Madame Chair
Westwood, Richard

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Over the holidays—from December 15, 1969 to January 15, 1970—my husband Dick and I visited our daughter Beth and our son-in-law Vern Davies in balmy Hawaii. Our festivities included attending a New Year’s Eve party; and then, on New Year’s morning, the telephone rang.

A voice said, “Hello, Jean, this is George.”

“George who?”

“George McGovern.”

“Oh, are you here in Hawaii for some reason?”

“No, I’m calling you from Washington.”

“What for?”

“We had a meeting of all my major advisors over the holidays to decide if I was going to run for president. We decided to go ahead. We want to start out in the spirit of our reforms, and would like to have a man and a woman cochair our campaign committee. So we decided we would ask John Douglas (a creative Washington lawyer and former congressman) to be chair, and we would like to know if you would be his cochair.”

After a stunned silence, I said, “Well, I’m not sure what that means, but I’m honored to be asked. I think I had better check with my husband, the governor, and our senator first.” (I was still a good establishment Democrat, not to mention a devoted wife.)

George said, “I want to announce it in the next couple of days. Can you call them and get back to me?”

“George, it’s New Year’s Day. I don’t think I can get them today. But I’ll try.” So I did.

Dick said yes immediately, once again amazing me at how liberated he was for a man of his day, not only allowing but actively helping me with whatever I wanted to do.

I called both Senator Frank (Ted) Moss and Governor Calvin L. Rampton in Utah. I knew Ted liked McGovern. They often teamed up
in the Senate with the apparent frontrunner for the Democrats’ nominee, Edmund Muskie. Ted supported Muskie, but he was not utterly committed anywhere. Regardless, he thought I definitely should go to work for McGovern. He was pleased because he knew of no other woman, or Utahn, who had headed a nominating campaign.

Rampton was far less impressed with McGovern, and he heavily supported Muskie. But, he said, “Nobody from Utah has ever been asked to do anything of this magnitude in a primary campaign, and there’s no way you can turn it down. It will be a benefit to you and to our state party, to have somebody in that kind of a national position.”

When I accepted McGovern’s invitation, I could not anticipate all the changes 1970 would bring. Dick and I would pelt our last crop of mink on our ranch that autumn. We lost our foreman, Dick Wilkes, to an automobile accident, and my husband had never fully recovered from a fall, which aggravated his arthritis and aged him.

Vern, too, was rehabilitating, enduring a series of surgeries to repair his right arm following shrapnel injuries received while serving as an officer in Vietnam. The four of us would spend another holiday season in Hawaii before the army awarded Vern a medical retirement, and he and Beth moved to Utah.

Those future changes seemed to gather and disperse like the cloud patterns outside the airplane windows as Dick and I flew home. Foremost in my mind, of course, was the call from McGovern. I was still stunned that he would ask me, an experienced party worker who hailed from an unfortunately small state. Later I learned that he had shielded me from the reactions of other party workers as I shouldered that important position.

Born on November 22, 1923, I grew up where vast coal deposits darken the hills. Price is the county seat of coal-mining Carbon County, Utah, and far from the sophistication of metropolitan culture. Even in one of the state’s most ethnically diverse areas, I felt the pervasive influence of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (usually shortened to LDS or Mormon). While my parents were not overly devout, much of our life as children did center on the church and its activities.

The church is run by a male hierarchy and a lay priesthood, which includes virtually all males age twelve and above. Later, when all but the most authoritative religions began to consider opening their hierarchies to women, the Mormon leadership launched a covert and effective campaign to defeat the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. Resistance by a few Mormon women near the nation’s capital sparked a
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long-running curiosity in the media regarding Mormon practices toward women. Like fundamentalist Christians and certain other authoritative religions, Mormonism teaches that a woman’s chief role is to be a partner and mate to her husband and a mother to their children. Then, obedient families may reunite after death—literally living happily ever after. Yet, hailing from coal-mining Price and a conservative church with a powerful pioneer heritage, I became a symbol of the independent feminist.

I could not deny that I was a born nurturer, desiring love, marriage, and close friendships with other couples. I wanted to be a good daughter, wife, and mother, which meant struggling to become a good laundress, janitor, cook, bargain hunter, seamstress, hostess, companion, and lover.

Yet my nurturing self was matched by a fierce desire to be myself, to achieve for myself. I wanted to learn all there was to know. I wanted to help decide what was best, not only for myself but for the wider world. I hoped to contribute to the rise of leaders and to the shaping of ideas through writing and speaking, as well as participating in politics and in my community.

Guilt dogged me when one or the other side of my persona dominated my time. Working with Dr. O’Connell, I finally recognized a link between nurturing and self-realization, and I saw how fiercely I wanted each component. Put simply, if you do not feel good about yourself, you cannot adequately care about others.

How much, I then wondered, did my physical health reflect my inner conflicts? Prior to my strokes, I experienced several serious illnesses, beginning with rheumatic fever and an overactive thyroid in my early teens. I suffered from toxemia with my first pregnancy, which led later to other “female problems,” requiring a medical abortion and finally a hysterectomy, all during my twenties. Ten years later I experienced a four-month siege by the most serious form of hepatitis. Then came twenty years of good health, with only a tendency to pick up the annual variety of flu.

My healthy phase ended in spring 1974 when I fell and suffered a double concussion, entering a coma for several weeks. That concussion foreshadowed the strokes, but so did my lifelong inability to rest long enough to fully recover. Later Dr. O’Connell helped me see how I drew on my innate stamina and my impatience with anything that interfered with my plans. Inevitably I sprinted in metaphorical marathons long before my doctors gave permission for me to reenter the race.

The first minor stroke arrived in 1982. The complete paralysis on my left side eased after forty-eight hours, and my neurologist placed me in
physical therapy right away. My expectations for recovery were high. I could only walk a hundred yards when I left the hospital. As the winter deepened I practiced walking farther and, by spring, I was making two miles a day.

But I kept having momentary blackouts, so I was not allowed to drive. Now, that’s depressing! Finally I hired a driver. More difficult was explaining my frequent waterworks by citing the frustrations of poor health. Then, at summer’s end, Dick and I joined dear friends to relax for four days on a houseboat on gorgeous Lake Powell in southeastern Utah. The outing over blue waves between red sandstone cliffs was a disaster. I picked at Dick until I drove everyone to distraction although they tried to be patient and sympathetic.

On the way home, I told Dick, “I can’t keep on this way. I need either a different neurologist, or a psychologist, or both.”

Our family doctor immediately sent me for a consultation at the heart and stroke rehabilitation program of St. Luke’s Behavioral Health Center in Phoenix. I went home with their long questionnaire and awoke two mornings later with a familiar numbness on one side of my face and around my lips, a sensation that preceded blackouts. But this time I ended up back in the hospital with another small stroke. Now I was really depressed!

The cause of the strokes remained unknown; I had neither high blood pressure nor any heart problems. So the doctors decided to perform more computerized axial tomography (CAT) and magnetic resonance images (MRI) scans, which turned up a pituitary tumor, a possible cause for the strokes and certainly another problem.

Later, Dr. O’Connell helped me unmask other well-disguised suspects. She combined a real understanding of the feminist movement with plentiful common sense. Together we examined my touchstones and turning points against the backdrop of momentous change in the nation. Despite later health issues, which required a series of surgeries, my depression vanished. My career and my close relationships flourished, side by side. As my mother’s daughter, I should have known they could coexist.

My mother, Nettie Potter, was born near Price, in Sunnyside, on April 26, 1903, the daughter of Mormon converts who had emigrated from England and Scotland. She grew up in a devout home but, as an adult, paid little attention to the church’s stricter tenets. However she insisted that her children participate regularly in ward meetings and functions. Her mother always quoted to her, “Sunday’s child is full of grace, wise, and bright, and fair of face.” No wonder Nettie grew up a giggler,
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outgoing and self-confident. Grandmother Potter insisted that all five of her daughters learn to sew, cook, clean, and entertain properly—achieving the ladylike graces. Grandfather, on the other hand, insisted that his girls learn some kind of salable skill. Mother became a beautiful seamstress, but she sewed gifts for those she loved, thinking it demeaning to be a paid seamstress.

During her high school years she worked as a bookkeeper, and she later clerked in department and specialty women’s stores. Most of her married life, she worked outside the home. She sold dresses and then sold dress materials, instructing others. But none of her students’ creations compared favorably with those she sewed for her daughters.

Mother cut her hair short, wore flapper clothes, and loved to dance, to play the piano, and especially to sing, even performing in public.
She supported woman suffrage, but so did the Mormon church in those days. Mother read more than most of her friends, but also enjoyed attending gossip-rich sewing bees and card games. She even had the chance to go to college, an opportunity not often available to young women of her time. Had she been interested in academics, she could have been a top student.

Mother was also one of the town’s better cooks, bottling countless jars of fruit, tomatoes, and spring beans each autumn. During the early years of the Depression, Mother rose every morning at five o’clock to bake in our old coal stove six pies for the drugstore. Then she roused the rest of the family. In the cellar, Mother and Daddy brewed root beer—and the stronger kind!

Grandfather Potter hated the mines and, in England, had studied to become a minister. Since the Mormons had a lay clergy, Grandpa had to work in the mines initially. He soon became a town clerk, and then the juvenile officer, and finally an accountant.

My grandparents built one of the first big houses in Price, two stories tall with seven bedrooms. All our aunts, uncles, and cousins visited on holidays, and they all loved to sing and recite poetry, especially Shakespeare and Scotland’s own Bobbie Burns.

My father, Frances Marion (Dick) Miles, grew up in Huntington, a few miles away from Price. His ancestors had been Puritans who joined with Roger Williams in settling New England. The Miles family questioned the precepts of established religions and converted to Mormonism, joining the westward trek to what became the Utah Territory. Settled in Huntington, Grandfather Miles established a freight business, hauling goods northeast to Fort Duchesne, which later became the Uinta-Ouray Reservation, an enforced home for three bands of Northern Utes, including two bands native to Colorado.

Dad said the Miles men fought in every war the United States waged, yet made it a practice to question both church and government and decide issues for themselves. Dad said that Mormonism was a good religion, offering its members the right to sustain those called to lead them. The church taught free agency and did not impose original sin. You paid the consequences for your own sins, Dad said, not for sins committed from the Garden of Eden forward.

Dad had observed the church’s struggle with the federal government over polygamy, which sent some families fleeing to Mexico or Canada. He felt that the Mormon leaders’ final abandonment of two defining principles—plural marriage and a communal economy—allowed statehood
but altered the church irrevocably. It turned inward, Dad said, and became too “hidebound.” Because Dad smoked, drank, gambled, and loved high living, he did not feel welcome at church meetings and functions, usually attending only if we children performed. Nevertheless, he believed in the “original thought” behind Mormonism.

When Dad was small, the railroad bought out Grandpa Miles’s freighting franchise, so Grandpa moved his equipment to Arizona, where sprouting Mormon colonies needed freighters. Grandma Miles refused to move anyplace hotter in the summertime than central Utah, so she and their children stayed behind. Her parents had been sent by the church to help develop the Huntington area, and after Grandpa left Utah, the church helped Grandma rear her family. Dad was born when his mother was suffering what was then called a nervous breakdown, due to Grandpa abandoning her. Dad watched Grandmother struggle to keep the farm and her children. He graduated from the sixth grade just before Grandma lost her struggle for independence and married a man that Dad didn’t much like.

Dad moved in with his grandparents for a while and then joined his brother Sam, who owned a combined barber shop and pool hall in Price. Dad attended school part time, cleaned the shop, dealt cards in the pool hall, and slept above the barber shop. Understandably he became a father who was determined that his daughters would learn skills to sustain their independence and that we would be as well educated as we wanted to be.

Sam moved to California at the beginning of World War I, and soon Dad enlisted in the army. After the war Dad tried chicken farming but it didn’t work out, so he returned to Price. He began taking meals at the local café where Mother worked after school. After a year of acquaintance, he asked Grandpa Potter for permission to marry Nettie but was turned down because he was a gambler.

Dad quit gambling and went to Salt Lake City to barber school, even as Grandma and Grandpa Potter sent Mother, ten years younger than Dad, north to Brigham Young University in Provo. Over the Christmas holidays, Mother and Dad met in Salt Lake City and married—Mom’s one act of rebellion against her concerned parents. Eventually the newlyweds moved back to Price, bought some land from Grandpa Potter, and built a house. Their elopement forgiven, Mom and Dad grew close to all the Potter family.

I was reared as the Mormon version of a small-town WASP (white Anglo-Saxon Protestant) with the strong influence of Grandfather and
Grandmother Potter. I also intuited a type of non-militant feminism as I observed my mother’s life and heard both parents’ stories. I grew up with siblings—a sister and two brothers—as well as many friends. I felt shy, for my sister was much prettier, and I had spells of ill health. Still, I excelled in my school subjects and took drama lessons. In the fourth grade I bet Jerry Olsen that President Herbert Hoover (who I felt could solve the nation’s economic woes, given enough time) would beat Franklin Roosevelt. Jerry and Roosevelt won.

My best friend Jean Gunderson and I wrote and put on plays throughout our junior high school years. In high school, we both joined the debate team and performed in plays, but Jean was popular with the boys and with the elite clique of girls, and I was not. Our friends in junior high school were of every nationality and religion, and I stuck with a diverse group all through high school. I wrote for the school newspaper and soon became editor. By then I had read everything I could find about FDR and his programs, and I also tuned in to his radio speeches. Radio was sufficient in those days, for all around me I could see the devastating effects of the Great Depression.

The mines began laying off workers and moving them out of company housing or charging them high rents. The company stores no longer offered credit for groceries. I heard Mother and Dad discussing the plight of poor women, arrested trying to steal coal from the slag dumps to keep their families warm. In countless ways, life in our mining community worsened. Half the population worked in the mines, and the other half depended on the miners to stimulate business. Unions gained power despite stern opposition from the LDS church leaders, who allied with mine owners and managers. Joining a union presented a dilemma, for the miners feared being laid off and then blackballed at other mines. Many could not decide which they wanted more: the security of regular paychecks or the long-range benefits of union membership.

I remember one day when the mine administrators joined police in using tear gas and billy clubs against the striking miners, who staged a protest on the streets of Price. The demonstration flared into a riot serious enough that police officers made us stay inside the school building until late that night.

J. Bracken Lee, who ran an insurance agency, showed several families the photographs he took during the riot. Brack later became mayor of Price, governor of Utah, and then ran an unsuccessful campaign for the United States Senate. With each campaign his conservatism tightened until he finally led a tax protest.
Brack and Dad were boyhood friends during the time Dad lived with Sam. Their group enlisted in the army together during World War I, and during the 1920s, they all lived for baseball. Mother and Dad couldn’t afford to travel with the country club set that included Brack and his wife Margaret; but their daughter Helen, who lived with Brack’s parents a few doors down the street, became my close friend.

Years later, Republican attorneys cross-examined me in preparation for the Watergate lawsuit. They asked if I had ever worked for a Republican, and I said, “No, not that I remember.”

“Well, you did,” they accused. “You distributed literature when J. Bracken Lee ran for mayor of Price.”

I cracked up and said, “That shows you’re using the FBI to investigate for political purposes!” As a young girl, I had helped Helen pass out pamphlets supporting her father’s candidacy in a nonpartisan race.

Dad was a Democrat, but no postal employee other than the postmaster was allowed to show any partisanship. Mother’s family was Republican, but Grandfather Potter had once run for county clerk on the ticket of the Bull Moose Progressive Party. I found myself more sympathetic to the Democratic point of view and worshiped Roosevelt as a hero. As I saw the jobs provided by his programs appear in our county, I realized that many of my friends’ families benefitted greatly.

All my grandparents had lived long enough to recall the division of political parties during one of the Utah Territory’s hopeful campaigns for statehood, eventually achieved in 1896. Because Republican presidents oversaw the bitter struggles regarding polygamy, public schools, and secular voting, most Mormons disdained “the feds” by becoming devout Democrats. So when Utah needed to demonstrate a two-party population, some Mormon bishops designated Republicans and Democrats by using the church aisle as a divider. Others asked every second family to become Republican. In more ways than one, it was the Mormons’ obedience to church leaders that won statehood. Even as I worked in party politics fifty to eighty years later, most offices were won by a fifty-two to forty-eight majority, or by an even closer margin. The old, arbitrary family divisions remained.

The impression of polygamy held by outsiders was only partly true. Rather than suffering in the virtual slavery depicted in anti-Mormon books and films, many plural wives became teachers in their extended families or even in the school districts. Some went East to attend medical school; soon midwives birthed thousands of babies, especially in the outlying settlements. Some plural wives initiated home industry or clerked
in stores. Musicians, actresses, artists, and librarians also rose from the ranks of plural wives, while others joined their husbands’ labor on farms or in granaries. Overall, plural wives were respected members of the community rather than being labeled “outside the marrying kind.”

The Relief Society was formed in Nauvoo, Illinois, in 1842, an era when many women could not join any organization outside the home. In addition to caring for the sick, the bereaved, and the poor, the Relief Society sisters studied church doctrine and encouraged cultural activities. Schools, playhouses, poetry societies, choirs, and operatic groups flourished. From 1870 to 1877, the Utah Territory was one of only two states or territories in which women could vote. Congress revoked that right as part of the campaign against polygamy; it did not want plural wives tipping the elections by voting against the feds.

Even with statehood pending, women worked for suffrage. In 1889 they held a mass meeting and formally elected a territorial suffrage association. By 1893 sixteen county suffrage associations boasted a membership of two thousand; in addition, fifteen hundred women also belonged to the national Women’s Suffrage Association. Although women were barred from the state constitutional convention, held on March 3, 1895, they had laid the groundwork.

The statehood convention endorsed an article on elections and rights of suffrage, which read: “The rights of citizens of the State of Utah to vote and hold office shall not be abridged or denied on account of sex. Both male and female citizens of this state shall equally enjoy all civil, political, and religious rights and privileges.”

In 1904 Utah sent Elizabeth Cohen to a national convention, where she seconded the presidential nomination of William Jennings Bryant, becoming the first woman to voice an official motion. In short, Utah was not only the first state to grant men and women equal rights in the political parties, but it pressed for that same equality nationwide. By 1913 Utahns had elected women to fill county offices, an entire town board, and eight seats in the legislature. In addition, the first female superintendent of schools was elected in Utah.

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, the years when my mother grew up and married, middle-class women nationwide believed in suffrage and liberation. As the early gains were instituted by women from the Victorian tradition, they formed clubs and societies, asserting a right to study the arts. But that is not all they did. Some became active in abolishing slavery. Others supported efforts to ease the plight of “the under-classes,” that is minority, poor, and working-class
families. Utah women formed coalitions to ease restrictions on women whether they involved anything from property to sexuality.

For instance, the job of secretary became desirable, for it not only required “male” skills such as typing, shorthand, filing, and bookkeeping, but it also placed young women in the business environment where good marriages might occur. And making a good marriage remained the epitome of success even as the flapper image celebrated the ultra-feminine, ultra-sophisticated, and sexually free woman. Mother’s jobs as a bookkeeper, and her short hair and skirts, illustrated the national trends but so did her happy marriage.

Mother was luckier or pluckier than we realized growing up, for the Depression erased many of women’s gains. Mother and her friends felt they could be active in both the community and the workforce without jeopardizing their future marriages. This autonomy never threatened Mother’s desire for romance and partying. She still wanted to be respectable, to practice wifely skills, to be a good mother, and to be a good social companion to her husband, but saw no reason not to do it all.

During the Depression, many women who tried to work—even if their husbands were unemployed—were blamed for taking “men’s jobs.” Relief programs were primarily designed for men and openly discriminated against women. The key reform lay in the concept that a government should help to provide protection and relief, and this emerged partially from the earlier women’s agenda. But, with the government as a substitute, the mass women’s movement fell apart.

Women’s organized efforts in those Depression years were mainly seen within the union movement, for they worked wherever allowed by circumstances or their community. They patched or remade old clothes, grew and bottled vegetables and fruit, and dried meat—all the old housewifely skills. I saw Mother do all these things, but she worked outside the home as well. I didn’t possess the word “liberated” in those post-World War I years, but I knew how it looked and felt.

Even during the Depression, we girls learned that we could become nurses, bookkeepers, office managers, or bank tellers (a step above clerking), run a telephone switchboard, or serve food. Also, women could teach, even in colleges, but their realm was the humanities, not the sciences. (Even the women who taught gymnastics were considered a little odd.) A woman might succeed in the arts or in social work but she definitely trespassed boundaries if she pursued a career in medicine, law, or science. Most girls took a degree to become more “cultured” and to boost
their chances to marry boys on the rise; boys’ careers, of course, were limited only by talent or money. Even after so many decades, this has not completely changed.

My parents encouraged each of us to develop our talents fully. One sign of their advanced thinking was apparent in telling us “the facts of life” in a straightforward, natural manner. I brought most of my girl-friends to Mother to learn these things. Their mothers would not discuss the changes occurring in their daughters’ maturing bodies. We Miles kids knew the proper names for all our body parts, how each functioned, and what the consequences could be if we violated sexual standards.

The Price I grew up in was a liberal community, typical of Utah’s other mining towns, and I cherished the variety among my friends. One girlfriend’s mother, for instance, taught me to make spaghetti and ravioli. Our Greek friends brought us garden produce such as eggplant, zucchini squash, and artichokes long before they became staples in the mainstream diet. Basque sheepherder friends gave us a butchered spring lamb each year. The Scots, including Grandmother, cooked scones, while the English and Welsh favored Cornish pastries and roast beef, with either Yorkshire pudding or browned potatoes. Scandinavians, such as the Gundersons, specialized in fish stews.

My friends and I attended the bar mitzvah of Bob Gordon, Frieda’s younger brother, and other Jewish celebrations. We went to Christmas Mass at the Catholic church and enjoyed Greek Easter festivities. Jean Gunderson invited us to the Community Church occasionally to hear their wonderful young preacher. And my friends all came with me to weekly meetings of the Mutual Improvement Association, the teenage auxiliary of the LDS Church.

When I was a junior in high school, I met Dick Westwood, who had come to Price to attend the junior college. Soon we were “going steady.” The following year he attended an aircraft school in California and then worked in a San Diego defense plant. During my senior year, I dated other boys but only cared about Dick.

By the time I graduated, I had formulated most of my ideals and political philosophy. George Morgan, our debate coach and American problems teacher, insisted we find the facts behind the policies. During those years Hitler was ravaging Europe, and the horrors we saw on newsreels increased our patriotism and our devotion to democracy. Our history teacher taught us to be proud of our diverse backgrounds and heritages, to dislike bigots, and to pity and care for those who were shunned because of race, or who were poor and needed help.
I worked part time for the *Sun Advocate*, the town newspaper, and hung around the office to lay out our high school paper. The *Sun* featured local people and events—births, deaths, social gatherings, sports, and city council and county commission meetings. But it also ran stories on the national economy, covered the mines, businesses, government programs, farm prices, railroad and freight shipments, and union and anti-union issues. The *Sun* informed us of crimes and court procedures, and provided at least a short summary of major international and national news. The sense of impending war pervaded our lives. When war came, Carbon County changed forever. Many young people left for the army, the war plants, or schools in other states. Most came home only for occasional visits.

In September 1941, after I graduated from high school, Dick and I married at my great-aunt Marie’s home in San Diego. Our families were so poor that only my dad and Dick’s mother could accompany me westward on the bus. Nevertheless Mother and Dad made sure I first saw our family doctor to get a diaphragm and instructions on birth control,
as well as having the legally required blood tests. Not that this erudition did much good! I must have become pregnant on our wedding night since Rick was born one day before nine months elapsed.

When I was in high school, I longed to get out in the world. I had watched Dick struggle vainly to stay in school. Even with a scholarship, I could not afford to attend Stanford University in Palo Alto, California. My chance for higher education came later at Carbon College in Price, after we returned to Utah. As many did in the war years, I opted to get married first. I hoped to retain my own identity, to study, and to begin a serious writing career. Such dreams were not unusual for a girl from a small town, just emerging from the Depression.

We had no honeymoon since Dick worked six days a week. When I became pregnant right away, we had to move out of our first apartment because children were not allowed. Luckily we found some housing built for war workers and lived there during our four years in San Diego. I had kidney eclampsia when our son Rick was born, and he was sickly during his first few months, but then he filled out and was healthy. Two and a half years later, our daughter Beth was born.

Living in San Diego did not diminish our social life, for we got together often with our relatives and neighbors. Jean Gunderson and her parents had moved to San Diego, and Mother and Dad visited for a few weeks when our children were born. Dick’s brothers and cousins worked in the war plants, and they took turns living with us. My sister Shirley attended college at San Diego State University and lived with us one year.

We sometimes attended meetings at our LDS ward and, when Dick worked swing shift, we spent many mornings on the beach. I took classes at the YWCA, and studied English and political science at a satellite of the University of California in Los Angeles. The last year of the war, Jean and I worked part time in the office of Congresswoman Helen Gahagen Douglas, folding and stuffing envelopes. (Douglas served from 1945 to 1951 in Congress but was defeated by Nixon in a run for the Senate; in return, she awarded him the long-lasting moniker, “Tricky Dick.”) Equipped with a typewriter Dick bought me, plus a correspondence course in short story writing, I won a national Writer’s Digest contest.

In order to understand the challenges of writing fiction, Dick also produced a short story, featuring a boy who dreamed of running a fur farm. A few questions, and I realized that was Dick’s dream too. I found books and a monthly magazine on fur raising in the library and recognized some Utah names, so we wrote to several of them. Bruce and Peggy Hartman responded and recommended that we work on a
fox or mink ranch to see if we really liked fur farming before starting our own operation.

When the war ended, war industries began laying off employees. Dick’s job continued despite a reduction in employees from sixty thousand to about three thousand. Dick decided to leave anyway, so we packed up our little family and moved back to Utah. The Hartmans helped find Dick a job on a fox and mink farm in the southwest corner of the Salt Lake Valley. My prize money, combined with a loan from Dick’s brother Melvin, helped us purchase a small lot and house in West Jordan, close to the Hartmans’ place. We bought two bred female mink and boarded them at the Harmans’ ranch until we had pens of our own.

When we compared our finances with those of another young rancher, Gale Vernon, we realized how poor we really were. Gale worked on the Jenson ranch with Dick; he also received the full GI supplement, and his wife lived in Coalville with her parents. As a former war worker, Dick did not qualify for GI benefits, and he earned only $150 per month. Another problem trumped our inadequate income, for I began to have “female problems” with hemorrhaging. We decided we needed extra family support and moved to Price to live with my parents, renting our West Jordan property to Gale and Marguerite.

Back in Price, Dick worked five or six part-time jobs. Then his Uncle Vere decided to use his trucks to move houses up the canyon to urban areas. Homes had been built in Dragerton for coal miners during the war, and they now were selling to veterans. Before they could be moved, the houses must be split in half. In the spring Dick moved to Orem, north of Provo, where the houses were reassembled. Eventually the children and I joined Dick, settling into one of those homes set on blocks.

After we relocated to Utah County, my doctor continued my thyroid and hormone treatments until I suffered a serious hemorrhage. Then came the news that I was pregnant despite continued bleeding and treatments, not to mention using my diaphragm (far less effective than the package claimed). Back to Price I went, for bed rest and several blood transfusions per week in an attempt to save our baby. My parents cared for me as I followed this regimen from April until July.

Finally, more than halfway through gestation, Dick and I faced the choice of giving up the baby, or both the baby and I dying. (And that’s the way we thought and talked about him—our baby, not a fetus.) Even a medical abortion was considered shameful, for it countered Mormon principles and endangered a doctor’s reputation. However
state law decreed that if three doctors concurred that the baby probably would not survive and the mother surely would die, a pregnancy could be terminated.

Never had I felt more vulnerable, and the events that followed fueled years of nightmares. Our family doctor, so trusted throughout childhood, was now chief of staff at the local hospital; other doctors (also family friends) knew what we did not—that the chief was preoccupied by an affair with his nurse, and both of them were suspected of abusing certain available drugs. My doctor’s lack of concentration seemed apparent during my last round of transfusions, for I nearly died. At that point, the necessary three doctors confronted their chief, insisted that he abort our baby, and offered to sign the necessary papers.

My doctor gave in reluctantly and ordered a spinal anesthetic, commonly used for delivery by caesarean section. So I was awake as they opened my abdomen and discussed the removal of my baby boy, who was well-developed but compromised in certain ways. I was only twenty-four, and hearing their discussion was just too much. I began screaming and heard the anesthesiologist say, “I’m going to put her under whether you like it or not.” I woke up the next day.

My baby was gone, and yet I continued to hemorrhage. I was sent home, but in a few days returned for transfusions as I grew weaker and weaker. Finally the trio of doctors insisted that their chief perform a curettement and, when that didn’t work, a hysterectomy to stop the bleeding. This was drastic given my young age, but at that point I just wanted to live for my husband and our two young children. Even after the purported hysterectomy, the hemorrhaging continued.

Severe headaches, a complication of the spinal anesthetic, added to my misery; yet after weeks of bleeding and hurting, my doctor sent me home. I moved into the house Dick had been building in West Jordan and saw three different doctors in Salt Lake County. Each would call my doctor in Price for background information and then conclude I was hysterical (a primary reason given for removing women’s reproductive organs in earlier times).

At last a doctor in nearby Midvale tried to treat me for anemia and requested my records from the Price hospital. He learned that the records had mysteriously disappeared! Finally he got my parents to persuade one of the doctor trio to talk with him, by telephone—and off the record. A complete hysterectomy followed. By now I was twenty-six.

Post-menopausal hormone treatment was neither widely known nor available, as demonstrated by my extreme mood swings over the next few
years. I don’t know how Dick and the rest of my family survived my deep depressions. Dick and I quarreled because he could not understand why the operation had not cured me. He did not “believe in” psychiatry, and I felt I needed it; we were both unaware that hormone shifts were wreaking havoc with my mood.

All this profoundly affected my thoughts regarding a woman’s right to decide her medical options. My experiences also derailed my Mormon belief that a large family was a gift: a woman should give her husband and the world—no matter the cost to her own well-being. I shuddered for the tormented women who felt forced to seek illegal abortions, and I admired the doctors who had helped me at peril of being ostracized, or worse. Meanwhile the son we lost appeared for years in my nightmares. In today’s world I would not have had to carry him so close to term, but, given the current power of the Religious Right, emergency abortions may not remain legal for much longer.

Dick and I bought a larger lot in West Jordan and, over the next couple of years, we purchased surplus houses and barracks and remodeled them for sale. One barrack, when sliced open, was lined with knotty pine. We transformed it into quite a nice house, our home for the next twenty-seven years.

We also built a small mink run and moved our mink there; over time, the mink ranch expanded into a full-time operation for us both. I did the record keeping and accounting, and then donned heavy boots and gloves to take over when Dick was out of town, or during pelting. We made friends with other young ranchers and were asked to run the annual live mink show and publish a magazine. After a few years we took our own live mink to shows around the country and began to collect prizes. Our next vista was the auction house in New York. For our first few ventures, I borrowed fashionable clothes. As we improved our stock, we also became active in the national mink associations.

Years later, during a trip to Hawaii, I pondered those years. I had tried to be a full partner in our mink business, yet that was Dick’s dream. Nontraditional students (over twenty-five) had not yet invaded college campuses in significant numbers. For years I had written a news column for a national monthly fur magazine, yet I felt that my writing talent had withered from disuse. After Dick and I became empty-nesters, I found myself frequently alone and close to tears; my flip side was grumpy and sullen. My doctor blamed it on menopause, even though I no longer owned all the relevant organs, and he prescribed hormone shots. But I really didn’t think that was the whole answer.
For one thing, women of all ages were experiencing my feelings regardless of their life situations. Some could not enter the university course or the field they wanted, while others entered but could not advance. Still others had worked a few years and then married, only to discover that janitorial chores and catering to a family’s needs and whims felt more like a life sentence than personal fulfillment. Many, like me, were entering middle-age; their children were grown and, sometimes, their husbands were gone. Some simply tired of the conforming role that society demanded.

I had tried hard, and mostly succeeded, in putting my nurturing self at the forefront. Because of the nature of our business, and our willingness to tackle problems together, Dick and I literally had been partners in ways uncommon during the 1950s. But it wasn’t enough. Dick needed more room to be his own man and, somewhere, my individual self awaited discovery.

Repeatedly I reviewed what I had done purely for myself. After the war, we had moved back to Utah with such big dreams in which each would help the other but also achieve individually. It was time to rework our relationship. And time to pioneer again.

Even during my years of poor health, I had continued to write. While recuperating in Price, I won first prize in an annual contest sponsored by a state writers’ association. Happily, their convention that year was in Price, and I became reacquainted with Olive Burt, the former editor of the Tribune Jr., and I met many other writers. A year or two later I attended a summer writing course at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City; the following year, I participated in a writers’ conference in Logan, north of Salt Lake. Next, I submitted a short story to Harper’s magazine which awarded me a scholarship to a workshop at the University of Colorado. My sister Lee (shortened from Shirley) strongly suggested I do this and invited me to stay with her. My parents provided my train fare. Dick and I scraped up enough cash for food and incidentals, but I traveled home lacking even a dime for coffee on the train!

Each experience boosted my confidence, and I began selling articles and poems to The Salt Lake Tribune and its competitor, the Deseret News, as well as other Sunday supplements. I published several times in literary magazines (for glory among other writers rather than a paycheck). Another article received a prize in a mink farming magazine contest. Both Dick and I wrote quite frequently for fur magazines; also, for a decade, I published a monthly news column in one magazine.

Then there was my serious writing. I wrote one teen novel but set it aside because I thought it too autobiographical. I met James Michener
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at the Colorado writers’ school. He then worked as an editor but had recently published his first novel, *Tales of the South Pacific*, which became both a Broadway hit and a feature film. At the time, I was well along on a second novel and took it with me to the conference as my work-in-progress. To my delight, Michener liked it and suggested I send the manuscript to his firm. Those editors liked it too, but wanted the ending changed. I couldn’t do that. In my mind, a serious writer must publish her work exactly as she wrote it!

The novel featured two sisters, one a good Mormon and one a feminist, who disagreed all the time. One was married, and the other one wanted her sister’s husband. It was not a plot popular in those cautious post-war years, for I made the male character weak and the women strong. Three different publishers would have published my manuscript if I had strengthened the male character or otherwise changed the ending. But I just wouldn’t do it.

Of course the protagonists were the alternate sides of my ego. I could not let either side win in print when I couldn’t work out the conflict psychologically. Not long ago I found and read that manuscript and others from around the same time. They are not as good as I thought they were—but they’re not bad, and they kept me aware of my developing self during those early years on the mink ranch.

The January after I moved to West Jordan, J. Bracken Lee became the Republican governor, elected in 1948. Margaret Lee, a gracious and personable woman, missed their friends in Price. She decided to bring together a group of the younger Price women who had moved into the Salt Lake Valley after the war. She invited about fifteen of us—all of us in our twenties—to the governor’s mansion for lunch. We were each eager for more interest in our lives than our routines around husband, children, and church.

Margaret had been active in women’s community and cultural organizations in Price. In Salt Lake City, the major women’s clubs had existed for a long time, some since the early days of the struggles for statehood and women’s rights. These clubs even had persisted through the 1930s, as women’s other roles shrank; the clubs then undertook various community projects during World War II. However these clubs were not looking to expand and were very choosy about new members.

An active Junior League was open only to the daughters of established, wealthy Salt Lake families. Most women’s groups were auxiliaries of organized men’s groups—the Elks, the Rotary Club, and so on. Even if the Lady Elks, the Rotary Anns, or whoever, maintained separate agendas,
the prerequisite for membership was to have a husband, or occasionally a father, who belonged to the men’s organization. At Mother’s insistence, I had kept up my teenage membership in the American Legion Auxiliary. When Dick’s mother moved near us, she wanted to attend their local meetings, so I sometimes went with her.

Margaret Lee heard about a national organization called Beta Sigma Phi, with local chapters offering young women an outlet to broaden their experience. It featured structured lessons in the social graces and various cultures, as well as guidance for community service. Meanwhile it wove a network of women with similar backgrounds and longings. Beta Sigma Phi boasted no ties to any church or race, and it espoused broad and tolerant views; still, I saw very few minority women in the Utah chapters. This society and others like it became the 1950s’ equivalent for middle-class women, especially married women, of the men’s organizations.

Chapters of these societies still flourish, especially in the suburbs, rural areas, and small towns, creating a tentative skeleton of an “old girl network” and acting as the necessary forerunners of more politicized women’s organizations. From the end of World War II to the mid-1960s,
the country was gripped by conservatism when it came to roles for women and for racial minorities. Women were expected to return from their wartime adventures and employment to the quieter life of family. Once again, the innocuous women’s clubs kept individualism alive.

Margaret Lee decided to help launch Utah’s involvement in Beta Sigma Phi by sponsoring a Salt Lake chapter that drew in young women from Price, as well as some of our new Salt Lake Valley friends. Eventually there must have been fifteen chapters in the Salt Lake Valley. After a few years, Margaret became an honorary sponsor, and membership shifted as couples moved out of the valley or on to other interests.

I stayed close to women in the Salt Lake chapters even when I became active in politics. When I participated in my first national convention, someone from my group telephoned every night, wanting a report. Many Beta Sigma members were friends from Price so we shared deep roots, but I had accumulated new friends who were just as dear. One provided the flowers for our children’s weddings; another came up with souvenir donkeys when I first ran as a national committeewoman. They sent roses when I was elected national chair.

Two other strands wove through my life during those days. Only a week after I moved into our West Jordan home, Melba Coons, the wife of mink rancher Clyde Coons, came calling, her arms laden with rolls and soup. Melba was active in both church and politics, and she helped me become involved too.

At Melba’s prompting, the Mormon ward leaders asked if I would teach the monthly social studies lesson to an adult MIA class that met midweek. I did that for a couple of years. Then I served as speech director for the stake, comprised of eight to ten wards. True, I questioned many of the church’s modern practices, and Dick hardly ever attended. But I still tried to reconcile my liberal beliefs with church tenets. Throughout our years in Utah, I taught in Mutual, Sunday school, or Relief Society, and, while our children were young, I insisted that they attend Sunday school. Yet I quite ignored the “Word of Wisdom” required of good church members. I smoked, I drank tea and coffee, and I even enjoyed an alcoholic drink now and then. My selves were still at odds, and each stayed busy.

Melba Coons also was a Democratic worker, as was another neighbor and mink rancher, Marvin Jenson. His father Hyrum Jenson was the local precinct chairman. I told Melba about my experiences working in California, and about a week later Hy Jenson put me to work within our district.

Political parties did not require party registration. In those days our workers went door to door asking party affiliation, and many folks
changed from year to year. Some wouldn’t tell, so the canvas workers then asked which candidates they supported. It must have been in the early winter of 1948 that Hy first involved me in the canvas. Spring brought more than robins, for I was elected to the precinct committee at our mass meeting.

Marv Jenson, was a boxing promoter as well as a mink rancher and managed several good boxers. One boxer, Gene Fullmer, became middleweight champion in the 1950s. Laurel Brown from Tucson, Arizona, read about Marv and his mink ranch while perusing an article on boxing. Laurel came north, worked for Marv for a year to learn about mink, and later bought a mink ranch about a mile south of us. A few years later Laurel became the Democratic Party county chairman. Gradually we developed an active mink ranchers’ caucus among Democrats on the southwest side of Salt Lake County.

From the time I began ringing doorbells, I kept records so I wouldn’t have to redo everything annually. I also asked extra questions as I canvassed: Why did you choose a political party? Why did you vote for one candidate rather than another? How is the economy on the westside this year? How do you think we could solve a certain social problem? Soon I had all our canvas workers gathering and recording more information than the census.

In the autumn of an election year, we had our county and legislative Democratic candidates visit neighborhood gatherings, juggling times so that a candidate could drop in on a dozen homes on a given Saturday. We briefed our candidates from our door-to-door file, empowering them to intelligently address the issues relevant to various groups and even to individuals. We were rewarded by a rise in Democratic votes in our district. Before we knew it, state and national candidates were dropping in at our “coffees” (more literally translated in a Mormon community as cider and doughnuts).

Utah voting districts are small, constituting around four hundred voters. In those days six or eight voting districts, in the metropolitan areas, formed a legislative district. Four legislative districts constituted a state senatorial district. Each rural county had two or three representatives and one senator. In 1970, after the one-man/one-vote decision by the United States Supreme Court, the state districts were apportioned primarily by population.

Our gatherings and get-out-the-vote efforts proved successful. Today, our methods are considered primitive but they still work in local and legislative races. Other nearby districts asked us to teach them how to
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canvas, keep records, present candidates and their literature, and get out the vote. So we did.

Another thread ran through my experience. When our son Rick first started school in West Jordan, I became a room mother. By the time Beth entered school, our neighbor Edna Bennett and I held offices in the local Parent-Teachers Association (PTA). I liked the first grade teacher each of my children had, but I didn’t like the school system.

In the Jordan School District, the Bingham copper mine was the biggest employer of a racially and ethnically diverse workforce; many children spoke Spanish or another language other than English at home. The unions prized social adjustment and harmony. If academic standards were lowered due to language or cultural differences, then those children and their families felt demeaned. I felt that lowering or erasing academic standards took the wrong way around the problem. I favored smaller classes, teachers who understood the students’ backgrounds, special coaching for children who were not learning well, and so on.

I talked our PTA into sending a questionnaire to the parents, asking what they wanted from the schools. The principal predicted, “Nobody will ever answer it.” But an 80 percent return favored emphasis on academic essentials. Armed with that, we confronted the school board and asked for a stronger focus on basic education, but we gleaned no immediate results.

I decided to try again at a higher level. Elected to the district PTA as scholarship chair, I battled through the late 1940s and early 1950s for special education classes, remedial reading, honor societies, foreign languages taught in both grade schools and high schools, and advanced mathematics classes. In the process, I learned a lot about the problems of parents, children, teachers, and school boards.

The changes came, but too slowly for my impatient spirit. I knew that Marv Jenson felt the same way, and his family roots ran deep in the southwestern Salt Lake Valley. We marshaled a group intent on persuading Marv to run for the school board, and his campaign became the first I helped manage—from the beginning until his election. Other school boards took notice and began to listen to our views. For one thing, we felt that the elected state school board controlled too much of local school districts’ priorities and activities.

So the next year I went to the Democratic county organization to insist that we recruit legislative candidates who cared about the schools; education, we decided, should rank high on our county platform. We recruited schoolteachers and devoted PTA workers, then taught them
Both the state and county Democratic parties had their headquarters in the Newhouse Hotel in downtown Salt Lake City. So, as I worked on those legislative campaigns, I began to meet politicians from all levels. My old Republican chum from Price, Governor J. Bracken Lee, was rightfully considered education’s prime enemy. Brack severed funding for public schools and higher education often and without mercy. Margaret Lee was a former teacher, and we now became allies. Margaret convinced Brack that giving better teachers higher salaries was a good conservative program. So he instituted a merit study commission and asked me to serve, focusing first on the Jordan District.

Our merit study outlined a six-tier evaluation, including students, parents, teachers from a sample school, its principal, outside teachers, and business people. The process was cumbersome but it worked because teachers in several districts felt it was fair. I maintained that better teaching requires proficiency in the subject matter, as well as skill in teaching. Teachers who master both areas should be paid accordingly. A teacher’s credentials are important but may indicate proficiency in one narrow field, rather than an enlightened literacy across many topics. Also, the skill level of people planning to enter trades rather than seek a university degree was not properly respected. We had received a better education in Price, where nearly every boy was destined for the coal mines, than was offered in classrooms where virtually every student was university-bound.

Eventually I served in the state PTA, as well as on the Utah Women’s Legislative Council during Lee’s last year as governor. I then served for two years under another Republican governor, George Dewey Clyde.

I decided the Legislative Council members were spinning their metaphorical wheels, so I sought more direct action. I viewed the two-party system as the basis for organized participation and issue development. It was important to work within the party, not only to promote a single issue, run for office, or run a campaign. I became skilled at running campaigns, but my major concern was the party, always. Some candidates run their campaigns alone, giving token cooperation to their local, state, and national parties. They welcome campaign funding from special interest groups and political action committees—especially the large political action committees—and then they tailor their votes entirely too much toward those contributors. As a result, party discipline declines regarding difficult issues, such as the national deficit, the environment,
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education, civil rights, a sound foreign and defense policy, equitable
taxes, medical care, and so on.

My version of a Mormon upbringing instilled the right and duty to
probe the affairs of others in the community. Yet in later years, I was
repeatedly asked, “How could you possibly have tolerated living in
Utah with those horrible anti-ERA Mormons?”

Never liberal, the Mormon leadership grew even more conservative
in the last half of the twentieth century, as the Religious Right flourished.
Core personal issues, such as legal abortion and homosexuality under-
standably cut deep for a variety of denominations, while social and
economic issues also became divisive. Many women, especially those
in their twenties and thirties, take for granted the gains accomplished
by the most recent woman’s movement; and we built on the base laid
by earlier women activists. We can justifiably claim advances in sexual
freedom, education, and the United States Supreme Court’s support for
Roe v. Wade, as well as civil, anti-discrimination, and political rights. In
short, a woman’s ability to choose her education, career, and intimate
partner(s) are such tremendous gains they are often ignored. Yet too
many of these gains were directed at—and accepted by—the white mid-
dle-class, and then spilled unevenly to the poor, the old, and the racial
and ethnic minorities. Nevertheless my generation can only marvel at
the rights so recently achieved.