
MOM - AND OTHER GREAT WOMEN I'VE KNOWN

CHAPTER 1: MOTHER'S GUILT DAY

I had been called as a bishop in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints the last Sunday in March. Now, six weeks later, I was still getting my feet wet. Our Sunday block of meetings was over, and I sat in my office waiting for one of our youth to arrive for an interview. Sister Porter appeared in the doorway. "Bishop," she said, "do you have a moment?"

"Of course, Sister Porter, come in." I rose from my chair. She entered the office with her customary slow gait. I shook her hand. "Please, have a seat."

She shook her head. "I'll just take a minute. I wanted you to know I won't be here next Sunday to teach my class. I've asked Sister Jorgenson to cover for me." She turned to go.

"Are you taking a little vacation?" I smiled.

Sister Porter stopped at the doorway, turned, and looked back. "Oh, no, Bishop, nothing like that. It's Mother's day."

I wrinkled my brow. "I don't understand."

"I'm not a mother," she said.

She turned slowly, closed the door behind her, and lowered herself into the chair across from my desk. "Bishop, you know I'm married. I have no children." She looked down at the carpet in front of the desk. "Every Mother's Day it's pretty painful to sit in my seat during sacrament meeting and hear about the great mothers in our ward and know I'll never be a mother. I've chosen not to come to church on" - she paused and shrugged her shoulders - "that Sunday."

"You're not alone in these feelings, are you?" I asked.

"Probably not." A fleeting smile played on her lips. "Thanks for listening."

At that moment there was a knock on the door. My appointment had arrived. Sister Porter lifted herself from the chair and shook my hand. I walked her to the door and opened it. "Thank you for sharing your feelings with me." She nodded her head as she left, and one of the young men in our ward nervously entered for his interview.

Throughout the afternoon as I had moments between interviews I kept thinking about Sister Porter. I couldn't help wondering how many others felt the same way she did. I mentally noted the adult sisters in our ward who had never married or had never had any children. The number was fairly large.

That evening as my family followed tradition and gathered with my brothers and sisters and their children at my mother's home, I mentioned that a sister in my ward was uncomfortable with Mother's Day. Immediately my mother exclaimed, "Well, you know how your Aunt Ruth felt about it."

Aunt Ruth had married three times but had never been blessed with children. She had taken various nieces and nephews on her vacations. My sister and I even spent an entire summer with her in Colorado Springs when she lived there. She helped several of us with college expenses and was more than generous with birthday and wedding gifts. But I did remember what she said about Mother's Day: "I'll celebrate it when they call it Aunt's Day." My aunt Ruth always had a smile and a joke on her lips. When she talked about Mother's Day, or Aunt's Day, it was one of the few times I remember seeing her looking wistful and sad.

One of my sisters interrupted my thoughts. Shortly after her marriage she and her husband had discovered they were unable to have children. They had filed an adoption paper but were still waiting. "I hate it! Maybe I'll feel differently after we..." Her voice trailed off. "If we ever get a baby," she concluded.

"Sorry I touched such a sore spot," I said. The conversation turned to the less volatile subjects of politics, gun control and the death penalty.

The next day I made my way to the faculty room during my consultation period. I spread out some papers I intended to correct and began to read one of them. Three of the other faculty members crashed into the room. After retrieving cans of soda pop from the machine in the corner, they assembled themselves around one of the other tables in the room. Their conversation focused on school matters, and I tried to keep my mind on the papers I was reading, until Mrs. Carter asked loudly, "Is this Sunday Mother's Day?" The other two women nodded their heads.

"Afraid so," said Miss Halman.

"Guess I'll have to stock up on food when I go shopping this week," said Mrs. Polaski. "My kids will come and give me a fifty-cent card, then eat me out of house and home."

I mentally reviewed what I knew about these three women. Mrs. Carter had married while she was in college and divorced within the year. I had never heard her speak about this experience except to indicate it was one of the "follies of youth." No children had come from this brief marriage, and she had never wed again. She had been the senior class advisor for as many years as I could remember and influenced the lives of literally thousands of students. Parents rejoiced when they found that their children were going to be taught by this kind, considerate woman.

Miss Halman was a girly recent addition to our teaching staff. Large and somewhat awkward in appearance, she loved teaching and she loved the kids. She was an open, honest woman who gave enormous amounts of time and energy to teaching. She accepted extracurricular assignments that other faculty members refused. I remembered watching her help with dance decorations for the harvest ball and admiring her creativity. She also quietly arranged for dates for several girls who had not been asked to the dance.