

Metamorphosis

Anne Eggebrotten

I NEVER THOUGHT I would become a full-time mother. In eighth grade I wanted to become a geologist. In high school I dreamed of being a writer. After college I applied both to seminaries and to graduate schools in English literature. I spent the next nine years in pursuit of a doctorate in medieval English literature (along with extracurricular activities like getting married, working for the ERA, and being active in the birth and growth of EWC). In 1979 I began to seek my first college teaching jobs.

Early in the 1980s the idea occurred to me of possibly adding a child to my life, of attempting the much-publicized "career plus mothering" combination. Now, I find myself a full-time mother of two, my career goals on the back burner.

Metamorphosis is the word that forces itself on me as I look back over the last 20 years to write about my pilgrimage as a Christian feminist. I became a Christian in 1962 and came to feminist consciousness as a college student in the late '60s. For a while the metaphor of myself as *pilgrim* worked, but in the last decade volcanic forces have metamorphosed the gently laid rock of my life. The layers are being warped, melted, and rehardened into some tougher substance that I never wanted.

To make a more familiar comparison, the caterpillar/butterfly change has happened in my life, but in reverse order. Having had freedom and beauty, I now find myself wrapped in a dark cocoon and losing my wings. It's not always that bad — and in fact the joys of motherhood are intense and beautiful — but many long days are spent in the house doing endless diapering, feeding, bathing, washing, picking up: the kind of thing that feels like just spinning wheels.

Before I go into this subject that ab-

sorbs my life right now, this career/motherhood dilemma, I want to pause and note that *change* and *choices* are what feminism is all about. The goal of feminism is not that all women should have careers or that all men should do homemaking, but that women and men should have more choices about what they do with their lives socially, economically, and politically. Thus when I see major changes in my life, I am aware that I had the freedom to choose, that I made certain choices, and that in the years to come I may make different choices.

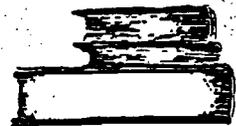
Let me also note that in past years when I have written about my journey as a Christian and a feminist, the focus has been different. In 1976, when writing for Virginia Hearn's collection, *Our Struggle to Serve*, I was occupied with whether egalitarian marriage is possible and biblically acceptable. Also, in Appendix 3 of that book, I anonymously discussed how hard it is to be a feminist in a large evangelical church — and how I decided to move to a church with more equality but less gospel emphasis. More recently, in *Green Leaf*, Bay Area EWC's newsletter, my pilgrimage focused on how the decision to have a child had affected my life, from my checkbook to my career.

All those subjects still occupy my thoughts and my day-to-day struggles, but the one that is foremost now is the realization that I have chosen to compromise my career in favor of motherhood.

I grew up assuming that I would not waste my time on such a menial occupation as baby and child care, of which I already had a healthy dose as the oldest of four children. With such attitudes, how did my metamorphosis occur? Why did I choose to become a mother?

Part of the answer is the usual

pressures in our society on a woman in her mid-30s, married for 10 years. Another part of the answer is my strong feminism. I wanted to understand women's experience, including those parts of it that are painful and difficult and that stretch back into prehistory. Having a baby would put me in touch with the lives of millions of women in an intimate way. Another reason I risked motherhood was that I didn't have much to lose in my career anyway. My jobs in teaching English were not tenured or even tenure-track, and I really didn't want to compete for the few teaching jobs in my field (medieval studies), for years devoting all my waking hours to the struggle to publish enough articles and books to hold a job. There were plenty of opportunities to teach basic English courses on a year-to-year basis, and having a baby would not affect my ability to get those jobs.



Initially I thought I could have one child without interrupting my life in the paid work-force more than a week or two. It worked beautifully: I was working at Cal State San Bernardino, and Rosamond Arthur Eggebrotten was born just as winter quarter began. My husband, John Arthur, took four months off from his job to take care of her.

That got us to summer. By September I had made the first compromise: I would give up teaching three day-time courses and go to three night courses at a two-year college in order to permit John to resume work in the daytime and to avoid putting the baby in day care.



Why didn't I use a day-care center or a sitter in my home? Before Roz arrived, I had just assumed that I would put the baby into some kind of care in order to continue teaching. However, once John and I had completed six months of caring for her ourselves, we had become perfectionists about how we wanted her handled. Even her grandmothers were not up to our standards, and the search to find a caring, stimulating environment to leave her seemed impossible. Eye contact, holding, language development, ego strength: could she get that even from a sitter in the home?

It was just easier to rearrange my teaching schedule and do it ourselves. Many of my friends, however, have worked out good child care for their infants. If I had had a career in full swing or a mortgage payment that required two salaries, I too would probably have found some kind of child care I could live with.

The next stage in my metamorphosis came about as a result of exhaustion. Teaching three college courses with endless stacks of compositions to be read and corrected, along with 50 or 60 hours a week of child care, was really grinding. Also I could never quite give up my EWC activities or my church work. When Roz was 18 months old, I took a semester off, and it felt great to sleep again. Nevertheless, the absence of a career made a great hole in my life and in my self-concept, so I plunged into day-time teaching again for the next year, with my two-year-old in the best day-care center I could find, three days a week. At that point I learned about the constant colds, flus and other diseases that kids are exposed to in those settings.

The third stage in my metamorphosis came when I decided to have a second child. By now I knew that another child would create further serious setbacks to my teaching career, but John and I felt that Roz deserved a companion. We were realizing that her upbringing

was going to be considerably different from that of her friends — little or no TV watching, lots of churchgoing, lots of feminism. She needed to have a peer with whom to grow up and share a perspective on her weird parents. So along came Ellen Arthur Eggebroten in January 1985.



This time John kept working, and I took the whole semester off. I knew there was no way I could return to teaching in two weeks with a three-year-old and a newborn, and, as it turned out, postpartum exhaustion plus germs from preschool caused me a long bout with pneumonia. That in turn caused me to postpone teaching yet another semester, and, partly because it is financially possible, now I've decided to take another whole year off to do full-time mothering. It's just too exhausting to combine teaching and mothering (and EWC and Sunday school teaching), at least for now.

Further, my respect for women who devote their time to raising children has increased dramatically now that I'm attempting to do it. I see both the difficulty and the value of surrounding small people with stimulation, safety, patience, and support. I also see that full-time mothering is a luxury. Many middle-class women today, like working-class women of earlier generations, would like to be able to give their time to their children but can't afford to.

Well, I wanted to understand those experiences that have so long shaped most women's lives. Now I do. Carrying a heavy, sick baby up and down the room, trying to put her back asleep, I understand the trapped feeling that so many homemakers have had — even as they enjoy those baby smiles.

Anne Eggebroten, currently coordinator for Bay Area EWC, was also its foremother.

Newcomer, continued

get, help from them all for some of the logistical tasks that are part of everyday living.

But, as every mother with a calling does, I also feel urgently my own expectations, my family's expectations, and the expectations of my constituency. My own expectations are the most demanding and most difficult to meet. They can be unrealistic and overwhelming. Yet much of what prepared me for the kind of ministry I have was nurtured in the crucible of my relationships. I now find it a challenge to choose with whom to be in each moment.

On occasion, I've thought that the early church had a good plan, entrusting the leadership of the institution to the unencumbered and unfamiliar. But, in my better moments, I know that the clutteredness of my life, with children, puppies, former students, relatives, neighbors, seminary buddies, and church members, is the place where I can seek the Lord and proclaim the good news of the gospel, the good news of forgiveness, reconciliation, health of spirit, and each person's freedom to incarnate the gospel wherever God put her or him.

I am grateful for God's call to the gospel ministry. I never expected it to be easy or smooth. I hope, too, that as women are faithful to their callings, the church is going to be increasingly effective in its outreach to the world's needs.

I hope that in the span of my ministry I will become a deeper, more Christlike, more honest messenger of the gospel. I hope I can be more open to the variety of people to whom God leads me. I hope I will encounter from male colleagues more genuine friendship and support.

I hope I will continue to see the displaced, disenfranchised, marginalized, and powerless, and be able to speak words of comfort to them — while challenging repentance from whatever the forces that oppress. □