



WOMEN'S VOICES 2007

THE LADIES' LOCKER room talk reminds me of my favorite part of church—the treble chatter that precedes the start of the Relief Society meeting. I love to sit off to the side, or even out in the hall, and let the sound of women's voices wash over me. There are loud happy greetings, hushed and earnest discussions of shared griefs, businesslike planning for church meetings or social activities, occasionally awkward introductions and lurching toward new friendships. I've been lucky enough to live in wards where the sisters are nearly as diverse in their life experience and approach to religion as are the locker room ladies, and the polyglot pre-Relief Society buzz seems like the most appropriate and authentic expression of sisterhood. Often I'm sad when someone stands up to hush the chatter and begin the official part of the meeting, with its correlated lessons and sometimes stilted recitations of acceptable answers to predictable questions. But even in these scripted exchanges, there is such richness in women's voices—so much meaning carried on their breath.

I've sometimes wished for the spontaneous spiritual outpourings that seem so common in accounts of the early Relief Society, and I still cherish a vision of celestialized Relief Society meetings where we speak heart to heart and bless one another and sing and prophesy in free and full unity. But for now, I'm learning from the little old ladies in the locker room

to love and appreciate a female relief society on a more human scale, to recognize and savor the gifts that come from simply choosing to tend each other, body and soul. The first step in that tending is to listen, to pay attention to the words our sisters speak and start to hear the ones they don't say. Choosing to hear each other is a simple and profound act of communion.

In these pages, we invite you to listen to Mormon women.

—KRISTINE HAGLUND

Guest Editor, "Mormon Women's Voices 2007"



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