

Copyright © 2002 by Katherine Padilla. This article is published by **Novaun Novels** at [www.zerosilver.com](http://www.zerosilver.com) and licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 2.5 License](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5). To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5>. This document may be reproduced for personal non-commercial use as long as the text is not altered in any way and the byline and copyright notice are included on every copy.

## DELICIOUS LITERATURE TO NOURISH THE SOUL

By Katherine Padilla

*This text was adapted from a speech that was presented on March 16, 2002 at the Frederick Maryland Stake Relief Society Women's Conference. The theme of the conference was "The Bread of Life," and the topic was "How We Determine What We Read by the Power of the Spirit."*

If I were to make a loaf of homemade bread, what ingredients would I use? The recipe my family likes calls for flour, honey, salt, yeast, potato flakes, eggs, water, and vegetable oil. Every ingredient has a purpose. The flour gives the loaf of bread its body. The yeast makes it light. The salt balances the flavor and inhibits the yeast so that the dough won't rise too high. The eggs provide richness. The honey adds a touch of sweetness. All of the ingredients work together to make the loaf of bread nutritious and great tasting.

When any of us set out to make a loaf of bread, we don't often stop to consider whether the ingredients we are putting into the bread are wholesome, or, in other words, conducive to good health. We assume the ingredients are nutritious and safe and that they will work correctly in the recipe because we've used them before and have achieved the desired results. We buy those ingredients at grocery stores we trust.

Just as various wholesome ingredients go into making a loaf of bread or any other nutritious food, certain ingredients go into creating a celestial piece of literature. If we were to write a recipe for a celestial piece of literature, what ingredients might we list? Truth, perhaps, and the presence of the Spirit. Celestial literature would be well organized and contain stories and ideas that would uplift and delight us. It would exhibit a depth of observation about life and encourage us to ponder the doctrines of eternity. We would expect the language to be refined and beautiful. We would be better people for having read it. We know celestial literature contains these wholesome ingredients because the perfect example of celestial literature is always before us—the scriptures.

Now going back to the bread, what would you say if I told you I had mixed a little dirt into a loaf of bread I had made? Or blood? Or rotten eggs instead of fresh ones? Or motor oil instead of vegetable oil? Or heroin? The bread would be disgusting, wouldn't it? We know that the ingredients I've just listed are unwholesome because someone we trust has told us so. Perhaps our mothers told us not to eat dirt when we very young. Maybe we saw a film in school on the dangers of heroin. Someone we know may have eaten rotten food and become sick. All of us have probably bitten our lips and tasted blood. If any of those ingredients were used, would a loaf of bread look the way it is supposed to look? Perhaps. Perhaps not. The loaf might be puny or disfigured. It may be

an odd color. It would probably smell bad. Eating bread made with unwholesome ingredients would certainly make us sick and unhealthy.

Then again, someone might argue that there would be only one rotten egg for four loaves of bread. The other one would be fresh, which certainly balances out the unwholesomeness of the other one. That divides into one fourth of a rotten egg per loaf. Why, in only one slice out of twelve per loaf, a person wouldn't be eating much rotten egg at all! Certainly only a teeny tiny bit of rotten egg wouldn't make someone sick! It's not as if he would be eating a whole carton of rotten eggs!

We all know it wouldn't matter. Even a little rotten egg is going to be bad for us. If we began eating bread full of these unwholesome ingredients on a regular basis, we would not be at our maximum health. Our lives would deteriorate, and we would have a difficult time functioning. We would eventually develop a taste for this contaminated bread, which would prevent us from enjoying good, wholesome bread. The contaminated bread would begin looking so normal to us that we might not even recognize the appearance, taste, and smell of good bread.

What would happen, in fact, if many people developed a taste for this foul bread? They and most of the people around them would be sick and not even know it! It would take on the status of a gourmet delicacy. We would have classes on how to let the eggs rot just right to get the correct flavor. People who liked wholesome bread would be considered odd and unsophisticated, and the sick people would laugh at them and tell them that they're behind the times: "This is the way we make bread now. It's so much better than the way bread used to be made. You need to develop a more mature taste."

The bread bakers would, by and large, stop making wholesome bread because they could make so much more money selling the contaminated loaves. They might say: "If I don't bake bread that pleases people, they won't buy it and I'll go out of business. I won't be able to support my family."

Wholesome bread would become so difficult to find that even those who preferred it might start eating the foul bread because it's so available. When warned by someone who recognizes the foul bread for what it is, people would defend themselves by saying, "But there isn't anything else available! It's just part of today's world! If I don't eat this

bread, what am I going to eat? All of the bread bakers and food experts say that this bread is all right. How can they all be wrong?"

And they *would* all be wrong, because it doesn't matter how many people think contaminated bread is superior. Eating wholesome bread will nourish us and eating contaminated bread will sicken us. The same principle applies to literature. Elder Ezra Taft Benson, who later became president of the Church, said this:

"Today, with the abundance of books available, it is the mark of a truly educated man to know what not to read. 'Of making many books there is no end' (Ecclesiastes 12:12). Feed only on the best. As John Wesley's mother counseled him: "Avoid whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, takes off your relish for spiritual things, . . . increases the authority of the body over the mind.'

"The fact that a book is old does not necessarily make it of value. The fact that an author wrote one good work does not necessarily mean that all his books are worthy of your time. Do not make your mind a dumping ground for other people's garbage. It is harder to purge the mind of rotten reading than to purge the body of rotten food, and it is more damaging to the soul." ("In His Steps," Speech delivered at Brigham Young University, March 4, 1979. Published at <http://speeches.byu.edu>.)

The one sure way never to develop a taste for unwholesome literature is to feast daily on the scriptures. They truly are the most celestial literature on this earth, and they are, therefore, the standard by which we should judge everything we read. As we digest the scriptures and make them a part of us, a remarkable thing happens. This celestial literature becomes so delicious and fulfilling that we are better able to recognize other quality literature. Not only that, but we become so familiar with its symbolic, often difficult language that we become better readers and thinkers, which means there isn't much written in our own language that we won't be able to read and understand.

It's interesting that even those who have no spiritual interest in the Bible consider it great literature. *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces, Volume I*, includes five

stories out of Genesis from the King James Version of the Bible, an excerpt from Job, five psalms, an excerpt from Isaiah, and six stories from the New Testament about the Savior.

The scriptures do more than teach us to read and think. They provide many examples of how both the servants of Satan and the disciples of God use language with great expertise, thereby teaching us how *we* should use language. Several years ago, during a period of time when I was presenting spotlights on literature to the women in my ward at homemaking night, I thought this would be an interesting topic to research. What resulted was [“The Power of the Word”](#) chart. The doctrine is so accessible and clear! Here are a few of my observations:

1. It’s obvious what kinds of reading material come from the influence of Satan and which come from the influence of God.
2. The more expert a writer/speaker is in creating or implementing the structure, the greater his or her potential is for influencing others, either for good or for evil.

Often we excuse inappropriate material because the book is a literary masterpiece. We overlook the foulness because the book is so good. Actually, our attitude should be the opposite. Since well-crafted literature has the most potential to influence us, we should take particular care to avoid it when it contains something that offends the Spirit.

3. The more we read and act upon material influenced by the power of Satan, the more spiritually blind we become and unable to distinguish between false doctrine and truth, ugliness and beauty.
4. When we create material that incorporates Satan’s lies or uses Satan’s techniques, our ability to influence using the glory of God is diminished.
5. Great intelligence combined with expertise in structure has the greatest potential for influence. Great art in all of its forms (including literature) is just that—a beautiful/extraordinary structure that radiates intelligence.

Studying this chart, it is easy to see why the scriptures themselves are so powerful. In them we have the words of men of extraordinary intelligence arranged in an outstanding structure.

Nothing we read will ever have the spiritual impact on us and on society that the scriptures do, but if we choose the literature we read carefully, we'll find other material that combines great intelligence with superb structure. As we dine on this other literature, our understanding of the scriptures can be increased. This very thing happened to me about a year ago.

I was asked to lead a book review in my ward. Since I didn't think I would have much time to prepare it, I decided to choose a book I had read recently and was quite familiar with—*Emma*, by Jane Austen, which, in my mind, is a perfect example of excellent structure radiating great intelligence. For those of you who are not familiar with this story, it's about a young woman who acts as a match-maker for her friends and ends up almost killing her own chance for true love. As I was preparing this review, I began reading *Emma* for the third time. One of the things I did on this reading that I had not done before was look for the theme of the book, that one pronouncement about life that ties the whole work together. Maybe I'm slow, but the theme of this novel was not obvious to me; I really had to think about it.

Toward the end of the book, I found a sentence that tied everything together and rejoiced! I had found what I believe to be the theme of *Emma*:

“Seldom, very seldom does complete truth belong to any human disclosure; seldom can it happen that something is not a little disguised, or a little mistaken; but where, as in this case, though the conduct is mistaken, the feelings are not, it may not be very material.”

So in language more modern but less elegant, we could say:

We as human beings have a difficult time seeing the truth clearly, especially in our dealings with other people, but when we really love those people, the misunderstandings that naturally arise from time to time don't have to matter.

I think this is an interesting observation, one I hadn't considered before. I decided that Jane Austen's observation was a true one, and as I continued to think about it, several questions came into my mind:

Why aren't we allowed complete truth at this point of our existence?

How do we gain truth?

What do we have to do to gain complete truth or, in other words, all knowledge?

Which comes to a person first? Complete truth or complete charity? How are these two concepts connected?

As these questions churned in my head, I began looking up scriptures about truth and gained deeper understanding of the principles on "The Power of the Word" chart. I would like to share a few of these scriptures with you, because they help us understand some things about literature and our relationship to it. We won't read any of the scriptures about charity, but they are there and they are important, particularly those in Moroni 7, if you're interested in looking them up on your own. As for the ones we'll explore today, let's start with D&C 93:24:

"And truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come;"

Summary: Truth is knowledge

Next, let's look at James 2:19:

"Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble."

Summary: Satan and his angels have knowledge but are subject to the power of God

Next, D&C 6:16:

“Yea, I tell thee, that thou mayest know that there is none else save God that knowest thy thoughts and the intents of thy heart.”

Summary: Only God knows our thoughts and desires—Satan does *not*. The implication is also there that our fellow human beings can’t know our deepest thoughts and desires either, unless they are given power from God. This is why we have the misunderstandings of the type so eloquently dramatized in *Emma*.

Next, D&C 88: 6 and a related verse, 41:

“He [Christ] ascended up on high, as also he descended below all things, in that he comprehended all things, that he might be in all and through all things, the light of truth;”

“He comprehendeth all things, and all things are before him, and all things are round about him; and he is above all things, and in all things, and is through all things, and is round about all things; and all things are by him, and of him, even God, forever and ever.”

Summary: Christ comprehends everything. This is how He is able to have all truth, i.e. all knowledge. This is how He can know the thoughts and desires we do not vocalize and why Satan, along with our fellow human beings, cannot.

I can’t think of a better way to describe the act of knowing the thoughts and desires of every person in the human family than to say he is “in all things, and is through all things, and is round about all things.” I also can’t think of a better way to describe the

very thing that great literature accomplishes. Whether it details a historical event or describes a character's thoughts and emotions, a powerful book helps us "comprehend all things," or, in other words, it helps us be "above all things, and in all things . . . through all things, and . . . round about all things." Consequently, one of the best ways we can develop our ability to comprehend truth is to *read* and *read well*. Participating in an activity that will help us be "above all things, and in all things . . . through all things, and . . . round about all things," will draw us closer to the Lord and make the Spirit a more powerful influence in our lives.

In D&C 88:67 we are told that a person will reach this state of perfect comprehension once the darkness in him is gone and he is filled with light:

"And if your eye be single to my glory, your whole bodies shall be filled with light, and there shall be no darkness in you; and that body which is filled with light comprehendeth all things."

One of the best interpretations of this scripture that I've ever read was given by Elder H. Burke Peterson in a conference talk he gave in October, 1993, addressing the problem of "sex, nudity, and vulgarity" in the media:

"In an application of this scripture today, it is my understanding that anytime we look at or listen to the kind of material we have been speaking of—even in its mildest form—the light inside of us grows dimmer because the darkness inside increases. The effect of this is that we cannot think as clearly on life's challenges—be they business, church, school, family, or personal—because the channel to the source of all light for the solving of problems is cluttered with various unclean images. Our entitlement to personal revelation on any subject is severely restricted. We don't do as well in school or at work. We are left more on our own, and as a result we make more mistakes, and we are not as happy. Remember, our mind is a wonderful instrument. It will record and keep whatever we put into it, both trash and beauty. When we see or hear anything filthy or vulgar, whatever the source, our mind records it, and as it makes the filthy record,

beauty and clean thoughts are pushed into the background. Hope and faith in Christ begin to fade, and more and more, turmoil and discontent become our companions.” (“Touch Not the Evil Gift, Nor the Unclean thing,” *Ensign*, November 1993, p. 43.)

In contrast, let’s continue our reading in section 88 with verse 68 to learn what will result if we work to eliminate those dark things from our minds and hearts:

“Therefore, sanctify yourselves that your minds become single to God, and the days will come that you shall see him; for he will unveil his face unto you, and it shall be in his own time, and in his own way, and according to his own will.”

Could there ever be a greater reward than that? Reading these verses, it becomes obvious that the reason we as human beings don’t possess more knowledge is because we still have darkness in us.

These verses from section 88 are loaded with truth; there is no doubt about it. I won’t presume to give anything close to a complete interpretation of these passages, but I do want to give you one more thought. As I was contemplating this doctrine in connection with reading *Emma*, I knew more strongly than I had ever known that the literature that will best help us be “above all things, and in all things . . . through all things, and . . . round about all things,” or, in other words, the literature with the most depth of observation about life, is the literature that is freest from darkness. This is the literature that teaches the truth and teaches it *in the Lord’s way*. This idea completely refutes the popular belief that a story must contain foul language, depictions of sex, graphic violence, or whatever to be completely realistic and “true.”

What does this mean to us as readers? First of all, it means that the most artistic books, in the heavenly sense, will not contain inappropriate material. We don’t have to feel as if we’re missing anything if we choose to avoid books that contain foul elements, even if they’re considered “art” by the rest of the world. What does this mean to us as writers? It means that every time we throw in a bad word or an unsavory scene, we’re

lowering the true literary quality of our work. It's as simple as that. If we want our writing to further the Lord's work, we will cripple ourselves if we use the tools of Satan.

Hardly a general conference goes by where we don't hear counsel concerning our media choices. Recently the Church published a new *For the Strength of Youth* booklet containing many of these standards we hear about at every conference. If you don't have this booklet yet, get it, study it, and *live* it. It may be directed to the youth, but it's for us too. I've actually heard the rationalization that the media standards the Lord asks the youth to live don't always apply to adults. The proponents of this philosophy claim that the prophets give the youth stricter restrictions because they are impressionable. They claim that mature adults can accept material that condones evil, along with some explicitness, without being adversely affected. This idea is ridiculous! There is no double standard in the Church. How can we expect our children to live the standards if we don't live them ourselves? Do we really believe the youth won't see through such hypocrisy? At the other extreme, do we want to be responsible for teaching the youth or anyone that they can disregard the standards and not be spiritually damaged?

As we do make that commitment to live the standards, the Spirit will give us feelings of discomfort if we are reading something that the Lord would rather we didn't read. For me, it starts with a feeling of uneasiness, then escalates into: "Uh, oh . . . I shouldn't be reading this." After an experience like this with a book, the Spirit may also direct me not to pursue that particular author, even if I have already read books by him that meet the standards. If we pay attention, the Spirit will give us the direction we seek and need.

Is there light in material that's inappropriate? Yes, and this is one of the reasons why making these choices can be so difficult. Many questionable books do contain light. Sometimes a great deal of light. Does that mean they're good for us? No. A restaurant may throw perfectly good food into the dumpster, but that doesn't mean we should go digging through the trash to find it! We who have the gospel are living in the spiritual equivalent of a palace. We have been dressed in our queenly gowns and are now sitting in the grand dining room with a feast on the table in front of us. Would a great lady or a queen go prowling through the palace garbage to find food? No! The idea is

preposterous! She would use all of the resources available to choose the finest food the world has to offer, and only that would go on her plate.

And how do I know how fine ladies eat? Because I read books like *Emma*, by Jane Austen! Now, not everyone who reads *Emma* will have the same enlightening experience I had, and as I said before, I didn't have this experience until I was nearly finished with my third reading of the book. Some of you, in fact, might find *Emma* downright tedious; I don't think my husband could read it if someone held a gun to his head. It doesn't matter. Different books speak to different people.

As we seek for the very best literature to put on our tables, we should seek out those things that edify and delight us. There is a trend these days to consider anything happy or hopeful to be too simple to ever be considered true "art." Nothing could be further from the truth! The classics come in all types. Whether we are more inspired by a cheerful story with a happy ending or prefer a subtle, perhaps starker tale is a matter of personal taste. *Don't ever let anyone make you feel like an idiot, a simpleton, or a prude for liking cheerful stories and happy endings!* On the other extreme, however, it would be a mistake to assume a book has to contain pleasant subject matter and a happy ending to be wholesome. Think of the scriptures. Many terrible things are documented in the scriptures, but we come away from them feeling uplifted and not depressed. Why? Because they teach the truth in the Lord's way. They contain hope and have a good balance between happy events and sad ones. Read the things you love, the things that expand your mind, the things that bring you joy. I like this quote by President Thomas S. Monson:

"Why is the story A Christmas Carol [by Charles Dickens] so popular? Why is it ever new? I personally feel it is inspired of God. It brings out the best within human nature. It gives hope. It motivates change. We can turn from the paths which would lead us down and, with a song in our hearts, follow a star and walk toward the light. We can quicken our step, bolster our courage, and bask in the sunlight of truth." ("Now is the Time," *Ensign*, November 2001, p. 59.)

I believe that if the books we read do for us what “A Christmas Carol” does for President Monson, we are reading correctly.

Read the things you enjoy, but every now and then choose something that will lift you out of your comfort zone. If you typically don’t read anything but the *Ensign* and Church books, live a little and read a novel once in a while. If you’re like me and love to read novels, try some poetry now and then or perhaps a play or a biography. If you love romantic suspense, try a classic romantic suspense novel such as *The Scarlet Pimpernel*. If you like *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, try something similar but meatier, such as *A Tale of Two Cities* or perhaps even *Les Miserables*. After reading the Evangelical Christian series *The Russians*, by Michael Phillips and Judith Pella, I went on to read the classic *Fathers and Sons*, by Ivan Turgenev. I was in the mood for literature about Russia, so reading *Fathers and Sons* was a pleasant and enlightening experience for me.

As you are reading, rejoice in the truth that the Lord is so generously pouring down on all people. One of the blessings I have received by reading in different genres is a testimony of how comprehensive the Lord’s influence is in this world. When He says that He is “willing to make these things known unto all flesh” and that He is “no respecter of persons” He means it! (D&C 1:34-35) He is literally pouring His Spirit down on the world, to people of all races, nationalities, and religions, and those who are sensitive to that Spirit are living many of the same standards we are and face many of the same challenges. Reading the literature of these people bolsters my faith in humanity and in my Savior, who loves *all* people. I don’t think there is anyone in this room who won’t feel a connection to this character from Leo Tolstoy’s classic novel *Anna Karenina*:

“Ever since Levin, at the sight of his beloved dying brother, looked for the first time at the questions of life and death in the light of what he called the new convictions which between the ages of twenty and thirty-four imperceptibly replaced the beliefs of his childhood and youth, he had been horrified not so much by death as by life without the slightest knowledge of its origin, its purpose, its reason, and its nature. Organisms, their destruction, the indestructibility of matter, evolution, the law of the conservation of energy, were the terms that had superseded those beliefs. These terms and the conceptions associated with them

were very useful for intellectual purposes, but they gave no guidance for life. Levin suddenly felt like a person who had exchanged his warm fur coat for a muslin garment and who, out in the frost for the first time, becomes convinced, not by arguments but with the whole of his being, that he is as good as naked and that he must inevitably die a painful death from exposure.” (*Anna Karenina*, Leo Tolstoy, Part VII Chapter 8.)

It’s amazing, isn’t it, that a Russian count who lived more than a hundred years ago could so eloquently illuminate an idea that has such meaning to us as members of the Church. That is, of course, because all truth comes from the same source. As we make a commitment to read well, the Lord will help us find the delicious literature that will uplift us and connect us to our brothers and sisters all over the world.

With that in mind, let me tell you how to find wholesome literature. The most obvious choice is an **LDS bookstore or book club**. Often we choose this route because it’s the easiest, but it isn’t necessarily the best. For one thing, these books are expensive, and I, for one, like to read for free. Not only do the books cost a lot, but if we limit ourselves to LDS fiction, we won’t get the blessings of connecting with our brothers and sisters around the world as much as we will if we read widely. Another problem with this approach is that we get so used to our Mormon jargon that we rarely look beyond the pat phrases and really delve into the concepts behind the platitudes to discover the deeper meanings. Often it takes looking at life from a different perspective to get out of this rut and gain a more complex understanding of truth. I think one of the biggest dangers of limiting our reading to LDS fiction is that we become complacent. We expect these books to be perfectly wholesome and safe, and frankly, this isn’t always the case. I’ve read a few books published by orthodox LDS publishing companies that have made me so uncomfortable in plot detail and theme that I would not recommend them to anyone. Does that mean we shouldn’t read LDS fiction? Not at all. It simply means that we need to be as selective in the LDS genre as we are in all of the others.

Similar to LDS fiction but often overlooked by members of the Church is **Evangelical Christian fiction**. These books are published by companies such as Bethany, Thomas Nelson, Tyndale, and Zondervan and are marketed to conservative

Protestants. I like many of these books very much, as long as they're not too preachy or delve too deeply into Protestant beliefs that contradict Church doctrine. I particularly like several historical series; some of my favorite authors are Judith Pella, Bodie Thoene, Kathy Tyers, and Thomas Williams. You can find these books in Christian bookstores, but sometimes these stores are more for gifts than for novels, and you will be more successful looking for the books elsewhere, such as the religion section of many general bookstores or in an online bookstore such as Amazon. Browse for authors and titles that look interesting, then go to the public library and look in the fiction section, or in the case of authors such as Kathy Tyers or Thomas Williams, the science fiction section. Most of the books I read in this category come from my local library. I've also purchased many of my favorites at the used bookstore I patronize. If you are interested in learning about new Evangelical fiction and reading reviews, the magazine *Library Journal* publishes an article about Christian fiction every other month. I found the authors Kathy Tyers, Judith Pella, and Linda Chaiken this way. In my determination to read for free, I read the column from the library's copy of *Library Journal*, and, surprisingly enough, sometimes an LDS title will even make it into the article for review.

The library and used bookstores are also the prime places to find the **classics**. This category contains the best religious fiction you will ever read and is probably where you will be most likely to find insightful adult fiction that is clean, particularly if you look for books that were written before the twentieth century. Contrary to popular opinion, these books aren't that difficult. If you can read the scriptures, you can read the classics. Believe me, compared to the scriptures, an author like Tolstoy is a breeze! I'll confess that as a young married woman looking for good books to read, I had no idea what the classics were or how to find them. I was, at the time, frustrated with the books I was reading. The ones with depth were filthy, and the wholesome ones were so lacking in substance that I always came away from them feeling as if I had wasted my time. I remember saying to my husband in exasperation: "There is nothing to read!" He laughed at me and replied: "How can you say that? You haven't read anything yet!" Somehow I had made it through high school and a year and a half of college without reading more than a handful of classic adult novels. Even though I had read and enjoyed Shakespeare, I had the idea that nineteenth century fiction such as *War and Peace* was too difficult.

Have you ever gone into the fiction section of the library when you didn't know what you wanted? It can be overwhelming. For this reason, along with the fact that I was too shy in those days to ask a librarian for help, I gave up looking for the classics in the library at first. I began learning about them by watching the movie versions. When my first child was a baby, one of the local television stations broadcast old movies on weekday afternoons, and since this was a very relaxed time in my life, I was able to watch many of them. This was when I was exposed to *Pride and Prejudice*, *Jane Eyre*, *The Man in the Iron Mask*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, and *Anna Karenina*. To this day, Anna Karenina is Greta Garbo in my mind. Watching the movie versions of the classics helped me know what they were and enabled me to approach them without apprehension. I still love watching film versions of the classics. As much as I enjoy these literary movies, however, I've found that it's a good idea to approach them with caution. Not all are as wholesome as the books they come from.

When I was a young mother, I also liked to browse the literature section of the bookstore. I found *A Tale of Two Cities*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *The Count of Monte Cristo* this way, and I became familiar enough with titles and authors that I was able to recognize others when I saw them at thrift stores, yard sales, and used bookstores. As I started buying and checking these books out of the library, I found that many of them list other titles on their end pages or book jackets. Other places to find lists of titles include the library reference desk, literary reference books, and school reading lists. The classics are also widely available on CD-ROM and online. Many works are, in fact, available for free download to your PDA. Online you will also find obscure books by authors such as Baroness Orczy and Gene Stratton Porter.

In my search for the classics, I also began finding **old popular books**. These are books that were written many decades ago when society's standards were higher. These books missed becoming classics and have been forgotten by popular culture, but many of them can be found in the library and in used bookstores. The best way to learn about these books is from people who have read them. I happened to be discussing books with a woman I didn't know at a bi-ward Relief Society function. I told her about my interest in wholesome literature, and she recommended the historical novels of Thomas B. Costain, an author I've come to really like. Another way to find old pop is to pay attention to the

credits when you watch old movies. Many of these movies are adaptations of books that were popular at the time they were made.

Sometimes you will get lucky and stumble onto an old pop book and feel as if you have found a treasure. I had read the classic *Lost Horizon* by James Hilton and liked it and so went searching for other books by him at the library. That's where I found *Random Harvest*, one of my favorite novels of all time. Another little jewel is *Portrait of Jennie*, by Robert Nathan. The best place to find old pop is at a used bookstore in the fiction section or online, where there are many people more than happy to sell their out-of-print books to you for a reasonable price. Since many of these books are out of print, the hardback versions, if they're in good condition, can be expensive. The best thing to do is to buy paperbacks or sub-standard hardbacks. These are cheap. Then if you like the book well enough, buy one of higher quality for your permanent collection.

One category of literature I rarely buy is **contemporary adult fiction**. I always get these books at the library. That way if I run across something that makes me uncomfortable, it's easy enough to take the book back. I haven't wasted any money on it. Almost every time I go to the library, I look at the new books. If one looks interesting, I take a few minutes to thumb through it, looking for evidence of offensive material. If I find nothing, I may check it out. Often I'll return the book without finishing it, but I have found some very good books this way. One of my best finds was *Dream of the Walled City*, by Lisa Huang Fleischman, a novel set in China during the Communist Revolution. When looking for contemporary fiction, pay attention to the reviews, which you can find in the newspaper, in magazines such as *Publishers Weekly*, and online. One place I like to find book reviews is at the online bookstores. I type in the name of a book or author I'm interested in reading and look at the customer reviews to see what others have said about it. It's amazing how many people like to write these customer reviews. You can learn a lot about a book this way. You can also type in the name of one of your favorite books and get recommendations of other authors and titles in the same category. If you want an easy way to know what authors and titles to avoid, pay attention to those book club advertisements you get in the newspaper or in the mail. All of them mark the titles that have explicit language and content.

When searching for wholesome literature, don't forget **juvenile and young adult fiction**. Many of these books appeal to adults too. These novels are usually shorter than adult ones of the same type, which can be a blessing if you're lacking in time and want something well written. They're usually cleaner too, but not always. Reading in this category will help you find good books to share with your children. My daughters and I love the *Anne of Green Gables* stories. One of my daughters has read the books many times, and the other has watched the movies over and over again. Whatever the medium, good stories have phenomenal power to edify and delight.

I'm not sure either one of my daughters would have known about the *Anne of Green Gables* series had I not introduced it to them. I may not have tried it either had I not heard so many good reports about the books and the films from my friends, which brings me to the best way to find good books—from **others who have similar reading standards**. Looking at the list of books I have read and would recommend, which contains 199 titles, I count 73 that were in one way or another recommended by people I know. Several years ago, I compiled a list of wholesome literature from titles submitted by women in my ward. The result was amazing! Fourteen of us contributed titles. We came up with approximately 350 entries for fiction—books, series, and authors. We can accomplish so much if we pool our knowledge and work together in this effort to read well. One of my goals is to collect so many titles of wholesome books that no one who knows of my work will have any reason to look for books in questionable places.

In conclusion, I would like to ask: What do you really want? I want to understand things, *great* things. I want to be, as it says in 1 Nephi 14:14, “armed with righteousness, and with the power of God in great glory.” Not just in the Celestial world, but *now*. I want to come into the presence of my Savior. I want to be a part of creating Zion. I want to be a queen in my Heavenly Father's kingdom. To get where I want to go, I have to work to become pure in heart. To do that, I have to be careful about what I put into my mind. I'd like to close with this passage from Revelation 19:7-9:

“Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.

“And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints.

“And he saith unto me, write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb.”