

PERSONAL VOICES

Seeds of Faith in City Soil: Growing Up Mormon in New York City

Neylan McBaine

A Miracle in Manhattan

In June 2004, I found myself, late on a Saturday night, climbing underneath the dressing room doors of the Manhattan New York Temple. Audio/visual equipment for the next morning's temple dedication blocked most of the dressing room doors, but my goal was to reach every locker in both the men's and women's dressing rooms. Each key needed to be labeled with the corresponding locker's number, and then a spare key had to be placed in the temple's facilities closet.

Aside from an unusually private glimpse into the after-hours life of a temple, I also had a remarkable opportunity to serve. Who would have thought that labeling locker keys could bring the level of satisfaction and joy that it did for me that night? I felt as if I had done nothing in my life as productive as labeling keys.

But most remarkable of all is the fact that there is a temple in Manhattan at all. A brief summary of the church in Manhattan testifies to something amazing: There are currently 42,000 members of the Church in the New York area, there are six separate meetinghouses within Manhattan alone, and most of that growth has occurred within the past 20 years. At the dedicatory services for the temple and at the fireside the night before, the temple was called "a miracle" by President Hinckley and others many times.

I like to think I played a small part in that miracle, which consisted of the fact that, in a large, transient city, there is a committed, faithful

community of saints Strong enough to merit a House of the Lord. After all, I was born and raised three blocks from the building that now houses the temple, on Columbus Avenue in Manhattan, across the street from Lincoln Center where my mother sang for the Metropolitan Opera. For twenty-one years, I walked to church—to the chapel of the Manhattan wards—walking up Broadway on quiet Sunday mornings while the imposing cultural temples of the Metropolitan Opera House, the New York State Theater, and Avery Fisher Hall lay dormant after lively Saturday night performances. I was blessed as a baby in that building and baptized in that building, and I was taught the gospel in that building. During my years in Young Women, I helped set up bake sales on the sidewalk outside, peddling banana bread and chocolate chip cookies to visitors at the Museum of Arts and Crafts next door in an effort to raise money for girls' camp. I played the part of a young shepherdess in *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, which we performed in that building with professional costumes and sets on loan from the neighboring theaters. As a young pianist studying at Juilliard, I thrilled to play the concert grand Steinway piano in the building's chapel. While I was in high school, my walk to the building for early morning seminary happened before dawn, when "the city that never sleeps" was, in fact, asleep, the *New York Times* being thrown to drowsy shopkeepers who were the first to rise.

I believe in the sudden, stark miracles that shock us into believing, like most of the miracles Christ performed during his life of healing the sick and raising the dead. But closer to my experience are the miracles that require hindsight to see their magic. As a child and youth, I didn't think—nor did any of us think—we were part of anything miraculous. I don't think I realized how different my church experience was from other young Latter-day Saints living in less urban environments. I went to Primary, gave talks in church, attended girls' camp. Other young Latter-day Saints were doing those things. But now as I look back on those years and that place from the vantage point of the temple dedication, it's clear that a miracle was in fact occurring as I was busy working on my Personal Progress award and attending seminary. The kingdom of the Lord was being built up all around me, growing the numbers of members and the strength of our faith as the years went by.

Whatever small role I might have played in this miracle, it didn't need me to succeed. But I needed it. While the kingdom grew up around me, it also grew up within me, a direct result, I believe, of the time and

place in which I was living. Yes, New York gave me my testimony. Or, more accurately, the city acted as a sacred conduit in which I could confront feelings and have experiences that led me to Christ.

A City of Contrasts

New York City might not seem like the ideal place for a young woman to develop a testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Many people I've met since growing up there seem curious about how I remained faithful in the midst of such a Babylon. I suppose the loud city streets and concrete jungle seem contradictory to the stereotypical vision of suburban bliss where the Spirit thrives in backyards of large family homes. But when I examine my childhood and try to determine what elements of my experiences helped form my testimony of the gospel, the fact that I grew up in New York City is high on the list of positive contributors. For me, it was *because* I lived in one of the largest cities in the world that my testimony grew strong.

My testimony grew out of contrasts, out of the black-and-white distinctions that are so prevalent and obvious in a place like New York. A friend of mine gained her testimony after September 11, 2001, when she reasoned that the evil demonstrated on that day had to be counterbalanced with an equal but opposite force for good. That reasoning caused her to investigate and later join the Church. Similarly, I witnessed opposing forces at work in my urban surroundings and had to choose which side I wanted to be on. My conversion didn't happen overnight as the result of some catastrophic event, like my friend's. Rather, my testimony unfolded over years as I observed the choices made by the variety of people around me. Daily life offered people of every political leaning, wealthy people and poor people, righteous people, cruel people, educated and uneducated, successful and unsuccessful. I witnessed some of the finest professionals in their fields, attracted to New York because of the professional opportunities. I saw what choices and sacrifices they had to make to get where they were. I saw women's purses snatched on the street, but I also saw kind strangers offer warm food to the homeless. I saw into the lives of wealthy Park Avenue socialites and discovered they had no greater claim on happiness than the rest of us. I joined the sister missionaries as they taught single-parent, African American families in Harlem who had humility and faith to be envied by every white, middle-class Utahn.

We were all crammed together in an intense and geographically

constrained community. Distinctions and variety among Heavenly Father's vast array of children forced me to constantly ask myself, Who do I want to be? Whose choices do I want to emulate? I had to be deliberate in my choices; too many contrasting forces were swirling around for me not to be. One bitter winter night when I was about ten years old, my mom and I rushed home along the sidewalk, bundled in our wool coats and shielding ourselves from an icy wind. Peeking through our scarves, we glimpsed a homeless woman, crouched against a wall, her possessions held close to her but her hand reached out to passersby. In the 1980s, the homeless population was a serious problem in New York City; but we rarely gave money, preferring instead to pay our tithing and volunteer at soup kitchens. But this particular woman who pled for help as we hurried by pitifully cried out that she was pregnant. We were only a block from our apartment building and so my mom and I hurried home and scrambled to find an old blanket or sweater that we could give her. I donated an old pink ballet bag that was big enough to carry our offerings back across the street. We returned with our contributions which the woman quickly wrapped around herself, but we were surprised to hear her ask us if we had any cash instead. We shook our heads and ran home, warmed by the goodness of our deed.

About six months later, in the summer, we encountered the same homeless woman in the same spot—and she was still “pregnant”! Were we sorry that we had gone out of our way to help a deceitful vagabond, who may not have needed our help as much as she said she did? Should the experience have made us skeptical of those in need? Should we have resented this woman's false need or let the opportunity to serve prompt us to greater Christ-like charity? Should we mete out love only to those who love us back? Such were the dilemmas of my childhood.

Implicit in a faithful Mormon life is the willingness to be obedient, even when we don't always understand the purpose behind a commandment, and childhood in New York City taught me the importance of trusting laws and leaders in an earthly context before I was ever forced to trust in them spiritually. Outside major metropolises, a childhood is often characterized by its freedoms: the freedom to play unsupervised in the backyard, the freedom to run over to a neighboring friend's house, the freedom to ride a bike in the driveway. Growing up in a city, however, I and other New York City children did not enjoy these freedoms. In fact, our lives were characterized by limitations: we had to hold our parents' hands

while crossing the street, we couldn't leave our parents' view while in public, we had to tell our parents where we were at all times. We couldn't go outside and play, we couldn't run over to a neighbor's house (unless the friend lived in the same apartment building), and there was certainly no riding bikes in driveways. We had to take bikes over to Central Park to ride them safely. For a child in New York City, it is a fact of life that dangers and obstacles lurk around every corner.

And these dangers are far less subtle or imaginary than the dangers in suburbia might be. While nightmares for children my age living elsewhere might have involved monsters or images from scary movies, my recurring nightmare was of a homeless man spitting on me (which really happened) or worse, snatching me away from my mother as we walked down the street (which didn't happen). Whereas children outside cities might be warned of getting hit by a car while crossing the street on a red light or, as they get older, being offered drugs or cigarettes, these dangers remain theoretical for much of their childhoods. But for city kids, crossing the street amid traffic is a real danger, and being offered drugs may very well be a real occurrence. Instead of being told never to talk to strangers, we city kids are instructed carefully about which strangers we should, in fact, talk to if we're in trouble. Look for the "Safe Haven" signs in store windows. If you're feeling in danger while walking down the street, take hold of a grown-up's hand while waiting for a green light and ask him or her to help you. Get out of a taxi if the driver takes you on an unknown route.

Learning about danger and how to handle it was a real part of my youth. I distinctly remember the first time I walked the half-block from my apartment building to the corner deli all by myself. I was probably about six years old. My mother and our doorman, Frank, stood outside our building watching me as I walked down the block, lost sight of them for a minute as I bought a quart of milk from the Hungarian deli owner, and walked back to my own building. It was my first foray into the world alone. I also remember my first solo taxi ride in fourth grade as I hailed my own cab from my school on East End Avenue and drove across town to Lincoln Center where I was due for a rehearsal for the New York City Ballet's *Nutcracker*, in which I played a soldier. In both instances, I remember a heightened sense of awareness, both of myself and of my surroundings. Did anyone with me on the street make me nervous? Was I watching the traffic lights and looking out for cars? Was I appropriately firm with the taxi

driver so he knew not to take advantage of me by taking the long route and charging me more? In these instances, my safety depended on my willingness to follow the rules I had been taught and to put my self-preservation above all other distractions or temptations.

If my physical safety depended on rules like holding hands while crossing the street and not taking candy from strangers, it wasn't hard to make the leap to believe that my spiritual safety would also depend on following rules. Hence, what may seem to be a childhood of fear and limitation actually became preparation for an adulthood of wisdom and faith. Laws, leaders, guidelines, and commandments were to be trusted, followed. Not rebelled against. And as I grew older, the principles of physical safety that I had learned and exercised as a child allowed me far greater freedoms as a young adult. I could go anywhere (clubs, bars, unsafe parts of town), interact with any person (drunk friends, an unknown taxi driver), and feel safe and in control. Similarly, following principles of spiritual safety allowed me to expand my intellectual understanding of the gospel while remaining in control of my faith. I trusted spiritual principles, I trusted spiritual leaders, and, like a child who doesn't understand why it's important to hold a grown-up's hand, I sometimes trusted without understanding why.

Manhattan Mormons Contribute to My Faith

While this life of contrasts, extremes, and dangers was forcing me to evaluate who I wanted to be, several specific aspects of Mormon life in New York City helped me find my way to Christ. Music is a flagstone on my path to belief, and the exceptional musical talent unique to New York City created opportunities for me to feel the Spirit at a young age. My mother, opera singer Ariel Bybee, has herself a special love for sacred music; she likes to say that she learned to sing by harmonizing with her siblings on hymns. My own youth was focused on becoming an accomplished pianist, and I spent hours a day and months every summer pursuing this goal. Primary songs, hymns, and religious music from Handel to Gounod to Copland dominated our home worship, especially as my own skills matured and I could accompany my mother in firesides, concerts, and on recordings. Our family's worship was echoed in the Lincoln Center chapel. Students at Juilliard or the Manhattan School of Music, established musicians and those with stars still in their eyes, sang and played practically every Sunday. On guitars, in brass quintets, in chamber trios

and vocal quartets, exceptional musicians spoke the Spirit's language as they praised God.

The chapel at Lincoln Center has the only full pipe organ that I've ever seen in an LDS meetinghouse. In addition, an anonymous donor in the late 1970s gave the chapel a nine-foot concert grand Steinway piano, which itself creates a musical atmosphere there that can't be replicated by the standard issue baby grand Kawai found in most other chapels. These world-class instruments were rarely neglected since New York's musical training and professional opportunities drew exceptional Mormon musicians from across the country.

Aside from my mother, several other respected musicians stand out in my mind for their contributions to my feeling the Spirit: David Fletcher, composer and organist, convinced me I was hearing the choirs of angels when he played the pipe organ in sacrament meeting or led the yearly Christmas concert. I vividly remember singing "Joy to the World" with hundreds of fellow audience members and wiping the tears from my face as David modulated to a higher key for each verse and literally pulled out all the stops. We stood, faces toward heaven, as if watching our worshipful sounds rush to God's ears. David also wrote several original hymns which I have performed often with my mother, repeatedly giving me sacred communion with Heavenly Father and my mother.

Murray Boren, currently the composer-in-residence at BYU, also made his mark in the 1980s. He composed an Easter Cantata performed by our stake. Noel and Royce Twitchell, he a singer and she a pianist in Broadway orchestras, never hesitated to share their own exceptional talents. Alison Dalton, currently a violinist with the Chicago Symphony, also lingers in my memory. My own piano teacher, Yoshie Akimoto Eldredge, was a member of the Church (although she lived outside New York in New Canaan, Connecticut); and in our student/mentor relationship, we shared the common bond of musical worship. More recently, I had the opportunity to perform with Jennifer Welch-Babbidge at a multi-stake concert in Carnegie Hall. The moment she opened her mouth, I recognized my mother's own vocal successor. Indeed, Jennifer has had an even more stellar opera career than my mother, appearing on the front page of the *New York Times* when she performed *Lucia di Lammermoor* at New York City Opera while seven months pregnant. And although I haven't met them, the Five Browns currently represent the musical environment in the New York wards. They are the rage among young

pianists: five siblings, each with enough talent to attend Juilliard and record several popular albums of five-piano music.

Music isn't the only art form thoroughly represented by the Manhattan Mormons. In 1999 a local lyricist and poet, Glen Nelson, formed the Mormon Artists Group which Glen himself profiled in *Dialogue*.¹ This group highlights and promotes the work of photographers, writers, visual artists, and musicians who are excelling in their chosen fields. But from the time of W. W. Phelps down to the Tabernacle Choir and now Gladys Knight's Saints Unified Voices, music has been the enduring artistic tradition in the Church. It is predominantly an amateur tradition, evoking visions of well-meaning ward choirs, timid hymn singing, and teenagers struggling through bad pop arrangements of Primary songs. We theoretically believe in the ability of music to be a conduit for the Spirit—hence the oft-quoted verse of the revelation to Emma Smith that the “song of the righteous is a prayer unto me” (D&C 25:12)—but few have had the opportunity to really experience music as legitimate worship, as piercing and testifying as prayer or temple attendance. For me, growing up in Manhattan as someone who was already being taught the language of music, the unique group of world-class musicians that gathered in the Manhattan chapel gave me that experience regularly.

Being raised in the New York wards also exposed me to local Church leaders who, as a group, were of a more consistent quality than I have found elsewhere in the Church. Of course, great bishops, stake presidents, and youth leaders can be found throughout our membership, and their “greatness” can be defined by their rock-solid testimonies, their management abilities, or their talent at relating to young people. But looking back, what I remember most about my local leaders is how they taught me to value the world outside our Lincoln Center chapel. The insularity and fear of being “of the world” that sometimes characterizes our people was completely nonexistent among my leaders. It was replaced by a fierce energy to do whatever it took to get me, as an impressionable child, to look beyond my Mormonness, to replace insularity with an ability to appreciate all of God's children, and to replace judgment with gratitude for variety. Thus, my Young Women's class attended High Holy Days services at a local synagogue; my family attended Christmas Eve mass at St. John the Divine (the largest cathedral in the United States); and youth conferences gave me, a white girl, the opportunity to be a minority among my predominantly Hispanic stake youth.

This external focus may have been because my leaders were often young people who had proactively chosen to come to New York for its offerings, professional or cultural, and who therefore were characterized by a heightened sense of adventure and confidence. This open-minded energy in my leaders is best exemplified by my seminary teacher, Raelene Shelley, who spoke Hebrew fluently, had attended Hebrew University, and regularly attended services at her local synagogue. But no one I've ever met has had a stronger testimony of Christ, so much so that, over the summer after my sophomore year of high school, she arranged to take our entire seminary class to Israel for two weeks. I have since returned to Israel on an archeological dig and on a religious tour with Michael Wilcox, both of which were highlights of my life, but nothing rivals those two weeks spent with Raelene and my friends as she taught us about Christ and his Jewish life.

Lorinda Belnap served as my Young Women's leader while my parents were going through the roughest time of their divorce. Lorinda is the wife of the beloved Brent Belnap, the current Manhattan Stake president, who has overseen the growth of the last ten years and the construction of the Manhattan Temple. Lorinda shares all of her husband's testimony, vision, and leadership, and remains a cherished friend. Another influential Young Women's president was Janae Powell who included us girls in her process of adopting two African American daughters when she couldn't have any children of her own.

There was also the bishop who almost refused to sign my application to BYU, arguing that I should take my mind elsewhere to help spread the Church among other academic circles. And there's the leader who directed our ward's roadshow production one year. In an effort to control the length of each ward's presentation and ensure a commitment to guidelines, each ward was asked to film its skit ahead of time. The movie would be shown to the stake instead of a live performance. Not being bound by traditional roadshow expectations, our director led us downtown to South Street Seaport and we filmed our skit (about repentant pirates) on one of the tall sailing ships docked at the Seaport. Only in New York.

Looking beyond New York

Would my testimony be as strong as it is today if I had not been raised in New York City? Maybe. There were aspects of my life outside of

my New York-centric paradigm that still offered the kinds of contrasts and extremities that led me to Christ. My family, for one, is a study in contrasts. My parents alone offer me entry into two very different social and economic spheres. My mother was one of five children born to a school-teacher and a secretary in southern California. Born into the Church from pioneer heritage, my mother has always been a faithful woman. She was a strong example to me of someone who could embrace a sophisticated, urban life and yet still remain committed to her humble, spiritual origins. We spent weeks and even months of every summer with her family in Los Angeles; and through those interactions with my relatives, I was reminded that I was part of a larger spiritual heritage that trumped any proud superiority I might feel from my metropolitan upbringing.

At some point in those summers, though, we would drive up I-5 from Los Angeles to San Francisco to visit my father's family. During that six-hour drive, I would transform from the suburban Mormon girl in a large, middle-class family of teachers and musicians to the prim and proper granddaughter of San Francisco's most elite socialites. My father had been raised in San Francisco as the older of two sons of Jane Frances Neylan McBaine and Turner Hudson McBaine. Jane's father, John Francis Neylan, was the best friend and legal counsel to William Randolph Hearst, the media tycoon. In fact, the Joseph Cotten character in the movie *Citizen Kane* is modeled after my great-grandfather. Because of my great-grandfather's wealth and position, my dad was raised in luxury that both fascinates and haunts me—cooks, nannies, horses, and trips to Europe—and then he was sent to boarding school in Andover, Massachusetts, at age twelve. Although much of my family's splendor has been squandered in the generations since John Francis Neylan, the formality, extravagance, and intellectual bravura remains. But Jane died an alcoholic, Turner disassociated himself from my older half-sister because she didn't write a thank-you note for something, and my dad daily feels betrayed by the expectations of his youth that there is no longer any money to support.

So in one day, I could wake up in a southern California beach town where I had to fight my cousins for time in the bathroom; and then that evening, after the I-5 drive, I could be served dinner by my grandmother's cook or watch my grandmother play bridge at her local country club. What affected me most about my two families was not the financial discrepancies or the inequality in educational levels; what affected me was

what I felt when I was with them. I was happier with my mother's family, and I often asked myself why. Why did I prefer backyard barbecues when I could be cooked for? Why prefer hours of family songfests when I could attend a cocktail party? Although I grew fond of my father's family and have always been grateful for their profound influence on my life, I felt early on that something was lacking from the dinner parties and beautiful clothes: the spirit of family, of unconditional love, of commitment to something beyond wealth and education. The juxtaposition of my families created a space where I could bring together the best of both worlds, being taught by the Spirit how to value the spirituality of my mother's family while appreciating the material beauty and academic superiority of my father's family.

A similar space was created for me as my academic schooling contrasted with my religious studies, and I again took the opportunity to fill it with the best of my various worlds. For first grade through high school, I attended a private girls' school in Manhattan called Chapin. This is the school Jacqueline Kennedy attended as a girl. During my time there, a schoolmate was Donald Trump's daughter, Ivanka. Chapin was the school my grandmother Jane picked for me, the one she felt suited my social heritage. After twelve years, I graduated with most of the same twenty-seven girls I had started with in first grade. Mostly daughters of investment bankers and lawyers, these girls shared my social heritage, but not my spiritual one. My experience there might be summarized by the fact that as a senior, I graduated as student body president without ever having once been invited to a weekend party. A nerd? Yes, perhaps, and probably a little self-righteous, but I was far from being an outcast or a Jesus freak. I simply was unafraid of external influence. I couldn't be touched. With much teenage hubris, I had decided who I wanted to be and no one could sway me from my confident stance. And who I wanted to be was someone inbetween my competing worlds: someone with the faith of a pioneer but with the intellect and urbanity of Jackie herself.

Chapin is, of course, situated in New York and it is hard to extricate its impact from its New Yorkness, but similar elite schools exist in most large American cities and I could have had comparable experiences elsewhere. And Chapin was ultimately a stepping stone to the real temple of education, Yale University, which, though maintaining a similar East Coast culture, is wholly separate from New York City. It was at Yale that I met others who had successfully performed the same balancing act that I

had: faithful Mormons who weren't afraid to embrace the best the world has to offer. Among those I met was my future husband, as well as some of the people who had the greatest influence on my testimony.

A Perfect Formula for Faith?

Even with the external influences of my family and education, my experiences as a New Yorker are so integral to my feelings about the gospel that it is hard for me to imagine growing close to God in any other setting. But, of course, people do grow close to God in other settings. In America, at least, Mormons are known as a suburban people, raising our large families as far as we can from the debauching influences of the big city. Most of the faithful, thoughtful, and productive members of the Church have come from this more "typical" setting, so it's hard for me to argue that an urban experience of contrasts like mine is necessary for molding testimonies. But my experience does make me feel conflicted about the young parents I've met in San Francisco and Boston (the two places I've lived as an adult) who are willing to sacrifice the richness of city life so their children can have a backyard and a soccer league. On the one hand, for many young parents the decision to move out of a city is purely economical. Cities are more expensive than suburbs, and families with multiple children can provide more material comforts in a suburban setting. Many would like to raise their children in a city if they could afford a spacious apartment, private schools, etc. (I was the only child of two successful professionals, so financial concerns did not dictate my parents' choices.) But the required sacrifices of economy and space are simply too great. As my own family grows, I can sympathize with their choice.

On the other hand, I feel that, in their flight from the city, these young parents teach their children to value Saturday soccer games over an afternoon at a world-renowned museum. They prioritize playing in the backyard over playing in Central Park, walking across the Golden Gate Bridge, or tracking the Freedom Trail. Maybe these valuations are justified; but because of my experience, I would like to see our people sacrifice more to give our children exposure to the richness and diversity of metropolitan life. As I've lived in San Francisco and Boston, what concerns me most is the fear that many of our faithful people feel toward city life. I've been discouraged by the depressed student wives who stay holed up in their industrial student housing with one or two small children, pining for Utah and bemoaning the absence of an Olive Garden. A lack of

money, a new marriage, the shock of new motherhood, and homesickness are all justifiable excuses; but their lack of curiosity and wonder frustrates me. When I do find a mother who packs up her kids in a stroller or backpack and scours the city for adventure and experience, I consider the gift she is giving not only herself but her children and her future family as she opens their eyes to the world beyond strip malls and minivans.

Are we still a suburban church? Culturally, yes, but statistically our membership belies this mindset. As the Church continues to grow, more and more of our young people are growing up in circumstances that fall outside the stereotypical ideal. They don't have the luxury of attending schools with other Mormons. They don't have safe backyards in which to run out and play. They don't have two-parent homes in which family home evening and family scripture study are norms. In Nigeria, Brazil, Russia, and someday in India and China, our youths gain testimonies of the gospel amid the clutter of urban noise, the confusion of broken families, and the pressure of friends who have chosen differently. It must be lonely for them, as it was sometimes lonely for me. It must challenge every ounce of confidence they have. They are learning about danger, about making choices, and about being peculiar, as I did. But there are many ways to choose the right, and our Asian, African, and South American sisters and brothers are showing us how they, too, can have the confidence to act on what they believe, even though they might not have the traditional trappings of a Mormon life.

But growing up in New York or any other city is not a perfect formula for developing an infallible testimony, just as growing up in suburban Utah has never been the perfect formula either. Several of my Mormon friends who were raised in the same wards, attended the same Primary and seminary and even went to Israel with me eventually stopped going to church. I always liked being different. Making choices that distinguished me came easily to me. But not everyone likes being different. For some of my friends, the city's popular tide of revelry and materialism was too great a temptation. Others found their peculiarity to be too lonely. In some cases, causes completely unrelated to our location, such as family situations or spiritual personalities incompatible with Church culture, were to blame. Church became simply another voice vying for attention amid the urban din.

But now, with my own young children and with career and family choices lying ahead, I have to confront my own argument and ask myself if

I am, in fact, willing to make the sacrifices necessary to raise my own children in the environment I credit with giving me my testimony. My husband is currently in graduate school, and discussion among our peers inevitably hovers around the topics of future locations, jobs, and children. I am often asked, Will we move back to New York? How many children do we want? How many can we afford? Is my husband pursuing a career path that is lucrative enough to support an urban lifestyle? Do we want private or public schools for our children?

I have no easy answer to these questions. Theoretically, yes, I would absolutely love to replicate for my own children as much of my own experience as I can. I would love to live in a pre-war four-bedroom apartment on the Upper West Side and send my offspring to private schools and have the girls take ballet at the New York City Ballet and the boys sing in the Metropolitan Opera Children's Chorus. I would love for my children to volunteer in soup kitchens, to deliver Christmas presents to a poverty-stricken family in Harlem, and to see the beauty and variety of Heavenly Father's children on the subway every day. But it will be very difficult for my husband and me to afford the same life for our multiple children that my parents provided for just one of me. Now with two children, a priesthood-holding husband, and a two-parent home of my own, I already have moved beyond what my faithful mother provided for me, making it much more financially challenging to recreate the material and educational privileges of my own youth. I am willing to make sacrifices, and I suspect my husband and I will be some of the last to finally pack our bags for the suburbs, but I don't want to be extreme, like the family in my Manhattan ward that raised eight children in a three-bedroom apartment. (The children slept on mats which flipped against the wall during the day.)

Of course, my larger family is a blessing I cherish, especially since my mother always wanted to have more children. I chose a more typical Mormon family under the assumption and with the faith that a more "normal" home would prove equally or even more effective than my childhood at growing my children's own nascent testimonies. But while I rejoice in my ability to nurture a large, intact family, I mourn the fact that my children may not have to pass through the crucible of an urban youth as I did. Since I suspect that my days as an urban dweller are numbered, I'm trying to be one of those mothers I admire who seizes city life and imparts boldness, curiosity, and wonder to her children. Just last week, I took my three-year-old daughter to a kids' matinee at the Boston Sym-

phony, and she has been in every major museum in Boston, San Francisco, and New York. I smile to myself when she asks to take the T (Boston's metro system) instead of the car, or when she instinctively grabs my hand when we get ready to cross a street. On a drive to New Hampshire to see the fall leaves, she asked where all the buildings had gone, and when we got out of the car to walk around, she complained the ground was "bumpy." That's my city kid.

Note

1. Glen Nelson, "Mormon Artists Group: Adventures in Art Making," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 39, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 115–24.