

IN MY SIGHT THE PRESENT-DAY FASHIONS ARE ABOMINABLE.

Joseph F. Smith
Oct. conference, 1913

SOMEWHERE INBETWEEN

Grethe Ballif Peterson

I had always known, or at least hoped, that my role as an adult female would be varied and progressive. I didn't know it would be as complicated or as conflicting as it has been.

My model was my mother, who gave as much time to her community and public commitments as she did to her family. During our early years, she was a member of the city school board and worked with the state Democratic Party. (Later when her friends were thinking about retirement, she was appointed Chairman of the State Department of Welfare.) She created a warm, comfortable home base from which to launch her various enterprises and both the children and the community seemed to prosper. The support of my father gave legitimacy to her duality.

After a solid and exciting academic experience at B.Y.U., I graduated unmarried, and was proud of it. I travelled in Europe, did graduate work at Radcliffe, and got married. My husband liked the idea that my interests might result in multiple roles. Together we hoped to create a warm, loving, committed, and interesting home.

After three years our daughter was born and two years later our first son. Even though those early years were physically exhausting, I enjoyed being a mother and I liked being at home. I knew those years would go quickly, and probably by the time the children were in school I would be getting another degree or working myself.

Our second five years found us deep in a medical practice in the West. We bought our first house and started knocking down walls, painting, plastering, and landscaping the back yard. Our second son was born during these remodeling years. As the plaster fell, he doubled his weight, my husband got busier and busier, the older children started school, and I began looking beyond the four walls. I did some political work, taught in the Relief Society, and made a modest but regular commitment to the community through Junior League. I volunteered at the Art Center, the Detention Home and the School for Emotionally Handicapped Children. I enjoyed my community work and found many possible avenues for a professional life. My dormant academic interests came alive and I looked forward to getting back into school. I returned home tired to my husband and children after my one day out a week, but with a new vitality. The children seemed to be doing well, my husband was stimulated by his practice, I was happy, and the re-

modeling was almost finished. We seemed to be on the verge of a new domestic tranquillity.

One night my husband asked, "If we didn't live in Salt Lake, where would you like to live?" I replied, "Boston," as he knew I would. He had been asked to return to Harvard as a dean. As we thought about the job challenge and the excitement of the Boston area, we found few reasons not to go. We uprooted our family, flew off to Cambridge, and landed suddenly in a dense urban area. There were more people, more cars, and more dirt than we had remembered. We no longer walked leisurely down Brattle Street as we had in previous years. There were endless hurried trips on one errand or another. But after a difficult year, we happily settled into a remarkable old Cambridge house.

I had anticipated that this move would provide me with a chance to return to school or pursue a career as my mother had done. The children were all in school at least half a day. I found a sister in the ward who could help keep the household together. My husband urged me to audit classes and attend lectures. But when I explored the possibility of more serious academic work, decisions got delayed, and I was uncertain as to the direction I wanted to go.

The children's lives in the city took more time and support than I had expected. I had to coordinate their play activities as well as their school life. It seemed to be important for all of us that I be at home when they returned from school.

In addition, I had to try to keep up with the intense political life that had descended upon Harvard College. What with driving elaborate car pools to and from everywhere and keeping the household running, I had little time for any new consciousness or direction of my own. For the first time I questioned whether or not I really wanted to have that "career" beyond the home.

In addition to these private doubts, the problems of our society were banging on our front door. Disillusion with the war was no longer academic. The students were taking their frustrations and immaturity out on the university. My husband confronted angry students daily. The issues were complicated, and the entire family was affected. More alienated street people gathered around Harvard Square. Our children walked through this tableau every day. They were sensitive and concerned about what they saw and needed us to help them sort things out. They needed explicit confirmation of our beliefs, our values, and our goals, which demanded a resourcefulness and tenacity difficult to sustain day after day. They were relieved to go to Church on Sunday, but that didn't diminish their perception of the problems they saw on Monday. As we observed the weakening of family ties of many young people and the extremes to which they were going to recapture human contact, I wanted to bolt the door and hold the children close. But of course I didn't. I had to be there, but I also had to back away, hoping they could cope with their complicated world.

After a hectic day, I felt pulled in all directions. Why weren't my solutions as clear cut as my mother's had seemed to be? Where was that balance I was so sure I would achieve? Wasn't I doing what I really enjoyed the most? Why this constant concern about a professional life of my own?

In the early months of Women's Liberation I read everything I could

get my hands on. Kate Millett hit me between the eyes as I plowed through *Sexual Politics*. I was both sympathetic with and outraged by her “biocultural” description of the history of women in western society. I read with great interest the responses and resolutions that came from women with a diversity of life styles. There were times when the militancy got to me and I thought about organizing a day care center of my own or marching with NOW on the State House. Those moments were fleeting; and ironically, as other women were seriously looking for new avenues of expression beyond the home, I was turning in the other direction.

I thought I saw my roles clearly developing in Salt Lake City, but my present fulfillment is not where I expected it to be. At a time when I assumed I would be preparing or participating in a career, I have chosen not to. While my greatest satisfactions are with my family, I realize that the quality of our home life is better when I extend my interests and energy to some issue, idea, or project. My life is not described in the conventional roles discussed in much of the Women’s Lib literature.

I have chosen to live between two worlds. There are the precious moments with the family, discussing the events of the day; there are the meetings on the Status of Women at Harvard; there are the Thursday night dinners with students; there is the satisfaction of submerging myself in the novels of the Bildungsroman.

The conflicts and choices that I have described are now engaging more Mormon women. Because our children’s experience can eclipse our own, and because our affluence and technology are giving us more time for other things, we must take off our aprons and go out into the world. The Church must help us discover new roles and role combinations. The solution for some women may be running the M.I.A., holding a full-time job, reading novels or coaching a little league baseball team. Each is an expression that can bring a stronger woman back into the home. Women must set priorities, live by them, and feel good about it.

I find my life somewhere in between conflicting expectations. I can’t be everything I want to be; I can’t meet everyone’s needs. I can’t be a superb gourmet cook and study American history; I can’t keep an immaculate house and help my husband in his work. Yet, there are satisfactions in trying to mediate between these worlds, and I await with interest the next nudge.