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SCHOLARSHIP
ISSUES & ART**

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SUNSTONE

SPIRITUAL PATHS AFTER
SEPTEMBER 1993

BY

LYNNE KANAVEL WHITESIDES

PAUL TOSCANO

MAXINE HANKS

D. MICHAEL QUINN

LAVINA FIELDING ANDERSON

December 2003—\$5.95

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SUNSTONE

MORMON EXPERIENCE, SCHOLARSHIP, ISSUES, & ART

DECEMBER 2003

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SEARCHING FOR TESTIMONY

AS A CHARTER SUNSTONE SUBSCRIBER, occasional attender and one-time symposium presenter, and committed Latter-day Saint, my response to the "Why We Stay" essays in the October 2003 issue may, I hope, reflect views of other subscribers as well.

I consider SUNSTONE and similar publications and activities as a resource rather than a refuge. I approach any resource by evaluating its contents to determine the extent of its merit. The standard works, *Church News*, general conference talks, Sunday School lessons, Latter-day Saint and other scriptural commentaries, St. Augustine, Plato, *Salt Lake City Messenger*, *Time* magazine, student comments in a class, and all else, come under a similar scrutiny. Of course, the nature of the scrutiny varies with the resource. I do not expect to find fundamental gospel principles in the pages of *Time*, nor do I expect to find current events detailed in the Sunday School manual from which I teach. I expect to encounter an authoritative presentation of Latter-day Saint doctrine in a general conference talk rather than in SUNSTONE. But I have found in SUNSTONE valuable insights into Latter-day Saint doctrine and practices. And while I do not normally cite SUNSTONE (or Plato, for that matter), in Sunday School or any other class I may teach in a Church school, I do not hesitate to use it or any other resource that might be appropriate to enhance understanding of a gospel subject. I have never experienced any restraint in doing so in a Church-related setting or institution.

So I felt some disappointment that none of the five essays include a forthright declaration that "we stay" because we believe that the Church is basically what it claims to be. Perhaps the setting did not seem to lend itself to such a declaration. Tom Rogers came close in his comments on "testimony," but his own testimony is still only implied.

I feel comfortable asserting that I "know" (with some understanding of the philosophical implications that accompany that assertion) that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is that which it claims to be. With that testimony, derived through the process consistently enunciated by that Church, I feel free to explore SUNSTONE and any other appropriate resource I may encounter.

Thus I am grateful for SUNSTONE as a resource, not as a refuge. And I am grateful for

those willing to discuss religious issues or to facilitate such discussions.

JOSEPH B. ROMNEY
Rexburg, Idaho

WHO'S YOUR AUDIENCE?

I'VE JUST FINISHED BROWSING THE latest issue of SUNSTONE (Oct. 2003), and I have read some of the articles. I find the series of essays on "Why We Stay" interesting. However, it strikes me, and I may be wrong, that in recent years, SUNSTONE has aimed at convincing "the Brethren" that the magazine is no threat but is, in fact, a "faith-promoting" publication. This article seems in line with that trend. Again, I may be mistaken, but I am struck by the impression that the number of people choosing *not* to stay is growing annually. I am one of those people. I have been a long-time subscriber to SUNSTONE, but I find that it is increasingly less relevant to me, and perhaps to others like me as well.

Mormonism is part of my culture. Toby Pingree describes this as being "intertwined with my DNA." I have often described myself as a "DNA Mormon." For that reason, I had hoped that SUNSTONE would be a useful addition to that part of my culture. Sadly, it is not meeting my expectations. I would hope that you know who your audience is and that you are publishing articles aimed at that audience. I am increasingly less a part of that group. Perhaps an article by people like me, entitled, "Why We Left," might address our concerns and interests. But, of course, that might rankle somebody deep in the bowels of the "Great and Spacious (Church Office) Building," and apparently that is something that you wish to avoid.

PRESTON BISSELL
Eau Claire, Wisconsin

AWAKEN TO THE PLIGHT

I COMMEND THE ARTICLE, "THE Making of Immanuel," by John-Charles Duffy that appears in the October 2003 issue of SUNSTONE. Mormonism seeks to marginalize the fringe that is intent on pursuing the origins of its foundation. My personal take, though, is that the path to progression is not in restoring the past, but in learning from it and moving yet closer to an ideal—for sprinkled amidst the glory of the past are also found heavy mistakes, which if we fail to learn from, we will repeat.

That said, I would like to set the record

straight on a few particulars that Duffy cited in relation to me:

Statement: "Church intervention led to the collapse of his study group."

Correction: The Church did not "intervene," per se. True, it was threatening some participants in the study group to take away their temple recommends or even membership, but neither the Church nor any of its leaders ever issued an edict to discontinue the group itself. That came through a consensus of the group leadership.

Statement: "Allan fled to a remote location in California, convinced that nuclear holocaust was imminent."

Correction: It was in Oregon. And the reason for the trek was with the intent of helping escort a group of people to safety should a nuclear holocaust occur.

Statement: "Allan was excommunicated for his allegiance to teachings of Avraham Gileadi."

Correction: Affinity to Gileadi's work was a factor, but not a heavy factor. The stated reason for excommunication was "for extreme beliefs regarding a Davidic Servant."

Statement: "Allan believed himself to be 'the one mighty and strong.'"

Correction: This should read "one and only . . ." I now believe there are many mighty and strong (e.g. 144,000), of which I am one. Some I consider to be more spiritually advanced or finely honed than myself.

Statement: "Allan has announced . . . that a recently discovered Bible code implores him to run for president in 2004 and predicts that he will win."

Correction: This should read "could win." I never stated that I "would" win, only that my candidacy was being presented to the American people as an opportunity for them to awaken to the plight we are in as a country and seek a mighty change of heart, thereby averting the destructions that otherwise await us as a people.

STERLING D. ALLAN
Manti, Utah

(Letter excerpted from comments on Sterling Allan's website: <www.greaterthings.com>)

CLARIFYING PURPOSE

I AM TRULY SORRY TO LEARN THAT I have disappointed Richard Rands (letter, "No Rationale for Abuse," SUNSTONE, October 2003) with my response to Lavina Fielding Anderson in the July 2003 issue. Richard is a good-hearted soul whom I am especially sorry to disappoint. I think his comments arise mainly from his misconstruing the purport of my earlier comments.

Apparently he took my comments as an attempt to rationalize abuse. What I thought I was doing was broadening the context within which we might understand Lavina's complaints about instances of abuse by Church leaders. I mentioned that the Church is no democracy not as a "defen(se) against [its] imperfections," but only because Lavina had complained about its violations of "due process" and "academic freedom." Similarly, my references to the Church as a normal bureaucracy, or as absorbing influences from the outside, were not offered in any way as an excuse or apology for anything, as Richard apparently assumed.

My purpose in responding to Lavina was a quest for understanding rather than judgment. If we are primarily after judgment, we can easily find places to point the finger, inside the Church and outside, especially when we have only one side of the story. Understanding, however, comes harder but ultimately gets us closer to the truth, rather than just to the facts.

ARMAND L. MAUSS
Irvine, California

DATELINE PASADENA

I'M WRITING CONCERNING YOUR October 2003 SUNSTONE "People" item which read: "DISAPPOINTED. The Primary children of the Pasadena California Stake, after stake leaders decided to cancel their annual Halloween Trick or Treat activity. According to local sources, the stake president finds the activity inappropriate because of its connection to a pagan holiday."

I'm always amused when I see a media re-

port on something I actually know about. Almost invariably the report is inaccurate, and it's often accompanied by even less accurate speculation in an attempt to juice up the story. Reality, however, is usually a lot more mundane. For example: DATELINE PASADENA, sometime in January 2003:

Stake president: "How many stake sponsored activities should we have this year?"

First counselor: "Usually we have two."

Stake president: "I notice we've scheduled three."

First counselor: "Let's stick to two so we don't over-program the members."

Stake president: "Which one do you suggest we eliminate?"

First counselor: "How about the Halloween activity? The wards can have their own if they wish."

Stake president: "Okay."

DATELINE PASADENA, 31 October 2003:

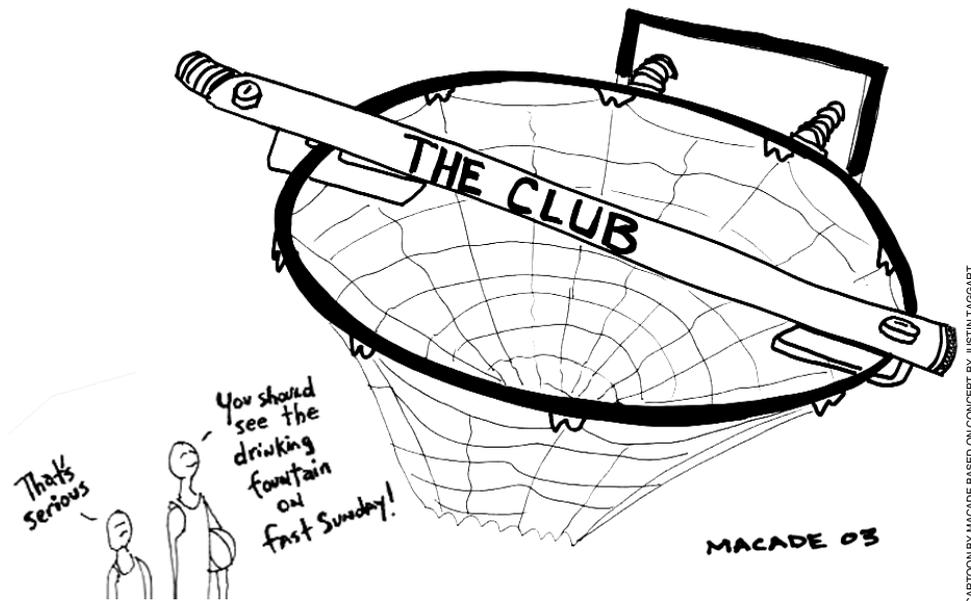
First counselor's wife to their eleven- and six-year-old Primary children: "Hey, kids, South Pasadena and San Marino Wards are having their combined trick-or-treat party tonight. Do you wish our ward had planned one?"

Primary kids: "No! We wanna go out with our friends."

STEVE BRADFORD

First Counselor, Pasadena California Stake

EDITOR'S RESPONSE: Upon receipt of this letter, SUNSTONE contacted its source for the report who wrote back with a very detailed account of how this decision—made, no doubt, at the stake level as benignly as described—had been "translated" quite differently, with all the "pagan connection" trappings, at our source's ward council meeting.



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FROM THE EDITOR

STATE OF THE BODY

By Dan Wotherspoon

We offer a hearty vote of thanks to Michael Austin for his great help as SUNSTONE's book review editor for the past several years. Michael, an associate professor of English at Shepherd College in Shepherdstown, West Virginia, will continue as a regular SUNSTONE columnist.

We're excited to welcome Brad Woodworth to the SUNSTONE editorial team, succeeding Michael in working with book reviewers. Brad holds bachelor's and master's degrees from BYU and Harvard and a doctorate in Russian history from Indiana University. Brad has published reviews in SUNSTONE and Dialogue and is a frequent participant in Sunstone symposiums. He currently lives in New Haven, Connecticut, with his wife, Cherie, and their daughter.

Always enthusiastic, Brad brings wonderful, fresh energy to this new "calling" (well, the pay's the same). If you are interested in reviewing books for SUNSTONE, please email him at: <bradley.woodworth@yale.edu>.

FOR THE PAST couple of months, I've been planning to write this editorial about the results of the survey we passed out at the 2003 Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium. And that's what I've done—mostly. But the deadline for this editorial coincides with my three-year anniversary with Sunstone. And, as do most anniversaries, this one has cast its reflective shade over my mind and heart. Time to take stock, time to try to make whatever course corrections those evaluations suggest. So some of my anniversary reflections are also part of this editorial. The two topics are nice complements for each other, but I think they work best presented in reverse order.

AS PART OF the application process for the SUNSTONE editor's job, finalists were asked to write a "not-more-than-ten-double-spaced-page essay" that, in Elbert Peck's words, didn't have to be "brilliantly original, for obviously much of what Sunstone is about has already been thought of and expressed." Still, we were to give our "take and perspective." Our essays were to focus on several issues concerning the magazine, but also on the

general question: what is the Sunstone Foundation, and why is it important?

During my anniversary mullings, I began thinking about my application essay—and, somehow, found it in my, um, "files." (Those who have seen my office know I use that term very loosely.) As I re-read the essay, my first reaction was embarrassment over the somewhat lofty tone I had used in a few spots. And, clearly, I had failed to be "brilliantly original." Still, I find I still like some of the ideas I'd played with there. Were I writing that essay today, I imagine I would come close to saying many of the same things.

I've chosen to share the following section of my essay partly in response to Joseph Romney's letter in this issue. In response to the "Why We Stay?" reflections in the October 2003 issue, Romney expresses his "disappointment that none of the five essays include a forthright declaration that 'we stay' because we believe that the Church is basically what it claims to be" (p. 2).

From my application essay:

At times through the years, I have wondered what a common testimony (if there is such a thing) among Sunstone participants and supporters might be. I am certain that any standard confession of "I know the Church is true" would not be the first thought for many. "I know the Church has many truths" might be a bit closer but still not it. I have decided that for most it might fundamentally be, "I know the Church is home." I like that metaphor, and I know Sunstone has played a major role in my learning to value the Church, in every sense of the word, as my home. . . .

Home: a place for fierce loyalty and communion, but also where children of wildly different temperaments can each explore her or his individuality. What a boring dinner table it would be without family members sharing the highlights of their very different days! Home: a place for the best wrestles. How can we really love a brother or a God that we haven't tested ourselves against again and again? . . . Home: a place where

family takes the forefront. Oh sure, our family might seem sort of weird at times, but it is ours, and it is good, and, by golly, we are going to fight for it! Home: the place where we have learned at the feet of our parents and older brothers and sisters what it ultimately means to be a "grownup." Home: the place where we learn that we are worthy of unconditional love. . . .

A true family does not believe it can be whole without Tommy, Jake, Liz, or Sarah, even though they are struggling through their adolescent years or feel a bit frustrated by the way things are going at home right now. I believe the vast majority of those for whom Sunstone plays an important role want to feel at home in their church. Sunstone very much is, and should be, about strengthening these feelings.

I appreciate Brother Romney's letter and his wondering about why a certain flavor of testimony might have been missing from those essays. And I don't know what he might generate in an attempt to articulate an inclusive, bottom-line, common-denominator testimony phrase for Sunstone-interested-folk. But even years later, I still like the theme of "home" landing somewhere in that mix. Yet I would very likely change my, "I know the Church is home" more toward an "I hope the Church can be a true home for me."

My sense of Sunstone survey data, from this year's symposium and that which has been gathered all the way back to Sunstone's early years, is that Sunstone has a core constituency of believers and hopefuls—folks who, for a wide variety of reasons, want to stay, want to fight for a home. Plenty of Sunstoners would feel fine about saying, "I stay because I believe the Church is basically what it claims to be." Many others wouldn't, but I sense that nearly all of us would admit to at least some small remnant of hope of, "Oh, but if it only could be all it claims to be. I would surely love to live in that home."

I MUST have been in a metaphor mood while I wrote that application essay, for I played with a second one as well:

If as the Doctrine and Covenants says, the "body hath need of every member, that all may be edified together" (D&C 84:110), to what part of the body might Sunstone best be compared? What role does Sunstone serve in furthering the overall health of the body of Christ? I have tentatively settled on the notion that Sunstone's role is much like that performed by *skin*. . . .



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Many Sunstone supporters presently consider themselves, or are considered by others, to be on the margins: the place, like our skin, in closest contact with the outside world. Skin is also our most vulnerable organ—permeable and tender, yet also protective and tough. . . . Skin is sensitive—one of our best warning systems. Sometimes danger is signaled by our hair standing on end, or our skin becoming clammy; skin is often the organ where we first feel pressure or come to experience pain. Sunstone, by being alert to so much going on in so many areas, serves the Church well as one of its most sensitive organs. It is also through our skin that we most quickly give expression to our fantastic diversity as human beings. Sunstone understands that no two fingerprints are alike, no two complexions are exactly the same. . . .

When Sunstone is working best—as directed by its mission statement—giving expression to the “rich spiritual, intellectual, social, and artistic qualities of Mormon history and contemporary life,” it also serves much like skin. At times, the expressions it hosts are extremely tender, at times, quite toughly worded. It is also by way of our skin that we are most vulnerable to the sting of the gadfly, and the Church is well-served by Sunstone as it sponsors forums that allow the artist, storyteller, historian, essayist, poet, and humorist to perform their enlivening roles. No work is a worthy effort if it does not cause a variety of reactions, if it does not engender discussion and, in President Hugh B. Brown’s words, “more thinking.” . . . All complacency must be stung to attention, all of us must be aroused to consider how much further we have still yet to travel.

The body has need of each of its members. To each is given a gift, which, in turn, is to be shared with the whole. Sunstone must continue to support each giver in such a way that her or his gift might be both given and received.

I’m far less likely now, three years later, to have written of Sunstone’s “skin-like” role in terms so obviously externally aimed. As I re-read my old words, I picture myself practically jumping up and down, convinced that if I just had the chance to make this case, “the Church” might listen and give Sunstone accolades for serving as resident gadfly.

I don’t think I’ve imagined that reaction for more than just a few minutes once I actu-

ally began sitting in this chair. But what I still like about the Sunstone-as-skin metaphor is its emphasis on diversity: no two fingerprints alike; each individual feeling different things; each member of the body reacting differently to things it’s sensitized to, whether its “hair standing on end” or (I wish I’d added it then!) the unmatched sensation of a caress or loving touch. No, Sunstone has become far too personal to me to spend a lot of time imagining its platform potentialities, or to think of aiming a megaphone at that big building three blocks down and three blocks over from our offices.

EVERY time I look at Sunstone survey results, I’m glad for the reminders it contains. The surveys remind me of our individualness more than our groupness, our “member”-ness above our “Church”-ness. I can’t help but locate myself in the data, and it’s always a great reality check to note that my interests and sense of what’s under- or over-emphasized in our forums don’t match with many of yours.

Each tick mark on a survey gives only the briefest hint of a personal story. As you view the numbers that follow, I hope you will stop in each section or query to find yourself. Then, as you do, fill in the details. We’d love to hear your story, your report of what is happening in your part of the body.

THE FOLLOWING DATA is excerpted from ninety-one stories we collected at the 2003 Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium, held 13–16 August at the Salt Lake Sheraton City Centre Hotel. Not all respondents answered every question. Our great thanks to Elise Eggett, a volunteer at the symposium who compiled the data into a very cool report (available on the Sunstone website, <www.sunstoneonline.com>).

AGE OF 2003 SYMPOSIUM ATTENDEES

6%	under age 25
7%	age 25–34
8%	age 35–44
14%	age 45–54
35%	age 55–64
30%	age 65 or older ¹

EDUCATION LEVELS OF ATTENDEES

22%	graduate degree, professional
33%	graduate degree, academic
34%	bachelor’s degree
11%	high school or some college ²

GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF ATTENDEES

62.5%	live in Utah
25%	live in the western U.S.

9% live in the eastern U.S.
3.5% live outside the U.S.³

NUMBER OF PAST SALT LAKE OR REGIONAL SYMPOSIUMS ATTENDED

43% attended 10 or more
22% attended between 5 and 9
24% attended between 2 and 4
10% first-time attendees

RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND AND CURRENT LEVEL OF CHURCH PARTICIPATION

48% LDS, active participant
16% LDS, semi-active participant
25% LDS less- or non-participating
5% former LDS, actively participating to extent they can
7% former LDS, no longer interested in participation in LDS church life

BELIEF IN LDS DOCTRINE, SCRIPTURE, AND CURRENT CHURCH POLITY

Participants were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 10 their level of agreement with five statements, 10 equalling a very high level of belief.

I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God and Savior of the world.

63% 8-10
20% 4-7
16% 1-3

I believe Joseph Smith is a prophet of God through whom the Gospel of Jesus Christ and essential teachings, priesthood keys, and ordinances were restored.

41% 8-10
78% 4-7
31% 1-3

I believe the Book of Mormon is essentially a faithful translation of an ancient record.

33% 8-10
26% 4-7
41% 1-3

I believe in the essential correctness of LDS teachings about the "plan of salvation."

38% 8-10
35% 4-7
27% 1-3

I believe today's prophets, apostles, and other general leaders continue to receive specific divine revelation and are leading the Church as God would have them do.

26% 8-10
34% 4-7
40% 1-3

INTEREST LEVEL IN SYMPOSIUM TOPICS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Contemporary LDS issues
80% High 19% Medium 1% Low

Mormon history
77% High 18% Medium 5% Low

Chance to meet friends and others interested in LDS experience and scholarship
64% High 24% Medium 12% Low

LDS doctrine, theology, philosophy
55% High 33% Medium 13% Low

Social, political, and general religious issues, even if not specifically tied to Mormonism
37% High 47% Medium 16% Low

Book of Mormon and other LDS scripture
33% High 46% Medium 21% Low

Humor sessions
33% High 46% Medium 21% Low

Films or plays
21% High 40% Medium 38% Low

Literature and art
20% High 35% Medium 45% Low

OTHER TOPICS OR SESSION TYPES RESPONDENTS ENJOY OR WOULD LIKE TO SEE DISCUSSED MORE AT SUNSTONE

"Need more on service opportunities"
"More sociology and psychology"
"Roundtables for topic sharing"
"Successes rather than failures in Church programs"
"AIDS and orphans"
"Science versus creationism"
"Having respondents from the Church would surely be interesting on some topics."

WHAT TOPICS SEEM TO BE OVERDONE?

"Book of Mormon historicity"
"Gays and lesbians"

"Women's issues"
"Retrospectives on Sunstone and Dialogue"
"Hearing from 'the Club' of excommunicants. I'm tired of their griping."

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING SYMPOSIUMS

"More audience participation. Speakers should speak from outlines. Too many papers read word for word."
"Find ways to promote the symposium with the youth."
"More group hymn singing"
"My experience confirmed that the Mormon History Association is more balanced and of greater interest in topics. It covers all sects connected with the restoration and doesn't pander to apostate 'Utah' church types."

AH, home! Can you imagine a more interesting dinner table than one with all of these family members? It's clear some of us will enjoy the meals in this issue more than others. But can (or should) it be any other way? *Bon appetite!* ☺

NOTES

1. These results are very close to the age demographics gathered from the 187 responses returned in our October 2002 SUNSTONE reader survey. However, a few more readers were in the age 45-54 category (16%).

2. These results correlate closely with data gathered in a 1999 survey of Sunstone attendees. Of the 314 people who returned surveys, 54.5% had done post-graduate work, and 34% again reported they had bachelor's degrees.

3. These statistics differ from Sunstone's overall geographical demographics. Active "Sunstoners" (defined as current subscribers, donors, and regular attendees at either the Salt Lake or one of Sunstone's several regional symposiums) are geographically distributed as follows: 40.2% live in Utah; 34.5% live in the western U.S.; 24.1% in the eastern U.S.; 1.2% live abroad.



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SUNSTONE invites short musings: chatty reports, cultural trend sightings, theological meditations. All lovely things of good report, please share them. Send submissions to: <dan@sunstoneonline.com>

Righteous Dominion

JESUS IN THE WARD

COLUMN EDITOR'S NOTE: *We are honoring the request of the writer of the following story to remain anonymous. Please continue to send in your stories of leaders and others who are true exemplars of the love of Christ. Email your stories to: <StewartSLC@aol.com>*

—ALAN AND VICKIE EASTMAN

WHEN I WAS CALLED AS BISHOP OF A YOUNG single adults ward, I knew I would face many challenges, and some might be unusual. But I never anticipated that one would be having Jesus Christ in my ward. Before you think I am being sacrilegious, read on.

Bob (I'll call him that) had been attending our ward for quite some time. A school friend had brought him to our meetings. He was very interested in the Church and seemed very earnest and sincere.

The elders assigned to our ward had been teaching him and announced one week that he was ready to be baptized. We already had a baptism scheduled, so he was interviewed and added to the baptism program. At the service, we had the good feelings that usually go with witnessing adult conversions.

The next Sunday, a fast Sunday, Bob and the other convert were confirmed as Church members in sacrament meeting. Later, the first one to come to the pulpit to bear his testimony was Bob.

He began by expressing how much the gospel meant to him. Because his feelings ran deep, and he thought a great deal about things, he was taking a considerable amount of time. I was becoming a little concerned that he might be one of those people whose testimonies tend to go on and on. Then I started having difficulty figuring out what he meant by what he was saying. What he was saying did not seem to fit with what a new convert would normally say in his testimony. He began to sound as if he were talking about *His* gospel.

He then announced that he was our elder brother, Jesus Christ.

A young man in the front row immediately stood up and, with evident displeasure, walked out.

As Bob added his hope that all of us in the ward would be able to pray about the matter and receive confirmation of his divinity, I turned to a member of the stake presidency next to

me and said, "I guess it's time for me to do something."

I stood up, put an arm around Bob, and said we loved him, that he was indeed our brother, but that we knew he was not our elder brother Jesus Christ.

He calmly left the pulpit and sat down.

The meeting continued, with several members of the ward giving testimony of their knowledge of the real Jesus Christ. Despite, or perhaps because of its beginning, this turned into a very spiritual testimony meeting. Afterward, I asked Bob to come to my office to talk.

I once again expressed to him my testimony that he was not Jesus Christ, and as I listened, he again, calmly, quietly testified that he was. Never having faced this situation before, I was hard-pressed to know what to do. I reiterated to Bob how much we loved him and wanted him to associate with us, but I might have to convene a disciplinary court to excommunicate him, because I just couldn't imagine how we could have a mortal member of Jesus Christ's church who claimed to be Jesus Christ himself. But I said I would seek the stake president's counsel and then talk to Bob next Sunday. He took it all very calmly, I suppose because he was pretty sure that in the meantime, the truth would be revealed to me.

As I had left the chapel after the testimony meeting, I had noticed that some of the women in the ward seemed to be upset to the point of tears about Bob's declaration, so after I finished my meeting with Bob, I decided to go to Relief Society to talk about what happened.

I talked about how chemical imbalances in the brain can sometimes lead to mental illness and delusions and that a common delusion among sufferers is for them to believe they are famous people, such as Jesus Christ. One of the sisters responded that she had a relative who had experienced this, and another sister volunteered that she at one time had similar mental difficulties and, for a period of time, had thought she, herself, was Jesus Christ.

I urged the sisters to not reject Bob, but as their own strength allowed, to show we loved him as our brother, but not as Jesus Christ.

I reached the stake president just as fast as I could. Fortunately he had much more wisdom than I. We discussed the situation at length and consulted the *Handbook of Instructions*. Nothing in the *Handbook* said people should be excommunicated just for their beliefs. A disciplinary court should only be considered if a person persisted in proclaiming doctrines contrary to the basic doctrines of the Church (this certainly seemed to qualify as a basic doctrine).

So, the next Sunday, I told Bob that we would have no problem with his continued participation in the ward if he

Mormon Media Image

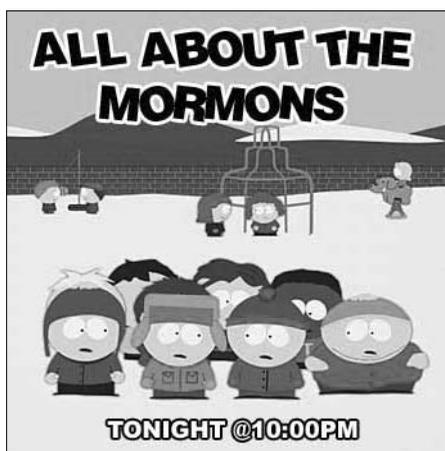
THE MORMONS COME TO SOUTH PARK

THE INCIDENT IN WHICH MARTIN HARRIS LOST 116 pages of the Book of Mormon manuscript was dramatized—and satirized—in a recent episode of Comedy Central's coarse animated series, *South Park*. When an LDS boy, Gary Harrison, and his family move into Stan Marsh's neighborhood, the Marshes (along with the TV audience) get a crash course in Mormon origins with the help of flashbacks to 1820s Palmyra. After initially being impressed by Gary and his family—think of the most *special* Mormon family you've ever met, then quadruple the specialness—Stan becomes incredulous about LDS beliefs. Seer stones in a hat, golden plates that only Joseph Smith could see, 116 lost pages that couldn't be reproduced—how dumb must Mormons be, Stan won-

ders, not to realize that Joseph Smith was a fraud?

Still, the Mormons get the last word. "Maybe Joseph Smith made it all up," Gary tells Stan. "But I have a great life and a great family, and I have the Book of Mormon to thank for it. . . . You're so high and mighty, you couldn't look past my religion and just be my friend. You've got a lot of growing up to do, buddy."

This is Joseph Smith's second appearance on *South Park*. In an earlier episode, he joined forces with other world religious figures, including Jesus, Mohammed, Buddha, and Krishna, to battle the rise of a new cult (see SUNSTONE, Nov. 2001, 17). *South Park* creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone are also responsible for the film *Orgazmo*, about a Mormon missionary turned crime-fighting porn star.



Above (l to r): Butters, Kyle, Stan, and Cartman, regular characters from *South Park*; Right: Martin Harris records Joseph Smith's translation of the Book of Mormon as Joseph gazes into his hat; Right inset: Moroni visits Joseph Smith, declaring "I am a Native American."



would follow certain ground rules. I asked him not to discuss his belief that he was Jesus Christ in any of the ward meetings nor with individuals at church. I acknowledged his sincere belief that he was Jesus Christ and said if someone directly asked him, he did not need to deny his beliefs. I further asked him not to offer his testimony in fast and testimony meeting. He amiably agreed.

IF JESUS CHRIST were to appear as a young man in our day, I believe he would look and act much like Bob. Bob's facial hair made him look much as artists through the centuries have portrayed Jesus as a young man. Bob's demeanor also fit. He was

unfailingly calm, meek, thoughtful, considerate of others, and very sincere.

In the ensuing months, Bob and I had many discussions. I tried every intellectual and spiritual argument I could think of to convince him that his belief was a delusion based on a chemical imbalance. Bob frankly told me that he was in counseling for mental difficulties and had some time ago stopped taking his medications. I encouraged him to resume taking his medications. But he continued to bear testimony that he was Jesus Christ, and that eventually I, and others, including President Hinckley, would receive answer to prayer that he, Bob, was in fact Jesus Christ.

Despite our differences over his beliefs, Bob and I developed a great respect for each other. I greatly respected him, his personal qualities, and, yes, even his persistence in what he sincerely believed to be true. In turn, Bob respected my treatment of him in our discussions and respected me as the bishop of the ward.

Ward members related to Bob in various ways. Some embraced him and encouraged him and let him know we loved him. Some were able only to just be friendly to him. A few who were more shaken by the events were able only to ignore him. But I did not know of anyone who rejected him as a person.

One fast Sunday morning many months later, Bob came to me just before the sacrament meeting and said that he would like to bear his testimony that day. He looked different, clean-shaven and especially happy. I suggested that he not bear his testimony that day, but that we talk right after the meeting.

When he came to my office, he explained that earlier that week, he had realized he was not Jesus Christ. He explained how he had come to that conclusion and said he had very carefully recorded all of his thoughts in his diary, so that if he were confused again, he could read how he had come to the truth. We agreed that I would briefly announce in priesthood meeting that day that Bob had asked me to tell the Elder's quorum members that he now knew the truth that he was not Jesus Christ. I told him that he could bear his testimony the next fast Sunday if all was still well.

COMPARE BOB'S EXPERIENCE with that of another young man whom I will call Bill.

Bill was new in our ward and made an appointment with me to clear up some things in his life. He had recently moved into the area and met an active LDS young lady whom he wanted to marry. He explained that he had been inactive for a long time but wanted now to come back to the Church. He told me what had happened to him just before he moved to our area. He had decided to leave his past behind and become active again. He had gone to a young singles ward in that area. After he'd attended for a few weeks, the bishop had asked to see him. He

All-Seeing Eye

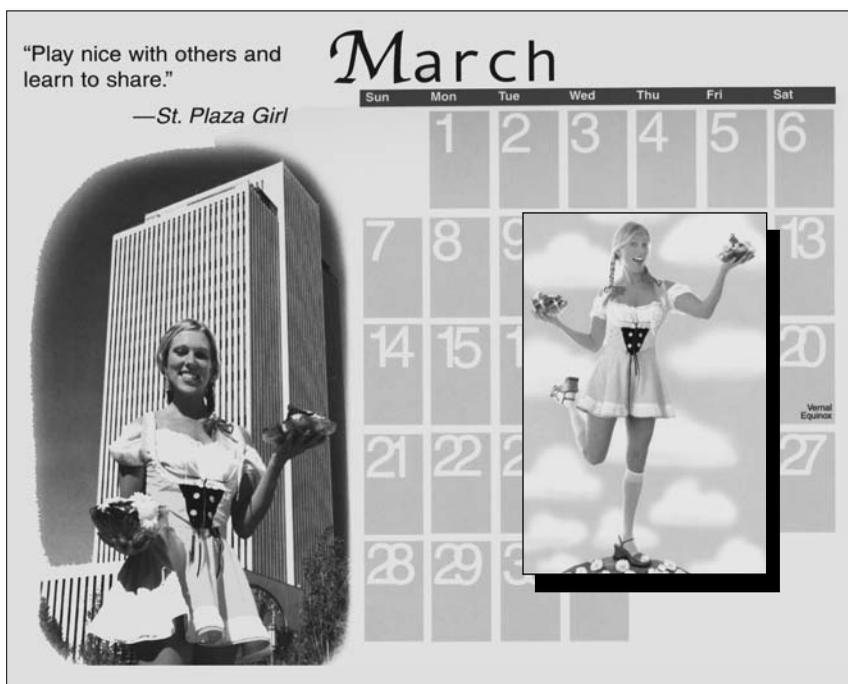
JELL-O DIPLOMACY

A NEW CALENDAR UNVEILED IN SALT LAKE FOR THE YEAR 2004 strives to bring unity to a community divided over the Main Street Plaza controversy. Dubbed the "St. Plaza Girl" (modeled after the St. Provo Girl, the mascot of locally brewed St. Provo beer), Heidi offers a variety of inspirational quotes each month while modeling in or near the plaza holding various servings of green Jell-O.

"Mistakes are fat free," and "Better than Prozac!" are just a couple of Heidi's reasons why gelatin might be the answer for bringing the divided community back together. "Green Jell-O . . . is a recipe for love. So let's put this darn Main Street thing behind us with a big helping of love. I like mine with whipped cream, though I hear shaved carrots also work."

When the St. Plaza Girl asks, "Can't we Utahns all just get along?" The reply is an enthusiastic, "Heck, yeah!"

Published by White Horse Books, the calendar is available for \$10.99 and may be ordered at <www.utahwhitehorsebooks.com>.



had been thrilled, thinking the bishop wanted to get to know him better. Instead, the bishop asked him to stop attending the ward. Bill told me that his hair and clothing at the time still reflected his past. The bishop told him that the members of the ward felt very uncomfortable in his presence and that he was therefore asking Bill to leave and not come back.

I WAS VERY pleased, some time after I had been released as bishop, to learn in stake conference that both Bob and Bill were to be ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood.

Lighter Minds

ARTICLES OF REGULATION

Joseph Smith penned the Thirteen Articles of Faith as statements of basic Latter-day Saint beliefs. But do they truly guide Mormon life and thinking today? Not according to a group of friends, including J. Jacob Sorensen (his official General Authority-sounding name), of Sandy, Utah, who in 1999, began listening for “Articles of Regulation,” the meta-messages that seem to guide modern Latter-day Saints as much, or even more, than the Prophet’s list. The Articles are continually evolving. Please send your suggestions to SUNSTONE, and we’ll pass them along to the compilers (and maybe even print a revised list in the future).

- First We believe that the most difficult and complex questions can be answered with a mindless cliché.
- Second We believe that the main ordinance of the gospel is home/visiting teaching.
- Third We believe that any personal experience can be adapted to fit the lesson.
- Fourth We believe in redundancy. The only way the Saints will ever live a gospel principle is to have a lesson on it over and over again. (Or “The Lord hasn’t revealed more to us because we haven’t mastered the basics yet” rule.)
- Fifth We believe in being orthodox. Saints should think within the box. Truths of the gospel cannot be learned if new things are brought up. (Or “The smallest box wins” rule.)

- Sixth We believe that humankind will be saved by ignorance. (The “What does this have to do with my salvation?” rule.)
- Seventh We believe that reading the scriptures, praying, attending church, and obeying the commandments will solve any problem a person has. (The “Your experience doesn’t fit correlation parameters, so it doesn’t really exist” principle.)
- Eighth No matter what the facts reveal, we believe they support our position and strengthen our testimony. (The “We may be wrong, but we’re never in doubt” rule.)
- Ninth We believe that everything that happens to us in life is part of God’s special plan just for us. It was supposed to happen, and it is a blessing.
- Tenth We believe that whatever the topic for this week’s priesthood lesson, it is the second most important principle of the gospel.
- Eleventh We believe than any comment made during a lesson, no matter how stupid or irrelevant, if it’s said with enough emotion, is of profound importance. (The “If you don’t have something to say, say something anyway” rule.)
- Twelfth We believe we should obey our leaders without questioning the wisdom of their instructions. (The “Even though we don’t believe in infallibility, our leaders can’t be wrong” principle.)
- Thirteenth We believe that people who have never experienced particular problems understand them much better than people who have.

Mormon Media Image II

PLAYING THE POLYGAMY CARD

ALTHOUGH BRYAN FELLOWS IS A POPULAR RECURRING *Saturday Night Live* character (portrayed by cast member Tracey Morgan), his lesser-known brother, Ryan Fellows, did not appear until the 6 December episode of the skit, “Bryan Fellows Safari Planet.” The Reverend (and U.S. presidential candidate) Al Sharpton hosted the show and played the part of Ryan Fellows.

The skit’s running gag is that although the show is about introducing viewers to members of the animal kingdom, Bryan is not an accredited zoologist (he is a high school drop-out, however) and is paranoid around the animals, often having visions of the visiting creatures attacking him or, in one instance, giving him a bad haircut.

In the episode with Sharpton, Bryan and Ryan are visited by a seal. When the animal’s keeper says that seals usually gather in groups of one male and thirty females, Sharpton’s character exclaims, “Are you saying that seal is a Mormon?”

Though LDS Public Affairs often challenges media references to Mormon polygamists, there has been no official statement to date regarding the seal’s alleged membership in the Church. Nor have officials commented on the likelihood that Sharpton will win the Mormon vote.



Bryan Fellows (left, played by Tracey Morgan) gestures to his brother Ryan (played by the Reverend Al Sharpton)

Twenty Years Ago In Sunstone

The following reflection by then-regular SUNSTONE columnist Michael Hicks is excerpted from his "Aesthetics and Noetics" essay in the November/December 1983 issue.

ART TASTES OF RIGHT IN A WORLD THAT IS essentially wrong. It speaks of health in a world essentially sick. And—here many fail to understand—it speaks of strength in a world essentially weak. Art, strong art, is potent to the degree that it may disarm or momentarily injure us in our weakness. For this reason, we sometimes fight art that is difficult. Like the wrestling angel, it wounds as it blesses.

The danger of religious art is the danger of religion itself. Rather than a force for right, health, and strength, it can and usually does become a mere salve for their opposites—wrong, sickness, weakness. That religion saves best, I think, that provokes us and challenges us. (Joseph made the telling remark that every divine communication will tell us things we never thought of before. The unthought-of, to turn his remark around, is a sign of truth.) Yet religion remains for most people an opiate—or, to hold to our terms, an anaesthetic. And most religious art deadens feeling by repetition, numbs by a litany of formulae, or puts to sleep by a surfeit of effects. The truly aesthetic, to the contrary, awakens feeling by variation, order, clarity. Thus any art should be above all a piece of artifice. Like language, it is a contrivance, one that informs the mind (read "spirit") by arousing physical sensations that correspond to ideas. Its logic may not be the logic of you or me, but that is how it teaches.

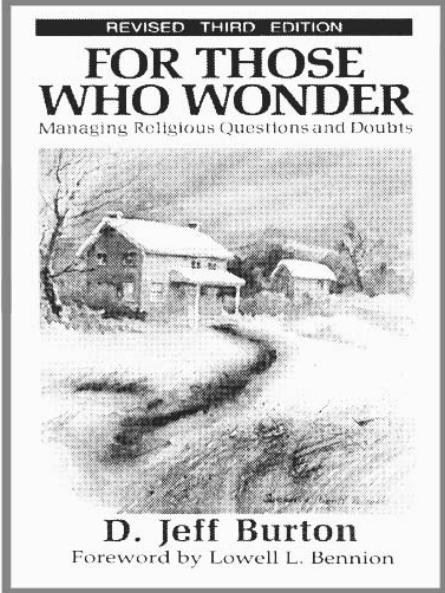
The aesthetic in religion and in art should not really lift us out of the body, but drive us, rejoicing, back into it. We should be, as the philosopher put it, "no longer swimming, floating, but walking and dancing."

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POTENTIAL BOISE, IDAHO, STUDY GROUP FORMING

As the Sunstone contact person for Idaho, I have received a few inquiries about potential events for the Boise area. As it seems that there might be enough people interested in organizing a group (and I am using the term loosely), I am asking interested persons to meet at my apartment on Thursday, 12 February 2004, at 7 p.m. This meeting will be to discuss the plausibility of organizing events around LDS topics. This will be the time to decide which direction, if any, we want to go, such as: scripture study, hosting speakers, book club, potluck dinners, etc.

Area readers please respond to me whether you would like to participate and give some ideas about the direction we should take. I look forward to meeting you all!

The meeting will be held at 2227 Stephen Ave, #102 in Boise, just off of Park Center and Pennsylvania. Feel free to email or phone if you have more questions or need directions: <dylanjmcdonald@hotmail.com>, (208) 381-0735

DYLAN MCDONALD

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SPIRITUAL PATHS AFTER SEPTEMBER 1993

By Lynne Kanavel Whitesides, Paul James Toscano,
Maxine Hanks, D. Michael Quinn, and Lavina Fielding Anderson



During September 1993, six high-profile LDS scholars and feminists were excommunicated or, in one case, disfellowshipped, for apostasy. The disciplinary actions against the “September Six,” as they came to be called, received national news attention, including a front page story in the New York Times and a report on National Public Radio with comments from Elder Dallin H. Oaks. Many observers believed the September Six were victims of an orchestrated “purge” intended to enforce orthodoxy in the Church. LDS officials denied that local Church leaders had been instructed to discipline these members, but they also affirmed the importance of preserving purity of doctrine and keeping wolves from entering the flock.

The September 1993 excommunications were traumatic not only for the six individuals themselves but also for other Latter-day Saints who saw themselves as having feminist or liberal leanings, or a questioning or intellectual temperament. Was there still a place for such Saints in the Church? What were the perils of participating in independent Mormon forums such as Sunstone? That many Saints identified strongly with the September Six can be seen from the candlelight vigils held outside stake centers, the two hundred people who gathered for a prayer service during the midst of the controversy, or the one thousand white roses delivered to General Authorities as a symbolic plea for reconciliation.

Eventually, the term “September Six” came to evoke, for many, the disciplining of other prominent Mormon intellectuals in subsequent years and the dismissals of certain professors during academic freedom controversies at BYU. Lionized as heroic figures by some and viewed as dangerous malcontents by others, the September Six have become a symbol for the troubled relationship between the institutional Church and some of its more independently minded members.

On 14 August 2003, the Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium featured a panel discussion that brought five of the September Six together to report on the spiritual paths they have taken during the decade since September 1993. (The sixth, conservative Biblical scholar Avraham Gileadi, has declined to participate in events protesting or memorializing the September 1993 actions and is the only one to date to have been rebaptized.) Have the other five negotiated new relationships with the Church? Have they found other spiritual homes? Ultimately, their remarks cast light on the question: What happens when personal spirituality and institutional affiliation are disrupted?

SPIRITUAL PATHS AFTER SEPTEMBER 1993

I wanted the Church to feel like home. It never did. The absence of the feminine not only makes a home lonely, but it also damages everybody in the house.

THE DANCE OF LOVE

By Lynne Kanavel Whitesides

A FEW DAYS AGO, I SAW A HAWK FLYING WITH A snake in its talons. In the Native American tradition this is the symbol of the above and the below, masculine and feminine, the rational and non-rational, a balance of the two. It is, for me, a symbol of life itself. Ten years ago, before I left the Church, I was living an extremely rational life. I had been married in the temple, my husband was a doctor, we had three children, I worked for Sunstone, I had a lot of friends. I was miserable. My life, the way it had been prescribed, was killing me. And so, I exploded out of the Church and my marriage and onto a very different path. I was looking for God and for myself.

Ever since I was a little girl, I have wanted to experience God. I used to go to sleep imagining Him, sometimes scaring myself with how big it all seemed to me. But I always knew that that was what I wanted. Like Joseph Campbell has said, I wanted not to understand the meaning of life (or God), but to experience being alive. To me, this means to experience or to merge with God. This desire is the reason I left the Lutheran Church, joining the Mormon Church when I was eighteen. I was sure this would be the path. And in a way, it was. To borrow a metaphor from Ram Dass in a reflection about death, leaving Mormonism was like taking off a really tight shoe. It enabled me to move in a direction I hadn't even known existed.

When I left the Church, I was very angry—although “angry” doesn't quite say it right. I was in a rage. As far as I could tell, the Church was full of the masculine with the feminine somewhere way out in the margins. There didn't seem to me to be a place for people to talk about the pain in their lives. The Church felt rigid, erect, with no soft places for one to find comfort, no place to be able to mourn. I thought that most people—and, for sure, most women—felt the same way I did. I wanted the Church to feel like home. It never did. The absence of the feminine not only makes a home lonely, but it also

damages everybody in the house. And as far as I could tell then and now, very few Latter-day Saints were embracing the feminine. But then, there isn't much embracing of the feminine in the world at large, period. We can see evidence of this lack every day. We live on the feminine—the earth, our mother, who gives us life and embraces us in death—and yet we are so disconnected we are trying to kill her and ourselves at the same time.

AS I SAID, I left the Church in a rage, and I have not looked back. What I did do was look inward. I realized in a dim, far-off, unconscious way that I was blaming anyone and everyone I could for what was going on in my life. My parents, my ex-husband, my friends, the Church—oh, and of course, God. Anywhere and anyone that was not me. This was an heroic attempt. It took all of my energy to be able to pretend nothing was wrong with me, to hide the pain I was in.

About this time, two things happened. I found an incredible therapist, and I began doing Native American ceremonies. Both of these, I believe, are gifts from God. One was rational; the other, non-rational. Both represented the beginnings of my own shadow work.

One of the most important things I saw in ceremonies was just how angry and hurt most people are and how out of touch they are with their pain. I saw mirrored back to me exactly where I was, and as I dimly began to see my own shadow, I identified with a dream that Carl Jung describes, where he “was in a mighty wind.” Deep fog was flying along everywhere. He had his hands cupped around a tiny light which threatened to go out at any moment. Everything depended on his keeping this little light alive. Suddenly, he had the feeling that something was coming up behind him. He looked behind and saw a gigantic black figure following him. But at the same moment, despite his terror, he was conscious that he must keep his little light going regardless of all dangers. When he woke up, he realized the dark figure was his own shadow that was brought into being by his own small light, and that the little light was his consciousness, the only light he had. He realized that his own understanding was the sole and greatest treasure he pos-



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sessed. Though infinitely small and fragile in comparison with what was in the shadows, it was still a light, his only light.

I believe this insight is true for all of us. Somehow I knew that if I were going to take care of, or even see, the light that was my consciousness, I had to begin by telling the truth—something that was difficult because I was so angry I couldn't really tell what was true for me.

So, I started by admitting I was really, well, *angry*. That was the beginning. The more truth I told, the more truth was revealed to me. I would go to a ceremony and then bring all of my feelings with me to therapy sessions where I would find language for what was going on inside. And finally I understood on a very deep level that everything and everyone was a mirror for me. That anyone I blamed for anything was someone holding a piece of myself that I could not yet hold. I figured out that the more I loved myself, the more I wanted all those pieces back. And back they came. I saw myself more clearly as time went on. Positive and negative. And as I took back those pieces of myself, I began to see other people more clearly. Instead of blaming them, I could now be grateful to them for being willing, on some level, to hold for me what I could not. I stopped taking everything so personally. I learned to have faith in the truth.

The more ceremonies and therapy I did, the more I felt myself coming to God. Not the god I had imagined when I was Mormon—the god Levi Petersen describes in *The Backslider* who is looking at us through the barrel of a shotgun, just waiting for us to slip up so he can punish us—but a loving presence who feels definitely personal. In a ceremony a few years ago, the medicine man said, “Instinct is prayer.” When he said those words, I felt something connect for me—an awareness that instinct is a gift that I had been cut off from because of my culture. I knew that I wanted to experience connecting with my instincts. I began to understand that whether aware of it or not, I was praying twenty-four hours a day.

DURING THIS TIME, I began to feel like Psyche, who in Greek mythology connects with the god Eros, at first without seeing or knowing him. Later, after seeing him in a forbidden moment, her desire is transformed and intensified. But she tragically loses him, leaving her only with a deep desire to be with him again. In order for her to find her way back to him, she must complete certain tasks, and as she performs them, she always finds something or



somebody to help her. Psyche's story gave me hope, because I was pretty sure I wasn't going to be able to do what I wanted to do all by myself. I, too, was having glimpses of my creator, and with a deep longing, I also had to figure out how to get back. Yet the mythic tasks in front of me were telling me truths at a level of awareness I was not always sure how to understand. Through the years, like Psyche, I have been and continue to be helped in ways I never could have imagined.

I began reading the New Testament again, this time with new eyes—and the words and life of Christ had new meaning for me. Know the truth, he said, and it shall make you free. I saw how often he took the things

people had done in the shadows and brought them into the light, helping people to know they were forgiven. In my experience, the path of truth and forgiveness is the path to freedom. I believe we all want and need to be forgiven for something—I know I do—and I believe the person we need to forgive the most is ourselves. Thank God for Jesus Christ.

I discovered Rumi, a thirteenth-century Sufi mystic who wrote hundreds of love poems to God during his life and, at the end of his life, claimed he hadn't said a word. How can you talk about that which is beyond and before language, or, as Rumi says, “the inner secret, that which was never born”? His poetry is a marriage of the rational and non-rational, a balance of the masculine and the feminine. He said, “Close the language door, open the love window.” And, “Both light and shadow are the dance of Love. Love has no cause, it is the astrolabe of God's secrets.”¹ As I read and re-read Rumi's poetry, I began to be clearer about love, knowing that I wanted to feel God's love. And through my study of scripture, through poetry, and through understanding and feeling my own love of God, I began to see life as a gift and our bodies as an amazing antenna that connects us to ourselves, to others, and to that which is greater than all of us.

TWO YEARS AGO, I was in the west desert sitting in front of a fire, praying. I had what I can only call a vision. Now I'm not a person in the habit of receiving visions, but here I was having one. I wanted to see the face of God. This has been a constant prayer of mine for years. At that moment, I had a glimpse of how amazingly beautiful God is. In fact, what I felt at that moment was that God was so outrageously beautiful that the only thing it could do was love itself. It also came to me that what I was seeing had created me. That

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I was a part of that incredible beauty. And because it had created me, it loved me as much as it loved itself, because I am made from it. Then I realized that everything around me had been created by that force as well. And if that were true, then everything I saw, every single particle in this world is holy. And if that were true, then I needed to walk on the earth and through my life in a very different way.

In this new awareness, like Moses, I must take off my shoes because I am standing on holy ground. But this is a very difficult space to stay in. I love it when I remember who I am, but I forget. A lot. I have faith in the truth. I have faith that God is here. As often as I get lost, I find my way back to myself and to God. The path I am on is extremely interesting, and I find myself grateful for every step. I am grateful for the Mormon Church, and I am grateful that its leaders kicked me out. I thank God for my life. 

NOTE

1. "The Meaning of Love," in *The Love Poems of Rumi*, Deepak Chopra, ed. (New York: Harmony Books, 1998), 50.



PAT BAGLEY

A DECADE REPORT

*I am amazed that ten years have passed since September 1993,
that so much has been lost, and that so little has changed.*

AN INTERVIEW WITH MYSELF

By Paul Toscano

IN THE FIFTEEN MINUTES ALLOTTED ME, INSTEAD of a speech, I will ask myself fifteen tough questions and give you my unrehearsed answers.

Why haven't you presented anything on Mormonism for so long?

I LOST MY faith. I didn't renounce it. I just lost it—like losing one's eyesight after an accident—and not just religious faith, but faith in the power of my words to make a difference. The polemics of a fiscally conservative, socially liberal, professionally orthodox, religiously radical, spiritually cynical, and politically incorrect excommunicant seem unlikely to matter.

Then why are you here speaking?

THIS EVENT I couldn't miss. It seemed right to set aside fears, doubts, and grievances and make an effort to connect. Not to have shown up might suggest aloofness or indifference, which are not what I feel.

How do you view the Church now?

IT IS LIKE a cherished old relative with advanced Alzheimer's disease. The tabernacle stands, but the lights are winking out. The Church is preoccupied with exteriorities. It prizes righteousness over holiness, image over inspiration. The Church is no longer the Saints, but an increasingly judgmental, puritanical, and authoritarian corporate entity.

Hasn't Mormonism always been that way?

MORMONISM HAS ALWAYS been a mixture of the unmixable. It started as a fresh, hermeneutical movement with a radical vision of messianic Christianity. I saw this even as a



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teenage convert, although it took years for me to articulate the power of its theology, which claims that:

- Christ is not merely God's Son, but God incarnate, who assumes our sins and imputes to us his holiness;
- the chosen people are not just the Jews but all who hunger and thirst for God;
- the Promised Land is not just in Palestine, but in America and in other lands, too;
- the Torah is equaled not only by the New Testament but by other sacred texts—all part of a great and open canon;
- the words of prophets are to be explicated and made relevant by the commentaries of later prophets;
- the covenants of God are to any who will receive them;
- all people are God's people, each with a role to play in the drama of salvation; and
- each soul is to participate in rolling forth the kingdom of God like a stone out of a mountain, a millstone grinding down selfish and narcissistic pretensions.

These notions are a bit out of joint with the banalities of modern Mormon life.

Out of joint, how?

MORMONISM IS NO longer a heterodox and healing hermeneutic of freedom and grace. It has become an archconservative culture built on the sand of family and tribal values, with respectability as its chief cornerstone. Its adherents are less like living stones in the mystical temple of God and more like living stiffs in a morgue of quiet conformity. Members are relentlessly pressured to strain at gnats by avoiding alcohol, tobacco, coffee, tea, facial hair, tattoos, body piercing, R-rated movies, public displays of affection, nudity, erotica, masturbation, necking, petting, pre-marital sex, disrespect or questioning of authority, dissent, and anger, while being constantly encouraged to swallow camels by tolerating elitism, racism,

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misogyny, lack of intimacy, homophobia, xenophobia, moral superiority, purification by exclusion, institutional secrecy, theological correctness, spiritual abuse, class discrimination, disdain for civil liberties, and the abdication of personal judgment and responsibility. Mormonism, I fear, is no longer a mystery. It is a machine.

What caused this decline?

THE SPIRITUALITY OF a hierarchical church cannot be greater than the spirituality of its leaders. Ecclesiastical power corrodes individual spirituality. In the early 1960s, Harold B. Lee accelerated this process by using his plan to correlate Church programs to centralize power at the top of the male priesthood hierarchy. The corrosive effects of this power-grab became evident to me in 1982 when Apostle Bruce R. McConkie, in a BYU assembly, told thousands of students not to worship Jesus Christ nor even seek a personal relationship with him. The rest of the apostles did not publicly denounce this heresy because they were more concerned with avoiding embarrassment and appearing united than with proclaiming Jesus as Lord. McConkie's

teaching has remained publicly unrebuked and has flourished despite his own contradictory, final testimony given in Conference near his life's end. Unchecked power has led Church leaders to believe that their authority is not limited by the gospel, but that the gospel is limited and may be amended by their authority—a belief evidenced in apostle Russell M. Nelson's recent *Ensign* article that arrogantly declares God's love to be conditional.¹ Faith, repentance, baptism, and the gift of the Holy Ghost are rivaled by obedience, respectability, denial, and sycophancy. The Church is no longer seen as the object of salvation, but its source. Christ is not so much author of redemption as authorization for an aristocracy of apostles who, like the seven dwarves, never tire of aligning themselves in order of their right of succession to the presidency of the Church and who serve less as shepherds proclaiming the gospel and more as sheep dogs protecting the Church's snow-white image from the night soil of human nature.



I love
Jesus
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fictional
character.

Do you regret your angry criticism of Church leaders?

I REGRET THAT my criticism did not have its intended effect of turning them from authoritarianism and intolerance or awakening them to their faults or convincing them they are not above reproach. I regret that my anger has given them an excuse to disregard criticism and tighten further the grip of oppression that manacles the Church. Though I regret this, I do not see that courtesy, flattery, or servility has helped much to lessen their narrow-mindedness or unrighteous dominion.

What about Joseph Smith? Was he flawed? Was he a fraud?

HE IS NO longer a hero for me. But I see no good evidence that he did not believe he was called of God. Of course he was flawed. What leader isn't? He lied. He acted in self-serving ways. He may not have been divinely inspired, but I believe he believed he was. It is not fraudulent to be mistaken or selfish. He had a powerful, expansive, and prolific mind, and genuine

spiritual yearnings. At his life's end, he was apparently troubled that the movement he founded had gone awry. I think he died in a state of existential crisis. His last words were: "My Lord, my God!"—his attempt perhaps to utter the Masonic distress call that ends with the question: "Is there no help for the widow's son?" No, apparently. Not for him.

It takes no courage to accuse the defenseless dead. Defying the powerful living is another matter. Those who shout out the faults of Joseph Smith are often unwilling even to whisper the failings of the current leadership cadre. All leaders sin. But I find sins of passion more understandable than sins of calculation and, therefore, prefer Joseph Smith to Brigham Young and Bill Clinton to George W. Bush.

What do you think of the Book of Mormon?

IT IS EXTRAORDINARY, particularly if regarded not as history but as epic. It tells a dark story of conflict among brothers

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that escalates into tribal hostilities that culminate in the violent eradication of the white-skinned and the Balkanization of the dark-skinned races. Who cannot see reflected in this story the conflicts that plague the world? Catholics versus Protestants, Palestinians against Jews, Christians contra Muslims, poor pitted against rich—rivalries all. The book shows that whites have no guarantee of supremacy or survival, that the powerful eventually fall, that the many trees in God's olive garden are equally subject to cultivation, pruning, and burning. This is a tragedy fitted to the end, not the beginning, of an age—if not a history, then a complex story, strangely prescient and strangely apt.

What do you think of Sunstone?

I FIND NONSENSICAL Sunstone's dream of turning its magazine into an unofficial Church publication, uncensored and uncorrelated and yet inoffensive to the Church hierarchy. In a theocracy, even minor grievances are impossible to express without offending somebody. The fear of giving offense has crippled Sunstone and silenced some voices. Nonetheless, I recognize that it has fostered important scholarship and provided many with comfort and support.

Do you still have a testimony of Jesus Christ?

I LOVE JESUS even though he may be a fictional character. I see him as a combination of Henry V and Dionysus—a king in disguise among his people, eating of their limitations and drinking of their disappointments, yet able to descend into the abyss and rise again, pulling out of meaninglessness both soul and cosmos.

Isn't that a testimony?

NO. TESTIMONIES AND other expressions of certainty disturb me. But I can say that if Jesus was not the Christ, he should have been. If he is not God, he should be. Even as a fiction, he is the best of all possible deities. His disciples claim that:

- He loves us in our sins, before we love him and more than he loves himself;
- He prizes us above his sovereignty;
- He lays aside the riches of his divinity to assume the poverty of our humanity;
- He offers us joint heirship in all he has claim to;
- He transforms a provincial religion of one God of war and one chosen tribe into a cosmic religion of one God of love and many suffering souls;
- He does not require certainty or purity as conditions of his deliverance, merely that we recognize our lack and long to be filled;
- From his cross, he spoke for all those assailed by doubts when he cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Jesus may be a fiction; but, if so, he is a fiction against which the banalities of history and sociology pale in comparison, a fiction that transforms reality.

You believe in spirituality, then?

YES. BUT I think its best and most unappreciated manifestation is irony—not sarcasm, or flippancy, or insincerity (all of which have their place)—the ability to read multiple meanings in a single text, to invest with paradox a single utterance, to see order in chaos and chaos in order. Irony is to transcend the single point, or line, or plane, or space and to approach the mystery of simultaneity. In moments of irony, the one becomes the many; the I, the thou; the we, the they; the foe, the friend; the human, the divine. This is the highest manifestation of the spirit of which I am aware.

Do you see meaning in the disciplinary actions of September 1993?

I DO. THOSE punishments had both historical and metaphorical significance. Metaphorically, I have come to see them as a rejection by the Church of elements of its own identity. Don't misunderstand me. Historically, the excommunications occurred for reasons known best to those involved. But metaphorically, they have meaning beyond that:

- Lavina Fielding Anderson was excommunicated despite her commitment to the Mormon community. Her continued Church attendance has proved unavailing. Her Church leaders do not want her kind of devotion. They want loyalty to the current power structure even when it is not loyal in return nor loyal to what has gone before.
- D. Michael Quinn was excommunicated for his commitment to and passion for historical and personal integrity. Church leaders want neither. First and foremost, they want to be obeyed.
- Maxine Hanks was excommunicated because, in Church leaders' eyes, she represents the dark feminine that must be subordinated to or severed from the body of the Church.
- Lynn Kanavel Whitesides represents all those guided by an inner light on a personal spiritual journey, whom the outward Church seeks to control but from whom it should rather draw strength.
- Avraham Gileadi represents the core of Mormonism, with its claim to spiritual gifts, healings, divinings, prophecies, ritual washings, anointings, and the sealing of the faithful, who wait on tiptoe for the final parousia.
- And then there is yours truly, who reputedly deserved his excommunication because of his anger and disrespect.

I wish to clear up a misunderstanding. I was not excommunicated alone. In 1993, Margaret was unofficially excommunicated with me. In fact, Acting President Packer tried to connive her excommunication first. But our stake president, Kerry Heinz, found me a much more deserving target. I was punished under the theory that my excommunication dissolved my sealing to Margaret and to our daughters as well as my baptism, remission of sins, Church membership, priesthood, and endowments. Brother Packer intended my wife to share the

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fate of her husband. But just to be sure, seven years later, on 30 November 2000, Margaret was officially excommunicated in her own right. If nothing else, President Packer is thorough. Margaret and I are the only couple among the September Six or Seven and represent the leaders' rejection of gender equality, of the fullness of the priesthood conferred on the man and woman jointly, and of the equal divinity and dignity of the Heavenly Father and Mother.

Of course, we are not those things any more than Lavina is loyalty, or Mike integrity, or Maxine egalitarianism, or Lynne spirituality, or Avraham ancient Mormonism; but this, I think, is what we have come metaphorically to represent. This symbolic link is, perhaps, why our excommunications are painful to those who identify with such aspirations. And it is this link, perhaps, that causes some to feel that by disciplining those who criticize spiritual abuse, ecclesiastical tyranny, theological correctness, spiritual gifts, and whitewashed history, Church leaders may have unwittingly established excommunication and disfellowshipment as the highest ordinances bestowable on those whose faith and ardor are manifest as indignation and dissent.

What about the future?

I SEE THE future and my own prospects the way old men see their genitals: empty, unpromising, and short. I'm probably too pessimistic. President Hinckley, speaking prophetically in

Conference, once said, "None of us can foretell the future." This candid admission is more hopeful than my own outlook. Perhaps the future is not bleak. Perhaps disappointment is not inevitable. Perhaps pessimism is unwarranted. Perhaps body, parts, passions, faith, hope, and meaning will rise again. Perhaps not. I tend to fear the future, flee the past, and fret about the present. But, then, I lost my faith.

Still I wonder: Is the hereafter any more improbable than the here and now? Is a one-dimensional cosmos of molecules likely to produce mathematicians, mystics, and Mormons? Absent a God of love and laughter, how could so sorry a creature as I find himself driving about in his old Lincoln, listening to the incomparable polyphony of J.S. Bach?

I am amazed that ten years have passed since that eventful September of 1993, that so much has been lost, and that so little has changed. I'd be astounded to find myself here ten years hence. So, let me here say sincerely that I meant none harm and no impiety. There was no malice in my anger, which frankly still lingers. For I must confess, in closing, that I am seriously peeved that September of 1993 and its aftermath have made so little difference. But that, I suppose, could change. After all, "None of us can foretell the future."

Thank you for listening to me.



NOTE

1. Russell M. Nelson, "Divine Love," *Ensign* (Feb. 2003): 20–25.



CAL GRONDAHL

A DECADE REPORT

I don't feel a need to be angry. I like who I am and who I'm becoming while seeing and trusting a higher wisdom and pattern to it all.

EXILE AND RETURN: FROM GNOSTIC MORMON TO MORMON GNOSTIC

By Maxine Hanks

AS THE SAYING GOES, “IN THE FUTURE, EVERYBODY will be world-famous for fifteen minutes.”¹ This could apply to the Church if it continues to discipline its feminists and scholars. Every heretic is a news story. You may be next. Or you already may be among those whom the Church has summoned for “discipline” during the past ten years. Whether dismissed, placed on probation, disfellowshipped, or excommunicated, Mormon heretics are a subculture with visibility of its own.

There are few things as controversial or life-shattering as a summons to a Church court. Church discipline is fifteen minutes of fame that hijacks your life. Suddenly your place in the world is reversed overnight—from insider to outsider, from ally to enemy. You are an “apostate.” You play a drastic new role in family, Church, and community, as a negative figure, a focal point for dread. This is the fast track to scandal.

Andy Warhol said we’d be famous for fifteen minutes, but it never seems to end. My fifteen minutes of fame are turning into fifteen years—from the Associated Press coverage of *Women & Authority* in January 1993, to *Vogue* magazine in June 2003. In between, it’s been constant print and TV interviews. Something about this journey is momentous enough to keep the media continually interested.

Why us? Why me, “in the spotlight losing my religion”?² Perhaps because the story is so obvious; the drastic transition from Latter-day Saint to apostate heretic is simple for outsiders to grasp. It’s formulaic, really—a feminist in a patriarchal religion gets excommunicated . . . that’s kind of a no-brainer. I am a sound bite.

However, the Mormon heretic story is worth discussing in public particularly because it cannot be discussed within the Church. By default, Mormon conflicts are mediated by the media. I appreciate the opportunity for self-reflection that the

media provides. Without the media, we could not see our culture or ourselves; we would not become self aware. Mormonism needs a mirror if it is to mature.

Yet, publicity is a stress all its own. It’s difficult to convey the complex position of a scapegoat or a symbol of feminism. I found myself functioning as a mediator for the media, transiting different perspectives from proto- to post-Mormon, translating between faith, feminism, and a secular world.

How does one digest the evolution from Mormonism to a new worldview? Or embody it? Today I have fifteen minutes to explain this transformation, fifteen minutes to describe a decade of metamorphosis launched by fifteen minutes of fame that changed our lives forever in September 1993. Quite simply, this is a transition that never ends: the losing of our former lives and the finding of ourselves.

Looking back, do I have any regrets? No. And yes.

I don’t regret excommunication, because it gave me myself; it refined and matured me. But I do regret its costs to my life, my family, and my livelihood. The price was far more than I ever expected or would have guessed. I regret the pointless loss of affinity due to fear, embarrassment, exclusion, and guilt.

Yet I don’t regret leaving the Church. Given who I was, and what the Church was in 1993, there was no place to go but out. Mormonism was limiting to me, so I needed to test the limits of Mormonism—to see who I, and the Church, really might be. I discovered that I am more than Mormonism, and that God is far bigger than one church. Excommunication opened the door to a larger cosmos, inside and outside myself.

I do regret the stigma of excommunication, which tainted my reputation and my book. It was unfair to the book and its contributors to lend them a heretic status by association with my excommunication. Church discipline is a personal issue. My book was a separate matter, a group text. And it was not unorthodox: it was merely ahead of its time—too much, too soon. I can remain outside of the Church, but I really wish the Brethren would reinstate the book.

Is there life after excommunication? Yes. It’s harder, but it’s better in many ways. What do you do after leaving the



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Church? You change. What have I been doing for the past ten years? Healing, and suffering, and learning.

What was hard? Being alone and seen as a threat. Being a feminist and thus feared, misjudged, rejected. Lacking support for my work. Living with disapproval and writer's poverty as constant companions.

What was better? I found myself. And I found God, within me. I learned deeper patience, wisdom, and understanding. I am more than I was before excommunication.

And I won't stop evolving or working for a better world. I've continued writing and speaking about women's issues in Mormonism and religion. I co-taught a course at the University of Utah on "Women in Mormon Culture" for seven years. I've edited or co-authored more books, and published in a variety of magazines and newspapers.

One positive outgrowth of *Women and Authority* was feminist networking, which has continued to be a love of mine. The Mormon Feminist Network became an Internet organization in 1998 with email lists and a website. Along with that, I've nurtured the idea of Moonstone, a foundation to support feminist work and spirituality studies in Mormon and religious culture.

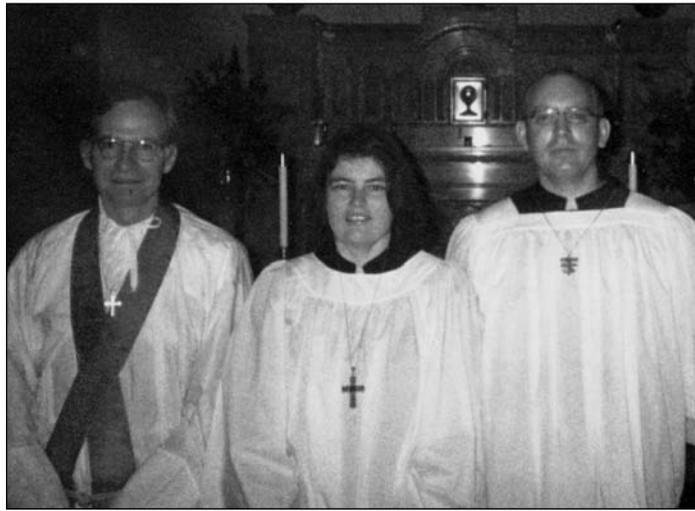
However, the most challenging and rewarding work in the last ten years has been my personal journey and spiritual search—the work of my own soul.

What have I learned along the way? I learned to adapt, change, migrate, evolve into something new. This wasn't easy, so I'd like to share a few of my transitions and what they taught me.

THE FIRST TASK was surviving excommunication and its scapegoating. That sounds dramatic, but it was quite a challenge. A scapegoat is one who is judged wrong or guilty at a time when it is the most dangerous to be so. One is blamed for a larger group problem. This can destroy one's reputation, and it often does.

It's a monumental task to wear the dread for a whole group, and even harder to rise above that group blame. Scapegoats can't defend themselves because they lack credibility and they're stuck in a negative role for an entire group. I can't tell you how important and heartening it was to find support, to be defended, validated, thanked or appreciated. Those moments were beacons in the night. I'll never forget the vigils or the full-page ad in the *Salt Lake Tribune* organized by J.D. Williams, which listed dozens of names in support of us heretics.

To survive, I had to constantly define my own role and



Ordination day, October 1999, Holy Cross Chapel
(L to R) Reverend Lance Owens, Maxine Hanks, Reverend Troy Pierce

image as a heretic, rather than be defined by the Church as an apostate. I had to somehow own the power of rejection and speak from that place, without internalizing the invalidation. Obviously this is tricky. Along the way, I developed "Seven Habits of Highly Effective Heretics" (which I don't have time to enumerate, but maybe if I print them in a pamphlet, it will become an international bestseller).

The key was learning to act from the core truth of who I am, rather than succumb to what others believed

about me. It's hard to hold onto your true self in the face of false or negative versions. You have to know your true role rather than play a part scripted by others. It's like being Miranda from *The Tempest* but cast as Kate in *Taming of the Shrew*; Miranda's part doesn't match that play. While Miranda sees a brave new world, others see her as Kate, a tempest to be tamed. It took me seven years to diffuse the energy of Church disapproval and find my way back to my own play. I now see myself as a scapegoat who escaped—an *escapegoat*.

MY NEXT TRANSITION was finding community. As I look back at all the really good advice I got, I realize the best came from Lorille Miller, who left Mormonism and became a prominent Unitarian. Right after my excommunication, she warned me, "Maxine, you need to find a community; you can't stay on your own, alone." At the time, it made no sense, because I prefer being on my own. My strength had always been my ability to stand alone. Belonging was a foreign concept to me, and a lot harder to do. But I believed Lorille because I respect her, so I visited a variety of churches, determined to find one that worked.

I had previous experience with other faiths because I had been led from an early age to attend other churches, starting with the Methodist faith at age five. I had visited nearly every church in my hometown, from Catholic mass to summer Bible school. They'd all held an attraction then and still do today.

As I searched for a new community, I was impressed by the Unity faith; I liked the Catholic grandeur, Episcopal ritual, RLDS equality, Unitarian humanity, and Quaker democracy. The Restoration Church offered me an apostleship, but that was a little extreme (deacon was more my speed).

Mainly I just wanted a place where I could finally be ordained! It was pretty simple. That was my acid test. I wanted a church that would give women the priesthood, because I'd always felt a personal call to priesthood, and I was weary of being shut down.

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Fortunately, I found a temporary home with the Sunday Gathering—an independent congregation of post-Mormons who formed in 1993 to support Lavina Fielding Anderson and the September Six. We held a service once a month for two years, co-chaired by Scott Kenney, Louise Degn, Marti Jones, Ardean Watts, me, and others. It was short-lived but blissful, ending on Sunstone weekend in August 1995.

Then in 1996, I discovered that my spiritual path specifically coincided with archetypal patterns, myths, and an initiation path in Gnostic tradition. This synchronicity repeatedly manifested in dreams, visions, intuition, and my reading. I continually rediscovered myself in a variety of gnostic manifestations, from Sophia to Kabbalah, hermeticism to the Nag Hammadi, to the heretics and mystics, even the Masons and the Mormons. I began attending Gnostic Mass in 1997 and was baptized in 1998.

Finally, I was ordained to the Melchizedek priesthood (minor orders) in 1999, embarking on a path of ordination that still takes years, but this time the permission was inner; a gnostic is governed by guidance within. I'm not a priest yet; I currently hold the office of exorcist, because that's my spiritual work now. I serve with two male priests (both former Mormons) and we celebrate a Gnostic Mass on Sundays in the Holy Cross Chapel.³

Anyway, Lorille was right. I needed to belong. And that simple shift triggered my healing. To really find belonging, you have to move beyond the role of the rejected one, shed your internalized rejection or outsider status. At some point, you have to cease not belonging and start belonging. You can't stay in the role of the rejected one forever; you can't stay in a negative place too long. Being wrong or bad can't remain the basis of your life; you need a positive role that has life-giving energy.

For me, this meant moving beyond the role of the rejected feminist. I had to leave my bad-girl role and non-status to become something positive. This was difficult to do after four decades of non-status in Mormonism, which had become a way of life.

First I had to fulfill my heretic role, take it to conclusion. Then I had to transcend it, move beyond it. This was only possible by finding priests who would accept me and work with me, grant peer status and offer belonging. This is why ordination was so important. I needed acceptance. It's not the end; nothing is ever finished or ideal. Even when women have the priesthood, they still have to work out gender dynamics with men. However, this one shift may be the most healing of all.

A really important part of finding myself was working with women in ministry of other faiths. My association with female clergy and leaders in the Quaker, Episcopal, Unitarian, Christian Science, Bahai, Catholic, and other faiths has been incredibly healing. These women are spiritually empowered, not waiting to receive acceptance or permission from their fellows, but actually living as ministers of God. They are my role models; they show me how to be alive in God. In 1999, several of us collaborated to create Utah Women in Ministry.

THE HARDEST TRANSITION of all was learning how to leave Mormonism. How do you really leave the “one true Church of Jesus Christ,” the “Restoration” of original Christianity, the “fullness of the gospel”? I went to original Christianity, which is always cited as the source of Mormonism, and there I found the source of both, which is *gnosis*. The gnostic experience is a larger tradition that encompasses both early Christianity and Mormonism. Gnosis is the spark of divine light that inspires all faiths.

How do you find yourself outside of Mormonism? I found myself straddling two worlds—one Mormon, and one bigger, beyond the Mormon worldview. The first was a Mormon paradigm; the second was a larger, global or cosmic worldview. A cosmic paradigm is a greater whole, where all things find a place and all are connected. God is bigger than one faith, one paradigm; God encompasses All.

So I had a paradigm shift—from the one true church to all faiths being true—each one revealing an aspect of God, a divine attribute unique to that faith. I saw that only when we value them all do we begin to comprehend the consciousness of God. To know all of God, I must know God in All.

I went from the alpha church, with power or authority over all others, to an omega church, which comprehends its place in relation to All. I went from the one above all others to one embracing all.

I discovered that I needed both paradigms in order to find myself. I couldn't disown the former (the Mormon paradigm), and I couldn't live without the latter (the global or cosmic paradigm). The two work together as integral partners, microcosm and macrocosm. I existed in both, simultaneously, discovering two dimensions of myself, Mormon and gnostic. I found that I'm a citizen of both the Mormon and the cosmic worldviews. I am a living paradox.

This transition manifested outwardly in my life as interfaith work. I joined the Interfaith Roundtable for the 2002 Olympic Winter Games and got involved with the United Religions Initiative in San Francisco. As I collaborated and worshiped with representatives of many faiths, it was exhilarating to see the global or cosmic paradigm operate in reality.

I think this shift to larger consciousness is healthy, not only for me, but it might do the Church some good, too. I see the Church moving somewhat in that direction, of recognizing a larger, multi-faith worldview beyond its own. I think this is due to the influence of the Olympics with its multi-cultural focus, and to the Church's increasing interfaith collaboration. These may have inspired the “doctrine of inclusion” presented by Elder Ballard in the October 2001 General Conference.

Based on the Eleventh Article of Faith, the doctrine speaks of “those not of our faith” and urges mutual respect for differences. It teaches “tolerance one for another regardless of the doctrines and philosophies which we may espouse.” It advises Church members to “practice the principle of inclusion of others and not exclusion because of religious, political, or cultural differences,” adding that “we are truly brothers and sisters

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because we are sons and daughters of the same Eternal Father.”⁴

Of course, the doctrine refers to people *outside* the LDS faith. It might be nice if it were applied to people *within* the faith. But I think this doctrine could heal Mormonism, both within and without, if the Church will take it to its logical conclusion.

THE MOST UNEXPECTED transition of all is what I call “the return.” If it was strange or hard to leave Mormonism, it’s even stranger to return to it, after all that I’ve experienced and who I’ve become. Yet, I have found myself returning to Mormonism in new ways.

Joseph Campbell said that we can’t truly understand or appreciate our own tradition until we have left it and then returned to view it anew from the outside.⁵ To return is to re-embrace what was lost or rejected, but coming from a new place of greater wholeness. For me, it has been like coming back to Mormonism from a long journey, as a new creature, more complete, whole.

When I was LDS, I was often colliding with Church leaders, locked in conflict with them. Simply leaving released me from that enmeshment. Moving outside of Mormonism dissolved our former relationship and allowed me to see them anew, as human beings. Now I can see that LDS leaders are dealing with tremendous burdens and responsibilities and that they, too, struggle in their own lives.

Now I can accept the Church and its leaders for who they are and appreciate them. I may still disagree with them but now with compassion and empathy. I find myself working with the Church in new ways, from a place of respect.

Since 1999, I’ve worked with prominent LDS men on the Olympic Interfaith Roundtable and other projects. At first, it was awkward, but they soon accepted me and valued my work. It was their acceptance that was healing—finally being embraced for who I am as I embrace them for who they are. All I had ever wanted with LDS men was partnership. The long-elusive solution was simple after all: just being willing to work together. Now we are friends and collaborate on projects such as the annual interfaith service held in the LDS Tabernacle.

To return is to recover our ability to relate to something or someone. I recovered my ability to love the Mormon within me and the Mormons around me. How? Through my love for all faiths. This wholeness I’ve found is symbolized by the Kabbalah, a Jewish Gnostic paradigm. It’s my favorite map of the cosmos, or cosmology, because it contains and connects everything, from the uncreated source of all, to all of creation—Jehovah, Elohim, Sophia, Logos, Jesus Christ, Judaism, Christianity, heresy, orthodoxy, mysticism, materialism, atheism, gnosticism, Mormonism, Sunstone, Moonstone, angels, demons, archons, divinity, the all-seeing eyes, nothingness, and the All.

I first encountered the Kabbalah twenty years ago, at BYU of all places, where I began my study of its mystic truths. Twenty years later, this summer, I realized that Kabbalah unites both the Mormon and gnostic paradigms in one cosmic framework.

That same month, I returned to BYU to participate in a women’s seminar. So my transition might not be so drastic after all; perhaps it’s more like a reversal. I’ve come full circle—from being a kind of “gnostic Mormon” to being a kind of “mormon Gnostic.”

WHERE AM I today? I’m happy. I feel healed, and at peace—not because I’m overly positive or ignoring the bad parts of the picture, but because I embrace the whole picture. I am neither naive nor afraid of conflict. But I see our common struggles, our humanity. And I see God working in all of us. I am filled with compassion for others, especially orthodox Mormons and LDS Church leaders. Some of my favorite people are LDS men. In fact, my best friend and soul mate has been my father, who has supported me in every phase of my journey, encouraging me with his unequaled positive energy. If I have strength or courage, I got it from him.

I understand my life now, even the awful parts. I see a larger pattern to my twisting path, a cohesiveness to my contradictory journey. Like the cosmic paradigm containing all things, my life contains a bit of everything, the positive and negative, the partial and the whole. As hermetic wisdom tells us, a human being is a microcosm of the macrocosm.

I recognize my own darkness and light, my limits and limitless love, my ability and inability to cope. I see my acquiescence and my anger, but I’m more conscious of them now, so I’ve learned how to deal with them better, I hope.

To be honest, most of my anger is gone. I don’t feel a need to be angry. I like who I am and who I’m becoming while seeing and trusting a higher wisdom and pattern to it all. I know that God is making something better of me and of everyone around me.

These past ten years have brought me full circle, from departure to return. I am complete. Like the doubting Thomas, who became the gnostic Thomas, I, too, have learned that “the kingdom is inside of you, and it is outside of you. . . the kingdom of the father is spread out upon the earth.”⁶ ☞

NOTES

1. Andy Warhol. The earliest reference to the phrase is found in the book *Andy Warhol*, edited by Warhol, Joenig, Hulten, and Granath, and issued in 1968 in conjunction with Warhol’s Feb./Mar. 1968 exhibition in Stockholm, Sweden.
2. R.E.M., “Losing My Religion,” *Out of Time*, WB IM 9 24696-1.
3. Holy Cross Chapel, dedicated as the Church of Mary Magdalene, was the first Catholic church built in Utah (1880s). It was superseded by the Cathedral of the Madeleine.
4. M. Russell Ballard, “Doctrine of Inclusion,” *Ensign* (Nov. 2001), 35; also referenced in Robert L. Millet, “What Is Our Doctrine?”, talk given to the BYU Religious Education Faculty, 12 Sept. 2003, <home.uchicago.edu/~spackman/millet.doc>.
5. *Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth*, with Bill Moyers, Vols. 1–6, (Burlington, Vermont: Mystic Fire, 1989), Videocassettes.
6. Thomas 3, 113. *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, Revised Edition, James M. Robinson, ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1990).

A DECADE REPORT

*Can there be spiritual life after excommunication from the true Church of God?
For me, the answer is both “yes” and “no.”*

APOLOGIA PRO MEA VIA

By D. Michael Quinn

AT SEVENTEEN, I BEGAN RESEARCHING MORMON history from a perspective I later found in Tennyson’s poem *Ulysses*: “To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.” Today, I’ve been asked to discuss how I’ve adjusted to the ultimate consequence of my refusal to yield. When non-LDS reporters ask how I feel about it, I say that to be excommunicated as a believing Mormon is like attending your own funeral.

So the question is, can there be spiritual life after the spiritual death of excommunication from the true Church of God upon the earth? For me, the answer is both “yes” and “no.” I’ll begin with the negative.

First, to be a Mormon is to be spiritually and socially linked to a tight-knit, yet diverse, community. Often they are strangers who become your friends as soon as they know you are a Mormon. Thirty years ago this month, my wife and I moved from Utah to Connecticut, where we knew no one. On arrival, I made one phone call, and shortly thereafter people were at our new residence, bringing food to us and asking if they could help us move in. During our first Sunday of LDS meetings, we linked up with a network of compatible personalities who were friends for as long as we lived among them. Active Mormons socialize primarily with other active Mormons, and on these occasions, some or all of their conversation involves the Church.

When you’re excommunicated, these social relationships end for the most part—not because of ill-will by former friends, but because of the awkwardness and sadness that active Mormons feel in your company. They try to avoid social situations where they don’t feel free to talk enthusiastically about the Church. I regret that loss of social fellowship.

Therefore, I appreciate the fellowship I receive from so many Mormons at Sunstone symposiums and similar gatherings. However, academic conferences (for me) cannot substitute for the fellowship of the Church.



D. MICHAEL QUINN is an independent scholar and was the Beinecke Senior Fellow at Yale University, 2002–03. The title of this essay intentionally uses the Latin noun “*via*” (path or way).

Second, as a selfish person, I also miss the opportunities and obligations of service to others that the Church provided me from adolescence to middle age—of monthly visiting several families whom I had not previously known, of administering to the sick and dying, of participating in service projects for widows and the needy, and even of attending boring administrative meetings whose main purpose was to discuss ways of serving fellow Mormons.

Whatever benefit to others may reside in the five books and twenty articles I have published during the past ten years, I do not deceive myself into thinking that academic contributions can substitute for giving care to the sick, the dying, the impoverished, the orphaned, the widowed, and others needing human compassion. Nor have I compensated for those losses by submerging myself in humanitarian service. I’m too selfish to motivate myself to follow the secular example of Albert Schweitzer and countless others who have not needed a church to make them follow the Second Great Commandment. Religious fellowship and compassionate service have ended for me as an excommunicated Mormon, and that has been a profound loss. I have occasionally attended meetings of other churches, but, in truth, I’ve had enough of organized religion of any kind. All my sabbaths are secular.

Which leads to a dimension of my experience that totally surprised me. Even though I did not want to be excommunicated, I felt a profound sense of relief afterwards. With all its truth and authority, the Church has promoted policies and ideologies that I could not support. Because it’s no longer my Church, I feel no obligation to make excuses for it nor to remain silent about matters of disagreement. I remain a Mormon in heritage and worldview—in my DNA, if you will—but as an excommunicated Mormon, I’m not required to “sustain” LDS teachings, policies, or prophets when I feel they are wrong. I think that is a good thing.

Nevertheless, I remember what nineteenth-century singer Jenny Lind advised a fellow Protestant who was about to accept Roman Catholic baptism: “[Don’t] expect more of the church on earth than she really can give.”¹

Third, there are limits to my detachment from organized Mormonism. I’ve abruptly refused evangelical Protestants who

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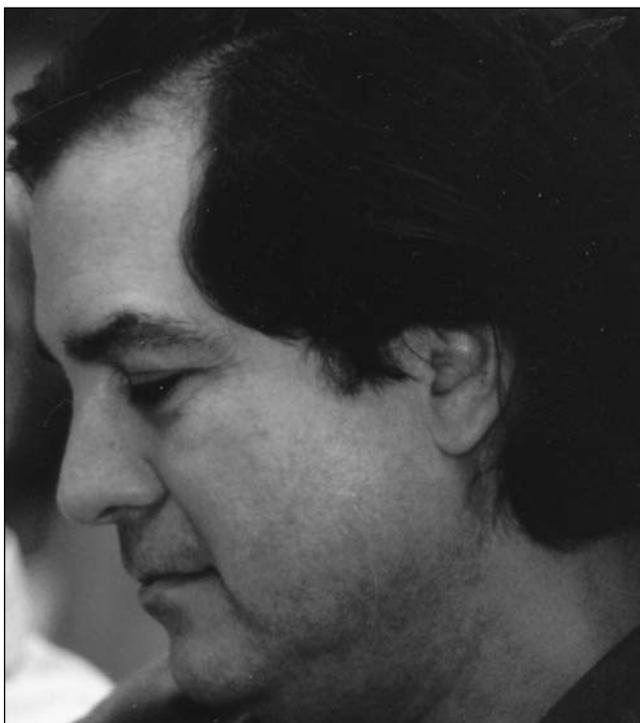
have invited me to endorse their polemical writings about the Church. I've explained the faith-context and differing viewpoints about Mormon controversies to newspaper reporters who expected me to present only the negative. I've been saddened to learn about the deaths of full-time missionaries and of General Authorities, both of whom devote their full energy to serving God and humanity as best they understand. And I've been pleased whenever I've heard that LDS missionaries have been given access to countries where they had previously been forbidden, even though I still have concerns about cultural imperialism in LDS proselytizing.

It is true that I've given encouragement to Fundamentalist Mormon polygamists, but not because I'm interested in joining them, nor to embarrass the monogamous Church, nor to ignore the fact that there are unhappy polygamist wives and children. I've spoken and written favorably about current polygamists because I support the efforts of all people to maintain loving families in whatever way they choose—without coercion and without fear.

However, I admit that my non-participation in *any* religious fellowship may be a flaw in my own personality or spirituality. I have friends, from my adolescence to the past year, who have left Mormonism for other fellowships. Having once served as full-time LDS missionaries, they have become Jewish, Sufi Muslim, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Gnostic, Quaker, Unitarian, New Age, or members of gay and lesbian churches. Some of them have said that, like me, they still see the world through Mormon lenses. Others do not.

Has my personal relationship with God changed since my excommunication? Again, "yes" and "no."

I do not have the same interactive engagement with God as I did while I was a missionary, a branch president, an elder's quorum president, a temple ordinance worker, a Gospel Doctrine teacher, a counselor in two bishoprics, or a member of a stake high council. These Church callings required me to



People like
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from our
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Father

seek God's guidance and strength more intensely and diversely than is necessary when you are living your life outside the Church.

However, I still feel the "burning of the Spirit" within me from time to time. I still talk with God as my Heavenly Father, give thanks for His many blessings, seek His guidance, and ask His intervention for myself and others. Although intellectually I believe in Mother in Heaven, spiritually my relationship on earth has always been with the Father.

Since adolescence, however, my intense faith has co-existed with a sacrilegious sense of humor. I'm not sure whether there has been an increase in my laughing at religious jokes, retelling them, or giving my own jibes.

I feel the same convictions about the afterlife that I did from my teenage years onward. In view of latter-day revelations, Mormons don't—or shouldn't—believe in a "hell" of never-ending punishment and torment. Instead, Latter-day Saints believe in eternal "degrees of glory" for every human being except those who hate God eternally. After death, I expect to be as close to God or as distant from His presence as we are both comfortable to be. If that means we can embrace once or twice, that will be enough. If it means that I will serve Him and others worthier than I from a distance throughout

all eternity, then I am satisfied. There is nothing wrong with being a "mere" servant to God in the afterlife.

And if my eternal status is like a twinkling star, rather than the brilliant sun of those who are "exalted," then I will be happy to be in my proper place in companionship with others who are comfortable in my presence. If I am not mistaken, "happy" is the word the founding Mormon prophet Joseph Smith used to describe those in the lowest degree of glory.

Nevertheless, some Mormons regard me as a danger here and now to God's Church:

- because I claim that a compassionate, clear-eyed view of Mormonism's fallible past is better than pre-

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sending it as a morality play directed at every step by the hand of God;

- because I claim that an active intellect is as important to God as a humble heart;
- because I claim that men are no more important than women in *any* field of activity—secular or sacred;
- because I claim that a woman's priesthood endowment in an LDS temple is the same as a man's receiving priesthood through ordination;
- because I claim that the mutual love of two men or of two women is as valid as the mutual love of a man and a woman;
- because I claim that prophets can be both inspired and uninspired, well-intentioned and mistaken, compassionate and insensitive, insightful and uninformed, kind and cruel—in other words, as fallible and complex as all other human beings;
- because I claim that you can serve the Church faithfully by being in loyal opposition;
- because I claim that excommunication—like other ordinances performed in the Church—depends completely on your personal relationship with God and the Holy Spirit of Promise before that ordinance has any eternal significance whatever;
- because I claim that any church that dismisses its non-conformists as expendable is a church that has forgotten the Savior-Shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine to seek the one lost sheep; and
- because I claim that people like me have nothing

to fear in the afterlife from our Heavenly Father, even though we have much to fear on earth from people who say they serve God by promoting suspicion, fear, hatred, and violence.

There are Mormons and other Christians who deny one or more of those claims, but I think such people do not understand either the gospel or the Savior.

I close with a statement of my faith, a testimony that is ancient:

*The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
He leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul:
He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil:
For thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:
Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:
And I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.*

—Psalm 23

Amen. 

NOTE

1. Anne C. Rose, *Beloved Strangers: Interfaith Families in Nineteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 98.



“Purge? Purge? What purge? I don’t know anything about a purge. . . .”

Pat Bagley

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*A coin that balances on its edge—that's the space I've claimed for myself.
I'm not in, but I won't be out, either.*

A DECADE ON THE THIN EDGE

By *Lavina Fielding Anderson*

IT'S AN HONOR TO APPEAR ON THE SAME PROGRAM with these thoughtful, creative minds with whom I have long been affiliated by affection and enterprises of serious inquiry into aspects of the theology and culture of Mormonism. When historians of the future figure out how and why we were selected for the crackdown ten years ago, they may very well decide that I don't merit inclusion in the company of scholars as thorough as Michael Quinn, feminists as thoughtful and passionate as Lynne and Maxine, or theologians as insightful as Paul and Avraham; but I hope to remain in that company because I share with them a vision of Mormonism as a supremely beautiful and empowering set of principles, however much we as individuals and the Church as an institution may falter in applying them.

I have sometimes heard people say things that can give the impression that others of the five people on this panel somehow "deserved" to be excommunicated or "had it coming" for some reason or that they didn't value their membership, while I'm somehow different and that I've somehow "done it right" by remaining attached to Mormonism while the others have withdrawn from activity or chosen other spiritual paths. I can't tell you how intensely uncomfortable such suggestions make me. None of us "September Six" deserved to be disciplined. And each of us is making a continuing contribution to Mormonism by the diverse paths we have walked during the past decade. I have complete faith that a future view of Mormonism will come to the same conclusion.

Ten years ago this summer, with the events of September 1993 still a month in the future, I realized spiritually (even though I was still resisting the knowledge intellectually), that I would be excommunicated, that I should not attend the court, and that I would not be reinstated quickly. I had already accepted those consequences, since the only way to deflect them

was to accede to my stake president's demands that I, first, stop talking to the press, and, second, stop talking to people who feel injured and betrayed by actions the Church had taken, whether on the general or local level. I knew I wasn't going to do either. So part of what I had spent the summer deciding was what to do about the consequences.

Here I'd like to pay tribute to my husband, Paul. As you can imagine, we did a lot of talking that summer. He helped me ask the hard questions and be honest with the hard answers: What would this do to Christian, then twelve and a new deacon? What would it do to our parents and brothers and sisters, all of whom were active, temple-married, calling-holding members (just as we were. I had three callings at the time). Were the issues really *that* important? Was I truly being called, on some spiritual level, to keep bringing bad news to an institution that traditionally responded to bad news, not by dealing with the message, but by punishing the messenger? Would I keep on attending church? *Could* I keep on attending church? Was I acting out of love, or out of pride and pique? I claimed to love Mormonism and the Church; could that love survive my being excommunicated? Excommunication was allegedly going to dissolve our temple marriage and our sealing with Christian. And above all, it was going to cause enormous pain and terrible disruption. Was it worth it? How could it possibly be worth it? *Why* was it worth it?

Those months of dialogue were sobering, clarifying, and steadying. Paul never got angry. He never threatened. He never minimized the importance of the issue to me. And even though he was working for the Church, he never ever, not even once, asked, "What if this jeopardizes my job?" (I was the one who asked that question. And for the record, Paul's supervisors remained personally very supportive of him.)

That was Paul in August. But in September, Paul never asked another probing question. He instantly, wholeheartedly, and completely gave me his unequivocal support, including the enormous benefits of his personal spirituality, sense of humor, and instinct for justice that kept him fair to both the Church's side of things and to me. He never horribilized what



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was happening. He dealt with his own anger by following Jesus' commandment to pray for those who spitefully use us.

Part of my decision during that summer was to remain as active as possible and live a completely Mormon lifestyle within the limitations imposed on me. I had three reasons. First, Paul and I wanted Christian to grow up understanding and appreciating his Mormonness. If I stopped going to church, he almost certainly would, too. Second, I had been enormously inspired by the example of Juanita Brooks and the shunning and threats she and her family endured to bring to light the facts of the Mountain Meadows Massacre. I consciously and purposefully took her as my model. Third, the Church itself had taught me that making a morally correct decision often resulted in unfair punishment. Under those circumstances, the solution was to live out the correct decision, accepting the consequences with grace and graciousness.

Even though I had made that decision, I wasn't sure I could live it out, week by week. It's a blessing of a magnitude that I cannot even begin to express that I've been able to. And now I have a fourth reason. I have felt, in the decade that has passed, that I have a distinct calling in the kingdom (not the Church) to "do" church vicariously for all those who no longer feel safe or welcome in their own wards. I think the phrase "out of sight, out of mind" truly applies to the excommunicated. Bishops don't want to deal with people who aren't following the "repentant sinner" script. Well, I'm the one who isn't going away. Just showing up, Sunday after Sunday, means that I'm bearing a testimony of presence, even when I can't bear any other kind of testimony.

And to give my ward its just due, I can honestly say that nobody, by so much as a lifted eyebrow, has ever communicated to me, Paul, or Christian that they find our presence undesirable. I have a theory: Because the stake president decided to do the excommunication himself, ward members could see it as something that happened "over there" at the stake center. They didn't have to take sides for or against me or the bishop. My reinforcing theory is that uttering the sentence of excommunication preempted discourse on the subject, and my ward has responded with silence. Only two people in my ward have

ever mentioned it to me. I'm not a project. I'm not a horrible example. I'm not an object lesson. I'm just there every Sunday, behaving Mormonly.

I haven't relied on the Church to provide my spiritual life since I was a teenager, but my spiritual life is deeply rooted in Mormonism. Since being excommunicated, I've learned a great deal about partaking of the sacrament spiritually when I'm forbidden to partake physically. I've also learned that it's more important to have the temple in me than to have me in the temple. Ten years ago, when I made my decision, I felt at peace with it. I still do. Being excommunicated is something I've been aware of every day of the past ten years, but I haven't once wished that I'd decided differently.

THIS DOESN'T MEAN it's easy. One Sunday morning soon after the excommunication, Christian was passing the sacrament to our section of the chapel. Paul, who was sitting on the aisle, absentmindedly took the bread and without thinking, started to pass the tray to me. Christian, startled, hung onto the tray while I leaned over and urgently whispered, "Don't!" We were frozen in a terrible little tableau of ironies—Christian resisting Paul to obey the Church's injunction that I could not partake of the emblems of the Savior's atonement; Paul, trying to include me because it felt so natural; I intervening to assure my own exclusion.

One lovely older sister, my last visiting teaching com-



PAT BAGLEY

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panion, did ask several times, "When are you coming back?" Since she usually asked while we were both standing in the aisle after sacrament meeting on our way to Sunday School class, I found the question both peculiar and painful. Finally, I said, "I'm here every Sunday. I never went anywhere. I'm as back as I can get in my heart. What happens next doesn't depend on me." She stopped asking, which was a great relief.

It wasn't that I minded talking about it. It's just that it was really clear that my priesthood leaders didn't know what to do next. We've had three bishops in the last ten years. I've kept track of my attendance at Church, and I'm petty-minded enough to be pleased that my sacrament meeting attendance has matched or surpassed that of the first two bishops. At my request, the man who was the bishop when I was excommunicated gave me a blessing a few days before the court. He asked to interview me only once and then spent most of the time talking about how bright and intimidating he found Christian. Soon after his release, this bishop stopped attending church, divorced his wife, and married a younger woman. I truly regret what his decisions did to his personal life, but I find it ironic that he would have presided over my court if the stake president had instructed him to.

Paul and I had a personal friendship with the second bishop and his family. Soon after he was called, I told him that I wasn't expecting him to intervene with the stake president on my behalf because of our friendship. He looked relieved and said that he tried never to ask the stake president anything unless he knew the answer was going to be yes. I took that as oblique confirmation that the stake president didn't know what to do, either. He had answered my first letter asking his



Mormonism
is my
world.
My God
is the
Mormon
God.

counsel about what I needed to do to be rebaptized by telling me I had to stop thinking the General Authorities could do wrong, and he hadn't answered my second letter, which asked for clarification of that quite remarkable statement. That was eight years ago.

I pointed out to both the first and second bishop that the *General Handbook of Instructions* allows nonmembers to be called as accompanists and choristers. The second bishop authorized the Relief Society president to ask me to accompany the hymns in Relief Society as an uncalled but permanent substitute. I've been doing that now for about three years and enjoy it very much. Ironically, Relief Society pianist is one of the three callings I had ten years ago when I was excommunicated, which actually says more about the rarity of musical ability in our ward than it does about my skills.

Our third bishop is a young man who moved into the ward only a few years ago. His wife is a nurse and also an executive in a ward auxiliary, and their children are preschoolers. I haven't felt like imposing one more demand on this stretched-to-the-limit man.

AS I THINK about the Church and me, the image that keeps coming to mind is that of a coin. We often think of

Church membership in binary terms, like a coin flip. Heads you're in; tails you're out. (Or maybe, considering which portion of the anatomy gets used during most meetings and which portion of the anatomy tends to get people crossways of the Church, that should be rephrased as: heads you're out; tails you're in.) But those aren't the only two choices. The third alternative is the coin that balances on its edge—a very narrow base, very vulnerable to toppling one way or the other. That's

A DECADE REPORT

the space I've claimed for myself. I'm not in, but I won't be out, either. It's a balancing act every day.

I do not consider myself a marginal Mormon. That would be something I did to myself, by moving myself to the margin. I consider myself to be a marginalized Mormon, shoved to the outer edge by the action of punitive and frightened Church leaders. That's too simplified a view, of course, but the image is often helpful to me.

I thought of it during last summer's Sunstone symposium as I finished embroidering Christian's temple apron. I'd started the apron earlier that summer in Nauvoo as I commemorated the twenty-year anniversary of Pilgrimage, a women's retreat group that has been very influential in the development of my Mormon feminism. I had the apron tucked in my bag and carried it through our tour at the Nauvoo Temple open house, the first time I've been in a temple for ten years and the last time for heaven knows how long. Christian wore that apron into the sealing room at his wedding last September in the San Diego Temple while Lorie Winder Stromberg and I sat in the lobby and she told me about Daniel Rector's death. Creating that temple apron is an example, I think, of living with the ambiguities of a coin balanced on its edge.

Mormonism is my world. It's my language, my people, my music, my history, even my leaders. My God is the Mormon God. I'm not rejecting Mormonism. I'm not trying to reform Mormonism. I'm trying to remind Mormonism of the truth and power and glory of its paradoxical assertion of absolute freedom and absolute love, a paradox that is reconciled in Jesus Christ. That's why I'm Mormon. That's why I love Mormonism.

I WILL CONCLUDE with a hymn and a prayer. The hymn is one sung by members of the Community of Christ and sent to me ten years ago by friends from the John Whitmer Historical Association. I'd like to publicly thank all of those friends, including Bill Russell and Ron Romig, who are here tonight. Christian, Paul, and I fell in love with this hymn and sang it repeatedly in our nightly family devotionals over the next several years.

*Gentle God, when we are driven
Past the limits of our love,
When our hurt would have a weapon
And the hawk destroy the dove,
At the cost of seeming weak,
Help us turn the other cheek.*

*Gentle Spirit, when our reason
Clouds in anger, twists in fear,
When we strike instead of stroking,
When we bruise and sting and smear,
Cool our burning, take our pain,
Bring us to ourselves again.*

....

*Let our strength be in forgiving
As forgiven we must be,
One to one in costly loving,
Finding trust and growing free,
Gentle God, be our release,
Gentle Spirit, teach us peace.¹*

The prayer is an anonymous "Prayer for Enemies" written in sixteenth-century England, also given to me by a friend ten years ago:

Merciful and loving Father,

*We beseech thee most humbly, even with all our hearts,
to pour out upon our enemies with bountiful hands, what-
soever things thou knowest will do them good.*

*And chiefly a sound and uncorrupt mind wherethrough
they may know thee and love thee in true charity and with
their whole heart, and love us, thy children, for thy sake.*

*Let not their first hating of us turn to their harm, seeing
that we cannot do them good for want of ability.*

*Lord, we desire their amendment and our own.
Separate them not from us by punishing them, but join
and knit them to us by thy favourable dealing with them.*

*And seeing that we be all ordained to be citizens of one
everlasting City, let us begin to enter into that way here al-
ready by mutual Love which may bring us right forth
thither.²*

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ☪

NOTES

1. Shirley Erena Murray, "Gentle God, When We Are Driven," *Sing for Peace* (Independence: Temple Worship Center/Herald Publishing House, 1994), no. 16.
2. Anonymous, 16th century English prayer, in Elizabeth Goudge, *A Diary of Prayer* (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1966), 78. Copy courtesy of Jill Mulvay Derr.

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PILLARS OF MY FAITH

Compelled to think deeply about what I actually believe—and in the absence of an operative metaphor—I find what remains is . . .

A FISTFUL OF LISTS

By Rebecca Chandler

NOTED EDUCATOR AND LECTURER NEIL POSTMAN once told the faculty of my school, “You can’t really do an effective job of teaching, until you figure out what the operative metaphor of your teaching is.” He suggested some classic examples of teaching metaphors: the gardeners planting and nurturing seeds of knowledge; the builders who lay foundations and complete structures stone by stone; the coaches who want to see their students fight the good fight, finish the course, or play to win the game that is life. None of those seemed quite right to me. To come up with a metaphor that satisfactorily describes the complex relationship between a student and a teacher, between whom and what is taught, requires a leap of insight I’ve never been able to make. Is the brain a blank slate or an empty vessel to be filled? A muscle to be exercised? A complex set of circuitry to be programmed? The possibilities boggle my mind, and after way too many years of pondering the complex interplay we refer to as education, I confess I’ve given up. But I haven’t stopped teaching.

I find the challenge of reinterpreting the metaphorical “pillars” of my faith to be equally daunting, and I ask you to forgive me for not coining a new metaphor. What I can do is tell you my story and hope that in some meaningful way it resonates with yours.

LIKE MANY SUNSTONE readers, I was born in Utah, in Salt Lake City—at the LDS Hospital on 8th Avenue and C Street—and raised just a few blocks southeast of that building. Our little house on “I” Street was not, however, the “house of faith, house of prayer, house of miracles” that I have heard many of you describe when reflecting on your own



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Mormon upbringings. I would have to characterize ours as a “house of tension.” Some tension was probably inevitable, given the times and the personalities in our household, but a fair amount came from living in Salt Lake City, in the very shadow of the temple, with parents who were essentially inactive most of my life. This situation did not preclude my indulging the perception that virtually everyone and everything around me was somehow Mormon, and I had little contact with the world outside of Utah. I remember reading *Little House on the Prairie* and being disappointed in Ma and Pa because they drank coffee. And I was horrified whenever anyone I admired pulled out a cigarette, as Snookie Lanson did one night on *Your Hit Parade*.

Mormonism was the natural order of things. The very presence of the temple spoke to that. I knew there were other temples in other cities too, and I knew a veritable army of missionaries out there would one day convert the entire world. David O. McKay was clearly a prophet. Anyone could see that, and the gospel simply was, well, everything everyone said it was. It was my family, clearly, that was out of step, and the older I got, the more determined I became to one day raise a family that was not. My family would march in cadence with the revealed word of the Lord.

My mother and father were actually and respectively, second and third generation Latter-day Saints. Mom’s mother, born in 1881, exactly a century before my youngest daughter, Alexis, had heard the gospel as a young girl in Leith, near Edinburgh, Scotland, and, convinced of its truthfulness, made plans to be baptized and to immigrate as soon two things happened: she had to turn eighteen, and her mother had to die. When both conditions had been satisfied, she and one of her sisters came by ship to Boston and thence by train to Salt Lake City, arriving just in time to see the turn of the last century. (Because they had missed the handcart/wagon train experience, I was told that I could not claim membership in the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers.)

She married my grandfather, whom she had known in Scotland before they both emigrated and with whom she may have had an “understanding,” and they settled down in the Avenues to raise their family. Unhappily, my grandfather, who

I have been given to understand was a remarkable man I would have liked, died in his early thirties, leaving my grandmother widowed with six children to raise during the Great Depression. She never remarried, and the family did not fare particularly well. There were no missions and no college educations to brag of. Only two of the children retained any kind of ongoing relationship with the church that had occasioned their birth on American soil. Grandma herself remained faithful to the end, committed to the gospel, though I never knew her to have a Church calling. She attended meetings and quite often the temple, with a thermos full of tea, all of her eighty-four years. If it was painful for her to see her children out of the Church, I never heard her talk about it. I remember her as gentle and lovely. She spoke with a Scottish brogue, and she knew David O. McKay from his missionary days in her hometown.

Dad's family might have been more illustrious in the conventional pioneer ancestry sort of way. I understand that one ancestor, John Isaac Worthen, apparently an earlier immigrant from England, joined the Church during the Nauvoo period and participated in the great trek west, but this was not a story I grew up hearing. This was the part of the family who did not speak to each other. I did hear other stories—about a bishop a couple of generations later, and then the proverbial son of a bishop who left home early and went to South America to work, who later ran a speakeasy in Salt Lake City during prohibition, eventually liquidated the family's assets to his alcoholism, and subsequently died at his own hand. That would be the patriarchal line through which my blessings came. If I sometimes had problems with "youth of the noble birthright" rhetoric—and I did—perhaps you can see why.

This man's second son, my father, was an intelligent and resourceful man who attended the University of Utah and obtained a degree in industrial engineering from the Montana School of Mines, making him the only college graduate on either side of my family. He was well read, had many hobbies and many friends, but, at least during my formative years, he also had "Word of Wisdom issues" and very little use for the Mormon Church. My mother, while only marginally active herself, was something of an apologist, and clashes over "the damn church" were common. I grew up apprehensive of genealogy—what I knew about my family tree did not inspire me to learn more—and with the simplistic notion that if Dad had just honored his priesthood, and had *taken* rather than *sent* his children to church, we would have had instant and

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and 2nd Avenue.**

perennial peace in our home.

What we had instead was compromise—the kinds of compromise that are often made in religiously divided households. We had a short blessing over dinner every night. Mom had bought a book of little prayers, most of them poems, that my sister and I learned by rote. These recitations, offered with our eyes squeezed shut—sometimes with some improvisation at the end—served as bedtime ritual and substituted for personal or family prayer. There were no "Family Home Evenings" unless staging one was required for one of us to earn a gay note in Primary or an honor badge of some kind later in MIA. In the interest of maintaining family peace, Mom limited her own activity to meetings she could take in during the week. She attended Relief Society and, more significant for us, she taught Primary.

Because I was not taught the gospel at home, my relationship with the Church was, thus, primarily (no pun intended here) an institutional one. I have written elsewhere about my memories of attending Primary in the North 21st Ward, just three blocks from our "I" Street house and separated only by a hedge from the other formative institution of my childhood, Longfellow Elementary School.¹ The church building, itself, has since been demolished. All that remains is a single stained glass window that was incorporated into the standard-plan building that replaced it. The meeting house was always kind of old and crumbly, and the grass was ragged and patched—but my memories of the inside are all good ones. The chapel was cool and quiet; the walls were creamy plaster edged with white. Windows on both sides were high enough to let in light but still keep us sequestered from the neighborhood outside. The aforementioned stained glass window, a dignified and delicate gothic arch directly below the steeple, presided over what must have been one of the few Mormon church balconies in Salt Lake City at the time. I remember all this with a reverence that recalls not only an awesome sense of quiet and peace, but also the dedication I sensed from my teachers, for whom Primary was a genuine consecration. Most especially, I remember singing there. I don't think it is possible to overestimate the influence of Primary music, which taught me gospel principles far more eloquently than any sermons or manuals have ever since; and the sight of Primary children lining up to sing, even now that my own children are no longer among them, still puts me in that precarious emotional situation that embarrasses teenagers *to death*.

My sister and I also attended Sunday School, sitting in miniature wooden pews lined up before a child-sized podium in the Junior Sunday School room upstairs. The fact that a special part of the building had been reserved for little children to use on Sunday mornings told me how important Sunday School was, and how important we were. Even those of us who walked to church unaccompanied by our parents, who had not been born in the covenant, and who did not regularly come back in the late afternoons for sacrament meeting knew there was a place for us in the Mormon church on the corner of K Street and 2nd Avenue. I was baptized by a neighbor who held the priesthood and confirmed by a man I didn't know at all, but whose picture I had seen in my baby book holding me the day I was blessed. I can't think of a soul in my family who ever bore testimony to me, but by the time I had worked my way through the Homebuilder Girls program, I was hooked, and it was Church programs that had hooked me. I wanted to be Mormon—not Mormon like my parents. Someday I wanted to be a really good one.

THAT THE CHURCH also had something of a dark underside was a fact of life I pretty much absorbed with my baby food. Utah's acrimonious politics—I grew up during the era of Mayor J. Bracken Lee—were an ongoing source of vitriolic commentary over the morning paper. My parents had also argued over which paper to take, and my father won: we took the *Salt Lake Tribune*, which came in the morning, rather than the Church-owned *Deseret News*, which was delivered in the afternoon. Closely related was the Church's monolithic presence all over the city. The fact that presiding Church leaders were often people who had grown up with, or gone to high school with, or were otherwise known to family members, sometimes kept them from being looked upon with much deference. Stories of unfair treatment of friends and family, or perhaps unethical business dealings of highly placed Church authorities, were everyday fare, and sometimes these tales hit close to home.

Both my mother's older brother and my father's very best friend since high school were in the advertising business. Each had his own agency, and they often competed with each other for commissions. This was all taken in fairly good stride. Sometimes one got the job, and sometimes the other did. Sometimes they both lost out to another competitor. That was simply understood to be the nature of the advertising business—except when any business was connected to the Church. On those occasions, an agency owned by a gentleman whose brother was an apostle *always* seemed to get the commission—even when his agency hadn't done much about competing for it. Both of my parents were angry about this situation, but they reacted in different ways. Mom made no excuses and saw the situation for what it was, but she refused to let such matters interfere with her own commitment or level of Church activity. For my dad, it was simply one more nail in the coffin.

We eventually moved up the hill—not the “I” Street hill where we had been living, but one on Laird Avenue—and

found ourselves in Bonneville Stake. The day the bishopric came to call, Dad was in the front yard with a rake in one hand and a cigarette in the other. Mother was humiliated. My sister and I weren't home, or we would surely have died of embarrassment. I was in sixth grade, and Yale Second Ward became the ward of my youth, just as North Twenty-first Ward had been the ward of my childhood. I attended MIA (we called it “Mutual” then) and started going to sacrament meeting as well. During my years at Roosevelt Jr. High and then East High School, I was finding my stride as a student and was willing to work very hard to see my name on the honor roll. Church programs, which were achievement-oriented and sometimes competitive, called forth a similar response. If it was possible to get an Individual Award with seventy-five percent attendance, I wanted ninety-five percent. Some years, I didn't miss a single Church meeting. (Actually, I had no life; I just didn't realize it until later.) I participated in just about any activity that was offered, went to MIA Girls Camp in Brighton, and enjoyed it all enormously.

During those years, my father somehow found his way back into Church activity, and my parents went to the temple, accompanied by a score of relatives I had never seen and what must have been half our ward. There was a reception afterward at Bishop Boyden's house across the street in Uintah Circle. The “Backer Bakery” Backers were members of the ward, and they supplied a sheet cake with the Salt Lake Temple in slate grey frosting and the words “Eternal Happiness” in the sky next to the Angel Moroni. Maybe there was hope for our family after all.

Dad was subsequently called to the Sunday School superintendency and one summer, found himself short of teachers. I was sixteen and deemed old enough to accept a teaching assignment. The course of study was “Leaders of the Scriptures,” and the class was composed of ten- and eleven-year-old girls. I learned to love both the Old Testament and the kids—especially the kids. Attending weekly prayer meetings and monthly stake inservice meetings (which at that time had standing roll call), I felt very grown up. This summer replacement calling became a permanent one, and I wasn't released until after I had graduated from high school.

I also took four years of East High seminary. In contrast to the pressure BYU-bound kids feel today, we were encouraged to consider seminary, but many active kids from active families did not attend. Year after year, I agonized over what high school courses I would have to forego in order to fit in another year of seminary, but I kept coming back, and in my senior year was “called” as a seminary officer. I loved that experience as well. I still have my journal from Grant Hardy's thoroughly memorable Church history course, and I'm astonished at how often, even now, I recall discussions from those classes.

Another highlight during those years was Bonneville Strings. Like about half the young violinists on Salt Lake City's east bench, I took lessons from Dr. David Shand, who lived around the corner. Dr. Shand had a small string orchestra—comprised largely of his own students—that rehearsed on Saturday afternoons at the Bonneville Stake Center and played

principally in local wards. We also performed for Bonneville Stake quarterly conference, where we sat, literally, at the feet of apostles and prophets.

The course was now clear: I just needed to live worthy of that returned missionary, marry in the temple, and build the kind of family I had wanted in the first place. College would help me be a better wife and mother. If it turned out to be at all possible, I wanted to find a way to live in the mission field where I could really make a contribution—and where I wouldn't have to feel quite so vanilla as I did as just another Mormon in Salt Lake City.

FAST FORWARD AN entire generation to where my youngest daughter, recently energized by a week with Especially For Youth, is growing up in the Shaker Heights Ward, Kirtland Ohio Stake. There are possibly a dozen kids in the entire ward, but these kids are devoted to each other, and as a co-educational group that spans five or six teenage years, are perfectly comfortable together. This is the same situation Neal and I found when we first moved to Cleveland Heights and were called to teach seminary, and it is exactly what we wanted for our kids. But it has not always been like this. Some years our children have had virtually no LDS peer group—at one point, two of our sons were the entire Aaronic Priesthood of the ward—and sometimes the kids who have been available haven't been particularly compatible with each other. Either a stake or a general edict prohibits “units” from combining just the youth to provide some critical mass, and statistically, our stake doesn't profile particularly well. The percentage of young men serving full-time missions is currently nineteen, compared to a Church-wide rate of about a third and an Intermountain west average of nearly half. Raising a family in the mission field has presented some challenges I didn't anticipate, though it's hard to tease out just what difficulties we might have encountered anywhere.

I've learned some things the hard way; some make me sad, and some make me angry. I've learned, for example, that Church activity is unfortunately but often unmistakably correlated to conditions that are outside and sometimes beyond a member's control. Some people seem to simply be hardwired

The course was now clear: I just needed to live worthy of that returned missionary, marry in the temple, and build the kind of family I had wanted in the first place.



Rebecca and Neal Chandler, Dresden, Germany, 2000

in ways that make accepting the gospel and participating in Church activity feel right and good; others encounter problems almost from the get-go. One fairly obvious example would be missionary work, to which some people are drawn and which they thoroughly enjoy, while others dread it. Ross Peterson speaks of his own experience growing up Mormon in Malad, Idaho, and recalls that his father, like the fathers of many of his friends, while a very decent and a very generous man, seldom went to church. He wasn't comfortable wearing a white shirt, and he didn't like to pray in public—certainly didn't want to preach or teach.²

Successful Mormons are often great planners and natural leaders. While it is true that accepting and magnifying Church callings may lead to personal growth, some people will remain more comfortable than others in those roles. We talk a lot about gaining a testimony, of being sensitive to the Spirit, but I think it's often hard to tell where an intuitive personality leaves off and what we call genuine spirituality begins. My guess is that there is a lot of overlap. The trouble often is that those members who don't seem to be subject to regular “promptings of the Spirit” may spend a lot of time wondering what is wrong with them or with their relationship to the Lord when other explanations might be valid.

Unhappily, we seldom discuss personalities and personal predispositions in ways that might be helpful to such members.

Two poems by Emily Dickinson are instructive on this point. When we hear her very famous lines

I never saw a Moor—
I never saw the Sea—
Yet know I how the Heather looks
and what a Billow be

I never spoke with God
Nor visited in Heaven—
Yet certain am I of the spot
As if the chart were given—

we marvel that this young poetess should have religious sensibilities so like our own. She dressed all in white, didn't she? What a great Latter-day Saint she would have made. Has

anyone done her temple work? But leafing through the anthology a little further, we come upon some verse much less often quoted:

Some keep the Sabbath going to Church—
I keep it, staying at Home—
With a Bobolink for a Chorister—
And an Orchard, for a Dome—

Some keep the Sabbath in Surplice—
I just wear my Wings—
And instead of tolling the Bell, for Church,
Our little Sexton—sings.

God preaches, a noted Clergyman—
And the sermon is never long,
so instead of getting to Heaven, at last—
I'm going, all along.

On second thought, perhaps Emily Dickinson wouldn't be all that comfortable as a Mormon, attending meetings on the block schedule in a cinderblock building.

There is also the matter of the shape life finally takes. Someone once observed—in the BYU alumni magazine, actually—that Church programs are tailored to meet the needs of a certain prototypical family: temple marriage, a given number of reasonably compliant children, a job that provides for a family's needs without making inordinate demands on the breadwinner or challenging his values—and that would be “his,” as mothers are still encouraged to stay home full time.³ And as it turns out, not that many families (something like twenty percent or less) manage to fit that model that much of the time. Little in the background of a card-carrying Mormon will help him or her deal with the truly unexpected: a divorce, say, or a family member with a mental illness or a substance abuse problem, a financial reversal, a family member who is gay, a Church disciplinary council.

The experience we all have with Mormonism, especially for those of us in the mission field, is actually lived out on the local level, and that experience can vary widely. Local leadership may be accepting of us as individuals, loving and supportive through difficult times, or they may be indifferent, even punitive. Ward members may through their love and concern provide a supportive community or ease a difficult situation, or through judgmental attitudes and gossiping be a huge part of the problem itself. In C.S. Lewis's *Screwtape Letters*, a senior devil reminds a young intern to make use of the “law of undulations”—something I've certainly been aware of during the more than two decades we have lived in essentially the same ward. There have been times we have felt comfortable and supported, have been extended opportunities for service, and times when we have not. The correlation between what we have needed and what has been available to us has not always been optimum, either. I think many active members find they have to be willing sometimes to endure periods when all they can do is try to hold on.

There are also the inexorable correlations with financial success. Some neighborhoods, some suburbs have staggering

levels of activity. Others, often areas where problems are greater and the support of a faith community the most sorely needed, just struggle. My own family's experience may be prototypical. Did the fact that we had moved to a more affluent neighborhood have anything to do with my father's reactivation? I have often wondered.

The very strengths of our church sometimes seem to be our biggest problems. If a huge part of the satisfaction of being Mormon is the opportunity to participate fully—to magnify talents and build camaraderie in the trenches, and for many of us it is—that experience is greatly diminished when such opportunities don't seem to be forthcoming. The strong emphasis on family seems like a pretty good thing, but when marital and family status become defining characteristics—when wards have to be organized around the perceived “special needs” of, for example, the unmarried—what has happened to the notion of coming together as a faith community to worship God? Lay leadership presents the same combination of strengths and difficulties. We learn from childhood that the priesthood has been given to serve members, and there is no question that, in the humility of administering ordinances and taking responsibility for the welfare of others, priesthood holders often do just that. But the fact is that the priesthood is also a hierarchy, and when we say “it doesn't matter where we serve, but how,” we are not quite telling the truth. There is power and prestige in presiding, and there are dangers both when callings are extended and when they are not. “My husband would be active,” more than one woman has confessed to me, “if he were just put in charge.” And for those who are in charge, there is sometimes inexperience, human error, and the “nature and disposition of almost all men” (D&C 121:39) that have to be acknowledged and somehow dealt with.

SO WHERE DOES all this leave me now? Less “actively engaged” with my ward at this point, frankly, than I ever thought I would be, and for reasons I never would have expected. Compelled to think deeply about what I actually *believe*—and in the absence of an operative metaphor—I find what remains is a fistful of lists. I suspect I may not be alone in this approach. There is the list of things of which I remain certain. It isn't very long. And there is a more substantive list of things I still essentially believe, and then a pretty long list of hopes. Then the lists get shorter again, rather like a bell curve. I have a list of wishes. I also have a list of items—some policies, some practices, some purported doctrines—I find confusing, a list of things I wish were different, and then there is a mercifully short list of things that really make me angry. I won't inflict all these lists on you, just a few items from the middle part of the bell curve.

I FIND I still essentially believe in the gospel as set forth in the Articles of Faith. For that I am indebted both to Brother Talmage, for his book of that title, and to my years as spiritual living teacher in Relief Society. But I also must credit all those Primary and Sunday School and seminary teachers for their

good efforts and all the positive associations I have with growing up Mormon in a much less complicated era. I can still recite all thirteen Articles of Faith verbatim, (along with their “key words”). More important, they still make sense to me, they still feel good and right, and they anchor my personal theology.

WHILE I HAVE not been wildly successful with personal study programs, I do genuinely love the scriptures—especially the Old and New Testaments. I’m glad we use the King James version, which appeals to my poetic sense, if not always to reason and clarity. “Behold the Lamb of God” has more power for me than, “Look, there goes Jesus,” though the latter rendition is admittedly less obscure. I am not bound to Biblical literalism. That may be a result of my training in literature, where it is all very well to know the history and the context—to know something about the author and his or her life—but ultimately, the text has to stand on its own. Rather than addressing the accuracy of a text or its historicity, I just want to know if the story is a *good* one—if it can be deemed valuable for one reason or another. What is it about this particular story that has kept it around this long or that got it included in the canon in the first place? What can I learn about my relationship with God or with others? Satisfactory responses on those points generally overshadow for me whatever other inherent textual problems there may be.

I am less enthusiastic about the Book of Mormon, which I find far less readable, and which is never my favorite text in the four-year Gospel Doctrine cycle. I agree with Neal that the stories themselves are less compelling, less instructive, and altogether less memorable, but it is clear to me that many people do not agree with this assessment.⁴ If the Book of Mormon does change lives, if it does bring people to Christ as it claims, then I must acknowledge that power.

LIVING IN THE Kirtland Stake as we have for more than twenty years, we are steeped in Church history, and I really like that. I like having access to the Kirtland temple. I have even been lucky enough to attend some worship services there. I have sung within those walls and with all my heart “The Spirit of God Like a Fire is Burning” with a group of Midwest Pilgrims on two occasions, and just this spring with Latter-day Saints of all stripes when the Mormon History Association held its annual meeting here. Our stake center is across the road and down just a bit from the temple. You have

The fact is that the priesthood is also a hierarchy, and when we say “it doesn’t matter where we serve, but how,” we are not quite telling the truth. There is power and prestige in presiding, and there are dangers both when callings are extended and when they are not.

to pass the Whitney Store to get there, and our stake welfare project is located on the historic Johnson Farm. There are plenty of problematic issues in Church history, and I don’t ignore those, but for the most part, I am proud of our legacy as Mormons and happy to play my part in its unfolding drama. I value our pioneer heritage, even though I have no particular claim on it through my personal ancestry.

I BELIEVE IN families. Who among us does not? Coming out against families would be like coming out in favor of dirty words. Even though it sounds and feels like a cliché, I must say that the experience of being a parent has exceeded all my expectations, and I have loved my children with an intensity that sometimes scares me. Neal and I are long past the days of standing in the doorway with our arms around each other watching our children in dewy slumber. Our kids are all grown up (and some of them

look kind of gross now when they’re asleep) but we remain overwhelmed with and deeply grateful for the experience of being parents.

I BELIEVE IN music. I love listening to it and especially participating when I can. I marvel at this gift to mortals given which has such power to unite and to satisfy. I also believe in food, which I believe has similar properties—especially when combined with community.

While I don’t have every single aspect of the entire plan of salvation firmly imbedded, I do have hope in the resurrection. One of my attendant hopes is that the Second Coming will not be presented in essentially a conference format and brought to us via satellite courtesy of Bonneville Corporation. I hope the nature of the event is more like a huge, happy, noisy family reunion. I know it is a little presumptuous to do this, but I have some suggestions: The event should be scheduled in the spring because I would like flowers, lots of flowers, and I would like all of them to be real. I also would like music—much of it “inappropriate.” I would like trumpets and French horns and guitars (though if your taste runs to zithers and dulcimers, I hope you get what you want, too). And food. We’ll need lots of food, because we’ll all be hungry. Except for those changed in the twinkling of an eye, the resurrection will be the culmination of a pretty substantial fast. I propose a traditional Mormon potluck. You bring your favorite family recipe, and I’ll bring mine. We should have Relief Society Tuna Noodle Casserole and Mormon Red Death Punch, all of the colors of

the Jell-O salad matrix, and BYU brownies—the ones with a layer of mint frosting under the chocolate—and maybe cherry chews and Y-Sparkle. I will bring Festive Yam Casserole, which my children despise. But if the resurrection is to involve the restoration of all things, they must surely expect to see Festive Yam Casserole restored. Moreover, in their perfected state, my children will *eat* it, and they will *like* it!

For now, that's about it—pretty far from the automatic declarations of certitude I hear every month in ward fast and testimony meeting (often from remarkably tender subjects), but a pretty good distance from anger or apathy. And, I'm indebted to many of you for my having gotten as far as I have with this personal lexicon of belief. When I hear assertions that “alternate forums” destroy faith, I'm a little incredulous, because so many of you have been of substantial help to me. Without the publications—*Dialogue*, *SUNSTONE*, *Exponent II*, without Sunstone Symposiums—in Salt Lake and Chicago and Boston and Washington, D.C.—without Midwest Pilgrimage and annual Exponent retreats, I wouldn't know much of this, and I wouldn't know very many of you.

I'm indebted to Lavina Fielding Anderson for her analysis of revelation.⁵ Like many of you, I also grew up with the “red telephone model of revelation,” as she put it, with one designee sitting around with nothing to do but wait for it to ring and the rest of us in metal folding chairs, pencils poised over steno pads so we can be given the message *du jure*. Lavina's alternate scenario of a room with lots of phones ringing, lots of messages coming in, file cabinets slamming and people

passing notes to each other, makes profoundly more sense, especially in light of the way I know Lavina lives her life.

The phenomenon that is Joseph Smith can be a sticking point for anyone seeking to develop a thoughtful, honest faith, and I'm indebted to Peggy Fletcher Stack for her straightforward testimony on that subject. One of the pillars of her faith several years ago was the simple statement: “Joseph Smith was a prophet”—a statement I'd heard myriads of times before, often in some pretty strange contexts, but it caught me by surprise in this one. She went on to suggest that, like many prophets, he was deeply flawed, but concluded that a prophet in any dispensation can have significant problems and still be regarded as “chosen of the Lord.”⁶ This position is much more comfortable for me than any of the polar alternatives usually presented.

J. Bonner Ritchie may have been applying the most fundamental principles of organizational behavior when he observed that it is in the nature of all organizations to become more and more conservative as they grow, but it was news to me, and it has helped me contain my dissatisfactions over the changes I've seen as the Church of my childhood morphed from about a million members, most in the Mountain West, into to a monolithic organization ten times that size. His assertion that all institutions—*all* of them—are essentially amoral doesn't make me very happy, but it has saved some hand-wringing not just in my dealings with the institution under discussion here, but with other institutions that hold sway in my life as well.⁷ I'm thinking most particularly of the school in

THIS PAINTING HANGS in my classroom to help me keep things in perspective. Teaching middle school full time while raising a family has not always been easy, and it is tempting when life piles up, as it sometimes does, to feel beleaguered. I draw literal strength from reminding myself that Mormons are tough. That, as a people, we have accomplished remarkable feats. There is a can-do, roll-up-your-sleeves quality to Mormon life that has both amazed and sometimes comforted me. I see that energy in everything from roadshows and girls camp, to Relief Society “Super Saturdays” and the sometimes Herculean efforts to get a sit-down ward dinner prepared on a minimal ward budget. If these enterprises seem trivial, and I admit that they do, I also recall the Thanksgiving a thirteen-year-old girl in our ward went for a walk in the woods near Chardon with a friend and failed to return by dinner time. When reasonable efforts to locate them failed, the quorum networks went into overdrive, and manpower from three area wards was standing by to continue the search at dawn.



I also need to remind myself sometimes—when grades are due, when bills are due, when blueines are due, when every child in my life seems to need something, when there doesn't seem to be enough money or nearly enough time—that this isn't, after all, the trek across the plains and that it is unbecoming of me to make too much of my so-called vicissitudes.

which I teach—which for all its centennial history, its fine academic reputation, its gothic arches, its stained glass windows, and its Latin motto, certainly seems to have a dark underside as well—as does every university with which Neal has ever been associated.

I'm indebted to Cathy Stokes for a more personal perspective. Once when she had accepted an invitation to speak in our stake, she also accepted our invitation to stay with us, and we had a great weekend together. Monday morning, dressed in her red traveling suit, as she was getting ready to leave, she put her arms around me to say goodbye and added, "Well, my dear, this is about as good as it gets," and she went on to enumerate a few things she had noticed during her visit—about our home, our children, my husband, and our lives together. Everything she said was true; it's just that I also had an equal and opposite list of everything that was wrong with my house, children, husband—*especially* my husband—our ward, my schedule. Her simple observations brought me up short. *Is this as good as it gets? Does anyone ever get every item crossed off the list? Or does completing one list just lead to generating another, so we are in a perennial state of mild discontent? "As good as it gets" isn't half bad, and while I'm sure her comment wasn't meant as a rebuke, I felt admonished and tucked the list of what's wrong with my life into a less accessible corner of my mind. I didn't immediately turn into Merry Sunshine, but ever since her visit, I have cherished a more comfortable sense of gratitude.*

Finally, my wish list:

- I WISH WE could treat each other better—and I mean that on every level such a statement could be made: I wish Primary children were nice to each other; I wish MIA Maids didn't form exclusive little cliques; I wish Relief Society sisters didn't gossip; I wish dental students didn't huddle in discontented little groups and ignore the permanent residents of the ward; I wish the hierarchy spent more time with the rank and file.

- I WISH WE could be more honest with each other. I have enormous faith in our ability to help and to heal one another when we treat each other honestly. One reason I particularly value my weekends with Midwest Pilgrimage is because of the honesty I find there. We leave our Sunday clothes and our Sunday faces home and sit around in jeans and talk about what's going on—about what's *really* going on—and I usually go home feeling better. This approach works in twelve-step programs; I can't help wondering if we couldn't find a way to make simple honesty work in our auxiliaries and more of our day-to-day interactions with each other.

- I WISH WE could be more flexible. I wish we could look at the needs of actual people a little more often when we weigh them against the perceived needs of the organization. I wish we could meet folks halfway sometimes if it means keeping, say, a part-member family involved and feeling a part of the

Church even one generation longer. The consolidated meeting schedule, especially in the mission field where distances to meetinghouses are often considerable, fosters an all-or-nothing approach to Church activity. My childhood was full of Mormon kids whose parents seldom went to church, and many of these kids grew up to be active practicing Latter-day Saints. I also remember many, many women whose husbands often stayed away. My mother was able to make some compromises in Church activity and keep the family in a positive state of association—if not in full activity—with our Salt Lake City ward, and I think she was right to do that. Sometimes half a loaf is better than none. I wish we could accommodate interfaith marriages more successfully. Whenever we treat a marriage outside the temple as a second-class union, the odds are pretty good that couple won't be coming back for more Mormonism and that ultimately they and their children will be lost to us.

- I WISH THE Church were more of a home to more of its people. Whenever this sentiment is expressed, someone usually quotes Robert Frost—or more often misquotes the poem, "The Death of the Hired Man." The line is, "Home is where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in," and far too many members of this Church do not have any confidence in that default. We all know of individuals who have been treated in ways unworthy of any institution that bears the name of Jesus Christ.

A story is told of a rabbi whose son left home without his permission—without even taking his leave. Surprised and hurt, he sent a messenger to bring his son back home. But when the messenger returned after several days, it was not with the son, but rather with another message: "Your son says he cannot return." The rabbi had a lot to weigh in his response. His patriarchy had been challenged, his ecclesiastical authority and his standing in his community perhaps questioned. But then there was his love and concern for his son. "Bring him back as far as he will come," he finally replied, "and I will go to him."

A good model, I think, and one I would happily see us endorse. 

NOTES

1. Rebecca Chandler, "Of Primary Concern," *SUNSTONE* (Dec. 1994): 66–70.
2. F. Ross Peterson, "A Boy Trailblazer: Growing Up in Mormon Idaho in 1945–1957," presentation at 1998 Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium, tape SL98–325.
3. Carri P. Jenkins, "The Changing Family," *BYU Today* (Mar. 1990):26–31.
4. Neal Chandler, "Book of Mormon Stories that My Teachers Kept from Me," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 24, no. 4 (winter 1991): 13–30.
5. Lavina Fielding Anderson, "In the Garden God Hath Planted: Explorations Toward a Maturing Faith," *SUNSTONE* (Oct. 1990): 24.
6. Peggy Fletcher Stack, "Tales of a True Believer," originally delivered as part of the "Pillars of My Faith" panel at the 1991 Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium; later revised and printed in *SUNSTONE* (Apr. 1995): 48–54.
7. J. Bonner Ritchie, "The Institutional Church and the Individual: How Strait the Gate, How Narrow the Way?" *SUNSTONE* (May-June 1981): 28–35; reprinted in Silver Anniversary issue, with additional commentary, as "The Institutional Church and the Individual," *SUNSTONE* (June 1999): 98–112.

Eagle Scout. Missionary. Husband. Father. . . . Human.

CONFESSIONS OF A MORMON BOY

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ONE-MAN PLAY
WRITTEN, CREATED, AND PERFORMED
BY STEVEN FALES

Original Utah Version

Confessions of a Mormon Boy began as a reading at the 2001 Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium and had its world premiere at the Rose Wagner Performing Arts Center in Salt Lake City, 23 November 2001. The two-week run sold out, and an additional performance was added to accommodate the demand. The Salt Lake Tribune called it “unflinchingly honest, wistfully comic, a compelling play, an enormous . . . achievement.” The Deseret News declined the invitation to review the play.

Since its beginnings in Salt Lake, the play has undergone significant rewrites. Much of the original Mormon in-humor has been taken out (including the Pre-existence and the theatrical convention of using St. Peter) but is preserved here. The play now details more about what it took for Steven to leave his “gay adolescence” behind and reclaim a life of integrity. The updated version has gone on to play highly successful runs at the New Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco and the Coconut Grove Playhouse in Miami. The run in Las Vegas coincided with the 2002 National Affirmation Conference (Gay and Lesbian Mormons). As with the original, there continues to be no swearing or nudity in the production.

The San Francisco Examiner recently said the play (now titled X'd) is “A story that must be told! One of the best new plays . . . seen in a very long time.” The Miami Herald called it “honest, moving, whimsical, sobering, tender, and cathartic,” with the South Florida Sun-Sentinel calling it “a coup de theatre.” It is now in pre-production for an Off-Broadway run to be directed by Tony Award-winner Jack Hofsis (The Elephant Man).

Steven considers Confessions a “valentine” to Mormonism. He further explains, “What I’ve tried to do is illuminate, with warmth and humor, the dilemma of those struggling to reconcile their dreams of becoming straight with the realities of being gay and what it costs to accept or deny that truth—especially when children are involved. As I’ve performed across the country, it’s been rewarding to have audience members—gay, straight, male, female, old, young, religious, non-religious—tell me how much the play has meant to them. I’ll often hear, ‘You’ve told 99 percent of my story!’—and that person will be Catholic or Baptist or Jewish.”

Steven claims to now have an extraordinary relationship with his ex-wife, actress/writer Emily Pearson, and his former mother-in-law, Carol Lynn. Emily is the co-founder of Wildflowers, a support network for women currently or formerly married to gay men (see <www.WeAreWildflowers.com>). The play is dedicated to Steven’s children.

THE PLAY IS PERFORMED WITHOUT INTERMISSION

(A backdrop of stars somewhere in eternity. A flashlight appears. A voice is heard in the dark.)

EXCUSE ME, ST. PETER? IS HEAVENLY MOTHER there? I’d like to talk to Heavenly Mother. Could you please tell her I’m here? You don’t know who that is? Look, pal, I know you’re the only one up here that’s not a Mormon, but you really should know who your Heavenly Mother is—the wife of Heavenly Father. Could you please turn

on some lights? I know I’m in Outer Darkness, but this is ridiculous! (Blinding lights come up revealing Steven in a white penitentiary jumpsuit with black “jailbird” stripes and a huge pink triangle on the back. He is holding a backpack filled with personal props, a bouquet of daffodils, and, of course, the flashlight. The stage looks like an opening night party for a new nightclub or Broadway musical. There is a red carpet downstage roped off with white velvet ropes and stanchions, ficus trees with lights, a cocktail table with a white satin tablecloth, fresh white roses, and votive candles. There is a disco ball hanging and a poster that reads, in large gold letters, “Celestial Kingdom—SOME Visitors Welcome.” Steven



Excuse me, St. Peter? Is Heavenly Mother there?

continues to address St. Peter.) Thank you!

Heavenly Mother said she would put my name on the list for her Celestial Tea Party, just in case the Judgment didn't go well for me. It obviously *didn't*. Am I on it? Brother Fales, Steven H. I'm not? Oh, she must have forgotten. It's an easy mistake. I'm sure it's

okay. Yes, I know homosexuals aren't allowed to go to Heaven, but this is an exception. I have permission from the glorified, resurrected Diva herself. She invited me *personally*. I promise I'll leave just as soon as it's over. Now don't tell me it's not going on. I saw the flyers down in Hell. I know it's today. And my kids are in there. So I'm coming in! (*Steven steps on the red carpet and burns his feet. Sirens go off.*) Ouch! Hot! Hot! Hot! Hot! Hot! Hot! *Good grief!*

Look, I came all the way from the Telestial Kingdom to be here. I had to sneak past security. Then I rode a million light years up the escalator through the Terrestrial Kingdom where I finally found the glass elevator to the Celestial Kingdom. Oh, St. Peter, don't tell me you don't know about Mormon Eternity! (*Steven turns over the poster and draws the Plan of Salvation with bionic speed.*)

The Celestial Kingdom, Heaven, where you're here standing guarding these Pearly Gates? That's only for the really good Mormons. (How did you get here? Even the popes live down with me.) The Terrestrial Kingdom is where the okay Mormons go. And the Telestial Kingdom, Hell, is where the really bad Mormons (and everyone else) go.

Heavenly Mother told me in the Pre-existence that I was invited to her Celestial Tea Party. The *Pre-existence*. Oh, you Catholics don't know anything! The Pre-existence is where we lived with Heavenly Father and Mother before we came to Earth. You know, where everyone was *Mormon*. We all smiled like this. (*Steven flashes his "Mormon" smile.*) It was the coolest place. Kinda like Krypton, where Superman lived before he came to Earth in that egg-ship. Everything was in its perfectly created pre-mortal form, and everyone was friendly and happy because nothing bad had ever happened to anyone. And just like Superman had to watch all those videos about trees and

Shakespeare and stuff, we had classes to learn about mortality while we anxiously waited to go down to Earth, where we would gain a body and suffer. Except when we got there, we would forget it all. Except for me. I remember *everything*.

I remember I was in love with Jimmy Flinders. The first time I saw him was at a class we were taking on dating and eternal marriage. I was there with my best friend, Emily. We were learning how to get a husband down on Earth. We were chatting away like we always did, when Jimmy walked in the Pre-mortal Conference Center. Talk about a First Vision. He was blonde, blue-eyed, 185 pounds, six feet tall—tanned, toned, tight muscular swimmer's build. There was no question he was the tops! I wanted so bad to be his husband . . . his wife . . . his *eternal companion*. (After we finished our two-year missions on Earth, of course, and our degrees in music/dance/theatre at Brigham Young University. You know, "the Lord's University"?) Emily and I were fighting over him, "He's mine!"

"No, he's mine!"

"He's looking at me!"

"He saw me first!"

After the closing prayer, we jumped out of our seats and raced towards Jimmy. I was afraid Emily would get there before me. I could never compete with her. She was blonde and absolutely gorgeous, not to mention the nicest and funniest girl in the Pre-existence. If she talked to him first, I would lose my chance. I was in the lead, but as I rounded the refreshment table, the director of the Pre-mortal Mormon Tabernacle Choir, Brother Lockhart, stepped in front of me. I crashed into the punch bowl. Red punch and Oreos went flying everywhere. Sure enough, Emily got a date with Jimmy to the Pre-mortal Gold & Green Ball. All I got was a mop and a seat in the alto section in the choir.

Do you have time for this, St. Peter? Good. Time doesn't exist here anyway, you know.

The pre-mortal premiere of the long-running, smash hit, Mormon mega-musical *Saturday's Warrior* had just ended. Jimmy had made quite a name for himself as a leading man in that production. I was a dancer in the chorus. But I didn't mind the chorus, as long as I could watch Jimmy from the wings as he gave them his big solo number in the second act. "I'll wait for you, Jimmy!"

Now auditions were being held for the revival of my favorite Mormon musical, *My Turn On Earth*. It was clear that Jimmy was going to play the male lead—*again!* You know, the Jesus part who then gets to play the husband part who marries the female lead, Barbara? Brother Stanislavsky said Jimmy naturally acted the part better. *Whatever!* Jimmy didn't even like acting or the theatre. He just stood there and acted all butch so everyone would fall in love with him. That's not acting. Me playing butch—now *that* would be acting!

So I decided I wanted to play the *Barbara* part. Not only would I be playing a leading part worthy of my talent, but on

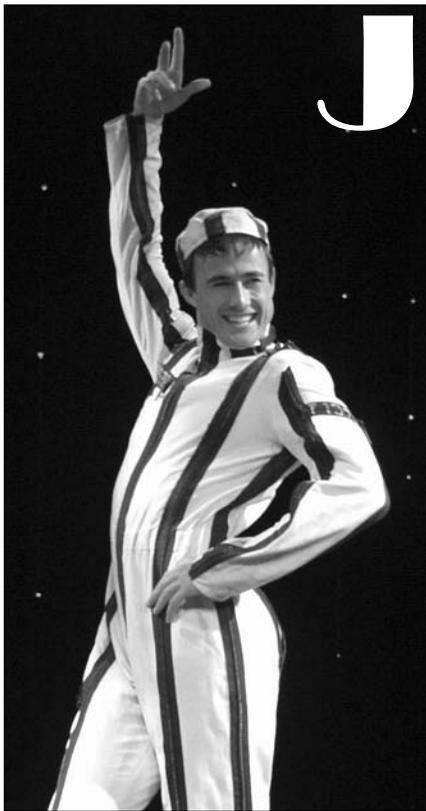
stage I would get to marry Jimmy. At the audition, I just kept thinking of him: *(Sings)*

*In these dreams I've loved you so
That by now I think I know
What it's like to be loved by you.
I will—*

“Next!”

Can you believe they cut me off?! I didn't even get to sing my high note, for Pete's sake! (Oh, sorry. I didn't mean to take your name in vain.) So guess who got the part? Emily. *Again!* I mean, just because her future mother would write the show was no excuse. I could belt higher than any of the other girls, and I had the best split leaps in my primordial dispensation—not to mention they should always give the role to the best actress!

Well, I did get cast. You know the part I got? *Satan*. He doesn't get to marry *anyone!* Now I would never get to marry Jimmy! So you want to know what I did? I learned the entire Barbara part behind Emily's back just in case she got her orders to go to Earth in the middle of a performance. Someone would have to fill in, and I would be ready! *(Sings)* “Emily, time to go home!”



Just tell St. Peter you're here, and I'll have him buzz you right in!

Getting sent to Earth at a moment's notice was always a possibility. Once, during a particularly long candy-wrapper matinee, we were all on stage singing: “*The world turns 'round like a merry-go-round. It lets some off, and it takes some on.*” There we were: Jimmy, Emily, Dave,

Marci, and me. And right in the middle of the number, Marci starts floating up out of the theatre and down towards Earth with a look of utter surprise on her face. *(Sings)* “*It ends with death. It begins with birth. And it's my turn—Goodbye, Marci! (Goodbye, bass section.)*” Then, as Dave and I are doing the dance lift Marci and I usually do, he starts to go, too. But he's

determined to finish the number. So, he's clinging to me, clawing at the scenery, grabbing whatever he can to stay on stage—chairs, a table. “Have a nice life, Dave! *(Sings)* *It's your turn on Earth.*” (Minutes later a pregnant woman in a remote village in Madagascar gave birth to a boy and two chairs. Now *that's* the magic of live theatre!)

I knew Dave wasn't a good performer because only the really bad ones (and lemurs) go to Madagascar. If you didn't want to end up there—or another non-elect country—you knew you had to razzle-dazzle 'em. There was no way I was going somewhere *non-elect*. I was going to Broadway! That's why I made sure my Satan was especially wicked every time. Like in the War-in-Heaven scene, where Jesus and I battle over whose plan everyone should follow down on Earth. *(Sings in a sexy, exaggerated style)*

I have a plan.

It will save every man.

I will force them to live righteously.

They won't have to choose—

Not one we will lose—

And give all the glory to me.

Give it to me!

Of course, Jesus always won that scene in the show. But since Jimmy was so cute playing Jesus, I didn't mind a bit.

ONE DAY AFTER rehearsal, I ran into Jimmy who was practicing the love duet he sings with Barbara, “Eternity Is You.” He was having difficulty with the harmony.

“Want some help?”

“Sure. Thanks, dude.”

(Sings) “*Looking at you I can see right through to eternity.*” We blended so well together. And

as I looked into his eyes “*Eternity is you,*” I could swear I saw eternity. So I kissed him. *Hard.* He was surprised. I could tell. *He decked me.* I went flying across the rehearsal cloud.

“Well, someone had to do it. And it wouldn't be right if it was Heavenly Father!”

I begged him, “Please don't turn me in to Heavenly Father!”

He didn't. He turned me in to *Heavenly Mother.*

I was summoned to the Pre-mortal Lion House. Heavenly Mother was holding high tea in the Celestial Tea Room (where they serve that delicious non-caffeine Celestial Seasonings chamomile tea). She was finishing her weekly support group for all the women who would be polygamist wives. It was getting really heated in there, so I just waited in the lobby where I watched *Who Wants to Be a Mormon Millionaire?* until the sisters finally came out. There was Emma Smith. “Hi, Emma!” (Boy, did she look pissed.)

I was a little nervous. It was so rare to actually see Heavenly Mother I forgot what she looked like. She came sweeping into the room. “Is that my little Steven? Welcome back, *dahling!*” Now I knew why they never talked about her. *She's fabulous!*

She was Auntie Mame, Betty Davis, Martha Stewart, and Oprah Winfrey all rolled into one.

We immediately hit it off. I complimented her ZCMI tea set and offered a few decorating tips as I rearranged the flowers on the table. Then I helped her pick out her veil for the Pre-ordination High Priest Gala to be held later that evening. She said, "Why do I always have to sit in the back and wear a veil? I am the mother of all Creation, dagnab it! Where are we, Pre-mortal Afghanistan?" She was also upset she didn't have her own email address on the Celestial Internet. She laughed as she told me that she'd secretly gotten hold of Heavenly Father's password. "Just four simple letters. Now I can send inspiration to my children whenever the heck I like!" We spent the rest of the time swapping Jell-O recipes and reciting our favorite Carol Lynn Pearson poetry: "Today you came running, with a small specked egg warm in your hand. . . ."

Before we knew it, it was time for her to go. I think she forgot why I'd been summoned to meet her. I rushed to help her put on her veil, her gloves, and her black mink stole. "Thank you, my dahling boy. (Pause) Steven, is there anything special you'd like down on Earth? Anything at all! A share at Fire Island or a Prada gift certificate perhaps?"

"I just want to marry Jimmy Flinders."

"Yes, he is a stud, isn't he? Well, don't tell your Heavenly Father, but I'll see what I can do. You must join me and the entire Relief Society for my Celestial Tea Party when everything is all said and done. You'll fit right in. Oh! If the Judgment doesn't go well for you, I'll leave your name at the Pearly Gates. (Would you be a dear and light this for me? Thank you, dahling. Can you believe it? I'm as old as time, and I'm still sneaking cigarettes!) Just tell St. Peter you're here, and I'll have him buzz you right in!"

I AM TELLING the truth, St. Peter. You think I just made all this up? Could you please check the list again? Brother Fales. F as in Frank. Not F-A-I-L-S. F-A-L-E-S. Fales is an old Welsh name meaning "son of Fagel." Fagel is spelled F-A-G-e-l. Fagel, sometimes pronounced *feyghella*, also means "to be glad," which is a synonym for happy or gay—and that's why I smile like this. (Smiles) So am I on the list? Steve Young, Donny Osmond, Orrin Hatch. . . . That's the *Terrestrial* list. I'm on the *Telestial* list. Well, tell them to find it and fax it up! Please! (Sighs)

I can't wait to see my kids again. It feels like twenty millennia have passed. But who's counting? Judgment Day was the last time I saw them. What a fiasco! My attorney was late, and my star witness testified against me—bitter old queen! I was screaming bloody murder when they tore me away from my kids. They sentenced me to eternal damnation with no visitation rights until the end of eternity! They let me keep this picture of them though. (Pulls frame out of backpack and shows



was in love with Jimmy Flinders.

to St. Peter) I keep it by my cot in my studio apartment on the Lower East Side of Hell. This is Christian and Tara when they were five and three. See the light in their eyes?

I tried to be a good father. We'd wrestle, put puzzles together, jump on the trampoline. I'd read them *Harry Potter* books. I even taught them Shakespeare monologues when they could barely even speak. I know my son would have

preferred to go to a Yankees game instead of the Metropolitan Museum when they came to visit me in New York, but that Jacqueline Kennedy exhibit was not to be missed! I took them to their first Broadway show, *The Lion King*. I was Mufasa. They were my Simba and Nala. Our favorite thing to do was to put on the ABBA CDs and dance around the living room. (Sings) "Angel Eyes, one look and you're hypnotized. . . ." We'd fly and fly. Oh, I can't wait to see them!

Now where was I? The Pre-existence! So anyway, I left the Celestial Tea Room so excited. The first thing I wanted to do was find Emily and tell her what Heavenly Mother had said about Jimmy and me. I thought I'd cut across Pre-mortal Temple Square. The trees were all lit up. (They keep it Christmas all year 'round so they don't have to take the lights down.) Everything was still. A hazy white mist descended and hovered over the ground like the Holy Ghost. I could hear crying. I followed the sound toward the temple. As I got closer I could make out the figure of a little girl who was sobbing on the steps. No one is supposed to cry in the Pre-existence! I put my hand on her shoulder. She looked up at me with the most beautiful brown eyes.

"What's wrong?"

She just handed me her golden envelope. That's the envelope your orders to go to Earth come in. It's where you learn all the horrible things that are going to happen to you. It's like a patriarchal blessing *before* you go to Earth. You're not supposed to be sad or question your assignment or where you are sent because we are told that everyone will suffer. Can you believe I still have it? (Reads)

Dear Sister 967,000,100,003:

Having been true and faithful in many things, we desire to give unto you your orders to go unto Earth. You will be one of ten children who will have the gospel literally beaten into you by your parents in Reno, Nevada. Without knowing how to balance a checkbook, you will be married off before your high

school graduation. Everyone will expect perfection from you as you raise six children. Don't expect much help from your husband. He will be busy going to medical school, delivering babies, fulfilling Church callings, caring for his horses, and doing genealogy in all his spare time. After your divorce, with no degree or skills, your health failing, and an abusive second marriage, you will fight depression, want to die most of the time, and be thought of by everyone as crazy.

You're a real trooper, Sister. 'Preciate ya!

—Your Heavenly Father and Uncles

I said, "That's pretty bad. It must really suck to be a girl. I'm glad I'm not one. (I only act like one.) But, hey! I can go down and help you through the hard times. I love to cook, clean, and sew. I'm great at curling bangs and changing diapers. When you're pregnant, I'll bring you pans to throw up in so you won't have to crawl to the toilet. I'll be there for you when your husbands are not, and I'll treat you the way you deserve to be treated. Let's hang out. It'll be fun!"

So she agreed to be my mother, and we filled out the paper work. As soon as she signed her name, she floated up past the illuminated spires of the temple and out of sight.

I thought, "This is *great!*" Not only did I know who my husband was going to be, I knew who my mother was! I couldn't wait to tell Emily. But when I found her on the Pre-mortal BYU campus, I could tell something was really troubling her. She had just gotten *her* orders! She told me that her father, whom she would love more than anyone in the world, would die of a disease called AIDS when she was only sixteen. This would send her into years of depression. To top it off, she would have this terrible condition that would make her want to win an Academy Award, which would take her to Hollywood where her butt would be on *Baywatch*. Then she would escape to Salt Lake City and fall in love with the man of her dreams. But after a short time, he would die in her arms of cancer. But the very next day she would meet her first husband. He would be a very cute boy who liked ABBA songs and who reminded her a whole lot of her father. Especially the part about being gay. (I thought, "Cool! What a cool thing to marry someone *happy!*") They would have two incredible children and together would endure poverty and graduate school in the backwoods of Connecticut (where the ward was nothing like the wards in Utah). Then after being married six years, they would both stop smiling because—

Just then, a messenger handed *me* a golden envelope. My orders! I was so excited I ripped it open:

Brother Fales:

Having been true and faithful in many things, we desire to give unto you your orders to go unto Earth. You will be gay. Good luck!

Gay? Cool! But why do you need good luck if you're going to be *happy*? Didn't Emily's orders say something about happy, too? Her gay father? And the father of her children? *I* liked ABBA songs. What if I was to be Emily's "happy" husband?

(Pause) Yuck! We were far too good of friends to let *that* happen! Besides, I already knew who I was going to marry. Heavenly Mother said!

Emily went back to reading me her orders: "Then after being married six years, you will both stop smiling because—"

"Jimmy!" There he was coming out of the Pre-mortal Marriott Center. "Jimmy, wait up! You'll be all right, Em. We all will. I just know it. I've gotta run. You're my best friend, Em. I'll see you when we get back from Earth. Can't wait to see your fabulous butt on *Baywatch!* Look for me, Em. I'll be the happy one with good luck—on Broadway! Hey, Jimmy! *Dude!* Wait up!"

I didn't even reach Jimmy before I started to float away into the starry black sky toward Earth. Down, down I floated, across the Atlantic. There was Broadway! Yes! But, no. I kept floating west over the Rocky Mountains, where I landed in Utah County Hospital in Provo, Utah. The last thing I remember, I was looking around for Jimmy. Where was he?



AM I BORING you, St. Peter? Well, you were yawning. I bet you don't see many gays up here do you? Oh, I know, "Hate the sin; love the sinner." More like "hate the sin; *ignore* the sinner." You probably think I had a choice down on Earth, don't you. That I wasn't gay in the Pre-existence and that I thought I'd just be clever and use my free agency to ruin everybody's life on Earth because it might be fun, huh? Outer Darkness, please! (*Lights go out. Steven makes monster face with flashlight and speaks with authority.*)

God made no man a pervert. You should rid yourself of your master, the devil, Satan. You do his bidding. You are in abject bondage, a servant compelled to do the will of Lucifer. The death penalty was exacted in the days of Israel for such wrongdoing. When the spiritual death is total, it were better that such a man were never born. Remember, homosexuality can be cured. You may totally recover from its tentacles. Don't be selfish, lazy, and weak. How can you know you cannot change until your knees are sore from praying and your knuckles bloody from knocking on the Lord's door for help?

Would you like to see the scars on my knuckles? If you only knew how hard I tried to prevent this. Believe it or not, I never asked to be gay.

AFTER SIX YEARS of marriage, except when we looked at our children, Emily and I *did* stop smiling. That's right. I married my best friend. We were living in Storrs, Connecticut. I was the only graduate school actor I knew in his twenties, married with two children. I think most people at school thought I was crazy. Not only were we broke and crazy, we were exhausted. It's exhausting trying to be perfect. Life was taking everything out of us. But our hardships were nothing like what the early Mormon pioneers had to endure: house burnings, tar and

made no man a pervert.

featherings, sweating and freezing across the plains, crickets! Grit was in our genes. My father used to say, "Who does the hard thing? He who can! Feel the pain, and do it anyway." And the Church taught us from a very early age to deny the pain and smile anyway: (*Sings*)

*If you chance to meet a frown,
Do not let it stay.
Quickly turn it upside down,
And smile that frown away.*

Remember that song from Primary? (Oh, I keep forgetting—you went to Catechism.)

One day, driving home from another pointless open call in New York, it was revealed to me, as head of the house and patriarch of my home, that we should move. I hadn't yet had sex outside of my marriage, but I felt I was a walking time bomb. It was only a matter of time before it would all blow up. And I didn't want it to blow up on Emily on the East Coast where we didn't have any family or close friends. In my head, I was confident and optimistic that I could keep it all together, but in my heart, I knew I was only postponing the inevitable. How long could I suppress what the Church called my "same-sex attraction"?

I started to blame my career choice for everything. Acting was the culprit. Working in the theatre and commuting to New York City presented many hazards to my eternal salvation. The male dancers in tights at auditions started to look intriguing, the porn shops on Eighth Avenue, inviting. So I thought I'd just take myself out of the situation entirely and move to where none of that existed—Salt Lake City (where Jews are considered Gentiles). I was bringing my wife and kids home to the land of green Jell-O, "the everlasting hills," "the crossroads of the West," "the city of the Saints"—Zion! (*Sings*)

*I'm goin' home to Utah.
I've gotta find my soul.
I'm goin' where the girls are real
And the men are whole.
I'm goin' where the sun shines high
And a cowboy can be true.
I'm goin' home to Utah
And I'm comin' home to you.*

*I miss the Rocky Mountains.
There's nothing quite as tall.
And summer wildflowers—
Aspens in the fall.
But most of all I miss your touch
And the wonder of your smile.
A life with you in Utah
Is really more my style.*

*Utah and me and you.
Utah and you and me.
I'll trade these lights for stars,
Trade your kisses for these scars.
There's no question now
What I should do.*

*You and Utah,
You never let me down.
Oh! You are all the reason I need
For leavin' this old town.
Don't you worry,
I'm gonna see this through.
Just stay right there in Utah.
A life with you in Utah.
I'm comin' home to Utah.
And I'm comin',
I'm comin' home to you.*

I wrote that song and sang it over and over to convince myself that moving was the right thing to do. Utah was going to solve all our problems. Utah was not going to let us down!

We got there—and I hated it. I loved the mountains and seeing Emily so happy, but I was miserable. (*Sings*) "I'm so depressed in Utah. I think I've sold my soul." I'd been away too long. I wasn't perfect anymore. I was a Democrat.

I made the most of it, and eight months later, we finally got into a house. But as I scraped off the old wallpaper and popcorn ceilings and painted and pulled out overgrown bushes, with every brushstroke, every repair, every shovel of dirt, I knew I was not going to be living there for long. But I wanted the house to be nice for Emily. She deserved that. And I especially wanted things to be nice for my kids. I wanted them to have a place they could be proud to bring their friends home to play.

Early one Sunday morning, after we'd been in our new house about two months, I had an epiphany. I wanted to articulate it to myself by writing an email to a friend who had been a confidant and sounding board. I went downstairs to the basement, where the computer was, and turned it on. I entered my password ("just four simple letters"), H-E-L-P, and began typing. Can you believe I printed it out? (*Pulls it out of his pocket and reads*)

Sometimes I think I can have it all, but I'm finding I'm not a very good actor offstage. Adulterer is too difficult a role for me. I think Emily suspects something is going on. The strange incoming calls on my cell, all the closing shifts at the restaurant, and you won't be-



How did you get here?
Even the popes live
down with me.

“Several.”

“How many men?”

“Twenty.”

“It’s over, Steven. *It’s over.*” Emily wailed through the house and went to church alone. It had finally all blown up.

So like the good Mormon boy I was, I turned myself in. “Bishop, this is Brother Fales. We shook hands once at church. I’m sorry to call you so late. I’ve been unfaithful. And it hasn’t

been with a woman. Get a blood test? Okay. Tomorrow? Sure. Two o’clock? I’ll see you there.”

The bishop took time out from work to meet me at his office. He had white hair and a kind, round face, sorta like Santa Claus. He said, “Steven, we all have something in this life that we have to overcome. I deal with . . . swearing.” When we finished our interview, he stopped me and pointed to the picture of Christ on the wall. I call it the Mel Gibson Jesus. He’s handsome, rugged, all-American. He said, “I like *this* picture of Jesus because he’s not portrayed as a wimp. We should all look to *this* Jesus for guidance.” (The bishop and I go for the same type!)

I was then sent on to the next ecclesiastical leader, the stake president. If you’re a serious sinner like me—the sin against nature herself—he takes over. Like the feds taking over from the local sheriff. It’s a pretty big deal. The stake president represents Christ himself and has the keys to bind or loose all my blessings and covenants. He had the authority to blot my name out on Earth—and Heaven.

St. Peter, you gave that authority to Joseph Smith, the prophet of the Restoration in the Dispensation of the Fullness of Times, who then passed it along till it reached my stake president. Thanks a lot! What? Don’t you remember? You were there, for Pete’s sake! (Oops, I did it again! Sorry, St. Pete!) I guess that’s why they keep you around! Have you ever thought of joining the Mormon Church?

I REMEMBER WALKING into the painted cinder block stake presidency wing of the stake center next door—one of the conveniences of living in Utah. I checked in with the executive secretary who sat *behind* the glass. It felt so clinical. I couldn’t believe it was actually me sitting there. Would I be excommunicated? Wasn’t excommunication for the *wicked*? How had I come to this? I had only ever wanted to be a good boy and do what was right. My dad’s sister told me when I was little I used to say, “Aunt Linda, I just feel Heavenly Father with me all the time!”

lieve this, but she found the condoms in my bag when I got back from that trip to New York. (He was this hot guy I met at Splash!)

I’ve been experimenting with this “gay thing.” It’s amazing that after sex with a guy, we can talk and talk. Of course, there have been guys that I’ve fooled around with that I didn’t really want to talk to. It’s not like I’ve made passionate love to all these guys. Some have actually been kind of gross.

(I hope I’m not grossing you out, St. Peter. I don’t have to finish this. You *want* to hear more?)

I’ve discovered moments where the kissing and full expression of who I am makes me feel so complete, so natural. It’s not just about sex. It’s an intimacy, an expression of my whole soul. It has been about an emotional connection from the beginning. You wouldn’t believe how many married gay men there are here in Utah! I meet them on this local gay chat line.

But it’s got to stop! Now that I’ve had my masculinity validated many times (especially by that hot doctor with the Porsche who looked like Tarzan and thought *I* was so masculine!), I don’t have the drive I did to have sex with guys. The attraction to have sex with men may always be there, but now maybe it won’t be as strong. I think I’m going to be able to be true to my wife now. Sex with her will have to be enough. Not as exciting and passionate, but fulfilling. I have been true to myself the past six months, and the result is I may never need to “act out” again. I think I’m going to be able to keep my family together and keep a smile on my face. I think I’ve faced my—

“Who are you writing to, Steven?”

I shut off the monitor. “No one.”

“Are you having an affair?”

I couldn’t lie anymore. “Yes.”

“With whom?”

Memories of my years of church participation flooded me. Like most Mormons, church was my life! My baptism when I was eight. Passing the sacrament when I was twelve. Ward Christmas parties, stake roadshows, youth dances, and fire-sides. Good times. *Good people*. And the temple. Everyone dressed in white. I loved just sitting in the chapel listening to the hymns played on the organ. Quiet, peaceful, holy. "Holiness to the Lord." I believed it with all my heart.

I especially loved the Primary songs I learned as a child. (A recording of Steven as a boy plays.) This is me. I was nine. This was my favorite song. I sang it all the time. This was recorded at my cousin Joshua's funeral. He drowned. He was only two.

*I wonder when he comes again,
Will herald angels sing?
Will Earth be white with drifted snow,
Or will the world know spring?
I wonder if one star will shine
Far brighter than the rest;
Will daylight stay the whole night through?
Will songbirds leave their nest?
I'm sure he'll call his little ones*

(Young Steven on recording breaks into sobs. Steven continues singing the song.)

*Together 'round his knee,
Because he said in days gone by,
"Suffer them to come to—"*

Just then the stake president opened his office door and stepped out. "You must be Brother Fales. Welcome. It must be very difficult for you to be here. Thank you for coming. The Lord loves you."

That's what I *imagined* him saying. What I got was, "Now, what's your name?" I was stunned. Surely my name was on his FranklinCovey Planner. All he'd have to do was glance down on his desk before he came out and greet the *only one* sitting there. Was I one of dozens of homosexuals he was seeing that day? Would he have forgotten my name if I were a client at work or a potential new convert? I told him my name. I went into the office and sat down. "I can't believe you didn't know my name. Do you even know why I am here?"

"Yes, I know why you're here."

It was a little thing, not knowing my name, but for me, it was huge. It summed up my whole experience growing up in the Church. I always felt I needed to win some leader's approval. I wanted desperately to be like them, for them to like me—to be noticed. I was invisible. No matter what I did or how well I did it, I felt I was never appreciated or accepted for who I was. I felt I knew what it must be like to be a woman in this Church.

We didn't start off well. There was no opening prayer offered, and he proceeded to ask me to define sin. How did I feel about sin? Did I think I had sinned? We weren't getting anywhere. I didn't know the right answers anymore. I couldn't say what he needed or wanted to hear. I said, "Mister Stake President, where is the love? It's been doctrine this and doc-

trine that my whole life. Work, work, work out your salvation, never being worthy enough of God's love. Where is the love?" He told me he needed to keep the Church pure. I told him the Church was a socio-economic-political-tax-exempt-multi-national-corporation posing as the Kingdom of God on Earth. He wanted to have the Church court right away.

I was throwing a birthday party for Emily the Sunday he wanted to have it, so he postponed it a week. I was working three jobs and was daddy in all my spare time. And in the midst of everything, my Church membership and my marriage were at stake. No, my marriage wasn't just at stake. It was over. I had never seen Emily with such resolve.

The birthday party was a huge success. A friend twisted my arm to sing. I looked Emily right in the eyes as I sang her the song I had sung at our wedding reception: (*Sings theme from Love Story*)

*How long does it last?
Can love be measured by the hours in a day?
I have no answers now but this much I can say—
I know I'll need her 'til the stars all burn away,
And she'll be there.*

WHAT DID YOU say, St. Peter? The list came in! Finally! Oh boy, the lucky ones from Hell who get to go to the party: Sonja Johnson (Isn't she still fighting for E.R.A? They let *her* in?), Emma Smith (Brigham Young said she was going to Hell in a handbasket), Elton John! I guess Princess Di arranged for him to play. You know, she was baptized for the dead in the temple after she was killed—so she's Mormon now. You see, if you're not a Mormon when you die, you go straight to Spirit Prison—kinda like Purgatory. There you wait to be baptized by proxy in a big baptismal font in a temple down on Earth. If you accept that baptism, it's like a get-out-of-jail-free card. You can bet that anyone famous, the Church did their work for them. Elvis, Judy Garland, and all the signers of the Declaration of Independence. . . .

I'm not on the list?! HEAVENLY MOTHER!!! *Don't* you shush me! I'm telling you, *I was invited*. Would you please send some cherubim, seraphim, or sing-an-hymn and just tell her I'm here. Thank you! I know we're here for eternity, but does *this* have to take that long?

You want to hear about my Church court? Well, I'll tell you anyway. It was set for Sunday, July 16, 2000, at 7:00 a.m. I was exhausted. I had played Perchik in *Fiddler on the Roof* at Sundance the night before. That's why I had a beard at the time. Mormon men are supposed to be clean shaven. (How did you get to keep *your* beard?) I put on my brown suit with an off-white shirt and brown tie. I was ready, beard and all, when the bishop came by the house to escort me to my disciplinary council, or "court of love," as they call it. When the high councilmen all arrived (the grand jury), I was led into the room. There must have been about twenty men all dressed in dark suits and power ties. They all rose. I thought, "Now *this* is the way to get a straight man's attention." They led me to the head of this enormous oak table where I sat next to the stake

president. He asked the secretary to read the charge: "Homosexuality." Then they turned the time over to me, the guest of honor. I was allowed to tell these men, whom I had never seen before, my story.

WHEN MY MOTHER found out she was pregnant (two weeks after the honeymoon, at eighteen) she went home to her dark, basement apartment in Provo, Utah, and in her desperation and loneliness, she threw herself on the bed and cried, "Please, God, send me a friend." When I was born, she says it was as if a ray of sunshine had burst through the clouds. (*A recording of Steven as a boy plays.*) This is me. I think I was about five years old. I just made up songs like this.

*If you are singing about flowers,
You are singing about joy.
You are the only one
That changes the world.*

(*Steven picks up bouquet*) These are my favorite flowers, daffodils—'cause they're yellow. They're also called narcissus. They're for my kids!

*If you are playing,
You pick flowers
For your mom or dad
Or baby sister.*

I got them from the Korean deli at 83rd and Amsterdam. (Hell uses the same grid system as Manhattan.)

*If you are singing,
Sing about flowers.
If you are singing,
Sing about joy.
If you are singing,
Sing about the whole world.
So be sure to sing about the flowers.*

"And then my heart with pleasure fills, and dances with the daffodils." With a song like that, could there be any question in anyone's mind that I was gay?

I was one of those perfect children who never even cried. My mother says the only time I did was when the mailman would leave after dropping off the mail. She also says that each year she would be amazed I was still alive. She says I was too good for this Earth. I don't think the stake president was in agreement. I could see one of the men checking his watch. They did have many meetings ahead of them.

My father really poured on the steam when I was about eight years old. He taught me how to run and act like a man. He also taught me about sex. He took me out to the cows and told me how that one Black Angus was going to put his penis in the other. He said one day I'd do that to my wife and it would feel really good and warm. ("Moo! Moo! Mooooooooooo!!!")

I was in Little League and Scouting. I became an Eagle Scout. I promised to keep myself "physically strong, mentally awake, and morally *straight*."

After my mission, I transferred to BYU. I was on scholarship to the Boston Conservatory my freshman year of college, but that was just a little too Babylon for me. The real reason for going to the "Y" was to find a good Mormon wife. Meanwhile, I knew I was on the fast-track in the music/dance/theatre department when I made the Young Ambassadors. The Young Ambassadors, or Y.A.s, was an elite group of performing missionaries that the Church used to charm nations that had not yet been receptive to letting the missionaries proselyte. They poured tons of money into our shows, which were a kaleidoscope of music, dance, colorful lights and costumes, and above all—*smiles!* It was a cross between Lawrence Welk, *The Donny & Marie Show*, Disney, and the worst of Andrew Lloyd Webber. "Meow!" Not only did you have to be young, beautiful, and talented to be a Y.A., you had to adhere to the highest moral standards as set forth in the Honor Code: namely, no sex, drugs, alcohol, tobacco, caffeine, R-rated movies, tattoos, piercings, facial hair, or shorts above the knee.

So, naturally, it was on tour with Y.A.s that I had my first homosexual experience. This guy was so straight acting you never would have known. And such a good kisser! I was floored when he turned our friendship sexual. (Homosexuality wasn't supposed to exist at the Lord's University!) The few times we got together were incredible. I remember one morning, in Salinas, Kansas, walking from our motel room to the tour bus with the biggest smile on my face. I understood what all the love songs were about! I thought: How can I be feeling what I recognize as the Spirit so strongly when I've just done something so abominable? The closer we got to Provo, the more the guilt set in. When I told my BYU bishop what I had done, he told me he would gladly pay for my therapy and to stay away from that predator! I started going to a clinical hypnotherapist:

"We're gonna have to work on your S.S.A."

"My what?"

"Same-sex attraction! You see, you have a compulsive sexual addiction. Do you look at pornography?"

"No! But once I got turned on watching a BYU football game."

"Tsk, tsk, tsk, tsk . . . S.S.A.! What about self-abuse?"

"Masturbation?"

"Shhh! Uh-huh."

"Once in a while . . . but I didn't even touch myself the first eighteen months of my mission."

"Self-abuse causes homosexuality."

"Then wouldn't *everyone* be gay?"

"Not necessarily. Have you ever been sexually abused by anyone other than yourself?"

"No."

"I knew it! Denial! Suppressed memories! Be brave. You can face this. Take some deep breaths. We are gonna find out who violated you as a child!"

And so we probed my early childhood, went down every path of memory we could. But we still couldn't uncover who made me gay.

"There is still a way. Give me permission to 'muscle test' you."



Am I boring you, St. Peter?

talked about Heavenly Mother. So she wrote this wonderful one-woman show called *Mother Wove the Morning*—sixteen women throughout history in search of the female face of God.

But her most famous work was her autobiography, *Goodbye, I Love You*. It told the story of her relationship with her gay husband, Gerald. After four children, they divorced but remained close friends. He was part of that first wave of men in San Francisco who contracted AIDS. Well, she brought him home to die. This was in the mid '80s when no one was talking about AIDS—let alone from the Mormon perspective. The book was published by Random House, and it put her on all the talk shows from *Oprah* to *Geraldo*. Their story was featured in *People* magazine. Their wedding picture even replaced Batboy on the cover of *Weekly World News*, “Wife Brings Gay Hubby Home to Die of AIDS!” It made her the patron saint of gay Mormon men and women.

So as we started to get more serious in our dating, I thought I’d read up on Em’s family. I started reading the book at eleven at night and finished it at four in the morning. I couldn’t put it down. From the first sentence, it was as if I were reading my own story. “Gerald shone.” When I got to the end, I just wept. What was I *thinking* dating this girl? What kind of joke were the gods playing on us? For what it was worth, Emily and I were falling in love!

I had to tell her what I had done in Young Ambassadors. It was all over with and repented of, but I had to tell her. When I said we needed to talk, she said, “I know where!” She took me to the park across the street from where she grew up as a little girl in Provo. The same house where Emily’s mother had found out that her husband had been cheating on her with other men. I told her—*everything*. But I was also confident it would never happen again. I left it in her hands and let her decide if she still wanted to continue to date. To my relief, she did! We went to pre-marriage counseling and talked it through. Our Church leaders assured us and gave us the okay.

Just before we got engaged, we flew to California to meet her mother. There I was sitting on the beach, with *the* Mormon matriarch with her signature short white hair and sparkling blue eyes. I told her I had been really moved by her book. She said, “Well, Steven, if there’s anything we need to talk about on that subject, now would be a good time to do it.”

I laughed, “Oh, no! Not me! I would never do that to Emily and you.” Emily was sitting next to me and watched on as I brushed her mom’s question aside. We had decided together, before we got there, *not* to tell her mother. We were going to write a different story. We had faith in this new reparative therapy, in the Church, and in ourselves. We could lick it! We were *supposed* to be together. We had fasted and prayed. We had all the right confirmations. We would succeed where the previous generation had failed. We would defy *Goodbye, I Love*

By rubbing her fingers together she could determine—by the change in texture of her skin—the answer to *anything*. She discovered that I had been aborted “one, two, three, four, five, six, seven—*seven* times before finally making it to Earth. That’s very traumatic for a fetus!” She also discovered (to her delight) that my father sexually abused me before I was one. I wanted a second opinion.

So I went to LDS Social Services to find a *real* psychologist. He proceeded to tell me all about Pavlov’s dog: “The dog would salivate just hearing a bell. Homosexuality is the same way. Just change the stimulus, and you’ll stop salivating. I used to get a hard-on every time I saw a motorcycle.” I decided *not* to go back.

I was then given a book, *Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality*. It said homosexuality was preventable and treatable. It gave me hope. My parents encouraged me. I got blessings from my dad. I was going to be okay.

After I felt God had forgiven me, I threw myself into school and dating girls. The girls I dated wanted to marry the butch MBA majors with the new SUVs. I didn’t even have a car. After one particularly devastating break-up, I said, “Lord, if I’m going to be single, just help me be chaste and send me good friends.” A year later, I met Emily Pearson. What a friend. What a catch! We could talk for hours on end—about anything. She was talented, gorgeous, funny, spiritual, cosmopolitan, *and* domestic. And because her mother, Carol Lynn Pearson, was a famous Mormon writer, she was what we call in Mormondom, *Mormon Royalty*.

Carol Lynn was the Eliza R. Snow of the twentieth century. Her poetry had sold hundreds of thousands of copies and had inspired a generation of converts. She wrote the children’s musical *My Turn On Earth*. I used to listen to it over and over as a child and just feel the Spirit. She was concerned that no one

You and write *Hello, I Love You*. I proposed on Mt. Timp-anogos. When we finally made it down the mountain, it was pitch black, and the ranger had towed my car.

We were married by the same General Authority who had married her parents in the same exact temple.

AFTER GRADUATING FROM BYU, we moved to Las Vegas (where I grew up). I was working at the university there. One morning, I was taking some books across campus to another department and discovered that the Bi-Gay-Lesbian-Transgender Association had put all these banners up: “National Coming Out Day. Show your pride by wearing purple.” I was disgusted. I thought, “How *dare* they infect this campus with their politics!” And then as I walked along, I noticed purple flyers taped to the sidewalks. “Ugh!” And then, looking down, I noticed *I was wearing a purple turtle-neck!* “Eek!” I looked around. Had anyone seen me? I raced home and changed my shirt.

Later that night, I was at my dad’s house and we were outside in the back. “Dad, I . . . I just don’t know if I can do this. I . . . I think I am *gay*.”

“Steven, you *can* do this. You are *not* gay!”

We became pregnant. We got the ultrasound, and we were having a boy. I thought, “Oh! How can *I* be a father to a *boy*? I don’t know how to do this!” I wasn’t able to be like (*Sings from Carousel*), “*My boy Bill, I will see that he’s named after me!*” But I just committed to loving him. Every night when I would come home from work, I would pick up my sleeping son from his crib and just hold him. How I loved holding my children.

I decided to get a master of fine arts in acting (whatever that is). I had to be selective about which program to attend. They’d have to be tolerant of my being Mormon and *straight*. The University of Connecticut gave me a full ride. We weren’t in Happy Valley anymore. We were in New England. And the religion practiced on campus was *Humanism*. I didn’t want to believe I was human. I hated humans. They were so . . . *human*. I was *Mormon*. And above all, dang it, I was a *straight* Mormon!

I had to navigate treacherous waters. All the classes seemed to blend into one long three-year course: postmodern-existential-iconoclastic-deconstructionist funk. But on top of it all, my S.S.A. got more intense. I thought I’d conquer it by trying something I had never done before: *pornographia heterosexualis*. I hadn’t read or been exposed to *any* pornography growing up. Certainly not gay porn, let alone the *appropriate* porn. I thought about it for a while and finally got up the courage to prove I was straight. I went out at age twenty-seven and bought my first *Playboy*! I took it home and secretly pulled it out one night. There I was, masturbating with all my heart to this voluptuous blonde in the centerfold. It seemed to take *forever*. Until that blonde began to look a lot like . . . Jimmy Flinders.

Now my theater department wanted to do *Angels in America*. I begged them not to do it. I just winced when I read it. First of all, I was a Republican. Reagan was Moses in my family. I was sure to be cast as the Mormon who ends up

leaving his wife for another man. And my pregnant wife was sure to be there opening night! So, luckily for me, they decided to do a new adaptation of the musical *Hair* instead, (in which they took everything Vietnam out and put everything HIV *in*). And they thought, “Wouldn’t it be clever if we took that wholesome Mormon boy and cast him as Woof, a Catholic gay activist? Let’s have him sing ‘White Boys’ and ‘Sodomy!’”

So rather than wage another fight with the head of the department, I thought I’d show them what this wholesome Mormon boy could do. Then, like the good M.F.A. actor I was being trained to be, I decided to do a little character research on the *homoerotic*. I went and rented a male strip video. It was the closest I would go to gay porn. One night, when Emily and the kids were visiting her mother in California, I put it in. As soon as I pressed play, I found myself pre-cumming all over the place. I was leaking out of control. A woman had never done that to me before. *Never!* What do you do with *that*? (I don’t mean you personally, St. Peter. I mean spiritually, not temporally . . . er . . . I mean figuratively, not literally . . . er . . . not . . . never mind.) That’s when I knew I was really in a bind. If you took a *Cosmo* and *Men’s Muscle & Fitness* and put them in front of me, there was no question which magazine cover my body would point to.

So I did the show. The reviews simply said, “Fales’s performance is a howl!” Each night at the curtain call, I felt this rush of electric authenticity. “Good Morning, Starshine!” It was so *freeing*. But it was so scary. I had *way* too much at stake to be feeling this free. So after the production, I slammed the door on exploring my sexuality any further. After all, we were expecting our second child—and I was the Providence Rhode Island Stake music chairperson.

Shortly after another graduation, the choice often became either commute into New York for auditions or buy diapers. One day, since it was a callback, I scraped together the spare change and drove two-and-a-half hours into the city. Then, after the audition, I decided to go really off budget and bought a half-price ticket to the play that had just won the Tony Award. (A professional actor needs to keep up on the scene, even though he’s paying off student loans and supporting a wife and two children!) I deserved a good Wednesday matinee before I drove back to the hard, cold realities of being a waiter in Connecticut.

I went in, sat down, and dived into the program. And this *guy* came and sat right next to me. He was so good-looking—so open and friendly. He had this great energy.

“Altoid?”

“Do I need one?”

“No.”

“Sure.”

We started talking. I didn’t mention my wife and children like I usually did. I wanted to see what would happen if I didn’t hide. There was an instant connection. It was so hard to focus on this dark Irish play when I was so lit up by this dirty blond.

At intermission, I decided to move up to some better seats that were vacant. I asked him if he wanted to, as well. To my

delight (and horror), he said, “Yes.” We lingered a bit after the show, then walked to Times Square. He asked if I wanted to go meet a *friend* that worked at the *hotel*. I just played naive. “No. I’ve got to drop these resumes off at my manager’s on Christopher Street.” So we wished each other well and shook hands with a little more intention than normal. We went in opposite directions.

When I got to the 42nd Street subway, I turned around and I could see him looking for me through the crowd. I thought, “Joseph ran! He left his garments in Potiphar’s wife’s hand and ran.” So I did—to the end of the platform—and turned my collar up and my back to the crowd. I was so relieved when the subway finally came. I got off at Christopher Street (where the Gay Rights Movement had been born), and he came bounding up from underground. “Steven! I don’t usually do this. But I’ve never met anyone like you! Ever! Here’s my address and phone number. If you’re ever in L.A. . . .”

“I’m sorry, I’m married with children. I’m flattered, but I can’t reciprocate.”

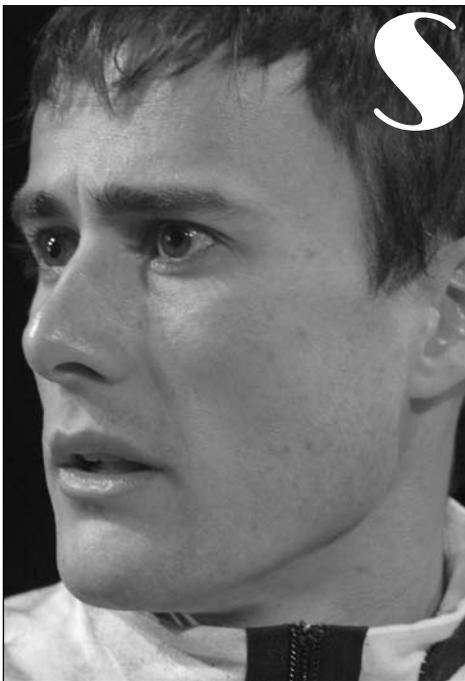
“Oh. (Pause) Well, if you’re ever in L.A. . . . I’ll be staying at the Hilton ‘til Friday.”

I took the show ticket with his name and address on it. “Thanks.” After I saw my manager, I walked back to the parking garage. Like a good husband, I tore up the ticket, hopped in the minivan, and hightailed it back to Connecticut. On the Merritt Parkway, I couldn’t stop thinking about him. Fantasizing. Blown away at his response. These close encoun-

This scared me into going back into therapy. I felt I had just put a Band-Aid on this issue and it was now time to buckle down and eradicate it once and for all. The theory behind reparative therapy was that homosexuality was caused by an overbearing mother and a failed relationship with an emotionally absent father resulting in an impaired sense of masculine identity. By developing close friendships with salient, straight men, masculinity would increase, and the “reparative” drive to fill the masculine deficit by merging sexually with another man would decrease or disappear altogether.

I went shopping for the best possible therapist. I looked in the back of a guide put out by Focus on the Family called *Setting the Record Straight*. It listed the National Association of Research and Therapy of Homosexuality, or NARTH. I called the number in California, and they gave me a list of psychologists in my area that administered the kind of therapy I was looking for. After interviewing in person with three local therapists, I decided to do phone therapy with the president of NARTH himself. I liked his Brooklyn accent and his gay jokes. I was willing to do or say whatever he wanted me to. The cure would cost me only the long-distance phone bill and \$135 for each 45-minute session.

He said I needed to be involved with an ex-gay men’s support group. So I drove an hour twice a month to HOPE ministries in Springfield, Massachusetts. All these married men, sitting around overcoming their same-sex attraction—together. I never missed a meeting.



on, we need you. We need you to cry and fill this gorge so we can swim across.

ters were happening to me all the time. It was following me wherever I went. I was tormented. Why wouldn’t it leave me alone? I wasn’t cruising. I just wanted to see a matinee. “No! I do not want to be gay!” I hit the steering

wheel. “No! No! God, why me? Why! No! No! No! No! No! I do not want to do this to my family!” I got home late. Emily was cool and went upstairs. I was so lonely. I thought, “I just need good friends. That’s all he has to be.” I stayed downstairs and called every Hilton in Manhattan—‘til I found him. We just talked about Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*. But I had crossed the line.

My therapist suggested I go to a “warrior retreat” in Pennsylvania. You know, men hugging trees and beating drums in the forest? At the end, they had an initiation ceremony. It was freezing cold this one night as they led me and the others blindfolded into a lodge. I could smell the sage smoke and hear chanting and beating drums. When they took off my blindfold, there was every man who had ever taken the course dancing around this bonfire—naked! I was called up before the Elders. They had me take off *my* clothes. They gave me a new name: Buck! They eagerly congratulated me on getting my balls back.

My therapist gave me a list of books to read. One book said that real men shouldn’t drink sissy drinks. That you should have hard liquor on the rocks. I didn’t drink, so that wouldn’t be a problem. (You Catholics have all the fun! We can’t even drink Coca-Cola!) I re-read *The Miracle of Forgiveness*. It talked of mastering yourself. It quotes Plato, “The first and greatest victory is to conquer yourself; to be conquered by yourself is of all things most shameful and vile.” I agreed, but wasn’t Plato gay?

Above all, the books suggested I needed to build straight, salient male friendships. I was the home teacher to a man who was a football coach at UCONN. He didn't know it, but he was going to be my salient male. One night I just popped over, like home teachers do, to see if he needed anything from the Church or if I could do anything for his family. He was watching "plays of the day" on ESPN. We just sat there and watched . . . and watched . . . and watched as I waited . . . and waited . . . and waited to turn straight.

Under the direction of my therapist, I wrote a letter to my mother. In it, I blamed her for my homosexuality, and I told her not only to stay out of my life, but my son's as well. I was afraid she would turn Christian gay, too. My son couldn't figure out why his beloved Grandma Butterfly seemed to disappear.

It came down to "pay rent or pay for therapy." I finally broke down and went to the bishop. I had paid tithing and fast offerings my whole life. Could the Church please help me pay for this therapy to help prevent me from turning gay and keep my eternal family together? The bishop didn't know much about what I was dealing with, so I bought him books to educate him. He never asked how the therapy was going. He just cut the checks.

I was seeing my Catholic therapist under the sound science of NARTH. I had my evangelical Christian ex-gay men's support group and my neo-pagan warrior community. Everything was financed by Mormon money. You see, it takes a village to make one straight!

WITH MY MOTHER out of the way and my new straight friend, my own superhuman strength, and moving back to Utah to join Evergreen, I was on my way to heterosexual wholeness. I was acting more straight than ever. I went in my closet and threw everything out that might fit tightly or was purple. I stopped taking an interest in any activity or skill that had a gay association. I stopped working out so I wouldn't be attractive and so I wouldn't be attracted to men doing squats at the gym. I started listening to Michael McLean instead of Bernadette Peters at Carnegie Hall. I lowered my voice. Steven became *Steve*. I was becoming this tightly coiled, homophobic *homosexual*—with no sense of humor. They said *this* was my true self. But doesn't your true self smile? And shouldn't my true self find my stunning wife—who looked like Nicole Kidman—or *any* woman attractive?

After all the time and money and energy, I still had to fantasize about a man to ejaculate while making love to Emily. That was our *reality*. The therapy wasn't helping. We both knew it. We didn't talk about it. We just pressed forward. I took my temple covenants seriously. Especially when I looked at our children: (*Sings*)

*Families can be together forever,
Through Heavenly Father's plan.
I always want to be with my own family,
And the Lord has shown me how I can.
The Lord has shown me how I can.*

So, when we got to Utah, I decided to join Evergreen International. That's the unofficial ministry for gay Mormons struggling to overcome same-sex attraction. I wanted to be their poster child. They should call it *EverQueen*. I had never seen more rainbows, earrings, or tight jeans in my life! I played the piano for the opening song, and we had a devotional on sexual addiction. Then we divided into groups where everyone told their titillating stories of sex-behind-their-wife's-back that week. One guy hadn't been in a year. This other guy leaned over to me and said, "Last time he was here he was caught giving this other guy a blow job right here on the church grounds!" (You think *you're* disgusted, St. Peter!) I left the meeting *alone* and vowed never to return. I was far too advanced in my recovery for this crowd. And way too busy to join their basketball team.

The annual NARTH convention got too many threats to be held in Los Angeles, so it had been rescheduled for Salt Lake City. "Go straight. Go NARTH!" I was asked to be a panelist for a session on men who had overcome their same-sex attraction. (Dr. Laura was going to be accepting an award.) When I saw my therapist in person for the first time, I went over to him and touched his arm. "Hi, Doctor. I'm Steven Fales."

"Oh, hello. You look skinny. Steve, we need yoose to help with the cause. We need men who have succeeded in therapy to take part in this liberal study that's tryin' to discredit our work. Don't tell them *we* referred you. Just tell them you heard about the study from . . . a *friend*."

So I called this enemy doctor in New York. He asked me all these questions. I told him all the *right* answers (inflating the truth when necessary).

"Do you feel isolated?"

"Of course not. Maybe if I lived in Chelsea or on the Castro, but . . ." But I was lying. I was isolated in *Zion*. I had never felt more alone in my life. I can't tell you what it cost me to lie.

So I had a choice to make. The ancient Greeks said, "Know thyself." Shakespeare said, "To thine own self be true." And in the Mormon temple ceremony it said that "through their experience, they will come to know." I was tired of theorizing and philosophizing. I had to *viscerally* know who I was. And so I chose knowledge—like Eve. I partook of the fruit, ignorance fell from mine eyes, as I waited to be cast out of the Garden.

WHEN IT BLEW up with Emily, I called my best friend from high school. He was straight and knew I was struggling. He was heading out the door but said he would be sure to call me the next day. He never called. Who was checking in on me? My lovers—and not to have sex. "Steven, I really hope you and Emily can work this out. Is there anything I can do?" The straight men in my life at that time just weren't there for me. This fact was driven home at that very moment in my trial by one of the high councilors. He had fallen asleep.

Then they wanted to ask me a few final questions.

What was my mission like? Hard. But wonderful. I went because I believed that "Christ takes the slums out of people and people take themselves out of the slums." I loved Portugal. I was known as the elder who played the piano and could sing:

(Sings “How Great Thou Art” in Portuguese)

*Canta minha alma
Então a ti, Senhor.
Grandioso es tu,
Grandioso es tu.*

I baptized a lot of people. But my greatest accomplishment came in helping one particular companion. He was gender-disoriented. He was gayer than I was. He wasn't at all happy, and one night, we talked about it. Just talked! We didn't kiss, or fall in love, or have sex. And later, when we'd see each other at mission conferences, we'd give each other a big hug, look each other in the eye and just . . . *know*. And at the end of my mission, when you have that final interview with the mission president, I offered the closing prayer in Portuguese. All I could say through my tears was, “*Nosso Pãe, Sou grato por minha missão.*” Heavenly Father, thank you for my mission.

What was my most spiritual experience? My wedding day. Kneeling across the altar with Emily. I was crying through the whole thing. I felt God had given me such a precious gift. Who else would marry a gay man? I never wanted to hurt her. I intended to be with her forever.

Is being in the arts causing my homosexuality? I only sleep with doctors, lawyers, and cowboys—never other artists.

Have I ever had sex with a minor? No. I'm into men.

Have I ever sexually abused my son? I was as good a father as anyone in that room. Did they ask that question to straight men? Did they ask if they had ever sexually abused their daughters? I looked them right in the eye and said, “No.”

Then they asked me if there was anything else I'd like to say. I answered, “Yes,” then told them about a dream I had.

I dreamed I was on the farm in Wyoming where my father grew up. There the land is flat, except for Heart Mountain standing alone, like a bear tooth, in the distance. A dry, harsh country, where summer is short and crops of sugar beets and pinto beans need irrigation to survive. I walked into this abandoned barn filled with cobwebs. In the corner was this dusty wooden chest filled with tack: saddles, halters, leather bridles. I opened the chest and picked up one of the reins, and instantly found myself riding across the high desert plains on horseback. My horse was magnificent. We were galloping at this exhilarating pace. I soon noticed I had been joined by my father on his horse and my grandpa on his, and then his father and his father's father. And soon I was riding with multitudes of my ancestors, racing ahead, leaving a dust cloud behind us that extended for miles. I didn't know where we were going or why we were going so fast, but it felt amazing to be part of this



Steven, I know who you are, and I am so much bigger than this Church.

family of fathers and sons all united with this incredible sense of urgency to get *some-where!*

Then all of a sudden, we came to an abrupt stop. Just a foot away was the deepest, widest gorge I'd ever seen. It reminded me of the Grand Canyon. It seemed a matter of life and death that we get across, but there seemed to be no possible way. Then one of the men, who

seemed to have the authority to speak for the group, got off his horse and walked over to me. “Son, we need you. We need you to cry and fill this gorge so we can swim across. We gotta git there. We've worked and sweat our tears dry and have nothin' left. Will you fill this gorge for us?” And so I did. I cried and cried and the canyon filled with warm, sweet, salty tears—for sweat. Sweat for tears! We swam across. It was green on the other side. And there were my children.

After I finished, I was asked to leave the room so they could discuss and pray. “Emily'll be well provided for. She can do better than stay with that unrepentant homosexual.” I knew they were not trying to talk her into working things out. At the same time, I knew some Church leader somewhere was counseling some gay young man to go ahead and get married. Another daughter in Zion would be sacrificed to straighten her husband out. And when would the next teenager come home after the Sodom and Gomorrah lesson in seminary and try to commit suicide?

They brought me back after ten minutes. The stake president said that they had decided to excommunicate me. Then he proceeded to pronounce my sentence in a formal declaration they are required to read to everyone. I just closed my eyes, folded my arms, and bowed my head. His voice became full and resonant, “This is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It is the Kingdom of God on Earth. . . .” I can't remember all that was said; I just remember how I felt. I didn't expect to feel this way. *His* voice faded out, and a warm feeling of peace and truth washed over me as *another* voice said, “Steven, I know who you are, and I am so much bigger than this Church.” (Pause) I knew God loved me.

When it was all over—it took three hours—the high councilmen lined up at the door to shake my hand. I had just been kicked out of the Church, yet they were all smiles and eager to wish me good luck. One brother gave me a big hug and said,

“You’re going to be okay!” Another brother just shook my hand and sobbed. I noticed he’d been crying throughout the whole Church court. I couldn’t help wondering why.

That night, as I slept again in the basement, I just basked in that warm glow. The feeling continued throughout the entire week. Until the letter from the Church declaring me officially excommunicated came in the mail. There it was in black and white. I was excommunicated for “homosexuality.” I got so angry. I couldn’t figure out why. Then I realized it was because *I was excommunicated for something the Church said didn’t exist.*

The words homosexual, lesbian and gay are adjectives to describe particular thoughts, feelings, or behaviors. We should refrain from using these words as nouns to identify particular conditions or specific persons. It is wrong to denote a condition, because this implies that a person is consigned . . . to a circumstance in which he or she has no choice.¹

I hadn’t been excommunicated for adultery or immorality or heresy or just wanting someone male to hold me in his arms. I was excommunicated for a small but quintessential part of who I *am*. I was tried and excommunicated as a noun even though I was supposed to be just a modifier. I wanted to sue for malpractice, but how do you tell God his chosen, anointed servant has his parts of speech mixed up?

THEY’RE BACK? WHAT do you mean they can’t find her? How hard can it be to find the Queen Bee herself?! Do you mind if I try? (*Steps on red carpet*) Ouch! Hot! Hot! Hot! I know! *My kids!* Go tell my kids I’m here. They can go find Heavenly Mother for me. Christian’s tall. Blond. Smart. Tara’s gorgeous. Dark hair. Clever. They’re both witty and talented and have my brown eyes. Please hurry! I really don’t have all eternity.

I’d rather be excommunicated a hundred times than have to repeat the day we told our children we were getting divorced. It was Emily, Tara, Christian, and me. I didn’t know how to explain something like this, but I still was the dad. I felt it was my duty to break the news. They were too young to know everything, and yet I didn’t want to blow it off like nothing was happening. (I knew from experience what it felt like to have your parents break up.) I decided to make the incision swift and clean. “Mommy and Daddy are getting divorced.” My son’s head shot to attention. He was only five, but he knew exactly what that meant. He put his hands to his ears. “No! No! No!” He ran to his room. Em and I followed. He was in there praying, “Please, Heavenly Father. No. They’ll ruin my life. They’ll ruin my life. No! No! No! No! No!” He echoed the same words I yelled as I hit the steering wheel during my Gethsemane on the Merritt Parkway.

As the divorce got closer, I got confused and scared. I didn’t know how to be alone, and I didn’t want to give up “hugging time.” Emily and I shared a tradition her parents had started. You know how early kids wake up? Well, we would try to sleep in—trying to put off their needs as long as we could. Then, when we couldn’t put it off any longer, we’d yell out, “HUGGING

TIME!” In our two children would run and jump on the bed. We would then hug and kiss and snuggle—all warm and safe and happy. How many gay men get to experience that? Let alone watch their children being born. Couldn’t I give it all up for the sake of hugging time? I was going to fight for hugging time!

I turned it all on Emily. It was *her* fault! *She* never wore lingerie! *She* wouldn’t watch the better-sex videos I ordered from the back of GQ. Emily knew going into this marriage it might come to this. And now that I’ve finally cracked, she’s going to just throw me out?! How *dare* she watch *Will & Grace* and laugh when I was trying to change! She had failed me!

I got in touch with the Church’s main psychologist. “Steven, if I could just lower your I.Q. by ten points, I could save this marriage.” He said I could still change. I confronted Emily.

“Go ahead, Emily. Go be single like your mother! Go be Carol Lynn Pearson. You’ve got blood on your hands. I want to work this out. You’re just a wimp!”

But no, Emily was not responsible for my homosexuality. She wasn’t meant to be an Evergreen daughter *and* an Evergreen wife. She deserved to have someone ravish her in the bedroom, to celebrate her femininity the way only a straight man could. Emily deserved to have her life back. She deserved to smile again. And so did I. But at the last minute, I didn’t want to sign the papers. I wanted more time. It was all happening too fast. So I refused. When Emily threatened me with alimony, I ran to get my signature notarized. As I handed Emily the papers I said, “Anything I ever do will come second to loving you.”

I didn’t want my kids to miss me, so I left as many things as I could. I planted daffodil bulbs all over the yard so that in the spring, they would come up and my kids would hopefully feel my presence. We went on one more family outing before I moved out. We went up to Sundance and rode the chair lift together. “That’s Mt. Timpanogos! That’s where you proposed to Mommy, right, Daddy?” When I moved out, Emily and the kids were away for the afternoon. As I shut the door, I just held the doorknob. I couldn’t take my hand off. I had tried so hard. I wasn’t straight enough. “Bless them. Oh, bless them.” When I let go, I knew it was over.

OUR DIVORCE WAS easy. We didn’t need an attorney. It cost \$150, and it took only three weeks to process. She got the house, the minivan, the prints, the piano, the furniture, the CD collection, the books—and all our mutual friends. I left with all the debt, child support, two suitcases, a box—and all the guilt. Emily had come to life in Utah, but I had to leave. I decided to stay in Salt Lake through the fall to help my kids transition. After Christmas, with a one-way ticket, sixty dollars in my pocket, and my smile—I moved to New York City.

(*Steven unzips the jumpsuit and steps out to reveal a sexy, black, tight T-shirt with “Mormon Boy” in rhinestones and tight black clubbing pants with “I Love UT” on rear pocket. Techno music plays, disco lights. It’s gay night at the famous Roxy nightclub.*)

“Hi, New York! I’m here! Validate me!” (*Steven dances wildly*)



Hi, New York! I'm here! Validate me!

like a go-go dancer. Then he meets and leaves with a series of men in a balletic montage.)

“Hi. Sure. Vodka and tonic. Thank you. Really? I’m sure you say that to all the girls. Hot yourself. Where do

you work out? Me, too. Hi, Chuck. *Steve*. Texas! Utah. No way, my dad’s a doctor! Upper West Side. You? Closer. Shall we go?”

“Vodka and tonic. I’m sure you say that to all the girls. Hi, Jeff. *Steve*. Seattle! Utah. Shall we go?”

“Vodka and tonic. Hi, stud. Utah. Shall we go?”

“Vodka. To go!”

(Club scene fades out. Steven makes a series of calls.) “Hi, this is Steve. I just wanted to call and say, ‘Hi’ and that I had a great time with you last night. You are so hot. I’d love to get together again. Like you said, maybe this time we could eat out. I know I gave you my number, but just in case, it’s (212) DO-ME-NOW. Hope you’re doing well. Give me a call. *Ciao*.”

“Hi, it’s Steven. I don’t know if you got my last message, but it would be great to see you again. Hope you are doing well. Give me a call. *Ciao!*”

“Hi, it’s me. Give me a call. *Ciao*.”

“Hi, it’s me—*again*. I’m a little confused. You said to give you a call and we’d go out sometime. I thought we really had a connection. Or was that just the ecstasy talking? I don’t let just anyone *do* what you did to me. So do give me a call, okay? Even if it’s to say that you’re too busy. Or have a boyfriend. Or a husband. Or a wife! Hope you’re doing well. Give me a call, damn it. *Ciao*.”

(Techno music plays even louder.) “I gave up hugging time for this? NOOOOOO!!!! JIMMY, WHERE ARE YOU?!!!!” *(music and lights out.)*

SORRY, ST. PETER. I forgot about the dress code. Do you want me to put the jumpsuit back on? Whew! Thanks. It’s so hot.

I went down to the Chelsea Health Clinic to get my free test results. When I got there, the counselor flippantly said, “I’m sorry, yours are the only ones that isn’t come back.”

“That means I’m positive, doesn’t it? They’re re-testing it because I’m *positive!*”

“Not necessarily, *amigo*. *Mirá*, calm down! Come back tomorrow!”

That was the longest night of my life. I had to take two Excedrin PM to knock me out. I didn’t have anyone to go with me the next day, so I took this picture of my kids. They’re all I had in the world. I got on the subway and just sat there holding them. When I got there the counselor came in, and I just stared in their beautiful brown eyes. “Don’t die, Daddy. We need you.” When I was ready, I said, “Okay. What is it?” *(Pause)* I was negative.

At the pier dance, after my first Gay Pride parade, I officially declared the end of my gay adolescence. I couldn’t believe how many of us there were. *Thousands*. Did God make this many mistakes? When it got dark, they set off fireworks with the national anthem playing. We all stopped to watch arm in arm. Me and all my gay brothers and sisters. Right there, I got an impression to call Emily on my cell. “Hi, Em. Em, your dad wanted me to call you and wish you a happy Gay Pride.”

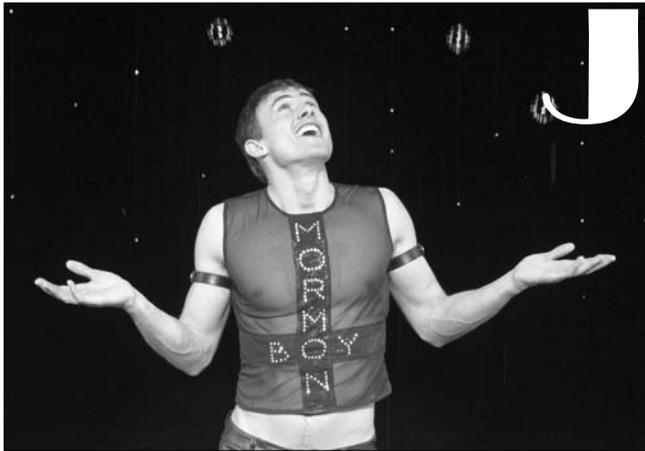
She started to cry. “Thank you, Steven. *(Pause)* Thank you.”

I was recently re-reading *Goodbye, I Love You* down in Telestial Central Park. When I finished it, I wept even harder than before. What were we thinking? Except for the AIDS part, Emily and I had relived her parents’ story, sometimes word for word—just on opposite coasts. Why did this have to happen? I take one look at our children, and I know the answer.

You want to borrow my handkerchief, Brother St. Peter? Can I call you brother, St. Peter? It’s okay, really. Everything’s gonna be just fine. *(Steven looks up to see his children have arrived.)*

KIDS! WOW, YOU look great! How are you? How’s the party? Yeah, Elton John’s a good friend. Heavenly Mother invited me, but I guess she forgot to put my name on the list. But I really only came to see you guys. Brother St. Peter, could you . . . uh . . . could you leave us alone? Just for a few minutes. Thanks. ‘Preciate ya. *(St. Peter leaves.)*

How are Grandma Blossom and Grandma Butterfly? Good! And your mother? Great! Hey, I thought maybe sometime you guys could get a special day pass and come down and visit me. Your Grandpa Gerald is there, too, and all your other wicked relatives. It’s really hot, but it just feels like another circuit party in Miami. Do you still know your Shakespeare? “Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow. . . .” Terrific! Hey, I brought the ABBA CD’s! I snuck them through the check-in. I thought they’d be a nice change from *Afterglow*. I know it’s been tough. I’m sorry I was so . . . *human*. I just hope you don’t think you were a mistake or that I abandoned you. I brought you these! *(Holds up daffodils)* I guess all I really wanted to say was hello . . . and . . . I love you.



Just four simple letters. How could I forget? I knew the password the whole time!

Oh, my gosh! *That's it!* That's the password! Just four simple letters. "L-O-V-E." How could I forget? How could I be so stupid? I knew the password the whole time! Quick! Enter it in the computer before St. Peter gets back!

(Disco ball goes and ABBA music plays "Angel Eyes." Steven steps on the carpet, but this time it does not burn his feet. Standing now inside the Pearly Gates as bubbles fall from Heaven.)

Shall we dance?

(After dancing with his children, Steven looks up and sees someone from his past.)

Jimmy!

(Blackout)

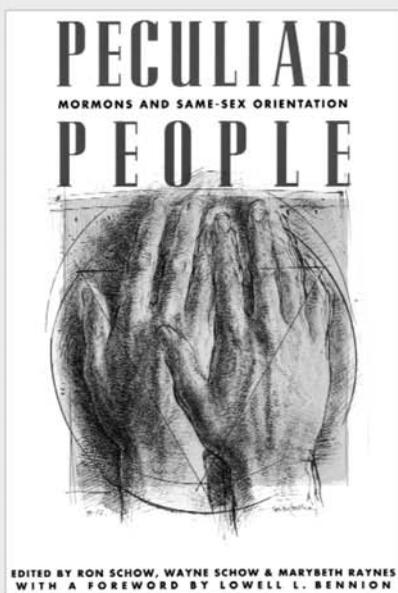
NOTE

1. Dallin H. Oaks, "Same-Gender Attraction," *Ensign* (Oct. 1995): 7.

STEVEN FALES bases his career in New York City where he has performed Off-Broadway and done his oxy-Mormon comedy at *Caroline's*, *Stand-Up NY*, and *Don't Tell Mama*. Regional credits include *Pioneer Theatre Company*, *Sundance Theatre*, *Utah Shakespearean Festival*, *Connecticut Repertory Theatre*, *New Harmony Theatre*, *Stages St. Louis*, and others. He holds a B.F.A. in music/dance/theatre from *BYU* and an M.F.A. in acting from the *University of Connecticut*. In addition to acting and writing, he is a public speaker. Steven is an active member of *Affirmation and Gamofites (Gay Mormon Fathers)* and can be reached through his website, <www.MormonBoy.com>.

Photos by KEITH JOCHIM

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PECULIAR PEOPLE: MORMONS AND SAME-SEX ORIENTATION
Ron Schow, Wayne Schow, and Marybeth Raynes, editors
Lowell L. Bennion, foreword
 Paperback. 406 Pages. \$19.95

In *Peculiar People*, a wealth of resources chronicles LDS homosexuals. Those who have chosen celibacy are occasionally admitted into full church fellowship. Others conceal their orientation. But many have decided that they "will not go where they are not welcome" and drift away from the community that once nurtured them.

For some time now church clerics, social workers, theologians, and sociologists have been engaged in debate about what place such people should occupy in the church community. To this discussion, Ron and Wayne Schow and Marybeth Raynes contribute their wide professional experience and bring a range of resources, gearing this volume toward helping people become informed and providing a variety of perspectives. These include the findings of biologists, therapists, and religious scholars.

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A loving gesture. Peace of mind.*

JAR OF REPENTANCE

By Kathleen Smith Thomas

MOTHER, MY FRIEND LINDA, AND I WERE HEADED north on the train to Edinburgh, Scotland. I felt as if we were in some movie, and the train, the English countryside, and the characters had all come together for my musing. My mom, Jessie, lived in Washington State, Linda in Utah, and I in Florida. When I had told Linda that Mom and I were going to England, she asked if she could join us. She had long dreamed of visiting the British Isles, and her recently discovered cancer combined to motivate her to make the trip.

Linda and I had known each other since we first met as eighth graders in Sweetwater, Texas, in 1963. We have always been opposites. If opposites attract, maybe the strong friendship we developed in our small west Texas town stemmed from that fact. In our last high school years, Linda had been elected to the homecoming court and yearbook royalty. I had been elected president of Future Teachers and vice-president of the student body. She was prettier and definitely more popular. I enjoyed her energy and extroversion. It allowed me my introversion without making me feel like a total outcast. My senior year, Linda convinced me to try out for cheerleader. She created a cheer for me and said I would be great. Reluctantly I agreed and went through the motions in front of the student body. Linda won, and I did, too, although my heart believed it was more a vote against the other contenders than a vote for me. Linda was selected captain and ran the squad like a benevolent general. She was Miss Energy and a perfectionist, tirelessly planning and enthusiastically working.

Linda was nominated for Homecoming Queen, but Carol won. That was okay, though, because the other big election was for yearbook queen, and we thought Linda would easily win. But Carol won again. After the announcement, I tried to console Linda. Our dates were with us, doing the manly thing, exclaiming, "How could this happen?" and "Carol is such a fake" and "We'll get her." (I was never sure exactly what that meant.) Twenty years later, at our high school reunion, we felt somewhat avenged as Linda, I, and those same dates were in the homecoming parade, perched atop a vintage red Corvette convertible, laughing about the runner-up syndrome. Linda



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and I had traveled several states to be there. Carol, who lived only an hour away, had sent regrets.

Our lives intersected at various times after high school. Linda went to a small college, and I went to the University of Texas at Austin. I thrived at school—university life satisfied all of my intellectual yearning. Linda was in a car wreck and almost died. After a year of recovery, she moved to Austin to work. We both got jobs at the state capitol and encountered everything from lecherous legislators to Vietnam War protesters.

Linda continued to work; I returned to school and eventually graduated. Afterward, my sister and I decided to attend acting school, and we moved to Dallas. There we joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Upon returning to my family, who had moved to Florida, I met someone and, after a year and a half, married. He was not a member, and our wedding took place on the beach. Shortly thereafter, Linda called. She was thinking about joining the Church! She knew I had recently joined and asked what I thought about it. Soon she and her husband were baptized. Over the years, we both had children—I had three, and their ages matched exactly the ages of three of her six children. I settled in North Florida, and she, in Oklahoma.

SO, TWENTY-FOUR years later, there we were together again, speeding north from London. The train was wonderful, clean, and comfortable. The scenery was delightful, much as I had imagined it would be. Green fields were interspersed with square plots of land, solid yellow with rape-seed. Cows and sheep dotted the field—not big herds of them as in Texas, but just enough here and there to make it scenic. The small stone homes were set in fields surrounded by wooden fences made from what looked to me like tree branches crossed in Xs. The church in the center of town, with its spire claiming the highest point, completed the pastoral setting. If I concentrated intently, I was able to put myself in one of the small cottages with a pot of tea, some wellies by the door, and my sheep in the field. I could block out Linda's cancer and, for a few moments, be someone else, somewhere else.

Linda and Mother loved the train trip, too. Linda was constantly taking pictures of everything. It became our inside joke that she would take pictures and I would harass her about it. I had left my camera at the flat in London—again! I had taken

maybe three photos in two weeks. We weren't sure where we were going in Scotland, planning to just ride until we decided to explore. Edinburgh arrived about the same time our hunger did, so we got off. We could board again later and travel further north. Mother and Linda looked at me as if I were the social activities director. I said I knew no more about this place than they did but maybe we could head off *that* way, pointing in the direction away from the train. We found a tourist information station where a helpful woman gave us a map. Then, as we headed out to eat some cheese and bread on a nearby lawn, we heard bagpipes from around the corner. Hurrying to look, we found the source of the sound. There he stood, in his kilt, playing real bagpipes. It was too wonderful; standing in Edinburgh, Scotland, with the afternoon breeze, listening to what was surely an authentic Scotsman playing an authentic Scottish folk song. The sun was setting rapidly, and we didn't know where we would stay the night. We felt much like explorers must feel charting new territories—invigorated and inspired.

After eating, we examined our map and started hunting for one of the bed-and-breakfasts we had heard about from the information lady. The late afternoon breeze was now a wind that was not so much blowing as it was whipping—whipping around each part of our bodies, around the building, around pieces of paper in the street and on the sidewalk. Seeing a curved lane off the main road on which we were walking, we gladly turned into it to get away from the noise of the traffic and the wind. The wind did seem to lessen, and, halfway around the curve, we found our place.

The owner was a friendly man who the next morning offered us eggs, bangers, and ham, and toast for breakfast. The place was filled with knick-knacks—expensive, nice ones. Porcelain ballerinas, dogs and cats, and other assorted animals. The owner must have been a trusting sort, because he left them everywhere. His treasures were in our room, in the hallways, and in every corner and nook in his home.

With the new day upon us, we were ready to sightsee. While walking down a mile-long road to see the oldest castle in Scotland, we came upon a parade of men in kilts celebrating some church event. Farther on, we found three men sitting on a bench. Telling Mother and Linda that I wanted to talk with some “real Scotsmen,” I approached the three. Apologizing for being so bold, I asked if they were indeed authentic Scotsmen. They said, “No, Lassie, we’re on tire from Ireland.” “Tire, tire,” I thought. “What is that?” After a brief moment of befuddlement, I realized they were saying “tour.” They were on tour from Ireland. They laughed easily. Mother and Linda joined in, and we had a lively visit.

Set on the top of a plateau overlooking Edinburgh, the castle was delightful. Extremely old, drafty, cold, and so . . . well, so castley. After a guided tour, we entered the gift shop. There were all the wonderful “Scottish” things: shortbread, marmalade, scarves, kilts. The orange marmalade, my favorite,



Linda, Kathleen, and Jessie in a park near Hertfordshire, England, May, 1992

We felt much like explorers must feel charting new territories—invigorated and inspired.

had been made in Edinburgh, and the white opaque jars it was in had been made just north of there. The jars were simple and quite beautiful in their simplicity. Easy to hold, square, and with a smoothness that reminded me of marble. Plain lines and simple lettering described the contents. A plainness that was appealing and inviting. A jar you would want to keep after having eaten what was inside. The gift shop also contained Scottish plaid scarves that depicted the colors of the different clans. We found ours but decided not to buy. Kilts and mittens. Toys and candy. My mother bought a mug with Scottish dogs on it. Linda and I finally decided on the shortbread and the marmalade. Linda bought the marmalade for her mother, thinking her mother would like the jar. I bought mine for me. The castle was closing, so we departed and strolled back down the road.

Looking for places we might eat, we ventured into several side streets. Noticing a pub, we put our heads in to check it out and found only men were inside. Reluctant to enter, we turned around to go back to the road when we noticed a staircase across from us that led to what looked like a place to eat. Going down the stairs, we opened the door. It was small—four tables at the front, some screens, and then two more tables. We entered and looked at the menu. Soup and bread. The place looked and smelled worthwhile, and we were hungry and cold, so we stayed.

The delightful man who brought us the menu had recently arrived from Russia. We had delicious tomato soup and French bread. All sorts of Russian memorabilia were displayed on the wall, and we had a lovely visit with the owner as he told us his life story. Never in my wildest dreams had I imagined I would one day be in Scotland, talking with a restaurant owner

from Russia, while eating possibly the best tomato soup I have ever had.

While returning to our bed and breakfast, we stopped one more time to exchange some money. In the process of returning the money to her purse and paying what she owed me, Linda dropped her bag. We heard something break, and at the same second, I knew it was the marmalade jar. Immediately a voice in my head said, "Give her yours." Almost as quickly another voice said, "No." While my mother and I sympathized and helped Linda clean up the mess, the battle continued inside my head.

"Your aunt and your mother would give it to her."

Well, I'm not as perfect as they are.

"It is just a jar, and Linda has cancer."

But I want it.

"Give it to her."

No.

"It is the compassionate, Christlike thing to do."

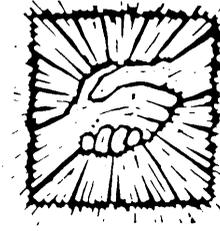
No, and stop it.

WE RETURNED TO London and eventually to the States. We kept in close touch over the next two years, exchanging pictures of "The Trip," writing letters, and visiting. Linda, her husband, and all six children moved from Oklahoma to Utah. I moved from the panhandle of Florida east to Tallahassee. Linda sent me a beautiful album about the trip. All those pictures she had taken that I had harassed her about brought back wonderful, warm memories.

Two years to the month after our trip, we talked on the phone, reminiscing about our adventures in England, calling it the most wonderful trip in our lives. We talked about her cancer and how she was maintaining a positive attitude in fighting it. At the end of the conversation, she said she wished, in her life, to have been more like me. It made me feel uncomfortable to hear her say this. I did not see myself as the person she was envisioning.

After we hung up, I went to the kitchen and opened the door to the small, not-often-used cupboard by the refrigerator. There, stuffed in the back (for I did not enjoy looking at it), was the marmalade jar. I took it down, washed it, polished it, and wrapped it in a clean white cloth. I carefully set it in a box and then sat at my desk and wrote Linda's mother a letter explaining that Linda had bought some marmalade for her while we had been in Scotland. That jar had broken, but this jar was the same as the one she would have received. I told her what a kind and loving daughter she had. I enclosed the letter in the package, walked to the car, and drove to the post office. Once the package had been mailed, I felt the way I feel after a splinter has been removed from my finger. I wonder how something so small can create such discomfort, and I marvel that its removal can cause so much relief.

A few weeks later, I received a lovely letter from Linda's mom. She thanked me profusely for the thoughtfulness, saying she loved to have anything of Linda's. I felt profoundly ashamed. Linda died later that year. ☹



THE FOX

*Why do we feel (we all feel)
this sweet sensation of joy?*

—Elizabeth Bishop's "The Moose"

"State officials estimate nearly 700,000 head of cattle reside in Manatee County, as well as 7,000 horses, 250,000 dogs, 750,000 cats"

and one fox
who visits
our sea oats back yard by the Gulf;
a mystery
how he came to this barrier
island, hardly a habitat
for foxes.
He does not appear rabid
(his demeanor—unruffled serenity)
stretching and sunning
on the wide stump
where a neighbor cut down a tree
that obstructed the view.
Cautiously wise, the fox is surprised
by our appearance as we are by his—
long grey brush of a tail, the reddish ruff
and pricked up ears . . . those eyes . . .
wild life
amidst the developers.
Why? *Why do we feel
(we all feel) this sweet
sensation of joy?*
amidst the terrible noise
of pile drivers,
each cement piling
a long spear
into the earth.

—ANNE FASULO

2000 Brookie & D. K. Brown Fiction Contest Starstone Winner

SKETCHING THE FIFTEENTH WARD

By Dawn Jeppesen Anderson

JANE DREW WHEN SHE WAS BORED. AND TODAY she was just about as bored as anyone could get, sitting in the third row from the back of the Fifteenth Ward chapel. Some members escaped the monotony of another church meeting by dozing in fits and starts. Even from her position in the back, she recognized when they had gone to sleep. The slumped posture, the nodding head, the slight tipping which was corrected with a sudden jerk. Others were erect with the kind of rapt attention possible only in the very pious. Were they really listening to the speaker? Were they really connecting with some higher plane? When she was in a position to see them, Jane could tell by their eyes. If the eyes were on fire, then so was the spirit. If the eyes were fixed, then so was the spirit.

She watched the young mothers wrestling children on and off the bench seats, dragging noisy toddlers in and out of the chapel until the doors were swinging like the kitchen entry of a truck-stop diner. Casting around for a suitable subject, Jane decided on the Claytons, two rows ahead.

They were easy enough to sketch. She drew a block above a suit to represent Brother Clayton's flat-top. Sister Clayton's hair was preposterously huge compared to her husband's. Jane penciled a big, shaggy mass, a towering combustible haystack of yellow tresses. Then she started on Tiffany.

Tiffany was a sturdy girl, and a perfect likeness of her mother: lipsticked *ad nauseum*, sweeping blonde hair shoved up in a sort of inverted waterfall, moussed spikes and tendrils exploding all over her scalp. In an unkind moment, Jane drew the girl with menacing eyes staring out of the back of her head. But that was not very professional, so she erased them.

There was a younger sister, yet another copy of the mother, only her hair was darker. Not smaller, just darker. And the youngest child, a boy of about eleven, completed the set. He

DAWN JEPPESEN ANDERSON has a bachelor's and a master's degree in English education and has taught writing and children's literature at BYU Idaho (formerly Ricks College), in Rexburg, Idaho, for the past eighteen years. She is passionate about Tolkien, John Irving, and Wendell Berry. She and her husband, Dave, have three boys.

and his father looked like small blocky bookends situated on either end of the family, propping up the hair queens.

Jane sketched away. The choir sang. A frazzled parent chased a small boy up behind the podium, which provided a moment of comic relief. The speaker made a joke about it, and the audience laughed tepidly. Jane leaned back, admiring her work. She did not show it to her parents—they would not approve. As long as they merely suspected doodling, they would leave her alone to draw.

Later, she showed the picture to her closest friends.

"The Claytons?" said one of them.

"And that one is Tiffany, right?" asked another.

Jane smiled, pleased that even the rear-view sketches were instantly recognizable.

Her brother was also able to identify the Claytons. Pretty soon, the sketch had circulated among many teenagers. Yet somehow, it remained outside the range of Tiffany Clayton's radar. But Tiffany got more compliments on her hair that week than she had ever had before. At first, she gushed. Then she became suspicious. She wasn't doing anything with her hair she didn't do every single day of every other week. She still washed it daily and applied several layers of mousse and superhold sculpting sprays. Even Tiffany knew that if her hair had not garnered praise in the past, then it should not be the subject of everyone's attention for this one particular week. Besides, the compliments had a slight edge of disingenuousness to them.

"What's wrong with my hair?" she demanded of her boyfriend one day.

"Nothing, why?" he asked.

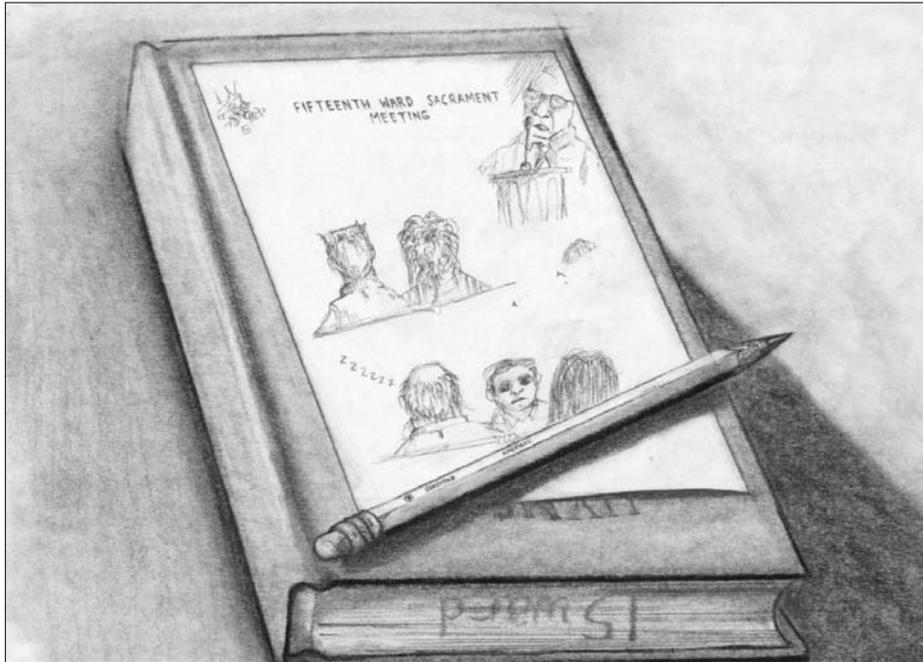
His friend sniggered, "It's so . . . so . . . large."

She slammed her locker and would not ride home with her boyfriend and his creep friend.

"What's wrong with my hair?" she whined to her mother.

Sister Clayton smiled and laughed, assuming a joke. When she saw her daughter's twisted expression, she said, "Oh, sweetheart. Your hair is beautiful." Of course, the mother's hair was exactly like the daughter's, like two mirrors faithfully reflecting each other.

Then Sister Clayton reached up to touch her daughter's



DOODLING, SHE TOLD THEM, HELPED HER THINK ABOUT WHAT THE SPEAKER WAS SAYING.

stiffened tendrils and said, “Do we need to schedule you for some more highlighting? I’ll call Misty and see if we can get you in tomorrow.” Tiffany had her hair highlighted to the tune of \$40 worth of strong-smelling chemicals, and for a while, she felt better.

Jane, meanwhile, decided to do another sketch. It was a wonderful way to pass the time in church. She became quite good at hair textures, as most of her work portrayed the backs of people’s heads. She tried drawing Sister Limpel’s face in Young Women’s, and the likeness was remarkable, but it wasn’t as easy or compelling as sketching the back of her short, dark hair. So she drew another rearview of Sister Limpel’s family during sacrament meeting. Brother Limpel was almost bald, and Jane struggled at first to depict the amazing reflection off his scalp. The Limpel children were all over the place during the meeting, and so she sketched them as shifting, dark-headed blobs.

Her collection of sketches grew. The Andersons and their three boys were famous for sleeping through the meetings, and Jane piled them into a lumpy pyramid of tilting heads. All six of the tall, wealthy Petersons she drew with swan-like necks and graceful, angular shoulders. The Borahs, on the other hand, made an interesting study in shape and proportion. Sister Borah was small as a mouse, with fly-away hair that looked, from the back, remarkably like whiskers. Brother Borah was a massive man and perfectly symmetrical. His shoulders had no definition—they were simply large, sloping arcs that started at his wide, wide neck and curved in a perfect hemisphere down to the bench seat. Their one child was not quite symmetrical but broad as a melon in her purple print dress. All of the figures Jane drew ended abruptly where the back of the benches began, like portraits limited by the size of the picture frame, like puppets cut off at the shoulder blades. Jane liked realism.

Her *rear-view portraits*, as she liked to call them, garnered quite a bit of attention from a few confidantes. Every Sunday, they would linger after the meeting and play a game of guess-the-back-of-the-head.

“The Hansens.”

“No, it’s the Christensens. Sister Hansen has lighter hair, doesn’t she?”

“Well, this is Brenda Davis. I saw you staring at her the whole meeting.”

Jane enjoyed the attention. Short, bespectacled girls with short, water-thin hair take it when they can get it.

Once, Jane’s father noticed her sketching away and, more out of stiffness than curiosity, craned his neck back and looked long and languidly at her rendition of Brother Bartle. He noted for just a moment how Jane looked up, looked down, looked up, looked down, applying detail and dimension to the portrait. When her father made the connection between the unwitting model and the sneaky teenager recording the image, he smiled to himself, admiring her resourcefulness, but didn’t give it another thought until they passed the sacrament and Jane was still sketching. He put a hand on her shoulder and gave her the look which meant cease and desist.

Her parents mentioned this obsession with art once or twice, and she assured them she did it to pass the time. Doodling, she told them. Helped her think about what the speaker was saying. And this was true. Words and ideas and platitudes drifted in and out of her head until it was difficult for her to distinguish between her own ruminations and the speaker’s.

“The scriptures tell us that John the Baptist lived in the wilderness among the beasts. . . .”

Jane drew Brother John Webster with a shaggy mane and replaced his white shirt with a hairy animal skin. Realism gave way to primitive interpretation.

"I knew the Lord guided my companion and me to that couple. . . ."

Jane sketched the sister missionaries on the second row with divining rods protruding from their skulls.

"I want all the little ones in my Primary class to know how much I love each and every one of them. . . ."

She penciled the six Sunbeams as insects, arranging them on a bench seat like an entomologist. One was a butterfly; one, a ladybug; one, a bumblebee; a grasshopper; a caterpillar; and the last one she sketched as a spider with horrible spindly legs and twelve eyes on top of his head. That would be Taylor McBride. Jane thought he was a brat.

The sketching of the Fifteenth Ward continued for some time, maybe two months. Even the Young Women's program, rehearsed for several weeks with much anguish and gnashing of teeth among the leaders, did not deter Jane.

By the time everything was rehearsed to death and the program ready for launch, Grace Peterson knew, second-hand, about Jane's drawings. Even at fifteen, Grace already had her father's height and her mother's looks.

"Like she's got nothing better to do, drawing her stupid little pictures. What's she got against me? Like *grow up* already." She rolled her eyes at her sister. The two girls slid from the back seat of the Petersons's Lexus, and the sister made a joke about Jane. Giggling behind their hands, they leaned on each other all the way into the church. Later, on the stand where the Young Women would stage their program, Grace stooped from her elegant six-foot altitude and adjusted her stocking, casting a sidelong glance at Jane.

Jane sat with one leg crossed over her knee, chewing on her pencil eraser and slumped so far into the folding chair it practically engulfed her. One sandaled foot pumped up and down like a piston. People filed into the chapel, milled about like so many restless mall shoppers, and finally settled into their seats. Jane fidgeted during the sacrament, using a tiny pink sharpener to shave little curls from her pencil.

At a signal from Sister Limpel, the Young Women stood and piped a raspy version of "Beautiful Savior." The song was followed by a series of thumps and squeaks as the girls dropped into their hinged chairs. Grace Peterson glided forward. Jane could see the girl's effect by a sudden restlessness among every teenage boy in the congregation. Grace reached for the microphone with a slender hand, adjusting it to her remarkable height. In a delicate gesture, she swept back her long, amber hair. She opened her scriptures. She adjusted the microphone again. The suspense was palpable, even painful. Murmuring bashfully, she said "Our theme for this Young Women's program is 'The Lord Looketh upon the Heart.'" Grace's talk was spare. Jane had a hard time attending to the few details, as did everyone else. "We should accept people for who they are—for the Lord looketh not on outward appearances," Grace breathed quietly into the microphone. Jane noted the many eyes that followed as she returned to her seat.

Tiffany Clayton practically skipped to the podium and chirped her way through a story from the *New Era*. Her blonde locks were taller and stiffer than usual—extra plumage for the

occasion. She giggled often and, nervous as a pigeon, shifted her weight from foot to foot, her shoulders bobbing. Her hair was the only part of her which remained immobile through the entire talk.

Jane's pencil flew: the Young Women's Program 2000 captured in interpretive pencil art for future generations. *Better than photographs, ladies and gentlemen, this is real art, the real thing, baby. A keepsake you will always treasure.* But there was one speaker whom Jane did not sketch, mainly because she was the speaker. Still clutching the pencil and notebook, she unfolded herself and shuffled to the podium.

"My talk today is consistent with the theme of love and acceptance," she stammered. Her voice came back to her a thousand ways in a thousand fragments of echo and distortion. Jane could hardly bear the sea of faces—there were so many faces—dizzying, leering. She much preferred her place in the back of the chapel with rows upon rows of heads turned forward and away. While she spoke, Jane looked up and looked down at her notes, looked up and looked down, but she did not focus on the words she had written. She sketched instead, swiftly, nervously—not anything in particular, just circles and squares and triangles and sloppy bugs and fountains. It was hard to do anything, standing in front of all those faces, all those judges.

When the speech ended, Jane was spent, her hand cramping. She could not remember what she had said, only the relief at being able to collapse into her seat. But after a few minutes, she revived, shook out her wrist. Two leaders spoke at the microphone, giving short testimonials of service in the Young Women's program and the gratitude they felt for working with such beautiful girls filled with the light of Christ. A member of the bishopric followed, reiterating all that had been said already: such beautiful girls, such beautiful spirits.

JANE MISSED THE following Sunday. She told her mother she was ill, but the truth was she could not bear to look into people's faces or have them look into hers, telling her what a great talk she had given, what a beautiful spirit she was. While the rest of the family went off to church, she stayed home and evaluated her artwork from all the Sundays before, all the sketches of the Young Women's program. The member of the bishopric she had illustrated with a white string knotted exactly at the back of his head to indicate the mask he presented to the congregation. The first counselor, Sister Nye, spoke with such airy enthusiasm that Jane replaced the woman's head with a large, transparent balloon. As a clever bonus, she had drawn a CTR symbol on the balloon, backwards but plainly visible to the listeners. And while Jane attempted an honest representation of Sister Limpel, she messed up the proportions of the president's head. She gave up and rolled the lead point around and around on the paper until the dark, helmet hair became a bowling ball—glossy, impenetrable, and pocked with three holes.

Jane's sketch of Grace Peterson was pretty generous, considering the others. She faithfully rendered Grace's shining hair, but then sketched the girl with an unbelievably long neck that

craned forward over the microphone. Long enough, surely, to give the boys a real start.

She hadn't needed to think twice about drawing Tiffany Clayton. She laughed aloud when she picked up the sketch. In place of Tiffany's head was a shooting, tumbling fountain springing up from the neck of her fashionably undersized dress. All water and air.

Jane spread the pictures out on her bed and pointed judgmentally at each one of them, proclaiming aloud, "The Lord looketh upon the heart. The Lord looketh upon the heart." Gathering the little papers into a pile, she mused at the sudden strangeness of it all. She knew every one of these people. Every head in the Fifteenth Ward was familiar to her. And yet none of them, not one, not even her parents or her brother or her best friend knew Jane. She made a face and smashed the pile with her fist, scattering the sketches like leaves across her bedspread. Then she stood and walked to the vanity table and dropped heavily into the chair. There was still one more sketch to finish. Jane looked for a long time at her reflection. And for a long time, the girl in the mirror stared back. She lifted some of her thin brown hair, bobbed in a straight line at the chin, and let it fall. Then she removed her glasses and leaned forward, squinting.

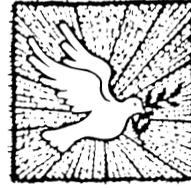
She could fix all this. On paper, she could make everything right. So Jane put her glasses back on and sketched. Her mind swirled with every doctrine, every platitude about self-worth she had ever heard. Words and random thoughts and more words merged into a spiral, like a pencil point, pulling a watery gray line closer and closer to the center of a page. She worked rapidly, feverishly. Finished at last, she taped her art to the mirror and collapsed on the bed.

When Jane's mother came in later and found her asleep and snoring softly, tossed out on the mattress like a garment, she walked over and laid a hand across the girl's neck, checking for fever. Curious, she nudged the wastebasket full of sketches with her foot and peered down at its contents. The depictions were very odd—people with balloons and bowling balls for heads. Jane muttered in her sleep and shifted on the bed. At that moment her mother noticed the picture on the vanity mirror. She reached out and peeled it away.

It was a detailed pencil sketch of Jane—at least it appeared to be Jane. She sank onto the bed by the snoring girl, clutching the paper.

Strange. Why would Jane sketch herself this way? How did she even do it, the mother wondered. And, as if she could find the answer there, she leaned toward the vanity mirror, envisioning how Jane might accomplish this image of herself. Why would anyone want to sketch the *back* of her own head? Absently, she stroked Jane's hair and sat staring at the mirror. She considered the sketches in the trash and almost added Jane's portrait to the rest, but on second thought, rose and pressed the paper back onto the vanity mirror.

Downstairs, someone banged through a couple of kitchen cupboards, looking for food. She tugged the corner of the bedspread over her daughter's shoulders and crept from the room. The roast must be done by now, she decided. ☞



RETURNING TO NORTH BRANCH

There's a low field in North Branch
where the grass, once two feet
with whip sharp tips
too slack for a switch,
has now come to nothing.

I'm facing southwest
where cows lag in cliques
across the summer field:
two beats beyond the electric
fence, cows drift near the road
to one low note of language,

Up deep from black/white
canvas stretched over each notch
of spine, mocking the far off barns
where crushed corn spills on
patches of standing water.

In that house near the edge,
equidistant to road and river,
my brother and I rhymed,
and my mother grew blue lilacs
which nearly beat the smell of field.

And to the cows
tracking through shit now
with ribs showing
like a stack of boomerangs,
turning back, I'll concede:
I am not the farmer. Not the mover.

—CHRISTOPHER SALERNO

TURNING THE TIME OVER TO . . .

Jared Christensen

MY GREAT DILEMMA

CHURCH-WISE, THINGS are pretty blurry for me right now. I'm angry, frustrated, and bewildered; yet, paradoxically, I also feel like my need for spirituality and my commitment to finding truth have never been stronger. I grew up in an environment where Mormonism was synonymous with perfection, swimming in a pool of "the Church *has* to be true; it makes so much sense," and "I know beyond a shadow of a doubt." During my teenage years, I never had a strong desire to seek that unwavering testimony of the Church that those around me seemed to possess. For me, it was enough to believe and practice, not necessarily to know.

I had always wanted to serve a mission. Like many young Latter-day Saints, I'm sure my desire to be a missionary grew from a collage of feelings and hopes from family, friends, my Church community, and myself. As the time to depart neared, I was faced with obstacles that threatened both my desire and eligibility to serve. During this time of turmoil, I often asked myself if it was really worth it for me to go.

To this day, I thank God for a loving and understanding mother, whose life experiences had molded her into a perfect friend. Her advice was invaluable, and I wish her advice could be given by every parent to every child in my situation. She said, "I want you to go, but if you don't think you can do it, I'll support you. I love you, and your life will be okay if you don't go." I knew that she meant it. I knew that she very much wanted me to go, but I knew that she would love and support me if I didn't. All the pressure and stress dissipated. What others wanted me to do suddenly became a non-factor.

I decided to go. I didn't pray about it, and I didn't try to find an answer in the scriptures. Neither was necessary. I knew that I needed to go for myself, to become the person that I wanted to become. This answer came from deep within, finally breaking

through a culture's burdensome pressure. My decision came just a week before I left, and that final week was one of the happiest of my life. For the first time in months, I felt no anxiety. Not only was I excited, but I felt worthy to go. I thank God for a loving stake president who followed his heart and trusted God's grace more than words in the handbook.

The day I entered the MTC, I received a gift: a desire to find truth. I struggled in the MTC with my testimony of the Book of Mormon and of Joseph Smith. I desperately wanted to know what was true. I yearned to know what God wanted me to know. One night in the MTC, I dedicated my life to seeking God's truth, whatever it was and wherever it came from. I decided to trust God to be my guide.

Brigham Young describes perfectly what I felt at this time:

It is our duty and calling, as ministers of the same salvation and Gospel, to gather every item of truth and reject every error. Whether a truth be found with professed infidels, or with . . . [any] of the various and numerous different sects and parties, all of whom have more or less truth, it is the business of the Elders of this Church to gather up all the truths in the world pertaining to life and salvation, to the Gospel we preach, to mechanism of every kind, to the sciences, and to philosophy, wherever it may be found in every nation, kindred, tongue, and people and bring it to Zion.¹

I became consumed with reading, studying, searching, pondering. This started in the MTC and continued when I left for my mission field in Columbus, Ohio. By the end of my first three months in the field, I had finished the standard works and the missionary library. I often stayed up into the late hours of

night, deprived of sleep but nourished with knowledge. I continued to read anything and everything.

My first area was filled with anti-Mormons and sects of every kind. Everyone seemed to be out to prove us wrong. Most missionaries would reply to anti-Mormon rhetoric by simply asserting that "it's not true." They'd say this whether or not they even knew what the person was talking about. Remembering President Young's advice to "gather every item of truth, and reject every error," I decided to investigate for myself the claims of the people whom I was trying to convert.

To this day, I am puzzled by the Church's response to anti-Mormon material. To me, the response seems filled with contradictions. On the one hand, it claims that anti-Mormon material is twisted truth, lies, and false information. On the other hand, we are told that this material will make us question our testimony and faith. Early in my mission, I asked myself, "If it is all lies and false propaganda, then how could it challenge my faith?" I soon learned the truth: it wasn't all lies.

S UDDENLY, I felt myself becoming like my father, even though I never really knew him. In 1985, when I was three years old, my father, Steve Christensen, fell victim to Mark Hofmann in the Salt Lake City bombings. During the years that followed, I learned from others that my father had been a seeker of truth. I heard stories of how he'd stay up all night reading. I often found myself doing the same. A close friend of my father's told me, "He had the desire to question, without doubting."

I decided on my mission to read the books that had been written about the bombings and the surrounding events. What I found changed everything. For the first time, I had to face concerns that threatened everything I'd been taught all my life. My determination to "gather every item of truth, and reject every error" took on a different meaning. How could I reject every error when so many of them existed within my own church? My father once stated, "I honestly fear that our sanitized curriculum lessons do not prepare our membership for an encounter with the dark side of Church history and the development of the doctrine."² I wholeheartedly agree.

The books about the bombings led me to others. Fawn McKay Brodie's *No Man Knows My History*, Richard Abanes's *One Nation Under Gods*, the writings of Jerald and Sandra Tanner, E.D. Howe, and others became a part of my study. I also read pro-Church material



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such as many works by Hugh Nibley, FARMS, and others strongly positive toward Mormonism and religion in general. I wanted to read any writing that had to do with Mormonism, regardless of whether it was “pro” or “anti.”

After about a year of my mission, nothing that I read could surprise me. I could tell I had changed. I realized that I was no longer like most of the other missionaries around me. To me, most blindly obeyed. It was puzzling to me that other missionaries didn't want to study out the very things we were supposed to be teaching. I became very discouraged as I'd talk with other missionaries or hear their responses to investigators. For example:

INVESTIGATOR: Why did your church practice polygamy?

MISSIONARY: Polygamy started when the Saints made their trek to Salt Lake City. The Lord brought forth polygamy so the widows of the Church would have support as they made the long and exhausting trip and as they settled into their new lives in the Great Basin.

INVESTIGATOR: But didn't polygamy start with Joe Smith?

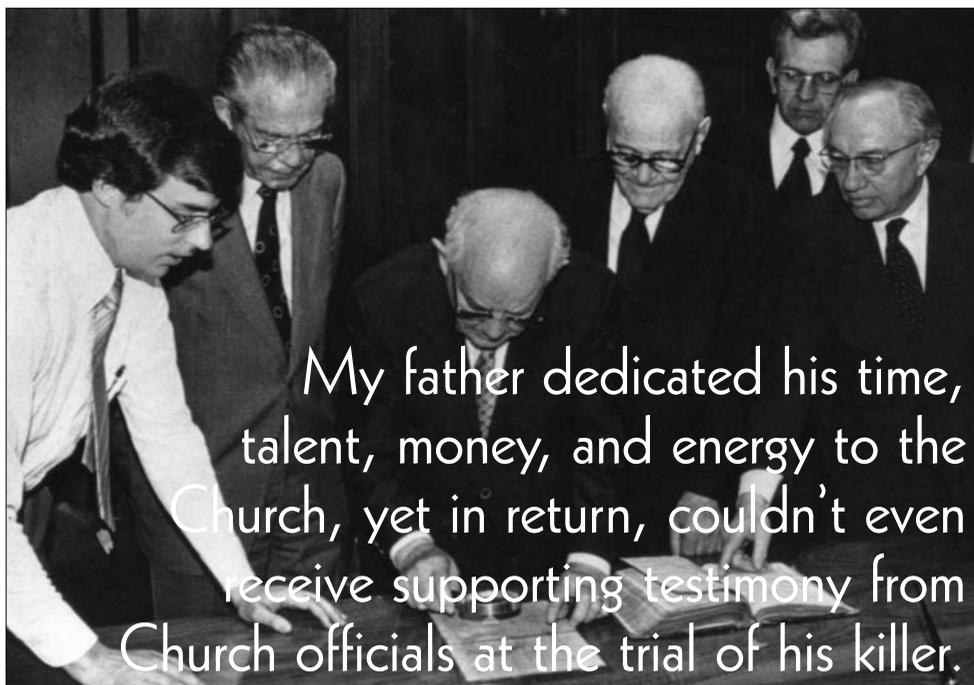
MISSIONARY: No, it was Brigham Young who started it.

I wanted to tell investigators and my companions the truth. I wanted to tell them that Joseph practiced polygamy secretly beginning in 1833 and continued until his death.³ I wanted to tell them to really read the heading of D&C 132. I wanted them to know the truth, including the fact that some of Joseph's plural wives were already the wives of other men and that some were teenagers. In my reading, I had come across the following statement by Joseph Smith:

The doctrine of the Latter-day Saints is truth. . . . Now, sir, you may think that it is a broad assertion that it is truth; but sir, the first and fundamental principle of our holy religion is that we believe that we have a right to embrace all and every item of truth, without limitation or without being circumscribed or prohibited by the creeds or superstitious notions of men.⁴

Why shouldn't we as missionaries be trusted with all the truth? And why shouldn't we be as up front as possible with investigators?

Near the end of my mission, the sisters in my zone asked me to assist them in teaching



In 1980, Mark Hofmann (left) shows documents to LDS Church leaders (l to r) Presidents N. Eldon Tanner, Spencer W. Kimball, and Marion G. Romney, and Apostles Boyd K. Packer, and Gordon B. Hinckley.

Larry, one of their new investigators. Larry had been carefully studying the Church for a month and was very interested in joining, yet he was puzzled and concerned with things he had read. Knowing I was versed in some of the things he had studied, the sisters brought me in. It was a pretty ironic situation. All of Larry's concerns matched mine. When he would bring up a subject, the other three missionaries would look to me for a response, either having never heard of what he was talking about, or feeling inadequate about their knowledge on the subject. My responses were just that—*responses*, not rebuttals. I found myself saying, “That's true, Larry.” His response would be, “Well, how can this be?” and I could only answer with empathy.

WHEN members have doubts about their belief in the Church, they will often say that “some answers we just won't know until the next life.” This attitude doesn't bother me. I'm no longer looking for answers to questions. I've found answers to most of them, and it's those answers that bother me!

On my mission, and now, I am puzzled and bothered by many things. They include but are not limited to the following: Joseph and polygamy (and the dishonesty and secrecy involved); the altering of many revelations and books; false prophecies; the Mountain Meadows Massacre; the changing

of the Word of Wisdom from “wisdom” to a commandment; post-Manifesto plural marriages; the Reed Smoot hearings (especially Joseph F. Smith's testimony); the withholding of priesthood and temple blessings from blacks and racist ideas held by Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and other Church leaders continuing into the twentieth century, and the Church's refusal (so far) to repudiate teachings about Cain's curse and supposed lack of valiance in the pre-Earth life; the connection between Masonry and the temple endowment and the subsequent evolution of the ceremony; and the Adam-God theory (not the theory itself, but the Church's spin doctoring about the doctrine's history).

Of course, I'm also troubled by more recent events. It is hard for me to read the words of Apostle Russell M. Nelson as he describes God's love as conditional. I also struggle with President Packer's teaching that “some things that are true are not very useful” and his emphasis on telling only one-sided, faith-promoting aspects of our Church's history, thereby ignoring the complexity of many persons and issues. I also have trouble understanding why, given the Church's renewed emphasis on Latter-day Saints being Christians, our leaders still back away from fully emphasizing Jesus's role as God and our Creator and Father.⁵

Yet my greatest heartache stems from the events surrounding my father's death. If, as the Book of Mormon teaches, “a seer can

It is important for us to share our souls with each other.

know of things which are past, and also of things which are to come, . . . and things which are not known shall be made known by them, and also things shall be made known by them which otherwise could not be known” (Mos. 8:17), why didn’t the prophets, seers, and revelators discover the intents of a murderer and forger? Why couldn’t they discern the intents of Hofmann’s heart like Alma and other prophets from scripture could?

Although these are hard questions, my heartache is intensified even more from my understanding that my father helped top Church authorities attempt to hide documents that could damage the Church’s reputation and shake the faith of its members. If, as the prophet Joseph stated, “our doctrine is truth,” then what do we have to hide?

But my heartache goes even deeper, for it’s been almost unbearable to look at the way Church officials handled the murder investigation of my father. While investigators were trying to find the killer, Church leaders were unwilling to give information that only they knew. It was more than a lack of cooperation; in some cases, their evasiveness bordered on outright lying.⁶ My father had dedicated his time, talent, money, and energy to the Church, yet in return, he didn’t even receive supporting testimony from Church officials during the trial of his killer.

All of the issues above have created for me what I call “my great dilemma.” I find it nearly impossible to give a sustaining vote to men who I feel abandoned my family in a most critical time. I don’t mean to sound negative and angry, only to say what I feel and know to be true.

SO why do I have a dilemma at all? Why don’t I just walk away? What keeps me believing in this faith? Simply stated, it is that although my intellect will no longer allow me to believe in the Church, my deepest spiritual self believes strongly in many things intimately connected with Mormonism.

Despite the many faults and sins of the prophet Joseph, I believe in him. I’ve had two experiences which have given me a deep spiritual confirmation of his divine calling. One of these came during the dedication of the Nauvoo temple. I will never forget that feeling. It continually pries at my intellect,

consistently reminding me that there’s “something there.”

I believe in the Book of Mormon. Do I necessarily believe that Nephites and Lamanites actually existed? No, I don’t. But I do believe this book can teach us divine principles. I have felt the love of God as I’ve read this book. The Book of Mormon has taught me that Christ is not only my Lord and Savior but also my Father and my God. It has helped me want to love and understand others as Christ loves and understands me.

I believe we were put in families for a purpose and that these relationships will endure into the next realm. This I believe despite Church teachings about a separation into various kingdoms in the next life. To quote my father, “Heaven [is] not going to be divided between good Mormons and good people.”⁷ I believe we lived as spirits in a pre-earth life, that there is eternal progression in the afterlife. I believe in visions, healing, and deep spirituality.

In the 1985 Sunstone Symposium, just two months before he was killed, my father gave a talk titled “The Informed Believer.” It has been an inspiration to me. In it, he said that “in spite of unanswered questions or unwanted answers—I believe because I feel it is true.”⁸ This is my feeling. Despite unwanted answers, my soul also believes it is true.

DESPITE my turmoil, I thank God for my mission and the months that have passed since I came home. I am grateful for the opportunity I had to serve in the Ohio Columbus mission, where I learned the most important of all life’s lessons: the love that God has for his children. To quote Nephi: “I know that he loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things.” (1 Ne 11:17) I felt this love from him, and I tried to give this same love to others.

I am grateful for this Church for many reasons. It has become my passion. I have dedicated these years to studying its history and doctrines. My search has fostered spiritual and intellectual growth that I could never have imagined. I will continue to trust in my God, Jesus Christ. I hope and pray that he will continue to guide me in truth.

During the 2003 Salt Lake Sunstone symposium, Paul Toscano stated that he had lost “faith in the power of [his] words to make a

difference.”⁹ Although I know he believes that statement, it is not true. His words saved me during a critical time on my mission. I didn’t find answers in his writings, but I found empathy. For the first time, I knew that someone else understood my feelings, someone had the same concerns and conflicts.

Because of this, I feel it is important for us to share our souls with each other. I hope we will continue to “prove all things [and] hold fast that which is good” (1 Thes. 5:21). When dealing with conflicting issues within our faith, I hope we will remember the prophet Joseph’s comments that “by proving contraries, truth is made manifest.”¹⁰ ☪

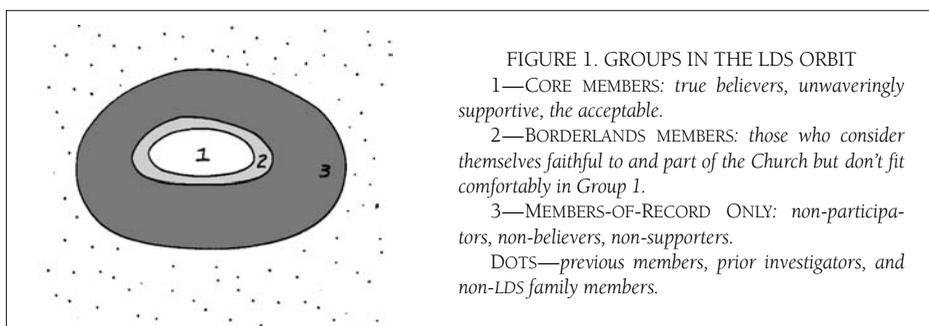
NOTES

1. *Journal of Discourses* Vol. 7:283.
2. Steven F. Christensen, “The Informed Believer,” paper delivered at the 1985 Salt Lake Sunstone Theological Symposium, typescript in author’s possession.
3. Historian Todd Compton argues Smith married sixteen-year-old Fannie Alger in 1833. See Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997): 25–28.
4. Dean C. Jessee, ed., *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1984): 420.
5. Russell M. Nelson, “Divine Love,” *Ensign* (Feb. 2003): 20–25; Boyd K. Packer, “The Mantle is Far, Far Greater Than the Intellect,” *BYU Studies* 21 (Summer 1981): 259–78. An example of a failure to acknowledge Jesus’s full role can be found in Elder Jeffrey R. Holland’s recent conference address, “The Grandeur of God,” *Ensign* (Nov. 2003): 70–73. Although in his account of Enoch’s vision of God (Moses 7) he describes God’s love wonderfully, Elder Holland doesn’t explain that this God is Jesus Christ, or Jehovah, the god of the Old Testament.
6. At a press conference and later in interviews with investigators, Church leaders seemed to act as if they could barely remember my dad or Mark Hofmann, often reminding detectives that they had hundreds of visitors a year in their offices. In reality, Church leaders worked with both my dad and Hofmann to obtain the “Salamander letter” and the McLellin collection, even securing a \$185,000 loan that would reportedly allow Hofmann to close the deal on the latter. Church officials seemed concerned about the purported contents of the collection and the effect they would have on the faith of some members. See Linda Sillitoe and Allen Roberts, *Salamander: The Story of the Mormon Forgery Murders* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998): 3–4; 86–91; 125–30; 178; 284–92; 324–57.
7. *Salamander*, 196.
8. “The Informed Believer.”
9. See Paul James Toscano, “An Interview with Myself,” page 17 of this issue.
10. *History of the Church*, Vol. 6:428.

BRAVING THE BORDERLANDS . . .

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES IN
THE BORDERLANDS

By D. Jeff Burton



MY LAST COLUMN explored the prospects for developing and maintaining a well-exposed, “faith-based” LDS personal religion (in contrast to a “testimony-based” one). I also promised to share experiences of Borderlanders.¹ Knowing that others are having experiences similar to ours and understanding how others have successfully (and unsuccessfully) dealt with problems can be useful.

Several good folks have stepped forward to share their stories. However, given the bravery of these kind souls, and based on questions many have posed about me and my reasons for sponsoring this column, it seems only fair that I share a few of my own experiences first, the sublime with the ridiculous.

First, my basic stats: Age sixty-two, happily married to a soul mate, four children; degrees in mechanical engineering and environmental health; consulting engineer, author; typical LDS upbringing; mission to Japan; high priest; have served in various callings including branch president, counselor in two bishoprics, stake high councilman; “asked in” twice to explain myself about Church-related writings; currently “less active” in my home ward; consider myself supportive and faithful to the Church; trying to be a good LDS Christian.

Second, how did I migrate into the

Borderlands? The journey began in my childhood. As a young child, I remember my mother pointing out a famous painting that adorned many LDS chapels of that era—Joseph Smith kneeling before God and Christ who are floating in the air above him. I immediately thought that God and Jesus couldn't be floating in the air for their feet were pointed straight ahead like they were standing on an invisible platform. Wouldn't their feet hang down? My feet hung down when someone lifted me up. That is my earliest recollection of the questioning (even skeptical) nature that became an essential part of my personality.

Through my childhood and teenage years, I listened to the authorities in my life talking about the importance and inevitability of receiving a “testimony” from the ultimate authorities: God and the Holy Ghost. Yes, I wanted one—at that age who wants to be outside the group? Like every boy growing up in the Ensign Ward, I thought I'd be a General Authority when I grew up. Of course I needed a testimony of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. And think how exciting it would be! Nothing came, however, during those years. “Perhaps it will come during my mission,” I thought when I turned twenty and got my call to Japan.

As you've guessed, no unshakable testimony of Joseph Smith materialized during

my mission either. Rather, an insatiable intellectual curiosity about the mode and function of belief, faith, and testimony began to build in me. While serving in the Sendai Branch, I wrote and distributed a questionnaire to the members, all of whom—in those early days of the Church in Japan—had been converted to Mormonism as teenagers or adults. Among other things, I asked about how they had been converted, their levels of belief, and whether or not they had received some spiritual or metaphysical message about the truthfulness of the Church and Joseph Smith. Of about thirty persons responding, only one claimed to have received a divine-origin “testimony.” Most were silently struggling with the issue of testimony and their beliefs, just like me.² It comforted me to know that others were sailing in the same boat as I was, but I also felt sad that they couldn't express their feelings openly. I also wondered if this was the case the world over.

A divine testimony of the Church never came after my mission either; but I stayed active and obedient, got my education, married in the temple, started an engineering consulting business, and throughout my twenties and early thirties, explored with others issues of faith, belief, and testimony. I found others who privately held the same testimony experience as I.³

Jump forward to a thirty-five-year-old family and career man. One afternoon on a business trip, I had an epiphany. “I am a skeptic from my DNA out, and it isn't going away—and I'm not getting a testimony of Joseph Smith.” Once that revelation became clear, I stopped expecting to get a “testimony.” I relaxed. And I was fully in the Borderlands. It actually turned out to be a good thing. (There are pros and cons associated with the LDS “testimony,” which we'll explore in future columns.)

SO, how have I dealt with my Borderland status? Here are six things I have found, literally through trial and error, that work pretty well for me.

1. *I try not to let my problem (a questioning and skeptical nature) ruin my life or my relationships.* I soon found out that there were groups, publications, and university programs devoted to hardy skeptics like me.⁴ I also learned that skepticism must be properly defined and managed. Left unchecked, skepticism can result in rejecting good ideas and the development of growth-retarding cynicism.⁵ As I embrace it, skepticism is a healthy but controlled curiosity. This positive form of skepticism takes a provisional ap-

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Healthy skepticism is a method, not a position. It provides a methodology for filtering out unwarranted and harmful claims and ideas.

proach and applies reason and logic to claims, ideas, and phenomena. For example, even though four million websites claim that pyramids held over the body or magnets held against the skin provide healing, I neither accept nor reject these claims; but I do ask for evidence, or reason and logic, to show how pyramids or low-powered magnetic fields could affect body systems. In the absence of positive evidence, or convincing reason and logic, I generally withhold belief. (And I save a lot of money by not buying plastic pyramids, crystals, and magnetic shoe inserts.)

Healthy skepticism is a method, not a position, as suggested by Michael Shermer, author of a skeptics column in *Scientific American* and publisher of *Skeptic Magazine*. It provides a methodology for filtering out unwarranted and harmful claims and ideas. Through this approach, a claim can graduate to knowledge or fact after it has been tested or confirmed, or at least backed up by convincing reason or logic. Water witching, also known as dousing, is a quasi-religious claim that has repeatedly failed all appropriate scientific tests. So until better supportive evidence has been produced, it is reasonable to withhold belief, despite personal and anecdotal testimonials, such as, “It worked on my property in Santaquin.”

Thus I approach all claims with an open mind that they might be true or real, but I expect to see compelling evidence or good reason and logic before I am willing to “believe.”⁶ I also generally adhere to Occam’s Razor—“The simple explanation is most likely the correct one.” This approach doesn’t mean that I’m not willing to accept things on faith, or that not enough evidence has yet been gathered, or that it might not be testable; but I am less likely to accept a claim if it has no evidence to support it, or especially if it has evidence to refute it. For example, because the clear evidence is just not there, I withhold belief in the claim that Brigham Young sanctioned the killings at Mountain Meadows.

As for strictly spiritual claims and ideas, I am generally willing to accept less-than-scientific testing. Personal experience and sound reasoning and logic are enough for me to at least accept a claim or tenet on faith. For

example, I accept the possibility that unencumbered prayer and anointing of the sick can have a positive or healing effect.⁷ Yet despite breathless reports in the *Reader’s Digest*, no authentic and thorough scientific study has yet been able to adequately test such claims. (But the converse is also true.)

So as far as religion is concerned, personal experience and faith have been valuable partners to my innate skepticism. Perhaps that is why I champion faith and urge those without a “testimony” to fall back on faith when testing is inadequate. In most other religions, faith is a primary focus; the concept of universally held testimony is not even considered. In early LDS tradition, “faith” was a first principle as declared, for example, in Joseph Smith’s Fourth Article of Faith. Have we lost our connection to that important principle in these late latter days?

2. *I try to see and accept my situation as a positive thing.* One of my favorite scriptures, also discussed in last issue’s column, is worth amplifying here:

To some it is given to know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. . . .

To others it is given to believe on their words, that they also might have eternal life if they continue faithful (D&C 46:13–14).

This scripture is but one of several verses in Section 46 which list gifts God grants to individuals. “To know” that Jesus is the Son of God is one gift, and I take the second promise to be a gift as well. So I routinely thank God in my prayers for the gift of healthy skepticism and the gift of faith. In some strange way, I feel it is better (for me, anyway) to have an “unsure” life of skepticism and open curiosity, which drives me to learn and study about all facets of life, than have the narrow, fearful approach some strong testimony-bearing members seem to have.⁸

3. *I try to go along with everything in the Church but, where appropriate, I alter things to make it easier for me.* When I went on my mission, for example, I asked to go to Japan partly because I would be asking people to convert to the Christian way of thinking and doing.⁹ I felt comfortable doing so and had good success.¹⁰ As it turned out, the Japanese word used most often to bear testimony in

those days, *shinjiru*, has the connotation of “to believe” and “to think,” not “to know.” That made it easier for me to “bear my testimony.” Today, my “testimony” in English revolves around the worth of Christ’s recipes for happy living and the testable religious tenets.¹¹

The temple experience is one that I used to find somewhat tedious and its motivations murky. I can’t go into the issues here, but let me share an example of how I’ve dealt with the temple experience to make it easier for me. It is common knowledge that we make certain covenants when we go the temple. Again, I can’t go into details here, but you temple-goers know what I’m talking about. I don’t find the covenants quite wide-ranging enough for me. So when I raise my arm to the square, I generally think to add personal covenants. For example, I like to consecrate myself to Christ and his teachings, and I like to promise to be faithful to my wife and children. This makes the temple experience a richer one for me and helps me to overcome the reticence I have about going.

4. *I don’t hesitate to volunteer (or even ask) for callings that interest me.* During the 1980s, I was a member of our stake high council and had access to information about new Church programs being tested in trial stakes. There was a new program sponsored by the then-LDS Social Services (LDSSS, now LDS Family Services) to provide another layer of social services between the stakes and LDSSS. The idea was to train lay counselors in the stake as a service to bishops, who could get quicker and local help for “troubled” ward members.

I asked our stake president if we could become one of those test stakes and I be the leader. He agreed, and I began a wonderful calling. Over several years, we expanded the program to include calling and training one couple in each ward as lay counselors; establishing half-way houses in each ward to assist, for example, runaway children and abused wives; training bishops in effective counseling; providing couples communication classes; and of course, providing counseling for people bishops referred to us. We sent the difficult cases on to LDSSS, but most of the time, we were able to shepherd people through the six to eight weeks people nor-

My stake president called me into his office (my first “call-in”) and said I had to be released from the high council

mally need to get through a crisis. I met with many troubled people during those years, many of whom could be described as Borderlanders in some way.

5. *I try to speak up or ask questions when I see something that seems amiss or needs information or clarification.* As audacious as it sounds, in the mid-1980s, I rewrote the creation story, as presented in the Pearl of Great Price, as a short screenplay. (I was careful not to include references to the sacred parts of the temple ceremony which, as is well known, also includes the creation story.)

While amateurish, the screenplay was positive, uplifting, and encouraging. It was to include beautiful music and so forth. Anyway, I sent it to two General Authorities and asked for their thoughts and if it were permissible to publish it. My unspoken motive, as naive as this sounds, was to show them that the creation story could be written to be uplifting and interesting and to emphasize some beautiful truths that are not generally thought about.¹²

I didn't necessarily expect them to encourage me to publish the piece, but I certainly didn't expect what actually happened. My stake president called me into his office (my first “call-in”) and said that as a result of a telephone call he had received “from downtown,” I had to be released from the high council. At the time, I was serving as the stake leader of the lay counseling project mentioned before. The stake president wanted me to continue in that calling and also to continue speaking with the high council at the monthly talks to the wards. He was a wonderful man, and I believe he was genuinely dismayed at what he had to do. But he was also now a little unsure about exactly who I was and what I was about, even though we had talked about my skeptical nature. This experience taught me that I needed to be more upfront with those who need to know about my “faith vs. testimony” experience.

6. *I allow all others to develop personal religions and relationships with God in whatever way works best for them.* Some very good people relate to God through the Church and have strong testimonies. Some hold fast to their Iron Rods, and others follow their Liahonas. Perfectly fine. Some leave and be-

come Buddhists. Also okay, though it seems unfortunate they couldn't find a pathway in Mormonism. The Church once sponsored a program for young men called, “One boy, one program.” It stressed the idea of tailoring a “program” for each boy based on that boy's nature, needs, and talents. I think it possible that God has, in principle, a “one person, one program” approach for every human being on earth. Who am I to interfere?

MY column space is up. Those are only a few of my many experiences in the Borderlands—some serious, some funny, and a few weird. I invite you to share your experiences, too. In the next few columns, I'll present the stories of other Borderlanders who have written to me about their experiences. 📧

NOTES

1. In my first column, I introduced the Borderland member as one who may have an unusual but LDS-compatible outlook on life; a distinctive way of thinking about faith, belief and testimony; a different view of LDS history; some open questions about a particular aspect of the Church; reduced or modified activity; or feelings of not meeting Group 1 acceptability criteria. See Figure 1.

2. Major reasons reported for joining included (1) liked the missionaries, (2) had friends at church, (3) wanted to learn English, (4) wanted to be with Americans, and (5) liked the Christian approach.

3. My first essay on the subject, presented at the 1982 Sunstone Symposium and later published in *SUNSTONE* (Sept.–Oct. 1982, 34), “The Phenomenon of the Closet Doubter,” explained one aspect of the experience many go through as they struggle with testimony issues and as they “come out.”

4. The Committee for the Scientific Investigation of the Claims of the Paranormal (CISCOPE) publishes *Skeptical Inquirer* and sponsors symposia and other intellectual and scientific pursuits. The Skeptics Society (of which I am a member) publishes the *Skeptic Magazine*. Both organizations champion the scientific method and tend to concentrate on paranormal claims and activities that can harm individuals and society—medical quackery, UFO abduction accounts, false memory syndrome, alternative medicine sold over the internet, “creation science,” and other inappropriate uses of science. Neither organization takes on religion except when it is used to relieve innocent people of their money, e.g., fraudulent televangelist healers who require “donations.”

5. Older and negative definitions for “skeptical” include cynical, mistrusting, doubtful, dubious, incredulous, suspicious, disbelieving, and unbelieving.

6. For the definitions I use for “belief,” “faith,” “knowledge,” and “testimony,” see my last column, “Can a ‘Faith-Based’ Personal Religion Find a Home in a ‘Testimony-Based’ Church?,” *SUNSTONE* (Oct. 2003): 64–66.

7. Many (non-LDS) churchmen use “healing of the sick” to make money, to gain power, or to pursue some other goal beyond the simple and humble desire to help. This fact of life is an excellent example of where skepticism can be a valuable tool.

8. Last Christmas, I gave thirty-one of my friends and family members gift subscriptions to *SUNSTONE*. Some will not read it out of fear that it might be detrimental.

9. There was no place on the application papers to make a request. My bishop penciled my request across the top of the form, and the selection process honored my desire.

10. My companions and I were blessed with sixty baptisms while I served, a few of whom have remained active. Others, while inactive, have adopted Christian and Mormon ways of thinking and doing (as I learned while meeting with some of them on a trip to Japan ten years ago).

11. Religious claims and tenets not easily testable include such things as: God having a body, life after death, the existence of heaven and hell, Joseph Smith's visions, the restoration of the “true church” in the latter day. Testable claims include any related to personal behavior, such as: honesty, honoring our parents, sharing, and doing unto others.

12. A somewhat revised version of the screenplay, “Adam and Eve: The Dawn of Consciousness and the Birth of Faith” appeared in the first edition of my book, *For Those Who Wonder*. I dropped it in subsequent editions to make way for more recent and useful essays.

Please send me any
of your thoughts,
experiences, or tales
from life in the
Borderlands.

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NONSTANDARD DEVIATIONS

DAD, IT'S NOT A KEY RING!

By Michael Nielsen

THE PHONE CALL came out of the blue, a complete surprise. The voice on the other end was familiar, but she didn't usually telephone us. She was pregnant and couldn't keep the baby. The father's solution was to offer his credit card to pay for an abortion. Her solution: Would we adopt the baby when it was born? She's a longtime family friend whose mother has known my wife, Sheila, longer than I have. She decided to ask us to care for her child because she likes the way we've raised our daughter, Kelly, who is a competent, inquisitive, and caring sixteen-year-old. Her hope is that we will do the same for this child. Sheila and I asked her a few more questions and quickly confirmed with each other that we were thinking along the same lines. "Yes!" we said. And with that call, the most recent phase in my adventure with fatherhood began.

One of my favorite passages regarding fatherhood comes from the Gospel of Mark—Mark Twain, that is: "When I was a boy of fourteen, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be twenty-one, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years."¹ I think Twain was right that fathers *do* learn a thing or two along the way. And the arrival of our new son, Paul Soren Nielsen, has caused me to wonder afresh about some of the life lessons I've learned most joyfully from my fatherhood journey.

Expect the unexpected. I first learned this bit of wisdom when our daughter, Kelly, kicked me for the first time—smack in the back—while we were sleeping. She wasn't yet born; Sheila and I were snuggled together on our air mattresses. (We were poverty-stricken graduate students with no furniture.) Suddenly, Kelly kicked hard enough to wake me. It was the first time I had felt her move. "Do it again!" I foolishly told Sheila, as though she controlled the kicking going on within her womb. The jolt of Kelly's kick and

my ridiculous request were warnings that I should be ready for many more unexpected things to come—and that I often might want to think past my first reactions to those surprises.

Love hurts—literally. I thought that I loved Sheila before Kelly was born, but whatever I had felt then was just a shadow of what was to come. I'll spare you the gruesome details of a long and difficult delivery and simply say that I really wondered if she would survive. *Really* wondered. Were it not for medical advances, there's no doubt I would have lost both my wife and child during that ordeal. I have sometimes said, only half-jokingly, that there is a reason we had one child during the first sixteen years of our marriage. The difficulty of Kelly's delivery, and the very real terror I felt at the possibility of losing both Sheila and Kelly, is probably the main reason why we've had a small family. Holding her hand through that experience taught me more about love and sacrifice than I had ever known before.

Experts aren't always right. The delivery room doctors and nurses had something of a bet going on when Kelly was born. We did not yet know the baby's sex, but they told us they had a sure-fire way of predicting whether it was a boy or a girl. As the baby entered the world, they said they would be able to predict its sex based on the shape of the ears. As Kelly's head emerged, they told us we were having a boy. Then, as her large shoulders appeared, they spiced up their forecast with the claim that our boy would play linebacker on a football team. They were almost right. Our then-eleven-pound, six-ounce baby girl now plays trumpet during half-time shows at football games.

Patience is a two-way street. A friend once gave a sacrament meeting talk on patience, introducing it with the somewhat-clichéd line, "I prayed for patience. God gave me kids." It's a fun statement, and true, but only half complete, I think. Children do teach

parents patience. Yet, I'll bet that if we asked our children if they have to be patient with us, they'd vote unanimously in the affirmative. Family members all teach one another patience, and it can be one of the more challenging lessons to learn as we try to balance the needs and desires of many people living under one roof.

Look for the humor—or, at least, the irony. Sheila and I have often remarked that we paid for our daughter Kelly with student loans. When we moved to Illinois for graduate school, we had enough money for either a year's worth of insurance or a month's worth of food plus the books we'd need for the coming semester. Being fond of eating, dedicated to our studies, and optimistic, we opted for food and books. But, like all best-laid plans, ours met reality, and soon Kelly became known in our private musings as "The Pre-existing Condition." We financed the nearly week-long hospital stay with student loans and have just this year finished paying them off. We now can officially consider Kelly to be paid for *just in time to begin paying the attorney's fees for Paul's adoption!* I can only hope that Paul is "paid for" before he turns sixteen!

My child is not me. We all know the stereotypical Little League father who is living vicariously through his child, trying to achieve the glow of athletic prowess by proxy. I have learned that this is not a good mode of living. In my case, the dream wasn't baseball, but my hope that my child would have certain interests or be involved in particular activities quickly showed itself to be misplaced. I now realize that I help my children most when I allow them the room, as Joseph Campbell says, to follow their own bliss. Each of us needs to live our own life, not someone else's.

I don't know everything. Actually, I have learned that I often know very little. One of the more laughable demonstrations of this fact came when Sheila told me she had a surprise and then showed me what I thought was an unusual-looking key ring. It took some coaxing from Sheila and my teenage daughter before I realized that it was a home pregnancy kit and that the plus sign did not mean a new car was on the way.

I am not in control. A couple of months later, I was brutally reminded that I am not in control and don't always get what I want. It is quite a psychological distance to move from being a nearly-in-our-forties couple with a teenager to expecting a second child. Still, excitement built quickly as we adjusted to the idea of childproofing, late-night feedings, diapers, and all the other joys of parenting a



MICHAEL NIELSEN lives in Brooklet, Georgia, with his wife Sheila, daughter Kelly, and new son Paul. They teach him how to be a father, one day at a time. A regular SUNSTONE columnist, Michael holds a Ph.D. in psychology and teaches at Georgia Southern University.

baby. Our excitement turned to grief, however, when this pregnancy ended early, ironically on a Thanksgiving Day. No, I am *not* in control. I am merely an actor. Sometimes I can ad lib my lines, but someone else has written the script.

Power and authority do not equal action or smarts. Through our adoption of Paul, I have begun to understand what Winston Churchill said about bureaucratic governmental agencies: "So they go on in strange paradox, decided only to be undecided, resolved to be irresolute, adamant for drift, solid for fluidity, all-powerful to be impotent."² This I have learned in the context of the ICPC, the Interstate Compact for Placement of Children, which oversees adoptions occurring between agencies in two states. To a humble non-specialist like me, ICPC actions at times seem not only contrary to its charter, but even illogical, inefficient, and contradictory. One branch of the ICPC required things that the other said were unnecessary; the left hand barely communicated with the right. Although Sheila was with Paul and his birth mother from the moment he was born and the judge granted us custody three days later, bureaucratic prowess conspired to make it so Paul was nearly one month old before he and Sheila came home.

We need to worry about the world we bring our children into and work to make it better. Can a person be a parent without worrying about our world? I have worried about small things and large ones. This summer, I worried about how Kelly would enjoy being away at camp for two months. In truth, I was worrying for myself; she was far more ready for the experience than I was. Now that we are rearing Paul, I worry about new things. For example, I worry about a culture in which boys are glorified for athletics and discouraged from academics. As one small illustration of the problem, I recently asked my class of thirty students how many of their high school's valedictorians had been male. Not one hand went up. Not a single student's high school had had a male valedictorian. During Academic Honors Night at Kelly's school, boys seldom went to the platform to receive awards. I'm worried as a parent and as a member of this culture. I must be on guard about the subtle messages my children receive, and I must take steps to send better ones.

Trusting each other is a risk worth taking. The most powerful lessons I have learned



The Neilsens and friend, Christmas 2003 (l to r): Michael, Santa, Paul, Kelly, and Sheila

about trust have come in my interactions with my daughter. One of them happened when we moved from Illinois to Georgia. Driving our U-Haul into Atlanta, we rounded a bend only to see traffic stopped ahead. Traveling at 55 miles per hour downhill in a tightly packed truck, I honestly doubted we'd be able to avoid crashing into the rear of the traffic jam, and I said something to that effect. I had both feet on the brake, practically standing on it. Six-year-old Kelly, sitting next to me, patted my knee, and said, "It's okay, daddy, we'll stop." I'm not sure whether she trusted me, God, or something else in that moment, but fortunately she was right. She's right about many things, and I've come to trust her judgment on a wide array of topics, from clothing to grammar. But on a deeper level, we trust each other with hopes and dreams, acting as confidante and friend as well as parent and child. Trust requires dependency, something that we as adults are sometimes reluctant to admit. In many ways, trust also is something that our Mormon culture, with its emphasis on self-reliance, does not always encourage. We would be better off if we confessed more often to each other our many dependencies and interdependencies.

The first will be last, and the last will be first. Placing others before ourselves brings greater happiness than does looking out for number one. This maxim is never more true than in the case of parents caring for a baby. But it also remains true as parents chauffeur a child to and from school or church and all the many other places and events that dominate the life of a child and teenager. Of course, after years of this kind of first being last, we eventually change places with our children. At some future point, our children adjust their schedules around us as we need help going to doctor's offices, the store, and all of the other places elderly people might need help getting to.

Life is beautiful. Through my children's eyes, I have been reminded again and again

that life is magical. In the eyes of a child, the world can be a truly wonderful place. Bugs crawl across the sidewalk. Sunsets glow brightly in the sky. White rice and brown rice have different textures. Ceiling fans are fascinating. The beauty of everyday things is revealed through our children's eyes. It is good to be reminded often of such things.

Even the smallest of creatures can teach love. During the past few months, I have gazed into my new son's eyes, and I have wondered many things. Most of all, I have

wondered if he knows what love is and the ways he has given love to me. Can infants understand love when they don't yet know how to feed themselves? Analytically, I suspect not. But I do think that we don't always have to be an expert in something in order to teach it to others. Love is a case in point. Whether or not they knew it at the time, my babies, Kelly and Paul, have taught me love beyond my wildest dreams. What else can account for the feelings we parents have when, awakened from a deep slumber, we stumble to the crib to pick up a child and are greeted with a grin from ear to ear. Because they symbolize love's bonds, those smiles make the interruption worth it.

Love is selfless. This message has come to me in small and large ways. The little things that we do for one another evidence the way love intertwines with selflessness. I am awed by the woman who called us one night a year ago to offer her unborn child in an amazing act of selflessness. Words can't describe the beauty of what she did. There is no way to repay her, except to be the best father I can possibly be.

KING Benjamin said that everyone affiliated with raising children should "... teach [them] to walk in the ways of truth and soberness; ... teach them to love one another and to serve one another" (Mos. 4:15). It seems to me that when we are really paying attention, much more than one-directional teaching is going on. Jesus invited the children to come to him. These are just a few reasons I believe we should do the same. ☺

NOTES

1. This saying has been attributed to Twain, but is still unconfirmed. See <<http://www.twainquotes.com/father.html>>.

2. Winston Churchill, statement made on 12 Nov. 1936, *Oxford Dictionary of Modern Quotations*, Tony Augarde, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

UPDATE

CHURCH STATEMENT DISMISSES DNA CHALLENGES TO BOOK OF MORMON

MORE THAN A year after DNA evidence was first used to challenge the notion that Native Americans are descended from Book of Mormon peoples who migrated from the Middle East, LDS leaders have issued a 125-word press release reaffirming the Book of Mormon's historicity and dismissing DNA evidence against it.

"Recent attacks on the veracity of the Book of Mormon based on DNA evidence are ill considered," reads the statement. Referring to DNA findings that support long-held scholarly theories that indigenous North and South American peoples came from Asia, the statement continues: "Nothing in the Book of Mormon precludes migration into the Americas by peoples of Asiatic origin" and adds that "the scientific issues relating to DNA . . . are numerous and complex." Then, in a surprising move, the statement directs "those interested in a more detailed analysis of those issues" to four articles in the recent issue of *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* (Vol. 12, no. 1, 2003) and an eighty-page treatment of the subject by well-known LDS Internet apologist, Jeffrey D. Lindsay (see <www.jefflindsay.com/LDSFAQ/DNA.shtml>.)

The DNA and the Book of Mormon controversy emerged in 2002 when Mormon anthropologist Thomas W. Murphy published an essay citing several DNA studies whose findings about the genetic characteristics of indigenous Americans challenge traditional LDS notions that Native Americans are descended from Israelites. According to Murphy, archaeological, linguistic, and DNA evidence point to Asia rather than Israel for the origin of Native Americans (See *SUNSTONE*, Dec. 2002, 73).

In a January 2003 lecture at BYU, biology professor Michael Whiting proposed at least two genetic theories that could account for the loss of Semitic genetic markers among Native



Michael Whiting

American populations. In an interview with *SUNSTONE*, Murphy responded to questions about Whiting's alternatives by claiming that for his theories about gene flow and genetic drift to work, "the same chance events would have had to happen independently, multiple times (since the Book of Mormon describes three separate migrations: Jaredites, Lehites, and Mulekites) and would involve the extinction of hundreds of different genetic markers."

Seeing the controversy as an opportunity to discredit the Book of Mormon and win Latter-day Saint souls for Christ, an evangelical group called Living Hope Christian Ministries released in March 2003 a video titled *DNA vs. The Book of Mormon*. "We are fighting for the truth as is shown in God's Word, the Bible," reads the group's site at <<http://www.mormonchallenge.com>>. "And we are fighting for, not against, the people who are held in deception."

In recent years, some LDS scholars, including many associated with the BYU-affiliated Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS), have proposed that the Book of Mormon is a record of God's dealings with inhabitants of a relatively small geographical area rather than the whole American continent. This limited-geography hypothesis diverges from the teachings of Joseph Smith and Church leaders through the years as well as from the official introduction to the Book of Mormon, which states that the Lamanites "are the principal ancestors of the American Indians." However, the small-population, limited-geography model seems to have become the Church's current default position about Book of Mormon peoples and events.

Perhaps sensing a need to begin a doctrinal reframing that preserves ties to traditional teachings, LDS biologists D. Jeffrey Meldrum and Trent D. Stephens write in one of the articles cited by the Church's press release that it is quite likely scholars may never find genetic markers for the children of Lehi. Instead, they argue, the concept of Lehiite lineage might best be understood as the Abrahamic covenant, which "has less to do with genetics and more to do with the transmission from one generation to the next of spiritual blessings and opportunities that transcend bloodlines." "We propose that the children of Lehi are the leaven of the Abrahamic covenant in the New World," they write, "unlikely to be detected by genetic analysis of modern New World inhabitants."

The next issue of *SUNSTONE* will contain an extended treatment of these recent challenges to Book of Mormon historicity and emerging hypotheses that suggest new directions for study.

LDS OFFICIALS RESPOND TO ACCUSATIONS OF "SOUL-BUYING"

IN A 5 DECEMBER press release, LDS officials characterized as "absurd" allegations that the Church is buying the names of deceased Russian Orthodox individuals in order to baptize them in LDS temples. The statement comes two weeks after the *Moscow Observer* ran a story with the headline, "Russians Fume as Mormons 'Buy Souls.'"

The story focuses on a town east of Moscow where the Church has paid ten U.S. cents for each page containing thousands of names of deceased people, dating mostly from the late eighteenth century, to be put on microfilm. According to the *Observer*, the Russian Orthodox Church "has expressed its outrage at what it claims is a Mormon scheme to buy up the names of dead Russians in order to baptize 'dead souls into their faith.'"

"Obviously we can't approve the practice," says Father Joseph, a spokesman for the Russian Orthodox Church in New York. "It takes away the most essential gift God has given people, their freedom. It turns religion into magic."

Rather than explaining the LDS doctrine of baptism for the dead, the LDS response focuses on the value of preserving old

People



Deceased. With great sadness, SUNSTONE notes the passing of longtime friend, supporter, and symposium participant JAY BELL, who died 18 December after being struck by a car. Jay is fondly remembered for his passion for learning, his friendliness toward all people, and his unflinching good humor. Despite being completely blind in one eye and legally blind in the

other, Jay's avocation was reading, and he was a tireless researcher. Jay not only played a key role in advancing Mormon research on various doctrinal and historical issues (see, for instance, his article "The Windows of Heaven Revisited: The 1899 Tithing Reformation," *Journal of Mormon History*, Spring 1994), but was also one of Mormonism's greatest networkers, always helping friends connect with others working on similar projects. He will be greatly missed.

For the past several years, Jay had been working on a massive project to document gay and lesbian Mormon experience and official LDS attitudes toward homosexuality. Four days following his death, Affirmation: Gay and Lesbian Mormons announced the creation of the Jay Bell Fund to support research that combats intolerance and preserves GLBT Mormon history. To learn more about the fund, visit <www.affirmation.org/jaybellfund>.

Discovered. A photo and brief biographical information about alleged Elizabeth Smart kidnappers BRIAN DAVID MITCHELL and WANDA BARZEE have recently been discovered in an unusual place—a book celebrating the one-hundredth anniversary of the Salt Lake Temple. *The Salt Lake Temple: A Centennial Book of Remembrance, 1893–1993* was privately published by the Church in 1993. More than half the book features photographs of temple workers at the time of publication, as well as a listing of every worker since 1893. Mitchell and Barzee (listed as Brian Mitchell and Wanda Mitchell) appear on page 196.

Although the book has always been somewhat scarce, retailing in the used book market at \$35–\$50, Curt Bench, owner of Benchmark Books, says the discovery of the



Brian Mitchell
Ordinance Worker 3 Years
October 18
Diecutter
Wanda Mitchell
Ordinance Worker 1 Year
November 6
Organist

Mitchell and Barzee reference could significantly increase demand and the book's price, especially in the short run. "My sense is it may soon sell for \$100 or more, but it is hard to predict whether the spike in demand and price will be permanent."

Appointed. Renowned LDS naturalist and writer TERRY TEMPEST WILLIAMS has been named as the first Annie Clark Tanner Fellow at the University of Utah. During her three-year appointment with the department of environmental studies, which starts next fall, Williams will bring light to environmental issues and moderate a series of naturalist lectures.



"I was hungry for a program that focused on the integration of both science and the humanities," says Williams, who has written twelve books. "My priority now, as a writer and resident of this state, is to inspire, expose, and educate the next generation as to the importance of an ethics of place."

Sentenced. JOSÉ BASILIO, 50, has been sentenced to six months probation for an amended charge of disturbing the peace. Basilio was originally charged with assaulting an anti-Mormon preacher who was desecrating a temple garment in front of General Conference-goers (see SUNSTONE, Oct. 2003, 74). According to a *Deseret Morning News* story, "Basilio's arrest sparked an angry outcry from many LDS followers who hailed him as a hero." Sympathizers from all over the country sent letters and donations, helping him post \$2,000 bail.

records. "The [*Observer's*] coverage has been disappointing because it inadequately explains and mischaracterizes not only our religious practice but also our cooperative records preservation work," says Elder D. Todd Christofferson, executive director of the Church's Family and Church History Department.

The carefully worded statement avoids altogether the expression "baptism for the dead," referring instead to "proxy baptism practices" and "a religious practice that dates back to

antiquity." In a slightly more doctrinally oriented statement, not included in the release, Christofferson explains, "Surely no one believes this practice forces a change in religious identity of any soul, living or dead. We certainly do not claim that."

In the past, the Church has been criticized for microfilming names of Holocaust victims and baptizing Jews by proxy. In 1995, Church leaders agreed to no longer baptize Jewish Holocaust victims—a commitment they have recently reaffirmed (see SUNSTONE, Dec. 2002, 78).

Special Report

RECENT CASES ONCE MORE THRUST POLYGAMY INTO THE SPOTLIGHT

UTAH POLYGAMY HAS recently received renewed media attention as two former plural wives, LuAnn Kingston and Ruth Stubbs, have testified against their ex-husbands, helping secure their convictions on polygamy-related charges.



Jeremy Kingston

Jeremy Ortell Kingston, 32, pleaded guilty on 30 October to third-degree felony incest for having had sex with his then fifteen-year-old first cousin and fourth wife, LuAnn Kingston.

One of Utah's most secretive and affluent polygamous clans, the Kingston family includes some 1,200 members of the Latter-Day Church of Christ. The group has business interests along the Wasatch Front with an estimated value of \$150 million.

"I had a relationship, a sexual relationship, with LuAnn for about four years," Jeremy Kingston told Third District Court Judge Paul Maughan. "That relationship ended about four years ago." LuAnn Kingston, now 23, expressed "shock to hear him actually admit to that." She added that Jeremy may have sacrificed himself for the good of the clan.

In exchange for Jeremy's plea, prosecutors recommended a sentence of one year in jail. He will be sentenced 5 January.

Jeremy is one of three Kingstons who have been in the news in polygamy-related stories during the past four years. In 1999, John Daniel Kingston was convicted of child abuse after having beaten his daughter Mary Ann Kingston unconscious for trying to leave a polygamous union with her uncle David Ortell Kingston. Mary Ann had been forced to marry her uncle when she was sixteen, becoming his fifteenth wife. David served a four-year sentence for incest with his niece and was released this past June.

On the heels of Jeremy's arrest, Mary Ann Kingston, 22, filed on 1 August a civil lawsuit seeking more than \$110 million from clan members, including her parents and close relatives—a total of 242 people said to be the key members of the Kingston organization.

"I am pursuing this lawsuit with the hope that other young girls and boys in the same position that I was in will see that the leaders of the Kingston organization are not above the law, even though they tell us they are," Mary Ann declared on 28 August. Mary Ann's suit includes allegations



Mary Ann Kingston and James Morris, one of her attorneys

of sexual abuse, intentional infliction of emotional distress, assault, battery, and false imprisonment.

CRACKDOWN IN HILDALE

IN ANOTHER POLYGAMY-related case, and also with the testimony of an ex-wife, former Hildale, Utah, police officer Rodney Holm was convicted 14 August on two counts of unlawful sex with a minor and one count of bigamy. On 10 October, he was sentenced to one year in jail but will be granted daytime work-release, spending only nights in jail. In addition, Holm was placed on a three-year probation, fined \$3,000, and ordered to perform two hundred hours of community service and to enroll in a sex offender program.

In 1996, Holm had polygamously married Ruth Stubbs, then sixteen. The ceremony had been performed by an official of the Fundamental Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (FLDS), centered in the Hildale area on the Utah-Arizona border. Holm's attorney, Rodney Parker, asked Judge G. Rand Beacham to reduce the conviction in light of Hildale's predominantly Fundamentalist culture, but Beacham noted that Holm, as a police officer, "is expected to know the law."



Rodney Holm (left) with defense attorney Max Wheeler

Utah Attorney General Mark Shurtleff has been both commended and criticized for recent initiatives dealing with polygamy. On 16 October, Shurtleff announced his decision to investigate and prosecute other Hildale police officers who have plural wives. "We will work to find out what evidence we have indicating if all or some are in bigamous relationships," he said.

"That sounds like a direct attack on polygamy to me," complained Hildale Mayor David Zitting, who believes Shurtleff is unfairly targeting Hildale.

Shurtleff claims he made the request because of his office's "frustration in dealing with law enforcement down there." "Not only have they not cooperated," he said, "they have stood in our way." According to Shurtleff's chief deputy, Kirk Torgensen, several dissident wives have told the AG's office that it is well known that in Hildale, "you don't go to the police on issues, because they are loyal to the church."

INITIATIVES LAUNCHED, BOYCOTTED

ON 23 AUGUST, Shurtleff sponsored a "polygamy summit" in St. George. Attended by law enforcement, attorneys, social workers, educators, and elected officials, the summit discussed topics such as welfare fraud, lack of educational opportunities, public safety concerns, child and spousal abuse,



Polygamy summit

and marriages involving underage brides.

When nearly one hundred women advocating plural marriage showed up for the public session, the gathering was moved from a

St. George hotel to the town's larger civic center.

"We who live in that community out there do not want child abuse, uneducated children, or welfare abuses," a Centennial Park, Arizona, teacher told Shurtleff in defense of the Fundamentalists. "If this is honestly not about religion and you're not trying to squelch us off the earth, the best way to do it is to do away with the law that prohibits us from living our religion." The summit resulted in a number of initiatives aiming to help those leaving the polygamist culture in the Hildale/Colorado City area.

Shurtleff's efforts toward increased prosecution of abusers as well as greater outreach efforts to understand these traditionally closed communities have met with mixed results. Although state officials, as well as pro- and anti-polygamy advocates, seemed encouraged by the summit, a Shurtleff invitation to join a committee being set up to help those within Utah's polygamist families who are suffering abuses was rejected by Tapestry Against Polygamy (TAP) when it learned the attorney general had also invited prominent plural marriage advocate, Anne Wilde, to join.

"The approach that the AG's office is taking would be similar to trying to create a rape crisis center and inviting both the rapists and their victims to attend," said TAP co-founder Rowenna Erickson in a recent press release. "Trying to come to a solution with the perpetrators or their wives is unrealistic."

For her part, in an interview with the *Deseret Morning News*, Wilde says she believes she had been invited to help broaden understanding of the lifestyle and that, despite what TAP leaders think, she supports Shurtleff's mission to help abused women and children get needed services. "It's true I'm not going to encourage women to come out [of plural marriage], but if they are truly abused, I'm not going to encourage them to stay."

Shurtleff's office still plans to proceed with the committee, but as noted in a short report in the 1 December issue of *Newsweek*, the committee will no longer include members of any advocacy groups.

POLYGAMISTS APPEAL CONVICTIONS ON NEW GROUNDS

IN THE PAST, polygamists have argued that as a religious practice, plural marriage is protected by the First

Amendment. Now two Utah polygamists, Rodney Holm (see foregoing story) and Tom Green (sentenced in 2002 to five years to life for child rape of one of his "spiritual" wives), are challenging their convictions on the basis of a recent Texas Supreme Court decision ruling that anti-sodomy laws violate the privacy rights of consenting adults.

Holm's attorney, Rodney Parker, argues that his client's conduct is being regulated merely on the grounds of moral disapproval—just as it used to be with sodomy. "Our contention is that [Holm and his plural wives] have a liberty type of right in their relationship," said Parker.

Attorney John Bucher is asking the Utah Supreme Court to overturn Green's convictions on a similar basis. Bucher argues that the Texas decision forbids singling out any one purportedly immoral group.

Recent Utah convictions, however, focused not simply on men who married more than one woman, but on men who married *minors*. "I have a hard time believing [the Texas ruling] means that [polygamists] have the right to take polygamous child brides," says Laura Dupaix, Assistant State Attorney General. Further, Dupaix believes that the Texas sodomy ruling validates monogamous relationships, not bigamous ones.

POLYGAMY AND FREE SPEECH

IN A CASE involving polygamy and free speech issues, a divorced Pennsylvania man is fighting for the right to teach his daughter Fundamentalist Mormon views on celestial marriage and polygamy. Soon after Stanley Shepp and Tracey Roberts divorced, Shepp became more public about his beliefs in many Fundamentalist teachings, while Roberts remained in the mainstream Church. A judge recently ordered Shepp to refrain from discussing plural marriage with his ten-year-old daughter, Kaylynne. Shepp is now appealing the case to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, arguing that the government should tolerate different religious beliefs.

"Right now, the government has said it's OK for two men to be married," said Shepp. "It's OK for Sally to have two fathers or two mothers but not all right to have one father



Stanley Shepp and daughter Kaylynne

and two mothers." Shepp argues that he's merely claiming the right to share with his daughter his religious views. Roberts fears Shepp is attempting to lure their daughter into an eventual plural marriage.

Shepp says he wants to teach Kaylynne about plural marriage so she will accept him if and when he becomes a polygamist. "We have never attempted to teach Kaylynne she had to be a plural wife with someone," says Shepp.

WOMEN'S FORUM DISCUSSES SOCIAL JUSTICE

WITH THE THEME, "Feminism and Activism—Working for Social Justice and Equality," the Mormon Women's Forum held its annual Counterpoint conference at the University of Utah on 1 November. In introducing the conference's focus, Janice Merrill Allred noted that concern for justice, equality, and giving a voice to members of traditionally marginalized groups represented, in many ways, a return to the origins of feminism, many of whose pioneers had begun as abolitionists.

The conference's morning sessions featured an exchange between Mormon philosopher R. Dennis Potter and author Emma Lou Thayne on the question, "Is War Ever Justified?," followed by an account of the personal journey of Salt Lake City attorney and former Young Women's General Board member Joann Shields as she came to understand the centrality of the Christian call to minister to the poor.

The opening afternoon session, "Are Children People?: The Problem of Children's Rights," was a spirited debate between Utah attorneys Martha Pierce and Frances M. Palacios, each holding a different perspective about whether state interven-

Solar Flares

Elder Ballard's Sermon Gets Stuck on Sex. Does LDS Apostle M. Russell Ballard talk too much about sex in his sermons? Some folks in southern Utah might say yes. A technical glitch



Elder M. Russell Ballard

in a Cedar City radio station stalled Elder Ballard's sermon during the October General Conference broadcast, causing listeners to hear Elder Ballard say, "sex, sex, sex . . ." for twenty-four seconds. Elder Ballard

was warning the Saints about the pernicious evils of the entertainment media when the KSUB's buffer system got jammed with an overload of data streaming into the station.

"I believe Ballard made his point," quips station host Steve Miner. "I hope [he] allows us to continue broadcasting conference."

Opiate of the Masses? Officials at the Utah State Prison found five grams of heroin inside cassette tapes mailed to an inmate from, of all places, Deseret Book. The investigation led police to Brandon J. Norton, 27 (who allegedly filled several balloons with the drug, placed them in the cassettes, and even re-shrinkwrapped the box), and Daisy A. Gonzales, 20 (who reportedly mailed the package from a Deseret Book store in Weber County).

Shortly after the *Salt Lake Tribune* broke the story, columnist Robert Kirby proposed a number of potential new advertising slogans for the LDS-owned bookstore, including one that reads, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a drug smuggler to enter into Deseret Book."

Millions Shall Know Brother . . . John? Editors know how hard it is to be completely accurate when reporting the many facts of a story, but the editors of *U.S. News & World Report* recently made a series of blunders, one coming right in the headline. "In John Smith's Steps," reads the title of a six-page story about the LDS Church which appears in a special "Mysteries of Faith" edition. The story gets Joseph Smith's



From *U.S. News & World Report* on Mormonsim. Opening page (inset, left). Enlarged caption misidentifying statue (inset, right)

name right in one of the captions, but unfortunately the accompanying photograph shows a statue of Brigham Young. An equal-opportunity blunderer, the same issue includes a story on what the table of contents calls "Catholicism."

LDS "Missionary" Condemned to Hell. A man playing the role of an LDS missionary was one of the condemned in the "Walk Through Hell," a haunted house staged this past Halloween by the Potter's House Christian Center in Ogden, Utah. The event is held annually by the Christian group in order to dramatize the reality of hell and the many paths that lead to perdition.

The Mormon missionary shared his consignment to eternal torture with a Catholic nun, a one-time drug user, a rich man, a gang member, and even a typical church-going Protestant Christian.

In a *Salt Lake Tribune* story about the haunted walk, Potter House's acting assistant pastor, Dave Bartelson, says the characters connected to specific faiths were singled out because of his church's belief that those traditions have doctrines and practices that undermine salvation. The other characters represent how anyone could be condemned if he or she were to put anything before Jesus Christ.

tion in family matters ultimately helps or hurts children. And the conference closed with a presentation by Utah ACLU director Dani Eyer about the ACLU's involvement in women's issues for the past thirty years, concluding with eye-opening reminders about just how far Utah women have yet to go in many areas. These include pay inequality (Utah ranks forty-ninth in the nation), reprisals against those who apply for rights under the Family Leave Act, and medical and housing discrimination against immigrants, gays, and the poor.



Natalie Palmer Sheppard

The Mormon Women's Forum's "Eve Award," given annually to "a woman of courage and vision who has made a significant contribution to Mormon women," was presented to Natalie Palmer Sheppard, who served for almost six years as Relief Society president of the Genesis Branch. The Genesis Branch was established in 1971 to support LDS members of black African descent. In connection with the Eve Award, Sheppard delivered the keynote luncheon address, "We Shall Not Be Moved: Claiming Our Place As LDS Women of Color." Sheppard's views on the role of the Church in race issues were recently published in *SUNSTONE* (May 2003, 28–39).

CHURCH SENDS THE "MICHIGAN RELICS" BACK HOME

ONCE THOUGHT BY some to be artifacts left by the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel, and still believed by a few today as archeological evidence of the existence of a Near or Middle Eastern culture in ancient America, the now largely debunked "Michigan Relics" were sent back to Michigan in October, donated by the Church to the Michigan Historical Museum, which will have them on display through next August.



The slate tablet (left) was called by Elder Talmage, "the most flagrant instance of modern workmanship" he found among the relics

The relics, uncovered in Montcalm County, Michigan, over a thirty-year period beginning in 1890, generated tremendous initial excitement, but their authenticity was almost immediately challenged by skeptics who pointed to evidence of chemical aging and marks of modern tools on many of the artifacts.

Recognizing their potential for bolstering Book of Mormon claims if authentic, LDS Apostle James E. Talmage examined them in 1909. But he quickly joined the chorus of skeptics, publishing an article in 1911, "The Michigan Relics: A Story of Forgery and Deception."

Still, believers in the authenticity of the relics exist. In an Associated Press story, one of them, Wayne May, publisher of the *Ancient American*, states that calling "them an outright

fraud is a big mistake by the archaeological professionals." Although conceding that some may be fake, May continues, "I believe there are a lot of pieces that are not fraudulent."

Bequeathed in 1929 to Notre Dame University by a major defender of the relics, the artifacts came to the attention of Elder Milton R. Hunter, a General Authority with a strong interest in Book of Mormon archaeology. His interest in the relics led to Notre Dame's donating its collection to the Church in 1960. In 1977, the Church asked LDS archaeology professor Richard Stamps to examine the relics, and he, like Talmage, concluded they were fakes. Stamps studied the relics again in 1998–99 and published his findings in *BYU Studies* (vol. 40, no. 3, 2001).

The full story of the relics, with pictures and descriptions of many of the most interesting pieces, can be found at <<http://www.sos.state.mi.us/history/michrelics>>.

RELIGIOUS LEADERS DENOUNCE GARMENT DESECRATION

ON 21 OCTOBER, with the LDS Conference Center as background, a coalition of evangelical Christian leaders condemned "profane acts of desecrating Mormon garments." In a statement read by the Rev. Jim Ayers, the ministers claimed that those who "used the Mormon garments to mock and ridicule the Latter-day Saint community in ways too egregious



to mention owe an apology to the Mormon community, and we call upon them to repent publicly of their activities." The statement is a denuncia-

tion of actions of street preacher Lonnie Pursifull, who, during the October General Conference, provoked the crowds by sneezing into an LDS temple garment and placing it on his buttocks (see *SUNSTONE*, Oct. 2003, 74).

Pursifull says he is now planning to protest in front of the churches of those chastising him. "My God says 'reprove and rebuke them,' these Mormons and sugarcoated preachers," Pursifull told *Salt Lake Tribune* reporter Peggy Fletcher Stack. "This is only going to make me more resolved." Pursifull continues, "We don't apologize for serving God. They need to apologize. They're no better than the Mormons."

TEMPLE CLOTHING AUCTIONED ON eBay

A SET OF men's temple ceremonial clothing was auctioned on eBay on 21 November. "Comes with chef-style hat," read the online description. A systems administrator from Virginia, who is LDS, paid \$112.50 for the items, admitting that he purchased them so they wouldn't fall into the wrong hands. (A new set of the ceremonial clothing costs between \$30 and \$60. Beehive Clothing stores sell the sets only to customers with valid temple recommends.)

Media Watch

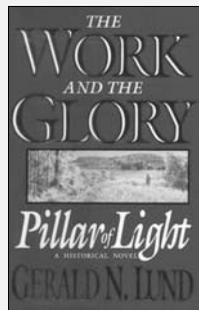
"THE MESSENGER HAS ARRIVED!"



A MADE-FOR-TELEVISION version of Tony Kushner's acclaimed—and controversial—play *Angels in America* aired 7 and 14 December on HBO. Claiming 4.2 million viewers, the six-hour drama was the most-watched made-for-cable movie of the year. Directed by Mike Nichols, the cast for this \$60 million production included Al Pacino, Meryl Streep, Emma Thompson, and Mary-Louise Parker.

Set during the Reagan era at the onset of the AIDS epidemic, the play has strong gay themes and sexual content which have offended many conservative viewers. At the same time, *Angels in America* is of particular interest to Latter-day Saints as it includes three LDS characters and incorporates elements of Mormonism's sacred history into its symbolic universe, including angelic visitations, prophetic callings, and seer stones. The made-for-cable version didn't shy away from any of these elements—nor from the depiction of temple garments, which are explicitly referred to in the second part of the play as a potent symbol of Mormon identity.

In addition to their realistic representation of garments (both one- and two-piece models are shown), the filmmakers used other pieces of LDS material culture, with results that are either unintentionally humorous or consciously ironic: In a scene set in the storeroom of an LDS visitors center, Captain Moroni action figures can clearly be seen on a shelf in the background.

THE WORK AND THE GLORY
SET TO COME TO SILVER SCREEN

GERALD LUND'S MULTIVOLUME historical fiction series *The Work and the Glory* will soon be made into a series of feature films. LDS businessman and Utah Jazz owner, Larry H. Miller, announced in early October that he would provide the sole financial support, to the tune of \$7.4 million, for the film adaptation of the immensely popular series that follows the fictional, nineteenth-century

Steed family as they meet Joseph Smith in upstate New York and become participants in many of Mormonism's founding events. In all, Miller says he expects it will take five or six films to tell the story contained in Lund's nine-volume series.

Heading the production team for the films will be producer Scott Swofford, whose previous work includes several IMAX hits, along with LDS productions *Legacy* and *Testaments*, and screenwriter/director Russ Holt, a longtime producer for the Church whose biggest directorial credit is the epic period film, *The Lamb of God*. Lund, a General Authority who is currently on assignment in England, will serve as a script consultant for the films.

Second-unit filming in the eastern U. S. was to begin just two weeks after the announcement. The producers expect the movie will take twelve to fourteen months to make and plan to release it in late 2004 or early 2005.

TWO RICHARD DUTCHER FILMS
"GREEN"LIGHTED

LDS FILMMAKER RICHARD Dutcher will be very busy in 2004. After financing setbacks caused him to temporarily shelve his planned film biography of Joseph Smith, *The Prophet*, Dutcher turned his attention to writing and raising money for a follow-up to his first LDS feature, *God's Army*.

As he was nearing his fundraising goals, Dutcher learned about Larry H. Miller's involvement in *The Work and the Glory* project (foregoing story) and read with concern comments Miller had made when reporters asked him about his decision to withdraw financial support from Dutcher's *Prophet*. Feeling Miller had misrepresented what had occurred, Dutcher called him, and the two went to lunch to talk over the situation. The result of their conversation was a press conference that featured Miller's apology for his misremembering the earlier events and making comments that could have hindered Dutcher's fundraising efforts. Miller also announced that he was investing "a significant amount" in both the *God's Army* sequel as well as in *The Prophet*.

Filming in Los Angeles in January and February, *God's Army II: States of Grace* will feature a mostly fresh cast, with a



few characters returning from the first film. And unlike the first film, which focused primarily on the nature of day-to-day LDS missionary life, the follow-up tells the story of missionaries working in a gang-infested part of Los Angeles. *States of Grace* is expected to reach theatres in fall of 2004.

Dutcher plans to begin the several-months-long filming of *The Prophet* in May and expects to release it sometime in 2005, the two-hundredth anniversary year of Joseph Smith's birth.

BYU "CALLS" SPORTS MISSIONARIES

DESPITE A DISAPPOINTING second-straight losing season, BYU's football team continues to receive endorsements from school and Church leaders, who have even implemented a new program designed to help it return to glory. "Don't judge BYU today by football," quipped President Gordon B. Hinckley on 7 November, during a special worldwide BYU alumni reunion broadcast from the Tabernacle. "I hope [the Cougars] will improve. . . . Better years lie ahead. . . . BYU is destined to be a winner all-around."



Pres. Cecil Samuelson

BYU President Cecil Samuelson issued a statement 4 December extending a vote of confidence to head football coach, Gary Crowton, who has led the Cougars in their worst season since 1970–71. "Fan support for our football team is critical to the continued success of our entire athletic program," said Samuelson. "We hope our fans, in true BYU fashion, will show up in large numbers to support the team next season."

Samuelson's commitment to Cougar success was further illustrated recently as he extended "calls" to five retired couples to act as "sports missionaries" in supporting the BYU football team and other athletic programs. Although the couples do not receive their call from the prophet nor wear badges, they are routinely referred to as "missionaries." Among other duties, the volunteers work as ushers, run a Cougar-owned cabin in Midway, and, in a hospitality tent before the games, "wine and dine" (or, more accurately, "chocolate and dine") fans who buy thousand-dollar-plus season ticket packages.

CHURCH CHANGES POLICIES FOR TEMPLE "TIME-ONLY" MARRIAGES

A RECENT FIRST Presidency letter to bishops and stake presidents changes the requirements for time-only marriages performed in the temple, increasing restrictions on such ceremonies and leveling the requirements for men and women. According to the 12 November directive, time-only marriages in the temple are to be performed only when both "the man and the woman are already sealed to a spouse who is deceased and from whom they were not divorced."

In the past, the time-only marriage ceremony could be performed when the wife had previously been sealed to a man, independent of the groom's status. This meant that a groom who did not have a wife previously sealed to him could sometimes marry a wife in the temple for a time-only ceremony.

The new directive does not address the more significant policy that keeps a man sealed to his first wife after a divorce, unless the wife requests a cancellation in order for her to be sealed to another man. As no other, this policy shows how deeply the theology of polygamy continues to be part of LDS practice. Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve alluded to this doctrine of eternal polygamy in a January 2002

devotional in which he called his second wife "the eternal companion who now stands at my side" (*Ensign*, Oct. 2003, 17). Elder Oaks's other "eternal companion"—his first wife, June, sealed to him in 1952—died in 1998.

MORMON LEADERS ABSENT IN GUN LAW PROTEST

LDS LEADERS WERE conspicuously absent from an event at which Episcopal, Catholic, Jewish, and other religious leaders protested a recent Utah law which LDS officials endorsed and reportedly helped write. In somewhat confusing language, the new law requires churches to notify the state if they intend to ban guns from their buildings. A coalition of Utah churches argues that they should not be required to register with the state in order to ban weapons from their own sanctuaries.

But LDS leaders haven't complied with the new law either, even though Church officials have in the past stated that guns have no place in churches. LDS spokesman Kim Farah stated on 23 December that "the Church is still considering its response to the requirements of the law."

NEW LAWSUIT EMBROILS LDS PLAZA

SIX MONTHS AFTER the Salt Lake City Council eliminated the city's easement on a section of Main Street between Temple Square and the Church offices, the LDS Plaza in downtown Salt Lake continues to be the object of litigation. On 7 August, the American Civil Liberties Union filed a new lawsuit claiming the agreement between the Church and the City of Salt Lake violates the First Amendment separation between church and state.

The ACLU is suing on behalf of the Utah Gospel Mission, the First Unitarian Church of Salt Lake City, the Utah National Organization for Women, the pro-nuclear disarmament group Shundahai Network, and two private individuals.

On 2 December, six weeks after the Church filed a motion to intervene in the suit, the ACLU added the Church and Salt Lake Mayor Rocky Anderson as defendants. The ACLU argues that the Church is acting like a government body in the way it exercises authority and curtails free speech.

CHURCH SUES OVER STRIP CLUB

THROUGH ITS REAL estate division, on 15 October, the Church filed a suit appealing a Salt Lake City Board of Adjustments decision to allow a downtown saloon to become a strip club. Lawyers for the Church claim the Dead Goat Saloon is too close to landmarks, parks, schools, and housing areas to merit the license. They argue the sexually oriented business would hurt LDS financial interests in downtown Salt Lake.

Saloon owner Daniel Darger said he's "very excited" by the prospects of a legal battle with the Church. "There will be a 'full-court press' until the Mormon version of Vatican City is established," he warned.

Darger, a lawyer, blames the Church for recent liquor laws that have doomed his establishment as a blues-music venue.

AN OLIVE LEAF

THAT PRINCIPLE OF GENEROSITY

By Joseph Smith Jr.

THE PROPHET JOSEPH SMITH spent the cold winter of 1838–39 in cramped, filthy quarters of the jail in Liberty, Missouri. On 4 April 1839, he wrote the following letter to his wife Emma detailing his desperation to see her and their children. Less than two weeks later, Joseph and the other prisoners would be allowed to escape. (From Dean C. Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 2002): 463–65. Original spelling and punctuation have been retained, however, other grammatical markings have been removed.)



Liberty, Jail, Clay Co. Mo, April, 4th 1839.

Dear—and affectionate—wife.

Thursday night I set down just as the sun is going down, as we peak throw the greats of this lonesome prison, to write to you, that I may make known to you my situation. It is I believe now about five months and six days since I have been under the grimace, of a guard night and day, and within the walls grates and screeking iron dors, of a lonesome dark dirty prison. With immotions known only to God, do I write this letter, the contemplations, of the mind under these circumstances, defies the pen, or tounge, or Angels, to discribe, or paint, to the human being, who never experiance[d] what we experience. This night we expect; is the last night we shall try our weary Joints and bones on our dirty straw couches in these walls, let our case hereafter be as it may, as we expect to start to morrow, for Davis Co, for our trial. . . . My Dear Emma I think of you and the children continually, if I could tell you my tale, I think you would say it was altogether enough for once, to gratify the malice of hell that I have suffered. I want <to> see little Frederick, Joseph, Julia, and Alexander, Joana, and old major. And as to yourself if you want to know how much I want to see you, examine your feelings, how much you want to see me, and judge for <you[r]self>, I would gladly <walk> from here to you barefoot, and bareheaded and half naked, to see you and think it great pleasure, and never count it toil, but do not think I am babyish, for I do not feel so, I bare with fortitude all my oppression, so do those that are with me, not one of us have flinched yet, I want you <should> not let those little fellows, forgit me,

tell them Father loves them with a perfect love, and he is doing all he can to git away from the mob to come to them, do teach them all you can, that they may have good minds, be tender and kind to them, dont be fractious to them, but listen to their wants, tell them Father says they must be good children <and> mind their mother, My Dear Emma there is great respo[n]sibility resting upon you, in preserveing yourself in honor, and sobriety, before them, and teaching them right

things, to form their young and tender minds, that they begin in right paths, and not git contaminated when young, by seeing ungodly examples, I soppose you see the need of my council, and help, but <a> combinnation <of> things have conspired to place me where I am, and I know it <is> not my fault, and further if my voice and council, had been heeded I should not have been here, but I find no fault with you, attall I know nothing but what you have done the best you could, if there is any thing it is known to yourself, you must be your own Judge, on that subject: and if ether of us have done wrong it is, wise in us to repent of it, and for God sake, do not be so foolish as to y<i>eld to the flattery of the Devel, faslshoods, and vainty, in this hour of trouble, that our affections be drawn, away from the right objects, those preasious things, God has given us will rise up in Judgement against us if we do not mark well our steps, and ways. My heart has often been exceding sorrowful when I have thought of these thing[s] for many considerations, one thing let [me adm]onish you by way of my duty, do not [be] self willed, neither harbor a spirit of revevenge: and again remember that he who is my enemy, is yours also, and never give up an old tried friend, who has waded through all manner of toil, for your sake, and throw him away becau[se] fools may tell <you> he <has> some faults; these thing[s] have accured to <me> [as] I have been writing, I do[n't] speak of <them> because you do not know them, but because I want to stir up your pure mind by way of remembrance: all feelings of diss[at]isfaction is far from my heart, I wish to act upon that principle of generosity, that will acqu<it> myself in the preasance of through the mercy of God. . . .

[Joseph Smith Jr.]

CONGRATULATIONS

2003 BROOKIE & D.K. BROWN

FICTION CONTEST WINNERS

SUNSTONE AWARD, \$400

"HEALTHY PARTNERS" by Lewis Home of Eugene, Oregon
a stunning account of a semi-psycho panhandler's supper with an LDS family

MOONSTONE AWARDS, Tie, \$250 each

"WOLF MOUNTAIN" by Mari Jorgensen of Midway, Utah
explores the tensions of an LDS mother vis-a-vis her groupie, environmentally fanatic, vegetarian but cigarette-smoking teen daughter

"THE ONLY WORD I KNOW" by Helen W. Jones of Salt Lake City
portrays the separateness of an LDS farm girl's life in southern Canada from the lives of the Indian laborers-and if and how the chasm might be bridged

ANNOUNCING THE 2004 BROOKIE & D.K. BROWN FICTION CONTEST

THE SUNSTONE EDUCATION FOUNDATION invites writers to enter its annual fiction contest, which is made possible by a grant from the Brookie and D. K. Brown family. All entries must relate to adult Latter-day Saint experience, theology, or worldview. All varieties of form are welcome. Stories, sans author identification, will be judged by noted Mormon authors and professors of literature. Winners will be announced in *SUNSTONE* and on the foundation's website, <www.sunstoneonline.com>; winners only will be notified by mail. After the announcement, all other entrants will be free to submit their stories elsewhere. Winning stories will be published in *SUNSTONE* magazine.

PRIZES will be awarded in two categories: **SHORT-SHORT STORY**—fewer than 1,500 words; **SHORT STORY**—fewer than 6,000 words. Prize money varies (up to \$400 each) depending on the number of winners announced.

RULES: 1. Up to *three entries* may be submitted by any one author. *Four copies of each entry* must be delivered (or postmarked) to Sunstone by 30 June 2004. Entries will not be returned. A \$5 fee must accompany each entry. No email submissions will be permitted.

2. Each story must be typed, double-spaced, on one side of white paper and be stapled in the upper left corner. The author's name may not appear on any page of the manuscript.

3. Each entry must be accompanied by a cover letter that states the story's title and the author's name, address, telephone number, and email (if available). Each cover letter must be signed by the author and attest that the entry is her or his own work, that it has not been previously published, that it is not being considered for publication elsewhere and will not be submitted to other publishers until after the contest, and that, if the entry wins, *SUNSTONE* magazine has one-time, first-publication rights. Cover letters must also grant permission for the manuscript to be filed in the Sunstone Collection at the Marriott Library of the University of Utah in Salt Lake City. The author retains all literary rights. Sunstone discourages the use of pseudonyms; if used, the author must identify the real and pen names and the reasons for writing under the pseudonym.

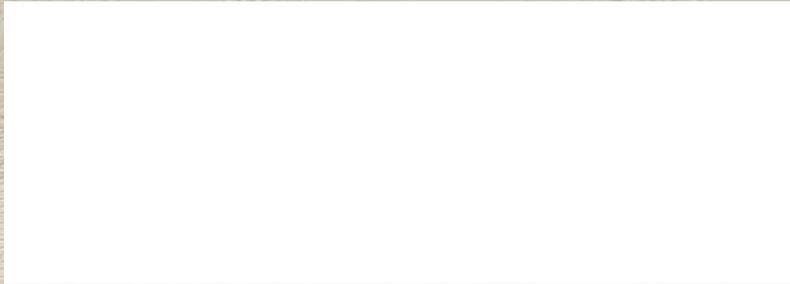
Failure to comply with rules will result in disqualification.

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