



# CORNUCOPIA

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No other name . . .

## WE GIVE HER A NAME

By MICHELLE, granddaughter of ANN, daughter of VAN TASSELL, wife of NIELSEN

**W**E GIVE HER A NAME BY WHICH SHE SHALL BE known on the records of the Church and throughout this life. . . . And that's just how I feel: I was given a name by which I shall be known, and without my name, I am not known. But somehow, keeping my name for the duration of time specified in the blessing has become difficult. The common expectation seems to be that I was given a name by which I should be known until I sacrificed it on the altar of marriage.

My name, Ann Michelle Van Tassell Nielsen, reads like a pedigree chart. When I introduce myself, people either stare or laugh. One name, five words, no hyphens—it can't hold the extra weight of punctuation. As a stranger once said, "that's not a name; it's a title." But no one hearing my name thinks of royalty. In fact, the most impressive claim I might make for my people is that at least one member of every generation since Nauvoo has been excommunicated. Some more than once. Yet we persevere. I find that commendable, especially for a line of arrogant redheads.

My first name, Ann, comes from my aunt, who got it from her mother, who sacrificed her surname on the altar of marriage but kept her middle name to pass on to the likes of me. My middle name, Michelle, is the one I've always used. My mother liked the sound of Ann Michelle better than Michelle Ann, which when slurred could sound like the name of a prominent tire company. Mom always privileges form over function—there is no really comfortable chair in her house—and I've always had to explain my name to bureaucrats.

My sister, Kathryn Van Tassell, is named after our mother. To distinguish herself, my sister shortens Kathryn to Kat, so with her, I shorten Michelle to Hell. She thinks that this is the name by which I am truly known.

If Kat has a daughter before she has a husband, there could be a Kathryn Van Tassell the Third. There are no "the Third"s among my sex; husbands' last names always get in the way of producing one. Nevertheless, my sister, the Second, has not

yet convinced my mother, the First, that striving for a Third is a worthy goal.

My last name is Van Tassell Nielsen. Three words. Too many for anyone—but after multiple attempts and the sacrifice of my first names, I finally got it all on a Social Security card.

Van Tassell, my husband likes to remind me, is my father's name and his father's name, and his father's, too. But these men gave it to *me*, and even sealed it with a priesthood blessing to be mine on the records of the Church and throughout this life, and now it is.

Nielsen is my husband's name. I did not adopt it when we married, but eight-and-three-quarters months pregnant with my first son, in a gesture of familial solidarity, I added it to mine. My son is nine years old now, the marriage is strong, and I still have not reconciled myself to my Nielsenification.

I've tried. For a while, I would phone people and say, "Hi. This is Michelle Nielsen," but I always felt like I was lying. And I always followed it with, "We met at X, and I have red hair . . ." as if no one would recognize me simply by the name. Why should they?—it wasn't mine. I was given a name by which I should be known, and without it, I did not feel known. By the time my second son was born, I had returned to sneaking around with my own name.

Soon, I was out of the closet. Michelle Van Tassell was back and unapologetic.

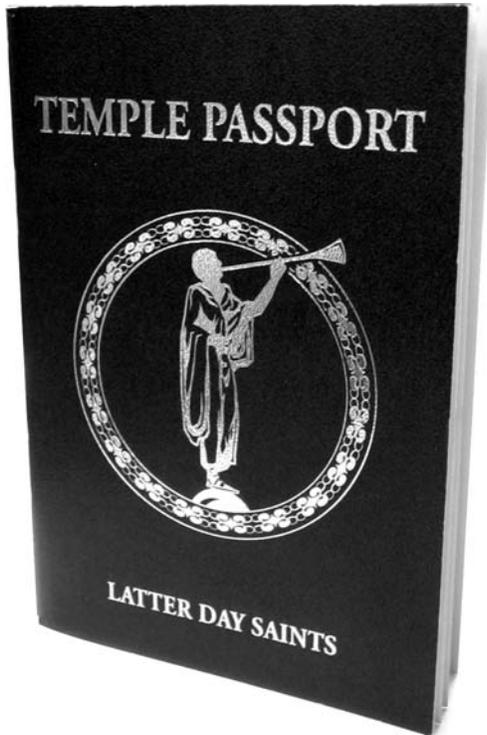
Except at church. Sister Nielsen went to church. Most people just called me Michelle, but behind that, I was still Sister Nielsen to them. Once a visitor to the Gospel Doctrine class I was teaching introduced herself saying, "I picked your class because my name is Michelle Nielsen." "Oh," I said, "Mine's not. Mine's really Michelle Van Tassell." It was a rude thing to say, and I didn't intend to be rude, but regrettably, I often speak without filters.

When we moved, I decided to be known, to have my own name, but I picked an unfortunate ward to convert. Some were explicit in their disapproval. The bishop's wife counseled me that Van Tassell, like a yarn tassel, was an adornment, an extra, something I didn't really need. Some called me Sister Van Tassell, but they always stumbled over it. Either out of fear of getting it wrong and offending an apparently bitter feminist or because they just couldn't stand to call someone—who holds a temple recommend and should know better—by the wrong name, rarely could ward members just say it. The only ones who said it without hesitation were the girls I taught in CTR 8, but they also called my husband "Brother Van Tassell," at which I could only smirk.

Just after my daughter was born, we moved again. Here the

All-seeing eye

## PASSPORT TO GLORY



**I**F YOU'RE A FREQUENT TEMPLE-goer but don't fully trust the accuracy of the notes the angels are taking, you can now take matters into your own hands. Echoing the appearance of an American passport, including a place to affix your picture inside, but with a golden Moroni seal on the cover, the Temple Passport helps you keep track of your temple attendance. And even if no temple worker will stamp this booklet, the Temple Passport comes with an array of stickers to affix next to the date and location for all the temples you've visited. (Retail price, \$9.99. From Marvelous Work Specialty LDS Merchandise, Ogden, Utah.)

According to an unconfirmed online rumor, when you fill out a whole page of the Passport, you can go to a temple cafeteria, say the sacred (not secret) password "Jell-o," and get a free lunch.

Relief Society is freckled with hyphens, a solution which works for the women with short punchy names. Several women use one name at work and another at church, but usually they got famous with their own names before they got married and had to negotiate. I have long arhythmic names and no likelihood of fame, so I say my name is Michelle Van Tassell Nielsen, knowing it doesn't fit in anyone's mouth. When people ask, I shrug and say they can call me what they like. (They usually do anyway, and I'm really not trying to fight.) For short, I use Michelle Van Tassell.

**I**DON'T UNDERSTAND the resistance. Why must I give up my name to be married? I can remember two different surnames for two people, even if they're bound in celestial alliance. And isn't it a quintessentially orthodox move to insist on the literal interpretation of a priesthood blessing?

I like when people know my name. Besides my personal attachment to it, I've found that someone always knows a Van Tassell from somewhere—the farm, the school, the prison, or *Sleepy Hollow*. I like making the connection. It's not a glamorous history—in fact, some of my relatives have been glad to be rid of it—but it is my history. Or, as my husband would point out, my father's history, and his father's, and his.

MICHELLE VAN TASSELL  
Arlington, Virginia

Cybersaints

## SCRIPTURES R US

**W**E MORMONS ARE A RECORD-KEEPING PEOPLE. And our records give us an opportunity to examine ourselves in the looking glass. We believe that similar records have been kept by ancient counterparts; in fact, we already have some of those ancient records, and we believe we will receive others in the future. However, anticipation of those ancient records yet to be revealed tempts some of us to step through the looking glass.

NetMo has discovered three different texts online all purporting to be the sealed portion of the Book of Mormon:

- *The Oracles of Mohonri Moriancumer* <<http://www.absalom.com/mormon/mohonri/contents.html>>. Written in 1987 by Davied [sic] Israel. Davied gives no explanation about the manner in which he received this material, but it was published anyway by The Council of Patriarchs, Sons Amman Israel.

- *The Sealed Portion of the Brother of Jared: Vols. I & II* <<http://www.sealedportion.com>>. Translated from a single Mayan glyph, these volumes were produced by The Brotherhood of Christ Church and published in 2001 and 2002 by Leathers Publishing.

Faith-promoting accessories

## HOW MANY SENINES WOULD YOU PAY FOR THIS WATCH?

**I**T'S CONFIRMED: THE EVENTS described in the Book of Mormon took place in Mesoamerica.

This confirmation doesn't come from FARMS, but from LDSTours.com. According to their website, they can conduct you from Nephi to Zarahemla and from Cumorah to Bountiful. They can also sell you an engraving of the "Tree of Life" Stela (\$15), a weights and measures set as described in Alma 11 and "still used by the Mesoamerican culture" (\$19.95), and even a faith-promoting watch. The watch (right) includes a golden plate embossed with a Mayan glyph that promoters claim means, "And it came to pass" (\$25). Hmmm. "And it came to pass that they waxed exceedingly entrepreneurial" might be a better translation.



- *The Sealed Portion of the Book of Mormon: The Final Testament of Jesus Christ* <[www.thesealedportion.com](http://www.thesealedportion.com)>. *The Sealed Portion* was translated from the original golden plates by Chris Nemelka, who received them from the resurrected Joseph Smith in an upper room in the Salt Lake Temple while Nemelka was doing his rounds as a security guard. The tools to do the job of translation, the Urim and Thummim, were given to him by an enigmatic angel some time later. Unlike the authors of the other two translations, who remain mum on the details, Nemelka glibly describes the origins of his work in his 300-plus-page autobiography which, unfortunately, has recently been taken off his website.

As yet, there seem to be no records from the Ten Tribe online, but *The Records of Nemenha* (<http://www.greaterthings.com/Records/Nemenhah/>) is a newly revealed tome of scripture from another itinerant group, the people of Hagoth. Somehow the velum scrolls of these wanderers ended up in Sanpete County where, written in a "Spanish-like" language (Reformed Spanish?), they were recently discovered and translated. The cool thing about this book of scripture is that it is validated through the application of the Alphabetic Code. (Through his own scientific manipulation of the text, NetMo has discovered that a disillusioned, disaffected, and deranged Strangite was the second gunman on the grassy knoll in Dallas. He was prevented from completing his mission by his sudden transposition into the limousine as President Kennedy's body-double. The real JFK was translated to a Zion society in an undisclosed location somewhere in Sanpete County. Apparently that's why

Governor Connelly is turning around in the Zebruder film and saying, "Huh?")

*Sacred Scriptures* (<http://www.absalom.com/mormon/rigby/index.html>), produced by Mike L. Rigby, contains the writings of various Old Testament and Book of Mormon prophets. They are published by M.A.P., Inc., of Orem, Utah. Rigby claims to have received these scriptures through divine inspiration.

Perhaps these imaginative efforts of twentieth-century moonbeams are more understandable when considered within the context of nineteenth-century legend:

Oliver Cowdery went with the Prophet Joseph when he deposited these plates. Joseph did not translate all of the plates; there was a portion of them sealed, which you can learn from the Book of Doctrine and Covenants. When Joseph got the plates, the angel instructed him to carry them back to the hill Cumorah, which he did. Oliver says that when Joseph and Oliver went there, the hill opened, and they walked into a cave, in which there

was a large and spacious room. He says he did not think, at the time, whether they had the light of the sun or artificial light; but that it was just as light as day. They laid the plates on a table; it was a large table that stood in the room. Under this table there was a pile of plates as much as two feet high, and there were altogether in this room more plates than probably many wagon loads; they were piled up in the corners and along the walls. The first time they went there the sword of Laban hung upon the wall; but when they went again it had been taken down and laid upon the table across the gold plates; it was unsheathed, and on it was written these words: "This sword will never be sheathed again until the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our God and his Christ." (Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* 19:38)

Curioser and Curioser.

NETMO  
*Archives of the Archons*  
Sanpete County

Oh, say what it truth?

## ACCURACY AND THE BIBLE: A REFLECTION

**A**FTER SITTING NEXT TO A MAN IN A SOCRATES Cafe circle and sharing a few laughs and thoughtful asides during the group's two-hour discussion on religion, the two of us introduced ourselves. Sam, it turned out,

was a tree farmer, a land developer, a writer, a former attorney, and an atheist. After going into our backgrounds a bit more, Sam pointed to the Bible sitting on the floor at my feet. "You know," he said, "my friends that know something about these things tell me that the King James Bible is probably the least accurate translation."

I was somewhat taken aback by what I considered an irrelevant comment, but I did not waste much time in responding. Accuracy, I explained, is not the reason I turn to the Bible. I did not bother to explain that I refuse to quibble about variations in translation of books that were written thousands of years ago and whose problems of accuracy, I suspect, are not attributable to translation errors alone.

I did say that the language of the King James Version of the Bible was the most beautiful to my ears of all the translations. I went on to suggest an experiment that I did not expect him to perform, but whose results I would be fascinated to hear. My idea is to have an atheist commit to reading the Bible, thoughtfully and respectfully, for a half-hour each day for six months and then to report on his or her experience. I would be curious to know whether a non-believer would be changed by participating in such an experiment, not because the Bible is accurate but because it is profound.

Sam and I went on to other topics before parting, but I have not forgotten his inclination to view the Bible as a nonfiction book to be evaluated in terms of its accuracy, and I have been left to wonder if my indirect challenge to become a regular reader of the Bible, if only for a limited time, has had any impact on a man I met only once.

W. M. DEMANDANTE  
Colorado Springs, Colorado

*Twenty years ago in SUNSTONE*

## SYMBOL AND PROMISE

*The following reflection is excerpted from the editorial, "Stretching Toward the Light," by Peggy Fletcher (now Stack), published in the January 1985 SUNSTONE.*

**M**Y FATHER TAUGHT ME THE CAREFUL, THOUGHTFUL search for truth. Examine the claims, weigh the evidence, and embrace that which seems the most true. Then revise your beliefs as your experience, understanding, knowledge, and vision increase. Faith is constantly shifting, always deepening. Commitment in the midst of uncertainty, he said. "Peggy my girl: If you can find a more true church, I'll join it with you. But while we look, we need to be committed to this one. It's the best we yet know. . . ."

I value symbols and promises. Eight-year-old Peggy was unclear about being baptized. I don't *know* the Church is true, I insisted. Not sure I want to join. A bishop with wisdom and

### *Rise and shout*

## BARBIE CHEERS FOR THE BLUE AND THE WHITE



**M**ETICULOUSLY DRESSED in white and blue, blonde, blue-eyed, and anorexic as ever, the BYU Cheerleader Barbie is now available on eBay for a mere \$12.99.

No word yet on where BYU Yell Leader Ken is. While some say he's serving an LDS mission, it is also rumored he's attending Evergreen meetings after having fallen for one of the action figure heroes from the Book of Mormon.

a walk in the woods convinced me. "Doubt is good," he said, "it helps us learn and judge. But baptism need not imply certainty, only intention, desire." I think of that bishop Sunday after Sunday as I hear the words, "That they are willing to take upon them the name of thy Son, and always remember him...." "Can I really say *always*? Then follows the assurance, "that they may *always* have his Spirit to be with them." Symbol and promise, cadenced together.

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