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As for Me and My House Emma Lou Thyne

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EMMA LOU THAYNE. *As for Me and My House*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1989. xii; 115 pp. \$8.95.

Reviewed by Lowell L. Bennion, retired, formerly director of the Salt Lake LDS Institute of Religion, associate dean of students and professor of sociology at the University of Utah, and executive director of the Community Services Council.

A more accurate title for this interesting book would be its subtitle, *Meditations on Living and Loving*. The primary emphasis is not on the house or housekeeping but on the people who lived in the house and on their relationships.

Emma Lou's mother, Grace Richards Warner, was a meticulous housekeeper who trained her only daughter well and without a distaste for cleaning, dusting, and washing. Housekeeping in fact has been a pleasure to the author throughout the years but not a major preoccupation. She learned from her mother to do things well, to clean up the kitchen as she prepared dinner, to drop everything to meet a crisis in the house, and to do the dishes after the party, no matter what the hour or state of fatigue.

The reader will not find in this book any systematic guides to housekeeping or homemaking. The book is a collection of sixteen short essays on living that grew out of family experience. They are stimulating, authentic, born of reflection on what is important in life. References to the house are there to illustrate human values.

The author enjoyed a happy family life as a child. She loved her mother and Grandmother Richards, who lived with the Warners for fifteen years. A great lover of books, her grandmother stimulated Emma Lou's interest in reading and writing as well as developed a warm relationship. Her father, Homer "Pug" Warner, loved sports, coached basketball, and promoted sports in schools and in the Church. He was a happy person and created a very positive view of life. Emma Lou had three brothers with whom she has maintained pleasant and meaningful relationships through the years. Growing up with her father and brothers, she developed a keen interest and participation in sports, particularly in tennis and skiing. Because of these warm family relationships, she gladly helped her mother meet the tangible needs of the male members of the family.

In her book, we see how she has coped with life, how she has responded to its joys and tragedies. Her reporting is not didactic, logical, or moralizing. Instead she relates her experience and leaves it to the reader to evaluate and draw conclusions. She draws a vivid picture of how one thoughtful, sensitive person views and shapes the human scene.

Emma Lou and her husband, Mel Thyne, had five daughters to whom they were devoted. When the youngest was in school full time,

Emma Lou fulfilled a dream and a plan by returning to the University of Utah to study creative writing, but she has maintained a close relationship with her daughters by cultivating traditions. Every Thursday, she has met with those in town for lunch. Every year she and they have gone away somewhere for four or five days — away from husbands and children to renew their relationship with each other. Our author has developed a similar tradition with her grandchildren. On his or her birthday, Grandma has a date with each one, goes shopping, buys an unusual present, and develops rapport.

Relationships come first with Emma Lou. They reach through the family to friends and to people everywhere. On a tour in Russia, she made friends with a Russian teacher of English and arranged for her to come to the University of Utah, stay in their home, and experience American hospitality. In her forties, Emma Lou decided “ultimately the thing I really have to give is a happy person, not as a mood but as a mode, to make me someone eligible for someone else’s wanting to be with — or hear from” (46).

While lying in the hospital for thirty-one days after a back operation, unable to read or write or think clearly, she discovered one value that had been missing in her life: a person’s need for privacy, solitude, time for meditation. It had been absent from the rich life of work and love which she enjoyed with Mel and the girls. She talked things over with her family, and they agreed that she should take Wednesday day and evening for herself, leave home, do as she pleased, and leave her husband and daughters to themselves. This arrangement was not easy to carry out but gave balance to her life. She studied creative writing and began as never before to write creatively. Without neglecting her family but with new insights to share as a student along with her daughters, she found life became even more exciting. Between her study, her Wednesday evenings alone, and her love at home, she became the happy, vibrant person she is and has been for a long time.

As for Me and My House is the unique account of a person who has learned to accept herself, to rejoice in countless experiences of life, even difficult and tragic ones, to write vividly and originally, and to savor her relations with family, friends, and humankind. It illustrates how a person can live a full intellectual and public life without sacrificing loving relations at home. Her book I commend to fathers and mothers and anyone who would like to review his or her own life anew.