



Finding Family HARMONY IN A Dissonant World

A N N . M A D S E N
THE MUSIC OF HOME

The music of home:
a subtle melody hard to improvise while far away.

Now
as it crescendos
surrounding me,
sometimes
in simple silence
or cacophony
of busy
growing,
it seeps
into my heart,
familiar counterpoint
of children, parents
helping to perfect
each other's natures
in the close harmony
called home.

It takes
a time
away
to hear it
properly.
The singsong
day to day
sometimes
obscures
the melody,
and dissonance
seems dominant,
though we're so seldom
really out of tune.

Sometimes
we just don't sing aloud
the crowded chords
our hearts
compose.
We think that
each one
knows
how dear a part
his is
in our song.

Heard at a distance,
half a world
away
it sounds
so solid a thing,
not easy
to contrive
but so alive
with
heavenly strains
that
I must hurry home
to sing
with you!

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Illustrations by Brian Kershisnik

IN 1973 WHEN TRU AND I RETURNED FROM A THREE-WEEK TRIP ABROAD, I WROTE THOSE LINES FOR MY CHILDREN. • MY DAUGHTER EMILY SUGGESTED HARMONY AS A WAY TO TALK ABOUT BALANCE IN OUR LIVES. I LOVE THE WAY HER MIND WORKS. SHE SAID THAT HARMONY IMPLIES SEVERAL MELODIES COMING TOGETHER IN A PLEASING WAY. • I HAVE SELECTED FROM OUR 41 YEARS OF MARRIAGE SOME OF THE THINGS I KNOW BY HEART OF HOW HARMONY WORKS IN OUR FAMILY. IT WAS A SWEET JOURNEY FOR ME TO GATHER THESE IDEAS, AND I THANK YOU FOR INVITING ME HERE SO THAT I COULD DO THIS EXPLORING. I HAVE PRAYED THAT THERE MIGHT BE SOMETHING VALUABLE FOR YOU. OUR TESTIMONIES OF JESUS CHRIST AND THE REALITY OF HIS ATONEMENT ARE THE FOCUS OF OUR FAMILY.

1

THE FAMILY IS FIRST

I remember exactly where I was sitting in the Provo Tabernacle on a sunny, Sunday morning 26 years ago when Elder Bruce R. McConkie stood up at the pulpit, looked straight at each of us, and said as only he could, “The family is first!”

That moment for me was akin to Jeremiah’s when he wrote, “The word of the Lord was like fire in my bones” (see Jer. 20:9).

So I know, have always known, but understood for the first time at Elder McConkie’s feet that the family is first. Therefore concern for our family literally outweighs other priorities. A dear friend

puts it this way, “The family is the melody while everything else is the accompaniment.” But often the accompaniment requires our attention as well.

Someone must be primarily responsible for dividing the tasks that keep a home going—no matter how many machines we have to cut

down our work. We can’t all abdicate everything. Orderliness, cleanliness, music, social life, decor—the abundant life is far different from merely existing in a space together. Someone or ones must have these as priorities or it will never happen. Is home just a place to eat and sleep? Is there no lovely window seat to curl up in to

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read a book? I love to design vistas in my homes—corners that look so inviting, corners that speak to the aesthetic sense in all of us. Sometimes spring is long in coming, and we need a new potted plant or hyacinths or a hanging, blooming thing to start spring indoors if it is lagging outdoors. Is there no pot of daisies or daffodils on

the table for dinner—not for company, just for spring? If family is first then shouldn’t there be flowers for family sometime? Or a special dessert or new recipe, “Just because I knew you’d like it”? When do we share?

Constructing a positive environment helps us furnish a virtuous home in which we can practice godliness. We can learn over time to respond in a godly manner. In the Old Testament, the high priest wore on his head a hammered gold crown on which was engraved “Holiness to the Lord.” Each of our modern temples has a similar sign above the eastern door. It is a promise to put that on a building. Couldn’t we, at least in our minds, have that kind of promise on our homes? “Nothing polluted will enter here.”

2

OTHER PRIORITIES

What of life’s other priorities? How do we line them up? In what order? I’d like to propose *be healthy* for some place near the head of the list. This is not always something we control. But we can plan our lives so that we get enough sleep, eat right, and exercise. I swim five days a week. It makes everything else possible. Maybe walking is more to your liking, but plan to do something that cuts through the stress and renews you. Remember to list *relax* along with your

other projects. It feels so good to feel good.

So, I feel good! But how do I accommodate the needs of my friends? (One of my swimming friends told me: “A friend is one who hears the song in my heart and sings it to me when my memory fails.”) What do I do when one of the sisters I visit teach has a terrible family crisis and needs me during my swim time? How do I fit in helping her along with other of my family’s needs?

3

FIRST THINGS FIRST

We make the choices of which things are first by deciding which is *important* and which is merely pressing or *urgent*. I learned about this from Steven Covey in his new book *First Things First*. When we're addicted to urgency and the "do it now" of the computer age, we sometimes finish projects in record time. But did we finish the *right* projects? Someone has said: Anything *not* worth doing is not worth doing well—and I would add or doing fast.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is our only reliable guide to know what the other priorities are.

Just as we need to learn to control technology and not be controlled by it, we can learn to control our daily lives. Just as we are flooded with data that we don't really need like ads in the mail, on the phone, on the fax, on the TV or radio, we can learn not to "Select All" (in the language of my beloved Macintosh) but rather carefully "Select," filling our 24 hours each day with truly important tasks. The wonderful thing about selecting *important* things and giving them first priority is that when the sun goes down you are filled with peace, and it is only the less important that gets put off to another time. What a concept!

Planning starts when the sun comes up.

Pray before finalizing your daily plans. One of the great benefits of personal morning prayer is the opportunity to ask the Lord's help as you plan each day. How do I really know what is important? I often pray, "Please, Lord, help me know the most important things I can do today." Almost all of us have our planners. I suggest that we always use a pencil with an eraser so that changes can be incorporated *after* morning prayer. It sounds too simple, but I know this works.

In our family we have often used the process we called *dovetailing*. How many thousands of times did my children hear me say, "Let's dovetail activities?" It's a family joke. When two priorities collide, sometimes they can be combined. Time alone with your spouse can be combined with visiting your friend in the hospital or with grocery shopping. It all depends on the focus of your conversation and sharing. A brief visit by phone with our son in Washington, D.C., can be combined with asking for some legal advice for the sister with family problems.

Involving our children in helping us to serve others' needs is one of the best things we ever did.

First things first! I haven't always gotten that right. But on our mission in New England we made real progress. We can thank Elder Franklin D. Richards, our regional representative, for that. He directed us to have an inviolate family day each Monday and a date night each Friday evening. Those times spent with our children and alone together are some of the happiest I can remember. And they made it possible for us to take on the tasks of the week refreshed and renewed. We still have a date night each Friday. We chose to spend this one with you.

4

MENDS AND

So what have we Madsens learned about harmony in our homes? I will tell you a few ways that work for us.

WE SING TOGETHER

We always sang in the car. We still do. Tru would teach us our four parts as he drove, and it was such fun to put it all together, to harmonize. Is this is a function of the priesthood: teaching harmony and peace?

Truman furnished our home with glorious music. We planned for it even

before we were married. Our spirits respond to certain chords, melodies, and modulations. We are lifted up or beaten down by music. Joseph Smith

made this elegant statement about man and music:

Man of himself is an instrument of music; and when the chords of which he is composed are touched, and salute the ear, the sounds appeal to his spirit and the sentiment to his understanding. If the strains are harmonious, he endorses and enjoys them with supreme delight; whether the tones are from a human voice or from an instrument, they arrest his attention and absorb his whole being.

A fine LDS musician I know has said:

Words communicate ideas. Music communicates feelings. While words get stuck in the thinking part of our brain, music sails through to reach the innermost corners of our emotional being. . . . This is precisely why music is such a wonderful, dangerous, exciting power. . . .

Let us not ask [how much] evil we can tolerate, but let us find ways of filling our minds with celestial stimuli.

Good music has the power to put us in tune with heaven, as Elder Dallin H. Oaks so eloquently taught us a few weeks ago in general conference. Don't you resonate to the music you hear in our most sacred places?

At our family reunion this year our youngest daughter, Mindy, gave each of us a surprise: a wonderful binder entitled "Peace through Music: A Collection of Madsen Melodies" with a dedication that made us cry, because it was a harvest moment. "This collection is lovingly dedicated to our parents: for the hours and hours they spent singing to us and with us—in cars!" She had found all the sheet music for songs we had sung and had learned by heart together.

WE EAT TOGETHER

There is such an emphasis on good nutrition these days. Do we ever fill our freezers with well-balanced, low-fat, low-cholesterol meals in

individual labeled packets and then run in all directions, left to eat our nutritious meals *all alone*? From nursing baby to white-haired grandmother, we communicate through food, through eating together. It's a time to share. It's a time for loving communion.

We often invited others to join us, especially for Sunday dinner—people from all over the world or strangers we met at church that day.

We *always* had breakfast and dinner together. We juggled schedules to do that. Family meals became the nucleus moments in our day. Truman was a master at finding out how each child's day had gone. Dinner was never quiet at our house. And it still isn't. I love it.

It was then we prayed together in family prayer.

the Lord, asking for strength and forgiveness. We pray for help in keeping covenants, in being led away *from* not *into* temptations. I cherish the spot near our kitchen table where Truman and I kneel together each morning. I love that feeling of oneness, of reaching up together daily. It is a sacred spot. It has been hallowed by our gratitude, our pleadings, and our expressions of love. We can just see the Provo Temple from our kitchen window, but for moments each day, that place of prayer becomes our personal sanctuary.

We have also formally dedicated our homes. There is no question in my mind that that particular prayer, with our married children and grandchildren in attendance, has contributed to the harmony in our present home that I find tangible. It has fortified our home against the darkness all around us.

What of the darkness in movies and videos? Barney's scripture still applies, but we say, "There are only a couple of bad scenes. We can fast-forward it." But does it edify?

"Except for the language it's pretty good." But does it edify? "It was rated PG-13." But does it edify? Explain to me why it's appropriate for me if my 13 year old shouldn't see it?

These influences contribute to the disharmony in a home. Family foundations are weakened. Homes are crashing down all around us—like steel balls have struck them. Let us remember those pioneer women!

There is an inherent harmony in righteous living that is not present when we sin. We can learn to avoid sin in our homes.



WE PRAY TOGETHER

Nothing contributes more to being able to see things clearly than open-hearted, honest prayer. Our prayers have become our sanctuary in space—like a temple. We separate ourselves for a time from the press of life and enjoy the peace of the Lord's Spirit.

I've noticed the tangible difference an opening prayer makes to a class. Students seem eager to pray for help in my Isaiah class! But after the prayer, everything feels different. We are ready to be taught. (Yesterday a quiet boy in class prayed and took my breath away with his tender humility.)

It is not always easy, even in our personal prayers, to be openhearted and honest, naming our sins before

I want to be like those pioneer women who stood at their cabin doors in this valley, fending off anything that would endanger their families. After all, they were building the kingdom of God. Their homes were holy.

What dangers approach our doors? Our son Barney returned from his mission 15 years ago and posted a sign on our TV that read, "That which doth not edify is not of God, and is darkness" (D&C 50:23). Beyond TV we need to know what's inside the books and magazines that are in our homes. We need to stop reading or looking when it's destructive and teach our children to do the same. Gutter language has become part of our spoken language. But we need not speak it. It can be a foreign language, unused in our homes.

WE READ THE SCRIPTURES ALOUD TOGETHER

It was just after dinner that we read the scriptures together. Tru and I now read just after breakfast. Our Indian son learned to read from reading the Book of Mormon and could read Alma and Abinadi before he could read Dick and Jane. Many of our grandchildren have read their first words out of the scriptures.

Our youngest daughter, Mindy, and her husband, Grant, do a simple thing. Each evening they have SS&P—Scripture, Song, and Prayer. It is not a long process. But it happens every single night. It's a portable program that can go with them on trips and vacations.

They used to read aloud to the children, but now Max (8) and Molly (5) help in the reading. They discuss carefully just one or two verses from the Book of Mormon, sometimes with more success than at other times. Each new word is patiently explained. One night we were there and they were reviewing from the night before. Mindy asked, "Do you know what *repent* means?" Molly, age three at the time, offered quickly, "Sure! It means changing from bad to good."

After the brief scripture reading and discussion they sing a Primary song. Then they kneel in family prayer.

WE CELEBRATE

We've always celebrated, but we learned more of how it's done from our Jewish friends in Israel. They celebrate circumcisions, bar mitzvahs, weddings under the canopies, Passover, Succoth, Shavuot, and especially Shabbat/Sabbath. All of these are family-centered feasts. There's lots of cooking!

We celebrate birthdays, baptisms, ordinations, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Valentines, Easter, our day to welcome spring, our day to welcome fall, graduations, and sometimes we just "say yes to life," which in our family means spontaneous celebration at anyone's suggestion. The traditions associated with these times bring back such tender memories.

We celebrate Shabbat/Sunday, always eating with our best tableware and flowers on the table with Rachmaninoff and Tchaikovsky in the background. And what Barney affectionately called "The MOTABCO," which translated means the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. We wanted Sunday to be a real renewal, a genuine change of pace, the harvest of the rest of the week. We hoped to teach our family to rest with the Lord in his way on his day.

We celebrate temple dedications. But Tru will tell you about that.

We have always celebrated general conference on the Sunday evening when the meetings are over. We con-

nect with each other through the miracle of long distance to compare notes and to verify that we all felt the Spirit and cried in the very same places and this year stood, wherever we were, to sustain a gentle prophet of God. How I missed this exchange while we were living in Jerusalem. After we had finished watching the videos of conference there, which was always delayed a few weeks, I longed to phone and celebrate with our children and grandchildren. Last year we tried America On Line with all of us logged on, but it wasn't the same. We didn't get to hear the excitement in each other's voices. So we're doing it the old-fashioned way.

There are always splendiferous banana splits at our home right after the general priesthood session. I loved looking down the dining room table this year watching my 92-year-old

LET US GET OUR
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—President
Spencer W. Kimball

Uncle Bill sharing his views of the meeting with our five grandsons; their father, Mark; and their grandfather, Truman—four generations of righteous, priesthood bearers sitting at our table, loving each other.

WE HAVE FAMILY MEETINGS

With children at home one can ask, "How will they know unless we teach them?" We have family meetings. As we meet, we try to respect each other's views and balance our needs and desires. We developed a system that we still use: How important is it to you on a scale from 1–10? We found we could negotiate better knowing how weighty a matter was to each family member.

We have tried many techniques

over the years. Some still work for us. Some worked for a while. Some didn't ever work. Relaxed flexibility is the key. I try to learn that from Truman. It is natural for him.

Truman and I still have a family meeting weekly. We try to be honest and open, not just handling scheduling and the calendar but current relationship concerns as well.

Clair and Dawna Rosza taught us to speak aloud our love as we visited them while they presided over the New England Mission. For about four days we observed them saying, "I love you" each time a child left and their beautiful mother replying, "I love you, too." At first I thought it was a bit too sweet, but there was a pervasive feeling of love in that home. It rubbed off on us. We've been doing it ever since.

Our son Barney said to me on the phone not long ago (he's a major in the Air Force JAG and a graduate from the BYU Law School), "Mom, I'm so glad that we do this." (We had just said "I love you" and were about to hang up.) He continued, "No matter when any of us dies [I knew he meant Tru and me], the last thing we will have said to each other will be 'I love you!'"

The harmony in our homes depends on each of us. Often we pray to be instruments in the hands of the Lord. To do this we must stay in tune with God and practice consistently. President Spencer W. Kimball said it so well: "Let us get our instruments tightly strung and our melodies sweetly sung. Let us not die with our music still in us" (*Miracle of Forgiveness*, p. 17).

I know that we need not be swallowed up in the darkness that surrounds us. I know that the beauty and virtue of our lives can combat the ugliness and sin in our world. I know that our radiant lives can become beacons to our children and to all whose lives we touch.

Our testimonies of Jesus Christ and the reality of his Atonement remain the focus of our family. God lives. His Son is our model. His living prophet sits with us tonight, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.