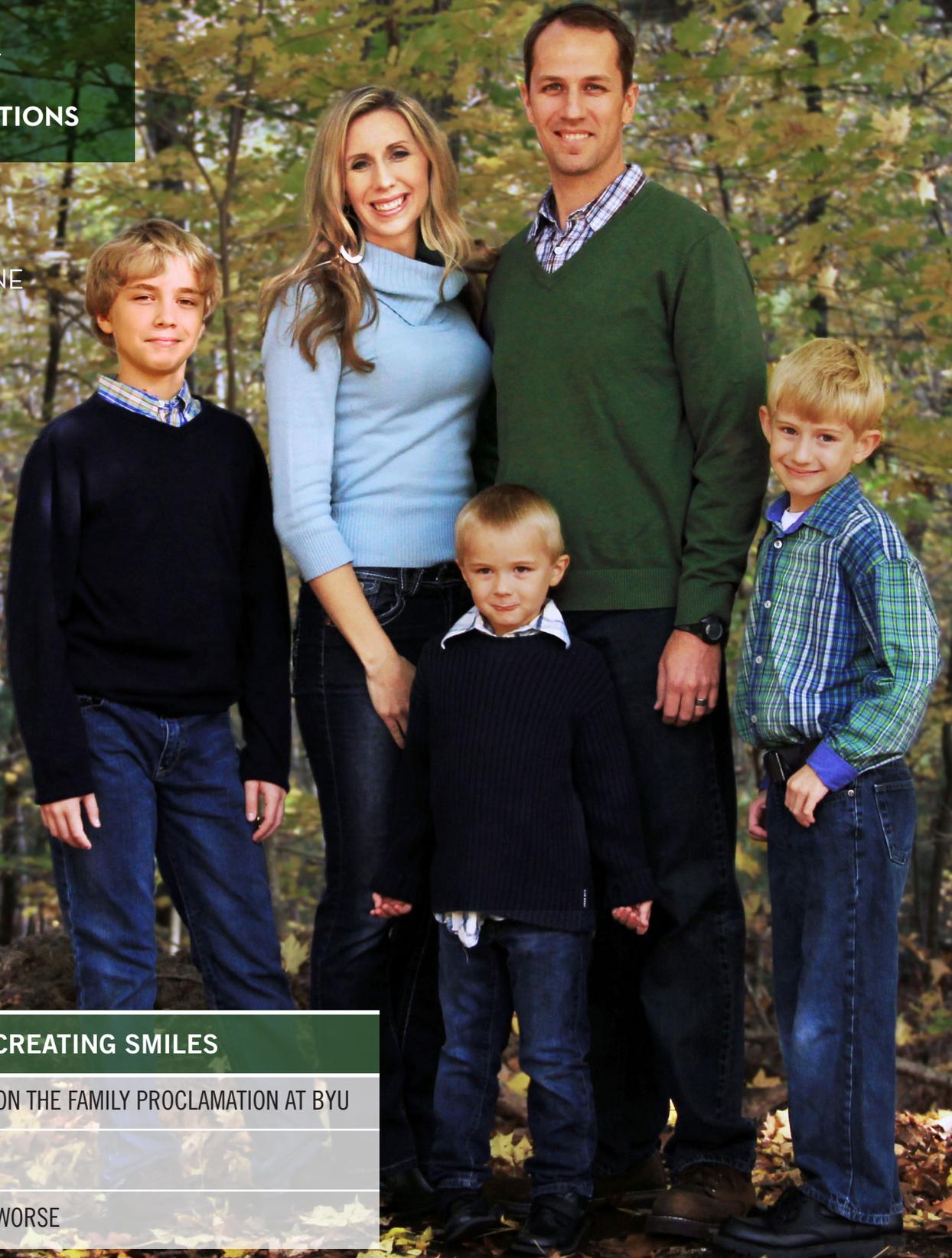




FAMILY CONNECTIONS

BYU SCHOOL OF
FAMILY LIFE
ALUMNI MAGAZINE
SPRING 2013



LESLIE GRAFF: CREATING SMILES

A CLASS AND A TEXT ON THE FAMILY PROCLAMATION AT BYU

TAMARA GILLILAND

FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE



MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

DEAN M. BUSBY
DIRECTOR
SCHOOL OF FAMILY LIFE, BYU

Dear School of Family Life Alumni,

My name is Dean Busby, and I am the new director of the School of Family Life. Rick Miller, the former director, has returned to full-time teaching and research. It is an honor for me to be associated with this School. I constantly feel that I am surrounded by excellent people who are a pleasure to work with, including the faculty, staff, students, and alumni of our programs. We are engaged in so many exciting projects that it is a rare day where I do not hear about a new publication on an interesting aspect of family life that our faculty and students have researched, or a new classroom experience that a student is effusively describing to someone in the hallways. We have the privilege in our School of investigating and teaching about the most important aspects of our world, our family relationships, and the significance of this endeavor and the passions that we feel about these relationships are filling the halls of the Joseph F. Smith Building. I hope you can pick up a little of this enthusiasm in this edition of "Family Connections."

In this edition, we highlight a current project about the interface of family life and health, a very important connection for us to study. For example, recent health studies estimate that nearly 70% of chronic illnesses and death in the United States can be attributed, at least in part, to four common daily habits.¹ These habits include how much people eat, what they eat, how consistently they exercise, and whether they use addictive substances such as tobacco or alcohol. The chronic illnesses that result from problems with these habits account for at least 75% of the health care costs in America.² Individuals usually develop, maintain, and change their health-related behaviors within the context of the family, as family members tend to share similar diets, physical activities, and use or abuse of unhealthy substances. When family relationships are stronger

it is easier to establish and sustain routines that prevent chronic physical or mental illnesses or help families manage these illnesses when they are inevitable. In recognition of this fact, the World Health Organization has characterized the family as "the primary social agent in the promotion of health and wellbeing."³



We hope you enjoy this edition and that it will help you feel more connected with the School of Family Life. Some of the ways our alumni help us are by staying engaged with the School, telling us about your accomplishments, sending your children to our programs, and donating resources and time when you are able to the worthy causes we are teaching about and studying in the School.

¹Rotheram-borum, Swendeman, & Chorpita (2012).

²Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (2009).

³ World Health Organization (1976), p. 17.



FAMILY CONNECTIONS

BYU SCHOOL OF FAMILY LIFE
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Message from the Director 1



SPOTLIGHT

A Class and a Text on the
Family Proclamation at BYU 3



Life-Long Learning 6



ALUMNI PROFILES

Leslie Graff 7



Tamara Gilliland 9



CURRENT RESEARCH

For Better or for Worse:
“Couples with Multiple
Chronic Illnesses” Study 11

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A CLASS AND A TEXT ON THE FAMILY PROCLAMATION AT BYU

In September 1995, President Gordon B Hinckley first read “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” and few could have guessed how far-reaching that single document would become. A few years later, President Boyd K. Packer, then acting President of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, came to speak to the faculty of the newly reorganized School of Family Life and gave them several challenging tasks: use the proclamation as the charter document for their school and produce textbooks that were worthy of the wisdom generated by secular scholarship as well as faithful to the moral and spiritual values revealed in the holy scriptures and through latter-day prophets. The faculty in attendance still remember Pres. Packer’s voice wavering with emotion as he urged them to take these charges seriously: “[Y]ou must . . . you must succeed . . . ,” he implored, and left an apostolic blessing on them.

Since that time, SFL faculty have labored to give form and substance to President Packer’s plea. The direct result of those labors has been textbooks based on the proclamation and a foundational class that explores its truths in-depth. Since Fall 2000, many professors have taught this new class, SFL 100, to more than 10,000 BYU students across the university. The class is now 12 years old and its history and adaptation over the years is something worth investigating.

In fact, Religious Education professor Lloyd D. Newell, voice of Music and the Spoken Word, taught the class when it first started in 2000. He had earned his doctoral degree a few years earlier at BYU in Marriage, Family, and Human Development. When interviewed, Dr. Newell stated emphatically that “I believe in the books and the class,” and expressed how he missed teaching the class now.

THE TEXTBOOKS

From 1998-2000, Dr. David Dollahite, Dr. Alan Hawkins, Dr. Newell, and others worked hard to launch the class: SFL 100. Early on it was clear that the class would need a new textbook to support the instruction. Dozens of LDS family scholars were invited to contribute chapters to the textbook.



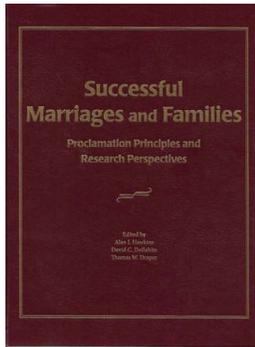
PRESIDENT PACKER AT THE SCHOOL OF FAMILY LIFE DEDICATION

The faculty in attendance still remember Pres. Packer’s voice wavering with emotion as he urged “[Y]ou must . . . you must succeed . . . ,” and left an apostolic blessing on them.

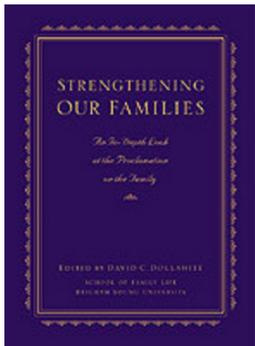
The first book was titled, *Strengthening Our Families: An In-depth Look at the Proclamation on the Family*, and was published by Deseret Book. The measure of the value of the book can be seen in how many students decide to keep the \$40 book instead of selling it back at the end of the semester. The BYU bookstore reports that about 70% of textbooks are sold back each semester, but only 7% of *Strengthening Our Families* texts were sold back.

In 2005, Dr. Craig Hart and his co-authors published with Deseret Book a collection of essays inspired by the proclamation on important family topics. It resulted in a supplemental text for the class, *Helping and Healing Our Families*.

A few years ago, however, the faculty realized that these texts needed an update. More than a decade of research on family life since the publication



of *Strengthening Our Families* had provided even greater secular understanding of and support for proclamation principles. And LDS Church leaders had spoken often about proclamation principles since the publication of this first book. In addition, Professor Hawkins believed that “students are always improving—getting smarter and more talented. We needed to bring the textbook up to date and include the best research to match the ever-increasing quality of our students.”



Professor Hawkins said at first they were thinking of just revising and updating the old textbook but the revision took on a life of its own and became a brand new publication. The result was *Successful Marriages and Families: Proclamation Principles and Research Perspectives*. Professors Hawkins and Dollahite, along with Dr. Tom Draper, were the editors, but again, they relied on dozens of excellent LDS scholars to provide chapters for the new book. Student reviews of the new textbook have been positive so far. One student, Savannah Keenan, who recently took Dr. Stephen Duncan’s SFL 100 class,

said: “I love the textbook. It is something I would keep for the rest of my life.”

MISSION OF THE CLASS

In addition to university goals such as improving critical thinking abilities and writing skills, the specific, three-fold mission of SFL 100 is to: (1) strengthen students’ faith and testimony of proclamation principles; (2) increase students’ confidence in their abilities to live those principles; and (3) strengthen students’ abilities to share and defend these principles.

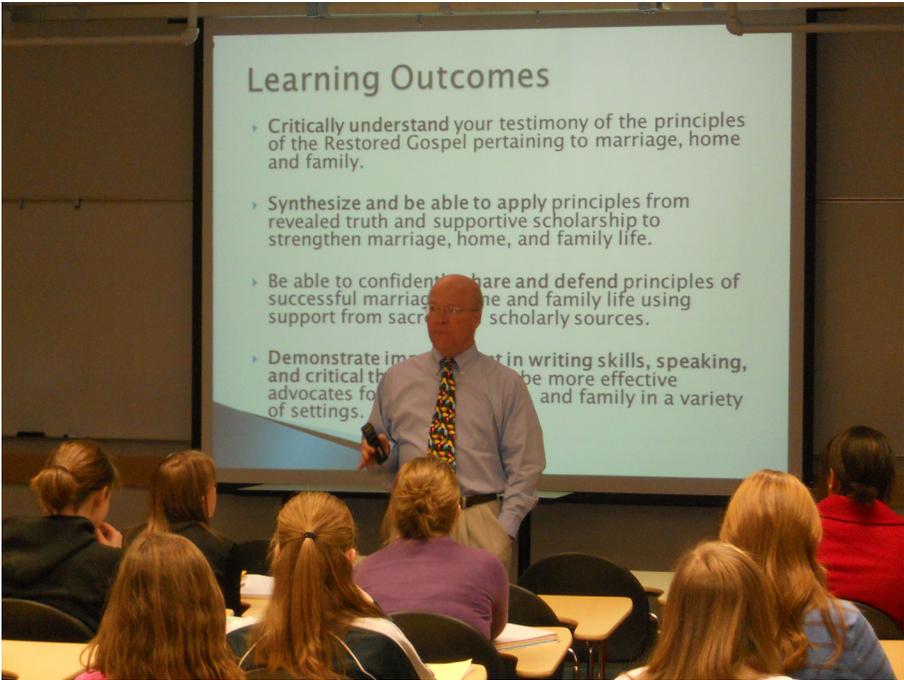
While students are familiar with the proclamation from Sunday School classes or Family Home Evening lessons, most have not made an in-depth study of the document. Professors who teach the course say that many students wonder how they can spend a whole semester on just 609 words. But students who take the class give consistent feedback that they developed a strong testimony of those proclamation principles by the end of the semester. Dr. Steve Duncan, who currently teaches the class, says that “I like to walk through literally

every phrase of the proclamation and treat it with gospel principles and scholarship.” He also enjoys the opportunity to deal with contemporary controversies in the light of timeless proclamation principles.

Helping students apply what they’ve learned to their own lives is the second mission of SFL 100. Some students, sometimes as a result of their own family experiences, lack confidence in their abilities to achieve their family aspirations. Professor Julie Haupt, a part-time faculty member who regularly teaches SFL 100, says: “For me, the most valuable element of the class is the students. They bring a wealth of experience and background, as well as questions, fears, and concerns. We do what we can to meet the needs of the students. Some are trying to work through the past; they need healing. But I see in all the students a desire to create strong families for themselves in this world.”

Students in SFL 100 are encouraged not to hoard proclamation principles for themselves, but to share them with others. Sometimes it is hard for students to talk to their friends about their values and why they live the way they do. The findings of social science that back up the principles of the proclamation can be a bridge for students to talk to their friends about their own choices and provide caring advice. Professor Larry Nelson said that the social science findings covered in the class “gives students a language to speak about spiritual principles with their neighbors and friends not of our faith.”

Professor Hawkins actually assigns students to initiate “share and defend experiences” with friends. A common experience that students report is sharing with a close friend the scientific evidence about the effects of cohabitation before marriage. “Students have reported to me some wonderful experiences about this and gained confidence that they can share these principles in ways that do not offend others and that many appreciate.” On a few occasions, students from many years ago will email Professor Hawkins and give a report of a “share and defend experience” they recently had, thanking him for the confidence to share what they believe with others. Professor Hawkins tries to practice what he preaches to his students: “I have had a couple of occasions when a colleague makes inquiries on the Church’s beliefs on some family issue and I have said, ‘Let me send you a chapter’ (from *Successful Marriages and Families*). I like doing that



The social science findings covered in the class “gives students a language to speak about spiritual principles with their neighbors and friends not of our faith.”



DR. ALAN HAWKINS

because it uses good scholarship that they know and are familiar with and then shows them how the religious principles are woven into that. I have yet to have a negative experience sharing these principles.”

To help share their beliefs with others, students are encouraged to memorize the entire proclamation as an optional assignment or for extra credit in the class. That way, they can articulate clearly and confidently the Church’s position or beliefs on some issue when asked. And such close attention to the words and other linguistic elements of the document helps students gain a different kind of understanding of the proclamation. One recent student, Cade Dopp, who has his sights set upon law school, said that memorizing the proclamation was “a powerful experience. I felt the power of the document. . . . The principles in the document were impressed upon my heart.”



DR. DAVID DOLLAHITE



DR. THOMAS DRAPER

THE ESSENCE OF BYU

Professor Jeff Hill regularly teaches SFL 100. He commented, “The integration of divine truth with scientific social science literature makes it a unique class.” Similarly, Professor Dollahite says, “I have had a number of students say, ‘this is what I thought BYU was going to be: a rigorous, full integration of gospel truth and findings from scholarship.’ They said they wished that more of their classes did this: full integration.”

Professor Haupt says, “I feel so much and so often the

support of heaven in teaching this class.” She continues to say that the class is sometimes a “difference maker” for students. Professor Dollahite agrees, saying that, “More so than any other class I teach, I feel the help of heaven. I believe that is a direct function of President Packer’s apostolic blessing.”

A CLASS FOR ALL

As School of Family Life professors have taught this class over the last 12 years, a variety of students have walked into their classrooms. “Well over half of the students in that class are not SFL majors,” says Prof. David Dollahite. It is a class that serves an entire university.

However, it can be more than that. All alumni and friends may take the SFL 100 course online at this website: <http://is.byu.edu/site/courses/description.cfm?title=SFL-100-200> (This class is for credit and has a fee.) But anyone in the world can take the class as an independent study course without being a BYU student. SFL 100 is offered online as an enrichment course, which is a free, online class without the paper assignments or exams (<http://is.byu.edu/courses/pe/999001071002/public/start.htm>.) Some may just want to purchase the textbook and study it on their own. (The book can ordered from the websites of Deseret Book and the BYU Bookstore.) The royalties for the SFL textbooks go to student scholarships. So when alumni buy a book to use or give away as a gift, they are also supporting the School of Family Life and the students.



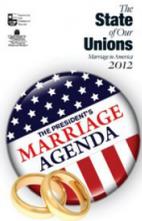
LIFE-LONG LEARNING

One of the aims of a BYU education is to promote life-long learning. In that spirit, the School of Family Life faculty have suggested some recent publications of potential interest to SFL alumni that will help you stay current in the various fields housed in the School of Family Life.



- Rodney Stark. (2012). *America's Blessings: How Religion Benefits Everyone, Including Atheists*. Tempeton Press.

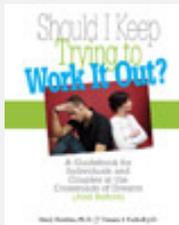
This book by the premier sociologist of religion documents the overwhelming evidence of how faith, belief, and religious practice benefits individuals, families, communities, and nations.



- The State of Our Unions: Marriage in America 2012.

Download a free copy at: <http://nationalmarriageproject.org>.

*This annual report put out by the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia and The Institute for American Values includes recent indicators of marital health and well-being and an essay: *The President's Marriage Agenda for the Forgotten Sixty Percent**



- Alan J. Hawkins & Tamara A. Fackrell. (2009). *Should I Keep Trying to Work It Out? A Guidebook for Individuals and Couples at the Crossroads of Divorce (and Before)*. Utah Department of Workforce Services.

Download a free electronic copy of the book at: divorce.usu.edu/html/about-the-program. Or you may contact Dr. Hawkins directly at hawkinsa@byu.edu. (Hard copies can be requested for \$8.)

This book provides research-based answers to common questions people often have when making the difficult decision to divorce or stay together. The book also includes resources and written exercises to help people think about how the research applies to their personal situations. It was written by current SFL faculty member Alan Hawkins and a Ph.D. student, Tamara Fackrell, who is also a divorce attorney and mediator, along with input from a number of undergraduate SFL students.



ALUMNI PROFILE: LESLIE GRAFF: CREATING SMILES

What does it take to create a smile? For Leslie Graff, a 2001 graduate of BYU's Marriage, Family, & Human Development masters program, this question could have several answers. It can take a few minutes of love, a short operation, or a lifetime of preparation.

Leslie currently works as a volunteer Child Life Specialist for Operation Smile, an international medical charity that provides cleft lip and palate surgeries to children in need. Her work has taken her across the globe to Kenya, Morocco, Philippines, Siberia, Jordan, Cambodia, Nepal, and India. She is also the Psychosocial and Developmental Specialist for the Vascular Birthmarks Foundation (VBF), which also helps children with mouth defects.

Leslie says that "I first became involved with VBF when my second son was born with a port-wine stain on his skin. It soon became apparent that there was a great need for someone to provide psychosocial support in this area as well as helping provide resources to prepare children and families for procedures and treatments and minimize the negative impacts of living with a visible difference."

CHILD LIFE SPECIALIST

As a child-life specialist, Leslie prepares the children for surgery, using games and toys to help them understand and feel in control. It can be hard for a toddler to face surgery on their mouth so every smile she can get before the surgery seems worth the effort. To help with this, she runs a hospital playroom on-site wherever the mission is across the world. She is also responsible for the psychosocial needs of the children on the medical mission. After the surgery, the kids have received a greater smile, but there is still scarring that can be seen. She helps them find ways to cope with living with a visible difference.

PERSONAL PATH

But how did Leslie get to this point? What created the smile on her face?



"I had long been interested in medicine and this seemed to be the perfect fit for my love of science, education, and creativity."

Leslie's family was in the Air Force so she grew up all over. Leslie graduated from BYU in Elementary Education and started teaching first grade in Virginia. She first found out about the opportunity of being a child life specialist while volunteering at a local hospital. She recalls that "I had long been interested in medicine and this seemed to be the perfect fit for my love of science, education, and creativity. So after that year of teaching I went back to graduate school with the intention of becoming a Child Life Specialist." She completed her Masters Degree in Marriage, Family, and Human Development at BYU and completed her Child Life Clinical Training at Johns Hopkins Hospital.

It was during this time that she met her future husband, Allen, for the second time. Their first encounter had been freshman year when Leslie was 17 and not ready for any serious relationships. She says that she "started to ignore him" because she wasn't ready for anything. But now, the timing



“I enjoy helping people feel more in control and positive when faced with difficult experiences. It is very rewarding to prepare a child for a medical procedure using medical play with actual equipment and watch them go into it feeling confident and in control instead of afraid.”

seemed right and they started dating. They were married after she finished graduate school.

Currently, Leslie lives with her husband and three boys in the “charming, quintessential New England town” of Sutton, Massachusetts, about forty miles west of Boston. They have lived there the past 11 years. Her position with VBF allows her to do most of her work at home.

A JOB WORTH DOING

For Leslie, creating a smile, both physically and emotionally, is what makes her job fulfilling. She says that “I really like making experiences for children and families related to medical issues and hospitalization easier. I enjoy helping people feel more in control and positive when faced with difficult experiences. It is very rewarding to prepare a child for a medical procedure using medical play with actual equipment and watch them go into it feeling confident and in control instead of afraid. It is nice to be the person who creates positive experiences in the hospital for children and families.”

Leslie’s work requires her to travel out of the country 1-2 times a year with Operation Smile for about 2 weeks each trip. Each trip is preceded by a week of “crazy preparation” in which their house is littered with “piles and suitcases and toys.” And each trip comes with a solid week of post-mission jetlag. A supportive husband and family help make the trips feasible.

CREATIVITY AND CHALLENGE

Leslie also produces personal smiles through her extracurricular hobbies, especially painting. Her domestic series, depicting women doing mothering and domestic work, was recently exhibited in several states. She also hosts art studio nights and is an art specialist for a local early childhood program. She also enjoys doing crazy things with her kids, cooking, baking, writing, sewing, making wedding cakes, and arranging flowers.

Leslie’s artistic skill and passion have enabled her to enjoy her job and create new ways to be a child life specialist. She says that “I love that it is a very creative job. For me it’s this perfect blend of medicine, psychology, education, art, and human development. I might be making cloth dolls for teaching, or doing therapeutic art activities, discussing psychosocial issues with parent groups, or helping a child practice the steps of a procedure, or blowing bubbles with a patient while having lab work done. It’s constantly changing. How can you not love it when your job is to play!”

Of course, no job is without challenges. Working with children in a hospital setting can certainly be hard. Leslie says that “People often ask me if it is difficult to work with children who are sick or have significant physical challenges. It is; it can be emotionally tiring, and you always feel like there is more you could do. But I think you have to learn how to find the balance.” The balance between work and play, experiencing healthy stress and being overly anxious seems to be the key for success in many areas.

WHAT’S NEXT?

What is in the future for this talented graduate of the School of Family Life and her smile? Leslie says that “I would like to continue to help develop the field of child life especially in developing countries. Right now I am working on some projects to do more training internationally with medical personnel on psychosocial and developmental issues of children as related to health care. It is something that is more of a standard care in the United States but is very lacking in other countries.” Such desires will certainly be granted for a person so devoted to helping others and creating more genuine smiles.



ALUMNI PROFILE: TAMARA GILLILAND: TAKING THE FAMILY PROCLAMATION AND FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION SERIOUSLY



“Once upon a time...”

The life story of Tamara Gilliland, a graduate of the School of Family Life, is rather like a modern-day, more realistic fairytale. Maybe Tamara wouldn't say that her life is that of a fairytale princess, but it definitely has some of the key elements of a good story. It starts with a bright, energetic young woman with flaming-red hair. Then there is challenge, uncertainty, unearthed potential, and discovery. Finally there comes understanding, achievement, and resolution . . . at least so far. This is her story.

Tamara Talbot grew up in Bountiful, Utah. She was a smart girl, who applied herself and got into one of the top schools in the state: Brigham Young University. She had her lofty sites set on medical school and thought that family life classes were for those students who were not “seriously academically oriented.” However, one document was destined to change her life.

In 1995, President Gordon B. Hinckley first introduced the Proclamation on the Family a few days before Tamara was going to serve a mission. Tamara said: “it stirred something in me so deeply... it literally changed the direction of my life.” She served in the Russia Novosibirsk Mission (Siberia).

After studying and sharing the Proclamation throughout her mission, she came back to BYU. She confesses that she was “repentant of [her] earlier opinion and wanting to take some family life classes.” She had found her true-life passion articulated in the last paragraph of the Proclamation:

“We call upon responsible citizens and officers of government everywhere to promote those measures designed to maintain and strengthen the family as the fundamental unit of society.”⁴

Tamara felt this call personally. She had too many credits to switch to the then-called “Family Science” major, but she minored in Family Studies and became a Certified Family Life Educator. However, this was only the beginning.

She decided to get her Masters degree in Marriage, Family, and Human Development (MFHD) at BYU. While doing her graduate studies, she met her husband, David Gilliland, in a singles ward. David had studied Finance/International Business and was pursuing a Masters in Organizational Behavior.

Working on her Masters degree in MFHD was very fulfilling for Tamara. She especially enjoyed being mentored by scholars at BYU who treated her as a colleague. She thrived in being involved with real outreach efforts to strengthen marriages and promote family life education. Her focus was on healthy marriage and relationship education.

Tamara remembers: “In the very first family life class I took as an undergraduate, I connected with fellow students who got me involved in my first outreach project, teaching fathering classes at the Utah state prison. That experience led to partnering with others to create a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting family strengthening efforts called the Family Life Education Institute.

This organization worked with local communities and taught workshops in various settings (businesses, schools, public libraries, the court system, church, etc.). Tamara and her partners with the Institute quickly involved student interns and evolved to focus most on training and supporting other



“The Proclamation.... stirred something in me so deeply... it literally changed the direction of my life.”

family life educators and supporting Family Life Education (FLE) outreach efforts. They conducted research and hosted a Family Outreach Conference at BYU.

The end of her Masters program was timely. Tamara said emphatically that her thesis was “submitted to the bindery the day I went into labor with our first baby! My thesis research was personally timely [because] it was on an educational program to strengthen marriages through the transition to parenthood!”

Her thesis work led to several publications⁵ but that was only the beginning of her contributions. She has since been able to contribute articles to newspapers, chapters to textbooks, and help produce a few small publications, including a set of long-distance marriage and parenting education booklets used by military and other outreach programs for families separated by deployment or other reasons. She also helped produce a publication on Family Life Education practices used by several universities for their certification programs.

Eventually the professionally involved season of Tamara's life faded

into the background when a new season of full-time wife and motherhood jumped to the foreground. Tamara and her husband now live in Provo, Utah, with their 6 lively girls (ages 10-2) and another baby due soon.

Still, Tamara remembers the outreach call of the Proclamation and takes it very seriously. She says that, “as time and energy have allowed, I've continued to try to respond to opportunities to use my training and share what I learned, in teaching an occasional semester in the School of Family Life, leading a few church or community workshops and discussion groups, or speaking to various groups on family life topics, both formally and informally.”

However, her most enjoyable work has been partnering with her husband in the work of their own family and in serving others. She stated that:

“We feel strongly that more than just being ‘good together,’ together we need to be good for something beyond ourselves. We've had a lot of fun teaching classes and giving firesides

Their favorite “outreach” effort is the team-teaching of their little group of “program participants” in the continual family life education training they conduct in their home with their children.

together, and we are also intentional about informal marriage support and mentoring. We love to talk about creating Christ-centered relationships and principles of the Family Proclamation whenever and wherever we can, and try to invite and encourage others to actively respond to the Proclamation call to reach out to others, too.”

Tamara and David believe that everyone has a stake in each others’ marriages and that we all need to help and support each other.

Still, their favorite “outreach” effort is the team-teaching of their little group of “program participants” in the continual family life education training they conduct in their home with their children. Tamara said that one of her favorite formal SFL classes that has helped her in the home was called “Work and Relationships in the Home.” She said that:

“I think about concepts from that course every day. The most powerful was the concept of ‘prosaics’—appreciating and finding rich meaning in our everyday family life experiences. Too often images meant to represent marriage are of sensational moments—a dramatic windswept couple on a spectacular beach or something similar. If I had a parallel life with a gift for photography, I’d do a photo series of what I have come to cherish in the real moments of our married life—our unglamorous morning routine, sitting shoulder-to-shoulder worshiping together at church meetings with laps and a bench full of wiggling children, playful bantering over dishes or diapers, a late night on our pillows rambling in random discussion, a gentle hand squeeze in an expression of apology or forgiveness for failings, and so on.”

This knowledge of the importance of the prosaic moments has helped Tamara understand that little moments are more precious and meaningful than any fairytale fantasies. She knows there is deep fulfillment that can come with everyday life and duties. Knowing this helps her enjoy the time that she spends “just at home.” Tamara connects the concept of prosaics to the Proclamation phrase that “successful marriages and families are established and maintained on principles of ...work.”⁶ Another Proclamation

concept that has helped her is the principle of “equal partnership” with your husband. All in all, Tamara and David testify that happiness in marriage and family life is “most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ.”⁷

IN THE FUTURE

Is there a happily ever after at the end of this story for the real-life princess with the beautiful red hair? That is yet to be seen, of course, but the trajectory of her yellow-brick road looks promising. In time, Tamara says that she would love to get back on the professional track and get a Ph.D. Her mentor at BYU calls regularly to tempt her to take on a family life education opportunity. But these temptations will need to wait a few more years until she can focus more on professional commitments. She would also love to write a book and serve many missions with her husband. Tamara Gilliland is a model of how one can help individuals and communities in formal and informal ways implement principles in the Family Proclamation through family life education.

⁴The Family: A Proclamation to the World, paragraph 9

⁵For example, see:

Hawkins, A. J., Gilliland, T., Christiaens, G., & Carroll, J. (2002).

Integrating marriage education into the healthcare system during the transition to parenthood. *Journal of Perinatal Education*, 11(4), 1-10.

Hawkins, A. J., Fawcett, E. B., Carroll, J. S., & Gilliland, T. T. (2006). The Marriage Moments program for couples transitioning to parenthood: Divergent conclusions from formative and outcome evaluation data. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 20, 561-570.

Gilliland, T. & Goddard, N.C. (2005). Promoting home in the community. In S. R. Klein & E. J. Hill (Eds.), *Creating home as a sacred center: Principles for everyday living* (pp. 378-387). Provo, UT: Brigham Young University.

Gilliland, T. & Goddard, H.W. (2003). *Making a difference: Your guide to strengthening marriages and families*. Provo, UT: Family Life Education Institute.

Goddard, H.W., Gilliland, T., & Goddard, N.C. (2003). *Assuring the future: Family life education* (NCFR fact sheet). Minneapolis, MN: National Council on Family Relations.

⁶The Family: A Proclamation to the World, paragraph 7.

⁷The Family: A Proclamation to the World, paragraph 7.



CURRENT RESEARCH: FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE: “COUPLES WITH MULTIPLE CHRONIC ILLNESSES” STUDY

In the later years it is not so much about what problem we have, but which problems are affecting us most at any given time. Health is usually not a singular concern but the combination of multiple issues.



DR. JEREMY YORGASON

The familiar phrase “for better or for worse” leaves a romantic ring and a nostalgic flavor for most people. But what does it really mean: “for better or for worse”? For couples in a recent BYU School of Family Life study, this means an illness is “owned” by the couple rather than just the ill partner. It means what affects one affects the other and a couple takes on the challenges that come together.

As we age, health becomes a major personal and family issue. But in the later years it is not so much about what problem we have, but which problems are affecting us most at any given time. Health is usually not a singular concern but the combination of multiple issues. But how do all of these different health challenges combine to affect you, your mood, and your relationships? This is a question SFL faculty members Drs. Jeremy Yorgason, Susanne Olson Roper, Jonathan Sandberg, and their research team set out to explore.



DR. SUSANNE ROPER

STUDY ORIGINS

This study was prompted by Dr. Yorgason’s research about couples with diabetes. During interviews, couples would say things like, “Oh, this really wasn’t so bad compared to the heart attack,” or “This isn’t half as painful as...” other health problems they were dealing with. He realized that researchers can’t just look at couples through the single lens of one sickness; they have to back up and observe the entire picture.

Thus, the “Couples with Multiple-Chronic illnesses” study began. They recruited study participants from a diabetes management clinic and from local diabetes education groups.

For the first part of the study, 28 couples participated. They were interviewed by SFL undergraduate students and asked to complete a structured daily diary where they would answer questions about health symptoms,

interactions with their spouse, and overall mood. Undergraduate students were heavily involved in this study, a current emphasis for student learning at BYU. Under faculty supervision, the students created the survey questions, recruited the participants, interviewed them, inputted data, and conducted analyses.

STUDENT INSIGHTS

One student, Kristen Crane, worked extensively with the project. She said that “I was definitely affected by the people that I interviewed. Some of the couples had very difficult experiences and several had very profound things to say about not only managing diseases, but also about keeping their relationships strong (something that over the past several years has become a passion of mine). So I guess that you could say that participating in this study helped to fuel my passion for helping couples develop and maintain stronger relationships.” Kristen also says that, “I loved learning more about [the couples’] relationship and how they have adapted their relationship so that they can remain close and keep a strong relationship despite the chronic illnesses that they together manage.” Kirsten was an undergraduate in the School of Family Life at the time that she worked on this project. She continued her studies to become a marriage and family therapist at St. Mary’s University in San Antonio Texas.

A PHONE CALL RX

After all this work, the research team found out that, with most couples, activity limitations directly correlated with the partner’s daily mood. Simply stated, if one spouse was having physical trouble one day, it affected the other spouse’s mood at the end of the day. This could cause real marital trouble if a spouse is always dealing with physical pain and restriction. But these effects are diminished when the ill spouse reports positive marital happiness and good family support, such as telephone conversations with caring family members and friends.

This finding could mean a lot for children or friends of an elderly family member suffering from multiple illnesses. Children or grandchildren often wonder what they can do for a parent or grandparent who is sick or for the spouse of the sick parent or grandparent. This study clearly shows that those frequent, short phone calls can help lift moods and even affect the spouse of the sick person.

“The worse” part of the marital vow doesn’t have to stop the pursuit of happiness. Most couples reported that they grew as a result of their health problems, developing “personal qualities such as empathy, patience, understanding, flexibility, compassion, humility, kindness, courage, and tolerance.”

“I’ve lived with pain all my life, so I try not to pay attention to it. There’s more in life than just pain.”

THE POWER OF THE POSITIVE

As Professor Yorgason conducted this study, he discovered how resilient people can be when it comes to tackling multiple illnesses. He stated emphatically that, “people have hard things happen to them, but they can still be happy and optimistic in life.” Apparently, “the worse” part of the marital vow doesn’t have to stop the pursuit of happiness. Most couples reported that they grew as a result of their health problems, developing “personal qualities such as empathy, patience, understanding, flexibility, compassion, humility, kindness, courage, and tolerance.”⁸

At times like this, a positive outlook can be the saving grace. One couple summarized it this way: “Well, we want to live, so we just go ahead and live! There’s no big end just because I have diabetes.”

For most couples, an optimistic attitude or the importance of being grateful were life philosophies that were already in place, but are now being applied to the illness. One wife whose husband had diabetes and osteoarthritis stated: “It must have something to do with the way that I was brought up, but you don’t just mire in self-pity. You can’t do that...life is for living. I just have this really strong feeling about it, and I’m not going to bask in self-pity.”

Another wife with both diabetes and osteoarthritis said: “I’ve lived with pain all my life, so I try not to pay attention to it. There’s more in life than just pain. I mean, you get up in the morning and you can see the sun and the beautiful world and hear the birds sing...How could I ask for any more than that?”

Feeling a sense of control in these times can empower couples. One husband said that, “I’d rather be in control of my life than have my illnesses be in control of my life.” Of course, not all individuals are positive, and most have both positive and negative perceptions of their illnesses, requiring, as Dr. Yorgason and his colleagues state, “a balance between the reality of

their illness challenges and an optimistic outlook of the future.”⁹

The phrase: “For better or for worse” can definitely seem more poignant to those who realize what that actually might entail. One couple summarized it well when they said: “Being married means supporting each other in whatever, even though over the years you fight and argue... A good marriage doesn’t mean that people are happy and carefree all the time. A good marriage means that you’re able to cope with what comes along with each other.”

COPING WITH CONTRADICTIONARY ADVICE

But how do couples try to cope with multiple illnesses? Two important parts of coping were healthy exercise and diet habits and gaining knowledge about the illness. However, this can sometimes present challenges when a person has multiple ailments that don’t work well together. One couple reported that, “We’re just trying to control [the diabetes], trying to exercise, but that’s where you get the problems with arthritis and diabetes. The best thing for diabetes is exercise. What hurts the worst when you have arthritis is exercise...So, the two often go together but they work against one another.”¹⁰

This concept of conflicting prescriptions for ailments is important for family and doctors to realize. A person cannot just prescribe one form of treatment without thinking about the other situations the person or couple is trying to deal with at the moment. The juggling match of trying to achieve the right balance is tricky and uncomfortable at times. There is also a fine line between spouses giving helpful reminders or nagging the partner to take their medications and pursue treatments.

FOR THE FUTURE

From the Couples with Multiple Chronic Illnesses study, two research articles have already been published with one more on the way. There is much more research to be done in this area. Collecting information from people struggling with health challenges is invaluable in this field but it requires sensitivity and care. Often such ill people will drop out of studies because of their ailments. To actually focus on their needs and hear their opinions is a great step in understanding them and providing future help and assistance. There is certainly a fertile future ahead for these researchers as they continue to expand the knowledge base in this field.

⁸Yorgason, J. B., Roper, S. O., Sandberg, J. G., & Higley, D. (2010). Older couples’ management of multiple-chronic illnesses: Individual and shared perceptions and coping in type 2 diabetes and osteoarthritis. *Families, Systems, & Health*, 28, 30-47. (Quotation from page 38)

⁹Yorgason, et al., (2010), p. 30.

¹⁰Yorgason, et al., (2010), p. 39.



FAMILY CONNECTIONS



THE
SCHOOL
OF
FAMILY LIFE