

Exponent II



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Submissions to Exponent II

We welcome personal essays, articles, poetry, fiction, and book reviews for consideration. Please email submissions to exponentiieditor@gmail.com or mail them to Exponent II, 2035 Park Avenue, Baltimore, MD 21217. Please include your name and contact information. Submissions received by mail will not be returned.

We are always looking for artwork and photography to accompany our writing. Please send jpegs or gifs of art submissions to our email. If you are interested in illustrating articles, please contact us for specific assignments.

The purpose of *Exponent II* is to promote sisterhood by providing a forum for Mormon women to share their life experiences in an atmosphere of trust and acceptance. Our common bond is our connection to the Mormon Church and our commitment to women in the Church. The courage and spirit of women challenge and inspire us to examine and shape the direction of our lives. We are confident that this open forum will result in positive change. We publish this paper in celebration of the strength and diversity of women.

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Remembering our Foremothers

For the past two years, I've made a daily drive past a house that I desperately want to buy. It's a 1940s original adobe ranch style home. Because of the adobe walls and the solid construction, the house is 15 degrees cooler than it is outside, even without any air conditioning. As anyone who has lived through an Arizona summer can attest, such insulation doesn't exist in most of the buildings around here. This old house also has big original windows that look out onto the half-acre backyard, beautiful doorway arches, and built-in bookcases in every room. Every day I wonder why no one has snatched up this gem.

I look at it with longing, realizing that as we live in one of the bottom three states for home sales, it's doubtful we could sell our current home so we could move into this one. Even if we could, we don't have the time or money for the renovations that would be necessary on the adobe house—the plumbing, the long-neglected landscaping, and all those “little” details that come with ownership of an older home. One of the other reasons I want to buy this house is because I fear it will be torn down. It's the last of its kind in the neighborhood, and I can't help but think about how we'll lose this piece of history to make way for three (or four!) of the currently popular Spanish colonial McMansions with their impractically high ceilings, shoddy insulation, and nary a built-in bookcase among them.

I see parallels between this historical house and our Mormon feminist history. How often do we modern Mormon feminists want to build something new and shiny without looking at the battles our foremothers fought for us? What insight and beauty can be found in our feminist history? What “architectural” details could we find in their writings to apply to our lives today?

Lately, I've begun to fear that I don't look to the past nearly enough, which is why I've been so happy with this issue and its historical components. Catherine Wheelwright Ockey's piece, “A Path Once Chosen” tells the story of her search for peace in the Church as she began to learn about the history of her foremothers who lived in Kirtland during the Mor-



mons' early days of settlement. Sarah Hogan's sacrament talk, “Like Eve, All Women Have Choices,” uses the experiences of Eve, Emmeline B. Wells and Ellis Shipp to illustrate how we, as women, can use their examples to better understand and make our own choices in our lives. In his essay, “My Search for the Divine Feminine,” Ryan Thomas looks to writers in scripture to understand Heavenly Mother. As part of our regular feature, “Exponent Generations,” Lorie Winder Stromberg's 1979 *Exponent II* essay, “The Sanctity Personality,” describes Edna Ericksen, a trail-blazing Utah legislator in the mid 1930s. (Lorie was a 1970s feminist pioneer in her own right.)

These pieces and their historical elements fit well with our other writers in this issue, women who have the courage to share their contemporary stories, including Suzette Smith's “My Faith's Journey” and Kathy Weinzinger's poem, “My Story.” In each of these pieces, we see women in search of ways to authentically experience their faith and ultimately grow spiritually as they work through their personal struggles.

There is power and knowledge to be gained in reading the stories of the past and keeping them in mind as we record our own stories to share with posterity. Aimee and I hope you feel this energy and will be inspired to share your experiences (and those of your foremothers) in *Exponent II* and not let them go the way of my beloved 1940s adobe ranch home.

- Emily Clyde Curtis, September 2010

Have a letter to the Editors or a submission for Exponent II? Email us at editor@exponentii.org.

Paul's epistles (often called pastorals) strengthened early Saints and uplift followers today. Sabbath Pastorals highlights women preaching and teaching from the pulpit in wards around the world.

Like Eve, All Women Make Choices

*Sarah Hogan
Cambridge, Massachusetts*

Eve entered into mortal life with two clear goals: to gain knowledge and to multiply and replenish the earth. As her children, however, we too often experience these as two separate goals women must choose between. Eve chose between eating and not eating the fruit. However, her role as nurturer and her desire to grow and develop herself are clearly linked. She reflects on her choice in Moses 5:11: "Eve... was glad, saying: Were it not for our transgression we should never have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption..." And Christ describes his redemption in John 10:10 as: "I have come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."

As we look to understand what God's plan is for women, we may logically turn to the scriptures. Certainly, the scriptures give us many valuable insights into God's plan which apply to women. I have a clear memory of the first time I was taught that the many scriptural references to "man" in King James English meant all people. We need to teach this explicitly to men, women and young people, as, for example, Alma did in the *Book of Mormon*, in Alma 32:23, "And now [God] imparteth his words by angels unto men, yea, not only men but women also. Now this is not

The goal is a more abundant life. If we all achieve that goal, we will all still be unique daughters of God, and we will all have found different paths to get us there.

all; little children do have words given to them many times, which confound the wise and learned."

However, as we turn to the scriptures specifically for a definition of what it means to be a righteous woman, there are challenges. Women are under represented in the scriptures. When they are included, they are usually peripheral in a story about men, and written by men. There was no attempt to include in the scriptures a comprehensive and prescriptive study of women. And yet, we often look for stories about women and, "liken the scriptures unto ourselves," based only on the few shreds of information we have about women who may have been in circumstances very different from ours. We may forget that Nephi also prompted his brothers, "Have ye inquired of the Lord?"

As I think of righteous women of the scriptures or of the restoration, or of the church today, they

are very different from each other, both in circumstance and personality. In fact, I believe it is much more difficult to see the clear path a righteous woman should take than that of a righteous young man. A young man expects to progress through the priesthood, a concrete measure of his spiritual development. He prepares to serve a mission at nineteen, and "get all the education he can," preparing for a career that will allow him to better his mind and his situation in life. Young women face a series of difficult choices, and yet many of the things they may hope to accomplish prove to be beyond their control. I'd like to tell you about a few women of the church who came to my mind as I was preparing this talk.

Ellis Shipp was a pioneer mother in Utah who undertook to educate herself. She began to rise each morning at four in the morning, studying a variety of subjects for three hours before beginning her day. Ellis had a particular interest in medicine, and eventually she studied with a Dr. Gunn in Salt Lake. Then in October 1873 President Brigham Young proclaimed that "the time has come for women to come forth as doctors in these valleys of the mountains." On November 10, 1875, Ellis wrote in her diary: "What a strange fatality! This morning I start for Philadelphia to attend Medical College." Ellis worked her way through

medical school by teaching dress-making skills. Pregnant, she prayed for the strength to finish her exams before the baby came, and gave birth to a daughter on the day after she finished. At 31, she returned to Utah to practice medicine but quickly recognized that the few Utah women who had qualified as physicians were insufficient. Within a few months she had started a School of Obstetrics and Nursing, often holding a student's baby—or one of her own—as she lectured. She gave birth to four more children after she returned to Utah. She continued her practice for many years, and taught in Utah, Canada, Mexico, Colorado and Montana.

Emmeline B. Wells grew up in central Massachusetts. A promising student at a private school, she gave up her education and most of her family and friends when she and her mother left to join the Saints in Nauvoo. She married as a teenager and gave birth to a son. When the Mormons needed

to leave Nauvoo because of persecution, Emmeline and her young husband lacked the resources. After the death of their infant son, Emmeline's husband traveled down the Mississippi River to find work and never returned. Eventually Emmeline would make her way to Utah. Although she remarried twice, she remained largely responsible for supporting herself and her children, first as a teacher and later as editor and writer for a magazine called *The Woman's Exponent*. She was active in the national woman's suffrage movement, was called by Brigham Young to lead a church grain storage program that famously sold wheat to the government during the first World War, and, after 22 years of service as General Relief Society Secretary, was called to be the General Relief Society President in 1910 at the age of 82. She served for twelve more years.

One thing that stands out to me about these stories is the way that these women accomplished things

that they could not have expected. President Kimball taught, "The abundant life is also achieved as we magnify our view of life, expand our view of others, and our own possibilities. Thus the more we follow the teachings of the Master, the more enlarged our perspective becomes."

I have a friend who always planned to be married and have children. She is very attractive and fun, and dated a lot. Her focus was always on serving others. When I met her she was in her mid-twenties, and our ward Relief Society President. When she was accepted to graduate school at Harvard, her father said, "That's a lot of money to waste if you are just going to get married." She doubted her plans, but eventually decided that she had the potential to do this and do it well. She felt inspired to develop herself and her abilities. After getting her Master's degree, she got an excellent job in her field. Eventually she felt strongly prompted to get a PhD, and received a Fulbright scholarship for study abroad.

I, on the other hand, always planned to get a PhD. I felt that I could be happy if I never married, and I didn't think I would ever find a man who would be the right person for me to marry. I didn't intentionally prepare myself for becoming a wife or a mother. However, I felt strongly prompted to become a high school teacher and was led to a particular school where I learned many things about myself and others that prepared me for life with the husband and children I now have. I think I might have allowed many opportunities to grow and serve others to pass me by if I had earned a PhD and stayed single.



Deseret Hospital. Front row, left to right: Jane S. Richards, Emmeline B. Wells. **Middle row:** Phoebe Woodruff, Isabelle M. Horne, Eliza R. Snow, Zina D. Young, Marinda N. Hyde. **Back row:** Dr. Ellis R. Shipp, Bathsheba W. Smith, Elizabeth Howard, Dr. Romania B. Pratt Penrose. **Photo courtesy of the Utah State Historical Society.**

However, I would still really enjoy working on a PhD. My friend still hopes to marry and have children. This story isn't about neither of us getting what we wanted. Instead, God often calls us into uncharted waters and asks us to develop skills we didn't know we could have.

As women or as men, we often look at a woman's life and make negative judgments or idealize her and feel inadequate by comparison. For example, we may think, "Ellis Shipp managed to become a doctor and have eight children, and she did it all without Mapquest or indoor plumbing!" Neither a negative nor an idealized perspective is useful or accurate. Like Eve, all women make choices that are complicated and difficult to make. The goal of all is a more abundant life. If we all achieve that goal, we will all still be unique daughters of God, and we will all have found different paths to get us there.

Romans Chapter 12 gives us my favorite description of what the ideal church—ancient or

modern—should be. The scripture says "brethren." I will change it to "sisters," but men should know that it applies to them equally:

I beseech you therefore, sisters, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service (verse 1).

And be not conformed unto this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God (verse 2).

For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office;

So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us (verses 4-6).

Let love be without dissimulation. Be kindly affectioned one to another with sisterly love... Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. If it be possible... live peaceably with all wom-

en. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good (Excerpts from verses 9, 10, 15, 18, 21).

I would add from D&C 84:110, "The body hath need of every member, that all may be edified together." Many of Christ's teachings seek to help people to appreciate that all of his children are our sisters and brothers. He asks us to love and forgive others, not just in an abstract way but by uniting ourselves in him as he is one with God. God has created us as distinct children with a divine nature. In the same way that women and men are intended to marry and create something greater than themselves, so women are each unique and yet dependent on each other. He asks us to find a more abundant life by building Zion together, learning to appreciate each others' strengths and characters. He knows that the relationships we will build together and the changes we will have made in ourselves will be among the promised blessings of living in Zion—blessings he can not give to us in any other way. ■



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In Direct Proportion

by Laura McCune-Poplin
Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts

Against her better judgment, Lucy agreed to meet Elder Edwards in the park at midnight. She had twenty minutes before she needed to leave, so she sat in the armchair, slouching so her head rested on the seatback and she could stare at the ceiling. All the lights were off, but the window was open, and the chiffon curtains lifted in the wind like ghosts. Even though the Soeurs lived at least a mile from the ocean by the most direct route, Lucy could smell the sea in her apartment.

She tried to empty her head and rest, but Lucy's mind would not sit still, bouncing between the ideas of kissing a missionary and kissing Elder Edwards. When she thought about kissing a missionary, Lucy felt dirty. She thought about her parents and President Martin and Elder Tyler and how disappointed they would be if they knew. When she thought about kissing a missionary, the only person Lucy imagined not loving her any less was her Grandma, and maybe Soeur Stanley.

On the other hand, whenever Lucy thought about kissing Elder Edwards, she thought about his green eyes and the way his shoulders looked in white shirts and how he spoke French better than any other missionary she had met, and how he never spoke badly of Catholics or Muslims. She thought about the way he could smile with only half his mouth, and the way

he flattered old ladies and made them blush and wish they were young again. When Lucy thought about kissing Elder Edwards, her stomach tingled and her heart beat faster, and she lifted her hands to her own mouth, wondering whether or not she had dreamed it.

Lucy took her keys from the desk and held them in her fist so they wouldn't jingle. She thought about taking her backpack, but it was still wet, the *Books of Mormon* inside water damaged. Instead, she reached inside the front pocket and pulled out her wallet so she would have some form of identification in case she landed in one of her mother's hospital horror stories because she refused to wear her nametag. Opening the front door, which clicked even though she had turned the handle as gently as possible, Lucy listened for sounds of Soeur Stanley waking. Hearing none, she stepped into the hallway and closed the door behind her.

The walk took longer than she expected. By the time she climbed the hill closest to the park, she was fifteen minutes late and worried that Elder Edwards might be angry. But from where she stood, the park looked deserted, the streetlamps confusing shape with shadow. When she arrived at the fork in the path that would either take her left into the park or right towards centre-ville, Lucy stopped walking and closed her eyes, counting one thousand ones to twenty-five like she did when tracting. If she opened her eyes and Elder Edwards

was there, she would turn left. If she opened her eyes and he wasn't there, she would turn right.

Lucy turned right; even though she closed her eyes to count again and even though she scanned the shadows until her eyes hurt, trying to coax movement or sound from stillness.

The first place Lucy went was La Bourse in the Rue du Palais. She didn't know why she didn't just turn around and go home, except the fear that if she went back to the apartment and Elder Edwards called, she would have to listen to excuses about why he hadn't come and hope she didn't find them ridiculous or untrue. And if he didn't call, she would make herself sick hypothesizing why. By not going home, Lucy could avoid her life for a while longer, or at least until dawn.

Walking through an arched passage and into a courtyard surrounded by pillars and giant windows, Lucy stood on top of a large stone compass with black and pink arms pointing in every direction. Imagining places the arrows would take her if she followed their direction without stopping, Lucy closed her eyes and spun in place until she became dizzy and her steps were heavy, echoing off the walls. Refusing to open her eyes until the blood in her head had stilled, Lucy faced the passage from which she had come and saw what looked like sterns of stone ships sticking out of the wall, as though they too had tried leaving and failed.



Roof Tops to the Sea by Sharon Furner

Stepping out of the courtyard and into the empty street, Lucy chose to walk in the middle of the road, which was slanted on both sides, the fifteenth century cobbles from Québec worn on the edges from wear. She wanted to see the moon. When she was little, she believed the moon was following her because every time she looked up it was in the place she had last seen it, no matter where she went. When she said such things, her father would laugh and tell her she was wrong and why, but Lucy never lost her sense of wonder and amazement.

Especially because there was still so much she did not understand.

Like why could Black men not hold the priesthood until 1978 if God was no respecter of persons, or why did circumstances determine right and wrong rather than the nature of the thing itself, because kissing an Elder was wrong, or

kissing a married man, but kissing a baby or a boyfriend or a spouse was beautiful, and good. Or why, her whole life, had she tried so hard to be good when the most spiritual, life-changing revelations came to men who were sinning, like Saul, or Jonah, or the adulterous woman brought before Jesus, who had been caught in the very act.

Even as a seven-year-old forced to spend afternoons listening to the *Book of Mormon* on tape because her father said she could not be baptized until she had read the entire book, Lucy loved the conversion story of Alma the Younger. He had spent his youth rebelling against God until he was struck dumb by an angel and didn't move or speak for three days while Jesus healed his soul. It was the only story she remembered hearing—the only story that made her stop doing cartwheels and somersaults on the wine colored carpet in the dining room, empty except for a

nightstand with a spider plant and a tape recorder because her parents couldn't afford to buy more furniture for the room. Lying on her stomach, knees and elbows dimpled with carpet marks, she looked at the book lying open and found the verses containing Alma's story, and pressed rewind so she could hear it again, mouthing the words as she read. Alma was Lucy's favorite prophet from any book of scripture, because he remembered what sin felt like, and every word he taught seemed to come from a place of compassion for the sinner.

The street Lucy was following dead-ended at a hospital surrounded by eight-foot walls. She sat on the curb in front of the cast iron gate and placed her chin on her knees, clasping hands around her legs, which were cold but not uncomfortable. Her skirt was long enough to cover her toes and gather in the gutter. She remembered her English professor saying that it was impossible to know what something was without knowing what it wasn't, and she wondered if such theories applied to Christ's atonement, because then wouldn't it be better to sin as much as possible? Even Alma said that the joy he found in redemption was directly proportionate to the depth of his pain.

Lucy had never tried cigarettes or alcohol. She had never lied to her parents, except when she threw away her report card in sixth grade because she got a D in Social Studies, and when she accidentally drove her dad's new truck into a chain link fence and scratched the paint on the hood. She had learned at church that rules were given to protect her freedom, that because

she didn't smoke or drink alcohol she would be free from addiction, that because she had never had sex she didn't have to worry about AIDS or unwanted pregnancies. But perhaps she had cut herself off from the world. Even good intentions could turn sour like milk left in the sun too long. Lucy wondered if empathy could be learned vicariously.

Leaning back against the iron bars of the gate, which ran parallel to her spine, Lucy looked into the darkened windows of second and third story apartments lining the street and imagined what it would be like to be French and live in La Rochelle.

At her back, Lucy could hear the bells in the Cathedral Saint Louis, which rang four times. Deciding her mind worked better when she was moving, Lucy stood up and walked towards the Vieux-Port, passing beneath the Grosse Horloge and the shops along the quai, their grates lowered for the night like eyes sleeping. But when Lucy passed the lighthouse and saw the fleet of Whitbread sailboats she stopped thinking altogether. Never in her life had Lucy been on a sailboat, but she found them magnificent. Growing up in California, Lucy had been on boats for practical reasons—she had even volunteered as a teaching assistant on a ship, teaching elementary school students about water pH, core sampling, salinity, pollution, and plankton—but sailing implied a luxury she didn't have access to.

She walked slowly along the edge of the dock, listening to the water gently slap the sides of the boats, which gleamed like waxed cars. The chrome railings sparkled

in the glare of street lamps and security lights, and the leather of the deck cushions glowed white, framed by dark polished wood. Lucy crossed her arms against the breeze coming off the water. Because missionaries didn't read newspapers or watch TV, Lucy didn't know about the Whitbread Cup. She didn't know that the boats had arrived at sunset and would be leaving at sunrise, and had she stayed home like she was supposed to, she wouldn't have regretted not seeing them because she would never have known of their existence.

But she had seen them, and their beauty had made her aware that she was not rich, she was not French, and La Rochelle was not her home and never would be no matter how much she loved the white stone buildings and the cobblestone streets and the lighthouses that looked like castle turrets. Struck by the idea that maybe she had been trying to convert people to become like her because she couldn't be like them, Lucy sat on a small cement pillar that fisherman used to tie up their boats. Did she have to choose between loving God and loving the world, and was this what

she had been asking her investigators to do? Her whole life she had struggled with the concept of what it meant to be in the world but not of it. But now she felt completely ungrounded.

Lucy didn't know how long she sat in front of the sailboats, but eventually she noticed the sky lightening from grey to lavender, and knew she needed to go home. Assuming Soeur Stanley had set the alarm clock, she would be waking up in less than an hour. Lucy was disappointed. Maybe she had expected a visit from an angel who would wipe away her past life and give her a new name like Paul or Israel or Abraham. But she had spent the night by herself, and for the first time she wondered if something like this could get her sent home.

Plus she had kissed an Elder. Standing up, Lucy felt her wallet bounce against her thighs and for a second she entertained the idea of running to the train station at the end of the pier and buying the first available ticket to someplace she had never seen. And for another half second, she thought it was a good idea. But Lucy didn't want to leave her mission. As soon as



Cypress and Olive Trees by Sharon Furner

MY FAITH'S JOURNEY

Suzette Smith
Alexandria, Virginia

she thought this, she knew it was true, and like her belief in God, it became a certainty she could hold onto when her doubts threatened to swallow her whole.

Suddenly exhausted, Lucy retraced her steps to the apartment without bothering to question why, satisfied with knowing only that she wanted to.

By the time she reached her street, the first cars had started circulating, their lights turned on in the morning half-light. She opened the glass door to her building and took off her clogs so as not to make any noise. She turned the lock so quietly even she could not hear the click, and pushed down on the handle to open the door, which caught on the bristles of the welcome mat inside.

The lights were off, the air inside the apartment stagnant and dead, so she didn't notice the three missionaries sitting in the dark with eyes rimmed red and worried. But when Soeur Stanley shifted in her chair to blow her nose, Lucy turned around and screamed.

"Serves you right," Soeur Stanley said, standing up and pulling tight the blanket she wore like a cape. She went inside the bedroom and slammed the door.

Lucy looked at Elder Edwards, wanting to blame him, to explain that everything was his fault because he didn't meet her in the park as planned, but it no longer seemed important or true. ■

Note: "In Direct Proportion" is a chapter from Laura's forthcoming novel, Entertaining Angels Unaware.

On a one-way flight from Boston to a new job in Salt Lake City, I found myself questioning the sanity of leaving an enjoyable single's life and the Red Sox. For six years I had grown attached to the green, forested countryside, the harbor, and the eclectic nature of downtown. Perhaps the desert of Salt Lake was the right place for my pioneer ancestors, but for me? I thought about the Cambridge Stake Girls Camp where I had served for many summers and wondered how it would go on without me. More than that, I wondered how I would go on without the girls. I reminded myself of the promptings that led to this move and reached yet again for Elder Holland's talk, "Cast Not Away Thy Confidence."

Following my spiritual promptings to get on that flight did not come easily for me. My faith was like the New Testament father who desired his son's healing, but feared his faith was not enough, crying out, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." (Mark 9:24) Throughout my life I have wondered and struggled with things of the spirit and principles of the gospel, often wishing for the spiritual gift of faith that is spoken of in the scriptures. Learning to trust the Lord has been and continues to be a process for me.

One memorable marker in this journey came two years before the flight to Salt Lake, at a time when my faith was weak and my spirits low. It was the fall of 2000 and I

had just started a difficult graduate program. I had been exuberant when accepted into the program, but it didn't take long for statistics, managerial accounting, and finance to discourage me.

It was not just my studies that brought me down; I also had many gospel questions that troubled me. I tried to discuss my questions with friends in my ward, but there did not seem to be anyone who understood or could help. My spirit was empty, and when I prayed there seemed to be no answers. I reached out to a church leader for guidance. When we met I told him that I felt distant from God and was confused by this, considering my faithful obedience. I read my scriptures and prayed daily as I always had, and I paid tithing, went to church, and served in the temple. Despite my efforts, I felt little comfort and few answers for my growing doctrinal questions.

What followed was advice that I will never forget. He said, "Your spirit is bigger than it once was and it is hungry. You are not feeding it enough." He explained that because my spirit had grown over the years, it would not suffice to feed it the same "seminary food." He encouraged me to dig deep into the scriptures to look for answers and to focus on feeding my spirit, emphasizing that I could not continue with the same amount of study and expect deeper understanding.

I chose to take his advice. I wrote down my questions and concerns and sought answers from the scriptures, spending a full,

quiet hour each morning in study, thought, and prayer. The process was challenging and took sacrifice and patience, but my spirit began to fill and I felt the budding of a greater faith. I was understanding the ways in which God spoke to me personally and my belief in His reality deepened. There were new insights into gospel principles I had studied for years, such as repentance, compassion, and hope. I began to navigate life, my exams, and my gospel questions with more confidence, and felt I was standing on a more solid foundation.

It was on that foundation I stood when I arrived in Salt Lake City two years later and began a new life. To my surprise, things came together perfectly in Utah with a great job, friends, new service projects—and I fell in love. This love was like a miracle for me. At 33, I felt that my trust in the Lord was being rewarded with this new relationship. I believed that God had intended this man for me and as I had followed His promptings, He had led me to him. After the years of waiting and wondering, this new life with Tom was just the right fit. Love was sweet and my prayers were full of gratitude to God for showing the way.

About six months into my new and wonderful relationship, I wrote a letter to my bishop back in Boston, who had encouraged me to follow promptings and come to Utah: “Miracles swirl around me everyday and it only gets better. Everyday I find I trust the Lord more and more—and myself. The ground that I ventured onto so tentatively is holding together more firmly than I ever imagined. I want to run, and laugh, and shout for joy. The future

is still unseen, but I grow more sure of it every day. And I grow more sure of faith and of love and of miracles. Thank you for encouraging me to come to Utah.”

I believed this answer to my “marriage prayer” was proof that I could trust in God completely. Then things changed. Tom decided to leave the relationship. When



Photo by Kimberly Brock

he walked away, my heart broke and so did my trust in God. I was knocked off my spiritual feet. I didn’t know what to do or even how to approach the Lord. No words would come when I got on my knees, only tears and bewilderment. I had sat in the temple and felt so sure about this man and this relationship. The spirit whispered that this was the right path. But now it was gone and where there had been certainty, now there was confusion.

My earlier experiences with growing faith and spirituality had taught me that I needed to study

and pray more deeply, but life’s bitter herbs had left me feeling betrayed. In frustration, my prayers became demanding and threatening. I wanted an explanation for my suffering. Why was I denied an understanding when I had followed the Lord? How had I misread the inspiration of heaven?

For months the heavens seemed silent and my frustration remained. Then, my habit of study began to aid me. I heard whispers of the Lord’s voice as I read the scriptures and the *Ensign*. Slowly the some answers began to penetrate my grief.

A year passed before I pieced together my thoughts and reflections and began to feel hope in God’s love and guidance again. A passage from Elder Wickman’s General Conference address “But If Not” (October 2002) was very powerful to me at this time.

Do not ever doubt the goodness of God, even if you do not know why. Why are we struggling with this misfortune, when others relate miraculous healing experiences? These are natural questions, understandable questions; but they are also questions that usually go begging in mortality. The Lord said simply, “My ways are higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:9)... In pressing too earnestly for the answer[s], we may forget that mortality was designed, in a manner of speaking as the season of unanswered questions. Mortality has a different, more narrowly defined purpose: a probationary state, a time to walk by faith.

The Prophet Joseph Smith defined that first principle of the gospel as “faith in the Lord Jesus

Christ.” It is that defining phrase—in the Lord Jesus Christ—that we sometimes forget. Too often we offer our prayer... and then wait nervously to see whether our request will be granted, as though approval would provide needed evidence of His existence. That is not faith! Faith is, quite simply, a confidence in the Lord.

Here was a piece of what I sought: this life is not about clear answers. Somehow, it helped to believe that I was not meant to know all the reasons “why.” It was also enlightening to understand that my faith could be centered simply in Christ and not on life’s happy results or on Tom. As I continued to ponder, I thought, “Perhaps my trust in God is its own reward.” Perhaps that trust alone could give me security and peace.

I began to believe again that feelings of faith in Christ could come in spite of uncertain times—

just as the scriptures had promised.

Another piece of my rebuilding came in the words of a poem about the pioneers published in the July 2002 *Ensign* called “At Journey’s End.”

Thirteen times we crossed the Platte ... [and] ... how we pled for the waters to part.

Now we kneel here in the sand, grateful for every unanswered plea that proved us.

Faith is the mountain that does not flee, the water that does not part,

[And] our faith... wrung drop by drop, blossoms—red as the promised rose.

Though my heartache seemed pale in comparison to those experienced by my pioneer ancestors, their determination inspired me. In my mind, they seemed to say “we too obeyed the Lord’s commandments, we too prayed for relief from our trials, we too struggled to

comprehend why we had to endure so much, we too were unsure of our answers.” For me, this message was motivating in moving forward, trusting again in God’s goodness, and once more searching for His voice. I was comforted, knowing that I was not the only one who searched for meaning and answers in the dreariness of mortality. And so life continued. I was promoted at work, I dated again, I enjoyed friendships and trips in Utah, and I eventually moved on to a new city. Wonderful things happened and painful things happened, but this experience remains a significant learning time in my continued journey of faith and trust in God.

Spiritual learning comes, for me, at different points and in different layers. With this experience, I understood that some of the answers do come when I study and pray with more focus and commitment, and other answers do not come at all. I realized that I am not meant to know all the reasons why mortality happens to me as it does. I believe that God does answer my prayers, but not always in ways that I understand. I do feel His love and I recognize His healing on my broken heart.

Most importantly, I have come to focus my faith more securely on God alone and that genuine goodness and love, rather than believing heaven’s blessings are proof of that love or a reward for my faithfulness. If my faithfulness brings me anything, it is a greater sense of who God is and who I am, a deeper relationship, which is its own reward. ■



Desert Landscape by Angela Clayton

SISTERS SPEAK

Sisters Speak gives our readers a forum to present their own ideas about a topic of interest to Mormon women. The topic posted for our December issue can be found at the end of this column on page 15. We look forward to hearing and publishing your own thoughtful response soon!

This month's question comes from **Caroline Kline, of Irvine, California:**

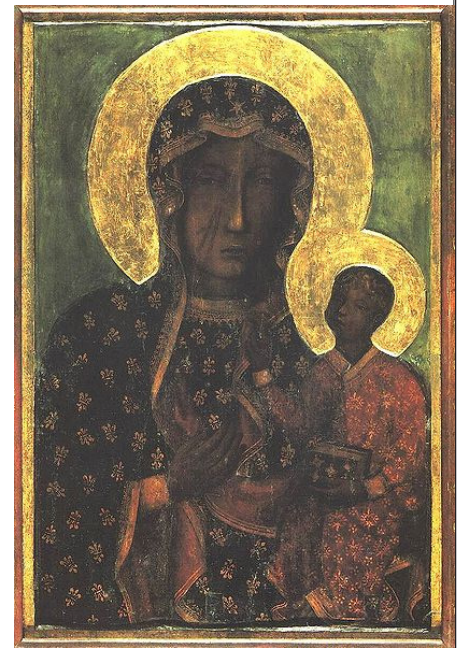
How should we go about integrating Heavenly Mother into our lives and teaching our kids about her? In what other ways can we teach our sons and daughters to see women as divine?

*I wish you could have seen [my friends] the first time they laid eyes on this label. You know why? Because when they looked at her, it occurred to them for the first time in their lives that what's divine can come in dark skin. You see, everybody needs a God that looks like them, Lily. (from *The Secret Life of Bees*, by Sue Monk Kidd)*

One of the greatest joys of being Mormon for me is our belief in a feminine divine. One of the greatest sorrows of being Mormon for me is her absence from our worship and, for the most part, our very consciousness. Because, when people acknowledge and commune with a God that looks like them, they see God in themselves.

At the same time, I think it's also crucial to have a God that doesn't look like them as well. I have a three-year-old boy who prays to Heavenly Father. As he gets older, I know that he will hear about Heavenly Father and pray to him dozens of times a week. I am happy that he has that model—he needs a God that looks like him, and I hope that as he grows, he will consequently feel his own divinity, his own limitless potential.

But I want him to see that potential in the women around him also. Will the lack of discussion at church about Heavenly Mother impact his ability to appreciate the divinity of the women in his life? Perhaps. So I intend to teach him, as well as my daughter, about Heavenly Mother. I'd love to hear others' ideas about integrating Heavenly Mother into our lives.



Lacy Mayberry, Sierra Vista, Arizona gives concrete suggestions on how to teach young children about Heavenly Mother:

I've been having such a Heavenly Mother awakening lately. So when I noticed the blatant Heavenly Mother omissions in my daughter's nursery handouts, I edited them. For the picture of God on a throne with Jesus standing next to him and all the children standing around, I drew in Heavenly Mother and hung it up on the fridge. For the paper necklace that said "Heav-

enly Father and Jesus Love Me," I told my daughter in a Family Home Evening that it said, "Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother and Jesus Love me."

I never really thought about Heavenly Mother much before recently, and I don't claim to be an expert, but my basic goal for my daughter is to get Heavenly Mother into her consciousness, to put her on the same footing I feel I'm just now finding. She and I can go from there. □

Alisa Bolander of Midvale, Utah is drawn to the idea that Heavenly Mother is connected to the Earth:

While I don't necessarily believe in these dualities, I am wondering if I might teach my children that Heavenly Father is the heavenly, spiritual, transcendent force, and that the Divine Mother is the grounding force, more about our earth, bodies, and nature, so that when we respect the Earth, we respect her. When we take care of our bodies, we respect her. And when we do something for our spirits, we respect him. □

Anonymous writes of the troubling absence of Heavenly Mother from our Mormon worship:

When I think about teaching my soon to be born daughter about Heavenly Mother, I am afraid that talking about this female deity, who is supposed to be divine and eternal, and yet is so bewilderingly silent and absent from meaningful action and discourse, will just be a giant confusing paradox for my daughter. Because that is what it is for me.

I wonder if our not hearing from her has more to do with us (meaning our cultural and social constructs blocking Truth) than it has to do with her. And it especially has more to do with the people who are in charge right now. Why else would a female deity be as absent from meaningful action and discourse as the general authority wives seem to be?

What if all of the Fire and Power and Destruction and Life and Renewal and Creation and Wonder in the scriptures were appropriately attributed to her as well as to Heavenly Father—wouldn't you think of yourself differently? Less passively? Less domesticatedly obedient (but more devoted and powerfully submissive to her will?) □

Allyson Smith-Maughan of Bountiful, Utah suggests a less direct way to teach our children about female divinity:

One thing I would suggest in teaching our children about the divinity of women is to focus on women in the scriptures. Everyone knows Sampson in the Old Testament but what about the story of Deborah? Why are there so many pictures displayed of Simeon with the Christ child but none of Anna with Him? Why don't people think she held Him? When more artwork is created and more stories are told about women in the scriptures, it helps all to feel the worth and divinity of great women. □

Sariah Toronto of New York, New York shares ideas of how to include Heavenly Mother in our speech at church:

I feel a great trust to speak openly about Heavenly Mother in church settings. When I was called as Primary president about five years ago, I felt a very strong impression that the children needed to hear inclusive language from me about our Heavenly Parents, as well as the words "Heavenly Mother," because they most likely weren't hearing them anywhere else. I also feel a need to use inclusive language and to speak about Heavenly Mother when I can in talks. When my husband and I were assigned to speak about the first Article of Faith, much of my talk referenced Heavenly Mother, for without her there could be no Savior and thus no godhead. □



Heavenly Mother by Sandra Rembrandt

Barbara Taylor of Pocatello, Idaho speaks of proactively making Heavenly Mother a part of her life:

I feel strongly that as an active woman in the Church who believes in a Heavenly Mother, I need to stop letting men dictate whether or not I speak about her, pray to her, etc. She will never be a part of our worship if we don't make her part of it. I also feel that the reason she isn't part of our worship has nothing to do with our belief in a Mother in Heaven, but rather the social construct that existed many years ago when the church was predominantly North American and surrounded by religions that only worshipped a male God. Who knows what might happen now that the church is becoming more international and spreading to countries that acknowledge female deity in their religious iconology. □

Tresa Edmunds of Modesto, California writes:

I speak about Heavenly Mother as the reality she is. I think that throughout the history of the Church, we women have given away some of our privileges, and if the day ever comes when we aren't allowed to teach about her at church, I want it to be because she was taken from me, not because I gave her up.

I've taken up gardening over the last few years, and it is a spiritual experience for me. Gardening is actually one of my favorite Sabbath activities because I feel like it's such an appropriate way to commune with the divine and glory in creation. The divine feminine has always been associated with the earth, and I like to imagine that is her stewardship now. □



Mexican devotional image, artist unknown

Jenne Erigero Alderks of Seattle, Washington shares her journey with the divine feminine:

As a convert to the LDS Church, I initially counted myself very lucky for a long time that I belonged to the only Christian church who taught about male and female God. Recently, as I've studied and pondered over what could be true about Heavenly Mother, I came to realize that there isn't a really good reason for me to not pursue knowing and understanding her on a personal basis.

So now I'm coming to the point where I need to figure out how that belief is going to translate into practice. I feel that the term "God" is inclusive of God the Father and God the Mother, equal partners in marriage and exultation. In my personal prayers, I feel comfortable addressing deity as "My Heavenly Parents." In teaching my three-year-old, we have already had a couple of family home evenings about Heavenly Mother and I am beginning more and more to use the phrase "our Heavenly Parents" or "God" meaning Father and Mother. □

Christanne Smith Harrison of Hamilton, New Jersey comments:

I think the best thing that we can do for our children to help them know and understand Mother in Heaven is first to be strong, kind, confident women who are equal partners in our homes with our spouses, and then to teach them to be confident and make choices based on what they have been inspired to know is right. They will have seen an equal parental partnership and assume it is the same in heaven. □

The next Sisters Speak: Loving and Conversing Openly With Those Who Have Left the Church

Our Sisters Speak question was sent to us by an anonymous reader: She writes: "I have a brother who stopped going to Church soon after graduating from high school. There wasn't a big discussion or fight; in fact, no one in our family has really talked to him about it as far as I know. Whenever I try, I feel embarrassed and tend to put my foot in my mouth and sound like a judgmental jerk. Maybe I'm approaching it wrong, but I just want him to know that I love him and I don't care if he's found that the Church isn't for him."

What's the best way to interact with and show love towards those who have left? Should we avoid mentioning the Church? And if we do mention it, is there a way to do so without making the other person feel awkward? What experiences have you had speaking openly with loved ones who are no longer practicing Mormonism?

Please send your Sisters Speak responses to sistersspeak@exponentii.org ■

My Story

by Kathy Weinzinger
Flagstaff, Arizona

“God is inside the box”
They said joyously enthusiastically firmly
How I wanted God, so I climbed in
Joyously enthusiastically firmly

Jumped in Head first Then shoulders
Torso
Legs

Although my knees stuck out And ankles
And feet

I wanted God, so I shifted Moved Pushed
Adjusted my limbs My head My heart
Still, I could not fit completely in the box. Something—
some part—peeked out An elbow A hip A mop of wavy
brown hair

Shift Move Adjust Others fit. What is wrong
with me?

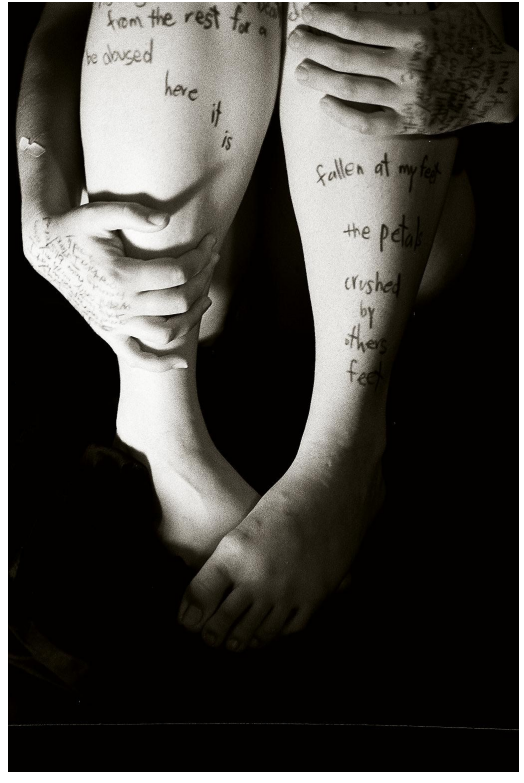
Then a whisper First quietly then
joyously enthusiastically firmly “Follow me.
Come out and follow me.”

First, a finger A hand Probing Testing Trying
An arm Elbow Shoulder Living
Being Welcoming
Neck Head Breast Strengthening Breathing
great gulps of air

“God is in the box” I hear it still
Yes, yes He is. Just as He is also outside of it
Under it Beside it In corners far, far away

Still, I keep a foot in the box A knee A thigh
For peace

Yet, my head is free My arms My hands
To reach To explore To embrace God in all of the places
that He is ■



Photos by Kimberly Brock

Jershon*

*Cari Hewlet
Farmington, Utah*

We came to thee
as strangers
strengthened,
changed by Love

bereft of
what we had before:

place
 soil that was ours

that we poisoned
with blood from our hands

that swallowed
our swords
when we buried them deep

never never
again.

We fled
 not knowing

if ever
we would
seed the ground

again raise life
or die peaceful
 but hard, lost

in this world—
saved in the next.
We were ready.

Then Light came before
we expected, and with you
we found
 home, again

undeserved. Given freely.

Eyes full with weeping. ■

**Note: Jershon is the land given to
the people of Ammon after they buried
their weapons and renounced war.*



Photo by Aimee Evans Hickman

Stay At Home Chemist

*Dayna Patterson
Nacogdoches, Texas*

Before children, she measured
 mercury.
Now she measures flour.
Her kitchen is her laboratory,
her lab coat a white apron.

When she mixes whole wheat
concoctions, she knows to add
a tablespoon of something acidic
like orange or lemon juice
to help with gluten formation.

She knows after kneading dough
with chopped jalapeños, to treat
the chemical burn with a milk bath.

She knows the amount of water
to add to a fork-whipped egg wash,
eggs fresh from her coop
of Bantam hens out back.

She understands the corollary
between raising children
and preparing dough to rise.

Her repertoire of experiments is
 vast.

On the days before market,
she is up at sunrise baking in the
 half light,
Italian focaccia, slipper bread,
ciabatta, and carefully woven
 challah.

A fine mist of flour floats in the
 light
from the kitchen window
haloing the dirty blonde
heads of her children.

Cooling on racks,
an assortment of English scones:
lemon poppy, lemon cranberry,
lemon ginger,
apricot almond, cherry almond,
apple walnut.

Every Saturday, at the Farmer's
 Market,
see her standing at her booth, her
 quick
smile, her children bagging bread,
her experiments for sale. ■

Linda Hoffman Kimball, who has been associated with Exponent II since 1973, muses with humor and affection on the goodness and grace in her own life and in the experiences of other women. She turns her eye toward the simple things that amuse the sojourn that is “fulfilling the measure of our creation.”

Moving Miracles

by Linda Hoffman Kimball
Evanston, Illinois

I surveyed the mountain of my family’s accumulated goods. We were moving and everything from crucial documents to furniture to tchochkes required sorting. A daunting task.

Creating categories for each item’s fate came first. Here was my list:

- Definite keepers
- Trash
- Give to particular people
- Donate to charity

I called Salvation Army and told them what I had to give. They scheduled a truck for Monday between eight and noon. Noon came and went. I called Salvation Army. The truck had broken down and wouldn’t be out to pick my stuff up after all. Glad I called. With some angst I rescheduled for Thursday. At 11:59 AM on Thursday the truck pulled up. They took our couch without complaint.

When they saw the pool table, however, they said it was against their regulations to take an “undismantled” pool table away. “Didn’t the scheduler tell you? No? They should have.” Also, they claimed that our large desk was too heavy and geometrically too big to remove from the house. (Did they think it sprouted into being from the floorboards like a fungus?)

Then the heavens opened. So did the tool cabinet. Miraculously the cumbersome items shape-shifted and disappeared. The invocation of a little green magic may have assisted.

You know the adage, “Pray as if it all depended on God and work as if it all depended on you”? I’m a be-

liever in that precept. Sometimes God uses assistants in accomplishing his mighty works. Did the seagulls know their feasting on crickets was God’s answer to the pioneers’ prayers? Probably not. To them it was just a stupendous binge-purge dream-come-true. But miracles are there if you have eyes to see.

There was also the visitation of angels.

In the “donate to particular people” category, I’d culled out a few items I thought my friend Lori might want (brand new workbench, big table, art supplies, etc.) Again the heavens opened. Angel Lori and her angelic husband Greg *did* want those specific things. Also, her neighborhood was having a huge garage sale in a few weeks and they would eagerly take ALL my cast-offs to sell at that event towards their “getting a new comfy chair for the family room” fund. Again, like a huge seagull from back in the day, Lori and Greg’s van pulled into my driveway, filled up, and drove to their house where it disgorged its contents and kept coming back for more.

Much of our stuff belonged to our three grown children. We summoned them for a day of decision making. My magnificent daughter-in-law came along for the fun. She grew up in a hoard-free home and had a native sense for what was worth keeping and what it was time to part with. She was a remarkable influence for good. The garbage cans swelled and eventually overflowed with the refuse of my kids’ early years. Particularly treasured items nestled happily in a short stack of plastic “keeper” bins.

After the younger generation flew away, I ventured into the garage to haul the stuffed garbage cans to the street. In the process of containing the overflow I came across items they had tossed which seemed per-



fectly appropriate for the “donate” boxes. While transferring them, out popped an envelope which had a little note poking out of it. Of course I had to read it.

There, in the unmistakable handwriting of the tooth fairy, was the message, “Congratulations on another lost tooth! Your friend, T.F.”

Moist-eyed nostalgia swept over me. Standing by the garbage can, holding that souvenir of their childhoods I wondered what I should do. Woman-up and put it back in the trash, focusing on my children’s amazing current lives rather than the wistfulness of a time gone by? Or could this little remembrance linger a little longer reminding me of the whole of their lives?

It was a painful decision to tuck it back into the garbage can, but I did. The short stack of plastic bins will be sufficient. Onward to the future. Put your shoulder to the wheel—of the rolling garbage can and get it all out to the curb.

The next morning when I went to retrieve the garbage can, I noticed a flutter of litter in the grass. I picked it up and saw what it was: the little note from the tooth fairy. Call me sentimental. Laugh at my gullibility if you will. But I think God (or one of God’s invisible helpers) decided that I could keep that little reminder. This time I did.

I can’t figure out the dynamics of miracles. With war and cancer and racism flaunting themselves in front of our (at least) annual pleas for “peace on earth, good will to men,” why do I get these miraculous tender mercies?

I refuse to analyze it. I will instead lift my heart and shout “God is good!” ■

BEE FARM

by Karen Rosenbaum
Kensington, California

The summer of 1952, because of my father’s job transfer with the U.S. Bureau of Mines, my family moved from Boulder City, Nevada, to Salt Lake City, Utah. I was 11, Rich was 9, and Johnny was 5. The other minors in our household were Mitzi, a black and white cat, and her two surviving male kittens, Snuffy and Tuffy. (The third kitten, a little orange creature named Enoughy, had been, unluckily, undertire when my father backed our car out of the garage.)

Homes were found for the two kittens when they were small, cuddly, cute. We children wanted, of course, to take Mitzi to Utah with us. She was a pleasant little cat and likely, we suspected, to produce more cuddly, cute kittens. Since no one in our part of the world spayed pets in those days, we were probably accurate in our prediction. This is also probably the reason that as moving day approached, no one offered to adopt Mitzi.

Just before the moving van arrived, our parents announced that they had found a good home for Mitzi, one where she would be much happier than she would be were she forced to ride in our 1947 Pontiac all the way to Salt Lake and to adjust to a new, urban house. “A bee farm,” Mama said. We pictured Mitzi running loose and free among rolling green hills and pretty wild flowers. Since we were children of the brown Nevada desert, we must have gotten such images from books.

About 18 years later, Johnny,

In her own home, Mom had had the illusion of being in control. Here she did everything she could to prove that she still was in charge.

Rich, and Rich’s wife and their three pre-school schildren were visiting my Berkeley flat. I suppose Johnny or I mentioned Mitzi—perhaps we were telling four-year-old Lisa about our first pet. “And you remember that story they told us,” Rich said, “about Mitzi going to the bee farm.”

Johnny and I stopped talking. “Story?” I asked. “There wasn’t a bee farm?” asked Johnny.

It was Rich’s turn to look stunned. “You didn’t know?” “Know what?” Johnny and I chorused.

“They had her put to sleep.”

“No!” we wailed. “Not Mitzi!”

Fast forward to 2005, 35 years after the lie was revealed, 53 years after the lie was told. Rich, John, and I were trying to move Mom, now 97 and long-widowed, from her condo in Salt Lake City to a Berkeley skilled nursing facility, close to the homes of her eldest and youngest children. Managing her 24-hour home care from 800 miles away had become increasingly difficult as her physical and mental limitations increased. During the fifteen years before the fall and hip surgery which precipitated her



Bee Garden by Sharron Evans

dementia and changed her mode of locomotion from walker to wheelchair, I sometimes took her to see friends and family members in nursing homes. “Don’t let me end up in a place like this,” she would say under her breath. “I want to live and die in my own home.”

We began dropping little hints. “You should come to California for a while,” I would say. “We have a friend whose mother’s health improved in this place they found. And you would get to see your family. And it’s beautiful, and there’s no snow.” Mom loved Utah, but she despised snow. The idea of a trip west would enter her mind, flutter around a bit, and then depart. When I took her to see her doctor, the doctor, knowing our wishes, asked her, “Do you think you’d like to go to California where you could see your daughter a lot?”

“Always,” Mom said. Later that

day, however, she looked around the den that she didn’t always recognize as hers and said, “I love being in my own home.”

In the end, we lied. When a room finally became available in the most caring facility we could find, Rich and his wife flew Mom on a “visit” to California, and John and I met her at the plane and drove her to the nursing home. We had furnished her room to look as much like her den as possible, placed a reclining chair in front of the television, hung our pop’s picture on the wall, and filled the place with flowers.

She was not fooled. She was furious. She called the aides names we didn’t think she knew. She ripped the shirt off one; she hit another with her telephone. Every day I tried to placate her and the frazzled staff. Every night I lay awake worrying. We had known

she would not go gentle into this period of her life, but we didn’t know how to deal with her rage and frustration. In her own home, she had had the illusion of being in control. Here she did everything she could to prove to herself and to everyone else that she still was in charge.

Time, drugs, and increased dementia did grant her—and us—some measure of peace. She got used to most of the rest of her life, another three years and four months. Her alternating feistiness and sweetness made her an unlikely favorite among the staff. She reveled in the attention and frequent family visits. When I arrived each day, her face lit up. “Hello, doll,” she would say.

I would sit with her in her exercise class or her gardening class or help her with her noon-time meal. When the weather allowed, and the weather usually did allow it, I would wheel her around the big back gardens. On really nice days, we would explore the neighborhood yards or cross the wooden bridge over Strawberry Creek to the grassy stretch of lawn beyond. After ten minutes, she would say, “Should I push you now?” and I would say, “Not yet, Mom—let’s wait till I’m tired.”

As we strolled, Mom and I would exclaim to each other, “Look!” at whatever was currently blooming—columbine, hydrangeas, roses, even one magical lilac bush. We would point and laugh at the sparrows and hummingbirds and chattering squirrels. And when we would come to the mounds of buzzing rosemary bushes, we would giggle in mock alarm at the many, many bees. ■

EXPONENT GENERATIONS

In 1872, our foremothers began publishing The Woman's Exponent (1872 to 1914). One hundred years later, their spiritual granddaughters formed Exponent II (1970s to present), and 30 years after that, a new generation launched The Exponent blog into the digital realm (2006 to present). In each issue, we will pay homage to our chain of sisterhood by reprinting thematically linked articles from the three different publications.

In this issue, we feature women paying tribute to women who have gone before and left a trail for them to follow. Emmeline Wells writes an ode for Eliza R. Snow, that "Poet! Priestess, Prophet too." Lorie Winder knocks on the door of a political pioneer, and Meghan Raynes finds strength and comfort in remembering her feminist foremothers.

The Woman's Exponent: Vision Vanished

*by Emmeline B. Wells
Salt Lake City, Utah
January 21, 1910*

Here she taught us life's great lessons,
From the fount above obtaining;
As we trod life's paths together,
Always righteousness maintaining—
With that wondrous gift of power,
Her true heritage and dower.

Many years she served the Master,
Truth's great banner wide unfurling,
O'er the world she carried tidings
To all human souls uplifting;
Gladdest message of true light
Peering through the darkest night.
Famous jewels she had gathered
In her pilgrimage sojourning,

Which she scattered 'mong the daughters
Freely, generously bestowing
Precious truths, the choicest gems,
Fairer than earth's diadems.
Rarest, sweetest songs of Zion
That are sung with sacred feeling—
Given her thro' inspiration,
Holy principles revealing
Crown with honor her great name,
Linked with everlasting fame.

And we call her regnant-mother;
In her chaste, pure life excelling—
Zion's daughters down the ages
Will her messages be telling.
Poet! Priestess, Prophet too—
Israel's hosts will honor you. ■

Exponent II: The Sanctity of Personality

*by Lorie Winder
Cambridge, Massachusetts
Vol. 5, No. 3 (Spring 1979)*

For a time, my roommate Peggy Fletcher and I discussed life's complexities daily, and it seemed that whenever the conversation turned to sensitive living, Peggy offered Mrs. Edna Ericksen as the example par excellence. Thus, I was acquainted with Mrs. Ericksen some months before we actually met.

Ascending the steps of an unimposing home near the University of Utah, we knocked on the door and

were soon greeted by a thin, graceful woman of average height, neatly attired in a pale blue dress, a string of colorful beads at her neck, and long grey hair carefully braided and wrapped on top of her head. Barely able to see, Mrs. Ericksen smiled warmly when she heard Peggy's familiar voice and drew us into her living room. After exchanging the usual introductory pleasantries, she asked for a bit of help in the kitchen preparing punch and delicately patterned, homemade, hand-pressed, Scandinavian cookies.

The refreshments served, we settled down to a discussion of a then-recent article in Sunstone on Hans

Küng's *On Being a Christian*, and unavoidably, its implications for Latter-day Saints. It was soon evident that Mrs. Ericksen was a creative and committed, yet not unexamining Mormon, whose insights were engendered by a quick mind, a subtle and ironic humor, and a wealth of experience. Later, as she related some of the highlights and turning points of her life, it was apparent, too, that much of her charm lay in her absorbing, though not obsessive, attention to detail in attitude and ambience, which Peggy described as an acute awareness of the "sanctity of personality" in the objects and people around her. She once told Peggy that before reading a book to her children, she would always wash her hands. It was not that they were dirty, but that she wanted the children to think of books with a certain reverence; there was something special about books, and this ritual would remind them of that specialness. It is just this sort of deliberate and thoughtful imagination employed throughout her life which freed her from conventionality even when her customs coincided with society's.

As a young, expectant mother, Mrs. Ericksen moved to Beaver, Utah, with her husband Ephraim E. Ericksen, who had accepted a position as the principal of the Church's Murdock Academy. Mrs. Ericksen recalled that the crates and boxes containing their material possessions were still packed and standing unopened in their living room when the census examiner appeared at their door. Leaning on a wooden crate, the

examiner thoroughly questioned Mrs. Ericksen about her husband, being careful to stress the importance of accuracy. He soon put away the impressively filled form, took out a blank sheet, and asked her name and occupation. She proudly responded, "I'm a homemaker and a mother." The examiner promptly recorded, "Nothing." Years later, when asked why such a gracious lady as she was involved in politics, Mrs. Ericksen related this story. To her, that "Nothing" on the census form represented the prevailing view about women. It was this experience, she believes, which first prompted her political aspirations.

In Salt Lake, where her husband was offered a position at the University of Utah, Mrs. Ericksen plunged into the campus social life, sang with the Tabernacle Choir, and became actively involved in political clubs. One day, the chairman of Political Ward II came to her door to ask if her husband would consider running for political office. He declined, but Mrs. Ericksen remarked that some day she hoped to run. He asked, "Why not now?" She responded, "I'm not ready. I must first take classes in political science and history." "But no one prepares to go to the legislature," he countered, "you just go." Needless to say, Mrs. Ericksen was somewhat bemused by his comment.

By 1933, Mrs. Ericksen was sitting behind desk 42 in the Utah State House of Representatives. She served one year in the House and six in the State Senate, becoming a champion of women's rights legislation.

Not content merely to sit in the legislature, she and fellow woman Senator Camilia Lund spent a great deal of time interviewing female laborers in Salt Lake in order to get first-hand information regarding wages, working conditions, and how female employees were being treated. This helped her to know how to vote and where to press for legislation. In describing women's role in government, Mrs. Ericksen wrote, "Women must express themselves more freely, they must act more courageously... Only when women participate actively in public affairs will democracy maintain a balance essential to social justice and international Good Will."

Although maintaining her commitment to women in politics, she always



Ericksen family in the mid-1930s, about the time Edna began her career in politics. Stanford, Howard (in front), Edna, Ephraim, Margaret (in front), Sheldon, Gordon

put the question to her family whenever contemplating running for political office. In most instances, all responded favorably. However, on one occasion her small son approached her in the kitchen after dinner, told her he did not want her to run, and asked her why she couldn't "just be ma." Without questioning his reasons, she withdrew her candidacy.

A decade or so later, the telephone rang at the Ericksen home just as Mrs. Ericksen began to wash her long hair. It was Governor Maw. He told her that Senator Gordon Weg-geland had resigned and asked if she would care to finish his expired term. She responded affirmatively. He then asked her how soon she could meet him at his office, suggesting fifteen minutes or so. She agreed, quickly dried her hair as best she could, grabbed her hat and coat, and sped to the Governor's office. She was still somewhat stunned when he immediately ushered her into the Senate chamber and introduced her to the Senate already in session. She then returned home and finished washing her hair.

Serving on the Patronage Committee in the Senate, which makes suggestions for various positions before the session begins, Mrs. Ericksen was given the responsibility of appointing the chaplain. She recommended Dr. Maud May Babcock, then a professor at the University of Utah. As they were reticent to approve such an appointment—there never having been a woman chaplain before—Mrs. Ericksen approached her leery fellow senators and countered their objections with, "Gentlemen, are you suggesting that a woman's prayers cannot ascend to heaven as well as a man's?" Dr. Babcock's appointment was approved, and she and Mrs. Ericksen shared an office together during the session. "My senate years were a good training period," Mrs. Ericksen reflected, "because you have to talk about every subject that has to do with life and living within a year's course of legislating."

Despite her political accomplishments, Mrs. Ericksen believes that for real personal development, her work on the Primary General Board creating the Trailbuilder Program far exceeds all her other achievements. Her success here let her see real growth and gave her confidence to do other things. It seems that a program was desperately needed to stimulate the interest of boys the ages of eight to ten. Mrs. Ericksen was

"Women must express themselves more freely, they must act more courageously... Only when women participate actively in public affairs will democracy maintain a balance essential to social justice and international Good Will."

-Edna Erickson

approached with the problem because she had been critical of the program already in effect and, in her words, "because I was the only member of the Board with more than one boy." She made it the objective of her committee to get acquainted with boys—by visiting them, observing them and the kinds of activities they enjoyed, and by reading numerous books. Finally, putting her theories into practice, Mrs. Ericksen taught the Trailbuilder class in her home ward, refining and revising it until she had a workable program.

The finished product, which was intended to be a series of suggestions for activities from which the teacher could draw depending on the needs of her class, appeared to be quite successful. Yet Mrs. Ericksen was somewhat disheartened years later when she received a letter from a distraught ward leader. The sister had taken suggestions in the manual to be hard-fast instructions for weekly activities, and when the manual had suggested that the boys go into the hills and watch the sun go down, she queried, "What shall we do—we have no hills?" The program had not been intended to stifle, but rather to enhance individual creativity.

Mrs. Ericksen is more than simply a wise older woman with numerous unusual experiences. She is a person who, even now while plagued with the nuisances of old age, lives her life by choice, not by default. As she quipped at the end of one of our visits, "I'm by nature an optimist: I don't believe in ending a sentence with a period, for with a period your voice drops and so does your incentive. No, I don't believe in them because I'm never through!" ■

***The Exponent* Blog: Hope in the Feminist Sisterhood**

*by Meghan Raynes
Denver, Colorado
April 6, 2009*

I was sitting at my desk in the Smith Institute for LDS History back in the days when it was still at BYU, reading through a newspaper article that one of the professors I worked with had been interviewed for. And I remember feeling so alone. The article was entitled “Where Have All the Mormon Feminists Gone?” and it basically asserted that the Mormon women of my generation had no use for feminism. This was in the days before *Feminist Mormon Housewives*, back when VOICE at BYU had died a quiet death, and a year before its softer re-incarnation, Parity, was born.

But I had a primal need for feminism—feminism was in my blood and in my bones and I felt isolated and assumed that I was alone in my concern for women’s space within a Mormon context. I had professors, both female and male, who nurtured my burgeoning feminism in the academic sphere but there was no one at that time to gently lead me into the lonely road of being a feminist and a Mormon woman.

If somebody had told me then that five years later I would be holding my baby girl at an academic Mormon feminist conference, I’m not sure I would have believed them! Like so many others, I thought Mormon feminism was silenced and dead, or at least softer. And maybe this was so for a while but it is certainly not the case anymore.

I have felt the ground shift and have seen the swell of excitement, creativity and thoughtfulness. Patriarchy, beware! We are making history just as Eliza and Emmeline, Laurel, Margaret and Claudia did before us. Mormon feminists are not just passive actors in our theological history, we have been a vital force from the very beginning.

Of course, Mormon feminists today experience a very different church from the one Second Wavers influenced during the 60s and 70s. There is so much distrust and many open wounds still left unhealed. My feminist sisters are also probably less optimistic that things will change. But this new feminist movement has reignited in only five years; think of the change we can accomplish in ten years, twenty!

Being a Mormon feminist is inconvenient and lonely. Other members of the church will think that you are crazy or sinful/prideful/power-hungry/deluded. You will have hard questions left unanswered. You will think really painful things about your community and God. But there is room in Mormon feminism for optimism.

Even if the church does not change or the questions go unanswered, you will always have sisters at your side. They will be there to teach you how to crochet and to giggle with you late into the night. They will be there to help carry the burden, to mourn and cry with you. They will be there to walk down the long road with you.

I have posted before how I worry for my daughter’s future as a Mormon woman. But today, I don’t worry because I know that she will have mothers and sisters who will always be at her side. And that is enough. ■



Sisters by Galen Dara

MY SEARCH FOR THE DIVINE FEMININE

*by Ryan Thomas
Hurricane, Utah*

Over the last several years I have been on a spiritual journey to know my Heavenly Mother. It began while I was a graduate student at the Harvard Divinity School, where academic study of the Bible exposed me to new ways of understanding the biblical text. As my LDS beliefs and values engaged with my academic learning, I was awakened to the presence of the Divine Feminine in scripture and to Her active presence in my life.

When I first came to graduate school, my beliefs about the Divine Feminine were not very different from other Latter-day Saints. Growing up I had been taught that we had a Heavenly Mother and that this was an accepted, even sacred, doctrine of the Church. But my ideas about her were vague and undeveloped. I did not see myself in a personal relationship to her; nor did I consider her absence from most of the religious teaching and worship that I experienced in the church as strange or reflecting some male bias.

I did, however, believe in the principle of the Heavenly Mother. Partly, this was because the idea just seemed to make theological sense. But it was also because I had been surrounded by extraordinary women from birth. Their intelligence, love, and strength gave witness to real feminine spiritual power.

As I grew older I had spiritual experiences that testified to the importance of the Divine Femi-

nine and laid the foundation for the transformation that I would later undergo. The first was my initial experience with the temple endowment. While there I was impressed with the idea that Adam and Eve, as represented in the ceremony, symbolized in some profound way I could not yet understand the male and female sides of deity. The concept felt like a revelation; it captivated me and overshadowed everything else I learned. All that seemed to matter for days after the experience was that the Divine was both male and female.

Another memorable experience occurred on my mission when I happened to hear a quote, attributed to Joseph Smith when he was speaking to the Relief Society, in which he said that he would make them queens and priestesses, to such an extent that the queens of the world would pale in comparison. The thought electrified me. I began to recognize the divine nature and potential of women and sensed implicitly that we as a church had not fully caught the vision set forth by the founding Prophet Joseph Smith.

Upon beginning my studies at Harvard, I became vigorously engaged in studying the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible in its ancient historical and cultural context, not expecting to make any grand discoveries or breakthroughs in biblical interpretation, but simply to try and gain insight into what had always seemed an impenetrable and mysterious world. But a sequence of events quickly narrowed

the focus of my research.

First, I became aware of an accumulating body of archaeological evidence that ancient Israel had worshiped a Mother goddess like other cultures of the ancient Near East. The goddess' name was Asherah, and contrary to the biblical record, her tradition appears to have been indigenous, widespread, and mainstream. This discovery took me by surprise, for my professors tended to emphasize the monotheistic tendencies and distinctive character of Israelite religion, an assessment based largely on the biblical evidence. Who was this Asherah? What happened to her tradition? Why was there such a disparity between the archaeological record and the Bible? I felt drawn to the question of Israelite goddess worship. I wanted to know about this Mother—intuition told me she was the spiritual forebear of the Heavenly Mother of Mormon tradition. Why was she so important to these ancient Israelites, but not to us?

I started to get some answers to my questions as I learned what biblical scholars knew about the formation of the Hebrew Bible. I found out that the reason the image of a transcendent, unembodied, solitary male deity dominates the biblical record can largely be credited to the Deuteronomists, a scribal school who are thought by scholars to have had a decisive hand in the composition and editing of the biblical texts. Living at a period much later than the events they narrate, and disconnected from

the religious traditions of ancient Palestine, they essentially wrote the Israelite goddess out of Israelite history and branded her as foreign.

That men could alter or produce scripture to serve their ideological goals made sense from an LDS perspective, but I kept wondering, is that all there is? Did the Bible only preserve the perspective of the Deuteronomists? Is it bereft of authentic traditions about the real historic religion of Israel? The first clue that the Hebrew Bible had more to say about the polytheistic/goddess tradition came, ironically, as I was pondering the scene of Jesus' baptism in the New Testament. The image of the dove descending out of heaven leaped out at me and made a strong impression on my mind. Why the dove? What does it mean? As I researched bird symbolism, I came upon the startling discovery that the dove was not only universally associated with goddesses throughout the Mediterranean and Near Eastern world, but that it had been connected to Asherah in particular in the land of

Palestine for more than a millennium preceding the time of Christ. That it appeared here in such a central narrative of early Christianity suggested to me that the goddess tradition of ancient Israel had greater longevity than I had previously imagined.

I then started to read the Hebrew Bible with new eyes, looking for evidence of the Israelite goddess in the surviving written traditions from ancient Israel. The first text that caught my attention was the book of Proverbs, whose female character Wisdom is widely regarded to have been patterned on ancient Near Eastern goddesses. As I studied the Hebrew text I realized that the book was radical in its implications for the development of Israelite religion. Wisdom was not a literary personification, but a real goddess, from a living goddess tradition. This was clear not only from the portrayal of Wisdom, who speaks and acts in ways comparable to goddesses elsewhere in the ancient Near East and has symbolism and iconography that matches

the goddess Asherah, but from the rhetorical context of the book as a whole. Proverbs seems to have been constructed in dialogue with Deuteronomy, or better, in polemical argument. Its riddle-like language, its mocking, satirical tone, its patterning itself after the book of Deuteronomy, its subversive intertextual allusions to Deuteronomistic literature, its apologetic pro-goddess attitude all appear to have been intended to counter the anti-Asherah ideology of the Deuteronomists. Wisdom was a cipher for Asherah.

Understanding Proverbs in this way was a mind-blowing experience. First of all, it opened a unique window on an until now forgotten tradition, a tradition of a vibrant and intellectually sophisticated Jewish community which had all but been obscured by biblical editors and centuries of Western religious development but which now shone forth in all its theological richness. It was my first intimation that the divine feminine had not died! At a more practical level, it showed that the biblical texts were far less theologically homogeneous than I had supposed. The Bible contained diverse traditions, some of them diametrically opposed to one another.

Shortly thereafter, I began to see that Proverbs was not the only book in the Bible to have preserved remnants of the Israelite goddess tradition, but that there were other books and passages that presupposed goddess worship. I found her theology to be densely concentrated in Isaiah, Job, and Malachi, much less so in the Pentateuch.

But most surprising was that in a few literary traditions the god-



Detail, *Dove Descending* by Sharron Evans

ness seemed to be referred to not by Wisdom or Asherah, but by the epithet *ruh* (traditionally translated as “spirit”). At first I took notice of the Hebrew term because I knew it was grammatically feminine. This was interesting to me because I had always been taught that the Holy Spirit, the third member of the godhead, was male in gender. But as I studied the subject more, I found that biblical scholars almost universally explained instances in the Bible where the Spirit seemed to be an independent being from Yahweh as something less, an emanation of power, a mighty wind, a hypostasis, but not a deity. This was difficult for me to accept, for not only did my LDS background incline me to see the Spirit as a separate independent being, but I wondered how the early Christians could have come to see the Holy Spirit as something separate from the Father and the Son, to say nothing of being worthy of their worship, if it had originated merely through an imaginative process of spiritual fission. It seemed doubtful *a priori*.

So I began reading these biblical passages more closely, wrestling with the meaning of *ruh*. The more I did this the more I felt that behind the Spirit was an independent female deity. But my proof was lacking. Why would a goddess be called *ruh*, the same Hebrew term used for wind?

The answer eventually came by looking at names for goddesses in the Syro-Palestinian region. I found that in this part of the ancient Near East, goddesses were frequently given epithets based on their cult statues. These epithets, such as face (*pane*), name (*shem*), and image (*sml*), were then linked to the male

deity in a grammatically genitive relationship and used as a compound name. For example, the goddess Astarte is called the “Name of Baal” or the “Face of Baal;” the goddess Tanit is called the “Face of Baal” or the “Image of Baal.”

This cultural pattern immediately shed light on the passages that I was reading where *ruh* seemed to refer to a goddess, for not only did Hebrew *ruh* have a technical meaning when used in connection to the worship of cult statues (Hab. 2:19; Jer. 10:14), but it was often paired with a male deity in a grammatically bound relationship comparable to the above examples for Tanit and Astarte. Thus, in Genesis 1:2 the *ruh elohim* (Spirit of God) is described as hovering over the waters, bringing new creation into being. In Isaiah she is the *ruh Yahweh*, who along with her husband governs the earth, provides prosperity, and cares for her children (e.g., 48:16; 57:16; 63:8-14).

My initial reaction to discovering that the Holy Spirit was an epithet for the Israelite goddess Asherah was elation. I felt exhilarated to finally know who the Spirit was, since the idea of the Holy Ghost that I had grown up with had always seemed confusing and disjointed, an unembodied male member of the godhead, difficult to relate to on a personal level. But the more I reflected on my newfound knowledge, the more I became uneasy and depressed with its implications for my faith. I knew that what I had found was historically accurate; there was simply too much evidence to deny it. But how could I reconcile it with the rest of the scriptures I believed in? With the restoration of the gospel



Jean d'arc in Rouen, France
Photo by D'Arcy Benincosa

by Joseph Smith that I had taught as a missionary? With the modern teachings of the church? Why had something so important been invisible to the church for so long? Was my religion of inspired origin?

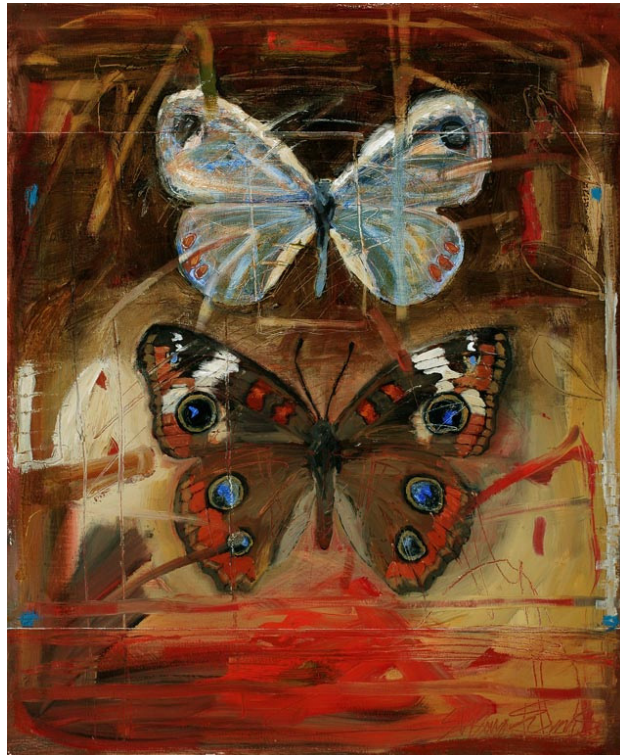
I remember at one point feeling particularly dark and alone, having no one to turn to. Then I felt I heard the Spirit's voice, the same voice I had heard many times earlier in my life, telling me to not be afraid, to keep going, to have faith in what I was doing. In my mind's eye I saw the women of the church and knew that what I was discovering had important implications for them.

After this my focus naturally turned to the question of the post-Hebrew Bible development of the goddess tradition. I presumed that there was a relationship between the Holy Spirit goddess of ancient Israel and the Holy Spirit of early Christianity, but I wanted to know what that was and how the latter

had come to be regarded as male.

First, I realized that as one moved later in time from the period of the composition of the Hebrew Bible, the goddess tradition did not simply fade away or disappear. Enochic Judaism, for example, was clearly in the stream of the polytheistic goddess tradition, with mythological and intertextual links stretching back to the goddess of Proverbs and Isaiah and further on to Israelite Asherah. This discovery was important, since the Enochic literature was written at a relatively short remove from the period of the New Testament and is regarded to have had an important role in the development of early Christianity.

Second, I found that reading the goddess tradition into the New Testament powerfully illuminated the character of Jesus and the background of early Christianity. In various ways, Jesus appears in the gospels as a son and representative of the Mother as well as of the Father. Sometimes this is indicated directly, as when the Spirit descends in the form of the dove at his baptism or when he claims to be a prophet of the Holy Spirit (Mark 3:28-30) or Wisdom/Asherah (Luke 11:49). At other times it is implied by his language, such as when he says, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest" (Matt 11:28), phraseology which is heavily dependent on descriptions of the goddess entreating people to come to her for rest, regeneration, and enlightenment



Trailside Buckeye and Spring Azure
by Sharron Evans

(Isaiah 55; Proverbs 9; Sirach 24, 51). John gives special prominence to the goddess: there Jesus teaches that one must be born again by the Spirit-goddess to enter the kingdom of heaven, and the promise of the Holy Spirit as another Advocate/Comforter forms a central theme.

Third, I discovered that knowledge of the Holy Spirit as mother goddess was prevalent in so-called Gnostic traditions, that Jewish tradition had remnants of the Israelite goddess in its concepts of the Shekinah and Bat Qol, and that the feminine nature of the Spirit was retained in Syriac Christianity for several centuries.

All this evidence was compelling. But for me personally the moment came one day when I was contemplating the titles for the members of the Trinity. The mantra of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit came into my mind again

and again. Then suddenly it dawned on me. The Trinity had originally been a family: Father, Mother, and Son! I knew it in my inner being in a way I could not explain. I knew that Jesus believed in the goddess and represented Her as well as his Father. Early Christianity developed out of ancient Israelite polytheism!

Having this knowledge put the subsequent development of Christianity in a totally different light. I could see that the identity of the Holy Spirit as goddess had been obscured early on, both because of incidental linguistic

development of the New Testament traditions (e.g. the feminine Hebrew ruh became neuter pneuma in Greek and then masculine spiritus in Latin), and because of larger cultural and ideological developments: the church gradually moved west away from its Near Eastern cultural origins, Christian theology was seen in terms of Hellenistic philosophy, and the New Testament became the theological preserve of a Christian culture that saw itself as utterly distinct from paganism and gnosticism.

Eventually the Holy Spirit was made a "he" in orthodox Christianity, first subordinated to the Father, then to both the Father and the Son in western Catholic Christianity. In time this concept of the Holy Spirit became the unembodied Holy Ghost of the Mormon godhead. I knew, however, that the Holy Spirit was still a "She," no matter how much tradition and theology said otherwise. Joseph Smith's understanding of the Spirit was

A PATH ONCE CHOSEN

by Catherine Wheelwright Ockey
Helena, Montana

influenced by his culture and he apparently never asked for a revelation about its identity. This is suggested by D & C 130:22, where new insight into the nature of deity is found only in the first two clauses that say that the Father and Son have a body of flesh and bones; in the third clause, his own reason and logic are used to deduce that the Holy Ghost “has not a body of flesh and bones,” for he explicitly states, “Were it not so, the Holy Ghost could not dwell in us.”

Although understanding the Holy Spirit as Heavenly Mother is different from what the present church teaches, it feels right to me. Indeed, having this knowledge has had a dramatic effect on my spiritual consciousness. At its most basic level, it has changed the way I read the rest of the scriptures held by the Church to be standard works. For the most part, the Spirit is automatically revalorized as female and read from the perspective of the goddess tradition, resulting in many new theological insights.

But at a deeper personal level, I have realized that the Mother I have found in the scriptures is my Mother. She has been there all along, attending me from an early age, giving me knowledge and inspiration, comforting and guiding me; I just did not know who She was.

I am now aware of Her presence in my life.

I now see Her in the face of the many women whom I have known, my grandmothers, my mother, my wife.

We as a church have been less without Her. Father in Heaven has been functioning as a single-parent for too long. ■

The first week of May, 2010, I left my Montana home in my trusty old Toyota and set out on a journey, a pilgrimage of sorts, to visit LDS church history sites across the United States. I looked forward to the time alone and to the opportunity to get a better feel for the people who preceded me in my uniquely Mormon life journey, especially the women—people like my ancestral mothers: Diantha Morley Billings, baptized in Kirtland in 1830; Catherine Farrar, a handcart pioneer from England; and Sarah Cordon Coulam, whose bones lay buried somewhere on the banks of the Missouri River. My first destination was Kirtland, Ohio. The morning after I reached Kirtland, I found myself on a long winding road that intersected with few others. The freeway was under construction, and trusting my limited sense of direction, I had taken a side road that I thought was parallel to the road I had intended to travel. After quite some time traveling this path, and feeling unsure of which direction I was headed, I became concerned with the precious time I was losing and finally pulled over to study the map and regain my sense of direction.

It was while sitting there in the solitude of a country road in the quiet summer rain that my mind began to clear and my pathway—physically and spiritually—seemed to open up before me. Just as the morning fog gradually lifted from the road in front of me, the spiritu-

al fog I had been traveling through for the past three years also began to lift from my mind.

Born to third and fourth generation Mormon parents, I grew up in the 1950s and ‘60s in an active LDS home on the East Bench of Salt Lake City. My parents were well-educated and fairly open-minded politically and socially, but their sincere devotion to LDS doctrine and practice set me squarely on their same spiritual path at a very young age. I did all those things good Mormons do—attended my meetings, graduated from four years of LDS Seminary, graduated from BYU, married a returned missionary in the Salt Lake Temple, served in whatever way I was called, and supported my husband in his many priesthood callings. I gave birth to four children, all of whom graduated from BYU and married in a temple. I give all these examples not out of pride, but to demonstrate the spiritual and cultural path my life had taken and from which I had not strayed for some fifty-five years. Though I can’t say that I was always happy on this path, I never considered taking any other, convinced as I was that happiness would come eventually—if not in this life, then in the eternities. However, my entire perspective began to change with a series of events that occurred about three years ago.

I have struggled with chronic health issues all of my adult life and was finally diagnosed about twelve years ago with celiac disease, multiple chemical sensi-

tivities, fibromyalgia, and chronic fatigue. The effect these illnesses have had on my life in recent years cannot be overstated. Through most of these health challenges, I have had unwavering support from family, friends, and fellow LDS Church members. When my disabilities have required accommodation on the part of ward members, my needs have, for the most part, been met with love and acceptance. When we moved to a different state nine years ago, members of my new ward were gracious and understanding, doing what they could to make church attendance more comfortable for me. Unfortunately, that began to change when I received a calling which put me in close proximity with members of the ward who were not as understanding.

For me, the chronic pain and sometimes severe manifestations of these health conditions are intensified by exposure to certain chemicals, especially petroleum-based chemicals found in synthetic fragrances. Most people are pretty accommodating to this concern (in my previous ward, the bishop declared the chapel a fragrance-free zone so that I could serve as ward organist). Normally I avoid being in the same room with people whom I know will be wearing fragrance. However, in my new Primary music calling, I could not excuse myself from the room when some of the teachers, women who were new to our ward, seemed unable to grasp the severity of my illness and continued to wear fragrances to church, though informed about my health issues at the time they were called. Though other members of the ward and my

husband did speak up on my behalf, my pleas to our newly-called bishop to speak to these women were met with silence. It seemed he was afraid of offending them. After weeks of increasing pain and asthmatic reactions, it became necessary for me to be released from my calling and curtail my church activity. Emotionally and spiritually, this experience was devastating.

Throughout my life of busy church activity and unquestioning obedience, I had always been critical of people who left the Church or became less active because of what I perceived to be personal grievances—a personality conflict, hurt feelings, or some other insignificant misunderstanding. Suddenly I saw a whole different side to these stories. Now I was the one who had been misunderstood, insulted, and rejected. Now I was the one withdrawing physically, spiritually, and emotionally from church activity. The physical withdrawal was intentional, to

protect my health, but the spiritual and emotional withdrawal came as a surprise to me and to those close to me. Yet, I think it is human nature, a form of self-preservation, to withdraw from circumstances that are as painful as these were for me. I felt unloved and unwanted, rejected by the Church to which I had dedicated my life, and I had no recourse. I had appealed to my bishop and he had done nothing to help me. The Primary and Relief Society presidents had tried, but without the bishop's support, they had no power. And, though it is general LDS Church policy to accommodate for disabilities, there is no legal requirement to do so (churches are exempt). I felt abandoned and lonely, left to follow a solitary path of spirituality separate from that of my church community, a path I could not seem to find.

So, for the next two to three years, I was unable to attend my own ward meetings, and found myself questioning everything I



Utah House by Evan Tye Peterson

had once believed immutable. My husband, a member of our stake presidency, pushed for stake-wide accommodations for me and other members who suffered from some of the same health issues—chemical sensitivity in particular—and eventually I was able to attend sacrament meeting in one of the other wards. The stake president even came over one night to apologize to me for the actions of others. But wounds as deep as mine do not heal overnight, and I started to question if there was really a place for me in the LDS Church.

Was there still room for me on this spiritual and cultural path? Did I even want to be on it? So I started to explore what other paths existed. Like looking at maps of places I had never traveled, I researched new spiritual arenas, reading ravenously about the spiritual journeys taken by others, especially women.

With no Church calling (and barely any attendance), I had more time available to me. Years before, at the urging of my mother, I had started writing the stories of my female ancestors, but I didn't have the time in those earlier years to finish the necessary research. I dug out what I'd already written, went through the materials left to me by my now-deceased parents, spent hours on the internet, wrote letters to distant relatives, and took several trips to Utah to do onsite research into the lives of my pioneer Mormon grandmothers. The stories I found were not all happy. These women sacrificed much with sometimes tragic results. I didn't agree with much of what they did and said. But I did admire them and I did grow to love them as I learned what strong individuals they were.

I was the one withdrawing physically, spiritually, and emotionally from church activity. The physical withdrawal was intentional, but the spiritual and emotional withdrawal came as a surprise to me.

The culmination of my research was a 300-page book which I self-published and gave to family and friends. This project gave my mind focus when my spirit was in turmoil. It helped me better understand my own background, and where this whole spiritual path had started, why I think and do some of the things I do—and I started to see that I still had choices, that I was not locked into a single path, even after so many years of living.

Not long after the publication of these stories, I started making plans to visit my youngest daughter in Virginia. As the time approached, it occurred to me that if I drove to Virginia, I could visit some of the places my ancestral mothers had lived—Kirtland, Nauvoo and Missouri. It was a daunting trip to take, but I was determined to do it. Thus I found myself wandering the country roads of eastern Ohio on a rainy day in May.

Sitting there on the side of the road, I realized how far I had traveled in the past three years. I'd left the safety of a prescribed spiritual path to explore new byways, just as I had set out on my own to

explore the geographical history of my ancestors. In doing so, I had gained new confidence in my own strength, in my own spirit, in my own capacity to learn and grow and change direction. I felt a weight lift from my shoulders as I saw the road before me. It was my choice now, and I had done my research. I had the information I needed to make a decision. I could get off the main road, take a side road, or go in an entirely different direction.

Looking at the map on the seat beside me, I saw that I was not on the road I had intended to take that morning, but that the road I was on would get me where I wanted to go eventually, though perhaps on a more roundabout route. In that moment I also recognized where I was spiritually—not on the well-traveled road I had started out on and traveled along for most of my life. Rather, I found myself now on a more circuitous route, wandering down side roads here and there, but it was a path that suited my needs and would get me where I wanted to be. When Mormons had rejected me, I had tried to reject Mormonism. But that had only added to my pain. It was like rejecting my own soul or cutting off a body part. I could not reject it all outright—it was too much a part of what I was.

I realized in that moment that there are many paths that lead to God, even to the Mormon God. As my grandmothers took different paths to Zion, so was I finding my own way, not entirely away from the main Mormon path, but different, sometimes intersecting, but never quite parallel. In traveling that path, I have finally found a measure of peace and my life feels rich with possibility. ■

FLANNEL BOARD

Sung to the tune of "If You Could Hie to Kolob," the following song was written by Exponent II sister, Susan Howe. Years later, Linda Hoffman Kimball altered the lyrics slightly and instituted the tradition of having the Relief Society sisters welcome infants into the ward and the world by singing this song to the infant's family.

We love the idea of using this song to more fully include women in the celebration of bringing a new life into our congregations and to mark the start of one's religious life on earth.

Hymn of Welcome

1. In the pow - er of the Spir - it We your sis - ter o - n this
 2. Em - u late Christ's lov - ing ser - vice Ev - ery mo - ment o - f your
 3. Ma - ny lives will be dis - cour - aged; Man - y faith - ful hea - rts will
 4. The - re is no end to vir - tue; The - re is no e - nd to

5
 day Give to you our joy - ful wel - come T - o guide you o - n your
 life; Hold His count - en - nance be - fore you Through each day of j - oy and
 fail; Man - y turn from joy to plea - sure; Man - y hopes grow o - ld and
 might; The - re is no end to wis - dom; The - re is no e - nd to

9
 way. De - ar bless - ed, n - o - ble child - ren Of great vis - i - on, love, and
 strife. There is hon - or i - n your miss - ion. There is glo - r - y in your
 stale. In such times of l - oss and sor - row when the world wou - ld bring you
 light. The - re is no e - nd to glo - ry; The - re is n - o end to

13
 soul, Th - e world, so s - ad a - nd bro - ken Ne - eds your gifts to make it whole.
 youth. Seek the best in a - ll yo - ur la - bors That your light may shi - ne with truth.
 low, Think on this great lo - ve w - e bear you. We are here to he - lp you know
 love; The - re is no e - nd t - o be - ing; We will know them a - ll a - bove.

Thought-Provoking Film Misses Mormon Efforts at Dialogue

by Julia D. Hunter
Somerville, Massachusetts

8: The Mormon Proposition fits its film genre well. As with other documentaries, it's packed with shocking evidence, exclusive interviews, surprising statistics, a clear mission, and a biased point of view. Most importantly it gives a clear, impassioned voice to a minority group long-silenced.

At first glance, the film's argument seems obvious and familiar. But what I think many may not know about the perspective behind *8:TMP* is that it is almost entirely the product of gay former-Mormons—written, directed, edited, narrated and produced—a voice I consider to be increasingly important and visible in this ongoing debate.

The greatest triumph of *8: The Mormon Proposition* is its humanization of homosexuality and gay marriage. By featuring the story of gay couple Tyler Barrick and Spencer Jones, who both grew up Mormon and married in San Francisco on June 17, 2008, the film portrays how Prop 8 was a literal stripping of their marriage rights. Tyler's mother, Linda Stay, is the real star of the film. She speaks of her experience feeling completely torn apart by the Church's involvement in Prop 8, which she experienced as a choice of whether to support her church or her son. In an interview at the Sundance premiere, Stay said, "These are lives, these are families that are being af-

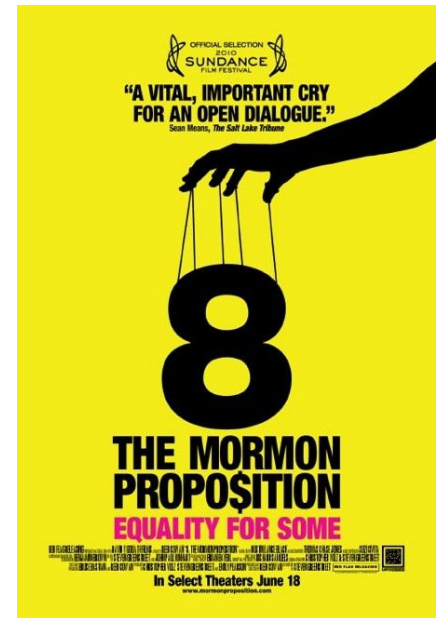
8: The Mormon Proposition

Directed by Reed Cowan and Steven Greenstreet
David v. Goliath Films, 2010

fectured, and that's the one thing we were always taught in the Mormon Church, that family is everything, and that's number one. And so, for me, my family is everything, and my children are amazing. I have two gay children and I will stand with them and stand for them every single time, and I wish more parents would."

Additionally, the filmmakers offer an in-depth look at the LDS Church's strategy and involvement in the Prop 8 political campaign, as well as a prelude effort in Hawaii. In my experience it seems that Mormons often believe the Church's only involvement in a political debate (whether regarding "moral issues" or otherwise) is through official statements issued to local congregations from the pulpit which encourage members to become involved as it suits their conscience.

But what this film portrays through extensive documentation and investigation led by Fred Karger and the California Fair Political Practices Commission, is that the LDS Church's efforts in Prop 8 and other political initiatives are often ambitious and extensive, involving years of survey, planning, correspondence, coalition building, and training. In the end, methods used under the direction of church leaders are just as tainted and complex as any political scheme, especially



as the Church seeks to maintain a low profile.

On the other hand, the fact that the film is peppered with hearsay weakens the legitimacy of some of its assertions regarding Mormon practice and belief. A majority of interviewees are "former Mormons," who relate other people's experiences with Prop 8 (relatives, colleagues and friends) rather than first-hand accounts. When the filmmakers could get a practicing Mormon to interview on camera, these speakers represented only extreme racist, bigoted, and incredibly politically incorrect opinions, like those of Utah State Senator Chris Butters and political activist Gayle Ruzicka.

Though the film was clearly the outcome of many years of personal

struggle and heartache with the LDS church, many of the creators insisted in interviews leading up to and following the film's debut that, "It's not an attack," "It's not against the Mormon church," and "It's not even so much about Mormons as it is about separation of church and state," while also asserting that Mormons are the people who most need to see the film.

As blogger TT on Faith-Promoting Rumor writes, "While in my view this film succeeds at one of its primary goals of humanizing the issue of same-sex marriage for an audience that may be skeptical of such a change, it does so at the cost of frequently dehumanizing Mormons." For example, prophets and general authorities are quoted over distorted images and a disturbing soundtrack. Angry former Mormons explain "the Mormon mind," as if it is homogenous and un-nuanced.

In my opinion, one of the greatest shortcomings of the documentary is that in dehumanizing Mormons in this way the film often criticizes and dismisses the real struggle and effort coming from within the LDS community to create a more open dialogue with the LGBT community.

For me, the strongest example of this shortcoming is the filmmakers' handling of the infamous suicide of Henry Stewart Matis, a gay Mormon who very publicly committed suicide on the steps of a Mormon church in California in 2000. Since their son's suicide, Stewart's parents, Fred and Marilyn Matis, have become middle-ground activists for gay Mormons. They co-authored a memoir about their experience with their son as

My sense from watching Prop 8 unfold, from speaking with both gays and Mormons, and from watching this documentary, is that Mormons and gays don't know each other, not really.

he struggled to reconcile his religion and orientation and how they sought peace following his death.

In *8:TMP* Stewart's parents were made to seem cowardly and dismissive for not being willing to comment or interview for the film. They are represented by a single quote from their book, given without context, about finding peace after Stewart's death. The way the filmmakers incorporated this quote into the documentary seems deliberately and unfairly to lead the audience to believe the Matises (and by association, the LDS Church) condone suicide as an appropriate response to homosexuality. What this shockingly low blow fails to acknowledge is the work the Matises have been doing within the LDS Church to reach out to LGBT Mormons and humanize homosexuality in the LDS community by hosting monthly firesides for LGBT Mormons and their families and friends. One of the things the Matises are most known for is their mantra, "All people want to talk about is the cause and the cure, but we're here for the care." In response to their son's death, Fred

and Marilyn have made it their work to lovingly embrace Mormon gays where the LDS institution, as well as other member-initiated efforts, have failed to do so appropriately.

Because of a very long history of anti-gay rhetoric streaming from the LDS pulpit, even a group of bright, timid young gays attending a fireside in the Matis living room can barely speak the word "gay," because getting over all the chilling authoritative statements Mormons have internalized as a people over the past fifty years is no small task. Part of the healing comes with time; the other part must come from a steady effort to create refuges for gays, much like the Matis firesides. When I see something like *8:TMP* I feel even more strongly that this comfort zone with homosexuality needs to be created from within the Mormon community before any significant shift in policy or practice can occur.

Overall, I found this to be a worthwhile and thought-provoking film. Ideally I would recommend a Mormon and a homosexual watch this film together, because my sense from watching Prop 8 unfold, from speaking with both gays and Mormons, and from watching this documentary, is that Mormons and gays don't know each other, not really. In many ways they've been taught to fear one another. And one of the hardest things for me in viewing *8:The Mormon Proposition* is that it only seems to continue this pattern of fear mongering between the two minorities.

I watched the film twice, once as a Mormon, once as a lesbian. I realize not everyone can do that, but oh how I wish they could. ■

A Call to Care

by Sariah Anne Kell
El Cerrito, California

As the title suggests, *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*, investigates gender inequality throughout the world with the call for readers to address women's issues as "the paramount moral challenge of the 21st century." Written by Pulitzer Prize winning journalists Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, a married couple who have traveled the world reporting on human rights since witnessing the Tiananmen Square massacre, the book reflects the authors' own passion to denounce and spread awareness about all types of human suffering as well as offer strategies to change the world.

A book with the premise that the oppression of women is an ignored injustice that requires a grass roots movement to effect change.

Through their engaging essays which offer historical context, heart-breaking yet inspiring storytelling, excruciating detail, and startling statistics, they show how education, medical care, and aid can make a difference to women and communities throughout the world. They focus on three horrific injustices: sex trafficking and forced prostitution; gender-based violence, including honor killings and mass rape; and mater-

Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide

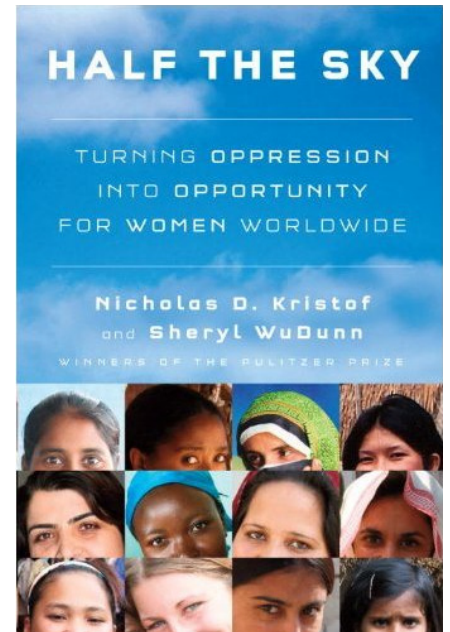
by Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn
Vintage Books, 2009, 254 pages.

nal mortality in the developing world. Giving the victims names and faces, they portray the suffering, audacity, determination, and hope of those who overcome their personal history as well as the heartache of those who do not. This is described vividly with atrocities such as teenagers who are sold into forced prostitution and contract AIDS, women who are raped and forced to marry their perpetrators, and women who suffer obstetric fistulas and become incontinent which leads to ostracization from their communities and often death.

Recognizing the complexities of such situations, the authors can-

didly discuss how their own efforts to help sometimes went awry. For example, even though they bought a prostitute's freedom, she later returned to her brothel both as a consequence of being

shunned by her home community upon her return home as well as a drug addiction which was initiated to keep her compliant when she was held prisoner in the brothel. But undeterred by complications, the authors show how individuals and organizations can help women in difficult circumstances, offering the hope and perspective that people can make a difference. They describe how international aid helped Srey Rath, a Cambodian



girl, build a business to support her family after she escaped from her brothel, and helped sustain organizations like the Edna Adan Hospital in Somaliland, which continues to save women dying from obstetric fistulas.

Another focus of the book explains the success of communities that take care of, educate, and enable women economically. In addition to describing how individuals and families benefit from micro-lending, the book describes how China became an economic power by employing women in factories, which although not perfect, provided jobs and opportunities and moved the culture away from historic foot-binding, concubinage, and female infanticide. *Half the Sky*, titled after the Chinese Prov-

GLOBAL ZION

erb “women hold up half the sky,” transforms women’s issues into human issues by highlighting how the plight of women is directly linked to global problems like poverty, maternal health, and education.

Although I have always been concerned about women’s rights, reading about the power of individuals and charities was a reminder to expand my brand of American feminism to include all women worldwide while remembering issues stateside. When I finished reading *Half the Sky*, I felt compelled to follow its simple suggestions to select and donate to an organization of my choice, look at websites for more information, and encourage people in my daily life to do the same. It made me want to be an activist, to truly show my compassion, concern, and faith by caring for poor and needy women throughout the world. I could appreciate how we are all in this sisterhood together.

Half the Sky’s premise is that the oppression of women is an ignored injustice that requires a grass roots movement to effect change. Reading the book is the first step to becoming informed. I hope it continues to motivate many people, whether secular humanists or religious believers, to reach out and help in the global community, even just by helping one person. For me, this resonates with Mormonism which proclaims “And if it so be that you should labor all your days ... and save it be one soul ... how great shall be your joy ... !” (D&C 18:15). To feel the tremendous moral responsibility to emancipate women and strengthen individuals and communities only brings more passion to the cause. ■

We are happy to announce our Winter issue will feature *Exponent II* Founding Mother Judy Dushku discussing her recent humanitarian effort with a group of Mormon women to build housing for former child soldiers in Gulu, Northern Uganda. Her essay will touch on how a community of young women who spent their childhoods in forced servitude, experiencing the worst traumas of war, still faces a very complex set of challenges, and why she and others feel compelled to give them a voice. Please enjoy this preview of the group’s visit.



Photos by Kristal Williams