

And Baby Makes Two: Choosing Single Motherhood

Jerilyn Wakefield

AS A SCHOOL TEACHER IN TOOELE — junior high science/English — I carpool the forty miles from Salt Lake City every day. I had always assumed, as teens turned into twenties, that someday I would be married and raise a flock of children, just as my mother had raised her seven, and my sisters-in-law were raising their twenty-two. I grew up with my six brothers in Huntington, Utah; and as the older ones got married, I became very close to the resulting nieces and nephews. As an adolescent I considered myself the queen babysitter in town and always had a choice of clients. I have forever been charmed by children. All but two of my brothers now live in Utah so I have had access to sixteen substitute children to “use” for Christmas, summers off, and other “occasions.” I always thought I would naturally fall into the average, ordinary, peaceably on-going nature of things.

After I graduated from Emery County High School I had a strong desire to graduate from college. I dreamed of being an FBI agent or a specialist in medical research at some center in the East, but I kept thinking that my real talent was with children and I could imagine being very satisfied as an elementary school teacher. Added bonus — I could stay close to home and family. So, I put in two years at Snow College and two more at BYU. After I had finished my student teaching (somewhere along the way I decided to teach secondary), I needed only five more hours credit. Meanwhile my best friend had gone on a mission, my brother Lond was going on a mission, and it seemed like an experience I also ought to have. After loving my eighteen months in Australia I finished school at BYU.

One of my missionary companions was from Grantsville and *she* found my first job teaching general business in Tooele. (I had placed a lot of value on my notes for English and biology classes and thought I could teach only those

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subjects, but the principal insisted I would have no trouble teaching business since I had been a secretary. I still find that encouragement hilarious.) After five years of driving to Salt Lake for entertainment and diversion, I decided to move there and commute to work. Unlike some of my friends who were waiting for marriage before they made important purchases, I wasn't long finding a house and furnishings. Neither was I willing to "wait" for a husband to travel with. It seemed as if I was always looking for a new place to visit. Or another movie to critique. Or a new play to see. As twenties turned to thirties, my social lifestyle filled all my time vacancies. That was then.

I suppose there's been a divorce somewhere in our family — though not in my immediate family — but I'm the only single mother. No husband. Just me and Jeffrey Leonard, the pint-sized delight of my life.

It began in early February 1983, when my principal called me into his office shortly after I arrived at school. Waiting for me was a counselor, a state Social Services worker, and a representative from Family Services. They needed some help with Linda (not her real name), a fourteen-year-old student I'd had the year before and genuinely liked. A feuding neighbor family had reported that Linda's father was abusing her and a younger sister and that Linda was pregnant. The Social Services people were wary about the source but obligated to investigate. The principal didn't particularly want to visit the father who didn't speak English well, chased visitors off his property, and had already had some ugly run-ins with school personnel. Would I take Linda to lunch and find out what I could?

I felt a little devious, but I was concerned so I agreed. I called her house immediately and got her father's permission. The principal got a substitute to cover for me. Then I borrowed a car and drove eight miles to pick her up. I hadn't seen Linda for almost seven months — since school had ended the previous May. She was now in ninth grade at the high school, a block away from my school, but she had stopped attending.

I could remember the first time I ever saw her. Shiny black Hispanic eyes, a flawless complexion, and the blackest hair I'd ever seen. She was very intelligent, despite low grades from frequent absences. Most amazing to me was her maturity. When she would ask to talk to me after school it wasn't about who was picking on her, or an excuse for a "lost" assignment, or a crush on some boy in another class, or any of the other typical junior high problems; it was "I wish my Dad would buy the groceries every other time like he said he would," or "My dad's live-in girlfriend keeps telling me I do housework the wrong way but she doesn't help me," or "Could I give my report on Tuesday? Wednesday is wash day and my dad won't let me change that." (She did the family laundry the way my grandmother did — no washer, no running hot water, no dryer.)

Linda's mother had left with another man when Linda was about ten; and for the last four years, Linda had mothered her younger brother and sister. When her mother remarried, her father had won custody of the children. There was no question of his fierce protectiveness nor — in my mind — of his

basic isolation from larger social currents. School provided the main connection with the rest of the world for those children. In fact, most of the school district's confrontations with Linda's father were because he kept her home so often to take care of the house.

I wondered all the way there what I was going to say. I wondered if it was dishonest not to tell her what my mission was. She was shy but seemed genuinely happy to see me. She'd put on a little weight. Her face was rounder, and there was a suspicious bulge at the abdomen.

She was also delighted to be going out to lunch, even at the meager range of high spots offered by Tooele. We chatted about things. I told her I was concerned about all the school she was purportedly missing. She'd been going out with Brad, also a former student and a real jerk in my opinion. He was at least four years older, a drop-out, and not deserving of her. My candid opinion made her anxious. Was she pregnant? Oh no, she hastily assured me. Had her father sexually molested her? Oh no, she assured me again, uneasily smoothing her napkin. I looked again at her waistline and sighed. Only fourteen.

Why wasn't she in school? When the school pressured the father for her improved attendance, he withdrew her, saying she was going to California to live with an aunt. I doubted it. Her father had not remarried, the girlfriend had since moved out, and Linda was too valuable to the family.

"Please get back in school, Linda," I begged. "This is such a valuable time for you and you're so bright. It'll be hard to make up time if you lose a full year." She warmed to my concern and promised to enter the alternative school until she actually moved.

Two weeks later, she phoned me at home in Salt Lake and asked if I would call her when I got to school the next day. "It's about what we talked about the other day," she said haltingly.

"You *are* pregnant?"

"Yes, and I don't know what to do."

I called her the next day. She sounded dreary, drifting. She had not seen a doctor. She had no idea when the baby was due nor did she have any idea how to calculate the delivery date because she had only menstruated twice in her life and no regular period had been established. She knew she didn't want an abortion, and it was too late for one anyway. Her father was so angry that he wouldn't talk to her except to say that he wasn't going to help raise it. Her grandmother wanted her to go on welfare and get an apartment somewhere. In some ways, that was appealing; but Linda was afraid that she would never get off welfare and worried that she couldn't give the baby the kind of life she wanted it to have. The state Division of Family Services had called her to say that if she were pregnant, they could easily find a home for the baby — "but they only sounded interested in getting the baby."

"Well," I told her reassuringly, "I know several couples who would give anything for a child. I'll help you find a perfect home, if that's what you decide to do." The names of several flashed through my mind even as I spoke, but Linda was continuing diffidently, "I wish *you* wanted a baby because I always thought it would be nice to have you for a mother."

I laughed, trying to lighten her despondency. “You want me to do something as drastic as get married?”

I promised to check on couples for her and began calling that night — not only the couples I knew but also friends, to see if they knew others. A very important call was to Richard, a good friend since we’d been in the same singles ward eight years ago. The important part of the call was when I reported Linda’s wish — that she hoped I’d take her baby. He laughed.

Although I tried to hide it, I was hurt. And insulted. I had always believed I’d make a good mother. Not being one was less important than feeling I had the potential to be a good one. Richard’s laugh denied that potential.

I kept calling, but I was smarting; and to Dan Marcum, a lawyer friend, I told the same story adding defiantly, “I wish it were legal so I *could* consider it.”

“Jerilyn,” he said, “it *is* legal. Any adult in Utah can adopt any child under sixteen as long as the Division of Family Services report is favorable and as long as the child is voluntarily relinquished.”

I stared at the phone for a long time after I hung up. All night I roleplayed single motherhood. Would it be fair to a little person to bring her to a home where I had to work full time? What if she were a boy? Who would take him to Father and Sons outings? Who would help him with Scouting? Camping? Fishing? Playing ball? Goodness knows if it were up to me, he wouldn’t know a football from a walnut. Who would teach him to urinate standing up?

And what about me? I’d already paid for a June 20 trip to New York to see every Broadway play I’d missed so far. How would I drop everything to spend a Saturday afternoon poking around antique stores or taking in the late movie at the Blue Mouse? Would my friends think I was crazy? What would my bishop say? Would my mother think this meant I would skip marriage altogether?

What if the baby had a handicap? Could I find a sitter then? I surely couldn’t say “Oh, I can’t take *that* one.” And what about Linda? She needed a mother herself. Could I — should I — remain close to her if I were to take her baby?

I was a wreck the next morning, but something had crystalized during that night of what-iffing. If I said no, I would be acting out of fear. I *did* have fears and they were legitimate fears. But did I want fears to dominate my life? I remembered hearing a talk once about hell — the speaker’s definition was “opportunity lost.” I recalled that now. It would be easier for me to survive something I did badly or failed at, than something I *wished* I had done.

I was most nervous about calling my mother so I called Valene, my sister-in-law who lives next door to her, to be prepared to pick up the pieces. When I got my mother on the phone, we chatted pleasantly as usual and I told her the story of my poor student. Mother clucked sympathetically, hmmed, and “oh dear’ed” in the right places. I then told her about Linda’s wish.

Pause.

“Mom, I think I’m going to do it.”

There was silence, a long silence. I froze. Then I realized she was crying. When she spoke it was broken and simple. "I think that would be wonderful!" She was probably reacting as much to Linda's compliment as to the baby, but it didn't matter — I could count on her for support and I felt great!

Minutes later she called back to remind me of the eight baby quilt tops I had made in high school — and to tell me she already had three shawl-and-bootie sets to choose from for the blessing — and I would be able to bless him, wouldn't I?

It was easy to soar with the excitement; but once over the announcement, I had to deal with my own feelings as well as those of others. What if Linda changed her mind? What if the baby died?

My family was uniformly supportive. Most of my friends, married or single, insisted that they loved kids, too, and that I'd make a great mother. My two married counselors in the Young Women's presidency were dubious: "Raising kids is hard even when there are *two* parents, Jerilyn," they pointed out. My bishop didn't bat an eye, just said, "Great idea. What a lucky baby." I could have hugged him. My stake president told me a sad story about a birth mother who had reclaimed her baby before the end of the six months that must elapse between placement and the final order of adoption, but I had the feeling he was trying to help me think through potential problems, not talk me out of it.

I bought every layette pattern I could find and sewed baby clothes without telling anyone. It would be easy to find someone to use the things, I told myself. I started buying diapers, a car seat, a few toys — but I kept every receipt.

I called my insurance company about the process of adding a dependent. The agent I talked to said the baby had to be declared healthy before he would be covered.

"Would that clause apply if he were being born to me?" I asked, indignant. After all, would someone try to cheat the insurance company by *arranging* to have a baby with birth defects?

"No, but you don't have to take a baby with defects. You wouldn't buy a used car with bad tires."

I repeated that statement to one of the company presidents.

"No one would have said that," he denied. That's exactly what *I* had thought too.

I called Linda every week or so to chat and see how she was doing but I didn't talk much about the baby. I wanted to communicate interest in her but not make her feel obligated to me. I talked to nurses and borrowed books, some for her to read, some for me.

Then in March, Linda fainted at home and her father took her to the emergency room. It was the first time she had seen a doctor and the obstetrician put her on a schedule of appointments. Linda was scared. Would I go with her? And somebody needed to be with her in delivery. I gulped. Her doctor told her she was due July 27. Good, no problem with my June New York trip.

I made her two pairs of maternity pants and a top because she seemed so destitute. When we were shopping for the fabric, I noticed some baby-print flannel with trains on it and said, "Isn't that cute?"

She agreed, smiling politely.

"Linda," I asked, "does it make you feel sad or uncomfortable to talk about the baby?"

She smiled again, this time with real warmth. "That's the only way I can be excited — through you."

At her appointment the first week in June, a second doctor saw her. He kept looking at the charts and finally said he thought the baby would come earlier than July 27. He scheduled an ultrasound scan for the next week. I had taken my mother out to meet Linda and we were all wondering what the scan would show.

Four days before that appointment, June 11, I went to Liberty Park with my DUP group for a luncheon skit, skirting the sandbags that were guiding the spring floods down Thirteenth South. It was raining hard when I got home and started giving my brother Preston a haircut. About 1:30, Linda's father called from the hospital. She was in labor and they'd been trying to reach me. A problem with my New York trip.

Leaving Preston with half a haircut, I rushed to the car for the forty-mile trip. Because State Street was blocked off, I had to go to 2100 South to reach the freeway. It was pouring. I was speeding. I wondered if I could convince a police officer that I was rushing to the hospital because I was having a baby. I started praying for the baby to be healthy and whole, for the delivery to go well. I've made that trip hundreds of times but this was definitely the longest.

The afternoon was even longer, holding Linda's hands, trying to encourage and reassure her, trying to count for her to breathe. I felt totally helpless. At 7:30 we went into the delivery room and her little son was born in a few minutes. The doctor, still holding the baby, looked at Linda. "Do you want to see him?" Suddenly, I was crying at the sadness of that question.

I followed the baby to the nursery, then called Dan, my friend and lawyer. Linda was exhausted and groggy when I left the hospital. I stopped at Richard's house but no one was home. I then went to my niece's house, needing to tell someone the news. By then I was through crying and ready for a little joy and laughter. Finally I went home to make phone calls. The excitement didn't wear off. I was higher than a kite all night.

Sunday I went back to the hospital. How would Linda feel about the baby today? She hugged me and sobbed, "Have a good life." I cried too. Then I went to the nursery. Did I want him circumcised? *Circumcised?* My word! I didn't have a clue. I gave him his bottle and he threw up, choking. I was so frightened I practically threw him to the nurse. I can't do this, I thought in panic. I've made a terrible mistake. That night I went to a movie to distract me. It didn't work. I was only thinking of his fingers and toes, his squeezed-shut eyes, how he felt in my arms. I couldn't wait to get out there again. I realized that I had already fallen in love with him.

Monday I took Linda a watermelon, which she had been craving, and the kitchen helped serve it. I visited her first so I wouldn't be coming from the nursery, in case thinking of the baby were painful. Tuesday I spent wrapping up the legal aspects and discovered that, because Linda and I lived in different counties, the Salt Lake judge had to actually see Linda and have her verbally consent to the adoption in his presence. Meanwhile, she had checked out of the hospital but had not gone home. I was at my wits' end before we found her, the courthouse was closed, and we had to leave the baby at that lonely hospital. I cried all the way home.

That evening I had a long conversation with Richard. We'd counted on each other for a lot over the years, particularly for good humor when friends and family members suggested, only sometimes tactfully, that two such good friends would make a wonderful couple. I wanted to find a way to share this new experience with him, but couldn't. "Jerilyn," he said, "it's just getting too complicated. Friends, fine. Pseudo-couple, okay. Pseudo-parents, no. I've decided I don't want to see the baby."

I felt devastated and betrayed. I went home but I couldn't stop crying. I knew I had to get some sleep — I had two eighty-mile trips to make the next day — but I couldn't even get my composure. What would the judge think about my moral fitness if I showed up with two-inch bags under my eyes? In desperation, I knelt to pray. Almost immediately, I remembered the feeling of holding the baby, marveling at the miracle of him. I rose feeling utterly at peace. I had experienced my last qualm.

The next day, taking a friend along to make conversation easier, I drove the forty miles to get Linda and bring her to the courthouse. Dan and her father met us there. The judge asked very pointed questions, stressing the finality of the decision. I kept flinching but Linda was quiet and calm. She signed the papers and her father took her home. I went back to the hospital with Dan and we finally picked up that sweet package. I had bought a car seat two months earlier, but it was hard to put him in it. I couldn't bear to let go.

I chose Jeffrey Leonard for his name. I'd always liked Geoffrey Chaucer and liked that Australian variation, but had struggled, as a teacher, with quaint spellings. My mother's maiden name was Leonard, plus it had some of the letters of his mother's name in it, and two Mormon historians I admired were Leonard Arrington and Jeff Johnson, also a friend from old single-ward days. After adding and subtracting, I ended up with Jeffrey Leonard Wakefield.

My bishop announced the birth, just as they do all the births in the ward. Laughing, he told me that some ward members, fooled by my comfortable wardrobe, assumed that I had been pregnant for the previous nine months and asked, in hushed tones, if "you're going to let her continue as Young Women's president?" My bishop also said, "We'll bless him at fast meeting in July if you'd like." I was stunned. The friends I knew who had adopted children had waited until the six months was over. "No," said my bishop, "he needs to be a member of the ward now."

Three brothers and two friends joined in the blessing circle. My brother Lond, leaving his own bishopric duties in Huntington, blessed him. Our family sang a musical number. My mother and I both bore our testimonies. We felt warmly welcomed. The Young Women gave him a shower. So did several women in the ward, as well as a former student, and three separate sets of friends. Two women in the ward still call themselves his Grandma. A woman I barely knew wanted me to use her beautiful cradle. Another offered her sister's playpen. The friend of a friend gave me her crib with six new sheets. A niece gave me a nine-drawer dresser. A colleague brought a swing and jumper. Several offered car seats and other necessities.

I don't know if this kind of outpouring accompanies the arrival of every baby. As a shaky new mother, I was touched by all the ways they expressed caring for me and acceptance of my choice.

Actually, I didn't get the chance to tell very many people. The news, as one friend put it, "spread like wildfire" and the first thing someone would say when they saw us would be, "So this is *that* baby!"

I hadn't really been prepared for the diversity of reactions. The most common is probably the horror expressed when people hear that I know the birth mother. "Has she seen him? What will you do if she comes and wants him back?" After the first dozen repetitions, I realized that that fear had vanished and with it a corresponding protectiveness. I want J. L. to know Linda — know who she is, why she gave him to me, and what she means to me. I wish her the best and want her to have access to J. L. I've called her with progress reports and sent her photos, all but one of which she has given to her friends.

When he was about four months old, she called from her grandmother's house in Salt Lake City. A friend and I were just leaving to run some errands so we picked her up. I was curious to see how she reacted to him, not having seen him since June. J. L. was in his carseat in front. Linda leaned forward and said hello to him when she got into the back seat but seemed more interested in telling us what she had been doing all summer. Although I have tried to safeguard her privacy by not telling people her name or facts about her, she has told several people, almost with pride, about the adoption. At Lake Point when I pulled into a service station one day, the young attendant, a former student, promptly asked, "Did you really adopt Linda's baby? She showed us that picture of you both. She took the whole classtime talking about you." Jeffrey Leonard is the center of my life but only a small part of hers. Right now Linda is living out of state with foster parents and is doing very well.

I've fielded lots of questions because he's dark-skinned and dark-haired. "Oh, his father must be dark."

I love saying, "No, but his mother is."

"Where did he come from?" someone once asked a friend the instant I was out of earshot. She simply answered, "Heaven."

A friend, Bill Green, brought his niece and nephew, both adopted, to visit when Jeffrey was only a few weeks old. As they peered into the cradle, Bill

explained, "He's adopted too." The little boy, Nick, asked, "Is he our cousin?"

At my clinic, the nurse demanded my middle initial for her records. I didn't have one and stated the fact.

She looked disgusted. "Your maiden name then."

"I don't have one of those either."

She looked straight at the baby, back at me, and then down at her book. Her thoughts rang so loud she might as well have used the intercom.

Our pharmacist once asked me for the name of the head of household. Juggling J.L. I said, "I am." He looked embarrassed and a little angry, as if I should have known better.

My pediatrician knows about the adoption but his nurse still calls me Mrs. Wakefield and tells me to check with my husband about the new vaccination.

My students see my nameplate on my door and J. L.'s pictures on my desk and then ask me if I'm "Miss" or "Mrs." They always look bewildered. Usually they ask the other teachers. At teacher's orientation that first September, I took J. L. for show and tell before taking him to the babysitter's. Among the teachers in the district to see us was a woman I'd gone to high school with. My mother called me that afternoon to tell me that that woman had called her own mother, only a few miles from mine, to say, "She wasn't that kind of girl when I knew her."

One of my former students, listening to a Sunday School lesson in which the story of my baby was told (I've wondered what point the teacher was making), interrupted her before she finished: "She wouldn't *do* that!"

When I was still contemplating the decision to adopt, I imagined many situations and questions I'd find difficult. My imagination could never have covered the realities.

When I applied for the new birth certificate after the adoption was complete, half of it was blank. Suddenly I became the "unwed mother." I thought it interesting that, without my request, the papers came back with "single parent adoption" written in the "father" blank.

I scoured bookstores looking for a baby book that had minimal "father's name, father's reaction, father's picture." Of course his family tree page is completely lopsided. One of the first items I put in the book was the newspaper ad of my trip to New York. I titled it, "My first sacrifice."

A woman from La Leche League called to see if I was interested in information on nursing. My first thought was, "I'm a teacher. Why would I want to switch careers?" When I realized she meant nursing a baby I was even more surprised, especially to hear of success stories, including case histories right in Salt Lake City, of women who had successfully nursed as adoptive mothers. I had thought it was a prank call, and I never entertained the idea, but it certainly livened my sacrament meeting, imagining us "seen" in the Eleventh Ward lavatory.

Before finalizing could take place, we had to file a paternity search with the Bureau of Vital Statistics. I also had to have him footprinted at the Crime Laboratory for a "kidnapped child" search.

When school began in the fall, I had to find child care. It took a couple of tries to find someone wonderful. I found Renée by asking my classes if they knew someone who tended kids near school — I remember adding, “Someone who loves children!” Renée, when I called, said she had never even thought about tending. She had two adopted teenagers and, after fifteen years, an eighteen-month-old daughter. She wanted Chrissy to have someone to play with. When we met, I liked her, she liked J. L. and it became a permanent arrangement. I hadn’t realized how good it was until I needed to find a substitute sitter. By the fourth day, Jeffrey was screaming when we stopped in front of her house, in addition to clinging to my neck and wailing brokenheartedly. I made other arrangements until we could go back to Renée’s.

From the beginning, one of my fears was that Jeffrey wouldn’t have enough male role models. My brothers have helped immensely but the opportunities for interaction are not constant. One of the appreciated advantages of the babysitters I’ve had, particularly with Renée, is the presence of the family father during the hours Jeffrey is there. Renée’s husband Bill works different shifts so he is often home during the days. A jack-of-all-trades, he lets J. L. “work” with him and I can instantly tell what his new project is. J. L. will spend hours at home with the screwdrivers, hammer, and tape measure, working over the cabinets. One day, he was holding the screwdriver to the wall humming loudly, then blowing at the spot. Sure enough, Bill had been using the drill. Such things as putting on a hat, busying himself for a minute, taking the hat off, drawing the back of his hand across his brow, and then replacing the hat are obviously not imitations of me.

Yes, I’ve had disasters in my mothering. I had stored some rubbing alcohol in a four-ounce baby bottle they’d given us at the hospital. Rushing out the door when he was about two weeks old, I grabbed a packaged nipple and what I thought was a fresh bottle of water. I tried to give it to him twice, despite his writhing and gasping, until I finally smelled it. Washing his mouth out with warm water soon calmed *him*, but I was a mess.

When he was about six months old, he flipped himself out of his infant seat on the counter beside me, head first into a bag of Nerf toys I’d bought for Christmas. He didn’t cry or even look surprised, but I couldn’t put him down for ten minutes.

Just after his first birthday, he touched a bulb in a lamp and got second-degree burns on three fingers. I had to face my fear of failing as a parent as I applied what little first-aid I knew. I kept thinking, “A mother should know what to do. She should know when to get help.” Not only did I not know, I felt reluctant to ask. Was I being responsible or overreacting, a stereotypical helpless woman without a man? I called a brother, then a married friend. They didn’t know either. Feeling more confident, I called Holy Cross emergency room. I learned that I don’t need a husband to share the burden during an emergency. Unfortunately there’s no one to share the blame with either, but that’s all right. I don’t need to feel that every cut, bruise, or scrape is my fault for not watching him closer.

Another tribulation came when the six months were up and we were ready to finalize the adoption. Our court date was set for 27 December 1983. We were in Huntington, Utah, 150 miles away by train, for Christmas at my mother's. The train was over eighteen hours late leaving Price because of a snowstorm and icy track. That would put us into Salt Lake City at 1 A.M. on the morning of our court appearance. That alone made me nervous. We soon found that the heater was broken on the train. Jeffrey, mercifully asleep for the entire trip, stayed warm in his wraps; my feet soon numbed. The three-hour trip stretched into four, then five. On the outskirts of the city we stopped twice, once to back up and get on the right set of tracks for the station, once because a passenger had had a heart attack (anyone ought to know why) and they had to get him off the train. It was 7:30 by the time we got into the station. I had only one hour to find a ride home, get presentable, and be at the courthouse. I was nineteenth in line at the phone. My arms were aching from holding my still-sleeping son, and I was moving my suitcase along with my foot. My niece's line was busy so I called a cab to keep from getting back in line. It was so cold I waited just inside the door but someone grabbed the cab away from me when it got there.

That was the last straw! I just sat down, trying not to cry. I had no energy left. Then someone came up who had recognized me getting on the train to Huntington before Christmas. A friend was picking her up and we only lived a few blocks apart. Would I like a ride? I swallowed hard, complained about the irritating cigarette smoke in the air, and thanked her with real gratitude.

Her friend turned out to be in my ward. As we rode up the street, I was imagining my car, buried in snow like those along the street. However, not only was my car brushed off, the driveway and walk had been shoveled. I couldn't have asked for a better gift. As I unlocked the door, J. L. woke up. We were on time for our appearance in court and Jeffrey was in great shape. The judge looked at him and asked, "Is she good to you?" Jeffrey grinned from ear to ear, as if he knew I needed that.

Jeffrey is just past his second birthday now as I write this. It's been two very good years. My life has changed a lot. I've started taking care of things like savings and life insurance, two items very low on my priority list before. Whoever said two can live as cheaply as one must be eating the same kinds of food, never growing out of clothes, be already immunized and potty trained, be able to stay alone without a sitter, and both have a job.

I feel comfortable parenting. As a teacher, I learned early about discipline. I believe kids need it and want it. Since I know that consistency is important, I don't mind disciplining in public. We eat out often, and J.L. has learned early to behave well. He enjoys playing with the other children in the nursery on Sundays yet seems to understand that the chapel is different.

Because he's the only other person in our family, I have always been prompt to change him, feed him, or entertain him. He rarely fusses or sulks. If he wants something, he either gets it or he can't have it. If he can't have it, he doesn't fuss long for it. With no one else to help him persuade and no history of wavering on my part, he doesn't bother.

He has always had a remarkably sunny disposition. Smiling and friendly, he has never been frightened of strangers. A frequent scenario when I am standing in a crowd or on an elevator is for him to hold out his arms to a man. The men, to my surprise, have always taken him, then given him back after a little hug and a thank you.

“What about your own time?” people ask. “Don’t you feel more tied down?” It’s true I don’t go to as many movies, concerts, and plays. Traveling has to be better planned and trips are more infrequent; but in all honesty, I haven’t spent a mournful minute wishing I were free. I have umpteen baby-sitting offers from friends and family. I have seen every movie, play, and concert that I wanted to see. When friends invited me to go on a vacation to San Francisco last summer, I had four offers from families to take care of Jeffrey, but I just couldn’t get excited about going. I get more pleasure from an evening at home trying to catch wild pitches or stacking blocks or reading *Chicken Soup with Rice* than I do from outside entertainment. I want no regrets when he is grown, wishing I had spent more time with him. Missing him while I’m at work is hard enough. And I revel in summers.

I had never felt like a misfit in my ward, but having Jeffrey made me feel like a new member at first. I had never minded being husbandless and childless as much as I minded strained efforts not to hurt my feelings. I recall moments of discomfort playing with my nieces and nephews when someone would whisper what a wonderful mother I’d make. I’d pretend not to hear. Was I too sensitive? Did I imagine that sometimes they stopped talking about children, wondering if my feelings would be hurt? And why does Jeffrey make such a difference? I’m certainly not one of the Young Marrieds and I obviously don’t get invited to elders’ quorum parties where we can get to know other children his age. Nor am I the first invited to a gathering of singles. Yet somehow, with less strain than before, I relate to both groups and feel left out of neither. Besides, we have our own place.

Yes, I’d do it again. I’ve thought of advertising on my classroom blackboard for a brother or sister who might become available. I’ve thought of registering with agencies that work with international children.

I’ve always loathed talks that equate “joy” and “children” as though one couldn’t exist without the other and I never plan to make a similar speech; but if I were ever put on the witness stand, I’d have to admit that I’ve never been happier. I’ve always thought of myself as a warm, outgoing person, but J. L. has tapped deeper feelings in me. I remember, when he was only a few days old, feeling love well up inside me, wanting to say “I love you,” and struggling with amazement and embarrassment to form the words. A baby was a wonderful audience to practice that little speech on. Thanks to him I can never imagine having trouble with those words again, to anyone.