



# AN UNEXPECTED LIFE

By Janine MacDonald

When I was a child, getting married and having children was an expected norm. As children on the playground, we laughed and teased each other and speculated as to which of our playmates we would eventually marry when we grew up. When I began keeping a journal at age 12, I intended that it would eventually be read by my children.

I dated a lot in my late teens and in college, so at the age of 21 when I wasn't married, I wasn't concerned and went off to serve a mission.

When I hit the age of 25 and still wasn't married, I didn't panic. Instead I assessed my career choices. What I really wanted was to become a doctor of chiropractic, so I joined the U.S. Army for two years to earn the money for chiropractic college. (Hey, I could find a really great LDS guy in the army, right? Well, it could happen!)

I served in the army's 101st Airborne Division and then went to chiropractic college. During my post-graduate college years, I had an active dating life, but when I graduated without a husband at age 30, I began to worry. I just

knew, though, that I would marry and have children.

I became an associate professor at my alma mater, launched my own practice, and developed my professional skills. My 30s passed. But I knew there was still a little time for having children. (Right?) Eventually I realized that I had officially become "old" without realizing my dream of marriage and children. I had not expected this!

My (married) girlfriends hastened to offer me support and comfort. They reviewed with me all the outstanding Latter-day Saint sisters they knew of who had never married or who married later in life yet still made stellar contributions to the world. We also talked about the many single women in our area who served as presidents of various auxiliaries, served multiple missions, and volunteered in our community. Even though my friends' encouragement could not take away the pain of knowing I'd never have children of my own in mortality, I did find wisdom in their words.

So, I could either think of my situation as a tragedy and feel sorry for myself, or I could make my life a triumph as these women had.

NEGATIVE THOUGHTS POOR CHOICES  
GRIEF DISAPPOINTMENT  
DELAYED DREAMS



*As a single sister, I consciously chose to live with confidence and hope.*

ANGER DOUBT POOR DECISIONS HOPELESSNESS  
ESPAIR TEARS ANGRY  
SIMPISM SADNESS



### DISTINCTIVE CAPABILITIES

“My dear sisters, whatever your calling, whatever your circumstances, we need your impressions, your insights, and your inspiration. . . . Married or single, you sisters possess distinctive capabilities and special intuition you have received as gifts from God. We brethren cannot duplicate your unique influence.”

President Russell M. Nelson, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “A Plea to My Sisters,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2015, 97.

### Redefining Success in Life

I believe that for the most part, successful single women are still single due to events beyond their control. Realizing, however, that living with hope and confidence *is* within our control—that it’s a matter of choice—I decided to take President Gordon B. Hinckley’s advice and choose optimism rather than discouragement or cynicism. I saw that as I kept my mind hopeful and optimistic, this allowed many positive things to enter into my life.

Choosing this kind of life and becoming a “successful single” in my book definitely required some adjusting on my part. Heavenly Father helped me to understand that one of the major reasons we are here on earth is to learn lessons and to develop godly characteristics such as sacrifice, patience, compassion, empathy, faith, hope, charity, self-discipline, service, righteous leadership, and learning to discern and follow the Spirit. I feel blessed to have had experiences in my life that have taught me many of these important lessons (just without the midnight feedings and sticky jam fingers).

### Turning Hurts Over to the Savior

What are the steps to initiate emotional healing? I once believed that all personal healing had to be done by myself alone. A friend helped me to learn how to turn my hurts over to the Savior. The more I turned my issues over to the Lord and invited Him into my life, the more I felt His miraculous healing in my soul. Even though I did consult with competent professionals whose wisdom and tools were important and helpful, I discovered that the healing process remained incomplete until I practiced giving up and letting go of my hurts and allowing my Savior to carry them (see Alma 7:11–12).

### Sweet Blessings in Service

I am so thankful that my Church leaders have taken the time to get to know me personally and to prayerfully extend callings to me as they would to anyone—either married or single. As a result, for the most part I feel that when other members of my ward look at me, they see Janine and not “that single girl.”





Being single without children has presented me with opportunities for service I could not have rendered at my age if I were still raising a family, such as serving as a temple ordinance worker.

I learned that a single person who consciously chooses a successful single's life of triumph can be blessed with experiences that teach most of the important lessons in life. Married people may find that they can turn to their successful single friends for support and empathy, just as they could their mature married friends. Often they discover that even though their single friends have a somewhat different life story, the wisdom and empathy that their single friends possess are like their own. My married friends are often pleasantly surprised to discover that I can empathize with them regarding things like empty-nest syndrome, the death of close family members, chronic illness, and so on.

## Leaving a Meaningful Legacy

As my life goes on and my peers begin empty nesting and passing around pictures of their new grandchildren, I sometimes wonder what kind of legacy I will leave. In the good LDS home where I was raised, leaving a legacy meant having posterity. So once again I pretty much needed to redefine what it meant for me to leave a legacy.

I've discovered that there is a huge demand in the world for caring aunts as well as for other caring, well-adjusted adults. Over the years I've had the opportunity to be a support person for young people inside and outside my family, as well as provide a resource for their parents. I've enjoyed activities such as holding children on my lap and reading to them, assembling toys on Christmas Eve (to the relief of exhausted and stressed out parents), teaching youngsters the finer points of Wii bowling and *Guitar Hero*, teaching teenage girls how to talk to boys, and teaching young, unsuspecting males the basics of understanding women. I have given skin care and grooming tips, helped with chemistry homework, and provided a secure home where nieces and nephews could enjoy staying while they gain a better perspective on life. I have also been able to provide an example of missionary and temple service and the power of optimism and positive choices.

All in all, it's been a good life, and I'm looking forward to many rich years in the future, which may still include marriage to a good man (see my optimism?). I'm actually kind of looking forward to the day when I get to meet the Savior and we review my life together. I look forward to getting to show Him what I've had to work with, who I have become, and the life I've made. And I suppose that's the most important legacy I can leave. ■

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## TEMPORARY FRUSTRATIONS

"We know that many worthy and wonderful Latter-day Saints currently lack the ideal opportunities and essential requirements for their progress. Singleness, childlessness, death, and divorce frustrate ideals and postpone the fulfillment of promised blessings. In addition, some women who desire to be full-time mothers and homemakers have been literally compelled to enter the full-time work force. But these frustrations are only temporary. The Lord has promised that in the eternities no blessing will be denied his sons and daughters who keep the commandments, are true to their covenants, and desire what is right."

**Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "The Great Plan of Happiness," *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, 75.**

