

The two young women, Jan and Lemon, are distinguished, especially in the third-person narrative sections, more by their situations and circumstances than by individualized characterization.

At the novel's centre are lost children, but Ruth suggests that there are no missing children without absent parents. She explores and probes a range of parent-child—especially mother-child—relationships, suggesting both their strengths and their vulnerabilities, their creative potential as well as their threatening limitations. Ruth eschews maternal stereotypes (even that of the wicked stepmother). Through Lilith's relationship with her own mother and her daughter, Ruth dares to confront the fine line between a maternal love that nurtures the child and a maternal love that functions to save the mother herself. In *Ten Good Seconds of Silence*, Elizabeth Ruth faces the complexity of motherhood, for mothers and their children alike.

## **Having Faith: An Ecologist's Journey to Motherhood**

Sandra Steingraber  
Cambridge: Perseus Publishing, 2001

### **Reviewed by Moriah Hampton**

Near the conclusion of *Having Faith*, Sandra Steingraber recalls preparing for a 1999 United Nations discussion on breast-milk contamination: "I know that I want to speak as a nursing mother. I know also that I want to speak dispassionately, as an ecologist, about the evidence. But how to strike the right balance between the intimate and the empirical?" (361). Steingraber strikes that balance when she introduces U.N. delegates to breast-milk contamination by first passing around a jar of her own breast milk and then proceeding to discuss the effects of toxic chemicals on breast milk and a suckling daughter. A balance between personal and empirical knowledge shapes Steingraber's book.

Part one chronicles Steingraber's pregnancy: nine chapters describe the changes that each month of pregnancy brings to mother and fetus. Intimate disclosure and empirical analysis intertwine and inform one another. Steingraber, the scientist, lucidly discusses menstrual cycles, organogenesis, fetal brain development, among other biological functions. On the other hand, Sandra, the pregnant woman, vividly recalls suffering through morning sickness and feeling her body changing. Steingraber also discloses her own life circumstances: she is a cancer survivor and adoptee. In one scene, she lies on the same examination table for cancer screenings and amniotic fluid testing. An obstetrician charts the fluid surrounding the fetus, while Steingraber's own

adoption papers remain sealed by the state. Her life circumstances and scientific training provide Steingraber with a unique vantage point for analysis, one that melds inner and outer worlds.

Steingraber melds inner/outer divisions most poignantly when she describes the porous placenta that connects the fetus to the outside world. As Steingraber explains, toxic chemicals that pass “into the mother’s body pass also through the placenta” (35). Thus, toxic chemicals such as pesticides permeate the placenta and fetal environment and often strengthen to more concentrated forms. Similar synthetic analysis characterizes part two, which concerns breast development and milk production. Following birth, the breast milk “takes over” (234) for the placenta, providing nourishment and strengthening an infant’s immune system. Yet, this life-sustaining substance also carries the toxic chemicals women absorb throughout their lifetimes; hence, dioxin-tainted eggs, gasoline vapors, and DDT-treated fruit all flow through mothers’ milk.

Steingraber’s analysis inspires imagination and fuels faith: “*May the world’s feast be made safe for women and children. May mothers’ milk run clean again. May denial give way to courageous action. May I always have faith*” (283). *Having Faith* is an important contribution to the study of ecology, globalization, motherhood, and environmental literature. It also is a moving memoir. Readers concerned about pollution and pregnancy will be inspired by Steingraber’s faith.

## **Finding Strength: A Mother and Daughter’s Story of Childhood Cancer**

Juanne Nancarrow Clarke with Lauren Nancarrow Clarke  
Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1999

### **Reviewed by Helene A. Cummins**

Few books have been written on the subject of the sick daughter who is cared for by her mother. In *Finding Strength: A Mother and Daughter’s Story of Childhood Cancer*, Juanne Nancarrow Clarke describes a painful journey of three years when her daughter Lauren Nancarrow Clarke was suffering with acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL). As a sociologist, Nancarrow Clarke takes the reader through the challenges a mother faces as she watches her daughter move through illness. She describes sharing the news of illness with family and friends; starting the treatment cycle of radiation and chemotherapy; assessing medication information; receiving poor medical treatment; and enduring