

We Are Going to Do Something Extraordinary

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Barbara Winder

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Sharon Eubank (moderator): These acts that women do—those are small, sometimes they're unnoticed in a world that looks at different kinds of things when they're looking at accomplishments—but over a lifetime that recreates something extraordinary, and that's our subject here today.

So I hope that the four of you can forget for a minute that there are 17,000 people here, and that we can just have an intimate conversation with 17,000 of your best friends listening. And I'm going to mention—instead of introducing you in the very beginning, I will just mention a couple things as we go along about each one of you, if that's OK.

So Sister Jack, let me just start with you. You started serving in 1990 and you served until 1997. And one of the hallmarks of your administration was the unity among the sisters of the world, even though they lived in diverse conditions. And I read that you said, "Every woman in Relief Society matters. Every sister counts. There is a great diversity in our sisterhood, but it's our commonality that is our faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ."

So I wondered, could you share an example of an extraordinary thing or extraordinary things that have been accomplished by just ordinary women?

Sister Elaine L. Jack: I can share a whole lot, Sharon, because during the celebration of the sesquicentennial, which was the 150th anniversary of Relief Society, we had as our theme "Something Extraordinary," and it gave a wonderful opportunity for us in the resource center to explain to leaders how important they were. We had a big banner that said, "You are something extraordinary." And we wanted leaders and teachers to know that we taught the principles of Relief Society, but they had the inspiration of their calling, and they were able to determine what was best for their sisters because they had that extraordinary ability. We wanted them to know that what you have is enough, each one of them.

One of the activities that was outlined when we had our sesquicentennial celebration was a service project for each unit throughout the world. And rather than telling them each one, “Do this,” or “Do that,” we said, “You look to the needs in your own community and decide what would be best for your area.” One of the areas in California went to their community leaders and said, “What are the things that this community needs that perhaps our women’s organization can do?” And after discussing this for a while, the community leaders said, “You mean 20,000 units throughout the world are going to be doing this?” And the Relief Society said, “Yes.” He says, “Then you’ll change the world.” And I think we did—we changed the world for the better. But there was such a variety of service projects that extraordinary women were doing in a very small way. In Samoa they planted flowers around the clock tower and painted the clock tower. In Africa they swept the path to the water hole. There were a lot of homeless shelters that were painted and refurbished. And in South Africa they made lap rugs for the elderly and they sent one to me. And it was interesting, in Jerusalem they went and cleaned the park in the Jewish area, and then they decided so they would not be partisan they would go to do a park in the Palestinian area. And as a general board, we chose as our service project a highway—to adopt a highway...

Sister Bonnie D. Parkin: I remember cleaning up that highway.

Sister Jack: That was hard work, I’m telling you. So—and I heard from another lady that said that they—their project was to take care of children, blind children in preschool—and she said, “Not only was the school blessed, but,” she said, “it was a life-changing thing for me.”

So I think that these many service projects opened our eyes to know what ordinary women could do, how they could change the world, in fact. And humanitarian needs grew from that, not only at home, but throughout all of the countries. In fact, I read in the paper just recently that McLean, Virginia had 400 women still doing a humanitarian project that has gone on and on. So the idea was not only to render service, to provide opportunities for us to interact with others in the community.

The ongoing service project from our sesquicentennial, however, was the gospel literacy effort, close to my heart. You know, one out of five people in America cannot read at a third grade level. And so we realized there was something that could be done. And so our aim was to not only teach literacy to those who couldn’t read or write, but also to encourage lifelong learning for all members of the Church. And it was interesting to me to see classes taught in Guatemala and in the Philippines by Relief Society women to a variety of people who needed to learn to read. We partnered with the Church Educational System, and we taught reading by using the scriptures, so it was just a double blessing for those who were there. But I saw mothers who wanted to be able to help their children, a 76-year-old man who needed to learn to read the scriptures, a variety of people that were helped through this project. I think we have book groups throughout the Relief Society even now; I know there is one in my ward and many other wards. And the one who is in charge of that the other day said, “We were going to study this book. We’ve changed our minds. This is not appropriate for a Relief Society book group.” I thought, “Isn’t that good—that’s a guardian. We’re helping each other to teach and learn that thing which is of most value.”

But one of the favorite things I remember from that is one woman who said, “When I was a little girl, my dad used to take me to the library, and we’d take books out because I was too little to get a library card. But we would take these books home and we wouldn’t just read them, we’d talk about them and we’d discuss them.” And then she encouraged the parents. She said, “Read to your children, read to yourself. Keep books everywhere—in your purse, in the car, on your bedside table, even in the bathroom—and make it a fun experience.” And she said, “I hope to get to heaven, and I hope there’s a library of the world’s best literature in heaven.” And she said, “I hope I can get a library card there.” So I really feel that all of those small acts have changed the world.

Sister Barbara Winder: Oh, I agree. And we met an outstanding woman—my husband and I were given an assignment to go behind the Iron Curtain. This was 1986 before the Berlin Wall had even fallen, and President Monson assigned us to go there and visit the Relief Society—visit the saints that were still there. And when we arrived in Brno, I saw this beautiful, lithe young woman running down the stairs. She had blonde hair and sparkling green eyes, and she reached out her hand and said, “Hi, I’m Olga Kovarova, and I’m the Relief Society president.” And that was all she knew in English, and I didn’t know a word of Czech, but our hearts immediately bonded. And I remember Olga sitting so intently in the meetings, listening and just soaking it in like a sponge—1986, under communism.

Then in 1990 my husband was assigned to go back to Czechoslovakia to be a mission president there and open the work because the Berlin Wall had fallen, and here was Olga, still very active in the Church. I learned that Olga had gone to a yoga camp—she loved outdoor exercise and activities—she’d gone to a yoga camp and learned about the gospel through the Vojkuvka family. She obtained a copy of the Book of Mormon, sat up reading it through the night, read it in a week. And she said as she read through the night, a light filled her room and she knew that the gospel was true. But they couldn’t practice religion openly. In spite of that, Olga started a campus newspaper with principles of health, and love, and things that they don’t even talk about in communism, and 500 copies were distributed every week when she made this little paper. Many students came into the Church because of Olga’s efforts. Her parents were baptized, her brothers were baptized, and many of the saints in her hometown of Uherski Hradiste. And when we talked to Olga just the other day, she’s still busy, active in the Church—she’s been the Relief Society president four more times.

Sister Mary Ellen Smoot: I would like to share with you a wonderful couple that had eight children. He was from the Philippines and she was from Japan, and they lived in Hawaii—Wahiawa, Hawaii. Very humble—in fact, he was a pineapple worker, and she had to teach him how to read. But this outstanding couple have raised outstanding children and grandchildren. They have sent in this family 37 missionaries into the mission field.

Sister Parkin: Wow.

Sister Smoot: They’ve had a daughter that came to Salt Lake to serve in family history, and they’ve been able to do the work for thousands because they found someone here that was an expert on the Philippines and another one on Japan. And so they’ve been able to search in both

the Philippines and Japan and do the research, and now they just send the names to everyone in the family. Now here's a humble man who could not read and was taught to read by his wife, and together what they have accomplished because they were united in their effort to raise a righteous family and to do what the Lord has asked us to do in searching for our ancestors.

Sister Parkin: Well, as I think about women that have left a lasting impression upon me, I'm reminded of the table in the office where I served, and around that table were adult, single women. The woman closest to the window was dealing with cancer. She had a gorgeous scarf on her head. And we were talking about challenges that were in their lives, and she was so remarkably positive about her life and what she felt. At the other side of her sat a sister who was from New York City, a single woman. This is what she said to me: "If I have to be single for the rest of my life, there's not a better place to be single than in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints." And I think of those women, those remarkable women, and what they did and what they represented, how they were strengthened by each other. But the powerful piece was, through all those challenges in life, it was their position of faith and not fear that was making the difference for them.

Sharon Eubank: That's a great story.

Sister Winder, you led the Relief Society from 1984 to 1990.

Sister Winder: Right.

Sharon Eubank: And you mentioned that you served with your husband in Czechoslovakia, and I know that you also served in San Diego.

Sister Winder: Right.

Sharon Eubank: And I happen to know that you've pretty much served full-time Church assignments back to back for decades. But you are known by everybody that I talk to as somebody that exudes kindness and the ability to get things done, to notice what needs to be done and then to just do it. It's a great trait that you have. And also people talk about your inner strength and your ability to project testimony, which I think you shared a little bit today.

I wanted to ask you, who taught you or influenced you about your own feelings about Relief Society, either as a young woman or as a mature woman?

Sister Winder: That's an interesting question. It's kind of like, "When did you gain your testimony?" or "Do you have faith?" And I thought, "I've always known." And I thought, "Why have I always known?" And I think I was surrounded in my growing-up years by women of faith and women who loved family.

I had two grandmothers, and we lived close to my grandparents. And I had lots of wonderful aunts, and I was one of the oldest of the cousins. But I can remember sitting under the Relief Society quilts—my grandmother Susie Stewart Hand and my grandmother Ruby Stubbs Woodhead were both Relief Society presidents. They both served for 16 years, and I played

under those quilts. I can remember going with mother, taking grandma's little red wagon and delivering food to people who needed it. Depression years were hard years. Grandma Susie never, ever closed the door to anyone who came that needed food. And so I had this example of Relief Society service throughout my whole growing-up time.

It was a remarkable situation to grow up in. I'm so grateful to them and for the things that I learned under their watchful care. I was thinking about some of the specifics that I thought about when I was a tiny child. Grandma Susie used to make roses—the sisters liked to decorate their homes then, too, and I can remember her making these soft-petalled velvety roses, and how I loved them. And then Grandma Woodhead had in her home little butterflies that were attached to the curtain—that held the curtains back that they had made in Relief Society. And I thought, “Oh my goodness.” Now I think back, it was before the grape era, but they were still decorating, and I learned that.

It was a wonderful way of life. And I was thinking, even after they had both been released from being Relief Society presidents, we sat around talking about who would be invited to my wedding party, and my aunts and Grandma Woodhead were saying, “Oh, well we've got to invite cousin Belle,” and I thought, “Who's cousin Belle?” And come to find out, cousin Belle was actually my grandma's niece, had married my grandma's nephew, Brother Spafford, and cousin Belle is Belle S. Spafford. And so I found a family connection that I didn't understand until now I really understand.

Sister Jack: You know, I think we've all had the experience of having a wonderful example, and my mother was one too. But I remember when she was older and she was ill, and homebound, and not able to get out. One day when I went to see her, she said, “Elaine, I've just been reading this—let me share it with you.” And it was this famous one, “When of thy mortal goods thou art bereft,” and—good heavens, I know this really well, “and from thy slender store, two loaves alone to thee are left, sell one, and with the dole buy hyacinths to feed thy soul.” And she said, “I wish I could go to Relief Society, Elaine, because Relief Society provides the hyacinths that feed my soul.”

Sharon Eubank: That's nice.

Sister Winder: Beautiful.

Sister Smoot: My Grandmother Smith and Grandmother Wood both served in the same Relief Society presidency in the Clearfield ward. And then years later my mother became Relief Society president, but then when they divided the stake to a North Davis stake, they made my mother stake Relief Society president. My mother had cancer for several years before she died, but she maintained her position in the stake Relief Society until just a few weeks before she passed away. I was looking in the book of the donors to the Relief Society building when I was general Relief Society president, and both of my grandmothers and my mother had donated money to help build the Relief Society building.

Sister Parkin: Doesn't get better than that. Well, as I think about those who have blessed my life of Relief Society, (they) would be my mother, (a) visiting teacher for 50 years; my

grandmother, whose picture was even in the old Relief Society magazine with quilts hanging behind her. Then I think about the women in Seattle that became my mothers. They were Relief Society women. They helped me grow up, they mentored me and they testified of Christ—that strengthened me. I also think of a woman who was 60 (I was 30) her name was Pauline Tholmander. She was my mentor when I moved into a new ward. And I couldn't not think about Sister Elaine Jack. I served on her board, and she helped me understand the Relief Society history and the love of Relief Society. And I would just say to you three women, thank you for what you've brought forward, that we worked with from what you did—handbooks, principles, love—and you blessed us in our little era of service.

Sharon Eubank: Sister Parkin, you led the Relief Society from 2002 to 2007, and you also served on the Young Women board before that, is that right?

Sister Parkin: Mm-hmm.

Sharon Eubank: President Hinckley was the prophet during your whole administration. And people often say about you, you have tons of energy, you're a doer, you don't let any grass grow under your feet. But I know that the hallmark of your administration was helping every sister feel the love of the Lord in her life every day. And I think one of the nicest stories that I heard about you was by someone who had observed you pray. And they said before you began to pray, you would stop for several seconds and just kind of gather yourself, and it invited the Spirit. And they said they never forgot how that felt as you prepared yourself to pray, and I thought that was a nice thing.

Sister Parkin: Sometimes you're just emotional, too. That describes me.

Sharon Eubank: I wondered if you would tell us a little bit about what it was like to work closely with the brethren in the priesthood councils when you served.

Sister Parkin: Well, as I served with the brethren, it started at the very beginning, from a call from President Hinckley on a Monday morning issuing the call right after the Winter Olympics. And then in the afternoon my phone rang and it was Elder Ballard, and he said, "Bonnie, how can I help you?" I said, "Do you have any time that you could give me some time?" And he said, "I'll clear my calendar for you." That was the first part.

When I met with him, there was Elder Samuelson, who was an advisor to Relief Society. As we visited, then we walked down the hall. And then we walked into the office of President Packer, and he began telling me about his great love for Relief Society. A remarkable man.

I think of another experience with President Hinckley, when Sister Hinckley passed away, and him calling me on the telephone asking if he could use the Relief Society building for her viewing. Now the prophet of God is going to ask me? Does that tell you what kind of a prophet President Hinckley was? Respect for women.

One other example that comes to my mind was, as a presidency we served on the general welfare committee, and that was a great experience. And we were to go into the welfare committee and

we were to explain how we taught the sisters about welfare. Now, you have to visualize this with me, what this welfare meeting looks like: At the top of the table is the First Presidency, around the table are the Twelve Apostles, on this side are the seven presidents, on this side are the Presiding Bishopric and the Relief Society president. So we decided the way to teach that was just the way we taught women, and you know how women do it—it's a discussion, isn't it? You ask questions, women answer. Well, we tried that. We were just—there we were, and so we asked the questions, and—figuring surely one of those men would not let us burn right in front of all of them. And so, sure enough, seven presidents, we got a response there; moved across the table to the Presiding Bishopric—Bishop Edgley responded; moved back around the table to Elder Holland—he responded; to the top of the table to President Monson. And all this time I'm watching President Hinckley, and he just has this smile on his face, and I'm thinking, "My gosh, what is he thinking—we're going to be fired immediately." Well, he smiled—and it was this twinkle in his eye. As he left his office, he walked in to his secretary Don—and Don happened to call and tell me this, and this is what he said. He said, "Don, don't let me forget—don't let me forget." Don looked at him and said, "Forget what, President?" He said, "Forget that today we were taught by the women of the Church, and we are no less for it." That's been my experience with prophets of God that I testify are prophets of God.

Sister Jack: And let me just add one experience I had when I was brand new. I thought, the Relief Society president works with the bishop. Maybe I need to see Bishop Hales, who was the Church bishop at that time. And so I did go over, and he spent about an hour and a half with me explaining what his concerns were, what he anticipated we might do, how we could work together. It was the most warm and welcoming and instructive thing of all. He said, "Elaine, there'll probably be three or four things that you'll be able to accomplish during your administration, and you'll come to know what they are." And I did. It took me about six years to find out exactly what they were, but they came along, and he had given wise advice.

Sister Smoot: Elder Oaks was my advisor, and he was wonderful. A national organization called and asked if I would serve on their board. So I phoned Elder Oaks and said, would this be a possibility? And he said, "Let me call you back." And two weeks went by, and he called me and said, "Sister Smoot, I would like you, if you would, to go to Rome, Italy, and help plan the World Congress on the Family." And so I did. It was a marvelous experience. And then I went to the World Congress on the Family, and it was very interesting, because the woman that started a standing ovation after I finished my presentation was a woman from Russia, and it was great to have her stand and start the applause. It told me many things. We are so grateful—we can be so grateful for our leaders, our priesthood leaders that give us guidance. And Elder Oaks said in this last conference, "Remember that desires dictate priorities, priorities shape choices, and choices determine our actions."

Sister Jack: Powerful.

Sister Smoot: So each day we might think through that as we strive to do the will of our Father in Heaven.

Sister Winder: That's a good one. It's kind of interesting as you've talked about these different brethren, and I just always felt like I was sitting at their feet learning so much. And you know,

we could list so many, because every experience that we had, every advisor, every committee that we were on, but always in our relationship with them we were treated with honor and respect. And I think that's really the bottom line.

Sister Smoot: It is.

Sister Jack: Barbara, I think you're right—even when the problems are thorny and difficult to deal with, they were great.

Sister Winder: Yes.

Sister Parkin: But what we really witnessed, I think, was women and men working together respectfully, and being valued for what you brought. It worked.

Sister Smoot: Right.

Sister Winder: It is, and Bishop Hales was also the one we worked with in welfare, and I just cannot say enough about his graciousness. And I had some hard problems that were going on in the Relief Society, and he said, "Please, you do not need to deal with those. Turn them over to us." And he just lifted them off our shoulder and took them. It was the most remarkable thing.

Sister Jack: Right.

Sharon Eubank: I appreciate what you said, Sister Parkin, that the Church provides a pattern that doesn't exist in a lot of places in the world for men and women working together in co-sponsorship on different problems. And I think you've all had good examples of that.

Sister Jack: Right, we did.

Sister Smoot: I don't believe that many women realize the committees that the Relief Society president sits on.

Sister Winder: Many.

Sister Smoot: I don't think they realize. And you feel so humble, you know, to add—but it's the welfare committee, and all of you have served on the welfare committee. I served on the committee for the Perpetual Education Fund, and it was a thrilling experience to be there at the beginning of that preparation for the Perpetual Education Fund.

Sister Winder: Well, and the temple ordinance, and the—I mean, it just goes on...

Sister Smoot: It does.

Sister Winder: But it's not unlike in the wards and stakes. As the sisters come, and we have to go in prepared, we have to go in with some solutions to problems, I think.

Sister Parkin: I think that's true, but the other thing I loved when I served on the—what is that board called, the CES board, Church...

(unintelligible)

Sister Parkin: ...that's what it's called, that board. Serving there, I remember Elder Scott was the chair of that board, and he valued every—I was the only woman, which you were too when you were there—but he wanted to hear what my thoughts were, and he always asked, and he was so respectful of what my thoughts were. For example, the new home that was to be built at BYU–Idaho for the mission—for the university...

Sister Jack: President.

Sister Parkin: ...president. And he said, “Have you looked at that floor plan? And is it going to work—as a woman will that work for you?” So, that's the kind of man he is.

Sister Jack: And what was nice was, I never hesitated to give an honest opinion. I felt very comfortable, and they were very accepting.

Sister Parkin: Right. Beautiful. Right.

Sharon Eubank: Sister Smoot, you are known very much for your humanitarian work that happened during your administration. You served from 1997 to 2002, and it was a time when the Church was growing—it was unprecedented growth in a lot of ways, and there were a lot of disasters during that time, so the Church did a lot of humanitarian work. You're often remembered because of the energy and the devotion and charity that you felt for women around the world and what they were going through in their lives. I just wondered if you would talk about how service and the way that we minister through charity and “Charity Never Faileth” — how does that help fulfill Emma's charge to “do something extraordinary”?

Sister Smoot: It certainly does. It was interesting, when we first—let's see, in 1999 we introduced a service project along with Brigham Young University Women's Conference. And there were 14,000 that attended Women's Conference each year. That year we had 20,000 women, and I think it's grown since then. We did 2,000...

Sister Parkin: What was the traffic like with 20,000?

Sister Winder: No road construction...(unintelligible).

Sister Smoot: And the next year, in 2000, they did quilts all over the football field, if you remember, and it brought out older women as well as younger women learning how to do quilts. Then I had the privilege of going to Kosovo and presenting some of those quilts to the women there. One of the great experiences I've had was going to a Payson stake recently to speak at a women's conference, and the secretary of the stake presidency came up to me and said, “I saw you in Kosovo.” We could not talk to the women about the Church. There are members of the Church there, but we were not to mention it while we were there. But here was a woman that

had left Kosovo and joined the Church, married in the temple, and works with the stake Relief Society presidency.

Sister Parkin: Wow.

Sister Smoot: Very interesting story.

Sharon Eubank: Thank you so much.

Sister Jack, I heard a funny story about you. I heard that you were speaking at the Tabernacle at the podium, and you had an earring on and it just clunked off onto the table.

Sister Jack: Clunk.

Sharon Eubank: And you just picked it up and put it in your hand and just kept going—you couldn't be flustered.

Sister Jack: (nods)

Sharon Eubank: But you learned to laugh at those things, and I just wonder, for all of you, what are some of the funny stories that just kind of helped to give you perspective when things were difficult?

Sister Jack: I don't know particularly one, but I remember a poem of Louise Robison's, one of the early Relief Society presidents, and she said, "God, give me sympathy and sense, and help me keep my courage high. God, give me calm and confidence, and please, a twinkle in my eye." So I tried to keep a twinkle in my eye.

Sister Parkin: Well, I think I've got one that this audience might enjoy, and I hope that you take it in the light that it is given, but this is what happened. We were working on the general Relief Society meeting, and we had a picture that we wanted on the poster—that era we were doing a poster, OK. So, we'd sent the poster—just a copy of the poster over, and the brethren had looked at it, and they didn't approve it. And I thought, "They didn't approve it because they haven't seen the original. But if they saw the original, I think they would probably think it was great." So what do you do? The picture was huge but it was lovely, and if I could tell you the name of it you would remember it. So we got the picture and we found a dolly. We put the picture—it was fine art—on the dolly, and we went underneath the garage over to the CAB building, right? OK. It's where the Twelve and the First Presidency...

Sister Jack: Church Administration—big men.

Sister Parkin: That building, so—that place. Well, that's where we went. So we get right to the door, and as we get into the door, with the dolly, with the picture and the three of us plus our wonderful administrative assistant, we met, who should it be but Elder Ballard. And he said, "What are you girls up to?" We went a little further and we got onto the elevator. We went up on the elevator, and as we got off the elevator, who should we meet but President Packer? And

he was walking down, and I said, “President, I just want you to take a look at this picture. It has possibilities.” So you know, he’s an artist. So he stood back a little bit and he made his “V” to take a look at, and then he looked at it for a minute and he said, “I think it would work. I think it has possibilities.” Well, then we went on into Elder Perry’s office, and Elder Perry—just as we got to his door, down the hall comes Elder Hales, and he said, “I understand Elder Perry needs help—you three are there.” And as we finished up, wonderful Elder Perry looked at us and said, “Next time maybe we could come to you.”

Sister Jack: Well, that would have been easier.

Sister Parkin: So have we got more? Barbara.

Sister Winder: I haven’t got a story, but I love your humor. And I had a counselor that was just like that. And when things would get really kind of tense and we couldn’t find a solution to a problem, she’d usually have some little fun quip, and if she didn’t have a fun quip she’d reach over and pat our hand and say, “It’ll be all right.” And when I told her children this, they laughed because, they said, that’s just the way mom is with us: “It’ll be all right.” And I said, “When you do her biography, title it, “It’ll Be All Right.”

Sister Jack: You know, I remember when we were helping with Sister Benson’s funeral, and President Hinckley, who was Elder Hinckley at the time, was in charge of the funeral meeting which they had to make the arrangements. And they asked if we could be in charge of preparing lunches for the family because they buried her in Idaho after the services. And I said, “We’d be happy to do that, President Hinckley. How many would you like?” And he says, “We’ll, let’s see, there’ll be 15 of the Twelve...” and then he laughed too.

Sister Parkin: And I can’t let you go without one last piece of humor—because there is a little humor in this. If you can imagine, you’ve been released, the stress is gone from your life. So one of my wonderful counselors was in the temple, and a woman came up to her and said, “You know, I found this wonderful picture of your presidency. I wonder if you would like it?” And my counselor looked at her and said, “Well, sure, I’d love that picture.” “Well,” she said, “it’s a picture of all three of you.” So she brought the picture to her the next day, and as my counselor looked at the picture, she realized it was like the picture that had hung in the main office on, you know, the second floor.

Sister Jack: We called it “the hanging room.”

Sister Parkin: The three women.

Sister Jack: The hanging room.

Sister Parkin: Yes, the hanging one. And she said, “Where did you find this picture?” And she said, “Oh, I found it at the DI for a dollar.” So it’s all relative.

Sister Jack: In case you think you’re big stuff, forget it.

Sharon Eubank: Sister Winder, you told me a story the other day, we were talking about...

Sister Winder: (laughing)...excuse me, I'm sorry.

Sharon Eubank: No—we were talking about sacrifices that your families had to make in order for you to serve, and you were telling me about your family, and I wondered if you'd share that story?

Sister Winder: Oh, do you know, they're all so wonderful, and they'd do anything. But we were serving in California San Diego Mission, and it hadn't been quite two years of a three-year call when the call came for me to be general Relief Society president, and this meant that my husband would have to give up his call as mission president. And President Hinckley was the one who called, and he was on the phone at 10:00 at night—it would have been 11:00 in Salt Lake—and I said, "President Hinckley, it's really late," and he said, "I know, I've been trying to reach you all day." We'd been at zone conferences—those of you that have been on missions know about those. And so when he made that call, I thought, here's my husband who is giving up his mission for me to be general Relief Society president. President Hinckley said, "This is highly irregular, but the Brethren have chosen." We came home. Susan and John—Susan and John Tanner, our daughter and son-in-law—were living in our home and taking care of it while we were gone. They were busy building their home in Provo, but it meant a really hasty, early move for them. And I thought, they had to move their little family quickly to provide me a place to live. And then because my husband had to go back to the mission and continue serving for about three months until they could find a replacement for him, our son, who was a student at the University of Utah and a returned missionary, was given the responsibility by my husband to take care of me. My husband turned to Bob and said, "Bob, take care of your mother. She will need a car. You must get her a car." And I thought, here's this young man who had to assume that responsibility all of a sudden. And it's a quick change, and changes are I think always difficult in our life—it takes a little adjusting. But you know, with the gospel and with the faith that everyone had, they were willing to make that adjustment.

And—oh, one of the interesting things about that was we had just learned that the California San Diego temple was going to be built. They'd been waiting and waiting for it. And so at our zone conferences that round, we'd said to the missionaries, "Be sure to listen to conference, because there will be a special announcement made." Little did we know.

Sister Jack: Well Barbara, yours were really great, but mine—I got a call from my son last night who lives in Alabama, and he called to say, "We're safe from the tornadoes; we're not being troubled by them. And Mom, you speaking tomorrow? Now don't embarrass the family."

And I remember when I was first called, and President Monson said, "We may ask you to say a few words in conference, but we don't want you to preach a sermon." So I was telling that to my children, and David said, "Mom, that's what we've been trying to tell you for years."

Sister Parkin: Well, I think about sacrifices of family, I don't think Jim found much of a sacrifice other than he became a great secretary. But his favorite title was "spouse." When he was introduced, he was the spouse—I'd always been the spouse.

Sister Jack: And he got a good seat at conference.

Sister Smoot: My husband joked with President Hinckley about having me gone for a long period of time, and he said, “Well, you can go anywhere you want to pay for.”

Sharon Eubank: I wonder if I could throw this question out to the group and just say, could you talk about your feelings about the roles of women in the Church and the contributions of Relief Society in the Church and also in the world?

Sister Jack: You know, I don’t think there’s any contribution a woman could make that is any greater than raising a family, whether it’s her own family or whether it’s family by affection that she’s adopted. There’s no way to make a better difference and—many ways. And I’ve seen that so often, the service that women give one to the other. And I love the quotation of Sister Hinckley, you know, “We need each other, oh, how we need each other.” Those of us who are old need you who are young, and hopefully you who are young need some of us who are old.

But I remember an incident in the southern United States where a woman needed bed care, and the Relief Society came regularly, and did such good care. And the husband said, “When I tried to thank them, they said, ‘Oh, it was nothing. Norma would have done the same for us.’”

And another instance where care was given and the sisters said, “We needed to learn more charity and we just needed somebody to practice on.” So I think I may be—I forget what the question was, but I just think that those kinds of examples contribute to the whole thing. Women contribute through families, they contribute through service to each other, and through being there, sharing their experiences and being there for one another. And they have opportunities to serve, to learn, to use skills—all of that is encompassed.

Sister Winder: When I was thinking about when I was a young mother, just starting my family and going to Relief Society—I was so excited to be able to go to Relief Society. And we had this marvelous education teacher, or spiritual living teacher, and our course of study was the Book of Mormon. Her name was Jasmine Arnold. She’s the mother of one of our general authorities now, Brother Mervyn Arnold. And she challenged us all to read the Book of Mormon, and I thought, this is so wonderful. And I felt such a great spiritual strength from her. And I think of the influence that we are able to have on one another, how we are a support system to each other. I just had a granddaughter call the other day that’s living in New York and working in theatre there and has some quite interesting people that she works with. But she said, “Grandma, I love my visiting teachers. I love my visiting teachers.” And they’re a strength and a stability to her in her life.

But the business of mothering is so important. Years ago I read a quote from Margaret Mead, a great anthropologist who said people have remained human because there were women who were there when they went to bed at night, when they woke up in the morning, they were there to soothe and comfort and sustain. Women can do this, and that’s really our role, and Relief Society is where we go to learn and support each other in these wonderful attributes—or help us develop these wonderful attributes. I am so grateful for the effect of Relief Society in my life

and what it has done for me and for my family, and for the effect that I see in the community. I love Relief Society.

Sister Smoot: I'm so grateful for the early Relief Society sisters. They didn't only make shirts. They also were able to work in the temple, do family history work. They covered the bases, and they were blessed and their families were blessed. I am so grateful for the opportunity to work in the temple, and I want to thank so many of you young mothers that come to the temple with your cards. All of you—it's just amazing how many of you are learning what to do to save the souls of your ancestors. And there is nothing that will bring you more peace than to come with that card and do all the work for that individual. The more you find out about that individual, the more closely knit you feel to your eternal family, and you look forward to meeting them on the other side of the veil.

Sharon Eubank: All right.

Sister Parkin: I think I'll let you go to the next question.

Sharon Eubank: I was just going to ask you to take, as we conclude, two or three minutes, and just bear your testimony of why modern women need Relief Society. What is it that Relief Society offers that is important in the 21st century?

Sister Parkin: Well, I think I could start with that. I think Relief Society is relevant in every woman's life right now, I don't care how modern she is. But it's relative, and it's relative, and I bear witness that it's relative, and it's because for me it's where I learned the gospel, it's where I had friends, it's where I had older women that were wise. And I think as women we need each other's stories of stupidity at times and each other's stories of wisdom, and you get that there.

The other thing I know for sure is that that motto, "Charity never faileth,"—it never fails because, you know why, it's Christ's pure love, and His love will never fail us. I know the power that comes to families by covenants and bear witness that covenants keep us on the path to where we need to go. And we help each other as we testify of Christ, and I believe that is our responsibility, to testify of Christ and to help another woman find her testimony of Christ. And we do that as we feel the Lord's love in our life daily, and as we say our morning prayers and we ask Heavenly Father, "Just help me feel your love today. I just need it." I've done it, it works, and it blesses my life, and I bear witness of that in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

All: Amen.

Sister Smoot: My husband was 27 when he was called to the bishopric, and he always served in a leadership position. We had six children in eight years, and they've been a tremendous blessing in our lives. I'm so grateful for the leaders, the wonderful pioneer women that lived in Centerville, Utah.

When my husband was not there and not available, I yearned to go to Relief Society meeting and hear their testimonies. They buoyed me up. They blessed my life so I could strengthen my

husband and support him in his leadership role, so that I could carry on with my family and bless their lives, and praise my husband for the service that he gave.

I know the gospel of Jesus Christ is true. We have been able to serve in Kirtland at the dedication of the Whitney store and it was amazing to me, the marvelous people that came and were a part of that experience. We will never forget President Benson coming and staying with his family just after he was called. He came and stayed at the Johnson farm, and he wanted to just be alone with his family there—so that he could feel the spirit of Joseph—shortly after he was called.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is true, and I'm so grateful for our family. We have a large family, and I'm grateful for each one of them desiring to serve, to be married in the temple and to go on missions. Their experiences in their life have continually blessed my husband and me. And I look forward to our ancestors on the other side of the veil, looking to reacquaint and become acquainted with them. I know they have been a part of any family history that I have been able to accomplish, with family members, with my daughters who have been able to assist. I know that our Father in Heaven wants us to reach out to those beyond the veil, and this is my testimony, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

All: Amen.

Sister Jack: There are a couple of quotes that I really like that I think make Relief Society relevant to every woman today. One is one of Eliza R. Snow's, and she said, "We stand in a different position from women of the world. We have made covenants with the Lord. We understand His order." And I know that sisters, women, are guardians of those covenants, whether they do it individually or whether they do it in the home. And there is nothing more important through our progress in the gospel than keeping those covenants. And this makes it very relevant for Relief Society. Covenants are important, and we understand what they mean.

The other is a quotation of Belle Spafford, when she said, "Relief Society is only on the threshold of its divine mission." Well I believe, sisters, that we have moved across that threshold into a new dimension of truth and light. I see the progress that's been made in Relief Society in my lifetime—which is pretty long, but anyway, relatively recently. The progress has been made. Women are coming to understand how important this association is. This is an organization founded by a prophet, under the direction of the Lord. What could be more important? How could we be better blessed by understanding the Lord loves us enough to give us this organization for women, and priesthood brethren that can help us in furthering our progress, each one of us. And by the same token, blessing families and blessing the world. Relief Society is relevant. I know that the Lord loves us. I love Relief Society and I love you sisters. I am grateful to be your sister. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

All: Amen.

Sister Winder: These are so beautiful, I just appreciate these words so very much. And I, too, have a testimony of Relief Society. And when the prophet Joseph came to the sisters and said, "I have something better for you than this constitution," I don't know that we really completely

understood the depth of what he was saying to them—“I have something better for you, and you will be organized under the priesthood after the pattern of the priesthood.” And as I read in the scriptures the importance of the work that we are doing, and that of charitable service that we might be able to become more Christlike in our lives, Relief Society affords us an opportunity in an organized way to learn how to do that. Heavenly Father has provided that for us. And as we actively participate in Relief Society, we have every opportunity to learn of Him. We have every opportunity to fulfill assignments that are given us, that help us develop charitable hearts and be able to be these wonderful friends, one with another. We have opportunities to have friends that can help us in our understanding of homemaking skills, and child development techniques that will help us raise righteous families. And as we progress along this pathway to this road to perfection that we are all striving for—and it won’t happen overnight, of course—we’re still working on it—but as we work toward that, we will hopefully always respect and honor the priesthood, and respect the men who bear it righteously, and stand nobly side by side with them in the kingdom of God. I know that this is the Lord’s plan for us today, and I do pray that each of us will embrace it wholeheartedly, and that we will be full participants in Relief Society. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

All: Amen.

Sharon Eubank: Sisters, I want to thank you for sharing such candid things, and heartfelt, personal things, but also these powerful testimonies. I think I can speak for everyone here—you have left a legacy in Relief Society for many people to build upon, and we’re grateful to you for the service and for the consecration of what you’ve done. Thank you very much for that and for today, also.

All: Thank you.