



# Road Warriors & Strong Families.....

*Road warriors aren't anything new, but to a family facing work-related travel, particularly for an extended period, the separation is very real—and potentially disrupting. How principles from The Family: A Proclamation to the World are helping these road-warrior families.*

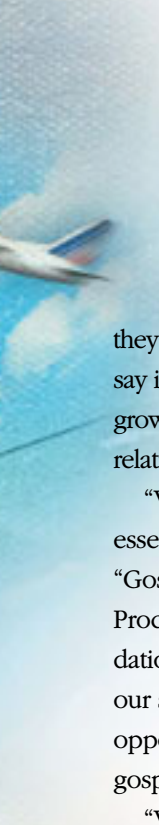
**By Melissa Merrill**  
Church Magazines

**W**ith 35 work-related moves in their 28 years of marriage, Ross and Lyndy Larsen had long accepted their mobile lifestyle and embraced the opportunities it gave them and their children to experience a variety of cultures. Yet when Ross was offered a new job in 2004 as a cruise-ship executive—a prospect that would allow their family to settle permanently in Lyndy's

childhood hometown in New Zealand—the Larsens welcomed the opportunity to put down roots.

They also knew that the position would bring a different set of challenges: Ross's work would require him to be at sea four months at a time, followed by a two-month vacation period at the end of each assignment. Ross maintained that work schedule for four years. Today, he works full-time in New Zealand, but the family is grateful for the time they spent in their less-than-traditional circumstances. Although

ILLUSTRATIONS BY CARY HENRIE



they realize that their situation was not necessarily ideal, they say it provided them great opportunities for learning and growth, particularly as they focused on developing family relationships.

“We realize the sacredness of the family unit and how essential it is to our eternal progression,” says Lyndy. “Gospel principles, especially those found in ‘The Family: A Proclamation to the World,’ have provided us a strong foundation on which we continue to build. We did not think of our situation as a stumbling block to progress, rather as an opportunity to make a concerted effort to put into practice gospel principles our Savior, Jesus Christ, taught.

“We have felt His love and His tender mercies toward us individually and have taken comfort in the realization that He is aware of our situation and will always be there to give us strength. We have learned from this experience just how much we love and need Him.”

Throughout the world, families like the Larsens are clinging to gospel principles to help them make the most of work-related separation situations. Here, members share how “faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities”<sup>1</sup> are helping them build strong families.

## Faith

Brian Daems of Utah, USA, works as a corporate pilot, a job that requires him to fly internationally for up to 10 days at a time. His work takes him from home 14 days per month, on average. He and his wife, Lisa, have found that one of the best ways “to keep the family and home running” is staying faithful with family prayer, family home evening, and family scripture study. The couple works to maintain these practices with their three young children whether Brian is at home or not.

“I want to do all I can to make our family relationship strong because it is more important than business, travel, or money and will last forever if we follow the Lord’s commands,” Brian says. “I know many other men who travel extensively and are still able to be good fathers and husbands and fulfill their church assignments effectively. I admire these fine men, as well as well-traveled leaders like President

[Thomas S.] Monson and former airline captain President [Dieter F.] Uchtdorf. They are great examples to me.”

Rob Barlow of Michigan, USA, travels extensively as a software sales executive. Although he and his wife, Lori, had worried about the potential to grow together spiritually as a couple, the Barlows have found that spiritual impressions aren’t limited by distance.

“One of the most significant experiences of our lives happened while I was on a business trip in France,” Rob recalls. “There were some situations in our lives, including a job change, that would affect our family, that we needed to think about. After reading the scriptures and praying about what needed to happen, that spark of revelation came. Because of the time difference, I had to wait a few hours before I could call Lori and share with her what I had found, but when I did, I learned that she had felt a similar feeling, and we knew what we needed to do.”

Being able to share faith-building practices and faith-promoting experiences, the Barlows say, has helped them maintain strong ties as a couple and as a family.

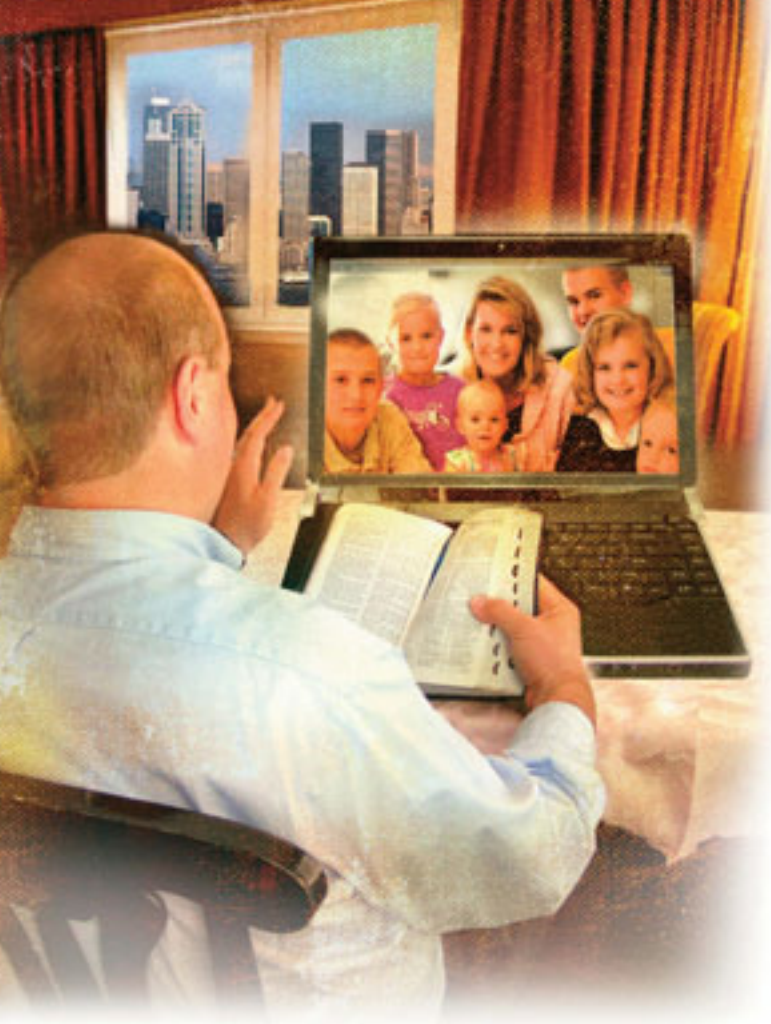
## Prayer

Jim Potts of Idaho, USA, works as an insurance examiner and travels throughout the United States performing his duties. He and his wife, Kayleen, have found that communication—not only with each other but also with the Lord—is essential in keeping their relationship strong.

“We communicate every day through e-mail,” Kayleen says. “Every night before I go to bed, I write Jim a good-morning e-mail so that when he wakes up and logs onto his computer, he has a message from me. We also talk on the phone every night. It’s then that we hold scripture study and pray together.”

She has also made a consistent effort in her *personal* prayers. “This helps us feel the Spirit in our home so that it is a peaceful and calm place.” That, she says, makes a tremendous difference, particularly when her husband is on the road and she might otherwise feel nervous.

“We have found that out of our small efforts come big things, and that often the small things touch hearts so much more than the great big ones,” Kayleen says.



repentance and forgiveness are for. And with each assignment, we're doing better than we did with the last."

Fronica points out that the principle of forgiveness has also helped her outside the family. Occasionally, when someone has made an insensitive comment about her husband's volunteering to take certain work assignments or critical remarks about her being at home with their children, she has found it helpful to give the person the benefit of the doubt. "They probably don't know our circumstances like we do," she says. "I have learned to realize that most people wouldn't say the things they sometimes say if they understood better."

### Respect

Kayleen Potts says that it's important for her to show her husband respect not only by how she interacts and corresponds with him directly but also by what she says to others about their circumstances. "Instead of moaning and groaning about being apart, be grateful to have a job," she

## Many families use phone calls, Webcams, and text messaging to stay close while one family member is on the road.

### Repentance and Forgiveness

Luke and Fronica Saurman of England have dealt with periods of extended absence for six of the eight years they've been married. Luke's assignment with the United States Department of Defense requires a lot of travel, much of which can be long term and scheduled with short notice.

"I think attitudes of selflessness and service help both of us," says Luke. Thinking only of yourself can trap you in despair, he says, but "if you look outward and especially upward, problems are forgotten or at least minimized."

He's quick to acknowledge that repentance and forgiveness are critical elements in his family's lifestyle, just as they are for all families. "With each separation, Fronica and I both make mistakes with the way we interact with each other. For her, it gets difficult with heightened tensions of being at home alone with three children, or for me, being in a combat situation. We may say or do things out of exhaustion or in an overheated moment. That's what

recommends. "It's not helpful for me to take on a woe-is-me attitude or to feel like I'm being neglected or to complain to others. It *is* helpful to recognize that this kind of work is what my husband does best and to be grateful that he's able to make a living doing something he's good at."

By pointing out the positive aspects of their family's circumstances, Kayleen helps everyone feel optimistic. Her husband, Jim, says, "Knowing that Kayleen is supportive of what I do makes an otherwise difficult time of separation more bearable."

### Love

Three months after they married, Dave and Lalove Foster of Idaho, USA, faced their first major absence from each other. Due to David's military obligations, the couple spent the next year and a half apart.

"It was really important that we keep in close contact," Lalove explains. "I wrote him e-mails almost daily, sometimes more than that. I told him about what I was doing

and funny little things that happened during my day; even little things are important because they really make you feel like you're a part of the other person's life."

Regular e-mailing helped the couple express their love, Lalove says, and as a result, she says she has felt a greater appreciation for her husband. "Even though it was a tough way to start our marriage, in some ways it was good. When Dave came home and we really settled into married life, we both had a deeper appreciation and gratitude for each other.

"Being apart made both David and me grateful for the sealing power and the opportunity the Savior has given us to be together forever. While David was living in a war zone, we were so grateful to know that no matter what, because of the Savior, we would be able to see each other again. This huge comfort allowed faith to replace our fears."

Expressions of love can help cement not only husband-wife relationships but also parent-child relationships.

the "frustration and exhaustion" each was experiencing.

The couple knew that it was important to talk about their respective challenges, but they also decided that they'd each try "to have two or three things to talk about that *didn't* involve the stresses of traveling," Heather says. "These have included interesting things my husband has seen in his various destinations, something funny our children have done, and insights we've had in our recent scripture study."

Showing compassion by focusing conversation not only on challenges but on interesting, positive subjects helped improve the couple's communication during periods of separation as well as in general. "My love for Darin and what we know about marriage makes me want to work at maintaining our relationship," Heather continues. "Darin feels the same way. We know that our relationship is deeper than this job, this year, this life—it reaches into the eternities. If we feel as though we are losing connection, we sit down with each other and discuss things we can do that

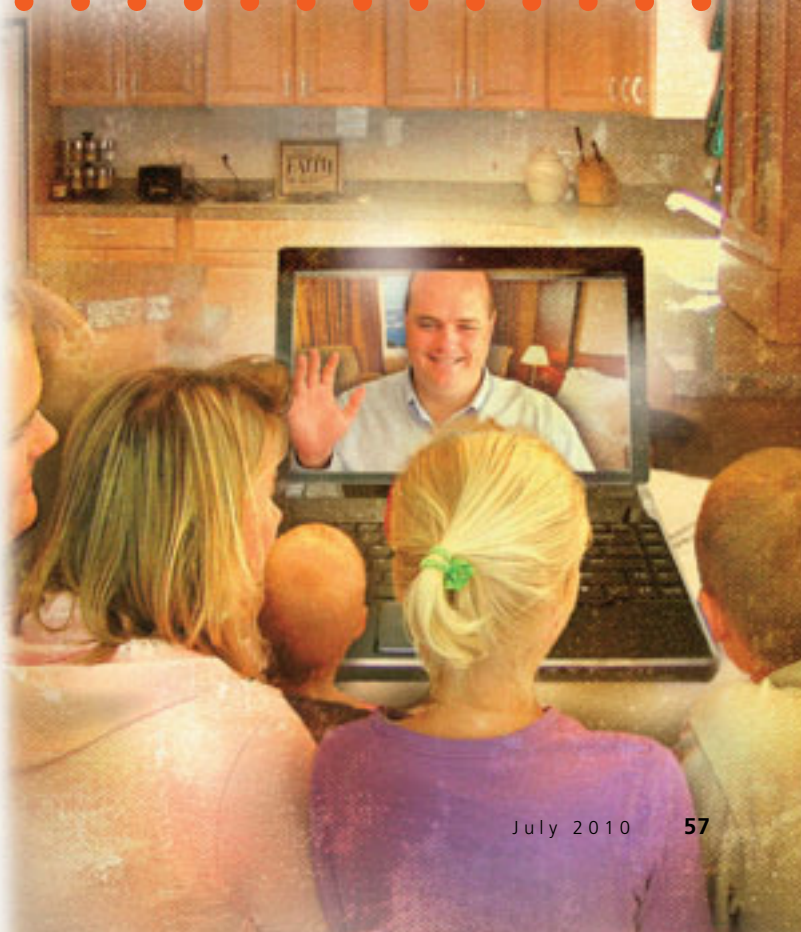
**Keeping in touch this way can help families maintain gospel-centered practices, express love, and stay connected.**

Before Brian Daems leaves on a work trip, he likes to write "I love you" on several sticky notes. He then hides the notes throughout the house for his family to find. "When we visit on the phone, the children are excited to report how many notes they found and where they found them," Brian says. Likewise, he often finds cards and drawings from his family in his suitcase, and occasionally, his wife and children will fax "I love you" messages to his hotel.

"These fun surprises brighten my day instantly. As we work to come up with ideas and then carry them out, it strengthens our love for each other," Brian says.

**Compassion**

Darin Palmer of Kentucky, USA, began traveling early in his career, when he and his wife, Heather, had two small children. Adjusting to the schedule was hard on their whole family, Heather says, and often when she and Darin would talk at night, conversation would center on



could work better for us and for our children. As we have worked together and looked to the Lord to find solutions and remain positive, we have felt our relationship with each other and with the Savior grow.”

### Work

Most people who live with frequent travel as a normal aspect of their lives will agree that it takes a great deal of work, both during separation and after a reunion. Ross and Lyndy Larsen found that technology played a helpful role in the work they did while Ross was at sea. Using Webcams, text messaging, e-mail, and phone calls, the Larsens were able to discuss important family matters. For instance, Lyndy would ask for her husband’s thoughts on how to move forward with a family concern or plan. “Even when I was away, I could still participate in family affairs,” Ross notes.

LuAnn Weaver of Utah, USA, whose husband, Lance,



works as a commercial airline pilot, says, “When Lance is gone, I have to make the ‘everyday’ decisions by myself. When he is back in town, I have to remember that he is there and to include him. However, the ‘important’ decisions concerning our family have already been made, and whether he is there or not, our family tries to implement those

decisions. They include attending our church meetings and having family prayer, family scripture study, and family home evening. By practicing those aspects of the gospel, I can make those ‘everyday’ decisions and stay focused on what is really important—our relationship with each other as a family and knowing and loving our Savior.”

The Weavers’ children are now grown, and LuAnn acknowledges that looking back, much of the work of raising their children seems relatively easy. “However, when you’re in the middle of it all, it’s difficult. But it was

## HELP FROM OUR WARD FAMILY

By Laurie Ellington

**M**y husband serves in the United States military and was recently deployed to Afghanistan for a year. Before his departure, he did all he could to prepare our home and me so that all would be well while he was gone. He taught me how to turn off the water and the air conditioner and even the gas in case there happened to be an emergency. He informed ward leadership of his departure. He asked them to take care of me and of our family. He shared the same things with our good home teachers.

Our home teachers were wonderful.

They came each month and gave me a message and helped in a variety of ways. They moved a heavy bookcase, replaced hard-to-reach lightbulbs, and even organized the Young Men and their leaders to do some work in our backyard to prepare it for some landscaping I was doing. The home teachers came one night to rescue our house when a water hose sprang a leak and filled the kitchen with water. They came later to replace the same hose! My visiting teachers were great too. They came every month to visit and cried with me if I was having a bad day. And though these people

say they didn’t do much, their service was huge to me because they did things I could not have done or would have found difficult to do for myself.

In addition to my wonderful home teachers, other good members of our ward took it upon themselves to serve our family in my husband’s absence:

A neighbor brought his 12-year-old son over on snowy mornings to shovel my walk and driveway. That same son took care of mowing and edging each week in the summer.

A brother took care of some drywall mudding in the kitchen.

Another offered to do some other finish work. He spent several hours and

important that we worked together to establish the gospel as a way of life. It has blessed our lives, and now as we see our children raising families of their own, it is a joy to see them teaching their children of our Savior and practicing the gospel.”

### Wholesome Recreational Activities

One of the Weavers’ children, Ashley Isenbarger of Utah, USA, says that she never felt that she was short-changed because of her dad’s work schedule. That, she says, is due to the emphasis her parents placed on family togetherness. “I didn’t grow up thinking our situation was difficult,” she says. “In my eyes, it was normal. And while my dad’s schedule was hard some months, there were good things about it too.”

For instance, when Lance was home during the summer months, the family would often go biking or swimming, during the daytime. “Those kinds of family activities wouldn’t have been possible if Dad had had a typical 9-to-5 job,” Ashley points out. “I’m grateful my parents realized our time together was precious—we just had to use it differently than most families. I know that nothing else in

this world matters more than our family relationships. They are what the plan of salvation is all about.”

Ashley and her husband, Kyle, are now raising their own family. Though Kyle doesn’t travel frequently, working full time and attending school part time mean long hours away from home. “The time our children and I get with him is precious,” Ashley adds. But the Isenbargers make family recreation a priority so that as their children grow, “they will have good times to remember and will expect that family comes first.”

Ross Larsen appreciates that same kind of attitude in his family. “I enjoyed my assignments at sea, but I really love my time spent at home with the family,” he says. “Our time together is a priority. We celebrated birthdays, even if it was after the actual date. We’d go to the temple. We’d play together. We’d talk about the future.”

It has been through these activities, Lyndy says, that family love has become more evident and easier to feel. The principles outlined in “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” have become not just ideals but a way of life. ■

#### NOTE

1. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.

days trimming and edging areas in the house that could have waited for my husband’s return, but how wonderful to have it finished when he got home!

Several sisters in the ward gave me a hug every time they saw me. It is amazing what a hug can do for someone who is missing a loved one.

A number of members prayed for us. Both my husband and I felt their prayers.

One brother came and pruned the apple trees in our yard.

Another replaced dangling lightbulbs with beautiful new can lights.

Then a brother and his son-in-law,

not assigned as my home teachers, stopped by after they had visited the families to whom they were assigned, asking what they could do to help.

My ward family was truly my family while my husband was away. They were willing to serve me, and it seemed that they truly enjoyed helping.

My husband is home now. It was not always easy to be alone while he was gone, but my ward family eased the burden and made the deployment go by a little more quickly. My husband and I will be forever grateful for the ways they helped in his absence. ■



For additional suggestions from families who face extended, work-related separation, please see [Ensign.LDS.org](https://www.lds.org/ensign)