

RISE UP,
YE WOMEN
THAT ARE
AT EASE.
ISAIAH 32:9

HAVING ONE'S CAKE AND EATING IT TOO

Christine Meaders Durham

It has occurred to me that the one element most likely to insure success in marriage is that element most discouraged by dating and courtship norms: honesty. Too many young women who feel themselves capable of career activities submerge their ambitions and conform to "acceptable" expectations to achieve their primary goal — marriage. Similarly, many young men, attracted to a girl for her ambition and self-sufficiency, maintain an inner conviction that these attributes will receive adequate expression in a mainly supportive, totally home-directed life. This basic dishonesty is responsible, in my opinion, for a great many frustrated wives and disillusioned husbands, both inside and outside the Church. Although our own marriage certainly has its share of frustrations, my husband George and I were at least quite sure of what we were getting into.

The foundations for our hectic enterprise were laid during the earliest days of our relationship. We met as college students and shared the fascination of intellectual exploration. Perhaps because I wasn't really husband-hunting, but more likely because I trusted George enough to be open about my feelings, I was always very confident about my ambitions and hopes for the future. I believed that women were the equals of men in ability and talent and assumed (rather naively) that their opportunities for achievement were also equal. In any case, my husband took me seriously and accepted my goals as being as important as his own. I must admit that at the time this didn't impress me particularly; I can remember feeling that it was as normal a thing for a young woman to plan upon some constructive contribution to society at large as well as to family and children as it was for a man. My plans were gloriously vague but oriented toward teaching or the law. They included college, graduate school, a year or two of independence, then marriage, temporary or part-time hiatus from outside pursuits while "launching" my children, and a return to an active career in my young-middle years. The best laid plans . . .

We were married during my senior year of college, and for want of the wherewithal to finance law school and certainty concerning our location for the next few years, I accepted a teaching job which afforded numerous challenges but little in the way of personal growth. George, behind me in school because of a two-year mission, decided on medical school and spent his spare time in the chemistry labs during the spring and the following year.

As we talked about beginning a family, we settled several things between us. Our marriage had been the result of mutual attraction based on intellectual challenge, emotional *elan*, and an ever-increasing spiritual rapport. It was the latter in particular which provided the values and framework for our life together. For both of us our success as human beings depends upon closeness to essential Christian principles and the happiness of our family in a gospel context. Given this primary goal, it seemed inappropriate to postpone the arrival of children for too long, since we looked upon our roles as future parents as being the most important we would fill. To wait until the completion of our mutual educational plans would mean too many years of postponed association with our children. On faith, then, since George's plans for medical school made finances a touchy subject and my hopes for graduate school even touchier, we prepared for the arrival of our first child. Subsequent events have never made us regret that we decided to see to that priority first. In fact, it was, in a way, my pregnancy that forced me to focus my plans and get busy. Law school began to seem an ideal choice for the kind of flexibility and scope I needed, besides being well-suited to my contentious nature. However, with a child now well on the way and only six months to a year more in Boston before medical school, I felt stymied. During the long, hot summer spent in Phoenix before the baby's arrival (while George studied enzymes in a laboratory) as I grew larger and larger around the middle, I began to feel more and more like Littlechap in "Stop the World": L*U*M*B*E*R*E*D. I had visions of long days in small apartments full of diapers, dishes, and slow death by boredom. George, sensitive as always to my needs and pointing out most emphatically that he had no intention of being held responsible for my inactivity and resultant mental state, pushed me into action. The result was that in mid-August of 1968, with a baby due in Phoenix on the thirtieth, I secured a place in law school in Boston, classes due to begin on September sixteenth. During the next four weeks, we had Jennifer (now nearly three), drove cross-country, borrowed the first semester's tuition from my parents (I have since managed to secure scholarships and federal loans), and set up our own three-ring circus in a one-bedroom apartment.

My classes were in blocks so that I could nurse my baby. George organized his schedule to be home two mornings a week, a friend and I traded for two more mornings of babysitting, and my sister-in-law offered her valuable time for the fifth. Jennifer did her part by sleeping while I was gone and fitting her feeding times in with my schedule. Although we soon began to feel that our family slogan should be "If there's a harder way to do it, we'll find it," we gained a great deal by working together for things important to us. I think that some of our friends at the time felt sorry for George, who stayed home with Jennifer two days, but the joy and pride he took then (and does now) in caring for and learning about the child he helped bring into our home are more significant than the results of any other activity.

When we returned to Arizona in January of that year, George taught chemistry while I finished my first year of law school at A.S.U. Again our schedules made an almost-equal division of Jennifer-care possible, although I continued nursing until she was nearly nine months old and was therefore

around *per force* at mealtimes. The love and sharing of that particular unpressured time in our lives have left warm and happy memories.

Those who believe that small children and fathers don't want or need the same kind of companionship that small children and mothers more often have are cheating themselves of a tremendous opportunity in a baby's life. Jennifer and her father developed a very special closeness, and I found my respect and appreciation for my husband growing daily. A useful side effect of this period was that George also learned something about how those daily hours at home are spent. He will never take my child-raising efforts for granted and is grateful for my willingness to shoulder the greater responsibility for running our home. His attitude is that my professional talents are as significant as his and that the time I devote to our family is given of love and free choice, not of ancient duty or biological fitness. When George's months of helping care for Jennifer were ended to begin medical school at Duke University, the break was rather traumatic for both of them. Jennifer at one year was so annoyed about her father's constant absence she refused to go near him for two days! We all adjusted, however.

The new routine left George freer and me busier. I found a happy babysitting situation for the two-to-four hours a day I had classes; Jennifer stayed with a young L.D.S. mother, a student wife with small children of her own. This arrangement, as opposed to full-time child care, which we couldn't afford anyway, left me a good deal of time with Jennifer and very little time to study. I must admit to occasional twinges of professional jealousy; my family responsibilities put me at some disadvantage with my fellow students. For example, my second-year transfer to yet another law school (my third) meant that I was unable to accept a position on the law review at one school and unable to devote the time to gaining and keeping a position at my new school. I felt I would simply have to sacrifice too much of my daughter's babyhood. This kind of compromise has often been necessary. I have never studied as much as I have wanted to, nor have I ever had the time to indulge in the more creative aspects of being at home. Achievement of my primary goals has necessitated ignoring numerous secondary ones, probably the greatest frustration in my experience as a professional student and mother.

Perhaps this frustration accounts for the underlying resentment I sense within myself of the "way things are" in our society. Our roles in life are decided for us by tradition, convention, and socio-economic institutions, rather than by individual differences, talents, and inclinations. This seems to me to be in basic contradiction to the gospel's teachings of free agency. As a woman, I must perform by definition the total home-child care function, and yet educational institutions and employers make few concessions to this demanding dual role. A young husband with small children does not expect to rush home from classes to cook, clean, and change diapers, however well-suited he may be as an individual to such tasks. A young wife with equal abilities and opportunities is expected nevertheless to do all these things, no matter how well or ill-suited *she* may be. This state of affairs was made painfully clear to me during my third year of law school when the arrival of daughter number two — Meghan Christine — coincided with

George's first year of clinical work. Since he was gone from 12 to 20 hours a day for several months, I was forced to carry a double load, often by myself, a situation guaranteed to produce dark circles of fatigue and Excedrin headaches. George, on the other hand, regretted deeply the months of Meghan's life that he missed. She was nearly three months old before he had an opportunity to hold her for longer than a few moments.

From the beginning we agreed upon equal responsibility for the success of our marriage and the rearing of our children. In a better society, I believe we could be very happy equally dividing work within and without the home. George is a marvelous father — gentle, patient, and completely involved with the life and happiness of his family. It seems ironic that, because he is "only" a father, society will expect him to devote the bulk of his active hours to professional pursuits. A man is made to feel guilty if he wants too much time with his family — a woman if she does not!

It is not surprising that I have found the pressures of my own personal merry-go-round oppressive from time to time. "Ah, but why do you do it then?" I hear a cynical (male) voice inquire from inside my head. Because I am healthier this way and happier; but I can still dream of a better time and place where neither men nor women have to sacrifice home and family for career, or vice versa, where marriage is more of a true partnership. Many economists are presently predicting that the three-day, half-time work week will shortly be upon us. It seems to me that families might capitalize on this development by eliminating some of the stereotypes that have accompanied the concept of the forty-hour job. Why not divide bread-winning and child-raising along neutral rather than sexual lines? A wealth of undeveloped talent and training could be uncovered and tapped for society's good, both in the marketplace and in the home. Of course, I am talking about a world in which profound social changes will have taken place — but we do believe in eternal progression!

I have heard of many members of the Church who feel that gospel teachings require women to stay home full-time while their husbands work at least full time, if not time and a half. For many couples, this arrangement is happy and adequate. For others, however, it is inadequate and even, I believe, damaging to the full growth and fulfillment of their spiritual selves. President McKay taught that "no success can compensate for failure in the home." My husband and I believe that statement to be an expression of the Lord's priorities and have adopted it literally for our own. It seems strange to me, in light of this belief, that so many L.D.S. priesthood bearers are satisfied with a social system which denies them the companionship of their children for all but a few hours each week, while they pursue success in myriad other forms. Not only do they remain satisfied with such a system, but many appear to feel threatened by the possibility of changing it. Leaving aside the radical and irrational fringes, it seems to me that what the best of women's liberation is all about is not the emancipation of women, alone, but of the family. It seems illogical for two people who set out to bring spirit children to this earth under an everlasting covenant to be limited by arbitrary requirements as to who shall do what when. The division of labor in most families is made not on the basis of individual talents but on

the basis of sex. Many women are far better suited to deal with small children than their husbands; many, if they are honest about it, are not — at least not always. Assuming the existence of the *spiritual* leadership and authority of the priesthood in the home, I feel very strongly that husbands and wives should be able to exercise their free agency in working out their respective social and family functions.

Given, however, the fact that our free agency is still limited in this respect by societal demands and stereotypes, those who attempt to shape new roles and new life styles will have to compromise. Since I cannot consider compromising my children's need for close parental association, I must compromise for the time being the extent of my professional activities. This means part-time work and taking what I can get in the way of experience.

Perhaps I am wrong in claiming to have my cake and eat it too. Perhaps one can only save the icing and enjoy the crumbs — but the effort is nevertheless enriching, worthwhile and, for me, very necessary. I have been blessed in many ways — with a magnificent husband, healthy, loving children, and the help and moral support of many people, including family, bishops and friends. People in general have been willing to let me “do my thing” however different from their own.

The family has been and will remain the first priority in our marriage. I feel that we are living close to the Lord and that we can depend upon his help in meeting the demands of our complicated lives. We married in order to share, and for us that means sharing educational and professional opportunities as well as the unique opportunity to raise our children. I feel that our experiences will be limited only by the narrowness of our spirits and hopes. With the gospel as a yardstick, we expect to fill our measure of joy upon this earth.

SELECTED SKETCHES

BARBARA CLARK, Seattle, Washington, is a pediatrician and mother of three children, ages two to five. For the past three years she has worked from twelve to twenty hours a week for the public health department doing well-child work. She has had live-in sitters, two L.D.S. girls from Germany. “I have had to settle for something less than my main interest in medicine, but the compromise has been worth it. I would not consider full-time work until my children are fully grown. . . . It is not only my children's attitudes which are important, but my conception of them, which varies according to my own mood and level of self-esteem. Rebecca, my oldest, is very aware of my profession and has often accompanied me to work, yet she has expressed desires to be a nurse and a mother, but never a doctor. When I feel low I think she is not identifying with me, but when my self-esteem is higher, I think she is identifying with my most important roles as woman, wife, and mother. My husband (who is a psychiatrist) refuses to analyze it for me!” Barbara served as Relief Society secretary in New Haven before moving to Seattle.

DELLA MAE RASMUSSEN, Provo, Utah, is a psychologist, Primary General Board member, and mother of six children, eight to nineteen. She completed her doctorate part-time and now works at the B.Y.U. Counseling

Center. "Child care has been no problem. The last child leaves for school at 8:30; I work from about nine to one and am home before the first child arrives at 2:30. While I was taking classes, my husband and I could almost always arrange schedules so he could be home when I was not. My parents have also helped in various ways. . . . I like being a woman in the Church. I feel we have untold opportunities to give service and develop abilities and talents. I need to be involved in many things to be really happy. We don't have time for TV at our house, but life could hardly be more rich and sweet."

SUE KOHLER, Watertown, Massachusetts, is a Junior Sunday School coordinator and mother of three children, ages one to seven. Three years ago she became "a light manufacturer of hand puppets." She sells only to big department stores, mostly in New York, and has gone from a part-time, year-round business to an intensive pre-Christmas operation. "During the few months I concentrate on puppets, I keep up my Church commitments but let my house go. There is one month when I don't read to my children and do not give Bern the supervision he needs with piano practicing. But they know it is for a limited time. They look upon it as a family project and enjoy our business trips to New York. . . . If I felt I *had* to do the work, I don't believe I would enjoy it so much. There is a tremendous market for homemade and small shop products; when my children are grown I hope to expand my business."

CAROLE BILLIN, Laconia, New Hampshire, is a veterinarian and mother of eight children, ages two to thirteen. For several years she and her husband, also a veterinarian, practiced together in the hospital they built, adjoining their house. "My children didn't know they had a 'working mother'; they could find me as easily in the hospital as in the house. I loved my work, but gradually I began to feel torn, to question if I were doing a good job in either place. It was a spiritual decision for me. I decided I was needed full-time for awhile as wife and mother." She now helps out at the hospital when needed and tries to attend professional conferences with her husband. "I feel it is important to keep my mind aligned with my profession. Because we have our hospital, I can move back at my own pace. It would have been hopeless had I married a dentist!" Carole is on the Relief Society stake board in Merrimack Stake.

RUBY PUCKETT, Gainesville, Florida, is Director of Dietetic Services for the health center and hospitals of the University of Florida. Except for four years when her daughters, now twelve and fourteen, were babies, she has worked full-time. Her children were cared for by a "hand-picked" housekeeper and attended private nursery schools. "It is difficult to know what effect working has had on my family. I have always felt it important to share time with our children on an individual basis each day. I have helped with school parties and Scouts. We have all been involved in Church activities since our girls were old enough to walk. . . . When I am asked if women should work outside of the home, I always say, 'What women and what work?' For some it is excellent mental therapy; for others it is a source of anxiety, guilt and frustration. A lot depends on a woman's ability to organize and, very basically, how much energy she has." For the past five years, Ruby has taught in Relief Society and Sunday School.