

Go To sleep, my little oaf,
Mama's little Sugar Loaf,
Go to sleep & stay THAT way
For at least a Night & day.
I'm No angel up above
Don't abuse My mother Love.
I CAN STAND so MUCH & THEN
MAMA WANTS MATURER MEN...

... DOROTHY PARKER

FULL HOUSE

Jaroldeen Asplund Edwards

I wake up in the morning to the sound of my husband's voice. But it is not really an awakening, rather it is a continuing. For night as we used to know it no longer comes to our home. There is a lull in activity, yes; but in the way of our youth, when night and sleep were a total experience that blocked the chain of days, a precious all-in-one piece of unconsciousness, an ending and a forgetting — in that sense night does not come. Even in sleep there is a consciousness of caring, a wakefulness that tests the murmur of the house through the darkened hours. The hum of the refrigerator, a last dryer of clothes with one clonking sneaker, water flushing, a cough, children padding on pajamaed feet through the always lighted halls, requests for drinks, solace from bad dreams, or a short diagnosis of unidentified aches.

Sometimes I open my eyes in response to an eerie sense of presence and see a face an inch from mine, staring. Child standing, me lying, eye to eye. "I can't sleep," and then the blissful snuggle in. Or there will be a gentle arising to the surface of sleep, a sudden awareness of silence, a listening . . . listening . . . listening . . . and settling back to sleep in the wonder and reassurance of our burgeoned home.

Not yet six in the morning. My husband is shaving and calls over the running water — something from the train of his thoughts. He assumes that I am (a) awake and (b) fully aware of his mental preamble, even though he knows that we have an unspoken agreement: "I never wake to the sound of an alarm, and he never wakes to the crying of a baby." He cannot resist this brief empty piece of time — no more can I, so I rouse and prop in bed and we continue the delicious conversation of our marriage. Fifteen minutes. Then up, make the bed, hair, slippers, robe, and a quick rich glance at our baby sleeping like a moist rose. Such beauty in our cluttered bedroom!

Morning husbands are so elegant. He comes from the dressing room in his starched white shirt, bright tie, polished shoes, face shining from shower and shave. All the beautiful odors, soap, shaving lotion, starch, and the masculine smell of his suit, mingle in that early morning embrace.

Breakfast with our seminary daughters is eggnog, toast and orange juice. Never time for more. The girls hurtle into the kitchen, shoes in hand, long shining hair, books a-clutter, hunting for gym suits or brushes or pens. Their day fresh and new. I never get used to seeing them grown so tall

and beautiful. I love their becoming, but I miss the little girls gone. It is a constant challenge to keep my relationship to them in the proper balance since it must change and develop as they do. Too often the childhood mother rises to the surface and makes a flat evaluation, "Change those stockings!" "Skirts too short." "Please take a sweater." "Do you have your homework and lunch?" Compromises reached, plans exchanged. As they fling out the door, coats, books, purses, I give each a brief kiss and a careful compliment, the ritual that says, "I love you. Hurry home."

Then one last apostrophe of time with my husband. Six-thirty a.m. He looking like Brooks Brothers and me like the Earth Mother.

The next half hour is my own sweet time. It's gorgeous to read in a still-sleeping house, prepare a church assignment, or spend quiet minutes with an early-awakened baby. At seven I must be fully dressed with makeup and hair done, ready for the official day of the family to begin. The children are wakened, first time cheerfully, second time, firmly, and if a third time is necessary, sharply.

I dress the pre-school children and babies in my bedroom. This bedroom is the hub of our home in the morning and evening. Here I keep a drawer with the stockings for the entire family. This serves two purposes. Naturally it saves a lot of sorting time, but it also makes it necessary for each child to come from the corners of the house to this room to complete dressing. I can make all the necessary checks — hair, teeth, clothes, homework, and morning chores. The stocking drawer is a siphon and it draws all the early morning family to me while I am busy changing diapers, tying shoes, and snapping trousers for the four youngest.

Breakfast and lunches are prepared with practiced swiftness. Simple meals. Bowls of hot cereal, milk and oranges. Lunches crackling in brown paper sacks with each name in marker pen, Catherine, Charles, Christine, Robin, Carolyn. Sandwiches all the same ("Sorry you don't like cheese, Robin; I'll make peanut butter tomorrow." Carolyn says she doesn't like peanut butter and we all laugh. "Tuna on Wednesday!" I promise.), cookies, an apple and milk money. Gathered around the kitchen table the children and I cram these last minutes with talking, facts, ideas, compliments, appointments, schedules. Family prayer and momentary silence as they start to eat.

The clock is inexorable. So is the school bus. Again at the door the farewells. My cheek is kissed and I forget to wipe off the cereal and milk. Midday I will sometimes touch my cheek and find it still sticky.

Catherine's Junior High starts later and so we do dishes and have a rare private talk. She practices flute or piano and, long dark hair bouncing, strides off to school. It would be wonderful to have eleven children and have each an only child.

Bless Sesame Street! That psychedelic learning feast! My three little boys sit in a rapt row. Fifteen minutes of hard exercise for me while they watch; the misery of middle-age, eleven children, and all that car-driving is that muscle tone is no longer inherent, it has to be earned.

Sunlight floods the kitchen windows and the lawn and patio sparkle. I fill the sink to bathe the baby. It is a time of savoring. Maybe it has

taken me all these children to appreciate how short these first months are. The glories of a new baby are beyond description. Hardly mortal! I revel in this tactile, subtle, exquisite and complex experience. One unexpected bonus of motherhood is the visual beauty. I am enchanted by the sights of my children, the tones of skin, the clear eyes, the grace, the curve of hand and cheek — to see them racing across the back lawn in a certain slant of light.

At about ten o'clock the baby is cared for and the discretionary part of the day begins. There is no one to tell me what I must do, only my own sense of responsibility and achievement. People often ask me how I manage with such a large family and I reply, "By a simple method of selective neglect." Which is just a way of saying that I manage through a system of compelling priorities. My present life as a mother has three profound purposes. (This aside from the relationship with my husband, which is my eternal and consistent preoccupation.) The first is to fulfill all my spiritual obligations as I understand them. The second is to educate my children. Educate in the broadest sense, not just helping them achieve skill and success in school, but giving them a sense of awareness, responsibility and joy. By far the greatest amount of my time is spent in this endeavor. Third, is my responsibility to give the best possible physical care to children and home. If any of these three purposes is neglected the balance and richness of our family is impaired.

Basic order is essential. This to me means beds, dishes, and general pick-up must be done consistently and directly. Each child makes his bed on rising and clears his own dishes. Clothes washing is done early and late. Hurrah for the men who invented dishwashers, dryers and permanent press! I am a compulsive picker-upper and throw-awayer; ask any child who has made the mistake of leaving a valuable piece of paper lying around. So the house is mostly neat. Once a week the house is cleaned royally by the entire family. The rest of the time no real cleaning except for accidents or VIP company.

Because the center of the day is too important to be expended on un-enduring things, all the routine must be compressed into the early and late hours. Then we can spend the rest of the morning, my little ones and I, reading, doing projects, going to Relief Society, visiting friends, gardening or singing. The pattern of life is greatly shaped by the houses in which we live. This California house, with its large open kitchen, adjoining family room and glass walls, is ideally suited to supervising and developing activities with my preschoolers and still working in the kitchen preparing food, folding clothes or doing dishes. Our great round table is piled with papers, crayons, books, and glue. One wall has a large blackboard and bulletin board. So much for them to learn . . . "There are four seasons" "Rains happens this way" "Who is Abraham Lincoln" "Catch the ball, ride the tricycle" . . . so many to teach.

I always hold at least one church job, not only because it is essential to feed my individual needs, but also because it is an example to the children. Mostly it is selfish! How I love to teach adults, to be involved, to be busy, to be serving my Heavenly Father in different ways. Often there are meet-

ings during the day. We go together. My children are at home in the church.

At three o'clock the children burst in from school and the house becomes vibrant with them. Imagine how many sheets of school assignments seven children bring home! We are inundated with smudged, gray, blue-lined papers. Practicing, homework, roller-skating on the patio, friends, basketball, rides to lessons, Primary — and always the talking, talking, talking.

At 6:30 or 7:00 p.m. my husband arrives home. There is a crescendo of delighted welcome. The baby in his arms and children clinging to his legs, pockets, and coattails, he goes in to change. An audience congregates in the bedroom as he struggles into his indestructable "home" clothes assailed by simultaneous accounts of daily activities, demands for justice, homework problems, and general claims for attention. Those nights when he is gone (traveling, working, or church), the excitement is gone too.

Supper is special because it is the one time we are all together. My recipes are easy and served in stove-to-table cooking pots. I prepare meals with a minimum of utensils and time, using many prepared products in order to buy time with money. Cakes are all made from mixes with home-made icings to make them "mother's." Casseroles in enormous oven dishes, placed in the oven at five, are a complete dinner at seven. I do not know how to fuss. I cannot complicate food preparation — when I do it is a disaster. Hot yeast rolls are made from mixes with lots of butter, cinnamon and sugar added. Delicious! Or canned spaghetti with added cheese, hamburger, onion and catsup, served with bread, fresh salad, or jello, milk and a frozen vegetable. The table is set by the children, with a red bowl filled with leaves or flowers and candles in the center. Our nod to gracious living. Evening prayer is held kneeling around the table.

All the children are bathed each night (except on Primary day). It is the easiest way to say, "That's the end of the day, my dears!" Our biggest bathroom is awash with clothes, shoes, sand, water, wet towels and suds. After the little ones are storied to bed, the school children and I gather in a circle on the living room floor. That is the theory anyway. There is always a feeling of coming and going. We take turns reading from the New Testament and then a short chapter from an older children's book.

Thus begin the long good-nights. Suffice it to say that no one goes to bed without individual encouragement. Gradually the house begins to settle. "I have to finish this page." "I have to give a talk this Sunday." "My report is due." "What shall I wear?" "I need another drink." "I forgot my prayer." Another round of kisses. "Goodnight we love you." "Go to sleep." "Go to sleep." "Go to sleep."

When my husband is not traveling, we close the day as it began, sharing, laughing, discussing, recreating one another's enthusiasm, love and joy. One last reassuring look in each room. We love you. We are here.

Precious commitment, eternal vigilance, limitless caring: I think this is the essence of Mormon parenthood. It is the Latter-day Saint concept of eternity which shapes our commitment, sharpens our satisfactions and enlarges our responsibility. We know the endless nature of parenthood and live with a profound knowledge of the bitter cost if we fail.

Of course not all days follow this pattern. Weekends are another world,

and sometimes the whole system comes to a grinding halt. Illness, an unusual church or community job, a child with a special need, or just an overwhelming day of weariness or frustration can destroy the whole chain. Some days I choose to ignore routine and steal a day for my own use. That is always the day visitors drop in. I wade through the toys, dishes, and children to greet them knowing that they cannot know all the things I have done that day because what I have not done is so apparent.

It is an irony that motherhood is the one profession that a dedicated and educated adult can practice for a decade and yet still not be considered an expert. Yet I confess I have confidence in myself and in my role. I believe I do it as well as I am capable of doing anything. I have chosen this life, it does not master me, I master it. I am not its victim, I am its recipient. And if there are times when I wistfully read a university catalogue, or wish that I could run instead of pushing a stroller and observing each leaf and stone, or if I get tired of the litany of “No’s” and “Do This’s,” those times are not frequent and they just serve to confirm that life is a banquet and, even when filled, we hunger and thirst.

My triumphs are measured in moments. Marianna plays Bach, Julia smiles at a new friend, Catherine organizes Family Home Evening, Charles serves Sacrament, Christine brings home a stray animal, Robin shows us what it means to persevere, Carolyn skates like a princess the first time, Westy reads a new word, Malcolm prints his long name, William holds his hand and looks up at my face, or Jarolee laughs in delight as I walk toward her crib.

So it is that each day runs its course, filled with being, many things undone, many just begun. And thus to bed . . . and a continuing into the night.