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Richard and Linda Eyre
and their daughter, Saren Eyre Loosli

Empty-Nest PARENTING

Adjusting Your Stewardship
As Your Children Leave Home

Not only will this book help you get through the difficult transitions of children moving out and moving on . . . it will help you build a beautiful family culture in your three-generation family . . . and that is where real happiness lies.

from the foreword by
Stephen Covey,
author of *7 Habits of Highly Effective*

Families

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Empty-Nest PARENTING

Adjusting Your Stewardship
As Your Children Leave Home

By Linda and Richard Eyre
with significant editorial input from their adult children

Foreword by Stephen Covey

I was delivering a seminar to AWPO, @ the World Presidents Organization. We were at a seaside resort location and some of the attendees -- each the president or CEO of his or her corporation -- had actually parked their yachts @ at the marina outside the hall where we were meeting. There were individuals in their fifties and sixties who seemed to have everything -- wealth, position, power, and the freedom to live where and how they pleased.

As we talked, the focus turned to family, and the mood turned sombre. With some probing on my part, a few individuals had the courage and candor to admit the loneliness they felt at this stage of their lives, with their children grown and gone from home. A I thought the goal was independence, @ one CEO said, A for my children and for me. I sent them to the best schools and they=re >launched= now -- doing fine -- we talk on the phone every couple of weeks -- but we live completely separate lives, and there is this emptiness. @ Others chimed in, agreeing that the luxurious, independent life style they=d worked so hard and long for was often sad and lonely because it lacked frequent family involvement and interaction.

Whether it=s a yacht or a camper or just your general life style, if you are moving in directions that separate you more and more from your children -- directions that make you more independent from each other rather than more interdependent with each other -- you are probably headed toward that same kind of emptiness. And your children could be losing the ultimate security of belonging to a family that never dissolves.

Not only will this book help you get through the difficult transitions of children moving on . . . it will help you build a beautiful ongoing family culture in your three-generation family . . . and that is where real happiness lies.

Preface and Warning

Warning: Who Should (and Shouldn't) Read This Book

If your idea of success is to Afinish@ with the kids so you can go live in Sun City and spend the next thirty years playing golf . . . this may not be the book for you.

We=re going to make the case that even when your children are grown and gone, Aparent@ is still the most influential and important role in your life. And while there are plenty of light moments and humor in parental relationships with adult children, this *stewardship* that we call *empty-nest parenting* is a pretty serious thing. Before you start reading you should know that:

- ! This is not a book written for people who are content to have Aaverage@ families.
- ! This is not a book written for people who just want a few easy little ideas for staying in touch or setting up trust funds for grand kids.
- ! This is not a book written for people who think that enduring families or great adult family relationships just happen by luck or by chance.

We=re going to try to persuade you (or support you if you already believe) that families and family relationships need constant maintenance. This is a book about:

- ! Choosing who you want to be for the rest of your life . . . and centering that choice on family.
- ! Making family bonds grow stronger rather than weaker as years pass and generations grow up.

- ! Becoming true patriarchs and matriarchs and leading and supporting your family forever.
- ! Creating a mutually beneficial and increasingly interdependent relationship with your children as you share your lives, and knowledge, and love.

Eternal Family Leadership

The reason aging people get discarded in America is that they don't take their rightful positions as the continuing heads of their grown families. They suffer for this and so do their children and grandchildren. We tend to blame the plight of the elderly on AWestern society.@ AIn Asia,@ we say, Aparents and grandparents are revered and respected by their adult children.@ But in fact, we parents of grown children have no one to blame but ourselves. If our goal is to put in our time and do our parental duty until our kids turn eighteen and move out so that we can get on with our own lives and devote ourselves exclusively to our own enjoyment and our own ambitions, then we deserve it when our children fail to listen to us or respect us or look up to us . . . and when they begin to see us as a burden that they may have to take care of.

Somewhere along the line, here in America, we have come to the common narrow notion that Afamily@ means parents and the young children who live with them; and that once the kids move on to their own families, parents should let them Ahave their independence@ by getting out of the picture. Thus we give up and walk away from the role we ought to play for the rest of our lives -- the role that will help our children most and that will preserve our own dignity, respect, and happiness -- the ongoing role of parent, advisor, grandparent, and family head. We also give up priceless opportunities to *learn* from our children, to share their lives, and enjoy their friendship.

Empty nest parenting doesn't mean we don't enjoy the greater freedom and flexibility that comes with an empty nest, but it does mean that we continue to be involved and active as the heads of our families and that we develop new and mutually beneficial ways of interacting with our kids.

So . . . if you thought this book was about disengaging as a parent, don't buy it. It is about engaging, about staying involved, and about loving it!

Who Should Read This Book? -- and When?

We are writing to any parent who wants to stay meaningfully involved in a way that *works* -- for the parents *and* the kids. If none of your kids have left home yet, it's a great time to read this book -- you can learn what to expect, become emotionally prepared, and lay out a strategy before the fact. If all of your kids have left and you're now a bonafide empty nester, it's a great time to read this book -- you can reassess and readjust your relationship with your grown children. And if one or more children have left your nest and one or more are still in it, it's a great time to read this book. You can improve your relationship with those who are gone and prepare thoroughly for the time when the next one leaves.

While we hope most of it would *work* for any empty nest parent, this book is particularly relevant to L.D.S. parents. We say it so often. We even post it on our refrigerators: *Families Are Forever.* One clear implication, and one we don't think about often enough or hard enough, is that *Parenting is Forever.*

As a church and as a culture, we have platitudes for that too. We say, *>Father= or >Mother= are the only two callings from which we will never be released.* We know that family relationships can continue beyond this life. Our whole concept of heaven is based on it. We even know that the Church itself is temporary while the family is eternal. We *start*

our journey as parents here on this earth, but we end it . . . never.

Yet some of our other favorite concepts, some of our best quotations, if we're not careful, can suggest to us subconsciously that parenting only happens in our homes and that the stewardship ends or diminishes when kids grow up and leave. We say, "No other success can compensate for failure in the home" and "the most important work you will ever do will be within the walls of your own home."

But we really know, don't we, that when President McKay and President Lee said "home" they didn't mean "house," they meant *family*, and they meant it for the long term.

Kids moving out is just a change of venue -- a road game instead of a home game. They're still ours, our salvation is still linked, our stewardship is still in tact.

As LDS parents, we have the insight and the tools to *design* the second half of our lives according to eternal priorities. It will take faith (which Joseph Smith defined as "working by mental effort rather than physical force") but we can do it. We can become parents for the ages -- literally.

Structure & Sequence

As you read, you'll notice the wide margins. Our idea here is to give you plenty of space to make your own notes, to jot down any ideas that come to you for your own family, your own empty nest parenting. While we empty nesters have a lot of needs and feelings in common, each situation is different, and our hope is that you'll essentially write your own book here -- using what we've written to stimulate your thought and prompt the ideas that will work best in your own unique set of circumstances. Some of our ideas and experiences will have little relevance to you. Others will seem "right on." Still others won't quite fit you personally, but will prompt ideas of your own. Make notes and underline and circle what

fits. Write your own ideas, [AAh ha=s,](#) and commitments in the margins, so that when you get to the last page, this has become your book instead of ours. You=ll also notice that, in the table of contents, we have included a lot of detail about each of the three parts of the book . . . so that you=ll be able to use it almost like an index to find the issues that are of greatest concern in your own family.

Here in Part One we share more of our perspective as LDS parents, and try to share our convictions about how important and how rewarding empty nest parenting can be. We want you to share in our enthusiasm for this part of life and to understand and appreciate the opportunity we all have to continue our help in shaping our children=s lives and in sharing in both the joy and the challenges of their adult lives. In Part Two, we=ve collected inputs from several ENP (Empty Nest Parent) sources -- parents whose kids have left, and from dozens of LTN (Leaving the Nest) sources -- kids who have recently left home. These inputs, first of all, will reassure you that you=re not the first who has gone through or felt the feelings you=re feeling. Section III will also give you a chance to [Asurvey@](#) a lot of other families, particularly the Eyres, and to see how they have viewed and coped with some of the same situations and concerns that you are now facing (or will soon face). In Section III it is especially important to *draw* from their inputs, take your own notes, to try to develop your own conclusions, and begin formulating your own ideas and approaches to empty nest parenting. The [ALTN@](#) inputs from Saren and her siblings and from other kids who have left their nests may help you understand what your own child is going through (or will go through) and the [AENP@](#) inputs from us and other parents will give you ideas and starting points for how you want to handle things in your own family.

The Appendix of this book is actually the risky part for us. We decided to get personal enough to share the whole process we=ve gone through in our own family to

transition from a full nest to an empty nest situation. The reason we made it an appendix is that we think the book is complete without it, and we would not expect or want you to follow the exact same formula. Indeed, our approach may seem way too involved and complicated -- after all, we have nine children! But *Case studies* really are the best teacher, and we hope that reading about the process we went through will prompt and catalyze your ideas for your own unique approach to empty nest parenting.

One way to look at it is that the book goes from the general to the specific. In Part One we're trying to present the overall concept of empty nest parenting -- and some principles and ideas we think apply pretty much to everyone. In Part Two we addressed fifty common questions, some of which will apply more to you than others. Last, in the Appendix, we get down to examples and specific strategies that may save you some time in developing your own approaches to empty nest parenting.

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PART ONE

Empty Nest Perspectives and Priorities

Re-emphasizing what we already know . . . that family relationships are the highest priority, now and forever. Then acting on that knowledge.

Chapter 1: The Simple Things That Matter

A Counterpoint Story

Let us begin with an interesting counterpoint to the wealthy, empty, wrong-priority CEOs mentioned by Stephen Covey in his foreword.

We were in the poverty-stricken central mountains of Mexico, on a humanitarian expedition to try to help a small rural village called Tamaula with its water problems. (It had been determined that if they could fence in their watershed and install water purification filters they could have drinkable water without hauling it by donkey from a distant spring.) As a family we love to go on expeditions like this, sponsored by a group called CHOICE Humanitarian. These trips are far more interesting (and actually less expensive) than elaborate vacations to some resort or to Disneyland.

Anyway, there in Tamaula we met the Laguna family. Juana (74) and Jesus (78) were kind of the matriarch and patriarch of the village. Over the course of the week we spent there we got to know them well. In fact, we came to love them. Here, in brief, is their story:

As young parents, Juana and Jesus homesteaded@ a remote mountainous area high above the city of Guanawato. It took hours to get there by foot or by burro, but they built a small adobe house and scratched out a bare living. Eventually they had ten children, six boys and four girls, and welcomed a few other relatives who wanted to join them in their new village.

Their crops, mostly corn and peppers, along with milk and cheese from their goats, kept them alive, but they had no money to buy building materials (they wanted to replace their tiny, mud-block adobe huts) or to get a small grinder to grind corn meal for tortillas. Finally, the oldest son, Pedro decided on the dangerous course of making his way north to the

Rio Grande and swimming across in hopes of finding work and sending a little money back to his family. Following his precedent, each of the other boys, Francisco, Pablo, Rudolpho, Martin, and Jesus Jr. each took their turn as wet backs in their early twenties -- spending two or three years across the border, sending back what money they could to the village. During our visit, Jesus Laguna, Jr., now in his early thirties, while we were walking to his small beekeeping, honey-producing place, told me, through an interpreter, of his experience across the border:

He began by explaining that all he had ever wanted was enough money to buy the little bit of lumber, nails, and fixtures that he could put together with home-made bricks to build a house for his little family. There was no way to get money in the village, and if he moved to a Mexican city he=d have to be away from his family for much longer to save enough. He walked and hitch-hiked his way 400 miles north to the Rio Grande and swam across in a particularly dangerous stretch, filled with whirlpools where many had drowned. But on the other side he was rounded up by border patrol dogs and helicopters and was sent back. He tried a second time and was picked up by Acoyotes@ (essentially slave traders who pick up wet backs and drive them to a farm or factory that pays them for delivering low-cost Mexican laborers). But the coyotes turned out to be bounty hunters who delivered him, instead, to the border patrol who sent him back again. On the third try he found Areal@ coyotes who drove him to a chicken soup factory in Georgia. But the trip took three days, in the back of a hot van with other wetbacks and with no food or water. By the time he got there, he had lost twenty-five pounds and was almost dead.

But Jesus, Jr., like his five brothers before him, worked for two years in the chicken soup factory, dutifully sending back small amounts until there was enough to buy building materials for a house.

As he talked, there were tears, and Jesus Jr. began to remind me of Vietnam veterans I've spoken to who have to summon all their courage to even think about, let alone talk about, what they have been through.

Anyway . . . as we got to know the Laguna family, we felt a rare peace and happiness in each family member. Juana and Jesus, Sr. have eight of their ten children living there in the village with them (two daughters moved away but come home twice a year on Mother's Day and Christmas). They have sixty grand children and one of the highlights of our visit was to watch their delight as they interacted and played with those grand children. Their children's families now each have a proper brick houses and the family has a one cylinder grinder to make corn meal. They have metal ploughs for their donkeys to pull and now, thanks to our expedition, they have a drip-system to irrigate their gardens and water that is clean enough to drink piped to the center of the village.

But the Laguna family's happiness has nothing to do with the modest material advances they have made. It has everything to do with their commitment and their togetherness as a family. They care for each other. They work together; on Sunday they go to church together. They have family meetings and work things out together. Juana and Jesus call all sixty grand kids by name and seem to have a personal relationship with each one. Their eight children respect them, seek their advice, take care of them. They are the matriarch and patriarch of a large, in fact, extended family. They will never be lonely or empty. They will always have struggles and challenges, but they'll face them together with their family and grow even closer in the process.

On the first day we went into the village, we pitied Juana and Jesus in their rude, primitive existence. Seven days later, as we left, we envied them, we respected them for the priorities they had kept and the relationships they had built. We taught them about purging

and purifying their water. They taught us about purging and purifying our lives.

One Thing That=s Guaranteed

Whatever you think about the Laguna family and whatever you think about the CEOs in Stephen Covey=s foreword, one thing is guaranteed: Covey=s CEOs will feel lonely and emotionally empty during much of the twenty or thirty years they have left to live. Juana and Jesus never will. If the Lagunas could see the yachts and life styles of the CEOs, they would probably feel some jealousy, but if they looked long enough they would also feel some pity. If the CEOs could see the family unity and security of the Lagunas they would certainly feel some jealousy -- and some longing -- and some regrets.

No one, on their deathbed, says, AGee, I wish I=d spent a little more time with the business.@ At the end of life, all that matters is our relationships. What we need to understand is that relationships are what matter *before* the end of our lives too. Twenty or thirty or forty years before the end of our lives, our children leave our homes. If our relationships leave with them, we are guaranteed the legacy of loneliness. But if we maintain and build on our relationships with our grown children, we maximize the happiness on both ends.

With that in mind, let=s look at some additional perspectives, first from empty nest parents (ENPs) parents, and then from leaving-the-nest kids (LTNs).

Chapter 2: Perspectives (from Parent and Child)

Parents Perspective (Are we done or just getting started?)

Somehow, many parents get the idea that when their kids grow up and leave home they are done with parenting! Well fellow parent, . . . think again! Parenting isn't finished when kids move away for college or jobs or marriage. The challenges *change*, but they don't end. In fact, they often get bigger and more complex.

Most of the eighty million baby boomer parents in this country have entered or are about to enter this new landscape of empty nest parenting, and judging from the reactions and interest we get at our speeches and seminars, it's a topic of ever-expanding interest and concern.

But here's the good news B just as the worries, problems, and challenges of being a parent don't end when the kids no longer share the same roof . . . the love, the joy, and the fulfillments don't end either. And while it's natural for a parent to dread the day when a child leaves the home to be on his own, it's also natural to look forward to the Afreedom@ you'll have when your kids move on and you have less day-to-day responsibility for them.

If you're an average baby boomer, you will be a parent for nearly sixty years of your life, and only twenty to thirty of those years will be spent parenting your kids while they live with you. You'll spend half to two-thirds of your parental span as an empty-nest parent!

So what kind of an empty nest parent will you be? How much control and influence should you try to maintain with kids who have grown up and moved on? How much do you want to help them financially? How can you do so without undermining their independence? How much should you influence their decisions about school, jobs, marriage, children? How much do you want to know about their day-to-day needs and problems? How often should

you call or write an e-mail? How much do you want to influence where they live and how close they locate to you? How often do you want them to come home? Most importantly, what do you need from them and who do they need from you?

There are lots of questions B *what* and *how* and *when* and *where* questions. Most parents take a wait-and-see attitude B deal with issues as they arise B feel their way. The thesis of this book is that you=re better off with a *plan* . . . with some well-thought-out goals about what kind of an empty nest parent you want to be and some specific ideas about how to make it happen!

This book will help you formulate your own objectives and will be a mental grab bag and a thought and idea prompter. There are more methods, techniques, and ideas here than any empty nest parent will ever use or than any one family could ever want. Every family, every parent, every child, and every situation is different and the key is to examine your own unique family situation, talk with your kids, and set your own goals and then choose methods and plans that work for *you* to reach *your* unique family aims and objectives.

We=re so pleased that we were able to write this book *with* the real experts on this subject B our own children. Each of them, as you will see, have strong opinions. And in some ways their views may be more valuable to you than ours. Saren, our oldest daughter, has combined her insights with the inputs of her six out-of-the-nest siblings and dozens of other Anest leavers@ . . . and has orchestrated them all into coherent, candid feedback about what it feels like to leave and about what parents can do to make all the transitions work better and facilitate meaningful ongoing relationships with their kids.

In the E.N.P. (empty nest parent) portions of this book, we will share the ideas and approaches that we and other ENPs have come up with over the years, but in the L.T.N. (leaving the nest) portions -- *which are always in italics* -- Saren and all the other

Adepartors@ will tell you, with first-hand authority, *“This is what your child needs when he or she leaves home! This is how he feels; this is what she hopes you will be to her and give to her.”* Particularly in Part Two, Saren shares these perspectives B the views of the Achild@ who we=re still parenting, the son or daughter whose happiness (along with our own) is the goal and the reason for wanting to continue to be the best parents we can be.

Richard and Linda

Child=s Perspective (Telling It Like It Is)

My role in this book is to tell you, bluntly, and with as many examples and stories as possible, what eighteen to thirty-something kids want and need from their parents. I certainly can=t speak for everyone, but I=ll do my very best to tell you what I can see from my perspective and try to make it as representative as possible of the other Akids@ I know.

Throughout college and graduate school, as I worked for several years and lived with roommates, and now as I=m married with one little boy and another one on the way, I=ve found it fascinating to observe all the different types of relationships that my friends have with their parents and the approaches that their parents seem to have taken as Aempty nest parents.@ I=ve heard a lot of interesting stories as friends talk about the things their parents and in-laws do that drive them crazy and as they praise the ways their parents help them out.

When I add up my experiences with my parents and the experiences that my friends have had, I=ve learned quite a bit about what works and what doesn=t work, from the child=s perspective.

I left home twelve years ago, and since then, my parents and I have learned to handle lots of new issues -- through trial and error, through talks and fights. I=m the oldest in the

family, my parents= guinea pig, so they were really in uncharted waters when I left home. Over the years, we=ve learned a whole lot about what we need to Abe@ to each other as we progress with our lives, and I think my parents have become better and better Aempty nest parents@ as they have more and more kids Aleave the nest.@ There were a lot of things my parents did that really helped me make a smooth transition to independent adulthood and inter-dependent daughter-hood. And there were some things they did that I=m sure we=d all agree didn=t help at all.

For years, I=ve had it in the back of my mind that there should be a book to help parents Aparent@ their grownup children. Every time I=d hear a story from a friend about something their parents did or said that seemed to really help them or really upset them, I found myself thinking, Athese parents probably have no idea how this is really affecting their child.@ Most parents probably don=t know where to turn for ideas about how to be a good parent to their kids when they=re grown up.@ A couple of months before we started this book, I got into a conversation with my dad about this subject. We both shared some stories about people we knew and talked about our own experiences. There seems to be ample need for parenting ideas for parents with kids over age eighteen. Were there any books out there that help Aempty nest parents?@ We did a little research and couldn=t find much. So the idea for this book was born: A book written by a mother and father and their daughter who=ve been through the main stages of empty nest parenting, a book that draws on our own experiences and our observations and knowledge of other families= experiences with relationships once they don=t all live in the same house anymore, a book that offers ample stories and ideas to help families develop their own unique Agame plan@ for moving forward in their relationships with each other.

Let me just start out by saying a few things on behalf of your children -- to you and to

my own parents. As your children, we need your love and support and listening ear all the days of our lives. We=ll never grow out of our need for your approval for the things we do. But from the moment we leave home and even before, we really want to be treated like adults in a lot of important ways. We need you to respect our opinions. We need to feel that you trust us. We hate it when you think you know the right thing for us when you don=t really understand the situation and you say you=re listening but you really aren=t. We hate it when you try to control our choices by dangling money in front of us or threatening us. A lot of the time, we really do want and need your advice, but we want you to give it without getting all bent out of shape if we don=t take it. We want you to love our friends and those we are dating. We want your admiration. We want you to tell us about your problems and seek help from us sometimes. We want you to see us more as peers and friends and less as subordinates. But we still need you to nurture us -- to check in with us and make sure we=re OK, to worry and call us when we=re sick or sad, and to send us the occasional care package. We want you to come visit us and to request our presence in your home quite a bit. We need you. We=ll always need you. And we like to know that you need us. But we need to communicate openly so that we can figure out the roles that we need to play in each other=s lives as time passes and changes happen.

The big thing, I think, is really understanding what each other is going through -- and that requires good communication and good questions. I=m sure it=s often hard for parents to accept that their child needs them less and less in many ways. Some parents cling too much and some turn their kids loose too completely and too easily. It bothers me how in most families the whole transition just kind of happens and everyone learns by hit and miss, by trial and error. Sometimes the errors are pretty painful. Sometimes the mistakes or insensitivity of the parent or the child deeply hurt the other, and communication can break

down or even pretty much cease for years!

It=s so much better to have a basic plan for the transition -- to decide in advance about how you=ll communicate and how much support will be given -- financially and otherwise. Not that every family=s plan will be the same -- or that every plan will completely work -- and adjustments have to be made as time passes. But it=s just so important to think about it and to work together to come up with some agreements about your expectations of each other and to keep the channels of communication open.

Using this book as a starting point, I hope you can find the best way to shape your newly configured family of adults and to develop dynamic and meaningful relationships with your kids as you disperse and diversify. After all, no matter how grown up they are, they=re still your kids and there=s so much you can do for each other throughout your lives!

-- Saren Eyre Loosli

Chapter 3: A Testimony of Families

The One Thing We Take With Us

As church members, you and we have so many added insights about the eternally important (and eternally joyful) nature of families. One of the most important of these is that family relationships are the one thing we can take with us from this world into the next. Not only our marriages, but our parenthood can be eternal!

Reminding ourselves of this should be motivation enough to take the time and put forth the effort required to thoroughly think through the empty nest phase of our lives and to work with our children to create a vision and a plan for the kind of extended family we want to have and for the kind of relationships with our children and our grand children that will provide them and us with the eternal joy we were sent here to find.

As we were writing this chapter, we wanted to include something like a personal testimony of families and of the church and of their relationship with each other. We wanted to write something that would clearly identify the higher plane the concept of family finds in the light of the restoration. Then we realized that we had already written something like that! A few months before, Deseret Book had asked each of us to write a brief essay on *Why I Believe* which would be included in a book that would be presented by the Church to visitors at the Salt Lake City Winter Olympics.

We've included those two essays here as our personal witness of how intertwined the priorities of church and family are and how reliant we are, as LDS parents, on the teachings and programs of the church.

Richard's Essay:

First of all, I believe in families! Linda and I have pretty much devoted our lives to

that belief. In addition to raising nine children of our own (a work in process), we have been writing books and doing various kinds of media aimed at family and parenting for more than twenty-five years. Our commitment stems from our conviction that family is the most important purpose of mortality.

Subconsciously at least, we all recognize this importance. After all, we all entered this life through family. And family will surround our exit. In between, family provides us with our greatest joys and deepest sorrows. Family has always been our main societal reference point and the basis for much of our terminology and metaphors. In history, the past is best understood and connected through extended *families*. In economics, markets and enterprise are driven by *family* needs, attitudes, and perceptions. In education, *family* support is the key variable and parents are the most influential teachers. In sociology and anthropology, society doesn't form families; *families* form society. In politics, all issues reduce down to how public policy affects private *family*. In public opinion polls we reveal that *family* commitments exceed all other commitments. In ethics or morality, *family* commitments teach the highest form of selfless and empathetic values, and lack of those commitments promotes selfish and antisocial behavior. In media, the things that touch us most deeply or offend us most dramatically generally involve *family*. In nature, everything that grows is in a *family*, and people living closest to nature talk of "Another earth" and "A father sky."

Our semantics, our similes, our symbols, indeed our whole frame of reference is *family*.

In my own private frame of reference, family is the first priority, both personally and professionally.

How does all this tie to my belief in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints?

In virtually every imaginable way! The theology of the Church centers on the family, and the programs of the Church are designed to support, sustain, and strengthen the family. Let me devote the balance of this essay to an elaboration of each of those two statements and to a summation of why I believe.

The *theology* of the Mormon Church is powerfully family centered. We believe that God is literally the Father of our spirits and that we lived with Him as His spirit children in a premortal existence. He created this earth and this mortal phase of our eternal lives to enable us to have the profound learning experiences of family. It is within families that we encounter the highest levels of sacrifice, of stewardship, and of unconditional love; not to mention patience and self-control.

We believe that family relationships and bonds continue after death, and when marriages are performed within our temples, the ceremony's wording is not "till death do you part" but "for time and all eternity." For Linda and me, one of the most memorable (and deeply spiritual) experiences in our lives was kneeling across an altar during our own marriage ceremony, looking into each other's eyes, and saying yes (or "I do") to commitments that we believe last forever. Each decision to have a child has had a similar spirituality as we have prayed to God that He would, according to His will, send to us a spirit whom we could both teach and learn from.

With this eternal perspective, welcoming each child at birth has felt to us almost like a spiritual reunion. It has also, we believe, given us a profound respect for our children and caused us to think of them not as our possessions but as our stewardships. When one of our boys was born nine-and-one-half-weeks early at three pounds in a tiny rural hospital in the south of England, and when it was unclear whether he would survive, we were able to pray and to receive a confirmation that he was sent from God and was intended to grow up in our

family. That answer, by the way, led to a spiritual prompting to transfer him immediately to the finest hospital in London where the procedures were taken that ultimately saved his life. (That little three pounder, by the way, now stands a healthy 6'6" and weighs in at 225 pounds.)

During our entire parenting career -- the twenty-five years spent raising our children -- we have felt that our deepest, truest prayers (and our clearest answers) have happened when we were praying about our children. These answers and the spirit they have come with are a big part of why I believe.

The *programs* of the Mormon Church also center on and around families. In fact, the fundamental purpose of the Church is to support families and individuals in reaching levels whereby they can return to Heavenly Father.

Amidst the complexities, amorality, and peer pressure of today's world, I have often wondered how we could even approach the challenges of raising children without the help and support of the Church. When they are small, children attend a Primary and Sunday School and learn the fundamental faith and basic values that shield them from much of the danger thrown at them by media and by society at large. As they approach adolescence, the Church sponsors scouting, athletic, and cultural involvements in addition to the Sunday programs. Teenagers can attend a daily seminary class while they are in high school. The best qualified adults in each ward or congregation are called as youth leaders, teachers, and mentors to help kids make the most of their teenage years. Parents receive manuals and materials to help them hold a family home evening once a week to unify their families and to anticipate and help kids with their problems.

In our own case, the Church has enabled our children to be somewhat protected from the world without being removed from it. While they have been leaders and student body

officers at large, diverse public high schools and have gone on to college at Harvard, Wellesley, Columbia, and Boston University, they've always managed to attend and participate in church and to live by their personal values and commitments. And though they've been involved in media and politics and in plenty of secular causes and issues, they have been able to keep their own priorities and perspectives. We like to call it "Being in the world but not of the world." This simply would not be possible without the Church and it is another very practical reason why I believe.

For me, the bottom line is that the "most spiritual" and the "most practical" have always proven to be synonymous. The theology of the Church has given our family the perspectives and joys that allow correct prioritizing, and the programs of the Church have given us indispensable help in keeping our family together. I have found, in my life, that the truest things work best, and that the things that work best are the truest. The Church works, and the Church is true.

Linda's Essay:

The obnoxious beeping of the alarm clock pierced my soul after a night of fitful sleep, and my consciousness told me that it had arrived -- the day I love to dread. At about two-thirty a.m., Noah, our nineteen-year-old brown-eyed, six-foot-seven-inch son, had finished packing all that he would need for two years in Santiago, Chile: dark suit, white shirts, six ties, eight pairs of socks, three pairs of shoes, three pairs of thermal underwear, two sweaters, gym clothes, an alarm clock, a first-aid kit, toiletries, a laundry bag, and, most importantly, his scriptures.

No matter how much I reminded myself that this was the day we had excitedly talked about and looked forward to since the day Noah was born, I still felt as if someone was squeezing my heart -- a lump of dread and joy, all wrapped up in one mother's heart.

Visions of the parade of friends who had left our house just after midnight a few hours before wafted through my mind. Pretty girls and loyal guys who had screamed for him and played with him at high-school basketball games, stayed up with him until the wee hours of the morning making posters and badges for his campaign for student-body president, and shown up dressed Afit to kill@ on Junior Prom nights had come to say their good-byes, promising a plethora of letters. They knew that life would be very different for all of them when they saw each other again after two long years. Many were preparing for their own mission departures within weeks. I especially loved seeing that kids who were left out or excluded in high school were part of the farewell crowd. Noah=s special friendship with them reminded my heart that he would be a great missionary.

So why was this unmistakable feeling of gloom still pressing against the joy inside me? It wasn=t that I knew he would be cooking for himself. he can scramble up an egg and make macaroni and cheese with his eyes closed, and I knew that rice and beans would be a pretty good filler-upper for one who eats like a vacuum cleaner. It wasn=t that I knew he would be assigned to a Acompañador, someone he=d live and work with twenty-four hours a day, who would probably be a native of South America who spoke not one word of English. AHard is good@ is one of our family mottos.

The apprehension wasn=t that I knew that we would be corresponding with him only by mail and talking to him on the phone only twice a year, at Christmas and on Mother=s Day. It wasn=t that I had heard horror stories of missionaries being yelled at, spat on, met at the door by shotguns, sworn at, and even mugged and killed by gang members in Russia or hit in the head with bottles in Bulgaria. (Well, I guess maybe that had a *little* to do with my uneasiness.) I knew that he would have doors slammed in his face every day. But I also knew that with Noah=s sense of humor, he would have the presence of mind, after a long

string of rejections at the door, to say, "Here, let me slam that door for you!"

I guess my rare combination of sadness and yet perfect joy came from realizing that Noah was making the rite of passage from being a carefree youth to becoming a full-time ambassador for our Savior Jesus Christ. He was saying good-bye to the life of the boy who had previously worried about girls, grades, and games to gladly immerse himself in a life of service and love. He would bring struggling brothers and sisters he hadn't yet met to a joyous understanding of the life and mission of Jesus Christ, whom he loves so dearly. He would have the privilege of telling them about the gospel of Jesus Christ restored to the earth and of a modern-day prophet who guides the Church and gives us an anchor in this uncertain world. And in the process Noah would become a man -- one who stands for what he believes so strongly that he is willing to give his life for it.

This interesting combination of trepidation and joy is not new to me. Noah is the seventh child, four sons and three daughters, that we have sent on missions for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, with two teenagers still waiting "in the wings." In addition, we've sent out our semi-adopted Bulgarian daughter and Ukrainian son (whom our children met on their missions and brought home to live with us) on missions of their own to New York City and Chicago. Young men who go on missions usually go at age nineteen and serve for two years. Young women who choose to go leave at about twenty-one and serve for eighteen months. Our oldest daughters went to Bulgaria and Romania, where they had opportunities not only to teach the gospel and lead people to baptism but also to work in the desolate orphanages there. Two sons have served in England, another daughter in Spain, and our most recent missionary son just returned from Brazil.

They leave their battered cars for their next younger sibling and instead walk countless miles on battered feet. They leave the comforts of home for bare apartments, often

complete with courageous cockroaches. Analyzing movies is replaced with two hours of analyzing the richness of life-changing wisdom found in the scriptures at 6:30 a.m. each morning. They lock up their hearts to feelings for the opposite sex and pour out their love unceasingly to those who are seeking the truth and light. They quit thinking about what they want to *have* and concentrate on what they want to *give*. In the process, they discover the depth of their abilities to pray, to yearn, and to love.

Noah joins an army of more than sixty-thousand young men and women as well as thousands of retired couples who are currently serving as missionaries all over the world. They do not choose where they will serve. Instead, each one has amazing faith that they have been called by inspiration to serve where they are needed in one of 330 missions in 125 countries, at their own expense of time and money, to stand for what they believe.

The letters we received from these great missionaries while they are in the full-time service of the Lord are even better than a letter from Oprah saying she wants us to talk about our new book on her show and make it a *New York Times* best-seller! Our oldest daughter, Saren, on her mission in Bulgaria, wrote, AI love the orphanages. The babies with birth defects need so much love and have so little. They light up at a gentle touch after initial shock and fear. I want them to know that at sometime in their short lives someone loved them and held them close and made them feel like a precious, real person. Maybe someday, if I=m really, really good, I can be friends with these special spirits in heaven.@

At the same time in Romania, Shawni wrote, AThe other day we saw three of the ladies we=ve been teaching the gospel coming toward us in the distance. These three beautiful women, glowing with happiness with their little four-year-old Alexander in tow, were walking along the street with sunlight shining through their hair. It was so beautiful. They=ve made such progress! I don=t think I=ve ever been that purely happy before. I

couldn't stop smiling the whole day. @

From England came this: AMissions teach you so dang much . . . about turning the other cheek, about dealing with disappointments and people (mean people, overly nice ones, and companions= annoying habits). It is a little microcosm of what life is about. @

AMissions are such an adventure! @ wrote one of our sons. AWhen you wake up in the morning, you just have no idea what will happen to you by the end of the day. It=s so exciting! @ (It=s not that our children have lacked for adventure in their lives. We have done crazy things with them through the years, ranging from building a log cabin together in Oregon; to spending summers in Japan, the Philippines, and Mexico; to building a cistern in a remote village and climbing Mount Kilimanjaro in Africa. But through the years, I have realized that there is nothing quite like the amazing adventure of serving a mission.)

From Saydi in Spain, we read, AThe mission is the hardest thing I=ve ever done in my whole life. Yet it somehow produces a more exquisite joy than I could ever have imagined: You overcome challenges that you thought you could never surmount, you have deep feelings of love that surpass what you thought you could feel, you see lives and hearts fill with glorious light as people find the answers and truths that their souls have yearned for. I=m learning that only through hard work, deep feelings, and the trial of faith is true strength and joy found. @

And from a son in Brazil came this: AThe joy of witnessing the change in this wonderful family all together is something indescribable I have watched the spirit of God in them through their eyes. We were so full of joy after our discussion that when we left, my companion and I just had to jump over a few bushes. Plus, I taught him how to say, >That was awesome!= in English. @

Seeing the miraculous changes that missions have made, not only in the lives of those

people our children have touched but also by the touch of the Master=s hand in their own lives, is one of the major pillars of why I believe! These valiant missionaries take the message of my heart and theirs -- that Jesus Christ lived and atoned for our sins so that we could rise again in a glorious resurrection and that He established His church again in these latter days, complete with all that is needed for our eternal joy. Only through this knowledge as Noah walks through the doors at the Missionary Training Center today can the tears of sadness that we won=t see him for two years be replaced by tears of joy for the person he=ll become and the lives he=ll touch. Besides, I must remember that when it comes to standing for something you believe, AHard is good!@

Chapter 4: What Does Empty Nest Parenting Mean to You?

Reactions to the Phrase

AEmpty nest parenting.@

The term itself conjures up all kinds of different thoughts and emotions. For as long as we've been working on this book (a long time) we've been bouncing its title off of friends and acquaintances and getting a huge variety of reactions:

AIsn't that an oxymoron B >empty nest= means the kids are raised and you're done!@

ADon't even talk about it. It makes me sad just to think about my kids being gone. It will be the hardest time of my life.@

ASure sounds more peaceful than full-nest parenting!@

ALet me tell you, the parenting problems just get bigger as the kids get bigger.@

AWhat that means to me is that I'll find gas in the car once in a while . . . and the radio buttons set to my stations.@

AWell I thought it was empty but two of them flew back in B to live!@

AI'd be careful of that term. I think once you spin them off, you should let them go. Quit clinging. Let them be on their own.@

AYes. They're gone now. The Ben and Jerry=s lasts more than a day. And I found the three sets of retainers they claimed the dog ate.@

ADon't kid yourself. They need you more than ever after they leave. Their decisions have bigger consequences and they continue to need all kinds of help and

advice. @

A I=d have done anything to keep them home a couple more years. @

A I did everything I could to get them to move out sooner. @

they=re A The important thing is that they do the right thing when they leave. If
on missions you=ll have a happy empty nest. @

A Finances are the big issue. You want to help, but what they really need is a
sense of their own independence. @

A Well, there=s so much to *balance*. How often do you talk on the phone, how
often do you see them? How much advice do you give? It=s so easy to do too much
or to do too little on every question. @

summer A This is what I=ve waited and worked for. Other than Christmas and a
reunion, they=ve got their freedom B and, hey, so do I! @

A The hardest part was the first year after he left home B and then the first year
after he was married. Those two times nearly tore my heart out! @

A What it means to me is I can go back to my painting and my music. I can get
a life again! @

A Well, the key thing is that you=re just turning them back over to Heavenly
Father=s care. He gave them to you for twenty years and now you=re giving them
back. @

A For me, it=s finding that dynamic tension between assistance and
independence B because they need both. @

A One word -- >grandchildren.= That=s the part I=m looking forward to! @

A Let me give you a wake-up call. My youngest left eight years ago B but they

don't ever really leave. There are as many issues as ever B just different ones.@

AHi ho, hi ho, it's back to work I go - and I'm looking forward to it!@

AIt's like someone peeled off a part of you.@

AFor moms especially, it's almost unbearable. Your whole priority -- all that you've lived and worked for B suddenly gone.@

AI think it's the payoff. After all, the whole goal of parenting is to work yourself out of a job.@

AIf you've taught them well -- if they'll keep the commandments and go to church -- they'll be fine.@

AEmpty nest what?@

AWell, you basically shift from being a manager to being a consultant.@

AYou better be ready for it, because it happens so suddenly, and it's gut wrenching.@

AI just wish I'd prepared more for it, thought about it more before it happened. I wish I'd had a plan for how we'd handle money needs and other things. We've just tried to figure it out as we go along. We should have had a strategy.@

AI say make it a totally empty nest. Leave yourself. Go on a mission or a long trip if you can.@

AIt's like a career change B only worse!@

AIt's like a big promotion B more money, more time B only better!@

AI can't talk about it; it makes me cry.@

AWell, one thing it does is it forces you to reestablish and recreate your

relationship with your spouse. @

AOh, I don=t know B I=m not ready to think about that yet. @

AThe only way our nest will ever be empty is if *we* leave. The kids certainly don=t plan to. @

How do *you* respond or react to the notion of empty nest parenting? More importantly, how do you plan to carry it out?

The Challenge of Our Time! (Personally and Societally)

The two of us (Richard and Linda) have Aspun off@ seven children B out on their own and into the world. One of every kind it seems B each with his or her own issues B each one with needs as important and unique as those they had when they were in the nest. It=s a lesson parents keep learning over and over B that no two kids are alike, that what works with one won=t necessarily work with the next, that just when you think you=ve got it figured out, something new will come up.

Anyway, the point is that we write this book not as Aexperts@ but as Afellow strugglers.@ But we write it with a conviction of the profound importance of empty nest parenting and with strong opinions about certain approaches and principles that we believe *work*. And we try, in this book and in our lives, to set the bar high, because we believe that our children can and should surpass us, living better and happier lives, partially because of what we were willing to give them and to teach them.

Societally, as we move further into a new century and a new millennium, empty nest parenting is the issue of our time, partly because America now has its largest generation of empty nest parents (baby boomers) and partly because the needs and challenges of young people leaving home are bigger and more complex than they have ever been before.

It's also the issue of *our* time, personally in the Eyre family, because we are so completely immersed in the midst of it. Every year, it seems, another Eyre child leaves the nest and still another gets married and starts his or her own family. New issues arise weekly if not daily.

The two of us love to write about what we're currently thinking about, experiencing, struggling with, and gradually resolving. Some might say, "Why don't you wait until the last of your kids have been gone for ten years . . . then look back and write about the process?" The answer is that we all *feel* most passionately about what we are involved in at the moment. There is a lot of hindsight in this book because the first of our children left home nearly thirteen years ago, but there is also a lot of "present sight" and "future sight" here as we continue to deal with the changes and to develop and fine tune the mental, emotional, financial *strategies* and *systems* of good empty nest parenting.

Here's what we believe: How well parents and their grown children handle their evolving roles, responsibilities, and relationships will have more to do with their collective happiness than any other factor. Empty nest parenting is simply too big an issue to leave to chance. The most typical approach is just "trying to deal with things as they come up," and that approach just isn't good enough anymore. As parents today, we need a *philosophy* B a clear understanding of what we want to do for our grown kids and a thoughtful *strategy* of how we will go about it. It is that philosophy, understanding, and strategy that this book seeks to help with.

Chapter 5: ENP: Who, What, Why, When and Where

Framework

Before we dive into the nitty gritty of dangers and dilemmas and of strategies and solutions, let's survey the broader landscape and think for a minute about the *scope* of empty nest parenting. Most of us, whether I'm writing or reading, feel better when there is a framework, when some parameters have been set wherein everyone is clear on exactly what we're talking about. So before we get into the *hows* of empty nest parenting (which is the whole point and purpose of this book), let's spend a paragraph or two on the other questions of *who, what, why, when, and where*.

Who?

Who are today's new empty nest parents? Quite simply, they (we) are the largest generation in America's history B the baby boomers. Most parents become empty nesters within the span that begins ten years before their fiftieth birthday and ends ten years after their fiftieth birthday. Most baby boomers, the post-war generation born between 1946 and 1964, are passing through their empty nest initiation during the early years of this new millennium. According to AUSA Today,@ AEvery seven seconds, a baby boomer turns 50 . . . about 64 million baby boomers will turn 50 in the next 14 years.@ (Sept. 20, 2000)

What's on the minds of these 64 million baby boomers? (Over 80 million if we add those who turned 50 between 1995 and 2000.) Surveys tell us what logic already has B that the two biggest worries of 50ish Americans are the two generations that Asandwich@ them B first, their kids, now in or entering college and leaving home and getting married and needing all kinds of help, financially and otherwise, and second, their parents, now mostly out of the

work force often burdened with health and finance-related concerns.

These trends and statistics are probably even more exaggerated in the Church where our families are larger and where our parents live longer.

For baby boomers it is truly the best of times and the worst of times. On the positive side, many if not most are at the peak of their professional powers, doing better than they ever have income-wise and also experiencing the emotional paydays of kids graduating from high school and college, getting married, and presenting them with grand kids. At the same time, on the negative side, the added financial needs and obligations seem to add up faster than the increases in income. It seems that kids turn out to be more demanding financially and emotionally after they leave home than they were when they lived at home, and aging parents extend our purse strings and our heart strings even further.

Often the negatives seem to outweigh the positives, and we tend to just put our heads down and plough ahead, trying to make the extra money to meet the extra needs, trying to be all things to all people whether they're above or below us on the family tree. Perhaps what we need to do is take some brief timeouts and start *thinking* a little harder about what we are and what we aren't, what we can do and what we can't . . . developing a *strategy* for the roles and relationships of the second half of our lives.

What?

What is the best way to think about and conceptualize empty nest parenting? First of all, try to view it as a fourth and completing phase or *stage* of a parent's mortal stewardship. First-stage parenting is babies and preschoolers B the incredibly formative time when children acquire 80 percent of their cognitive abilities and need an incredible amount of parenting attention. Second-stage parenting is the elementary school years B sometimes the least

turbulent and worrying phase but also the most opportunistic time to teach children responsibility and values. Third-stage parenting is the adolescent and teen years when children transition into decision-making young adults.

And then comes fourth-stage parenting B beginning when children first leave home . . . and continuing . . . and continuing . . . and continuing. This is empty nest parenting, and it can (and should) occupy about half of your adult life here on earth.

This book is *just* about the parenting part of that second half of life. It is not about time management or mid-life crisis or Agetting a life@ or late career burnout or taking care of elderly parents or any of the other issues of the age group *except* as those issues apply to and relate to parenting.

Why?

Why acknowledge and prioritize and work at empty nest parenting? Some of the answers are obvious B they=re still your children, your *stewardship*, the biggest part of your heart. Some are less obvious but equally important B answers that have to do with the most fundamental goal of happiness which resides in and revolves around family. The most fundamental reason for doing your level best at empty nest parenting is that your efforts there will have more to do with the long-term wellbeing of your kids, of your family, and of yourself than anything else you can do.

I (Richard) served as the national spokesperson for MasterCard on an ad campaign and a national public opinion poll called APriceless.@ The ads showed the prices of various things and connected them to the other things that were Apriceless@ (i.e. basketball tickets: \$32.00; hot dogs: \$8.50; team pennant: \$5.00; time with your son: priceless). My job was to discuss a national poll that, among other things, indicated that on the open-ended question,

“What is priceless?” or “What matters most?” over 80 percent of Americans said “family” or “children.” The next highest answer received less than 10 percent. Does family cease to be the priority (or our prime source of happiness) once the kids leave home? No, of course not, nor does it get any easier.

A nuclear family is not just a temporary organization that fulfills the purpose of raising kids to adulthood and then becomes obsolete or redundant. Family, as we will all find out sooner or later (through positive or negative experience), is the vehicle for joy and the antidote for loneliness. It is the interdependence between family members that teaches us the most important lessons of life and that gives us our best chances for ongoing happiness, and anyone who tries to substitute something other than family to meet his or her long-term emotional needs will eventually find himself empty and alone.

When?

Empty nest parenting is an issue (an opportunity, a challenge, etc.) from the day your first child moves out until the day you die. But there are four times, whatever sequence they come in, when it takes on special intensity and importance: 1. When your child first leaves home, often for college; 2. When your child first gets his or her full-time job; 3. When your child gets married and starts his or her separate family unit; and 4. When your child has a child and you become a grand parent.

The question of “when?” can be well-answered with a graph:

levels off
levels off
levels off

levels off

The order and sequence and shape of these four peaks of phases will be different for each child, but the ideal scenario is to be *ready* for each spike of opportunity (or need) and to talk to your kids ahead of time about each one. Then you will have some objectives in mind and some plans and ideas in place before you need them. If you are already into one or more of the peaks, the challenge is to think and learn and apply some appropriate approaches as soon as possible.

Where?

This may seem like a less relevant question, but the issue of *Where?* comes into every phase of empty nest parenting. Should they stay close or go far away for college? What are the pros and cons of living close after they're married and start a family? What are the times when it's most important to be with them and when is it best to leave them on their own?

Another important take on the *Where?* question is this: *Where* is empty nest parenting a continuation and an extension of in-the-nest-parenting and where is it something completely different? Certainly in terms of listening and communicating, of respecting and asking for kids' opinions, of caring and loving unconditionally, parenting is one long continuum, involving the same principles no matter where the kids are. But in other ways, there are distinctive *breaks* and *shifts*. Once they are gone, you become more of a *consultant* than a *manager*, and the two roles are very different. They now make the final decisions for themselves whereas you did before, and your parenting success will now be based more on your ability to give advice and support than on your ability to discipline

them.

The AH@ Question

If only the one Ah@ question were as easy to answer as the five Aw@ questions! *How* is always the tough one, especially in matters of family. We all know we want to trust one another, to continue to grow together, to communicate with and help each other in every possible way. The question is *how* to do each of these things, and while there is no simple answer there are lots of previous experiences we can learn from, lots of good approaches we can adopt, lots of mistakes we can anticipate and avoid rather than fall into, lots of issues we can think ahead on and build strategies for.

Chapter 6: The Emotions of ENP

From the Mother=s Perspective

Just let me (Linda) speak here for a moment on some of the emotions of *mother* ENPs. It=s all well and good for Richard to lay out his framework and analysis, but to most women I know, an emptying nest is first and foremost a highly emotional experience.

A dear friend of mine recently gave me a perfect example of what we mothers go through. Picture Bobbi, mother of six, four daughters and two sons, contemplating her life. Her oldest son and daughter moved out, did college, and married. The transitions were gradual and felt natural and good. After those two departures, she was delighted at last to have some space for her own art room, and was settling in to enjoy her return to painting when suddenly two more children decided to get married and she was confronted with the trauma of planning two more weddings within the next five months. Her art room filled with wedding gifts and paraphernalia and it seemed that every day had been crammed with planning events, ordering flowers, finding the perfect dress, finding someone to make the wedding cake or setting up a wedding breakfast, plus dealing with the emotional ramifications of losing two more children.

When the dust finally settled, she found herself down to two children and decided that now was the time to redecorate these last two girls= bedrooms with the true designer=s flare that she had always dreamed of but had no money to implement while the children were growing up. However, as she announced her plans to the girls, they each dropped an unexpected bomb. One thought she too had found her prince charming and had been trying to get up the courage to tell her that yet another marriage was imminent. And the youngest was pondering a move to the sorority house on the nearby university campus.

Back while she was dealing with the everyday hurricane of raising these six children, older more experienced mothers had often said to her, "Just enjoy it while it lasts, because it goes so fast!" "That's easy for you to say," she used to say to herself as she dealt with the constant everyday problems of diapers and fevers and broken arms and teenage car accidents. But now the realization of actually and suddenly having all the children out of the house made those years seem like a moment!

Still reeling from the most recent "exodus" announcements, she channel surfed onto an Oprah show one afternoon about empty nesters . . . mothers who had just sent their last child off to college and were trying to deal with their emotions. Having first just glanced in passing, she decided that this was a show she really needed to see. With a mug of her favorite comfort food . . . hot chocolate . . . she sat down and began to cry with the mothers on the show who were bemoaning the loss of their child-on-board-motherhood.

"Even though they were only talking about losing children to their college careers, not even to marriage, which I had been dealing with, I felt their pain. My tears streamed like a river and I was totally sucked in," she confided. "By the end of the show, I was a basket case! Why hadn't I finished those rooms sooner, why didn't I appreciate every day they were home more fully, why hadn't I realized what a great time we were having while they were all home?" She began a full-fledged guilt trip.

Suddenly, she sat up and began to laugh at herself, mired as she was in misery, and began scolding herself: "Bobbi, are you crazy? This is the time in your life that you have longed for, waited for, and been excited about!" She soaked up the tears and realized that her family *had* spent wonderful times together. They had stocked up more precious memories than she could record, or even remember! She began to reflect and giggle about the time her daughter Sarah ran through their new brick retaining wall when she was practising driving by

going in and out of the driveway with her dad=s new car. She remembered all the times the kids got lost and all the great vacations they=d had together, as well as the quiet moments helping with homework and panicky moments of breaking the speed limit to get the girls to ballet on time. She remembered all the tears spilt down the piano keys and the kids= friends she and her husband did and didn=t like who had eaten at their kitchen bar.

After that kind of reflection, Bobbi told me, AI=m just so grateful that I was able to spend so much time with them when they were young because . . . hey . . . now is the time I=ve looked forward to all my life. A time to spend a little more time on *moi!* In the aftermath of that Oprah show I dried the last sniffle and realized that this was a rite of passage that I had a right to! I had done my best and I should now look forward to the next exciting phase of my life!@

The Difficulties of Letting Go

I (still Linda) want to tell you that, with our large number of children, we have had more than our share of farewells and homecomings. In addition to sending them off to college, new jobs and marriages, we have also sent all of them off on missions (to Romania, Bulgaria, Spain, England [two of them to England], Brazil, New York City, Chicago, and Chile).

Having sent seven of our own children and two semi-adopted children off to college and missions and having married five of them off, you=d think the process would get easier. Indeed in some ways it is easier, knowing that the first crop has gone out and come back for short or even extended visits several times and we=ve all survived, but I must admit that each one is hard.

This year we have sent our little Noah (who now stands 6'7") off for his mission to

Chile. As a little boy, Noah was the apple of everyone's eye with his cheeky little grin and engaging personality. Siblings, grandparents, and a constant gaggle of friends thought they had died and gone to heaven when Noah was around. He was a basketball player and student body president of his high school. He could keep us rolling with his 'Saturday Night Live' imitations of 'Deep Thoughts by Jack Handy' and his sensitivity to the needs of others keep us in awe.

One of the trademarks for his last years of high school and extending into his first year of college where he played basketball for a college in Hawaii (poor guy) was that he only buttoned every other button when he wore a button-down shirt. When he wore a tie he claimed it didn't matter that he only buttoned every other one because you couldn't see the buttons anyway. At first, I kept forgetting that he was doing it on purpose and reminded him again and again that some of his buttons were undone. His wry smile reminded me and I responded with, 'Oh yeah, I remember.' Even tuxedo shirts at the Junior Prom were only half buttoned. Everyone knew . . . that was just Noah.

I must admit it felt like a dagger in my heart when a huge family group saw Noah off at the missionary training center where he began his two years of missionary service. As he entered the door, he pointed to his buttons with a big grin. *All* neatly buttoned, they signified the 'Right of passage.' He was happy and excited to move into another era of his life. But for just that poignant moment, it hurt my heart to say goodbye to my delightful boy, knowing that he was forging on to the new exciting but scary territory of becoming a man.

Balancing Our Needs with Those of the Children

Even though we have been spinning children off into the world for more than twelve years, we're only now just approaching a literal empty nest as the last two children prepare to

Alaunch. Yet we've also realized that we've sometimes seen the same child come and go several times, and have learned that dealing with the emotion of empty nest parenting is an ongoing process no matter how many children you have! Further, as time marches on and they really *are* gone, there are emotional and poignant times when you have to decide just how involved you want to be with the children after they have left the nest.

As a mother, I have quickly learned that, even though I had thought of this era of life as carefree and fancy-free, empty nest parenting can also become a day-to-day full-time job if I allow it. There are always emotional needs for phone calls, advice, baby sitting, and of course, money. When children who have left home are in various kinds of emotional stress, I have to decide when and how much to help. Every other ENP mother I have talked to has had the same experiences and feelings. The following is a list of the *pulls* we feel on our time and energy (from each direction . . . on one side our own needs pull us, and on the other side our children's needs continue pull us).

Our own needs:

- ! Time to exercise, play tennis, golf, run or walk, and enjoy nature.
- ! Time to think and set goals for the future.
- ! Time to enjoy one's spouse and do things together that we haven't been able to do because of the demands of the children.
- ! Time to just sit down and read all those books you've been stockpiling.
- ! Time to develop gifts that have lain dormant.
- ! Time to resume your career or to find a job in the work place that is meaningful and fulfilling.
- ! Time to travel without the demands and worries of children at home.
- ! Time to give service in volunteer work that involves serving those outside the

home.

The children's continuing needs:

- ! Letters, e-mail, and A care-packages. @
- ! Advice about what classes to take, what to major in, what job to take, how to deal with their own kids, etc.
- ! Input on major decisions involving where to live, buying a house, going into debt.
- ! Assistance in helping them deal with a spouse or a child's illness, emotional stress, financial hardships or difficult circumstances.
- ! Baby sitting.
- ! Requests (i.e., A please send the robe I left, please call someone for me, please come and visit for a few days, please tell me what to do about little Mary's tantrums @)
- ! Phone calls.
- ! Money

As we each try to balance this list, we can quickly see that the balance will be different for different mothers according to our unique needs and preferences. Although there is no right or wrong in many of our decisions as we contemplate how to spend our time once kids have flown the nest, it is important to A begin with the end in mind. @

It seems that there are two extremes on this spectrum. On one extreme, there are mothers who feel that they had A done their thing. @ It is now time for them to fulfill the dreams they have put on hold while the kids were growing up and let the kids take care of themselves. They do not intend to be roped into baby sitting when they=d rather be working or golfing, and are essentially saying, A Goodbye, I love you, but you=re on your own! @ After

all, our goal in raising our children is to work our way out a job, right?

The other extreme are the mothers who have loved parenting their kids so much that they just don't want to give it up. They are so centered in the great times they had in raising their children that they cannot imagine having fun doing anything else. Plus it is so fun to be intimately involved in the lives of their grandchildren while not having the total responsibility of their care. They want to have a hand in guiding their children, the parents of their grandchildren in matters of discipline, money, and wardrobe. After all, that's what all these years of experience and finally having a little financial stability have been for, right? This time around, they can do a really good job!

Though there are mothers on each end of the spectrum, most of us all fall somewhere in between. What we have to ask ourselves in order to find the right balance is: *What do I want for my children and their children at the end of my life.* If I want a truly deep and meaningful relationship with my children and grandchildren, it is going to take some time to develop. Are we willing to make sacrifices to baby sit when we are desperately needed, even if it's inconvenient because we realize that each encounter with a grandchild is money in the bank for creating a wonderful relationship? For some, whose children and grandchildren live too far for baby sitting to be an issue, giving up part of your vacation time, or making a long and arduous trip to see them may be the sacrifice you make to create the relationship you want in the end.

A List of Questions

I've found that there are some key questions that mothers can ponder which can help us establish what we want our emotional relationship with our children and grandchildren to be . . . and that help guide our decisions as we move into and through the empty nest years.

Thinking about them now might help to establish in your mind the relationship you want to have in the end, rather than just working things out as you go and wishing you'd thought some things through more clearly before you got to the end. In order to make things work as you'd like them to in the long run, you have to think through in advance what you want your future relationship to be with your children. Use my following questions as a springboard to help you think of even better ones of your own. They should help you to think about establishing the relationship you want to have with your children and grandchildren as an example of beginning with the end in mind:

At the end of my life . . .

1. How do I want my children to remember me?
2. What will each child say about their relationship with me?
3. What specific memories with my grandchildren will be my treasures?
4. Did I spend enough time with each grandchild to *really* know him or her?
5. Did I pay the price I needed to in balancing my relationship with my children after they left home? Was I overbearing or aloof?

If we think long and hard about these questions before we get too set in our ways as the children to leave our home, the chances of being an emotionally stable empty nester is much greater. If you have a clear idea of what we want in the end, it will make the day-to-day decisions so much easier and the burden of guilt, or wishing we had done better so much lighter! What it all boils down to is one key question to both ask and answer *now*: What specific things can I do now to insure the relationship that I want to have with my children and grandchildren before I die?

By the way (Richard speaking now), I think these questions work equally well for ENP fathers. And I think we Dads feel most of the same emotions Linda has mentioned.

Linda insists that it's harder on Moms, but I'd suggest you Dads keep on reading this chapter too.

Changing Your Thought Patterns

I (Linda) do believe that mothers have a particularly difficult time with this letting go business, so let me tell you about another one of my friends:

Dixie, mother of two, who had always been involved in creative projects and is now three years beyond the day when the last child left her home, expressed a sort of delight in letting her children go. She had been the PTA president or deeply involved in the schools and lives of her children while they were home. Her children had been the center of her life, yet when the time came for them to leave, she was so excited about going on to the next phase of her life that she didn't think too much about mourning. With one child married and the other in school, working and living outside the home, she began to develop her talents for gardening. She also started a small wedding flower arrangement business and nurtured a wonderful flower garden that gave her much pleasure. Though she still loved the contact that she had with the children at least once a week, she says that she wouldn't want to go back to full-time mothering for anything. Part of being emotionally stable when your children leave the nest is being ready for the next step. Dixie's advice to the rest of us: Remember your dreams and figure out how you're going to make them come to pass.

Part of the problem is the habits and patterns that you have formed over years which revolve around filling the needs of the children in your care. Our first thoughts in the morning for so many years have been, "Oops, we're out of milk." "I wonder if Jonathan has a clean shirt." "How am I going to get out of my meeting so that I can take Emily to the orthodontist." "I think we're out of lunch sacks." "Oh, what I'd give for just one more

hour of sleep!@ AI wonder what time Andrew finally went to sleep after I finished helping him with his Shakespeare paper.@

These habits and thought patterns can continue for as long as we let them. After the children have gone, we can continue our mothering thoughts with, AI wish that Angie would listen to my advice about majoring in business management.@ AI=m calling her to give her another piece of my mind,@ or AI wonder if baby Katie slept through the night.@ AI=d better call Andrea and see if she took my advice about feeding her cereal just before she went to bed.@

There is usually a space of time (between the kids and the grand kids) when we need to break out of habits and really appreciate the fact that we don=t have to eat any more macaroni and cheese, and we can quit rocking when we=re talking to a young mother who is rocking her baby as she talks, that you don=t have to feel compelled to point out every dump truck and train as you travel along the road and you can quit checking your watch to figure out who has missed the curfew.

Breaking out of these habits and replacing them with new thought patterns, may not only be difficult, it may make us feel guilty. Waking up with thoughts like, AI think I=ll spend my day at the gym,@ or AI=m just going to hunker down with a good book today and go to lunch with a friend,@ makes many of us feel uncomfortable, even guilty. Unusual thoughts like, AWhat can I do for my husband today,@ and AWhat would I really like to do for myself today,@ are new approaches that we sometimes struggle to get comfortable with.

Of course, being totally self-centered or even totally self- and husband-centered is not the answer to becoming a good, emotionally stable empty nest mother, but allowing yourself more time to take care of yourself and have more fun with your husband is. Just as important is finding new ways to offer service and contribute your skills and talents outside your own

immediate family. Finding opportunities for employment or volunteerism in a cause that you believe in not only fills the cavity that the children made when they left but provides a great example for them as well. Balancing your needs for self-fulfillment should always include service, that gives you a way to get outside of yourself and concentrate on others= needs.

Service has always been a very important part of our parenting process. Two years ago when we could see that our summers with children who are able to travel with us were numbered, we decided to try what we thought was the ultimate service project . . . building a water cistern and school house for and with the villagers of Mwambalasi, Kenya, Africa. The preparations were almost beyond belief. By the time we had prepared sleeping bags, mosquito nets, food, snacks, a ton of mosquito repellent, medical supplies, water pipes, clothing, eating utensils for ten of us, as well as paper, sports equipment, books, crafts, and carnival supplies for a party on our last day with the villagers, we looked like a three-ring circus! And when we got there, unforgettable memories were made as we worked side by side with villagers, ate their food, enjoyed their music, customs, smiles and were overwhelmed with their abilities to be happy in the face of enormous trials and needs. Though we were anything but comfortable, we could hardly remember a time when we were happier.

This year, quite by serendipity, we have discovered that we can find that same kind of happiness in service with families less than two miles from our own home. We have become immersed in helping families in the center-city-project where we have found families in just as desperate need as the villagers of our little village in Kenya. Their need centers not on food, water, or medical attention, but on the devastation of the breakdown of their family. We have found that the lack of the ability to show love and the pervasiveness of child neglect and abuse can destroy a soul just surely as the lack of food and water and medical attention in

Africa can destroy a life. What a joy it has been to have the luxury of a few extra hours a week to help a family to learn to be self-sufficient in spite of overwhelmingly difficult emotional circumstances! And how helpful it has been to *me* to be doing something meaningful that takes my mind off of how much I miss my departed kids!

Epecially for Women: What Do You Really Want?

Let me close this little mothers= section with the very interesting story of a friend named Dagny. She is the wife of a film maker and they have spent their life in the busy fast lane of Los Angeles. They have raised seven children of their own and a foster child. At one point in their parenting process, Dagny=s husband told her that the dream of his life was to own a large range in the wilderness of Oregon where he could retire, enjoy a quiet life and have time to read and write. She didn=t share his need for isolation or open spaces because what she loved was being actively involved in organizing performing groups for youth, particularly teenagers who were her children=s ages. She immensely enjoyed being intimately involved with her children and their friends and being always busy in doing meaningful and exciting things.

Finally though, with just a couple of kids still at home, her husband committed her to trying a life of seclusion and meditation as soon as the last two left the nest. Since she still couldn=t imagine that time ever coming, she agreed. When that time DID actually come, she followed through on her commitment and they moved from California to an eighty-acre ranch in Oregon, far from friends, community, shopping, the airport, and any hope for organizing youth singing groups. Before long, she was stretched to the limit with her isolation. She decided that this was definitely *not* her dream! Her husband could see her unhappiness and realized that it wasn=t exactly what he had planned either. In addition to doing some writing,

he continued making films and traveled often. After six months of reading books and enjoying the scenery, she decided that enough was enough.

The turning point for her really came when she realized that in addition to living her husband's dream, it was also crucial to live her own dreams! By then she had calculated that even though she had turned sixty, with the medical history of her family on both sides, it was very likely that she would live a strong, healthy life for at least thirty more years.

THIRTY YEARS! She felt that was an unbearably long time to read and collect stamps! She also realized that just because her children had left the nest, she couldn't just suddenly become somebody else. She decided she had to be who she really was, no matter what the context. As you might have guessed, Dagny sat down and set some goals for her own empty nest years. She knew that in order to be happy, she had to be actively involved in organizing and helping people as well as having some wonderful quality time with her husband.

Dagny and her husband picked a new dream place nearer to their children in California and she is now back to organizing performing groups for youth, this time with younger children who are her grandchildren's ages (they have nineteen so far). She is also actively involved in a church job and loves what she is doing. Her husband and children support her wholeheartedly knowing that she is happy and fulfilling her destiny. Although they regret that she can't be with them every time they'd like to have her, they understand that she has goals and needs. In addition to continuing to support their children's budding families, Dagny and her husband have found a struggling young family near them who they are working with and caring for, feeling that they are making a very real difference in the difficult lives.

Dagny knows the life she's chosen for her empty nest years wouldn't work for everyone. In fact, she has one friend who went back and resumed the full-time career she had

enjoyed before having children and another friend who decided to drop out of activity and be a full-time grandmother. Once her children left home, she loved dedicating herself completely to the needs of kids and grand kids. When I try to get her to come and help me with some of my projects, says Dagny, she just says how happy she is, not having any pressure to go places and do things. Having no deadlines and having the luxury of time to spend with her children and grandchildren has been her dream, which she is now happily living!

The bottom line: Get in touch with *yourself* and discover what *you* want, what *you* need and what you wish to accomplish in order to fulfill *your* destiny during your remaining time here on this earth. Set goals physically, mentally, spiritually, and socially for your empty nest years -- goals that will make it the most productive and fulfilling time of your life!

Chapter 7: Three Steps and Eleven Essential Elements

Relationship and Family Survival: What You=ll Need

While I (Richard) agree with all that Linda has said about making emotional adjustments and defining your own needs, I also know that she agrees with me that as ENPs we need to really come to grips *mentally* with this transition and carefully think through what our LTN children are going to need from us and what we are going to need from them. We also need to work hard mentally to understand this one central fact: *We are not Afinishing up@ as parents -- we are transitioning into another, equally important phase of parenting.* So . . . from a father=s standpoint, let me present a bit more analytical approach.

First of all, if we think of it eternally, we have just begun a parenting role that lasts forever. We=re on page one of a book with infinite pages and chapters. If we think of it in earth terms, we=re about at half-time. In the first half, thirty years give or take, which probably started in our twenties and ends in our fifties or early sixties, our children lived with us in our home. The second half, again thirty years plus or minus, will hopefully take us into our eighties or beyond and be played with our children living outside our home.

Which half is most important? Which half of a basketball game is most important? What a tragedy if our team quit playing, quit trying when the buzzer went off to end the first half!

The Three Steps and the Eleven Essentials

The fact is that most of the same principles and priorities that applied in the first half continue to be equally important in the second half. To illustrate: Years ago we wrote a book for young parents called *3 Steps to a Strong Family**. It=s thesis was that *every* organization

*Simon & Schuster, 1994

or institution that wants to survive and last (including the institution of a *family*) must have three things: 1. A family legal system (*rules and commitments*); 2. A family *economy* (a way of dividing its tasks and motivating its members); and 3. Family *traditions* (rituals and predictable good habits that bind us together). Do we still need them when our children leave? Of course we do! They may *change* and *evolve*, but all three are still absolutely necessary.

More recently, in another book, this one aimed more at families with adolescent and teenage children, called *The Happy Family: Restoring the Eleven Essential Elements That Make Families Work*,** we expanded the three steps into eleven things that our research indicated were present in some form in all succeeding families. We said:

On the first page of *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy makes a most provocative statement. He says, "Happy Families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way."

When we first read that sentence, we disagreed with it on two levels. First of all, no family is completely happy or completely unhappy, so what was he talking about? Second, no two families, happy or unhappy, are alike anyway.

But maybe Tolstoy didn't mean it the way we first read it. Maybe he simply meant that there are an infinite number of ways to fail as a family, but there is only one way to succeed. Perhaps he was suggesting that there are certain essential elements that are a part of all happy families, certain things that buttress and protect a family from forces that otherwise would inevitably tear it apart, and that these elements don't change.

Indeed all families that last and that produce security and happiness for their members do have some fundamental things in common, some elements that may exist in different forms but that are always present.

1. **Commitment** and recommitment (frequently stated as well as demonstrated).
2. A clarity of **purpose** . . . some kind of formal or informal (written or implied) family mission statement . . . a conscious parenting approach or strategy.

** St. Martins Press, 2001

3. A true **prioritizing** of family and family relationships . . . personal time management reinvented to reflect family priority.
4. **Communication** -- an insistence on it and a constant effort at it.
5. Family **rules**, laws, or standards.
6. Some sort of family **economy**, or a way of dividing family tasks and teaching responsibility and motivation.
7. Fun and lasting family **traditions** that involve humor and service.
8. Some sense of heritage, family history, and **roots**.
9. Efforts to help kids gain or accumulate an **understanding** of other people, of other cultures, and of the larger institutions that have an impact on their lives.
10. Correct **principles** being taught, including faith and belief.
11. A set of clear and recognized **values**, which are even more specific than principles.

The point is that every one of these eleven essential elements is as vital in empty nest parenting as it is when kids are still at home. To illustrate that, let's ask some self-evident questions about each essential element and see what empty nest ideas they call to mind:

1. Commitment and Recommitment

Questions: How important is it to kids who have just left home to know that you are still deeply committed to them, to their needs, to their happiness? As they go out to face the world on their own, how much do they need the safety net of our unconditional love and support?

Ideas: Keep telling them! Every letter or e-mail, every phone call, every visit should include a recommitment -- a little reminder that while so much has changed physically and logistically, nothing has changed emotionally. Always say, "I love you," rather than (or in

addition to) AGoodbye.@ Tell them often that while you will respect their independence and try to be wise in what and how much you give them, you will always be there for them and will always be their mom or dad.

Testimony and spiritual commitment ties so closely to family commitment, and a private family testimony meeting on any Sunday when you might be together can strengthen the ties that bind. Similarly, use of the Priesthood in the home can deepen both gospel commitment and family commitment. Give father=s or grandfather=s blessings to those with health needs or those facing important decisions or any kind of difficult challenge. Gather as much of your family as you can for blessings and confirmations as well as marriages. Use the great commitment of these ordinances to remind you all of your personal commitments to each other.

2. Clarity of Purpose

Questions: What *is* the purpose of an adult, empty nest family? Is it important that ENPs and LTNs come together on a purpose and a plan -- that they share common goals and have clearly-defined expectations of each other? Since most organizations and corporations today have a Amission statement,@ should families have one too? Can that credo or missions statement embrace the principles you=ve tried to teach and that you hope your departed children continue to embrace?

Ideas: If we want our families to continue to function and to *exist* after our kids leave home, we better have some plans about what they will do and how. Ask each other the basic question: What is our family now and how should it serve each of us. Try to get everyone involved in writing a family mission statement. Ask what they think the key principles are that they have learned and incorporate them into the statement. (We will get much further into the writing of extended family mission statements and vision statements in Section IV.)

3. A True Prioritizing of Family and Family Relationships

Questions: Is it harder to prioritize children once they've left home? Is it out of sight, out of mind? Are our kids still the most important thing in our lives? Should they be? Do we just need to turn them loose and stop thinking about them so much? Is it time to move on to other priorities? If our kids *do* still come first, how do we show it and live it?

Ideas: Family is always first. The minute we lose that sense, we begin to lose ourselves -- our truest identity. They are no less ours when they're gone -- our stewardship, our joy, our pride, and our concern. Think about their needs every day. Don't smother them or try to manage them, but always be *aware* of them. When you plan your day (or your week or your month) think of your family and your kids first.

There are two simple adjustments you can make in how you make your list of things-to-do each day that will bring about a more consistent orientation to the priority of kids and family. First, get in the habit of thinking, "What does my family need today?" and writing down the answers that come to you *before* you make your list of "Things to do." (After all, *things* are never as important as *people* -- especially people who happen to be your children.) Second, draw a vertical line down the middle of your planner page or your list page. Keep the *things* (work, business, church assignments, etc.) on the left. Reserve the right side for family things that may come up. Be willing to "jump the line" and take care of family whenever a need or idea occurs to you.

4. Communication

Questions: How do we stay in close touch while still giving them their independence? What are the key things to communicate about? How should our relationship change now that they're grown and gone? How do we approach them as adults but still as our children? How do we show interest in what they're doing without being too intrusive?

Ideas: This should be a great pleasure and reward of empty nest parenting -- kids who we can now talk to as adults, as friends, as interesting people who can expand us even as we expand them. Think of your communication with them as an interest and a joy. Ask questions of genuine interest rather than interrogation. Enjoy them like you would a new friend. Realize that the very technology we often blame for moral and family decline can be assets and powerful keys to our success in empty nest parenting. E-mail, computer instant messaging and low rate, long-distance calls can keep communication open and current from any distance. Grab at any chance to travel somewhere with an adult child. A Car time@ almost always lends itself to an Aopening up@ type of communication. Encourage your grown children to talk to each other often by phone or through Aweekly update@ types of e-mail. Consider a brief Aon line family home evening@ once a week from your various locations through an easy-to-set-up computer Achat room.@

5. Family Rules and Standards

Questions: Do the rules still apply? How would you or could you or should you enforce them?

Ideas: It's more a question of standards than of rules once they are gone. Now is the time they will make truly independent decisions about their behavior. Encourage them by making full use of the two most important tools you still have: example and confidence. View your own behavior not only in terms of its consequences to you but in terms of its impact on them. Look for every opportunity to show your confidence in them and in their choices.

Perhaps the most thorough way to realign and set up family standards for your grown, adult family is to get together and work out a Afamily constitution.@ We'll get deeply into how to do this in Section IV.

6. Family Economy

Questions: What expenses should you pay and what should be their responsibility?

At what stage should they be completely on their own? What are the tradeoffs between gifts and loans? What approach will maximize their individual initiative and motivation. Do you want them to struggle like you did? or Have the advantages you didn't?

Ideas: Talk this out together and come to an *agreement*. Don't figure it out as you go. Kids need to know what to expect and what not to expect. Keep in mind that the goal is independence and self-reliance. We'll try to give you more detailed ideas on finding the balance between independence and financial assistance in Section IV.

7. Family Traditions

Questions: How many of your family traditions can be continued in some form even though the children are not living at home? What new traditions are starting to form now that they're living elsewhere? Why is it important to hang on to as many traditions as possible? How do you go about establishing new ones (that center around reunions, weekly e-mails, doing similar things on Sunday, etc.)? What difference do your family traditions make to a child once he or she has left home?

Ideas: If traditions are the glue that holds families together, perhaps we need them even more when our kids are living away from us. Write your traditions down or have your child make a list of them to see what he or she remembers. Calendar them -- the holiday ones, the birthday ones, the seasonal ones, the weekly or Sunday ones, the ones that center around the dinner table -- whatever they have been, capture them in writing and give a copy to your departed children. Make an effort to keep those traditions alive, even if you have to do them separately or save them up for times when you are together.

8. Family History and Roots

Questions: Why does it matter that kids know something about their grandparents, great grandparents, and ancestors? Why might this be especially important to a child who is now living away from home?

Ideas: We adamantly believe that you don't know who you are until you know where you came from. The older we get the more we see traits of our parents and grandparents in our children. (Along with a lot of ours -- the bad along with the good.) Kids can see part of their own dreams, desires, and gifts as they study the lives of those who preceded them on the family tree. Write down any interesting stories you know about any of your ancestors -- particularly incidents that illustrate their character or personality -- and send these to your live-away child. If you don't already have one, make up a pedigree chart. Develop and communicate an interest in the cultures and places where your family has originated. Talk and write about the self-identity we can gain from our roots. Do genealogy together and go to the temple for your own ancestors. Celebrate ancestors' birthdays, complete with cake, birthday song, and stories that have been passed down. Often working together on the Aroots@ is the best way to strengthen the Abranches.@

Consider a summer family vacation to the land of your ancestors. Go to the actual places they were born and where they lived. If your children are not all with you, write descriptive and imaginative accounts of what you learn about your ancestors' origins and circumstances.

9. Understanding and Healthy Skepticism for Larger Institutions

Questions: If we think of the family as the smallest and most basic institution, where our deepest loyalties should lie, what are the larger institutions which compete for that loyalty and which can undermine the principles and priorities we've learned in our families? Which larger institutions are particular threats to a child as he or she leaves home for the first time?

Ideas: Have some "adult conversations" with your departed (or soon-to-depart) child about the "mixed blessing" of today's large institutions which on the one hand serve us and provide valuable services, but which can also deceive and damage us. (Big financial institutions encourage debt, big merchandising and advertising fosters materialism and greed, big media promote violence and recreational sex, big data and information [computer and Internet] can waste time and access pornography, big government can over regulate and over tax, etc.). Help your child become a "good critic" and have an attitude of healthy skepticism toward the forces around him in the world -- looking for and appreciating the good but also being aware of and cautious of the dangers.

10. Principles

Questions: Do moral and gospel principles get more or less important as children leave? How does "I teach the people correct principles and they govern themselves" apply? How and when should children live less on "borrowed light" and rely more on their own, self-gained convictions and testimonies?

Ideas: Continue to talk about gospel principles. Hold at least occasional "family home evenings" even if it has to be by conference call or Internet chat room. At family reunions, have each family member prepare and present a talk on a gospel principle that is important to him. Have scripture-reading schedules that you all try to follow as a family. Pray specifically for each other and let each other know the things you'd like to have them pray for for you. Ask missionaries to send home names and details about investigators and members they are working to reactivate so you can pray for them specifically and by name.

*Joseph Smith in answer to a question about how he could govern so large a number of church members.

11 Values!

Questions: In connection with the thoughts just mentioned, how will the values you've tried to teach your child be undermined as he or she moves out on his or her own? How can those values be kept prominent despite the counter influences of media and peer group? Away from your home and your influence, won't it be substantially harder for your child to live within those values?

Ideas: Agree together to a list of values and to focus on one of those values each month wherever you are and wherever your child is. Devote one letter or e-mail per month to the Avalue of the month. Focus on and discuss how values connect to happiness. Make service to others the paramount value of your family and look for chances to serve *together* in various capacities.

Do the eleven essential elements still apply to grown-up, empty-nest families? Of course they do. In fact, the eleven elements can be used as an effective check list to evaluate and measure how well you are doing with your empty nest parenting. If you feel or sense slippage on any of the eleven, it may mean that your family is, at least to some small degree, weakening. Like mending a fence, prop up and rebuild any of the eleven sections that are sagging a bit. Be *aware* of the condition of each element and make repairs and improvements consistently. In so doing, that fence will stay strong enough to protect your family from outside elements that would undermine and destroy and it will also hold in a concentration of unity and joy that will make the rest of life worth living!

Four Additional Essential Elements

As long as we're talking about essential elements that apply to all families, let's add

four more that apply particularly to empty nest families -- four things that often been helpful in keeping families together emotionally and spiritually, long after they have been separated physically. The four are: 1. APlace (Having a traditional place or location to Agather) 2. Family Reunions (Structuring and organizing our Agatherings so that they help each family member grow and progress.) 3. AF and FF and AM and FM (Dads forming AFathers and Future Fathers clubs with sons and moms forming AMothers and Future Mothers clubs with daughters.) And 4. ADeep Affirmations and ARelationship Descriptions (to build ongoing communication and character). Let's take a little deeper look at each of the four.

APlace (a traditional location to Agather):

We're writing this section in a place we call the Lighthouse, a summer house we built on top of a steep hill overlooking Bear Lake, a natural aqua blue gem in the mountains on the border of Utah and Idaho. We've been spending family time at this lake for twenty-three summers. More communication, more relaxing, more sharing and more *fun* seems to happen here in the few days or weeks we spend each year than in all the rest of the time and all the rest of the places put together.

Extended families -- families with grown children especially -- need a *place* to gather and to communicate. It ought to be a place somewhat removed from the daily routine and rat race -- and from the normal distractions of work and friends and commitments. Days seem so much longer at a place like this -- there is more time to talk and to listen and to enjoy each other. There also seems to be more time and more opportunities to discuss problems or choices and to help each other with solutions and decisions.

For some ENPs, this place might just be the family home to which kids return. But the problem there, usually, is that the ENPs have a busy work life and social life revolving around their home, so they are not really Agetting away when the kids visit. A *second* place

-- somewhere else to go -- where the dynamics and perspectives change a little -- is worth its weight in gold.

And, by the way, it doesn't have to cost very *much* gold. One family we know just uses their old Winnabego. Once they're in it together, they start to talk and have fun on a different level. Another family just has a very inexpensive vacation rental that they go to in the off-season. Friends in Bulgaria and the Ukraine, though they earn virtually nothing by American standards, still have a little Adocca® -- a tiny country or forest cabin, often that they built themselves, where they can get away as a family. Still other families simply go camping to some familiar place they have come to know and love.

In our own case, we started with a rough little one-room-and-loft A-frame at Bear Lake -- all we could afford, but a place to start making memories as a family. It has grown and been added onto over the years, and now, whenever we want to get together for real talking and real fun, it's here at Bear Lake. Now our grand children are forming some of the same memories that our children have from this place. This is where so many of our traditions happen. We're glad we started coming here so early, when our kids were small, but if we hadn't done it before, we'd do it now -- for our grown family -- get a *place* to gather and to enjoy and to re-bond.

Reunions (structuring and organizing our gatherings so they help each family member to grow and progress):

Family Reunion.® The phrase conjures images of parks or beaches, barbecues, volleyball games and tug-o-wars. Our favorite country-western song is called "All Because Two People Fell in Love." One verse goes like this:

At a picnic shelter, down by County Creek
You'll find potato salad, hot dogs, and baked beans.

The whole Wilson family=s lined up fillin= their paper plates;
They=ve drove or flown in here from fifteen different states.
Stanley Wilson says sixty years ago he knew Miss Emma Tucker was the one.
Five generations get together every June all because two people fell in love.

Many of us have those memories from our childhood, and the nostalgic feelings they retrieve ought to be reason enough to create the same kind of memories for our children and their children. When LTNs return for reunions, there can be a magical merging of past, present, and future.

To be successful, a family reunion ought to provide generous helpings of three things besides the food:

1. Fun (and food)
2. Opportunities to teach each other the gospel
3. Progress on the family structure (genealogy, mission statement, finances, etc.)

Fun: When we gather each summer at Bear Lake, water-skiing is the top priority.

When the wind is calm and the water becomes a sheet of glass, we drop whatever else we=re doing and head for the boat. Reunions also include the annual Eyrealm tennis tournament and the Bear Lake pentathlon (events: 1. sagebrush run, 2. cowpie toss, 3. water rock skip, 4. around-the-deck race, 5 surf and swim relay), not to mention late-night marathons of ASpeed Scrabble@ and AScum@ (a hard-to-explain card game).

Gospel Teaching: Each person is assigned a gospel topic which he or she prepares in advance for presentation in one of the ASerious sessions@ (late night meetings after kids are in bed).

Family Structure: We=ll talk more later in the book about doing an adult mission statement and a family constitution. But we work on these at reunions, along with genealogy, family finances, and other Abusiness.@

Another kind of family reunion that can accomplish the same things and add an element of serving and helping together is a humanitarian expedition.

A few years ago, we were invited to join the board of a nonprofit humanitarian group called CHOICE (Center for Humanitarian Outreach Inter Cultural Exchange). The CHOICE philosophy (and there are other similar groups around the country) is that, to really serve, people have to give of *themselves* as well as their money to make a true and meaningful contribution. They accomplish and facilitate this by sending out expeditions to intensely poor Third and Fourth World locations. The expeditions last one or two weeks and accomplish some particular project like building a simple school or health clinic, digging a well, or constructing an irrigation project, or setting up small micro enterprise businesses. Expedition members (usually a group of several families) pay their own transportation plus the cost of the materials to accomplish and complete the designated project. An advance team of interns usually gets the materials in place before the expedition arrives.

It wasn't long before we discovered that we could go on one of these expeditions for less cost than to use the same vacation time to go to Disney World and/or some other typical vacation. We also found that our own internal family interaction, bonding, and communication was far more beneficial and complete on an expedition than on a more traditional vacation.

We have also realized that you don't have to go to a Third World country to derive these benefits from service. A full-family mini-expedition to feed the homeless at a shelter provides the same kind of bonding and communication and the same kind of perspective and gratitude boost.

M&FM or F&FF (Future mothers and Future fathers clubs):

I (Linda) am reminded of a story of a young mother who always cut off the end of the pot roast before she put it in the pan for Sunday dinner. When her husband asked why she always did that, she said, "This is the way mother *always* did it." Curious, she began questioning her mother and grandmother, who had always prepared their roasts by cutting off the ends. Finally a great grandfather remembered that his wife had always cut the end off the roast because it was too large to fit in her small roasting pan. Scary how simple everyday survival modes can become family traditions!

From our own experience, we know that many things our daughters do when they establish their own families are usually taught by our unspoken example for better or for worse! Yet there are so many things that *need* to be verbally communicated about our feelings regarding motherhood and its importance. The difficult thing is making time and finding a place to do it.

As my daughters started leaving home, I began to wonder how I could pass on important concepts to my daughters through real and meaningful communication rather than just letting the vitalness of what they were doing as mothers pass through the generations by chance with no explanations like the cut-off ends of a roast. The difficult thing was finding a time and a place to make that communication happen. I realized how easy it would be to lose touch with what they were thinking and how they were really feeling. Then, as our first grandchild was about to enter the world, I was worried that my daughters might lose track of how important their role as mothers was as they encountered the stress and hardships of every-day motherhood.. In addition, I felt that our daughters, whether they were mothers yet or not, needed to think about motherhood as a serious career, one that would make not just a little difference, but a profound difference in the lives of not only this generation but that of many yet to come. I realized that unless we organized to be together so that we could talk

about these things that really matter, we might be in danger of being like ships, passing in the night, never really sharing our deepest feelings, especially about things that matter most.

From these concerns and hopes has sprung the illustrious organization, *Mothers and Future Mothers of Eyrealms* (MFME for short). Once a year, usually for three days and two nights, the Eyre women meet at an appointed place and time to exchange ideas, enjoy cultural events, and to generally relish being out of our own worlds and into the world of nurturing our love for each other and appreciating each other's ideas. Although motherhood is the underlying theme, it is so exciting for me to learn from these women who have their own perspectives and ideas because of their own life experiences.

At the first conference, before any of them had children, we talked about motherhood theoretically. Each conference becomes a little more interesting as our older daughters grapple with the realities of actual mothering. We try to combine deep communication about motherhood with discussions about learning and opportunities to share what we've been learning about the world that surrounds us, since the mother is the primary teacher in the home.

During our latest MFME conference, each daughter presented something from her sphere of expertise. Saydi explained some of the fascinating principles of communication that she was learning in her classes and with her social work clients. Saren presented a picture of what she had learned from a recent business trip with her husband and baby to the south of France. We also loved hearing a book report by Shawni on *The Poisonwood Bible*, which most of us had read and loved and which is an engrossing study of women and the family. Aja, who has been taking a wonderful class on the history and traditions of women in China, educated us about a vastly different world of women and motherhood, and Charity reminded us of the perils of women in high school. Our daughters living away from home

(who I might add, are all quite as desperately poor as we were at their age) look forward to these precious days together like a four-year-old waiting for Christmas. Our youngest, fourteen-year-old Charity, though a fair distance from motherhood, learned perhaps more than we know, not only about the importance of motherhood, but also learning subtly that communication and learning from one another is perhaps even more important after one has left the nest. @

We had great adventures at the Museum of Modern Art and the Museum of Natural History, accompanied by the normal crisis of losing someone in each museum and the baby being fussy and somebody's knee hurting. But the greatest adventure of all came on the Sunday afternoon when the girls and I filled out a questionnaire. Not only questions about motherhood, but their answers to questions about life were extraordinarily revealing. That discussion taught me so much as their mother. I love the memory of sitting around a table with a beautiful blue Indian tablecloth talking about things that really matter.

Just in case you'd like to know the fourteen questions I chose for this Sunday afternoon discussion, I'm including them. Hopefully they can serve as a springboard for even better questions you might like to ask your own daughter or daughters:

- 1a. For those who are not yet mothers: What are you looking forward to most about being a mother? What do you think will be the hardest part?
- 1b. For those who are now mothers: What surprised you most about being a mother? What *is* the hardest part?
2. What are the most important things to look for when choosing a marriage partner?
3. How many children would you like to have? (Realizing that you can't always have what you want.)

4. What are the most important things you are learning right now?
5. What is your most memorable experience this year?
6. What do you think you=ll be doing five years from now?
7. What should be your criteria when you and your husband ask yourselves whether or not it is time to have a child?
8. What do you dream of doing?
9. What is the most important thing to remember when you are a mother?
10. If you could have lunch with any three people alive, who would they be?
11. What do you love most about what you are doing right now?
12. If you could go anywhere on earth where would it be?
13. What do you worry about?
14. If you had a magic wand, what is something you would change about yourself?

Later in the conference, the girls suggested we go around the circle and tell each person what we each liked best about her and then some thing they wished she would change.

It was maybe the most revealing and valuable time of all. The things that came out were both gratifying and surprising. Everything was said kindly, but it was a great chance to get some things out on the table that needed to be said.

At the end of our time together I gave each daughter a little book where they could put a picture and a short synopsis of our adventures that year as a permanent record of our MFME conference.

I highly recommend these mother and departed-daughter meetings! The most important aspect is that you are all together and all *away* from your normal routine. If getting together for two or three days is out of the question, maybe just a Saturday get-together or even a prearranged weekend conference call with a Amotherhood agenda@ would be great.

Just remember that your continuing communication with your children once they have left home may be your greatest tool in keeping your family together forever!

A Deep Affirmations@ and A Relationship Descriptions@ (to build ongoing communication and character).

Sometimes we think that our A grownup@ kids no longer need us to build up their self-esteem and bolster their confidence . . . and that the relationships and rapport we=ve built with our children will automatically stay in place even when they=ve moved away. When we think that, we=re wrong on both counts. So much of our children=s self-image and confidence, even when they=re grown, is linked to what they think we think of them. And *all* relationships, including those between ENPs and LTNs take ongoing maintenance.

A A Deep Affirmation@ is a conscious, thoughtful effort to think through the strengths and attributes of one of your children B the aspects of his or her personality or character that you appreciate and admire B and then to *express* these compliments and positive affirmations to your child in person, in a letter, or on a voice message. If you express them verbally, it=s best to write them down first so your child knows you=ve thought about them carefully and deeply and that you really mean them. An example:

A Son, I=ve just been thinking about you so much since you=ve been away at school. It seems that your absence makes me even more aware of how much I love you and how many things I like and admire about you. You have an amazing sense of determination that allows you to get things done even when they are more difficult than you thought they=d be. You=re an optimist B you seem to always see the bright side of things and because of this you cheer up other people who consequently love to be around you. And you=re

amazingly interested in others B good at asking questions and at being sensitive to how they feel and what they need. These are great gifts, and they seem to be getting even stronger now that you=re out on your own.

I think your best quality of all, son, is your good heart. I have never for a moment worried about you doing anything really wrong, or taking advantage of anyone. You care about people, you stand up for anyone who is being picked on or needs help or support. Basically, you are courageous. You=ll do what you think is right regardless of what others are doing.

Just know that I have total faith in you son. I love you and I=m proud to be your dad.

A *Relationship Description* is another very powerful way to use writing, this time to establish in your own mind the kind of communication and relationship you want to have with a *grown-and-gone* child.

We usually think of *goals* in connection with achievements or things we want to accomplish rather than in terms of relationships. But when you write a brief description of the relationship you *want* to have with a departed son or daughter, you are actually setting a goal for that relationship and putting a picture or image in your own mind that you will work toward both consciously and subconsciously. Just project out six months or so and write a little description of the relationship you want to have and of how you will communicate together. Do it in your journal or some private place. No one has to see it but you. An example:

Leslie has been away at college for six months now. Though we only see each other a couple of weekends a month and talk on the phone maybe twice a week, we=re actually closer in many ways now than we have ever

been. I treat her as an adult and show a lot of confidence in her and in her decisions. I even ask her for advice on things and that seems to make it easier for her to ask for my advice. We laugh a lot and genuinely enjoy hearing about each other=s experiences.

She can feel my trust and admiration and, as a result, we tell each other everything B no secrets. I don=t try to solve all her problems for her; I just try to listen and sympathize and express confidence rather than to judge or lecture.

In return, she seems anxious to share not only what she=s doing but what she=s thinking about.

The thought and time spent in Deep Affirmations and Relationship Descriptions is well spent! It brings our ENP priorities to the forefront and opens us to inspiration from Heavenly Father.

Chapter 8: A Word from the LTNs **(and the Basic Purpose of an Empty Nest Family)**

Before we move on to Part Two (where we LTNs really get involved) let me just jump in as the daughter and make a point or two. I just think it is so important as you think about some of the things my parents have brought up, to involve your kids in that thinking. As your children become adults, they really need a new kind of communication where they feel comfortable in bringing up anything that is on their minds.

For some reason, it=s really hard to tell your parents that you need certain things or are bothered by certain things they do. When we try, parents can be pretty defensive and annoyed -- then things are just unpleasant and pointless. So as long as we have a pretty tolerable relationship and we aren=t around each other that much anyway, it=s easier to just not say anything.

This book suggests that you, the parent, take the initiative to bring up a full range of subjects -- from financial issues to communication ideals to roles you want to play in each others= lives -- with your kids. I really appreciate the fact that my parents brought up so many issues and ideas and plans with me before I left home, and that they continue to discuss and adjust the roles they play in my life. Because of these ongoing discussions, I find it fairly easy to bring up my own issues and worries with them. It=s my hope that through reading this book and sharing thoughts and ideas it inspires with your kids, you=ll be able to open a door for continually building and strengthening your relationship with them.

Your kids really do want a strong, ongoing relationship with you. To illustrate this, I asked some of my siblings a basic question: AWhat is the purpose of family once family members don=t live together any more and don=t rely on each other for their basic daily

needs? @ I got some pretty interesting answers:

SAYDI:

I have found that family relationships are the foundation upon which I have built and continue to build my character. That was easy to see when I was small, living in the same house as my parents and siblings. My parents taught me about life, gave me structure and rules and provided for me. My siblings were the friends I was around the most, the ones I could be anyone around, be stupid with, say anything to, they would always end up loving me the same. I guess I thought that as we all got older and moved away and started our own lives and families that my family would have less of an impact on me and who I was. Now I see that=s not true. Now that I=m older and have been away from home for a while my family has a different impact on who I am and perhaps it=s a stronger one. Now my family members are my peers, but they have this special place built by unconditional love so I know they are always honest with me and I know they can give me the most true and real advice because they know me the most and they know I won=t judge them by what they say to me or how they act towards me. My parents and siblings are who I go to for advice, for reality checks, for comfort. The purpose of family now in my life is to help me remember who I am and feel good about it, to help me build good character and to love me no matter what I do.

AJA:

My thoughts and foundation are still with my family. I don=t see my family every day anymore, but I feel them almost all the time. I don=t so much think about what they are doing or what=s going on at that particular point in time, but I do feel their influence and their love, and I am concerned or joyful for and with them, across all the miles. It seems almost mystical, and maybe it is, but emotionally and spiritually I never really feel like I=ve left home.

SHAWNI:

The purpose of family once the kids have moved away is to remain as intact and in love as ever, helping each other through different stages of life. I think relationships change and things are different as family members move away and the family is no longer a cohesive unit living in the same house. But I guess the key is figuring out how to keep that cohesive unit in love despite long distances and increasing distractions and chaotic schedules. In some ways I feel even more connected to my family now that I have moved away and been married for a while. As we all grow up differences in age seem to diminish and we all kind of relate on a different, more adult level.

I think I'll always be lonely for siblings and parents when I'm not around them a lot. I just love them so much and feel so close to them from all we've been through together I always feel lonely for them when we're not together. I'm so glad for the phone and the Internet to stay in touch!

JONAH:

Now that I'm away from home, family is the memory of all the silly fights and the car rides and all the missing curfews and how you all worked it out and that you are all still together. Family is simple support and knowing that there are people who will always be there to fall back on, whether it's a need for love or a desperate need for money. It's important to know that there are always those that will help you in any way that they can. Family is not just a place to eat Thanksgiving dinner, rather, it is a place where you know people really know you. Being out in the student world where everyone is trying to fend for themselves, I realize how important it is to know I have a family who cares about me and is willing to fend for me. Physically parents are with their children 24/7 before the move out. Ideally, their influence and support stays with their kids 24/7 if they continue to do their job

right.

Part One Conclusion

The Church as Our Help and Our Key

I (Richard) was on an airplane once, seated by a stranger -- a psychologist as it happened -- who knew a great deal about the church. (He had several LDS friends and neighbors and had observed them closely.)

A I can't say that I have too many opinions about the doctrine and teachings of your church,@ he said A but I can tell you this -- Joseph Smith and Brigham Young had to be cultural and psychological and sociological *geniuses!*@

A What do you mean by that,@ I asked.

A Well,@ he said, A they somehow anticipated the most common and prevalent developmental problems people would face -- even in our day -- and put in place systems and programs that would solve them!

It sounded like he'd thought a lot about this so I asked him to go on.

A Okay, let's start with kids transitioning into adulthood. Most eighteen or nineteen year olds are too young to make good college, major, and career choices, so they make a lot of false starts and poor choices. You've got your missions at that age. Kids give service, forget themselves, become more mature and sophisticated, see different parts of the world and its cultures, and come home knowing far more about themselves and their aptitudes and their options . . . ready to make good education and career decisions, not to mention marriage decisions. Your missions are a sociological and personal development master stroke.@

Well, I thought, I've never looked at it quite that way. A What else?@

“The other most difficult developmental phase,” he said, “is the empty nest syndrome and retirement. Most people flounder. They don’t feel useful or needed anymore and there are huge rises in everything from nervous breakdowns to divorce to health problems. But you Mormons have missions for retired couples and you have that temple and genealogy thing. People not only stay busy, they perceive what they are doing is even more important, so their mental and psychological health and their marriage relationships are usually excellent. I just think it’s brilliant. Joseph and Brigham were unbelievably farsighted.”

I’ve thought a lot about that discussion. The ideas aren’t Joseph’s or Brigham’s, but they are brilliant. Of course missions, genealogy, and temple work aren’t just for the benefit of those who participate in them, but they are master strokes indeed -- strokes from the Master.

The whole process and transition of empty nest parenting is made more positive and more productive for us ENPs and for our LTNs by the inspired programs of God and of His Church.

Full acceptance and activity in every opportunity we have as members is the most powerful key in unlocking the door to successful empty nest parenting and a happy and hopefully long second half of life.

Priorities and Commitment

There are lots of books about this transitional time of life -- many of them written to and for baby boomers -- books with titles about “The Second Half of Life” or “Life After Fifty,” or “The Autumn of Life.” Most of the books are about finances, or travel, or various ways to enjoy our new-found freedom.

But what matters most? And what will ultimately have the most bearing on our happiness? The answer, of course, is our family and our children. So it is ironic that so many of us plan so carefully for every other aspect of our upcoming retirement and of our life's second half, but think and plan so little for what remains our most important stewardship and the key to our happiness -- our families and our ongoing relationships with their children.

There's no single *right* answer for the issues and challenges of Empty Nest Parenting. We each have to find our own. But there is one right attitude, and that is to *prioritize* our families, children, even after they leave, above every other aspect of our lives. After all, we've *invested* eighteen to twenty years in each of them-- and we're now nearing the home stretch. This is no time to slack off or slow down. We are now in a position to build the *beautiful family culture of a three-generation family* that Stephen Covey spoke of in the foreword.

It's so interesting to speak (as we often do) to audiences of nonmember parents. While they share the same kind of unconditional love for their children, they often think about commitment and about priorities in a very different way than we do. After one speech on the East Coast a person said, in essence, *Before my kids grew up and left, I had to pretty much make every decision with them in mind: the kind of house we lived in, where we went on vacation, what I spent my money on. Pretty much everything had to be oriented to them, and I think I passed that test. Now I'm at a place where I can think about what I want.*

Not that there's anything so wrong with a little of that kind of thinking, but as Church members with testimonies of eternal families, we are naturally going to be more concerned with the preserving and strengthening of relationships and with things like family reunions, interfamily advice, mutual assistance, helping with each other's testimonies and lifestyle choices, etc. For us, there has been no change of priorities, just a change in the address where

those priorities live!

Intermission

Two Related Issues

This book (all of both of its two parts) is exclusively about *Empty Nest Parenting* -- about being a parent to sons or daughters who have moved out. *But . . .* there are two related issues that are so *relevant* and so *connected* that they can't be ignored. A brief intermission that deals with each of them will, like all good intermissions, enhance our enjoyment of Act II.

The first issue is on the minds of parents who still have one or more children who have *not* yet left home, and who want to do all they can to *prepare* (both the child and themselves) for that day of departure. The second issue is about empty nest *marriage* -- about making the relationship adjustments that married empty nesters need to make.

Preparing a Child to Leave Home -- and Preparing Yourself for the Departure

Say you've got an older teenager or two who will be leaving home in the next couple of years. Do you put this book on the shelf and wait until you really need it -- or do you start now (start *thinking* about the transition and start consciously preparing your child for his LTN phase)?

Of course it's wisest to anticipate and prepare! The simplest and most effective way to go about this is to sit down with your teenager and make a list of what he/she will want to know and to be able to do by the time he takes off for college or a mission or whatever. The list can include anything from knowing how to cook a few things to knowing how to budget, how to use a day timer, how to make wise choices on friends, etc.

We asked our two Astill at homers@ -- Eli (17) and Charity Jade (14) what they

thought. Actually, we posed four questions to them. Here are a few of their answers (completely unedited):

What am I most worried about as I think about leaving home?

CHARITY JADE:

Being the baby of the family, I know that my leaving home will spring up many new opportunities for my parents. They will want to travel the world, spend years in tropical locations to golf and lounge away when all of their kids have left. Frankly, this worries me. I want to call home and hear their comforting voices at every worry (without having to track them down). I want to come home to our cozy house for Christmas and Thanksgiving to see the whole family. I know that by the time I have left home, my family will be much larger and more branched off. I am scared that they will all be doing their own thing . . . I hope they all don't forget that I am still hanging on the end.

Because of this worry, I feel that it is very important that parents, while still giving their kids a sense of independence, don't let them go too fast. I know that I will probably be pretty home sick when I first leave home and I believe constant support from the parents is very important. I feel that each child deserves to know that there is always a constant person to turn to in times of turmoil. I really believe that parenting should be the same, if not harder, after the children leave home. I will have so many questions when I leave home, and I will need that crutch to lean on.

Because my parents and siblings have taught me both verbally and through example so much about leaving home, I really don't have a long list of worries. This shows me how much preparing your child for life away from home can help them to minimize the worries they have about it.

ELI:

I have heard from each of my siblings, and it is often said in the world, that you don't truly appreciate something until you no longer have it. I think the thing I am most scared about leaving home is the fact that my parents won't be there, to help me up when I am down, or to remind me about something, or to push me to achieve more.

It is a given that it will be nice to have a little bit more freedom, as far as certain things go. I'll clean my room when I want, come home when I want, etc. But in pondering this, it isn't all that great. Without my parents I would be nowhere. Seeing as I have never really lived away from home, that has never been a problem. But as I prepare to go to college this fall, I realize how worried I am to be away from the comfort of my parents and family.

There is so much stuff in my life that my parents do for me, often without me even noticing. I worry that, without them, that stuff they do won't get done, and thus I will fail.

I am also kinda scared to face the real world, not one sheltered by my own comforts. It is no longer high school where things don't matter all that much. In college, everything I do and learn will somehow affect my life and the path it takes.

What can my family and I do now (while I am still at home) to overcome these worries?

CHARITY JADE:

I think that it is important that I develop a strong sense of love and trust with my parents before I leave home. I think that they need to let me know that they will always be there when I need them. I feel we need to establish that support right now, even before I step

foot on my unchartered soil. There should be a promise between us that they will always be around if I need them.

My parents and family can also continue to explain to me what things will be like; they can share their experiences with me. I know that I will be very confident when I leave home because I will know almost exactly what I am getting into and what I am going to experience.

ELI:

Let kids practice a little bit of independence. Let them know what the real world is going to be like. Let them know that Mom and Dad aren't always going to be there to pick up after them to push them along and to straighten things out when they mess up.

I stress the importance of making sure they know how to handle money. Make them earn it in high school. Don't just give it to them. In the real world, people aren't just going to give you money. In high school, I have had to work for my money; the money that I have spent on clothes and entertainment is money that I have earned. When a kid earns his own money, it is then natural for them to take care of it and spend it wisely, whereas if you just give them the money, they won't care what they spend it on, or how fast they spend it.

Don't do everything for your kids; help them out a little or maybe even a lot while they are still at home, but make sure they know you won't always be there to correct their faults and get them out of difficult situations.

Thinking not just about myself, but about kids in general, what are the things that make a person really prepared to be on their own?

CHARITY JADE:

After years of complaining, I have finally come to realize how grateful I am that my parents taught me how to work. Ever since I was eight, I have earned every penny to pay for every item of clothing that I have bought (partly through doing family chores and getting paid to practice the flute). I have also paid for nights out with my friends and other activities. I have sometimes envied my friends with their closets full and their freely giving parents. Now I just feel bad for them. I know that when I am out in the real world, I will be more successful than they. I will know what I am doing. I will handle my money well. I will have more. I appreciate so much that my parents have made me work for my privileges. I am so glad that I know how much money to spend and how much to save and how much to give. This is one of the greatest gifts my parents have given me because I know it is truly preparing me for what=s ahead.

I once heard of a mother who decided to clean up after her child and never to make her work. She realized that it would take less time if she picked up the toys or did the dishes than it would to tell her daughter to do it and wait for the complaining to stop. Her daughter was pampered with never having to work. Recently, this girl began her freshman year in college. She is miserable. I am so glad that my parents not only made me work for my money and clothes, but also taught me how to cook and clean and carry out simple tasks that I will have to do every day of my adult life. I might not be great at it, but this also has made me so much more prepared for Alife in the fast lane,@ and I am so grateful for it.

Parents can also prepare their child for life living out of the home by telling them what it will be like and letting them know that they, as parents, will always be a steady stream of support. Every child needs an idea of what it will be like out there, and it is almost fully the parent=s responsibility to prepare them for that. Parents can also start to change

roles from a parent that children depend on for the basic needs of life, to a parent that children depend on to be a friend and a support source.

ELI:

I think the most important thing that prepares kids to be on their own is by hearing experiences. Whether they come from siblings or parents, just their ability (the kids) to know what to expect can make worlds of difference. Parents should tell you what they remember about being your age!

The advice of older siblings that have moved away from home is also very important. They know how it works and can tell me what to expect and how to live on my own away from my parents. They can relate stories to me, and overall, just make the transition easier.

I have seven older siblings that have all gone away to college, and in watching them and hearing their personal experiences, I have better knowledge of what to expect when I leave home.

Even though I don't yet have any experience away from home, I anticipate that what I'll need from my parents during my first year gone will be . . .

CHARITY JADE:

I have said this at least five times before, but I think it is crucial. Before the child leaves for his/her first year away, the parent needs to establish a support system that states that they will always be there in hard or great times. I feel that the parent's line should never be busy and the answer should never be no to a child who wants advice. The support has to be there. Most children as they leave will be homesick and scared at one point. They

need people that they can always turn to, that they can rejoice or mourn with. I think this is one thing that I will desperately need my first year away. I have heard the phone ring when calls of my older siblings come in uncountable times. And my parents are always there to talk. I feel that this is one way that they all made it through their first year and beyond doing so well and being so happy.

ELI:

I anticipate that as I move away to college or leave the house, the thing I will need most from my parents is their love and support. I will need to know that they are there for me, to know that they are thinking about me and loving me. I need to know that, if emergency strikes, or just during tough times, that I can fall back on them, and that they will be there; that I can call them, and talk things over when I am having a hard time. This is what I will need from my parents.

Another thing I will need is their advice and ideas. I need to know that I can ask them for advice whenever I feel I need it. It is important though, that parents give good advice, but if the children don't take it, they can't be offended and need to be willing to give advice again the next time it is asked for.

Most of all, I just want to have my parents' support, and I want to know that they will support and love me no matter what decisions I make. The bottom line is I just need to know that they will be there for me.

Summary

If you still have children living with you in your home, realize that the first step in successful empty nest parenting is to *prepare* for it. First prepare your family by having some

ideas and plans in mind to preserve and maintain the eleven essential elements discussed in the last section. Second, prepare yourself by anticipating the emotions you=ll feel and by having some special events or travel in mind to take up the emotional slack when the nest is first empty. (Nothing better than another Ahoneymoon@ where you reinvent your relationship with your spouse and have some leisurely time to think about and discuss your own personal empty nest parenting strategies.) Third, prepare your child by talking frequently about what it will be like to be gone. Sometimes brief Aseparations@ (a term exchange program or a summer with relations) can be great Areviews@ of what it will be like to live away and can take a little of the sting out of the Areal thing.@

The Church offers us some pretty amazing opportunities when it comes to both the preparation and the actual departure of our children. EFY programs and other short-term away-from-home experiences can prepare them emotionally and spiritually. Church universities or institute programs can give them a gospel-centered home away from home. Church sponsored study abroad programs can allow short-term Aadjusting times.@ Missions can provide perhaps the best independence and maturity-gaining experience available anywhere. And temple, genealogy, and senior missionary experiences can be the perfect buffer and transitional experience for empty nest parents.

Most of all, though, the Church and its doctrines of eternal families can give us the profound motivations we need to bridge any gaps, cover any distance and overcome any challenge in keeping our empty nest families close and in tact.

Re-tuning Your Marriage

How often have you heard this story: The last child moves out, and within a few months . . . one of the parents moves out too. So, if you are a two-parent family, along with

all your efforts at empty nest parenting, there should be some serious attention paid to *empty nest partnership*.

Single empty nest parents* can skip this part -- (or use this intermission to get a bag of popcorn or a soft drink!) -- but married parents better not! Because the old phrase "The best thing you can do *for* your kids is to love their mother" (or father in the mother=s case) IS STILL TRUE. Nothing gives adult children more security and happiness (not to mention an invaluable example) than seeing that their mom and dad are still in love. Remember that the goal is an eternal family. To be even more direct, the goal is a kingdom -- a kingdom within God=s kingdom. And the first requirement for any lasting kingdom is a unified "king" and a "queen."

If you *are* fortunate enough to still be married to the father or mother of your children, begin with an understanding of the profound importance of that partnership. It is the new and everlasting covenant, it is the relationship that preceded and spawned and still gives nourishment and security to your relationships with your children. It is the trunk of your family tree, the connections between your roots and branches. It is the ultimate key to your happiness here and hereafter.

Retuning from orchestra to duet.

Forgive my (Linda=s) musical analogy, but let=s face it, with kids pulling at our heartstrings for at least two decades, when the children leave home, our marriage is bound to be somewhat, or perhaps even drastically, out of tune. For marriages that have survived,

*If your partner had preceded you to the next phase, you will seek his or her will and approval as you complete the stewardship you started together. If you are divorced or separated, you may still find ways to work together or at least in some kind of tandem or agreement on matters relating to your children. Even if you have remarried or blended families, your new relationship with spouse will have a profound influence on your children and on your

relationship with them.

some adjustments probably need to be made when our children leave home in order to get our marriage partnership back in full harmony.

For many mother and father birds, one of the greatest worries living in an empty nest is learning to live together as a couple again after many years of sharing that nest with younger and smaller people and all *their* problems. As we anticipate being on our own, we have empty nest visions of traveling at will, eating gourmet food, no longer being prisoners to homework, not having to wring our hands when teenagers have missed their curfew and being able to go to the movies whenever we feel like it. But will we be able to survive each other - just each other -- full time? All those years of car pools, juggling schedules and sweating over being late for ballet are gone. Yet somehow, things are not really that much less complicated. There are still career issues and community involvement and church jobs to deal with as well as the inevitable needs of the children even though they are away from home. Life is not easier, but *life is different* in an empty nest. How do we re-tune our marriage in order to make it into an exciting partnership for the future?

Before we get to the big questions, let's talk about a couple of the little ones that make a big difference. One might be: How does one deal with those annoying habits of a spouse that have sort of gotten swallowed up in the hurricane of life with children? Chances are that those irritating idiosyncrasies will now be laying . . . exposed . . . and somehow easier to stumble over in that empty nest. For years I have complained sporadically about Richard's habit of flossing his teeth in bed at midnight and been disgruntled by the fact that when he makes the bed, it looks like there's somebody still in it. It's easier to dwell on little things like that when there are just the two of us in the house. We have learned that, even though one or the other spouse may be worried about something that may seem to be a silly little thing, the best thing that can go through a spouse's mind when there is a need to change is,

Alf it=s important to you, it=s important to me!@ (He can be quieter with the floss and neater with the bed. I can be more tolerant on both and keep them in perspective.)

We=ve also learned that Aconstructive criticism@ is usually Adestructive.@ After years of complaining about some of Richard=s idiosyncrasies, I have realized that the best way to change behavior is not through criticism, but through praise. Praise is a powerful tool, not only to build someone up, but also to help *you* realize how grateful you are for a spouse who is really trying to be the best he can be, even though it may not seem like it at times. Praise focuses your attention on the things you love rather than the things that bother you. Praise is almost like a magic wand to help a spouse feel worthwhile and eager to fulfill expectations. It is a vehicle for choice. It maximizes both spouses= chances to change. Criticism is a judgment, a verdict, and a stifling dead end.

The empty nest is a place (and a time) to consciously change old habits and patterns. Years of dealing with the realities of life produces habits that are sometimes simply modes of survival rather than something that is really helping to enhance your marriage. Even though I tried to be loving and helpful to Richard when all of our children were home, the message that usually came through on the day-to-day was, AI love you but I=ve got all these kids= needs to attend to today. I can=t handle *another* child so you=re just going to have to take care of yourself!@ Now mind you, on many days that attitude was absolutely justified, but I think I established a habit of thinking of the kids= needs first. Now that most of them have gone, it has taken a conscious mental shift as well as deliberate physical action to let Richard know that he really is my first priority. This is the person I plan to live with for the rest of my life -- and even beyond. Our children will all eventually have their own spouses and their own separate homes and children to care for. The prime relationship for eternity is that of husband and wife.

Which leads us to the fact that a prime relationship deserves prime time! We have decided that now that we are approaching a new phase of life, we need a new vision statement for our marriage. Since you will be reading in detail about our new family mission statement at the in the last section of this book, we should just say here that we spent a few days on a business trip talking about what we envisioned for our empty nest years. We decided to call it *The Mission of Our Marriage*. Later we started calling it, *Working out our own salvation*. After several rather long paragraphs containing thoughts that we wanted to include but that we probably weren't going to remember, we decided to simplify our statement to two words: *Love More*. These two words are really the heart of our purpose as we progress in our partnership. Developing your own mission for the empty nest years can give you a sense of purpose and a track to run on.

Learning from Missionaries . . . *Companionship Testimonies*

Perhaps the biggest ongoing worry of most mission presidents is companionship problems. It was certainly true for me (Richard) in London. Whenever the phone rang, there was a chance that the Elder or Sister on the line would say, *President, I just can't stand my companion any longer*, or *Elder _____ is driving me nuts*, or even *Well, President, it finally came to blows. I told you you should have transferred one us*.

After a year or so in the field, I noticed something. One of the questions I asked in missionary interviews was, *Do you have a private companionship testimony meeting each week as suggested in the white handbook?* *Those who did rarely, if ever, had serious companionship problems.* As I thought about it, and asked about it, I realized that those weekly testimony meetings, besides being an endearing private expression of faith, belief, and love, were also a time to clear the air, to get feelings and frustrations out in an atmosphere

that defused them and put them in perspective. After bearing his testimony and telling his companion he loved him, loved the work, loved the investigators, and loved the Lord, it became easier and far less painful or threatening to mention something that was bothering him or that could be improved on.

It turned out that this one little twenty or thirty minute weekly companionship testimony meeting was the single most effective thing we ever found to eliminate companionship complaints, criticisms, and contention.

With the mission in mind, and with the commitment of devoting prime time to our marriage relationship, we decided that we would have a companionship meeting of our own every Sunday night.

A few things that make it work best for us:

- ! Meet in a quiet, private place at the same time every Sunday evening.
- ! Start with each of you bearing your testimonies -- real ones that end in the name of Jesus Christ. Include things like, "The thing I like most about you is . . ." or "What I admired about what you did this week was . . ."
- ! Ask what you can do from that week's experience to change for the better.
- ! Discuss what the challenges of the coming week will be.
- ! Talk about how to accomplish the things that need to be done during the week and divide responsibilities so that you feel you're working as a team.
- ! Decide on a time and place for a date that week. Go over the schedule.

Over the years, our favorite part of these our partnership meetings is always the private, one to one, testimony bearing where we express our feelings about the blessings of our lives. These positive feelings go a long way to get us safely through the week and add greatly to our "emotional bank account," which inevitably has substantial withdrawals during

the hassles of the real world during the week.

At our wedding reception thirty-two years ago, we displayed a picture of the two of us gazing off into the sunset. The caption read, "Love does not consist of gazing into each other's eyes but of looking forward together in the same direction." Well, in hindsight, it *is* important to look forward together in the same direction, but it is also important to gaze into each other's eyes!

Different things work for different people, and different things work for men than work for women. I (Linda) smile when I realize that after these thirty something years, I have discovered that verbally expressing my admiration and appreciation to Richard (along with supplying more frequent back and foot rubs) is the most romantic thing I can do for him. He has discovered that doing the dishes, and seeing what needs to be done around the house and doing it without being asked, goes a long way to aid the romantic atmosphere in my mind. Romance, especially when the children have left home, can be the magnet that draws us back together after many years of fragmentation and distraction.

Even if our marriages weren't perfectly in tune before we started having children, the "orchestration" of the events of our lives as we have lived with children in our homes may have helped create the "duet" that can make life even more rich and vibrant come as we begin our empty nest years. As we re-tune our marriage and recharge it with love, appreciation, and the excitement of a new era and a new horizon, we hope we'll find that the most beautiful music is yet to come!

The Three C's

There are plenty of books about rekindling romance after the kids are gone, about learning to be alone together again, about filling the void together that the kids have left.

We've read a few of these and think most of the good advice they contain can be summarized into three ACs. @

COMMITMENT to each other, and to each other=s happiness

COMMUNICATION with each other, and enjoying being together

CONCEPTUAL PLANNING with each other, and working toward common goals

Each of these *becomes* a new challenge and a new opportunity as the kids leave. The requirements and the patterns for each are straight forward but difficult, simple to *say* but down right hard to *do*. But there are two overwhelmingly important reasons for tackling all three with vigor and energy: 1. First, succeeding together at them will bless the lives of your children; second, succeeding together at them will deliver more peace and happiness to you and your spouse than any thing else in the world.

So . . . during this intermission, before the lights start blinking for the final act of *Empty Nest Parenting*, let=s think hard together about the three crucial elements of *Empty Nest Partnership*.

1. RENEW YOUR COMMITMENTS

We know one couple that actually retook their marriage vows after their last child left their nest. The way they saw it, they were going back to their courtship -- back to the one-on-one romantic relationship they had the first time they were married, and they wanted to re-formalize that love and personal commitment.

We may not all have to go back to the altar, but we *do* all need to recommit ourselves to each other as our kids move on and leave us alone together. And when you think about it, it=s a pretty exciting thing to fall for each other all over again -- you=ve probably got more money and more freedom than you did the first time, so you may enjoy it even more this second time around. Think back to those things you did to win your spouse over in the first

place, and do them again -- flowers, romantic dates, gifts, love notes, you name it.

Renewed, unconditional commitment is a marvelously powerful and security-giving thing. In the warmth and glow of the complete commitment of a spouse, a person can relax and unfurl and truly be himself. In our initial courtship, we earned each other's love. In the intervening years of raising children and expanding careers, we have served and helped and loved each other in such a variety of ways. Now, as we move toward some kind of retirement (or at least toward new situations in both our family and our work), we should be capable of even deeper commitment to each other and support for each other.

But that recommitment isn't automatic or assumed. It needs to be *made*. Let us share a written commitment that one husband made to his wife on their thirtieth anniversary as their last child prepared to go away to college:

AMy darling: Thirty years ago I pledged to love and be faithful to you in sickness and in health, for time and eternity. In those thirty years we've raised our children and built our careers. We've sacrificed for and supported our children and each other in countless ways. We've disagreed and fought and argued, but we've always made up and gradually come to understand our differences and the way each other thinks. Through all the struggles, we've kept our marriage vows and kept our dream of unity and of growing old together, surrounded by children who still love us and grand children who know how much we love them.

AOn this anniversary and as of our youngest child leaves the nest, I feel prompted and prepared to make simple recommitment to you -- one that carries with it all of the love and all of the faith I have. It is this: Since I believe in the eternity of the soul, that love can outlast death and that relationships can carry over to the next life, I now pledge to love and be faithful to you for eternity. My commitment to you and my love for you is co-eternal with my soul and with your soul.

AWith this eternal commitment comes a new realization -- an epiphany I have recently received. It is that there is nothing I would change about you -- that with my unconditional love is an unconditional acceptance.

AThis is not to say that I am under the illusion that you are perfect or that I will not support you in ways that you want to change and progress, but I have realized that there is nothing that I would want to choose to change about you. You are a complex biological and spiritual organism, and I love the *whole* too much to risk changing some *part* of it which might make the whole something different than what I have

come to love. Besides, as the song says, >For every fault you have, I have ten,= and >the little faults you do have, just make me love you more.=

ASo, my thirtieth anniversary gift to you (and my Asecond wedding gift@ as we start our voyage as empty nesters) is this: my eternal and unconditional recommitment of love.@

What wife wouldn=t want to receive that kind of letter -- or what husband? We are all warmed and filled by the commitment of our spouse. It is one of the key reasons we get married in the first place. And with a solid *recommitment* from each other, a married couple at this stage of life is ready to face the challenging readjustment of an empty nest.

The goal is not to make our spouses better, it is to make them happier and to expand the joy we have together. The awesome and sometimes frightening thing about a marriage -- especially a long-lasting one -- is that we each have more influence on the happiness of our spouse than we do on our own. By now we know how to make each other happy. We simply have to recommit ourselves to doing it!

2. WORK AT TOTAL, OPEN COMMUNICATION

You *think* you=ve been communicating all these years, but so much of it has been about the kids, and about the life you lived while they were in your home. When they are gone, it can feel like there=s not much left to talk about.

Once again, the whole process is a little like starting over -- a little like getting married again. We tell young couples, in our marriage seminar, that there are five things they must talk about openly and constantly, revealing to each other their whole mind and heart.

The five things are:

- ! Finances
- ! Sex and physical intimacy
- ! Goals and dreams

! Feelings and beliefs

! Children and parenting

The beginning of the empty nest phase is a time when all five topics take some shifts and turns, and require an extra effort at good clear communication. Where are the finances now and what kind of budgeting or planning will you do to see that everyone is taken care of? How will your physical intimacy be affected by being alone again . . . what do you each hope for and expect from each other? What goals and plans and hopes do you each have for this new season of life . . . are you on the same page about how you want your lifestyle to change? How are your testimonies and what are you both feeling emotionally . . . do you each have a different mix of missing and wishing? What continues to need to be discussed about the kids . . . what kind of empty nest parents do you want to be?

The bottom line: There is not less to talk about now -- there=*s more*. This is a new phase and with it comes lots of issues, lots of opportunities and options, lots of challenges. Step up your communication . . . open it up . . . the sooner the better!

One couple we know anticipated their empty nest phase with some apprehension. They had seen other couples pull apart after their kids were gone and so they had a little plan in place. The first thing they did after the last child left was to go away together themselves -- two weeks in the Caribbean on a second honeymoon. It was a relaxed, peaceful time to get to know each other again -- not as a mother and a father, but as sweethearts. They talked a lot about each other=*s* needs and actually avoided talking about their kids. (They=*d* done plenty of that in the immediate weeks before.) They made new commitments to each other and they took the time to really talk about their life as a couple -- past and future. They made plans about things they would do together and time they would spend with each other. They talked about their biggest hopes and fears entering this new phase of life. They decided to be patient

with each other and to realize and acknowledge that it would take a little time to make this adjustment.

3. CONCEPTUALIZE AND PLAN THE REST OF YOUR LIFE

Out of our renewed commitments and communication should flow some solid conceptual planning about our married life together as empty nesters. In our own case, even as we've dreaded the day our last one leaves, we've relished and looked forward to having the opportunity to do some things that weren't possible (or at least not practical) while the kids were with us: from simple things like more reading to complex things like travel and humanitarian service on a whole different scale.

It's best not to leave these visions and dreams of what we'll do with the second half of our lives to chance. Sit down together, or take a trip together and make some conceptual plans about what you want to do as a couple after the kids are gone. Give yourself some things to look forward to . . . to balance and counteract the dread you may feel about your children leaving. Learn to see the empty nest phase as a natural progression and a great opportunity.

We heard of a couple who went about this in a very organized and systematic way, and while the structure of it might not appeal to all of us, what they were trying to do and what came out of it were very interesting:

§ First, they each made a separate, independent list of "things I want to do before I die" -- places they wanted to visit, adventures they wanted to have, even people they wanted to meet and contributions they hoped to make. They didn't worry much about what was realistic -- they just each created a "dream" list.

§ Then they combined their lists -- seeing how many matches they had and trying to win each other over into unanimity on their respective favorites.

§ Then they tried to calendar the ones they agreed on -- chronologically in terms of *when* they thought they might be able to do them.

§ Then they set their completed *A dream list* aside and made a second list -- this one they called a *A hope list*, and it had two columns. On the left they listed the things they still wanted to take care of and feel some responsibility for (their children were at the top, followed by their aging parents and then by things like their health, their small company, their church, their house, and their little summer place). In the right column they wrote their *hopes* for each thing on the left -- the things they wished for each thing on the left.

§ Finally, they had both lists artistically laid out on parchment paper by a calligrapher and framed. They hang side by side on the wall of their library.

The husband told us that he had read somewhere that *“All happiness starts with hopes and dreams.”* He said their hope list and their dream list had become a sort of reference point for their plans and their goals and that, since they had created them together, the lists seemed to keep them together mentally and spiritually and lent a certain excitement and anticipation to their life together.

A brief introduction to our own family (as contributors to this book.)

One final intermission item: Since, in the process of the rest of this book, our families B yours and ours B are going to get pretty close (you=ll know ours through what you read and we=ll try to know and anticipate yours through what we write), some introductions are in order. Here=s our lineup of kids who have Agrown and flown.@ (And who you=ll be hearing from in the AQ & A@ of Part Two.)

Saren: (thirty something B just barely) Wellesley and Harvard graduate; went on a mission to Bulgaria in between; married to Jared Loosli with an unbelievably gorgeous baby boy named Ashton and a new baby on the way; curriculum and education consultant; living and working in the Silicon Valley. (Jared, by the way, was a missionary in Italy and is a silicone valley engineer and MIT graduate with an exceptionally calm and unflappable demeanor -- the perfect complement and partner to Saren -- an answer to prayer [hers and ours]!)

Shawni: (almost thirty something) Boston University and Brigham Young; served a mission to Romania; married to David Pothier and mother of two incomparably beautiful children, Max and Ellie; an artist and designer, living in the Washington suburb of McLean, VA. (Dave, the first to join our family by the in-law route, is a creative and capable investment banker and B.Y.U. graduate who served a mission in Taiwan and who we love as much as our Aborn@ sons.)

Joshua: (late mid-twenties) Brigham Young University graduate in construction management; served a mission in London; waiting a little longer than we=d wish for the right woman; working in Washington, D.C. in the

construction and computer industries. We owe him so much for the constant example he's set as the oldest son.

Saydria: (early mid-twenties) Wellesley graduate with a master's from Columbia. Counselor and social worker and loving the single life in New York City. Served her mission in Spain. Has a Mother Teresa side that leads her to social work and to humanitarian trips to India, Bolivia, and Kenya.

Jonah: (earlier mid-twenties) and new wife Aja, both studying anthropology at Harvard, expecting their first child and living, as coincidence would have it, in the student housing apartment right next door to the first place we (Linda and Richard) lived as students after our marriage. Served a mission in England. (We love Aja not only for her brilliance and strong opinions, but for making Jonah a vastly happier young man!)

Talmadge: (earliest twenties) Six-feet-nine-inch basketball scholarship student at Weber State University B living on campus but close enough to come home part time; trying to balance very heavy doses of academics, church involvement, athletics, and dating. Served mission in Brazil.

Noah: (nearly twenty) Currently on his mission in Santiago, Chile; our second high school honorable mention All-American basketball player who hopes to come home and play with his brother; student body president in high school and leader with always sensitive empathy for everyone.

Frankly, our advice and ideas would lack both credibility and completeness without

response and reaction from those we've tried to apply it upon. Saren, by virtue of her seniority as well as some special interests and abilities, has become our chief partner and collaborator in this book and has frequently polled and debriefed her siblings so that their perspectives can also be included. While regular 'in the nest' parenting is principally something parents themselves decide on and work at, empty nest parenting should be more like an *agreement*, where the parents and the kids together decide how to handle various issues of support, communication, and relationship. This is how we've tried to do it and this is how we've written it.

Years ago, if we'd seen a list of departed children like the list above, of some other family, we'd have said, 'Well, there you go. They've finished their parenting.' Oh, how little we knew. Each of these 'departed seven' as you'll see from their inputs in this book, is *in the process* of leaving home, a process that is gradual, multi-staged, and ongoing. The physical leaving (for them) and the physical 'letting go' for us, is just the beginning. There is an emotional leaving and letting go that takes much longer, and a social, mental, and spiritual leaving and letting go that is not (and should not) ever be over. Getting it right *is* this leaving and letting go *is* the challenge all empty nest parents face.

SAREN:

I just have to jump in here and comment on my Dad's introductions (and this comment may serve notice for how candid I intend to be in the next part of this book). I just think it is so interesting how parents seem to have to slant things a little, and how they seem to stay with their early preconceptions of their kids.

The things Dad chose to include in these very brief descriptions of us were so typical they made me laugh while making me a bit exasperated. To him, Shawni's always been

As the artist of the family -- while she does enjoy dabbling in art and she's really into interior design as far as fixing up her own house, it was funny to see my Dad describe her as an artist and designer. She's always wished my Dad would think of her as more of an intellectual and a writer. Josh quit his job recently and is trying to move from the construction industry to computers somewhat against my Dad's advice. So Dad keeps his options open and writes that Josh is A in the construction and computer industries. Is it too much for him to admit he has a son who's not working full time right now? Josh is happy about his situation, but maybe it embarrasses my Dad. Saydi is studying social work. It was funny to see that my Dad just wrote that she is A doing graduate work at Columbia. I think Dad's sort of subliminally uncomfortable with admitting that she's not pursuing something more lucrative at Columbia. He said Jonah and his wife Aja are going to Harvard when actually Aja's at Harvard and Jo's working temp jobs to support them while she finishes, plus he's taking a couple of Harvard extension courses. He'll graduate from Utah State next year. I guess Dad thinks it's more impressive to say they both go to Harvard. Anyway, you get the picture. It mostly makes me laugh. He's very proud of his children -- but we all wish he'd be a little more proud of the things we're proud of. I know he likes to brag about us and we don't mind being feathers in his hat -- but I think it'd be better if he'd be proud of realities, not fictions!

Well, after that response, perhaps we should say a little more. First of all, Saren's right. We do like most parents have a tendency to brag too much about our children, to exaggerate a bit here and there, and to make their accomplishments a little too much a part of our egos. And we do (especially Dad in our case) sometimes think of our children and their gifts and talents too much as we originally perceived them or as we want them to be rather than as they now are. We should all challenge ourselves to continually Aget to know them@

as they evolve and change and develop new interests and aptitudes.

Responding to Saren=s response also gives us the chance for an update. As we finalize this manuscript, we=ve had quite a summer with Shawni and Dave having their third child (a daughter) in June, Saren and Jared their second (a son) in July, and Jonah and Aja their first (a daughter) in August! Life goes on!

(photos follow)

SECTION III

AThe Four Peaks@

Four times when emotions and challenges intensify (and some thoughts on how to handle each).

Peak ONE: When your child first leaves home.

Peak ONE(a): When (and if) your child goes on a mission.

Peak TWO: When he or she gets the first full-time job.

Peak THREE: When he or she gets married.

Peak FOUR: When he or she has a child.

Section III

Questions and Answers

Writing Section Three of this book was a long and interesting process of asking potential ENPs (Empty Nest Parents) and LTNs (Leaving the Nesters) what questions and worries they had (we came up with 50 common questions) and then asking seasoned and experienced ENPs and LTNs how they handled those issues and answered these questions.

As you read these questions and answers you=ll see what a *variety* of perspectives and opinions there are among both ENPs and LTNs. Don=t let this variety confuse you. Just zoom in on the ideas that *ring true* to you. You know yourself and your children and your situation. You will be drawn to the comments that make sense and work for your own particular conditions.

SectionThree is not so much about final answers or strategies as it is about knowing what the issues are and surveying what a lot of ENPs and LTNs have said about them. Saren has done most of the work in this section, first of all researching what kind of questions and concerns were most common among ENPs and then getting answers and inputs from LTNs that help parents see each issues from the child=s point of view. We held some focus groups of parents, too, many of whom were seasoned ENPs, to see Ahow they did it,@ but you=ll see that most of the section is aimed at giving us a better sense of how our kids would advise us in terms of how we handle their departure.

Before we go on, we must say that the answers and inputs we got from our own children have been incredibly insightful! We discovered things that they thought and were worried about that we never would have known otherwise. It has opened doors to

understanding what they were thinking that we never even knew were there. Also, hearing how other families have dealt with similar situations has been very interesting. In some cases, because we are parents, we could feel the reasons that parents acted as they did, even though the child who was explaining their situation didn't. It made us realize how very interesting and complex empty nest parenting really is. In addition, it was a wake-up call on things that we had neglected to do or even think of as parents of children who have left home.

In retrospect, I (Linda) found myself rationalizing why we did things as we did (i.e. we didn't spend much time asking Shawni about her dates because we were too busy helping younger children with their homework and struggling to survive babies who weren't sleeping through the night). Also it helped me to see that Jonah, who is our middle child, really could have used more support when he first went away to school. The earlier nest leavers got lots of attention but our focus was pulled to other things when it was his turn to leave. Probably the best realization was that even though we did some things backwards and upside down, it is never too late to try to set things straight and never too early to try to be a better empty nest parent.

The questions we asked drew so many interesting responses that we thought you might want a concise list of the questions themselves to ask your own children . . . and yourself. (That's one reason we put the full list of questions in the table of contents.) Your own children's responses will be even more insightful than the sample answers that follow. Reading other's responses will be sort of like *Watching a movie*. Working out your own and your spouse's response as well as getting your children's responses to the questions will be like being *in* the movie. And any changes we make for the better will certainly be useful in making a movie with a happy ending!

What You've Always Wanted to Know About Children Leaving Home But Haven't Dared to Ask

What I did for my contributions to Section Three was to gather inputs and stories along with advice and opinions from a very diverse group of young adults -- people who live all over the world, people whose parents are divorced and together, people with very close families and more distant family relationships, people from rich families and poor families, people in and out of the Church, and people in all sorts of different schools and careers.

First, I worked with my parents to collect the most commonly-asked questions from empty nest parents. I addressed these questions to a panel of nest-leavers -- people in their twenties and thirties who have stories, examples, and advice to share with parents who want to do a great job with their adult children. And I sent out the questions via e-mail to my siblings and to a long list of friends all over the world. The principal inputters are my own brothers and sisters because we want our own family to be a kind of case-study for you throughout this book. But I also held focus groups where I asked groups of friends many of the questions. I also gathered and/or wrote lots of the stories, complaints, and praises that friends have shared with me about their parents over the years. In some cases, real names are used. In others, pseudonyms are used and details are changed slightly. Some stories are written in the first person by those whose experience and opinion is being shared -- I got these stories via e-mail and added them to this section pretty much verbatim. Some are written in the third person as I describe the stories and experiences that other people have related to me. But all the stories and examples offered here are true and the advice is sincere.

As I talked with friends and siblings, I heard so much praise and admiration for parents along with some very constructive criticism. My hope is that this material will point

out what works and what doesn't work. You will likely see yourself and your children in many of these stories. You'll surely see some things you'll want to try to do in your family and some things you'll make a point of NOT doing.

So many times, as friends have shared their frustration with things their parents are doing or not doing, I've asked "Have you told your parents how you feel about this?" The answer's a fairly predictable "No." It's hard to tell our parents how we feel about their parenting techniques. For one thing, we don't want to "rock the boat" when everything's pretty much OK and when we're not together all the time anymore and the little things that come up don't really affect our daily lives. Also, we don't want to hurt our parents' feelings. We realize how much they love us and want to do right by us -- and we don't want them to think that we don't appreciate all they've done for us and continue to do for us. Whatever the reason, a lot of our feelings and opinions about how we could have better relationships with our parents just get swept under the rug. But making our relationship better for us and for you requires that we get things out in the open -- even things that aren't urgent and that don't really seem like a big deal at the time.

I'm thinking one great way for you to get things out in the open with your kids and really start talking about taking your relationship to new heights is to read the stuff in this section, then have your kids read it, then talk about the questions and stories and opinions that resonate most with you and with your kids. Or you may want to start by asking the questions to your kids (use the full list of questions from the table of contents) then you can compare the answers you get with the ones in the book.

So . . . here we go. We'll put the "common questions" in bold italics followed by ENP comments and then by LTN inputs. Skip past those that you don't relate to and think hard (and take margin notes) about those that ring true and seem relevant.

A Meeting of ENPs and LTNs

We think the best way to think about this ASection Three@ is to imagine yourself sitting in a large room with dozens of other ENPs and about-to-become ENPs talking together about the feelings, the challenges, and the opportunities that come when kids leave home. There are also lots of LTNs in the room who are willing to talk openly about how it feels to leave the nest -- even to give us parents some advice from their point of view. These LTNs are ages 18-35, from all sorts of families, going through all different stages of life.

Into this room full of similar-situation, similar-need people comes a moderator with a bunch of questions to throw out at us all. He takes his seat at the front of the auditorium and starts asking things that every ENP wonders about and that most every LTN has an opinion on. He=s a good moderator, because he draws most of the answers from the kids, knowing that is what the parents need to hear. And he asks for lots of stories, knowing that stories usually help us and stay with us better than plain old advice.

You sit back and listen -- jotting notes on the thoughts that seem relevant to your own family. Now and then you raise your hand and answer a question or give an idea that comes to you. As the meeting goes on though, you and the other parents there say less and less. It=s more interesting to listen to what the kids say -- to look for insights and clues to what your own child (who has now moved away) might be feeling.

The meeting lasts about 100 minutes -- or 100 pages -- and by the time it=s over, you don=t feel quite as alone in your worries and concerns, and you feel both better understood and better prepared concerning your own empty nest parenting.

The meeting has four separate sessions divided by little refreshment breaks. The four sessions are on the four Aphases@ that seem to be the most difficult for ENPs and for LTNs. The moderator calls them Athe four peaks.@

Peak 1: When Your Child First Leaves Home

Peak 1a: When (and if) Your Child Goes on a Mission

Peak 2: When He/She Starts a Career (Gets a Full-Time Job)

Peak 3: When He/She Gets Married

Peak 4: When He/She Becomes a Parent

Note: Running heads, left hand page: AThe Four Peaks@

right hand page: Peak 1: When your child first leaves home.

Peak 1: When Your Child First Leaves Home

(Have you accomplished your mission or fallen into an emotional abyss?)

Some parents fret and worry about this moment years before it comes; others hardly think about it until it actually happens and they are standing in an emptier house, realizing their baby is gone.

A whole gamut of new emotions is experienced when a child leaves home for the first time . . . usually at about age eighteen . . . usually to go away to college . . . usually both excited and scared to be leaving but usually not admitting either. Profound new emotions that are being felt by parent and child.

We Eyres have felt it ourselves seven different times so far . . . felt the deeply intertwined pride and worry that attends a child's striking out on his/her own. We've also sat down in discussion groups with dozens of other parents who have experienced it . . . and recorded their feelings and observations which we hope will be useful to you in two ways: 1. In helping you to know how it will feel and to know that you're not the only one feeling it; and 2. To help you get in mind how you'll respond to your feelings . . . and to your child's feelings . . . and to decide how to best handle the whole situation.

For some families the initial leaving of a child is a celebration and a mission accomplished for the parents. For other Moms and Dads that first departure for college or for an apartment is a trauma and a heartbreak. Whether your child is moving across town or across the country, emotions will run high for awhile -- many of them bitter sweet emotions similar to those felt by your child.

Here are some of the most common questions ENPs have about this first peak . . .

each followed by some ideas and opinions from other parents who are a lot like you and some answers and advice for LTNs who are a lot like your child. We'll put our own little thoughts and summary at the end of each question, sometimes from us and sometimes from Saren.

Note: In the pages ahead, you'll find the responses of empty nest parents (ENP) in regular type and you'll find the responses of our children and of other kids who have left the nest (LTNs) in italic type. Each ENP response (other than our own) will be labelled with a first name and last name initial, and each LTN response will be labelled with a first name only, in caps. We or Saren (or both) will put our own little thoughts and summary after the other responses to each question (labelled AL&R@ or ASaren@).

One additional note: As we worked in this section, we were involved in lots of lengthy individual conversations and group discussions with our older out-of-the-nest children, and fourteen-year-old Charity Jade, our youngest, didn't like it much. First of all, she never likes being left out of anything; and second, she was a little offended that we were even writing a book called *Empty Nest Parenting* because, as she frequently pointed out to us, our nest wouldn't be empty as long as she was there . . . so why were we jumping the gun.

One evening after eavesdropping on one of our brainstorming sessions on a common questions,@ she said, "You're acting like those questions are so hard, and you're making the answers way too complicated. I'm only fourteen and I already know the answers."

Feeling a little guilty for not having involved Charity more, I (Richard) sat down, took out my pen, and started asking her the questions parents had been asking us.

What unfolded next was an illuminating experience for me. Charity was answering each question with a single, direct declarative sentence! These were questions that parents and older kids were analyzing with hours of discussion and trying to answer with pages of inputs. Part of it was that Charity had overheard a lot of the discussion and was boiling it down to a more basic level, but the real factor was the brilliant and candid simplicity that children are often gifted with. ("Out of the mouths of babes . . .") We liked Charity's answers so much that we put them first throughout Section Three -- right after the questions and in a type face which is reserved just for Charity Jade. We think you'll enjoy the refreshing clarity in which a fourteen year old sees the world.

1. When should kids leave home? When should I push them out of the nest?

CHARITY JADE:

After graduation from high school, that is when they need to learn the independence of being on their own.

Bette T.: I think when they turn eighteen it's really time to go -- time to be independent and out in the world.

Winifred R.: Either when they get a full-time job or when they start college.

Carolyn M.: What's the rush! Sometimes it makes so much more sense for them to keep living at home if there's a good college close by. Or even if they're working -- they can pay a little rent and keep living at home. I want to keep mine around as long as possible. My Mom lives with us, too, and I love having the three generations under one roof. I actually like this "sandwich generation" thing. I don't know where we get this idea that kids need to move out or that parents shouldn't move in. If we love family, why not live together as much as we can -- as many as the house can hold? Everyone says it takes away your freedom. On the contrary, Tom and I travel a lot and it's so great because my Mom and our boys are there to watch the house. The place is way too big for just the two of us anyway. We've got three generations living here and we each live our own lives. We just overlap where it's advantageous.

Peter J.: We couldn't seem to get our girls to move out. Then Bill decided to move back in because his job didn't work out in California, and he brought a roommate with him. So guess what we did? *We* moved out. Now we've got a quiet little condo and our kids have got the house. It's funny because we told Bill we didn't want him to move back in because he'd lose his independence. But he was as independent as ever when he moved back in. It was *us* that was losing our independence. So we moved out.

ALICE:

I think kids should leave home when they're ready. This means that they should have learned how to handle money and make good decisions on their own. Hopefully this readiness should come about when they finish high school -- but if not, I think parents should get their kids ready -- take a few months if necessary and help them be ready to face the world before they get kicked out.

R&L:

As we see from these ENP and LTN inputs, there is no right answer about when kids should leave. But it's good for each family to *think* about the question and about the individual natures of their own kids. And whatever you conclude, *set it up* so that the rules and expectations are clear and agreed upon.

SAREN:

I have friends who are thirty something and still live at home -- just because it works well for them and their family. I don't think this is generally a healthy situation, though. Kids should leave home and get out on their own as soon after eighteen as they can. I think being an adult doesn't work well if you're still under your parents' wing.

2. What emotions will I feel when my child first leaves home?

CHARITY JADE:

You'll feel sad. You should! It's your kid! But I think you'll also feel pretty proud of the person your little boy or girl is turning into!

Fred J.: For me it was bitter sweet. I guess I knew I'd feel pretty emotional about seeing her go off to college. What surprised me was that it kind of felt like a celebration, too.

I mean it just seemed to occur to us that this was a happy, celebration time. I just looked at how beautiful she was and she was really ready for this new adventure and new independence. It was better than her high school graduation. I was choking up but I felt excited and happy at the same time.

Marilyn J.: It=s way harder for me when I see my boys go. The girls are my buddies and we=ll just talk about everything on the phone and have a great shared experience. But my boys still need me to mother them and I won=t be there! I think it=s just the opposite with Fred. He gets more emotional when our daughters leave.

Marion P.: It=s at dinner time that I miss Brianne most. That=s when we used to talk. She was always hanging out in the kitchen when she was home. Every time I walk in there I have a little pang of nostalgia and worry. I wonder how long this will last!

Jim R.: I=ll tell you, it was the weirdest combination of emotions I=ve ever felt . . . different feelings I didn=t know you could have at the same time. I felt a kind of *elation* actually, but right along with it, I felt something really close to despair. This marvellous new young adult was going out into the world and I had enormous confidence in her . . . and I felt happy and excited for her. But big pieces of me were going with her . . . and had I done all I could for her and taught her what she=d need to know? And how could I stand it tomorrow when she didn=t come down to breakfast?

SHAWNI:

In talking to my mother-in-law about this, she said it didn=t really hit her until after her second child left home how difficult it was to let a child go. With her first it was an unknown new experience and she didn=t realize all that would change after he left. When he came home after being gone for quite some time she realized how much he had changed -- matured and grown up. She realized he would never be her little boy again. This made it a

lot more difficult when she sent the second child off because she realized she was saying goodbye not only to her child being around the home all the time, but she was saying goodbye to the child she knew as she realized he would never live in her home again as he had -- when he came back he would have made the same transition her older child had and life would change forever. Not that this was a negative change -- she was proud to have her children grow up and mature. But it was emotionally very difficult to say goodbye to these teenage boys and realize that when they returned they would be adults.

R&L:

You=ll feel a wide range of emotions when a child leaves. The important thing is to talk about what you feel -- together with your child -- face to face before he or she leaves and by phone afterward. Keep things positive and remind each other that what you=re both feeling is normal . . . and is evidence of your love and concern for each other.

SAREN:

I think my parents had a pretty hard time letting me go. I was their first, after all. But I think they set up expectations that helped them as well as helping me. We knew when to expect to hear from each other and see each other. I=m sure that helped them as much as it helped me. I also think that in my case, my parents missed all the babysitting and house cleaning I did when I was at home. Since I was the oldest and took on lots of responsibility, I don=t think my leaving home was as much as a Arelief@ for them as it is for some parents.

3. What should I worry about when any child leaves? What shouldn=t I worry about?

CHARITY JADE:

Worry about their safety and how they=re doing. Don=t worry or stress too much about what they=re

doing. You=ve already taught them all you can by your words and example (or maybe that=s why you are worried!).

Fred J.: The real question isn=t about our worries. It=s about the real *dangers*. And the biggest danger is that we=re not *with* them so we don=t see the warning signals. There are a million different problems they could have, and we=re not going to know enough to even know what to *ask* about, so the big thing is to have enough good and frequent *communication* that we know what=s going on!

KATE:

I think the best way for you to deal with your worries is to talk to your kids about them. I know lots of friends= parents that seem to worry, worry, worry -- but they don=t seem to ask many questions so they don=t know if their worries are founded on anything. Before worrying, ask questions. Keep that communication wide open and make sure you are really listening to your kids.

R&L:

There is a particular basketball coach we=ve long admired because of his uncommonly calm demeanor during games. No matter how good or how bad things are going on the court for his team, he seems to be enjoying the game. We once had a chance to ask him about this and his answer impressed me so much I can remember it almost verbatim: AMost of my coaching is done in practice, before the game begins. I teach them all I can and we have a pre-game meeting to go over it all. Then when the game starts, I turn them loose. I hope one of the things I=ve taught them is to learn from their mistakes in a game, so I=m not going to take a kid out every time he screws up.©

This coach does call timeouts to *apply* what he has taught to specific situations in the game, but he doesn=t try to teach them something different during the game than he=s taught

in practice.

We think parenting is a lot the same. When children move out of the home and into the real game of life, parents have to mostly rely on what kids have already learned. Some good 'pre-departure' reviews are a good idea, and timeouts are the calls and letters and visits, but basically it's a matter of having some confidence in what you've already taught.

SAREN:

A lot of your worries will go away once you've talked to your kids about the other questions in this chapter and established together some basic principles and agreements about how you want to communicate with each other and help each other as you move into a new phase of your relationship.

4. How will my kids feel as they leave home for the first time? What can I do to help them transition into their new life?

CHARITY JADE:

They will feel excited, scared and nervous. You can help by being there for them when they need you but letting them be independent at the same time.

Bette T.: Probably the best thing you can do is let them go. It's like jumping into cold water. They've just got to do it all at once, they can't just stick their toe in. So I'd say just turn them loose and don't baby them.

Marilyn J.: Well, I think it should be gradual. They will feel so lost and so homesick. I'd say move them out in phases and in the first phase they still kind of live with you. They

come home a lot and you go see them a lot.

AJA:

My mom and dad surprised me with their surety that I would be more than just fine when I moved away to start my freshman year at college. So, I landed in Boston alone, with four big boxes and two big suitcases, not knowing a single soul in the whole city. Some of my mom's friends at home in Las Vegas had a distant cousin in Boston, however, and they all somehow worked it out for me to get a ride to Harvard from the airport. My four new roommates and their parents and sisters and brothers all crowded into our living room for first introductions, and later my roommates told me how badly they felt that I was alone, with no parents to attend opening ceremonies and all the pomp of opening days. But, though I was alone and a little afraid, I had been prepared for the adventure with years of good friends as parents, who continued to become even better friends as the years continued.

SHAWNI:

I don't think I was really ready to leave home when I left for college. I was always very attached to my family and friends and although I knew I was making the right decision to go across the country for college, it didn't mean it was easy for me. My parents were great about it, although I don't think they thought I was quite ready either. I guess I was always pretty sheltered growing up, but I got the impression they worried about me leaving and being on my own a lot more than they worried about my older independent sister.

I have to smile when I think of the moment I made the decision to go to Boston University. I was on a trip exploring the campus with my mom. We had recently visited a school in California that I knew right when we arrived was not right for me. But as we passed by the tall brownstones of Boston on Commonwealth Avenue that bright spring day, the scariest thought secured itself in my mind. I was going to go to this huge, unfamiliar, far-

away-from-home school. I kind of blocked it out at first, but I did tell my mom I was pretty serious. Her reaction is the thing I remember well and have to smile at. She almost gasped. Then she smiled and I think she told me something to the effect she thought that was great, but I could see it in her eyes that she thought I was too naive and would be much too homesick to actually carry it out. I heard her talking on the phone to my dad later and it was obvious in her voice that she was amazed that I was considering B.U. (that=s without a AY@ in between) so strongly. You may think this would hinder my decision. Make me question my ability to really leave home and be on my own. But it was actually the best thing that could have happened because it made me that much more determined that I would follow through with what I knew I should. Who knows? Maybe my parents planned this. I think they knew it would be a great choice, but I think I really surprised them when I actually left.

But because my parents knew me so well from when I lived at home, they knew exactly what I needed. They called quite often, sent me packages, and even moved across the country for a month to be a little closer to me. (This wasn=t necessarily for me. It was something they had wanted to do for awhile, but I think they timed it great to help their A poor little naive daughter@ out.) But most of all, aside from being there for me when I needed it (whether on the phone or in person) they had spent so much time with me when I was at home that they were kind of with me in my heart even when I was all alone. Although they were surprised with my decision, they built me up enough and helped me feel confident and secure enough on the inside before I left that I really COULD do it. I knew that although they were worried about me and surprised that I was ready to leave them and my friends I loved, they also always taught me I could do anything I put my mind to. I am so thankful to them for that and for their encouragement to leave my comfort zone and letting me go with all their love. So what I=m really trying to say in a nutshell is that what I needed when I left home was

encouragement from my parents, and a lot of phone contact and visits. I also needed something they couldn't give me after I left, but something they had given me all my life their time. They knew me so well because of all we did together growing up and I knew they loved me unconditionally. This meant so much to me. If you still have children at home TAKE ADVANTAGE OF EVERY MOMENT YOU CAN TO BUILD STRONG RELATIONS WITH THEM!!! It won't last forever that they are there with you all the time make it the best relationship you can NOW and it will last forever.

Although I must admit I kind of liked how they babied me, I think it would have helped me spread my wings even more had they had a little more confidence in me. Their worry and concern made me want to carry through even more, but it kind of bugged me that they didn't treat me more as an adult. I think it is important for parents to find a balance between still showing their children that they are concerned about them and love them, and that they trust them with adult decisions.

SAREN:

I felt like I was pretty independent and pretty good at navigating new situations when I left for college. After all, as the oldest in my family, I'd always been the first to do everything. Plus we moved so much when I was growing up that I'd become really adept at meeting new people and adjusting to new situations. But in all the new situations I'd been placed in earlier in my life, I'd had my family right there to support me and to hang out with as I searched out new friends. I remember the night before I was supposed to go to college, I had a party with a bunch of friends and after they left, I sat there thinking, "What am I doing? I've got this great family, all these great friends, why in the world should I be going across the country for school?" I decided I really didn't want to go, after all. But with all the money we'd already sent off to Wellesley and all the people I'd told I was going, it

didn't look like I could turn back. So I didn't say anything to anyone about my major second thoughts.

I got on that plane the next morning with my mom, full of renewed excitement for this new adventure and totally full of gratitude that I'd have my mom beside me for a few days at least. It was so great to have Mom with me to basically hold my hand while I got registered and set up my dorm room. I'm sure I could have handled things without her, but it made me feel so much more comfortable to have her there. Plus it was just really nice to know that she would know where I was and who I was with and what my life was going to be like to some extent. By the time my mom headed home, I was settled in and excited about my new life. My mom was really excited for me and that helped me to be even more happy in my new situation. We both cried when she left, but it was a sweet, soft little sadness, not a worried and scared sort of thing. We had learned about and accepted together my new life together. All would be well.

Our LTN kids will feel a range of emotions as wide as those we ENPs are experiencing. The biggest thing parents can do is to Ask and listen. Ask about what they're feeling -- especially in phone calls where you can hear tones of voice as well as words. Then really listen to the answers. Try to empathize and to remember (and relate) as much as you can about when *you* first left home.

By the way, we're not suggesting that all kids should go away to college at eighteen. Many choose to work and others stay at home and attend a local college or university. But we do encourage you to *consider* many options and not just follow the common pattern where you live. For boys (or girls) who are planning on a mission, a year or even a semester away at college can be a great preparation that allows them to enter the mission field more prepared and less homesick.

5. *What if they=re really homesick? Or what if they don=t seem to miss me at all?*

CHARITY JADE:

If they=re homesick, let them know that it=s natural to feel this way and that you=re just a call away. If they don=t miss you, tell them that you miss them.

Peter J.: One really important thing is to discuss what a *good* thing homesickness is. After all, it absolutely demonstrates how much we love those we miss.

Pam L.: On the other hand, if your departed child is relatively free from homesickness, take that as a positive, too. Praise him or her for his independence and at the same time prepare him for what might come by telling him that a little longing for home is not a bad thing.

SAREN:

Once they leave home, a couple of different things will typically happen to your kids: either they=ll have a pretty hard time for a while as they realize how good they had it when they were home with you, or they=ll have so much fun trying out our their new wings and meeting new people and living a new life that they won=t really seem to miss home at all. Either way, things will be fine. If your kids are super homesick and you call them a lot, send them packages, maybe even go visit them, they=ll feel secure about your support and hopefully they=ll get used to their new situation with a little time. Perhaps if you ask your kids a lot about the things they really like about their new situation, that will help them to focus on the positive. But they also need you to take their concerns and hard times seriously. Sometimes I=d call my parents and complain and complain B and I really didn=t want them to give me an answer or tell me everything was OK B I guess I just needed them to

commiserate with me. Sometimes your kids just need you to say "Wow, that sounds really hard," or "I'm sorry that your week has been so terrible. I'm so proud of you for making it through." A lot of times, it was just annoying when my parents tried to reassure me that everything was OK. It didn't feel OK to me and that's what mattered at that point. I think kids need parents to ask us what they can do to help make things better and sometimes, they just need you to listen and agree when they tell you that things are hard.

If your kids are having a great time, be happy for them! Get excited about the things they're excited about and call them to do quick check-ins. They'll really appreciate calls, notes, e-mails, whatever – even if they don't respond right away. Try not to send them on guilt trips about not calling you enough – you don't want to play the role of the whiny parent! Given a little time and a little confidence, most kids settle into a pretty good pattern of talking to their parents and sharing what's going on in our lives. And given a little time, they'll doubtless hit some bumps and need a little advice, support and TLC from you. Keep that door wide open so that they'll be able to come to you when they need to. You can keep the door open by keeping the calls and the notes and the packages coming no matter how unresponsive your kids may be at times.

R&L:

Saren put it well. Put more mental effort into trying to empathize with what they feel than in trying to fix or correct it.

6. What do my kids need from me when they first leave home? What role should I play in their life during these first years away from home? Should I be a best friend, a consultant, a manager, a coach, a sounding board, a shoulder to cry on, an observer?

CHARITY JADE:

They need constant support and confidence from you. You should now be both their parent and their friend. Maybe you can be all of those things in the questions because they=re all good!

Katherine P.: Believe it or not, I like the Aobserver@ answer. That=s the *first* role to play. If you really see what they=re doing and notice what they=re feeling, you=ll know what other roles you should play for them.

JONAH:

Like a lot of kids, my first real away-from-home experience occurred when I left for college. It was only an hour and a half away but it seemed like a lot further than that. There was no curfew and I really had to be the one to decide upon whether or not to get up for church or class. I could have really used more phone calls from mom and dad just to ask how I was and that=s all. I ended up calling them a lot and it made me feel like a wuss but I really needed their support and I needed to just know that they were thinking about me.

When children leave home, I think they should be able to freely confide in their parents, knowing that the time for punishment is over and that not going to church or getting a bad grade rests on the young man or woman rather than the parent. I recall the first Sunday when I realized that it was completely my choice whether to got to church or not, sans guilt trip or any other bad feelings. I remember knowing that I would go anyway because of how I was brought up. Parents must realize that much of their time to directly influence through guilt or other means is over. They aren=t the Acoach@ in their kids= lives anymore. They=re more like cheerleaders and fans. They can get in there and give advice, but they should just offer or wait for their kids to ask, not jump in there and say what they think their children should do all the time.

TALMADGE:

For my first year of college I went to a school that is only about an hour away from my house. I didn't struggle with too much homesickness, but the thing I needed the most was that they (my parents) showed concern. For example, when I went home on the weekend they would ask me about what's going on in life and really keep involved in what I was doing. I wanted my parents to keep being my parents & care about me and help me when I needed it. But I needed them to sort of back off with some of the heavy duty parenting things like setting limits and knowing every little thing I did & they did a good job of backing off. I liked that they seemed more like interested friends than some sort of controlling figures in my life.

SHAWNI:

I think parents have the obligation/responsibility to still be parents once their children move away. That means that although the kids are more adult once they leave, they still need emotional parenting. I love that my parents still looked out for me when I was gone. I could feel that they still loved me just as much and were doing all they could to keep us connected. When I moved to Boston, they came to visit, they called, and they sent tons of letters. Even though I didn't live at home anymore and I was an adult, I felt I was still their daughter who they loved and protected with all their hearts. When I transferred from Boston University to Brigham Young University, they were there for me when the transition was tough. Following is a journal entry from when I was having a particularly hard time deciding on a major:

Today was so stressful but I think I got most everything worked out. Mom came down and brought me homemade soup and took me to lunch to talk about my major. She came to campus with me and everything and I went to a ton of classes to figure out what I like. My mom waited for me all day and then brought me back to Salt Lake so we could talk with Dad about everything. I felt so much better after. My parents are so amazing. I love

them so much. @

Let's face it, when you leave home straight out of high school, no matter how old and mature you think you are, you are only a teenager! Teenagers need protective, nurturing and loving parents just as much as little kids. So do adults for that matter. Even as a mom with two children of my own now, I still need parents.

IRENE:

I don't believe a parent's role should be anything other than a parent/teacher. This is the natural state of things and you don't want them to be your best friends or peers. You already have friends and that is not what you need from them. Obviously a parent is not at college with you to establish rules of behavior (you should already know them!), but they should certainly take an active role in the academic life as that is what they are paying for!

AJA:

When I first left home, I could never get enough letters and packages from dad and mom. Anything...even just a little note. I especially liked birthday presents and licorice. I think this need applies to anything that my parents sent me or said to me that just let me know they were thinking about me as much as I was thinking about them.

I think that parents should always provide their grown-up kids with the following:

- ! A home to come home to, a welcome with open arms every time.*
- ! A telephone number where they can **always** be reached (with cell phones, this is actually possible.).*
- ! Lots of visits, but never too long.*
- ! Lots of conversation and not so much advice.*
- ! Keeping themselves healthy.*
- ! A chance to offer support to their parents, a more evenly two-way advice and*

support relationship.

! Cash reserves when emergencies come up.

R&L:

Actually, you may get a chance to play all the roles mentioned in this question, *except* that of *manager*. That's the dangerous one. You're not their manager anymore, and if you try to continue to be, you will either drive them away or undermine their independence (or both). All the other roles in this question are good roles, and ENPs should strive to play each of them well enough to be nominated for best *supporting* actor.

SAREN:

Gathering from the experiences of the people I know and the information shared by various people above, most kids really need a lot of support (via mail, phone calls, visits) when they first leave home. If your family is a very tight-knit family, the homesickness your kids experience will likely be harder to deal with in some ways, and easier to deal with in others. As Shawni pointed out in her story, she felt that her family was still in her heart even though they were thousands of miles away since she had so many great memories and connections with them. Strong, solid relationships with your kids before leaving home followed by mutually-agreed-upon regular contact and communication is the best insurance policy to helping those that have newly left the nest feel supported, connected and happy.

7. How will they feel about their new independence when they leave home? How can I let them feel independent while keeping involved in their lives and making sure that they feel my support and interest?

CHARITY JADE:

About half of the time we will feel more scared than excited and half of the time we will feel excited more than scared. Let them know you're always there but don't barge into their lives.

Dick D.: I think, once a kid leaves, we need to get really good at asking questions. Not intrusive, interrogation-type questions, but interested, friendly questions that will show support and interest without introducing doubts or lack of confidence in their ability to cope for themselves.

AJA:

Whenever I come back to school after being home, and I have to carry all my luggage and boxes by myself on the subway, I realize I don't live at home anymore. Whenever my roommates go into the bathroom after I've been in there and don't say anything, I know I'm not at home anymore. Whenever I have no cash (and that means I don't have any cash—no sofa cushions, no sister's piggy bank, no benevolent parent) I know I'm not home anymore. Whenever I'm sick at night from only eating dry cereal for every meal, I know I'm not home anymore. When I came home at four in the morning my first month away from home and my four roommates were waiting at the door looking at their watches, I definitely knew I wasn't home anymore—my parents could never stay up that late. When boys could come in my room—nope, not home anymore. When I opened the mailbox everyday and there was only mail for me—lovin' not being home anymore.

When I could sleep until two minutes before my class and come home after classes and take an uninterrupted three-hour nap, I thought that was the joy of independence! But actually, I don't think moving away from home and independence should be equated. In one sense, I lost my independence from financial obligations, cleaning and cooking responsibilities, and mundane chores and correspondence when I moved out. And, without my parents always watching out for me, I had to impose more rules on myself than they had

*ever done. The punishments for disobedience just weren't so harsh. There is a certain
Afeel@ of independence, though, when you can go where you want to, do what you please, eat
what you want, spend what you want (when you have anything to spend), talk to all sorts of
peopleCbut in a way, though the novelty of the idea and action excited me when I first left
home, it made the world seem a little bleak. As I would hop on the subway to downtown
Boston, and spend my afternoons snacking on street side roasted nuts and window shopping,
with no responsibility to come home at a certain time, or tell anyone where I was going or
what I was doing, it both excited me and saddened me. Look at meCI was a young woman,
surviving on her own, walking around in the big cityCwatch out world! But on the other
hand, I thoughtCwho cares? No one. No one cares what I=m doing or if I even come home
tonight. I have no one to take care of or be responsible for either. How lonely! When I lived
at homeCI felt very independent and joyful. It was only when I was on my own that I felt
constrained by solidarity and too much self-introspection.*

*So I don't know what advice I would give parents about independence of kids. Maybe
just that parents can help their kids make the most of being kicked out of the nest by helping
the kid still feel secure and lovable even though the kid is trying to fly on their own.*

SHAWNI:

*When I left home I felt so much support from my familyCespecially my momCsimply
through letters. I lived in a place where my roommates and I all got our mail in one big pile.
My friends actually ended up making me my own little mailbox for all my mail because I got
so much. It made me feel so loved and still so connected to my family to know they were
thinking about me enough to send me so much mail!*

TALMADGE:

When I left home, it was weird, I actually had freedom to stay out as late as I wanted

and my relationship with my parents just got better. They were not always baring down on me for things but I had to learn how to manage my time better. My new role in the relationship was to keep them informed on what I was doing in life and take care of myself. I knew that I could do it because my parents showed confidence in me and my ability to make it on my own. My parents' role was to be there when I needed them and to keep up on what was going on in my life. Just recently I overheard my younger brother getting in trouble for getting in late and it made me glad for my new relationship with my parents. I like being able to do my own thing, my own way. But I'm so glad for the values my parents taught me so that I can choose for myself without getting myself in trouble.

R&L:

As with so many of these questions, the answer is balance. ENPs need to be constantly aware of the need to balance a confidence of "We respect your independence and have faith in your choices," with the security of, "We love you and think of you as much as ever, and we're there for you whenever you need us." These two feelings are not opposites or mutually exclusive. We just have to be *aware* that our LTN kids need both, and we have to work at keeping the two in balance!

SAREN:

I think most kids relish the idea of independence -- and often curse the results of it (not enough money, poor decisions, feeling alone, etc.). But with support and unconditional love from parents, kids can develop a wonderful sense of "interdependence" with their parents where there is a lot of give and take and a lot of learning from each other.

8. What do I need from my kids once they're gone? What should I expect from my kids when they've moved out and started college?

CHARITY JADE:

You'll need them to keep needing you, but you're not going to be their prime source of everything anymore.

Bill T.: I think there are three things I really *need* from my kids after they leave home -- especially *just* after they leave home. First, I need information! The more I know about what they're doing, the less I worry -- seriously -- even if they are doing some worrisome things. I worry less than if I don't know. My imagination is always worse than reality. Second, I need appreciation. Not a whole lot of it, but just a thank you when appropriate and maybe even some retroactive thanks for things they now realize they didn't thank me for along the way. Third, I really need them to show they need me once in a while. It makes my day when one of my moved-away kids asks for my opinion, or better yet, my advice!

SHAWNI:

I feel like kids are the ones who need to keep the communication open. I've seen so many kids leave for college and feel tremendous freedom in that they don't have to tell their parents anything anymore. They don't have to answer to anyone and they want to be so independent and on their own. But I think kids have a big responsibility to tell their parents what's going on and what they're thinking if they want to maintain a good life-long relationship. They really need to tell parents what they need because parents can't just magically know all the time -- no matter how in-tune they are with their kids. The other day my dad made me mad in some things he did. It would have been easy for me to just keep it inside and let it bother me, but I'm so glad I just told my dad it bugged me because it helped us understand each other's needs and it helped us grow closer.

IRENE:

Parents should expect and give respect and honesty as before but realize that they can't control or make decisions for their child. They can certainly offer their opinion!

AJA:

I think parents should be able to expect the following from their kids when they move away from home:

- ! Lots of visits, and always long enough.*
- ! A telephone number with a reliable messaging device (i.e. Cnot roommates pretending to write down messages).*
- ! A little something, like a job, a boyfriend/girlfriend, recent trip to Japan, or a half dozen children, so that the parents can have something to say when their friends ask, so Ahow is your son/daughter doing? @ No matter what little tidbit of information the kids give their parents to use, the joyful mother can answer her friend, AGreat! He=s got a great job as a international consumption consultant (waiter a at Mexican restaurant) in Boston and he=s dating this great red-head girl (took a co-worker to get ice cream after work), and he just got back from a business trip to down to South America (spent a week with friends down in Cancun Mexico.)! @*
- ! Phone calls at least once every one or two weeks, on their own phone bill.*
- ! Care and support as the parents get old.*
- ! Taking care of their body and health.*
- ! Grand kids (some day, anyway!).*

SAREN:

I think it=s reasonable to expect regular communication from your kids -- e-mails, phone calls -- whatever you decide together works best for you. I think parents should be able to expect as much respect as they give, expect to get their kids to open up as much as

they're willing to open up, expect their kids to be as excited about seeing them and keeping in touch as they are excited. Expectations need to go both ways as interdependence replaces dependence. I think the most important thing is to really communicate with your kids about your hopes and expectations and talk things through.

9. What do I want my kids to be to me as they take off on their own? An extension of myself? An accomplishment to be proud of? No longer a burden? A chance to do fun things vicariously through them?

CHARITY JADE:

You want them to be a friend, but you shouldn't pressure them to be like you or to be what you want them to be. Be proud of what they really are and of what they want to be.

Pam J.: What a child who's moved out should be, in our minds, is a successful apprentice in life. Someone we've tried to teach and to train who is now out learning new things, trying his wings, and finding his own happiness. I don't think I should live through them but I love it when what they do broadens my own horizons. I love that with their increased independence and freedom, my own freedom has also increased. Not that they were ever a burden, but they did tie me down!

Katherine P.: I think your kids should now be your friends! They couldn't really be that in high school -- you were too much of a disciplining parent. But now, with them a little more on their own, you can really feel like friends!

JONAH:

Remember that your children will always be your children. The memories that you have made with them will always be far and beyond any memories or relationships made with

friends. Let your kids help keep you young by involving you in their lives. Advice will move in both directions if you ask for it and that is what makes everyone feel good.

JAYNE:

My parents are wonderful about heaping praise on me. They think I=m the greatest B or so they say. Everything I do is wonderful and they=re always bragging about me to everyone they know, which makes me feel great. BUT B it also kind of bothers me. I feel a lot of pressure to be always doing something that they can brag about. I wish they=d get excited about some of their own talents and interests and get their own stuff to brag about! Sometimes I just feel bad for them B they=re both retired and they don=t seem to have enough exciting stuff in their own lives, so they use my life as something to be involved in and talk about. It=s sort of like people who watch soap operas all the time B they talk about the characters on TV all the time and live vicariously through them and it=s sort of pathetic. Not that my parents are pathetic at all. They=re wonderful, great people. I just wish they=d do more with their abilities and pay a little less attention to me!

DEREK:

When I left home, my mom totally redecorated the whole house, threw all my stuff out pretty much, made my room into a cozy little sitting room off the Master bedroom. She took a full time job that was really exciting for her and I thought AGo Mom B way to get on with your life.@ But she seemed so caught up with all this new stuff B maybe this is selfish for me to feel this way B but it seemed like she was just glad to be done with me, like I was a project she=d successfully finished and now she could move on. She calls me every week and we do the holidays together and she=s always so nice to me when I=m home B but I feel like it=s all a big duty for her B not something she really likes. My dad=s never been a very involved parent, so things didn=t change much when I left home. He asks me if I need money

sometimes. That=s about it.

SAREN:

I=ve talked to a lot of people who seem to feel pressure from their parents in one way or another -- to be what their parents want them to be, to give their parents something to brag about, etc. In general, we want to make our parents proud of us, but we need you to be proud of our happiness, not just the select accomplishments that you feel are noteworthy or in line with your vision for us.

R&L:

We agree! So we guess we=d better start acting like it.

10. How much should I try to influence their college education . . . the classes they take, the major they choose, and their long-term educational goals?

CHARITY JADE:

You shouldn=t do that. Let them follow their dreams and passions. But its okay to let them know what you think they could succeed in.

Dick D.: Try to think of your influence as that of a consultant rather than that of a manager. Good consultants lay out alternatives, increase awareness, and make non-binding, no obligation recommendations. They know it=s not their decision, but they have real interest and real concern. They try to divorce themselves from their personal biases and prejudices and try to help their client see both himself and his options with clarity and perceptiveness.

Kenneth W.: Give input only if they ask! Suggest they take some aptitude tests and see the career counselor.

Tom M.: Don=t even go there! Our generation=s advice is so outdated! I heard of

one Dad warning his son to stay out of *that flaky computer industry* and get into something dependable. I don't think we know enough about the future or the new economy to influence our kids. I think they know more than we do about where the opportunities lie!

IRENE:

My parents definitely had a say in the classes I took, which for the most part I agreed with. Fortunately they are both aficionados of language as am I, so we have common interests. Mom said that I couldn't graduate (sort of kidding) without taking Art History and I put it off and put off until my Senior year and loved it. I regretted not taking it earlier because I probably would have double-majored. Parents very often do know best! They are also paying for your education so I don't believe in allowing a teenager to decide on her/his own without any consultation.

JONAH:

I think that parents need to understand that all people learn differently and that there are a lot of different ways of "making it" in the world. Parents need to really listen to their kids and realize that there are many good paths that are different from the path that the parent took. My dad has always been very complimentary about my abilities, but because he went to Harvard Business School and that worked out great for him, he thinks going to a good business school is the best way to support a family and make a name for yourself. I have always struggled with school and the way that teachers teach which is in most cases very narrow and there is supposed to be only one right answer. I have never learned like that and have always taken the most in when I get out there and experience the world for myself. My frustration with my difficulties with traditional classroom learning is compounded by the expectations of my father. Recognize and appreciate the differences in your children. Realize that it's OK and even good if they have different abilities and possibilities than you. If they

want to take classes that you wouldn't take, encourage them to explore and find what would be best for them. Don't make them feel like you think they're a failure if they don't do well at some of the things you think are important. Just help them to figure out what they are good at and pursue something that will work for them.

MARGARET (by Saren):

When I was a residence advisor in my dorm at Wellesley, a girl named Margaret who lived down the hall tried to commit suicide. Actually, she didn't try very hard. She took some pills, enough to make her sick and scare everyone, but not enough to do much damage. I felt terrible about the whole thing. Margaret had told me the week before that she'd chosen a major and that her parents were irate about it. They'd told her that there was no way they were investing all their hard-earned money in a degree in studio art that would never result in any sort of decent career. I had suggested that she talk to her parents a little more and try to explain her point of view and really listen to their suggestions to see if maybe they had any validity. I didn't spend that much time with her B I was writing a paper at the time and it seemed like she wasn't really listening to my suggestions anyway. She just kept saying, Ayou don't get it, my parents don't talk WITH me, they talk AT me. They don't listen to anything I say and they don't care what I want. It'd take a lot more than me talking to them to get them to make an attempt to understand me.@

Well, Margaret certainly got her parents' attention. The day after the suicide attempt, her mom and dad flew into town. I don't know what went on between them. But I know that she took the rest of the semester off. When I saw her the next semester and asked how she was doing, she said she had had a wonderful month studying art in Rome while she took off time from school and she was really excited about all the art classes she was taking. ASo you're doing the art major after all?@ AYeah, I know what I want and now my parents

understand how bad I want it, so they've become pretty supportive. They still think art's sort of pointless, but I guess they'd rather have an artist child than a dead child.

SAREN:

I think that it is so important to respect and encourage your child's need to explore many different fields. Most kids start college knowing very little about the range of courses and careers that exist. They know about their parents' and friends' parents' careers and they've taken courses and done extracurricular activities that have exposed them to potential areas of interest. But there's so much more out there! And there's so much that their parents haven't even heard of. I think it's most helpful to encourage your kids to spend their first couple of years in college really exploring a wide range of possible interests. I've talked with so many friends who regret taking the advice they received to get their general requirements Aout of the way in their first year or two at college. They wish they'd shopped around more -- going to at least the first day of any course that struck them as interesting and taken more classes that helped them figure out what they really had a passion for. You can take general classes later. But you're supposed to figure out a major by the end of your sophomore year in most cases. I'd encourage your kids to make the most of their first years as a time to explore through courses and talking to people in different fields. They'll get better grades and ultimately be much happier in life if they pursue their own interests, not yours!

11. How should I communicate with them and how often should I do it?

CHARITY JADE:

There's this thing called a telephone. You pick it up and push the numbers. And then you ask questions.

And then you listen.

Lonnie P.: I really think you can overdo the communication. Let them call you when they need to talk. If you're always calling them, it expresses a lack of confidence.

SAREN:

Before I left home for my freshman year, my dad established this idea of writing each other Aliterature letters@ every week. We=re both really into poetry and fine literature and we=re great admirers of the day and age when people wrote each other beautifully penned and worded letters that expressed thoughts and described scenes and events in a vivid and lovely way. We decided that every week we=d write each other a Aliterature letter@ that offered interesting and intriguing glimpses into each other=s lives. I loved getting letters from my father. They were full of poetry and included some carefully selected advice here and there. I grew to love writing my Aliterature letters@ to my family. I would keep notes all week of interesting people I met, select points made in lectures, thought-provoking stuff I read in books. I=d combine these sorts of observations with updates on the amazing and constantly changing beauty of the Wellesley campus and comments on the events of my week. To this day, I love writing weekly letters to my family, capturing and celebrating all that=s going on in my life. The idea has spread to everyone in the family who lives away from home. They now take the form of rather descriptive weekly e-mail updates.

My entire freshman year of college, I received a postcard from my mom pretty much every day. She sent me lovely art-print postcards that offered me great little daily glimpses into everything going on at home. We share an avid interest in art B so I loved the prints on the cards and made a collage with them on the back of my dorm room door. But more importantly, I loved the fact that she was thinking about me every single day and was keeping me in the loop with everything that was going on. She=d scrawl down a few lines waiting in

line at the grocery store, waiting in the car for one of my siblings, watching my little sister=s dance class, or sitting in a meeting. She=d start out most postcards by writing about the situation she was in as she wrote and that made me feel so close to everything going on. My mom=s always got a million things going on, so to have her find a few minutes in every day just for me meant SO much to me. In addition to all the postcards, she sent me wonderful care packages at holidays. I remember that she sent me this huge Easter basket full of treats and decorations and all these fun little toys as well as a big stuffed Easter bunny. I felt like a little girl, I was so excited. I remember picking up the box at the mail room and seeing all these other students looking at me in envy and my roommate gasped and said, AYour mom is amazing@ when she saw me pull the big basket and bunny out of the box. I had to agree with her.

JONAH:

I think the main thing that I needed from my parents right when I left home was for them to call me instead of waiting for me call them. It=s important to just ask simple questions and really listen to the answers -- questions that reflect love only, no judgment passed.

IRENE:

When I started college, since I was across an ocean from my family (they live in England) and telephone calls were still pretty expensive, I always called home every Sunday at 6:00 pm which is when the rates went down. This was a great way to communicate because I was able to look forward to speaking to Mom (she filtered info to Dad) and think ahead about what happened during the week, academically and socially and she looked forward to it too. It made communicating special and fun. Mom carried this on with my brother, Allan, when he went to school and still does it now he's married. Regular, scheduled phone calls

makes communication more of an event or tradition and we'll probably always do it this way.

TALMADGE:

When I first left home, because of the short distance of travel between my house and college, I didn't feel the need to talk to them every day. I didn't feel the need to talk to my parents until I felt there was a problem or if I needed advice on something. I remember many times my parents would call me just to see if everything was okay.

I am now into my second year of college and just last night my dad did something that I really liked. We were talking on the phone because he is in California and he asked me a bunch of details about my basketball team. He knows each player and how they play as well as I do. During the conversation I could tell that he was really interested. Instead of just saying "How are you?" He says "so, How's Chris Playing?" or "Are you having a chance to be leader on the team?" That wasn't something that he just thought up right then. It showed that he had naturally been thinking of me and my situation earlier. Thus it became easy for him to give advice, and easy for me to appreciate and accept it.

ROB:

When I first started college, my parents called me all the time, almost every day. I appreciated their interest and concern, but come on, I had a life to live! I started letting the answering machine get it when they'd call. After a while I guess they got the idea and stopped calling. I felt like they were mad at me and like they were acting pretty childish to just stop calling altogether. We went on like that for a month or so -- neither of us picking up the phone other than for basic information that we really had to get from each other. Finally they asked me why I wasn't calling them and we had a big conversation about everything. They had decided that they didn't want to bug me so they'd just let me take the initiative to call when I wanted to talk to them, and I'd assumed they were mad when they were just

trying to give me my space. Anyway, I think it's good to talk to your kids up front about everything and both parties just get themselves in trouble when they make assumptions.

SAREN:

*Different kids need different amounts of contact and communication with their parents -- and what they need changes as they go through different things in their lives. From everyone I've talked to about this question, the best answer seems to be *Communicate about communicating!* If you like writing, tell your kids how often you'll be sending them a letter or an e-mail. Definitely plan a regular time to talk on the phone. Don't assume that your best mode of communication will line up with your child's favored mode. I have one friend whose father wrote her e-mails every Wednesday and Sunday throughout college. She loved hearing from him. But she didn't enjoy expressing her thoughts through writing, so she'd just write short replies here and there and do most of her real communication during their Monday night phone calls. Try out different approaches. Talk about what's working and what's not. Make your communication techniques dynamic and varied yet as consistent as possible once you establish a pattern.*

R&L:

Most parents need a plan and some sort of a schedule for solid, regular, meaningful communication with kids who have recently left home. Different kinds of communication fill different needs. Letters and thoughtful e-mails can express complex emotions and really describe situations and experiences. Phone calls let us hear each other's immediate feelings.

In our family two strong patterns have emerged. First, a *weekly update* e-mail from each person in the family to everyone else in the family and second, a Sunday phone call from us to each of the kids. The e-mails just keep us apprised of what's going on in everyone's lives and each of us take a certain pride in writing clearly and descriptively --

sometimes humorously -- about the week we've just experienced. The phone calls are the Q and A of our lives -- mostly about how people are doing, what they need, how they are feeling. Other calls happen, of course, but the Sunday ones are the serious ones.

12. How will our relationship and communication change once we don't live in the same house anymore?

CHARITY JADE:

It will be about different things and it will be a more friendly type conversation.

Katherine P.: Well, think about it! Everything changes. Quantity first of all. Instead of dozens of small interchanges every day you might have one -- or maybe only one or two a week. When he was at home you already knew a lot of what's going on -- just by observation. Now you only know what you ask, or what he volunteers. Your questions become *so* important; not only what you ask but how you ask them. If questions sound like interrogation, he will resist them. If they sound like an interested friend, he will welcome them. Also, if he gives you an answer or some information that shocks you, try not to act or sound shocked, or he'll stop talking.

Jim R.: The big difference is, you're not the coach anymore. She's moved off to a higher league and you're not calling the plays or making the substitutions any more. You know what you are now . . . instead of the coach? You're a *fan* -- that's what you should be -- cheering him on!

TALMADGE:

I found it much easier to talk to my parents after leaving for college. It seemed like we were on more of equal terms. After a while I found myself talking about things that I would

only talk to my best friend about in high school. We now talk about girls and friends and situations in more of a casual way and it's great.

AJA:

Although I knew it was sometimes too much for Mom, she very slowly weaned me from talking to her on the phone and e-mail almost twice a day. We talked a lot during high school, and she knew I needed that still, but she also knew it couldn't go on like this forever. Actually, the change for me happened naturally, as I found friends to confide in and became more busy with school work. The great thing I recognize mom for doing was not being offended by the downplay on talk time, but instead encouraging my activities that took me away from dependency. Although the time and amount of communicating was lessened, we still talked about all the important things, and kept our communication at a level that I knew she was always there to talk when I needed to, and I could still talk to her about almost anything, and she with me. Four years later, even though I'm paying for the phone bills now, it's still something I think we're both very comfortable with.

LISA (by Saren):

When she first started college, Lisa was on the phone with her mother every evening for about an hour. She and her mom had always had a close relationship. According to Lisa: AWe've always told each other everything.@ Lisa told her mom every detail of her day B what happened in class, how much homework she'd finished and how much she had yet to do, what she had for dinner, you name it. Lisa would complain about how often her mother called, but she felt that her mother would become very depressed and hurt if she didn't fill her in on all the details of her life. She said, ALook, my mom needs to talk to me. Talking to me is the highlight of her day and I just can't take that away from her.@ A few months after school started, Lisa met this great guy and started wanting to spend a lot of time with him.

Between increasing homework and wanting to spend time with her boyfriend, the talks with her mom started getting shorter and less frequent. Lisa and her mother started fighting on the phone frequently -- about how much to talk, how much to share. Gradually, they settled into a pattern of talking that they could both live with. According to Lisa, "My mom really needed to get her own life. I felt bad cutting her out of mine, but I don't think it was healthy for either of us to talk so much or share so much."

SAREN:

From those I've talked to, communication seems to get simultaneously harder and easier once kids leave home. It often becomes easier to share when you're no longer so intimately involved in the day-to-day happenings of each others' lives. But the question of how much to share and how much to be involved in each others' lives needs to be resolved. Most kids really want to share what's going on in their lives with parents. They welcome and hope for good questions and a listening ear from their parents. But they get really turned off when communication from their parents is primarily suggestions, advice, and/or probing questions that seem to be searching out bad things that might be going on. Assume the best about your kids. Ask and listen. Offer advice when asked, but encourage your kids to come up with their own answers as you talk things through with them. Share a lot about what's going on in your life -- your thoughts and feelings. As parents share, kids are more inclined to share.

13. How often should I visit? How often should they visit me?

CHARITY JADE:

It obviously depends on how far away they live and how much money you have. Not too often if they're

close. As often as you can if they're far!

R&L:

When both of our oldest girls were in Boston (one a frightened little freshman), we actually arranged our affairs so we could live at nearby Lake Winnepesaukee for a few weeks in September, home schooling the younger kids so we could be closer to our homesick-prone college kids. This was a rather extreme measure but it gave us an opportunity to introduce the East Coast and early American writers and literature to our school-age children. It also helped them to realize that going to school in a far away place can be pretty exciting!

IRENE:

Visits home or visits from parents seem to be a great remedy for homesickness. But I think it's all too easy if you're going to college close to home to retreat there when things are tough. I would say that it's important if you live close by to regulate the visits, otherwise how has any sort of independence been reached?

RENNIE (by Saren):

Can you see each other too little? Yes. Freshman year, my friend Rennie was SO homesick she was literally physically ill. She missed her parents and house and dog and little brother and high school friends so much B it=s all she could talk about. Her parents had both gone away for college and they=d only gone home for Christmas and in the summer B which worked fine for them and works for lots of people. They told Rennie to just plan on Christmas and summer B but this twice a year plan just didn=t seem like the right approach for her. Her parents could afford to come visit her or fly her out to visit them for a three-day weekend or something, but they thought that would only make her homesickness worse and they wanted her to learn to Abe tough.@ Rennie was in such bad shape though B it got to the point where a bunch of us wanted to call her parents ourselves and fill them in on the full

extent of the situation. Finally the Head of House (a woman who lived in our dorm and helped out in crisis situations) called Rennie=s parents and told them everything going on. They flew Rennie home for a weekend and she came back doing much better. It seemed like she just really needed a little dosage of home to get her through the rest of the semester.

ELLEN (by Saren):

Can you see each other too much? Yes. I had another friend in college, Ellen, whose parents visited every weekend. They lived about two hours away. Ellen is their only child and they just missed her a lot. She missed them a lot too B so she was really happy to see them, at least for the first few months. After a while it just wasn=t working. She could never go do anything with us on Saturdays because she was always booked up by her parents B and she couldn=t go out and do fun stuff on week nights because she was always doing homework and knew she wouldn=t have the weekend to catch up like the rest of us did. Ellen and her parents would do great stuff together B things that most of us were a bit jealous of. But it was just too much to get together all day every Saturday. We all kept telling her that she should talk to her parents about coming a little less often, but she didn=t want to hurt their feelings. Finally she did talk to them and they weaned their way down to coming once a month which worked out great. When they only saw each other once a month, it became something they could plan out and look forward to B and my friend as well as her parents had the chance to build up their own separate weekend activities and separate lives.

R&L:

Maybe the simplest answer is, AAs often as the LTN child wants you or as often as you can afford to, whichever is less.@ A few visits from parents (depending on how far away from home the child is) cannot only ease the transition, it can give the parent a clearer picture and perspective of where the child is and what he needs and doesn=t need.

SAREN:

Bottom line, all parents and all kids have different needs. It's important to look at your own individual situations and talk about what's feasible (based on the money and time available) and what everyone's hopes and expectations are. Then work out a plan that feels good to everyone concerned. It may well be that visits will seem much more necessary during the first year than they'll seem down the road. I think that everyone concerned can benefit from visits that are as frequent as logically and logistically possible in the first year can help ease your kids into becoming more independent. Gradually, visits will become less of an ached-for necessity and more of a really nice and fun occasion that happens a few times a year.

13b. How can I make it special for everyone when my children come home to visit?

CHARITY JADE:

Throw a big, huge surprise party for them!

AJA:

Always, mom and dad got me excited to come home. Not every homecoming was preceded by homesickness, and yet I always longed to come home. There are two reasons I see for that: first, it was ALWAYS a big deal when I came home. My sister, who now goes to school only 400 miles away from home, goes to see our parents very often and usually sporadically, so I don't know if she still gets the same celebration, but it's still a very big deal for her, too.

IRENE:

I grew up with a wonderful family and was always thrilled to go home. People will

feel most happy about visiting a happy home and since not all are happy, there must be a lot of young people who don't go home. It would be pretty hard to rectify the matter this late in a young person's life, but it seems a basic concept that if you provide a safe, warm and nurturing environment, your children will always want to return.

SAREN:

I remember the first time I came home from college. It was Thanksgiving my freshman year and I was counting down the days until I could go home practically from my first day away. I was having a great time at college and my parents had been great about sending lots of letters and calling regularly, but knowing that I'd be going home for Thanksgiving is what kept me going on some bleak homesick-soaked days. I remember the plane ride home. I was soooooo excited, the five-hour plane ride felt like an eternity. It felt just like Christmas Eve when I was a little kid. When we FINALLY arrived in Salt Lake, I felt like mowing down all those other passengers and racing off that plane. But I waited in that snail-pace line in the plane aisle, my heart racing while my feet shuffled forward. When I FINALLY got off, my whole family was there right outside the door to the jet way B huge smiles on their faces, holding up a big welcome home sign and a bunch of balloons. I couldn't hug them all enough! It was just so amazing to actually be with my family again, after thinking of them and missing them every day for almost three months. I couldn't believe how much my littlest siblings had grown. It was weird to see everyone wearing clothes I hadn't seen them in before. Things change a lot in three months B especially when you suddenly take three months off from people you used to see every single day.

It felt so good to see everyone so excited to see me. It was even nice to hear the little kids fighting B since they were fighting about who got to sit by me in the car on the way home. When we got home, I found everything exactly as I'd left it in my room, except that

there was a gorgeous bunch of flowers on the table by my bed B I=ve always had a special liking for fresh flowers.

Now that I=ve had about 50 homecomings and now that others in my family have Aleft the nest,@ my homecomings and homecomings in general have become less of a novelty. But my mom still puts fresh flowers by my bed. Quite a few of my family members still come get me at the airport. Everyone still sets aside special time to go on a walk or out to lunch with me.

R&L:

It=s easy to go too far either way on this one. On the one hand, if we treat the LTN as royalty when she comes home, it may make her wonder if you=ve got a life of your own. On the other hand, if you make no fuss at all, she=ll wonder if you even missed her.

Strike a middle ground by making her feel totally special and totally missed, but also letting her see (and hear) about your own full and busy life.

SAREN:

I think homecomings should always be special B and just a few little things can make all the difference. But that first homecoming B I=d say go ahead and make it pretty memorable. It=s just so very nice to be welcomed with total joy and jubilation. It=s so good to have those you love ask lots of questions and learn all about your new life. It makes you feel so loved and valued and Afills you up@ so you can go back to school renewed with energy and confidence. Make sure that whenever your kids come home you try to make it special for them -- plan their favorite meals, some fun family activities, and some good one-on-one time. Be sure to coordinate what you plan with things they may need to do and others they want to see while they=re home.

14. How should I handle financial issues? How much support (if any) do I want to provide?

CHARITY JADE:

Have this all worked out before they go so everyone will know what to expect.

Marilyn M.: Basically, it=s simple. We support them completely until they are married. Then they=ve got their own family and they=re on their own.

Kent E.: Listen, I had to work my way through college and I=m a better person for it. It made me self-reliant. I want my daughter to have that same experience. She=ll thank me for it one day.

Pam J.: I put my college kids on a strict budget. And since it=s my money, I get to make up the budget.

Lonnie P.: The last thing I want my son to worry about right now is money. He=ll worry enough about that later on. Right now just want him worrying about grades. If he keeps his grades up, I=ll keep his bank account up.

JOEL (by Saren):

My friend Joel=s parents gave him and his brother \$50,000 when they turned 18. They let their sons know that they=d be getting no more money from there on out B they were on their own. They encouraged their sons to use the money to help pay for school or invest it and save it to buy a house one day. They=d taught their kids about money management and investing all their lives, so they felt pretty confident handing the money over to their kids. Joel spent a good \$10,000 right off the bat on various toys and another \$20,000 on his first year of tuition and school expenses. After that first year, he realized that he=d better slow down. He transferred to a state school, got a job to help out with expenses, and found some

scholarships that helped with tuition. He did lots of research and found some pretty unique and unlikely scholarships & one was in the meteorology department! He put as much money as possible into various investments, and by the end of college, he had about \$15,000. This kept growing until he put it towards a house a few years later.

Joel's brother went to an Ivy League school and spent all his money on his education and living expenses during college and took out quite a few loans as well. He got a great job after graduation, so he's been paying off loans and saving money just fine for a couple of years now.

Both Joel and his brother thought that their parents' method worked great for them. Joel said, "I'm not saying this is the way all parents should handle finances. It worked for us because we understood finances and investing pretty well by the time we were eighteen and we'd been taught to really value education, so my parents weren't worried that we'd just blow the whole thing on dumb stuff. Yeah, they were a little worried when I bought that motorcycle and big screen TV freshman year. They asked how my money was holding up and hinted around about the fact that it might be hard to pay for the rest of college if I didn't budget more carefully. But they made it clear that the money was mine and I could do what I liked with it. They also made it VERY clear that there would be NO more money coming from them & they aren't the sort of people who'd be softies about the whole thing if I ran out of money. You've got to build a strong foundation for doing something like this with your kids."

BETHANY (by Saren):

My friend Bethany's parents worked their way through school since their parents couldn't afford to help them. They thought the experience of doing everything for themselves was very beneficial, so they decided they wanted the same for their own children. They

encouraged their kids to work and save money throughout high school and helped them search out and apply for scholarships. Bethany saved all she could and got great grades in college that helped her get a few thousand dollars in scholarships. But there was no way she could afford to go to anything other than a state school, and since she couldn't afford to pay for tuition as well as room and board, she decided to go to a nearby state college and live at home. She worked about twenty hours a week at various low-paying jobs, so she couldn't take as many hours as she'd have liked and it took her five years to finish college. She says she's glad she learned how to make money and budget and she certainly feels that she values her education more than some whose parents just paid for everything. But she says she wonders what it would have been like to go away for college, go to a really good school, or go on study abroad. So many of her high school friends got to do these things and she feels like her options were really limited by her parents' decision not to help her financially.

Bethany said: I really appreciate what they were trying to do. They're such good parents and they wanted the best for me. But I have to say it was really hard for me that they didn't help me to have more opportunities. It was one thing for my parents when their parents couldn't afford to help them. It's a whole different thing knowing that your parents have the money to help at least a bit, but they just don't believe in helping. It's hard not to feel a little resentful. A couple thousand a year would have meant nothing to them, and there I was, working my butt off as a waitress to make that much money when I could have been taking more classes and learning more. @

SAREN:

At Wellesley, between grants and loans and parents' contributions, tuition, room and board was taken care of for most of my friends. Some worked part time and many worked during the summers to make their own spending money and contribute a little to the rest of

the expenses. But lots of people used summers for unpaid or barely-paid internships that offered great resume-building experiences. Most people lived within a pretty set budget and very few people seemed to have enough money to just do whatever they wanted to do. We all felt pretty Apoor @ B we almost never went out to eat, almost no one had a car, and people didn't seem to be shopping for clothes very much.

Most people seemed to be pretty committed to their education @ partly a function of the school itself, I'm sure. There was just a culture of interest and learning on the Wellesley campus. Some of my friends whose parents paid for everything were really committed to learning and doing well in school, others were not. It seemed like a person's overall upbringing had more to do with their efforts and commitment to schooling than did the manner in which their education was financed. I did notice, however, that almost all of those who were helping to pay for their schooling and were planning to take responsibility for paying back loans seemed to be pretty committed to getting all they could out of their education. I also noticed that those whose parents were making real sacrifices to put them through school were similarly committed @ although they seemed to be more committed to pursuing their parents' dreams than their own in some cases. Many people felt that if their parents were paying for their education, then their parents should have quite a say in what classes they took and what they pursued. Some people didn't mind this. Others minded a lot.

My parents believe that it's good for us to pay for our own education, that we'll value it more if we have to pay for it. But they're realistic enough to know that no matter how much we might work in high school, saving enough for a private college education is really not possible. So they set up this plan where they'd pay for our room and board and we'd pay for our tuition via no-interest loans from them and we'd earn our own spending

money via doing some part time work or using our savings from high school and summer jobs. Overall, it's a good plan. It made me feel accountable for the money I was spending and helped me take my education more seriously.

But I was always SO stressed out about money! I felt like I could never never never buy anything and I felt pretty deprived. I did some babysitting to make some spending money, but it didn't go far. I felt like I had this huge burden of debt over me as my loans from my parents increased and increased. I'm sure it was mostly my personality and not so much the method that caused me such stress. But I hated feeling so poor and so indebted.

SHAWNI:

It's interesting to read what Saren wrote because I really have no problem with the way my parents handled helping us financially in college. I don't really understand why she feels so guilty and worried about it. If you can pay it back, pay it back. If not, it's supposed to be fine. I guess different personalities deal with things in different ways. And maybe my parents sort of changed the way they presented everything to me after seeing that Saren was stressed out about it B I went to college two years later.

I would have been in trouble if I was just plunked down in Boston by myself with no income or financial support. My parents always made a strong effort to help us be financially aware when we were at home. At age eight we had to start buying all our own clothes, and we had our own Afamily bank@ checkbooks. Yes, eight is young, but you must understand that my parents provided every means for us to earn our own money and to have enough for what we needed. We actually had a very elaborate system in which we did our household jobs, helped take care of our Atutee@ (one of the children younger than we were), got to bed on time and did our music practicing in order to earn money. If we were responsible to keep track of what we did we reported it to my dad on Apay day@ and earned

money to put in our Afamily bank.Ⓢ This is all information carefully outlined in another book, but getting to the point, this system ran quite smoothly and was great when we were home. It helped me out a lot in the real world of college too. I knew how to take good care of the things I worked hard to pay for and was well aware of how much money I had.

My parents decided that since they would be paying for our room and board had we stayed at home and gone to a nearby college they would still pay for that when we left home which was great. I took care of other things using my savings but I must admit I still felt pretty attached to my parents for money help. I was so thankful for all the help I could get.

My husband, on the other hand, is really grateful he was much more financially independent. He jokes around with me because he thinks it=s funny I never really had a real job until after I graduated from high school. (For some reason he doesn=t count my month of gift wrapping at a jewelry store for the busy Christmas season a real job!) He is so thankful to his parents for teaching him how to work hard and be responsible at a job. He values the fact that he held different, serious jobs every summer because he learned so much from them. He worked hard for his money and was able to pay for a great deal of his college education with his savings. My family was different in that we traveled a lot during the summers and didn=t have jobs. I sure wouldn=t trade this for the world. But my husband wouldn=t trade his experience either so I guess to each his own!

STAN:

My parents provided EVERYTHING while I was in high school so that I could be involved in extracurricular activities rather than working for spending money. At the time this was great, but when I went to college, and my parents expected me to get a job and work for my own spending money (they paid for tuition and rent), I was experience-less about how to get a job or manage my money. I was so indulged during high school that I felt totally

unable to deal with applying for jobs and interviewing, plus I lacked any sort of work skills and work experience. I felt shocked! They had set this "giving" mode that I took for granted and it was a very hard transition to go from having everything provided to taking care of myself!

SAREN:

Wow, there are lots of points of view on this one B and lots of ways of handling finances that seem to work. Parents have all kinds of different ideas and I saw the issue of finances handled in a good variety of ways by the parents of my high school and college friends. Different approaches seem to work well for different families B and the success of all approaches seems to be connected to the way that kids are brought up all their lives and what their expectations are. I=d say the most important thing is to discuss financial support well in advance of your kids= leaving for school. Help them work out how much college will cost and then work out, together, who will pay for what. Put expectations and commitments from both parties in writing.

R&L:

We agree with Saren=s summary here. But there is more to it than that -- much more.

We=ll present a full-fledged financial strategy in Section Four.

15. How should I be involved in their dating lives? How much should I ask? When should I worry? What about their roommates or friends?

CHARITY JADE:

It=s just one area of interest when you=re just normally talking to them. The two times to worry would be 1. if they=re just dating one person while they=re too young or 2. if they=re not dating anyone at all.

Kenneth W.: Again, give input only if they ask.

Dick D.: Know all you can. Ask all you can. Just because they're gone doesn't mean you don't still have responsibility for them! They're in more danger now. You've got less control; there are physical dangers (STDs) and emotional ones. Be involved! Deep down, they'll appreciate your concerns.

AJA:

During college, I got involved with a guy that my whole family (myself and the guy included) thought I would eventually marry. My parents met him when they came to visit me at school. He came home with me for a weekend. These visits coupled with all the information I gave my parents about everything when I would call or write home led to Mom and Dad feeling very involved in the relationship. Mom felt very attached to the guy, and thus indirectly pressured me to work desperately to insure the success of the relationship. Neither Mom nor Dad had been so involved in one of my relationships before, even when I lived at home, but because of my age, which seemed to them a marriageable one, I think they took it this relationship a little too seriously.

As a result, when my boyfriend and I broke up, it hit Mom even a little bit harder than it hit me, I think. I wish she hadn't had her get so involved. But, we all learned from the experience, and when I met Jonah, even though I knew my mom loved him immensely, she gave no pressure. I told her just as much about Jonah as I had told her about the other guy, if not more and told her about all the things that Jonah and all I felt and faced. But this time, she played the part of an uninvolved listener. Luckily, I didn't have to test how involved she was with a break up, because Jonah and I got married. But I know that it was completely my decision to marry him, and my decision way not spurred on, though it was thoroughly approved, by my parents and siblings.

SHAWNI:

I wish my parents had asked me more about the people I was dating back in high school. I'm not sure why they didn't but it seems to me the only thing they asked is whether I was kissing anyone too much. Even this much interest was welcomed by me. I think because I was one of the first in the family in the dating scene they didn't really know how much to be involved. Now I think they are so great with the people my youngest siblings are dating. They know all about each and every date. I think the communication has just become much more open. Having said this, I definitely think there should be a balance. I had a lot of friends who had parents much too involved in their relationships. But my parents just seemed to trust whatever I was doing and not want to pry too much. As much as some kids may love this, I wished my parents would have been more interested in what I was thinking and feeling.

JUSTIN:

I think it's great to show a real interest in your kids' friends. Remember names and basic information on friends and ask about people whenever you talk to your kids. It meant a lot to me that my parents wanted to take my roommates out to dinner whenever they'd come to visit. My mom was so great about always showing a genuine interest in what was going on with my friends. Friends were such a huge part of my life & like family members in so many ways & so it was really important to me that my friends get to know my family and that my family get to know my friends.

My parents never seemed to be worried about any of my friends. But we had such a good relationship that I think they would have been able to say something to me if they did have worries.

SAREN:

Your kids will have some really interesting and tough issues going on in their lives

related to dating once they leave home. They may be excited about all the new people to go out with. They may find themselves in a relationship that feels pretty serious pretty quickly. I think it's great for parents to be happy for their kids when they're excited about their dating lives. As your kids get to know people of the opposite sex that they like a lot, they may be facing some difficult questions about what they want to do about spending a lot of time with one person, figuring out what sorts of relationships they want now and what they want as they look down the road at the rest of their lives.

Your children will probably be excited to tell you about the people they're meeting & if you have a good relationship with them and if you don't have a history of being judgmental about their friends. They'll really really want you to like their boyfriends and girlfriends. It seems like it makes people really confused and conflicted when parents don't like someone that they really like a lot. Sometimes parents' disapproval makes kids want to do the opposite of whatever they advise & just to prove that their parents can't tell them what to do. If you like their dates, tell them that you like them and ask about them whenever you talk. If you're worried about people they're dating, be careful not to judge too soon. Get to know more about them before you decide what you think about them. Ask your kids questions in a genuinely interested way (they can totally see through you when you ask questions where you think you already know the answers). When you've given someone a really fair chance, and you're worried that the person isn't good for your kids, I think it's good to tell them your thoughts & what you're worried about and why. Your child will probably appreciate your honesty. But you need to recognize that who they spend time with is ultimately not your decision.

16. What should I do if I'm worried about some of the things they're doing or not doing?

CHARITY JADE:

Just tell them your opinion. But first really listen to their opinion and really take it into consideration.

Marilyn J.: Just quit worrying. You've done all you can to teach and train them.

Now you just have to pull back and see what happens. Pray for them -- that's about all.

Winifred R.: Be open enough to talk about each other's worries. You want to know their worries so you should tell them your worries. The two go together. Don't just tell them your worries about *them*, tell them your concerns about everything and ask them to tell you theirs. Just try not to look too shocked if they tell you something shocking.

AJA:

When I have confided in my parents, they have been more than understanding and have told me how they had, or would have handled similar situations in their past. When I was growing up, my parents usually found out about disobedient things I did right away (thanks to my little sister), but when I moved away, when things did come up, they usually found out about it some time after the incident. My mom and dad made the transition well, I think, because they realized they did not need to impose any sort of punishment or chastisement, for if I were to be chastised for the incident, I had already done it to myself. So, those times I felt alone ended up being the punishment and life changers that I needed to get back on track.

SHAWNI:

I think open communication is SO important when kids leave home. If there's open communication kids will tell parents what they're doing and not doing and parents can deal with it from there. I think the thing that keeps the communication lines open is total support from parents. This is especially important when kids may confide in parents something that

isn=t what they expect or what they would be proud of.

I know one girl who is terrified to tell her parents anything that may be a little questionable because her parents would flip out if they even knew she was exposed to something they wouldn=t approve of. This is a good kid I=m talking about, but her parents are so overprotective she can=t get close to them or have good communication with them because she=s so worried they=ll freak out if they find out anything that isn=t perfect in her life. I don=t think her parents realize that the world is out there and you can=t protect your kids from everything.

SAREN:

Sooner or later, kids are going to see things parents wish they wouldn=t. Sadly but realistically, kids will have some pretty negative experiences in their lives. But if parents can open the lines of communication and just listen to their kids Ceven if their kids happen to tell them something that shocks them, they can help their kids out so much. A child who confides in her parents Cespecially something that=s not admirable Cis reaching out for help and needs understanding not judgment. If you know your parents love you and TRUST you, you will tell them what you are up to. You=ll feel guilty if you do something they wouldn=t approve of and you=ll want to improve if you don=t think you=re quite up to par with the good things they have taught you. But the relationship has to be good to begin with for this to work. I think parents need to still show their children they care just as much about them (if not more) even when they don=t live at home anymore. This includes phone calls, really listening, letters, visits, as much contact as possible.

Additional Perspectives, Motivations, and Ideas for LDS ENPs

As Church members, our beliefs and perspectives should be reflected in *every*

question and every answer. But besides that, there are some additional ENP questions that apply only to Church families. Many of them center on missions.

17. How about missions? When should they go and how much should I push?

CHARITY JADE:

Simple. The boys should go when they're nineteen, and the girls should think about it and pray about it. But don't be overbearing.

Jim R.: Careful, if you push too hard, they'll push back -- in the other direction. It's got to be their decision. If they go for the wrong reasons they may not make it.

Carolyn M.: I don't know . . . I'd almost say get a son into the mission field any way you can. Let's be honest, most of them don't know what they're getting into, but once they're there and they feel the spirit of it, most of them thrive. And the Prophet did say, *Every young man.*

Pam L.: You know, I just wish we wouldn't repeat that so much -- like we're ignoring or excluding girls from the experience. I'm told sisters get into more homes and have more converts than elders, and I don't think there's anything stronger or more equal than a marriage partnership between two returned missionaries!

SHAWNI:

I'm trying to figure this out myself now that I have kids of my own. I loved that you guys didn't push me at all but you were so supportive and excited when I decided to go. You taught me from the time I was young how to really get guidance and answers to prayers (particularly about making a

prayerful decision and then getting a confirmation as discussed in D & C 9). I prayed about the mission and really got a sure answer. This was so helpful on my mission because when it got hard I looked back and remembered that sure answer that that=s exactly where I should be. It made all the difference in my life and I am SO thankful I went. I want my daughters to go so much as well, but I don=t want to pressure them -- I just want them to figure out what=s best for them the same way I figured it out. I sure hope the answer is a mission though!

I think it=s different with boys. It really was more of a choice for me since I=m a girl. I think it=s important to just raise boys to know that a mission is just what you do. I want my boys to know that a mission is what Heavenly Father wants them to do and it will change their lives. Boys mature so much on missions and turn into men that can raise families with priesthood strength and confident humility. I don=t ever want my boys to feel that they are forced to go, but I want them to plan on it and get ready for it with excitement from the time they are little.

As for the mission timing -- I think every situation is different and that it has to be prayerfully figured out when to leave. My dad always encourages my brothers to get in a year of college before they leave, no matter when their birthday is, and I think it=s a good idea. It makes them more prepared and mature to be great missionaries -- also less homesick from home) under their belt. But my brother-in-law left directly after high school and is loving that decision as well, so I think it=s kind of an individual thing.

SUSAN:

I wanted to go on a mission really bad but my Mom was totally against it. She said that girls aren't supposed to go on missions in general, but if they aren't really marriage materials, it's OK for them to go. I had lots of friends who had gone or were going and I was pretty annoyed by her opinion. I prayed hard about it and decided to go. Ultimately, my Mom was supportive and I wouldn't trade my mission experience for the world. I think parents should pretty much stand back and let their daughters make their own decision about missions. I don't think they should try to influence them one way or another.

MIKE:

I went on a mission because my parents insisted. They said I'd never be able to get married to a decent girl if I wasn't a returned missionary. Furthermore, they said they wouldn't pay for college if I didn't go. I really didn't have a testimony of the gospel at the time and I was pretty immature and worried about leaving my car and my girlfriend and my nice cushy life -- but I turned in my papers and before I knew it, I was in the MTC. I hated the MTC and made life pretty miserable for my companion. I had a really bad attitude when I arrived in the mission field. Luckily, I had a really good mission president and he helped me get my butt in gear and have a decent mission. But I wish my parents had let me make my own decision. I wish they'd told me about how important they think missions are and then let me know that it was really up to me whether or not I went.

TALMADGE:

What can I say? I wouldn't trade my mission for anything. I know I

learned more and grew more in those two years than I will in my four or six or ten years of college. And more important than how much I grew was what I was able to give. God works through missionaries to change people=s lives, and there is nothing better than that!

R&L:

Question 17 is a big one, isn=t it? Perhaps the most pivotal question asked so far . . . and it has so many sub-questions that perhaps it should be a whole section rather than just a single question. How much should parents be involved in the mission decision? Is it a commandment that all young men go or just advice from the prophet? How much should we encourage daughters to think about going? What is the hardest part of a mission for most kids? How do you prepare them (and yourself) emotionally? What can we really do for them while they=re out there in the mission field? What kind of letters help them most? Is it wise to go pick them up when they=re done?

There are, of course, whole books written on this subject and these questions. But here are a few candid, personal opinions on aspects you may not have fully considered . . . *questions of who, when, and how.*

Who *should* go? Frankly, for a boy, the decision should be simple because the Prophet did say that every young man should go. From our vantage point as former mission president and wife, we understand why. Of the 600 missionaries we had during our three years in London, we sincerely believe there was not *one* who could have learned more, grown more, contributed more, or served God and grown to love Him more by doing *any other thing!* Think about that. A mission does more for God, for fellow man,

and for self -- far more -- than any other alternative. For boys, there should be no decision. *Just do it!* (We realize we have simplified that . . . there are many issues, no two cases are the same, and certainly there are marvelous men in the church who did not serve).

For the same reasons, girls should consider a mission as a serious option; although, for them, it is a more complex decision. During our mission presidency, we were constantly requesting more sisters, because they do get into more homes and teach more families. Each of our daughters have gone, and come back far more prepared for life and for an equal partnership in marriage. Still, it is a different *kind* of decision for girls -- one of making a personally and individually guided *choice* rather than of simply whether or not to follow a Prophet's admonition.

When to go? Speaking generally, the best prepared and most ready Elders we received in England had finished a year (or at least a semester) of college. Elders who came right out of high school, or who had never before been on their own or away from home had a little tougher adjustment. But again, each case is different. Nineteen, with or without any college or experience away from home, is a remarkable age -- an age of faith and a time when nothing seems impossible. But young men who are in their early twenties should never think they are too old to go. Some of our best missionary elders were twenty-two or twenty-three when they entered the field.

How to go? (How to prepare a son or daughter?) The obvious answer, of course, is to teach and live the gospel. Beyond that, here are aspects that we

think sometimes get overlooked:

1. Teach total commitment and sacrifice. The missionaries that have the toughest time are those that go out conditionally or tentatively -- wondering how much they'll have to give up and how they'll like it. On the other hand, missionaries that are determined to sacrifice and give up everything except serving the Lord for two years adjust quicker, are less homesick, and enjoy their missions far more.

2. Have them help finance their missions. Even though parents usually pay (and receive blessings for doing so) it's a good idea to have prospective missionaries save and pay for at least ten percent (a Atithe@ of their missions).

3. Prepare them for the M.T.C. For many missionaries, the M.T.C. is the hardest part. Wonderful as it is, the M.T.C. is a very regimented place, and artificial in some ways since it's not the actual mission field. Prepare your missionary for this by talking about it and helping him or her understand that the collective uniformity of the M.T.C. will prepare him for the individual challenges of the real mission.

4. Be totally honest and sincere. Don't think of your input (to your child's decision to serve) as pressure or non-pressure. Just tell him exactly how you feel. Bear your testimony honestly and openly. Give him the benefit of your deepest and truest opinions but make it clear that you cannot decide for him.

5. Focus your letters on the mission. Once your missionary is on his mission, let him know all is well at home, but don't dwell or elaborate on

things of home. Help him give it all by focusing your letters on the gospel, your testimony, any spiritual experience or missionary opportunities you have, and on questions about his investigators and his mission.

How to bring him home? If your circumstances permit, go and pick him up when his mission is over. Do some sightseeing, but go mainly to see where he has been and to meet converts and members. There is no better way to *feel* and understand his mission. It is also a good beginning for his transition back into regular life. Whether or not you pick him up, be aware that for a good and dedicated missionary, the adjustment of coming back into normal life is tougher than the adjustment when he went on his mission. What he begins doing when he returns -- classes, working, friends, dating, will seem less important, less challenging, and less fulfilling than what he did on his mission. Help him out with some good discussions of the *phases* of life and with your assurance that just as God wanted him to focus on the needs of others on his mission, He now wants him to put some focus on his own life plans and to work out his education, his career, and his future family.

SAREN:

I just want to mention one other aspect that is related to missions and that I think should be mentioned in this section about going away from home for the first time. While I love BYU and love going to college close to home, for me it was so right to be away for most of my university years. I just want kids and parents to consider this, so I'm putting in a paragraph from three friends:

JOHN:

I went to Dartmouth for college. It worried my parents, but I=d prayed about it and felt that it was right. I had a small handful of Mormon friends, most of whom were very different from me, but all of whom I learned to really appreciate. I have no doubt that my testimony really grew as I had daily opportunities to explain my beliefs or the actions that were determined by my beliefs. I really feel like it=s important to let your kids go to whatever university they really want to go to -- and have faith in their ability to be strong members of the church in any situation they find themselves in. After their initial worries turned out to be unfounded, my parents became strong proponents of Mormon kids going away to college. All of my siblings and many of my cousins and Mormon neighbors have had great experiences going away to school and being part of a Mormon minority rather than a Mormon majority. I do think, though, that it=s important that there be SOME Mormons at any school where your kids go -- it=s so important to have at least a couple of Mormon friends.

MEGAN:

I got into a couple really good schools -- Brown and Amherst -- and I was pretty excited about it. My parents didn=t even know that I applied to these schools -- I knew they wouldn=t be excited about me going anywhere other than BYU. They were both BYU alums who felt like BYU was the ONLY school for smart Mormons to go to. Anyway, I thought that maybe when I got my acceptance letters, they=d be excited for me and maybe consider the option of my going away to school. Nope. They were mad I=d even applied and they

said there was no way they=d support me going away to school. So I went to BYU and I liked it fine. But I=ve never gotten over the fact that I didn=t really have a choice in the matter. I think that parents should at least entertain the option of sending their kids away to school -- if their kids really want to go away. You can be a really good Mormon without going to BYU!

TOM:

I just think it=s important for parents to help their kids explore ALL the options of school they could go to and then support them in whatever they decide. I personally believe that kids who grow up in Utah really need to go away for college. I think it=s nice for people to have some part of their lives where they=re surrounded by Mormons -- but if they=ve had this experience during their younger years, they don=t need to have it again for college. I knew plenty of people at Ricks who went inactive during school or later in life. Going to a church university is not a guarantee that you=ll be a good church member. You can make your kids resent the church if you force them to go to a church school, so watch out!

Peak 1 Review -- Conceptualizing and Understanding the Transition

We like the model of the solar system. We've even nicknamed our nine kids after the nine planets (Venus always loved her nickname, but Earth and Uranus were never too fond of theirs). For us, the symbolism is that we want to spin each of our children off into their own successful and independent orbit, self-sufficient and with their own moons. But we still want our own gravity to hold all of us together as an extended solar system or family system. We want each planet to have its own gravity but also to share a common gravity. We hope that we can all stay in the same moral and spiritual proximity within the larger universe, and that each of them can continue to be lit and energized by our warmth.

This is a helpful way to conceptualize the departure of a child. We didn't bring them into the world and raise them to live with us forever or to be an appendage of ourselves. The goal of parenting is to gradually work your way out of a job -- never to fully retire but to semi-retire -- to spin them off and to watch and enjoy their exciting new orbit. We need to relish that idea rather than resist it.

Keep holding and protecting them with the gravity of your love. Keep lighting them with the brightness of your confidence and support. Keep warming them with the fire of your loyalty and commitment, but let them spin on their own axis and move out into their own orbit.

Additional Perspectives, Motivations, and Ideas for LDS ENPs

What an exquisite parenting model we have in how Heavenly Father parents us -- particularly as we depart from home for the first time. God taught and nurtured us closely in His home, but when we left, His was a plan of agency. He knew that our growth would be facilitated by making our own

choices and even by our inevitable mistakes.

Yet He is always available, always willing to listen and to guide. And He encourages our close contact and frequent communication. In fact, He repeatedly *asks us to ask* because when His advice or help comes at our initiative, it does not violate our agency.

His response to us is always wise and measured. He allows us to work through many of our own difficulties and dilemmas rather than miraculously bailing us out. Yet He is always there when our own resources run out. His love is completely unconditional.

Beyond the example of God=s parenting and His Plan of Salvation, we are also blessed to have the practical, day to day help of an expanded family we call a ward, another set of teachers, counselors and leaders to back us up and support us. And even beyond that, we have the seminary program and the Institute program or even a Church university. And still beyond that, we have church missions which are the best transition imaginable between childhood and adulthood.

The Church also puts us in the powerful spiritual position that allows us to remind our recently departed children (and ourselves) of who they (and we) really are -- part of the same divine family -- spiritual siblings as well as parent and child -- here with reasons and priorities for living -- eternally dependent on God and interdependent on each other.

Finally, and most important of all, LDS parents have the overwhelming advantage of knowing who the real parent is and of being able to go to him in

a kind of direct-stewardship prayer that essentially says, "Father, please help thy child which thou has entrusted to my care. Thou knowest her far better than I. Inspire and guide me to be a wise steward and where her needs go beyond my capacities, please intervene." Alma Sr. prayed this way and so can we.

Peak 2: When He or She Starts a Career

(Do you cut the purse strings as much as the apron strings?)

This second emotional peak is an interesting combination of relief and worry. We're glad to see our offspring becoming self-sufficient, yet we can't help wonder if they are quite ready and if their choices are quite right. Here are the common questions, with ENP and LTN responses:

18. How much should I be involved in their career decisions? How much should I ask? How much should I suggest?

CHARITY JADE:

Tell them what you think they're good at, but respect their own dreams and passions and support whatever they decide.

Bill N.: Here is where we need to really back off. If we give too much input and they follow it and it doesn't work out, they will blame us. And if it does work out, they'll feel less satisfaction since it wasn't their decision. If we give lots of advice that they don't follow and they end up having problems, we'll say, "I told you so," which is probably the worst thing we could say!

Le Ann D.: I disagree. I say you can't ask too much! Give them all the input you can. Why let them rediscover the wheel? You've been around the track a few times and they might as well learn from you! You've got contacts and connections! They don't!

Gregory B.: Well, look, the key here is to give them so much confidence and support that they feel secure. Then they will probably *ask* you for your opinion. Once they've asked,

it=s their initiative rather than yours and you can give inputs without taking away their independence.

Kenneth W.: Again, give input only if they ask.

Tom M.: Instead of pushing or making strong suggestions or interrogating, say things like, AWhat are your two or three best options or alternatives right now?@

SAYDI:

One of my all-time favorite things my dad has done for me in my life happened a few months ago. I live in New York and I'm getting my masters degree in Social Work at Columbia. Last summer when I was home I was having a financial discussion with my dad. I think it was a time when he was a little stressed about supporting the five kids he had in college and he told me that he thought it was a little unfortunate that I had chosen to go into a career that wasn't an investment. I think he was kind of kidding and I know he just meant to state the financial facts about the Social Work profession. But I took what he said right to heart and flew off the handle defending the great investment that learning about social work was in my life and how much it was going to enable me to help people and make a contribution. We patched things up a bit and he told me that we'd work out my loans but that I had to be realistic and realize that I wasn't in the most lucrative of fields.

A few weeks later, my dad was in New York for business and he insisted that he come check out my internship in Brooklyn. I assured him that it wasn't all that important to see, that I just had a shared office full of toys for kids to play with while I talk to their parents and try to help them solve their familial and life problems. I told him that my job was at a pretty basic community center in a run down area of Brooklyn and that he would probably be better off staying at his hotel and preparing for his meetings. But he insisted and came with me. Because we were running late, as soon as we arrived at my work I had to make him turn right

around and go back home because I had to go into a meeting. He quickly met my supervisor and some of the other students interning there, I gave him directions how to get back to Manhattan and sent him on his way.

When I got home from work, my dad told me that he had some thoughts that he wanted to share with me, an epiphany he had had that day. He took me to a nice restaurant and gave me all his attention while we ate and talked about my life. Near the end of our meal he told me that after I left him to go into that meeting at work, he sat outside the building and just watched people for a while. He noticed the people walking by, the mothers with their babies in strollers, the little kids running around. He noticed how many of them looked like they needed help, and he thought about the work I was doing and the person I was becoming, and the people I was serving. He held my hand across the restaurant table, looked me in the eye, and said he admired and supported me with all his heart. It meant the world to me.

TINA (by Saren):

My friend Tina's father is always offering to pay for things that he'd like to see her do. He thinks her job working for an Internet company isn't a real job and continually nags her about going back to school so that she can get a graduate degree and pursue something meaningful which to him is either music (Tina is a gifted pianist and her father worships the arts), banking, or the law. Every time they get together, he suggests that she go back to school and offers to pay for it as well as give her extra money for books and living expenses. He has no interest whatsoever when Tina tries to explain what she's doing at work and why she likes it. He sees this job she has as a phase that she'll hopefully grow out of soon. He's always holding out his connections and money as if they are carrots that can urge a stubborn horse onto the right path.

JOSH:

I had a hard time deciding on my major in college. When the time came that I would have to decide or I would be taking useless classes, I went through the list of majors and started crossing them out. I kept crossing them out until there was only one left . . . construction management. I had received some valuable advice from a church leader that if you plan on going to graduate school, it doesn't really matter what you study as an undergraduate. Just pick something you have some interest in. This from a man who had studied chemistry in undergraduate school, gone on to receive an MBA, started working for Eastman Kodak, and worked his way up to President and CEO. So because construction management was something I had interest in, I declared it as my major. I wasn't sure how long I'd stay with it, but I ended up making no changes and graduated with a construction management degree.

After graduation, I got the perfect straight-out-of-school job for a construction management graduate. I worked for one of the largest, most respected home building companies in the country. Other companies were always modeling their strategies after this one. They had a good training program, and I progressed quickly and felt comfortable there. The entire time I was there, I was constantly analyzing things, and trying to decide if it was what I wanted to do for a long time. After about a year, after months of thought and prayer, I decided that I wanted to try something else. I was very careful to base my decision on my true desires and feelings, making sure that bad days and relationships with other employees didn't influence my decision. I started looking for other job opportunities, but didn't have the time to do a thorough search with the hours I was putting into my job and the commute times. So I decided I would quit that job and put all my time and effort into a new job search. I know the unwritten rule that you should find a new job before quitting your current job, and I gave that a lot of thought. But I was at a time in my life (perhaps for the last time)

when I could take that kind of risk and that it could work out to my benefit. I was not supporting a family, and I had plenty of money to live for several months without any financial problems. I felt that I needed time to think about what I really wanted to do without distractions. For me and the way I think, I felt strongly that it was what I should do. I wouldn't put this out there as a recommendation, but for me at that time, I felt like it was the right thing to do.

I knew my father would have a hard time with my decision, so I wrote him a long letter, explaining in detail how I had come to my decision. As soon as he got the letter, he called me, overreacted and said that I was a quitter and that I should not quit. I had based my decision on so much thought and prayer that I felt terrible when I didn't get my father's support. I don't think he read my entire letter. There is just no way to know a situation like mine without living through it and making a decision over the course of several months as I had. My father talked me into asking my boss if I could come back after some travel and time off so that I could work until I found a new job. I had a very good relationship with my boss, and he said that would be fine if I wanted to come back. So I did go back for a few months, but it was a very awkward and uncomfortable time. I felt like I didn't belong there and that I should not have gone back. My boss wasn't sure how long I would be there, so it was hard for him to plan accordingly. After a few months, again with no time to look for another job, I finally just sent in my resignation and quit for good. I wished that I hadn't gone back, because I probably would have had another job by then. I didn't tell my father, but when he found out, I could tell that he was upset and didn't agree with my decision.

I found out soon after that from a brother that my dad had told him that I was going to regret my decision and that I was going to have a miserable time. He was basically saying that I was going to fail, without even waiting to find out what really happens. I try to set a

good example for my younger siblings, so it was also hard that my father had told my younger brother that I had made a mistake before he knew if it was a mistake. It made me feel that he had no confidence in me and that he was rejecting me because I had gone against his advice. I wished he would realize I was very capable of making decisions for myself. It would have felt so much better to hear him say, AI respect your decision. Just let me know if you need any help of advice.©

Since then he has changed his outlook, and he says that he has total confidence that I will find what I want. He admitted that he overreacted, and it made me feel much better. I feel that I made the right decision, and I feel confident now that I will be able to find what I am looking for.

NANCY:

My husband, Evan and I have experienced the two extremes as far as career counsel goes. My father went way overboard with the career thing -- he drafted my cover letters for applications, called his friends and networked for me even if I hadn=t said I was interested in his friends= line of work, and hounded me about how to follow up, how to interview, etc. It was a disaster. Not only did he terribly jeopardize our relationship, but he undermined my own confidence in my ability to find a job. I questioned myself at every turn, losing faith in my ability to ever succeed in the work place since my father was suggesting that I couldn=t even get a job without help. I would have gained much more confidence, self-knowledge and independence if I were left to enter the workforce on my own. On top of all that, the process was wholly unsuccessful, probably because I felt that in applications and interviews I wasn=t being myself. I wasn=t natural -- I was saying what I was told to say instead of my intuition told me to say.

My dad is a smart man, and it wasn=t that he was necessarily giving me BAD

interviewing advice, it was simply that he was dramatically out of touch with what companies these days are looking for and how business people these days behave and interact. (Very simple but illustrative example: My first interview at a dot com I wore a formal tailored suit per my dad=s advice but against my intuition. He said that even though dot commers don=t wear suits any more, they=d admire my elegance and sophistication. Instead, my interviewers made cracks about my suit all throughout the interview -- which disconcerted and embarrassed me -- and I didn=t get the job.) My dad stopped working seven years ago, and doesn=t even know how to turn on a computer. I too was going to become a stone-ager if I didn=t get my own act together and pull out of his all-consuming grasp.

The difficult thing about the situation was that I understood the motivations behind my dad=s crazy actions, and they weren=t all bad: an overwhelming desire for me to be happy in a rewarding, prestigious job; sheer excitement over having me live in the same city, after many years of being apart; relief from the boredom of retirement, among others. Of course, there were the not-so-good motives or wanting me in debt to him so that I would remain in the subservient child-like position.

I think this, although unpleasant, is a primary motivation behind parents who exercise control over their adult children. They both want to selfishly relive the happy childhood memories, but they also want to maintain their hold on the controlling, parental dominance they enjoyed over reliant and wholly trusting children. If a parent can reign in their desire to maintain that parental high of being constantly needed, trusted, and turned to, they will more likely succeed across all of the challenges of empty nest parenting. It is a wholly selfless act to give this up, and for my father, whose sense of satisfaction and self-worth in large part comes from my own triumphs, this was and is an impossible sacrifice to make.

For Evan=s parents, on the other hand, it seems to have been the easiest thing in the

world. I think the difference may lie in that they have four other (younger) children to take care of (whereas I am an only child) and his parents are still very much interested in each other (whereas mine are divorced). There are simply other things to occupy them, whereas I=am the only child of an unmarried, retired older man living in the very same city. Bad combo.

SAREN:

A few of us come into this world with a strong inclination towards a particular career. Some of us get pushed towards a certain career from a very young age by over-eager parents. Most of us really don=t know what we want to do when we start college and have a really tough time trying to decide what to major in. Even after we=ve settled on a major, a whole lot of us still have a really hard time trying to figure out what we want to do for a living. Most people come out of college not really knowing very much about very many different jobs and careers. Young people typically know a little about their parents= professions and maybe some friends= parents professions. Life experience has taught them a little about what doctors and dentist and cashiers and policemen do. But there are thousands of careers out there that most young people have never even heard of B and plenty of good careers that their parents haven=t heard of either!

Hopefully, you=ve helped your kids develop and explore different talents and interests all our lives so that they have some ideas about what their abilities and likes and dislikes. Hopefully, your kids have taken a good variety of classes and done some good internships as well as worked in some different settings during their college years. If so, they=ll have some ideas about what they like and don=t like, where their abilities lie, and what sort of environment they might like working in. But regardless of what sorts of classes and part-time jobs they may have under their belts as they leave home or as they go through college, your

kids will probably need to do a fair amount of further exploring as they think about entering the work world.

Encourage them to spend a lot of time in their school=s career center, talk with career counselors, and go to career fairs. Suggest that they could talk to some of your friends about their careers. Ask them about their interests and really listen to the career ideas they come up with. Don=t try to make them do what you did. Don=t try to steer them away from what you did because you didn=t like it. Accept the fact that they are NOT YOU and that they have their own unique talents and opportunities and dreams. Certainly, ask questions, offer ideas, suggest connections you have that might be of help to them.

Please understand that we currently live in a world where the average college graduate only stays with their first job for a year or two and most people have 3-4 different jobs in their first ten years of work. Gone are the days when people picked one career and one company and stuck with it for 20+ years. Accept the fact that your kids may go through several jobs in the course of finding something they really enjoy B but do what you can to help them make their work experiences positive from the beginning of their career. Be ready to support your kids if they choose a path that you wouldn=t choose. Be open-minded and realize that some of their proposed career paths could well be more interesting and lucrative than you might originally think!

R&L:

Right on Saren! The only thing we=d add is that *parents* might learn a lot by having some Acareer path@ discussions with their kids. Think about holding a little career seminar as part of a family reunion. Invite a career counselor to come. Get on the Internet and read up on career trends. Read through college catalogs on various study programs, majors and minors, and job preparation possibilities.

19. What sort of financial support (if any) should I offer once they=ve finished school and entered the full-time work world?

CHARITY JADE:

It should be a lot less now. So unless they=re in a really bad position, tell them it=s their obligation and their responsibility.

Kurt E.: None! They=ve got to be independent and self-reliant by that point. If they have to struggle or scrimp or go without a little bit, it=s good for them.

Crystal N.: Well, I think you have to be a safety net. Be there for them if they fall on hard times.

Kate P. You know, in a way, everything=s backwards. We=re older, we don=t need any big ticket things, yet we=ve got money. Our grown children are out there needing to buy a house or a car, yet they=ve got no money. We should just chip in. Some day they=ll probably have more than we do -- like in our old age -- and maybe then they can return the favor.

LAURA:

Right after I finished college, my dad sat me and my two brothers down and told us he was no longer giving us money for anything. It was his turn to save for his own retirement and our turn to take care of ourselves. I guess this abrupt approach was the only way to go because we=d all come to feel "entitled" to what our dad was always giving us. I think all of us felt scared and a bit unsure that we could provide for ourselves. We also were used to having "a lot," so it was pretty hard for us to learn to live on a shoestring - not an art we had any practice with! So, my advice to parents is to think ahead and prepare your children. It

may take time and thought but it is worth it for your children's future. Let them know ahead of time what their expectations should be, listen to their concerns, and support them through their anxieties of flying solo out of the nest.

SAREN

My parents made it very clear that once we turned eighteen and left home, we were essentially on our own. They=d give us interest-free loans for certain things (tuition, help with a down-payment on a first home) and they=d pay for plane tickets for us to come home for family reunions summer. For as long as I can remember, I knew this would be the case, so I never expected anything different. I think this worked well for all of us that have left home so far. It=s good to be independent financially as soon as you can be. It=s good to know that you=re assured of the chance to go home at least once a year, no matter how difficult your financial situation may be.

Whenever I=ve visited home, my parents have been really generous about taking me out to dinner, movies, concerts, etc. It=s sort of this unwritten rule that my parents pay for everything as long as we=re with them. When you=re living on a shoestring and counting your pennies, it=s just so nice to be able to have a break from that when you go home to visit!

Once in a while, it=s so nice to order what you want off the menu or go to a wonderful cultural event without worrying that you=re ruining your budget for the month.

My parents have also been really generous in paying for wonderful family vacations for us. Sometimes they expect us to chip in for airfare B it depends on the situation. But once we=re all together, they take care of food, hotels, everything. I=ve been able to go on some wonderful vacations and build some amazing memories with my family since leaving home thanks to the fact that my parents are willing to plan and pay for these vacations.

TIM:

My parents have tons of money and they are such misers! I have a job and I can support myself just fine B but I=m a teacher and that means money=s pretty tight. I know I=m an adult and I=m glad my parents respect my independence B but it sure wouldn=t hurt them to be a little more generous with Christmas and birthday gifts or maybe offer to pay for some nice stuff here and there to soften my tight budget. I have this awful old bed and when my parents came to stay I had them sleep on the bed and I slept on the couch (which is much worse than the bed). They complained about how bad the bed was and worried that my back was getting messed up. I told them I just didn=t have the money for a new bed right now. So there=s a simple example of where they could have called up dial-a-mattress or something and had a bed sent my way. The money for the bed wouldn=t have made the slightest dent in their fortune, but it would have made a huge difference for me. It=s just hard when I know they=re rolling in the money and I=m feeling so impoverished. But I guess it=s their money and they can do whatever they want with it!

SAREN:

While it=s really important to set clear expectations and be sure that your kids are taking care of themselves after a certain point in their lives, it=s also important that your kids know they can always come to you in a time of crisis. I=ve always felt like my parents would be happy to loan me some money if I was having a hard time. During times when things were really tight for me, my mom has often slipped me a little money or bought me something she knew I needed B just little things, but at a time when it really made a difference. It=s good to know that your parents fully acknowledge your financial independence, but that they want to soften things a bit here and there and that they=re always there for you if you=re really in trouble.

R&L:

We'll talk about a family loan system in section IV.

20. How should I help if they're out of work?

CHARITY JADE:

Help them not to get discouraged and tell them to look harder. It's good for them to be poor for a while . . . of course if they don't have one thing to eat, help them now and teach them not to let it happen again.

Katelin J.: Help them with a loan. Keep it strictly business. Have them sign a note and pay interest. It's got to be strictly business at this point. Or, co-sign with them so they can get a bank loan.

Le Ann D.: Well, the way you help them is to show confidence in them and tell them you know they'll find what they're looking for. Then, if they want you to, make some calls for them or give them some contacts.

Jim R.: Get on the phone, call up some of your buddies, and line up some interviews for them! There are always some strings you can pull. You've got to help them get back out there in the workforce.

JOSEPH:

Last year I got laid off. I'd been working hard, getting promotions, making good money, and my parents were proud of all that. But as soon as I lost my job, their pride in me went right out the window and they got into this 'I told you so' attitude. My dad had never approved of the career path I'd chosen. My dad kept lining up all these informational interviews with all his friends -- pushing me towards fields where I had no interest and no expertise. My sister told me that Dad complained to her a lot about how ungrateful I was

about these interviews he set up and how picky I was about finding the perfect job. It wasn't like any of his friends were actually offering me jobs -- and I don't blame them -- my background and experience was a terrible fit for most of the companies where my dad's friends worked. Anyway, I did get a job eventually and everything's fine now. But I really wish my parents had been more supportive and showed a little faith in me. I wish they'd bothered to listen when I tried to explain what sort of a job I was looking for rather than pushing me towards careers that they thought would be good for me.

SAREN:

After graduating from Wellesley, I went on my mission to Bulgaria. When I came home, I expected the perfect job to fall into my lap. Sure, I knew I'd have to do a little research, send out resumes and cover letters and all that, but I had a great education and some good experience, so I had little doubt that something would turn up. I packed everything I could into a couple suitcases and headed to Washington D.C. where I had some friends I could live with and where there seemed to be lots of internationally-focused jobs.

After living in D.C. for a couple months, I was loving my roommates, making tons of new friends, having a blast B but I didn't have a job. I'd spent a good chunk of every day making phone calls, following leads, sending out resumes, going to interviews, searching out job openings, asking anyone and everyone about possibilities. I was really, really doing the best that I could B and I was feeling like a colossal failure. I'd been pretty set on doing this on my own, but after a couple months with no luck, I asked my dad for some advice and any leads he could think of. He only had connections in certain areas B and they weren't the areas I was most interested in. But as I got more desperate, I asked him to set up any sort of interview he could for me.

With his help, I got a job at an agency in D.C. that supports Volunteer Centers across

the United States and helps promote volunteerism. It was at least loosely connected to my interests and I was just grateful for anything at that point. Once I started working, I was able to move around within the agency until I was doing things that I really enjoyed and I gained lots of experience and contacts. It was really hard for me to ask my Dad for help, but I'm so grateful he was able to help me out and that he never made a big deal about the fact that he helped me get that job. He was proud of my accomplishments and I was able to prove my abilities and gain back some of the confidence I'd lost.

DANA:

I was out of work for a year between jobs one time and my parents were great about offering financial support. Luckily, I didn't need much, because I had some good savings and I did some part time work while looking for a new job. It took a lot of stress out of the job search process to know that I had a safety net to fall back on. It meant a lot to me that my parents wanted me to be happy and they were always reassuring me that the right job would come along if I kept trying hard.

SAREN:

Bottom line, when your kids are out of work, I think it's so important to offer whatever help you can, but stand back and let your kids make their own decisions in their own time frame. Help them to feel good about themselves as they go through the often depressing process of searching and getting rejected. They really appreciate your confidence in them, whether or not they accept the job search help you offer. If you think they're at a point where they really need financial assistance, offer help so that they don't have to come begging to you. Setting it up as a loan helps them preserve their dignity.

21. What if they want to move back into the house?

CHARITY JADE:

Say no. If they come back, it's too easy and they won't want to be independent. But tell them how much you love them.

Mandy E.: Absolutely not. Worst thing you can do is let them move back in. It's like a defeat for them. Like a retreat from the real world. You can't go back into the womb once you're born!

Jim R.: I think it depends on your house. If you've got the space . . . especially if you've got kind of a separate space where they can be a bit independent. But they should pay rent or cover their share of the expenses.

Carolyn M.: Well, it may make sense -- economic sense -- if your house is bigger than what you need. You know, most societies have at least three generations living under one roof. I've been kind of encouraging a couple of my kids to come back. And I've got one who's has never left.

AJA:

Every time I've gone home for Christmas vacation, I've sort of wanted to just stay there. My mom does my laundry and cooks for me and my dad always wants to go do fun stuff with me, like go for motorcycle rides or go to the movies. But, as far as moving back home, I've never really been given that option, so I never really thought about it. I have moved back home a number of times since I left. I've spent almost the whole of every summer break from school with my family (even after I got marriedCJonah and I moved in to the guest room), and I think we're going to keep Amoving back home@ until we have too many kids to pack into my family=s spare room! But I don't think I=d ever go back to living there full-time. I need my own space.

ABIGAIL (by Saren):

Abigail, one of my good friends from college, is 30, single, and living with her parents. She went away for college but then moved back home and has lived there ever since. This situation is great for Abigail and her family. Her parents love having her, their only child, right there with them. She doesn't have to pay rent, so she's saving tons of money (she has a really good job) and she loves being able to spend time with her parents. Both Abigail and her parents have their own separate social lives and do their own thing a lot of the time. When Abigail finished college and found the perfect job it turned out to be in the same city where her parents live. Since they have a big house with a bedroom over the garage with its own entrance, they all decided together that there was no reason why Abigail shouldn't live there.

SAREN:

There are incidences where people move in with their parents, and everything works out well for all concerned. But it really doesn't work for most people because it seems like parents have a hard time taking on a different role from the one they played with their child when he or she was in high school. It can cause havoc in the lives of both parents and kids if parents try to monitor everything going on in their kids' lives, probe their dating lives, set curfews, and do other things that might have been appropriate when their kids were in high school, but that won't work now that their kids are adults. For every one success story of a kid moving back in with his or her parents, there are probably 20 stories of messed up relationships and hurt feelings and family disruption that come from kids moving back in.

22. Should I encourage them to find a job near me?

CHARITY JADE:

I think they need space from you. If they can get a better job further away -- where they can do what they love and get paid for it -- they= should go for it.

Lonnie P.: Oh, for sure; the closer the better! I mean they=re your best friends as well as your kids. Who would you rather go to a movie with or have over for Sunday dinner? And hey, those grand kids are coming and you=ve got to have them close!

Bill N.: You know, I don=t think so. As much as I love my kids, I=m glad they live a plane flight away. When I visit them or they visit me, it=s so special, and we really talk and totally focus on each other. I think if they lived right here, we=d take each other for granted, and maybe even take advantage of each other.

SHAWNI:

My parents are almost funny about this because they encourage us to go to college, find jobs, and live at least major portions of our lives away from them. This could be taken in the wrong wayI don=t think they really want to get RID of usCthey just want us to experience the world. They=ve seen so much of it out there and have gained so much insight from their travels and experiences that they only want what they think is the best for us. I cannot thank them enough for their Abig picture@ perspective because I have learned and gained SO much from living away from home and having my own independent experiences. Sure, I have been homesick too, but I think even the homesickness has made me a stronger person. The thing that makes living away so great, (and I=m sure the main reason my parents can feel so at ease about sending us far away,) is that they LOVE to travel and they come visit us as much as possible. They love opening their eyes to new things and have helped us to love it as well.

SAREN:

Now that I have a child, I have to admit, it would be so nice to live close to my family.

Plane trips get harder and more expensive as our family grows and I yearn to share my kids= lives more fully with my family.

R&L:

There are so many variables here. Go easy on this one parents. It has to be your kids= decision where they live. If you really want them nearer to you, be the kind of parents they want to live closer to!

23. How much advice should I offer about how they spend their money?

CHARITY JADE:

The only time you=d tell them any advice on this without them asking is if you thought they were spending a big amount on something really dumb.

Kenneth W.: Zero -- only if they ask. If you start meddling here, you=re on thin ice. It=s their money now and they=ve got to learn by experience.

Dick D.: Well, the big thing is to help them understand credit. Kids just don=t get it about the dangers of credit cards and high, consumer debt interest. Show them how to budget and live within their means or they=re headed for trouble.

SHAWNI:

I wish my parents had talked to me more about financial planning. Growing up, I heard snippets of information that I pieced together to figure out some of what goes on with my parents financially. My dad did a great job teaching us about saving money, always encouraging us to save 20% of any money we ever made. I wish he=d helped us understand a little more about WHERE to save this money. For the first five years of my career, I just

put money in a savings account. I was very frugal and really saved a lot, but the money didn't really grow. I remember hearing the terms IRA and 401K thrown around, but retirement sounded so far off and I didn't really understand the benefits of such things. After getting married, my husband taught me a lot about investing (his father helped him follow investments all his life) and I realize that there are so many simple things I could have done with my money all those years to make it grow so much more! I just wish someone had sat down with me and offered me a few scenarios for how I might want to be saving my money and what sorts of returns I could expect from different scenarios.

SAREN:

If you haven't taught your kids good solid saving and budgeting habits by the time they leave home, it's a little hard to start now! Once your kids are out there on their own, making their own money, it's really totally their decision how they spend their money. You can certainly offer advice, but be prepared, they may not take it well. No one likes to be told how to spend their money. If you do have concerns or just want to offer general advice, I think it's best to ask questions in a nice, interested way. Ask them how they've decided to handle their savings. Ask what bank they're using. Inquire how their budget is working out. These are all non-confrontational questions if they're asked in the right way in the right setting.

Let them know that you're there to help them out if they want any advice and that they're welcome to talk to your accountant or any friends you have that might offer alternative points of view of other sorts of financial advice. It's always great to suggest that they get other points of view from yours B there are many good methods of doing things out there, and the more input they get, the better they'll feel about their decisions.

R&L:

For what it=s worth, we=ll talk about our family=s money system in section IV.

24. How often should I try to get together with them? How often should I encourage them to come home?

CHARITY JADE:

Whenever you can, but no one just starting out is going to have a lot of extra money for travel, so don=t expect them to come a long distance too often unless you pay for it!

Bill N.: Hey, as often as you can afford it! And especially for special occasions.

Marilyn J.: I think gradually cut it back. As your kids get more and more involved in their own lives and careers, don=t expect an unreasonable amount of time with them. You should simultaneously be developing other interests of your own so you=ll probably have less time for visits, too.

PETER:

I had knee surgery and my mom took a week off work to fly out and to cook for me and help me hobble around as I got through the worst part of recovery. We hadn=t had one-on-one time in years and although we couldn=t get out and do fun stuff together, we really had a good time just talking. I have to admit, it was pretty sweet to have my mom baby me like she hasn=t in years. Sometimes, you just really, really need a mom, and I=m lucky enough that I had a mom who was willing to be there for me. I think it=s great to make every possible attempt to be there for anything important or difficult going on in your kids= lives. Be there if they=re really sick. Be there for graduations. Make it to big performances. Plus make a point of visiting when they have a new job or new apartment, so you can see their new surroundings and learn about important new things going on in their lives.

JESSICA:

Go visit your kids as often as you can. I loved having my parents come to my work place with me when they=d come visit. I was proud to introduce them to my co-workers and glad to have them see a little bit about what my days consisted of. I loved having them meet my roommates and friends. It was really important to me to have them meet anyone I was dating, so I was really excited to have them come visit when I was getting to know someone new.

SAREN:

Invite your kids to come home often -- but don=t pressure them. They won=t always be able to make it, but they=ll appreciate knowing that you=d love to have them home. They will reciprocate and invite you often too. Just be sure you communicate about what works best for both of you.

Some people visit home all the time because they live nearby. Some people visit seldom because they don=t have the means or it=s just really far away or they can=t get off work. Every family will go through phases where visits are more frequent or more seldom based on circumstances. But as long as you=re keeping in good contact with each other and everyone has the sense that you=re seeing each other as much as possible and/or as much as is good for everyone concerned, things should be fine. It=s important to talk about how everyone feels about the frequency of visits and change things as necessary.

25. How often should we communicate with each other?

CHARITY JADE:

Same answer as when they=ve just left. But now you=ll talk about different things since they=re

working.

LeAnn D.: Well, that's why I'm glad long distance rates are coming down. I can call every night. It's almost like they're not even gone. And with cell phones, I can almost always find them.

Katelin J.: I still like old-fashioned, stamped letters. They're even better than e-mails because we write them slower and more thoughtfully. It's like reading Newsweek once a week instead of reading the newspaper every day. A letter really means something. I try to write one each week. And I save a copy and it's like my journal. Of course, if there's something more urgent I can e-mail or call.

Dick D.: Use e-mail. It's the perfect compromise between phone calls and letters.

Tom M.: Our grown kids live so close we have to restrain ourselves a little so we're not calling or going over every day. We're trying to give them a little space.

VALERIE (by Saren):

Valerie, complains about how her parents never, ever call B she always has to initiate any phone conversation they have. They talk fairly frequently, but A I'm the one who finds the time and pays for the call and that bugs me big time. I mean even though I'm working now, they can afford it easier than I. I wonder if I just stopped calling if we'd just never talk! Maybe I'll try it.@ Her parents always seem happy to hear from her, but they usually seem to be in a rush and they seem to be trying to get her to quickly get to the bottom line. A I feel like they think we should just talk if we have an important question for each other or something like that. I don't think the understand the value of just sort of chatting with each other once in a while, you know, letting whatever topic come up.@

JOHN (by Saren):

John has a mother that calls every day. Mostly she just leaves messages on his

answering machine at home or his voice mail at work since John=s out a lot, and since he=s started to not pick up the phone when his mom=s number comes up on caller ID. Alt=s not that I don=t want to talk to her B we have great talks. But I just don=t have time to talk as much or as long as she wants to talk.@

SHAWNI:

I=ve always tried to type up a weekly or bi-weekly update that I send out to all my family members. These updates have become a great journal for me to keep for myself and a good way to let everyone in my family know some of the facts and happenings of my life B without having to repeat things in several phone calls with several people. My mom sends all of us a weekly e-mail update and I love reading them and getting caught up on everything going on at home. Then my parents and I talk whenever we feel like calling each other, but I wish we had a weekly call that we could plan on B I do miss having good conversations with them and spur-of-the-moment phone calls seem to always be at a bad time for me or for them.

SAREN:

Most LTNs I talked to said that they really liked having a set time each week when they could plan on talking to their parents B seems like Sunday evenings were the most popular time. A lot of my friends said that they really appreciated it when their parents asked lots of thoughtful questions B questions about specific events or people that had been brought up in a past conversation or questions like AWhat=s the best thing that happened this week? @ and AWhat was your least favorite thing that happened this week? @ With new jobs, they welcomed their parents= curiosity but not their skepticism or criticism.

Several individuals said they really liked exchanging e-mails with their parents and some said they were frustrated that their parents didn=t seem to have quite caught on to the beauty of e-mail yet. E-mail is so nice because it=s fast, easy, can be written and received

whenever each party has a minute, and doesn't require postage. Since many of us are in front of a computer terminal all day at work, e-mail is very accessible. Many of those I interviewed talked about how much they enjoyed getting little e-mail notes from parents asking about their presentation that morning or their date last night. It's nice to know that your parents care about all the little yet important things that are going on in your life.

Additional Perspectives, Motivations, and Ideas for LDS Parents

26. What if their Church activity is slipping?

CHARITY JADE:

You should talk more to your kids and really communicate about it and bear your testimony to them!

Katherine P.: I'd think inactivity would be a symptom more than the problem itself. The challenge would be to communicate enough to know if it's a testimony problem or if someone in their ward offended them or whatever. But a parent would just have to find out because what we're talking about here is where your own child's heart is!

Peter J.: Your child is in a singles ward . . . well, I guess it really doesn't matter what kind of ward it is . . . call the Bishop there. He's probably the one that can give you some insight, and maybe you can give him some, too. Especially if your child is living a long way from home, that Bishop is your best link.

Katherine P.: I'm not so sure about that -- it seems like you're ~~checking up on your child rather than communicating. Wouldn't you want to~~

approach something like this face to face, one on one, with your child?

Dick D.: Pray a lot. Sometimes that=s the only thing you can do *and* it=s the best think you can do!

SHAWNI:

This is a huge concern and worry. I really think that if you prayerfully raise your kids in the gospel to the very best of your ability you have done an amazing thing, and that you can=t beat yourself up if a child=s church activity slips. Even the best parents have kids that slip and have serious problems with the gospel. I think the only thing you can do in a situation like that is love them with all your heart -- just the same as you would otherwise. This doesn=t mean you have to love their actions and accept them -- you should tell them how you feel, but they need to know that you unconditionally love them no matter what they decide. I have two friends who decided they didn=t believe the gospel and didn=t want to come to church anymore. It was interesting to see both sets of parents go through so much pain and sorrow, and put their children on guilt trips at first. This did nothing except turn their kids further away from them. When they realized all they could do was just unconditionally love their kids things were much better and at least they still had loving relationships.

Christ taught us to love everyone, and I don=t think He would ever love anyone less if they didn=t do what he wanted. Of course He=d be heartbroken -- as most parents would be in this situation, and He wouldn=t love their actions, but He would love them. I think parents have to do the same thing. If

you love your children and be sure they know how much you love the gospel

too, chances are much better that they=ll come back some day than if you pressure them, put them on guilt trips, etc.

PAM:

After I got my first job, I got pretty frustrated with the bishop of my ward at the time. He gave me some counsel that really rubbed me the wrong way and I stopped going to church. My parents didn=t even know that I stopped going to church. I went with them when I was home and they never really asked about my ward or my church activity, so the subject just didn=t come up. I eventually realized that the gospel meant a lot to me and gave up my silly hurt feelings to go back to church. I wish my parents had asked me more about my ward and shown more of an interest in my spirituality and church activity -- that might have helped me realize sooner that I needed to go back to church. I think that parents should always pay attention to their kids= spiritual development --whether they=re kids or grownups.

JOE:

I was excommunicated after I got back from my mission. I was stupid and got a girl pregnant. She didn=t want to marry me and wanted to give the baby up for adoption -- so that=s what happened. I had a lot of pretty lame friends at the time, and between bad influences and feeling bad about the decisions I=d made and being excommunicated, I fell further and further off the Astraight and narrow path.@ My parents expressed love for me through all this and they kept fasting and praying that I=d see the light. It took a few years, but all the things they=d taught me all my life were still in me and I came around. I can=t believe how stupid I was. But I=m so grateful that my

parents never gave up on me. They had some frank and tough talks with me about where my actions were taking me (I hated those talks at the time, but now I'm grateful for them); they send me inspirational quotes and scriptures all the time (that bugged me too at the time but a lot of what they sent really sank in); they talked to the bishop in every area where I lived and asked that he and others in the ward seek me out; they prayed a lot; and most importantly, they never gave up on me.

R&L:

Once again, like on question 17, this one looms so large for those that face it that it makes all the other questions seem almost trivial. Most of us trust that if testimony and church activity is in tact, other problems will be worked out; whereas if spiritual commitment declines, everything else is in danger.

The easy answer here would be, AI=ve taught them all I could and now they have their agency.Ⓒ This might be true, but it is certainly not an acceptable answer. The real answers are never easy, but here are some things to consider:

1. Try to determine the root cause of the inactivity. Three of the most common (and each requiring a completely different approach) are:

a. A genuine lack of testimony -- serious and sincere doctrinal doubts.

b. Confusion between the gospel and the culture -- doubts or concerns about how something is done and a failure to separate various church cultural norms from church doctrine.

c. Some personal offense -- someone, often a Bishop or ward leader, has offended them.

Actually, b and c are much more common than a!

2. Other than prayer, the most effective thing you can do for any of these is deep and trusting communication. Arrange for a long drive where you are alone together in a car for several hours (or some other situation really conducive to talking) and ask questions for long enough to understand which of the three you are dealing with. If you determine that it is Aa, the two best things you can do is to pray together and to bear your testimony. In the more likely scenario of Ab or Ac, try the following:

Ab (doctrinal/cultural confusion): Try to explain the difference. Predominant church culture might involve anything from the way people dress to their politics to the kind of professions they value or the things to which they afford status. Help your child to see that God doesn't attach much value to these things and doesn't control the members of His church regarding them. Explain that the gospel itself and the actual restored truths of the Plan of Salvation are what matters. Try to think of examples when you have faced similar dilemmas in disliking or not feeling right about something in the culture, but retained your doctrinal testimony of the gospel.

Ac (your child has been offended): If you discover this to be the cause, rejoice a little, because it is both the most common and the most easily corrected. Tell your child that and

help him or her understand the basic fact that the church is perfect but none of its members are (and some more obviously than others!).

3. Don't expect overnight results but don't ever give up! Patterns of activity can take time to develop (in both directions). Hang in there and keep communicating and praying. Show *faith* both in God and in your child!

Peak 2 Review: Learning to be a consultant rather than a manager.

Manager: *A person in charge -- with responsibility, with authority; one who decides and directs.*

Consultant: *A person who helps another person with his goals; one who advises and assists.*

What a difference! With small children, parents are the managers. With our growing children depending on us and in our care, the day-to-day responsibility is ours.

With grown working children it all changes . . . not only in degree but in *kind*. A whole different type of relationship needs to evolve -- one where we try to *respond* to their initiative, to help them with *their* goals, to back off and give them space to make their own decisions but to be always willing and ready to help.

This is not an easy shift! Our instincts are still to protect and to shelter . . . to manage. This inclination can undermine our grown children=s independence, their motivation and their confidence.

Consultant-style input and support, on the other hand, compliments and enhances their new independence and leaves them with the positive incentives that comes to anyone who feels entrusted with his own life.

But you can=t just suddenly announce one day that you are now the consultant rather than the manager. You have to consciously and carefully work into the role. The most effective *route* is to ask questions. That is the prime skill of all good consultants. Ask (with positive interest and with no judgment) every question you can think of. Get inside their head and their heart and understand where they=re coming from. And learn to wait for the magic moments when *they* ask *you* for advice!

Additional Insights, Perspectives, and **Motivations** for LDS ENPs

As mentioned earlier, it's such a critical word and concept in our relationship with God; and it can also be so important in our relationships with our children.

Some have said that one of the great gifts of the Prophet Joseph was his ability to ask the right questions. Virtually every facet of the restoration (and every section of the Doctrine & Covenants) was triggered by an apt and timely question. And the whole process of restoration was started by Joseph's response to James' admonition to ask.

In an ideal world (and an ideal parent child relationship) there would be a consistent and considerable bit of asking going on in both directions. Parents would ask with honest and loving interest about every facet of their grown child's life. Children would reciprocate in kind and add questions of advice and guidance.

And the higher degree of asking -- that of asking God and praying for each other would solidify eternal relationships. Alma Sr.'s prayer for his son was answered when all other parental efforts seemed to have failed. And when children also pray for their parents, the triangle is complete, and God is at the family apex.

Peak 3: When He or She Gets Married

(Does Againing a son@ or daughter have to be as hard as giving birth?)

This may be the biggest emotional peak of all . . . and the biggest role and relationship change. Nothing marks your child=s departure from your family like starting a family of his or her own. Is it time now to finally really turn them loose? Here are some common questions along with a variety of ideas and inputs from ENPs and LTNs.

27. What=s my role in my child=s marriage decision? How can I get to know someone that they=re talking about marrying? How should I treat their fiancé?

CHARITY JADE:

It=s his (or her) decision, but you should encourage him to think and pray really hard. Ask both of them lots of questions about why they love each other.

Katelin J.: I think the thing you can do is to help them go through the right *process* to make a good decision. Help them ask the right questions about the relationship and encourage them to have a long enough courtship to really answer those questions.

Crystal N.: Be careful not to get too involved. It=s got to be their decision. What if you somehow pushed them apart and sidetracked a marriage that would have been great? Or what if you encouraged too much and your child married the wrong person? I=d stay pretty far away in this one. But once *they* have decided, support and welcome the decision with open arms.

SHAWNI:

Being the first child married in our family wasn=t the easiest thing. I don=t think my

parents knew exactly how to deal with it and neither did I. One thing I really appreciate is that they didn't question my decision of who to marry. They trusted that I had made the right decision (at least they made me THINK that they did) and were very supportive.

I remember the night I came home late and told them I had decided to date Dave (my husband) exclusively. My dad said, 'Just tell me when to start planning the wedding breakfast.' They never said, 'Whoa, are you sure??' They just trusted my decision. Now I must say in hindsight that I'm pretty sure they actually did worry and pray about whether I was really doing the right thing just because they love me and it's a huge decision, but the key is that they didn't bring ME into their insecurities.

My dad sure wanted to find out everything possible about Dave. We took a family trip up to Jackson Hole with the family right before we got engaged and my dad insisted Dave ride in his car alone with him for the first leg of the ten-hour round trip. Well, this turned into including the second leg as well, and a surprise 'We got lost!' jaunt to make the trip even longer. By the end my dad and Dave had spent 11 hours in that car alone talking about who knows what. (It seemed even longer to me -- wondering what they were saying.) But Dave endured and that was a strong point I'm sure. Even though I worried about Dave being questioned to death in that car, I loved that my dad cared enough about me to spend that much time with someone who might well be my future husband.

I now really think every parent should thoroughly interview anyone trying to marry one of their children. Even though Dave was the one who had to endure the interview, he wants to do the exact same thing for our kids.

SAREN:

My decision to get married came as quite a shock to everyone B including myself and my husband-to-be! I was visiting my family for a couple weeks one summer and they had the

opportunity to spend some time with Jared, who I had been dating for about a year. With all the time Jared and I spent together that summer, our feelings for each other escalated quickly, and both of us started thinking about marriage B but we had a tough time talking about the subject even to each other, and we sort of down-played our feelings to our families. The day before I was supposed to head back to Boston, we both got pretty frustrated with our somewhat stagnant situation. We drove up the canyon near my house and sat there in the wildflowers, neither of us knowing what to say. Jared finally broke the silence by looking directly into my eyes and saying, 'I want to marry you.'@ It was like the floodgates to our feelings had been unlocked and we were able to get everything out there and decide to be married.

Then we were left with the question of what to do next. We headed back to my house so that Jared could formally ask my dad for my hand in marriage and we could gather everyone together and make an announcement. We were so giddy with the excitement of our recently-made decision that we didn=t really think much about how our families would take this surprising and sudden news. As my dad and Jared headed out on the balcony to talk, I got this sudden worry that maybe my dad wouldn=t be too thrilled. He hadn=t interviewed Jared at length as he had my sister=s husband before they got engaged. He hadn=t really spent much time with Jared B and my dad=s known to be somewhat overprotective (I think most of my siblings would call that a major understatement!). I went into my dad=s study where I could hear everything going on out on the balcony and eavesdropped nervously. Jared explained that we=d arrived at the decision to be married. My dad paused just a moment, then asked Jared a single question -- why he loved me. I could hear the smile in my dad=s voice as he asked the question and I felt sure that everything would be OK. Jared gave what I thought was a great answer. They talked for a few minutes, then they came inside and

my dad gave me a huge smile and a big hug.

We finally tracked my mom down at the dentist to give her the news B we were too excited to wait until she got home or even until she got out of the dentist=s chair. She was so surprised and excited when we told her the news that she nearly sent dental instruments flying in her rush to get out of the chair and hug both of us! My mom had especially liked Jared from day one, so I wasn=t surprised at her enthusiasm about our marriage decision. It meant a lot to me that my parents immediately accepted my decision to be married and embraced Jared as a member of our family from that day forward. They never said anything negative about Jared to me and never even asked questions with any negative connotation.

Although I was relieved when my dad didn=t start grilling Jared when he asked for my hand, I think I sort of expected that he=d pull Jared aside at some point and have a big talk with him, like he=d had with Shawni=s husband (but hopefully not for 11 hours!). I remember feeling relieved when he asked Jared to ride with him in his car on the way to Bear Lake a week after we got engaged. I guess I felt like this father- to-future-son-in-law talk was a sort of rite of passage that would give the two main men in my life a chance to get to know and like each other more. Plus I think I needed to feel like my dad was making sure that Jared was perfect for Athis little girl.@ It sounds silly, but for all my independence and desire to be respected as an adult who makes sound decisions of her own, I wanted my dad to scrutinize my choice and agree with me wholeheartedly.

JONAH (by Saren):

When my brother Jonah was getting pretty serious about his wonderful girlfriend Aja, we all had to hold ourselves back from pushing him towards her. We all LOVED Aja and could see how happy she made Jonah. She had every positive quality we could ever imagine that would be good for Jonah. But we knew that he needed to take his time and make his

decision without feeling that he was getting any pressure. I remember talking with Jonah about Aja on many occasions, listening as he=d list what he loved about her and as he=d mention his reservations and small concerns. I tried to listen and understand, but let him come to his own conclusions rather than jumping in there and saying, ASo, Jonah, I think you should marry her!@ It was hard to hold myself back, but I knew that he just needed a sounding board and that even if he did want my opinion, this was one decision that he would definitely need to make on his own. It would be awful to make a marriage decision and then worry in retrospect that you were unduly influenced by others when you made the decision!

SAREN:

While your kids want you to fully respect their decision once they decide to get married, they really do want their parents= approval. They want their parents to take the time to meet their serious boyfriends or girlfriends and perhaps even spend some time alone with them to really get to know them.

As a parent, you=ll probably have some concerns that arise B let=s face it, no one=s perfect and very few people could be good enough to marry your son or daughter. But keep your minor concerns to yourself, especially once your child has made the decision to be married. Major concerns are a whole different story. But any small, negative thing that you mention about a prospective spouse can really hurt your child=s feelings and may encourage them to see you as possessive and petty and even an Aopponent@ to their loved one. Look for and point out the good in the prospective spouse. Welcome him or her to family activities.

I suggest you don=t push your child too much towards marriage or too much away from it. I=m sure you=ve noticed this B your kids, no matter how old they get, tend to shy away from anything they feel like their parents are pressuring them to do, even if it=s something they=re actually already inclined to do.

28. What should I do if I'm worried about the marriage decision my child has made?

CHARITY JADE:

Think about it a lot before you bombard them. But if you feel sure they've made the wrong decision, you have to try to talk it over with them. But no matter what, support them now and also later when they're getting a divorce.

Jim R.: I think about the only thing you could do would be to discuss the *process* by which the decision was made. How and when did they decide? Do they know enough about each other? Questions like this might help your child re-examine his or her decision without too much resentment.

Betty T.: Quit worrying. You've got to trust them on this!

DALE (by Saren):

The other day, I asked a group of friends: "What's the best thing your parents have done for you since you left home?" Without hesitation, my friend Dale answered, "They told me not to marry Tara." He went on to explain that he was engaged to this girl for several months and that the longer he was engaged, the more worried he felt about the relationship. But he didn't say anything. His parents had made every attempt to get to know Tara from the time the relationship became serious; they included her in family activities and shared what they liked about her with Dale. When Dale decided to get engaged, his parents were very supportive, but as time went on, he could sense that they had some worries.

Just as Dale's silent worries about his upcoming marriage began to peak, his parents sat down with him one day and lovingly explained some concerns they had about Dale and Tara's relationship. They didn't say bad things about Tara which probably would have

made Dale jump to her defense. Rather, they pointed out concrete concerns about the way that Dale and Tara interacted with each other and wondered about whether they really complemented each other very well. They said they=d been really hesitant to say anything and that they=d certainly support whatever Dale=s final decision was regarding the marriage, but they felt strongly that they should at least share their thoughts.

Apparently Dale=s parents= concerns mirrored and confirmed his own worries, helping him to more clearly see what was wrong with the relationship. He broke off the engagement and now says, AI=m more glad every day that I didn=t go through with that marriage. It would have been a disaster.@

Dale writes: AI=d say it=s a very good idea to express well-thought-out concerns in a loving and timely manner when it comes to your child=s decision about a future spouse. It=s probably better to express concerns before an engagement is underway B but late is better than never! In my case, I don=t think I=d have listened to my parents if they=d brought up their concerns any earlier. They were wise to wait until I seemed to be having some second thoughts myself.@

PAULA (by Saren):

Sometimes, parents can be too forceful with their opinions about who their children should marry. A parent=s pride and/or pre-conceived opinions can really taint the ordinarily happy event of marriage and cause all sorts of lasting upset in a family. I have a friend from school, Paula, who met a wonderful man, Doug, and decided to marry him.

Paula was living away from home when she met Doug, and her parents had only met him once before they were informed of the engagement. They were somewhat shocked as their daughter had not really prepared them for such an announcement. .

Paula and Doug wanted to have the wedding soon and were eager to begin with

wedding plans, but Paula=s parents were really worried about the situation. They started out by saying that they simply needed to get to know this guy better. Paula was initially hurt that they weren=t excited for her, but trying to see things from their point of view, she and her Doug set up opportunities for everyone to get to know each other better.

But, offended at not having been involved before the engagement, Paula=s parents seemed to be looking for bad things about Doug. They seemed set against him. They were just so hurt that Paula had decided to marry without asking their advice or involving them in the process that they couldn=t get past it. I knew Doug. He was a perfectly nice guy, clean-cut, smart, kind, and very good to Paula. Talking to Paula one day, I said, AI don=t get why they don=t like him.@ She replied, AIt=s simple, they decided not to like him and they decided not to change their minds and they=re mad because everything didn=t turn out the way they imagined it and they=ve decided not to get over being mad.@

They considered delaying the wedding and trying to do what they could to help Paula=s parents accept Doug, but they finally went ahead and got married. They decided that Paula=s parents weren=t going to change their attitude, no matter how long they waited. Paula=s parents refused to have anything to do with the wedding plans and her mom didn=t even show up at the wedding.

Doug and Paula are very happily married after five years, but their relationship with Paula=s parents is still very strained. They seem to be quite sure that this marriage is going to fail sooner or later and then they=ll be able to say AI told you so.@ They have too much pride to just say, AHey, we were wrong and we=re glad we were wrong. We=re glad you guys are so happy.@ The bitterness, the pride, the anger, the sadness B it=s all very tangible still.

SAREN:

From every LTN I=ve talked to about this question, it seems best for parents to meet and get to know any serious boyfriends or girlfriends, and then in a timely way, express everything they like about each person along with any concerns they may have. Then, most importantly, completely respect a marriage decision once it has been made. Once your kids decide who they want to marry, they=ll expect and need you to support their decision. If you don=t like their fiancé, try to learn to like him or her. Your kids are adults and they=ll ultimately make their own decisions. If you=re really worried about a marriage decision, your child will probably listen best to your concerns once you=ve shown and stated that you respect their right to choose. Once they know that you recognize that this is completely their decision and that you trust that they ultimately know more about the situation than you do, they=ll be more likely to listen to any concerns you may have.

Additional Perspectives, Motivations, and Ideas for LDS Members

29. What if my child is seriously dating (or marrying) a nonmember?

CHARITY JADE:

I think you should really talk to them about it. If it=s an inactive person maybe you can help. But in the end you=ve got to support your child and never give up on him or the one he=s marrying.

Carolyn M.: Well, first of all, you should have been warning them about this for years so now it may be too late. That sounded terrible, didn=t it? I guess what I=m saying is I don=t really know what I=d do. My heart would be telling me to try to discourage the marriage in every way I could, but that might just distance me from my own child.

Katherine P.: I've just got to say I think we jump to conclusions and prioritize the wrong things sometimes. I'd rather have my daughter marry someone with genuinely good character -- an honest, honorable, gentle man who may be for whatever reason inactive or even wasn't a member than an active member who was two faced or even abusive. I think if it's a truly good person everything will work out over the long run, even the Church. I'm not saying it would be easy. I'll tell you one thing, if they do marry in the temple and some of the spouse's family aren't members or don't have recommends, have a ring ceremony first and make it a focal point so no one feels totally left out or excluded.

Bill T.: I think all you can do is be honest. I'd tell my son or daughter how much the Church has helped in our family and how much eternal temple marriage means to me. I'd just lay it out, but I'd try to respect their free agency.

SHAWNI:

This is so tough because of course every parent in the church wants their child to find a strong church member to marry. But the truth is that even kids that have strict rules to only date members and who have grown up with strong testimonies sometimes end up marrying nonmembers. I think it's important for kids who marry out of the church to be realistic and realize how HARD it's going to be for them to do this, but to also realize that not only church members are good, strong, Christ-like people. I have friends with nonmember spouses who have become stronger by being the one to take their kids to church all by themselves and teach them gospel principles all alone

(VERY difficult), and other friends who have gone inactive because they are influenced negatively by their spouse, and still others who are great missionaries and end up helping their spouse get baptized. It's a tough road any way you look at it. I feel so much for those whose relationships suffer because of their beliefs. I just think some kids who get into relationships with nonmembers don't realize the tough road ahead of them if they get married.

LYDIA:

My husband is totally inactive. We got married five years ago and he went inactive a year after we were married. He was really bothered by the attitudes of many of the members who looked down on us because we have an inter-racial marriage -- plus, he figured he could be a good Christian person without necessarily going to church all the time. He is fine with me going to church and he thinks that it's good for our two kids to be going to church as well -- he wants them to be good Christians and feels that they'll learn a lot at church as they're growing up. I hope and pray that he will become active again one day. It's really hard for me that he doesn't have the Church as a priority in his life right now. I really appreciate the way my parents have handled the whole thing. They never say bad things about Paul and who nothing but pure love for him. I have friends in similar situations who have parents who treat their non-Mormon spouse in a very un-Christlike way. It's sad. I think people who are inactive need extra love and DON'T need to be judged. I think it's important for parents to see the good in their son- or daughter-in-law, regardless of their church activity.

KRISTINE:

When I started dating Raj, my parents were really worried because he wasn't a member of the church. When I decided to marry him, they were really upset. Raj is a wonderful person, but they didn't seem to notice that. They just cared about his church status. They predicted that our marriage wouldn't last and washed their hands of the whole thing, so to speak. They were always nice enough to Raj, to his face. But we both knew what they thought of our marriage -- an accident waiting to happen. Anyway, we've been married for three years now and Raj and I are really, really happy together. He respects my beliefs and has no problem with us raising the kids with Mormon beliefs. Sure, it would be easier if he were a Mormon -- but I prayed about my marriage decision and felt good about it. I feel strongly that God approved of our marriage and that He has a plan for our ultimate happiness. I wish my parents could have supported my decision! My sister who was married in the temple is now divorced and my brother, also married in the temple, is having serious troubles in his marriage and with his testimony (he's got a little pornography problem). The other day, as my mother was talking to me about her worries about her kids' marriages, she remarked, 'I guess a temple marriage is no guarantee of anything.' I agreed and added that Raj and I seem to have the best track record for a marriage in our family. I think that parents should respect their kids' marriage decisions and realize that things aren't always what they seem!

R&L:

Here is another truly huge question, because most LDS parents sense that if their children make a great decision about marriage, all the other decisions of their life will likely be easier and better.

There is no question that our children=s best chance for a happy and lasting marriage is to find someone worthy to go to the temple with. The eternal covenants of temple marriage and the unity that is possible between two people worthy to kneel across that altar amount to an immeasurable advantage! Still, we all know that temple marriage is no guarantee, and its promises are fulfilled only as its commitments are kept. The *quantity* or duration of a temple marriage is eternal only if the *quality* of that marriage meets the standards the Lord has set. Thus Katherine P. (above) is probably right when she says she=d prefer her daughter to marry a man of honorable character outside the temple than a dishonorable scoundrel who somehow got in. The former is capable of progression that may not end with eternity while the latter is probably doomed to digression and disillusion.

So it=s one of those answers that is simpler than it is easy! Strive all their lives to help children prepare for and find a partner worthy of temple marriage.* Work toward this by example, by discussion, (your children should know your feelings and know that statistics are against them if they marry out of the temple and even more against them if they marry out of the church), and

*In the early dating years, even as you encourage children to date strong members, it is probably unwise to unilaterally and unconditionally forbid them to date nonmembers or inactive members. Hopefully you have raised them to Ainfluence more than they are influenced@ and they will pull their friends toward the church rather than themselves being

pulled away.

by prayer. If, after all you can do, your child falls in love with one he or she can't go immediately to the temple with, look at that person's true character and work *toward* a later sealing.

If your child and his or her partner are temple worthy but one or more of the parents are not, have a ring ceremony and take any measures you can to make them feel involved and included.

If circumstances and distances allow, go with your child to the temple for his or her endowments before the wedding so he can concentrate entirely on the endowment the one time and entirely on the wedding the other time. Encourage the spouse-to-be to do likewise with his or her parents (perhaps together with your family).

Back to the original question: Temple marriage and eternal families are the goal, but if it doesn't happen initially, remember that it is a lifetime goal and that nothing can stop you or your children from working towards it all their life.

30. What should be my role in my child=s wedding?

CHARITY JADE:

Be the supporting actor or actress. Don=t try to be the leading role or the center of attention. And just be really happy!

Carolyn M.: Read the books. Those marriage and etiquette books lay out exactly what is expected of the bride=s parents and the groom=s parents. You=ve got to follow some higher authority or else there will be disagreements and problems.

Bill N.: To be honest, I thought about paying them to elope. It would be a lot less trouble and a lot less expensive! As it was, I just stayed out of the way and signed the checks.

Le Ann D.: Keep in mind that, for church members, we=re talking about the reception and the wedding breakfast, not the wedding. In the temple your role is just to sit and enjoy. The reception and all the other stuff is the mother=s responsibility really. I mean it=s mostly our friends who come, and I really don=t think the kids have the time or the know-how to plan one anyway. I think it should be as big or as little as the parents want to make it.

Fred J.: I think the most important part of weddings is all the new relationships. It=s the best chance you=ll even have to meet the new in-laws, and to really talk to and get to know the parents of your new son or daughter-in-law as you plan your parts of the wedding. Make it fun! Let the kids have the final say on everything, but be on board for the ride! Oh, by the way, give them a budget at the beginning -- or at least a bottom line.

SAREN:

My parents gave me a lump sum of money to use for my wedding and told me I could use the money however I wanted B I could spend it all on a nice big reception, I could do something simple and save a lot of it or use it for a honeymoon, whatever. I really

appreciated their generosity in providing me with ample funds to have a beautiful wedding B and I also appreciated the fact that they let me decide what sort of wedding to have without feeling like I=d be forfeiting money or getting less than anyone else in the family if I opted for a small, simple reception. Remember though, I was in my late twenties and they knew I had a pretty good idea of what I wanted.

I went with a big, formal yet fun reception -- tons of people, a great swing band, lots of dancing, good food, a gorgeous dress, an amazing cake, beautiful photography. Expensive B but it was my dream and it was worth every penny!

My parents didn=t have to do that much. Jared and I found the band, decided on menus, reserved the ballroom and took care of most logistics without bothering my parents about it. We invited family members to be involved in a lot of ways and we asked for some advice about different options B but it never felt like they were trying to assert their opinions or steer us in any particular direction. Everyone in my family helped out with anything I asked them to do. My dad ordered the tuxes for everyone as I=d requested. My mom did some research and put together a short list of the best places for wedding dresses and cakes and invitations B and she went with me on lots of my errands. It was so important to have her by my side as I tried on dresses and decided on the cake and invitations. My brothers and dad stepped way out of their element to help me pick out jewelry and make-up and flowers when I had my bridal photos while my mom and sisters were out of town. Everyone was so supportive of my wishes and determined to help make this day perfect for Jared and me. I wish everyone getting married could have support like I had!

SHAWNI:

Getting ready for my wedding was probably the most memorable time I=ve had with my mom. I will always really cherish the time we were able to spend together one-on-one as

we prepared for the big day. Coming from a family with a lot of kids it was so great for me to get so much undivided attention. My mom was so great about everything. This was her first time helping to plan a wedding and she did SO much since I was in school an hour away from home and in the midst of finals the week right before the wedding. With how much work she was doing on my wedding, you=d think she=d be sort of attached to having things her own way, but she always asked me what I thought and made it just how I wanted it. I=d come home and she=d have a big list of things we needed to do and we=d drive around together and just talk. I loved it.

SAREN:

Most LTNs I spoke with agreed that your wedding day can and should be one of the most memorable days of your life. Weddings are about family and friends and traditions -- but they=re primarily a celebration of the love between the bride and groom, so the bride and groom should really be the ones deciding what they want. Give your kids a budget, be there to help and offer to help in areas where you=d most enjoy helping -- then stand back a bit. Make sure your child will always feel that his or her wedding day was his or her day, not your day. Your kids might benefit from various boks or websites about wedding planning. Offer them such resources and your advice if they seem overwhelmed. But you should be content to let your kids make the decisions and create what they want while you fill a purely supportive role.

31. What will my child go through during those first few months of marriage? What will he or she need from me?

CHARITY JADE:

They won't really know what to do. So tell them about how those first few months were for you. They might not seem too interested, but they probably really are.

Winnefred R.: Well, there will be some adjustments, that's for sure. Your child will probably miss you and appreciate you in some new ways, which is good. Hopefully they will tell you this. I think the parent should just be a listening ear -- but not even that very often. The newlyweds need to learn to depend on each other. If we just support them and tell them we have confidence in them it will help. We can also tell them that we had a few adjustments to make, too . . . when we were in their shoes.

Marilyn J.: I think our kids just need to know we approve, and that we love them, and that we're happy for them.

Peter J.: The funny thing is, they need just about everything. They need furniture, they need recipes, they need plane tickets, they need a fast modem, they need to go with us on our vacation. And they need money -- only more of it now!

AJA:

It's hard to fully define what I need most during my first few months of marriage, because I'm still in those first few months right now. I still need and want those same things I needed when I first moved away from home--open communication, open invitation to always come home (though I bring Jonah now too) and lots of packages to open.

Just a few months ago, we lived for seven weeks at my parents' summer home on an island in Washington State, where I had done most of my growing up, including the big growing up that happened when Jonah asked me to marry him B there on the island. My mom was so excited to have us with her, especially to help her look after my little brother when she had to go back to Las Vegas every few weeks for work. Almost every day I think she told both Jonah and I how excited she was to have us there, and how glad she was that we had found

work on the island so we could stay there for a nice long stretch. Not only did her hospitality and excitement fill those same needs as when I first left home, but I also know that enthusiasm helped ease the tension Jonah and I were both feeling about parking ourselves in a house that wasn't really ours. We were stuck there on the island for a while, but my mom didn't cause us any reason to regret it. It turned out to be a great opportunity for Jonah to get to know my family better and for them to get to know him.

I think it's so important for parents to always welcome their married children home with open arms and to find opportunities to spend some good blocks of time together with their new son- or daughter-in-law. You always need a house to come home to, and even though Jonah and I have our own house together, we both know that we are not excluded from our first homes.

JAKE:

Those first few months of marriage were pretty rough B wonderful too, though. We had a nice apartment that we=d set up before the wedding B but deciding what should go in the apartment was harder than I would have thought. Mary was really into getting lots of nice furniture that would last for a long time, while I thought we might as well sort of camp out since we only planned to be in that apartment for a year. We=d talked about finances before getting married and decided we wanted to combine our savings and checking accounts. It all made sense and we went through all the processes to get the money moved around and we liked seeing our two names on our new checks. But Mary got freaked out a little about the idea that she didn=t have anything of her own anymore and she questioned stuff I bought which drove me crazy since I was used to doing my own thing my own way. Anyway, I remember lots of discussions about lots of issues B painful at the time, but we gradually learned how to get things out in the open and we figured out some solutions that

we=re always fine-tuning.

Throughout all this, my parents were great. They=d call us every Saturday morning and check in, asking what was new with us and whether we needed anything. They invited us for Sunday dinner as often as we wanted to come. They were really complimentary about the way the apartment looked and the dinners we fixed for them. They made a point of complimenting me on what a good husband I seemed to be, and Mary on how happy she was making me.

I really appreciate the fact that they were very interested in hearing everything going on in our lives, but they never pried. I have a friend who=s mother used to corner him and ask him all these questions about his relationship with his wife when they first got married. I=m sure she meant well, but it just made him totally turn off to her.

Mary and I decided right at the beginning of our marriage that we weren=t going to say anything bad about each other to anyone other than each other. Does that make sense? Anyway, there were times when I was so frustrated with Mary that I wanted to call a friend or my dad and just vent B but I=m so glad I never did. Instead, I told Mary how I felt and we worked things out between the two of us.

SAREN:

Marriage can be hard B especially at first, but I=d say parents should leave their kids alone and let them work things out themselves. Third parties just get in the way. I think if kids start saying bad stuff about their spouse to you, it=s good to suggest that they keep those things inside their marriage. If things are really really bad, they probably need to get outside help. But as they work out the business of living together and planning a future together and dealing with each other=s quirks and needs, it=s detrimental for parents to be too involved.

Call regularly, ask sincere, non-prying questions, spend time with them -- as much

time as you and they are comfortable with -- compliment them, make a point of spending quality time with your new son- or daughter-in-law. Assure them that the first year of marriage is supposed to be hard and that the better they can communicate with each other, the more they=ll grow together. I think it=s good for parents to selectively share stories of the hard times and great times they had at the beginning of their own marriage.

R&L:

Spiritual input is probably both the easiest and the most important input to have with your child=s new marriage. Simply encourage them to make their marriage a three-way partnership with the Lord as the third (and managing) partner. Encourage them to pray together over every decision. If they do this, a. they will succeed and b. the pressure will be off of you because they will be relying on their true Father.

32. *What sort of a relationship should I hope for with my married child?*

CHARITY JADE:

You should be close and comfortable but not to a point where you take them away at all from their new spouse.

Tom M.: Once they are married, I really think we should try for a horizontal, friend-to-friend relationship. They=ll understand so much more about us now, and we=ll just have a lot more in common. I really think we should visualize how we talk and relate to a friend, and then treat our married kids just the same way.

Kenneth W.: It=s like your child has now become the president and you=re the chairman of the board. Let him run his own marriage and family, but call him in for a corporate meeting from time to time.

SHAWNI:

I'm so glad that my parents and I had such good relationships to begin with because it's kind of a difficult transition after you get married. One thing that was hard for me was to lose the strength of the confidant relationship I had had with my dad as my husband gradually moved in on that role. It wasn't that my husband wasn't good at it I am so lucky to have a husband who took on the role so perfectly. But I just love my dad and it was hard to lose some of his deep involvement in my life and me as he loosened his grasp a bit to let my husband take over.

I think my dad kind of has a hard time letting go too, or at least finding a balance. Sometimes I think he still feels like he needs to be in on everything, and he asks too many questions especially about financial matters. But I think both parents did a pretty good job of letting go enough, but not too much. Even though I know they must have been DYING to jump in and tell us what to do (especially my dad, who I'm sure my mom was holding back with all her might), they tried to show us they trusted us and let us do it on our own.

My very opinionated dad was obstinate about telling us over and over again how much we should ask for his advice, but he tried to take it in stride when we didn't. I think this is really important. Parents know so much from being through so much before, but I think it's so important that they let their kids figure most it out for themselves especially once they're married and have a partner to work with.

Let your children make mistakes it's good for them. They don't need someone telling them what to do every step of the way even if they think they do because how else will they learn to cope in the real world. I have some friends who try to make every decision for their still-at-home children. They read their e-mails, they chose their friends, they control them in so many ways. I wonder about how this will translate into their children's married

lives. They may have helped them stay away from some problems, but they have hindered them from learning on their own some very important things.

JONAH:

Aja and I have been married for seven months and five days and there is no doubt that with each day our love grows more and more for each other. I know that she is my family now and that I should "cleave unto her" (as it says in the Bible), but that in no way suggests that my birth family has lessened in importance for me. The support and teaching from my parents is what has made me who I am today and has given me confidence. To this point in my life, I have been away from home full time pretty much since I was 19 and have come to love the adventure and independence of it, but my family's support will always be important to me.

Even though I'm married, I still need my parents to call me regularly, to come visit me, to show an active interest in my life, to tell me that they're proud of me, to offer me advice but to accept the fact that I won't always ask for it or take it.

SAREN:

Talking with a group of friends about this book one evening, we stumbled into the topic of how our relationships with our parents should change once we find a spouse. Everyone quickly agreed that parents need to recognize that they should take a back seat once their kids marry. Once married, the foremost relationship in our lives should be the one we have with our spouse. Some of those I interviewed said that they had been away from home long enough to begin to see a gradual stewardship shift from being under the stewardship of their parents to being their own stewards and that the next natural step took place quite easily as they entered into a relationship with their spouse and became each other's stewards. Others talked about how their parents seem to have a very hard time

letting go of the custodial and controlling aspects of their parental role B complaining that parents called them up too often and asked too many questions. One friend said his mother made his wife=s life miserable by constantly comparing everything the wife did to the superior way that she, the mother, had always done things. Overall, everyone agreed that parents need to:

- ! Really acknowledge, verbally and through their actions, that their married child=s first allegiance and priority is his or her spouse*
- ! Regularly express love for and confidence in their child and his or her spouse*
- ! Talk openly together about what sort of role the child wants his or her parent to play now that he or she is married*

33. What should I do if I see something going on between my child and his/her spouse that worries me?

CHARITY JADE:

Let them work it out on their own with their own judgment. But if it gets really serious, step in.

Kenneth W.: Bite your tongue! The last thing you want to get into is a marital problem between your kids.

Fred J.: My own mom wouldn=t even intervene in a playground fight. If I=d come in and tell her about some kid who was beating me up, she=d say, AWell, you go on back out there and try to talk to him and work things out.@ And, amazingly, I usually did. Well, if it works that well on playgrounds, the same approach may be good for marriages.

SHAWNI:

My parents have some good friends who are very concerned about some of the things

going on in their daughter=s marriage. The wife was talking to my mom about some of her worries B nothing specific, just hinting at the seriousness of her concerns. My mom asked what her friend was going to do about these concerns. ADo? I certainly can=t do anything. It=s really not my place. Well, I guess I=m praying for them and that=s doing something. But they need to work everything out themselves, don=t you think? @ My mom agreed that they certainly need to work things out for themselves B no one else could possibly do that for them. But she tried to politely suggest that talking to her daughter about some of her concerns and asking if she wanted any advice might be appropriate.

I don=t know what ever happened with that situation. But when my mom told me about the incident, it made me wonder whether there are a lot of parents out there who feel like they should never say anything at all about their child=s marriage. I=ve certainly heard of parents who go way too far the other way, criticizing their child=s spouse or their child all the time and bringing up worries unceasingly. That can be very, very destructive to both the child=s marriage and to the parent/child relationship. But I do feel that a loving parent should always be sharing any serious concerns and persistent thoughts they have about what=s going on in their child=s life.

I think it=s a really good thing to regularly notice and tell your child about all the good things you see in their spouse. This helps you to maintain and enhance positive feelings towards the spouse and it helps your child to keep looking for the positive themselves.

SAREN:

I think parents are best off prefacing observations with statements such as, AI want to tell you about some things I=ve had on my mind. I=m not sure if my concerns are valid at all because I=m just an outsider in this situation, so feel free to totally forget about anything I say that doesn=t really apply.@ It=s important to ask your child lots of questions and really

listen to the answers. It=s extremely important to be very open minded and accept the fact that your concerns may be totally off the mark. And it=s important to talk to your child regularly and have a strong relationship so that you=re not just bringing up concerns about something as personal as their marriage out of the blue to a person you hardly ever talk to.

34. How much financial support (if any) should I offer them now that they=re married?

CHARITY JADE:

None. It=s their life now. They don=t get an allowance. When they=re in big trouble though you should help with loans.

Bill N.: I think you=ve got to just wait and see what they need . . . and then hope you=ve got the means to help.

Mandy E.: It=s really dangerous to help now that they=re married. It can cause more problems than it solves. It can pull them apart from each other. I even think you should talk to the other in-laws and agree together to let them be on their own. Give a timely gift -- something for their house or apartment -- but not money.

SAREN:

I was talking to a group of LTNs about this the other day, and they shared some interesting stories about parents helping pay for everything from down payments on houses to family vacations. Some complained about parents giving lots of money to a sibling and less to them for various things. Some complained that parents will say they=ll pay for something, then forget about what they said. Some said that parents agree to reimburse them for various things and then forget to send a check and then it=s very awkward having to ask for the money. One person said that he=s never asked for or accepted any money from his

parents since getting married & he believes in total financial independence after marriage. Most said that they feel like their parents have so much more money than they do right now as they're just getting started and that they think it's great if their parents want to help out with things. But they get very frustrated when their parents only offer money with strings attached (stuff like "We'll help with a down payment if you buy a house in our neighborhood" and "We'd love to help you with graduate school if you want to go for that business degree" or "We'll give you the money if you'll get something other than that ugly green trim painted on your house").

SHAWNI:

How to deal with money after marriage is such a big issue. I feel like it's a continual struggle and I know it's the same with most of my married friends to find a balance. My parents raised us to understand how important it was to be financially independent. The definition of "financially independent" to them in no way meant great wealth. It simply meant that when you earn all you have on your own, wholly independently, the joy is so much more heightened than when you have things that are just given to you. My parents (as most parents do) love to talk about the days of their financial struggles (kind of like the walking to school in the snow uphill both ways when they were little type of stories). They love to talk about living in Boston as newlyweds with hardly a penny to their name, counting out their coins to buy vegetables at the Haymarket Square farmers market each Saturday. They always talked about the joy of splurging when they could and not feeling guilty because it was THEIR hard-earned money, not money someone had just flittingly given them. I told my husband before we got married how much I wanted to "struggle" financially. I romanticized about how great it would be to save up and work so hard together to make ends meet.

Anyway, with these stories and this philosophy being carefully etched into my brain

growing up, I always feel a little guilty when my parents pay for things for my husband and me. Like my parents, we have definitely experienced the *Accounting-out-our-pennies* days, and to my great surprise, it wasn't as grand as my parents had made it out to be! In fact, I didn't like it one bit. My husband had to frequently remind me of my dreams to *struggle* each time I started to feel bad. I didn't like feeling so dependent on parents to help with airline tickets to see them every once in a while, and it was hard to see my husband so worried about financially supporting my dream of having our first baby. It was hard because my parents wanted to help and insisted on helping but to me it was contrary to everything they had taught us. Of course we accepted any help we could get but we still felt guilty about it. In hindsight, just as my parents said, I am glad we struggled so much. We learned so much and we will understand how to do it better next time if we need to do it again.

I think probably every child/parent relationship had to come to grips with this problem. I know so many parents who almost *bribe* even married kids with money and trips galore in exchange for a lot of control; and other parents who cut their children off financially the moment they get engaged. One thing that would have helped so much would be to talk much more frankly about financial matters with parents before we got married. I'm not talking about getting financial advice—we got plenty of that which was great. I'm talking about figuring out exact expectations before the marriage actually took place. My husband and I were the guinea pigs. There was no *formula* for money when we got married. My parents were very graciously generous and we just kind of blindly accepted what they offered (which was so very appreciated) and saved like crazy for the rest. I guess it all comes down to good communication. Kids and parents alike need to be open with what they expect help with and what they feel strongly about doing themselves.

NANCY:

Financial support from your parents, especially once you're married, can really complicate everything. Part of the reason I let myself wallow for so long in my dad's stifling job search maze was because he was pouring cash into my new out-in-the-world life and I felt like I owed it to him to follow his job-search advice. He did so much for us when we got married. He furnished almost our entire apartment, got his brother to give us a car, got my grandma to buy us a piano, and got his girlfriend let us live with her for a month when we first moved here. Did I feel indebted? You bet! Although I was grateful for the support, part of the excitement about moving to a new place (newly married) was that we would create our own home, with furniture that we picked and that reflected us. Instead, my husband has to live with heavy, gold old-man arm chairs and a big poofy bed because that's what my dad picked. I'm so grateful for all that he did for us and I know he mostly just meant to be kind, but it would have worked out a lot better if he'd let us know that he'd like to help, suggested some things he could do for us, and then let us be involved in deciding what would be most helpful.

SAYDI:

I think my parents have some pretty good ideas on how to handle finances. They have changed their minds about some things here and there, and they've caused some dismay when they've said they'd pay for something and then lost all recollection of that conversation. But we're gradually hammering out a pretty good plan for how they'll help us out with certain things. They'll pay for us and our families to come home once a year for our family reunion in the summer. Other times we want to come home for holidays or weddings or whatever, airfare is up to us. It was two times a year at first when just a few of us had left home B but now that there are so many of us to fly home, once a year seems totally fair. Beyond their formula for helping with school, they'll help us with a down payment on a

house. They won't give us the money to help with a house, but the money they put in will result in their ownership of whatever percentage of the house their money represents, but we get all the leverage. Then when we sell the house, we give them that percentage of the selling price. I like this method a lot because we don't have to feel like we're getting handouts and my parents simply get a chance to make another investment. I think this is all that my parents have agreed to pay for for us. I feel like they'd totally help us out financially if we were ever in dire straights. They've been very kind to slip us a little money or a couple needed gifts here and there if we're going through a hard time, but they never do it in a way that makes us feel guilty.

SAREN:

It's really important to set up clear expectations about money issues. And it's very important to be consistent and consistent between siblings in a family and consistent in that you say what you'll do and you do what you'll say.

Financial independence following marriage seemed to be a universal value and expectation in most families I spoke with. Kids want and need to be independent financially once they start to create their own family. When times are hard, it's good to know your parents will help out a bit. It's very important to make expectations clear about any financial help you do plan to give your kids once they're married. Among those I talked to I found that parents frequently help with visits home once a year, down payments on homes, and graduate school expenses. Most people felt grateful and positive about help they received in these areas, provided expectations were clear up front.

R&L:

You'll notice how often the communication and clear expectation theme comes up from kids. We've stumbled along on some things but now finally have some clarity. We'll

explain further in section IV.

35. What can I do to help when they have a crisis with money or have trouble finding a new job?

CHARITY JADE:

Set up an IOU plan where you make them a loan if you can or help them get a small loan from a bank and help them do a budget so they can pay it back.

Kenneth W.: Let them work it through. Don't jump in and solve it for them.

Jim R.: Help out, but be sure you use it as a lesson . . . so they'll learn from it and it won't happen again.

SHAWNI:

One of the hardest times for my husband and me financially was right after we graduated from college. My husband got a job offer from a company in California that we didn't feel good about and we had a few other leads. But when we graduated, we didn't know what our next step in life was and neither of us had jobs. So my parents kindly offered to let us stay for free at their little cabin until we figured out what we wanted to do.

It was incredibly difficult to be so dependent on my parents; he wanted so much to provide for a family and take the right next step. The hardest thing for me was to observe how it was even more painful for my husband to be dependent. My parents really tried to be good about it, and not to make us feel bad, but we felt awful. We were stuck. . I think it was hard for my Dad because he had SO much to say about what we ought to do & he kept suggesting people for us to talk to about jobs and telling us his ideas about good careers. Since we were living in his house completely dependent on him we felt an obligation to listen and do what he suggested.

It was hard because we didn't have a phone along with not having any money so we had to be at my parent=s house all the time to make phone calls, send letters and do the things we needed to in order to figure out such an important step. I hated this time because I was trying to be supportive of my new husband at the same time I was trying to heed the advice of my dad and thank him and my mom enough for all they were doing for us. I was totally torn apart about it all. My parents were so nice about it. As much as I could completely tell how frustrated they were for us, they really tried to help us feel better. They even offered us a part-time job at my dad=s office while we were there. But it was just horrible for us to feel so dependent.

I don't know exactly what advice I could give to anyone not to get in the same situation. I guess I just want to share with you how newly married kids can feel when they are so dependent. In some ways I felt like my dad was bothered by my husband because he didn't go about getting a job the same way he would have done it. It=s just so important to realize everyone is different.

DENISE:

My mother can be so pessimistic and unsupportive! One time, I discovered what I had thought was a great home-based business opportunity. I was thrilled at the thought that FINALLY, after wracking my brain and struggling for months I had found something to support our starving student family while staying home with my two young children. Over the phone, I spilled out all the great details to my mom and told her how perfect a job I thought it would be for me. Immediately she told me every possible thing that could go wrong and Awhat if this and what if that.@ My excited, enthusiastic spirit began to suffocate under a thick blanket of skepticism. I just wanted her to be excited . . . to be proud of me and the challenging, yet profitable opportunity I had finally found. I simply wanted some support.

*Couldn't she just stop being a protective mother for just ten minutes and believe in me?
Parents don't realize what showing confidence in their children can do for them. If your
parents believe in you, you seem to find courage, endurance and strength to meet challenges
and take hold of opportunities. And suddenly you feel intelligent, responsible, and capable.
Even if my mom's opinions are almost always opposite of mine, it would just be nice to be
supported even a little bit. If parents have real concerns, sure, they should express them, but
only after showing support, asking a lot of questions, really listening, and realizing that they
are only seeing the situation from the outside, so their concerns may not be valid.*

SAREN:

*So . . . again, find your own individual-circumstance @ balance between assistance
and independence. You will find this only together, as you communicate with your kids.
Remember that the confidence and trust you show (and your relationship with them) may be
more permanently important than whatever temporary crisis they may have.*

36. What sort of relationship should I try to cultivate with my child's spouse?

CHARITY JADE:

Just be their new friend. But remember they've got their own parents, too. Your relationship can't be stronger than between you and your son or daughter or between them and their parents.

Meg L.: I think it's easier, in a way, to have a good relationship with a new son or daughter-in-law than with your own daughter or son. They respect you more and listen better. And there's not so much baggage.

Marilyn J.: Just treat them like your own child. I think this is what puts everyone at

ease tell them that=s how you think of them and that there will be no secrets or false fronts. Just agree to totally accept them and to be totally real with each other.

SHAWNI:

My husband has always been so thankful to my mom for how welcoming she was when bringing him into the family. My dad was great too, but from the very beginning my mom has always looked out for Dave and made him feel so at-home and comfortable when he=s at our house. She always seems to know what he needs and will even buy little extra things especially for him when we come visit. I think this is so important. I was so lucky to marry into my husband=s family too. His family has always been so accepting of me. They have a lot more kids married in their family than we do and they really have the hang of it with the in-laws. It=s their family joke that the in-laws become the favorites instead of the kids once they marry into the family. It just feels so good to be so unconditionally accepted and loved.

DAVE:

I like calling my father-in-law Dad and my mother-in-law Mom. Why not have two dads and two moms? I don=t think it diminishes or lessens my love or respect for my own parents.

ROB:

Don=t ask your son-in-law or daughter-in-law to call you AMom@ or ADad!@ My wife=s parents asked me to call them Mom and Dad and I just can=t do it. I have a Mom and Dad -- and they aren=t my in-laws! I just avoid calling my in-laws anything. It=s awkward. Most of my friends call their in-laws by their first names. I think that=s a lot more comfortable and appropriate.

NANCY:

An issue that has been very interesting to me since getting married is how differently my parents and my husband=s parents have viewed their relationship with their new son or daughter-in-law. One of the wonderful things about my new parents-in-law is how they've truly adopted me as a friend. They would never counsel me in any sort of condescending way, but they always want to talk with me when we have family calls simply because we enjoy each other. In fact, my husband=s mom sometimes calls only to speak with me! I love that. They see me as a true equal, and we can laugh about my husband, Evan, and have that unique bond, but they never assume a parental tone or controlling attitude.

My dad's response to my being married has been quite different. He views Evan as my third parent. For example, at instances when my dad has been displeased with my behavior, he has called Evan and complained to him, implying that Evan has disciplinary control over me and seemingly bypassing me because I'm only "the child." On a different bent, whenever Evan is out of town, I get multiple calls from my father daily, because he knows that Evan's not around to "take care" of me and he feels that he's the default "custodian". He would never dare criticize Evan and treats him on an equal level, as though they are in a chummy, old boy relationship and have bonded over having responsibility for me. Very weird. I definitely do not encourage this attitude!

SAREN:

Set aside time to get to know your new son- or daughter-in-law. Include him or her in your family e-mails, birthday lists, etc. Look for all their good points and be free with compliments. When you call your son or daughter treat the spouse with equal interest. And talk together openly about your evolving relationships. Let me save the rest of my comments until after the next question because they are about in-law relationships in general

R&L:

What a joy to get new sons and daughters via the marriage route! As you are gathering through these pages, Dave and Jared are totally like our own sons, and Aja like a lovely fifth daughter. Everything about our family is better and more complete with these three on board. They are true brothers to our sons and sister to our daughters. They are helping to complete our family as well as their new spouse. It's an exciting adventure to get to know each of them and to find the things in them that caused our daughters and son to fall in love!

37. What sort of relationship should I try to cultivate with my child's spouse's parents?

CHARITY JADE:

You're going to be sort of grandparents-in-law with each other -- or something like that -- so be really nice to each other.

Kate P.: This is really important -- for your married kids -- if you know the other parents well, you can agree on how to do certain things and have a more united front. Also you can work out (or help your kids work out) how much time your kids will spend with each of you on holidays and such.

Larry L.: Unless you knew them before or live pretty close, it's unrealistic to expect to get to know them very well.

SAREN:

A few weeks before my wedding day, my dad and I made a 5-hour drive up to Ashton, Idaho so that Dad could meet Jared's parents and see the farm where he was raised. My dad's usually a pretty busy guy, and it meant a lot to me that he'd take the time to not just meet Jared's parents, but meet them in their element and see this place that was such a part

of the Loosli family. My parents and Jared=s parents are from different generations (I=m the oldest in my family and he=s the eighth of nine kids). So while our parents share a lot of similar experiences in the Church and having raised very large families, they=ve had very different life experiences and careers. I loved seeing my dad so interested in everything about Jared=s parents. He asked for and received a full tour of the Loosli farm, asked all sorts of sincerely interested questions about the farm and the family, and showed genuine admiration for this family I was joining. The Looslis were wonderfully hospitable to my dad and clearly really enjoyed his company as much as he enjoyed theirs. It was so wonderful for me and Jared to see our parents mutual admiration for each other and to have them get to know each other.

My mother did a wonderful family dinner and program the night before our wedding B just for my family and Jared=s family, so that everyone could casually get to know each other and relax together before Athe big day.@ She made everyone feel so welcome and made sure that everyone got to know everyone else. During the program, she made sure that everyone got a chance to say something about me and about Jared B a great way for everyone to get to know more about us and about everyone else in the room. My mom has made a tradition of having these special night-before-the-wedding parties for both families and I think it=s really helped as two families get linked up.

I=ve never heard either of my parents say anything remotely negative about my in-laws or my sister or brother=s in-laws. They genuinely like them and think of them as best friends. I think it=s so important that they=ve taken the time to get to know the families that we=ve married into. I think it=s vital that they=ve been so completely positive about the families we=ve joined.

SAREN:

Here is a summary of the suggestions that came up in a discussion I had with several LTNs on this whole in-law subject (with reference to question 36 as well as 37):

- ! Set aside time to get to know your new son- or daughter-in-law. Get to know them by doing stuff with them, your spouse, and their spouse (your son or daughter) and also doing stuff with them one-on-one. Examples include going to lunch together, going on a hike together, having them ride with you on a road trip, and taking them to a special event (a ballet, a game, a museum) that represents an interest you share.*
- ! Immediately include new sons- and daughters-in-law on all your family phone lists, e-mail lists, birthday lists, etc.*
- ! Look for all their good points and be free with compliments. In general, don't say anything bad about your son- or daughter-in-law and his or her family -- what's the point?*
- ! When you call your son or daughter, spend a few minutes talking to his or her spouse. Ask about and remember details about his or her job, hobbies, and important events.*
- ! Ask your sons- and daughters-in-law about traditions in their families and ways that their families handle certain things. (Their family may do some great things that you could adopt.)*
- ! Let them call you whatever they're comfortable calling you. Don't insist on AMom@ and ADad,@ but welcome it if they are comfortable with it.*
- ! Make a real effort to get to know their parents and families. Point out what you like about their families to your son- or daughter-in-law and to your own family.*

! *It=s really important to spend time getting to know your child=s future in-laws before the wedding. Go to dinner together early in the engagement and work out together some of the issues about who=s paying for what at the wedding.*

R&L:

Right on! What better way to make good new friends than to have your daughter marry their son. Isn=t that how the old kings consolidated and expanded their kindgoms?

38. What should I do if my child complains about his/her spouse to me?

CHARITY JADE:

Tell them they should be talking to each other and not to you.

Tom M.: Don=t ever talk to one of them about the other one. If one complains about the other, you should probably keep your mouth totally shut. (Maybe your ears, too!) If you do want to talk or try to help, insist that it be with both of them together.

Le Ann D.: Well, you=ve got to listen, don=t you? I mean if they=re having problems, they=re probably not speaking to each other, so they=ve each got to find someone they can talk to.

SAREN:

Here=s a collection of responses I got from LTNs on this question:

! *ADon=t listen! Cut them off and ask them whether they=ve shared this concern with their spouse yet. If the answer is Ano@ tell them to talk to their spouse and then if they still want to talk with you (together), you=d love to talk.@*

! *AListen, but gently remind them that they are the one who chose to marry*

him/her. Tell him/her that communication between spouses is very important and remind him/her that marriage isn't a bed of roses, but it can be (and should be) the most wonderful relationship you can ever have! @

! If they have some really serious worries or complaints, perhaps they you should talk to a marriage counselor B not to you. They should talk to someone who=s really trained to help with marriage problems. You may have some good ideas and advice for them, but you may not have enough information or knowledge to really help them. Plus, you could be perceived by their spouse as messing up the relationship and things could get sticky. It=s better to suggest they go to a specialist and avoid getting in the middle of things yourself.@

39. How do I deal with married kids dividing their time between two sets of parents?

CHARITY JADE:

Make sure you=re not demanding more than your share. Try to trade off, and don=t bribe them.

Kenneth W.: Well, this always hit us at Christmas and we finally just did the obvious thing: every other year.

Katelin J.: I think the kids have to make their own decisions on this, but it=s not a bad idea to talk to the other in-laws before you make invitations. This way you can avoid conflicting schedules and maybe avoid putting your kids in a difficult dilemma where both sets of parents want them at the same time.

DANA:

Since we=ve been married, both my parents and my husband=s parents keep Ascore @

of how much time we are spending with the other family. This drives me crazy! They will say, AYou spent two weeks with them, why are you only spending one week with us? @ Dealing with the demands of a new marriage in addition to new in-laws takes a careful balance and I wish our parents understood that we are trying to be as fair as possible, considering both families= circumstances.

SAREN:

More on this topic under question 49 in the next section.

40. How often should we communicate with each other now?

CHARITY JADE:

Haven=t we had this question before? Nothing=s changed. Just keep communicating as often as you can -- with both of them!

JIM (by Saren):

My friend Jim got married a few months ago. Jim=s parents and my parents are very good friends, so my parents had dinner with Jim=s parents over the holidays, and since I was in town, I joined them. During dinner, Jim=s mom, Beth, started taking a little about how she felt about having her first child, Jim, get married. She=s always had a very special and close relationship with Jim and before the wedding, she=d been very apprehensive about how her emotions would hold up once he was married and his wife became the Awoman of his life.@ Ever since Jim left home, Beth had called him almost every day to see what was new in his life and share what was going on in hers.

Anyway, as we talked at dinner, Beth said that she=d called Jim a few times during the first few weeks of his marriage, but when she called and his new wife picked up the

phone, Beth sensed some resentment in her voice and worried that she was bothering the newlyweds by calling too much. She resolved not to call Jim anymore, but to let him call her if he wanted to talk. She said this resolution had been very hard for her to keep but that she=d been really good about it. She hadn=t called Jim in almost a month. They=d seen each other a few times and he=d called a couple of times. But I could tell she was quite hurt that Jim wasn=t calling her more and that she really missed their frequent conversations. She said, AThis is hard for me, but I know it=s what they need right now. They need time to build a great relationship with each other without me calling all the time and butting into their lives. Maybe Jim will call more once the newlywed stage wears off.@ It made me so sad to see Beth so obviously hurt and sad, and I had to wonder whether Jim had any idea how she felt.

A few days later, I was talking to Jim and asked him how his mom was handling everything. He said it was weird but she didn=t seem to want to talk to him very much anymore. She was always really nice on the phone when he=d call her, but seemed to want to get off the phone quickly and she never called him anymore. He was sort of confused by her behavior. AI can=t tell whether she=s just decided to really move on with her life and stop being so involved in my life or whether she=s sort of mad at me for getting married or whether she just needs some space from me so she can adjust.@

Anyway, I suggested that he talk to his mom about the whole thing. But I came away thinking, wow, here are two people whose relationship is being needlessly interrupted because they=re misinterpreting each other!

SAREN:

It=s so important to TALK about how often you=d each like to communicate and TALK about how you feel about the changes going on in your relationship. Don=t assume

that your kids want to talk to you or don't want to talk to you. Don't assume how often they want to talk or communicate. ASK! There are so many needless hurt feelings and interrupted relationships out there due to misunderstandings and lack of communication about communication!

Peak 3 Review: Backing off while staying close

When your children marry, they're not just under a different roof, they're part of a whole new and different organization. They're not just playing a road game, they're on a new team. The Bible says it best; they must now *leave* you and *cleave* to their spouse. This priority shift, this emotional leaving and cleaving, can be a traumatic transition for your child, even if he or she has lived away from home for some time. He or she had just jumped over an invisible barrier out of your immediate family and into his own. You and your child are now parts of each other's extended families.

But that is the amazing thing about families -- they expand forever without contracting. They break the law of equal action and opposite reaction because they're always additive and never subtractive. Your child gets married and starts a new, additional family, yet he is still part of your family, and his wife is added to your family. Net result: a larger family for you and a new family besides. And so it goes, on and on.

What does have to equalize and balance is your time and your priorities. Your family will keep growing but your time and your mental energy won't grow along with it. You'll have the same finite amount of hours and of effort and you'll have to spread them thinner and over a larger number of family members. And your now-married son or daughter will (and should) devote most of his or her family time to the new spouse and new family.

Once we empty nesters see this process clearly, and accept it, we can be happy with

our evolving role. We can let go gladly of control and responsibility and yet still preserve closeness and confidence. With gratitude and grace, we can step nimbly aside and into the remarkably joyful roles of trusted adviser and friend.

Additional LDS Perspectives and Insights

There are a lot of *Apay days* or joyous times in parenting, probably none greater than seeing a faithful, grown child kneeling at an alter of the temple across from a worthy, chosen eternal companion.

There is a certain relief in our joy, and actually a *release*, too . . . as though we are released from being our child's closest confidant and most significant eternal relationship.

We're never released as parents of course, and the family kingdom just expands, never divides. Still, this child now *Aleaves* us and *Acleaves* to a new eternal partner and companion. It is about as close as a parent ever gets to *AWell done thou good and faithful servant.*

That unique joy -- the deep happiness mellowed by a subtle relief and release is perhaps the biggest parenting transition of all. We must soon support in a different way, respect the sanctity of this new family, and look to our children as respected equals.

If the moment isn't quite that perfect -- if the initial marriage isn't in the temple -- think of the glass as half full, not half empty. Soak up all the joy that is there and know that no glass is toally full and that the joy is in the ongoing process of filling.

Peak 4: When They Have Children of Their Own

(Can you stop worrying long enough to realize how wonderful this is?)

Here is where the vertical or diagonal relationship really seems to become horizontal. They who made you a parent are now parents themselves. Suddenly they understand certain things and can relate to you with a new commonality. But with grandchildren come a whole host of new questions. Here are some of them, along with responses from our ENP and LTN panels.

41. How will our relationship change once they have their own children?

CHARITY JADE:

I think you'll be even closer because now they know what it feels like to be a parent. They'll probably turn to you more for advice because being a parent is a scary thing. And, they'll appreciate you a lot more!

Marilyn J.: I think you just be their cheerleader now. They're at the most hectic and busy time of their lives when they have little kids and they just need to know that we went through it and that *it's okay!*

Carolyn M.: I think this is the biggest of all the changes. Now our kids are really like us. They understand what we went through with them. It's neat! It opens up whole new areas of commonality and conversation.

HOLLY:

When I had my first child, my parents - and my mother in particular - built on the firm foundation of a relationship they've always had with me. Having a child is a different kind of event from anything else one does in one's life, so some of the things my parents did in

our relationship once I had a child were new. But the way in which those things were done was the same pattern they had always followed -- giving me complete and total support, sharing in my excitements and anxieties, respecting me as my own person and trusting me in the conduct of my own life.

Our relationship has changed in that we now have a very strong element of common experience which simply did not exist before. My mother has used that common experience to offer support and encouragement to me as I have tried to settle into my own role of being a mother -- a process which has not been easy for me. I am a person who guards and values my personal time, and I found the extraordinary claims which my first child made upon my time to be a frustrating trial rather than a joyful experience. Instead of telling me to quit complaining or get on with life, my mother listened to me for many hours over the space of seventeen months as I tried to come to terms with what it means to be a mother. I felt I could go to her as a specialist in the field of parenting, and I liked feeling that my mother was the person to go to on this subject. Our shared experience changed our relationship by bringing us closer.

As I've had children, my relationship with my parents has changed not only because we now have the common experience of raising children, but also because I now understand more what was entailed in raising me, specifically, as their child. Although my mother has counseled me on countless other subjects, such as scholastic and career issues, when she counseled me on mothering, I not only felt like I was going to some specialist in the field of parenting in general, but also to a specialist about me as a unique and individual parent. There is something about my mother's advice on being a mother that feels at once interesting on a general level as well as intensely personal. It's that combination in my mother's advice of both theoretical parenting and the fact that she has experience in being my own mom, that

makes me feel closer to her when I apply that advice.

AJA:

Even though I don't have kids of my own yet, I'm sure my mom will answer my questions and give me advice when I need it, but I dearly hope she will give me (for I think I will dearly need it) unending support and affirmation of my potential for being a good parent. It is when really love myself that I feel most receptive to the positive influences of my life, current and past.

SHAWNI:

Right now I need a fine-line balance from my parents. I need them to continue being the amazing grandparents they are to my children. I have never seen more attentive and more in-love grandparents, which results in grandchildren who idolize them. I can't even describe how amazing it is to watch someone love your kids almost as much as you do. But at the same time, I need them to be aware of me as a separate entity than my children. Sometimes I feel like I'm turning into AMax and Elle=s mom@ to them instead of their daughter Cmy own separate person.

My dad recently came out to visit and we had a great time with the kids as usual. But something started to really bother me. We had decided to take a trip to an aquarium about an hour away and I was excited for the trip so I could talk to my dad for a little while. I was sad when the kids started dozing off that my dad started dozing off too. When we had lunch I saw it as another opportunity to get some adult talking in with my dad. But he answered all my questions with one or two words and focused on the kids.

It just made me sad because I still need to have intellectual adult conversations with my dad. I love to talk about his views on politics, on his latest book, on the world in general. Over lunch, my dad talked about the stimulating conversations he had with my single sister

who he visited in New York before he came to our house, and he went on a long drive and had a long conversation with my single brother who lives close by the night before. I guess I just wanted to have a little time to talk to him too. I=d still choose the Ainvolved grandparents@ role over the Astimulating conversationalist@ role at the drop of a hatCI wouldn=t trade the love my dad gives my kids for anything. But I think it=s SO important for parents to stay in touch with their children as their children just as much as it is to stay in touch with the new parents their children have become.

SAREN:

In some ways, once they have their first child, your adult children will need you more than they have in years. They=ll have questions about diaper rashes and spitting up and sleeping schedules. They=ll want you to be on hand frequently to ooh and ah over the most beautiful children in the world. They=ll want you to approve of them as parents and they=ll probably want to help you define your role as a grandparent as that role evolves. They=ll ask for quite a bit of advice and you=ll doubtless think of lots of unsolicited advice you could give. You may find that you talk more frequently and have a closer relationship than you have in years. But as Shawni points out, it=s also important to continue to show interest in and encourage your children=s interests and abilities and activities that are non-child-related. When you talk or get together, I think it=s a good idea to always ask at least a few questions to your kids that have to do with something other than your grandchildren!

42. How much should I help with my grand children? Can we draw appropriate boundaries on our involvement and dependency on each other if my kids live near me and we see each other a lot?

CHARITY JADE:

Offer to help out when needed, but not all the time.

Kate P.: You *have* to set boundaries. Otherwise you=ll be babysitting the grand kids every day and you won=t have a life. Just tell them what days you=re available and what days you=re not or set up a schedule in advance. Don=t allow the kids to just be dropped off at Grandma=s whenever!

Betty T.: (responding) Wow, I can=t believe I=m ever going to worry about that. No grand kids yet, but I think I=m going to have to fight for my time with them. I want to be there for them whenever they need me. Nothing I=d like better than to be the surrogate mom!

DAWN (by Saren):

Dawn recently had her first child. She lives just a few blocks from her mother. When she found out she was pregnant and shared the news with her mother, she was surprised to find that her mother wasn=t exactly doing cartwheels. It turns out that her mother had seen a lot of friends really Alose their lives@ when they became grandmothers. They started taking care of their grand kids all the time, filling in constantly for the parents when the grand kids needed something and the parents were busy with other things.

Dawn=s mother sat down with her early in the pregnancy and basically laid down the law. Grand kids couldn=t drop by unannounced; there=d be no spur-of-the-moment babysitting, all babysitting would have to be set up well in advance and there=d be no more than one babysitting session a week, the kids would be Dawn=s responsibility and not her mother=s responsibilityY

Dawn was really crushed by the whole discussion. She feels really guilty whenever she asks her mom to help out in any way B she always tries to get friends to help out and only asks her mom for help as very a last resort. She feels like her mother views her baby as an

imposition and Δ that=s just the saddest thing!@ Dawn said she totally understands the need for clear expectations and limits Δ and she certainly never expected that her mother would do some of the things that her mother adamantly said she wouldn=t do. She just wishes that her mother had approached everything in a different, more gentle way. In her words: Δ I just wish my mom could have been a little more excited about this baby before getting into her concerns about everything. I want my daughter to be a joy to my mother and I hate to see my mother missing out on her babyhood Δ but after all my mother said, I just feel awkward about suggesting that she be involved in anything to do with the baby.@

SHAWNI:

I think my mother-in-law does a great job with this one. She lives in Mesa, Arizona, and so do four of her children with families of their own. There are so many grandchildren around she could easily be overwhelmed with babysitting constantly. But she seems to have a perfect balance. Every time we go to visit I wonder how she divides her time so well among so many. I don=t know the details Δ but she and the families there seem to have an understanding about babysitting which they have obviously discussed and feel good about. Her kids don=t depend on her to be there for them all the time because she is really busy with so many other things. I think it would be so easy to have your life just turn into full-time grandchild care giver in that situation, but she has great hobbies and talents that she works on which are so important for her well-being. I think she has set times each week when she helps out with the grandchildren, which her children appreciate very much, but I think the most meaningful thing she does is that she plans out specific fun events to do with the grandchildren.

She schedules things like Δ grandma-sleep overs@ and has an annual Δ Grandma=s Christmas Party@ where she has all the grand kids over to make sugar cookies and go

caroling to the neighbors. She makes sure she has individual time with each child and knows them so well, yet she balances her time well enough so that she has time to do the things she feels she needs to for her personal growth as well.

SAREN:

Again, it=s about expectations and communication. After reassuring your kids about how much you love them and your grand kids, explain any concerns you have about grand parenting. Don=t get taken advantage of and don=t get taken for granted. But also, don=t miss chances to be with those kids! Ask about any concerns they have about your new role. Decide together what the bounds will be.

43. How can I be involved in my grand kids lives if they live far away from me?

CHARITY JADE:

Call them if they=re old enough to talk, and write them if they=re old enough to read. And go visit them whenever you can or send their aunt to see them (me!).

Katelin J.: That=s our vacation now-a-days. I don=t want to see beaches or volcanos, I just want to go see my grand kids.

Carolyn M.: Well, I personally think that grandparents have a special license to spoil their grand kids. I try to send them some little thing every month and to write little notes and to just constantly tell them how fantastic and perfect they are!

Peter J.: We take grand kids on vacation with us. Their parents can=t afford to go some of the places we do, and since we=re retired, we go pretty often. We like to take the grand kids one or two at a time so we can really get to know them!

JACK (by Saren):

Jack=s grandparents have a tradition of taking all their grand kids on a special trip when they are between ten and twelve years old. Every summer, any grand kids who fall into this age range and who have not yet been on this trip meet up at their grandparents house, load up their big RV, and head out on a two-week history trek. For months in advance, the kids work with their grandparents via e-mail and phone calls and meetings at family reunions to choose a part of the country they=d like to visit and map out the sites they will see. They=ve done the Civil War sites, the Revolutionary War sites, and Colonial America tour so far. Jack has wonderful memories of the time he spent with his cousins (who=ve never lived near him) and his grandparents, learning together, playing games together, planning together and just being together.

SARA (by Saren):

Sara feels like her in-laws are really missing out on her children=s childhood. They live abroad, but they have the means to visit a couple of times a year. When they come, they stay for at least two weeks. So, theoretically, they should be able to spend some quality time with their two little grandsons (ages 1 and 4) and build some good memories with them. They have the money to stay in a hotel, but they always stay with Sara and her family, reasoning that they=ll have more time with the grand kids that way. But while they=re there, they get up early in the morning, plan out a bunch of things they want to do that day, and take off on their own for the whole day. They play with the kids for a few minutes in the morning and sometimes a half an hour before the kids= bedtime. Last time they were visiting, Sara=s four-year-old begged his grandparents to take him to the park and they refused, saying they already had plans for the day and that they=d be back to play for a bit in the evening, as usual.

SAREN:

It's wonderful to see the bond that my parents have with my little one-year-old son. He's just a baby and we live far from my parents, but when we get together, I can just tell that Ashton is so happy with his grandparents. He'll just sit there in my dad's arms and STARE at him with this look of interest and love on his face. I've never seen Ashton look at anyone else that long or that hard. My dad loves playing with him and carefully observing all his little personality traits and interests. I love hearing my dad tell me about his observations after spending a few hours with Ashton. And when we're at their house, Ashton adores the way my mom talks to him and lets him play with all the big spoons and safe utensils in her kitchen. She's always giving him a little extra love and attention and buying him great little things that quickly become his favorite. My parents make the most of every little bit of time they get with my son. Plus they ask about him all the time, talk to him on the phone when they call, and send him nice little things he might like. It's so early in my son's life, but already, he's got a firm foundation of a good relationship with his grandparents.

SHAWNI:

My parents are amazing at being wonderful long-distance grandparents. We live all the way across the country and there is nothing better to me than watching how much my parents love my children when we are able to be together. I will never forget the picture in my mind of one night when I was with my dad with my first newborn. He was so sweet with that baby, and so in love with him. I remember that he just sat there and didn't take his eyes off of Max for about a half hour. He had a big loving smile on his face and a little tear in his eye contemplating what sort of boy and man this baby would become. He and my mom watch my children so intently and concentrate on them so much that they really know them inside and out. They give them undivided attention and make them feel so special.

My mom has come to stay with us for at least a week with each newborn baby and she cleans our whole house, stocks the fridge, cooks gourmet meals, and even gets up with the baby in the night. She always sends us the most thoughtful things too that make me realize how much she thinks about us and loves us. My kids get SO excited when I tell them that AGamma@ and AGampa@ are coming! There=s definitely a strong bond between them B and I=m sure it comes from the efforts my parents make to visit as often as possible and to make every visit really special for the kids.

My parents have to travel a lot, and they=ve perfected the art of routing every possible trip through Washington D.C. so that they can stop in and see us. (Did you know you can get to Dallas from Salt Lake City by going through Washington, D.C.?) I really appreciate their efforts, and so do the kids.

SAREN:

Some grandparents have the means and the desire to do a lot of traveling, so it=s easy for them to visit their grandchildren quite often. Some young families (but not many) have the means and the ability (dependent on ages of children and how well the kids travel) to take their kids to visit grandparents a few times a year. But no matter what the situation may be, everyone I talked to agreed that nothing can replace Aface time@ with grand kids B especially when they=re little. There=s an almost magical bond that can develop very easily between grandparents and their grand kids B with even just a few weekends a year spent together.

I guess the biggest suggestions to grandparents that I heard from those I asked this question was simply to visit as often as possible (within reason!) and to make visits really count by spending quality one-on-one time with grand kids (reading stories, sharing memories, doing crafts, going on little outings) and planning special, memorable activities to do with the

grand kids, both with and without the parents. (A special, memorable activity can be something as simple as a trip to the ice cream shop or the zoo)

44. What sort of financial support (if any) should I offer my children and grandchildren?

CHARITY JADE:

Give them gifts but not money. But you could start a college fund and let it grow.

Tom M.: I think anything you do for the grand kids has got to be in coordination with the agreement of your kids (the parents). You've got to support them in their stewardships of their own family. Let them ask for what they need. Or, if you have an idea, clear it with them.

Lonnie P.: Vacations are the best idea if you can afford it. This doesn't injure your kids' pride or undermine their independence. Nice vacations aren't a very feasible expenditure for your kids at this point, so they are so appreciative and they can use their own funds for more practical things. Plus, vacations are the most relaxed atmosphere to really communicate and to have quality time with grand kids.

JARED:

My grandfather put a few hundred dollars for me into some promising stocks when I was born. He did this for all of his grand kids. That money grew and grew. We just used a chunk of it to put a down payment on our first home. I'm so grateful that my grandfather had the forethought and generosity to put some money out there for me! All my life, I watched that money grow. Every couple of months, I'd get a statement showing how my money was growing and my dad would go over the statement with me. Through this experience, I learned a great deal about the way that saving and investing can make your

money grow.

When our son Ashton was born, my dad put some money into some stocks for him. We plan on helping Ashton follow what happens with this money as he grows up. We'll go over statements with him and help him make choices about moving money around. Some day he'll be able to use this money for college or a home or whatever he needs. I think that if grandparents have any resources to put into investments for their grand kids, it's a really good thing to do.

KRISTEN (by Saren):

Kristen has three young children. She works part time and her husband has a good full-time job so they're doing quite well financially. So I was surprised the other night when we were chatting with a group about this question and Kristen shared that her parents send her \$150 a month. She said she loves having a little 'extra' money to spend on 'little luxuries like manicures or expensive shoes or a beautiful sweater I don't really need or a super-cute outfit for one of the kids.' Everyone in the group expressed surprise that Kristen's parents send her money. She said she's always sort of assumed that most parents send their kids a little stipend every month and was surprised that no one else in the group got money from their parents.

Kristen had to leave fairly early that evening, and after she left, everyone was commenting about her situation. 'I can't believe they send her money' 'Sure, my parents sent me money in college, but come on, it's weird to keep sending money forever.' 'I wouldn't mind if my parents sent me money!' 'I wouldn't take money from my parents at this point in my life' 'It just seems wrong.' 'I'd feel indebted if I took money from my parents. I like feeling totally financially independent. What I do with my money is totally up to me.' 'I like it when my parents slip us a little money or send us something we've been

needing when they know things are a bit tight for us B but every month, that=s too much. I=d feel like my parents had no confidence in my ability to make and handle money.@ AHey, it=s their money -- let them give it out!@

SAREN:

In talking about this question most people agreed that kids should be financially independent of their parents once they=ve established their own family. But most agreed that financial help with the following was helpful and quite common:

- ! Down payment on a home.*
- ! Trust funds/college funds for grandchildren.*
- ! Help with graduate school tuition.*
- ! Help with plane tickets to visit home.*
- ! Paying for vacations with parents.*
- ! Helping in a time of crisis.*

Other than these things, most felt they shouldn=t expect or ask for financial help.

45. How can I help my kids to be better parents to my grand kids (without offending them or making them feel like I=m forcing my ideas on them)?

CHARITY JADE:

Once again, let them know you want them to call you if they have any parenting questions or dilemmas. But remember their kid is different than they were when they were your kid.

Kenneth W.: Don=t even offer advice unless you are asked. This is *such* a sensitive area.

Winifred R.: Well, your kids re going to follow the example you set as a parent

whether they want to or not -- that's just how it seems to go. So if there is something specific you wish you'd done differently, tell them about it. Then you are criticizing yourself and not them!

SHAWNI:

Each new catastrophe I faced with my children seemed to be something my parents could have done blindfolded with their hands tied behind their backs. I got so frustrated at first wondering how they just naturally had all the answers. But my parents were so sweet about it when I got frustrated. They always treated me like I was my own expert and like I was just doing a phenomenal job as a parent. They were quick to explain that they have been parents for thirty years and claim to be amazed at what I have been able to do in only three years. Of course this is pure flattery because I have so very much to learn, but it sure made me feel better! Their unquestioning approval of me as a parent has meant so much to me. Lets face it, all parents of children with children are going to know much more and are going to have so many answers for their kids in the parenting area. I just think it's so great when a parent can build up their new-parent child by not pushing too much advice on them and helping them realize their ultimate parenting potential.

SAREN:

The other day my dad made a comment that really annoyed me. He said, 'I don't think you're feeding Ashton enough. It seems like he's ready to eat a lot more when you stop feeding him. It seems like he's always starving!' Ashton's got to be about the world's biggest eater for a one-year-old. And no matter how much we feed him, he'll always take more and he'll always act upset when the food is gone. And then when he's thoroughly overeaten, he'll throw up. Over the months, I've figured out how much food seems to work

well for him and I've been trying so hard to make sure he eats right and gets plenty without getting overstuffed. So given this background, it really hurt my feelings when my dad made this comment. It was just a little thing and maybe he didn't mean much by it, but somehow, I came away with the sense that he thought I was a mean mother, who underfeeds her little boy, and I felt upset that I'd been judged so unfairly. I think it would have been a lot better if Dad had just asked me some questions about Ashton's eating habits & then I would have told him the whole story and he'd realize how well Ashton was eating and how hard I was trying to do everything right.

This little example points out a few things. First of all, your kids can be so easily hurt by any little negative remark you make about what they're doing with their children. Second, it's so important to ask questions before jumping to conclusions. Third, it's good to realize that every child and every situation is different. What worked for you when you were raising your children may not be the right thing for your kids and their kids.

JACKIE:

My parents grew up in Taiwan and a lot of the parenting practices that are common over there are not common over here. My mom means well, I'm sure, but she causes so many problems and makes me worried. When my daughter was born, she came over to my house and told me all the stuff I'd bought for my baby was wrong -- wrong sort of clothes, wrong diapers, wrong bathtub. She told me that putting the baby in the baby swing would turn her stupid. She said that strollers were a total waste of money and that babies were better off in a baby sling. She insisted that babies should eat ground-up table food by the time they're six weeks old and that bananas and honey would help them sleep (when my doctor said I had to wait until four months for solid foods and told me that honey was very dangerous for infants). When she'd hold my daughter, she'd bounce her around so hard on

her knee that I was worried about shaken baby syndrome. All her ideas about baby care and a lot of her ideas about child rearing just don't match up to what I've read or been taught and what my husband and I want to do with our baby. She's very offended that I haven't taken much of her advice. In Taiwan, children are supposed to respect their parents' wishes, no questions asked. She's only visited twice since the baby was born because I think she's offended. I know she grew up with these traditions and that they are ingrained in her, but it makes me so sad that she can't be the sort of grandma I always hoped my daughter would have!

I've talked to friends about my mom, and while they don't have such extreme traditions to deal with them their parents, they have shared lots of issues that have come up. One friend's mom insisted that her newborn should be slathered in lotion after every bath when the doctor said that lotion was bad and that newborn skin should naturally flake off until it grows accustomed to the air after being in water for so long. Another mother accused her daughter of condemning her newborn to misery after refusing to put baby powder on his bottom after changing him to keep him dry. With the stay-dry diapers they have now and the research that's been done on how dangerous it is for babies to inhale talcum powder, my friend didn't want to use powder. There are way more examples out there of grandparents, especially grandmothers, who insist that their daughters should do things the way they were instructed to do them when they were young mothers -- but times have changed, new research has been done, new products are out there. I guess most mothers just want to share knowledge with their kids, but they need to not be so pushy!

DENISE:

I have always done things differently than my mother did and the way I do things seems to be either intimidating to her or revolting -- I haven't quite figured it out. I feel a

great lack of support from her and oftentimes I wonder if she thinks I'm an idiot. I guess having a bachelor=s degree; living abroad for one-and-one-half years; being married; and having children of my own still doesn=t make me very experienced or credible. I remember one specific time when my husband and I and our two-month-old daughter moved into my parents= home for a few months so we could save money for a home. Every time I stepped into the kitchen it seemed that a smorgasbord of unsolicited opinions was being served. I had shared with my mom that I had some concerns about vaccinations and talked about how I was thinking about holding off on vaccinations until more research was completed or she was just a little older and more able to ward off any side effects. I had really felt worried about the vaccinations and was doing lots of research. Anyway, before I could even explain my concerns, my mother began to tell me horrific stories of children she grew up with who contracted polio or whooping cough, etc. She used statements like: AYou better . . .@ or Aif you . . . you=ll regret it for the rest of your life@ or ABoy, if I were you . . .@ I just cringed and felt like screaming: AWHO DO YOU THINK I AM??? DON=T YOU REALIZE THAT THIS IS MY BABY AND OF COURSE I WANT THE BEST FOR HER? I=M NOT ELEVEN YEARS OLD! I=M NOT AN IDIOT!@ It just would have been nice to have maybe a few words of caution and then a few words of support. It=s a lot easier to listen if your parents express confidence in your abilities and assure you that you are doing a good job and that you obviously are trying to do the best for your kids before throwing out their advice and opinions.

SAREN:

Ask questions a lot. As you ask and listen, your kids may ask you for your ideas and advice. The best time to offer advice is when you=re asked! Praise your kids for everything good you see in their parenting. Model parenting practices that you think might help them

while you're with them and their kids. Respect the fact that they're the parents and they have the final say. Realize that what worked for you may not be right for them and their child.

46. What is the biggest difference between *Parenting* and *Grand parenting*?

CHARITY JADE:

Parents influence their kids every day. Grandparents just come in and out and spoil the kids. You can do grand parenting but don't try to do parenting, too.

Peter J.: Well, the biggest single difference is that you can send the kids home!

Kate P.: One big different I'm *hoping* for, although it hasn't happened to me yet, is that grandparents have more *time* and don't have to be in a hurry. I want to be able to sit down and just be with my grand kids -- really listen to them and not have to rush off to the next thing!

SHAWNI:

Parents should provide for all their kids= basic needs B physical, emotional, mental, etc. Parents should be the ones who make the major decisions for their kids B from what they should eat as a baby to when they should be potty-trained to what school they should attend to what lessons they should take. Parents are the primary care givers, educators and decision-makers in their children=s lives. Grandparents should be sort of like the Aicing on the cake.@

Grandparents can add so many wonderful Aextras@ to their kids lives B more outings, more fun, more love, more support. They can also help reinforce the things that their children are trying to teach their grand kids, encouraging them to listen to their parents,

sharing personal stories that help kids understand why they should do or not do certain things, listening to them when they just need someone else to listen, offering them more of an outsider's view on issues going on in their lives or with their parents.

SAREN:

Many of the LTNs I talked with vehemently stated that grandparents should NEVER disagree with something that they (the parents) have said in front of the children. They should do everything they can do to be on the children's side AND on the parents' side when there's a disagreement, helping kids to see both sides of an issue and understand what their parents are trying to do. If grandparents have issues with the way their children are handling or not handling certain things, they should bring up these issues by asking questions in a caring way and in a private setting.

Most LTNs also agreed that It's great if grandparents want to help out with some of the needs and wants of their grandchildren (i.e. paying for lessons or college, buying them clothes sometimes, setting up a trust fund for them), but they should always coordinate any help they offer with them. The parents are in charge. The grandparents are loving helpers who step in as needed and requested and desired.

47. What should I do if my kids don't want me to do the things I'd like to do for their kids

CHARITY JADE:

Try to lay back on the stuff they don't want you to do but I think presents should be okay.

Kenneth W.: Clear everything with your kids. If they don't want you to do it, don't!

Carolyn M.: Like I said, I think I have a license to spoil my grand kids and I just can't help myself. I guess I'll just keep doing it and repent later.

KAREN (by Saren):

My friend Karen was complaining to me the other day about her in-laws. Karen has three kids, ages 5, 3 and 1. She and her husband, Dan, are really health conscious people & they exercise a lot and they really try to eat right. They limit the amount of sugar and empty calories their kids get in their diet & focusing instead on whole grains, fruits and vegetables. On Saturdays on holidays, the kids can have candy. Karen was saying that it's really hard when they visit Dan's parents house because his parents LOVE candy and treats. They always stock their house with candy & especially when they know the grand kids are coming. Dan's dad always has pockets full of butterscotch candies and loves handing out candy every time a kid gets near him. Dan's mom puts candy dishes full of treats on every available surface in the house and offers the kids candy whenever they do something for her or whenever she wants them to read a book with her. After a day at Dan's parents' house, the kids are on serious sugar highs and it's hard to get them to settle down and go to bed. Plus it really bothers Karen that Dan's parents seem to be using candy as a way to buy the kids' affection and bribe them to do things. They want their kids to spend time with their grandparents because it's fun, not because they get treats for doing it.

Karen said that she really doesn't know what to do. She wants the kids to spend time with their grandparents, but she's really uncomfortable with her kids having all that sugar and associating their grandparents so strongly with candy. Dan did try to talk to his parents a while back. It was a short conversation because Dan felt like he offended his parents right off the bat by even bringing up the subject. His parents said that they felt that it was good for kids to get special treats when they're with their grandparents and that the candy made their visit more special. Besides, a little sugar can't really hurt kids, Son.

After recently coming home from a four-day stay with Dan's parents, the kids kept on

begging for candy every day. Karen said, AIt just really bothers me that we=ve worked so hard to help these kids be healthy and enjoy healthy foods and do things without bribes and all that B and Dan=s parents just don=t care. They=re so set in their ways!@

DALLIN:

I was so mad the other day! My eight-year-old daughter, Marissa, came up to me and said, AGrandpa said I can take gymnastics and I might even be on the Olympics some day!@ She was so excited. Her grandpa (my dad) had told her he=d take her down to sign up for lessons next week as long as my wife and I said it was OK. Marissa=s friends have all been in gymnastics since they were three but Marissa. She bawled when we tried to take her for lessons and it wasn=t worth the fight. So her friends are these excellent gymnasts now B and she can barely do a somersault. Marissa has lots of talents, but even though we put her in ballet and jazz and tried the gymnastics thing, she just has a hard time making her body do anything complicated. OK, so she=s not the most coordinated kid. Who cares? She=s a great little flutist, she=s been in plays and choirs, and she excels in school. We=ve tried to get her over disappointments about dance and gymnastics by helping her excel in other areas and it=s worked great. Sure, she mentions from time to time that she wishes she could dance like so and so or do gymnastics like so and so.

Anyway, I=ve TOLD my parents about all this B but I guess they weren=t listening. I=m sure Marissa just mentioned something about how cool it would be to be able to do gymnastics and my dad jumped in there and offered lessons. I=m sure Marissa said she wasn=t good at it and I can just picture my dad saying, ASweetheart, a beautiful, smart girl like you can do anything she sets her mind to do@ and then he probably went on about her being in the Olympics. I know my dad means well but I wish he=d talk to me about stuff like this before getting my daughter=s hopes up. What am I supposed to do now? Tell Marissa

that her grandpa=s wrong and no matter how hard she tries, she=ll probably never be an Olympic gymnast? Let her take some lessons and be in the class with all the three-year-old beginners? I=m sure that=d make her feel just great. This is just like when he bought her a kitten without talking to us. AShe just wanted it so much, Dallin! Who can say no to that cute little face.@ My wife=s allergic. The whole thing was a mess. Parents need to ask their kids before they DO ANYTHING or OFFER anything to their grand kids. It=s just safer that way!

SAREN:

From these stories, it=s clear how important it is to talk to your kids about virtually anything you want to give your grand kids. Your kids have the final say about what=s best for their children. Don=t assume that anything is Ano big deal.@ It=s much safer to ask.

48. How often should I talk and write to my grandchildren?

CHARITY JADE:

Often! As much as you can. You should play a really big middle size role in who they become.

Carolyn M.: In many cultures of the world the grandparents teach and influence children more than the parents. This is not a bad idea -- grandparents are probably wiser and more experienced. Just communicate and coordinate with your kids about what you=ll each do for the grand kids.

SHAWNI:

It means the world to them and to us. I think it=s good to set up a regular time every week when you talk to your kids and grand kids B that way everyone has their expectations straight and it really happens.

SAREN:

When I turned five, I started receiving letters every other week from a character called Ællsworth Elephant. Ellsworth wrote me all about his family and how excited he was to be starting school soon. He told me what he was scared of and what he was excited about. I wrote back to him (with help from my parents) and had so much fun corresponding with an elephant just my age who went through so many of the same things as me! It was my grandma sending me the Ellsworth letters. She=s done that with every grandchild once they turn five. I still remember the joy of finding a letter from Ellsworth in the mailbox and having my mom read it to me! I think it=s wonderful for grandparents to think of something like this B something sort of magical and special B to do for their grand kids. When I grew out of the Ellsworth stage, my grandmother continued to write me, always telling me how special I am to her and pointing out what she appreciates about me. I=ve always treasured these letters. There=s nothing like getting a special letter in the mail, addressed just to you, when you=re a little kid. Whether your grand kids live close or far away, write to them regularly B they=ll be so excited to get your letters! Reading your letters and writing back to you is a great way to help your grand kids work on their reading and writing skills in a fun way. (By the way, all of this applies to e-mail too.)

JOHN:

My grandparents never seemed to want to talk to me. They=d always try to get off the phone as quickly as possible and I thought it was because they didn=t want to talk B but now I realize it was because they were worried about the expense of long distance calls B they were very, very frugal people. When we=d get together, they had all the time in the world for me and I loved being with them. But we only got to see them a couple times a year and it would have been nice to be able to talk to them and connect with them on the phone during

the many months we were apart.

Now that I have kids of my own, I want them to be able to talk to their grandparents on a regular basis. My wife and I have set up a time every Sunday evening when we'll talk to her parents and my parents and have the kids talk to them. Just before the call is due, we talk to our kids about what they want to tell grandma and grandpa this week and have them come up with some good questions to ask them. I think these calls have been great for the kids B they're sharing their lives with their grandparents and practicing good conversation skills.

SAREN:

Set up regular times to talk to your grand kids. Ask your kids what=s going on in their lives so you can think of appropriate questions to ask them. Write them regularly. Getting mail or e-mail can be such a highlight in a child=s life. Coordinate with your kids about how often you should communicate so that everyone=s comfortable and knows what to expect.

49. How often should I get together with them? How often should I encourage them to come home? How should we handle family reunions and holiday get-togethers once our family gets bigger and more spread out? What if they want to have Christmas on their own with their spouse and kids?

CHARITY JADE:

Your grandchildren are cute and you want to see them. But remember they have other grandparents and another side of their family.

Peter J.: As time goes by, the only reliable way to get them all together is to make the

reunion so compelling and attractive that they choose to come to it over their other vacation or holiday alternatives.

Pam J.: You=ve got to try to be flexible here and to leave a lot of initiative to the kids.

SHAWNI:

Your family is always your family. No matter how many other people join the family (i.e. in-laws, grandchildren) there is still a family unit to prioritize. Now that I am married with my own family, I feel I need to put their needs as my top priority. I need to be in tune enough with them that I know what they need from me and I need to look out for them for my entire life. When my children grow up and have their own children, I hope I will understand their need to put their new families as their first priorities. I think it will be my husband=s and my own responsibility to set up family reunions, visit our children and keep in contact with them as much as humanly possible. But it will also be very important for us to respect their freedom as their own families too. No matter what happens, I will continue to nurture and love them in every way I can. I think that is the role of a parent in keeping a family in tact. I think that is exactly what my parents have tried to do for us so far. They gather us together twice a year and make sure as many can make it as possible. They make sure we have time to discuss life and the goapel and really connect once again after being apart for a while. I have friends who are frustrated because their parents have dropped the ball on that and they are stuck with the logistics of making sure reunions take place. I really think this should be the parent=s responsibility.

SAREN:

Wow, holidays get pretty hectic when you have two families to juggle! Since my parents and my husbands= parents live within a five- hour drive from each other, we feel like we should really try to get to both families for holidays. This is OK over Christmas when we

typically have a week or more B but Thanksgiving is tricky, and so are other quick weekend trips. We try to keep things even, visiting each side of the family as equally as possible, and so far, we've been successful. Our families seem to have had a pretty equal number of special events and reunions, which makes it easy to be fair. We try to trade off visiting our different families for the major holidays and our families have been understanding about these trade-offs.

I have lots of friends whose parents can be very demanding of their children's holiday time and very hurt if their kids don't visit as often as they'd like. I think it's important to realize that your kids typically have about two weeks of vacation from work out of the whole year. If they go to family reunions with both families during the summer, that can eat up all their vacation time right there B without saving any time for their own Christmas or their own little family vacation. It's great to invite them home all the time, make sure they know they're always welcome for holidays, but be understanding if they can't always make it for everything you'd like them to come home for.

SUSAN:

My parents and my husband's parents both live within an hour's drive from us. A few years back, my parents decided that the 27th of December would be Christmas for them. They saw no reason why they couldn't just move Christmas back a day so that all their loved ones could be with them every year and still be with their in-laws and/or have their own family Christmas on December 25th. The holidays have been so much nicer since then! My husband's parents have this major feast on Christmas Eve and love doing special stuff with the grand kids on Christmas morning. We tried to trade off going to my parents and my husband's parents on Christmas Eve and morning, but it felt like we were running all over and never really pleasing everyone. Now there aren't any conflicts and my kids certainly

don't complain about having Christmas twice every year!

MARK:

My family is really close and we seem to get together all the time. We have big-deal reunions B usually a cruise or a trip somewhere great. My wife=s family, on the other hand, is smaller and they=re content with getting together every couple of years. She has two brothers who are much older than her and her parents are a lot older. She=s never felt like she has a whole lot in common with any of them. When they do get together, they like to go to movies and play silent games like chess or scrabble. Frankly, neither I nor my wife really cares to get together with her family B and the kids complain about visiting them. AIt=s so boring.@ AWhat are we going to do there?@ ADo we have to go for three whole days?@ It=s pretty sad, I guess.

My wife says sometimes that she feels bad that we=re so uneven in how much time we spend with our families, and she wonders if it bothers her family B but they=ve never said anything. I know it=s really important to them that we visit at least once a year. They do try to plan some things that the kids might like B but they=re pretty out of touch with their needs. Last year they took us to this petting zoo B obviously designed for toddlers B and my kids are 8 and 10. The kids thought it was pretty lame, although they were nice about it (we threatened them). Anyway, I guess we=ll just keep things the way they are B we don't know what to do. I hate to admit it, but deep down, I guess I=m glad that we don't need to visit Marie=s parents more often B it means we can use all our vacation time doing stuff with my family!

SAREN:

Here are the top responses I got in a discussion with LTNs on this question:

! Talk with your kids well in advance about dates for weddings, reunions, and

other family events. Try to accommodate their schedules when possible. Be understanding if they can't make it to every family event.

! Decide together how often you will all be able to count on seeing each other.

Will you have a reunion every summer? When? How long will it be?

! Make expectations clear and, if they live far away, be consistent about helping to pay for airfare to get them home.

! Well in advance, invite your kids to everything important -- extended family reunions, graduations of younger kids in your family and cousins, etc. It's important that they feel included and informed. Understand, however, that they will not be able to attend all of these events. If they know about things in advance, though, there's a better chance they might be able to come. You never know when your kids are going to be able to get some time off, or when they may have other things going on with friends or business in your area.

! Acknowledge the importance of them spending time with their in-laws.

! Acknowledge the importance of them having their own family time and vacation time with just their spouse and kids.

! When they do come home, make it special for them. Plan favorite meals and activities. Don't just sit around together in the same house and make them wonder why they came. Always ask them in advance about some of the things they hope to do while they are home.

! Understand that they will probably want to spend time with friends and other family members in the area when they come to visit. Don't expect them to spend every minute with you.

! Try to set a time every year when everyone will do their best to get together

(often summer reunions work best since most families trade off which parents to spend Christmas with). Have a schedule and an agenda so your time spent together really counts. If possible, have a special and traditional place to gather each year.

R&L:

Isn't it interesting to see how much the grown children want the identity of an extended family reunion. Back on pages ____ to ____ we presented our personal feelings about the *elements* you need to bring together to have a successful reunion.

Additional Perspectives, Motivations, and Ideas for LDS Parents

50. What is my role in the gospel-teaching testimony-building of my grand children?

CHARITY JADE:

You need to be a good example, share your testimony and teach them about the gospel whenever you're with them. It will be fun!

Lonnie P.: Well, this is the best question of all. That's my vision of grand parenting at its best! Reading a Bible or Book of Mormon storybook to my grand children. I can't wait. It's the best role of all.

Kenneth W.: Don't take the stewardship away from the parents. But help where you can. I think just letting grand kids know you have a testimony is the key thing.

Pam J.: You know, I have an even more specific answer -- something I've been trying. Tell them stories about you when you were their age . . . and about any of their other grandparents or ancestors. They love it, especially if

you have pictures or maybe even a family tree with pictures so they can see where they came from and who they look like. If you tell them a true story about an ancestor=s testimony or mission or conversion or an act of courage or honesty . . . They just internalize this kind of stuff. I think it makes them feel connected and important.

SHAWNI:

I think grandparents should try to teach their grandchildren everything they=ve taught their own children if they get a chance. I think any parent would love to have their own parents reinforcing the most important things they try to teach their kids. I love that my parents help my children pray, teach them more about Christ, encourage them to bear their testimonies, etc. I couldn=t ask for better helpers to teach my children the most important things in life.

R&L:

First of all, don=t think of teaching the gospel to grand children as an obligation or responsibility. It is a *joy!* What could be better than the opportunity to transfer parts of the most valuable possession to yet another generation.

Essentially, there are two ways to do so: 1. Individually -- with just one or two grandchildren at a time -- discussing, asking, listening, telling stories that teach principles -- especially stories about yourself -- and even more especially, stories about yourself at their age. 2. In groups or Ameetings.@ Many of our most cherished memories (and still one of our favorite traditions) is a family testimony meeting after we get home from

church and before we eat on Fast Sundays. We sit in a big circle in our living room -- in the same place and the same circle as when someone is ordained or confirmed or blessed -- and bear our testimonies to each other. All our kids are rarely there at once, but several always are, on any given Fast Sunday. We're often joined by a close friend or two, for the first time, by one or more grand children. Feelings are expressed in these meetings that don't come out as deeply in any other place or at any other time. The spirit witnesses our love for each other and testifies to each of us of what each other knows and believes. We have begun to feel that the best way to strengthen the testimonies of the next generation is just to get them to this family testimony as soon as they are old enough.

Oh what a special and unique testimony we can bear to our grandchildren when the opportunity permits -- individually or in a group. We can tell them what we believe and the experiences we have had that helped us believe. We can promise to be examples for them and we can extend to them a pure and spiritual love. We can give to them our spiritual heritage and inheritance. We can tell them things we learned the hard way so they won't have to make the same mistakes.

In the long run, our grandchildren will revere us more for what we have taught them of the gospel than for what we have left them of the world.

Peak 4 Review: Your three-generation family.

Nowhere in the Bible (or, to our knowledge in other sacred and ancient scripture) is the word *family* used to describe a two-generation household. *Family* always means more than that -- three generations or more. As an empty nest parent and a grandparent, you are now the patriarch or matriarch of a real three generation family from generations if your parents are still alive! You have the opportunity to create a beautiful family culture that will bless and enrich your own life and the lives of every family member.

The time and mental energy you used to use to read bedtime stories or pick up car pools or help with high school homework can now be used to plan family reunions or to visit new grandchildren or to orchestrate family e-mail updates or family chat rooms where you develop an extended family mission statement.

The point is that if we think of families as two generations only, then your grandchildren *replace* you as the other generation in your children's family. It's like odd man out or a game of musical chairs with only two chairs. And you are the one left standing, left out, labeled as redundant or past the point of usefulness or relevance.

But if we learn, together with our children, to think of families as three of four generations, then we are the respected matriarchs and patriarchs, useful and important in countless ways, enriching the lives of our children and grandchildren by our advice, our assistance, and our support even as they enrich ours by their respect, love, and friendship.

Additional LDS Perspectives and Insights

The perspective of the pre-existence is such a powerful prism through which to see more accurately the whole process and flow of expanding families.

Our children came to us as stewardships from their (and our) true father. They were, in the pre-mortal world, at least as mature of spirits as we, and their entrustment, as helpless infants into our inexperienced care, was a great act of faith on their parts as well as a profound gift from God. They could have just as well been our parents but for the birth order that Heaven ordained. So we try to respect them and to raise them the way their true Father would want them to be raised.

Then they themselves take their turn as parents and we watch them welcome their own little stewardships. What a joy to now see more clearly how it all fits together. And what a privilege to be there on the sidelines, getting into the action when we are asked or prompted, watching their family expand within ours, even as ours expands within His.

Section III

Conclusion

It's all about asking and listening.

When I (Richard) was a mission president, I once had a young missionary who, in an interview, asked me a most interesting question: "What do you think," he said, "is the most frequently repeated admonition in the holy scriptures?"

"Do you mean the thing God tells us most often to do?" I asked.

"Yes," he said. "What advice or counsel does God give the most often, the most repetitively? What's number one?" (This elder was quite a scripture student and also something of a trivia expert and statistician.)

"Something to do with love or loving," I guessed.

"Nope, that's number three."

"Then how about something to do with repenting?"

"That's number two."

"O.K.," I said, "I give up. What's number one?"

"To ask," he said. "God's most frequently repeated admonition is to ask."

I've thought a lot about that. Linda and I have thought a lot about it together. If we are God's children (as we believe we are), and if He has placed us here on the earth to learn and progress through our experiences and our choices (as we believe He has), and if God respects our agency by letting us take the initiative rather than Him (as we believe He does), then our *asking* is the key to everything. God wants to bless us, to help us, to guide us, but He waits for us to ask so it is our choice, our initiative, our learning and progress. This is the point illustrated by the great Christian painting that shows Christ on a doorstep, knocking on

our door, willing to come in to our lives. But there is no latch or handle on His side of the door. We have to open the door from inside, from our side, by *asking*.

There are three powerful ENP applications or adaptations of this principle of asking, and if we understand and implement all three of them, we will meet every challenge and succeed at every opportunity that has been suggested in section three.

1. Make *asking* your prime conversational approach with your adult children. Hold off on the advice, judgment, and criticism that jumps into your head. Ask questions instead. Don't ask like an interrogator or a cross examiner. Ask like an interested friend. Ask about feelings and hopes. Ask about day-to-day activities. And when you really feel like you know what's going on (and they really feel like you care), ask what you can do to help.

2. Ask them to ask you . . . and thank them for asking when they do. Really *discuss* the important difference it makes when your adult children *ask* you for your input or advice. It automatically makes you a helpful consultant rather than a bossy manager or a nosey superior. When they ask, you can respond with love and without that uncomfortable feeling that you might be interfering or imposing.

3. Ask God for help. Most parents who have any kind of faith or belief in a higher power eventually come to two conclusions: First, parenting at any stage is a super-human task where we need all the help we can get from a higher source; and second, our children are really God's children, so it is appropriate and natural to ask for His help. Parents, especially in times of intense worry and crisis, often find a level of faith and prayer beyond what they have known. Rather than waiting for crisis, we should learn to pray more often and more consistently for help from our Father in wisely caring for His children.

Once you get the asking going . . . there's one more thing: Listen! Listen and then ask some more. Ask and listen. Listen and ask. Make it your mantra and your motto.

SECTION IV

Empty Nest Parenting

Establishing a Family Strategy for the Rest of Your Life

Two Ways to Fail -- *Abdicate* or *Arbitrate*

Okay, here's the worry: There are two perfectly predictable ways to fail at empty nest parenting . . . and most of us are headed directly for one of them. Ironically, they are the exact opposite of each other -- yet each is a virtual guarantee of a deterioration of your relationship with your grown children. One way is to *abdicate* -- to simply quit parenting once your kids leave home -- to have no strategy or plan about what you will or won't help with -- to step totally aside and give them complete independence unless or until they come to you with a problem and they hope you'll find a way to help. The other way is to *arbitrarily* lay down a pattern or set of standards -- how much financial help they'll get, what responsibilities they'll take and what ones you'll keep -- all *without* their input or agreement.

We're thinking of one family we know who had a little *send off* party each time one of their three children went off to college. It was like a celebration, a *bon voyage!* -- a goodbye party for the child and a retirement party for the parents. The tone was, *A.O.K.* we're done, good luck. Try not to bother us but if you really need something, call and we'll try to help.

Another family, a single father, was the complete opposite. With the help of his attorney he drafted a document that laid out not only a trust account and a precise schedule of when his children would receive what funds, but also a schedule of when they would visit home, when and how they would communicate by phone and e-mail, how he expected them to budget their time and their money and where he expected them to be in their professional careers by the end of the decade.

Most parents don't do it this quickly or this distinctly, but most do gravitate gradually toward one or the other of those two extremes -- to *abdicate* or to *arbitrate*. Once again, both of these courses are guaranteed to drive parents and children apart! What is needed instead is a carefully planned and communicated middle course involving a well-discussed and agreed upon *strategy* of how the relationship, the independence, and the assistance will evolve as the child goes through the *phases* of moving out, going to school, working and starting his or her own family. It is like a spectrum where we need to pull ourselves to the middle rather than be sucked to one end or the other:

<u>abdicate:</u> Back off and just wait for needs and problems	<u>consult and communicate:</u> Develop an agreed on strategy that balances growing independence with gradually decreasing assistance.	<u>arbitrate:</u> Lay down the rules according to what you want.
---	--	---

We hope that, as you read this section, you will be attracted to the middle possibility, that you will see the *opportunity* and the *joy* of communicating and working with your kids to develop a plan for your ongoing relationship with each other. We also hope that you develop a real *fear* of the two extremes and realize that it is *abdicating* or *arbitrating* that *distances* family relationships and eventually cuts off parent from child and child from parent.

The Middle Course

If you decide that you want to pursue the middle course, this book (and particularly this last section) seeks to be both your motivator and your guide. It is not that we think we have all the answers. Rather, it is that we have been through the consulting and communicating *process* with our children that the middle course requires, and we (our family) can serve as a *case study* or an *illustration* of what the process is like. We will present the *pattern* of what we went through, the conclusions we reached, and the strategy we established for our own empty nest parenting and for the relationships we hope to maintain and build with our adult children and their families.

You will not necessarily follow or copy our conclusions or our solutions. Rather, they can serve as a *stimulus* (along with the other alternative approaches and examples from other families) for the development of your own unique strategy based on your own unique situation and your own unique communication with your own unique children. We've done the research and sifted through the ideas enough to save you some time and to push you ahead in creating your own approach.

The Case Study Method

I (Richard) remember with crystal and poignant clarity the day I dropped our first daughter, Saren, at Stone Hall, her dorm at Wellesley College outside Boston. She had just turned eighteen and was beginning her freshman year. As our oldest child, she had already assumed a lot of responsibility in her young life, particularly for her younger brothers and sisters, and as a result, she was mature beyond her years in many ways. Still, this was a long way from home and a long way from her comfort zone.

I remember the thoughts that flooded my mind that night as I held her in my arms for

one last hug before I headed for the airport. Linda had been there the week before, helping her move into her dorm and get started. In a way Saren was probably anxious to see me go -- we=d been doting over her, first Linda and then me, for more than a week. But another part of her was clinging on to me, as through our tears we said our first real goodbye to each other.

AWe=ll see you at Thanksgiving Sar B it=s less than three months away.@

AI know. I=ll look forward to it every day, Dad -- but don=t worry about me, I=m fine, and I love it here.@

I think it was after the hug -- during my hour-long drive to Boston=s Logan Airport -- that it really hit me. The transition had begun. Our first child had left our nest, and our relationship would never again be quite the same. How did we want the relationship to evolve? Where was the balance between giving the kids their independence and staying involved in their lives? As they spin off into their own orbits, how strong should our gravity be?

Since then, we=ve gone through that emotional first real goodbye six more times. It=s never any easier and it=s unique and different every time. Some kids are more ready to go than others (and some you=re more ready to let go than others). But it always tugs at your heart and there are always a million questions.

The real purpose of Section Three is to help you anticipate some of these questions and to formulate some answers so that you are ready when you need them. Now, in Section Four, we want to go beyond that to an actual plan or strategy for effective empty nest parenting and for building a happy and nurturing extended family. We felt the best way we could help is to share our own experience (both the ideas that worked and the ones that didn=t).

I remember another time in Boston, an earlier time -- nineteen years before that

goodbye with Saren: Linda and I were just married -- Linda soon to be pregnant with Saren, and I was entering my first year at Harvard Business School. The classes were (and still are) taught entirely by the case study method. Instead of a lot of theory and instruction, students are just presented with a situation -- a *story* to follow -- and asked to think about what the characters did and to see where they agree and disagree and what they would have done differently. I found that the case study approach made me think and drew out my own creativity in my effort to find *my* solutions. That case study method is basically the approach we will take in this Section Four of this book. After some opening discussion and stories about each aspect of empty nest parenting, we=ll use our own family as a case study, laying out our own discussions and communication with each other in our struggles to reach agreements and guidelines for how we wanted to relate to and help each other as our children moved out, went to school, entered careers, got married, and had children of their own.

Actually, the AEyre case study@ got started in Section Three. You as a reader are already somewhat acquainted with our adult children via the comments and inputs each of them made in part two. You=ll get to know them better (and perhaps know your own kids better by association) here in part three.

The evolution of our case study is probably more complicated than your own situation for two reasons: First, we have nine children and, strangely enough, no two of them are alike. And second, we were writing this book at the same time as we were trying to figure out and restructure our own family so we wrote down and documented everything. Please don=t feel that you have to go to quite the lengths we have to figure out your empty nest parenting. Just *glean* what makes sense to you from our case study, and use the parts you like as a headstart on your own strategy.

We are convinced that parents have an open channel to inspiration from a higher

source when it comes to the divine stewardship they have over their own children. Our case study and the other points we make in this concluding section will hopefully be the *prompts* that will cause you to think (and to pray) about your own unique children and your own particular family, and as you do, we promise you that you will find your own answers and your own strategies!

Remember that what follows is not intended to be a *model* for you to follow. A case study is different than a model in that it merely brings to mind points you should think about and directions you might consider rather than laying out some formula for you to follow. This Section Four is highly personal because it is an honest account of exactly what our family went through. It if seems a little overwhelming at times while you're reading it, remember that it was a process that evolved over many months. As we were going through it (and you'll probably feel this as you read it), we often felt like it was just too much and that maybe we should quite trying so hard to figure everything out and just let life happen. When we felt like that, we would remind ourselves of the reason we were doing it (and the reason, by the way, that we were writing this book). That reason, in a nutshell, is this: IN OUR BELIEF IN ETERNAL FAMILY, WE MUST, THROUGHOUT LIFE, MAINTAIN AND IMPROVE OUR RELATIONSHIPS AND OUR UNITY, FOR IN THEM LIES THE CORE OF OUR JOY IN THIS LIFE AND THE NEXT. THUS A DEFENSE (WHERE WE TRY TO FIX THINGS AS THEY BREAK) IS NOT ENOUGH. WE NEED AN OFFENSE AND A WORKING STRATEGY FOR HOW OUR FAMILY IS TO PRESERVE AND OUR RELATIONSHIP EXPANDED DURING THE EMPTY NEST YEARS!

Process Over Product

You'll notice, throughout this case study, how our approaches and agreements

evolved through our process of communicating with our children and gradually *developing* a family constitution and extended family mission statement along with some plans or principles that would get us there. It's this *process* -- some kind of communicating and collectively *developing* your approach and your united sense of what your family should be and how it will operate -- that really draws family members together and gives them all ownership in the final product (and *commitment* to it). Again, our *process* was particularly long, since we have nine children and were trying to write this book as we went along . . . and your process will be different than ours, but equally important!

Cromwell said, "I wouldn't give a fig for the simplicity that lies on this side of complexity, but I would give my right arm for the simplicity that lies beyond complexity." What we did was go through a fairly complex process (and a lot of drafts and discussions) to figure out how to get to simplicity. We wanted to discuss and think about our growing, evolving future family in all its dimensions and complexity -- getting everyone involved -- and then pull and distill and conceptualize that diversity and complexity back to certain simple principles and basic strategies and agreements that every one of us had ownership in and commitment to.

So first we talked. We talked at family reunions and on conference calls. We talked through e-mail and family chat rooms. We came up with ideas and e-mailed them to each other. Finally the two of us started trying to put things in writing -- sending out memos to our far-flung kids and asking for their responses on each of the five facets of how we wanted to function as an empty nest family: 1. emotionally (how we would love and encourage each other), 2. socially (how our roles and relationships should evolve and how our communication could stay open and positive), 3. physically (financially and temporal

guidelines and policies), 4. mentally (sharing goals and dreams and keeping each other mentally stimulated and educated), and 5. spiritually (how we would remain united and serve and support each other in the Church and the gospel).

These memo and responses evolved from ideas to *agreements*. It was, we think, a good example of gradually moving toward the simplicity that lies beyond complexity. Simple ideas led to the fairly complicated memos that you'll see in this section, and then progressed beyond that complexity to the much simpler sets of principles, practices, and premises in each of the five areas or facets.

By the way, if you're thinking my kids wouldn't take the time to read or respond to memos or to get involved in this big process, let us make an admission. We believe in bribery! Knowing how busy our adult children are, we offered to pay them for the time they would have to put in to get involved -- to read and respond to the memos. After all, they'd be helping us with *our* empty nest parenting. Of course their prime motivation would be love and their own desire to preserve our family. But sometimes a little secondary motivation helps to get things done when there are so many other things competing for our time. It's like paying small children a little bit to practice on the piano when they are first starting. Their real motivation (and you tell them this) is that music and playing an instrument will become a great joy to them. But *until* it is, a little secondary motivation helps. We told our grown kids the obvious: That working together on a plan for our long-term family was important and would benefit all of us over the long term. But we also acknowledged the reality of how busy they were and respected that by offering to pay them a little for the time it would take to respond and input and be involved.

If they had lived closer to us, our process would have been *meetings* rather than *memos*, and maybe a big Sunday dinner could have provided the secondary motivation. We

did manage to get everyone together (except missionary Noah) for our annual family reunion a few months after the back-and-forth e-mails you=ll be reading -- and Saren suggests later in this chapter that maybe we could have simplified the whole process and done it all at the reunion. Perhaps that just underscores the point that there are many ways to do it, but the important thing is *to do it*.

Results!

The *result* of our own efforts to figure out empty nest parenting were:

1. A family constitution@ consisting of agreements in five areas:
 - a. Emotional Empty Nest Parenting (a strategy for finding an emotional balance between continuing to care for them and having a life of our own).
 - b. Social Empty Nest Parenting (a strategy for establishing secure, lasting and mutually beneficial relationships among family members).
 - c. Physical (Financial) Empty Nest Parenting (a strategy for giving the assistance that boosts them ahead without undermining the independence that maximizes who they are).
 - d. Mental Empty Nest Parenting (a strategy for transforming ourselves from managers to consultants and for developing and helping each other with synergistic individual goals).
 - e. Spiritual Empty Nest Parenting (a strategy for developing a long-term spiritual unity and strengthening each other=s testimonies and eternal insights).
2. A general vision statement@ which is a declaration of purpose about what we want our family to be and how we hope to connect and relate to each other as

we separate and decentralize . . . the purpose or goal of our family.

3. A boiled down mission statement that serves like a motto.

SARENS PREFACE TO SECTION FOUR

Let me just warn you up front here. This case study is long. It'll hopefully be interesting enough that you can read it fairly quickly through and perhaps much of what is said will likely remind you of situations, feelings, concerns and issues in your own family. But to tell you the truth, the process was a little longer and more involved for our family than it really needed to be. Hindsight is always clearer than foresight, right? To introduce this section to you from my perspective, let me outline the process we went through and then suggest how we could have done it more simply and make a few suggestions for how you may want to explore issues and devise a plan for working together in your own unique way as an empty nest family.

First of all, my parents sent out a series of memos, one on each facet of empty nest families (the emotional, social, mental, physical (financial), and spiritual aspects), to all of us grown up kids. They asked that we read them carefully and respond. Then, taking all our responses into consideration, they took a crack at creating fairly simple agreements, spelling out principles, promises, and practices for each facet. They sent all these agreements out to us, and asked again for our response. We all sent in additions, edits, and comments and ultimately we came up with a final version of the agreements. Then we worked together to create an adult realm vision statement and mission statement, encapsulating the basic gist of what we all want to do for each other and be to each other as we move forward as an empty nest family.

Before you think that we all found time to quickly and thoughtfully respond to all

these memos and agreements purely out of devotion to our family and respect for our parents, please know that our parents offered us a little stipend to cover the time it took to work on all this. Still, it was like pulling teeth to get some people to get their responses sent in! The fact that there are so many of us and that we live all over the country also made the process more complex and more focused on reading and writing than it would need to be for most families. I don't think it's realistic or necessary for you to go through such a lengthy, written process in order to come up with a set of agreements for how everyone wants to support each other in a family of adults. It's important that everyone has a chance to contribute to agreements about how their empty nest family will work, but for most families, this can be accomplished very nicely through in-person discussions or conference calls.

Still, the fact that we wrote it all down allows us to share it with you. So bear with us, skip the parts that don't seem relevant to your family, and at the end of the case study, I'll make some suggestions on how you might simplify the whole process.

CASE STUDY

Once we had decided that we really wanted to [get serious](#) about the whole business of empty nest parenting and about creating solid agreements between ourselves and our children regarding what our family should be and how it should function as kids move away, we decided that the first step was to try to write some kind of memo about the process we would have to go through to figure it all out.

So . . . we started with the following note sent out by e-mail to try to capture a lot of what we'd been talking about within our family. (By the way, we call our family [Eyrealm](#).)

*To: Eyrealm
From: Dad and Mom
Re: Eyrealm Evolution*

Note: Please read this carefully. It reflects a lot of what we've talked about and tries to provide the basis for how we'll try to structure our ongoing family. Read this with your pen out! Edit it and mark any questions you have or changes you'd like to see.

1. *Raising each of you and having you with us full time for eighteen years has been by far our greatest joy and privilege as well as our most important stewardship. The traditions and rituals were developed in our family, our ways of helping and showing love for each other, our family rules and family economy . . . these are the very heart and substance of our lives, and we know that we have learned more from you (and from being your parents) than we have taught you. As we have tried to raise you, you have completed us as people and opened within us capacities for love far beyond what we could have otherwise known. Since you are the source of so much joy (A joy@ defined as challenge as well as pleasure), it is only natural that we have such apprehension and anxiety about your departure and that we miss you so much once you're gone -- so much that we're actually somewhat comforted when you tell us that you miss us too.*

2. *Perhaps it's partly because of what you've taught us about where real joy comes from that we want to continue to be active, involved parents (albeit in a different way) after you've left home. We don't want to lose any of the joy (or the security or the pride or the challenge) when you don't live here full time anymore -- nor do we want you to lose any of it. That's why we're so anxious to redefine our relationship now that you're gone -- in ways that are helpful and useful to you without being overbearing or overprotective -- in ways that increase your independence even as they preserve our interdependence -- so that we can have the strength of depending and relying and counting on each other without the weakness of being too dependent on each other. This transition, from the dependence of your childhood to the independence and interdependence of your adulthood is the subject of this draft memo, which we will finalize with your inputs. If we have the right strategy and approach to the transition, it can be a progressive thing of beauty and power. Together with you, we want to develop and create our family's approach to the progression of this transition so that we're acting on a well-conceived strategy rather than reacting to circumstances as they come up.*

3. *The transition can be diagrammed to help us conceptualize it better:*
childhood _____ adulthood

<i>the security, identity and pride _____ of our nuclear family</i>	<i>the security, identity and pride _____ of your nuclear family and our extended family</i>
---	--

<i>your dependence _____ on us</i>	<i>your growing and _____ evolving independence</i>	<i>our chosen interdependence _____ on each other</i>
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As a baby and a child, you were almost completely dependent on us, and it was

our stewardship for you that taught us so much of a deeper love. Much of your early security and larger-than-self identity hopefully came from being part of our family. As you grew, you became, usually with our encouragement, more and more independent in various ways . . . from learning to walk and talk and dress yourself to learning to make good choices, to think for yourself and to develop and follow your personal values. Although the transition was gradual, parts of it became rather abrupt when you moved out of the house and into your own world as a college freshman. Separation can enhance the transition, hopefully without breaking any family bonds. Gradually the transition takes on additional financial and social dimensions and eventually leads to marriage and to a family of your own, refocusing your security, identity and pride in your own nuclear family. As the transition progresses, we hope the emotional and spiritual support and connections between us never weaken. In fact, we hope they continue to grow into a marvelous and chosen interdependence where your family cares for ours, and ours for yours.

4. *Practically speaking, this transition probably has four key parts or phases, each adding new levels of independence and self-responsibility.*
 - A. *When you first move out. In our family this means the freshman year -- new bed, new environment, new life. Dramatically increased mental, physical, and social independence.*
 - B. *When you first go to work full time -- generally after graduation, perhaps before graduate school. Big changes in financial independence.*
 - C. *When you get married. Now your emotional dependence shifts to your own family.*
 - D. *When you have children of your own, the cycle starts over. You start learning, as we did, from life=s greatest stewardship, and we start enjoying the greatest privilege of all -- grand parenting.*

5. *Nothing about the transition or its stages is predictable or necessarily sequential. Everyone of you will live a unique life and do things and learn things in your own way. Given that uniqueness and unpredictability, it is even more important to have as much stability, reliability, and predictability as possible in the way we will help each other and relate to each other within our family. How much better it is if we=ve agreed in advance on some things . . . thought through a pattern of financial assistance for different phases, for example, or worked out a strategy for staying emotionally in touch. Each of your lives are increasingly busy, and, strangely enough, so are ours, and since day-to-day necessity doesn=t force us to interact and communicate anymore, how important it is to have well-thought approaches for ongoing communication and helping and sharing between us.*

6. *This whole business, which from our perspective we are calling Δ Empty Nest*

Parenting@ should be a process of thinking together and agreeing together with you. There should be nothing arbitrary or unilateral about it. Our strategy should be composed of a series of agreements about how we will handle certain things, how we will balance our assistance with your independence, how we will give advice enough but not too much, how we will communicate and get together and preserve family traditions. These agreements will take some thought and some discussion (and hopefully some creativity) and need to accurately reflect each other=s needs as well desires.

7. *One way to look at the whole transition is to try to analyze the various facets of the change. What changes emotionally as you move away -- and how should these changes be handled? What changes socially? What changes physically (financially)? What changes mentally? What changes spiritually? How can each of these changes be dealt with and built on positively so we can each learn and grow from them? As we think about these things together, we can anticipate a lot and have some approaches and strategies in mind that will keep our family together in the ways we want it to stay together even as the circumstances and time lines of our lives pull us apart.*

PROPOSED AGREEMENT ON AGREEMENTS:

Since we=re the empty nest parents (and still the stewards though in a very different way), we=ll take some of the initiative by putting together a series of memos -- draft memos -- on these various aspects of our long-term relationship with you and on the various parts or phases of the transition. We=ll get these drafts to you one at a time so you can respond and revise. We=ll work at being clear on each other=s needs. We=ll develop together some strategies, some standards, and some systems that will maximize our individual and collective happiness (which we think is the basic reason we were put together in a family in the first place). Hopefully the end product will be something like a family constitution@ and out of it we can draw a family mission statement.

Love, Mom and Dad

We received varied reactions to this first memo from our children. Here is a sampling . . . some excerpts of what they e-mailed back to us:

SAREN:

I totally agree that as we Aspin off@ into our own lives and families, it=s important for us to figure out how we can best increase our necessary independence and build great

relationships with new family members while maintaining the enormously beneficial relationships we have with everyone in the family. I think that basic principles are important in order to do this. Systems such as we had when we were at home won't work with this new phase of our family. There can be formulas for financial support and regular plans for family reunions. There can be agendas and meetings when we get together. There can be established methods of communication and advice-seeking and giving. But we need some basic principles that we all agree to, and individual approaches that suit each person's needs, rather than a bunch of new systems. I think you realize this I'm just stating it clearly for us all.

I really like paragraph 3 and wish that more parents understood the principle of dependence leading to independence, leading to interdependence! There are way too many parents out there who try to keep their kids safely tucked under their wing for too long, or who very abruptly cut their kids off too soon in their lives.

On paragraph 5, I think that while we should definitely have these strategies and expectations, we need to all accept that they should be subject to flexibility and change (as long as everyone agrees on a proposed change). Situations will arise that none of us can anticipate right now. Plus we all have very different needs on some issues so I think it's important that we all understand the basic principles but we're all willing to accept that there will be exceptions.

SHAWNI:

I feel that communication is definitely the bottom line. It has to be there to make good relationships and build a strong family. I'm just so thankful that you guys care enough to make our communication even better even though I thought it was good to begin with. It IS

different when we take off for college, marriage, etc. and it's so important to keep working on our relationships and to be open with what we expect and want so we can continue to be so close.

On paragraph 2, I think we can all function OK on our own, and don't die if we can't talk every single day, yet we yearn to talk to each other and we consider each other best friends. I don't know what I would do without each of our family members. I want to tell you guys things and want to share my life with you and I want to know all about what everyone else is doing. And I am so glad we are all doing such different things because we learn and gain so much from each other.

In paragraph 3, as much as I love my own amazing new little family now, I would feel SO much loss if I didn't have the emotional and spiritual support from you guys that I've always had. It is so strong and it completes me.

JOSH:

I think that it is so great that learning goes both ways, and more importantly that we have parents that acknowledge that . . . some parents don't accept the fact that their children have so much to teach them.

I think that in a way, the transition is complete before we move out to college. Then when we actually move out, we implement many things that we have learned, that up until that time were just ideas about how we would act when we left. It's like we were developing our own values and choices for 18 years.

Just a comment on paragraph 5: A lot of the interaction and communication we will be doing will be totally spontaneous. While it is good to have approaches in place, they will be ever changing as we continue to learn and grow.

SAYDI:

All families are going to be different, with their own strengths and challenges. However, all families have the same basic needs and structure and power to hurt and to heal. Thus, it is essential that parents and families engage in the struggle. I see so many families in my work as a family counselor who just kind of float through their lives, they don't give solid thoughts to what is happening, what forces they are letting take control. They just live, floating where the wind and current take them. They don't sit and think about the challenges, the unique circumstances, the directions they want to go in, the principles they want to sail by, the currents they want to catch and avoid. . . . Families are strengthened when they acknowledge and work at their struggles and find a small helm of understanding and unity with which they are able to direct the winds and waves that push them to higher realms. Without this small helm, without unity, without thought and deliberation, the same winds and waves leave us shipwrecked. I've seen this happen to so many families. I'm grateful that we have learned to be strugglers. To be aware and engaged in what new challenges face us so that they don't come and simply blow us over. I love it that mom and dad are doing all this stuff now before we all get too imbedded in our independence. You never know where we could end up if we didn't think first . . . down the road we could all be walking on eggshells , having great regrets about not giving advice, not asking for advice or not taking advice because we were too proud. It's just so good that we are thinking about it all.

I love it that Mom and Dad want to stay active in our lives. It makes sense. If they didn't have this great urge to stay connected I'd be sad. I believe that these memos will be good and that we need to find a good balance.

But, Mom and Dad are essentially saying, AWe need to come up with strategies, approaches or formulas. I don't think that I really agree with this way of thinking of it at all.

We are all so different, I think that it would be amazingly hard, if not impossible, to come up with precise strategies to use in different situations. I think the thing that would work best is to come up with a list of principles that we can all agree to live by. I believe that we need to commit to principles that ring true to our hearts and then we can act straight from our hearts. Something about reading the memo just seemed a little too strategic to me for dealing with human emotions and experiences. It is good to analyze things, but it's also very important to consult your heart and live in the spirit so that our relationships and communications can be lead and directed by that which is higher and all knowing and all understanding.

AJA:

I respect the fact that acting on a well-conceived strategy rather than to circumstances as they come up is a very stable and good managing technique. But I believe that part of the uniqueness of families in comparison to other organizations is their potential to deal so individually with its members and grow and change with time, all the while maintaining complete unity. Any plan to facilitate communication through and around an empty nest must be as dynamic and flexible as the present and future members that make it up.

TALMADGE:

It's interesting that as I read this, it dawns on me that there are so many social problems in this world because people don't have families or responsibility enough to raise kids correctly. Therefore they get caught up on other things to please them and keep them excited.

I've always thought you leave home and just find out from there. Your family is

still a nice support when you need it but you're on your own. I guess I thought that because I've see it on many occasions. It's a NORM. But I think our family can be a DEVIANT* and break into a new and more higher perspective where we've thought it through and know in advance how we'll handle some things.*

**These words ANorm@ and ADeviant@ I just learned in my social problems class.*

In the kids= responses it became clear that many of them were a little wary of Astrategies and Asystems@ and wanted instead to think more in terms of basic principles and simple flexible agreements that allowed everyone to be themselves and do things their own way.

Still, we all agreed that it was a process and that we might have to start by laying everything out and then simplifying it and boiling it down.

Emotional Empty Nest Parenting

Finding the Balance Between **AHanging On@** and **ALetting Go@**

The Psalmist said, *ATo every thing there is a season.@* For most of us who are writing or reading this book, it is autumn, or at least Indian Summer. Our children have grown up and have left or are beginning to leave home like leaves falling from the trees.

So how do we think about fall? It is a time of loss and decline, or is it the most glorious and colorful time of all? Is it a time when our family separates and dissipates or a time when it reaches its full richness and maturity? For us parents, is it a time when we retreat or retire from family life or a time when we redefine our role as advisers and mentors and grandparents and patriarchs and matriarchs of three-generation families?

As we make these fall decisions and set our autumn priorities, we ought to also be thinking about winter. When real old age comes, do we want to be alone or to be emotionally surrounded by our children and grand children?

Studies on longevity have shown that those who retire earliest die soonest, and that those in the most engaging and creative vocations live longest. Orchestra conductors lived the longest of all professions surveyed. That bears some thought. Maestros are always creating, always mentoring, always orchestrating, always conducting. Can we, in the fall and winter of our lives, become the maestros of our families?

Pain and Gain

The best decisions are made and the best goals set when we carefully analyze both the long-term pain and long-term gain that are likely to accrue from various alternative directions. If we make choices for the fall of our lives that allow the emotional bonds and family to fray

or weaken, a lot of *pain* will result, both in the sense of what our children and grandchildren will miss out on and in terms of our own loneliness. If we make the choice and take the steps to keep our families emotionally close despite the Adepartures and distances,@ we will *gain* security and Aconnectedness@ and motivation for our children and involved Ausefulness@ and perhaps even longer lives for ourselves.

The beginning step in the active, involved, family-prioritized approach to the autumn of our lives is to have a plan for the all important *emotional* facet of our empty nest parenting, a strategy for continuing to give love, confidence, identity, and emotional support to each other.

What a tall order! Once kids are gone B away from our daily observation and interchange B how do we even know when they are emotionally up or down and how can we gauge what kind of emotional support they need?

The simple answer is that you can never give too much love or support, so long as you couple it with confidence in them and respect for their adult independence.

CASE STUDY

In our own effort to figure out this first facet, we again started with a memo in order to try to crystalize our own thoughts and get a discussion going. We weren=t trying to be formal or businesslike, we just needed an organized way to get all of us, living so far apart from each other, to focus on the emotional needs we could help each other with.

To: Eyrealm
From: Mom and Dad
Re: *inding Balance Between Our Two Common Emotional Needs*

1. *When you were little children, all of us living together, thinking more about Little League or being popular at Indian Hills Elementary than about choosing a college major or planning for families of your own -- back in those good old*

days, we felt like there were two things which would, if we could instill them in you, give you a happy life. First was a solid emotional foundation of family identity, security, and pride -- a safe harbor of acceptance and inclusion so that whatever went wrong outside the home you would be comforted and sustained by the unconditional love from within our family. Second was an emerging, growing sense of individual confidence and uniqueness -- so you could gradually begin to strike out on your own, find your own gifts, your own niche, your own way of becoming your truest self.

2. Now that you are mostly grown and mostly gone, we find we still have exactly the same two hopes for you, although perhaps reversed in their emphasis: First, that through your own growth, with God=s help and the occasional bit of advice from us, you find and enjoy your own unique foreordination, building your own family and your own life in your own way, flowering and *Abroadening@* into the person (and the family) that God intended you to be and *Acontributing@* in the directions to which you are particularly suited. Second, that the ongoing love and support of your extended family -- of *Eyrealm B* helps you to magnify it all, to go through the hard times with less pain and through the good times with more joy.
3. There is always a certain dynamic tension between these two most basic emotional needs (the need for the security and identity of being part of something bigger than self and the need for the confidence, individuality, and freedom of being on one=s own). We=re so aware now, as you leave, of the need to balance the two -- to balance *Acontinuing care@* with *Ahaving your own life@*: It=s an issue on both sides of the table. You *Anest leavers@* deserve and desire your new freedom and independence, and yet you want our ongoing interest and involvement. We *Aempty nesters@* want to *Aget a life@* in terms of new freedom to travel and do other things we couldn=t while you were our chosen *Ain-home@* priorities, and yet we deeply want to continue to help and parent you, and to continue to give and receive love and support.
4. **PROPOSED AGREEMENTS DRAFT:** It seems to us that there are two agreements we can come to that will help if not ensure this balance.
 - A. That we each cast ourselves as *Asupporters@* rather than as *Acritics@* -- that we build up rather than tear down, looking for the positive for each other=s choices. What this does is to prioritize each other=s emotional needs above what we might judge to be their mental shortcomings or errors. If we have misgivings for example about a career choice or professional decision one of you is learning toward, we ought to first express our support for you, our love for you, our respect for your agency and our confidence that you ultimately know more about yourself and your destiny than we do. Then, within the warm cocoon of that positive confidence, we should tell you our misgivings and you should consider them. In the other direction, if you question some choice we are making, perhaps to sell a house or to take an extended trip, you ought to take the time to understand our thinking

and reasons and then express support before you raise any concerns or objections.

- B. That we all recognize the need for balance between support/security and individuality/independence and communicate about it, on the one hand, asking questions like, "How much do you want me to be involved in this?" and on the other hand saying, "You know I want and respect your input and your opinion, but after all is said and done, I'm going to have to do what I think is best." Inherent and implicit in all the communication is the unconditional love that supersedes any and all differences of opinion and says that, no matter what, we are always there for each other!*
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Here are some of the reactions and responses we got from our kids:

SAREN:

On paragraph 1, I didn't realize that you guys were specifically focusing on these two Ajoys with us B but now that I look back, it makes sense. I always felt total security within our family and a wonderful safety and warmth in our home. No matter how much we moved and found ourselves in new situations, no matter how friend-less I felt at school, I always had a group of people that I loved to hang out with right in my own family. I also always felt a strong sense of self-worth and confidence in many areas due in large part to the encouragement I received from you guys. THANKS!

It's interesting B as we've left home and developed our unique abilities and personalities, we've grown so much closer to each other in so many ways. We've found bonds and similarities that were hard to see when we were all living on top of each other, fighting for space and attention and separated by age differences that become less and less important as we grow older. At certain periods of time since I've left home, circumstances have led me to draw extra close to each of the older kids in the family.

On paragraph 3: I think you guys do a great job with this, overall. We all love how

much you visit. There=s nothing like a visit to help us feel connected with you and give us the chance to share our own separate lives with you. It=s so important to us for you to meet our friends and see where we work and come to classes with us B maybe partly because we want you to be proud of us B not just in a generic way, but because you KNOW what we=re doing and you know it=s good stuff. It=s also important to us that you understand what=s going on with us because we=ll never outgrow our need for your interest and concern.

I think it=s important that love and support become more and more a two-way thing. When we were little, we needed a whole lot more acts of love and support than we gave. But as we get older and learn more and understand new things, we=re more and more in a position to give you more. I think it=s so healthy and positive for all of us to be helping each other in a more and more equal Agive and take@ manner. It always makes me feel good when you ask for my ideas about what can be done to help someone else in the family.

I remember one time mom and I had a pretty unpleasant phone conversation and she ended up hanging up on me. She seemed overly upset by stuff I said and it was sort of weird B I don=t really remember the details. She called me back a few minutes later and told me, in tears, about what a really hard time she was having with some different things and that talking with me was sort of the Astraw that broke the camel=s back.@ It was so refreshing and so good to have her just totally open up to me and tell me what was on her mind and let me try to talk her through some of the things she was dealing with. I think too many parents are so attached to maintaining the strong parent role B never letting their kids think they might be vulnerable or worried or sad or confused.

On paragraph 4: Dad can say that he respects our point of view and our ability to make a good decision B but he seems to really, truly believe in his heart that his point of view and assessment of the situation and ideas about what we should do are better than ours.

Dad=s like me B he really thinks he=s right almost all the time B and if you really think you=re right, it=s very hard to genuinely accept someone else=s decision if it isn=t what you think is right. I guess the key is really convincing yourself that you do not know the whole situation and you are not really the person involved, so no matter what seems right to you, you could really, truly be wrong.

I think this memo leaves out a few important things about emotional ENP.

I think we should add some specific stuff about how we want to help each other during times of intense emotions B ending a relationship, deciding to get married, losing a job, making career changes, going through identity crises and mid-life crises, trouble with friends, dealing with the death of a loved one . How should parents help their kids when they=re going through something involving intense emotions? How can kids help their parents? It=s important that we know we=ll always be there for each other. I hope that we=ll always feel like we can call each other at any hour of the day or night if we need some emotional support. I want us all to feel that we can cry to each other B that there=s someone out there who will just listen and comfort and commiserate if that is what is needed, or someone who will offer solutions and advice if that=s what=s needed. I want us all to feel each other=s pain and each other=s joy B to weep together and to rejoice together. To me, a big part of the meaning of family is the knowledge that there are people out there who will rejoice with you and weep with you and love you no matter what.

SHAWNI:

I sure felt this A safe harbor @ of acceptance and inclusion. I wonder how you guys did it now that I have kids of my own and want to duplicate that feeling for them. I love how in our family we really did feel secure. I love that we could tell you guys anything and you

could understand. You trusted us and we liked to talk to you about stuff.

On paragraph 3: This sure is a tough balance to achieve. Sometimes I miss being under your wing @ but at the same time I am SO glad you let Dave and I be our own unique family and you let us make our own decisions and never even question them (at least not to us). It=s interesting to hear you say you want to Aget a life@ because it=s so weird to think of it that way. . . . Yet we need to understand that you need your personal space as a couple just as we need ours and I just think that is so important B something I don=t think us kids think about that much and need to focus on more.

JOSH:

Emotional needs are very important. And because we do know more about ourselves than anyone but God, understanding what we want to do or decide to do should come before any misgivings are shared.

I feel that it needs to be stated again here, that if we continue with what we were leaning toward, and choose not to follow your advice, that decision needs to be accepted and respected.

JONAH:

There does need to be a distinguishable difference between the advice that you give now when compared to the advice earlier in our lives. Hopefully you do feel confident that we will make right decisions because of the way we were raised.

I know that we all want to feel less pain and more joy and you give us advice to try to save us from the pain, but some of the pain that we feel is essential to our growth. Try to imagine how you and mom would be now, had you not slept on the floor in Peabody Terrace

and struggled through those first years. I know it is hard to think that we are going to have a hard time but I think that we need to go through these things ourselves.

Let us always look for the positive in others= choices even if the statistics and our own judgment says otherwise. Let us, once a person has made a decision and especially if they have received confirmation from God, totally stand behind them and try to see things from their level and realize that we never have all of the inputs into each other=s lives because we are all so different.

Whether or not we ever get these memos all ironed out, let=s always remember that we love each other and that love will never fail. Emotional support is all about really loving each other, not just when it comes to giving advice.

AJA:

I appreciated its emphasis on the strength of individuality as a partner with the strength of unity. The strength of unity may be given too much attention though, and that strength is typified as coming only out of Eyrealm and not out of other families that a person will build in their lifetime.

Paragraph 1 says that two gifts of Eyrealm should be acceptance and inclusion and individual confidence and uniqueness. I think that both of these gifts and the goals that were behind them lead to a contract of listening and support rather than how we can critique and consult. In other words our emotional agreements should not have an underlying motive of correcting one another but of admiring and sharing life with one another.

I really like 4A and what it=s trying to promote. The line about the warm cocoon of Apositive confidence@ is good, but let=s be sure it doesn=t become a way to introduce a family-friendly tactfulness when dishing out Amisgivings,@ rather than a way to allow

opinions. I think a tact that works in close relationships of this kind would in mean things like the following: the giver always strongly presents misgivings as what they are usually B just opinions (except in the case of maybe life or soul threatening decisions or actions), the misgivings are expressed more of a questioning session, rather than a telling session (i.e. B how does this whole thing make you feel? Do you have any worries about your decision?), the giver offers help in pursuing that and alternate paths in order to make other options more feasible, or perhaps tact might even just include waiting until an opinion is asked for.

I think a great thing to elaborate on would be the meaning of the phrase, AWe are always there for each other.@ This is not implicit to everyone, and it doesn=t mean the same thing for everyone. It would be helpful maybe to even sketch how and what this means. For example, a list might include: we can call each other anytime, anywhere and just be able to talk, or if I was starving, my family would feed me, or if I were going astray, they would help, or when I experience joy, my family experiences it with me, or if I have a heartache, they will listen, if I need a ride to the airport, they are there for me, and when I need a bed to sleep in, they=ll pull down the sheets and tuck me in. The list would be different for everyone, but I think it=s a great thing to think about.

TALMADGE:

I like this stuff. I love that you guys are involved and the question shouldn=t be, AHow much do you want me to be involved in this? @ the question should be from us: AMom or Dad can you help a little with this decision? @

Again, I think the ideal scenario is if the children ask for the help and advice. We need to be the aggressive ones in this. We need to be the ones who take the initiative. When we get offended, it=s because we probably know that we should be the ones figuring out our

lives.

After reading the kids' responses, we realized we had been a little bit off in the focus of our memo. Emotional needs and emotional empty nest parenting is not about advice or correction on what someone is doing. It's purely and simply about love and support and empowerment. The reason for creating the "warm cocoon of positive confidence" is not to soften our misgivings or criticism, it is an end in itself!

We decided we should leave the questions of giving and receiving advice to the social empty nest parenting strategy which is more about our roles and advice-giving communication with each other.

Emotional empty nest parenting is the first facet because it is about giving each other the kind of unconditional love that makes each other facet of empty nest parenting possible. It is about making sure your family is an emotional safe harbor (a metaphor they all seemed to appreciate) where you know you are always loved and accepted no matter what. It is about creating what Stephen Covey calls an "emotional bank account" into which you continue to make such large "deposits" that every other kind of parenting you do can never overdraw it.

Also, once again, the kids' responses were saying that on this emotional level we needed something simpler -- something less like a contract and more like a set of principles we agreed on and promises we would make to each other.

The Eyrealm Emotional Safe Harbor (giving love, confidence, identity, and emotional support to each other).

Case Study:

After much discussion, mostly by phone and e-mail, we finally came up with a metaphor and a format and a set of simple emotional principles that we all agreed on and signed off on.

Dear LTNs:

Thanks for your feedback and inputs. It seems what you're all saying, and we totally agree, is that Eyrealm needs to be, first of all, an emotional safe harbor where we all know we are unconditionally loved and accepted for who we are. Here is a summary of what we've come up with together. It has turned out to be a short and sweet emotional agreement for Eyearlm.

We're glad you've helped us to see that our emotional empty nest parenting, and the agreements and commitments we make in the first (emotional) facet of our adult Eyrealm constitution shouldn't be about advice-giving or correcting or changing each other. On the contrary, they should be about loving and accepting each other for who and what we are. That's what the safe harbor is safe from -- from second-guessing, guilt, the uncomfortable turbulence of people trying to improve you. Questions about those things are best left to other parts of the constitution.

Our emotional agreements are now simplified into some very basic principles, practices, and promises.

Principles of the safe harbor

- ! What people need emotionally from family is unconditional and even irrational (not tied to performance) love, acceptance, approval, and confidence.*
- ! In the adult Eyrealm, this works in all directions, kids need it from parents, parents from kids, parents from each other, kids from each other, and grand kids from all of the above.*
- ! The purpose of the love is not to change each other but to nourish each other.*

Promises of the safe harbor

- ! We will love each other unconditionally and consciously strive to make each other happy.*
- ! We will always be there for each other, night or day, to laugh or cry, to rejoice or commiserate, to share each other's emotion.*

Practices of the safe harbor

- ! We say *love you* instead of (or in addition to) *goodbye* whenever we talk, and we think about it and we mean it.*

- ! *We e-mail and call each other regularly (so we're all updated).*
 - ! *We listen and lift@ developing our gifts of empathy and genuine compliments -- and giving these gifts to each other.*
-

Social Empty Nest Parenting

Sorting Out the Evolving Relationships and Changing Roles

Just as we were trying to fashion our family constitution, we had two experiences that focused our attention on the social part of empty nest parenting. The first involved our adopted Ukrainian son and the second took place at sea on a family cruise.

We adopted Eldar Maximov, a nineteen-year-old Ukrainian boy, when our missionary son Jonah, who had taught and baptized Eldar in London, urged us to do so. We sponsored his entry to the U. S. as a student and helped him as required with living and college expenses. He became like another son to us and has blessed our lives in many ways. One way that Eldar has probably exceeded any of our natural-born children is in his desire to seek our advice on everything and to implement that advice almost unquestionably once he's received it. On almost every question from education to dating I (Richard) could count on Eldar asking for our advices, taking careful notes on everything I said, and then implementing it to the letter. I always had to be pretty careful what I suggested he do, because he would do it!

Until one particular day . . .

His phone call came my cell while I was traveling, and in Eldar's typical get-right-to-the-point style, he said he had something *very* important to get advices on and that he first had to explain something to me for about ten minutes. He told me about a girl he'd met at school three weeks ago, seen every day since, and was totally in love with. It was his first real experience with love he said, and hers, too. She was everything he'd every wanted. He felt that he'd known her forever, and the advises he wanted was about where he could get

the best deal on a diamond.

AWhoa! Hang on a minute, @ was my reaction. Aren=t there a few other things we ought to talk about first B like how well you really know each other after three weeks and what the big rush is?

But usually-deliberate-and-careful Eldar didn=t want to hear it. AWell, @ he said, AI=m going to go meet her parents next week and I want to get engaged first. We=re totally in love and we=re perfect for each other B I just know it. Besides, we=ll have a long engagement B three or four months B where we can really get to know each other.@

I called him back when I got to a land phone and it was a two-hour telephone call, consisting mostly of me repeating the reasons he should take it all a little slower and him repeating the reasons he shouldn=t. I brought up every experience and story I could think of and Eldar listened politely, frequently telling me that he respected my inputs and advice . . . even if he didn=t think he=d follow them. Probably the one thing I did right was to avoid getting completely exasperated with him and to remind him throughout the conversation that I had faith in him and would support whatever decision he made.

As we finish this manuscript, Eldar is married and it=s been a rocky road for him and his new wife, Courtney. We hope all will work out, but I=m wondering if I should have been somehow more forceful or convincing in my advice about a longer, slower courtship.*

Not long after my cell phone talk with Eldar, we had an opportunity to take some of the kids on a Caribbean cruise ship where we were lecturing on family relationships.

On the cruise, while we tried to use our own family examples to stimulate thought,

*Update: As this book goes to press, Eldar and Courtney are doing just fine. They=ve been coming to us for advice and we=ve had some great talks. They think, and we agree, that the toughest part is probably behind them. We=ve even wondered if the only way the Lord could get them married was on the Afast track.@ Because if they=d had some of their

problems prior to the commitments of marriage, they'd have called it off. I'm so glad now that they made their own decision that I didn't undermine it, and that we kept our communication channels open. Ideas and improvement in other families, it really, worked the other way around. Being with and listening to the concerns and worries of other families helped us to get a closer focus on some of the evolving patterns and needs in our own family.

One day we asked all the parents with grown kids to write down their single biggest worry or concern. It was interesting that every one of their responses had to do (directly or indirectly) with communication and relationships. Whether they were mentioning a child's departure from their values or talking about some particular argument or friction, it always boiled down to the question of how to communicate about it -- how to strengthen the relationship and make it mutually beneficial.

As the issues were discussed, it seemed to us that a sort of spectrum developed. At one end of the spectrum, certain parents were saying, 'We're still the parents. They're still our stewardships even though they've left home. There's so much they don't know and of course we should continue to help, advise, and guide them in whatever ways we can. If they're off course, we need to help them get back on. If they're about to make a mistake, we have to try to help them avoid it.'

At the opposite end of the spectrum, other parents were saying, 'We've got to give grown kids their independence, to back off, to let them make mistakes and learn from them, and to be sure we don't offend them or undermine their confidence by giving too much advice. And when we do give advice, we've got to be sure we're not offended if they disregard it or don't follow it.'

It was the classic argument (and dilemma) between 'staying involved' and 'backing off.' And each side was warning the other side. The 'stay involveds' were saying, 'You'll

never forgive yourself if you let them make mistakes that you could have warned them about. And the 'back offs' were saying, 'If you're too strong or controlling in your opinions or advice, you'll end up pushing them away --or pushing them in the opposite direction.'

It was also about how open and candid to be. The 'stay involveds' seemed to be saying, 'Share all your feelings, tell it like it is, don't have any secrets from each other.' I (Richard) began to picture a big, boisterous Italian family putting it all out on the table, having their say, fighting and arguing when they disagreed, hugging and back slapping when they came together, wide open --letting the chips fall!) The 'back offs' on the other hand were saying, 'Avoid sensitive subjects, use tact, don't offend.' (I was imagining a tight-lipped New England family, stoic, polite, holding things in, keeping everything quiet and calm.) As the discussion developed, I began to sense that it really wasn't as much about staying involved or backing off as it was about what each person feared most. Those on one end of the spectrum feared conflict and contention and being hurt or offending each other. Those on the other end feared not knowing what others were truly thinking and feeling, and they feared the consequences of not doing all they could to help their kids.

Now -- if the discussion in that parents' meeting was the macro, then the micro was going on right within our family during the cruise. One night I was sitting with Saydi and Tal and Eli, at dinner, and we were talking about Josh and some issues we knew he was facing. Eli said, 'We've all just got to leave Josh alone on those things. He knows what he's doing. He's worried enough about it. He's sick of all our advice and inputs. It just bugs him if we bring it up.' Talmadge responded that if it's a concern then we should be talking about it -- 'That's what families are for.' Eli countered that it offends people if you bring up things that might be shortcomings or worries. Tal said, 'Maybe not,' and reminded us that when he

was having trouble reading, everyone in the family gave him advice, kept it an open subject, and that was motivated him to work at it and improve. Saydi sympathized with both sides, saying we certainly need to avoid being critical, but that if you feel or believe something with a family, you need to bring it up. She said she sometimes feels like she=s walking on eggshells around Josh, being so careful not to mention any subject that he=s sensitive about. She said she hated that feeling and that she=s learned in her social work profession that if you really care about people, you have to be able to talk to them honestly and candidly.

A day or two later, after Saydi had sung in the cruise talent show, an impressed older gentleman, knowing she lived in New York asked me if she sang on Broadway. I said, ANo, she is a graduate student at Columbia in social work.@ He said, ADid you encourage her to do that?@ ANo,@ I laughed. AI encouraged her to sing on Broadway.@ He said, AWell, she has quite a voice. You should have encouraged her to go into social work and she=d now be singing on Broadway!@ He may have been closer to the truth than any of us know!

That same night, Jonah told me that my advice and my personality are too strong and there have been times he=s done just the opposite of what I suggested to prove his own independence (to himself and to me!).

Even advice-advocating Tal said to me in the top deck gym one night (when I suggested something I thought he should say to his coach): AI think I would have had that idea but now you suggested it so it can=t be my idea.@

The questions of social empty nest parenting strike right at the heart of our changing relationships with our adult children. How much advice should we give? How forcefully should we give it. How much should they accept? Where do our strong opinions undermine their ability to develop their own? How often should we communicate? How open and candid

should we be? How involved should we be in each other=s lives?

CASE STUDY

We knew the social facet of empty nest parenting had to do with transferring our relationship from a vertical to horizontal. This was reflected in our first social memo:

To: Our children

From: Mom and Dad

Re: Eyrealm Social Strategy Draft: Your Transition With Us From a Vertical to a Horizontal Relationship and Our Transition From a Management Role to a Consulting Role

- 1. When you were born, you came to us as a precious stewardship from God. Our commitment, as we understood it in bringing you into this world, was to love you unconditionally, to educate you and teach you correct principles and values, and to help and motivate you in every way we could to reach your full potential and happiness.*
- 2. Now, as you leave home to live under another roof for the first time, we feel an exquisite combination of sadness and joy. We also feel the importance of understanding and defining the ways we want our roles and relationship to stay the same in this new phase, and the ways we want them to change.*
- 3. As we have discussed, when you were a child, our relationship was vertical, like this . We were responsible for you. At some time in the future, when your own family and your own life is thoroughly established, our relationship will be horizontal, like this . You will be completely responsible for yourself. During the transition, our relationship is sort of diagonal, like this . This can be a difficult time, with danger of us trying to be too intrusive and controlling (or the opposite of backing off so completely that we=re not there when you need us. You, at the same time, might try to be too independent too soon on the one extreme, or too dependent on us for too long on the other.)*
- 4. Another related danger, during this transition, is for either of us to become offended. If you are offended by advice we give you (or by the fact that we give advice at all) then (a) you won=t follow it even if it=s good; (b) you won=t ask for it even when you need it; and (c) you will in essence say, I=ll show you and become locked into a contrary position. If we feel offended that you don=t want our advice or don=t follow some advice we have given then (a) we might stop giving advice even when you need it; (b) we might argue too vigorously for our position in a power-grabbing attempt to prove we are right; and (c) we might say, I told you so when something doesn=t work out. Each of these six possibilities can drive us apart.*
- 5. On the question of advice, clearly your Dad is prone to lean toward the over-advice*

side. Your Mom, while she is as strong-willed and opinionated as anyone, tends to lean correspondingly (balancingly?) to the *careful not to push or offend* side.

So . . . where do we want to be as a family. Where do Mom and I want to be on the advice spectrum, and where do you, as siblings want to be in terms of how much you share with each other, and how much opinion and advice you give each other? How much do we share? How much do we say? How brutally honest should we be with each other?

6. *Moliere=s *La Misanthrope* (The Misfit) is about a man who is always totally honest and candid, expressing literally everything he thinks and feels, regardless of the circumstances. He constantly embarrasses and offends people because the society in which he lives just doesn=t operate so openly and honestly. The message is that caution, tact, and discretion in what you say and what you don=t say is necessary to function well in the broader society.*
7. *On a more personal note, when Mom and I were in college, there was a bit of a fad going on called *T Groups* or *Encounter Groups*. Basically it was a group of students getting together, sitting in a circle, usually late into the night, and being brutally honest with each other. One person at a time would be focused on and everyone else in the group would tell that person exactly what he or she thought of him or her. The idea was not to sugarcoat anything -- what=s wrong with his nose, his clothes, his personality, *what I thought of you the first time I met you,* *what problems I see with you that you probably don=t see in yourself.* I went to a couple of sessions that were just brutal. One girl left in sobbing tears and was absent from campus for a week. There was a rumor that another participant attempted suicide. Clearly, too much blunt openness among friends and acquaintances can be counterproductive.*
8. *In a Sunday School class once, the teacher read some passages where Christ seemed to be harshly and bluntly critical of His apostles, particularly Peter. Then she reminded us of how totally and unconditionally Christ loved His apostles. Then she reread the same words, but in a tone that reflected one who cared enough to correct. Her point was that when love is strong enough, there is no need for tact or for mincing words or for walking on eggshells.*
9. *We remember an old mouthwash commercial that had the tagline, *Even your best friend won=t tell you* (about your bad breath). So the question is -- who will tell you? . . . about something you may not be able to see for yourself, about something that might keep you from having to rediscover the wheel, from having to learn to mistakes that someone else has already made, from getting hit by the truck instead of going around it?*
10. *Some of you were with us on the cruise and we talked about the staying involved vs. backing off spectrum.*

<p>Staying Involved</p>	<p>Backing Off</p>
<p>Advice, openness, let it all out <i>Unexpressed feelings never die, they just fester and come forth</i></p>	<p>Don=t intrude, don=t ask. <i>Some things are better left unsaid.</i></p>

later in uglier forms. @

11. *What occurs to us is that the only real justifications for the right end of the spectrum is that we don't want to offend or to be offended and that we don't want to infringe on anyone's independence. It's a defensive position. It's about what we don't want to do. Don't offend. Don't antagonize. Don't push away. Don't try to control. The left, on the other hand, is about what we do want to do. We want to help, to support, to advise, to motivate, to give perspective and input. It's an offense rather than a defense -- but the problem is that the offense can be offensive.*

12. *Now, as we make our transition toward horizontal relationships, if we could come up with something that would take care of the defense, that would insure against anyone being offended or losing any independence . . . some strategy or agreement that just took care of all that, then we could concentrate on the offense, we could eliminate the fear and just get on with loving each other openly, with sharing all that we feel about each other, and with each other. No secrets, no sacred cows, no fronts, no facades, no taboos, no off limits, no eggshells.*

It didn't work in La Misanthrope, and it didn't work in T Groups, but it worked for Christ. Could it work in a family? Could we create a family bubble containing the pure oxygen of such unconditional, unquestioned love that offense is never given or taken and that independence is never compromised or undermined? Christ did so with His apostles. Can we approach some similar level within our family?

13. *It's a high-risk, high-effort strategy. Harder and more dangerous than just backing off, skirting issues, saying nothing, avoiding friction or feelings. But isn't that what we learn from the pre-existence and the war in heaven -- that risk and effort is why we came? That hard and danger are good? That helping and mutual interdependence is what it's all about?*

14. *But how do we create that bubble -- that family in which the very atmosphere is different than the world around it? Covey, by the way, uses a different metaphor. He speaks of an emotional bank account into which we make a deposit every time we serve and love each other. The account gets so big that it hardly dents it when we make a withdrawal by counseling or correcting each other.*

But let's stay with the bubble analogy. How can we create an atmosphere within Eyréal where no offense exists, or control or manipulation, where independence and uniqueness flourish and grow right along with advice and opinion and candid suggestion from each other.

15. *We think the answer is that we have to carefully and consciously build that bubble. It won't come about by chance or by luck, and it won't grow spontaneously just because we love each other. We think we have to plan it and build it and maintain it. And we're going to review now some of the things we've talked about and some that we haven't for your review and input, in the hopes that we can refine and complete it and thus have the eternal blessing of being able to communicate all and share all and give all.*

Proposed Δ Congruence \emptyset Agreement (Draft)

- i. *Let=s define congruence as complete honesty, openness and candor \emptyset - too complete for use within society, but desirable (though difficult) within Eyrealm. It allows (indeed encourages) us to say what we feel and what we believe to each other and about each other individually and collectively.
Thus we commit that we will stay open and communicative with each other about our transitional roles -- telling each other what we feel, what we need, and what we don=t need. Particularly that you will try to be aware of areas where input and advice might be helpful and take the initiative to ask us. When the initiative comes from you there is less chance of offense from either side.*
- ii. *In order to achieve Eyrealm congruence, all (and each) Eyrealm member agrees:*
 - (a) *to trust each other and to trust our love for each other, to believe and remember that we have each other=s best interests at heart;*
 - (b) *to seek time together in groups and one-on-one, to prioritize opportunities to talk and to share;*
 - (c) *to pray together -- all together or two together, remembering that with God=s help and with the spirit present, we can never hurt or mis-advise (or even misunderstand) each other.*
- iii. *As parents (or siblings in the advice and opinion-giving mode) we agree:*
 - (a) *to listen, ask, and try to understand first;*
 - (b) *to give input, suggestion, and advice in the Δ consulting mode \emptyset -- objectively, without guilt, knowing that it is not the only input going to the receiver and acknowledging his independence and decision-making control;*
 - (c) *to not be offended when advice is not followed.*
- iv. *As offspring (or siblings in the advice-receiving mode) we agree:*
 - (a) *to be neither offended or diminished by opinions, inputs, or advice given.*
 - (b) *to strenuously avoid over-reaction either toward or against suggestions given; to take them as input into your own broader knowledge, and decide and act independently.*
 - (c) *to ask parents and other Eyrealm members for input and counsel, thus keeping the initiative and allowing yourself to feel ownership of the ideas (you asked for them, they were given, and they are now yours).*

SAREN:

I think it=s good to have a sense of what to say and when. I don=t think it=s necessary to Alet it all hang out all the time@ in order to be an open and honest family. I think that tact is a valuable trait for all of us to hang on to. But, with a little tact, I think we should all have the courage and the desire to say anything that we=ve thought over and decided is important and worthwhile.

I don=t think we need to say everything that=s on our mind, but I do think we need to say everything that is persistently on our minds and that we think could really help someone else. I had a good talk with Josh over Christmas B I just laid out all my feelings on the table (I was having similar feelings to those Saydi mentioned B feeling like I was walking on eggshells around Josh). I was totally open and honest and shared things that had been on my mind a lot about Josh B directly to him. He seemed to really appreciate my directness and we both learned a lot during our discussion. I realized that I=d been making some assumptions about Josh that crumble when you talk directly with him. This brings me to an important point: We should all agree that it=s OK to talk to about other people when they aren=t there B as long as we share what was talked about in the discussion with person who is the subject of the discussion RIGHT AWAY. Whoever we=re talking about has a right to know that they=re being talked about and what people are saying B plus hearing what was said can be very helpful to them as they deal with whatever situation is at hand.

Dad, you can be overbearing with your advice sometimes B and I know you don=t want to be. I=m way overbearing with my advice a lot. I think that you and I are alike in that we honestly think we=re right the vast majority of the time. If we think about someone=s

situation and come up with an idea about what they should do, we feel quite certain it's the RIGHT idea. So if they don't do what we suggest B they're doing it WRONG. I'm trying to learn to really believe that other people's ways of doing things and their decisions that are different from what mine would be are OK.

One important way to make advice less overbearing is to always ASK QUESTIONS before giving advice. You do ask questions, but maybe if you ask more, we would come up with ideas ourselves rather than you having to outright offer them to us. For example, if you'd asked Tal what he was thinking about saying to his coach, he might have said what you were about to suggest. Or he might have said, I'm having a hard time figuring that out. Do you have any ideas for me?@ Then he's asking your advice and anything you say, after he's asked, will be more welcome. When I was doing all these training sessions to prepare to be a residence advisor at Wellesley, they suggested that whenever someone has a problem or tells you about a problem, or even asks you for advice, you should ask lots of questions and ask them what they think about everything before you share what you think. . . . Maybe helping people figure out what to do isn't really about making the right suggestions, it's about asking the right questions until the solution comes out.

It would really help if you'd always encourage us to ask other people for advice as well. We don't ask others enough and you're so willing to jump in and advise, that we get all Aadvised out@ and don't often enough look for further input. I think it would soften any advice you give and keep people from thinking you're overbearing with your advice if you simply routinely asked who else they've talked to about this.

If we want to be like Christ, I think we should seek to understand situations and people very well before offering advice. I think we should express confidence in them and make sure they know that they make their own decisions in this life. I think we should say

anything that we=re inspired to say in a loving and kind and timely manner. I think we should do all we can to help people come up with their own solutions rather than suggesting whole

ideal scenarios to them. I think we should be very careful to let go of our advice and let people do with it what they will, fully respecting their free agency.

*I think it would be good to be a little more specific with these commitments. Maybe should commit to suff like monthly interviews with mom and dad, making a point of asking for advice every time we possibly can, expressing our feelings through e-mails or conversations as soon as something comes up between us that is worrisome, dad and mom always using some preface phrase that everyone agrees with before starting to give advice (something like: *I have a few ideas on your situation that might help you out. I don=t know everything about this situation, so maybe my advice won=t work for you. I know that you will ultimately make your own decision and I=m sure you=ll know what is right for you. Do you want to hear my thoughts? @**

It=s hard to Alet go@ of a piece of advice you=ve given and totally feel fine about it when your advice is not followed. It=s hard for me, and I know it=s hard for you. I think we all need to learn to truly GIVE advice B when you truly give, you let go and you allow the person who now owns the advice you gave them to do whatever they want with it. Usually, when we Agive advice@ we=re really holding on to it B holding it out in front of our advisees and feeling quite sure that they must follow it or things will not go well.

SHAWNI:

I=m not sure I agree with the thought that we would ever be truly Ahorizontal.@ I understand what you are trying to say B as I=ve become a parent I do feel that we have

become more and more that way. I love that I can share things with you that you may not have thought of and that I can relate so much to being a parent now, too. But I think a parent should always be a little bit on the Avertical@ side of things just because they are a parent. I don=t think a parent should ever just discontinue the nurturing relationship because I feel that the kids will always need that B no matter how old they are. I know that even though I am older now it still feels like velvet to me when you guys care about my emotional well-being and ask questions and are still my PARENT that way.

Yes, you were more obtrusive in my decision-making processes when I lived at home, but I really think you=ve stayed out of it since I left home. You=ve always been positive and encouraging to what I decide to do, but I don=t think you=ve tried to push me to do anything B especially since I=ve been married. Dave and I really appreciate that. We really have felt that you trust us in our decision-making and have really stayed out of it.

With three of us in the family married so far, it seems like you=ve stayed out of what Saren and I do much more than you have with Jonah. I think it=s just different with daughters. It shows you trust our husbands to make important decisions with us B their wives. This has really meant a lot to Dave. He feels a lot of trust from you and really appreciates that. I=m sure it=s much easier not to get involved though when it=s not your own son B even if you may not agree. It=s easier to draw the line on how much advice to give since you didn=t actually raise these men in your own home and you don=t know them inside and out like you know your own sons. I think since you know Jonah and Josh so well you want so much to push them and mold them in a way you see so clearly would help them and benefit them. I see you wanting to get involved purely to help them and let them see things from an experienced eye. But in some cases this may be the hardest thing because they need to figure out so much of it on their own without you.

I tend to be a little biased to the Abig, boisterous Italian family idea because I love when people can communicate and tell each other things and not be offended. I love what you say, Alt really wasn't as much about staying involved or backing off as it was about what each person feared most. We get so worried about not offending others or about avoiding conflict that we don't say the things we really need to.

I personally think that in our family we may not tell each other enough. I think we are really good at building each other up and giving compliments, but we sometimes don't really say what we feel. I just want you guys to know that even though I am a little sensitive I really do want you to tell me things you may be worried about. I'm going to make a commitment to tell people things that worry me. There are a couple of things I've kept inside I don't know how to say them to people, but at the same time I know that they would help people so I need to get better at that.

I think it's important to note here how important it is to prioritize time together with each and every member of the family -- not only those you relate to the most. For example, it's easy for me to talk to Saren and Saydi every day and keep up with all they're doing since we have so much in common and relate in so many ways, but I need to make more effort to make a phone call to the kids at home, keep up with Tal's games, write to Noah more often, etc., etc. to strengthen these relationships and make them as strong as the easier ones. In turn, it means so much to me when I call home and Eli and Char ask questions about what's going on out here, and when others in the fam take time to make their relationship with me better too.

I love that we do this as much as we do -- especially taking long drives and just talking a lot. I'm so thankful we have places to get away so we can be on our own without phone calls and friends around so we can just be together.

JOSH:

The analogy to the vertical and horizontal relationships makes sense, and I guess the big question is how far diagonal the Aadiagonal@ relationship is. I think that in different stages it changes. I think it starts moving from the vertical position sometime in high school. It gradually moves from vertical toward horizontal, and on the very day that we leave home, it immediately drops below 45 degrees to a more horizontal position than vertical. Then it gradually moves all the way to horizontal.

The root word Aoffend@ is used so many times in this memo. Sometimes it doesn't feel like the right word. I think that true advice in itself is never offensive, but that the way that it is given or the reaction of the person on the receiving end can be offensive.

I think these are good commitments . . . the only thing that I would add would be that when we don't ask for advice, that decision should also be respected. There are certain times when I am in a situation when only God and myself understand. There are some things that are impossible for other people to understand, because the only way to understand it is to have lived through it or to be God, who knows everything. So I think that understanding and not being offended when we make decisions without asking for advice should be added.

On another point: I wish I had known that Saydi felt like she was walking on eggshells around me. Nothing she has ever said has even slightly suggested to me that she feels that way. I had no idea. If she had brought it up at any time when she was mentioning a subject that she felt I was sensitive about, I would have been very surprised that she felt that way, I would have found out why she felt that way, and I would have done all I could to make sure she didn't feel that way any more.

I was sitting in the kitchen around Christmas time and Saren was cooking some food and asking me questions about what's going on in my life. I was answering with my normal

answers, and glancing over the newspaper as I talked. Out of the blue, Saren says, *AI feel bad when I ask you about things like this and you just give short answers, act like you don't want to talk about it, or read the newspaper.* This got my full attention quickly! Puzzled, I asked her why she felt that way, and explained that I certainly wasn't trying to make her feel bad. We had a great talk about it as she brought up more concerns about how we communicate and why some of the things I had said or done made her feel that I really didn't want to communicate with her. There had been some misunderstandings in the past, and I was so glad that we talked it through so that we can make changes and communicate more openly in the future. A similar experience happened when I went to visit Jonah in Boston a couple of months ago. It was almost the exact same situation. Jonah and I were sitting in his apartment, and we were having light conversation when he said, *AWhy don't you want to talk to me?* Again, I was shocked and quickly replied, *AOf course I want to talk to you.* We sat down and talked for a long time and had a great discussion.

I wish Saydi would have spoken to me a long time ago about how she felt talking to me about things she felt I was sensitive about. I'm now trying to overcome whatever it is I do that makes people feel I don't want to talk.

Sometimes I don't want to hear advice, for fear that it will be what I have already decided, which makes it look like it wasn't my idea. Sometimes I have done the opposite of what I have been advised to prove my independence. Other times I have followed advice that I later wished I hadn't. And there are times I don't want to hear advice because I know exactly what it will be, and it is sometimes hard to go against someone's advice, especially when they are very assertive when they give it. I value my independence so much. I feel it is very important to live my own life without being pushed into doing things I don't want to do.

When two members of our family are communicating, advice doesn't always have to

be given . . . I just get the feeling from some of the things said here that the only times we're going to help each other out is when we are giving each other advice. I think it is just as important, and sometimes more important, to just be a good listener. And to ask good questions. So many times this leads to the person genuinely asking for advice and appreciating so much more the advice he does receive. When two people meet just so one can give advice to the other, the advice is not as valuable. Sometimes we need to just talk about fun and exciting things, and enjoy each other's company. Then it becomes more natural to ask for, give, and receive advice.

Give advice on only two conditions. First, when the advice is asked for. And second, when it is clear that a big mistake is going to be made, and that avoiding the mistake completely is better for the person than learning from the mistake. Because learning from mistakes is sometimes the only way to learn something. This may sound strange, but I am actually grateful for some of the mistakes I made in my life. If I had been advised to avoid the mistake and had followed that advice, I wouldn't have learned as much as I did by making the mistake and learning from it.

SAYDI:

Just a note here so that this statement I supposedly made about Josh doesn't get set in stone. I don't know if I was trying to say exactly that. Yes there are times that I do feel like I'm walking on eggshells with Josh . . . but it's every bit as much my fault as it is Josh's. Josh has never been angry when I've asked him things. Josh usually is fine with it when I do ask him things . . . but for some reason I find myself hesitant to bring some things up. Perhaps sometime in the past I've felt a little weird about some way that he has reacted to a question or conversation . . . maybe it was just a little misinterpretation on my part. The

point is . . . we need to keep communicating about things even if it was uncomfortable once or twice. Not talking just makes the uncomfortability mount until it feels like there really are eggshells all around when really there aren't.

I don't think that we should ever be worried about who's idea is who's. Why does it matter who came up with the idea? Most of the ideas that we have in our head come from God through the Spirit anyway. I think that it's kind of prideful of us to think this way and I think we can take the responsibility to change that part of our nature.

While I was home for Christmas Dad and Mom and I were talking about all this Arelationship, advice@ stuff and Dad (on the verge of his guilt trip approach) said that maybe he'd just stop giving any advice at all. Maybe the solution should be to just work on his books, to just give advice to people who'll buy it in his books and send him great letters of praise . . . who'll even want him to personally address and sign the advice! Although it was kind of just a point Dad was making . . . I could tell that part of him really wondered if that was the solution (whether it was to make us realize what we're missing . . . or just to not put so much energy into thankless work . . . I don't know). We all know that despite this passing thought of Dad's . . . he'd never really stop giving advice . . . and THANK HEAVENS for that! But Dad's comment really got me thinking and I felt panicked for a minute. I'd feel so sad if I didn't have Dad and Mom to look to for example and advice. Yeah, sometimes Dad's advice might feel a little controlling . . . but we are old enough to not let that affect us. We are old enough to see the value and wisdom in Dad and Mom's advice. (What Mom is speaks so loudly that sometimes she doesn't need to say anything . . . Dad too . . . but he likes to say things.) Let's all keep that in mind, okay?

Within the family there is the power for complete renewal, salvation, joy and completeness. At the same time, there are powers to destroy, pull down, crush and hate.

Because we are biologically, emotionally, and socially tied to our family members, they can have tremendous power in our lives. You can be helped or hurt the most by those who are closest to you. That's why love is so important. I like what it says a little later in the memo . . . Christ showed a perfect example. He loved so completely that he was able to scold, to be honest, to reproach . . . because people felt loved and accepted. I think we have that safety in our family . . . so we need to use it to help unlock the powerful influence of family and help one another progress. It's true, we can be more honest with one another because we love one another. I know that I need to use this obligation in two ways (both encompassed by mutual love that should be reassured and restated before doing either). First, I must ask for the honest opinion of my siblings and parents. They see me perhaps more clearly than anyone else and thus they can help me see what I cannot (bad breath). I need to be humble and open to really regarding and considering their advice, critique as well as compliments. Second, I need to be open with my siblings and parents and not keep thoughts that could help them to progress to myself because I fear their reaction. I need to be more prayerful in really being a powerful force in my family's life. If I can see things and help more powerfully than others then I feel obligated to put in the energy to do so. I can already think of some things that I should say (like to dad that he really shouldn't wear those jeans with the white back pocket that he's had for years [ha ha ha!]).

Again, I don't like the "strategy" terminology . . . we need basic principles that we can act by when situations come up. All situations will be different. I don't like the idea of one proposed strategy . . . it would feel fake.

I have wondered if one of the reasons mom and dad are so wise as is that they had to figure out a lot of things on their own. Sometimes I wonder if the fact that we have so much guidance from Mom and Dad will inhibit us from making mistakes, from growing through the

struggle of it all. When I asked dad about this he said that he really wants us to be able to go further than he has and he wants to give us the advice and direction that he didn't have. So, we are advantaged . . . what a tragedy it would be if, because we are guided, we were lazy and didn't go beyond those who have gone before us. I don't want that hanging over my head at the end of my life when I am aware of everything and can see it all objectively. So that's why it's so important that we not only ask for advice, consider it prayerfully but also look to other sources, put in our own hard work and thought and creative energy. We need to use all that we have to go beyond and reach new heights. It may sound a little cheezy, but I am dead serious about this one. We would be committing great sins of omission if we didn't really look at what we have and work our heads off to work out our own destinies. No matter how much we are advised . . . it is ultimately up to us!!!

*I like the idea of vertical to horizontal, however, the *Management Role* to *consulting role* I feel is a bit off. Maybe it's just a matter of semantics, but I don't feel like parents should be called *managers* of their children's lives. Yes, I do want to acknowledge the effort and energy, time, money, etc. that you have sacrificed to provide for us and direct us, but I don't think it's right to say you *manage* us.*

Yes, we are shifting from a vertical to horizontal relationship. This transition is hard because not only do our actions and words need to change, but so do our feelings. Growing up in a vertical relationship conditioned us to certain responses and feelings under certain circumstances. What would be advice in a horizontal relationship was more or less rules under a vertical relationship. In our family one of the main ways I feel we were disciplined is by feeling guilty for not doing what mom and dad had told us to do. I don't say this in a negative way. I think it's a great way to discipline kids . . . I'm not talking about guilt trips, rather I'm talking about natural guilt that spurs up as a result of not doing what you know to

be right. Honest feelings of inadequacy and shame that come when children have let their parents down, betray trust and confidence, etc. Because we had such a loving, trusting relationship with our parents they rarely had to punish us per say. Instead we just felt bad about what we had done because it saddened our parents who we love and love us and because in retrospect we can see that what we did wasn't the best thing for us or for someone else. So, that's the model that we lived by in a vertical relationship. Now, the challenge is to change that, to somehow remove that element of guilt from the table. If we don't work on both ends to remove this feeling of wanting to please and obeying then I don't think we can truly have a horizontal relationship. For me personally I feel like I have grown up and been away long enough to not feel guilty when I don't take advice. Even when I don't take advice and things go wrong, I feel accountable . . . but I do think that there was a time when it was hard to make that separation.

*I remember calling home from Wellesley when I was in the whirlwind of exams and stress and much to my dismay, dad would answer the phone. Normally he is my most favorite person in the world to talk to on the phone . . . but not when I'm stressed because I know that he'll just say, *Work hard, Saydi, get all A's.* Or, *Yes, it's hard work, but keep at it. You'll feel so much better when you are done . . . don't forget to get all A's.* I remember not being able to wait to talk to my mom because our conversations would be full of encouraging, comforting thoughts like, *Don't worry. In a few years you won't even remember if you got an A- or B+ and Just do your best, but don't stress out too much. Get some sleep, eat, take plenty of naps.* I remember not really knowing how to take my dad's advice. Feeling guilty if I didn't get all A's, feeling like I had let him down, etc., etc., etc. Now he still encourages me . . . I take the advice and do my best and don't feel too bad if I don't do too well. I don't know if all of that is too relevant . . . but the point is that it*

takes time to get to a horizontal relationship. And sometimes more time for some than for others. I don't think that we can just say that it all of a sudden turns into a consulting relationship. There are too many emotions involved to use such a business-like analogy. I don't even know if that's the right analogy to aim for because I wouldn't want advice to be given and taken so dryly or coolly.

I agree that we have had a history in our family where we have been offended by advice that our parents have given us. But when I really think of that, it makes me kind of ashamed. I think that we need to sit back and humble ourselves and realize what it is we have been given. Wonderful parents who really care about our lives. We are old enough to know how to either take advice or leave it. I think maybe the most important matter in all of this is that we are humble and found our relationship with our parents on the spirit. Sometimes I feel as if we take on the attitude that Mom and Dad (especially Dad) are trying to live our lives for us or through us or trying to control us. Think about how illogical that is. Dad is much too good of a person and father to fall for that trap. And he's got too much going on in his own life. Of course, it is only natural that he would want to guide us and help us as much as possible. He has so many good ideas and is so creative. Sometimes, out of his intense love and concern for us and his habit of being in a vertical relationship with us he does give advice that seems overbearing. But that's just out of the bottom of his heart, stemming from the love that he has for us. He is conscious that he does this sometimes and he's working on it . . . but no one is going to do it perfectly. I think more than anything it is up to us to be humble and guided and to take the advice with love and gratitude and consider it, explore it, pray to know if it should be made ours or not and then, if we feel so inclined use it to progress and go toward and maybe beyond what our parents have done. If we don't feel it is right for us we thank him, we explain what we have chosen to do and why and then

we move forward . . . and keep asking for advice from him and many others.

Sometimes the reason we become offended when we are offered advice or when our advice is rejected is because we don't feel the safety of complete love and confidence and support. Perhaps when Mom and Dad offer suggestions it would be good for them to surround them with a net of love and support and confidence in our abilities to make good choices and do what is right for us. They have taught us correct principles and part of letting us govern ourselves is showing their faith in our abilities and the truths that they have taught us. So perhaps it would be good to preface any advice by statements like, "We know you will do what is best for you; we know you will think it all through well and pray and know what it is the Lord would have you do. We also are confident that you have strength, talents, abilities, insights beyond what we have to do that which the Lord requires of you . . . so here's the advice. Take it or leave it." Something like that would provide a buffer and make advice easier to give, accept, or reject.

Key element: Without the help and guidance of God through the spirit, all of our efforts to work this out are futile.

JONAH:

I feel great about the relationships that we all have but I am feeling like this is all a business and it can all be planned and mapped out to the point where smoother is better.

I don't think that there can be a "consulting relationship" between family members, at least not in a family like ours. A consultant by definition is totally free of obligation to the person receiving advice because there are certain contracts written and things signed to put the consultant out of harms way.

Because parents know their children much better than a consultant knows his clients,

parent is the term that should be used, so not confuse people. The business model is great to illustrate points, but the term parents is so much more fitting to the role. God chooses the title Afather@ above all others.

What I am saying here is that the advice that parents give is always strong to me because I know how much they love me, but many times there is an urge to start making my own choices.

I hope that parents would sometimes allow their children to make less than perfect choices because that is how we learn. They are not forfeiting their stewardship by allowing their children to make their own decisions they are enhancing it. By writing this I am not saying that there should be some huge decision to be made that parents should not offer suggestions but I think that the suggestions that are offered should be asked for. If a parent feels confident in what they taught their child then they will trust that they will choose right and if they choose wrong that they can learn from it. I think that sometimes the right choice is the wrong choice because we learn from it.

I will say that I am a little uncomfortable when we talk about a sibling and try to figure things out without talking to them specifically. For example, Tal and his decision of what school to go to when he returned from his mission. We were very vocal with each other about this even before we talked to him on what we thought about each option.

There is so much uniqueness in each member of our family and that is something that we have all strived for because while we all really want to be members of Eyrealm, we all want to make names for ourselves too.

I would say that the Astay involved@ and the Aback off@ can both happen. And we can be open without going too far and saying everything. A happy medium needs to be reached. Although the AMisfit@ and AT groups@ are good examples they are a bit extreme.

Christ on the other hand is the perfect example. Most obviously it is better that we are closer to the example set by Christ, nevertheless that is perfection and we will not be perfect in this life so we need to take it somewhere in the middle and slowly work out way to total honesty. We still have to use tact with one other (something that I am not doing very well in these responses).

*I don't know why I get so hung up on that *Aconsulting@* word , but I want to be a brother and a son . . . not a consultee.*

TALMADGE:

*I wonder if any of the kids who have left feel like you parents are holding on too much of staying too involved in our lives? I don't think you two have the ability to *Ahang on@* to them as much as you hang on to the kids at home.*

It seems to me that those of us who live away just naturally become more independent and ask Mom and Dad for help and advice where needed.

I think that you two do a great amazing job while the kids are in K to senior years. Your examples are almost more important than other things now that we have graduated. I think we will be more motivated by your examples and then we will come ask you two for help and advice.

My example about reading was the fact that I had to face my problems. Though it was hard to become a great reader, I had to do it. I was embarrassed many times for not knowing how to read well. But that=s something I had to face to get through it.

It=s almost like M & D are the car batteries in our cars. It almost seems that you are ahead of us in our lives. You think about our problems and solutions before we do. You (parent batteries) keep trying to start our cars and the alternators (us) are not putting out the

effort. Soon enough the battery will wear out because the alternator never pre-charged the battery. We need to take initiative!

With strong parents, it is harder to take initiative. I think it should be the other way around. We should be the batteries, and you (parents) the alternators. If we are constantly trying to fulfill our destiny, we will learn and you will help when you can.

WE, the children need to get our butts going!

On paragraph #8: This is a part that I feel is very important. In Parley P. Pratt's description of the spirit he indicates that "someone who has the spirit doesn't get offended." If we take advice from someone with the spirit, we will be better off and not be offended.

Our family isn't a business. We're an eternal unit and that means we will function the best on Gospel principles (based on the spirit) and not on man-made principles.

On paragraph 9: Saydi did this to me after the cruise. She straight up told me that she didn't think I was acting nice and that since I returned from my mission I've been self-righteous and not caring enough about others. That was hard to swallow. We talked it through and though it was tough, I learned a lot. I think we both could have been a bit more tactful on that one.

The way I keep seeing it, Mom and Dad, is that your example should propel us to want to excel in our lives. Thus we will naturally want to ask for your help on our decisions. We as kids just need to step it up and do better.

An ideal comment could be, "Dad and Mom, I've been thinking and praying about something in my life and I'd like to know what you think."

I think this "bubble" that you are talking about is great and the way we are going to build it is through the little things. If I can't get through a day without having a misunderstanding with Charity, this must mean our bubble's not too thick.

I think it comes through small things like small talk at the dinner table, good family scripture study in the mornings, being more kind . . .

ELI:

This is really good stuff. I agree with Sar and Tal=s comments. It is true, that we need to have a good balance between brutally honest, and tact. If this were all to work out, especially between me and Charity I would be the happiest kid around. But it is all of our faults when it gets screwed up. No one person can be blamed. We need to recognize our shortcomings, and set goals and pray to overcome them.

AJA:

The problem with this memo is that it introduces the concept of fear and offence as a motivator of communication. In this way, the advice perhaps takes on a more defensive tone and suggest that parents= gauge communication in order to avoid offending their children or Aundermin[ing] their confidence by giving too much advice.@ Thus, those who Adisclose everything@ are pitted against those who Adon=t intrude@ and Adon=t ask@ on opposite sides of the spectrum. Are these really two distinct sides of the coin? The two sides are described as harsh extremes, and yet the rest of the memos seem to side with the far left.

I think that siblings= advice is more easily seen as just suggestions instead of Aconsulting;@ there=s less weight tied to accepting or rejecting the advice, so it=s easier to listen to in the first place.

There should be cases where a parent can ask a trusted sibling to offer the advice rather than an authoritative parent.

Christ, I believe, could and does listen in a moment to the intent of someone=s heart.

I think that pinnacle of unconditional, unquestioned love is not being able to freely say what you think and have people freely take it or leave it, but instead loving someone so much that you know what they need from you . . . not just what one thinks they need. The greatest example of this is prayer. Sometimes we need an answer and sometimes we need to go ahead on our own. We don't know which is which, but Heavenly Father knows us well enough to practice restraint and to give freely.

I disagree with the extreme lean towards the left of the spectrum. Both sides have their equal merit, which makes me question whether there should be a spectrum at all. And does there need to be an agreement? Is there perhaps a flexible agreement that could actually work across family members and across time so that it could work for the other in-laws that will be coming into the family and the families they are going to start? We must not promote individual understanding and intense listening and conversation (instead of consulting). I do believe that a static agreement is possible, but would be too impersonal, too formulated. We didn't grow up all our lives with a family and spend countless hours together and learn to understand one another only to throw it out the window with one scheme to fit all.

The beauty and uniqueness of families is that unlike the world, there can always be love and support and people who understand you. I get enough advice and correction and formulas from the world, from school, from work, from friends, even from church. When I am home, whether it is in my mind, my heart, or in actuality, I need and look for that unending, uncalculated, effervescent love. That love corrects my shortcomings only because it loves to the good parts of me so much, I feel like they can overtake the bad, and they do.

I would like to see more of a positive, simple statement of principles than this long contract.

The feedback from our children helped us understand how dynamically and dramatically our roles and relationships with each other were changing and how important it was to have some basic agreements about how we would communicate and give advice to each other.

They all wanted to stay in close touch and to preserve the friendship and enjoyment we feel from each other, yet they all wanted their independence and agency to be respected. They wanted a special kind of trust and openness that was removed from the "norms" of the world, but they didn't want such complete openness that there was no tact and no sensitivity.

Beyond their e-mails, we had numerous phone chats, and it seemed like everyone in the family talked individually to everyone else. I (Linda) got together with all five girls in New York, and we discussed it further still. Finally, we came up with the simplified concept of the Eyrealm "social grove." Here is the e-mail where we tried to summarize it:

The Eyrealm Social Grove *(charting the evolution of our roles and relationships with each other and establishing enduring patterns of communication and advice, asking, giving, and receiving).*

Dear Eyrealm L TNs:

Your input and feedback and ideas and suggestions on the "social" memo were fantastic. You've all seen each other's responses now, so you know how much agreement there was, and how many common suggestions. It helped us realize that we can never be (nor should we want to be) "mere consultants" to you. Even as our relationship becomes more horizontal, we will always be your parents, and our advice and opinion, if not given in the right way, can be dangerous. Because of its emotional weight, it can cause overreaction (either in accord or in resistance) and can even undermine your free agency and independence.

We need to remind ourselves that each of us existed as individual unique spirits long before our family was formed. We are each who we are, and only God knows us fully. The family's role should not be to mold us into some stereotype or some copy or extension of our parents, but rather to help us each discover more who we each truly are and then to nourish and magnify that core into the best reality it can be.

The best metaphor we've been able to come up with together is a young grove

of tress. As seedlings the new trees look very similar. They begin to differentiate as saplings because each is a different kind of tree: an oak, an elm, a poplar -- but even more than that -- each tree is unique, the only one of its exact kind, and that uniqueness is in the spirit seed which comes magically from afar rather than just dropping off of the older trees. The two parent trees, and indeed the whole growing grove itself, offers protection and community, and the roots of the trees even intertwine and draw and share the same nourishment. But, the trees don't try to change each other=s identity and the parent trees are not disappointed when the saplings don't turnout to be just like them. Rather, they appreciate each other=s diversity. As they grow, they shade and shield each other and eventually the young trees become fuller than their gradually and gracefully aging parents.

We seem to all like that image, and, with it in mind, we=ve worked together with all of you to boil down our @social agreements@ into some simple principles, promises, and practices.

Social grove principles

- ! Each individual=s uniqueness must be discovered and appreciated.*
- ! Each person=s agency must be protected and respected.*
- ! ASKING each other is the key to this discovery, appreciation, protection, and respect. Asking about needs and about dreams, and asking for input, opinion, and advice.*

Social grove promises

- ! We will become @masters of the ASK,@ seeking each other=s opinions and ideas and feelings and within this context we will each be both givers and receivers of advice.*
- ! Even if the ASK principle is not followed, we will neither overreact (pro or con) to advice or be offended by it. Nor will we be offended if our advice is not followed.*
- ! We will communicate openly and honestly and fully, using tact not as a devise but as a way to build each other and be sensitive and positive.*
- ! In-laws (new sons or daughters in-law) come into the grove as complete equals both in our trust and in our sharing.*
- ! We will seek time together and spend time together and prioritize time together despite all the other demands.*
- ! If two or more Eyrealm members talk about a non-present member (an observation, a situation, how we can help, etc.) it will be kept positive*

and complimentary, and that member will be informed of the discussion right away.

Social grove practices

- ! We hold a summer reunion each year at the Lighthouse* and an annual Eyrealm Foundation meeting, FFFE** meeting, and MFME **meeting which may be part of or separate from the reunion. One automatic part of each year=s reunion is to refresh and recommit to our Eyrealm Aconstitution@ which we are now constructing. There is also usually a separate Aplayers meeting@ (no parents or Acoaches@) and sibling Amentor-mentee@ assignments.*

**Summer home in Idaho.*

***Fathers and Future Fathers of Eyrealm, Mothers and Future Mothers of Eyrealm.*

- ! *In addition to the annual family reunion, we schedule one more coming together each year, currently a trip for married Eyrealm members and a service expedition for single members.*

- ! *We send regular e-mail updates to each other to keep everyone up to date. In these updates, we share both the events of our lives and our concerns, joys, and challenges.*

- ! *Dad does a rotating monthly Sunday interview with each child (and an augmenting monthly letter that supports Mom=s weekly updates).*

Financial (Physical) Empty Nest Parenting

(Finding the Balance Between Assistance and Independence)

How Much

An investment broker and financial counselor we know has a sign in his office that says:

If you're wealthy,
don't tell your kids!

The idea, of course, is to keep kids from squabbling over your wealth, and to encourage their own initiative and independence rather than a reliance on you.

A completely opposite view of the issue was illustrated once when we were hosting a TV talk show and interviewing Dick Van Patten (from the old "Eight is Enough" TV series) and his family. One of the sons said what he liked most about his dad was that he'd tell him anything B including exactly how much money he had and what bank it was in.

Beyond how much our children *know* about our finances is the bigger question of how much financial assistance we give them after they leave home, after they have a full-time job, after they are married, after they have their own children.

We have two sets of friends who approach this issue in such strikingly opposite ways that their stories really establish the two extreme ends of a spectrum.

Bill and Marge Jones each grew up with little family money, had jobs after school and all summer, and worked their way through college. They feel this made them tough and independent and they want the same "blessings" for their kids. So, even though they are quite well off, they basically give their kids nothing beyond the basics of food and shelter,

expecting them to earn all their own spending money while they're young and then either get scholarships or work and take student loans to get through college. Their kids *have* become marvellously resourceful and independent, but it took some of them seven or eight years to get through college and there is a certain resentment about the shoestring lifestyle they've been forced into.

Pat and Liz Smith also grew up relatively poor and had to make it on their own, but their goal is to make sure their kids *don't* have to do the same thing. They want their children to have all the advantages they didn't have, so they basically give them everything they need (and a lot of what they don't) financially and just encourage them to take advantage of every extracurricular opportunity and to do their very best in school. Thus the Smith kids went to far better (and more expensive) colleges than the Joneses, and they finished sooner and went onto graduate school. Now that they are out of school, though, they are having some trouble living within their means and learning to live independently from their parents.

The challenge for parents who have a reasonable level of resources is to try to be honest with children about their financial position and yet not let kids rely on it so much that it diminishes their own incentive and initiative.

People try to create this differentiation in lots of different ways. Not long after one friend of ours sold his Internet company for a very large sum, his fourteen-year-old daughter asked him, "Daddy, are we rich now?" With a chuckle, he replied, "Your mother and I are rich now, but you're as poor as ever."

The ultimate goal, of course, would be to give our children the independence and self-reliance of the Jones kids *and* the advantages and head start of the Smith kids. That seems like an almost impossible combination, but we have tried to do it by helping our children earn

and save their own money through their adolescence* but supplement what they=ve saved through educational Aloans@ from our family partnership that allows them to go to the best schools they can get into and can progress into their careers and families and homes as rapidly as they want to. The Aloans@ carry no interest and are paid back at the discretion and timing of the child. The point is that they *perceive* it as *their* borrowed money and thus value their education more.

We tried to summarize this and other related approaches in our financial empty nest parenting memo:

CASE STUDY

We concluded long ago that the goal of financial empty nest parenting should be a balance between advantage B giving assistance and initiative B giving independence.

Here is how we=tried to convey those conclusions to our L TN children:

To: Eyrealm

Re: Financial Issues: Draft Agreement

From: Crunk and Moffitt

There are two parts to this memo. First, an overview of the principles of financial stewardship or the Rules for Financial Freedom@ which we=ve tried to teach and that we=ve discussed together over the years, and second, a summary of our proposal for how the First Intergalactic Family Bank of Eyrealm should work in terms of your ability to borrow, invest, and repay. Please view the whole memo as a proposed financial agreement for our ongoing physical and financial family.

I. Financial Principles of Stewardship and Perspective

1. We own nothing. Everything belongs to God and we are stewards. Take care of and magnify what you are given by God.
2. Each of us comes to earth with a mission or Aforeordination@ of what we should accomplish here. We must strive to recognize the gifts and opportunities that enable and lead us to our mission.
3. Money is a tool, much like health or access, valuable for the freedom and opportunities it gives rather than for itself. Like money, career and

occupation are not ends in themselves but the means *to the ends of family, relationships, service, and personal growth.*

4. In other words, broadening and contributing (learning and giving) are the goals which are facilitated and enabled by financial resources and freedom.
5. There is a financial range (which may be different for different people) in which maximum happiness lies. If our financial and material resources are too small or if they are too large, we lose freedom and thus happiness.
6. *Δ*All battles are won on reserves.*@* The biggest opportunities and challenges of your life will depend on whether you have some reserves to draw on *B* financial and otherwise.

II. Financial Principles of Implementation and Application

1. Pray for enough *and try to understand what that means.* (*Ask God to provide and guide you to enough financial resources to meet your mission and to give you the freedom to make life choices on merit rather than on cost, but not so much that your things rob you of your time and your freedom.*)
2. Practice the 10-20-70 formula (donate the first 10 percent or more of everything you earn to church or charity; invest the next 20 percent; and live on the 70 percent that remains).
3. Give something back *B* of time and money (with the 10 percent or more you give to church) *B* give something of yourself. Volunteer in some capacity on a regular basis.
4. Establish a formula for your 20 percent saving (only a small part of it in high risk investments; think long-term with no *@trading;**@* have it all in a separate account to be removed only for *Δ*absolute emergency or opportunity,*@* not for *Δ*consumable investments*@ B* see #6 below).
5. No credit card or consumer debt. (Have one low-limit credit card on which you pay the entire balance each month to establish credit. Other than that, use only checks or debit cards and buy no *consumables B* including cars *B* on time or on credit.)
6. Borrow only for the two *Δ*consumable investments*@* of house and education. (Both, as you use *and enjoy them are virtually guaranteed to provide a financial return that is greater than the interest you have paid.*) *On everything else, practice delayed gratification and pay as you go.*

III. The First Intergalactic Family Bank of Eyrealm (FIFBE)

1. Our Abank, @ so called, is legally a Family Limited Partnership which has acquired and saved assets over the years for the primary purpose of providing financial assistance to our children (AEyrealm @ members), particularly for education and first-home purchase.
2. For undergraduate education, we pay room and board (since we would pay for those items if you continued to live at home). Entertainment, clothing, and incidental expenses continue to be your responsibility as they have been at home. Tuition, fees, and books are your responsibility (and your chosen Aconsumable investment @) but you may borrow FIFBE funds to cover them beyond what your part time work and your own savings in your 20 percent investment account will cover. Your loans (on which you will sign promissory notes) will accrue no interest and will have no repayment schedule. You will repay it according to your own circumstances and judgments following graduation.
3. For post-graduate education, all expenses including room and board are your responsibility, but you are able to borrow from FIFBE up to half of the total you need with the same no-interest, flexible payback conditions. The other one-half you must obtain from your own resources or from regular federal or university-supplied student loans.
4. For first-home purchase, FIFBE will provide matching funds on a down payment, putting up an equity *amount equal to what you are able to supply personally. This will not be a loan but an equity investment in proportion to the total cost of the home (i.e., if you purchased a \$250,000 home and wanted to make a \$50,000 down payment, you would put up \$25,000. FIFBE would match it with \$25,000 and the \$200,000 balance would be your regular first mortgage on which all payments would be your responsibility, along with all upkeep, improvement, and maintenance. FIFBE would own 10 percent of the home and receive 10 percent of the selling price whenever the home was sold. Your cost of materials for home improvement (not repairs) could be added to the home=s cost, thus reducing FIFBE=s equity percentage.*
5. Spouses may become full-fledged Eyrealm members with the same opportunities, options, and obligations as Anatural born @ members.
6. Repayment of loans from FIFBE is to be both flexible and optional according to circumstances. Each Eyrealm member should feel responsibility to pay back what he or she can as he or she is able

(without extreme sacrifice) according to circumstance and choice of profession. (The investment bankers among you might be expected to perform a quicker payback than the teachers and social workers.)

Though we've discussed most of this agreement in some detail, please respond with your corrections, concerns, and counter offers.

Our children had basically grown up with many of these principles in place, but the memo was the first time they'd seen the approach all written up in one place. Here are some of their responses:

SAREN:

I don't know if having or lacking things can rob you of time and/or freedom. I think it's more THINKING ABOUT THINGS that can rob us of time and freedom. No matter how much you have, you can think too much about what you have or don't have and therefore take your thoughts away from more important areas.

I think it's important that we all understand that savings may have to fluctuate slightly over the years and that different things can constitute savings. For example, right now, we can't save 20% of our paycheck after tithing and our mortgage we barely have enough to live on. Still, we do save. 10% goes right into a stock purchase plan, 5% goes into a 401K, and a ton of our money goes into our mortgage payment and since our house is a big chunk of our savings/investment, we consider that to be savings, too.

Money in a straight savings account won't grow fast. I think it'd be great if you'd encourage everyone to do their own research and ask for advice from lots of people about the best ways to make investments. You should really suggest everyone start a 401K as soon as they get a job and start a Roth IRA asap. I wish I'd started one right out of college but I

didn't know about it!

It might be good to have a formula for repayment of educational loans. Maybe you could propose a certain percentage of a paycheck once the education is finished & perhaps one percentage for while people are single or married with double income and one percentage for those who have kids. I'd feel better about all my loans if I'd been paying off a little every month over the past ten years since I graduated. Your proposed formula could be very flexible, but I think it would make the loans and the repayment feel more real.

Do you want to make it clear that you guys will pay for one semester of study abroad? You paid for that for me and it was so good of you! Thanks.

I think there should be some emergency savings that we're encouraged to keep and not spend on education or down payments on houses, don't you agree?

What about paying for people to come home for special events? You should state what you're willing to pay for.

I think there should be some sort of general statement at the beginning of this saying that you guys want to use your financial assets to help us broaden and contribute.

SHAWNI:

I am so thankful for this insight you have ingrained into our minds. I think the root of so much unhappiness lies in the inability to recognize the fact that all we have belongs to God. I've seen greed and materialism cause so many problems in the lives of so many people who are close to me. It makes me sad. But I can totally see how easy it is to get caught up in all that, and have to watch myself sometimes. We live in a world of wanting more and more. People rack up more and more credit card debt to keep up with friends and to have things they think they need. It's so refreshing when I meet someone who understands

fully the principle that we are only stewards over material things. I am so thankful for the tithing we pay to the church and the little bits we are able to give to charity. I think it's such a great tool to help us recognize over and over each month that all we have really belongs to God anyway.

I'm so thankful for all the time you spent with us growing up figuring out what our gifts are. The more I grow up, the more I realize how unique and lucky I am to have such an amazing family and most especially parents who help see talents and help kids reach their potential. I loved how Dad would always write our gifts on our fingers and how we would make goals to develop our talents further as we did our Sunday Sessions each week. I also love how you guys had the 5-facet reviews and knew so much about us by concentrating on us so you could help us find gifts and abilities that would lead us to our foreordinations. In reading this memo it makes me think I better keep working on figuring out what my mission or foreordination is. I think it needs to be a continual search to keep you on the right track and it's so good to think about it and concentrate on it often.

I feel so sad for those who don't have the financial resources and freedom with which to facilitate broadening and contributing. I just feel extra sensitive to this since I felt so strapped financially in the early parts of my marriage. It was literally painful to feel so much freedom locked up because we were so financially unstable. Now that Dave has a better job and things are better it scares us to death to go back to living without money. Maybe that's a bad thing to be so dependent on money, but it's true that not having it takes away so much freedom to do things that broaden and contribute. Having said that, I must say that I sure felt like we were broadening (or learning) when we were so financially insecure. We learned how much we want to take care of financial stewardships and how important it is to be giving and to contribute what you have when you do have financial resources because we

were so thankful to people who were so generous and kind to us when we needed it.

So many people seek more and more wealth and the more they get the less satisfied they are. Wealth should never be the end-all goal B as it is for so many people. Some people could have a lot of problems taken away if they didn't have so much money. So I like the idea that we can pray to not have too much just as much as we can pray to have enough. The problem is, it gets hard to see where to draw the line of what is enough and what is too much.

It=s amazing how many people are so into credit card debt. Dave and I have realized this more and more B especially with his work (mortgage banking) where he deals with people in so much debt every day. I=m so thankful you guys have always steered us away from this. Credit is so easily accessible and so dangerous!

JOSH:

Shouldn't the Apercentage@ formula really be 10-20-30-40 instead of 10-20-70? 10 percent to church, 20 percent to investment, 30 percent to the government, and 40 percent to live on? Two things you can't avoid . . . death and taxes. Seriously, I really believe strongly in doing this. Ever since I started earning money . . . way back with my paper route and picking raspberries in the summer . . . I have always tried to follow this advice. If it is done consistently and the 20 percent is invested wisely, it can lead to so much financial freedom down the road. Sometimes I have not been as strict with myself as I have at other times, and I later wish that I would have saved more.

I remember hearing this advice for the first time. We were upstairs at our cabin at Bear Lake. Dad told us all about making money and what we should do with it. I=m not really sure why, but I was so interested in what he was saying. I was very young at the time, and I didn't make any money. But I decided right then that I would always try to follow this

model, because it made so much sense to me. Dad has explained it several times since then, but it made such an impression on me when I was young that I know I will try to do it throughout my life.

I agree with most of the memo, but I don't think there is anything wrong with experimenting with stock trading every once in a while. It should never become a habit, but you sure do learn a lot by trying it out!

Credit cards can be so dangerous. But if they are used carefully, they can be very helpful and beneficial. I actually use credit cards quite a lot. But I am very strict on the two rules that I follow. When I use a credit card to buy something, I deduct the amount from my checking account, just as though I am using a debit card. If I don't have enough money in my checking account, I don't buy it. And the other rule is that I always, always, always pay the ENTIRE balance every month. It is never a problem, because the money is already withdrawn in my checking account records, and all I have to do is make a simple transfer on the Internet. I have never paid a penny of interest on a credit card, because I pay the full balance off every month. It is like a free 30-day loan, but it shouldn't even be thought of as a loan, because charges should be deducted directly from your checking account. Also, you should never get a cash advance with a credit card, because interest in cash advances starts to accrue immediately . . . there is no 30-day grace period as there is with purchases. My cards also have no annual fees.

There are several benefits in using credit cards like this. First, you build good credit. When the time comes to buy a house, people will be looking at your credit report, and if you have used credit cards in the manner I just explained, you will have a very high credit rating. Another good reason to use credit cards is that many of them have added benefits, such as insurance and cash-back awards. If you use them correctly, you can actually get money back

depending on how much you charged to it. Products purchased with credit cards are usually insured from damage or theft, and it gives a little more peace of mind when making certain purchases. They have their own built-in return policy as well. Some have other types of included insurance. With some you can get free airline miles with every dollar spent, although these ones usually have an annual fee. And another good reason to have at least one credit card is that there are some instances, such as renting cars, where using a credit card is the only way you can get what you want.

Even with all the benefits credit cards have, they can be so dangerous. You have to be extremely disciplined and follow your own rules very strictly. If the rules are ever bent, it can lead to big, big problems.

I was always very grateful that you did this education loan thing. I think it is important to act as though you are paying for it . . . look for inexpensive housing, similar to what you would pay for if it were coming out of your pocket . . . look for good deals on food. This is something our parents do that very few others do. The tuition loans from the family help us value our college experience and degrees. I have thought if this is how I will do this in my family, and I guess it really depends on my financial situation at the time. We are so blessed to have parents who can do this.

SAYDI:

As a social worker I think a lot about how much good I could do and how many needy people I could help. I know there is so much that I need to do and right now it=s hard to see how I won=t be frustrated with all my good ideas but no means to move them to fruition! Ahhh! I need to find a rich husband (for much different reasons than most people want to marry rich!). Once I find him . . . he=ll never be able to be one of those FILTHY rich people.

I=ll use it all before it gets to be too much! (Maybe I shouldn=t tell him that until after we are married!)

I see so many people here in New York who don=t understand that money is not an end in and of itself. They get so caught up in the glamor of having more than they know what to do with. Sometimes they get to a level where money is seen as a means to an end . . . but in the end is just to get above others on the competition ladder . . . to play the game of who has the most! It=s so sad and it doesn=t bring happiness as far as I can see. The happy ones are the ones who are poor and generous! It=s rare when I see a rich, generous, happy person. When I do I greatly admire them for what they have achieved.

*This kind of fits in with what I was talking about with Dad the other day when he was in New York. We were eating at the top of The World Trade Center and we started talking about how easy it is for all the people in this huge city to buy into the same paradigm about money. They all seek and work and strive to make it to the top . . . but they don=t realize that they are only making it to the top of someone else=s structure, someone else=s game. So, usually when they make it up the ladder they are not satisfied. They never thought for themselves or created their own individual model for happiness . . . so they feel empty and brainwashed by what society says is good and worthy and successful. We need to create a new view of money, of life, of success in order to be really happy. Happiness comes from *Athinking freely.* I love these principles to use to regard money and finance because they give us some sort of defense against falling into the limiting way of thinking about money and resources that so many fall into and are made miserable by.*

Just a note . . . I don=t know how this could be incorporated . . . but I have the coolest friend who is married and they decided that in addition to paying tithing . . . whatever money they use on their own personal entertainment they match it and put the funds into an account

that they use for service-related activities or that they donate to humanitarian causes or give to homeless people, etc. I thought that was a good way of balancing what you spend on yourself and what you spend on others. Good idea, huh? I think this is something that saves one=s sanity when you are exposed to poverty and those who need so much. It=s so hard to indulge and justify spending money on yourself after serving and seeing people with nothing. This kind of keeps that all in check somehow.

I think we need to keep in mind that we are not Apaying for our education ourselves@ and be mindful and grateful and obligated to Eyrealm. Sometimes I find myself telling my friends proudly that AI=m paying for my own school.@ . . . I guess I just worry that I=ll get prideful rather than grateful in the eyes of others. I need to remember my duty to Eyrealm and its mission.

I love this document. It=s so good for us to have and to review often. Money is something that can help so much or hurt so much. I love being guided in this manner.

Also, I am so grateful for the opportunity to be helped financially . . . it is such an asset and makes me more able to really serve others and make a difference. Thanks Mom and Dad.

JONAH:

I am so impressed by how the financial principles we have learned in our family have applied to life. I have actually been saving 40% for the past 6 months. Aja and I live on hardly anything because we were both taught to be conscious of our money and how we spend it. We have also been greatly blessed by parents who understood this principle could help us not to go into debt and not to have big student loans to pay off for the next ten years after we graduate. What an immense blessing! I totally agree with all that is written in part

1 of this memo.

I feel bad sometimes that Eli and Charity weren't around in the days of the van and the old Mercedes. Although you can now afford to buy new cars, I remember how much you used to impress on us NEVER to buy a new car. I have saved so much in knowing that I can get around in a less-than-perfect car.

I really think that this memo turned out the best because it can all be measured and there can be hard and fast rules set where on all the other memos there are always going to be some differences between how a different child will react to different policies. Financial parameters are so much easier to set because you are dealing with numbers instead of minds. Absolutes, instead of unknowns are much easier to write about and to organize like a business.

AJA:

I don't know what to say about this memo . . . I totally agree with saving and investments, and I like the Eyrealm bank. I still owe you a discussion of how money works in my family, but the more I think of it, the less different it seems from yours. I guess there just wasn't a very calculated contract of saving and everything when we were little B I think we just watch my parents save so much and be so frugal and still make us feel financially secure even though we lived on a dirt road in a trailer house, that we contracted the saving disease. Plus, we all had to get jobs in the summer and did baby sitting during the school year, so we quickly figured out that two hours of work is not worth one stinky CD. Better to save it and get some interest. Anyway, other little differences, but not much.

TALMADGE:

Hmmmm . . . very good. Cool. Very cool.

After wading through the emotional and social parts of our effort and an adult family constitution, the financial part seemed more straightforward. Maybe this was because, by definition, it can be reduced to numbers and formulas, and we had worked out and established many of these while the kids were still small.

*Still, there were some corrections and clarifications that the kids' responses had suggested, and we now wanted to put the whole thing into the *principles, promises, and practices* format that was evolving. Also, we wanted to have an *image* or metaphor for this physical or financial part as we did for the other facets.*

Eyrealm Financial Foundation (establishing a structure of financial independence and assistance that enables and empowers).

Dear Eyrealm LTNs,

Thanks for your memo responses which were so strong and supportive but which also pointed up the need for certain clarification. Since then, we've talked enough together that it seems we're all on the same page and that the best simplifying metaphor here is that of a foundation. You each are designing and building your own unique lives, but it may take you longer and you may not be able to build as strong or as tall if you don't have any foundation to start off with.

As adult Eyrealm members, we all agree that it's best for each of us to pay our own way as much as possible, yet as your parents we don't want you to be held back or delayed by financial limitations. For example, we want you to be able to go to the best schools you can get into and graduate and move on as soon as you can rather than to compromise or delay because of financial limitations, and we want you to have a house sooner because you have a down payment rather than later because you don't.

This balance between assistance and independence is the basis for the physical or financial facet of our Eyrealm constitution which, with your inputs, can be revised a little to fit the principles, promises, practices framework.

Financial foundation principles

- ! *We are not owners but stewards.*
- ! *Money is a tool, a means to the ends of broadening and contributing and*

of finding and fulfilling foreordination.

- ! *There is a financial range in which maximum freedom and happiness lies.*
- ! *All battles are won on reserves.*

Financial foundation promises

- ! *Pray for enough (and to know what is enough).*
- ! *Practice 10 - 20 - 70.*
- ! *Hold the A20" in and Aoff limits@ investment account and deplete only for education or house down payment.*
- ! *No credit or consumer debt (other than one low-limit credit card).*
- ! *Go beyond the A10" by volunteering and/or having a Apersonal giving fund@ equal in size to your entertainment budget.*

Financial foundation practices

- ! *FIFBE covers room and board for undergraduate college and the entire cost of one semester abroad.*
- ! *All Eyrealm members can borrow interest free from FIFBE for undergraduate or graduate education as outlined in earlier memo and each establishes their own repayment schedule.*
- ! *All members can have FIFBE as a downpayment-supplying equity partner in a first home purchase as outlined in the earlier memo.*
- ! *According to your circumstances and depending on your career choice and income level, all members will attempt to repay and replenish FIFBE so it can continue to make loans to other Eyrealm members and cover travel, reunions, and other broadening and contributing Eyrealm activity.*
- ! *We hold a Afinance session@ at each Eyrealm conference to review FIFBE status, to share ideas and insights on individual investing, and to discuss each other=s employment and career options.*
- ! *An Eyrealm trust fund is established to provide matching funds for grand kids= education.*
- ! *Each grandchild receives shares in a mutual fund at birth. At age eight, these shares are put in the child=s control as the start of his or her A20" investment account and governed by the same Aoff limits.@*

Elaboration

As Jonah pointed out in his responses, this financial facet of our empty nest family was easier to define and lay out because it deals with tangibles rather than intangibles.

For our own approach and plan, we owe a lot of acknowledgment to our attorneys and accountants who were so instrumental in setting it all up. While each family would (and

should) do it differently, let us simply share our model as a Acase study.@

Grandchild Gifts
(Mutual Fund Shares)

Education
Trust Fund

Richard and
Linda as
Individuals

Retirement
(IRA=s, etc.)

Family
Partnership
Or
LLC
(Intergalactic bank)

Individual children as limited partners and owners

Family
Charity
or Foundation

As individuals and in our own names we try to own less than what can be passed on without estate tax (not terribly hard with our limited means). The family partnership owns a summer home and other assets that we want to pass on to the kids. (Thus they already own them since they are the partners in the family partnership or LLC [limited liability corporation]). We (Linda and Richard) are the general partners so we control those assets as long as we're alive. We get assets into the partnership either by gifting them (you can give \$10,000.00 per year to each child without tax consequences) or by creating some kind of business within the partnership that generates its own profits. The family bank is also a part of the partnership . . . from which the kids can take educational loans or partner for the down payment on their homes. Technically these Aloans@ are distributions from that child=s capital account within the partnership. If and when that repays it, their capital account (share of ownership) is restored.

Our retirement account=s obvious purpose is to fund our retirement, should that ever

actually occur. Whatever is left in it when we're gone (as well as in our own estate) goes not to the kids but first (up to a certain limit) to an educational trust fund which will provide matching funds for grand kids' college education. (The matching kicks in after their investment account funds are used. Whatever is there beyond that trust fund will go to the family charity.)

Our family charity, while it doesn't have great amounts of money (and had to be qualified as a 501 c 3 non-profit entity) has been a real joy to us. Our adult children constitute its board of directors and meet once a year (in connection with our family reunion) to decide on what charitable gifts we should make that year. They look for small charitable causes B soup kitchens, mentoring organizations, etc. B where a few thousand dollars could make a big difference, and allocate whatever the foundation can afford for that year. Thus they are getting together with the unselfish motive of selfless giving rather than getting together as some families do to selfishly argue about who gets what from the family estate (*that* kind of meeting will never happen in Eyrealm since whatever estate there is will go into the family charity and be available only as gifts to charitable causes).

What the kids (and grand kids) will have financially when we're gone (other than the principles we've tried to teach them) will be some education trust funds and the summer home that has been part of our tradition and that they will hopefully keep forever as a gathering place. The grandchildren are also given a modest amount at birth, in the form of a mutual fund Bbirthday gift.@ This grows for eight years and starts off their A20%@ investment account, which they contribute into and which is off-limits except for education and first-home purchase.

Tying Service into the Formula (Giving Something Back)

I (Linda) have thought so much lately about how hard it is to really be grateful for what we have until we don't have it any more. It's hard to truly appreciate your thumb until it's broken and you can't use it. It's hard to really adore the time you have with your preschoolers until they've gone off to school. For the purposes of this chapter, we have to remind ourselves that it is hard to really appreciate money management skills until we run onto hard times or don't have it anymore . . . unless you are blessed with an experience that we've had in recent months that has helped us to see what might happen in a family with NO financial skills or training.

Two months ago we decided to do a Church Service Mission. This involves attending church services in a new location with an inner-city ward, enjoying new associations and being assigned to care for some special needs families and to give them assistance in whatever way we can. What a *great* learning experience this has been!

At the core of the problems of many of these families is the lack of financial stability and sensibility. Even though they are on welfare, there is no way most of them can pay the rent and utilities. The church is helping, but the families are desperately in need of a long-term solution to their long-term problems.

One of the greatest blessings for us is that these dire situations and financial disasters help us to be so very grateful for our own good, hard working, loving, financially conservative parents who, even though they were near the poverty lines themselves, taught us principles of earning and saving that we just took for granted. When we were children, we thought everyone lived that way. Thankfully, due to this recent Church service mission, we haven't had to actually experience the loss of financial stability in order to truly appreciate it.

As your children prepare to leave your nest and you continue to work with them on financial planning, add service to the mix. Volunteer everywhere you can -- from soup

kitchens to ward welfare assignments. Besides the joy of service, this will give your children the opportunity to see the consequences of mishandled finances and to gain fresh appreciation for what they have. Work together with your children to teach sound financial principles to others and the teaching will reinforce the knowledge in your own children. Talk together about what you observe in the financial lives of others.

Mental Empty Nest Parenting

Helping with Each Other=s Goals . . . and Staying Stimulated

I (Linda) was almost in a trance as I watched one of the last high school assemblies that our youngest son Eli would be a part of. It was the last half of his senior year which had seemed to be slipping through our hands like water through a sieve. With delight, I watched the absolutely darling brigade of senior boys doing the ARiver Shants,@ a technical Adance@ choreographed by the head cheerleader and performed by a bunch of senior boys, including Eli. These boys had practiced and refined to the point that even the original River Dancers would have been impressed. A smile leaked from everyone=s face in the audience as we watched them all kicking and whirling in their open-necked white shirts and shants (for those who may not know this is a cross between shorts and pants which was extremely popular at our school at that moment). Feeling like there was a shard in my heart, I realized that no matter how much I wanted to stop it or freeze it, time was marching on! Soon those great kids who had watched movies and played basketball and Nintendo at our house and had raided the food cupboard in our garage (stocked especially for them) would be gone. Even though many would keep in touch, most would be gone onto a new world of work, college, and missionary service.

My reverie was broken by one of the other mothers who slipped into the seat beside me and began to share the worries on her mind. It was the day after parent/teacher conferences. Interestingly, her concerns were not about her son who was a straight A student, but her cousin=s son whose family had been transferred across the country and who she had offered to care for so that he could finish his senior year and his soccer career with a team that had a shot at the state championship. This young man was one of Eli=s friends who had often

been in our home.

“He’s failing in every class!” she moaned. “His citizenship grades are awful too. Once the soccer season was over and he didn’t have to maintain eligibility, he just dropped everything. He stays up late and goes to school only when he feels like it. I don’t know if he’ll ever be able to graduate! Plus, I’m feeling like the wicked witch of the west when I try to make him do what he should. Our relationship is strained to the max. What can I do?”

I felt so sorry for this good mother who was doing her best in a difficult situation. Also sorry for the terrific young man who we all loved and whose soccer season had been a big disappointment. The only thing I could think to say was, “Sounds like Travis needs to set some goals.”

The assembly ended and my friend and I were hurled back into our own worlds. But I couldn’t help thinking about our conversation and how important setting and working toward goals is as we progress through life. This boy had probably not thought much about what he wanted in his life past the soccer championship. High school kids are especially good at living for the moment. Unfortunately there is no way we can really set goals *for* them. We can encourage them by providing a framework for them. We can add physical tools like paper and pencils and insist they work on their goals each week. We can ask them to consider what they want to do in the coming year: physically, socially, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. Yet the only way they are ever going to follow through on things they think they should or would like to do is if they *own* them.

No matter how much we would like to set goals for them based on what they need to do in order to accomplish the things we want them to do, it will never work unless the goals are *their* ideas and the plans of how to accomplish them come from *their* heads. We can cajole and bribe until the cows come home, but by the time our children are ready to leave

home, goals are useless unless they come out of the head of the owner!

In our house, with a father who is a goal master (sort of like the Yoda of Goals), our children have been setting goals since they were old enough to draw pictures. At three, every child started having what we call a Sunday Session, which consisted of them drawing a picture on their goal chart for the week of something (1) that they could do for a family member that week: i.e. get the diapers for the baby when mommy needs them, (2) something they could do for a friend: i.e. share a toy, and (3) something they can do to show that they love Heavenly Father: i.e. say my prayers every night. The pictures that they draw were hilarious and a visual reminder of a simple goal.

As time passed, the Sunday Session became a habit (sometimes a parent-enforced one). Once a year, during the last week of August, we had the kids do a little longer session where they set their school year goals, thought of their own personal theme for the year and actually made a chart that showed their goals and included a few of the plans to accomplish them.

Before you send yourself on a guilt trip, please know that we know that every parent does not have a gift or a drive for teaching their children to set goals. Those who do may have other, even better methods and those who don't are most assuredly better at some other parental responsibility. Our experience has simply taught us that kids need to set their own goals and that they benefit hugely from it. And as we've said to parents so many times, it's best to start early, but it's never too late!

If you have the luxury of a few more years with your children at home, during their junior and senior years when they are busy taking the SAT and ACT tests and thinking about college, it is important to spend some time helping them think about where they are going and what they want to do with their lives. For most, the long term is still pretty vague, but they

know what they're good at and probably need some time beyond what they might do at a college fair or a counselor's office thinking about what they dream of becoming. They can really benefit from your input about their talents and your guiding questions about what they might want to pursue.

If your children have already left home and you haven't talked much about goals, arrange a dinner or even a phone call where the entire conversation is based on a presentation of their goals and an in-depth talk about what they think they'd like to become. It will give you a chance to hear some things that you may not have known. Though you may be dying to give advice during the conversation, remember that while advice may be important, admiration, encouragement and praise is infinitely more important. Be careful not to assume that they have already spent some time thinking about their life goals. Time to think and talk about their goals exclusively and a chance to present them to you formally will add so much to their ability to truly own them. If you really want them to share their goals and dreams, you may want to start by sharing your own!

The real beauty of parenting children who have set their own goals is that you become their *helper* and their *supporter* rather than their *nagger* or their *criticizer*. It's *their* goal which they *set* and you are trying to help them accomplish it. This casts you and your relationship in a completely different light than when you are just trying to get them to do what you think they should.

Herding or Influencing?

A lot of us who like old west novels and movies aren't aware of how much the job (and the philosophy) of real cowboys has changed. A *Cowboys* -- those *Boys* who get cows from the range to the market -- used to herd them with their horses and their lariats and

their dogs -- keeping the herd together, moving them along, and rounding up any strays. The problem with this old-fashioned kind of cowboying was that the cattle were too stressed by the herding and harassing and lost too much weight by the time they got to market. What successful cowboys do today is called *Ainfluencing*.⁶ They ride along way out on the perimeter of the herd and try, just by their presence and direction, to influence the ways in which the cattle move. Instead of whooping and yelling and slapping and sending out the dogs, they actually sing -- it seems to calm the cattle as well as letting them know where the cowboys are and influencing them to move along at their own pace in the right general direction.

Mental empty nest parenting ought to change and evolve in similar directions. Small children, growing up in our homes, need a certain amount of correction, of management, of firm direction -- of *Aherding*.⁶ What grown children need and deserve (and the only thing they will accept over the long term) is *Ainfluencing*.⁶ We should strive to be a calm and reassuring influence in their decisions, their goals, and their lives. When we push too hard, or herd, it always creates stress and often resistance or rebellion.

Of course the analogy breaks down, because in empty nest parenting our children, not us, choose which market or destination they're going to, and there is no cowboy-cattle distinction. We are the same and they are equal with us.

When we make our first attempt at a *Amental empty nest agreement*⁶ we hadn't quite figured this out. Still, the memo was an honest attempt, and it led to some great feedback and resolutions.

It was with these thoughts in mind that we drafted our mental ENP memo:

CASE STUDY

To: *Eyrealm*

From: Dad and Mom (particularly, in this case, Dad)

Re: The Mental Functions of Eyrealm

1. I've always said (and felt, deeply) that the most important thing you would ever learn from your parents was a true empathy and a genuine concern for other people, which I knew you would learn 90 percent from your mother who possesses this Christ-like quality as an abiding gift. If I, on the other hand, have a corresponding gift (albeit a gift of less importance), that I've wanted to pass on to each of you, it is my ability to bring things to pass by setting goals and implementing plans.
2. My efforts to pass this ability on to you have ranged from helping you draw pictures of three simple weekly goals (one for school, one for self, one for family) before you were old enough to write . . . to the proper use of planning books, and day timers . . . to our personal mission statements . . . to hour-glass-timed Sunday Sessions . . . to the rather sophisticated yearly theme and goal charts that we prepare together each summer for the year ahead.
3. One of my greatest sources of pride (the good kind of pride, I hope) is to see how good each of you have become at goal setting and planning. You've each adapted and developed your own way -- which matches your own personality and approach -- and you're now becoming my teachers as you continue to get better and better at deciding what you want and then bringing it to pass.
4. All of which is why it's even more exciting (and mutually beneficial) to talk about and help each other with goals now that you've become an adult and moved away from home. As we consult with and advise each other on our goals and plans for our individual families, our educations, our careers, our service, etc., we not only synergize and refine those goals, we communicate on a whole new and fully-sharing level and we stimulate and motivate each other, opening new insights and perspectives to one another.

PROPOSED AGREEMENT

5. Thus, we suggest that we should all agree to continue the tradition of each creating for ourselves a large goal and theme chart for each new year and sharing these creations with each other for input and enhancement. We suggest that we continue to have our year's start in the fall with the start of the school year. This allows us to develop our goals and themes during the summer and then to complete, refine, and share them with each other at the August Bear Lake Eyrealm reunion.
6. The individual and collective benefits of setting and sharing our yearly goals are:
 - A. It maximizes our chances to make each year a masterpiece of sorts by

thinking it through in advance and Acreating it spiritually.@

- B. It attracts inspiration and divine guidance; makes our prayers more specific and thus our answers.
 - C. It improves and deepens the communication and trust between us -- because we are sharing with and helping each other on our most intimate hopes and desires.
 - D. It facilitates the Aconsulting@ relationship discussed in the Asocial ENP memo@ -- and fosters the Ashare all, be offended by none@ mentality.
 - E. It sets both a pro-active, goal-setting example and a communication example for the next generation (your children and our grandchildren).
 - F. It gives us a basis and reference point for the weekly Ahour glass@ Sunday planning sessions* to which we=re all committed and makes those Sunday hours a kind of link and bond between us all as we share the practice.@
7. As we take active interest in each other=s goals and in the process by which those goals are set, we become more appreciative of how each other thinks and of our potential to both stimulate and be stimulated by one another=s ideas and perspectives. Thus we accept the opportunity and the responsibility of sharing things we=ve read or heard or experienced that we think might motivate and enhance each other=s minds.

Here are some of our children=s responses to the Amental memo.@

SAREN:

I don=t remember us doing these Ayearly theme and goal charts@ at our reunions. I=ve only seen Eli and Charity=s goal and theme charts B does anyone else do them? I think it=s an idea that came along after I had left. It sounds like a good idea and it probably works well for some people. Doing school-year-based goals is also a good idea for some people. For Jared and me, the school year has no real meaning right now so we=re doing Jan-Dec goals. I don=t think it=s a good idea to state here that you think this is the best way for us all

*The practice of sitting down for an hour each Sunday to plan the week ahead.

to be setting goals, especially after you just said that we all do things in our own ways and you think it=s great.

I propose that this summer, we all share our methods of goal setting B both long and short term. I=d be very interested to hear what everyone else is doing these days, especially the other married couples. Maybe we need to just ask open ended questions about how people do goals and glean ideas from each other rather than saying that we should all do goals for a certain time-frame in a shared manner. It would be great to share our goals when we get together this summer as well as talk about processes we use.

I also propose that we take some time this summer to talk about how we can help each other reach our goals. One idea might be to find Agoal buddies@ who have a similar goal to us so that we can check up on each other. Shawni and I have shared goals lots of times about eating right or doing other things and it=s great to check up on each other.

With this memo, I think it would be good to do a list of principles of goal setting that we can all agree on (sort of like you did in the financial memo) and then propose a list of practices that could support these principles. Something like:

- ! Lifetime, era, yearly, monthly, and weekly goals help us to consciously and consistently move forward in our lives, fully embracing the concept of eternal progression.*
- ! Setting goals in specific priority areas helps us maintain balance in our lives (i.e., family, career/school/projects, personal, others).*
- ! Setting aside time each week and extra time once a month to review and set goals is vital to the goal-setting and reaching process.*
- ! Sharing our goals with spouses and with family members helps us to reach them.*

To support these principles, we propose:

- ! *All members of Eyrealm have weekly Sunday Sessions . . .*
- ! *Once a year, Eyrealm members share their yearly goals, talk about their goal-setting processes and strategize together about how they can help each other reach certain goals.*
- ! *Once a year, Eyrealm members make a few specific goals for what they=d like to collectively accomplish during the year (a service project, a family newsletter, help for some extended family members . . . a couple of cousins need help right now).*

I also think that this memo needs to address some of the other aspect of Amental ENP@ which might include:

- ! *How can we stimulate each other=s minds (book reviews, quote exchanges, etc.).*
- ! *How can we learn from each other B maybe report at conferences on the most important things we=ve learned that year (about the world, people, ourselves, the gospel, etc.) or a new subject or book that we think everyone would be interested in.*
- ! *What can we do to make sure everyone=s getting enough mental stimulation (especially those at home with young children who may feel at times that their intellectual minds are underutilized)?*

SHAWNI AND DAVE:

Neither of us has ever done this type of Agoal and theme@ chart before. This is something that you started after I left home and I=ve seen them before but have never been

involved in the steps to doing them.

When we get married off into our own families it just has to change a little somehow. It=s not the same as when we were just one individual family unit and we just shared everything in life. Maybe it=s not all healthy to always Ashare all@ because sometimes new family units need their own unique bond and things they only share with each other.

It=s weird but as you get married and spin off into your own little planet family, things aren=t as Apublic@ as they are when you=re still in your little home orbit around the sun with no one else to pull you in another direction. This is not to say that Dave pulls me in a bad way away from you, but he has his own way of doing things and sometimes I think he needs to figure out his own way for his own sanity. Our family has so many systems and traditions and unique ideas that I think others who join in want to find another way to do things B not because they don=t agree with what=s being done, but because they would feel helpless and insignificant if they just followed along with the status quo, never questioning, never re-evaluating.

So I guess what I=m trying to say is that I really agree with and love the idea in this memo, but I have to take my own new family into account too and we need to figure out a system that works well for us. I think it=s great to help each other out and be aware of what everyone else in the family is striving for B and it definitely makes us feel closer and more bonded so I will commit to try my best to do this. But I don=t think we can just expect everyone who joins in the family to jump right in and follow the current.

I totally agree with Saren=s comment about stimulating each other=s minds. We all have such different and diverse interests and curiosities thus we can gain so much by sharing with each other. We can (and do, I think) help each other become the best we can be by observing each other and learning from each other. There=s nothing I like better than when

Jonah shares a poem he loves with me, Saren shares an insight with me, Saydi shares her perspective with me, you let me know what you've noticed about Max or Elle lately and help stimulate new ideas for parenting, etc.

JOSH:

I have a problem with this proposal. In item 3 above, you say AYou've each adapted and developed your own way B which matches your own personality and approach, and you're now becoming my teachers as you continue to get better and better at deciding what you want and then bringing it to pass.@ But then you suggest that we all should do our goals your way . . . with the charts. How are we going to learn from what we've adapted and developed if we revert back to a system that many of us were never even a part of? I think that if we are going to do any sharing (which in itself I am a little uneasy about), it should be the sharing of our own systems, and how we each individually bring things to pass.

The Agoal and theme@ chart sounds like a good thing for visual people. Dad is very visual and he likes to make charts and things that he can look at. I would have a hard time coming up with a large chart, and it wouldn't be something that I would hang on my wall and look at. I am more of a mental person. I agree that it is important to write goals down, but I like to structure them in my mind rather than on a poster. And I always set my yearly goals at the beginning of the year now that I am not in school. Perhaps when my own kids start school I will go back to beginning in the fall.

I don't want this to sound negative, but I really feel that there are many goals that are personal, only between me and Heavenly Father, that I don't want to share with everyone. It is good to share some goals, but I would feel uncomfortable sharing all of my goals with the family. I don't mind sharing goals after I have achieved them, but there are

some that I just feel should not be shared.

Is so good to be aware of what we are each doing. It allows others to help us in ways that we can't help ourselves. Some opportunities are only accessible through others. So I agree that we should share many of our thoughts and ideas with each other. But I feel that some goals become more personal when we leave home, and they become more of a personal thing instead of a family thing. So I feel that we should only share the goals that we want to share and the goals that we want others to follow up on. There are some things I want to do in life because I personally made that decision and did it all myself, not because people are expecting it of me because they heard I was going to do it or because they are watching me and following-up on me. If people always knew what I wanted to do, it would take much of the spontaneity and surprise out of life. A Congratulations, you did it, but I already knew you were going to do it. It's a hard thought to explain, but one that I feel strongly about.

JONAH:

This one is a hard one for me. I know that I am good at goal setting and I have really adapted a lot of what I have been taught by you, but I just feel like I am not doing it quite right all the time because you made it such a system. I feel like you addressed this well in 3. Right now in my life I really don't feel like I have a lot of goals . . . but I really do. Actually I guess that they are all plans and I know what I am working towards. Aja makes goals in a completely different way than I and she seems to be effective in reaching each one of her goals. She just makes lists and crosses things off each day as she finishes them. Her goals are what we would call plans. Our goals together are strong and solid but we are just trying to integrate the different ways that we get things done.

I think that we should totally be able to share our goals because in many cases I think

that we can help each other to reach the goals that are set. Because we are all going to have very different professions I think we will be able to have our own Anetworking@ only it will be much more effective than business networking because we have better communication and experience together than any business could ever develop.

I know that Aja and I will eventually develop some kind of perfect goal making and striving process but I really think that we are going to have to create the method ourselves. With the lessons we have learned from our families as a catalyst, we may come up with a perfected version in a few years . . . you have to admit that it took you a long time to get to this point of making your charts and most of the learning took place in doing things in other ways until you realized that you had found your best way. Struggle is a big part of the reason that we are here on the earth and we have the privilege of struggling together if we are married and sharing the burden. So many of the stories that you and mom have together are from those early years of struggle and we do appreciate the help that we get from you and we do struggle in different ways with the changing of the world around us. There are so many things that we gratefully won't struggle with because of your lessons. We will never struggle with great debt and we will always live within our means and I am so grateful for that because it will help us to live free.

We should share it all but need to realize that the methods to setting and reaching goals is and will be different for each of us with some common threads because of our upbringing, but we will bring strength and variation because of our ability to adapt to the way that our spouses were taught.

TALMADGE:

The bottom line on this whole part is that we've (the children) got to step it up and

really broaden and contribute. I imagine the amazing synergy if we could all step it up and be a little more aggressive in our own individual goal setting.

AJA:

I like this memo, even though I'm not totally used to this whole formulated goal-setting program yet, because it's so different than what I'm used to. I obviously could comment on some of the 'fully-sharing level' and 'consulting' comments because I think they are a little too formulated, but all-and-all, I say Gung-Ho! Oh, one question . . . what should happen when someone doesn't like/has misgivings about someone's goals or lack of a specific goal? Are we just going to tell each other straight out?

Well, our 'mental' memo stimulated lots of important feedback and brought out some important issues. After trying to digest it all, we made our attempt to reduce the 'mental facet' of our adult family agreement to a memorable metaphor and to the principles, promises, and practices format.

The Mental 'Watchtower' of Eyrealm (Synergizing with and Stimulating Each Other in the Arts of Mental Creation and Perspective Expansion)

Dear Children:

Once again, your response, this time to the 'mental' memo was illuminating. It's interesting that we all appreciate each other's interest in and support of our individual dreams and goals, but none of us want to be stereotyped or confined in how we do our goal setting and planning and we each want to make the choice as to which goals we share and how we share them. And we all see the 'mental' facet of Eyrealm

as broader than just the sharing of goals . . . it includes stimulating and educating each other and sharing everything from ideas and perspectives to favorite books.

What it really seems that we want to do for each other is to elevate and expand our perspectives ^B to lengthen and broaden our views. By ourselves, each of us has a limited, ground-level view of the terrain around us and even of where we want to go in that terrain. But together, and with the individual and collective mental resources of Eyrealm, we can boost each other up onto a ^Awatchtower[@] and see further and with more perspective, thus understanding the world around us better and also having a sharper vision of what we each might be able to accomplish and where we might be able to go in the world.

With that image in mind, and drawing from the input each of us gave, perhaps we can all arrive at the following strategy or agreements for the mental Eyrealm.

Mental watchtower principles

- ! *Desires and dreams must become goals and plans in the mind before they can become realities in the world.*
- ! *Sharing your goals with those who love you unconditionally refines the goals, commits you to their pursuit, and increases their chance of being accomplished.*
- ! *Lifebalance results from goalbalance. The three prime stewardships are family, work, and self (^Aself[@] includes the service you choose to give others). Both our goals and our life should balance them.*
- ! *From foreordination insights and from eternal and lifetime goals, we can ^Adraw down[@] goals for the seasons and eras of our lives. From these we can draw down yearly monthly and weekly goals.*

Mental watchtower promises

- ! *We will each seek divine guidance in laying out our lives according to God=s will.*
- ! *We will each share selected yearly goals and their derivation (and our own unique goal-setting methods) at the annual Eyrealm conference ^B establishing commitment and seeking input.*
- ! *We will each hold a weekly ^Ahourglass Sunday Session[@] that reflects yearly and monthly goals for family, work, and self.*
- ! *We will be aware of, and offer help and support for the goals of each other Eyrealm member.*
- ! *We will each share in the responsibility for the ongoing mental stimulation and education of each Eyrealm member and support and celebrate each other=s pursuit of knowledge and know-how..*

Mental watchtower practices

- ! *We each create (and selectively share) our own unique approaches to*

and methods for goal setting, planning, and time management . . . and share the goal=s themselves as we see fit, looking to each other for support and for ideas on implementation.

! *We share (formally once a year at Eyrealm conference and informally via e-mail) what we are each learning (about our own profession or discipline, about the world, etc.).*

! *We share brief summaries of favorite books and articles via e-mail. Each of us is assigned one month of the year during which we share, via a more detailed summary, our favorite book of the year.*

Any parent who feels that he is good at something, wants his children to emulate the skill. The only thing better than emulating is when children develop their own unique approach, borrowing what they like from Ayour way@ but adding and modifying according to their our gifts and perspectives. That is exactly what happened in our family regarding goal setting.

And what a blessing it is to have unique, individualist children who pursue their own interests, read their own books, see the world from their own vantage points . . . and then share their particular perspectives with each other and with you!

Spiritual Empty Nest Parenting

Understanding That All of the Real Answers are Spiritual

It was our annual family reunion B the time we are supposed to come together, to share, to have fun in the joy of being together. And we were having fun on the afternoon I=m going to refer to. Saydi, Noah, Eli and Talmadge and I were waterskiing on the mirror surface of our beloved Bear Lake, and were in the process of teaching a little cousin to water-ski. I thought I was doing the teaching. Sixteen-year-old Eli thought, since he=s a better skier than I, that he was doing the teaching. I reminded him who it was that had taught him to ski. He reminded me that that was a very long time ago. I chose to ignore everything Eli said and proceeded to teach the kid my way. Eli responded with some angry, rude, comments, one of which got to me enough that I pulled the boat into the shallows near shore, turned the driving and teaching over to Talmadge and Saydi and told Eli to get out and walk to the beach with me. The two of us walked in through the shallow water, continuing our argument. Jonah, twenty-one at the time and feeling that Eli needed some support (or possibly some protection), got out before the boat pulled away and followed us. The two boys basically ganged upon me, and said, in essence: AYou=ve always taught us to have our own opinions and do things our way B but you don=t listen to our opinions B you just plough ahead with your way.@

AThis isn=t about opinions,@ I said. AIt=s about respect. You just don=t talk to a parent the way Eli was talking in the boat.@

AWell, you better decide what you want B kids with their own opinions or kids who just shut up and let you do everything your way.@

AI just said . . . it=s not about opinions, it=s about respect. @

I also told Jonah that Eli didn=t need his help with the argument and that it was between the two of us. Jonah=s response was, AWell yeah, but you=re so overbearing, and it gave me a chance to make a point. @

AWhat point? @

AJust that, you say you want us to think for ourselves, but you smother us with your view of things and it=s so strong and so persuasive that we feel like we don=t have a choice or an opinion! @

ALike when? @

AOKAY, like when I wanted to go for a semester in Boston and you thought I should wait and stay near home until graduate school. Part of the reason I went was to *defy* you B because it *wasn=t* your idea . . . @

Suddenly the waterskiing issue had escalated to defiance, independence, and the whole sweep of who we each were to each other.

With hindsight, I=m so glad we were on vacation so that we had time for the talk that followed (isn=t that the real reason for vacations and reunions?). We spent the rest of the day talking heart to heart, first the three of us, then alone with Eli, sitting on the sand. Then alone with Jonah, walking along the beach. Then with the whole family sitting around our big table and offering a family prayer for better understanding of each other=s feelings.

What we all ended up doing (along with venting and explaining and apologizing and resolving) was to recommit all of ourselves to more open and more spiritual communication. We realized anew that we are a family of strong individual wills and opinions and that only the spirit can truly unite us and calm us to where we learn from each other rather than arguing and competing.

ASpiritual empty nest parenting@ is last in this book=s format because it is the ultimate answer and the facet which can help with and pull together the other four.

Three and Four Generation Families

As mentioned earlier, nowhere in the scriptures, when the word Afamily@ is used, does it refer to a two generation family -- to children and parents alone. The word always refers to three generations or more. The modern American idea of a two-generation nuclear family -- parents and kids living in one house -- is a new and limiting definition of the word.

Family should mean more than that -- especially spiritually. *Family* should, on a practical and daily basis, mean at least three and maybe four generations. As an empty nest parent, your spiritual concept of family should include your adult children and their children as well as your own parents if they are still alive. ACousins@ and Auncles@ and Aaunts@ and Anieces@ and Anephews@ and Agrandchildren@ and Agrandparents@ and even Agreat grandparents@ and Agreat grandkids@ should be important and functional words in the concept and operation of family.

Is this possible, people ask, in our modern, mobile, transient world? Answer: Yes -- and it is more important and more *needed* than ever before. The harder the wind blows, the more we need our Aroots@ and our Agrove@ -- not only for protection, but for peace and for security. The deepest and most spiritual view of a family is that it is made up of relationships and bonds that can outlast this world.

Everyone defines ASpiritual@ differently, yet Gallup tells us that 80 percent of Americans describe themselves as ASpiritual people@ and 95 percent believe in some kind of higher being. Certainly for those of us in the Church who do believe in a personal and interested God, the spiritual aspects of empty nest parenting are the most important of all. Many parents find that they pray more about a child after he or she has left home than they

did before. Perhaps because the danger and challenges the child faces are bigger, or perhaps because when he or she is gone B out of our sight B and further from our influence B we feel more need for God=s involvement.

Maybe right there is the real key to understanding spiritual empty nest parenting. Just as we tend to depend more on God to watch over our children when they leave our home, perhaps God depends more on us to watch over His children when they leave Him and come to this earth. God, as our Heavenly Father, the true Father of our spirits, thus we are mere Ababy sitters@ for the children he sends to us. In that context, we should be constantly asking the true parent for help and guidance in raising and caring for His children. And we should assume and expect God to answer that kind of direct-stewardship prayer.

In the turmoil and materialistic complexity of today=s world, most believing parents acknowledge the need they have for God=s help. And we do often feel that need most keenly when a child has moved on and no longer lives under our direct care. In that mind frame, we drafted our first attempt at a Aspiritual agreement@ with our adult children.

CASE STUDY

To: Eyrealm
From: Mom and Dad
Re: The Spiritual Center of Eyrealm

1. *As our family grows -- as each of you spin off into your own orbits with your own unique interests, individual careers, and families of your own -- it could be thought of as Athe great diversification or decentralization,@ Athe pulling apart,@ Athe breaking up@ or even Athe redundancy@ of Eyrealm.*
2. *We all choose not to think of it this way, however; quite the contrary. We think of it as expansion, as growth, as the maturing and seasoning and ripening of our family kingdom; as the harvesting of our joy and as the increasing opportunity for family synergy and for mutual help and chosen interdependence that magnifies both our individual and our collective broadening and contributing.*
3. *The reason we can live far apart and progress with our own individual lives*

without jeopardizing the unity and sanctity of our family is that we have a dense spiritual core whose powerful gravity holds each of us in dependable, coordinated orbit. (We must like that metaphor, having used it twice, perhaps because there are nine planets in our solar system.)

4. *That dense, spiritual core, of course, is Christ. What could be more uniting than our shared (yet individual) belief that He is our Creator, our Savior, our Advocate and our Judge.*
5. *This (His) spiritual gravity Δ holds Δ us in a number of beautiful ways. (An alternative metaphor from one of our two favorite hymns, Δ Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing, Δ [the other one -- Δ If You Could Hi to Kolob Δ -- stays with the first metaphor] is that of a long and benevolent leash that keeps us from straying into darkness and danger. For though we are Δ prone to wander, Lord I feel it Δ we can ask Him to Δ let thy goodness, as a fetter, bind my wandering heart to thee. Δ)*
6. *What are the ways we have personally found in which His gravity and his fetter holds us close (both to Him and to each other)?*
 - A. *Because of Him we try to see everyone and everything spiritually. Each person is a brother or a sister, and each thing (or challenge or opportunity) is a gift from Him.*
 - B. *Because of Him, there is a focal point for our worship, and we unite ourselves by thinking about the same aspect of His character each Sunday, each of us, wherever we are as we partake of the sacrament (by focusing on the same chapter in What Manner of Man).**
 - C. *Because of Him we value each other eternally. We believe we were close brothers and sisters in our spiritual existence before this life and that we are here together to help each other return to Him. Thus we prioritize each other and take responsibility for each other. (An unending extension of when you, as eight year olds, were Δ tutors Δ for a younger Δ tutee. Δ)*
 - D. *Because of Him we concentrate on learning and teaching and living the values He taught and exemplified and the joys He gave and made possible. We've structured and organized these joys and values and taught them to you as you will teach them to the next generation of Eyrealm.*
 - E. *Because of Him and His example, we are oriented to service, both collectively and individually. Our idea of a great family vacation is a humanitarian expedition to some place with great needs, and each of us looks for service opportunities and factors Δ contributing Δ heavily into the choices of career and profession.*

*Richard Eyre=s book containing a separate aspect of Jesus= character to focus on each week.

- F. *Because of Him we pray and study and testify together and separately. Our monthly family testimony meetings which we do in our own orbits and together whenever we can allow formal expressions of love and belief. We try to coordinate scriptural study to motivate and share with each other and we pray together when we can, even by phone.*
7. *Isn't it great (and important to remember) that all the preceding points begin with "Because of Him." Think how weak and powerless we would be as a family if we were left to our own devices or plans or schemes for staying united and committed to each other. It is our allegiance, commitment, and loyalty to Christ that makes possible our deepest unity with each other.*
8. *PROPOSED AGREEMENT DRAFT: Our goal is nothing less than spiritual unity and character unity. This is our center and our priority. It has always been so. When we used to make up our "school year goals" together at Bear Lake each summer (and as we still do when we gather there for summer reunions), we structured and clustered our goals by category. For students, "category 2" was always academics and grades and "category 3" was extracurricular things from student government to sports and music. "Category 1" was always character . . . giving service to others and develop your testimony and spirituality. May it always be so!*

Some of the kids' responses to this draft memo:

SAREN:

This memo, like the mental one, really needs some more concrete principles and suggestions for practices stated. It's nice, but it's vague. How do you, as our parents, want to continue to guide us spiritually? How will you continue to contribute to our ongoing spiritual development? What is our role, as we become more "interdependent," in helping you guys increase your spirituality? How can we all help each other draw closer to Christ and thus closer to each other? Do we want to talk about and maybe all commit to some basic principles regarding living the gospel to a high standard (such as how we observe the Sabbath Day, how we share the gospel, how we read the scriptures, how we help others around us, etc.).

I think we need to come up with some more concrete methods. Reading "What

Manner of Man@ together and having testimony meetings together when we get a chance are two great methods that we should never abandon. But I think we need to address all the questions I've just asked in this memo. I'm very interested in what you think about our roles in each other=s spirituality and salvation.

SHAWNI:

I totally agree with this memo, so I'm having a hard time figuring out what to write that isn=t just a reiteration of what you have said. So I thought I=d just mention something this memo made me think about. Reading this made me wonder how our family would be without Christ. I think that we would still love each other so much. Just the way our personalities seem to mesh just seems so natural and so much how it is supposed to be. But are our personalities the way they are because we do have that inner core belief in the gospel? Would we be different people if we didn=t believe in Christ? Would we not care about each other as much? Thinking about that makes me realize how true it is what you say about Christ being the one who unites us. He does create that dense spiritual core whose gravity pulls us even closer together.

I thought about the fact that Christ unites us and brings us closer a lot when I was going to Boston University. I made a lot of really nice friends B some of whom I still keep in touch with. I loved the fact that they were different from me and we had some great discussions. But the whole feeling was different when I was surrounded by people with my same belief in Christ. Somehow that just made me so much closer to them. Some people I would meet I would click with from the first moment because we had so much in common B and we shared the same deep-down beliefs. So do you think we would lose a lot of our strong relationship as family members if we didn=t believe in Christ? There are some families I

have met who are very close who don't believe in God, but I really don't think it's the same kind of closeness.

So I think that having Christ-like love is the key for any family to stay together & as you say & Christ is the key, the gravitational core. Trying to gain that Christ-like love takes a lot of effort & a lot of reaching out to hold that hand that is & continually stretched out @ to us as Isaiah says so many times. It takes a lot of effort to always be aware of the needs and concerns of each family member. And of course some family members are a lot easier to give that Christ-like love to than others. But if we can continually strive to have it for each and every family member then we will really always have all that this memo promises. Christ is the core, the center, our Savior & He has made our family possible. We need to always strive to stay so close to Him and if we do we will always be close as a family.

JOSH:

I believe this memo contains the main purpose of families: To help one another return to Him. And I believe that without any of this current discussion or any of these memos, we are doing, and always have done an excellent job in helping each other return to Him. We are forever in debt to our earthly parents who have done such a wonderful job of this. We are all so blessed to be born in the time we were born, the country we were born in, and most importantly the church and family we were born in. The odds are astounding. But these really are not odds because this is how God wanted it.

There is nothing here to disagree with. There isn't much to add, either. I do think that the bond that we share as a family is very unique and amazing. I love how we all have such big visions and dreams to do our own little parts to change the world. I am so grateful that we have the gospel and that Christ is at the center of everything we do.

JONAH:

The worries as expressed in paragraph 1 could never be realized in our family. We will undoubtedly go our own ways but we will never fall apart. The structure and skeleton of Eyrealm will always be necessary and present because we are built on its foundation. Because we are close and we do have good relationships and channels of communication the solutions and the mission statements need to be short, simple, and to the point.

Christ truly is the center and core of who we are and who we can become and that is such a central part of our family.

This is the most important part of Eyrealm because it is really what binds us all together . . . it is our testimonies that have led to missions and to callings but mostly just to a deep and abiding belief. I really like the concept of spiritual gravity and the imagery that it brings up with our all holding together and being close to the center.

AJA:

Through all this empty-nest stuff I always wonder about the fate of the in-laws. Not just Jared and Dave and me but all the six others that will shortly come. I feel like my entry into the family has been nothing but smooth and warm and fun and joyful, but I'm still not too used to everything, and I still appreciate my past with my family and feel infinitely emotionally, spiritually, and physically attached to them in a way that I'm sure could never be duplicated. So, how am I supposed to really get totally into the Eyrealm conversation? I'm still trying to figure it out . . . I'm new at this whole thing. But, I'll let you know.

TALMADGE:

This is great stuff. We're using our abilities better than ever before. Dad and Mom are using their talents of writing to give me (us) a better vision of how they see Eyrealm formulating. It's big stuff. It gets me excited.

I like this whole memo! Again if there's anything we could add, it would be more emphasis on helping those that aren't married & to get happily married. If we don't stress this & or at least be conscious of it nobody will marry. Get my point?

While there was little disagreement or controversy in the kids' response to this memo, there was the sense and suggestion that it would be more meaningful and have more actual affect on each of us if it were more pointed and prescriptive. So we attempted to work it into the now standard A metaphor and the three P's format.

The Spiritual Omniscient Partner of Eyrealm (forging a common character and developing personal faith, hope, and charity)

Dear children:

What a profound blessing it is to feel as much spiritual unity as we do. It is so remarkable that a group of people as individually strong-willed and opinionated as we are can agree in a humble and united way on the pre-eminent importance of Christ.

Deep down we know that the best advice, the best answers, and the best approaches are always spiritual. Each of the other facets of our adult Eyrealm agreements (the emotional, the social, the financial, and the mental) work best and accomplish their intention if they are spiritually guided. And our vision statement we'll work on next should really be about building an extended family structure that helps each of us return to God.

Therefore, the image we should all carry is that of a partnership that includes and values each of us but that is managed by an omniscient managing partner who we submit to humbly and petition constantly for direction and guidance.

Omniscience is such an awesome word -& all seeing, all knowing. Our own perspective is so limited, and God's is so total. It has been said that the essential difference between God and man is awareness. He is all-aware and thus omniscient and omnipotent. If we can, in every aspect of our personal and family lives, seek His inspiration and His will, we may still have setbacks but we cannot ultimately fail.

The marriages, the families within Eyrealm, and Eyrealm itself are all partnerships. If we can include in each of them the managing omniscient partner, they will each become more than we could have imagined. With that in mind, we set forth our ^Aspiritual agreements.®

Spiritual omniscient partner principles

- ! *Christ is the focus of all we do, the light that leads us, the ultimate example we follow.*
- ! *Spiritual serendipity: Guidance is a more worthy goal than control and spiritual awareness can get us to where God wants us to be.*
- ! *Spiritual stewardship: Since all things belong to God, we should seek His will in all things.*
- ! *Spiritual synergy: It is not independence we seek, but dependence on God and interdependence with those we love.*

Spiritual omniscient partner promises

- ! *We will put Christ and Heavenly Father first in all things and seek their will above our own.*
- ! *We will serve God by individually and collectively serving each other and our fellow man.*
- ! *We will take upon us Christ=s name, remember Him, and keep His commandments.*
- ! *We will be our ^Abrother=s keepers,® safeguarding and strengthening each other=s testimonies in every possible way.*

Spiritual omniscient partner practices

- ! *We each read the same chapter (about the same aspect of Christ) of What Manner of Man in church each Sunday.*
- ! *We fast and hold family testimony meetings on the first Sunday of each month.*
- ! *We donate, volunteer, and give service together and individually. Both Eyrealm charity gifts and some kind of service expedition are agreed on and participated in yearly.*
- ! *We teach each other spiritual principles at the annual Eyrealm reunion.*
- ! *We each receive a priesthood or father=s blessing on our birthday.*
- ! *We pray constantly for each other and ask each other to pray for specific needs we may have.*

It was this fifth facet -- the spiritual aspect of empty nest parenting -- that really pulled us together and reassured us that we were on the right track. We felt that we now had a five-part family constitution that included and combined the

emotional safe harbor, the spiritual grove, the physical or financial foundation, the mental watchtower, and the spiritual omniscient partner. The *process* we'd gone through to arrive at each one had pulled us together and taught us a lot about each other. It was far from perfect (the process and the product), but it was *ours*, and we all shared in it.

With a family constitution in hand, we felt like we were ready to go for the simplicity that lies beyond complexity by attempting to formulate a family vision or mission statement.

An Adult Family Mission Statement

*Putting it all together into a form
that becomes part of us*

Walk into most any corporate office B companies large and small B and you are likely to see a nicely framed Amission statement@ or Avision statement@ hanging on the wall. Business executives have found that a clearly-stated, attractively-worded summary of the firm=s principal purposes and attitudes can have a powerful unifying and motivating effect on employees.

It is the same in families. Stephen Covey says that bringing one=s family together to write a family mission statement is Athe single most important and effective exercise of leadership that a parents can undertake.@ He also explains that in the absence of parental leadership a mission or purpose will be established in kids= minds by the media, the peer group, and the broader society . . . one that certainly will not reflect the values and principles parents want for their children.

But the goals (and the vision statement) of a young family with small children in the home is fundamentally different than one for an empty nest family. It is a little like comparing a small, centralized, on-location company with a larger more decentralized company where most of the authority and decision making has shifted out to the branch offices. When our own family was young and all the kids were at home, our mission statement had more to do with the things we wanted to do together and with how we wanted to treat each other within the walls of our own home. As kids grew up and left, we began to feel the need to establish communication patterns and common interest projects that would preserve our love and bonds and help each other and our diverse individual pursuits. The process of establishing our Eyrealm constitution put us in a position to get at the *heart* of

what we wanted our ongoing family to be. Like a distilling process, we felt that out of our efforts on a constitutions, a Mission statement could drip down.

CASE STUDY

Eyrealm Constitution

<i>Emotional commitment and agreements</i>	<i>Social commitments and agreements</i>	<i>Physical (financial) commitments and agreements</i>	<i>Mental commitments and agreements</i>	<i>Spiritual commitments and agreements</i>
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Vision Statement
(Summary of Goals and Purposes
of Our Adult Family)

Mission Statement
(Brief Version or Motto)

With the background of all the earlier memos and responses and after talking about it on the phone, through e-mail and personally whenever any of us were together, we (Linda and Richard) took a crack at drafting an adult family mission statement something we hoped reflected what we discussed with the kids and that would give us a goal or target to aim at as we further worked out our approach to empty nest parenting. We would have preferred to hammer all this out in person at some great all-inclusive meeting, but with kids living all over the world, we decided to let the process unfold through writing and through e-mail.

To: Our Children
From: Mom and Dad

Re: **Eyrealm Adult Family Vision Statement (draft)**

- We choose to continue to strengthen our family relationships. We believe that*

we, as adult spirits in the pre-earth life, chose to join and unite within an earthly family, we now, as physical adults, recommit to that choice. Whatever distances or differences may separate us, we choose to continue to love and prioritize each other, together with our spouses and children, forever.

2. *We see our ongoing family as a chance to further develop God-like attributes.*
We believe that it is possible to return to God as a family, for we see the family as the organization and government of God in the hereafter and we appreciate that our roles within our family bring us as close as we can get to the Godlike attributes of self-sacrifice and unconditional love. We call our expanding and ongoing family "Eyrealm" because we view it as a sub-realm of God's kingdom and because we seek to live by standards and with a unity that elevates each of us to a higher realm.
3. *We vow to support each other in our individual efforts to broaden ourselves and contribute to the world around us.*
Our vision of the mission of the family in general and Eyrealm in particular encompasses two broad and eternally important roles. Its "internal" role is to provide the support and the strength that allows each individual member to reach his/her potential and to discover and fulfill his/her foreordination. Its "external" role is to use its collective commitment and synergy to work as a family for good causes in the outside world. These two roles are natural extensions of the "broaden and contribute" motto we've always had in our family. The adult Eyrealm should be designed, structured, and maintained as a vehicle that helps each of us within it to broaden into the best people we can be; and should be organized into an entity that contributes effectively to individuals in need and to the broader society.
4. *We will work to make Eyrealm a protecting and nourishing membrane within which we each flourish and grow.*
Actually, any good organization has some form of dual internal and external purposes. Strong companies, for example, must be concerned about the "inner" individual growth and well-being of each of their employees as well as about the "outer" sales or distribution of their product. What elevates Eyrealm above this norm is the permanence of its commitments and the freeness of its contributions. In a sense, Eyrealm is a magical encircling membrane, flexible enough to allow each of us, though still inside, to go as far as we wish in our own way while still surrounded by its protection and its support. The membrane also serves to concentrate and mix our collective abilities in synergistic ways so that Eyrealm may contribute more to the outside than could the sum of its parts.
5. *We understand that, in order to be an effective facilitator of both inner growth and outer contribution, Eyrealm must work or function efficiently in five planes:*
 - ! *It must work physically or financially in terms of providing a foundation of resources for education and other "broadening;" as well as the resources for humanitarian work and other "contributing"*

- ...@ all without undermining the independence of its members.
- ! *It must work emotionally by giving confidence and encouraging uniqueness and individuality, even as it provides support and a safe harbor of acceptance when things don't go well. Our unconditional acceptance within the family also makes us emotionally equipped to notice and listen to the concerns of people outside the family.*
 - ! *It must work socially to keep members both in close touch and in constant trust; and to maintain a communication that is open and positive. It thus allows roles and relationships to evolve and mature so that we respect each other's differences, stay always open to each other's advice, and relish in each other's achievements as if they were our own. This inner social security@ emboldens us to reach out to others who need a friend.*
 - ! *It must work mentally to where we freely and fearlessly hare our goals and dreams with each other and take responsibility for keeping each other mentally stimulated, broadly interested, and fully aware of new ways to give and to serve.*
 - ! *Finally, it must work spiritually, with Eyrealm undergirding our individual faith and holding us to an inner unity of belief and of purpose which can spill out to meet the spiritual needs of others.*
6. *We see Eyrealm as both our cradle and our catalyst, both our center and our circumference. We want to continue to live as part of it even as we build our own families apart from it. We will draw strength and support from it and we will combine our talents within it. We will formulate physical, emotional, social, mental, and spiritual agreements that serve our individual needs and preserve our union. Eyrealm will endure eternally because it is made of the unbreakable bonds of unconditional love.*

Reactions & Feedback:

SAREN:

I like the concept of AEyrealm@ as a subset kingdom within God=s kingdom. But what about our in-laws? If we=re part of the AEyrealm,@ then can we also be a part of the Loosli-realm and the Pothier-realm (Shawni) and the Fegert-realm (Aja)? I think we need to be careful that the concept of Eyrealm does not override our focus on our own mini-realms that we=re building and the realms of our in-laws and their great families.

I'm curious to see how everything will work beyond this life & what eternal families will really mean, and how they'll all fit together.

Maybe what you're saying, in simpler terms, is that our family mission as we go forward is to support each other's individual broadening and contributing (through encouragement, advice, and sharing insights, knowledge, and ideas) while capitalizing on opportunities to broaden and contribute collectively as we combine our talents, resources, and ideas to learn together and make the world a better place together.

I like the Amembrane@ imagery a lot. However, it brings to mind again the question of how in-law families fit in. If we're all inside this wonderful Eyrealm membrane, can we also be inside a membrane of another family? I think we can & but I think that the importance of our Aother families@ (in-laws) needs to be brought up in this memo.

I think it might be nice to finish this off with a one-sentence mission statement that encapsulates the great ideas included here. We all love Abroaden and contribute.@ Maybe we could simply expand on that a little and add in the concept of loving more. Here's one quick idea:

ABuild a realm of unconditional love where everyone works to broaden each other's minds, talents and possibilities so that we can collectively and individually contribute all that we have and are to the world and to each other.@

It might be nice to ask everyone to write up a one-sentence mission statement for what they see as the mission of Eyrealm and then combine concepts and phrases to make one statement we can all share.

SHAWNI:

I feel that we have such a huge responsibility to search diligently to figure out our stewardships and internal individual potentials as well as make a very significant contribution to the world. We are so incredibly blessed as a family and need to realize that we better prepare ourselves to give back so much.

I just want to say how important family reunions become as we get spread further and further apart. Even if we can't get everyone to come every time, we need to continue to have them! I really think the reason we are so close as a family is because we do strive to get together every chance we can. This is so important. Reading this makes me so thankful that you guys make our reunions somewhat structured with some time set apart to really communicate and share our lives with each other. This becomes SO important as we move away and have such different lives. I want so much to always keep up with what everyone else is doing and want to be aware of things family members are going through.

I suggest that we come up with something short and sweet to sum everything up B maybe just a short statement that we can all post in a place we can always remember all this important stuff and be reminded of it daily. A sign we put on our fridge or maybe even something we want to frame in our homes to remind us always of the importance of Eyrealm and our stewardship to our family and to the world.

JOSH:

I just wonder how our relationships will be in the future compared to other relationships in our current extended family. Obviously each of us will come up with our own mission/vision statement for our own families.

I think that the Aemotional@ paragraph should be listed first, even if they are not

in order of importance. Although the financial one is important, this one is a million times more important. Money can come from anywhere, but the emotional support of a family can only come from one place. Some of the others below should also be put before the financial one.

TALMADGE:

I really like this way of explaining the Eyrealm and its possibilities . . . but we have to consider marriage as a top priority that doesn't have to be 5 or 10 years after we leave home.

If we put more emphasis on this, I think it will help the unmarried of the family to have a different perspective.

Reading the kids' responses, we realized that our first draft was both too long and too limited. They wanted a clearer, more concise statement B one they could memorize or put on a plaque B one that really represented A the simplicity that lies beyond complexity. C But they also wanted it to be about more than what Eyrealm would do for them. It needed to be about what each of us would do within Eyrealm for each other and for others.

We realized that we really hadn't defined what our adult family was. We had named it Eyrealm, but was Eyrealm us (Linda and Richard)? Or was it all of us? Or was it the relationships and agreements between us B our family structure? In a way it was all three, but we had to clarify that before we could be clear on the purpose of Eyrealm or on our vision of what it should become.

After some thought and some further discussion with the kids, we asked each of them to try to come up with a draft of a very condensed adult family mission statement and

to e-mail it to us. We, in the meantime (and without seeing theirs), sent the following e-mail to each of them.

VISION STATEMENT

Dear Children:

Thanks for your responses on that draft vision statement. We agree with your consensus that it needs to be refined and boiled down to something shorter and more pithy. Here are some thoughts and then an attempt to boil.

We didn't create you (you came from God and were already you) but we did (with God's will and help) create this family B this Eyrealm which has raised you and which can now evolve and become what we and you want it to be. The vision statement we are now trying to condense should state the ongoing purpose for the family structure we call the adult Eyrealm.

Each of you are in the process of creating your own family, and Eyrealm, for one thing, should be a helpful resource to you in that process. It should enhance our individual happiness, freedom, and potential and be a safe harbor of acceptance. It should help us each to become all that we can be and to give all that we can give. And it should retain and expand the A broaden and contribute mentality of our original family mission statement.

But again, Eyrealm itself is not just a structure, it is the individuals within the structure and the commitments of each of us to each other. Therefore, the vision statement should give us some motivation, some guidance, some vision in terms of 1. What each of us within Eyrealm try to do for each other (emotionally, etc.); 2. What Eyrealm, as a structure, does for each of us (financially, etc.); and 3. What Eyrealm made up of all of us, does for others, for society, for the world (charity, service expeditions, our work to strengthen families, etc.).

We want a brief statement that speaks volumes to us because we know what's behind each of the words. Here is an attempt:

Eyrealm Vision Statement

As we each create our own families, we will build an extended family realm of unconditional love wherein, regardless of distance or difference, we all strive to enhance and broaden our own and each other's minds, possibilities, and faith . . . so that we can deepen our joy, discover our individual destinies, contribute individually and collectively, (particularly to the strength and well-being of other families) and return, together, to God.

This is probably still a little too long for a mission statement, but we'll refine and combine as your drafts come in and maybe we can have a briefer mission

statement@ to just trigger all these concepts in our heads.

We were glad you all seemed to like the image of the magical, encircling membrane of love which is so totally flexible that it doesn't restrict or restrain any of us in any way, allowing everyone to do their own thing in their own way and their own place and yet still holds all of us in its embrace. The membrane, as you pointed out, is not only flexible but Aintersectable@ so each of us can also be inside the membrane of other families -- like the one we join when we marry. In any case, this encircling concept helps us think of Eyrealm in the three ways mentioned earlier: 1. Each of us helping and serving and being there for each of the others within; 2. The membrane itself having certain financial and other resources to nourish (womb-like) those within it; and 3. Combining our strengths and gifts within so that, as the combined Eyrealm, we can contribute more outside than we could individually.

Before our children received our draft, several of them sent us their drafts.

TALMADGE:

Dear Dad:

Here=s a shot at a concise adult family mission statement:

ATo have each member of Eyrealm work together in the cause of Eternal Families. To help other families as we go along and be a fortress of strength always.@

JONAH:

In trying to get something really brief, I=ve been thinking about getting down to action!

I think that the catch word phrase should be Atalk but DO.@ We really need to be aware of the things that we need to DO. I love how much we get together and talk, but I am wanting to be sure it happens!

AJA:

I don=t know if you=re looking for a catch phrase, or what . . . but I=m all about the short two or three word mission statements.

I really like the simple two-word phrase you attribute to your father: ALOVE MORE.@ It relates to all realms of Eyrealm . . . physical, emotional, spiritual, social, mental . . . and it also encompasses inner/innie (i.e. broaden) and outer/outie (contribute) focuses. It=s simple, yet so awesome that it is a very noble and difficult goal. Plus, we can work on it as individuals and as a family!

I also still like BROADEN and CONTRIBUTE, especially now that I understand that BROADEN means broadening the mind, not broadening the family through getting married and having children. Perhaps both meanings of BROADEN should be included: BROADEN BROADEN AND CONTRIBUTE.

Others received our draft and responded:

SHAWNI:

Mom and Dad, I really like the vision statement you wrote -- I really think it sums things up perfectly and wouldn't have anything to add or take away. I think the essence of it all of course is simply what we have talked about -- Love More. But I really like what you wrote -- a little more descriptive and explanatory to help us remember the real reason for families here on earth. I know Heavenly Father put us together for a purpose and I feel SO blessed to be a member of Eyrealm.

At this stage, we felt it was time to get on the phone and on the computer and push our collective thinking until we had collectively condensed all the hopes and thoughts we had down into the essential code words we were trying to incorporate. After one last flurry of communication, we came up with:

<p><i>Broaden and Contribute, Love More, & Return Together</i></p>
--

To each of us, these six words summarized and captured what we wanted to do for each other within our family, what we wanted to do together as a family for others, and what we wanted our family organization to facilitate and do for each of us and for all of us. It embodied our desires to grow together, to serve together, to increase in real love together, and to spiritually return to God together.

Part 3 Conclusion

It's all about the process of agreement.

Our family's *process* had taken several months, but it had been well worth it. It had caused us to think and to communicate on a whole new level, and we came out of it feeling like we knew each other better.

We all realized that our family will never be static. Each of us will always be changing and growing, as will our relationships with each other. Thus, we know that our family vision statement and constitution will need adjustments and additions. We hope the ongoing process will continue to be enjoyable and productive and continue to cause us to think about who we are to each other.

But for now, we were where we wanted to be, and we tried to pull it all together in a summarizing e-mail to our children:

CASE STUDY (CONCLUSION)

Dear LTN Children:

Thanks! Despite your busy and demanding lives, you have rolled up your sleeves and together we have hammered out an adult family vision statement, mission statement, and an Eyrealm constitution. We think these will serve us (and help us to serve others) forever!

Through the process of our back-and-forth interchanges we have gradually distilled the simplicity that lies beyond complexity. We've all read each other's inputs and mentally merged them with our own. Because of this process, we all know the pages of meaning that are condensed into Broaden and Contribute, Love More, and Return Together; and we know exactly what the Eyrealm membrane does to protect, nourish, and support us within even as we combine our gifts to contribute without. Because of the process, we know the symbolism and well as the principles, the promises, and the practices of our emotional safe harbor, our social grove, our financial foundation, our mental watchtower, and our spiritual omniscient partner. And because we recorded the process (wrote it, e-mailed it, etc.) we can go back and remind ourselves of the

meanings, the symbols and the commitments whenever we want to.

Several of you, throughout the process, reminded us all that what we wanted to end up with was something simple and symbolic enough to frame on our walls or post on our refrigerators or our screen savers. We now have, because of all of your efforts, that beyond-complexity simplicity:

The Eyrealm Membrane

Broaden and Contribute
Love More
Return Together

Our Emotional
Safe Harbor

Our Financial
Foundation

Our Spiritual
Omniscient Partner

Our Social
Grove

Our Mental
Watchtower

Alt=s all About the Process of Agreement@

There are two key words here: AProcess@ and AAgreement.@

The best ideas in the world for empty nest parenting will fail unless there is a *process* of development and discussion with your adult children B a process wherein their needs and ideas are talked about and dealt with as much as yours and where you all truly empathize with each other=s perspectives and feelings. This process may take months or even years, and so

long as it is *active*, there is no urgency or pressure to complete or conclude it, because the process is actually the ongoing answer.

The goal of the process, the thing you are working toward together, is an *agreement* or a series of agreements that will be a guide and a channel for your adult relationships with your children. By definition, an agreement reflects the needs and wishes of each party. It ought to be written (for clarity and consistency) and it may need to go through several drafts before it works for everyone. You may call it an adult family mission statement, a family credo or pact, and, as we have a vision statement, a basic series of family agreements or a constitution.

None of the time you spent in this process of agreement is wasted. It is time spent thinking and talking about *life* about the needs and hopes and dreams of life and about how family members can help each other with them. How could time be better spent?

Your process may involve letters or phone calls or family meetings or long one-on-one drives or e-mail or family reunions or chat rooms or family vacations. It may start after you read this book and after all of your children are gone; or it may start a few months (or even a couple of years) before your first child leaves preparing him or her and preparing yourself.

The adult mission statements and agreements you come to don't have to be final or static. Let them evolve and be adjusted, altered, or added to as time passes and needs and situations change. Keep the process alive, because the process and the agreements are your passport to a beautiful and fulfilling autumn and winter of your own life.

Saren's Suggestion:

Okay, I loved the process our family went through, but, with hindsight, it could have been much simpler and more streamlined (and I think I'd change the order a bit, too). Here

are a few suggestions (If we were doing it again . . .)

1. VISION STATEMENT AND MISSION STATEMENT: In a family meeting or via e-mail, have all the adult members of your family draft a basic statement of what they see as the purpose of your adult family. What is your basic role in each other's lives as you move forward? What do you want to expect of each other? Work together to boil down these ideas into one all-encompassing vision statement and a short, catchy mission statement that captures the essence of your adult family's functions in a few words. Make sure that everyone has a chance to review and edit these statements.

2. QUESTIONS: Talk about the 50 questions in section three with your kids. Maybe you could set aside time at a reunion, plan a special family meeting or conference call, or use e-mail. You might want to just work on 5 questions at a time, so no one gets overwhelmed or burned out on the process. Take careful notes on these conversations!

3. FACETS or MAIN TOPICS: Using the answers you get on these questions, decide on several areas of facets of your adult family that you'll focus on. You can choose the facets we chose (emotional, spiritual, mental, social, financial . . .) or you may come up with other main topics that work better for your family (communicating with each other, advising each other, helping each other financially, seeing each other, etc.).

4. AGREEMENTS: Under each facet, come up with agreements on each one -- a list of principles, promises and practices that take everyone's ideas and answers from your discussions into account. You, as the parents, could come up with these agreements yourselves or you could ask each of your adult children to take one of the facets and write up the agreement for it. Either way, everyone needs to see the drafted agreements and edit them and agree to them before they can be finalized.

5. ADULT FAMILY CONSTITUTION: Combine the vision statement, mission

statements, and all the agreements into one document and make sure everyone has a copy.

6. REVIEW AND REVISE: On at least a yearly basis, go over your family constitution and make additions and changes.

In our family, we ended up with a great family constitution that everyone=s pretty excited about. In the process, we learned a lot about each other and discovered a lot of feelings and issues that had been smoldering or simply ignored. We all felt that the process was pretty tedious, though. If we had it to do over, I think we=d have gone for the more simplified process suggested above. If this process still seems a bit overwhelming to you, don=t worry. There are so many ways you can create your own unique and happy empty nest family. The most important thing is that you=re reading this, thinking about these issues, learning from reading over our family=s case study, and coming up with your own ways to address the important questions of empty nest parenting with your children. If nothing else, we hope you will use this section as a catalyst for figuring out what you need from your children and what they need from you -- and that you=ll ask them some questions and use their answers to clarify what everyone hopes and intends to do in each others= lives.

Good luck! If you learn even a fraction of what we learned in our family through your own family=s process, it=ll be well worth your effort!

Postscript (and Best Wishes)

As we watched our grown children interact with each other and with us during the process of trying to better establish our adult relationships, we thought a little about how our Heavenly Father must feel as He watches us relate one with another.

We don't want our children to compete and compare themselves with each other -- rather, we want them to support and magnify each other. God must feel the same way, and it must please Him when we learn and interact in ways that help each other to grow and progress.

We would love for this book to be the beginning of an ongoing interaction between you and us. No one is an expert in this challenge of empty nest parenting -- it's new to all of us and we're all fellow strugglers@ trying to understand and deal with new situations. We wish we could have sat with you as you read this book, and heard your reactions and your ideas.

Maybe the next best thing can happen. We've added a new *empty nest parenting* section on our web site (valuesparenting.com) where we all can share experiences, concerns, or things we are trying. There may also be some things on the site that will be helpful to your children as they become parents. So come and visit us!

Best wishes in this new phase of life. May it be a happy adventure for us all!