

CONVERSATION STARTERS

Women Are Scary: The Totally Awkward Adventure of Finding Mom Friends

If you're reading *Women Are Scary* with a group of women, **you are fabulous**. Attached are a few conversation cards you can use in your book club, moms' group, women's conference, etc. to get the ball rolling toward deeper relationships.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mel". The letters are cursive and fluid, with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

MELANIE DALE

@UnexpectedMel | Unexpected.org

What holds you back
from meeting other
moms?

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steer into the surprise

What's your most
awkward small talk
experience?

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What do you tend to
judge other moms
about?

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How have you ever
felt judged by another
mom?

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What are some ways
we can encourage
each other as moms?

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What food do you
sneak when your kids
aren't looking?

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What surprised you
the most about
motherhood?

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What TV show/
book/movie are you
completely obsessed
with and why?

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How do you like to
have fun?

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Tell us something
weird about yourself.

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How do you cling to
sanity in the midst of
crazy kids?

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What's your favorite
thing about being a
mom? Least favorite?

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Tell us about the
moment you found
out you were a mom.

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Why are
momlationships
important to you?

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Why do friendships
take bravery?

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Describe an
embarrassing
momlationship
moment.

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If you were doing a lip synch battle with Jimmy Fallon, what song would you pick?

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What do you wish other moms knew about you?

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Are you a hugger or not so much?

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Have you ever experienced a phaseout or confrontation with another mom?

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What is your coping strategy for dealing with momlationship upheaval?

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Have you ever had a close friend move away? How did you handle it?

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What are ways that you stay close to your best mom friends?

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Describe the perfect mom date.

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steer into the surprise

W O M E N
A R E
S C A R Y

THE TOTALLY AWKWARD ADVENTURE
OF FINDING MOM FRIENDS

melanie dale

 ZONDERVAN®

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Women Are Scary

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In order to protect the poor moms who are stuck on fourth base with me, I have changed their names to companions from *Doctor Who*: Rose, Martha, Donna, Amy, Rory, River, and Clara. I don't want to out them publicly and end up back on first, and my love for them transcends time and regenerations.

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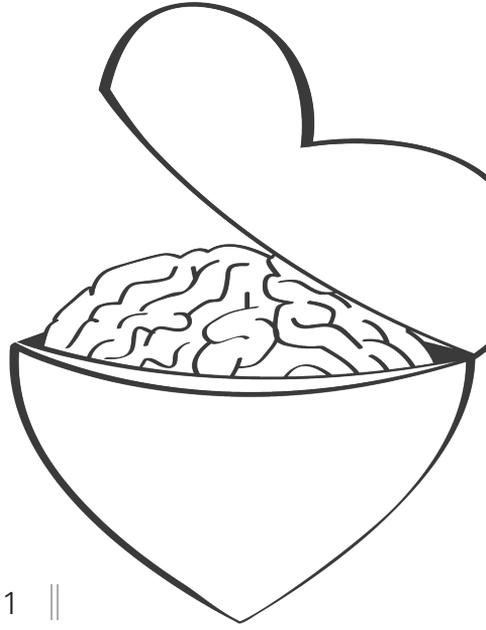
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|| CHAPTER 1 ||

A Complete Lobotomy of the Heart

Principal: "At no point in your rambling, incoherent response was there anything that could even be considered a rational thought. Everyone in this room is now dumber for having listened to it. I award you no points, and may God have mercy on your soul."

From Billy Madison¹

I'm going to need a hug before I get started. I'm about to tell you about my relationships with women, but I'm not completely all that terrific at small talk, so can we skip ahead together and pretend like we've known each other for a while? Come over here and hug it out.

Okay. Thanks for that.

When we finally brought our Elliott home from neonatal intensive care and my husband had the gall to go back to work and leave me alone with our four-pound floppy baby, I felt overwhelmed.

I'm not the only one, right?

Young mothers are shriveling up into crusty dried raisins of despair. Every minute feels like forever when your two-year-old wants to put on her own socks and your five-year-old won't get in the bathtub. When you're a mom, you spend hours and hours sitting with other moms while your kids kick a soccer ball, learn how to blow bubbles in the pool, and shake maracas at music class.

You bat eyes at each other and glance away. It's awkward and someone always needs a diaper change and no one ever knows what to say. And most of us are frazzled and lonely, isolated in our minivans, schlepping bags, strollers, and munchkins to and fro across town.

I believe that we are better together. We make each other better moms, better humans. We need each other, because mothering is just too darn hard. *Women Are Scary* is our journey to each other, to finding our people and being other people's people, to learning how to bless each other and not destroy each other.

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My Lumpy, Bumpy Road

I'm the least likely person to write a book about motherhood. For years, I didn't want to be a mom. My boyfriend and I almost broke up because of it.

I have the most amazing parents in the universe. Ever. My mother stayed at home with my brother and me, and she could do it all. Baked goods greeted us when we came home from school. She was room mom, made homemade dinners every night, and we always had folded, clean clothes. When I was wracked out in pain every month because, unbeknownst to me, endometriosis was killing my fertility, she held my hand, brought me meds, and whispered to me to think of my toes. *Think of your toes, sweetie. Relax your toes.*

My mom gave everything she had to be a superhero to us, and

even so, we treated her like crap. Despite her self-sacrifice and outpouring of unconditional love, we took her for granted, took advantage of her, took her cookies and ran.

I told my boyfriend that I couldn't handle the sacrifice. I told him, "I'll have kids if I can be the dad. I don't want to be the mom." I could never live up to my mom, and my kids deserved nothing less. So I just wouldn't have them.

"I'll have kids if I can be the dad.
I don't want to be the mom."

We almost ended it there, but we were in love and total idiots. We decided to table the discussion and keep swing dancing and watching *Fletch* together. A few years later, we got married, and a few years after that, I felt the oddest urge to do the mom thing, like maybe the baby wouldn't start rejecting me right when it came out. Like maybe the first few years might be worth it. Like maybe even if I wasn't as good a mom as my mom, maybe I could be good enough. I found myself experiencing a complete lobotomy of the heart. I wanted a baby. I really, really wanted to be a mom.

Then I discovered I couldn't.

Every year that crept by felt like twelve deaths. I rode a monthly merry-go-round of up-up-up hope, hanging at the top, feeling *maybe this time*, then down-down-down into despair. Every month it felt like my dream baby died. On the road of infertility, I discovered how far I was willing to go for my child. I would endure any needle, any surgery, anything for my baby.

And finally after five years, I held him. The little preemie red raisin who survived my body, barely, and lay in his incubator hooked up to all the beeping things. He made me a mommy. And I loved him.

I loved being Mommy. I loved it so much that I tried to make more babies—more needles and science and more brokenness.

My body told me, "You're done," and after months of counseling, I began to feel whole again. God glued me back together,

shard by broken shard, and then surprised me with an unexpected gift, a passion for adoption—*passion*, not fallback. Adoption became the deep desire of my heart, not a backup plan.

We worked and waited for our daughter for two years, and it still surprises me how hard I work for the children I didn't used to want.

We brought our daughter home from Ethiopia when she was almost two. Now she's four, our incubator boy is six, and as I finish this book, I'm sitting in a cozy apartment in Latvia with the nine-year-old girl who has captivated us all. Three continents, three kids, and three unique journeys to each of them.

Powerhouse Women

As I've met moms, from the ones at our local playground to the ones advocating for orphans around the world, I'm flabbergasted that I ever had a dim view of motherhood. I saw it as giving something up. It never occurred to me what I'd gain. My rough road to motherhood grew my character and readied me to join this incredible group of women, powerhouse women changing lives around the world together.

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It never occurred to me what I'd gain.

Mothers are strong and powerful, and when we join together in relationship, mountains move. The girl who once turned up her nose at motherhood fought tooth and nail to enter in. I'm still fighting for my kids.

As I gained kids, I gained so much more. I entered into a living, loving organism of motherhood. Society fears our power, seeks to divide us on issues, but when we pull together for the common good of generations, we change the world.

So I'm here, oddly enough, the girl who didn't want to be a mom, the girl who couldn't be a mom, trying to break down these

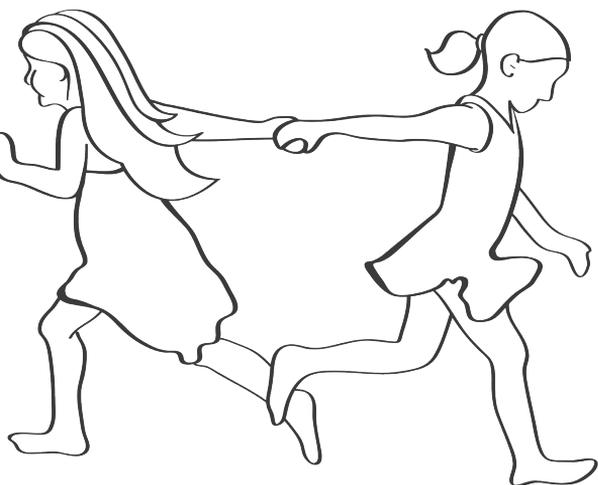
crazy things I call momlationships. You know, those relationships that come with car pools and cupcakes, friendships borne at T-ball games and in quiet corners feeding babies.

Whether you became a mom accidentally or on purpose, hesitantly or with gusto, you're here now, and sooner or later, we're going to meet at a park or soccer game or ballet class. And it might get awkward.

In this space of a book I invite us to come together. So much of mothering doesn't seem to apply to me—like Pinterest. And other parts of me don't seem to apply to mothering—like my unabashed movie quoting. If these pages don't apply to you, read my story and have the freedom and grace to live your own. No matter who you are, you are welcome.

Notes

1. *Billy Madison*, directed by Tamra Davis, Universal Pictures, 1995.



|| CHAPTER 2 ||

Women Are Scary

The Doctor: "There're a lot of things you need to get across this universe. Warp drive . . . wormhole refractors . . . You know the thing you need most of all? You need a hand to hold."
From *Doctor Who*¹

I was sitting in a roomful of women I barely knew, watching a video in which Bible teacher Beth Moore got down in someone's face and declared, "I love women!"²

Oob, I thought to myself, *I don't think I love women*. Women are scary, complicated creatures.

The very next moment, something inside me bubbled up and I prayed inside my head, "God, help me to love women."

Nothing happened. I didn't feel the earth shake or my insides quiver. I finished watching the video, picked up my daughter in the nursery, and moved on with my life.

Never did I suspect that God would answer that little prayer in such a big way. I've spent the last four years blogging about orphan care and our adoption journeys. As a sponsorship coordinator for Children's HopeChest, I've traveled to Uganda several

times where we partner with a group of widows in a small village to serve about three hundred orphans and vulnerable children. Loving the women in Uganda came naturally to me. Loving the women right here at home felt harder.

Looking back over the last couple of years, since praying that prayer, I've realized that God has completely rewired my heart. I find myself asking questions, listening to the hearts and hurts of the women around me, and offering bear hugs with abandonment. Where I wanted to run, I now leap to encourage. Where I felt defensive, I now celebrate our differences.

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encourage. Where I felt defensive,
I now celebrate our differences.

In the 'burbs where I do life, we live in an independent, isolated culture. As I've traveled to Uganda and witnessed material poverty in the village with which we're partnered, I've discovered that my culture struggles with a different kind of poverty. We don't lack food, clean water, or clothing, but we lack relationships. Whereas my friends in northern Uganda reside in small mud homes and live life together, outside, as a community, gathering at the borehole for water, working their gardens side by side, and looking out for each other's children, we live in elaborate homes with multiple rooms and water that comes out of our own faucets. We drive our cars into garages and close the doors behind us, and we can go days and weeks without interacting with the neighbors unless we're intentional about making friends.

And while I will continue to champion the orphans and widows whom I love, I've realized that it's no less noble to reach out to the hurting moms and kids right in my own community. If we can learn how to develop real, soul-soothing relationships, there's no stopping what we can do together for our kids, our families, and the world. But first we have to stop being scary and scared of each other.

Hiding from Women

I meet so many women who say they had few girlfriends growing up. They preferred to hang out with guys, because guys were less complicated and more fun. That was me. And apparently there were a lot of us who felt that way. Many girls were difficult and hurtful, and we just gave up, took our toys, and went home. We hid. Some of us are still hiding.

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A “friend” in high school once said of me, “I’ve spent a year trying to get to know the real Melanie, and I’ve decided there’s just not that much to get to know.” Twenty years later, I still remember that. And someone else is probably still remembering something mean that I can’t take back.

Words hurt, and they are the weapons of choice for a lot of us women. We build relationships and hang out with other women and think we’re connected, only to have mean girls shatter us with clever words. Maybe you’ve been on the receiving end of a word bullet, or maybe you’ve been the shooter.

We leave high school, but if we aren’t careful, we never leave high school. We just grow up, acquire kids, and have even more things about which to bicker. From how you feed your baby to how you educate your first grader, we argue and scare the crap out of each other. Other women can be scary! We all have big opinions, and you never know what’s going to set us off. *Why bother. It’s too awkward and complicated. Who has time for other women?* Right? I’ve thought it.

My First Real Girlfriend

In college, they force you to have roommates. And for many of us, that was hard too. Here were people from whom you couldn’t get away. You just shared a space and hurt and annoyed each other

month after month. By the end of my sophomore year, I was ready to move into a single room and give up on girls altogether. I felt unlovable. Argumentative. Misunderstood.

I'll never forget casually mentioning that I was thinking about moving into a single room for junior year and one of my roommates saying something like, "I'll go wherever, as long as we're together." Maybe she didn't say it that way. But in my head, people started soft-shoe dancing and there were cartoon birdies. Another girl actually wanted to keep being my friend, to keep living with me. I couldn't believe it.

She was my roommate for two more years. We were in each other's weddings. You could not pick two more different people. As a quiet person, she taught me to listen. Well, at least I got better at it. When I was a crazy psycho because my boyfriend took his darn ol' time proposing, she gave me grace. She introduced me to the pomegranate, and we listened to Big Bad Voodoo Daddy together. We weren't moms yet. But she was my first real day-in, day-out, doing-life-together relationship.

We attended our first women's retreat together, hosted by the women at our church. At that point I was still learning how to be a little bit normal, how to navigate female relationships. My life as a theatre major, a fairly untalented one, consisted of daily rehearsals in which I stood in the back and played the silent role of wench or maid and practiced carrying trays and not drawing attention to myself while wearing a corset and petticoat.

On the night of my first women's retreat, I of course had wench or maid rehearsal in my whalebones and came to the retreat late, tired, and my insides just a little squeezed. My boobs were relieved to be out of the corset and away from my throat, and I guess I was exploring my diaphragmatic freedom, because before I knew what I was doing, I burped loudly in front of everyone.

I liked burping. Burping was awesome. And then an entire room filled with older church ladies turned to stare at me and I could tell they were mustering the good Christian grace for which they'd trained, and I realized that maybe my parents weren't the

only ones who thought burping in public was a bad idea. Having girlfriends and being a lady might require sacrifice on my part. No more burping wench-maid. I wasn't sure what I thought about this.

I Don't Quite Fit

Years later, I still love Jesus, and burping, and sometimes in spite of myself and my complete weirdness, I still go to these things called women's conferences. They're filled with lovely ladies and prayer and I'm always just a little on edge, like I don't quite fit and if they only knew what was going on inside of me . . . you know, besides gas. In a room full of Christian women I always secretly panic that I'm going to somehow lose control and scream the f-bomb over and over until they drag me out by my Bible.

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And sometimes when I'm hanging out with friends I worry in my head that I'll bust out my bilingual Christianese and start talking in church words, and they'll bless my butt out of Dodge and spank my exegesis.

And that right there illustrates how remarkably bizarre I am, if I'm worried that I'm too Christianese *and* that I'm a total wreck and too morally repugnant. If someone this screwed up in the brain can make friends, then you can, too. I'm sure of it. And if you read this book and still crash and burn, well, then, at least you'll have someone to blame. (*Disclaimer: Reading this book will not automatically give you friends. I have no formal training in people or relationships and am in no way an expert on friendships. Also, sometimes I'm serious and sometimes I'm kidding, and I leave it to your discernment to figure out when. If you experience relational upheaval after reading this book, it's

not my fault, although I'd be happy to give you a full-frontal hug if that'll make you feel better.)

When you get past the scariness, other moms are fun. You'll find that they're covered in vomit just like you. They try not to go off on their kids just like you. They try to find time and energy for sex just like you. They crave adult conversation with someone else who understands, just like you.

Women Are Scary is an invitation to momlationships. Girls are tricky and weird. We're too opinionated and insecure. We tear each other apart. And we need each other.

I witnessed the perfect illustration of female relationships as I waited for my kids in the pickup line at preschool. I watched as two three-year-old girls held hands and tried to walk in opposite directions. They yanked and yanked each other back and forth. They were very angry. They were bossy. They tried and tried to get the other one to go their way. Because their way was better. They knew. No matter how hard they yanked and yanked, they each had their own idea about the right way to do things. But in all the yanking and bossing, they never let go. They held hands tighter and tighter.

That's a relationship with a girl. We hold hands. We don't let go. Because we need each other. We yank and yank, but we don't let go.

So this is a call to find your girls, grab hands, and don't let go. We are better together. Put on your best sweatpants and let's get started.

Notes

1. "The Almost People," *Doctor Who*, British Broadcasting Corporation, May 28, 2011.
2. Beth Moore, "James: Mercy Triumphs," Lifeway Christian Resources, 2011, DVD.