

## Mother's Day Talk of SJL - maybe 2008

So, today is Mother's Day. Betsy VanDenBerghe at a BYU Women's Conference in 2005 had this to say about being a mother: *I felt this in my younger years.*

With a wonderful husband and professional experience writing about family issues--you would think creating a sanctuary for my own children would come naturally. It has not. My personality is headstrong, demanding, and easily exasperated. My children are closely spaced and not perfect. What comes naturally to me are unrealistic expectations, shrieks of agitation, overdramatic looks of disapproval, and long-winded lectures.

I know I am not alone in having difficulty creating this charitable refuge with my very human disposition. Hearing other mothers relate what pushes their tolerance to the limit is a source of consolation to me. One friend asked her older, competent kids to prepare the younger ones for church and, when it was time to go, found them all still in pajamas playing a board game. Thanks. Another <sup>mother</sup> painstakingly and meticulously readied her daughters for a picture-taking session and, upon arriving at the studio, discovered the girls had been playing with a pen in the car and had covered their dresses with ink. I have a particularly hard time with teenagers--already late for school, slowly eating their breakfast while they read the cereal box, gradually bringing each spoonful to the mouth as the carpool honks outside.

*Betsy*

She was juggling the overwhelming physical demands of motherhood while trying to be spiritual. Behaved like a true schizophrenic.

Remember Eve. She reminds us that being perfect in a void of the realities of daily life is empty and promotes no growth. In Moses 5:11 she states,

"Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient."

Eve saw that the muck of mortal existence was superior to a pristine Eden. She appreciated far sooner than Adam that to be "mother of all living" involved a world filled with evil and invariably our own personal transgression and sin.

Proclamation of the family states that "Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children.

So if mother is the nurturer, how would Betsy and I do it?

Read a piece I wrote 17 years ago:

Since Randall and I divorced eight years ago, our family life has suffered. I had to go back to work full-time, and I took on extra work tutoring after school to add to our income. That means I now get up every morning at 4:00 a.m. to help Stuart with his 100-paper newspaper route, leave for school about 6:30 a.m., tutor after school, and usually arrive home for the night between 6:00-8:30 p.m. Then I begin preparation for my English classes: reading for class, grading tests, writing exams, or correcting essays. By the time I hit bed, it is well after 11:00 p.m. Needless to say, I nap whenever I sit down. My kids--ages 20, 18, 16, and 14--have learned to feed themselves during the week, and on Sunday we sit down and eat together. I know I rarely spend more than ten minutes with each kid each day because I am gone, they are gone, I am sleeping, or they are working, studying, and sleeping.

Contention is not the great problem in our home. Having any time together is. . . I found a one-liner that said, "Anything will work if we work at it." I know this is true, but sometimes I am so frenetic with overload that I isolate myself when I could be there for the kids."

The physical demands eclipsed my spiritual intentions.

- How keep Jess from living in the garage for 2 days and nights—cats
- How keep John from shooting out the streetlight in our backyard—BB gun

Many years ago the First Presidency issued a statement that has had a profound and lasting influence upon me. "Motherhood," they wrote, "is near to divinity. It is the highest, holiest service to be assumed by mankind. It places her who honors its holy calling and service next to the angels.

Betsy said, "I cannot accomplish this kind of sanctuary with willpower, goal setting, and especially my myriad of shortcomings combined with the frustrations of child rearing. However, I can accomplish it grace by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. As mothers we cannot rear our children in love and righteousness without relying on the merits of the Savior to compensate for our inevitable failings (2 Nephi 28:23). His love fills the void when ours is lacking. His Atonement helps us overcome, or at least improve on, so many weaknesses--that I know firsthand. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13).

I naturally hearkened back to my own mother and wondered how she did it?

We deify our mothers. Mine didn't look like any of the others. Here are her beginnings, revealing her first noticeable trait.

"My mother was one of ten children, and her mother was the last born of my great-grandfather who had three polygamist families. Because my grandmother was the family toy, carried around on a satin pillow, she never learned any consistent responsibility for doing housework or keeping on schedule for any task. When grandma had ten children of her own, she was so overwhelmed, she often had to retire to the quiet and order of her own room to remain sane. Because my mother was the first girl born after three boys, she became the organizer of the house. Sadly, she had learned all grandma taught her. The Swensen women couldn't control clutter and chaos. My mother passed these weaknesses on to me."

Secondly, she didn't marry until she was almost 31.

- Never knew my mother with anything but orthopedic old-lady black shoes and thick cotton hose, rolled down to her knees, and gray hair, naturally wavy. Couldn't teach me how to do my stick-straight hair.
- Friends were afraid of her. Not stern or mean. Just herself without trying to win anyone over.

- Barbara's mother would include herself in girl gab-fests at her house. My mother never did that.

No one's mother was like mine.

- For years I couldn't put my finger on it. ~~I was too close to her.~~
- I was too close to her.
- Took me years to articulate it.
- She lived her life, not ours. She taught us to work out our own problems. She never rescued us.
- My mother lived, not mouthed, Christ's qualities. She showed me a woman who emulated the heart, soul, and mission of Jesus Christ.
- We always went to church, but my mother never preached or scolded or berated us about living the teachings.
- She centered herself in His teachings in a most quiet way and lived the example.
- We didn't have FHE or family prayer, but Christ's qualities in my mother dominated our house.

Julie B. Beck in 2007 said, "However, mothers need not fear. When mothers know who they are and who God is and have made covenants with Him, they will have great power and influence for good on their children."

Let me show you the qualities I discovered. *— later in my life.*

- Servant—Raised cabbages—the one grocery needed fresh veggies. Red wagon she pulled one mile. *54*
- Served others-- someone always needed her. The junior high principal Mr. Newell in Elsinore had to have a foods teacher and a basketball teacher. Mother volunteered. Mrs. Knight couldn't knit unless mama held her hand but when Marion Pfund came each year to crank out meals while my mama, chained to the sewing machine, mended all her clothes

that had died that year, the whale-bone corsets, silk dressing gown that had to be completely remade, Mrs. Knight stayed home. Daddy even stayed away.

- Helpful—Graduation, spilled punch. *BYU — College of Food + Nutrition*
- Compassion—I didn't get into a sorority. Held me. Created frozen meals for my father's father in Mt. Pleasant.
- Truth-teller—Brother complaining about girlfriend gaining weight. "Well, prize."
- Be not afraid—Hydrochloric acid in face. No hysteria
- Peacemaker, no contention—Never saw parents fight or say a cross word. She refused. Thought all parents were like that.
- Kind—Knit Christmas sox for kids in hospital.
- *Teach not control — Kids whine and don't want to go to bed. Stand.*

But she had her sorrows. RH negative. Lost a little girl 4 hours after birth. Had 3 more miscarriages. Never mourned outwardly. Move on with faith.

I thought about my life.

- Years since I mourned the miscarriage and loss of our second child, a little boy at 5 months<sub>x</sub> *into the pregnancy.*
- Remember the experience of divorce but not the pain or anger or resentment.
- The Lord succored me, lifted me out of bitterness. Not once did those feelings shred and stab at me. Peace was my glorious gift.

Consider the following passages from the Book of Mormon:

We labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do. (2 Ne. 25:23)

"Now, James,  
 don't dip the cattails in gasoline  
 and set them on fire when I'm gone,"  
 said his mother.  
 As she turned the corner  
 smoke rose from the ditch bank.  
 He shot sparrows,  
 nailed cat skins to the outside barn wall,  
 and rode his horse Shorty  
 on the mountain  
 with his grandpa  
 while their sheep grazed in the sun.  
 That day in high school  
 when they sneaked  
 into the chemistry lab  
 to make ether,  
 he alone passed out cold, got suspended.  
 His dark wavy hair earned him the leads in school plays.  
 Twelve years of dating Dot Stewart wore him thin,  
 pushed him into bachelorhood.

One of Margaret's dresses was for school,  
 the other for Sunday.  
 The hand-me-downs drowned her at first,  
 usually fit for three good months  
 before they shrank to skin-tight.  
 In the hot, dusty summer Margaret and a herd of kids  
 dawdled the five miles to Utah Lake for a free swim  
 and hitched rides on snowy buckboards  
 to ice skate in the winter.

With her leather-strapped skis and bamboo poles,  
 she herring-boned up the snow hills  
 swooshing down to win ski races against her friends.

*Start* [She lived home economics long before *earning a Master's at*  
 studying at Columbia  
 by cooking for the family of twelve, mending knickers,  
 knitting for the next baby, and raising the younger boys  
 with a willow switch and hours of stories  
 in the waist-high backyard grass.  
 Margaret quietly turned thirty.  
 "I can't let you go," said her mother.  
 "You've been here too long. I'm used to you."

One date. Only one date and they knew.  
 Time snailed those three months  
 until the wedding.  
 "No reception! Repeat the motto! Say it in your sleep,"  
 my mother wrote him.  
 "No one shares the first three hours with the new  
 Mr. and Mrs. Jacobs."  
 In the December snow in the honeymoon cold  
 that locked them indoors, they ate tangerines and  
 she taught him to knit by the fire.  
 He settled in to her as the wind howled.

From the river their white ranger station  
 gleamed through the thick pines.  
 He brought home rainbow trout, mallard ducks with  
 breast down for pillows, and an occasional pheasant.  
 She could walk to town to buy  
 fresh cream and home-churned butter.  
 'How do I cook for only two?' she wondered.  
 They raised hollyhocks and bluebells and  
 three little kids in a row.

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On his birthday she cooked up  
 steak smothered in pork chops as requested.  
 On her birthday he bought her a white slip,  
*Wind Song* perfume, and gathered miniature vases of  
 violets and lilies of the valley.  
 He helped us crayon cards, plump fingers drawing  
 cakes and candles for her  
 on folded sheets of typing paper.

YAMTAILYMMMMMM always ended his letters,  
 the notes he left on the fridge, the memos on his checks.  
 YouAreMyTweeTieAndILoveYouMore&More&More&More.  
 She addressed anything written to him,  
 DWPH--Darling Warling Parling Heart.  
 He nibbled. She cooed.

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On a night train high in Switzerland,  
 my sister awoke to see my father sitting up,  
 mother's head in his lap, his hand on her arm,  
 as the train swayed and the wheels clicked in the darkness.

She boiled the water.  
 He picked the corn after the water started boiling.  
 He picked the new peas.  
 She creamed them over the new red potatoes,  
 served them with a plate of hot-ripe sliced tomatoes,  
 a bowl of cucumber rounds and onion rings in vinegar.  
 We licked our fingers.  
 No one liked to do the dishes.  
 So she ~~did~~ <sup>Served</sup> them ~~in the~~ <sup>for</sup> morning.

✕

My father planted yellow evening primroses  
 that grew into bushes.  
 After supper he circled aluminum lawn chairs  
 in the driveway  
 for the old ladies up and down the street  
 to come and watch the show.  
 Summer evenings, fifteen minutes after sunset,  
 the bright buds burst into flower  
 one burst at a time  
 until he counted one hundred and eighty-three  
 sun-colored stars on the bush.  
 He and mother held hands as the flower fireworks  
 Lit up their faces.

Entertainment

From the front plate glass window--  
 across the block, above the houses,  
 at the corners, in the alleys--  
 they spied seven street lights.  
 When the blue sky pinked and silvered and greyed,  
 he stood by the window, she knelt on the couch  
 betting nickels on the first one to light,  
 then the second and the third,  
 playing street-light roulette at dusk.



He loved basketball.  
 She loved the symphony.  
 They had season tickets to both.  
 He dozed in the symphony.  
 She had to ask questions at the games.  
 Sometimes a basketball game  
 collided with the symphony.  
 He said there was no question.  
 They were going to the symphony.  
 She said she wouldn't hear another word about it.  
 They were going to the basketball game.

He told me--one spring day by the fireplace  
 while arranging yellow, purple, and white crocus  
 in a ceramic swan to put on the mantel--  
 how much he loved her.  
 She made him deerskin leather gloves and a navy blue silk  
 nightshirt with a matching nightcap.  
 He walked two fields and climbed a fence in Plain City to cut a  
 bucketful of thin green asparagus for her.

At her funeral ten people pulled me aside and  
 whispered that she was their best friend.  
 He was hers.  
 One month later, from his hospital bed,  
 he turned to me and said softly,  
 "I want to be with mama."  
 Within the hour he was.

Frygal

He rubbed his hands together with a smile  
 over seven loaves of day-old bread for a dollar.  
 She made every winter coat I wore until I was in college.  
 He wore one pair of purple-red socks for twenty-seven years.  
 An elegant evening out was Wendy's for two cups of chili.

Hang the bread and the winter coats.  
 Turn over in your graves. (Wince at the price. <sup>headstone</sup>)

Nothing but the deepest, blackest, shiniest African  
 marble that cost as much as their last car  
 would form the headstone  
 to mark the shrine of  
 two people still holding hands underground.

If men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me, for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them.  
(Ether 12:27)

Come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; . . . that ye become holy, without spot. (Moroni 10:32-33)

Let me return to the Proclamation of the Family.

"In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners."

My parents did this. My father's temper often erupted, but over the years, he learned from my mother's wise silence and loving example. They were equal partners. Hear the love that Christ's example can bring to a marriage.

(Poem)

Fret not about your imperfections, mothers and surrogate mothers. Become whole and perfect in Christ. Bless your own lives by giving up your pride and insecurities. Mimic the flowering trees outside by blossoming in spirit. Love your husbands and children and all those around you as Christ does you.