row, NY, NY, p. 27

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How to know that anything can be – the possibilities, the haves? The happy ones? Certainly not by concentrating on the mustn'ts. What damage to a sense of the world to be resisting instead of rushing to? How better to lose sight of Christ than by looking always for his adversary? A maybe apocryphal story tells of a sister approaching Brigham Young asking, "What shall I do? My husband told me to go to hell." Brigham's answer: "Don't go."

My father always told us: "Try hard. Play fair. Have fun." How different might that have been if he'd said, "Don't be lazy. Don't cheat. Don't get mad." How different "Don't find fault" from "Find the good." Even "Don't sleep in" or "Don't eat fats" from "Look at the morning!" or "It's great to let your body move."

The hymn with my words to Joleen Meredith's music asked more than thirty years ago, "Where Can I Turn for Peace?" She and I were on the YWMIA board and in the midst of some suffering in our families, mine a daughter with manic depression and bulimia, hers her own battle

with familial depression. Ours was not a turning *away* from the devil, but a turning *to* Christ for peace. Is the reason for that hymn's being sung now in many languages, arrangements, and settings that it is looking for balm, not blame?

What is harder to live with than blame? How disabling to look for or look out for the devil in any of it. How presumptuous to read such blame into the actions or trials of others.

During the slow healing of that daughter, of course her father and I were full of blaming ourselves. What could we have done differently? How did we fail? One well-meaning official even offered to give her a blessing "to get the evil spirit out of her," this nineteen-year-old with a chemical imbalance that for more than twenty years has been controlled by a simple daily dose of Lithium, prescribed and monitored by a knowing professional. Treatment has allowed her a life of not only peace but productivity and joy with her husband and three sons and now grandsons, as well as

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Tell the Devil

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with her own creativity in stained glass and in her father's profession of real estate. At the time of her illness, when we searched for how to blame ourselves, our second of five daughters said something wonderful: "Mom and Dad, I've never heard you take credit for anything good we happen to do, but, boy, are you quick to blame yourselves for anything that goes wrong."

To pray without ceasing means to be in touch. It does not mean ignoring the bad. Only to keep steady inside, to appreciate instead of criticize. In tennis, the worst thing to think when tossing the ball is "Don't serve doubles!" The best is to imagine an ace.

Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, might, mind, and soul and thy neighbor as thyself. How different from "Don't hate people. Don't scorn God – and keep an eye out for the devil." What if instead of *Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth*, the Beatitudes read "Cursed are those who are not humble for they shall be cast into the devil's clutches." This *Blessed are*, I believe, is Christ's purest manifestation of his *I come not to destroy but to fulfill the law* – to turn the *Thou shalt not's* of the Mosaic Law into the *Thou shalt's* of the Gospel.

What life has ever been free of distress? Once upon a time a crowbar became airborne on the freeway, came through the windshield, and smashed into my face. Once upon a time our grandbaby was

born, couldn't breathe, died. Once upon a time our daughter went through a painful divorce. Once upon a time my husband needed triple-bypass surgery. All the time there are starving and deprived people, wars and terror.

Things happen. Things always will. Because we're being tested? Because the devil is after us? Who knows why? But what can I do about most of it? Except to try to love God and my neighbor as myself, and to show it. Maybe loving God means to have faith that he is in charge, that paying attention to him and looking for him rather than fearing the devil and scouring for signs of him just might work better to allow me to "Try hard, play fair, and have fun." After all, aren't we created to have joy even as we love and serve our neighbors? And to savor what we've been given?

Today, take the time to see the seasons take over like the hand of God. Listen to the persuasive urging of his son to judge not, to love our enemies, bless them that curse us, do good to them that hate us – or are not like us – and pray for them that despise us and persecute us – or others – that we may be the children of our Father in Heaven.

And devil, wherever you might be lurking, just go to hell. OK? ❖

Exposure

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that I feel was inspired. I expressed my fears and told her that I was bipolar. She reassured me that Megan did not have any signs of Down syndrome. She told me how remarkable it was that I had twice been able to give birth to healthy children while taking Lithium. She helped me to calm down and told me it was extremely normal to feel overwhelmed by the prospect of caring for two children. She complimented me for doing so well thus far with my son. After she left, I sat on my bed in my blue hospital johnny, still bleeding and in pain from natural childbirth, and felt God's presence. In that moment I knew that He accepted me as the mother to these two beautiful children and that my sacrifice was sufficient. I could choose to stop having children without guilt. Instead of feeling overwhelmed by the responsibility to mother them, I felt reminded of the miracle of my being able to bear them, especially in light of my condition.

I consider myself a strong woman. Although my life outwardly seems simple, I struggle more than most people know. My mental illness confuses me and frustrates me on a weekly basis, at best. I still wonder if I see the world the same as other women around me. I look for ways to connect with other women and I listen to their busy lives. I am envious of women who raise many children, hold high stress jobs, cook for themselves and for others in need, make a lot of money, stay physically fit, and have the many other skills that I struggle with. I try to stay

focused on the things I do well. I spend a great deal of preparation time so that I show competence when stress hits. I reserve the detailed descriptions of both my experiences with depression and mania for friends who know me well and have earned my trust and loyalty. But I am beginning to accept that I am bipolar and not feel disappointed with myself because of it. I want to talk about my life experiences honestly and candidly, just as my mom talks about her encounter with breast cancer.

When I was admitted in 1997 to the psychiatric unit at Beth Israel Hospital in Boston, Bishop Greg Sorenson visited me. He gave me a priesthood blessing. He told me that my mental illness was not a character flaw. Almost a decade later, the births of my two children, also at Beth Israel Hospital, marked an important moment in my emotional journey with a mental illness. My children symbolize my gratitude and humility. I acknowledge that bipolar disorder has not flawed my character. I am also willing to have people feel awkward when I mention my mental illness or even to reject me.

I still take Lithium. Some days I still struggle to understand why I need it. But I've learned that by caring for myself physically and emotionally, I can be a positive example and loving mother to my sweet Conor and Megan. ❖

The (Not-So-Perfect) Primary Program

by Amber Heiner

It may have seemed like any ordinary Primary program from the looks of it. Parents and grandparents sat straining their necks to see if they could get a good look at their little performers. The music director looked around nervously to see that everyone was properly seated and prayed that the children would remember the words and actions to the songs that she had painstakingly practiced with them for months. The Primary president and her counselors tried to make sure that everyone was ready. The teachers sat with their classes and hoped that their students would behave during the program.

But this Primary program was going to be far from ordinary, for it was a far from ordinary Primary. This was the Special Primary that met every Tuesday afternoon after school. The students that made up this Primary had a variety of special needs. Some could not speak, while others could not walk. Yet these students had the capacity to love unconditionally.

The teachers were not ordinary, either. They were young high school seminary students who were asked to volunteer a couple of hours every week. They had no formal training and little or no experience. But they, too, had unconditional love.

The program started off smoothly with the Primary president welcoming the parents

and relatives. I sat quietly with my class, the CTR Bs. I was a high school senior at the time, and I was struggling with making a decision as to what field of study I should go into when I went to college the next fall. I had considered special education, but I wanted to make sure that I had the ability to work with disabled children. I saw the special needs Primary as a prime opportunity for me to gain the experience that would help me in my decision.

Throughout the year, I found that I enjoyed working with the special souls who made up my Primary class. I found more patience and tolerance within me than I ever thought possible. But as I sat with my class listening to the Primary president welcoming everyone, I still had doubts.

After her introduction, the Primary president turned the time over to the music director. The children stood at her prompting and began to sing their first song. All seemed to be going better than anyone expected when what I considered disaster struck. Katy, a rambunctious and energetic young lady from my class, bolted out of her place and began to run. She was full of spunk, and she loved to run. I could rarely keep her quiet and in her seat during a lesson, but I had hoped that she would stay still during the program. To my dismay, she dashed across the gym and ran out a door.

I tried to go after her quietly and discreetly.

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By the time I caught up to her, she was almost out the front door of the church. I took her hand and tried to coax her back into the program but to no avail. She refused to budge. I was finally able to convince her to sit on my lap out in the foyer. We sat there together listening to the other children singing. I longed to be back in that gym with those children. I felt discouraged that I was sitting in the foyer while the other teachers sat with their classes and enjoyed the program. I began to feel that perhaps I didn't have the patience to work with children like Katy.



Finally, I was able to get Katy to go into the gym while the children sang their last song. We sat in the back and watched as they sang "I'll Walk with You." Still fretting and feeling discouraged because I thought that I had missed the whole program, I was surprised to hear a snuffle in front of me. I looked around and could see that every person in that audience had a tear trickling down his or her cheek. That is, everyone but me. It seemed that I alone had been untouched by the spirit of the most perfect Primary program ever performed.

I looked down at Katy and saw that she was smiling at me, and I realized that I hadn't missed the program at all. Katy was as much a part of that program as any other child, and I had been able to sit with her and keep her happy. I smiled back down at her and felt the spirit finally touch my heart.

I then knew what field of study I would pursue, and I am grateful to say that I have had a number of opportunities to work with many special children and adults. These opportunities have blessed my life and have made me a better person. I will forever be grateful for Katy and those very special Primary children who sang with all their souls:

*If you don't walk as most people do, some people
walk away from you*

But I won't! I won't!

*If you don't talk as most people do, some people
talk and laugh at you,*

But I won't! I won't!

*I'll walk with you. I'll talk with you. That's how
I'll show my love for you.*

*Jesus walked away from none. He gave his love
to ev'ryone.*

So I will! I will!

*Jesus blessed all he could see, then turned and
said, "Come, follow me."*

And I will! I will! I will! I will!

*I'll walk with you. I'll talk with you. That's how
I'll show my love for you.*

Children's Songbook, pp. 140-141 ❖

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Breakfast in China

by Julie Berry

I do not read to my children enough. Scarcely anything except the Riot Act. And in the face of today's read-to-your-kids-or-else PR machine, that's one baby step away from failing to feed them.

I always assumed that I would instinctively read to my kids since I spent so much of my childhood reading. I grew up in farm country before the invention of the Playdate. My older siblings were avid readers, so reading, not playing, was what I did, obsessively.

I remember, during my teen years, hearing some church speaker quote a little poem that I've since seen on library walls. "Something something, you may have (lots of money, etc.)/ But richer than I you can never be, /I had a mother who read to me."

That, I knew, would be me. Be it ever so humble, my future home would be a place where children were read to. (To which children were read? Whereunto children were read? Anyway.) You could have knocked me over if you'd shown me what a kid-reading flop I'd turn out to be.

Fast-forward in time to the births of my children. By this time the emphasis on reading to kids had reached a fever pitch, and strange devices that you strapped to your pregnant belly that amplified the sound of your reading voice were selling

like crazy. If your child was not fed a steady diet of *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* while floating in the womb-womb, its SAT scores would teeter. The best you could hope for Jimmy would be a career in penal servitude.

We read to our first son. Mind-numbingly repetitive little counting books that we bought somewhere for 99 cents. He wouldn't know the difference, right? He demanded them over, and over and over and over again until we wanted to tear them into bits and stomp on them. I've since learned that great children's literature is not really for the kids, who can gain language skills by watching *One Life To Live*. It's to protect the parents from going berserk.

Then we had two kids, and then three, and suddenly we were stuck forever in Seuss land. In Whoville. I appreciate Seuss's genius, truly I do, but we were in a literary rut. Reading to kids had lost its joy. And still the demand was for *Dr. Seuss's ABC*, over and over and over and over and over and over again. (Sing along with me: "Big A, little a, what begins with A? Aunt Annie's alligator! A, A, A. Big B, little b, what begins with B? Barber, baby, bubbles, and a bumblebee!" Don't think I had to check my sources. *I know this.*)

I confess: We got to the point where we hid their favorite books. But I know I'm not the only one.



sign my name to it. I am answerable to a kindergarten teacher, who periodically sends home snippy notes on teddy-bear-sprinkled paper saying, “Mrs. Berry, we haven’t seen Daniel’s Reading Log in a while!”

Why wasn’t I read my rights on the first day of school? Can these signed reading logs be used against me in court?

Last year my oldest son’s teacher sent home, with the second trimester report cards, a list of the number of books read thus far that year by each child, with my child’s number circled. The numbers were blessedly anonymous, but there was our circle for our little superachiever – second from the bottom. 29 books in the school year, with a cluster of little show-offs posting 239, 202, 187, etc. at the top, and the rest weighing in at a healthy hundred-plus (which means approximately one book per day). Our son had 29, and someone else, whose parents are probably both in jail, had 27.

Does this go on his Permanent Record?

The ironic thing is that our sons can all read very well. I swear we did nothing to facilitate it, but their oddball little brains had all grasped reading independently before finishing preschool. Our kids ought to be the best readers in their school, but they *don’t want to*.

To illustrate: Two years ago my husband read the complete *Winnie the Pooh* stories

By the time they entered school, I’d given up on their intellectual stimulation. School, in my eyes, was all about “You take them for six hours” not “Prepare them for Harvard.” But right at this stage, the chirpy enthusiastic teachers entered the scene with their Parents as Reading Partners propaganda, copied on Pepto-pink paper and sent home with a stack of Reading Logs. Now it’s my job to read to them daily, record what was read and by whom, and

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to the boys every night before bed, and by imitating the voices from the Disney movie, he was able to hold their attention pretty well. They were smart enough to see that it postponed bedtime by a few minutes each night and played along.

So, inspired by his Pooh success, I tried to read them *Little House in the Big Woods* by Laura Ingalls Wilder. Sons 1 and 3 vanished completely, but son #2 paid a smidge of attention, so we slogged our way through it. Recently I thought I'd try *Farmer Boy*, another book in the same series. At least it's about a boy.

So when I offer reading time, son #2 feigns interest. He likes the attention. He says, "Okay, Mom, you read, and I'll be right here listening while I play Game Boy."

When I explain that that is not the deal and that he must focus, listen, and look at the pictures, he agrees and flops down on the bed next to me. A few paragraphs later, the soul of politeness, he says:

"Excuse me, Mom? Can you just hold on a sec? I want to solve this hidden picture puzzle on the cover of *Highlights for Children*."

Again I remind him, lovingly, that this is our reading time and that he can look at his magazine later and to please pay attention.

The reading continues. Little Almanzo is just

at the thrilling point of training his calves that "Gee" means right and "Haw" means left when Daniel shakes my shoulder.

"Mom! Mom! Stop! Do you *smell something?*"

No, I don't.

"I do! It's . . . it's coming from China."

From China.

"Did you know that right now it's morning in China?"

Is it?

"I think I'm smelling their breakfast all the way from China."

I am at a loss.

"Well, keep reading."

Certainly, dear son.

Poor attending skills, weak listening comprehension, insufficient titles read, no reading logs. I often imagine the school district is gathering evidence, building a case for a Neglect charge against me. But if I ever do get my day in court, even though I *am* guilty, I believe I would not be convicted by a jury of my peers. ❖

Threads of Courage

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as a guard in the kingdom.

In fact, I think in almost every issue of *Exponent II* you could find a thread of courage running through the lives of this sisterhood. Many of our life situations—whether it’s teaching a Relief Society lesson; supporting our mothers, grandmothers, or daughters through trials; or sharing deeply personal experiences—all require courage. This is a resourceful, courageous group of women, relying on our faith in God, our communities, our sisters, and, of course, ourselves.

And as Linda Hoffman Kimball writes, “Keeping a cudgel close at hand is not a bad idea, either.” ❖

Dining Room Table

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hand-dipped on the dining room table contributed to its deterioration. Neighborhood kids dropped in unannounced to make oatmeal chocolate chip cookies at the dining room table, and Mother was happy to oblige, even though by this time maneuvering around her kitchen in a walker with sheets of cookies was challenging.

No, the dining room table was nothing to look at, nothing to fight over. So Mother, I don’t know who actually got your dining room table, but all who dined with you inherited a portion. And we will try to perpetuate your willingness to share and your joy in nourishing a person in physical or spiritual need. The knowledge that your table was in my dining room would have comforted you, but in reality your table now lives on in the lives of all who gathered there. ❖

On Motherhood

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and wise decisions, no matter how I try to strengthen my defenses for his success. But today, Thursday, at the Sailboat Pond, he can look back at me and give me a moment of acknowledgement that validates my new work, my new weight-of-the-world role as his mother who needs all the reassurance there is. And perhaps we really will remain above water, this child and I, if I can remember that he is not afraid of being the captain—that perhaps God made him purposefully able and anxious to steer.

“No. No, he is not afraid,” I reply, whispering to myself. I smile at the sailboat men and hurry to catch up to this soul, to my child, who has been steps ahead of me from the beginning. ❖

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Little Ones

by Heidi Poulson Bennett

I love nature. I love trees and sunsets and flowers and mountains; I love the ocean and rivers and rain. I hate to see animals in cages. I thrill to see birds in flight and wildlife in their habitat. But Gary Larson made it clear that “there’s a difference between loving nature and understanding nature,” and those who love nature without understanding it tend to get in the way and mess things up. I cringe to think that I’m one of those people, but I’m afraid it’s true. I love nature, but do I understand it enough to love it even when I don’t like it?

I know the “law of the jungle” and the notion of “survival of the fittest.” I’ve seen the nature videos and taken the biology classes and read about the ecosystem. Nature is expert at balancing herself, and it’s important to not get in her way. I know that. Really. I just don’t like to see her darker side in action.

I was an overly sensitive child, and though I no longer cry when the Christmas tree is thrown out, I still have a tender spot for all things innocent and helpless. I most likely inherited this trait from my father, who can’t stand to see an animal neglected or in pain. It was understood in my family that we didn’t watch animal movies—*Old Yeller* or *The Yearling* or even *Bambi* and *Dumbo*—and that those who made them and showed them to children were just plain sadistic. Coincidentally, my husband James



was also a sensitive child. His older brother and sisters liked to make him watch the animated Christmas movie *Nestor, the Long-Eared Donkey* just so they could watch him cry.

Which may explain why we both reacted so strongly when James accidentally soaked a baby bird with the hose. The bird had most of his feathers, but he was still just a little guy, his feet still too big for his body. We didn’t even know he was there until James changed the position of the hose on the lawn and suddenly there was something chirping and flapping in the grass. We ran to see what it was, and there he sat, a tiny common sparrow, wet and shaking. We didn’t want to touch him for fear it would make other birds reject him, so I coaxed him onto a garden spade and carried him to the porch. As I watched him shiver, all my motherly instincts were roused. It didn’t help that when he would chirp periodically, head up and eyes closed, he sounded so plaintive and sad. I desperately wanted to hold him

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and pet him and keep him warm. I wanted to nurse this little brown bird back to health.

At the same time, I remembered all I'd heard about natural selection and mother birds shoving the weaker ones out of the nest. He seemed too big to have been shoved, though. How did he come to be in the middle of our lawn, hidden in our grass? Our street is lined with large sycamores, and we have a bird feeder outside to feed the many little birds of his kind. Did he even know how to fly? Could he have fallen? Was he injured as well as soaked? I tried to think objectively, pushing my maternal instincts aside: This was a wild animal that could be sick or carrying dangerous parasites.

By trying to save this little bird, I may get in Nature's way. But would it really matter if I did?

In the end the maternal instincts won. They always do. I knew that leaving this bird

outside doomed him to be eaten by one of our neighbors' cats, and as much as I knew that was the natural order of things, I couldn't bear the thought of leaving something so innocent and pathetic so helpless—especially to the nasty cats that used our garden as a litter box. I wasn't sure what to do, and when my husband joined me on the porch, I knew that he was also at a loss. He'd already had a rough week, and the little sad bird brought tears to his eyes. When I suggested that we take him inside for the night, James said, "If I find him dead in the morning, I'll absolutely lose it." We had no idea how to take care of a bird, especially a little wild one, and I hated the thought of his dying because of our ignorance. But looking at him, stiff and shivering, I doubted there was much we could do.

"Maybe all we can do is make him comfortable," I suggested, avoiding James's eyes. "He might not survive the night anyway."

"So we're like birdie hospice," James offered.

"Yeah. Are you okay with that?"

"I guess so. We just can't give him a name, okay?"

So I gently picked the bird up and carried him in cupped hands up the stairs to our apartment. Now that we had decided to nurse him, we weren't so concerned about

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not touching him. It made me happy to pick him up and pet his head and feel his warmth between my hands. We found a large box and a soft dishtowel, and we put in it a shallow dish of water and a pile of breadcrumbs, just in case he could eat on his own. He still didn't move much, and he still had his eyes closed, so we petted his head and left him in the back room and tried to forget he was there. We wanted to help, but we couldn't afford to get attached.

When I went to check on him the next morning, I was pleasantly surprised to find him alive. He was dry and had stopped shivering, but he still didn't move much. "Hey, Little One," I whispered as I pet his soft head, "you look a lot better today." Then I touched his foot, and he squawked and flapped and jumped out of the box. I gasped and jumped backward, completely surprised and laughing. He's okay after all, I thought as I watched him hop across the floor. I hurried to catch him before he went under the bookshelf, and he flapped to the other side of the room and made it under the computer desk before I could catch him. He seemed happy there, so I just made sure to close the doors to that room so we could find him after we got home from work.

I called a friend who raised her pet bird practically from the time it hatched. If anyone knew what to do with a baby bird, Amber would. She told me that at our bird's age it would be hard to feed him, so she suggested I look for bird rehabilitators

on the Department of Wildlife website. Sure enough, there were a few who took in perching birds. The only one I could find at home was in South Jordan, and he agreed to take him in.

Amber told me that she and her parents rehabilitated a few birds when she was living in St. George. The birds bonded with them, and once they were set free, they decided to stick around. She said that when she visits her parents, she can go in the backyard and call the birds' names, and they'll usually come perch near her.

More hopeful for our bird's chances, we chased him down (he was in fine health and had made his way across the room several times) and put him in a deeper box for the drive. He chirped at me from time to time, but he never tried to get away. "We can name him now if you want," James said, "now that we know he'll be all right." We tried a few names – Buddy, Fred, Thor – but none seemed to stick. He really wasn't ours to name.

Our rehabilitator was an elderly man who'd recently had both hips replaced. He had a kind manner, and his yard was full of birdhouses. He had what he called a "bird condo" in the back – a large structure with about twelve nesting spaces. All were full. He invited us in to see the baby hummingbirds he was nursing. Two little girls down the street had found the nest, and after the mother didn't return for a few

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days, they took the golf ball-sized knot of grass and string to their neighbor. This man had kept baby hummingbirds alive longer than anyone at the Department of Wildlife had ever seen. He fed them a homemade mixture of sugar syrup, egg white, and calcium supplements and watched them carefully. These tiny creatures amazed me. I'd never seen a perched adult hummingbird, and here were two babies, each smaller than my thumb.

This man had learned to get abandoned chicks to open their beaks for food by blowing in their faces to imitate the flapping of a mother's wings. He knew to feed hummingbirds animal protein instead of grain protein. He didn't care about disturbing the ecosystem—he knew how to nurse birds, so he did. Some survived, some didn't. What mattered was that he tried.

I was reminded of Loren Eiseley's experience with a star thrower, a man throwing beached starfish back into the sea. Eiseley had been jaded with life, with human

cruelty and futility. Seeing this man's efforts to preserve life, to choose life in a desolate world, gave him hope and a realization that we need not be consumed by darkness. In thinking on this man's actions, Eiseley comes to the following conclusion:

"I do love the world," I whispered. . . . "I love its small ones, the things beaten in the strangling surf, the bird, singing, which flies and falls and is not seen again."

It was like the renunciation of my scientific heritage. . . . I had come full upon one of the last great rifts in nature. . . . But no, it was not a rift but a joining: the expression of love projected beyond the species boundary by a creature born of Darwinian struggle, in the silent war under the tangled bank. . . . Here, at last, was the rift that lay beyond Darwin's tangled bank. For a creature, arisen from that bank and born of its contentions, had stretched out its hand in pity.

I no longer worried about disturbing Nature. Our Little One may not survive; he may get sick or be eaten by a cat or coyote. Our efforts may ultimately turn out to be futile. But in choosing to preserve his insignificant life, James and I had reached beyond our evolution. We both felt taller as we drove home. ❖

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A Time to Keep Silent and a Time to Speak

by Charlotte Anderson

Let's get one thing straight right off the bat: I'm just an ordinary girl. I'm not gorgeous nor am I ugly. I'm smart in some things and incredibly stupid in others. I love to read, crochet baby hats, rock climb, play the piano, and hike. My idea of a perfect evening is going out to dinner with my husband and then watching our two toddlers throw rocks in the ocean while the sun sets.

I am a daughter of my Heavenly Father. I am a wife, a mother, a daughter, a sister, a friend. I've been a Gospel Doctrine teacher and a data entry specialist for the Family History program and have had just about every calling in the Young Women's program. In addition to all these things that I am, I am also an LDS girl who was sexually assaulted.

I wanted to give you an idea of me as a person first because that last part of me is the part I'm going to share with you now, and I didn't want you to think that is all that I am. That's important because if you are also an LDS girl who was sexually assaulted (and the statistics say there is a one in four chance that you are) then you need to remember that that's not all you are, either. Sometimes that's hard to remember because sexual abuse isn't something we talk about much, at least not on a personal and spiritual level. Sure, there are articles and movies and books about "date rape,"

"domestic violence," and other scary topics. They have lots of advice about how to avoid becoming a victim, along with lots of scary statistics, but very rarely in the popular press – and even more so in Church literature – do they talk about what to do if it has already happened to you.

Date rape. Sexual assault. Abuse. Domestic violence. Dating violence. It's hard to stick a name to it. Oh, sure, it's easy when it's someone else. We all know "of" someone who was raped or assaulted. But when it was me, I wasn't sure what exactly had happened to me, much less if it fit any of the above terms. In fact, I never thought of it as any of those words until about five years after the fact when it went to court. Even when I saw "forcible sexual assault" on the court papers, I still thought in my head, "That's not what happened to me."

The first problem I encountered in dealing with my assault was deciding what to call it. The majority of girls whom I've come across have a hard time with the semantics, just as I did – especially if it wasn't the Hollywood definition of rape. If it has happened to you, maybe you wondered if what had happened

Sexual abuse isn't something we talk about much, at least not on a personal and spiritual level.

It's painful to identify oneself as a survivor, to talk about what happened.

was really that bad. I did. Perhaps you too wondered if maybe you just overreacted or made it into a bigger deal than it was. There's this weird murky middle ground between someone "copping a feel" at a crowded party (Yucky? Yes. Huge deal? Not so much.) and getting dragged down a dark alley by a stranger and raped (definitely illegal, tragic, and with life-long consequences). My assault falls in that gray area. Most of them do. I thought that since what happened to me wasn't at the latter end of that spectrum, it couldn't have been that bad. News flash: Even if you weren't raped but were "just" fondled, touched, groped, or forced to do anything sexually that you didn't want to, it *is* tragic, it *is* illegal, and it *will* have lasting consequences. Part of validating and accepting your experience is giving yourself permission to call it what it was.

Another issue I have with talking about my assault stems from being LDS, specifically my *pride* in being LDS. *We* don't drink alcohol. *We* don't do drugs. *We* don't have pre-marital sex. *We* don't get ourselves into bad situations. This type of thing just doesn't happen to *us*. Let me paint you a picture. Just a few weeks ago, I was sitting in Relief Society and a dear sister was teaching a lesson on overcoming personal trials. On the board, she listed various trials that women called out – things like "poor

health," "financial problems," "wayward children," and "depression." And don't get me wrong – those are all serious problems – but when nobody suggested it, the teacher asked the class, "What about abuse? Has anyone ever been abused?" I'm sure you can guess how many women raised their hands. That's right. None. Not even me. Why? The short answer is because we just don't talk about it. People don't like to believe it could happen to them, and acknowledging that it happens to others – good churchwomen that they know even – is the first step to recognizing that it could be them. I can understand this feeling quite well. Even though I have court documents stating I was "sexually abused" by my ex-boyfriend, including his admission of guilt, I still catch myself thinking that it can't happen to me – mostly because I still wish so much that it hadn't.

Another reason I think we don't talk about it is that it is genuinely hard to discuss. It's painful to identify oneself as a survivor, to talk about what happened, to listen to the heartless things other people say in trying to protect themselves. I think many of us also have the instinct that we can't talk about our trials until we can use the past tense. It's really difficult to stand up and say, "Yes, I'm still having a really hard time dealing with this. In fact, I probably always will." How much easier it would be to stand up in testimony meeting and say, "Once I went through something really awful but through the grace of God and diligent work I have overcome it and learned these fabulous

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A Time to Speak

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eternal truths, which I will now enumerate for you.” Of course, we’d rather be in the latter group, but I’m finding that not many of life’s trials fall into that tidy category.

Learning is all about the process, and the process is messy. And long. And hard. And worthwhile. And important. Why? Because it’s why we came to earth – to struggle, to learn, and to grow.

So why can’t we be more accepting of people who are going through the process? I don’t know. All I know is that it’s a lot easier when we share each other’s burdens. When we talk about it. When we hold onto one another for support and cry. After all, isn’t that part of the mission of the Relief Society? Seriously, if I were with a victim of sexual assault, I’d listen, and then I’d encourage her to keep telling her story. I’m convinced that the telling is part of the healing, and part of the healing comes from the naming. (And, by the way, that nice little conclusion in the last sentence was something that has taken me a lot of time to accept. I didn’t talk about it with anyone for over five years after it occurred, so if a woman is still silent, I understand that too.)

There is another word I have a problem with: *victim*. Perhaps you have noticed I avoid using that term, especially in reference to myself, as much as possible. I hate the powerlessness that it denotes (even though I was powerless), the weakness it implies (even though I was weak), but most of all, the lack of responsibility it shows. In our

religion, taking responsibility for one’s actions is a big deal. God gave us free agency to choose, and part of that gift is the responsibility for the outcomes of our choices. I made my choices, and some of them were bad ones.

I admit that. I claim that responsibility, and in doing so I also claim responsibility for my choices in how I deal with it now – namely, to heal and to repent.

So what do I call myself instead? Well, mostly I just prefer my own name. The assault has simply become a part of who I am, integrated into my character, my sense of self. When my ex-boyfriend spoke in court, he addressed me and the others collectively as “my victims.” It dehumanized us, owned us, and shuttled us all into one category that did nothing to acknowledge or differentiate our experiences or our uniqueness. We all have names. Names have power. They should be used. I am not Victim 1 in State vs. X. Smith. I am Charlotte with all the good and the bad that entails.

So why am I making such a big deal about this naming stuff? First of all, because if you aren’t willing to call it what it is, you minimize your experience. Secondly, you deny yourself avenues of help. In my reticence to call my experience sexual

I’m convinced that the telling is part of the healing.

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assault, I never sought out counseling, support groups, or even friends. Instead, for years I called it things like “my mistake” or “my morality problem” in my head. This hurt me and stunted my healing. I followed dark paths of ruthless self-recrimination and endless guilt trips. I was unable to make any sense of my experience or why I still felt so badly about it. And worst of all, I was unable to hold my ex-boyfriend accountable for his part in it. In refusing to name it, I absolved him of all responsibility and, unwittingly, allowed him to assault many others. The third reason I wanted to talk about naming is simply to say that we need to speak of it. Aloud. And to each other. I know it’s hard to do, but it will

The worst part of my experience was how alone I was, and it didn’t have to be that way.

be instrumental in stopping the same thing from happening to others. We need to make our voices heard, send up the warning cry to our sisters, our daughters, our

friends, and our youth. This type of crime thrives on silence; by gagging ourselves, we inadvertently do the same to future victims.

Lest you think I’m out for blood, I want to say that this need to talk is not about vengeance or circumventing the forgiveness process or even about naming the perpetrator. All I’m asking you to do is name *yourselves*. The worst part of my experience was how alone I was, and it didn’t have to be that way.

If this has happened to you and you are suffering alone right now, I’m so sorry. I can’t be your therapist or counselor, but what I can be is your friend, your confidante, your ally. The best gift I can give you is to help you know that you are not alone. I’ll give it to you straight—the story of how I’m still healing, the impact it has had on my life, the messy un-endings. But more than that, I hope to point you to the only true source of healing—the Savior. Let’s face it—being sexually assaulted or abused can really throw your testimony for a loop, especially if the perpetrator, like mine, was or is a member of the Church, too. My instinct was to pull away from Christ, to hide what I had become, but I’m here to tell you that He is the only one who knows *exactly* how you feel. And He loves you. Yes, right now, this very minute, He is loving you. He has the power to make this weak thing become a strength to you if you will let Him.

It is important for you to know that you are not alone. You are not crazy. Things will get easier. I promise. ❖

The Connections We Make

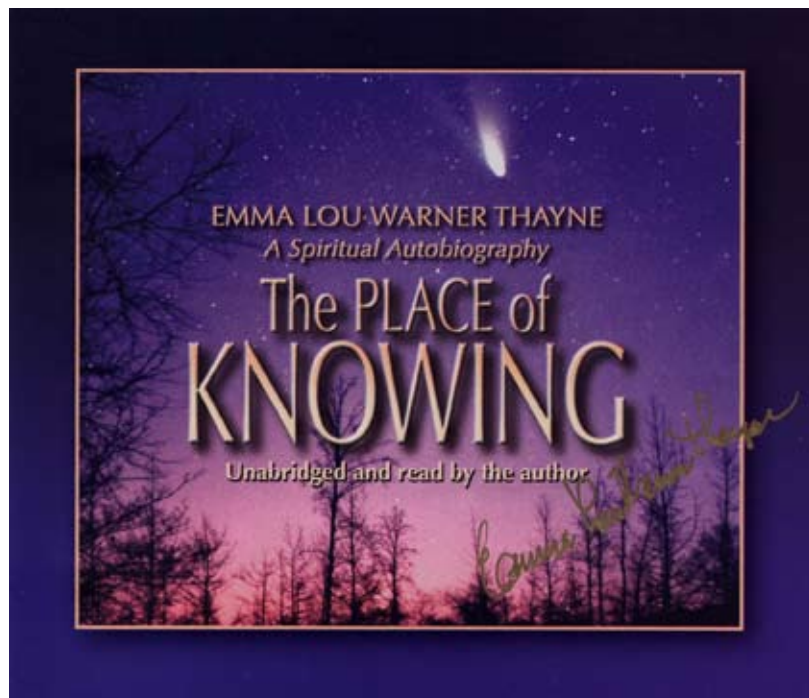
by Suzanne R. Hawes

Emma Lou Thyne, The Place of Knowing, Grey Matters, New York, www.mormonconnections.com, 2006

How honest can I be? The reason that it took so long to listen to this audiobook is that I was concerned about listening to it when my fairly conservative branch president son-in-law was home and downstairs. After hearing the story of Emma Lou's accident and a vague description of the "place of knowing," it sounded like a mystical, new age place. I have two friends who were in stake Relief Society presidencies who somehow got disaffected with the Church and are now far out into New Age beliefs. I was afraid that Emma Lou had joined them.

Since Katrina heavily damaged our houses, my daughter's family and I have been sharing a newer house. So, for the last year we have had three adults, a nineteen-year-old granddaughter, and a fourteen-year-old grandson living under one roof. It is both wonderful and challenging. With two teenagers and a grandmother with quite poor health, we try to keep the place fairly peaceful. So, I would listen to the book for the half hour between the time I got home from work and my daughter and son-in-law got home.

I should have had more faith. Having finished the recording, I wish that I had listened harder and faster because I now



know that absolutely nothing in it would have offended my dear son-in-law. *The Place of Knowing* is a place where any LDS person would feel at home—and more of us should find our way there.

The book is composed mainly of stories from Emma Lou's relationships with a vast array of different people. Every listener will relate to those stories that resonate with their own lives. There are many stories, so everyone should be able to find favorites. The tales are all about paying close attention to others, trying to relate to them, and letting them know that you understand them—synchronicity, as Emma Lou calls it.

The episode about meeting Paul at a work-

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shop and how their friendship grew was intriguing. A heterosexual female Mormon writer becoming fast friends with a homosexual Catholic artist is not the LDS norm. Their mutual friendship and understanding and her long-distance support as he slowly succumbed to AIDS was touching. He had painted thirteen large pictures of the Stations of the Cross, all done in shades of red. His partner eventually got all the pictures to Emma Lou. With her ecumenical connections, she found an appropriate place to show these pieces of art where many could enjoy them.

Emma Lou describes her experiences connecting with women of Russia and Eastern Europe in her travels to promote peace. These women spoke no English, and yet Emma Lou was able to reach a mutual understanding with them without using words. She attributes this ability to the fact that she pays attention to people and what they are doing and can see the divine in them, which helps her to reach out to them, drawing out mutual feelings.

The same thing happened with Edith, whose San Juan Mountains of Washington were so much mistier than the Wasatch's, and who became a friend with whom she shared her island isolation. The two women both wrote and loved the outdoors. They were able to connect and share both their commonality and their differences. This connection with others is what I see as Emma Lou's talent, which she has nurtured even more after finding the Place of Knowing

Emma Lou met a shy twenty-something young man with Down Syndrome and cared enough to try and draw him out. When their visit was over, he wore a huge smile because he and this sweet woman shared a birthday. Then she followed up and phoned him on "their" birthday.

My favorite story was about Lowell Ben-nion, a man whom I wish I had known personally. His statement when he was "dismissed" as Institute Director is one we all could heed. He did not make a big public display of righteous indignation, which he could have done because of his popularity. He took his removal without recrimination. His words were something like, "I do not wish to be defeated twice – once by circumstance and once by myself." If we could all face adversity with such an attitude, our lives would be better.

Emma Lou is always an emissary for the influence of God, peace, truth, friendship, and caring. Her faith as she describes the Place of Knowing is magnificent. Her prayers are like breathing. The life she lives and describes is full of reciprocity, synchronicity, and paying attention to others and the divine. You need to read the book to meet the multitude of friends she has made on her way to the Place of Knowing. You will come to appreciate what and where the Place is. And the beauty of it is that we all can be on the way to that same Place. ❖

Psychology and the Mormon World

by Kristin Lang Hansen

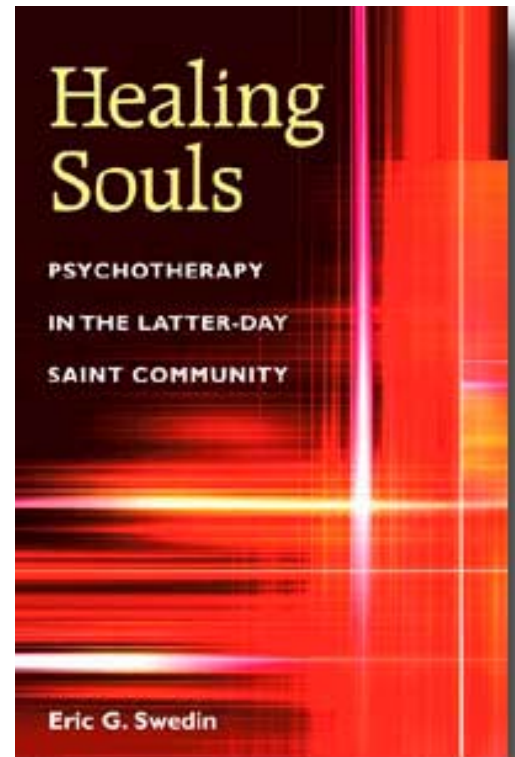
Eric Swedin, Healing Souls: Psychotherapy in the Latter-day Saint Community, University of Illinois Press, 2003.

Eric Swedin's *Healing Souls: Psychotherapy in the Latter-day Saint Community* is a wonderful book on the history of psychology within the LDS community. Written for an audience with an interest in psychotherapy, it highlights the struggle between modern psychology and the LDS Church over the second half of the twentieth century. While I may be biased in my enjoyment of this book – given that I work as a psychologist – I think it is an interesting read for anyone with a curiosity about psychology and psychological treatment in the LDS community. It provides a context for and an understanding of an often fear-based response to psychology in LDS circles and assists those who might need psychological help become better informed in seeking it. This is an academic book, but while it is not a light read, it is a rich one.

In this book, Swedin addresses how contemporary American religious communities have confronted the “psychologizing” of America, using the LDS Church as his prime example. His first point is that “modern psychologies and religion are close cousins” in terms of their function in America society, both providing a way to talk about values and, in some cases, helping each other. Second, he shows how modern psychologies have affected the LDS Church. Third, he

addresses how the LDS integration of modern psychologies has differed from that of Protestant denominations.

Throughout the book, Swedin describes how the LDS Church has managed the tension of incorporating useful worldly psychological understanding without rejecting often conflicting LDS doctrine. Along with fundamentalist Christians, LDS theology has not been changed by psychology because it has retained its literal interpretation of the scriptures. This has not been the case for other Christian faiths. Swedin contends that when mainline Protestant churches weakened their metaphorical link to God by adopting higher criticism and redefined the Bible as a moral work, their ability to resist the appeal of modern psychology was eroded even when it was inconsistent with their doctrine. Through Swedin's eyes, the reader experiences repeated examples where the LDS Church's firm stance has allowed for the integration of psychological ideas without changing its



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doctrine despite an increasingly immoral and psychologized secular America.

Swedin presents the debates on several issues, such as how can a counselor be nonjudgmental and at the same time help a client take responsibility for sin. Swedin addresses the often difficult ethical overlap in roles between priesthood leaders and psychological counselors. He describes how leaders and mental health professionals have interacted at different periods in the Church's recent history and chronicles how the Church has used mental health workers – both in creating LDS Social Services, which hires therapists willing to uphold LDS standards, and by supporting associations of practicing Mormon mental health professionals. The book presents debates among mental health professionals within academia – specifically at BYU and in Allen Bergin's short-lived but influential BYU Institute for Values and Human Behavior.

Swedin describes different LDS approaches to healing, such as C. Terry Warner's Agentive approach and De Hoyos Celestial therapy. To this day, LDS psychologists – having no unified theory of psychology – tend to be eclectic, drawing on what works from secular psychological theories without compromising Mormon doctrine. Swedin discusses psychopathology common in the LDS community, such as obsession with perfectionism, religious rationalization for neurotic behavior (that is, not adequately dealing with and taking reality into account), religious content that is actually a manifestation of mental illness, and mental

health problems resulting from stress related to LDS roles and cultural pressures.

Perhaps of most interest to *Exponent II* readers may be Swedin's chapter on feminism. He places Church members' questions about the role of women in various contexts within the broader secular historical framework. Swedin mentions the struggles and writings of individual women, as well as the creation of literature for dialogue, including the *Exponent II* magazine.

While psychological terminology and a psychological mindset (or way of knowing about reality) has entered the LDS community, the LDS community has largely rejected the selfist psychologies, which promote a self-centered view rather than a God-centered view of reality. The selfist psychologies encourage self-realization through personal effort, whereby relationships are meant to serve the needs of the individual. In contrast, an LDS world view suggests that groups of individuals must relinquish some of their highly valued individuality for the greater community. Furthermore, the LDS emphasis placed on service provides a doctrinal grounding for why a selfist psychology cannot work. Some aspects of the modern psychologies tend to help the "natural man," while the LDS community is aware that our psychologies need to help "put off" the natural man.

While I believe there is much good to be found in psychology, it must be handled delicately. One should not absorb

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Guarded Comments

by Linda Hoffman Kimball

I recently returned from a Wellesley College alumnae trip to Tanzania. The first part of the adventure was a cultural exploration of “Modern and Traditional Women of Tanzania.” We visited Masai *bomas* (villages) where the families live in simple mud huts with central cooking pots just as they have for millennia. They dress in vivid colors with elaborately beaded jewelry. Some make extra income when westerners (few and far between) stop by to ogle their beadwork and purchase their wares. The Masai men dress in bright reds and purples that make them easy to spot out on the vast savannah herding their cows. They are skilled defenders of their herds, having experience killing lions, hyenas, cheetahs, and other predators.

The second half of our junket was more traditional game animal viewing in Northern Tanzania. For this we stayed in a temporary camp set up on the chilly rim of the Ngorongoro Crater, where the temperatures dipped into the 30s overnight. Our tents were supplied with comfortable cots with two down comforters and a hot water bottle that stayed warm the entire night.

I was surprised to learn that we had a Masai guard hired to keep watch over the camp while we slept. Apparently these confident warriors are often hired as professional guards in the more populated areas of northern Tanzania.

I asked one of our drivers what the guard would do if confronted with an animal at night. “He’d spear him.” No guns. No tazers. No tranquilizer darts. So, there was our guard, roaming back and forth in front of our dozen tents at night, wrapped in his purple and red blankets, carrying a spear, a machete, and a cudgel. I don’t know why I found this so comforting, but I slept peacefully. I felt ably watched over.

I heard later that some Masai guards also carry cell phones, although what good a



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cell phone in mortal combat with a leopard would be, I have no idea. Calling for back up when the next expert was three hours away even by Land Rover seems cold comfort. Perhaps the phone could take a nice trophy photo when the battle was over.

The next camp, a more permanent arrangement in the Serengeti, wasn't guarded by a Masai warrior but by a green uniformed young man from a different tribe toting curare-tipped arrows and a bow. He had to accompany us whenever we walked off the immediate camp property, even for

a leisurely nature stroll. "Nature" in those parts was likely to spring out of the tall grasses and ambush us.

Knowing that my – our – lives were in the hands of men armed with tested, ancient, and low-tech weapons made me ponder the service of guards, in particular and in general. When I learned that the Swahili word for guard is *linda*, I paid special attention.

What kind of guard was I, this pale *linda*? And you, are you a *linda*, too? What do you guard? How do you guard it? What tools do you carry for the task? What are you willing to sacrifice for the preservation of what you are guarding? What kind of training have you gone through? Who else relies on your abilities to guard well?

Now, back at home, when I hear the contemporary counterparts of snapping jaws and hyenas howling in the distance (or close at hand), I think about my task as *linda*, my identity as a guard. I sink my teeth into it Ephesians 6:14-17, so to speak, and hope to stand as courageously as those skillful, prepared, alert African men did around our tents in Tanzania.

Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Ephesians 6:14-17

Keeping a cudgel close at hand is not a bad idea, either. ❖

Hanging Out the Wash

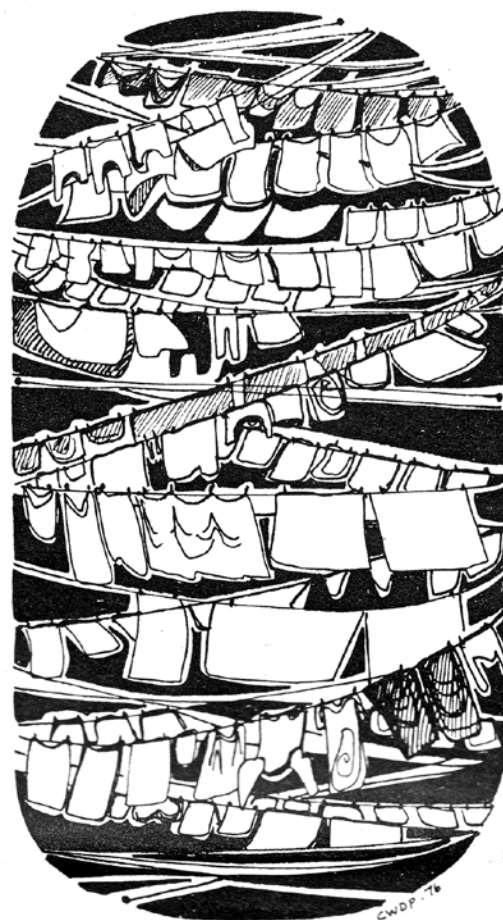
by Susan Gong

I hang out my wash. I know people consider it a primitive task, but it's my favorite household chore. It's physical. I carry out a load: darks, lights. Each load has a mixed personality, a piece of each member in the family – Ben's soccer shirt, Angela's splattered painting shorts, Jacob's fluorescent nightshirt imprinted with the labeled constellations, Gloria Jean's new red sweater. I hang each piece separately, sure-handed. My fingers know just how to put the damp fabric against the line, how to slightly rock the clothespin over the edge. I am a master of the secrets: Hang the pants waist down so the thick double-layered waistbands are blown back and forth in the wind in a longer arc than the top. The clothes dry evenly that way. I am deliberate, not hurried, not clumsy, nor sloppy like I am about most household chores. This is one I am not just trying to get out of the way. I pin two pins on the legs of pants so they can be ironed out by the sun. When I gather them in, I take the time to bury my face in the fabric of the sheets and smell the sunlight and wind. That smell cannot be copied or sold at any price.

While I stand moving down the white line, filling it up, I am at peace with the earth. The trees surround me, their branches bow over my head. I think we are connected now. I am not consuming their resources. My work is friendly. Do they sense that I am meaning to protect them with this labor? Do

they see that I respect their inherent power, relying on the energy of the sun and wind, willing to intertwine my economy with theirs? The leaves flutter and whisper. Donald Nicholl says that the monks in India talk to their trees, and the trees instruct them how to cultivate, prune, add cuttings. Tom Brown says that the plants are willing to teach him about themselves because he has learned how to listen.

I feel the trees leaning over me, and I can almost understand. I want to ask, Will you tell me your secrets? Is your work conscious? Do you know what you are doing? Or does the work of your life happen subconsciously? Can you count the ions pulling the carbon dioxide into pieces? Do you think about how those little thylakoids pass the positive charge one by one down the line? Do you separate the streams of light, yes to the red, no to the green, yes to the blue? Do you work at assembling the carbon and light into sugar? Do you work out your



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salvation, or does the meaning of your existence happen incidentally, out of the corner of your eye? Do you focus on other things while your body breathes out that precious oxygen?

The questions are alien to them. We cannot be connected by information. I take off my shoes and plant my bare feet into the ground. They say that the earth is a mother. Do the trees know her, have their roots reaching down her soil, prying themselves into her rocks, drinking up her minerals, her water. As those roots feel her warmth, do they sense that deep under the complex and overlapping layers of soil and stone is a buried history and a heart of fire with terrifying passion and power to melt mountains and move continents?

People say that space-time is curved. I speculate that truth itself is curved. That way it can arrive back at its Source—the beginning and the end—can be encircled by a real, finite being. It could even be comprehended. How is it then that verity has betrayed us? Left alone, the earth has turned, and old living truths are now dead dogma; insight has playfully danced off to the left (or to the right, depending on your politics) and left ideology in her place. If I am ever to feed my hunger to understand, I have to accept the curved nature of truth—that it can't be seen all at once, that truth itself is ambiguous. It takes a corner just when you least expect. It is riddled with contradiction. If we want to follow the passion to understand, we must see things in two ways; we must accept the quixotic nature of its fact and let our verities

change their shape before our eyes. If we want truth, we have to reforge it again and again and use it while it is hot. If we want to communicate truth, we have to quit beating it into a mundane clarity that leaves it spiritually dead.

Maybe the light of life is a barter. Maybe truth is best known in some curved path—like prayer. I kneel, curve my neck and back in the presence of the sun and respire all my poison. I am hanging out my wash, performing the exchange of love—participating in the eternal economy. I tell you my story. You tell me yours. My truth for yours. I give you my carbon dioxide, my mixed up heartaches and loneliness, questions, and dead ends in the maze. You give me your immensity, knowledge, light.

I uncurl my face and hands upward and let an unspeakable peace gently flood, ion by ion, into the chloroplast of my fronds and pass itself molecule by molecule through the filaments of my being. I can see the light behind my eyelids, locate it as an expansion of my heart, sense it in my fingertips. My mind is playing its small part. Most of understanding is just beyond my grasp, too small to track or too large for the frameworks I have constructed to trap it. My life lies in a small visible spectrum. I accept that. And just as I do, I understand something new—some little thing, something unexpected, almost always small, maybe not important. Could truth and light itself be small? It makes me laugh aloud, gurgle upward in bubbles. I understand why

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Hanging Out the Wash

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God's voice is the sound of rushing water, or music, or laughing. I understand the urge to shout hallelujah. All those soft and rounded shapes and sounds give expression to my new chemistry. It's all the sound of the bubbles of joy, gurgling upward to burst themselves to the surface. My husband says my face is shining. My children try to touch me as I transpire the oxygen of my new love.

I'll get up again tomorrow and fight to grow. ❖

Psychology

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psychological constructs uncritically. As a Catholic doctoral student in psychology, I was permitted to think about psychological concepts without being encouraged to consider their doctrinal implications. While I may have been young in my understanding of the scriptures and I do know some Catholics who are more scrupulous in their integration of psychology and religious faith, Swedin's point that the psychologizing of America has weakened many mainstream Christian faiths was something I experienced. As I began to grow in my understanding of the scriptures, I began to question some aspects of psychology, and I believe this helped prepare me for the Mormon Church. Amidst this questioning, I learned about the Church (in my last year of graduate school) and was naturally attracted to it due to its steadfastness in adhering to doctrine despite psychology's strong presence in American culture.

Jumping on the psychological bandwagon without making carefully informed decisions about the spiritual consequences of doing so can be harmful to one's testimony and growth in the Church. If Church members are not clear about their own doctrine, they can easily buy into psychological concepts that can actually draw them away from the gospel. In reading this book, one has an opportunity to observe individuals' choices within the Church and Church decisions from the top down regarding psychological themes as they dance across the LDS community in many forms and contexts. ❖

Has Pornography Affected You?

In many ways and settings, the Church has been taking on the problem of pornography addiction and how it affects the lives of LDS families. We, too, would like to help publicize this problem and how women, in particular, in the Church are dealing with it. Therefore, if you or your family is dealing with this issue and would like to write – or know someone who would like to write – about your experiences to help broaden the understanding of other sisters in the Church, please consider the following questions:

- ❖ Have you had a relationship that has been affected by pornography?
- ❖ How would you describe its impact?
- ❖ Why do you think it affected your relationship the way it did?
- ❖ What have you learned about dealing with the temptation pornography holds either for you or for someone who is close to you?

All responses will be published anonymously. Please have your contributions to us by July 1. E-mail them to editor@exponentii.org. ❖

Exponent Retreat 2007

The annual Exponent Retreat will be held again at the Boston University Sargent Center for Outdoor Education in Hancock, New Hampshire. This lovely 3,000 acre woodland on the shore of Halfmoon Pond has proven to be a fair substitute for our much-loved Hillsboro Camp. The retreat will begin Friday, September 14, with dinner at 6:00 P.M. and end on Sunday, September 16, at 3:00 P.M. The weekend will consist of workshops, discussion groups, canoeing, swimming, hiking, great food, and wonderful conversation.

This year's keynote speaker will be Sue Booth-Forbes, a former editor of *Exponent II* for twelve years. Now living in Eyries, West Cork, Ireland, Sue has created a marvelous artists' retreat there on a hillside above the sea. She will talk about her vision of this retreat and the process of its actualization and the creative artists' community it nurtures.



See our website at www.exponentii.org or e-mail Barbara Taylor at saige3tb@yahoo.com for more information or to register. ❖

So What Do You Think?

Please feel free to let us know what you think about our first online publication and the process through which you accessed it. As we embark on this new frontier, we want to make sure that the process is “user friendly” for you, our most loyal subscribers. You can send your feedback to subscriptions@exponentii.org. Hope to hear from you. And spread the good news of our new online format to all your family and friends. ❖

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