

BY SHAUNA BIRD DUNN

*The job opportunity was everything I had trained and planned and hoped for during the past 15 years. How could I pass it up?*

**W**hen I was a teenager, I decided that when I grew up I wanted to be the leader of a large corporation. I planned the rest of my education based on that decision. I took foreign language and advanced-placement classes in high school and majored in marketing and economics in college, all to strengthen my résumé and progress along the path toward corporate leadership.

I had my life mapped out. After my mission, I would graduate with a law degree and a master's degree in administration, work for several years, get married—not before age 30 at the earliest—and then, after a couple of years, I would *maybe* consider having a child.

Right in the middle of my graduate studies, the Spirit strongly told me I should marry the young man I was dating. Luckily, I listened—Brent was too good to pass up! He was worried about my attitude toward having children, but he followed the promptings he received to marry me anyway.

While waiting outside the Salt Lake Temple for Brent and me to come out, my sister asked my mother, “Do you think they’ll have any kids?” My mother responded, “I think Shauna will have one, just to say she did it.”

#### **An Unexpected Decision**

Shortly after we were married, Brent and I both felt strongly impressed that there was a child who needed to come to our family right away. I don’t think I have ever seen Brent more surprised than he was when I told him, “I think Heavenly Father wants us to try to have a baby

# Mother, COME HOME



soon.” His response was, “I felt the same way, but I was too afraid of your reaction to bring it up.” Less than a year later, we welcomed our son Malachi into our family.

I still dreamed of being a corporate leader. My husband was supportive and helpful. We promised each other to live by the Spirit and follow those promptings. As we talked about our life plans with each other and with our Heavenly Father, it seemed to us that my goals were acceptable to the Lord.

### **A Long-Sought Opportunity**

Fast forward a couple of years. As I was finishing graduate school, I interviewed with a large international company for a position in their prestigious two-year training program. This program seemed to be the fast track to corporate leadership, my dream come true.

The compensation package was amazing—about four times as much as anything else I had been considering. The competition was fierce, so being offered a position would be extremely gratifying. The company had an even more enticing compensation and reward package to encourage

### **A DIVINE RESPONSIBILITY**



*“May I say to mothers collectively, in the name of the Lord, you are magnificent. You are doing terrifically well. The very fact that you have been given such a responsibility is everlasting evidence of the trust your Father in Heaven has in you. He knows that your giving birth to a child does not immediately propel you into the circle of the omniscient. If you and your husband will strive to love God and live the gospel yourselves; if you will plead for that guidance and comfort of the Holy Spirit promised to the faithful; if you will go to the temple to both make and claim the promises of the most sacred covenants a woman or man can make in this world; if you will show others, including your children, the same caring, compassionate, forgiving heart you want heaven to show you; if you try your best to be the best parent you can be, you will have done all that a human being can do and all that God expects you to do.”*

**Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Because She Is a Mother,” Ensign, May 1997, 36.**

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graduates of the program to stay with them. If I were accepted, it seemed that once I completed the program I could design my own future. I envisioned someday wearing power suits to my penthouse office, dazzling my co-workers and employees with my expertise, and cashing paychecks that truly reflected my value.

After my third fly-back interview, I received a telephone call from corporate headquarters. They were offering me the position. There were so many reasons to accept this job. The money could be used to pay off my pending student loan debt. The recruiters’ views of my university might be tainted by a refusal. And mostly, this position seemed to be everything I had trained and planned and worked for during the past 15 years.

I figured that after completing the program I could work part-time while our children were young and then return to full-time work when I was ready to more actively pursue my dream of corporate leadership. I could have it all!

But just as the elation and excitement at being offered the position began swelling within me, a different feeling emerged: the sinking feeling that this was not what Heavenly Father wanted me to do.

Brent was supportive. He prayed and counseled with me, and he promised to support me in whatever decision I reached through prayer and counsel with the Lord.

I prayed that night and told Heavenly Father the unbelievable benefits of this position. But still the Spirit let me know that I should refuse it. I called back and turned down the offer. It was one of the hardest things I have ever had to do. I felt I was giving up my chance to make something of my life—that I was giving up my well-earned reward for four grueling years of graduate study, giving up my chance to be fulfilled in this life, giving up my dreams. Even though I knew it was the right decision, it was really, really hard.

### **A New Direction**

Brent and I prayed to know what to do next. A job fell into my lap, and I ended up working with a company I enjoyed, with flexible hours. It wasn't quite the high-powered career I had envisioned, but it paid the bills. Brent stayed home with Malachi and worked on his fledgling business on the

side while I worked full time. While this decision may not be right for everyone, we had prayed about this new direction for our lives, and it was right for us. We promised the Lord we would try to stay close to the Spirit and always make prayerful decisions about our lives. As a result of these prayerful decisions, we welcomed our daughter Sophia into our family.

After four years with this company, I felt that I was not supposed to work outside the home anymore. After another long night of counseling with my husband and with the Lord, I told the company owner I would be leaving. This decision took a leap of faith because we still had bills to pay, including student loans, and we had recently welcomed another daughter, Aerie, to our family. But I had learned that I am happiest when I follow the Lord's plan for my life rather than my own personal plans.

Three years after this difficult decision to leave my job, our daughter Aerie asked me, "Mom, if someone said you could have ten thousand million diamonds or your Aerie, what would you choose?" I told her, "I would choose my

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PHOTOGRAPH BY MAGGI QUACKENBUSH

Aerie.” She went on, “If someone said you could have ten million hundred dollars or your Aerie, what would you choose?” Again I told her, “I would choose my Aerie.” She jumped up and down, crying with glee, “I knew you would say that! I just knew you would say that!”

It hit me then that I *had* chosen my Aerie. Had I taken the position with the large international company, I probably would not have her in my life. And she is truly a joy, as are our four other children.

#### **“I’ll Go Where You Want Me to Go”**

Just after this experience with Aerie, I had a tender moment in Relief Society. I had always sung the hymn “I’ll Go Where You Want Me to Go” with thoughts of missionary service. This time as we sang the hymn, my heart was filled as I applied the words to my own situation:

*It may not be on the mountain height  
Or over the stormy sea,  
It may not be at the battle’s front  
My Lord will have need of me.*

*But if, by a still, small voice he calls  
To paths that I do not know,  
I’ll answer, dear Lord, with my hand in thine:  
I’ll go where you want me to go.*

*There’s surely somewhere a lowly place  
In earth’s harvest fields so wide  
Where I may labor through life’s short day  
For Jesus, the Crucified.*

*So trusting my all to thy tender care,  
And knowing thou lovest me,  
I’ll do thy will with a heart sincere:  
I’ll be what you want me to be.<sup>1</sup>*

Over the past seven years since I made the decision to be home full-time with my children, I have stayed up many nights to comfort a sick or frightened child instead of staying up preparing a presentation for the board of directors; worn clothes covered in peanut butter smears instead of power suits; cleaned my home each day instead of enjoying a penthouse view from my office; bandaged “owies” and

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN LUKE



encouraged piano practice instead of handing out performance reviews; and enjoyed hugs and kisses instead of stock options as my compensation plan. In doing so, I have come to realize that a mother's work is the Lord's work. As a mother, I am not just a co-creator with God when children grow within my body; I am a co-creator with Him as I help these children learn to walk their own path and become the people He wants them to be.

I find it telling that God experiences great joy in His role as a parent. He says in Moses 1:39, "This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man." That is my work and my glory too—to do those things that will help my children along the path to immortality and eternal life.

### Powerful Lessons

Motherhood isn't easy, but it is worth it. Many times I have looked around and said to myself, "For this I went to college?" and then I think of the promise made to mothers by Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: "Yours is the work of salvation, and

therefore you will be magnified, compensated, made more than you are and better than you have ever been."<sup>2</sup>

I'm grateful for my calling as a mother. I'm grateful for each of our five children, who teach me daily about purity, trust, and love, and about becoming more like the Savior. They help me understand how powerfully Heavenly Father loves me because I am His child.

I am grateful for my testimony of the Savior and His sacrifice for me, for it is through the Atonement of Jesus Christ that hearts can be changed—that *my* heart could be changed. I'm grateful for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, which led me to make significant changes in my attitude and desires to more fully follow the Lord's plan for my life.

I am indebted to the Lord for sending His Spirit to guide my life in the way He wants it to go, for lifting me in the difficult times, for giving me glimpses of the joy that comes from submitting to Him and seeking to assist in His work and His glory. ■

### NOTES

1. *Hymns*, no. 270.
2. "Because She Is a Mother," *Ensign*, May 1997, 36.

**The Dunn family (far left to right): Aerie; Sophia; Coco holding Sally; Malachi as a child; family photo; Sophia, Shauna, Coco, Brent holding Sally, Malachi, and Aerie; Malachi as a young man; Shauna holding Coco; behind: Sophia; Aerie; Malachi holding Sally.**

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