

# THE PHYSICAL PROCESS OF CREATION

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I grew up in the Cambridge Ward. Wonderful student wives were my Mutual teachers. Unmarried graduate students sat around our family dinner table every Sunday. I was raised in Cambridge Mormondom. Latter-day Saint culture, scripture, history, words of the prophets, all were to be studied, examined, explored, pondered, interpreted, reinterpreted. If there was anything “lovely, virtuous, of good report, or praiseworthy” we sought after those things. I was comfortable with it all, and I loved learning, even though I hated school. At my school, kids were mean. Teachers were mean. Rules were stupid. I could hardly stand to attend regularly enough to graduate. But church I loved. To me it was social, spiritual, and intellectual manna. Church was my haven.

Later I met with the Cambridge women’s group and had the best time of my life, discussing women’s issues, studying early Mormon women, looking at our own lives, and feeling the energy of change. There was an important movement for greater equality going on—a movement that affected me personally. It was a thrilling time. And it felt so good that I was sure it was God-inspired. I was a young LDS woman in my early twenties, temple marriage, growing family, and active in the Church. I wanted to do something to contribute to that, something more than be a good wife, a good mother, and a good Church worker. But I still wanted to remain close to home. I saw my part of making the world a better place by working on *Exponent II*.

My wonderful women friends and I had talked about *Exponent II*. It was a big project, but we were the women to do it! Something lit up in me and I knew we had to do it. I couldn’t contribute to the writing or editing or poetry or art; our group clearly had that covered. But I

could do all the other necessary work, the business side. What I didn't know how to do, I would learn. I wanted to share some of what we had in our little Cambridge women's group with other LDS women, and we could do that with *Exponent II*.

There were lots of us, smart and capable women to do the work. We had time—most of us were mothers and homemakers. And we had smart husbands with skills we could use. Connie's husband was a lawyer. My husband was a computer programmer. We'd need them. I had every confidence that we'd discover what we needed to know as we went along. But many were cautious. How would we pay for it? Would anyone buy it? Did we have anything to say? Who would write for us? We wanted to keep the cost low for poor students and student wives, and we could do this if we did all the work we could do ourselves and recruit a few more volunteers. Once convinced the paper would pay for itself, everyone was enthusiastically on board. Creating *Exponent II* felt so right to me. So necessary. So inspired. It felt like I'd been given a divine calling. I had a testimony of *Exponent II*.

We never worried even for a minute that we could possibly offend anyone or needed to be careful. We were sharing our talents. We were good LDS women doing a good thing for good LDS women everywhere. We decided to call ourselves Mormon Sisters Incorporated. We made lists of necessary tasks. We needed to incorporate as a non-profit. We needed an address and mailbox. We needed a checking account. We needed to apply for a bulk mailing permit and learn the rules for mailing our papers. We needed to settle on a print shop and establish a relationship there. We needed a place to paste up the paper and someone who could show us how to do it and what supplies we'd need. We needed to type up the paper and find artwork. We needed to manage a subscription list. We needed to spread the word about our wonderful project. Claudia was soon off collecting content. Laurel and Judy and others were doing writing assignments. Carolyn Peters (Person) produced our cover art. Bonnie Horne and Joyce Campbell managed layout and paste-up.

Connie Cannon worked on our legal filings. Susan Kohler investigated bulk mailings. I opened the bank account and the post office box.

We decided to give away our first issue. We started to collect names and addresses of people we knew, friends and family, people who would hand out copies to their friends. We'd send a bundle to each of them. We asked if we could pass around copies in Relief Society. We asked if we could designate representatives in all the wards of the stake. We asked if we could leave stacks in the ladies' room at the church. We asked *Dialogue* to share their mailing list with us, and we sent copies to all subscribers.

Our first paste-up was on a hot day in June 1974. Mary Ann McMurray was moving soon, so she was willing to have her place trashed. Her backyard was enclosed, so the kids played outside. There was a wading pool and an unlimited supply of popsicles. Mary Ann was pregnant, so she spent her time lying on the floor with her feet up against the wall. Bonnie set up the lightboards, large pieces of frosted glass, in the living room. Each rested on two large wheat cans, part of the McMurrays' year's supply. Lamps were placed on the floor underneath the glass so we could see through the pages of typed text and follow guide markings on the flipchart paper beneath. Bonnie had marked the tops and bottoms of the newspaper page and the front edges of the three columns. We knelt on the rug to lay out and attach the articles on these big sheets of paper.

We later moved paste-up to my big house where it could take over the dining room and spread out to the parlor and kitchen and living room as necessary. My husband built frames to hold the frosted glass so we could stand up to do the paste-up. Children were then banned at paste-up. We worked mostly in the evenings when husbands could tend children. Infants came and slept under the table, waking occasionally to nurse. I kept my family out of the downstairs rooms so all our *Exponent II* work could stay where we left it all week long. The layout crew could drop by and work whenever they were able. The front door was never locked.

The only way to get big or bold or fancy titles was to buy sheets of plastic letters and stick them on, one by one, handing them to the paste-up person working on that page. Every title was done this way, choosing from a variety of sizes and styles.

The typewriter was set up for last-minute edits and corrections. Claudia determined the order of articles in advance, but things could be moved around. Our layout people designed the pages and looked for art as our paste-up people cut and fitted and attached things. We wanted art in advance, but we didn't know our needs until the page was pasted. Linda Hoffman Kimball, one of our artists, sometimes came to paste-up and drew things to fit our spaces as needed. When a page was done, we hung it on the wall so we could stand back and get a good look. I loved to see the pages going up.

It was a busy place with lots of activity. And we felt a real camaraderie as our paper took shape. Paste-up took about a week. If we hadn't all read the articles in advance, sometimes a paste-up person would read aloud as she was pasting and ask what we thought. Could this be misinterpreted? Should this word be changed? Edits would be called for. Sometimes on the themed issues we'd all realize that an important experience or point of view was missing and we knew just who could write it. Quick phone calls requested additional copy tomorrow. Sometimes one of us would just go in the other room and write.

Finally, our art editor would check the "bluelines": the pale blue printed proofs reduced to the size of our finished paper. We found mistakes on the clean blues that couldn't be seen on the relatively messy pasted-up pages. We devoured each new issue of the paper as if we hadn't written, edited, typed, or pasted every word, and proofread it twice. It was delicious!

I loved to tend the mailbox. I was the first to read the "Letters to the Editor." I spread them out across my bed while I sorted and read and re-read them. We got checks to deposit and subscription information for the keypunchers, bills, article submissions, and "Sisters Speak"

responses. The Letters to the Editor were full of heartfelt thanks. Later I would watch the response of other *Exponent II* women as the letters were passed around and read. Those letters told us we were appreciated. They confirmed that our work was important. We did it all and we got better at it. Many people helped with the work and the writing. It felt good!

After we had been publishing for a little more than a year, we heard a rumor that the Church leadership wanted us to stop publishing. I thought it must be a mistake. The rumor was true. One of the Brethren told Claudia to close down the paper. We decided we needed to respond. We each wrote our feelings about the paper and included many of our best readers' letters as well as copies of the paper in an attempt to persuade them of the worthiness of our cause. I thought they would understand and thank us. But that's not what happened. They sent Elder L. Tom Perry out to meet with us all. Since her husband was the stake president, Claudia was told to resign as editor so no one would assume we were an official publication. The rest of us could continue if we chose, but we were cautioned to be careful because the Brethren thought we would mess up sooner or later.

We had long and anguished group discussions. Some thought we should quit. We began to plan the "dead bird" issue, envisioning our last cover art as a crow on its back with its feet in the air, Xs for eyes. But some understood Elder Perry's words as giving us the OK to continue, that they had found nothing wrong with the content. It was obvious that the General Authorities didn't have confidence in us, but we had confidence in ourselves. I still had a testimony of the value of *Exponent II* and felt it my calling to work for our paper. We needed to focus on how we could carry on without Claudia.

So I privately talked with Claudia and asked her who else in our group could edit the paper. Nancy Dredge, a very competent editor, was her answer. I talked to other board members about Nancy's editorial skill and her willingness. *Exponent II* now had name recognition. We had four thousand subscribers and people were sending us articles unsolicited.

This support encouraged us to continue. We remained mystified and saddened by the meeting with the Brethren, but we were thankful that *Exponent II* would go on. We would publish. We would make our good little paper better. And we would be careful.