

I SAY THEREFORE
TO THE UNMARRIED
AND WIDOWS, IT IS
GOOD FOR THEM IF
THEY ABIDE EVEN
AS I. PAUL, I COR. 7:8

SINGLE VOICES

A LETTER FROM THE EAST

Anonymous

Who would want to write an article on the single woman? It would be like being branded with a scarlet "S"! Our Church places a great emphasis on marriage and homelife. In terms of an ideal of personal happiness, doctrinal adherence, and societal cohesiveness, this viewpoint has its advantages. However, there are other parts of the equation which merit thoughtful evaluation: what kind of person are you? *Why* are you doing what-ever-it-is you are doing? I have seen many unhappy, frustrated and dull people and enough happy, productive and interesting people to know that similar circumstances do not determine similar results. There are so many challenges to living in today's world that we must put our feet firmly in the present and not over-reference ourselves to the past or the hereafter! We must strengthen our intellectual analysis, our spiritual guidance, and get to the actual doing — and find a measure of peace in all of this.

A LETTER HOME*

Maryruth Bracy

Dear Mom and Dad,

Your phone call last night left me feeling strangely orphaned, as if you had placed me on some foreign doorstep. I know you thought that Tom and I would get married, and that you can't understand why I've quit my job. Last year you questioned my going on to graduate school; last night you wanted me to return for more schooling in Utah: is it that you'd rather have me in school there than struggling out here?

My dear sweet parents, underneath all that you said was one question, "Why aren't you married?" I'm afraid I just don't know all the reasons. Somewhere along the way decisions were made and the results of these decisions have led me to where I am. I guess the best reason is that the right man has not come along at the right time. Can you understand that if I married Tom without the love I know I am capable of giving, I would be cheating both of us?

*A composite letter representing the feelings of twelve single sisters, 25 and over, across the country.

My “right man” has changed a lot since high school. And the range is narrowing; not just because the number of available men is decreasing, though I have used some foresight in planning where to live and work, but because I find *myself* gradually becoming less flexible. I am no longer willing to date just to be going out. I could not say that before I turned 24. I do love to date, but I find an increased longing to have the experiences be meaningful. I also find myself struggling to be patient; patient with the “relationship process” which takes time to enact. The biggest danger I see in breaking up with Tom is hesitancy to start that process all over again with someone new. It takes an incredible amount of energy to begin again.

There is something I need from you right now: to write me and love me and include me, without the pressure your worry too often instigates. Please be comforted that marriage and a family are still my goals. If I could only know that in say five years I’d be married, then I would have no regrets about my life to this point. My greatest plague is that my previous decisions may have stacked the cards against my getting married. But since there is no way of knowing that, I try not to worry. Even if worst comes to worst, I guess as long as I live worthily of the celestial kingdom, I will still have that final choice between being a second wife or a ministering angel!

Your loving daughter,
Mary

JOURNAL JOTTINGS

Dianne Higginson

The Victorian Ideal of Womanhood doesn’t seem so disadvantageous to girls thrust into a hostile world “on their own.” When you remain single, society takes away the advantages of being a girl and forces upon you the disadvantages of being a man — so you are neither and are lost in the void.

* * *

It is difficult to talk about the advantages of being single since after a certain age it cannot properly be considered to be a blessing, though it well may be. All the advantages seem temporal and selfish, character-softening, and of diminishing value. Others, who tend to judge righteousness in terms of pitifulness (“It’s not her fault, she *wants* to marry.”), tolerate only facetious exultings in the unencumbered life, for to be seriously exultant is to be instantly suspected of unrighteousness. To be too happy brings judgment, yet being too obviously unhappy is criticized just as severely. Job’s comforters never had it so good!

* * *

It’s a buyer’s market, one may as well face it. G. gave me this, from *As you Like It* (though I don’t):

Mistress, know yourself. Down on your knees,
And thank heaven, fasting, for a good man’s love;
For I must tell you friendly in your ear,
Sell when you can! You are not for all markets.
Cry the man mercy, love him, take his offer,
Foul is most foul, being foul to be a scoffer.

(Act III, Scene V, Lines 557-62)

Bewilderment is the main feeling. How does everyone else do it? And why can't I?

* * *

The post-college single L.D.S. girl on the outer rim of nubility is aware of being in the right church but the wrong pew. Neither a priesthood bearer nor a childbearer, her presence becomes increasingly embarrassing, unless she has the good fortune of being in a predominately singles ward.

* * *

Marriage: to be determined not to be determined by it is also to be determined by it.

* * *

A year ago, away from home for Christmas, bronchial, and feeling keenly homeless, I re-read *Little Women*. My grief astounded me: I wept and wept and could not be consoled, not because Beth died (it seemed right that she should on this reading), not because Jo wouldn't marry Laurie, but because it was irrevocably clear to me that, of the four models for girlhood and womanhood presented by Louisa May Alcott, it was *Amy* who was the embodiment of all that was good, not Beth; Amy who triumphed, not Jo; Amy who deserved admiration and emulation, not Jo or Beth or the docile Meg. My grief was from shock and disappointment at having been so long and confidently wrong, from a horror of prolonged and disastrous self-deception. Perhaps other girls were perspicacious enough at nine or ten to realize that Amy was the one they wanted to be like. Perhaps they were half in love with Laurie and wanted to marry him and live happily ever after. I wasn't that insightful. I thought Amy a horrid, selfish little person quite deserving of the fate of marrying Laurie, whom I did not admire or find attractive; I accepted Jo's refusal of him as just in the largest sense, though heroic and sad too. Now I could see that while Jo reared Laurie, it was Amy who brought him to his best self, Amy who was the real "Little woman." The grief is real: I am not an Amy. I do not like or admire Lauries, and there simply are not enough German professors to go around.

* * *

I am someone to whom movies like "Gigi" and "My Fair Lady" appeal psychologically — fulfill all fantasies . . . wanting to be the toad who is discovered by the Prince and magically changed into a princess. *Not* wanting to be found by another toad . . . and accepted with resignation.

* * *

Out of the context and structure of family, the individual loses her meaning. There are so many other beings, how can God care about me? What about all those others on the subway? Within the family, with father or husband representing the Lord, *she matters*; she knows it, and the security is vital to a clear perspective. Family Home Evening groups in university wards are a worthwhile attempt to compensate for not being properly organized into a proper family.

* * *

Faith is dating boys who, when they ask, "Is there someone else?" can only be answered, "There's got to be."

Faith is buying only dresses with sleeves.
Faith is knowing you would like polygamy.
Faith is crying a little bit when your Bishop tells you that had you been Eve you never would have eaten that apple.
Faith is dressing up and attending your ninety-ninthousandth M.I.A. social.
Faith is not contracting spiritual pneumonia from the cosmic chill blasting in from eternity.

* * *

There is something to be remarked in coming home from a fairly satisfying Sunday School and a better than good Relief Society and instantly feeling the need to play Peggy Lee's, "Is That All There Is?"

A CANDID AND UNCENSORED INTERVIEW WITH A MORMON CAREER GIRL

M. Karlynn Hinman

Q. Our readers are interested in knowing more about single professional women in the Church. Tell us about your background.

A. I'm from a small Utah community. I went to college in Utah and to graduate school in the east.

Q. What do you do with your spare time. Do you cook or sew for example?

A. Don't you think that question is beside the point?

Q. Not at all. I'm sure our readers would like to know —

A. — that I'm a genuine Mormon woman? O.K. I'm not a freak. I cook — make jam, bottle fruit on occasion, but I don't seem to get the right spice balance in my Pakistani curries; commercial curry powder just isn't proper. And I sew. I made both of my winter coats; they are lined, underlined, and interlined; and I love to throw parties and entertain. I once gave a surprise baby shower to which husbands and single men were invited. We had a folk-rock band. Some friends of mine who happened to be in town came by. And the oven caught fire and the refrigerator warmed instead of cooled. It was a great party! But I wander. Let me guess: your next question was going to be whether anybody had ever proposed to me.

Q. Well, this was to be a candid interview, but I wasn't quite going to get that personal. Uh, has anyone?

A. I've left a trail of broken hearts across three — no four — continents. It may interest you, though, that I have never had a proposal from a Mormon. I am not certain of all that says, either about Mormon men or about me. I think that it reflects the relatively young marriage age in the church and the fact that Mormon men are guided to seek wives who fit into a particular mold. On the other hand, maybe I have chronic halitosis and my best friends won't tell me.

Q. What about your childhood and home life?

A. I had a lovely childhood, and my parents encouraged me in my career ideas. My mother returned to teaching when I was about four years old. My father thought that was just fine, and he never felt any threat to

our home life. From what I can tell from talking with other women, I had a closer relationship with my father than most girls do, and I know that this helped to influence me to develop as much as I could professionally. I remember when I was about three my father decided to raise some pigs for the bacon. I went out to help build the pigpen. When he hammered the nails, his hammer left an indentation on the wood which I thought was like a ruffle or lace, so he made sure that he left hammer marks by all the nails. It's a little thing, but it always made me feel very happy to be with a father who understood a three-year-old's idea that pigs, like little girls, needed ruffles. I grew up feeling there was no contradiction between being a girl and developing to the fullest whatever talents I had.

Q. Do you think you'll marry?

A. Probably. It's a very great burden to break hearts all the time. Actually I prefer the company of men to that of most women. The most lasting and meaningful relationships I have had with people — particularly with men — have been where we both had deep intellectual curiosity. Few women are encouraged to explore the world of ideas, and I am happy in their company for only limited periods of time; the new rap groups are an even worse drag because of the ideas they think they explore. I prefer to be off doing something.

Q. Then you're not one of the bra-burning Fem-Lib People who —

A. You've been observing me closely enough to answer that question yourself.

A LETTER FROM THE WEST

Anonymous

I sat down to write for *Dialogue* on the position of the widow in the Church, but I could never get past the first sentence, which was: "There is no place for a widow in the Church unless she is willing to look resolutely and cheerfully toward the grave." I'll probably write such an article sometime, but it won't be now and it won't be for *Dialogue*.

The truth is I don't like being "single" again and yet it gives me a great deal of freedom and mobility which I love. I find my greatest joy in being a mother, the role I take most seriously and which has the most stabilizing influence in my life. So far as the Church is concerned, the mother who *must* work is regarded in a far different light from one who does it for other reasons.

I also think that so far as the Church is concerned a widow is in quite a different position from someone who has never married or from a divorced woman. It's not a position I like because it does carry with it a certain amount of pity and condescension, but on the other hand there is no feeling of censure, which I think the divorced and single often get, and my strong sense of identification with women who are married helps them to see me as a person rather than as a position — widow.

Although I can in no way explain it, my relationship with people who knew my husband has a different aspect to it than my relation with people who only see me alone. The best way I can describe it is to say that people who only know me, only know a part of me.

If singleness is an affliction, I can only conclude that I'm not a good example. I love living alone. I love travelling alone. I love people but not necessarily to live with. I enjoy company and contact and conversation, but I enjoy being a free soul who can come and go and do what I feel like at the moment.

Although I have been married and have a son, I have been alone for the last twenty-eight years, for all of my nineteen years in the church. A month or two before my baptism, I took a western trip. On a Greyhound platform I met a lovely elderly lady awaiting the same bus I was to take. We chatted and I asked her if she was a Mormon. She said, "Yes, why do you ask?" I replied, "Because you look like one and I am going to be one shortly." She exclaimed, "My dear sister, when you are ready to go to the Temple you must come to St. George and I will go with you." Two years later I did go and stay with her and she went with me every day. She said then she did not know what single women would do in eternity, but she would be willing to share her husband, dead for several years, with women like me. I don't know what to think about that! Still, where would one find that kind of friend except in the Church?

I have been asked how I feel about my status in a Church which emphasizes family life so strongly. Do I feel left out? I can only say what an awful thing it would be to be single and *not* be in the Church. I have shared so many families, their company, their children, their hospitality. Where else could one meet so many wonderful people of all ages, interests, talents and tastes, but all with the same spiritual ideals and working for the same eternal goals? Wherever I go I find brothers and sisters; I have visited Mormon churches in Hawaii, Alaska, Puerto Rico, England, Virginia, Florida, California, Utah, Mexico, and all over New England.

In Juneau the mother of an M.I.T. student took me to church; I was invited to dinner by the cousin of our Boston Stake Relief Society President. In Anchorage a former member from Cape Cod Branch took me sightseeing at nine p.m. in the bright-as-day light. In San Juan the member of the Church whom I phoned to find where services were held invited me to go with her family, calling for me at my hotel. In Hawaii, I was given a wonderful day of sightseeing by the widow of Matthew Cowley. Why shouldn't I feel I am a member of a very large family?

My son married about twenty-two years ago and so far I have not had time to be lonely. I think he expressed it rather well when his future mother-in-law asked him, "What will your mother do if you get married?" and he, who had been in the Navy for three years and in school for two years, replied, "Why, I guess she will just go on doing what she always does." I was working then and loved it. I am still working and still love it.

I may be single, but I never feel alone. The Church is a wonderful, warm, loving comforter, always within reach if the need should arise. It would take an hour for my son to reach me in an emergency, but I know I could get help in ten minutes from the Church if it were necessary. I know the home teachers would do anything for me — except my housecleaning! I mentioned that one time when they said, "Can we do anything for you,

Sister Baker.” I was deep in sewing as usual and anyone could see I *needed* some cleaning done. They just smiled and said, “Well, good night.” They are dears and so are the visiting teachers. When I really need them, they’ll be there.

I do have many friends outside the Church and they are dear to me too, but it is the Church which is the structure of my life. As for the hereafter, perhaps I can best approach it this way. I have always known my Heavenly Father fairly well and had great confidence in *Him*. Before I was a Mormon I looked into a lot of things and annexed a lot of ideas and, perhaps, experiences of how He operates. In the years since I have been in this Church I have learned much, much more. I think that whatever his plans are for me will be O.K.



I say Ladies,
if WE ask YOU to
make your dresses
a little shorter,
do NOT be extra-
vagant & CUT
Them so short
that WE can see
The TOPS OF YOUR
STOCKINGS. BRIGHAM YOUNG