Leave The Dishes In The Sink

Thorne, Alison

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10 The Widening Reach of the Women’s Movement

The Equal Rights Amendment

March 1972 Congress passed the Equal Rights Amendment which read, “Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.”

Women’s groups across the country swung into action to try to persuade state legislatures to ratify it, and, in Utah the Governor’s Committee on the Status of Women played a coordinating role. I was no longer on the committee, but I was on their subcommittee assigned to write a brochure to convince the public and the Utah legislature that the ERA should be ratified.

I saw a parallel between our ERA effort and the struggle of suffragists before the turn of the century to get votes for women written into the Utah constitution. The suffragists were successful and when Utah entered the union in 1896 the state constitution contained the following section:

The rights of citizens of the State of Utah to vote and hold office shall not be denied or bridged on account of sex. Both male and female citizens of this State shall equally enjoy all civil, political and religious rights and privileges.

One wonders how that second sentence on equality of rights got in. I suppose it was because, over the years, the rhetoric for suffrage became tied in with equality. In any case, Utah lifted the wording from Wyoming, which had become a state six years earlier. Over time the wording of that second sentence proved to be empty. To my knowledge it has never been used in litigation and cannot be considered a state equal rights amendment.

Historian Jean Bickmore White has written about the way woman suffrage made its way into the Utah constitution. In 1870 a Mormon territorial legislature enfranchised Utah women. Women voted for seventeen years and nothing disastrous happened. But in 1887 Congress took away this right, and Utah suffragists tried to get the vote...
back. In Utah these nineteenth century suffragists were not seen as radicals. There was no militancy. There were no public spectacles. Suffragists did not espouse other controversial reform measures that might alienate supporters. The women supporting suffrage were predominantly from the respectable Mormon establishment. Suffrage was frequently promoted through the Relief Society, and there was grass roots support throughout the territory.¹

In the 1970s those of us who worked for ratification of the ERA tried not to appear radical. We eschewed the term “women libbers.” We sought grass roots support and hoped the Relief Society would honor its history on suffrage and related matters of equality.

But as early as 1970, LDS Church authorities made pronouncements against the women’s movement. A headline in The Salt Lake Tribune blared: “Shun Women’s Lib, Relief Society Told.” According to the article, a church apostle, after quoting from items in national publications which expounded on “free child care, free abortions and equal employment,” told sixty-five hundred women in the Tabernacle, “Such idiotic and blatantly false philosophy must not be entertained or believed—for God has spoken.”²

At the same meeting Relief Society president Belle Spafford announced that The Relief Society Magazine would be discontinued after fifty-six years of publication. Historian Jill Mulvay Derr noted that the LDS Church movement toward “correlation” brought all activities into a system directed by priesthood offices, but this had unintended consequences for women, “further diminishing any sense of female leadership and collective identity, and focusing even more narrowly on woman’s role in the home.”³ Proponents of the Equal Rights Amendment found themselves up against a narrow focus on woman’s role in the home to the exclusion of other interests.

In September 1972 our little subcommittee of the Governor’s Status of Women Committee was meeting in the governor’s office. He was out of town and, although we usually met in his boardroom, it was otherwise occupied. Three of our four congressional delegates had already voted against the ERA, but we included in our brochure a long list of organizations favoring it, including League of Women Voters, Business and Professional Women, General Federation of Women’s Clubs, and Church Women United. We gave pro-ERA arguments.

Apparently as we worked, rumor went out that a group of women’s libbers were writing something in the governor’s office that would undermine the families of Utah. A phone call to the governor’s secretary
resulted in an invitation to the callers to come and see what we were
doing. Two very frail-looking wives and mothers arrived. They were
sure the ERA would do away with doctors who specialize in treatment
of women. Women would be drafted into the army, or would have to go
to work even if they had children. We talked with them at some length,
but I doubt if we modified their view. They left with several pieces of
our printed material.4

At the end of December 1972, I attended a meeting in the gover-
nor’s boardroom on strategies for getting the ERA ratified. The state
BPW president reported from a poll they had taken on the stand of
each club. The state president of the Federated Women’s Clubs
reported where their member clubs stood. Two presidents in the Provo
area had refused to poll their members or to have anything to do with
the ERA. However some women in the Provo area favored the ERA,
including Algie Ballif, former state legislator, and Virginia Cutler, for-
mer dean of Family Living at BYU. Carol Lynn Pearson, a noted author,
was in favor, and another woman living in Provo had personally pur-
chased a lot of our little leaflets and persuaded a fabric shop to put one
in each woman’s purchase of fabrics and patterns.

Homemakers, Incorporated, a group based in Arizona, sent all our
legislators material against the ERA, much of it taken out of context
from a Yale Law Review article. We suspected John Birch Society money
was behind them. They were one reason that Arizona defeated the
amendment, although Colorado and Idaho had ratified.5

January 1973 was a bitter cold month in Utah. Wynne was on a
quick trip to Hyderabad, India, and then was going on to Ethiopia on
behalf of the United Nations Development Programme. With one
day’s notice I had agreed to teach an elementary economics course
with seventy-five students. This was the class in which, when I said I
was going to Salt Lake to debate in favor of ERA on TV, a young man
on the front row asked, “Does your husband approve of this?”

It was Friday, January 26, and a blizzard had come in early. My car
slipped badly on college hill, so I went home and waited a half hour
and tried again. Though I still slipped, I made it safely to the top and to
my class. At eleven, I was due to leave for Salt Lake City for the debate.
The highway patrol warned me over the phone that the canyon was
snow packed and slick with zero visibility and would be that way all
day. I phoned Channel Five and said I was not coming.

But the legislature was holding a hearing on ERA at four that after-
noon. Dean Phyllis Snow said we had to be there, and she would drive.
Carl Johnson of the forestry faculty would go with us to represent the USU Faculty Association, which backed the amendment. Beth Gurrister, chair of the Governor’s Committee on Status of Women, lived in Brigham City and we picked her up. In spite of the bad roads we made it safely, though the wind blew snow steadily and cars were off the road.

The auditorium was packed. The opposition was powered by the John Birch Society and similar movements, and I considered their arguments drivel. Pro and con speakers alternated. When my turn came, I gathered up the opposition’s chief arguments and refuted them. As I went back to my seat, a little elderly lady told me I did just fine. I had heard her telling someone near her, before the meeting began, that she remembered when Utah women and Susan B. Anthony marched for women’s vote and how people laughed at them, but they had been right.6

Interest in women’s issues ran high. The annual University of Utah conference on women, in September 1973, drew people from across the state and seventy-five women attended from Salt Lake Trade Technical College. I was particularly struck by the women and law session, called “Legal Wilderness,” which resulted in creation of a strong support group for divorced women.

In November the annual state social welfare conference included a workshop on women as consumers of health services, which I co-chaired with Jan Tyler of Weber College. We could not persuade any male medical doctor to be on our panel, but we had a young mother from Provo who had confronted the local hospital on its practices with regard to births. She had persuaded new mothers to write the hospital about what they liked and did not like, and real changes had occurred. She was working on a checklist for doctors to answer.

On our panel we also had Mildred Quinn, retiring head of nursing at the University of Utah, who told us about the long and honorable history of midwifery training at that institution. Even then, on the Navajo reservation, seven nurse midwives were at work, and the Navajo women preferred them to male doctors. Mildred Quinn had not heard of the Boston Women’s Collective, and I told her about Our Bodies Ourselves which I knew was in the university bookstore. Barrie had sent me an early copy before it became a published book.7

In 1974 the Utah legislature voted down the ERA. Years later former Governor Calvin Rampton said:

I was amazed, however, when the legislature refused to ratify the ERA . . . I guess I was rather naive because I stated I didn’t see how
anyone was going to be against it . . . At that time the LDS Church had not [formally] taken their position against the amendment, and in view of the fact that Utah had a similar provision in the state constitution, I could see no reason why Utah legislators wouldn’t ratify a similar addition to the federal constitution. Some Republicans voted for it, as did almost all of the Democrats, so it was defeated only narrowly. After that the LDS Church took a position against it, and I’m still appalled at the amount of damage and division that’s been done in our state and elsewhere over what I regard as an innocuous and desirable change in our federal constitution.8

Polarization in Utah grew. The LDS Church tightened restrictions on women at the very time that the women’s movement was growing nationally and globally.

Three Significant Women’s Conferences in 1977

Hands Across the Valley

In April 1977 the USU Women’s Center sponsored a conference called “Hands Across the Valley.” A principal mover of this event was Jean Christensen, wife of Boyd Christensen, vice president for business. The Christensens, who were LDS, had lived elsewhere for many years, and Jean had seen LDS women work with other women in bettering their communities, but she saw very little of this kind of cooperation in Cache Valley.9

Here again was the long standing problem of how Mormons and non-Mormons lived together. I knew, and others knew, that non-Mormon women moving into Cache Valley suffered cultural shock. Mormons had so many church duties that they kept mostly to themselves, unaware that people who were not LDS would like to be better acquainted without attempts at conversion. Many Mormon children made life miserable for non-Mormon children who didn’t belong to “the only true church.” Teachers in the public schools sometimes asked for a show of hands on religion, perhaps to determine who would be going to LDS Primary after school on Tuesdays. I recall Superintendent Eyre sending out instructions for teachers not to do this.

LDS young people were told by their church and families not to date outside the church. But if non-LDS attended LDS seminary, this ruling could be overlooked. Still another sore point was that Mormons had little understanding or appreciation of the rituals of other churches. For example, they could care less about Good Friday, or
about a possible Easter vacation, because the LDS Church did not pay much attention to Easter. A spring vacation always occurred, but it didn’t have to be at Easter time.

Jean Christensen and Anne Hatch called together a large group of women from all over the valley and discussed with them Emma Lou Thayne’s talk of the previous year on “looking at our similarities in light of our differences.” Emma Lou Thayne of Salt Lake City was a gifted, warm-hearted LDS woman who taught English at the University of Utah, an author of poetry and prose, and the mother of five children. I had attended her talk in 1976, held in Logan and sponsored by the USU Women’s Center. I found truth in her statement that the presence of the LDS Church affects the environment just as the mountains affect the horizon.⁠¹⁰ There were two commentators after her talk. One of them was Judy MacMahon, new director of the Logan Library, who said that, after moving to Cache Valley, she had to search her roots in Ohio to come to terms with Mormon culture.

Now it was 1977, and Judy and Carolyn Cragun were chosen to co-chair the conference, “Hands Across the Valley.” Carolyn was a homemaker, active in the LDS Church and in doing good deeds in the community. Elki Powers, who along with Judy was a LWV member, designed a logo for the conference, a series of hands reaching toward each other. They were all white hands. There were very few people of color in Cache Valley, and race was not yet an issue.

The conference began on Thursday night, April 7, with a keynote address by Emma Lou Thayne. The next morning Emma Lou joined the panel of local women, LDS and non-LDS, who had already met three times and had come to trust each other. They spoke on local issues. At one point the audience was asked to show by raising their hands how many were Mormon and how many not. It was evenly divided. On the question of who was native to the valley, it turned out that most were not. Even most of the Mormons were not valley natives.

At 12:30 Barrie Thorne and I discussed three generations. We had hoped my mother would come, but she and my father were living
permanently in St. George. Louise Comish felt too old to attempt the trip, so Barrie had spent the night with them, coming on alone the next morning. We spoke of how Louise Comish reared her children and then gave our own views on family life. In making the point that parents should raise their children to be unafraid to take risks, Barrie said her favorite picture of me was the one on the front page of the *Herald Journal* leading the peace march, a remark that brought much applause and startled me. In the afternoon Barrie led a workshop, which the magazine *Utah Holiday* described as follows:

> . . . Mormon and non-Mormon women got together in a cooperative effort that some may not have guessed was possible . . . a women’s conference at Utah State University in Logan. Called ‘Hands Across the Valley,’ the conference was created on the assumption that there were issues that mutually concerned all Cache Valley women.

In a Student Union Lounge on a sunny April afternoon, the mix of women in the room for a seminar on Humanism and Feminism told the story. Pantsuits, levis and hiking boots sat alongside sweaters, dresses, blouses and skirts. Many of the women were in their 40’s and 50’s; students talked with mothers and grandmothers; women who work inside the home talked with professional women.

> ‘Feminism can sound scary and shrill,’ panel moderator Barrie Thorne began. Attractive, pregnant and unprepossessing, Thorne shatters feminist stereotypes by her very presence. She had ended the morning session with a generational discussion of her Mormon Cache Valley roots with her mother Alison Thorne. ‘Historically and factually,’ she continued, ‘feminism is simply the freedom for women and men to make choices that affect their own lives. It stresses first of all that we are all human beings, that gender is secondary. Obviously, it does not deny the facts of reproduction, but only that we can’t rigidly channel individual lives on the basis of gender.’

The baby that Barrie carried would be born September 7 and named Abigail Louise in honor of Abigail Adams and Louise Comish.

In her discussion, Barrie chose to define humanism simply as being human. Feminism of course was a suspect term, but she insisted on using it. Indeed, some of my LDS friends insisted on calling themselves both feminist and LDS.
Back in the auditorium there was reading of poetry written by Cache Valley women—marvelous pieces—especially “One Woman’s Mecca Is Another Woman’s Zion,” by Sue Van Alfen. There was also an art exhibit on campus with works of five outstanding Cache Valley women artists.

The conference led to the creation of ten groups to meet in homes, three times before the next October, with hope of eventually forming a Women’s Interfaith Council. One of these groups met at my home, but I found, as did the others, that while there were non-LDS women eager to participate, it was hard to get LDS women to come. I prevailed on my immediate neighbors, and they came out of loyalty to me. I was also fortunate that Phyllis Taggart and Jerrilyn Black, both LDS, chose to attend my meetings. Extremely perceptive women, Phyllis was married to the president of USU and Jerrilyn was married to the head of the Sociology Department. Our non-LDS women were associated with other churches, and some but not all, were faculty wives.

In going over minutes of my meetings, I find we spoke of understanding religious practices of others that affect the community; adequacy and inadequacy of family services; knowledge of what agencies render what services; concern over child abuse and battered wives; questions on the mental health program and what can be done to prevent suicides; safety on the streets and campus; and why rapes were not reported in the local newspapers. We stayed away from ERA and abortion.

The Salt Palace Meetings

Before I can describe the statewide women’s meetings held June 24–25, 1977, in the Salt Palace, I must give the background that started it all, International Women’s Year (IWY).

Whether called feminists or participants in the women’s movement, activists across the world were concerned about women’s poverty, poor education, poor health, overwork, lack of resources, and lack of political voice. The United Nations declared 1975 to be International Women’s Year and urged countries to gather data on women’s condition. The UN conference in Mexico City launched International Women’s Year and the International Decade of Women. It drew thirteen hundred official delegates from 130 countries. Seven thousand others attended at their own expense, including thirty-seven women from Utah, some of them from BYU.
The IWY logo was a dove with the women’s symbol and equality designed into it to represent the major goals of Equality, Development, and Peace. This logo appeared on IWY reports and on postage stamps issued by various countries. I have the IWY stamp of the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen, because Wynne sent me a letter from there while on a five-week consulting assignment for the United Nations Development Programme.

After the Mexico City meetings, Congress created the National Commission on the Observance of International Women’s Year, which spent twelve months investigating issues affecting women and then published its findings and recommendations in the document, “. . . To Form a More Perfect Union . . .” Justice for American Women. Congress came forth with five million dollars for state conferences to consider these recommendations and to elect delegates to a national women’s conference to be held in Houston, Texas, November 18–21, 1977.

In Utah the IWY Coordinating Committee, with forty-two members of diverse religious, ethnic, and political backgrounds planned the state conference with twenty-five thousand dollars from Congress, fourteen thousand dollars from the Utah Endowment for the Humanities, three thousand dollars from private companies, as well as many individual donations. They scheduled the IWY Conference for June 24–25 in the Salt Palace, a round, tan brick conference center not unlike a giant salt shaker. We came to call this gathering simply the Salt Palace meetings.

In May the coordinating committee held “mass meetings” across the state to consider issues important to women, but these were poorly attended. I was one of only a handful who attended the meeting, held in the cafeteria of Logan High School.

Enter the LDS Church. Apparently the LDS women’s auxiliary, the Relief Society, thought that more Mormon women should show interest and they prevailed on Ezra Taft Benson, then of the First Presidency, to arrange phone calls to key church leaders telling them that each ward should send ten women to the state conference. The Relief Society followed up with instructions on how to participate and enclosed a list of candidates for election as delegates to the national meetings. These women were listed as “conservative patriots” dedicated to preserving the Constitution and traditional moral values. I noticed that the list of suggested delegates was short on Democrats and racial-ethnic minorities, and long on Republicans, the American Party, Eagle Forum, and right-to-life activists. The American Party and Eagle
Forum were ultraconservative organizations. Right-to-lifers opposed the right to abortion.

What I did not know was that these conservatives held large "informational meetings" in Bountiful, Ogden, Kearns, Provo (two), Salt Lake City, and Logan. I was completely unaware of the meeting held in Logan. Conservatives supplied the speakers and told those assembled that the IWY conference was a plot by the federal government to take over people's lives, and that the delegates should vote down all the resolutions. Georgia Peterson, a Republican in the Utah legislature, was
leader of one conservative group, and “Bishop” Dennis Ker, an ultra-
conservative, led another group. It was not known if Ker was really a
Mormon bishop, but he used religion in his arguments.

Early Friday morning, June 24, I drove to Salt Lake with Ione
Bennion, Anne Hatch, and Vickie Coleman. Vickie was Black (the term
African-American was not yet in use) and a member of our faculty. We
had nominated her to be a delegate to the national meetings.

Three thousand had pre-registered, and thousands more registered
as they arrived. The Salt Palace teemed with people, mostly but not
entirely women. Later there were boasts that, with thirteen thousand in
attendance, it was the largest of any state conference. The registration
process was swamped, and the vast majority of attendees had not read
the national report, ‘To Form a More Perfect Union . . .’ I registered and
pinned on my name tag, not realizing it was upside down, and wan-
dered around in the crowd waiting for sessions to begin. The women
milling about regarded me with suspicion until Leonard Arrington, the
well-known Mormon historian, came along. He greeted me cheerily
and loudly, “Hello, Alison. How are you?” Instantly the woman near-
est me smiled and told me, kindly, that my name was upside down.

My general impressions were as follows: The ERA was shouted down
(as a person who raised my hand for “yes” on ERA I was branded by all
those around me as a package of evil); rudeness to those conducting; tak-
ing over of workshops, not permitting planned programs to take place;
men with walkie-talkies walking along the edge, representing the
Mormon priesthood and telling their wives and other women what to do.
The ultraconservatives had control. Vickie, with her dark skin, stood out
in the crowd. I wondered why more Black women had not come. Voting
machines stood in a great hall. Women carried Phyllis Schlafly material
and voted down every resolution the national commission had put
forth—even voting down action against rape. Appalling to feel the
hatred. Appalling to witness unquestioning obedience to male authority.14

The most thoughtful accounts of what happened were written by
Linda Sillitoe and by Dixie Snow Huefner. They speculated over
whether the LDS Church was duped by the ultraconservatives, or was
it willing to be influenced, considering the fact that Ezra Taft Benson
was highly sympathetic to far right views.15

There was an interval when I walked out of the Salt Palace and over
to Temple Square to the Relief Society monument; my heart was full of
sorrow. I knew in the depth of my being that my great-great-grand-
mother, Louisa Barnes Pratt, and my grandmother, May Hunt Larson,
believed in equal rights for women. My loyalty to the church and to Relief Society was being shattered.

We stayed overnight with Anne Hatch’s parents, wonderfully hospitable people, but we left the meetings early on Saturday afternoon because the atmosphere was chaotic and filled with hate. Emma Lou Thayne was heartsick, and in a column in the Deseret News she compared the Salt Palace meetings with “Hands Across the Valley.”

As in Logan, the steering committee was made up of honest, thoughtful women from all walks of life. Housewives, mothers, professional people, they had given hours and hours in months prior to the conference, attempting to isolate the credible concerns of all kinds of women in Utah. The whole thing was planned as an opportunity for women in the state to get to know each other and help each other . . .

But there was no coming together, there was only an assembling . . .

Much of the contingent that poured in for a last minute say in the proceedings came, unfortunately, armed with preconceptions, informed prejudice and a schooled determination to scuttle everything . . .

And so much of the pillage was done in the name of God-fearing chastening . . . and everyone ended up losing (except perhaps the American party, who in a post conference flyer declared the sacking a victory!)

. . . if we want to cradle freedom and respect for individual differences, we must find ways to come peaceably together for friendly persuasion.

Logan did it. The hotbed that was Cache valley now teems with newly formed interfaith planning groups, downtown/university task committees, rural/urban discussion workshops preparing heartily for a better life together—and for another conference next year.

Why can’t that happen here?16

All my life I had assumed that the LDS Church urged members to vote, but left it up to individuals to decide for what or whom they would vote. I was horrified to learn that in the name of the church, Mormon women also sought to dominate and scuttle the IWY meetings in Texas, Washington, Idaho, Montana, and Hawaii.
In spite of, or perhaps because of the Salt Palace debacle, most Utah Democrats continued to favor the Equal Rights Amendment. Wynne and I attended the state Democratic convention in August because I helped write the human rights resolution which included the ERA, and we wanted to see it adopted. When each resolution came up for discussion, only one brief affirmative and one brief negative comment could be made from the floor.

I held my breath on the fifth resolution: Resolved that: “. . . equality of rights under the law shall not be abridged by the United States or any State on the basis of sex, race, age, religion or national origin, and that those laws presently in effect in the State of Utah to guarantee equal opportunity in employment all be vigorously enforced . . .” The negative comment from the floor was an attempt to take out the word “sex.” I gave the affirmative comment by telling of the recent United States Supreme Court decision that General Electric and other private businesses could drop maternity benefits of employees, while still paying gender-related employee benefits such as men’s hair transplants and vasectomies. I said this was discrimination against women. Had ERA existed, the Supreme Court could not have so ruled. Fortunately the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare’s Office for Civil Rights ruled that this decision did not apply to Title IX regulations. This meant public schools and colleges could not drop maternity benefits because the Title IX regulations were signed by the president and reviewed by Congress in 1975. The Utah Democratic convention voted overwhelmingly in favor of the human rights resolution, keeping the word “sex” in it.¹⁷

National IWY Women’s Conference, Houston

In the meantime, preparations went ahead for November’s national women’s conference in Houston. Thirteen of the fourteen Utah delegates elected to attend were Mormons, including Belle Spafford, former Relief Society president. There was only one ethnic minority. All were anti-ERA. However, they realized they could not go to Houston saddled with the votes against all national resolutions, so after holding hearings they modified their stand somewhat on such issues as credit, child abuse, rape, and battered women. The National IWY Commission had power to appoint delegates-at-large to “balance” representation, and in Utah’s case, they did exactly that.

The commission appointed nine delegates-at-large for Utah to counterbalance the state-elected slate of fourteen, who were all against the
ERA. The delegates-at-large would sit in a separate section but would have the same voting privileges as the state-elected delegates. The national commission wanted to record their outrage that some states were not fair to their citizens, that in some states there was apparent control by right wing groups. Alabama, almost 30 percent black, had an all-white delegation.

Among Utah’s delegates-at-large were Esther Landa, president of the National Association of Jewish Women, who conducted our state IWY meetings; Kathleen Flake who attended the international meetings in Mexico City and was now a law student at the University of Utah; Reba Keele, a BYU professor; and Lynne Van Dam, a writer and editor who defended ERA and was booed down at the state meetings.

The four of us who drove together to the Salt Palace meetings decided that we would go to Houston as observers, staying with my daughter Sandra, who lived there and also wanted to attend the meetings. But
there were rumors of possible violence from far rightists, and Ione, who tended to have high blood pressure, decided not to go. Vicki Coleman was writing her doctoral dissertation for Rutgers University and felt she could not take the time. So that left Anne Hatch and me to make the trip.

To curb possible violence at the meetings, observer passes were required, and they were hard to come by. I managed to get one ahead of time from Gunn McKay, the Utah Congressman who was a conservative Democrat. When we arrived at the conference, Utah friends gave us two more, so Anne Hatch, Sandra, and I became legitimate observers. Delores Bennett of Logan was one of the fourteen elected Utah delegates, and we had been friendly through years of community work. She was always strong in the Republican Party, but we had a habit of laying aside our party politics when they got in the way of community work. The Herald Journal interviewed Delores, Anne, and me about the coming Houston meetings and ran a picture of us.

Before the meetings Delores gave me a flyer which outlined the position of the elected delegation on certain national issues, but the delegates-at-large in Salt Lake City had difficulty getting a copy. The elected delegates certainly were not happy that delegates-at-large existed. When the elected delegates passed candy during the flight to Houston, it stopped short of the delegates-at-large in the back of the plane.

At the Salt Palace meetings in Utah, the air had crackled with suspicion and 80 percent of attendees voted against the ERA. At Houston there was much more courtesy, and 80 percent of the delegates voted in favor of ERA. As a feminist and a liberal, I felt as though I had come home at last, and I heaved a sigh of relief. A nineteen-year old Smith College student who was a delegate to Houston from Maine said, “Now I know that all those other women feel the same way I do, if they call themselves feminists then that’s what I am too.”

The Texas delegation sat at the very front, to the left in the large hall of the Coliseum. The elected Utah delegation was directly behind them, bearing their “pro-family” standard, which irritated some of us because we had families too, and we cared deeply about them. Indeed, concern over legal rights of homemakers was one of the national resolutions. The delegates-at-large clustered at the back. Those of us in the slanting balconies could see better than the delegates-at-large, who were seated on the flat floor. Delores Bennett sometimes climbed the stairs to tell me how things were going because observers were not allowed on the floor. I was grateful for her kindness.
The one resolution that passed almost unanimously brought the Texas and Utah delegations to their feet to hug each other. It was the resolution on the rights of racial and ethnic minorities, which had been rewritten by the third of the delegates who were Black, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian American. It is important to note that these minorities were represented at the conference from one and a half to three times their occurrence in the general population. Gloria Steinem had worked with these women through two days and a sleepless night, helping them rewrite the resolution so it described their common experiences while preserving the special issues of each group. Later Steinem would look back on those two days as the emotional highpoint of her writing career.20

Resolutions came up in alphabetical order, which put the ERA fairly early on the agenda. Mary Ann Krupsak, lieutenant-governor of New York and a member of the national commission, was conducting the plenary session when the ERA came up. In fact, as a national commission member, she had attended our Salt Palace meetings, where she was not well treated. Krupsak called for the “aye’s,” and after an overwhelming vote in favor there were jubilant surges in the aisles and around the hall. Wisconsin delegates carried their banner, “Women’s Rights, American as Apple Pie.” Krupsak then turned the gavel over to her vice-chair, Esther Landa of Utah, who called for order. Esther was able to get the delegates back into their seats and called for the “no” vote, which was small. She brought down Susan B. Anthony’s gavel, as she announced that the resolution favoring the ERA passed. The Smithsonian Institution had loaned the gavel that Anthony used at the 1896 conference on woman suffrage.

As expected, the other two most controversial issues were reproductive choice and sexual preference, which fortunately came toward the end of the alphabet, when some people were getting tired. Both resolutions passed. It was a historic moment when Betty Friedan, who had long argued that endorsing lesbian rights would hurt the women’s movement, took a microphone to announce that lesbians are entitled to civil rights. After the conference we heard dire warnings that the issues of abortion and homosexual rights would be associated with ERA and prevent the ERA from getting the final three states needed for ratification. This would prove prophetic.

There were delightful moments at the conference: Great pleasure when the torch came in that had been carried twenty-six hundred miles from Seneca Falls, New York, through fourteen states, by runners who
began September 29. They wore light blue T-shirts with “Women on the Move” above the IWY dove. We bought T-shirts for ourselves, and over the next few years on the day that I discussed the Houston meetings in women’s studies class, I wore that T-shirt. On the stand at Houston were illustrious women, including the presidents’ wives, Rosalynn Carter, Betty Ford, and Lady Bird Johnson. Among the luminaries who spoke were Barbara Jordan, Margaret Mead, and Jean Stapleton.

It was a colorful conference with tri-cornered hats worn by delegates from Washington D.C., Hawaiians in colorful long gowns, Californians waving yellow neck scarves, New Yorkers holding up apples. There were balloons and lapel pins of great variety. At various locations we saw women’s art displays, women’s studies meetings and materials, job placement booths, and a film festival. In the exhibition hall, Utah was the only state with two separate exhibits. The one organized by our IWY coordinating committee, with funds from the Utah Endowment for the Arts, showed a slide tape of women in Utah history. The exhibit set up by the elected delegation had brochures about Utah today, and flyers stating their position on national issues.

We were in meetings for a long time on Saturday. After the morning session, Anne, Sandra, and I went out to lunch, but then we returned and remained in the Coliseum from one until nearly midnight. Rumor had it that the radical right from the Astroarena were milling around the Coliseum, and we should keep our seats. This later turned out to be exaggerated.  

Gail Sheehy has compared the leadership and behavior at the conference with those of the counter rally held at the Astroarena. She wrote that the anti-feminists were a pro-family and pro-life coalition. “The signal feature of the audience was its white-bread homogeneity. . . . The striking feature of the leaders was that most of them were men. The only two Black faces noticeable in the entire assemblage were also up on the stage.” Sheehy described Robert MacNeil’s interview with Eleanor Smeal and Phyllis Schlafly for the MacNeil/Lehrer TV Report. MacNeil surprised both of them with a national Roper poll showing that only 20 percent of those polled identified with the anti-ERA movement and with Phyllis Schlafly. Smeal, who was president of NOW, thought for a moment and then smiled, because that was the percentage of opinion at the conference. Schlafly spent five minutes berating MacNeil, Lehrer, and the Roper poll. Afterwards, MacNeil was livid. “I’ve been reporting for many, many years,” he said, his voice shaking with contempt, “and I just want to tell you that’s one of the cheapest shots I’ve ever heard. I
respect your right to say your piece, but there was a lot of meat in that poll, and we didn’t get to it because of the time you took for your cheap accusations.”

In contrast to Schlafly, who epitomized anti-feminism, Bella Abzug was a guiding light. As congresswoman from New York she, along with Patsy Mink of Hawaii, had gained congressional support for Public Law 94-167, which funded the state conferences. I first saw Abzug before the national conference in Houston began, when she came in, through a light drizzling rain, with the runners who carried the torch. Someone said, when Abzug joined the run for the last couple of blocks, “Slow down, Bella can’t keep up.” But she more than kept up on the Coliseum platform, whether conducting or just sitting. At one point she lost her glasses and was poking about in her things and pattering her pockets, when a Texas delegate motioned that they were lodged on top of her hat. A ripple of laughter went through the audience as Bella reached up, dislodged the glasses, and grinned. Her hats were her trademark at a time when women rarely wore hats.

Two years later, Abzug spoke on our campus, at convocation, which was held every Thursday in the large auditorium of the Fine Arts building. Before she went on stage, I urged a strong pitch for ERA. She did make a strong pitch—not that it did much good, because faithful Mormon sentiment was strongly against. Faculty member Dan Jones arranged for Abzug to speak to his large political science class and invited me to come, a pleasant enough invitation except that he warned me not to start controversy by speaking out in the question period. Oddly enough, Dan asked me for a bit of information in the question period. I gave the answer. No controversy resulted.

Abzug chaired the National Advisory Commission on Women, created after the Houston meetings to advise President Jimmy Carter on legislation coming out of the National Plan of Action, which consisted of the twenty-five resolutions, ranging from arts to welfare, and passed at the Houston conference. But Abzug proved too outspoken for Carter, and he replaced her with Marjorie Bell Chambers, national president of AAUW.

I heard Chambers speak at Weber State College in Ogden when she said it was hopeless to pursue ERA in Utah and advised our AAUW branches to drop the effort. “If you must work for ERA,” she said briskly, “go join the League of Women Voters.” Here was the sensitive matter of the relationship of a national organization to its local members. AAUW had played an excellent coordinating role at the Houston conference and continued nationally to support all twenty-five resolutions.
eggs were not in one basket because ERA was only one of those resolutions, and feminism would persist along many fronts.

**Sex and Gender in the Social Sciences**

On campus our women’s studies program found a home in the College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (HASS) when Dean William F. Lye offered us secretarial help, drawers in a filing cabinet, and funding for leaflets listing our courses. How pathetic, looking back, were those little bits of help for which we felt so grateful.

At the meeting where the amenities were offered, I was elected chair of the women’s studies committee. We voted to accept the amenities, and we decided to try for a research grant from the Women’s Educational Equity Act Program administered by the U.S. Department of Education. Dean Lye encouraged seeking such a grant and promised equipment, space, and other help if we got one. This act is another example of a national resource that could be used to make local headway in the women’s movement and in women’s studies. Grants were the coin of legitimacy in higher education, as well as sanctions such as those of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act and Title IX of educational amendments to the act, which created affirmative action programs.

Over the summer we persuaded Judy Gappa and Jan Pearce to be codirectors of the project and major authors of the proposal. I wrote the justification, and Glenn Wilde, associate dean of HASS, worked out budget details. Our intent was to get women’s issues into introductory courses in history, political science, and economics. Current classes would be reviewed, and then guidelines created for suggested curriculum content, and for making classroom interaction more equitable.

In April we received a Women’s Educational Equity Act grant for $94,000, the largest grant the College of HASS had ever received. We were astonished when the Political Science and History Departments refused to participate in our project to mainstream women’s issues. They assailed us in a joint department meeting, saying that if they let our representative sit in on their courses to look at course content and teaching methods, then they would have to let the John Birchers do it too. They never did come aboard. According to them we were a threat to academic freedom. We didn’t argue. We simply asked the Sociology and the Psychology Departments if they would participate instead, and they said yes. The Economics Department had said yes from the very beginning.
The Sociology and Psychology Departments each appointed a graduate student to survey recent introductory texts, but the Economics Department was not so accommodating, so I did it myself. That was fine because I had the time, and I was wondering why it was so hard to bring women’s issues into that particular field. I thought that reading current introductory texts might give me some clues.26

Codirectors Gappa and Pearce created a national advisory task force with a distinguished scholar from each field: Barbara B. Reagan, professor of economics, Southern Methodist University; Nancy F. Russo, administrative office for women’s programs of the American Psychological Association; and Barrie Thorne, associate professor of sociology at Michigan State University. Also on this task force were two USU people: James P. Shaver, director of the Bureau of Educational Research in the College of Education; and Abelina N. Megill, director of special services for disadvantaged students. Marilynette Glatfelter, psychologist in the USU counseling service, and I, as an economist, were special consultants.

The task force and consultants met together on our campus in October 1979 and again in May of the next year, to discuss how to create gender sensitivity through course content and classroom interaction. These were tremendously exciting meetings. Barrie observed to me, with satisfaction, that Jim Shaver was not a sexist. I agreed with her.

By 1980 the guidelines were written and ready to be field tested. Judy Gappa had accepted a position as associate provost at San Francisco State University and arranged for testing to be done in eight colleges and universities in California. By December the testing was complete and the project took the final form of three loose leaf notebooks, one for sociology, one for psychology, and one for microeconomics. Each bore the title Sex and Gender in the Social Sciences: Reassessing the Introductory Course.27

The material on classroom interaction was the same in all three documents. The difference lay in suggested curriculum content. The content pages contained the best references that the task force knew, fitted into major topics of each field. In spite of Barbara Reagan’s and my valiant attempt to pull together feminist content for microeconomics, it was obvious that the disciplines of sociology and psychology were more open to women’s issues than economics. The sociology curriculum covered ninety-two pages; psychology, forty-eight pages; and microeconomics, only twenty-five. Even before we undertook this Women’s Educational Equity Act project, the professions of sociology
and psychology made position statements on sex and gender, but such a statement did not occur in the economics profession until 1990.  

Why was economics so far behind in this respect? The answer is complex. For one thing the percentage of women in the field was low. Also, economics claimed to be more scientific than other social sciences, but this claim hid subtle discrimination which eventually would be unveiled along with outright sexist bias and neglect. And economics was dominated by one theory, the neoclassical, whereas sociology and psychology had many conflicting paradigms, theories, epistemologies, and methods. They were less bounded as disciplines and therefore more permeable.

Wynne’s Death

It was a day in November when we finished writing the Women’s Educational Equity proposal. Judy Gappa dropped me off at my house, stopping to join me where Wynne was busy planting daffodil and tulip bulbs under our front windows. He leaned on his shovel and the three of us visited together, unaware that Wynne would not live to see the tulips emerge the next spring. He came home ill from a trip to the Middle East in December, was diagnosed in late January as having cancer of the liver, and died February 15, 1979, at the age of seventy. Some of the family had come home for Christmas, but we did not know then how serious his condition was. Later each of our sons and daughters came and stayed for a time with me in Salt Lake City where he was hospitalized.

We were staggered by Wynne’s death. I ached emotionally and physically. Yet I knew that hard work would get me through the shock better than anything else, and I knew that Wynne would not want me to go to pieces. His daffodils and tulips bloomed in the spring, a brave blooming against remnants of snow.

The first year after Wynne’s death was rough for me, but letters went back and forth and I visited with various members of the family. I especially appreciated the October and May task force meetings when Barrie came to campus.

Sonia Johnson and the ERA

Sonia Johnson was twelve years old when her family moved to the First Ward of Logan. We moved to the First Ward three years later, and we, too, attended the LDS Church located just across the street from us,
a church of red brick with white pillars on its wide front porch. The chapel has high arched windows, and at the front is Everett Thorpe’s painting of a blue-gowned pioneer woman holding a baby. She stands beside a covered wagon that has a patchwork quilt smoothed over the bed inside. Seagulls circle above, and in the distance are gatherers of wheat. I always thought how very tired the woman looks, but Sonia saw more. Her poem about this woman ends: “and you, my pioneer sister/ with your grave and steady eyes/ who knew so well what there was to fear/ and feared not.”

When we moved to the First Ward, I began teaching the Sunday School class for young people. Sonia was in this class, and I found her warm and unusually intelligent. After her marriage she lived various places. It was while she was living in Virginia that the drama began that would sweep her along toward excommunication.

Her father, Alvin Harris, phoned me one evening to tell me that Sonia was on television. This regarded her verbal exchange with Senator Orrin Hatch in Washington, D.C. The Salt Lake Tribune of August 5, 1979, carried this story, which I paraphrased in a family letter.

Sonia maintained that a substantial number of female members of the Mormon Church oppose the church’s mandated opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment. They listed Sonia as being from Sterling, Virginia. Hatch said, ‘You’ll have to agree that in the Mormon Church almost 100 percent of the women are against the ERA.’

Sonia: ‘Oh my goodness, I don’t have to admit that. It’s simply not true.’

Hatch: ‘Yes it is. I’d be surprised if the Mormon women who are for ERA would constitute one-tenth of one percent.’

They argued back and forth and Mrs. Johnson said she represents a loosely organized ‘underground’ group called ‘Mormons for ERA’ which has considerable support among Mormon women around the country. Many are willing to provide financial assistance but want to remain anonymous because they are afraid of what the church will do to them.

Subcommittee chairman Senator Birch Bayh asked Mrs. Johnson whether she expected difficulty within the Mormon Church because of her strong statements on behalf of the ERA. ‘I hope there won’t be,’ she replied. ‘So do I,’ Bayh said . . .
Mormons for ERA grew even as LDS church spokesmen variously indicated that women would, and then would not, lose their temple recommends if they joined the organization. The *Salt Lake Tribune* of November 27, 1979, carried a large advertisement with 258 names on it, which said, in various sizes of print and capitals:

This week we’re thankful for our American freedom. Next week we might not be so lucky . . .

On December 1, in Sterling, Virginia, Dr. Sonia Johnson will be tried in a Mormon Bishop’s Court—a proceeding which could result in her excommunication. Sonia’s bishop has charged her with influencing people to move away from the church’s counsel, hampering church missionary effort and spreading false doctrine. It is stated that Sonia’s words and actions on the Equal Rights Amendment are undermining the support of the Prophet.

Sonia is only speaking her conscience!

In denying free agency for Sonia, the Bishop’s Court threatens the First Amendment freedom for all Mormons. When this freedom is suppressed by any group in our society, it affects everyone. Sonia doesn’t want to leave her church. Nor will she abandon her principle. We believe she shouldn’t have to make that choice. We urge the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints to examine the issues in this case and

Exonerate Sonia Johnson.

The Following People Support the Review of the Sonia Johnson Case:

Then followed 258 names. Mine was one of them.\(^{32}\)

Obviously we and other defenders of Sonia carried no weight with the church authorities. On December 1, Sonia Johnson was excommunicated. The next day a hundred people rallied in Salt Lake City at the federal building. Esther Landa was a particularly strong speaker, indicating among other arguments that many women’s rights advocates across the country were outraged that Sonia was denied her right to freedom of speech or freedom of expression.\(^{33}\)

Sonia wrote eloquently of her excommunication, and so did Linda Sillitoe and Paul Swenson in their article for *Utah Holiday*, which included a touching picture of Sonia, with her mother on one side and Esther Peterson on the other clasping her protectively on that bitter cold
night in Virginia, on their way to the trial. Sonia appealed, but the First Presidency in Salt Lake City turned down her appeal on June 30, 1980.

One evening three months later, I had a phone call from Sonia saying she would like to speak at USU and would do it without the regular fee. “People in Logan think I am of the devil,” she said, “but if they can listen to me, they might find out that they are mistaken. I would like an opportunity to speak in my home town.” So I approached a student body officer and a faculty member who were on the committee that arranged convocations, but they were not interested in facilitating any appearance of Sonia Johnson. USU might be a public institution but it has always been obvious to me that it listens to official Mormondom. Sonia was persona non grata. The support that I needed came from the women’s movement on campus. We decided that I would arrange for a place, and on the stand would be Patricia Gardner, Marilyn Glatfelter, and me. One of our strong pro-ERA Mormon women offered to sit with us, but I said no, because I didn’t want to jeopardize the high regard that Mormons had for her, and Mormons were essential to her work. I was inactive in the LDS church.

I wrote my family that Sonia Johnson blitzed Cache Valley. I was with her for two days. I introduced her to the Presbyterian adult Sunday school class on Sunday morning. Because her folks lived just across the street from the Presbyterian Church, and slightly east, we only had to walk a short distance.

Earlier there had been an article in Savvy magazine (women’s executives’ magazine) written by Chris Rigby Arrington. The Rigbys lived across the street west from the Presbyterian church. The article was about Sonia, and Sonia’s mother loaned me her copy, so I could copy it for Chris’s mother and for my own family. It included a description of fast meeting in the First Ward.

On Monday I took Sonia to two different sociology classes. We had lunch with several women feminists on campus and a woman reporter for the Herald Journal. At twenty minutes to five in the afternoon, I picked up Sonia and her mother, and another car took her son and brother Mike and her sister. We arrived at the business building to find the business auditorium jammed and people out in the halls. Fortunately it had a good loudspeaker system, and those in the halls could hear. As tried and true Mormons got offended (after the first hour) and left, others slid into their seats, so the seats were always full during the two hours we were there, with people still seated on the floor of the carpeted aisles.

I introduced Sonia by saying I had always believed in women’s rights, giving something of my own Mormon background and of my
kids growing up in the First Ward where Sonia grew up. In the early 1970s the women’s movement came to USU. I had asked the counseling and testing service why they had no women on the staff, and they said, “Women like to be counseled by men.” (Laughter.) Then I said Marilyne Glatfelter was the first woman to join their staff. Marilyne, bless her heart, made trips from down in front where we were, up the aisle into the hall, to get a paper cup of drinking water for Sonia. It was terribly hot in the auditorium. I also introduced Pat Gardner, who initiated women in literature classes and had succeeded me as chair of the Women’s Studies Committee. Then I said that we three women faculty took the responsibility for this public meeting, and as women who believe in women’s rights we wanted the audience to hear from another woman who believed in women’s rights.

The audience was obviously split. The anti-Sonia forces tried to bait her during the question period, but she was too skilled for them. The beginning question asked for the wording of the ERA, and Sonia who, I had discovered, carried it on a card in her purse was going to go over and get her purse, but I rose to my feet, took the microphone and quoted it slowly and effectively from memory. (Applause). A good thing I did, because she would have broken the spell she had cast if she went as far as her chair and purse. Sonia was absolutely the best speaker I had heard in my life. Three male political scientists returned to their department after hearing her, still spellbound. (So maybe the trip to chair and purse would have been all right).

The verbal opposition was mostly male. The pro-Sonia was mostly female hand clapping. There were some anti-Sonia hecklers who whispered and made remarks but were promptly shut up by those who said, “Be quiet, we want to hear what she has to say.” After the first hour I saw a number of older people leave, obviously offended. Sonia told about the Virginia Mormons defeating ratification of the ERA and simultaneously defeating four pieces of state legislation women had worked hard for. One was a bill that gave a woman who had never worked property rights on her husband’s death. Another was police power to pursue fathers who had abandoned their families and were not paying child support. These bills went down the drain.35

The best pictures of Sonia appeared on the front page of the Logan High School newspaper, *The Grizzly*.36 Sonia had graduated from Logan High and was invited to speak there. The pictures and the news story reported her visit respectfully.

A lot of things happened in the next few years, but to make a long story short, Sonia tried to get on the ballot of the Citizen’s Party in Utah.
for possible election as president of the United States. I signed her petition when Carol Clay brought it around. Sonia needed only three hundred names, most of them from Utah, Salt Lake, and Weber counties.

The county clerks in Utah and Weber counties did not verify the signatures and take the petitions to the Capitol, a fact discovered too late. In our county, the clerk promptly phoned his friends to tell them who had signed the petition. Ida Harris, Sonia’s mother, was incensed because this was a breach of confidence that could cause bishops to call people on the carpet for signing the petition. Carol Clay phoned the county clerk and spoke harshly enough that he phoned back his friends to apologize.37

The Equal Rights Amendment died, unratified by the needed three states, in June 1982.38

My Mormon Connection

In spite of being a fifth generation Mormon, I left the LDS Church in 1989. Barrie had been excommunicated a few years earlier. She suspects it was because of the audacity of her book Rethinking the Family: Some Feminist Questions.39 My other daughters, my sons, and I requested to have our names removed from the membership rolls. This was done by our local bishops. In the 1990s the church excommunicated and disfellowshipped a number of liberal intellectuals and feminists, and that’s precisely what we are.40 Barrie says we are “ethnic Mormons” because we have a warm appreciation of our Mormon heritage, but we strongly disagree with certain aspects of Mormon theology, and we require more freedom of thought than today’s LDS authorities permit.

Without trauma I moved from the Mormon Church and joined the First Presbyterian Church of Logan because of their long history of working for good causes, because they encourage freedom of thought and expression, and because I have always had close friends there. I find it possible to be both an “ethnic Mormon” and a Presbyterian. My friends in the First and Fifth Wards are still my friends, especially those who were rearing their children when Wynne and I were rearing ours.

The continuing tie between the Mormon church and the Republican party is troubling. Thad Box, who is retired from USU, writes a column for the local Herald Journal. After writing a column on the tie between church and political party, he was surprised that he received no negative comment. The explanation seems to be that Mormons are so used to sustaining church authorities that they carry this habit over into their politics.41