

# "THAT THEIR DAYS MAY BE LONG. . . ."

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My father and mother greeted me as the first of five daughters, eleven months and sixteen days after they were married. During the fifty-five years of their being together, I have been home with them, daily or weekly, except for twenty-two months when proselyting for the Church, six months concluding graduate work out of the state, and a few short vacations. I have now stopped asking myself, "Why didn't challenging professional opportunities appear further than fifty miles from the home front?" "Why didn't marriage and a family come to me?" "Why has it been my lot to remain at home?" "Whose responsibility is it to care for elderly parents?" But I can't help asking another question over and over: "Does it have to be so hard?"

For the first ten years of their marriage, my parents moved back and forth from southern Nevada to central Utah trying to settle. Father had been reared in Nevada with seven brothers, all trained to be productive in cattle raising and agriculture. But as one daughter after another arrived, Father looked at her daintiness and finally decided to return north to Mother's country. "We can give them better schooling," he said.

Our parents gave us a memorable childhood. Our winters were spent in town, attending school, playing with friends, and going to all Church functions. Summers were spent in the canyon where Father was a flume patrolman for the utility company. Here all of the cobwebs we had accumulated during the school year were gently blown away. We hid among the trees, played paperdolls, swam in the river, and read. To develop our character, we picked strawberries, during the season, down in the valley. We were paid ten cents a crate, which not only developed character but a stiff back for a bonus. We never had money to go on a trip. In today's terminology I suppose we were economically deprived, but those were glorious and peaceful years. Mother's discipline was easy going, but we minded Father as law. Both were kind and earnest, desiring to see all of us mature socially, economically, and educationally. Throughout our growing years Mother stressed Church attendance, paying tithing, saying our prayers, and doing what the Church authorities said. Father emphasized being honest, helping everyone, working hard when doing all tasks, and giving more for a day's work than we were paid. During the subsequent years these principles have been our anchor-age.

Starting about 1927, each time Mother became restless or bored she purchased real estate. We had, on the average, a new mortgage every four and one-half years. A few of the houses were sold (as a last resort), one was lost during the depression of the Thirties, but the rest have been rented, usually to students who stayed, at best, one school year. We moved at least every six months, in those early years, into whichever unit was unoccupied at the time. Finally in 1938 Mother bought a large lovely family dwelling where we are yet living and where Mother wants to spend her last years. During these productive years Father turned most of his wages over to Mother. He also repaired, painted, and remodeled the rentals and worked full time for the power company. He kept reminding us that it was a good thing he was in the family. All of us agreed with him; he could fix anything.

Indeed, Mother's rental units were a project that involved the whole family. Mother always said, "If you can carry a scrub bucket to our houses, you can make money." Until they married, my younger sisters and I carried the scrubbing gear to empty real estate purchases while Mama collected the money. She used the money to help us advance, spending very little on herself. However, as my sisters left home the cleaning-up task became almost entirely mine.

Until her eightieth birthday Mother was full of subtle humor, taking her renting troubles lightly and meeting the financial needs of her daughters with calmness while they were growing toward maturity. Several years ago, a girl who commuted with me to work said one day, "My mother is now seventy-five. You can expect changes to come to your parents anytime after seventy." Mother gradually began disliking little things the renters did. She would ask them to leave, have me clean up the apartment, then rent a single unit to three different couples. When things went wrong she scolded and blamed me. She began increasingly to compare me to my younger sister, now living four miles away, who has always been Mother's favorite because she is our peacemaker, can calm stormy weather. "Why aren't you more like her?" Mother would ask. Though I was trying harder to agree with her, I was steadily pleasing her less.

Father has always been a great talker, bringing home a multitude of stories about the progress, regressions, business accomplishments, and humor of individuals and families.

Slowly the stories became less lively, duller, and seemingly endless. His attitude toward politics became contentious; he complained constantly that no government leader was good for much, that no one was being raised up to save our economy. By the time I got home from work in the evenings, Mother would be distracted with his rumblings. At eighty these two persons were not the parents who had reared me, but the behavioral changes were so subtle that a net was woven around me by this time, and how could I get out?

I found that I had to adjust my personal schedule to accommodate new duties at home, and the net drew tighter. But there were times when the net became almost tolerable. One rare Sunday I was relieved from my responsibility with the children's program for ages four through seven and allowed to go hear a general authority speak at quarterly conference. To hear adult talk on Sunday morning was a treat, especially since the brother from headquarters seemed to speak especially to me. He gave a beautiful address on the necessity of families taking care of their parents. I listened for guidance. He said his own family members had realized that they should care for their mother. As they agreed that she would reside in his home, their decision had brought them all closer together in love. He told us that blessings were in store for all persons who honored their parents and took care of them.

My feet were scarcely touching the floor as I left the tabernacle at the end of the session. I resolved that I would remain at home, try harder to honor my parents, and do more soul searching to correct my attitude about my circumstances. Three months later, I learned that this same general authority had placed his mother in a rest home.

My responsibility to my parents seems to grow more difficult year by year. In recent years the apartments have required more repair, the cost of labor has risen, and taxes have increased. We now make less than \$300 above expenses from the rentals, and a \$400 house payment has to be made monthly, "before we can eat." Mother has had a severely sprained ankle and a cataract operation. She enjoyed being in the hospital and was upset when the doctor released her to go home. She had paid money to remain longer because she wanted a "good long rest." At home, naturally, she wanted the same personal care the nurses had given her around the clock. She needed constant encouragement and few gestures we could make to relieve her hardship soothed her.

Father has been brought through two heart attacks while refusing medical aid. He said he had to cough it out himself. Two months ago, while he was walking to town to say hello to bankers, barbers, and shoe repairmen, Father's right leg gave way. We nursed him, but after

seven weeks he was no better. He finally consented to see a doctor, and a brother-in-law secured the help of a physician who would make a home call in the evening. Next morning Father was in the hospital, and a week later his leg was amputated. Our oldster will be eighty-three in two months; quite a birthday present for a man who has found solutions to all his problems by using his limbs, talking a lot, and swearing a little.

It will soon be time to remove Father from the hospital. He has been saying repeatedly, "Hell, this is no place to get well. When I go to Sister's I'll improve." But how can my sister take him? She has a husband convalescing from a stroke, limited facilities in her home, and children who should not see so much suffering. We have a pleasant small apartment on the ground floor which would suit his needs well. A woman has agreed to be with him, and he would be on our home block, so family, relatives, and friends could visit and cheer him. But he wants to go to my sister's and she, the peacemaker, says, "We haven't tried having him at my home yet. If he wants to come, he should. Things will work out."

Over the past ten years our peacemaker and I have seen many changes as we have tried to take care of our parents. One of the greatest changes has been in my attitude. For thirty years my sisters have come home with problems, secrets, productive husbands, beautiful children, and adorable babies. They have planned to arrive when I would be home where they would find tasty food and adequate lodging. Never in this long time have I heard one of them open the door and ask, "What can I do to help?" Instead, when they arrived, Father would greet them and say, "Let me take the baby." Mother would say, "We have a good dinner. Wash your hands, we'll eat and you can relax." While young parents were being trained to "collapse," I was being trained to do the adjusting. Over the years resentment built up in me; I grew more and more bitter with the sense that life had cheated me.

Mother likes to close the Sabbath by listening to Elder Sill's radio address. One spring evening while I was listening with her, he gave an example of a man bitten by a rattlesnake, who had retaliated by chasing the rattlesnake. I found this story analogous to my relationship with my family. Throughout my adult life, filled with the constant tedium of family obligation, I began to feel the poison of resentment permeating everything I did. Like the enraged man in the story who sent the rattler's poison racing through his veins, I was governed by a quiet vengeance that distorted a clear vision of my circumstances.

After the broadcast that Sunday evening, however, the numbing ache of having run for years with venom in my heart found cure. The revelation that this simple story brought me