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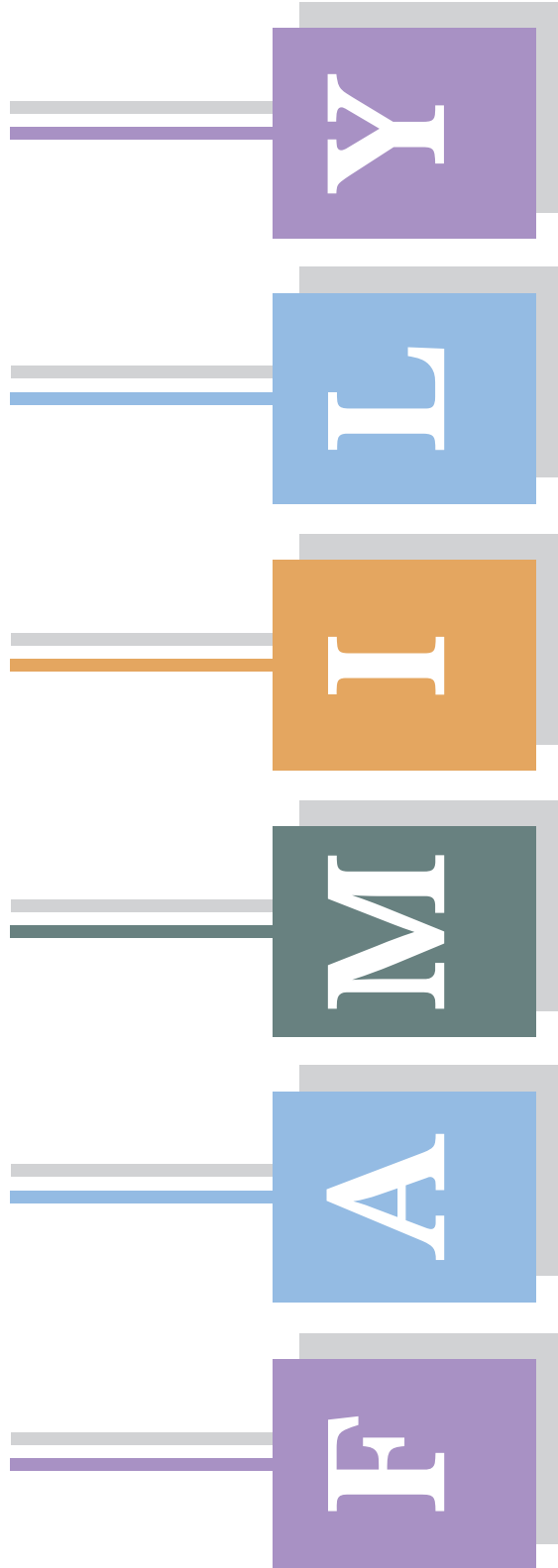
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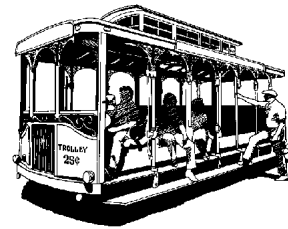
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MORMON EXPERIENCE, SCHOLARSHIP, ISSUES, & ART

MARCH 2005

Issue 136



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## TRAINING BEGINS AT HOME

L AURA BUSH'S FINE REFLECTION, "From Bunkerville to Babylon: Juanita Brooks and Phyllis Barber Tell the Story of Twentieth-Century Mormon Women's Sexual Training," (SUNSTONE, December 2004) is very thought-provoking—and disturbing. To wit, from page 29, Brooks's father's statement: "I'd hate to have the fellows discuss my daughter like they did one girl this afternoon. If she knew the things the boys say about her, she'd be less free with her favors."

From Brooks's account, we learn that her father listened to the stories about the girl. And we learn that he, who's trying to teach his daughter appropriate behavior, didn't chastise the boys for their misbehavior. What would have been the effect on Juanita had he been able to report that he'd snapped right back: "Now don't you boys ever talk that way about that girl or any other girl, whether you think it's true or not. Don't you have any decency? And don't you boys ever do anything to any girls that could get them talked about that way, either. You have a responsibility to be decent to women and to your own selves as men." And what might have been the effect on the boys, who, of course, may have been lying the whole time?

And what if we could know that Doctor McGregor (discussed on page 31) was worried not only about the "good names" of the Dixie Junior College boys he'd treated for venereal disease? What if we could know he had also worried about the good name and health of the victimized girl enough to treat her? She hadn't developed the disease on her own.

Even though Brook's accounts are of events that happened some eighty years ago, I'm not convinced today's fathers and doctors do much better. I hope Bush's article and Holly Welker's excellent response, which demonstrates harsh realities about today's sexual attitudes, will be widely read and serve as a catalyst for healthy discussions.

GALE PETERSON

Albuquerque, New Mexico

## CATCHING FIRE

T HANKS FOR PUBLISHING THE ESSAYS from the "Mormonism as Praxis" panel (SUNSTONE, December 2004). I had attended the session at the 2004 Salt Lake Symposium and was very sorry when I learned that the recording had failed.

I'm especially inspired by John Dewey Remy's essay about his practice of prayer, even though he's a skeptic. I very much liked learning about his devotions during the administration of the sacrament. He says: "I sit in silence, seeking the divine light within me and feeling it not only there, but also becoming aware that there are hundreds of little flames burning brightly in the hearts of all of who are sitting around me."

I usually read scriptures during this time but am now focusing on igniting my small spiritual flame that could merge with the glow of my community of believers seeking the enveloping light of Christ.

LYNN MUMFORD

Salt Lake City, Utah

## RECONNECTING

N EAL CHANDLER'S PIECE, "KEEPING Faith and Reading Kafka" (SUNSTONE, December 2004), is a wonderful gift, both for its prose and insight. Before her passing three years ago, my grandmother was one of those "church-running ladies" that Chandler speaks so fondly of and for whom the Church in Germany was a vital part of her life. I will treasure this essay for how it has reconnected me with her as well as with the German people, whom I have barely taken the time to try to know, though I am descended from them in heritage. Thank you, Brother Chandler, for sharing your thoughts and opening this window for me. Like you, I'm going to take Elder Moyle's advice and go buy a few books to help me better understand "their hearts and minds."

TED COOMBS

Portland, Oregon

EDITOR'S NOTE: Due to the unprecedented number of letters received in response to Blake Ostler's essay, "Assessing the Logical Structure of DNA Arguments against the Book of Mormon," (SUNSTONE, December 2004) and Ostler's desire to respond in some depth to each of them here, we have decided to delay the publication of Part II of his essay until the next issue.

## CORRECT "PRINCIPAL"

I READ WITH PLEASURE BLAKE OSTLER'S "Assessing the Logical Structure of DNA Arguments against the Book of Mormon." I believe that translating arguments into a logi-

cal form is a valuable contribution to the discourse. However, I would like to encourage Ostler to more accurately represent my arguments and reconsider his analysis under the premises represented below.

In his discussion of the deductive argument, he contends that I have proposed:

- P1. The Book of Mormon claims that all aboriginal inhabitants of ancient America are of Hebrew descent.
- P2. DNA studies show that all inhabitants of ancient America are of Asiatic, not Hebrew, descent.
- P3. DNA studies are accurate.
- P4. P1 cannot be true, given P2 and P3.
- C1. Therefore, the Book of Mormon claim stated in premise P1 is false.

My deductive argument is more accurately represented as follows:

- P1. The Book of Mormon claims that *the principal ancestors of American Indians* are of Hebrew descent.
- P2. DNA studies show that *the principal ancestors of American Indians* are of Asiatic, not Hebrew, descent.
- P3. DNA studies are accurate.
- P4. P1 cannot be true, given P2 and P3.
- C1. Therefore, the Book of Mormon claim stated in premise P1 is false.

In his discussion of the inductive argument, he contends that I have proposed:

- M1. "There is no genetic evidence to support the view that the ancient inhabitants of the Americas were of Semitic descent."
- M2. If there had been peoples of Semitic descent in the ancient Americas, then it is highly probable that genetic evidence showing such Semitic descent would appear among the DNA samplings that have been collected so far.
- M3. Therefore, it is highly improbable that there were any people of Semitic descent in ancient America.

My inductive argument is more accurately represented as follows:

- M1. "There is no genetic evidence to support the view that the ancient inhabitants of the

Americas were of Semitic descent."

- M2. If *the principal ancestors of American Indians* had been peoples of Semitic descent in the ancient Americas, then it is highly probable that genetic evidence showing such Semitic descent would appear among the DNA samplings that have been collected so far.
- M3. Therefore, it is highly improbable that *the principal ancestors of American Indians* were of Semitic descent.

I would like to encourage Ostler to reconsider his analysis with the corrected arguments noted above. To continue his critique otherwise is merely to argue against a straw man.

THOMAS W. MURPHY  
Edmonds, Washington

BLAKE OSTLER responds: I appreciate Tom Murphy's timely response to my article. I especially appreciate his acknowledgment that recognizing the logical structure of arguments is important. Further, by disavowing premise P1 in the deductive argument, Murphy acknowledges implicitly that the Book of Mormon does not

teach that "all aboriginal inhabitants of ancient America are of Hebrew descent." That recognition is crucial in the discussion of DNA issues and is a real step forward in the discussion. The denial of P1 also implies that the Book of Mormon teaches that there were others already present when Lehi arrived who are also ancestors of Native Americans, which I argue for in Part II of my essay in the next issue of SUNSTONE.

Of course I desire to state Murphy's arguments accurately. Did I misstate the first deductive argument? No. I took the premises of the argument from his statements in the Living Hope video that I quoted. Murphy never uses the phrase "principal ancestors of the American Indians" in that video. So Premise P1 seems to me to accurately represent what he stated there. Moreover, Murphy's suggested emendation (I will call it P1\*) is still false. The Book of Mormon nowhere states that "the principal ancestors of American Indians are of Hebrew descent." Murphy cannot quote any chapter and verse in the Book of Mormon where this assertion is made because it isn't there. I acknowledge that others have made that claim about the Book of Mormon (e.g., the Introduction added to the Book of Mormon in 1981), but it isn't a claim that the Book of Mormon makes for itself, as P1\* asserts. In Part II of my article, I deal with the fallacy of attributing to the Book of Mormon what others say about it to assess whether what it says is



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true. It is a fallacy that Murphy commits in his letter.

Moreover, Murphy's suggested emendation, MP1, is vague. Just what does it mean to claim that "the principal ancestors of American Indians are of Hebrew descent"? Does it mean "the vast majority of ancestors," or "the most important ancestors," or "the ancestors responsible for the Book of Mormon," or "the most noble ancestors," or "the only ancestors"? Without clarification, I don't know what it is that Murphy believes he is asserting. In any event, his argument remains unsound because premise P1\* is false and, as I have shown, hopelessly vague.

Murphy also suggests that I have misstated premise M2 in the inductive argument. I am willing to adopt Murphy's suggested changes to premise M2. He is always free to try to strengthen his argument. But does Murphy's suggested change to premise M2 (I will call it M2\*) really make any difference to the argument? No, it doesn't. In fact, it makes matters worse. The problem remains that we don't know whether M2\* is true and are not in an epistemic position to know what could make it true—and Murphy's suggested change makes matters worse because, as discussed above, the inclusion of the phrase about "principal ancestors" makes us uncertain what the premise means. Thus, the argument is not inductively valid. Moreover, Murphy's recognition that the Book of Mormon does not claim that all Native Americans are of Hebrew descent reduces the initial probability that we should expect to find clear evidence of Hebrew DNA markers among present DNA samples—though without more information, we have no way of assessing whether the probability is high or low.

## DATING CHALLENGE

IN HIS ARTICLE IN THE DECEMBER 2004 SUNSTONE, Blake Ostler addresses recent writings by Murphy and others on DNA studies as they relate to issues of Book of Mormon historicity. Ostler claims that the scientific facts are only that "Amerindian DNA is consistent with an Asiatic ancestry." The DNA evidence is actually stronger than this. The principal mitochondrial markers, which are passed mother-to-daughter, and the Y chromosome markers, which are passed father-to-son, exhibit genetic variation indicating that the Amerindians have been separated from both Asiatic and European stock for at least 12,000 years.

Needless to say, a 12,000-year separation time does not help defend the traditional view of Book of Mormon history, which depicts the Jaredite migration as occurring, at most, some 5,000 years ago, and Lehi's de-

parture from the Middle East about 2,600 years ago. Given this, the best we can say is that conceivably the original Book of Mormon groups may have quickly assimilated into much larger native populations so that today we cannot discern any genetic trace.

These are difficult challenges, and I don't pretend to know the answers. But we need to be realistic about the scientific evidence. Philosophical, lawyer-like jockeying around the issues will not save the day.

DAVID H. BAILEY  
Alamo, California

BLAKE OSTLER responds: I appreciate David Bailey's comments because they provide an opportunity to further clarify the issues related to DNA and the Book of Mormon. Let's look at his two main assertions (and given that we're talking about clues derived from chromosomes, let's have some fun and label them x and y):

(x) Genetic dating demonstrates that (all?) Amerindians are of Asiatic descent, descending from ancestors who departed from Asia or Europe at least 12,000 years ago.

And, given that Bailey accepts that "conceivably the original Book of Mormon groups may have quickly assimilated into much larger native populations so that today we cannot discern any genetic trace," I believe he would endorse:

(y) It is consistent with the genetic data of Amerindian origins that more recently than 12,000 years ago, non-Asiatics may have arrived in the Americas from whom modern Native Americans are also descended.

Now it seems to me that if we consider that Bailey really meant (x) to mean "all" Amerindians are of Asiatic descent (and, if he didn't, then there's really no extra challenge in his adding the findings about separation dates to the discussion), his allowing that (y) may also be true is inconsistent. One cannot fairly state something categorical in nature (x) while also admitting possible exceptions (y).

An exercise in clarifying claims like those in Bailey's letter and in the implied arguments of those pushing DNA findings beyond their proper bounds isn't just "lawyer-like" jockeying. Its purpose is to demonstrate how those who attack the Book of Mormon tend to focus on totalizing statements like (x), while those who defend the Book of Mormon point out that statements of the tenor of (y) are true. And given that (y) is true, so possibly are Book of Mormon historicity claims.

Moreover, what does the Book of Mormon itself lead us to expect? I point out in Part II of my essay (in the next SUNSTONE) that one scenario consistent with the Book of Mormon is that a

group of people, probably largely Asiatic, arrived in the Americas some 4,400–5,000 years ago. The Jaredite population included Asiatics (if Hugh Nibley is correct that the Jaredites journeyed across the steppes of Asia). There was also a later group of non-Asiatics (Semites) who arrived about 2,600 years ago. These non-Asiatics, consisting of about sixty people at most, were quickly assimilated into the existing population of Asiatics. However, large numbers of those descending from the non-Asiatic groups did not survive because of their mass destruction. Thus, the Book of Mormon is consistent with the genetic data. If my reading is correct, the Book of Mormon leads us to believe that we will find largely Asiatic DNA among Native Americans. Given that the number of those who assimilated into the existing population, and thus who left behind descendants, is at most about sixty souls, it is not surprising to me that distinctive Semitic mitochondrial DNA or other genetic indications seem to have disappeared.

However, I believe that (x) is not quite accurate either, for GM haplotypes evidence suggests at least four migrations of Asians, the first between 17,000 and 25,000 years ago (Moses S. Schanfield, "Immunoglobulin Allotypes [GM and KM] Indicate Multiple Founding Populations of Native Americans: Evidence of at Least Four Migrations to the New World," *Human Biology* 64, no. 3 [1992]: 381–97). However, it also

seems clear that such evidence shows only when the first ancestors of Amerindians arrived; it doesn't show what happened thereafter. That is, other groups have undoubtedly arrived in the Americas since that time. So the fact that the evidence shows when the first ancestors arrived does not address the issues raised by the claims of the Book of Mormon. When the Jaredites migrated to the Americas is uncertain, but it was almost certainly long after BC 20,000. If Nibley is correct, then the Jaredites migrated from southwest Asia, and their presence would not introduce any new types of DNA—that is, DNA types different from those already brought to the Americas by the first migration of Asiatics. If I am correct, the number of Israelites who were assimilated into the preexisting culture was so small that bottlenecks and genetic drift are very likely.

### THE INEXORABLE CRAWL

BLAKE OSTLER HAS NOT BEEN SHY about confronting Book of Mormon criticism. The first effort of his to reach my radar screen was his article, "The Book of Mormon as a Modern Expansion of an Ancient Source" (*Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Spring 1987, 66–123), in which he attempts to develop a model of revelation that would honor both ancient and nineteenth-century elements in the Book of

Mormon. His latest venture, "Assessing the Logical Structure of DNA Arguments against the Book of Mormon," is an argument attempting to mitigate the impact of Thomas Murphy's Amerindian DNA studies as they relate to Book of Mormon claims. I can agree with Ostler in regards to Murphy's ill-advised interview with a religiously fundamentalist organization; yet while I think that Ostler's article is carefully and logically written, it employs straw-man logic. Murphy's findings on the so-called Lamanitish DNA is, in my opinion, devastating to claims about the historicity of the Book of Mormon, and the more so because the science behind DNA sequencing and analysis is precise and overwhelming. Remember, DNA science forced the obfuscating confession of Bill Clinton.

However, the DNA discussion is only peripheral to the central question that has amplified since the publication of the Book of Mormon. Two quotes from Ostler will help illuminate this larger matter: (1) "I believe it will be evident that DNA studies have little or no bearing on the question of Book of Mormon historicity," and (2) "Those who rely on DNA evidence to discredit the Book of Mormon are claiming more than they can know."

Two observations emerge from such statements. First, that for Ostler and other apolo-

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gists, there never will be sufficient evidence to discredit central Book of Mormon claims. However, by engaging the debate at all, Ostler has entered into a devil's pact by insisting that Book of Mormon claims can be tested by logic and reason. Thus, unwittingly, Ostler has undermined the very nature of his own faith claims. Make no mistake about it, Ostler's apologetic is a faith claim.

Second, in his article, Ostler challenges as non-parsimonious Murphy's jump to assign nineteenth-century origins to the Book of Mormon, yet Ostler gives no countervailing logic that has led him to conclude on an ancient setting for the Book of Mormon. In his footnote 6, Ostler lists a large number of apologetic Book of Mormon studies, including those related to so-called internal Hebraisms, the limited-geography model, and Ostler's own *Dialogue* article, but to my knowledge, every article listed appears in non-peer-reviewed journals, and each is in some way a concession to science and a retreat from mainstream, traditional views of the Book of Mormon. We must believe that, given Ostler's unforgiving expectations of Book of Mormon critics, he surely has his own vigorous evidentiary claims for Book of Mormon historicity. Perhaps at some later date he will share these for peer review—hopefully in some non-LDS scholarly journal. Else why would he be such a strong defender?

Science-generated criticism of a religious canon can be onerous and difficult to bear for the inquisitive, but for “true believers,” textual veracity is ultimately subsumed to a faith which is untestable, unfalsifiable, and outside the purview of the scientific method. Fortunately, intellectual integrity concedes to the inexorable crawl of science. As all religions bend, shape, or retreat, there will be a smaller community of hardcore believers.

In 1997, Michael Drosnin wrote the best seller, *The Bible Code*, describing how he decoded “prophecies” of historical events past (he couldn't manage events yet to come). Many skeptics claimed the book was a fraud. Drosnin told *Newsweek* in June 1997, “When my critics find a message about the assassination of a prime minister encrypted in *Moby Dick*, I'll believe them.” When mathematician Brendan McKay took up the challenge by finding messages in Melville's classic about Indira Gandhi, the exile of Leon Trotsky, Martin Luther King, Jr., and others, how did Drosnin respond? He wrote *Bible Code II*.

STEVE OAKEY  
Rexburg, Idaho

BLAKE OSTLER responds: *Let me begin with a*

*point on which Steve Oakey and I both agree: I am not shy. Unfortunately, that's about all we agree on.*

*I'll admit that after reading Oakey's letter several times, I'm still not clear about what he intends to say. He first asserts what appear to me to be two contradictory claims:*

(1) *for people “like me” there never will be enough evidence to discredit the Book of Mormon; and*

(2) *by engaging evidence and logic, I have already undermined the very nature of my own faith claims.*

*I take his real beef to be something like: “The evidence really shows the Book of Mormon is false and Ostler just doesn't get it because of his prior faith commitments.” However, I can see no reason to give any credence to this assertion. I came back from being a skeptic about the Book of Mormon to adopting the expansion theory I argued for in my 1987 *Dialogue* article because I was looking for a way to explain all of the evidence and not just what one polemical position or another claimed. Moreover, if my “apologetic is a faith claim,” then Oakey's faith in science and his own view of the evidence is no less a faith claim. It appears to me that he is blind to his own “faith” commitments or presuppositions since he appears to believe that I come to the text with some prior commitments and he does not. That isn't true.*

*Oakey is clear that he sees DNA evidence as “devastating to claims about the historicity of the Book of Mormon.” From his seeming disdain for religion that is slow in bending or shaping itself to the demands of “the inexorable crawl of science,” my guess is that he disbelieved the Book of Mormon before he saw any DNA evidence. However, I insist that before an argument from evidence can be “devastating,” it must first be valid and sound. In Part I of my essay, I show that the arguments from DNA are neither—and Oakey completely ignores my arguments. So I invite Oakey to give us a valid and sound argument from DNA that demonstrates his claim rather than an unsupported assertion—regardless of whether DNA showed Bill Clinton to be a liar.*

*That brings me to Oakey's second beef. I cite numerous articles demonstrating that the Book of Mormon evidences awareness of ancient Israelite prophetic call forms, Israelite judicial procedures, and substantive law and covenant renewal festivals. Oakey asserts that this evidence is not trustworthy because it appears in journals that are not peer-reviewed. Is that the best he can do in response? All the articles I cited appeared in peer-reviewed journals and books.*

*BYU Studies, Dialogue, and the books I cited are all peer-reviewed publications. I suppose that Oakey's real beef is that he wants the “jury of peers” to consist of people who are not LDS or*

*who know nothing about the Book of Mormon—in other words, people who are more likely agree with him that science has supposedly shown that all religion is false. From my perspective, Oakey's criticism is without merit. What he needs to deal with is the evidence and not whether the panel of peers shares his biases.*

*However, let me observe that my own approach to science and issues of faith is much different than Oakey's. I am torn in two directions. I am quite certain that “science” will change drastically over the years and that what we take as established by the evidence and explained by adequate theories will be rejected and viewed as vastly inadequate in the not-too-distant-future. However, I also believe that it is worthwhile to assess our view of the scriptures in light of the best evidence available to us—what else can we do? I didn't come to the view that the Book of Mormon teaches about a small group who lived in relatively limited areas of the Americas and surrounding islands and who were surrounded by indigenous others by looking at DNA evidence, but it seems to me that one could come to that view based on the scientific evidence.*

*Believers approach the issue of evidence and scripture much differently than Oakey does. It seems to me that the critics of the Book of Mormon see any change or shift in understanding of the Book of Mormon as evidence that Latter-day Saints are just plain wrong. Oakey and Murphy see DNA evidence as “devastating” to the Book of Mormon. However, it seems to me that the believer is within his or her epistemic rights to reason something like this:*

*I believe in the Book of Mormon. The “scientific” evidence shows that the only way that the Book of Mormon can be true is if there were indigenous “others” who were of Asiatic origin already present when Lehi arrived. Therefore, if it is possible, in good faith, to read the Book of Mormon as being consistent with the presence of preexisting Asiatic populations, then it is most responsible and in line with the evidence to read it in that way.*

*It seems to me that it is a virtue to read scripture in light of our best evidence. When LDS read scripture in light of new evidence that may disagree with opinions held by earlier Church leaders, I would have thought that Oakey would see that as a good thing. Instead, he appears to see it as capitulation and bad faith. Rather than using DNA as proof that the Book of Mormon is false, it seems to me that the believer will refer to DNA evidence to update and correct assumptions held about the Book of Mormon. As I show in Part II of my essay, I believe that the Book of Mormon actually leads us to read it in a way that is consistent with the DNA evidence.*

## CONCEDING THE WAR

I'D LIKE TO OFFER A BRIEF REBUTTAL to Blake Ostler's logical analysis of the DNA arguments against the historicity of the Book of Mormon. As I understand him, Ostler's arguments can be condensed to two principal points:

(1) The only basis for the statement that all Native Americans are descended from Hebrews comes from Book of Mormon statements by early prophets and elaboration from more recent prophets, who were mistaken; and

(2) We cannot conclude that DNA evidence of Hebrew ancestry in American Indians is absent because we haven't tested all currently living Native Americans.

I'll address Ostler's points in reverse order. Ostler is absolutely correct that not all Native Americans have been DNA-tested (2), and that absolute conclusions cannot yet be drawn. But many Native Americans have been tested, and no Hebrew DNA has been found. True, we're not talking about one-hundred percent certainty here, but the levels reached so far are pretty discouraging for many. Does Ostler really want to suggest we reject all evidence that doesn't reach the hundred-percent certainty level? Reasonable people will discount such an argument, simply because we all realize there are extraordinarily few hundred-percent certainties in life and we don't demand that for our important decisions.

Ostler's other premise (1) is that our justification for believing that all Native Americans are at least in large part descended from Hebrews comes from Book of Mormon prophets and latter-day prophets, and that these prophets were mistaken. That premise supports his argument for the Book of Mormon's historicity. But does Ostler really want to argue that the Book of Mormon is a historical document by asserting that statements in the Book of Mormon and from early and modern LDS prophets about this scripture have been false? False statements on such an important point by so many prophets? I don't see the logic of attempting to win the battle by conceding the war.

If Ostler really wants to pose a logically imperative, unassailable argument that DNA testing of Native Americans is irrelevant to the historicity of the Book of Mormon, without conceding that latter-day and Book of Mormon prophets teach false doctrine, he might consider this one: Even if the Nephites and Lamanites represented a large population

group in ancient America, it is quite possible that the surviving Lamanites discouraged intermarriage with other tribes (I understand this was not uncommon), and that the Lamanites were eventually decimated by disease, famine, or war (also not uncommon in the ancient Americas). This is entirely possible, and could easily account for the lack of any discernible Hebrew DNA in current Native American populations. Just a thought.

MICHAEL J. BARRETT  
(another damn lawyer)  
Sterling, Virginia

*BLAKE OSTLER responds: I appreciate Michael Barrett's taking the time to read my article and respond. Unfortunately, the points he responds to are not points that I make. He attributes to me both (1) and (2), but neither represents my arguments, even remotely. I don't believe that all Native Americans are of Hebrew descent (and I don't think that the Book of Mormon teaches it, either), and so (1) is something I have not and would not assert (and indeed, I believe it is false). Further, I don't argue that we must test all of the DNA evidence before we can draw any conclusions—where Barrett thinks I argue that, I'm not sure.*

*Moreover, I have neither asserted nor do I believe that (2) is true. In fact, Barrett's letter provides a good example of common assumptions about two points, both of which I actually argue against. First, he takes the DNA evidence showing that Native Americans have Asiatic ancestors as evidence that they don't also have Hebrew ancestors. It is a logical fallacy to argue that because DNA evidence demonstrates that modern Native Americans have Asiatic ancestry that it follows that they didn't have Israelite ancestors as well. Equally important, the Book of Mormon doesn't teach that all Native Americans are of Hebrew descent. Nor does it teach that they don't have ancestors who are not Hebrew.*

*While I agree that the basis for believing that*

*some Native Americans may have Hebrew ancestors is primarily drawn from the Book of Mormon, I don't believe the Book of Mormon prophets were wrong about that assertion. However, it appears that Barrett is actually saying: "Look, you assert that the Book of Mormon prophets would have been wrong if they had claimed that all Native Americans are of Hebrew descent, so you undermine the basis of your claim because they are also the only basis for believing that Native Americans have Hebrew ancestors." This is not my position. I am merely pointing out that prophets are fallible and that if the Book of Mormon writers made a claim that all Native Americans are of Hebrew descent (which I don't believe they did), then they did not have the epistemic basis for doing so. I believe this assertion is defensible and in line with LDS teachings about revelation and the possibility that prophets may make mistakes. And I don't believe my saying this constitutes an example of winning a "battle by conceding the war." I suggest that the Book of Mormon should be read to see what it says rather than relying on others to characterize what it says.*

## SYLLOGISMS GONE WILD

- P1. The Book of Mormon portrays lawyers as being pretentious and contentious (3 Nephi 6:10–11).
- P2. Blake T. Ostler's rebuttal to Tom Murphy's work specifically, and others of his ilk generally, is pretentious and contentious.
- C1. Therefore, the Book of Mormon is true.

I COULD EASILY SUBSCRIBE TO THE proposition that Murphy's hyperbole (i.e., Native Americans have an Asian rather than Semitic genetic legacy; therefore, the Book of



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Mormon is a nineteenth-century creation schemed up by Joseph Smith with the intent to deceive) is neither good logic nor good science. Other than that, about all that the two-and-a-half pages of Ostler's pontifications confirmed for me is the reason why scribes and lawyers (no matter the merit of their intentions nor the quality of their character) get a bad rap in holy writ.

DOUG WARD  
Longmont, Colorado

*BLAKE OSTLER responds: I trust that Ward's syllogism and letter was primarily intended as fun. So, in reply, how's this?*

P1. No one is perfect.

P2. I'm no one.

C1. Therefore, I am perfect.

*How's that for pontificating!*

*More seriously, it appears that clarifying fuzzy reasoning and applying sound logic to matters that are negatively and needlessly affecting people's faith in scripture isn't Ward's thing. Does he suggest we just let imprecise language and bad thinking go without a challenge? If I've parsed the issues and critics' arguments wrong, I want to know about it. If the intent of his letter is to say that principles of sound reasoning have no place in this discussion, then he would probably*

*find supporters among some of the folks pressing use of the DNA findings far beyond their proper bounds.*

## MALAY AND DNA

**B**LAKE OSTLER'S ESSAY CONTINUES the debate over DNA and its potential application to the question of the historicity of Book of Mormon. The Malay Hypothesis I have proposed provides a reasonable way to resolve this continuing DNA controversy.

The Pacific "Quarter" was the uninhabited quarter to which the Jaredites were to go (Ether 2:5). They and the Lehites and Mulekites managed to go as far as the Pacific rim, landing on the Malay Peninsula. The peninsula (Alma 22:32) provides a setting which is compatible, to the best of my knowledge, with all Book of Mormon accounts.

But owing to dissention and directives from the Lord (1 Nephi 10:13; 17:38; 2 Nephi 23:14), small groups "hived off" the peninsula and migrated to islands of the Pacific and to a few sites along the western shores of the Americas. Hence many common cultural traits are found in Southeast Asia, Polynesia, and the Americas.

DNA evidence shows that few, if any, original Americans came from the Middle East. According to the Malay Hypothesis, Middle Eastern DNA is more likely to be found in descendants of these groups that hived off the Malay Peninsula.

A very small portion of my argument was published in *SUNSTONE*, March 2004, pages 30–34. Unpublished copies of my full study, "The Malay Peninsula as the Setting for the Book of Mormon," are available in several libraries, including the University of Utah, Utah State University, and Montana State University. It is also available for downloading through the Sunstone website at: <[www.sunstoneonline.com/magazine/issues/131/olsen.html](http://www.sunstoneonline.com/magazine/issues/131/olsen.html)>.

RALPH A. OLSEN  
Bozeman, Montana

*BLAKE OSTLER comments: I applaud Olsen's willingness to consider new approaches to the Book of Mormon. Moreover, as I suggest in Part II of my essay, it seems to me that Jacob expressly states that the Nephites are on "an isle of the sea" and "wherefore as [Isaiah's record] says isles, there must needs be more than this, and they are inhabited also by our brethren" (2 Nephi 10:20–21). So what Olsen says bears further consideration, though I have not studied enough about his Malay hypothesis to be prepared to endorse his particular views.*

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## FROM THE EDITOR

## ON THE DEATH OF NEPHI

By Dan Wotherspoon

## CALL FOR REFLECTIONS

As part of our May 2005 SUNSTONE issue, we plan to include a celebration of the life and work of Hugh Nibley. Please send us a short reflection about Hugh. How has his approach to the gospel affected your outlook or spiritual journey? Tell us about your most memorable encounter with the man or his writing. *Deadline for submission: 25 APRIL.*

**I**N MY ROLE here at Sunstone, I am often asked about my own take on the Book of Mormon. Given my exposure to Book of Mormon controversies over the past couple of decades, especially the recent challenges from DNA studies, how has the Book of Mormon survived for me?

When I answer my conversation partners that I really haven't come to a conclusion, they usually seem disappointed. Surely after years of thinking about it, I've had time to get my mind around what I think the book is! "Come on," they'll seem to plead, "just say it." I'm usually not sure what exactly they're hoping to hear from me, but there's something about their desperation for a succinct statement that makes me even more determined not to offer one.

To some degree, my hesitation comes from feeling that I have an inadequate knowledge of the relevant materials—all the arguments for and against its historicity. I've watched and listened to all sides as they've brought out their best stuff, but I still can't say that I'm fully conversant with the strengths and weaknesses of every approach. There's no personal image more unseemly to me than that of the blustery buffoon who has a little knowledge yet waxes long and loud, pretending to know more than he does, feigning a confidence he hasn't earned.

But mostly I hesitate because my walk with the Book of Mormon is a sacred journey for me. It is littered with milestones that mark all sorts of shifts in perspective—and is still ongoing. I'm not really in a hurry to see this journey end.

**I** GREW up active LDS and, for most of my youth, was seen by my teachers and leaders as a kind of rising star—the kid most likely to be stake president, that kind of thing. I was blessed with a good, grasping

mind and an ability to recall scriptures in context while applying them to most any gospel topic. I wasn't shy as a public speaker. "Oh, what a missionary you'll make!" I liked the approval I received.

But as with anything that is too easily attained, I didn't value what I had been given. As with any image that is bequeathed to us by others, my "golden boy" mantle never truly rested well upon my shoulders. And so I shrugged.

By the time I finally read the Book of Mormon five years later, I was no one's golden boy. Years of sabotaging every gift I'd been given and obliterating every line I'd ever drawn in the sand (as if to say "Here's the limit to how far I can fall") had left me without hope. One of the profound moments of my life was hearing what I understood to be the voice and laughter of Satan in my head, saying, *Gotcha! You've rejected every good thing that has ever come into your life. You couldn't make a good choice if you tried.*

I've shared in a past editorial how through the grace of an aunt and uncle, and the magic of living with their loving family, I was slowly able to challenge the taunt of that voice, to prove it wrong and make good choices again. One of those choices was finally to read the Book of Mormon.

It was there that I met Alma the younger and the sons of Mosiah. They were me. And in their transformation, I found hope for my own. *Maybe I, too, can be a person of worth again.*

**I** VE read dozens of commentaries on the Book of Mormon's weakness as narrative—how, if it is fiction, it's pretty formulaic stuff. Nephi, Laman and Lemuel, Alma, Ammon, and the other sons of Mosiah—they're pretty one-dimensional, not very interesting as characters go, arche-

types more than depictions of genuine human beings. And I agree. But I'll always be grateful for my encounter with those poorly drawn people. I'll never be able to deny how, toward the end of my mission, I was blessed to experience what the Book of Mormon says of Ammon and his brothers: that "they were desirous that salvation should be declared to every creature, for they could not bear that any human soul should perish; yea, even the very thoughts that any soul should endure endless torment did cause them to quake and tremble" (Mosiah 28:3). In those final days, I came to experience what the Book of Mormon says of Nephi: that "the fullness of [his] intent" being a desire to call all persons to God (1 Nephi 6:4).

**M** ANY voices, some in the letters on the preceding several pages, have begun to use recent DNA studies as decisive grounds to declare their own version of Nietzsche's "death of God"—in this case, we could say, the death of Nephi. When understood in proper context, however, Nietzsche's declaration was really about the death of an *image of God*, an understanding of God that modernity had surely shown to be inadequate, even harmful. For those who had ears to hear, Nietzsche was announcing an opportunity for human beings to re-think, re-value, re-imagine. "How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers?" he asks of those who through study and faith in modernity have killed God. "Must not we ourselves become gods simply to appear worthy of it? There has never been a greater deed; and whoever is born after us—for the sake of this deed he will belong to a higher history than all history hitherto."<sup>1</sup>

Given my experiences with the Book of Mormon, Nephi still lives for me. After all my reading and reflection through the years, I haven't fully decided if he and the others described in the Book of Mormon ever really lived, ever drew real breath; I simply know that they gave life to me and that at times, they've taken my breath away.

Killing Nephi is no light matter. As I've pondered and continue to ponder this act, I recognize that I am on holy ground. Is what I would offer as justification for my deed something that would serve as a higher truth for those who come after me?

I'm on a sacred journey with Nephi and company. I feel no need to rush to the end. 🙏

## NOTE

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Walter Kaufmann, trans. (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 3: 125, 181.



# CORNUCOPIA

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No other name . . .

## WE GIVE HER A NAME

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

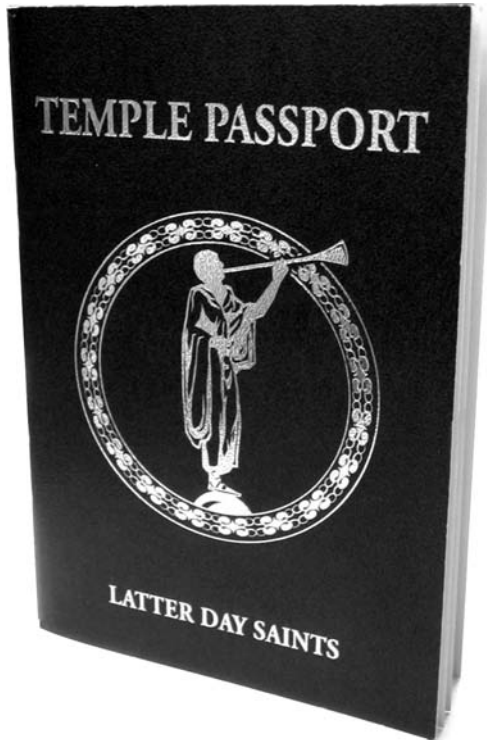
Except at church. Sister Nielsen went to church. Most people just called me Michelle, but behind that, I was still Sister Nielsen to them. Once a visitor to the Gospel Doctrine class I was teaching introduced herself saying, "I picked your class because my name is Michelle Nielsen." "Oh," I said, "Mine's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

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

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

All-seeing eye

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

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

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

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

MICHELLE VAN TASSELL  
Arlington, Virginia

Cybersaints

## SCRIPTURES R US

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

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

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

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

Faith-promoting accessoriesHOW MANY SENINES WOULD YOU  
PAY FOR THIS WATCH?

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Curioser and Curioser.

NETMO  
*Archives of the Archons*  
Sanpete County

Oh, say what it truth?

## ACCURACY AND THE BIBLE: A REFLECTION

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

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

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

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

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

W. M. DEMANDANTE  
Colorado Springs, Colorado

*Twenty years ago in SUNSTONE*

## SYMBOL AND PROMISE

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

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

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

### *Rise and shout*

## BARBIE CHEERS FOR THE BLUE AND THE WHITE



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

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

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

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# FAMILY

## A PLAY IN TWO ACTS

By Eric Samuelsen



### CHARACTERS

#### *The Hull Family*

CRAIG HULL . . . also DAD, early fifties.  
 MELINDA HULL . . . also MOM, in her late forties  
 ASHLEY HULL JARVIS . . . 27, newly married  
 DEANNA HULL . . . 24, R.M., in graduate school  
 JACK HULL . . . 19, on a mission  
 CARLA HULL . . . 16, in high school

#### *And, the Visiting Teachers*

SISTER DAWES  
 SISTER SWANSON

### CAST

*Family* was first presented by the Brigham Young University Department of Theatre and Film in the Margetts Theatre, 2–19 March 2005. It was directed by David Morgan.

The original cast was:

CRAIG HULL . . . Ward Wright  
 MELINDA HULL . . . Tracey Woolley  
 ASHLEY HULL JARVIS . . . Hollie Bellows  
 DEANNA HULL . . . Renny Richmond  
 JACK HULL . . . Slate Holmgren  
 CARLA HULL . . . Michelle L. Hales  
 SISTER DAWES . . . Denise Cutliff  
 SISTER SWANSON . . . Bryn M. Fairclough

### AUTHOR'S NOTE

**Y**EARS AGO, I wrote *Accommodations*, a play about a somewhat dysfunctional LDS family where maybe one or two finally get their act together. In early 2003, I decided to experiment with a play about a more functional family, one in which the whole family is the protagonist. My own kids are becoming adults, ready to be out on their own, and I'm discovering that it is at this point that a family is really forced to redefine itself. So I thought I'd create a more positive family and focus on issues in LDS culture which could unsettle such a family.

We Latter-day Saints idealize families and family values, yet we don't often write about them very realistically. So I set up this play about people who pretty much feel they're ideal. They've decided who they are, they're settled, happy as is, finished thinking about themselves. But they don't realize that in order to move toward being Gods, which is the whole point, they have to constantly reinvent themselves, be reborn, re-think, re-decide.

And so the Hull family gets unsettled by real life, which of course includes disagreeing on trivial as well as important matters, getting on each other's nerves, giving no respect nor privacy, not letting anyone get away with posturing and pretentiousness, and yet somehow muddling through crises and coping with mistakes.

In *Family*, real life becomes a bad weekend for the well-educated, intellectual, gospel-grounded, well-to-do Hull family. One daughter has left her husband (whom she may or may not really have shot), a son has left his mission early, and another daughter, an R.M., has left graduate school. Not exactly ideal. And their dark space monologues reveal the reality they're in that they don't want to tell anyone and almost can't speak. Even the parents who burn the roast or buy the wrong salad have to re-decide who they are and what they mean to each other as individuals and within the family unit.

—ERIC SAMUELSEN

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ERIC SAMUELSEN, Ph.D., is head of playwriting and screenwriting at BYU, where he has been on the faculty since 1992. This is his third play published in SUNSTONE (Gadianton, July 2001; Accommodations, June 1994). Sixteen of his plays have been produced professionally, and fundraising is underway for one, Peculiarities, to be turned into a film.



## NOTE ON SCRIPT

A note about notation. In this play, a dash (—) indicates an interrupted line. An ellipsis (. . .) should suggest a pause, a line trailing off.

## NOTE ON LOCATION

The play takes place in the Hull home, in San Jose, California. The time is late January 2003.

## ACT ONE

*Friday night and Saturday*

*(As the play opens, we see each of the members of the HULL family in spotlight pools. The music is Collective Soul: "I Tremble for Your Love, Always." DAD is reading a book, ASHLEY is dancing wildly, CARLA more wildly, DEANNA most wildly of all. JACK dances uncomfortably, sedately. MOM watches them all, troubled. As the song ends, lights up on the HULL living room. Sofa, coffee table, a bookcase, a piano. It's very nice. Off left is the kitchen and off right, the family room and other bedrooms and bathrooms. What we can see of both are very nice. Up some stairs is the master bedroom and two other bedrooms. All exceptionally nice, we gather, though we can't see them. Outside the HULL living room are a few Dark Spaces, poorly lit, barely visible. Lights up on MOM in her Dark Space.)*

MOM: *(On a phone.)* Craig. Pick up. Pick up! No, I've already left a . . . Craig! You've got to come home, they just called from Jack's mission, they don't know where he is. *(Pause.)* I mean they don't know where he is. He's not with his companion, he's not anywhere they can—.

DAD: *(Enters his Dark Space on a cell phone, dialogue overlapping.)* AWOL? *(Pause.)* Because, you see, when you say he's AWOL, that implies a certain . . . *(Pause.)* Yes, President Garman, I am fully aware of the meaning of the acronym AWOL, which I would remind you is a military term, implying—.

MOM: *(Pushes a button on her phone.)* Sister Swanson, I'm just telling you what they told me, he apparently ditched his—.

DAD: My point is, President, I could be in San Diego in. . . *(Pause.)* No, look, I believe there are flights every two hours,

if not, I could drive it in about six. . . .

MOM: *(Phone.)* No, I still haven't heard anything. *(Pause.)* That really isn't necessary, Joan. *(Pause.)* Well, of course, but I don't want to be a . . . hang on, I've got a call on another line. . . . *(Pushes button on phone.)*

DEANNA: *(In her Dark Space, on a phone.)* Mom. Hi, it's me, Deanna. Uh, listen, I'm wondering if I could come home after all. School is, um . . . would that be all right?

DAD: *What?!?!?!?!?*

MOM: I just got off the phone with her, she called from one of those inflight phone—.

DAD: She's on a plane heading home *today*? *(Cell phone rings.)* Hang on, this might be—. *(Pushes button on phone.)* Craig Hull.

MOM: *(Pushes button on line.)* Joan, I do appreciate your concern, but. . .

DAD: *(On phone.)* So you're saying he *did* communicate with you?

MOM: I honestly do think that we. . .

DAD: Yes, all right, it's cryptic, but it would imply, would it not, that he's on his way here, home?

MOM: Yes, I suppose so. Come, I don't know what I'll have you do, but . . . Hang on. *(Pushes button on her phone.)* Bishop?

DAD: Yes, I'll certainly call you. *(Pushes a button on his phone, looks at it.)* Great, a message.

ASHLEY: *(In her Dark Space, on phone.)* Listen, Dad, I'm calling your cell because the home line's been busy. I'm just going to say this, I've left Steve, it's permanent, I'm coming home, I'll explain it all later. Look if you get this, can you pick me up? My flight arrives at, uh, three fifty-five, American Airlines, flight one eight nine. I'll wait by the baggage pickup, and if you're not there, I'll, I don't know, grab a cab. Something.

MOM: *What?!?!?!?*

DAD: You can hear it yourself.

MOM: And she left this just now? Today?

DAD: You can hear it yourself.

MOM: Unbelievable.

DAD: It's just an hour after Deanna's flight comes in, I'll get 'em both, I guess.

MOM: Ashley, *too*? *Today*?

DAD: It would seem so.

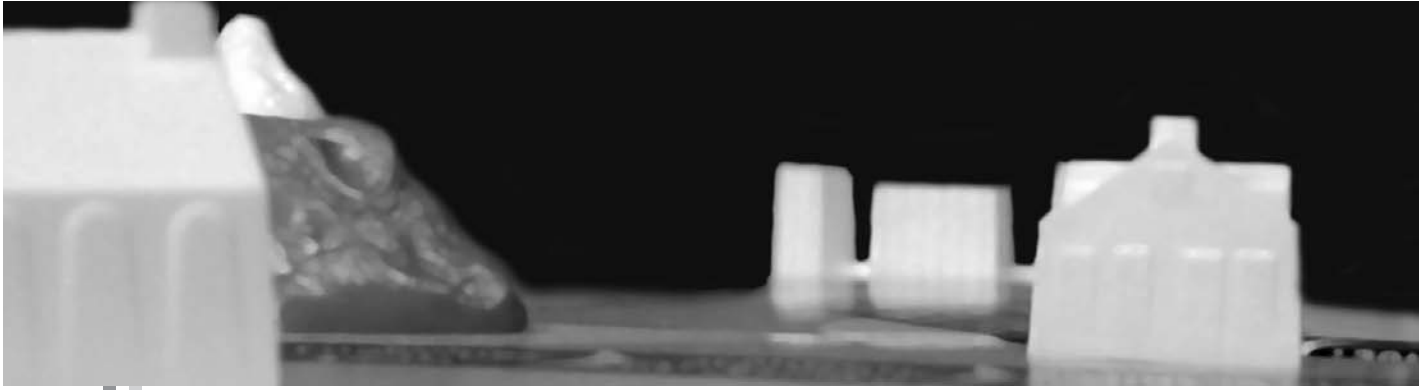
MOM: While you're out there, check on flights to San Diego.

DAD: I think he's coming home.  
MOM: What did they tell you?  
DAD: Apparently, he did communicate with them, left a message on the mission phone. Two words.  
MOM: What did it say?  
DAD: "I quit." (*Pause. DAD's cell rings. MOM jumps, then notices she's holding a phone.*)  
MOM: I forgot, I've got the bishop on hold. (*Pushes a button.*)  
Hi, Bishop, I'm so sorry, it's been quite the . . .  
DAD: (*Answers phone.*) Craig Hull.  
JACK: (*In his Dark Space, on phone.*) Dad, this is Jack. I'm at the airport. I'm home. (*Utterly depressed, he sits on his bag.*) I don't want to talk about it.  
MOM: No, we don't know anything.  
DAD: (*Cups phone, whispers.*) We do now.  
(*Lights up on DEANNA and JACK in separate Dark Spaces. MOM and DAD exit.*)

DEANNA: Jack!  
JACK: Deanna?  
DEANNA: Jack. What in the world are you doing here?  
JACK: I don't wanna talk about it.  
DEANNA: You're supposed to be in San Diego, on your—.  
JACK: I don't wanna talk about it.  
DEANNA: Did you get sent home?  
JACK: Dad'll be here soon. I just wanna tell everyone once, okay?  
DEANNA: Whatever. (*Pause.*) Dude, what did you *do*?  
JACK: Deanna. . . .  
DEANNA: I mean, seriously, what did you—.  
JACK: Aren't you supposed to be in Rhode Island? (*Pause.*)  
DEANNA: I don't wanna talk about it.  
JACK: What, did you flunk out?  
DEANNA: Shut up. (*They look anywhere but at each other.*)  
JACK: So, Dad's picking you up too, huh? Great.  
DEANNA: We're supposed to keep an eye out for Ashley, too.  
JACK: *Ashley*? Seriously?  
DEANNA: Something about her leaving Steve.  
JACK: No!  
DEANNA: I don't know anything more.  
JACK: Man.  
DEANNA: Yeah.  
JACK: Mom's freaking out, you know she is.  
DEANNA: Yup.  
(*Lights down on them, up on the rest of house, doorbell rings, DAD sprints in, carrying his shoes.*)

DAD: Honey, they're here.  
MOM: (*Dashing down the stairs with an armload of fitted sheets, blankets.*) Why I ever agreed to let them come today of all days. . . . (*Shouts.*) Carla! (*Scurrying.*)  
DAD: They're at the door.  
MOM: I just have to. . . . (*And she's gone.*)  
DAD: (*Slapping pockets.*) Keys, glasses, wallet. (*Checks the wallet.*) Honey? (*Doorbell rings again.*) Honey?  
MOM: (*Off.*) Carla!  
DAD: Look, do you have any cash?  
MOM: (*Sprinting back on.*) I got it, I got it! (*Shouting upstairs.*)

Carla! (*To DAD.*) What?  
DAD: Cash?  
MOM: Don't you have your checkbook?  
DAD: Airport parking.  
MOM: Purse. (*DAD heads up the stairs. MOM does one quick dash around the living room.*) On the way, I need you to stop at the store and—.  
DAD: I know, I know.  
MOM: (*Shouts upstairs.*) Craig? (*Shouts downstairs.*) Carla? (*Sigh of frustration. Then, big smile, opens the door.*) They found him, he's okay.  
SISTER SWANSON: Seriously? Oh, Melinda—.  
SISTER DAWES: That's wonderful news!  
MOM: Craig's going to get him now.  
SISTER SWANSON: That's got to be such a relief.  
SISTER DAWES: Absolutely.  
MOM: It really is.  
SISTER DAWES: Get him where?  
MOM: The airport. Jack called us from San Jose Airport.  
SISTER DAWES: So he's here, in San Jose?  
MOM: Yes.  
SISTER SWANSON: Well.  
SISTER DAWES: Thank heavens, he's fine.  
SISTER SWANSON: (*Another awkward pause.*) Do you know anything, what happened?  
MOM: We don't really know much at this point.  
SISTER DAWES: But you do know he's okay, he isn't hurt or . . . anything?  
DAD: (*Enters.*) Honey, I couldn't find. . . . Oh, hi.  
SISTER DAWES: Brother Hull.  
DAD: Hello, sisters.  
SISTER SWANSON: It sound like you've had some good news.  
DAD: It's been a great relief. Good of you to come by.  
SISTER DAWES: We had to. When we heard.  
DAD: Yes indeed, very much appreciated. Melinda, did you need me to. . . ?  
MOM: Just while you're out, something to go with the roast tonight.  
DAD: There wasn't cash in your. . . . Never mind, I'll hit an ATM. Pasta salad, maybe, rolls?  
MOM: Something suitable for company. The pasta salad, uh. . . . (*Lots of head and eye gestures.*)  
DAD: (*Not sure, but okay.*) Right. (*He exits, out the door. Another awkward pause.*)  
MOM: I do appreciate you being here for us, today.  
SISTER DAWES: It's just pure chance we happened to call.  
SISTER SWANSON: I was just calling to set up our usual visit, and I catch you in the middle of this, uh . . .  
SISTER DAWES: Well, we obviously had to come by. We're just five minutes away, it was no trouble.  
MOM: No.  
SISTER SWANSON: But at least the news is good. That's what's important.  
MOM: Yes.  
SISTER DAWES: Not much to do but wait, I suppose.  
MOM: No.



A

**pparently, he did communicate with them, left a message on the mission phone. Two words: "I quit."**

SISTER SWANSON: Well. Perhaps we should begin our usual . . .  
(*With a look at SISTER DAWES.*)

SISTER DAWES: It's really up to you, Melinda. Do you want a lesson? Company?

MOM: As a matter of fact, just some company would be welcome.

SISTER DAWES: Not a problem.

SISTER SWANSON: Well, I can only just imagine what you've been going through. Every single day that Charlie was out, I worried.

SISTER DAWES: I remember that.

SISTER SWANSON: I knew Australia was safe enough. But you know how it is, he's still your child, and he's on the other side of the world.

MOM: That's exactly right. I mean, Jack's been in San Diego, six hours drive.

SISTER SWANSON: But you worry. Every day.

MOM: Exactly.

SISTER DAWES: And you've been through it once, with Deanna.

MOM: That's right.

SISTER DAWES: Well. Why don't you catch us up? How's Deanna? I notice she didn't come home for Christmas.

MOM: None of the kids did this year, actually. Well, Jack is on his mission, of course. . . .

SISTER SWANSON: Of course.

MOM: Yes. (*Pause.*) No, Steve and Ashley spent the holidays with his family this year, in Montana. And Deanna . . . wasn't able to make it either.

SISTER DAWES: What a shame. To spend Christmas alone.

MOM: She felt she needed to work, she had a chance to pick up some extra shifts. (*Explaining further.*) The institute at Brown

had a special Christmas celebration together, so she was with friends.

SISTER DAWES: Brown is where, I know you told us, but. . . ?

MOM: Rhode Island.

SISTER SWANSON: That's right. And what was her field again?

MOM: An odd field, actually. Brown's one of the few schools in the country to offer a grad program in it. History of mathematics.

SISTER DAWES: Wow. History and Math. That sounds so . . . daunting.

MOM: Well, it's what she loves.

SISTER SWANSON: Still, I'm sure you missed her.

MOM: Yes. (*Another pause.*) Listen, sisters, I do appreciate you coming. (*She stands.*)

SISTER SWANSON: Well, we just thought it was the least we could do.

SISTER DAWES: But we mustn't outstay our welcome either. Joan, perhaps we should . . .

SISTER SWANSON: (*Gets it.*) Oh, yes. I'm sorry, of course.

MOM: Thanks so much, as always.

SISTER DAWES: Well, what's important is that Jack is safe. That's what matters.

MOM: Yes. That's true.

(*The SISTERS prepare to leave. Enter CARLA.*)

SISTER SWANSON: And here's Carla.

MOM: Carla. Jack's okay, he just called Dad from the airport.

CARLA: That's a relief.

MOM: It really is.

CARLA: What happened?

MOM: We don't know. Just that's he's okay, your dad's gone to get him.

CARLA: Man. Scary day, huh. Hey, Sister Dawes.

SISTER DAWES: I was hoping you'd say hello. (*She gives CARLA a hug.*) Are you okay?

CARLA: A little freaked out is all.

SISTER DAWES: We were all a little freaked out.

CARLA: So, Mom, did you need something?

MOM: It's okay, honey.

CARLA: I was at a place I couldn't save.

MOM: It's fine, honey. (*With a hint of steel.*) No reason you shouldn't play video games on a day like today.

CARLA: I figured you'd tell me if there was something I could do.



SISTER DAWES: So what were you playing, Carla?

CARLA: *Final Fantasy Ten.*

SISTER SWANSON: Oh, a video game? *(Kidding around with her.)*

Not one of those violent ones, I hope.

CARLA: Well, it's more an RPG than an FPS, but you can quest online, too; and that can get kinda deathmatch. It's not, you know, *Quake* or like *Halo*, but it's still pretty sick.

MOM: *(Quick save.)* She's doing a paper for school on role playing games.

CARLA: Uh, yeah. Um . . . ?

MOM: It's fine, honey.

CARLA: Okay. Hey, what were those calls about?

MOM: Letting the rest of the family know what's going on.

CARLA: Okay. I just thought I heard Dad swearing when he hung up that last—

MOM: But you didn't. Did you?

CARLA: Whatever. *(To the SISTERS.)* Good to see you. *(She exits.)*

SISTER DAWES: She's growing up so fast.

MOM: Yes, she is.

SISTER DAWES: And she's a Laurel now. I so miss the Young Women.

SISTER SWANSON: And she's doing well in school?

MOM: Yes. Carla, thank heavens, is doing fine.

*(Sisters exit. MOM stands, irresolute, checks her watch, leaves. ASHLEY to her Dark Space.)*

ASHLEY: So it's over. I still can't believe it. You get so used to it, married, a married woman. My husband this, my husband that. And now it's over. I dated so many guys, I know at the reception, they were all, why him? I mean, like: him? So of course now I'm beating myself up; why, when I knew all along we had nothing in common. I mean, outdoorsy Steve, and me. I met Steve at the Los Gatos REI, for heaven's sake. He hits on me, we start dating, and, you know, he took me nice places, museums, concerts, movies. And hikes, but I figured I could be a good sport and do the outdoors thing once in awhile, especially after I made him take me to see *The Vagina Monologues* in San Francisco, which he was a very good sport about. I mean, he's hunting-camping-fishing, while I'm your basic clothes, hair, and nails kinda girly girl, but, so, opposites attract, and he promised me, *promised*, that we wouldn't live in Missoula forever. I took him at his word. And there were times we were great together.

**T**hen, when I shot him, you wouldn't believe the whining.

*(She steps out of the Dark Space into living room.*

*Lights come up on the living room where DEANNA, JACK, and CARLA are now standing, suitcases on the floor, MOM and DAD sitting on the sofa.)*

DEANNA: So it was just about Missoula?

CARLA: I mean, news flash, Ashley hates Montana. We *did* get your emails, Ash.

JACK: Do they even have a mall?

ASHLEY: Southgate Mall, with a Gap and an Eddie Bauer and the Maurice's I worked at, so not so bad.

JACK: You said you liked your boss.

ASHLEY: Brenda was terrific. She was a great buyer, and her husband is outdoorsy too, so we could commiserate. In fact, I've got to email her, let her know I'm fine.

DAD: So what happened?

ASHLEY: Okay, it's time for the deer hunt, which is a very big thing in Missoula. And he and his dad and his brothers, it's this major family thing, every year. And Steve wanted me to come along.

DAD: You shoot?

ASHLEY: I learned. Seriously, there's this shooting range, and I actually got pretty good, though it's death on your nails. So, up the mountain we go, me and Steve and his Dad and Larry and Bronco.

DEANNA: Bronco?

ASHLEY: Gives you pause? His real name's Brad, you met him at the reception. So there we are, up this mountain, and they say, I haven't been blooded; I haven't shot my first deer yet. So they tell me they'll find me this spot, sort of overlooking this ravine, and they'll drive a deer my direction, it'll be an easy shot. And I'm thinking, okay, I eat beef, veal even, still, I'm *not* shooting Bambi. So I'm primed to miss on purpose,

take some gentle ribbing, and get back off the mountain to a hot bath and aroma therapy. And so I wait for a deer to come by so I can miss it. And I waited—seven and a half hours.

JACK: Snipe hunt.

ASHLEY: Is that what it's called? Finally, I get a clue, spend another two hours clodding down the mountain in these new astoundingly ugly Birkenstocks Steve got for me. I'm exhausted, I'm famished, I finally find the camp, and they're all settled around the fire. And they thought it was *so* funny.

JACK: They put you through a snipe hunt.

DAD: I don't think it's funny.

ASHLEY: No it's not.

DAD: Someone with no outdoors training or experience, alone on the side of a mountain, with a hunting rifle she barely knows how to use. Completely irresponsible.

ASHLEY: Well, all right then. 'Cause Steve told me I was overreacting. He said I was just being hysterical.

MOM: Did he?

DAD: It's abusive, it's wrong.

MOM: Sure, if that's what—?

ASHLEY: Then, when I shot him, you wouldn't believe the whining. (*They all pause, stare at her.*) In the hand. It didn't even require a lot of stitches. (*Another pause. Then DEANNA laughs. After a second, the others join her.*)

DEANNA: You did *not*.

ASHLEY: I did. I shot him.

DEANNA: You are such a liar.

ASHLEY: Deanna—.

DEANNA: Okay, Tim McCormack, remember him? You told us he'd run the lawn mower over his foot, cut his whole foot off? I cried for two days, 'cause I really liked him, and you knew it, and now he was gonna be amputee boy. Church that Sunday, he's walking around fine, he'd taken a little skin off one of his toes.

ASHLEY: Okay, I know what you're—.

DEANNA: Mark Martinez, remember, his "drug overdose?" Which turned out to be Tylenol? Tina Higginbotham, remember that bogus story about her getting pregnant? And that's not even counting the stories you told about yourself.

JACK: Remember the time I was supposed to have blown up the school chem lab?

MOM: I remember that one.

DEANNA: You didn't shoot Steve. Get real.

ASHLEY: I did, though. (*Skeptical looks all around.*) Okay, I didn't, you know, shoot him. Lethally. You know that little web, like between your forefinger and thumb? I got him there, just took a little skin off. (*Pause.*) The gun went off, I was holding it, the bullet got him in the hand. For real.

DAD: Ashley, you'll understand that we're still a trifle skeptical.

ASHLEY: I know. I've, like, cried wolf, in the past and stuff. Still. I'm telling the truth here.

DAD: Then I need to know something, honey. Couple things, I guess. Is Steve all right?

ASHLEY: He's fine. Like I said, it just grazed him.

DAD: Are you in trouble, legally?

MOM: Craig . . .

DAD: I'm just asking. Have criminal charges been filed?

ASHLEY: No, there aren't—.

DAD: Is it possible they could be filed?

ASHLEY: Dad. Steve's not going to file a complaint.

DAD: You know this?

ASHLEY: I do. We've talked about it. He's fine. We're fine. (*Defiantly.*) It just means he never wants to see me again. And that's fine with me.

CARLA: The snipe hunt would have ended it for me.

DEANNA: Amen.

DAD: Ashley. Honey. (*He has her attention.*) I need to say this, and I hope you're listening. If you're telling the truth, and you can see we're still unconvinced of it—.

MOM: To put it mildly.

DAD: Right. But if you are, you discharged a firearm aimed at your husband. Whether he's badly injured or not, or whether or not there's a criminal complaint, that's a very serious matter, and one that has me concerned about you in ways I've never been concerned before. Do you understand me?

ASHLEY: I do, Dad. (*Pause.*) It was an accident. I stumbled, the gun went off. That's all. I thought the safety was on. It wasn't. (*Another pause.*)

MOM: All right, then.

DEANNA: Ash, you know, the snipe hunt thing, that was rotten of him, okay. But then you make up these stories, and you do this, you really do, you think because you're cute and all you can get away with murder—.

CARLA: Or attempted murder.

DEANNA: I mean, you didn't check the safety? I don't anything about guns, and I know that you—.

MOM: We don't have to talk about this.

DEANNA: All I'm saying—.

MOM: (*With a hint of steel.*) We don't have to talk about this. Not now. (*Pause.*)

DAD: I would like to talk to you about this again later, though. Perhaps just the two of us.

ASHLEY: Okay. (*Another pause.*)

DAD: (*Awkwardly.*) Well. It sounds like we all have a lot to talk about. Beyond just hearing Ashley's story, I think it would—.

DEANNA and JACK: Not tonight.

DAD: Okay.

MOM: Craig? (*At a loss.*) Fine. Dinner's served. Pot roast, everyone? (*Some weakly positive ad libs.*) And pasta salad? (*Even more weakly positive ad libs.*)

(ASHLEY, JACK, DEANNA, AND CARLA exit.  
*Light shift suggests passage of time. MOM collapses on the sofa. After a moment, DAD joins her. Long pause.*)

MOM: None of them liked that pasta salad.

DAD: Oh. (*Pause.*) It's a family favorite.

MOM: No, you and Carla like it. That was what I was trying to signal you, just before you left.

DAD: Oh. (*Pause.*) They choked it down.

MOM: Yeah, well, the alternative was overcooked pot roast, so . . .

DAD: Once Ashley's flight was delayed, there wasn't much we could—

MOM: I know. *(Pause.)* Real overcooked pot roast.

DAD: They choked it down.

MOM: Yes. *(Pause.)* Barely. *(They share a brief chuckle.)* You're so subtle you know, just quietly getting up, handing out the steak knives.

DAD: Well, I think the chain saw's out of gas. *(Another chuckle. Another pause.)*

MOM: I was just thinking. Five years ago. Next month.

DAD: I know exactly what you're going to say.

MOM: That twenty-four hours. I still remember, Dr. Seitz saying, you know, inoperable cancer, three months tops, get your affairs in order. He pronounced you, basically. And then the bishop did the same.

DAD: I took great comfort in that blessing.

MOM: Well, it was not a "rise and walk from your bed" kind of blessing. It was more like, "Brother Hull, go to the light!"

DAD: That's *not* what he said, and that's not all he said. I appreciated that blessing. It was a good blessing. *(Pause. Then, brief chuckle.)* All except for the "you're going to die" part. *(They laugh together briefly.)*

MOM: Thank heavens for second opinions. Dr. Holdman.

DAD: I love Dr. Holdman.

MOM: Oh, me too. Sweetest word in the English language. "Misdiagnosis."

DAD: It's actually a word of Greek derivation, *gnosis* suggesting knowledge, while—

MOM: Good to know. But that twenty-four hours, before we saw him, when I knew, absolutely *knew* that you were going to be gone. The worst day of my life.

DAD: Until today.

MOM: Until today.

DAD: Strike one, strike two, strike three. Hat trick. If you'll pardon the mixed sport metaphor. *(He sighs.)* It's not as though we weren't warned.

MOM: No.

DAD: Deanna deciding to not come home for Christmas, for starters, and her emails explaining it. Too cryptic and too positive; they always struck a false note. And Ashley. . .

MOM: The calls.

DAD: At least twice a week, she'd call home.

MOM: Griping about Missoula.

DAD: Or Steve.

MOM: I don't think she's called home since August.

DAD: We've talked to her, every week.

MOM: Because *we've* called *her* on her cell. Has she called us once?

DAD: No. *(Pause.)* I thought she was adjusting. I thought her having Christmas in Missoula was a positive sign.

MOM: Me, too.

DAD: And Jack.

MOM: And Jack. *(Pause.)* He looks so thin.

DAD: He looks all right.

MOM: Thin and pale and exhausted.

DAD: All things considered, I think he looks fine.

MOM: I suppose.

DAD: All right, today was shocking. Admittedly. But we can't pretend we didn't know he was struggling. President Garman kept us well apprised.

MOM: Health, he said he was having health issues.

DAD: That's what I was saying. *(Pause.)*

MOM: So that is it, right, his health? He was sick, and he finally decided to come home.

DAD: I'm assuming.

MOM: You didn't talk to him about it?

DAD: He was so down, honey. I didn't have the heart to press him. Nor, I noticed, did you.

MOM: No. *(A pause.)* And then you bring home pasta salad.

DAD: As I recall, they also hate my biscuits and gravy. Got that for breakfast! *(They chuckle over this.)* At least Ashley would talk about it.

MOM: Oh, yeah. Ashley was just a . . . flood of information. Do you think she really shot him?

DAD: Typical Ashley, wasn't it, the big shocking announcement, then quickly backing down? Tomorrow, or the next day, she'll come to one of us and tell us the truth of things. Or some version thereof.

MOM: Sounds about right. *(Pause.)* You know the biggest mistake we ever made with her? Sixteen years old, paying for cheerleaders' camp.

DAD: I've often thought the same.

MOM: *(Starts to get up.)* Hey, in the car home?

DAD: What about it?

MOM: Okay, Jack was down, the others weren't ready or whatever. Did you talk? At all?

DAD: We talked. A pleasant chat. *(Another pause.)* Interesting word, chat; one suspects a French origination, something to do with yowling cats, but, no, it's Anglo-Saxon, I believe, derived from chatter, which was originally a descriptive verb akin to twitter, describing bird—

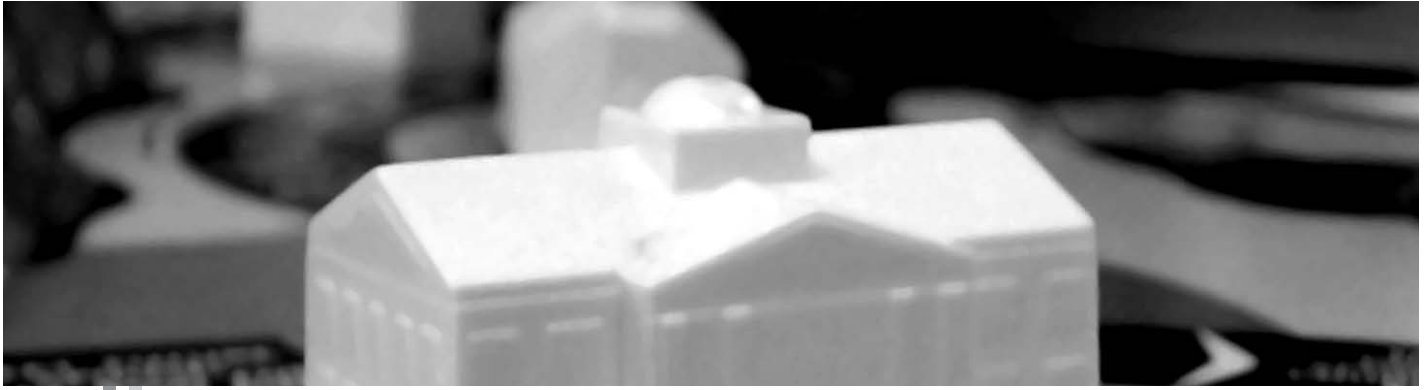
MOM: *(Oh so patiently trying again.)* Is there information that was communicated to you that you might want to, you know, pass on?

DAD: We talked about the Sharks.

MOM: You talked hockey? Today?

DAD: It seemed to me that the alternative was to not talk at all. *(They exit. DEANNA steps into her Dark Space.)*

DEANNA: It wasn't a guy. The guys at Brown are . . . they all drink exotic coffees and smoke exotic weed and listen to bands like Modest Mouse and Pailhead, and Dandy Warhols. Like, White Stripes is too mainstream for them. Besides, you sort of don't date at Brown. You arrange to, like, sort of decide you're both going to be at the same place at the same time. And then the idea is you hook up, sort of drift effortlessly into a sexual encounter. Like, "not that it's important, but, whaddya say, do you wanna?" . . . The boxes got smaller and smaller: Californian, straight, a virgin, a Mormon. And show some, you know, enthusiasm for the subject matter, and you get all this bored East Coast attitude. Enthusiasm, a word Greek in origin, meaning possessed by a god, prophetic or poetic frenzy. *Enthousiasmos.*



W

ell, it was not a “rise and walk from your bed” kind of blessing. It was more like, “Brother Hull, go to the light!”

*(Sarcastically.)* Yeah, if I'd really had that goin' on, I'da been all right. Anyway. So. Even half-stoned, listening to Portishead, I remained *virgo intacta*. No, it definitely wasn't a guy.

JACK: Dee, I went to those kinds of parties too, but—

*(DEANNA steps out of her Dark Space, confronts JACK who has entered the living room.)*

DEANNA: I didn't inhale and it didn't get me high, instead it nearly choked me and I will really never do that again, ever.

JACK: I don't want to know about it.

DEANNA: But I wanted you to know. Baby brother.

JACK: Well, I'm so proud of you. You only smoked pot. Boy, that's sticking to your standards, sis, way to go.

DEANNA: Bite me.

JACK: Seriously, you're on drugs? An R.M.?

DEANNA: I'm not on drugs, okay? I smoked grass once, it was no big deal.

JACK: It's a big deal!

DEANNA: I gave into peer pressure, I'm a weak person, get off my case. At least I managed an entire mission, and not a third of one.

JACK: That's a low blow.

DEANNA: So is you overreacting.

JACK: Peer pressure? A guy, right?

DEANNA: It was not a guy, I'm still a maiden, you're a churl for asking, and I'm not talking about it.

JACK: Well, that's a relief.

DEANNA: Whatever.

JACK: *(Pause.)* Good game last night.

DEANNA: Yeah. *(She decides to let him off the hook.)* I like moving

Graves to second line.

JACK: Me too. And that backhand goal Owen Nolan scored ...

DEANNA: He's so tough in the crease. *(Enter MOM.)* They can say what they want about Robataille, Yzerman, Sakic ...

JACK: Nolan's as good as any of 'em.

DEANNA: Total jerk, though. I bet they traded him.

MOM: Look who's up.

DEANNA: Hi, Mom.

MOM: Hi. *(Nobody speaks.)* So, anyone want some breakfast?

JACK: Omelettes?

MOM: Sure. It's not every day we have all the kids at home.

DEANNA: Mom ...

MOM: What?

DEANNA: We said we didn't want to talk about it.

MOM: *(As they head towards the kitchen.)* I said nothing, I was talking about breakfast. ...

*(They exit. JACK sits alone. Enter CARLA, passes him on her way to the family room.)*

CARLA: Jack.

JACK: Hey, Carla. *(As she heads down.)* What's up?

CARLA: Nothing much.

JACK: Mom and Deanna are doing omelettes for breakfast.

CARLA: Sweet. *(Pause.)*

JACK: Hey, Carla?

CARLA: *(Clearly antsy.)* Yeah.

JACK: How's it going? I mean, you know, it's been—

CARLA: Eight months. Since your farewell.

JACK: So. I saw you playing *Final Fantasy*.

CARLA: Yeah. *(Pause.)* *Ten*, it's sweet.

JACK: Better than *Seven*?

CARLA: *Storyline's* actually not as good as *Seven*, but the graphics are fly, and it's got voicetracks instead of supertitles. And the mini-games are dope, like, instead of those lame chocobo races, you can play this thing called blitzball.

JACK: Who's your character?

CARLA: Guy named Tidus, plus friends, of course, especially this hot, like “summoner” chick called Yuna. Oh, P. S.: the bad guy's name? Sin, I'm totally not kidding.

JACK: The bad guy's called Sin?

CARLA: Is that great? Way better than Shinra Corporation or whatever.

JACK: I may check it out later.

CARLA: Well, good luck, because when I'm not playing, Dad is.



# Y

**ou only smoked pot. Boy,  
that's sticking to your  
standards, sis, way to go.**

JACK: Yeah, I saw that he got the new EA Sports NHL game.

CARLA: Yeah, he, like, plays dynasty mode, which used to piss me off, but then I realized, it's sort of an RPG too, only with sports instead of, like, elves and dwarves and dragons and stuff. Last week he played twenty seasons, took him, like, five hours. It's bad enough to get kicked off by Mom—her one-hour rule. Now Dad wants to hog it.

JACK: Uh, *my* system, right?

CARLA: Well, you're on a mission. Speaking of which. . . ?

JACK: I don't want to talk about it.

CARLA: Hey, you're sitting here, and you want to, like, make friends or something. And you totally freaked me out yesterday.

JACK: I'm sorry.

CARLA: San Diego's a big city, Jack. You coulda been anywhere, you coulda been in an alley somewhere, you coulda been dead. I mean, we were freaked out. I was . . . . (*Emotional, catches herself.*) I'm glad you're back, I'm glad you're safe. But I was thinking about where you could be, and yesterday was way too scary, you know? For you to come home and want to talk hockey and *Final Fantasy* and crap.

JACK: You were scared?

CARLA: Hi, you were lost, in San Diego—

JACK: I'm sorry.

CARLA: So. What happened?

JACK: I'm still not ready to talk about it. (*She turns to go downstairs as DAD enters.*)

CARLA: Whatever.

DAD: Heading for the Playstation? I was sort of hoping, later today—

CARLA: I just want to do one thing fast before breakfast, then I promise, I'll save.

DAD: Okay. (*CARLA's gone.*) Hey, son.

JACK: Dad.

DAD: Good game last night.

JACK: Yeah.

DAD: Love Owen Nolan in the crease.

JACK: Me too. He's kind of a jerk, though. I bet they trade him.

DAD: He's team captain, I think that's most unlikely. Paper?

JACK: Help yourself. (*JACK looks at DAD reading the paper for a moment, then steps into his Dark Space.*) I tried. You can say lots of things, lots of things about what kind of missionary I was, but one thing you cannot say is that I didn't try. I tried so hard. . . . I have eczema on the backs of my hands, groin, and armpits. I can't keep anything down. I have rectal bleeding from colitis, and acid reflux, and blood pressure 170 over 110. And, uh, less pleasant symptoms. The President, my mission president, agreed. I tried. I tried hard. (*Back into the scene.*) Dad?

DAD: Yeah.

JACK: Nothing. Omelettes for breakfast.

DAD: Great.

JACK: (*Abruptly.*) Dad. I tried.

DAD: I know you did, son.

(*Enter ASHLEY.*)

ASHLEY: *Don't* even look at me.

JACK: We won't.

ASHLEY: I'm a total mess, I know. *Don't* even look.

JACK: No.

ASHLEY: So, Daddy, do I call him or what?

DAD: Well . . .

ASHLEY: I wouldn't even come down here looking like this if I didn't really need to know, so seriously, you tell me, I can go either way, do I call him or not?

DAD: Steve?

ASHLEY: Of course, Steve. Do I let him know I'm here all right, safe, like he'd care, so of course I don't, what a dope, I'm divorcing him, but he might be worried too, I would, so let him, who gives a damn, I don't call him, obviously. Let him stew, you're absolutely right. Thanks, Dad.

DAD: You're more than welcome. (*ASHLEY heads off.*) They're making omelettes.

ASHLEY: Looking like *this*? Dad, honestly.

(*She exits. DAD goes back to reading the paper.*)

JACK: Did you understand any of that?

DAD: She's trying to decide just how final this divorce is.

JACK: I thought it was completely final.

DAD: That was yesterday. Comics?

JACK: (*Hands over part of the paper.*) Here.

(*MOM sprints into the room.*)

MOM: Paper away, twenty second clean-up, now. (*DAD and JACK pick things up quickly.*)

DAD: What's going on?

MOM: Visiting teachers.

DAD: They were here yesterday.

MOM: (*Frenetically straightening.*) Don't you know, visiting teaching is more than just one visit a month, no, it's essential you show a personal interest in the families of those you visit teach.

DAD: They heard something.

MOM: My guess, Sister Barnard blabbed. (*JACK leaves. MOM quickly straightens her hair as the doorbell rings, she opens the door.*) Sister Dawes, Sister Swanson. Why you were just here yesterday!

SISTER SWANSON: I'm so sorry.

SISTER DAWES: I know we were here yesterday, we just wanted to stop by.

MOM: It's fine. You're my visiting teachers. Always welcome.

SISTER SWANSON: It's just that . . . with Jack home.

SISTER DAWES: We called, the phone was busy, and we just didn't know—.

SISTER SWANSON: We went back and forth.

SISTER DAWES: If we could be of service, we wanted to be, but—.

SISTER SWANSON: But if you'd rather be alone together, then that's fine, too.

SISTER DAWES: On our way to the library we thought, two minutes, we'll just poke our heads in.

SISTER SWANSON: But I can see, we are intruding, and I'm so sor—.

SISTER DAWES: We want to do what we can. (*CARLA has drifted up, stands behind MOM.*)

MOM: It's really very kind of you. But everything's fine. (*Pause.*)

CARLA: Jack hasn't told us what's up, if that's what you're asking.

SISTER DAWES: Really?

MOM: That's not entirely true. Jack became ill and needed to come home immediately.

SISTER DAWES: Oh my.

SISTER SWANSON: I'm so sorry to hear that.

SISTER DAWES: Is he okay?

SISTER SWANSON: Was he in a hospital, perhaps? In San Diego?

SISTER DAWES: What sort of illness. . . ?

MOM: We have a number of questions ourselves about Jack's situation. His illness does not appear to be . . . life threatening. We expect he'll be back in the field in a couple of weeks.

CARLA: Well, he did leave a message on the mission phone saying "I quit," so I don't think he's planning to go back.

SISTER SWANSON: "I quit?"

MOM: (*Without MOM turning to look at her, we can tell that CARLA*

*is dead meat.*) Yes. As Carla points out, he called the mission and left a short message. That message. "I quit." What we don't know at present is his state of mind when he left it.

SISTER DAWES: No. Of course not. (*Pause.*) Well, we certainly must provide meals.

SISTER SWANSON: I feel so inadequate, a casserole, but if it would be of any help—.

SISTER DAWES: You're surely far too distraught over his illness.

MOM: Not at all, we're managing nicely. Very kind of you to think of meals, but we're fine.

SISTER SWANSON: Now, are you sure this isn't just obligatory "I don't want help" Mormon stubbornness?

SISTER DAWES: It's so hard to ask, I know it is.

MOM: That's really not—.

SISTER DAWES: Sometimes, just not having to deal with dinner can be a big relief.

MOM: Well.

SISTER SWANSON: A little break from the daily grind?

SISTER DAWES: And Melinda. You know my chili taco casserole.

MOM: (*She can practically taste the casserole*) I do. It's awfully tempting.

SISTER SWANSON: Has there ever been a ward potluck when that casserole lasted more than two minutes?

SISTER DAWES: Unless Jack's illness prevents. . . . It is a trifle spicy.

MOM: No. He should be able to handle it just fine.

SISTER DAWES: So, dinner, then? (*Pause.*)

CARLA: You'll need enough for six. Deanna and Ashley are home too.

SISTER SWANSON: Oh, my—.

SISTER DAWES: Goodness.

MOM: Yes. Thank you Carla. Yes, Deanna and Ashley are here to help out. Rallying around. The way families do.

SISTER DAWES: Well, that's very good of them.

SISTER SWANSON: Only what one would expect, of course.

CARLA: Jack doesn't look all that sick to me.

MOM: No. It's quite amazing. I can hardly tell that he's ill at all. But, doctors, you know. Better safe than sorry. Nonetheless, I think perhaps we'll take a rain check on your very kind offer of dinner.

SISTER SWANSON: Certainly.

SISTER DAWES: Of course.

SISTER SWANSON: Anytime.

SISTER DAWES: Please give our best to poor Jack.

SISTER SWANSON: Our prayers are with him.

SISTER DAWES: It's in my freezer, you just say the word.

MOM: Thanks again. And thanks so much for stopping by.

(*Mimes closing a door, with some firmness. Turns.*) Carla!

(*The rest of the family has gathered.*)

CARLA: What?

MOM: There are such things as family secrets. Things we don't just blab out, without any consideration for. . . . You're grounded!

CARLA: What did I say?

MOM: Do you really want us to be the most gossiped about family in the ward? Is that what you want?



DAD: Plus costing us a whole chili casserole all to ourselves.

JACK, DEANNA, and ASHLEY: Seriously?

CARLA: Mom, it's Saturday. Tomorrow, we go to Church.

Everyone will see 'em.

MOM: Yes, they will. They will indeed. And I want things settled before then. So we can tell people the truth and not have to hang our heads. I'm sick of this, this, this, "I don't want to talk about it, I'm not ready" act. Jack, you will tell us why you're home from your mission and what you meant by "I quit," we will decide what to do about it, and you will call the mission president and see what can be done to allow you to go back and finish honorably, and tomorrow, we will tell everyone what the problem is and what we're doing about it, and that's all. And Deanna, same with you. Home from graduate school, nobody just quits graduate school. I give you two days, two days, to get your head back on straight and go back to finish your degree. As for you, Ashley, if you really shot your husband, then, I don't know what to think, but I do know one thing, you can't stay here. Two days for you, too, two days to figure out what you're going to do, and then make a decision and go do it. I've had enough. Talking hockey and not saying anything, I've had it. I've got a nice breakfast in there, and we're going to go eat that nice breakfast, and we're going to say a blessing on the food, and we're going to feel good about saying that blessing on that food! *(They look at her, defiantly. No one says anything.)*

CARLA: I'm up for breakfast. *(Muttered agreement from everyone else. All exit, except MOM and DAD.)*

MOM: *(To DAD.)* Don't you start.

DAD: Not me.

MOM: It's all falling apart. And the kids hate me.

DAD: They don't hate you.

MOM: I just kicked three of 'em out, and grounded Carla.

DAD: They know you didn't mean it.

MOM: I *did* mean it. *(They laugh together briefly.)* What are we going to do?

DAD: We talk.

MOM: No, I know, but what are we going to *do*?

DAD: I don't know.

MOM: They really do hate me.

DAD: No, they don't. *(Pats her shoulder.)* Come on. Let's get some breakfast.

*(Light shift indicates passage of time. ASHLEY, CARLA,*

**I** 'd get anxiety attacks. I mean, I'd feel panicked, and, like, cold sweat, and I felt like I was going to pass out. . . . And it never got better, not even a little.

*JACK, and DEANNA enter from the kitchen where they've just finished breakfast)*

ASHLEY: I just hate it when she acts like that.

JACK: Drives me nuts, I just hate it.

DEANNA: That was what I was dreading, on the plane coming home.

JACK: But she just explodes like that. Dee, Ash, was she always like this, or is she getting worse?

ASHLEY: Oh, you have no idea. Dee, remember that time?

DEANNA: Which one?

ASHLEY: That Halloween, you and me and Rickey—.

DEANNA: Rickey Blake.

CARLA: Was that when you were, like, toilet papering?

ASHLEY: It was totally no big deal, we only had three rolls, we were just hitting like the bishop's house and Sister Whatsis, remember Dee, the Young Women's leader we didn't like?

DEANNA: Sister Jenkinson.

JACK: I didn't know her.

DEANNA: No, they weren't here very long, moved out after about a year.

ASHLEY: Well, Mom totally freaked. It was horrible.

DEANNA: Grounded me for two weeks, you for like a month . . .

ASHLEY: Yeah, 'cause I was driving, and I was, like, the oldest, I should have known better.

DEANNA: And then the next weekend, there was this dance we wanted to go to in that stake in Los Gatos, and she let us go.

ASHLEY: Yeah, well, you were too scared to ask her. I had to for both of us.

DEANNA: But she said yeah.

JACK: What, you do the airhead space cadet act?

ASHLEY: No, that only works on Dad. With Mom, you have to be, like, sincerely repentant. But she let us go.

JACK: Well, listen, it's mostly about me this time, guys. I'm really sorry, home early from a mission, that's just the kind of thing to make her go off.

ASHLEY: I don't know. Blown marriage, home from grad school, we gave her a lot to work with. Let's admit it, guys, our timing all kinda sucked.

DEANNA: Seriously. Next time, let's coordinate a little better, whaddya say?

CARLA: (*Drily.*) There's going to be a next time? (*They all laugh.*)

ASHLEY: Oh sure. It'll be, like, "August, you can't have cancer in August, remember, my nervous breakdown?"

DEANNA: (*Going with it, leafing through an imaginary planner.*) "I'll come out of the closet in November, that'll give you October for your sex change operation."

JACK: "No, October's not good, that's when I'm having my affair." (*They all laugh together again.*)

CARLA: You guys are not setting a very good example.

ASHLEY: Okay, but see, Carla, this way, anything you screw up your whole life, you've got three bad examples to blame it on.

CARLA: I just think this isn't a very healthy dynamic.

DEANNA: What do you mean?

CARLA: What comes next. (*They stare at her.*) Dad comes in, sort of apologizes sort of explains, and he looks all puppy dog, and we all go, oh, great, it's Dad, he's the good guy. And we forgive him, and he's sort of adorable about it. And Mom's the bad guy. And we don't pay much attention, and that's too bad. Because, what if she's right. (*Pause.*)

ASHLEY: (*A little dangerously.*) You're saying she was right to go off on us like that?

CARLA: Well, you know, Jack scared the hell out of us yesterday. And we still don't even know what happened. (*Pause. They all look at JACK.*) I mean it, Jack. You're gonna have to tell eventually.

ASHLEY: I told. No way you get off.

JACK: Okay, fine. (*Pause.*) Tell Mom and Dad to get in here. I'm ready to talk.

CARLA: Okay. (*She exits.*)

JACK: Dee. You're next.

DEANNA: I'm still not ready.

JACK: Yeah, well, neither am I. But I don't get out of it. (*Enter MOM and DAD.*)

MOM: (*As she enters.*) I was working on the dishes.

DAD: Honey, when they're ready . . . (*To JACK. Awkward pause.*) Jack, I understand you have something to tell us?

JACK: Yeah. I guess I do. Look, Mom, Dad. First thing, I'm really sorry. To you all. I just haven't felt ready to talk about things, you know. But Carla, you're right. It's time.

CARLA: (*Under her breath.*) Duh.

JACK: (*Gives her a quick glare, but continues.*) You're probably all wondering if I *did* something, right? That I shouldn't have done?

MOM: Go on.

JACK: I didn't. I didn't break any mission rules, and I didn't do anything I shouldn't have, not until that last day when I broke a whole bunch of rules at once. And I'm not sick, physically. Well, I sort of am, but also not really. (*Pause.*) I just . . . I couldn't do it. I just couldn't do it anymore.

DEANNA: Couldn't do what?

JACK: Any of it. Missionary work. I couldn't go door to door. I couldn't teach people. I just . . . couldn't.

MOM: And why couldn't you? What was wrong?

JACK: Mom, I'd get, I don't know what to call 'em, anxiety attacks. I mean, I'd feel panicked, and, like, cold sweat, and I felt like I was going to pass out. It was all I could think of, just this feeling of terror and panic and . . . and it never got better, not even a little. It got worse.

DAD: We knew all that, of course. Your mission president kept us well apprised.

MOM: You saw a counselor, right?

JACK: President Garman set me up with an LDS psychiatrist.

MOM: President Garman told us. A good LDS counselor who said your condition wouldn't prevent you from serving.

JACK: Right. He said I had something called acute anxiety disorder. But that I could overcome it. Will power, the power of prayer. I just had to want it enough.

DAD: (*Appalled.*) That's what he said?

JACK: Yeah.

DAD: That all you needed was more *will power*? For *acute anxiety disorder*?

JACK: Yeah.

DAD: That's the most appalling . . . that's medical malpractice, I'll have his license for—.

MOM: Craig. (*DAD subsides, though he's still fuming.*) Jack, we knew about the diagnosis, of course—.

DAD: But not his course of treatment!

MOM: Craig. (*DAD mutters to himself.*) We specifically asked President Garman if you could see another doctor, get a second opinion.

JACK: That never happened.

DAD: President Garman told us it did happen. And that the second doctor confirmed the opinion of the first one.

JACK: I went to see another doctor.

DAD: All right.

JACK: I went to see him. I sat in his office, the nurse called my name. I knew that I would see him. I knew what he would say. And I couldn't face it. I booked.

MOM: You left?

JACK: Swore Elder Stokes to secrecy, told the President the second opinion had been the same as the first. I lied, so I could stay on my mission.

DAD: My goodness.

MOM: We didn't know. President Garman told us—.

JACK: He told you what I told him. (*Pause.*) I think the first doctor was right, you know? I've got symptoms, lots of symptoms. I'm not well. But it's all caused by anxiety. I'm actually fine.

DAD: You're actually not fine, son.

JACK: Whatever.

DEANNA: No, you're sick. A treatable illness.

ASHLEY: Acute anxiety disorder.

MOM: With symptoms, physical symptoms.

JACK: I'm a casualty.

DAD: What?

JACK: There was a guy, Elder Bowers. He got ulcers a couple months ago, and had to go home. And President Garman talked it about in zone conference. He said we missionaries, we were at war. A war against evil. And so, you had to expect a few casualties. *(Pause.)* I'm another casualty.

DEANNA: That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard.

JACK: No one came home early from your mission, Dee?

DEANNA: Lots of guys went home early, Jack. They weren't casualties.

JACK: What would you call it?

DEANNA: I'd call it—

MOM: Could we bring it back to yesterday? *(JACK and DEANNA glare at each other.)* Please?

JACK: Yeah, okay. *(Pause.)* I was sitting on a bus, and this rash on my leg, it just started itching.

DAD: President Garman said something about shingles.

JACK: Could be. Anyway I was scratching it. And it was getting painful, you know, like it really started hurting. It was driving me nuts. And I thought about it. Sixteen more months, my leg was going to itch like this. I mean, I had all these other symptoms, and just a freakin' itch. . . . *(Gets control of himself.)* Suddenly, I handed Stokes my backpack, and said "look out for this, would you." And I got off the bus, and he was slow pulling the stop cord, and by the time he musta pulled it, I'd gotten into a cab. I'd just gotten paid, so I had money for a plane ticket. Took a cab to the airport. Stopped on the way to use a pay phone, left a message for the mission president. "I quit." That was the message. "I quit."

DAD: We heard about the message.

JACK: Yeah. *(Pause.)*

CARLA: Shingles. What are shingles, anyway?

DAD: What Jack describes, really, a painful itching rash.

CARLA: And that's what set you off?

JACK: Could be. I don't know.

CARLA: So you're another casualty.

JACK: Yeah.

CARLA: I don't know about you guys, but that seems like a real Nazi thing to say. Casualty? You're not dead.

DAD: I agree, Carla, a very poor choice of words. Well, the whole situation was appallingly handled. Starting with that psychologist.

DEANNA: No kidding.

MOM: The point is. *(They all look at her.)* The point is, you actually are sick. Physically. You really are ill. Getting off a bus like that, it's a nervous breakdown, really.

JACK: Well, something.

MOM: A nervous breakdown. And shingles. My point is, we can tell people you're sick, and it will be nothing but the truth. And when you're well again, I expect you can finish after all.

DEANNA: Mom, not a chance, no way they'd even let him.

MOM: Maybe not. None of us knows the future. My point is, I didn't actually lie to the visiting teachers. I was afraid I wouldn't be able to take the sacrament.

DAD: And you're home. That's what matters.

JACK: Yeah. I guess.

MOM: I just wish you'd told us.

JACK: You would have insisted I come home.

DAD: Son . . .

JACK: You would have. And I was going to stick it out. No way was I giving in.

DEANNA: Yeah, until you had to.

DAD: I do think we need to have you see another counselor.

JACK: Whatever.

DAD: I really do think I'm going to have to insist on it, Jack.

MOM: Absolutely.

JACK: Yeah, okay, we'll see. *(Pause.)*

CARLA: Okay, I think it's time for the farming game.

DEANNA: Okay!

ASHLEY: Not me. Nails won't be dry in time.

DAD: We can wait. I think a little crop failure and incipient bankruptcy may be just what the doctor ordered.

CARLA: You up for it, Jack?

JACK: Yeah. Okay, sure.

MOM: The farming game sounds great.

DEANNA: Wo-oo farming game!

MOM: So we start with, what, twenty acres wheat? *(She exits.)*

DEANNA: Ten wheat, ten hay.  
*(Everyone but ASHLEY heads off. JACK goes to his Dark Space.)*

JACK: They're not the ones who failed. Me. *(He starts to leave, then goes back.)* And we love to laugh, make jokes, not deal with things. And sure, they can laugh at President Garman all they want to. The casualty line. I'm the one who couldn't hack it. Fact is, he was right.  
*(He heads out of the Dark Space. Phone rings.)*

CARLA: *(Off)* Ashley. It's for you. I think it's Steve. *(Pause.)*

ASHLEY: Tell him I've gone out. *(Pause.)* Tell him I've told you to tell him I'm not here. *(Checks her nails.)* Good enough.  
*(ASHLEY heads to her Dark Space.)*

ASHLEY: What I liked about Steve was . . . the dares. He'd dare me. We'd be in a restaurant, and he'd be like, I dare you to flash the waiter. With that mocking smile. And I'd be like, I can't do that, I can't. And the waiter would come over, and I wasn't even wearing a bra. And so I'd dare him back, like, same date, to hit on a guy in the men's room. It got bad, like the time he dared me to kiss five total strangers at a party, or my get-back, which nearly got him arrested. I loved that about him. The dares. It's still what I miss. *(Ruefully.)* The least healthy part of, you know, us, and that's what I miss.  
*(She steps out of the Dark Space.)*

CARLA: *(Off)* Ash? You gonna play?

ASHLEY: You guys start without me. I gotta call Steve.  
*(She exits. Light shift indicates passage of time.)*  
*Enter DAD. He sits to read. Enter JACK.)*

JACK: Hey.

DAD: Jack. *(Picks his book up again.)*



**T**he boxes got smaller and smaller: Californian, straight, a virgin, a Mormon.

JACK: Whatcha reading?

DAD: Guy named Jared Diamond. (*Shows him the cover.*)

JACK: *Guns, Germs and Steel.*

DAD: Are you up for this? (JACK *nods.*) Well . . . I often find immersing myself in a good book helps when I'm feeling stressed.

JACK: Me too.

DAD: Terrific book, this one. Marvelous explanation for why some societies evolve differently from others. What material advantages did Mesopotamia have over other areas of the world? I mean, think of it, Sumer and Ur and Lagash and Eridu, why those cities, all there, at that time, 4000 BC, before the Egyptians—

JACK: I thought the ancient Chinese—

DAD: No, this is before the Chinese—I mean the Sumerians were maybe two thousand plus years before even the Shang Dynasty.

JACK: Ah.

DAD: It's marvelous. And then the conquests, the Akkadians, the Chaldeans. Hittites later on. Why there, why then? Why cultivated crops and domesticated animals, there, then, only at that place and time? Not Africa, where mankind evolved, not China, not Egypt. Mesopotamia, the Fertile Crescent. Well, maybe, just maybe, and this is Diamond's thesis, it's because there was cultivatable vegetation there, only there, there were domesticatable animals there, only there. An accident of geography.

JACK: Sounds interesting.

DAD: It's so marvelously exciting. I know your sister was going to do her research on the *suán chu*, the Chinese art of calculation, math. And here I was urging her to study Pythagoras instead. No, no, Sumeria, Mesopotamia, *that's* where it started.

JACK: Great.

DAD: And the implications of this on Book of Mormon studies.

Look at it, Enos talks of the Nephites as an agricultural society, and then talks about the Lamanites as this blood-thirsty society of hunters. Hunter-gatherers. But that's obviously nonsense, war propaganda really; the Lamanites outnumbered the Nephites pretty severely, and a hunting economy can never support that kind of population density. Obviously the answer is intermarriage, with, who, the people coming down from the Bering Strait? Besides, King Lamoni had herds, which clearly suggests an agricultural economy, the whole thing's so. . . . (*Looks at JACK, as though seeing him for the first time.*) I'm sorry. I haven't laid any kind of foundation for any of this. I just find this sort of thing so exhilarating.

JACK: I know you do, Dad.

DAD: Ever since Deanna got home, I've been dying to talk to her about this. Well, you too, obviously, both of you.

JACK: Yeah.

DAD: I have no doubt there are some who would argue that this kind of scholarship renders absurd the historicity argument for the Book of Mormon—

JACK: Actually, Dad, on my mission, when we'd teach people, that sort of objection didn't really come up much.

DAD: (*Laughs.*) Are you mocking me, son?

JACK: (*Grins.*) Just a little, maybe.

DAD: Well, mock away. I, for one, have no intention of changing.

(JACK moves to his Dark Space.)

JACK: Nearly every evening, growing up, we'd be at the dinner table, and we'd have family history lessons, he called 'em. And he'd read *everything*, it felt like, and remembered everything, and it was as though, I don't know, Hammurabi or Zoroaster or Cyrus the Great were his best buddies. I mean, you seriously didn't want Dad helping you with your history homework. He'd take a black magic marker and cross things out of your textbook. "They got it wrong," he'd say. And here's my Dad, and his degree's in accounting, and he's a supervisor for H&R Block. He's a tax law guy. I mean, he was on a first name basis with Hugh Nibley and Eugene England, guys at that level, and now he helps people do their tax returns for a living. But he got married right off his mission, and Mom got pregnant with Ashley his junior year



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**estimony-wise, I try to avoid situations where they're going to, you know, pin me down.**

at BYU, and he switched from history to accounting. Gave it up. Basically for us. And never once complained. And you've always got, you know like default mode; you can always talk to him about hockey and basically any time period in history. Yeah, I got real lucky when it comes to Dads.

*(He steps out of the Dark Space, enter MOM.)*

MOM: Are you still reading that?

DAD: Marvelous book.

MOM: And boring Jack to tears, I suspect.

JACK: No, it's interesting.

MOM: I bet.

DAD: You're welcome to it when I'm done.

MOM: Maybe so.

JACK: What are you reading these days, Mom?

MOM: Oh, you know me. Love my Anita Stansfield.

DAD: Blech.

MOM: Don't listen to your father. The man hasn't a speck of romance in him.

DAD: I beg to differ. *(Leans over and kisses her.)*

MOM: All right, you have a speck. I came down to say, Jack. Big day tomorrow.

JACK: I know.

DAD: We're there for you, son. You know that.

MOM: That's absolutely right. And Jack, if you're not up to going to church with us, that's your decision.

JACK: No, I'm going to church.

MOM: I hoped you'd say that. I love our ward, Jack, always have. But it has its share of wagging tongues.

JACK: Best to get the first Sunday over with, then.

MOM: Exactly. That's exactly right. Well, I'm exhausted. Honey?

DAD: Just want to finish this chapter.

MOM: Well, if you're more than half an hour, the light will be off. *(DAD waves her off. She heads upstairs.)* Don't stay up too late, honey.

JACK: *(Abruptly.)* Mom, Dad. *(They stop what they're doing. Look at him.)* Tomorrow's not really the problem.

DAD: Oh.

JACK: What do I do *Monday*?

MOM: What's Monday?

JACK: I'm an R.M. I guess. A returned missionary. Sort of.

DAD: Certainly.

JACK: What do I do? *(Pause.)* I mean, what do I do? *(Pause.)*

DAD: We'll have to spend some time tomorrow talking that one over.

JACK: I guess so.

MOM: Well. We still have church tomorrow, probably should make it an early night.

JACK: Yeah. Actually, I thought I'd play a little *Final Fantasy*.

MOM: If you can pry the controller from Carla.

JACK: She said she'd show me how to get past this dragon.

*(He exits down, MOM exits up. DAD's still reading.)*

*ASHLEY, JACK, and DEANNA step into their respective Dark Spaces. CARLA is in her Dark Space, too, watching.)*

ASHLEY: No. Steve, no, I don't think that's a good idea. No. No.

JACK: Some guys couldn't wait to get home. There's even a word for it: trunky.

DEANNA: *Suan Chu*. So, see, this Emperor Yu guy, a mythical ruler who almost certainly never existed, was bathing by the Lo River, and saved this magic tortoise, who gave him this divine gift.

ASHLEY: Because, I don't think it's a good idea.

JACK: I had this one companion, he knew exactly what he was gonna do, his first day back. He had a menu planned for dinner his first night back. He knew what TV shows he was going to watch.

DEANNA: The gift was a series of diagrams called *Lo shu*, which contained the principles of Chinese mathematics. One diagram, the magic square, was thought to possess magical qualities, and led to the development of the dualistic theory of Yin and Yang.

ASHLEY: Because, I don't think it's a good idea. I just . . . you don't have to remind me of . . . no.

JACK: Girlfriend. Their car. A job lined up. Some guys, they were counting the days.

DEANNA: Yin represents even numbers and Yang represents odd numbers. Or, conversely, men and women. Depending.

ASHLEY: You're not going to guilt me into. . . . because it's a terrible terrible idea, and you're . . . . *(She's weeping. Music starts up, U2's, "Original of the Species," from the album How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb.)*

JACK: But for me, a mission was the only thing I can ever remember wanting to do, the thing I dreamed of when I was a kid.

DEANNA: It's a gift of God, pluses and minuses, debits and credits. One plus two, plus three plus four. Peace, found in the harmonious balance of oppositions, the perfect alliance and also perfect enmity of numbers.

JACK: I had a message, this perfect, beautiful message, and all I wanted to do was share it. With everyone. Anyone.

ASHLEY: I *do* remember that night . . .

JACK: And nobody was interested. Nobody cared at all.

ASHLEY: I *do* remember.

JACK: So . . . what do I do now?

DEANNA: And it's so cool, and spiritual, and zen, and it leads me toward God, or Buddha. One, or both.

ASHLEY: *(Crying.)* No, Steve. No. No, I can't.

DEANNA: And I don't want to do it anymore. *(Looks at her father, reading.)* It's going to tear him up.

## END ACT ONE



## ACT TWO

### Sunday

*(Actors as at top of the show. Now the music is Indigo Girls, "Closer to Fine." Now the dancing is very subdued, contemplative. DEANNA dances with JACK, ASHLEY with CARLA. DAD continues reading. MOM watches. Lights down, all exit. Lights up again on living room. Enter MOM, dressed to the nines. She looks upstairs.)*

MOM: Deanna? Ashley? *(Enter JACK, in his suit.)* Jack, thank heavens. We're running late.

JACK: Yeah.

MOM: I think that was Carla in the shower a few minutes ago.

JACK: I showered early. I've been up since six—you know, mission time.

MOM: Ashley? *(ASHLEY comes in, drowsy.)* Honey, we're leaving

in less than five minutes.

ASHLEY: Sorry, I slept in.

MOM: Have you seen Deanna?

ASHLEY: I don't think she's going.

JACK: She said something like that.

ASHLEY: You go without me.

MOM: No, you couldn't *possibly* be ready in time. This is very disappointing, Ashley. I would think you would want to support your brother—

JACK: It's okay, Mom. *(Enter CARLA.)*

MOM: Carla? You're not seriously considering wearing that, are you?

CARLA: What? A skirt and top.

MOM: Something that casual, on the day your brother . . . oh, never mind. Let's go. Craig?

DAD: *(Enters.)* Ready. Where's Deanna?

MOM: Not going, apparently. Our one returned missionary, and she can't even . . . never mind, it doesn't matter.

*(They all exit, except JACK, who goes to his Dark Space.)*

JACK: Aren't I a returned missionary? Don't we have two R.M.s in this family? Don't I . . . count?

*(Frustrated, he exits. ASHLEY goes to her Dark Space.)*

ASHLEY: See, here's the thing. I think being a Mormon is a very good way to live your life. It's a healthy lifestyle, basically, in lots of important ways, spiritually, physically. I've been a Mormon my whole life, and I expect to stay one. In fact, aside from an impending divorce, which believe me is not going to consume me, I feel like my life is going well right now. I'm in a good place, psychically. And that's what I wanted to say. *(She starts to leave, changes her mind.)* Now, the thing is, push comes to shove, I don't actually believe a lot of it. I don't think Joseph Smith was visited by any Angel Moroni or anything. I doubt there even are angels. I've certainly never seen one. Testimony-wise, I try to avoid situations where they're going to, you know, pin me down. You cross your fingers a lot and you try to word things just right, and you can skate through with minimum psychic damage. But tithing, no problem; I'd just waste it on clothes anyway, so why not do some good with it? Word of Wisdom, chastity, hey, that's all basically me. Bottom line, I think being a Mormon is a very good way to live your life, and I'm probably going to keep going to church and all. Probably forever.

*(Light shift indicates passage of time. Lights back up on living room. MOM and DAD enter, collapse on the sofa, DAD whips off his tie.)*

MOM: Well, that was gruesome.

DAD: It was, yes. *(Pause.)* Brother Mazer's Sunday School lesson, for example. That absurd assertion that the Jews were the only people in the history of the planet sufficiently wicked to crucify their Savior. Hah. Quite apart from the anti-Semitic overtones of such a statement, it's nonsense; the Hittites or the Medes would have crucified their God, and served him up on a bed of pasta with a red wine sauce.

MOM: The Medes had pasta?

DAD: Well taken. Bed of leeks, then.

MOM: I meant for Jack. And Ashley. Once she showed up.  
 DAD: She was in Relief Society?  
 MOM: Yes. The worst meeting of them all, and *that's* what she comes for.  
 DAD: I know.  
 MOM: It's all that kindness. Consideration. "We just want to support you in what we're sure must be difficult times."  
 DAD: You'd prefer rude insensitivity, then?  
 MOM: No. *(Pause.)* Is there such a thing as kind and compassionate insensitivity? *(DAD laughs briefly.)* I just hate being talked about. Ward council meetings, it'll be "and what can we do for the Hulls."  
 DAD: At least there wasn't a talk about the prodigal son.  
 MOM: Yeah, well, they didn't have time to prepare one.  
 DAD: They care. They want to help. You've given a lot, over the years; they want to return the favor.  
 MOM: I know. It doesn't mean I have to like it. *(DAD gets up.)*  
 DAD: I'll get the potatoes in.  
 MOM: Thanks.  
 DAD: We can start broiling in an hour or so. *(He exits. Enter JACK.)*  
 JACK: Hey, Mom. Paper here yet?  
 MOM: Apparently the Sharks lost again.  
 JACK: Great.  
 MOM: Dad's doing steak and baked for dinner.  
 JACK: Great.  
 MOM: Did you get steak much?  
 JACK: Oh, all the time.  
 MOM: Seriously?  
 JACK: Seriously. Top sirloin couple times a month.  
 MOM: How did you afford it?  
 JACK: Members. The last area I was in was pretty well off, considering. They'd feed the missionaries every Sunday. Food was not a problem.  
 MOM: That's good to know. *(A rather lengthy pause.)*  
 JACK: Some great people there.  
 MOM: You miss it.  
 JACK: I don't miss how I felt.  
 MOM: No.  
 JACK: Felt it all again today. That sick, you know, nausea feeling. "Oh, he's home. Sixteen months early."  
 MOM: I know. *(Pause.)*  
 JACK: I was thinking maybe San Jose State. At first. I'll need to find out when the term starts.  
 MOM: Honey, I don't think....  
 JACK: Today was the last time I will ever feel like that, Mom. Next Sunday will be bad again, but not as bad as today. And the next week will be better still.  
 MOM: We'll see a doctor Monday.  
 JACK: Mom, Monday, I'm looking for a job.  
 MOM: Yes, fine. But you're also seeing a doctor. We're getting a second opinion.  
 JACK: Mom . . .

*(Enter DEANNA.)*

DEANNA: Hey.  
 MOM: Deanna. How are you feeling?

DEANNA: I'm okay. A little tired. *(A pause, and then MOM blows up.)*  
 MOM: Well, I'm sorry to hear you're tired! Today was your brother's first Sunday back from his mission. An exceptionally difficult day emotionally for him, and for all of us, frankly. And you somehow found it impossible to get yourself up and dressed and to Church. Our one returned missionary, and you couldn't support the rest of the family in a time of difficulty and need. The selfishness that represents . . . *(She can't go on.)* Dinner in a couple hours. I'm going to go change.  
 DEANNA: *(Quietly, not belligerently.)* I thought me being there might make it worse.  
 MOM: *(Off.)* I don't want to hear it!  
 JACK: *(Pause.)* Hey Dee.  
 DEANNA: Hey. You okay?  
 JACK: Yeah.

*(MOM steps into her Dark Space.)*

MOM: I live in a house of strangers. Five years ago, when I was certain Craig was going to die, that was my first thought—I'm going to be alone in a house of strangers. I'm going to lose my dearest friend, and afterwards be alone, with people who don't much like me, and who I don't understand at all. I pray every night that I go first, or at least that he'll be with me until they all leave home. Craig loves his word games, so here's a revealing one: I bore them, in both senses of the word. I gave birth to them. And now I've become this person, this preachy, conventional . . . mom. And they just don't find me very interesting. *(She exits.)*  
 DEANNA: *(Pause.)* Seriously, how was it? Awful?  
 JACK: What do you think?  
 DEANNA: I am sorry, Jack.  
 JACK: Yeah, it's okay. *(Pause.)* You shoulda been there.  
 DEANNA: Maybe so.  
 JACK: *(Pause.)* Like, they all wanted to ask, of course. Like, they were desperate to ask. But they also couldn't. And so we'd have these bizarre conversations. *(ASHLEY enters.)* Ash, did you get any of those?  
 ASHLEY: Oh, it was great, you shoulda been there, Dee. It was excruciating; they'd come up to you, like "So, Ashley, how are . . . things?" "Things," I love that, with this contortionist's act—"How are . . . you and your folks and what is Jack doing home is he really sick and aren't you married and living in Montana what gives and what about the rumor that Deanna's home too, what the hell is going on?" . . . things.  
 CARLA: *(Enters.)* Sundays suck.  
 JACK: What, the no Playstation rule for the Sabbath? Addict.  
 CARLA: That plus everything. Family time stuff.  
 ASHLEY: You looked cute today.  
 CARLA: Mom had conniptions. I think she wanted me in, like, formal mourning or whatever.  
 DEANNA: Reason fifty-seven why I couldn't face it.  
 CARLA: Yeah, well, thanks beloved sister. Making us go through it while you beauty napped.  
 JACK: It wasn't so bad, actually. They're good people.



ASHLEY: Well, yeah. Anyway, I like that outfit on you.

CARLA: Thanks.

ASHLEY: Have you thought of some tint in your hair, just highlights?

CARLA: Like, blue. Or stripes. Like a zebra.

JACK: What'd Mom say to that?

CARLA: Do I look stupid? It can wait 'til I'm eighteen, and then it'll be my business.

JACK: *(Pause.)* So listen, Carla. You're a junior now?

CARLA: Yeah.

JACK: Have you been thinking about college?

CARLA: I've been thinking a small place, Coe or Reed or, like, Carleton.

DEANNA: Carleton? Seriously, from California to Minnesota.

CARLA: It's a good school.

ASHLEY: That's like in Northfield, isn't it? Where Jesse and Frank James went down, guns ablazin'.

CARLA: *(Drily.)* Yeah, that's mostly why I want to go there.

DEANNA: Do you have the grades for a place like Carleton?

CARLA: Well, yeah.

JACK: Have you thought about a major?

CARLA: International relations, maybe. And then I thought the Peace Corps.

ASHLEY: Seriously?

CARLA: Well, yeah.

DEANNA: Actually one of my roommates went to Carleton. She loved it.

CARLA: Anyway.

JACK: I can see you now. You're gonna dye your hair purple, and get a nose ring—.

CARLA: You bet. And tats. I want tats.

JACK: *(They all laugh.)* Do us all a favor and don't tell Mom until we're there to watch.

ASHLEY: I've got one.

DEANNA: You've got one what?

ASHLEY: A tattoo.

DEANNA: You do not.

ASHLEY: Do so. *(She turns her back to them, lifts her top a little to show her lower back.)* See?

JACK: Ashley! President Hinckley specifically said—.

ASHLEY: Well, he wasn't there, was he?

CARLA: So just a little rose. It's pretty.

DEANNA: Now. Forty years from now—.

H

**e said we missionaries, we were at war. A war against evil. And so, you had to expect a few casualties. I'm another casualty.**

ASHLEY: Forty years from now who'll care how I look?

CARLA: Cool. *(Change of subject.)* Anyway, seriously, Deanna, Church blew. You shoulda been there.

DEANNA: Did anyone ask about you and Steve?

ASHLEY: Sure. "How's Steve these days?" What I wanted to say was "fine, the gunshot wound's healing nicely." And then leave 'em hanging.

JACK: You didn't though.

ASHLEY: Sorely tempted. And by the way, beloved bro, that's three straight.

JACK: Three straight what?

ASHLEY: Weenie comments, weenie responses. "President Hinckley specifically said. . . ." You've reached your limit; time now for you to be amusing.

CARLA: Have you filed?

ASHLEY: Weenie comment.

CARLA: I haven't reached *my* limit yet.

ASHLEY: *(Pause.)* I just got here.

CARLA: No, I mean, in the last five weeks, have you filed? *(Pause.)*

ASHLEY: What are you talking about?

CARLA: You shot him on a deer hunting, trip, right? And Steve's dad and his brothers, Bronco and all, they deer hunt every year?

ASHLEY: Like I said.

CARLA: Which means they obey the law, get a license, they don't poach.

JACK: Of course they don't poach.

DEANNA: What's this?



**I** f I didn't have an intellectual testimony of the gospel, I wouldn't have anything at all. So why don't you try laying off me a bit.

CARLA: Trying to find out what's going on.

DEANNA: I don't think this is an appropriate—.

CARLA: I do. (*Boring in.*) It's January, Ash. Hunting season ended the 30th of November in Montana. Looked it up on the Internet, took me five minutes.

ASHLEY: Why would you do that?

CARLA: Your story doesn't hold up. You shot him, and then you came straight here? *Not*. So you hung around Missoula for five weeks, minimum five weeks. So did you file? Straightforward question.

JACK: I don't think this is necessary, Carla.

CARLA: Another weenie comment, Jack.

JACK: Lay off!

DEANNA: This interrogation isn't nec—.

CARLA: Probably not. I still want to know. Don't you?

DEANNA: It's Ashley's business.

CARLA: You're here, you want our help. It's all our business.

ASHLEY: You little creep. Last time I show you my tat. (*They're all looking at CARLA uncomfortably.*)

CARLA: Look. I'm the kid sister, and I should know my place. In the, whatever, hierarchy. You think of me as cute and little, right? Thing is, I'm not the one here in, you know, disgrace. I actually live here, getting good grades and not, you know, leaving missions or shooting people or whatever. So deal with me. (*Pause.*)

ASHLEY: No. I haven't filed. (*Pause.*)

JACK: So you hung around Missoula for five weeks? Before you came home.

DEANNA: What did you do?

ASHLEY: I hung around. I did stuff.

CARLA: Like what?

ASHLEY: Okay, I quit my job, I cleaned out my bank account, I bought a plane ticket and I lived off what was left. I checked into a motel and I watched a lot of daytime TV. (*Pause.*) And, you know, thought about things.

DEANNA: Steve must have been going nuts.

CARLA: He never called here.

ASHLEY: Steve knew where I was. I talked to him every night on the phone, from the motel.

DEANNA: He knew which motel it was?

ASHLEY: He stopped by a couple times.

CARLA: Really?

ASHLEY: Spent the night twice.

DEANNA: Seriously?

ASHLEY: You want details?

CARLA: Okay, that's a big TMI.

JACK: But then you came home. You used the plane ticket.

ASHLEY: I had to decide. What I was going to do. And then I decided, and then I used it and flew home. (*Pause.*) You don't know what it was like. I . . . (*Composes herself.*) Thing is, I love Steve. I really do. (*Pause.*) He's just great, and he's good for me, and he's good to me. And I'm this total spoiled brat. And we'd pray, you know, he'd mostly pray but then sometimes we'd pray together. I'd say a prayer too, to make him feel better, mostly.

JACK: And you got an answer?

ASHLEY: Yeah, well, okay, what does that mean, an answer? You know, you think and you worry and you think and you study it out in your mind, and . . . you pray. And this big stone wall, you know, like there's this big stone wall between you and, whatever, the ceiling. God. So, we all know the formula, right?: wrong answer, stupor of thought; right answer, heartburn. Hey, I'm blonde, I don't get anything but stupors of thought. (*A quick laugh.*)

JACK: (*Drily.*) That's true enough.

CARLA: No argument there.

DEANNA: Okay, that's totally bogus, you know.

ASHLEY: What is?

DEANNA: Well, for starters, your whole dumb blonde act. We know better, Ash.

ASHLEY: Okay, grad student genius girl, remember you're talking to a college drop out.

DEANNA: Yeah, and someone who had like a three eight when she—.

ASHLEY: Hey, flirt with a teacher, tight sweater, good grades are not a—.

DEANNA: Okay, whatever. Point is, the prayer thing, that formulaic understanding of D&C nine? It doesn't work that way.

JACK: It does too.

DEANNA: *(The next twelve line exchange between JACK and DEANNA, they interrupt each other.)* Not for me, bro. Treating talking to God like some switch on switch off binary—.

JACK: The scriptures say plainly—.

DEANNA: Jack, some kind of oversimplified—.

JACK: . . . set out for us a model for spiritual—

DEANNA: . . . So dealing with our sister with some small degree of sophis—.

JACK: Hey, I'm going to stick to revealed scripture, if you don't min—.

DEANNA: I don't mind, but I do mind not *having* a mind or being willing to use—.

JACK: There you go, intellectualizing the—.

DEANNA: . . . oh, oh, oh, and some oversimplified version of one of the—.

JACK: Hey, if there's one thing I know—.

DEANNA: Yeah, that's about right Jack, you know about maybe one thing—.

JACK: It is that an intellectual testimony will not stand. It's built on a foundation of sand—.

DEANNA: If I didn't have an intellectual testimony of the gospel, Jack, I wouldn't have anything at all. *(Pause.)* So why don't you try laying off me a bit. *(Pause.)*

ASHLEY: So. *(Drily.)* I can maybe get answers to prayers other ways, is that what you're saying?

DEANNA: *(Still glaring fiercely at JACK.)* Absolutely. You have gifts most blondes are denied.

ASHLEY: But what you don't know, darling sister, is that I really am blonde. Like, spiritually.

JACK: And we all know you better than that.

DEANNA: Exactly.

CARLA: What he said.

ASHLEY: Yeah, you all know me so well.

JACK: Better than you think, Ash. *(Pause.)*

ASHLEY: But see, I don't mind. It's a way to like yourself. To look in the mirror and think, "Maybe I don't look so bad." It's something. Could afford to lose ten pounds.

CARLA: Who couldn't?

ASHLEY: But you know, I just don't think your God likes the package. You know? And the package is what I got. *(Pause. Harder.)* And Steve's dream job is in Missoula. And me in Missoula the next thirty years is not gonna happen. And it's a drag, because I really do love the big jerk. I really think I do. *(Pause.)* But I shot him, shot at him, I wanted to shoot him; I'm gonna hurt him, I'm gonna keep hurting him. So if I love him, what's best for him. . . . *(Fiercely.)* And no kids yet, and I still look okay, so if I want out, try again, I better do it now. Maybe I marry money next time.

JACK: And that's what you came to? Thinking it out?

DEANNA: It does *not* make sense. Ash, this is not right, this doesn't even sound like you, this isn't you.

ASHLEY: Isn't me? I'm Ashley the airhead, of course it's me. *(Enter MOM and DAD. They all pause.)*

DAD: Hey kids. *(They ad lib hellos)*

ASHLEY: *(And now she loses it.)* Oh, Daddy. *(And she collapses into his arms. He pats her on the back, says "there there" and "it's okay honey," ad libbed.)*

MOM: This was sounding like an interesting conversation.

CARLA: *(To MOM.)* Ashley was telling us that she hadn't filed yet.

MOM: No? Why would she?

DEANNA: Long story, we'll catch you up. *(Takes her aside.)*

MOM: *(Breaks away from DEANNA, goes to her Dark Space. Staring at DAD and ASHLEY.)* His bond with the children is, well, cerebral. Family history lessons and "I just read the best book." It's why they're all so insufferable; everything came back to books, growing up. But when it comes to the hugging, the one-on-one stuff, the nurturing stuff, the emotional, painful, "I need comfort" stuff . . . it's him then, too. *He's* who they want. *(Not quite bitterly.)* I'm the one who keeps the schedule, keeps things running smoothly. That's when it's not me who's the one who said the thing they need comforting from. *(Pause.)* Of course it's not fair. I don't expect it to be. I just think I got the crappy role here, and somebody had better make it up to me, that's all I can say. *(Looks up.)* You hear that? You owe me big time. *(She steps back into the action.)* Kids. Ash and her Dad need a moment, here. Let's get the table set or something.

*(They all exit. Light shift indicates passage of time.)*

MOM and DAD enter to the sofa. DAD's reading.)

MOM: Dishes are done.

DAD: Mmmm.

MOM: Kids are off, doing whatever. I'm suspending the rule about Playstation on Sundays. It got Jack and Carla out of the way.

DAD: I'm sure that's okay.

MOM: So? *(DAD puts his book away.)*

DAD: I'm sorry.

MOM: Wow, your undivided attention. First time in twenty-eight years.

DAD: Yes, I'm sorry. So, Ashley?

MOM: I guess the first big question is, did she really shoot Steve?

DAD: At least I can say that her version of events didn't change from before. I'm not sure I entirely believe it.

MOM: That the gun simply went off.

DAD: It's not implausible. It was dark, she stumbled down the mountain with a rifle she hardly knew how to use.

MOM: I thought she'd learned how to shoot.

DAD: One half hour session at a shooting range. Anyway, she was furious about the snipe hunt aspect of things, and even more livid at their laughter. Which I really do understand.

MOM: Me too.

DAD: Do you remember their reception?

MOM: Of course I do.

DAD: Remember the cake thing? He cut the cake, but instead of feeding it to her, he ground it into her face, made a huge mess? And his Dad and brothers laughed?

MOM: And you didn't laugh.

DAD: No.

MOM: Nor did I.

DAD: As long as she took that morning, getting her face and hair looking perfect. She was so lovely. And then for him to treat her that disrespectfully. They were a married couple at that point; there wasn't much I could say. But I was appalled.

MOM: It's pretty common nowadays, in Mormon receptions. I think it's distasteful, but it has become commonplace, like throwing rice, like throwing the garter . . .

DAD: That doesn't make it any less despicable.

MOM: No, I agree. So, the snipe hunt, she comes off the mountain, they're all laughing. . . .

DAD: She stumbled, the gun went off. That's her version. Shocked her, she said, because she thought the safety was on.

MOM: Typical Ashley?

DAD: Maybe. As I said, I don't entirely buy it.

MOM: But it's also possibly true.

DAD: Yes. (*A pause.*) She comes off the mountain, furious, livid. She looks at Steve. Laughing. She told me, she wanted more than anything to "wipe that smirk off his face." She's maybe twenty yards away, a campfire between them. She squeezes the trigger. A private moment, imagining shooting him, thinking about it, a harmless fantasy, really, because the safety was on. (*Pause.*)

MOM: Except the safety wasn't on.

DAD: And she had a round chambered. Which she'd also forgotten.

MOM: That sounds like her, too.

DAD: It does.

MOM: And we'll never know, will we? What really happened?

DAD: No. (*Pause.*) I choose to believe her. I choose not to believe my daughter could aim a firearm at a man and pull the trigger.

MOM: (*Drily.*) Well, I'm glad that's settled.

DAD: Accident or design, we're fortunate in one respect. She's a lousy shot.

MOM: So is she divorcing him or is he divorcing her?

DAD: She says Steve's willing to forgive and forget. It's really her call.

MOM: Has she decided?

DAD: No. (*Pause.*) I had no idea what to say to her. I listened mostly. Urged her to pray. She said she has.

MOM: To no avail, right?

DAD: That's what she says.

MOM: That "stupor of thought," "burning in the bosom" thing never worked for me, either.

DAD: It has, sometimes, for me.

MOM: Not for me. I get answers other ways.

DAD: Yes. Anyway, I finally did suggest something to her.

MOM: What?

DAD: I asked her if she wanted a father's blessing.

MOM: A priesthood blessing.

DAD: Yes.

MOM: What did she say?

DAD: She said she'd think about it. (*Pause.*)

MOM: You know, when she got married, I thought, well she's moving on. Up. Whatever, a direction. Finally.

DAD: Me, too.

MOM: She's twenty seven!

DAD: I know.

MOM: They are *all* too old for this! That's the thing, they're all like that!

DAD: Drifting, rootless.

MOM: They're not supposed to be rootless. It's our job to give them roots!

DAD: Or suggest places where roots might be found.

MOM: You know, times like this, you drive me crazy.

DAD: What do you mean?

MOM: You, sitting there, analyzing it. Sort of sadly. Saying things like "places where roots might be found."

DAD: Do you analyze it differently?

MOM: I don't turn neat phrases for it. I get pissed off!

DAD: Okay. . . .

MOM: What do you plan to do?

DAD: What do you mean?

MOM: About Jack, about Ashley, about Deanna! What are you going to do?

DAD: Wait. Support them. Pray for them.

MOM: And that's all?

DAD: Support their agency. I'm sorry, honey, but I do not believe that the sole measure of parenting is how the kids turn out.

MOM: It's a measure!

DAD: Granted. It's a measure.

MOM: (*Saying "damn" is hard for her, but she's on a roll.*) Look, forget about it. Okay? Go back to your . . . damn . . . book.

DAD: If we need to talk—

MOM: No. We always do that. You're better at talking than I am, and it'll just piss me off worse. But we have a problem and I don't know what to do about it. And so we'll do nothing, as usual. (*As she exits, she turns to him.*) And now you're gonna go all wistful. And that pisses me off, too.

(*And she's gone. DAD looks at his Dark Space, yes, a bit wistfully. Sighs, crosses to it.*)

DAD: (*Holds out the book.*) In some respects, I'm having a crisis of my own this weekend. Jared Diamond really threw me. Evidence always trumps opinion, and his evidence is so compelling, and the resultant conclusions so inevitable, I frankly find myself rather shaken by him. Can I reconcile his ideas with the notion that the Book of Mormon is a genuine historical record, about people who really existed? My initial conclusion was that they couldn't be reconciled; that I must, at the very least, rethink issues I'd come to regard as settled. And then it turned out, I didn't have the leisure to spare for it. (*Pause.*) Isn't that exhilarating, though? Doing as



B.H. Roberts did, starting from scratch, blowing every settled conclusion to smithereens, rebuilding my testimony from the foundation up! What a marvelous gift a good book is, especially one like this, one that genuinely forces you to confront bedrock beliefs, rethink everything. Contemplating the gospel, thinking about it, taking it seriously, it's a feast, a banquet, not just correlated cream of wheat. I wanted to share my thoughts with them, especially with the ones most likely to get it, Deanna and Ashley. And then, instead, my children come home, all in a state of crisis, forcing me to rethink *them*, too—reevaluate, arrive at a second opinion. And they're hurting, in pain, and nothing I have ever done before has prepared me for this crisis. It overwhelms me, it's so immense. And we're tied together by priesthood, and more importantly, by love, and all I can think is how very very good God is to us all. What a tough and terrible tutor crisis can be. (*Looks tenderly where MOM just exited.*) And yes, short term, while we're in the moment itself, it pisses me off, too.

(MOM enters.)

MOM: Everyone, living room, NOW! (*They all start to gather.*)

DAD: What?

MOM: They're back! (*Another quick, flurried pickup. Another doorbell.*) Craig, dishes away, Deanna living room, Jack, upstairs by the bookcase, Ashley, do *something*, Carla, put away all evidence of Playstation—.

CARLA: It's in the family room!

MOM: They can see it from here and believe me they'll check.

Move. (*Flurry of movement. They all put things away. MOM stands by the door, quickly checking hair, dress. Opens the door.*)

Sister Dawes, Sister Swanson. Three visits in three days!

SISTER DAWES: I do so hope we're not intruding.

SISTER SWANSON: If this is even the tiniest bit inconvenient—.

MOM: Not at all, always have time for visiting teachers. Please, come in.

SISTER DAWES: I was thinking about you, Melinda, and, well... (*Holding out a casserole dish.*) Lemon bars.

MOM: How very kind. (*Takes the dish.*) Craig, look. Sister Dawes made her lemon bars.

ASHLEY: Oh, man. (*Reaches in, takes one.*) These are the best, I remember 'em from girl's camp. Dee, check it out, lemon bars.

DEANNA: I love these!

**I** sn't that exhilarating, though?  
**Doing as B.H. Roberts did,  
 starting from scratch,  
 blowing every settled  
 conclusion to smithereens,  
 rebuilding my testimony  
 from the ground up!**

MOM: Get a plate, girls, we eat from plates in this family.  
 (*ASHLEY dashes off.*)

DEANNA: Jack, lemon bars.

JACK: Sounds great.

MOM: This really wasn't necessary.

SISTER DAWES: Nonsense. It's no trouble at all, and besides, it gave us an excuse to give our regards to Jack.

SISTER SWANSON: There was such a press of well wishers in church. . . .

MOM: Of course.

SISTER DAWES: And I must say, Jack, it's wonderful to have you back.

SISTER SWANSON: How is your health?

JACK: I'm doing all right.

SISTER SWANSON: Well, you look rather thin to me.

SISTER DAWES: You should know, Jack, that my lemon bars are utterly fattening, and no good for you at all.

JACK: (*Smiles a little.*) That's good to know.

SISTER SWANSON: We just hold you in such high regard, Jack. Your whole family, of course.

JACK: Sure.

SISTER DAWES: Well. I suppose we'd best be off.

SISTER SWANSON: Yes, we don't mean to disrupt your Sabbath. Just wanted to make a quick delivery.

MOM: Thanks once again. Girls?

CARLA: (*Mouth full.*) These are awesome, thanks! (*DEANNA and ASHLEY, who has returned with plates, mumble thanks.*)



**T**hey're all such amazing navel gazers, like, "Oh, how do I feel today? Oh, it's all so hard."

MOM: Once more, it was so good of you to stop by. *(The SISTERS head for the door.)*

JACK: Sisters?

SISTER SWANSON: What is it, Jack?

JACK: Can I ask you a question?

SISTER DAWES: Of course.

JACK: This is a really stupid question, I guess. And you're just two sisters, friends of my Mom and all. You're not the whole ward, is what I mean.

SISTER SWANSON: Go on.

JACK: Am I an R.M.? I mean, do I . . . *count*?

SISTER DAWES: I'm not sure I understand what you're asking, Jack.

JACK: Never mind, it was a dumb question, I just—.

SISTER SWANSON: Jack. You're asking if we consider you a returned missionary.

JACK: I came home early. I didn't finish two years, not even one year. *(Pause.)* What am I? I mean, what *am* I?

SISTER DAWES: Jack, I don't know all the details of your return, nor are they any of my business. I understand you were ill. That's enough. In my mind you are certainly an R.M.

SISTER SWANSON: A returned missionary, every bit as much as my Charlie.

SISTER DAWES: Or your sister, for that matter. *(Pause.)*

JACK: *(Very moved.)* That . . . that means a lot to me.

SISTER SWANSON: I know why you felt the need to ask. One hears silly things from time to time. People who came home early don't really count as R.M.s, that sort of nonsense. Why I have a sister-in-law who took all sorts of grief because she married a convert!

MOM: I remember that.

SISTER SWANSON: Joseph Smith was a convert, you know. Brigham Young was a convert.

SISTER DAWES: That's mostly a Utah thing, I think. Thank heavens we California Saints are more sensible.

SISTER SWANSON: *(To JACK.)* Jack, if you're in need of a job, Barry's hiring at the Cupertino store. Stock boy, not exciting work, but it's better than minimum wage.

JACK: Thanks. I'll stop by tomorrow.

SISTER DAWES: And it's really good to see you again.

JACK: Thanks. *(They start to leave.)*

CARLA: Oh, also, Ashley's getting a divorce. Ash, you wanna tell everyone about that, too? And Deanna's quit school or something; we're not sure quite what.

SISTER SWANSON: I think perhaps we'd best leave your family alone. *(Notices MOM.)* Melinda, it's going to be fine.

MOM: I know. *(Genuinely, this time.)* Thanks for stopping by.

SISTER DAWES: We're your visiting teachers. It's our responsibility. *(Hugs all around, ad libbed goodbyes, and they leave.)*

DAD: Well, that was something. Unexpected.

MOM: They're good people.

DAD: Yes, they are.

MOM: And Carla. You're out of the will. *(Laughter.)*

CARLA: No fair!

DAD: I'm with your Mom on that one. *(More laughing.)*

ASHLEY: Jack, you really wanna be a stock boy at Barry Swanson's store in Cupertino?

JACK: It's a job. I need a job.

DEANNA: Do you know anything at all about paint?

JACK: I'll learn.

DEANNA: Well, those lemon bars were great. *(And everyone swivels to look at DEANNA.)* Who's up for euchre? *(No takers.)* Hearts?

ASHLEY: I think we're all up for a spill-the-guts session.

DEANNA: I'm not ready.

CARLA: We're ready!

ASHLEY: I say it's time.

MOM: *(Starts a chant, which the rest join in.)* Spill the guts! Spill the guts! Spill the guts! Spill the guts!

DEANNA: I said I'm not ready.

CARLA: Look, could it be worse than Ash's attempted homicide?

ASHLEY: Or Jack leaving his mission?

DEANNA: It's not, it's just. . . . *(Looks at her DAD quickly.)* I'm

sorry, I. . . . (*Dashes up the stairs. After a moment.*)  
MOM: I get so tired of this from her. Excuse me. (*She exits too.*)  
DAD: (*Looks around.*) We still have enough for euchre.  
(*They all exit, CARLA steps into her Dark Space.*)  
CARLA: Okay, the *Final Fantasy* stuff; yeah, I'm addicted. That's the kind of person I am, like, if there's a puzzle, I just have to finish, like, I can't stand the thought of not finishing. Once I'm done with *Ten*, I'll probably never play again. It makes the others not take me seriously, which makes sense because I was like seven when Ashley went to college. But the thing is, they kinda drive me nuts too. They're all such amazing navel gazers, like, "Oh, how do I feel today? Oh, it's all so hard." And meanwhile there are hundreds of thousands of orphans with AIDS in West Africa. You know? And we've got this great house, and life, and what are we doing? You know? And, like, Iraq, and the Sudan, and, like, starving kids in Haiti. And like that. The world's a mess and we don't even wanna think about it. And I think it's time I take, like, King Benjamin seriously and, you know, maybe, help. So Peace Corps for starters, and then, I don't know, journalism, maybe something with the State Department. I get that from Mom, not Dad. He'll say all the right stuff, but she's the one who gets her hands dirty.

JACK: (*In his Dark Space.*) Deanna's thing, her problem.  
CARLA: I can't get worked up over it.  
JACK: It's a guy. It's gotta be a guy.  
ASHLEY: (*In her Dark Space.*) She says it's not a guy, and I believe her.  
CARLA: It'll be something she thinks is impossible for us ordinary mortals to even begin to comprehend. And it'll be something totally obvious and stupid.  
JACK: She intellectualizes the gospel and she's not open to the Spirit.  
ASHLEY: She's probably like me. "Hello, God?" Oops, can't get through.  
CARLA: She's the deepest one of us. *Self-appointed* deepest.  
JACK: She's my sister, and I love her and there was a time I really looked up to her. But does she feel the Spirit?  
ASHLEY: It's not a guy. It's something else.  
(*DAD enters and crosses to the sofa with a different book. All others exit their Dark Spaces. He reads. After a moment, MOM enters, plops down next to him.*)  
MOM: What a day.  
DAD: Indeed.  
MOM: I'm totally pooped.  
DAD: Yes.  
MOM: What Sister Swanson said. About Jack.  
DAD: Yes?  
MOM: So does he count? As a returned missionary?  
DAD: I don't know why not.  
MOM: Don't you have to finish the whole thing?  
DAD: There aren't rules for it. It not like there's a Returned Missionary merit badge.  
MOM: No, but if you call someone an R.M.—  
DAD: I think we just decide. We just tell people, we have two children who served missions. Honorable missions.

MOM: Okay. It's still gonna be tough for him.  
DAD: I know.  
MOM: Honey? (*DAD grunts.*) Honey?  
DAD: (*Puts his book down again.*) I'm sorry.  
MOM: I want to ask you a question. About hockey.  
DAD: (*Surprised.*) Shoot.  
MOM: Now, you know how I feel about hockey.  
DAD: I promise, we've never held it against you.  
MOM: So big of you. No, but see, I remember once in a moment of feigned interest, I asked about the playoffs or whatever—  
DAD: To win Lord Stanley's Cup.  
MOM: I don't think we're going to make it. I don't think they're a very good team.  
DAD: Quite true. It's been a disappointing season.  
MOM: We're a really bad team.  
DAD: Unfortunately. They've not played well. What makes it worse is, their team captain, Owen Nolan, is unhappy. They're almost certain to trade him.  
MOM: Well, that option's out for us. Though I wouldn't mind seeing what, say, the Bennetts would want for their Barbara.  
DAD: Oh, I'd think Deanna, Carla, and a draft pick. Not a good trade, that one.  
MOM: No, I think we're stuck with what we have. (*Pause.*) Why do you all like the Sharks so much? I mean, you guys are anatical, have to watch *SportCenter*, see how they're doing.  
DAD: They're ours. That's all that matters. They're *our* Sharks.  
MOM: But you could pick a different team to root for. A better team, one that might win.  
DAD: That, my dear, would require that I root for the Detroit Red Wings. And *that* I will *never* do.  
MOM: So you cheer for San Jose.  
DAD: With great hope and determination. (*Goes back to his book.*)  
MOM: So what are you reading now?  
DAD: Nothing important.  
MOM: You've finished it, that Diamond book?  
DAD: Yes.  
MOM: Geez, our lives falling down around our ears and you still found time to read some honking big intellectual—  
DAD: I find it helps.  
MOM: So what are you reading now?  
DAD: It's really nothing.  
MOM: Come on. I wanna see. (*She grabs at it.*)  
DAD: Why are you so—  
MOM: Let me see—  
DAD: Honey, please, if you—  
MOM: *Louis L'Amour*?  
DAD: Yes.  
MOM: You're reading Louis L'Amour?  
DAD: Light escapist—  
MOM: In hardback? Let me get this straight, you went to the library in order to check out an edition of Louis L'Amour in *hardback*?  
DAD: It's an annotated edition.  
MOM: Of Louis L'Amour?

DAD: He was quite an interesting Western historian.  
MOM: He wrote cowboy books!  
DAD: Actually very few of his books dealt specifically with—  
MOM: And you got it in hardback so we wouldn't notice it was Louis L'Amour.  
DAD: Well, actually, Arthur Henry King used to say that reading a paperback was an insult to—  
MOM: (*Hooting.*) Big Mr. Intellectual, head always buried in some heavy duty hardback, and really it's . . . let me see this. (*Snatches it from him.*)  
DAD: There's really no need to—  
MOM: Okay, okay: *Utah Blaine*? What is that, a title?  
DAD: And the name of the leading character.  
MOM: You're reading a book called *Utah Blaine*?  
DAD: (*Ashamed.*) I am.  
MOM: Sounds like an Amway salesman from Provo. Utah Blaine? With a character who, oh, this is great: (*Reads.*) "had a face as sharp as a Paiute tomahawk."  
DAD: I know. I'm a total fraud.  
MOM: You are. "Pay no attention to that man behind the curtains, he's reading *Utah Blaine*."  
DAD: It's been a hard day, I wanted to read something reasonably mindless.  
MOM: I sure understand that.  
DAD: Now I've shattered all your illusions.  
MOM: Honey, if I ever had illusions about you, I lost 'em a long time ago. (*Pause.*) It's gotta be past midnight, I'm totally exhausted, and I can't go to sleep.  
DAD: Yes. Well, hence my choice of reading material. (*Pause.*) You want it when I'm done?  
MOM: I saw Diamond laying around the other day and actually started it.  
DAD: Really?  
MOM: Yeah. It's interesting.  
DAD: Let me know what you think of it?  
MOM: I will. (*Pause.* DEANNA comes down the stairs.)  
DEANNA: Mom? Dad?  
MOM: Deanna?  
DEANNA: Hi.  
MOM: You okay?  
DEANNA: Yeah. Yeah, I think so.  
DAD: It's awfully late. We were just going to bed.  
DEANNA: Oh.  
MOM: We could stay up a little longer. If you need us to.  
DEANNA: Oh, no, it's okay.  
DAD: Come on, sit down.  
DEANNA: I don't want to keep you guys up.  
DAD: Nonsense, we always have time for our daughter.  
DEANNA: The thing is, I think maybe . . . (*Her voice trails off.*)  
MOM: Ah. (*Gets up.*) I understand completely, you want to talk to your father. Get the lights when you're finished, will you?  
DEANNA: Actually . . .  
MOM: What is it, honey?  
DEANNA: I'd rather talk to Mom.  
MOM: Oh.  
DAD: (*After a pause.*) Oh my.

DEANNA: I'm sorry, Dad, but this is—  
DAD: It's perfectly all right. I'm perfectly fine.  
DEANNA: This is hard for me.  
DAD: Yes. Meanwhile, I've got a good book to read, I'll head upstairs where I won't disturb you.  
MOM: (*To DEANNA.*) Are you sure?  
DEANNA: Yeah, I am.  
DAD: Then I'll make myself scarce. (*Kisses MOM.*) I may be asleep when you come in.  
MOM: Of course. (*DAD exits. MOM sits, uncharacteristically anxious.*) Well, sit down, honey.  
DEANNA: Thanks. (*She does.*)  
MOM: Can I get you some hot chocolate?  
DEANNA: No, I'm fine. (*Awkward pause.*) This was a really tough day, wasn't it?  
MOM: Oh yeah. You remember that time, few years ago, when your father was diagnosed with cancer.  
DEANNA: I remember. You told us all we had to prepare ourselves, you had some terrible news.  
MOM: And it turned out to be nothing. A mistake.  
DEANNA: I remember.  
MOM: Your Dad and I were saying yesterday, this, having all of you come home like this, this was as bad.  
DEANNA: Seriously?  
MOM: Oh, yeah.  
DEANNA: But we're all okay. I mean, basically, we're okay.  
MOM: I suppose.  
DEANNA: In fact, that's part of what I keep telling myself, that what I'm going through is not actually that big a deal. I mean, it's not like a divorce, or even Jack and his mission thing. I'm sort of, maybe, inflating it all in my head or something. I keep telling myself that, at least.  
MOM: It must have been somewhat serious. Enough to come home. When you couldn't even come home for Christmas.  
DEANNA: I thought about this the whole break. That's all I did, work and think about this.  
MOM: We missed you.  
DEANNA: I missed you, too. (*Deep breath.*) Basically, it's a guy.  
MOM: Someone you've been seeing.  
DEANNA: Sort of. We haven't actually *dated*; people sort of don't date at Brown. But we talk, wonderful conversations. We go on walks, that amazing frosty air in Rhode Island. We argue.  
MOM: What's his name?  
DEANNA: Seth. Seth Cohen.  
MOM: LDS?  
DEANNA: Oh no, no, the guys in Institute, there aren't many of them anyway, and it's a real . . . I just didn't fit in. No, Seth's Jewish. Non-practicing.  
MOM: And because of this guy, this Seth, you had to come home?  
DEANNA: No, it's not like that, it's . . . I don't believe in anything.  
MOM: The gospel, you mean.  
DEANNA: No, I'm not saying that, it makes sense to me, it's comforting.



MOM: What is it, then?

DEANNA: (*Exploding.*) I mean, I don't believe in *anything!* I mean, Seth believes in so many things. He believes, with all his heart and soul. In, you know, politics, and feminism, and the environment, and gay rights. And he was in law school, actually, and he switched to social work administration, and he believes in Derrida and in Foucault and power structures in a culture and post-structuralism. And he's against war, and he's so passionate about all of it, *all of it*. He believes, and and and he acts on what he believes, like he marches and and and here I am, a Mormon girl from San Jose; he can hardly believe it, he's having these arguments with a Mormon, we're everything he loathes, homophobic and conservative and pro-life and anti-environment and sexist and Republican! The Christian Right. The only way he'd talk to me at all was when I told him on my mission evangelicals hated us as much as they hate what he stands for.

MOM: Sounds like a good liberal.

DEANNA: Yes! And he's kind and he cares about people and not just abstractly, he works in a soup kitchen Saturday mornings and he, he . . . He wanted to sleep with me, he told me so, and when I told him I couldn't, wouldn't, he understood completely. *Completely*. That was Thursday, and Friday I packed and came home.

MOM: Well, good for you. Holding to your standards.

DEANNA: It had nothing to do with standards. I wasn't sure, I *wasn't* ready. It took me by surprise. Next time he asks, the answer might be different. I don't know.

MOM: But you came home. Got out of the situation.

DEANNA: Mom, this *isn't* about chastity.

MOM: It certainly sounds to me as though—.

DEANNA: Mom, tell me something. How did you get up this morning?

MOM: I don't know, Church is at nine, around seven I—.

DEANNA: No, I mean *how*. How did you get up?

MOM: I don't understand what you're—.

DEANNA: Grudgingly? Angrily? Hit the snooze alarm four or five times?

MOM: Certainly not. That's your father's way, of course. But I had to get ready. It was Sunday, and it was sure to be an awkward day.

DEANNA: Do you bound out of bed, like you can't wait to greet the day? Like, it's so exciting to be up?

Y

**ou pray. And this big stone wall, you know, like there's this big stone wall between you and, whatever, the ceiling. God.**

MOM: I get up when the alarm sounds, because I have things to do.

DEANNA: Seth jumps out of bed. Like he can't wait to see what's in store that day.

MOM: You know this *how*?

DEANNA: He told me. See, he's non-practicing, but he said that it's a commandment, like the Jews have something like three hundred commandments, sort of sub commandments under the big Ten, and one of 'em is to get up excited, thrilled to be able to worship God that day.

MOM: I think I—.

DEANNA: I have never in my life felt that way! Passionate, excited, energized! And especially not Sundays, where I can hardly bear to face it, Church, and all those droning dreary talks and songs too slow and . . . I don't believe in anything. Seth made me realize. No, I have a testimony. I believe in God. I find the gospel comforting, it makes sense. That's all.

MOM: I think I understand.

DEANNA: So I had to come home. I *had* to.

MOM: I thought you loved your major.

DEANNA: I love Dad. And Dad got pretty passionate, sometimes, about books and history and some new connection between things he'd discovered. That's the closest thing to it I've ever felt, watching Dad. Seth's like that all the time.

MOM: Jack's like that.

DEANNA: Yeah, and that's why he came home. It was making him sick.

MOM: I suppose.

DEANNA: I can't borrow . . . energy, passion, from Dad anymore. And it's not good for me.

MOM: In what way?



DEANNA: Oh, man, I was doing all this stuff about Emperor Yu and his magic tortoise, and I got to thinking, hey, what's the difference between believing in that and believing in Joseph and his golden plates? They both seem just as absurd.

MOM: I would say there's a *big* difference between—.

DEANNA: And everyone wants the same thing preached every Sunday, basic doctrines. No . . . controversy, no disagreements, no passion.

MOM: They find it comforting. To—.

DEANNA: I don't think so, I think they're just afraid. I think they're terrified. Jack says I only have an "intellectual testimony," and I'm going to hell because of it, and he's right, that's about all I have left, but wanting to hear the same five talks and the same four testimonies every week, that's an intellectual testimony, too; you're going to hell, too. Just not a very interesting one.

MOM: There's a good deal more to Church than—.

DEANNA: No, there is, you're right. But Mom, what am I gonna do?

MOM: I wish I knew.

DEANNA: I miss him. I miss being around him, all that energy.

MOM: I certainly do understand that.

DEANNA: Mom, what am I gonna do? *(Pause.)*

MOM: We're not, you know.

DEANNA: What?

MOM: What he says we are. What you're saying. We're not.

DEANNA: We sort of are.

MOM: I don't get up in the morning all excited to worship. I probably should, and it's probably a good idea, but I don't. But I do get up, immediately. With energy. Because there are things to do, and it's my job to do them.

DEANNA: I know, Mom, that's not the same—.

MOM: I get up because I have to make the beds and maybe someone's had a baby and I have to make dinner for them, or because I have my visiting teaching.

DEANNA: Mom, you don't—.

MOM: In fact, the more I think about it, the more pissed off I'm getting.

DEANNA: Mom—.

MOM: Don't tell me I don't have energy! Don't tell me I don't have passion. Don't tell me my testimony isn't spiritual enough just because I don't care to argue in Sunday School. Or that I'm going to hell for it.

**D**

**on't tell me my testimony isn't spiritual enough just because I don't care to argue in Sunday School.**

DEANNA: I didn't say—.

MOM: This Seth person, he's not here, and he's not right.

DEANNA: He's sort of right.

MOM: He's not right at all!

DEANNA: He's right when he's talking about me.

MOM: No. Not true.

DEANNA: I think he is.

MOM: Deanna, do you want my advice?

DEANNA: I do, yeah.

MOM: I think you need to stick up for yourself. I think you need to show some backbone.

DEANNA: *(A bit offended.)* I don't think—.

MOM: I think you should go back to Brown, and I think you should go see this Seth, and I think you should have a good long fight with him. And don't give an inch, not on anything. Defend who you are and what you believe in, because it's worth fighting for.

DEANNA: I don't know that that's—.

MOM: Because you've done nothing but back down. You've conceded every point. Haven't you?

DEANNA: No!

MOM: You can too get passionate about the gospel. I know you can, because I've seen you.

DEANNA: Not for a long while.

MOM: Because you're embarrassed. "Just a Mormon girl from San Jose." Nonsense! You're my daughter, and your father's daughter, and you're a returned missionary, and you're not some little Mormon mouse. You've let Brown University intimidate you. Get over it.

DEANNA: It's not easy.

MOM: You want it to be.

DEANNA: I never said that I wanted an easy road.

MOM: But you do want it to be more exciting.  
 DEANNA: I think there's something wrong with a culture that—  
 MOM: Never mind that!  
 DEANNA: No, but I think that there is.  
 MOM: Well, what have *you* done about it? I say, defend the faith, and you'll feel the passion.  
 DEANNA: I wish I knew.  
 MOM: And *conservative*—you let him call you a conservative!? Excuse me, but I have been Democratic precinct captain for San Jose Eighth for fourteen years! Nobody calls *me* a conservative!  
 DEANNA: No, that's true.  
 MOM: Go back to Brown. Go back to Seth. And fight with him. And make it a good fight. A hard fight. Let him know he's been in a tussle.  
 DEANNA: If I do, there's a pretty good chance I'll end up wanting to marry him.  
 MOM: We'll cross that bridge when we come to it.  
 DEANNA: I don't know that I can stay in that major.  
 MOM: Well, what other majors have you considered?  
 DEANNA: (*Laughing, a little.*) You're putting this all back on me, in other words.  
 MOM: Yes. I *am* putting it all back on you. (*Enter CARLA to a Dark Space, where she listens intently to the conversation.*) Your father is upstairs. You need to tell him what you told me, about your major.  
 DEANNA: I will.  
 MOM: Deanna. On your mission, you told me in Taipei you taught a first discussion to a young woman you saw sitting on a park bench.  
 DEANNA: I remember.  
 MOM: A first discussion, about Joseph and the plates. The story you say now reminds you of Emperor Yu's tortoise.  
 DEANNA: Yes.  
 MOM: And then the Spirit told you to challenge her to baptism. And you did.  
 DEANNA: And she accepted. Fifteen minutes after we met her. Chen Wei, I got a letter from her a couple months ago. I know where you're going with this.  
 MOM: Who was the girl who taught that discussion?  
 DEANNA: Mom, I don't know her anymore.  
 MOM: Well, you should reintroduce yourself. Because she was, and is, terrific. (*MOM and DEANNA cross to their Dark Spaces.*)  
 CARLA: Family is a big puzzle sometimes, who fits where, who does what. And to make it worse, we don't ever stay the same. Or act predictably.  
 (*JACK to his Dark Space.*)  
 JACK: To keep Mom happy, I did see a doctor, who confirmed what my mission doctor had told me. (*Pause.*) My mission is over.  
 (*ASHLEY to her Dark Space.*)  
 ASHLEY: And I can't go back to Steve. I cannot, cannot live in Missoula.  
 DEANNA: But I'm going back to Brown. And I'll finish my degree in History of Mathematics. It's only a master's and I can switch gears for the Ph.D.

(*DAD enters his Dark Space.*)

CARLA: Mom told us all about Seth.  
 JACK: I knew it was a guy.  
 ASHLEY: You can't keep secrets in a family.  
 CARLA: And Dad reading crappy Westerns! (*They all laugh.*)  
 DEANNA: We'll tease him about that for the next ten years.  
 JACK: I believed with all my heart. Tried to serve with all my soul, all of it. It wasn't good for me, it made me sick. What I need is, I don't know, more balance.  
 DEANNA: Yin and yang. One, plus two, plus three plus four.  
 ASHLEY: I figure I just need to meet a new guy. A better guy. So, quickie divorce and back on the circuit. But then that blessing of Dad's kinda messed that up for me.  
 DAD: I believe that Steve is far more abusive than she's been willing to share with us. And that was confirmed for me when I gave her the blessing.  
 ASHLEY: Some of the things Dad said about Steve didn't sound right to me. Abusive? He's never hit me. But what do I know about the Spirit? At least I felt *something*. Something . . . different. I'm still trying to figure things out.  
 CARLA: Dad's always gonna be the cerebral one, and he's always gonna have these enthusiasms. And he talks about publishing a book some day, and he never will.  
 ASHLEY: But he's there for us, all right, every time.  
 CARLA: And Mom keeps things running.  
 DEANNA: I'm scared. I'll try to stand up to Seth and he'll overwhelm me, all that energy, all that passion. Am I up to it?  
 ASHLEY: I'm scared. All I got's the package, and the package needs some work.  
 JACK: I'm scared. I gave myself so completely and it didn't work.  
 CARLA: I'm never scared of anything. I just watch it all unfold, figure out my own way, where, maybe, I can help.  
 MOM: I'm scared for all of 'em.  
 DAD: And I think I speak for all of us when I say I'm scared most of all for the San Jose Sharks.  
 MOM: I'm scared for you, Craig. Second opinion and all, I'm still terrified.  
 DEANNA: But I'm going back to Brown, and I'm going to carve out time to do some reading I've neglected.  
 ASHLEY: Me, too.  
 DEANNA: I, Deanna, having been born of goodly parents. . . .  
 JACK: Therefore I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father. . . .  
 ASHLEY: And being richly favored of the Lord in all my days . . .  
 CARLA: Therefore, I make a record. Of our proceedings.  
 DAD: Of *all* our proceedings.  
 CARLA: We listen and we bicker and we tease. And share the same dumb jokes, and work to solve the puzzle. The greatest puzzle of all. Family. ☺

(*Music. They all dance, this time to Bob Dylan's "Shelter From the Storm."*)

FINAL BLACKOUT

2002 Brookie & D. K. Brown Fiction Contest Sunstone Winner

# THE ANGEL IN THE PIN-STRIPED SUIT

By Mari Jorgensen

JARED, THE MAN IN MY LIFE, STILL DOESN'T KNOW that I know this about him: his white-hot fear that he's responsible for his brother's death. It's been nearly two years since the night I sat hunkered under an afghan in my apartment in Salt Lake, shushing my roommates as they played Uno on the floor and watching the grainy images of Jared on TV. Of course I didn't know then it was Jared. He was simply some stranger standing before the red-rock formations in St. George—rocks that looked as if they were made from wire and plaster, painted in pinks and browns and part of the runaway train ride at Disneyland.

A reporter was asking him if his brother was still alive when he left him on the rock.

"Alive?" Jared had said. This was St. George, one of the hottest seats of the desert soul, yet he had his hands jammed into his armpits like a man waiting for a bus on a nippy morning. "We were up there," he said, flicking his finger in an indeterminate direction. "The lip crumbled, and he fell."

"But your brother," the reporter pressed. "Was he alive when you left him?"

"Screw him," one of my roommates said. "Who does he think he is? Freaking Sherlock Holmes?"

"Shhh," I said. Leaning forward, I shoved the afghan aside as if its weight on my legs might somehow impede my ability to comprehend what was happening. Jared appealed to me even then, even though he looked, according to my roommates, "a little creepy"—his lips twisting into a sort of half-sneer, his hair sticking out from his head in sweaty tufts.

"Alive," Jared was saying. "But just barely. I didn't know what to do. I was never a Boy Scout or anything. I never learned CPR. I had to go for help."



MARI JORGENSEN is a full-time mother and a part-time composition instructor and writer. She lives with her husband and children in Midway, Utah. She is currently working on her first young adult novel, *Lizzy at Large*. She welcomes comments and feedback at

<mejorgensen@msn.com>.

"And were the two of you using climbing equipment?"

"Shut up!" my roommate shrieked. "It's not his fault! Sometimes things just freaking happen, okay?"

Now, more than two years later, I count myself lucky, because baggage or no baggage, Jared is one sweet guy. Tonight, for example, he's called to tell me he has this hot ache deep in his gut whenever he pictures my face. I miss him, too, being stuck as I have been for the past four days here in Scottsdale, Arizona (a.k.a Hell), for a training conference my firm sponsors. And, as if being subjected to lectures entitled "Determining the Fair Value of Assets" and "Calculating Projected Benefit Obligations" for eight hours a day isn't bad enough, I've also had to put up with some serious morons. Out of the three hundred and twenty-three CPAs crammed into this resort (a posh place with three tennis courts, two heated pools, and a staff of Mexican chambermaids who congregate in the courtyard stacking towels on their carts and giving you the evil eye as if you're personally responsible for robbing their ancestors blind), only forty-nine of us are managers. The rest are "new hires": kids fresh out of school and with their frat-boy mentalities still intact.

"These frat boys," I tell Jared tonight. "They're clueless. I don't know why they come."

"Lane," Jared says, his voice as smooth and soothing as a glass of warm milk. I can picture him lying on his bed in his boxers, his ceiling fan whirring over his head, his dog Tobias draped over his ankles. "When will you get it? We're all the same, us frat boys. It's you who is the anomaly, the angel in the pin-striped suit that the rest of us slobs are just trying to look good for."

"Yes," I say, "but does it have to be that way?"

Jared says: "Come on, Laney. When are you coming home? Hop on the first flight out and you could be home by eight. I need you to tell me to peel my butt off the bed and pick up my socks. And Tobias is so blue he can hardly see straight."

Tobias is a husky-malamute mix—way too hairy to hack Salt Lake in the summer. In the summer he mopes around with his tongue lolling out of his mouth and sheds fist-size

balls of fur that skitter around Jared's apartment like families of brazen mice. He won't perk up unless we pack him into Jared's Wrangler and head for the hills, for the part of the Uinta National Forest where the sky is a cool, liquid-blue and where you can still camp wherever you want as long as it's a hundred feet off the main road.

This is where we like to play house. Here, high in the Uinta National Forest, the three of us tend to morph from our true selves—a frazzled career woman, a grease monkey who's haunted by his fear that he killed his brother, and a slobbering dog. We become, instead, a tight nuclear family.

Tobias, of course, is the child. The moment the Wrangler grinds to a stop, he's scrambling out, nicking the hell out of Jared's paint job. He lopes from tree stump to rock, snapping at the pine-scented air and snuffling at gopher holes. Jared and I stand by and watch, smiling and holding hands like the sweet married couple we're pretending to be.

I am the mother, only I'm the one who brings the hatchet. I know the different types of fires: tepee, log house, etc. I know about knots, too: half hitch, double half hitch, clove hitch, sheepshank, and my favorite—the bowline. The bowline is a knot used for rock climbing, but it also comes in handy if you're camping and you want to make soap-on-a-rope. Jared says I should have been made an Eagle scout. I tell him yes, I should have been made an Eagle Scout because when I was a kid, my dad was Scoutmaster and, up until the summer I turned thirteen and started growing breasts, he used to take me along with him on their campouts. If my dad had had his way, I say, I would have been made an Eagle Scout ten times over.

"You have breasts?" Jared says whenever I tell him this story. "Let me see."

Now, lying on my bed in this posh resort, I don't know how to respond to Jared. What can I say? He knows as well as I do



JEANNETTE ATWOOD

*"Alive," Jared was saying. "But just barely."*

septum" and hung out at the labs, poking around inside leathery-skinned cadavers and reeking of Formaldehyde. It was pure and unadulterated bliss. But then all the buzz started going around about the possibility of medical care becoming socialized, and there was all the squabbling and backbiting over the barest of openings in even the country's second- and third-rate medical schools. After that, all I could do was picture the remaining seven years of my education—more if I wanted to specialize—stacked one right after the other like a train of freight cars stretching into the horizon of my life, waiting to crush me.

So I switched, and five years later, I had my "big MAcc"—my master's in accounting. Now I work fifty to sixty-five hours a week. More during tax season. I question various companies' derivatives; I hash out their unrealized gains and losses. I receive "Exceeds Expectations" on my quarterly reviews. (What, Jared says, are you so hellbent on proving?) I am a person who, in short, is hurtling herself down what we in public accounting refer to as the "partner track." A phrase which, if I allow myself to dwell on it too much, recalls to my mind that

I promised my father, who retired two years ago to a trailer park in Mesa, that I would stay over for a couple of days. And he doesn't really expect me to bail on my father, does he?

"You don't really expect me to bail on my father, do you?" I ask.

Jared is silent. He is silent for so long—at least several seconds—that I imagine I can hear the blades of his ceiling fan whirling their blurred circle above his head. "Fine," he says. "Stay over. But remember, Lane. This is the man who named you after a feature in a bowling alley, for crying out loud. How loyal do you think you have to be?"

I BECAME A CPA for the money. I have no qualms about admitting this. During my first two semesters at the University of Utah, I was in pre-med. I memorized terms like "fractured tibia" and "deviated

same set of freight cars.

This is what I'm thinking about while I sit in one of the resort's lobby chairs, my laptop open, a spreadsheet staring me in the face. I am waiting for my father, trying as usual to be productive in this spare pocket of time. But my mind simply won't *fix*. Clearly it's Jared's fault. That cool yawn of silence he allowed to creep into our phone conversation last night? It makes me feel jangly and unhinged. I can't help it. Jared, this guy who works at Lee's Automotive and who wears green polyester shirts with his name stitched into the right breast pockets—this is the man who holds it so easily within his power to nail my heart to the wall.

"Lane? Laney?"

I almost don't recognize him. Emerging from the revolving glass door, his face filmy from the out-of-doors swelter, my father appears before me like a stranger. I don't know why he strikes me as different. He looks the same as he did three months ago when he last came to Salt Lake. His hair is the same—the color of snow, carefully parted and shellacked to his forehead. He's wearing the same Dexters, the same pressed khakis, the same white dress shirt I know he ordered from Land's End because, ever since he conducted his own product durability test years ago, he orders all his shirts from Land's End.

These are the same clothes and the same hairstyle my father has worn ever since I can remember. He wore them to work and to mow the lawn and to attend the movies. On Sundays, he dressed them up with a jacket and tie, and he wore them to church. So why am I surprised?

I snap my laptop shut. "Hi, Dad," I say, struggling out of the overstuffed chair.

He offers his hand. "You work too much," he says.

"So people tell me."

Outside, my father's Crown Victoria is idling in the handicapped stall by the front entrance; a woman with a poodle on her lap is sitting in the passenger's seat. "That's Ida," my father says.

Rolling down the window, she hits us with a burst of refrigerated air. Her poodle gives me the once-over with these yellow-rimmed eyes. "Pleased to meet you," she says. "This is Jeepers. Say hello, Jeepers." She flaps her dog's paw at me.

I smile rigidly and wait for some sort of explanation from my father as to who this woman is. Perhaps a lonely neighbor who needed a lift to the grocery store? Perhaps someone he met at church—someone who likes cruising around in Crown Victorias on blistering afternoons? Perhaps a friendless widow he's been assigned to home teach?

It becomes quickly apparent, however, that no explanation is forthcoming. I climb into the Crown Victoria, which reeks of hot leather and Ben Gay. Soon my father is veering madly through Scottsdale's six o'clock traffic while Ida yammers on about how it's so much worse in the winter, when the sunbirds descend upon the city in an infestation of Winnebagos. "You see that tree?" she says as we're nearing the outskirts, her whiskery face poked between the two front headrests.

"What tree?" All I can see are several straggly cacti dotting

the rim of a golf course.

"That tree." She points.

"You mean the cactus?"

"It's called a saguaro. See those holes in it? Most people think they're made by golf balls. That's what Arnie thought when he first came. Didn't you, Arnie?" (My father grunts non-committedly.) "But really birds peck those holes and make their homes in there."

By now, Jeepers has his head between the two front seats as well. It hovers just below Ida's. I nod, wondering what I'm supposed to do with this information, and shift in my seat, trying to arrange myself so that no part of my rayon blouse is touching my skin. "Is that so?" I say.

We're heading to the Village Inn for dinner. As soon as we step inside and are met by Velma, the blue-haired hostess, it's pretty apparent I'm the only one in the place under sixty. Suddenly I'm keenly aware of my legs. I'm wearing a business suit with a mid-thigh skirt, and all I can think about are my legs, which (even if I do say so myself) are thin and shapely and, as of yet, completely spider-vein free. They feel obscene.

"What's good here?" I say after we've been seated.

"I'd recommend the meat loaf," Ida says.

"First things first," my father says. And he begins to talk. I can tell he's leading up to something big because while he talks he brings his hand down on the table at right angles, as if slicing off squares from a sheet cake. He says he hopes I know he loved my mother and that they had a wonderful life together. He says he hopes I know he loves me.

He says he and Ida got married last week.

"Excuse me?" I say. "Are you shitting me?"

My father blinks. His hand, side up on the table, stops cold.

"I mean," I stammer, "I don't understand. How could you be married? I didn't even know you were dating."

"We're no spring chickens," my father says. "What's the point in waiting? Last week, Ida and I just up and went to the temple."

"No notice?" I say. "No invitations?"

My father swipes the side of his hand across his pink laminated place mat as if he's brushing away crumbs. It was, however, as far as I could tell crumb-free. "I didn't want any of you to feel like you had to make a special trip. And, Laney"—his voice is apologetic—"it wasn't like you could have come."

My father's eyes, I notice, are a little bloodshot.

I know then that I have no choice but to succumb. It is a familiar, almost friendly feeling. It is a feeling straining with guilt, a feeling that tells me I'm screwing up. I'm screwing up my father's happy nuptials, just like I screwed up when I switched from pre-med to accounting. Just like I screwed up when my mother was sick, just like I screwed up when I became a "Jack Mormon"—or whatever the feminine equivalent would be—and just like I'm probably screwing up with Jared.

"Really," Ida says. "You should try the meat loaf." She reaches across the table, and in a gesture I find as invasive as if she'd just reached inside my blouse and snapped my bra strap, she points to an item on my menu. She smiles a sweet, wobbly smile. "The meat loaf here is superb."

**A**NOTHER SECRET: NOT only does Jared not know that I know about his white-hot fear, he also doesn't know how I manipulated his fate.

It was after I saw him on the news report and knew that he and I were destined to be together. I called Channel 4 and in this sophisticated CPA voice I trot out sometimes with clients, I asked one of the flunkies there whether or not a donation account had been set up for the family of the poor boy who had fallen to his death the other day in St. George. No, the flunky told me, there was no account that he knew of, but if I would hold the line, he was sure he could hook me up with someone who could help me find at least a post office box address.

"Thank you," I said. "That would be helpful."

After that, all I had to do was stake out the post office. Fortunately, it was after the tax deadline, so I took a couple weeks off work and parked in front of

the post office with the zip code matching the one the flunky had given me. I bought a bunch of business-sized envelopes and sat hunched over them for hours, rifling through them, scribbling down addresses. And all the while I watched out of the corner of my eye the rows of numbered boxes in the alcove just beyond the swinging glass doors.

On day four, I saw him. He looked exactly as he had on the news report: his hair still standing on end, his eyes still brimming with bewilderment. I thought I even recognized the flap of blue material sagging below the rim of his sweatshirt. It was, I was fairly certain, the same T-shirt he'd been wearing during the news interview five days before.

I then pulled the oldest trick in the book, timing it so that at the exact moment Jared was walking past my car, his eyes glued to the wad of envelopes he held clutched in his hands, I swung open my door. His knees hit it with a soft plunk. "Oh," I gasped, springing out of the car to help gather his mail, which was now strewn over the asphalt. "Are you okay? Anything missing?"

"Missing?" Jared said.

And just like that, he was smitten. It was positively corny, like a scene in a bad made-for-TV movie, the way we stood there, barely breathing, our eyes locked in what can only be

described as a grand and wordless rapture. It was the first time in my life I felt like I was flying and falling at same time. We were each other's destiny. So what if the cosmos needed a slight nudge?

But now, lying on the Murphy bed in the sunroom of my father's double-wide trailer, I find I can't sleep. For one thing, the



JEANNETTE ATWOOD

*It was a gesture I find as invasive as if she'd just reached inside my blouse and snapped my bra strap.*

walls are too flimsy. They are nothing more than corrugated metal and tack board, and they don't do a thing to muffle the sounds of the desert nightlife. You'd think that in a place like Mesa, where everything appears to be either dead or dying (except, naturally, for the golf courses), you wouldn't have to worry about lying awake at night listening to croaking and chirping and caterwauling. I've never heard anything like it; the only sound I can pinpoint is the cicadas. You can't mistake the sound of cicadas—their high-pitched drone is exactly what I imagine you'd hear in your head just before you went insane.

Squeezing my head between my hands, I try to block out the cicadas and the image of my father's guilt-inducing stare and the memory of that flap of blue material sticking out from beneath Jared's sweatshirt. It's been a full twenty-four hours since I've talked to him. Where could he be? I've tried calling him three times since we left Village Inn, but all I get is his voice informing me that he's either out or in the can but assuring me that I know what to do. I feel more unhinged than ever.

In the kitchen my father is eating tuna on Melba toast. Splayed on the table in front of him is the photo album my mother put together in the weeks before her death. He is

thumbing through it, pausing to run his fingertips over photos here and there. It still flabbergasts me what my mother was able to accomplish in the weeks before she died. Take this album. It isn't one of those cheap peel-and-stick ones; it's a full-blown scrapbook, complete with humorous captions and field day ribbons and ticket stubs to Disney on Ice.

"Can't sleep?" my father says, nudging a pot of peppermint tea across the table towards me. The sleeves of his robe are folded up, so that he looks like a child who has grown out of his clothes.

"Nope," I say, slumping into a chair across from him.

"Have some tea," he says.

I nod and pour myself a mug. It tastes like green water.

"I can't get over it." My father is still paging through the scrapbook. "It was so beautiful, the way you helped your mother before she died."

"What?" I say.

"I haven't forgotten, you know. I remember how you used to bring her ice chips in that blue plastic cup."

"Uh-huh," I say. I can't help but fix on the cordless phone resting in its cradle on the kitchen counter. It is inexplicably, thunderously silent.

"You were lovely with her."

"What?" I wrench myself back to my father.

"The ice chips," he says. "You remember?"

I nod. My father's memory is so slippery. What he recalls from that time—that long stretch from my mother's diagnosis to her death—is me bringing her ice chips in a blue plastic cup. What I remember is that I was twelve. I brought her ice chips, but only because she asked me to in a voice so dark and sickly-sweet I was sure it was the cancer itself, welling up from inside her gaunt and struggling body. I remember that was the year I bought my first pair of jeans that zipped at the ankles. It was the year I went to Windy Hills on an overnight camping trip with the other sixth graders. I was twelve. What had I to do, I remember thinking, with the woman lying in a rented hospital bed, asking for ice chips?

"Uh-huh," I say. "I remember."

"Lovely," he says, and he continues to thumb through my mother's memories, passing his fingertips over the pages, bobbing his head up and down like a blind man reading Braille.

**O**N THIS, THE third and last day of my visit, my father has informed me that it's high time he de-winterized his cabin.

Technically, it's not really a cabin. It's a single-wide trailer he deposited on a wooded lot he owns in the mountains near Payson—a place he can escape to when the temperature in Mesa spikes to over a hundred for weeks at a time. But he says it needs de-winterizing, so we all pile into the car—Ida and my father and Jeepers and me—and pretty soon we're climbing higher and higher to a place where the air is sharp and clean.

"I'm sorry," was all Jared said the other morning when I finally got him on the phone. "Lee was swamped, and I needed the overtime."

"I thought you were dead," I said.

"No," Jared said. "Not dead. Just dying one day at a time, like the rest of us."

"Ha-ha," I said.

I was miffed, and Jared knew I was miffed, but what was there to say? He didn't wheedle and goad me to come home. He said, "So I was working late. It's not like you never work late."

Now my father, hunched over the steering wheel, is driving at a heartbreakingly slow pace. I close my eyes, and the shadows of pines flit over my lids.

After we've arrived at the single-wide, my father rummages through a shed out back for a couple of minutes, then emerges with two rakes and a crumpled box of Hefty garbage sacks. "First things first," he says.

Soon we're busting our butts, Ida and my father and I, scraping together piles of yellowing needles and stuffing them into garbage sacks while Jeepers bops around our ankles. Ida is surprisingly spry for her age. I can't help but think of Jared's mother, who is about Ida's age but who has two prosthetic hips and several fused spinal disks and, consequently, is on orders from her doctor to avoid any kind of "BLT"—bending, lifting, and twisting. But here's Ida like a bat out of hell.

"I'm sorry," was all Jared said last night. And it's not until now, raking pine needles in Payson with my father and new stepmother, that it comes to me, like a gift, what I should have said to him. No, I should have said. I'm the one who's sorry. Because I know I'm failing you. You think I don't know I'm failing you?

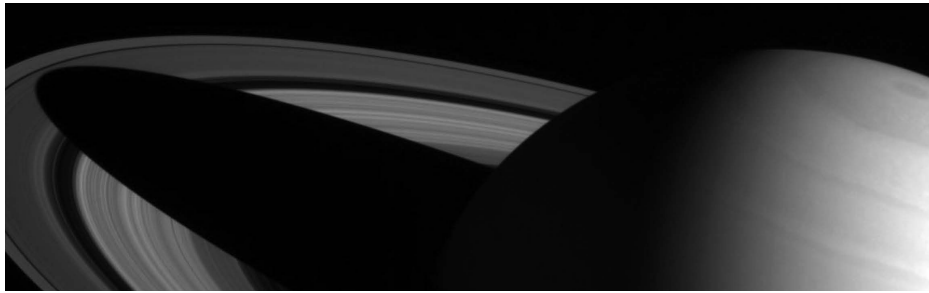
*But here's the thing, I should have said. This is what I dream. At night, when the lights are out, I dream that I met you more than two years ago and taught you CPR. I have CPR down cold. Did you know that? My father taught me back when I was an honorary member of the Boy Scouts. He taught me where to place my hands over a dying person's heart; he taught me how to cover the dying person's mouth with mine; he taught me how to count. I could have taught you. But better yet, I could have taught you the bowline. Not just good for soap-on-a-rope, the bowline—it's also a rock-climbing knot. I dream I taught you the saying that helps you remember: the rabbit comes out of its hole, around the tree and back into its hole again. The trick is getting the loop right. You have to get the loop going the right way to begin with, or when the rabbit goes into its hole the knot will slip.*

This is what I dream, I could have told Jared. But when I'm awake, I'm fully aware that if you fail a person once in your life you can't help but fail him or her again and again. Because our pasts bleed. No matter what we do—no matter what kinds of mad-dash, scrambling efforts we make—our pasts bleed and bleed and there's not enough gauze in the world to stop them.

I could have told him all this. This is what I realize as I hold open a garbage bag for my father to rake crumpled leaves into. And it's a pity, really, that I didn't tell him, because squatting here on my haunches in Payson, Arizona, it comes to me with a startling, bell-like clarity—like a gift from God—that Jared, the man in my life, would have understood it well. ☹

## TURNING THE TIME OVER TO . . .

Stephen Carter

HOW TO USE THE TOTAL  
PERSPECTIVE VORTEX IN YOUR VERY  
OWN SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASS

**I**N HIS BOOK, *Fear and Trembling*, the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard writes something that has lodged in my brain with the tenacity of a chorus from any Barry Manilow song. He muses about what it might be like to teach the story of Abraham and Isaac to a congregation. It's a strange story. (How often do we tell stories about attempted infanticide with any degree of sympathy for the guy on the blunt end of the knife?) It involves a man who is commanded by God to plunge a knife into the heart of his son—a son who is supposed to father Abraham's giant future kingdom, no less. But it is also probably one of the most mind-blowing meditations on faith and sacrifice in literature.

Kierkegaard imagines that, in the first place, it would be quite a decision for anyone to choose to tell the story. Because really, who wants to be blamed for a sudden violent decrease in youth program attendance? But imagining that the preacher decides he must tell the story of Abraham, Kierkegaard hypothesizes that he should approach the telling of the story with great care. At every point he should remind his audience of Abraham's overpowering love for his son. He should remind them of how heinous this act

is, and detail every misery, every regret, every broken social contract required to fulfill the commandment God gave to Abraham. Because what if—what *if* someone actually takes the story seriously? What if, the next day, a man decides to take his son out to a mountain to offer him as a gift to God? This would be a catastrophe, and the preacher would be obligated by all that is good to make every attempt to stop this man from carrying out a sacrificial act that the preacher himself had lauded just the day before.

Kierkegaard spends the rest of his book hypothesizing about how Abraham's story works in the larger scheme of things, and I encourage you to read it. But I want to stop here because I am interested, not in Abraham, but in the fellow in the congregation who was so struck by Abraham's story. I'm trying to remember the last time a Sunday school lesson affected me like that. No, not the last time I felt homicidal—I feel that way quite frequently during Church lessons—but the last time I felt as though I had entered a space as spiritually volatile as Kierkegaard's hypothetical sermon. When was the last time a Sunday school lesson took the Rubik's Cube of my soul, mixed it up completely, pasted on new colors here and

there, and threw it back in my lap? In other words, when was the last time a Sunday school lesson *converted* me?

Sadly, not in recent memory.

And this bothers me. I'd like to think that our church meetings can be places of great growth for the souls of people like me. I'm trying to figure out why my Sunday meetings seem so benign and impotent. If I can, maybe I can do something about it. Thus, I offer the following: an analysis of the average Sunday class, undertaken by an amateur rhetorician (whose English and philosophy degrees should be counted as liabilities rather than assets), and some ideas on how to improve things.

**T**O begin with, it seems I should ask: what is the goal of the two hours we spend in Sunday classes? Are they for instruction? Edification? Enlightenment about the principles of the gospel? Are they for reaffirming our beliefs? To give nourishment to our world-weary souls? To explore the highest heights and the deepest abysses? To learn the mysteries of godliness? Let's say the answer is D—all of the above. So the question now is, how does the average Sunday class go about achieving these objectives?

Observing the setup of my priesthood quorum and Sunday school classes, I've started to draw some conclusions about their pedagogical leanings. At first glance, it looks like learning about the gospel consists of hearing the good word from someone authoritative and then applying it during the course of our normal lives.

But wait. This is preaching, and preaching takes place during our seventy minutes in the chapel, a time and place specifically designed for one-way communication: from pulpit to audience. So maybe our Sunday classroom time is meant for something else. Since we're usually sitting in a small room, perhaps it's meant for a more personable style of communication. Maybe more of a small group discussion. A time where the Saints get together to talk about how the principles of the gospel have (or have not) been applicable to their lives recently.

This scenario sounds about like what I experience each week. And it seems to be effective in some ways. The teacher never seems to have a hard time eliciting comments from the group. People are always willing to hold forth or tell a story. So I suppose the question is, in what ways is this time of personable, two-way communication put to use? And how useful is it?

So far I've identified three basic ap-



STEPHEN CARTER lives in Fairbanks, Alaska, with his ravishing wife, Noelle. Having finished their MFAs in creative writing, both of them are now working on Ph.D.s in cross-cultural education. Their two sons are majoring in swimming, GameCube, and Captain Underpants. Stephen can be reached at <fsrc@uaf.edu>.

## It is paramount to my spiritual survival that I am shown, on a regular basis, that the world is a much larger place than I had originally thought.

proaches to Sunday class lessons. The first I call the Pep Rally. In this setup, the teacher comes with a topic at the ready. At the beginning of the meeting, he tells us what the principle up for cheers is, reads a quotation or two, and everyone happily joins in singing the praises of faith, sacrifice, the Word of Wisdom, whatever.

Second is the Tips 'n' Trix Seminar. In this model, the teacher reveals the topic, acknowledges that following the particular principle is sometimes difficult and enjoins the crowd to cite scriptures and examples to help the theoretical wayfarer keep the commandment in question. When conducting a Tips 'n' Trix seminar, Relief Society sisters usually have the foresight to create a good acronym or list to paste onto refrigerator magnets.

The third strategy is the Whack-a-Moral Game, in which the teacher brings in stories, reads them aloud, and then leads the class in extracting a moral from them, no matter what those stories may be. These lessons are most fun during the Old Testament years.

All of these structures seem to work just fine. But what do these three approaches say about the kind of teaching we, as Latter-day Saints, are content with? As far as I can surmise, these three structures assert that values are essentially black and white. Faith is good; sacrifice is good; the Word of Wisdom is good. The world is bad; disobedient children are bad; drugs are bad. Humans are split into the forces of good and evil, but, lo, a principle has come to us shining from the heights, a principle that can heal ills, answer life's difficult questions, fold your socks, and provide the answer to that all-perplexing question, "What do you say if your wife asks you how she looks in her newly purchased dress, and she looks frumpy?"

Essentially, when a teacher stands up and starts a lesson as a Pep Rally, Tips 'n' Trix seminar, or Whack-a-Moral game, he or she has, consciously or not, limited the playing field. He or she has constructed an atmosphere that accepts only polarities. "Faith is good because of such and such." "We need to work harder." "We need to reject the evils of the world, and here are ways I have done that."



At first, such structures don't look so bad. And I believe there are good times and places for them. However, from time to time, these approaches are taken to absurd extremes. For example, the Sunday school lesson I attended that, by the teacher's innocent oversight, blundered into Judah's seduction by his daughter-in-law (Judah thought he was rattling the bushes with a mere whore: little did he realize. . .). Discovering the moral can of worms she had just opened up, the teacher blithely tied the story shut by saying, "This shows us that we should teach our children the law of chastity." A direct bulls-eye in a Whack-a-Moral game.

Another time, a member of my quorum recounted an experience when a skeptic had told him that although his argument for obeying the Word of Wisdom had been a good one, he was obviously "programmed" to say that. My quorum brother said he was disturbed by this accusation, but after thinking about it had decided that, indeed, he had been programmed. And what good programming it was, too! In fact, he was programming his own children to the same ends. I figured this comment was an anomaly and let it slide, despite its frightening implications about the human soul. But then a second brother took up the ball, grandly stating, "Some people call it brainwashing; I call it indoctrination." The Pep Rally was in full swing, much to the delight of our good-hearted teacher.

As far as I can tell, the unsettling implications of Judah's story were pushed aside so easily because, when in the clutches of these pedagogies, which I have chosen to call the Three Sedating Sins, we feel that we must have answers to quickly put sticky questions to rest. When in the grip of the Pep Rally, Tips 'n' Trix Seminar, or Whack-a-Moral Game, no question can come up that can't be dealt with promptly. The programming inci-

dent is an example of the Pep Rally gone wrong: a bizarre idea was brought up, but since it supported the original premise of the lesson, no one challenged it. If any statement supports the principle *du jour*, it must be on the level.

I finally could bear it no longer and objected to the programming model on grounds of free agency. But no one in the quorum responded to my objection. They just went on to the next comment. There is no contradiction so blatant, no claim so outlandish, that it can't be swept under the rug in seconds by a class under the influence of one of the Three Sedating Sins. All it takes is a "Well, yes, sometimes life is difficult, but the gospel is true, and that's what really matters."

And that's probably true, but I'm not sure that maxim should let us ignore the huge paradoxes of life. This is where my own peculiarities come into play. This is where the essay throws off its veil of objectivity (like I've been fooling anyone) and shows you what I value.

I'M a strict adherent to the Thirteenth Article of Faith, especially the part that says, "if there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things." I don't follow this rule because I'm righteous. I follow it purely out of a survival instinct. It is paramount to my spiritual survival that I am shown, on a regular basis, that the world is a much larger place than I had originally thought. I need periodic inoculations in the Total Perspective Vortex as described in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.<sup>1</sup> In case you haven't read this series of science fiction novels, which I consider to be some of the greatest contemporary works of philosophy we have, the Total Perspective Vortex can extrapolate the entirety of reality from something as insignificant as a piece of fairy cake. The Vortex is used to execute especially dangerous criminals by showing them precisely how small they are in comparison to the rest of the universe. The effects of this "reality check" annihilate the victim.

Being human, I naturally tend to interpret the world as being smaller than myself, as a

## "I come here to get answers. All you give me is questions." I was about to congratulate myself when I realized that she didn't seem very grateful.

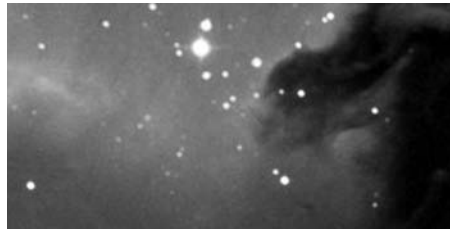
place I have some measure of control over. And being a lower breed of academic, I'm especially prone to thinking that I'm smarter than everyone else. When I suddenly realize that the world is larger than I had once thought, my small mind is horrified but also, strangely, comforted. As the playwright David Mamet writes in *Three Uses of the Knife*, "Myth, religion, and tragedy . . . awaken awe. They do not deny our powerlessness, but through its avowal they free us of the burden of its repression."<sup>2</sup>

For example, in the movie *Seven*, Brad Pitt's character, a homicide investigator who has contemptuously treated his quarry (a man who kills serially according to the seven deadly sins, played by Kevin Spacey), is caught in a position where he must either help fulfill the killer's plan or acknowledge the killer's superior intelligence. The killer literally has Pitt's wife's head delivered by courier. Pitt has a gun, and the killer is in chains. He knows that Pitt has an explosive temper and will most likely give way to wrath, the last deadly sin, for which there has not yet been a murder committed. It is an ending that never fails to open my soul to the core. To me, Pitt is everyman. At some point each of us will find ourselves in Pitt's shoes: the world will be too big for us, and it will demand an answer. What is really inside of us? No tips or trix will suffice.

As the screen fades, Morgan Freeman (Pitt's partner) says, "Ernest Hemingway once wrote, 'The world is a fine place, and worth fighting for.' I agree with the second part."

Other works of art have done the same thing for me: Levi Petersen's *The Backslider*, Graham Greene's *Heart of the Matter*, Sharon Olds's *The Gold Cell*, the movies *Monster* (another serial-killer flick) and *My Dinner with Andre*, and Gustav Mahler's *Symphony of a Thousand*.

What these pieces of art offer me are trips into the depths and heights of life, to places where the paradoxes become almost unbearable. I say "almost" because, while experiencing a piece of art, I am not actually in the situations, only by proxy. It's a strange kind of temple work: fictional characters performing initiations and endowments for living, breathing people. From time to time,



the scriptures do the same thing for me, especially the Old Testament and the sayings of Jesus. The juxtaposition of God with the horrors of Joshua's war tactics never fails to blow my mind, nor does Jesus' contention, "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these" (Matthew 6:28–29).

This is the mission of religion for me. To take me to those places, to help me open my soul to the hugeness of the world. To encounter the paradoxes. To contemplate the heights and the depths. To push rationality till it breaks and then to rocket into mystery. Who knows where we'll land? As Kierkegaard put it,

When I have to think of Abraham, I am as though annihilated. I catch sight every moment of that enormous paradox which is the substance of Abraham's life, every moment I am repelled. . . . [W]hen I reach the height I fall down"<sup>3</sup>

As you can see, I'm not hip on the Pep Rally, the Tips 'n' Trix Seminar, nor the Whack-a-Moral Game. I think they are used far more often than their limited capacities can bear. But I wonder: am I asking too much? I mean, are church classes really meant to rocket us into mystery? If I were founding the Church of Carter, the sign on the door would read: Your soul seared in one hour or your tithing back. But is it fair for me to ask that our class time to be devoted to the deep and paradoxical when so often what some of my brothers and sisters really need is just a little boost to help them face the coming week?

Mamet was writing about drama, but he articulates this kind of dilemma well.

Stanislavsky says there are two

kinds of plays. There are the plays that you leave, and you say to yourself, "By God, I just, I never, gosh, I want to, now I understand! What a masterpiece! Let's go get a cup of coffee." And by the time you get home, you can't remember the name of the play, you can't remember what the play was about.

And there are plays—and books and songs and poems and dances—that you leave unsure, but which you think about perhaps the next day and perhaps for a week, and perhaps for the rest of your life.

Because they aren't clean, they aren't neat, but there's something in them that comes from the heart, and, so, goes to the heart."<sup>4</sup>

As an experiment, I twice tried to create a non-clean, non-neat teaching atmosphere, to construct an environment where something like what Mamet describes could happen. And believe me, it was difficult. The first time I tried it was in an early morning high school seminary class; the second was in an elders quorum meeting.

When I took over the seminary class, the outgoing teacher tearfully bore her testimony to the class members that I was the one the Lord wanted to teach the class now. I knew that she really loved that class. It was a big part of her life. And now she was turning it over to me. Her daughter was in the class and would surely report on my attempts at teaching, which made me kind of nervous.

Looking back, I realize that experimenting on the early morning seminary class was probably ill advised. Brains that have just been roused from sleep are not in the mood to explore ambiguities, much less open their souls to the core. Essentially what I tried to do was take each of the lessons and find a place where things got muddy, where a person actually had to do a little thinking, and where there was actually no answer.

One of my methods was to have my students write letters to a non-member friend of mine, telling him about the gospel. I wanted his influence because he could ask questions that I could not. The students couldn't as-

## If I were founding the Church of Carter, the sign on the door would read: Your soul seared in one hour or your tithing back.

sume he had any previous knowledge about the Church or the gospel. They had to start at the beginning, which required examining their beliefs and assumptions. My friend agreed to answer the letters if I would provide Sunday dinner each week. With some prompting from me, he drafted questions about the concepts they had written about in their letters: I bet you think I'm going to hell, huh? Does reason have anything to do with your faith? What if God tells me to kill someone, like he told that Nephi guy?

I brought the questions back and used them as discussion starters. I thought this would be a good idea. I mean, my class members were in communication with a real person whose soul, ostensibly, hadn't been saved. Real mission field stuff. I had other tactics, too, all designed to make the gospel real. Well, "real" as I define it, meaning that it makes a difference in the way you live your life and brings up questions that can turn your head inside out.

It turned out that I garnered more complaints in a month than most teachers get in the normal four-year term. I should have guessed this was going to happen when the previous teacher's daughter (who was also one of the brightest people in the class) said, "I come here to get answers. All you give me is questions." I was about to congratulate myself when I realized that she didn't seem very grateful.

The first official who came through to check me out (they have to perform a personal visit for every complaint) was understanding. He could see what I was trying to do and expressed his support as long as I didn't teach false doctrine. But the next guy who came was firmly of the Pep Rally, Tips 'n' Trix, Whack-a-Moral school, and he was very, very good at his job. The problem was, everyone knew why he was there; they also knew that my teaching methods rely heavily on discussion, and so they boycotted me. Half an hour into class, I had to turn everything over to the official. The students gratefully followed his formulated lesson plan, and I knew then that I wasn't cut out to teach this class.



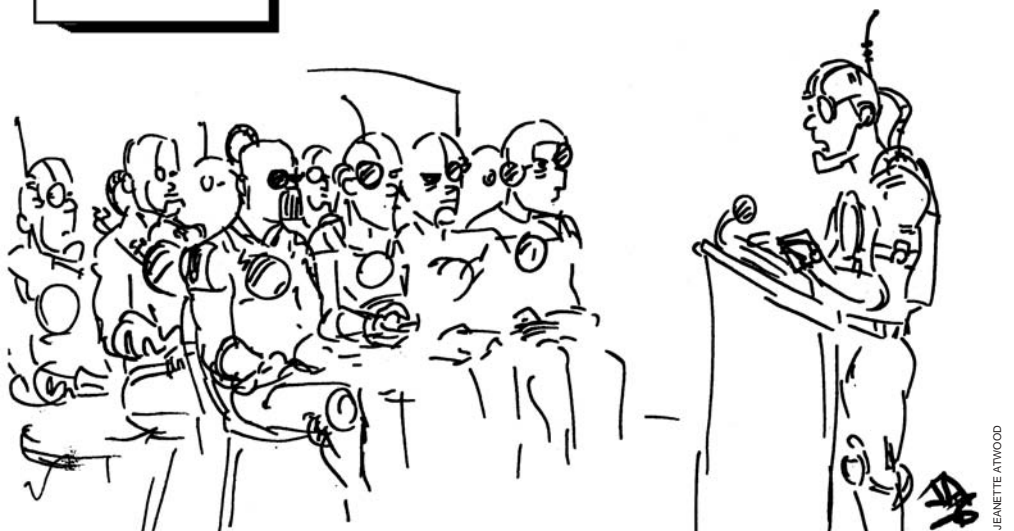
Strangely, there was one girl who had attended seminary only sporadically before I became the teacher, but she attended almost every class during the month I taught. She sat next to me (I formed my class in a circle), mysterious and silent. I wondered why she came at all. The last day of class before Christmas break, she gave me a letter that I still treasure. It turned out that my neuroses were her neuroses, too, and she was grateful to have company for a month. She said she was leaving to go on a work-study program and wouldn't be back to seminary. Thanks to this letter, I figured that maybe the previous teacher had actually known what she was talking about. God really *had* called me there. But it was for this one person, and she was leaving now. For that reason, and some other good ones having to do with my wife's

health, I gave the job up to a husband-wife team. They give the kids what they expect and do it very well.

The elders quorum experience was better. After all, I only had half an hour to mess up instead of a whole month. As I prepared for the lesson (which took all week), I found myself contending with all the temptations of the Three Sedating Sins. I realized how engrained they are in my own psyche, that everyone would subconsciously expect at least one of these models, and that I was completely unwilling to give it to them. I also realized that at every point, I would have to be vigilant lest we succumb to the gravitational pull of one of the Sins. This was no easy task.

Throughout the week, I constructed practice classes in my mind, posing questions and imagining various responses. It took me all week—hours of conversation with my wife, plus actually reading the lesson materials—to come up with some questions I thought I could pose constructively. I thought the questions could work because they drew on values that have equal weight within a Mormon worldview but contra-

BORG SUNDAY  
SCHOOL...



"Today's lesson is on unity . . ."

## I tried to take each lesson and find a place where things got muddy, where a person actually had to do a little thinking, where there was actually no answer.

dicted each other at the same time.

The lesson topic was work. So I decided to see if the elders would be willing to assert that there is some hierarchy of values when it comes to work—that certain kinds of work are more valuable than others. This was easily done. We also came to an agreement that self-reliance was a good thing. Once these two values were established, I asked them, “So what about Jesus? He was always living off other people. He wasn’t self-reliant.” The answer came back, “Well, yeah, but he was doing the most important work.”

“Which is?”

“The work of God.”

“Which we defined as the most valuable work?”

“Right.”

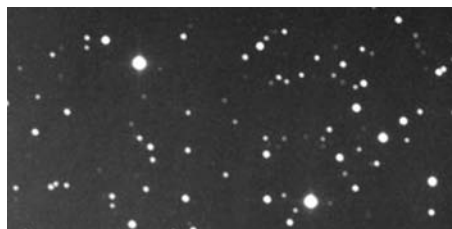
“That could be true—after all, ‘seek ye first the kingdom of heaven.’ But wait. Aren’t we supposed to be like Jesus? Who here is willing to forsake all right now and teach the gospel on the streets and in the wilderness of Alaska?”

“But that was Jesus’s mission. Not ours.”

“Really? Well then, what about *my* mission? I just got a master’s degree in creative writing. I spent two hours a day for a year writing a screenplay. That’s more than seven hundred hours. It’s very likely that no one will ever produce my screenplay. It’s possible that it’s not even worth reading. And even if it does get produced, it’s only a romantic comedy with no socially redeeming value. Where on the hierarchy of values should we put my seven hundred hours?”

That one took us a while to work through. Some quorum members thought it was good work because it went toward my (currently nonexistent) career. But career-related work had ranked fourth on the hierarchy of values we had come up with earlier. Shouldn’t I have been using that time to teach the gospel or work at a soup kitchen—first-tier values?

Interestingly, they started talking about personal desires and personal missions and started to wonder if fulfilling one’s personal mission, no matter how ludicrous and socially unconstructive, didn’t rank up there with doing God’s work. “Even if my personal mission is to write bad screenplays that no



one will ever read?” I wondered aloud.

This seemed a bit far-fetched, even to me. But some of them grunted their consent. One guy even said that President Hinckley had counseled the Saints to follow the Spirit in setting their priorities. He even admitted, after being reminded of a few odd stories from the scriptures, that the Spirit could be quite unpredictable in the establishment of values, as illustrated by Nephi’s offing of Laban. Then one of the quorum members started arguing against a hierarchy of values, saying that he thought values should be more fluid.

My type of guy.

When I ended the lesson, our elder’s quorum president, a good man, whipped out the manual and read a passage he thought was important. It told us that work was a good thing. The Pep Rally had reared its head—but only after I had sat down.

At one point in *The Hitchhiker’s Guide*, Zaphod Beeblebrox, a politician and (ironically) criminal, is brought to the Total Perspective Vortex and forced to submit to its machinations. The governor’s pardon fails to arrive, and the switch is thrown. The machine hums to life and performs its dread task. When the attendant opens the door, expecting to find but a vapor where Zaphod once stood, he is shocked to find Zaphod grinning hugely. “Just as I thought,” Zaphod says, “I really am the center of the universe.”

The thing Zaphod didn’t know was that at the moment, he was actually inside an artificial universe that fit in an attaché case. He had stepped into a fake Total Perspective Vortex machine designed especially for him in order to smuggle him past the murderous Frogstar Fighters. Had Zaphod been in the real Total Perspective Vortex, he would have become a whiff of ionized air.

This story is important in two ways

(Whack-a-Moral advisory now in effect): First, it illustrates the narrow attitude I see underlying overuse of the Three Sedating Sins. Second, and more important, the story calls into question everything I have written in this essay. It is entirely possible that I have been speaking to you from my own little attaché case universe, of which I am the center. In which case, my exhortations have little to recommend themselves. The only reason your time spent reading this may not have been wasted is if my neuroses are also yours.

Finally, Zaphod’s story helps me ride out a sting of irony as I present to you some Tips ‘n’ Trix for joining me in the fight against full-blown Pep Rallies, Tips ‘n’ Trix Seminars, and Whack-a-Moral lesson structures, which you are welcome to cut out and adhere to your refrigerator.

1. Find the paradoxes in the lesson material and draw them out.

2. Find scriptures to support all sides of the paradoxes. (This is very important.)

3. Argue constructively about them with your spouse/roommate, and then give him/her a really nice back rub.

4. Imagine yourself posing these paradoxes to your class members. How might you do it? How might they react?

5. Be entirely willing to leave the class without an answer.

6. In fact, be entirely willing to leave the class with more existential questions than you came in with.

7. If there does happen to be an answer, let this insight cut you to the core and then email me about it. I’m always in need of another session with the Total Perspective Vortex. ☺

### NOTES

1. Douglas Adams, *Ultimate Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* (New York: Random House, 2002).

2. David Mamet, *Three Uses of the Knife: On the Nature and Purpose of Drama* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 15.

3. Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling/The Book on Adler* (New York: Knopf, 1994), 24.

4. Mamet, 21.

## ANXIOUSLY ENGAGED . . .

THE LEARNING LABORATORY  
OF RELIGIOUS EXCHANGESACRED ENVY: WHAT I'VE LEARNED  
FROM OTHER RELIGIONS

By Jana Riess



IN 2002, WHEN I was in California visiting the mission at San Juan Capistrano, I had a brief and lovely moment of longing. My friends and I had toured the mission and the enchanting gardens and were casually wandering through the side chapels of a church. I slipped into a quiet chapel, adjusting my eyes to the darkness. The peace was soon disturbed by a low moan that was almost a wail, and my eyes sought the source of the anguish: a middle-aged Hispanic woman was standing at the small altar, arms outstretched before a statue of the saint. She was weeping. As I watched, fascinated, she unfurled her hands in supplication, edging closer to the statue, and began to caress its feet. Like the unnamed woman in the Synoptic Gospels, she anointed his—by now the statue was a living saint to me and no longer a piece of sculpture—feet with her tears, stroking them gently with her fingers. She appeared to be profoundly comforted by this act. As I tiptoed forward, I could see that the places her hands were touching had been worn smooth by generations of devotees, the marble brown and glistening with the shine of their touch. The saint's face had the same delicate patina, testimony to the tender, consecrated caresses of the faithful. I silently withdrew, feeling like a voyeur who had intruded on this woman's very private act of devotion.

I also felt very jealous.

"Do you ever have Catholic envy?" I asked my three friends at lunch. Of the three—all Protestant—two said yes and one offered a rather bewildered no. I certainly have Catholic envy, precisely because of these tac-

tile, sensory experiences and the physical and emotional accessibility of the saints. I have Jewish envy—for the scholarship, the emphasis on social justice, and the glorious holidays that root the supplicant in an ancient tradition and provide an impeccable sense of rhythm for life's days. I have Buddhist envy, for the stress on compassion, meditation, and mindfulness of the present moment. And I have Lutheran envy for the comfort food.

My day job is to study religions and keep current with new developments as religions grow and change. So I work every day with people of other faiths, hoping to understand them well enough to write about them compassionately and responsibly. I take for granted that they are as sincere in their faith as I am in my own, and that I have a great deal to learn from them. And I certainly have learned.

In terms of my Mormon practice, I've enjoyed several foundational experiences of other religions that have affected my outlook and strengthened my spiritual walk. I think that we would all do well to pay better and deeper attention to the religions around us. As Ibn Aribi said,

Do not attach yourself to any particular creed exclusively, so that you may disbelieve all the rest; otherwise you will lose much good, nay, you will fail to recognize the real truth of the matter. God, the omnipresent and omnipotent, is not confined to any one creed, for he says, "Wheresoever ye turn, there is the face of Allah."<sup>1</sup>

BECAUSE my husband is a United Methodist, I've studied the teachings of John Wesley and have found Wesleyan theology helpful in keeping my spiritual reflection fresh. One particular contribution of Wesley's has helped me achieve peace on a thorny issue for the church (by which I mean the little-c catholic, universal church encompassing all Christians): homosexuality. Wesley did not address homosexuality directly, but he left behind a theological paradigm that has been enormously valuable for me. When Wesley broke off from the Anglican Church, the Anglicans had a tripod of theological meaning: Christians could rely on the scriptures, the traditions of the Anglican communion, and their own reason in discerning God's will. To these three, Wesley, with his interest in personal piety and holiness, added a fourth and equally important criterion: experience. In the Methodist faith, scripture, tradition, reason, and experience stand together as reliable pillars of belief and practice.

Now, with regard to homosexuality, I have listened to and agreed with many people in various Christian traditions, including Mormonism, who have stated that the Bible and the traditions of the church stand against homosexuality. And despite my reading of John Boswell and my understanding that the two-thousand-year history of Christianity has never been monolithic about this issue, I do agree that the general trend of scripture and history is on their side. However, Wesley teaches that this is only half the story, and maybe not even the most important half. My own reason—which tells me that homosexuals would not choose a life of ostracization, that sexual orientation is more inherent than learned, and that science is beginning to discover a genetic predisposition toward homosexual orientation—cannot be discounted. Moreover, Wesley affirms that my experience cannot be denied. And my experience tells me clearly that my homosexual friends are every bit as loved by the Lord as I am, perhaps even more so since their spirits have already been refined by the intense suffering that comes from being misunderstood.

So, I have learned an important lesson from John Wesley, and I count him as a great spiritual teacher.

My experiences working with another religious denomination have also given me a new perspective on my own religion as a changing, historical institution. For a couple

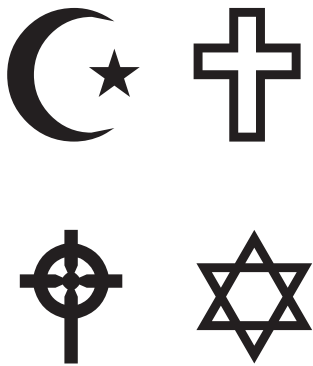


JANA RIESS is the Gospel Doctrine teacher in the Winchester, Kentucky, ward. She has a Ph.D. in American religious history from Columbia University and is the Religion Book Review Editor for Publisher's Weekly. She is co-author with Chris Bigelow of the recently released *Mormonism for Dummies*. She also has two other published books, *The Spiritual Traveler: Boston and New England* and most recently, *What Would Buffy Do?: The Vampire Slayer as Spiritual Guide*.

of years, I worked on an as-needed basis as a historical consultant to the First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Boston. I was originally hired to write the introduction to a new volume of Mary Baker Eddy's autobiographical writings, including a memoir that she drafted in 1902 but that had never been published. The publication of this document after a century of languishing in an archive was quite an event for Christian Scientists. For comparative purposes, imagine that the LDS Church was to suddenly announce that Joseph Smith had left behind an autobiog-

yond its emphasis on healing, I have learned from the Mother Church's historical development, which (up to the last decade) so uncannily paralleled our own. In this story, a small, unusual sect was founded in the nineteenth century by a charismatic prophet/prophetess who was often unreasonably vilified in the press. As a result of those attacks (and in the LDS case, actual physical violence), the group turned inward, emphasizing its own unique truth claims and reverence for its founder. It remained suspicious of the outside world and adopted

Science leadership on this project, and the radio tour that followed the book's release, taught me some valuable lessons. First, I'm far less judgmental of LDS leaders than I used to be. It's awfully easy for members to sit back and think that our leaders are too conservative or out of touch, when in fact we may be the ones out of touch—not understanding the immense challenges of meeting the needs of a vast and growing global constituency. And for the first time in my life, I've wondered: has the LDS church membership ever held the prophet back from seeking



**IN THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE TRADITION, THE LEADERS ARE BOLDLY GOING WHERE SOME OF THE MEMBERS FEAR TO TREAD. HAS THAT EVER HAPPENED IN OUR OWN TRADITION? HAS THE CHURCH MEMBERSHIP EVER HELD THE PROPHET BACK FROM SEEKING OR ANNOUNCING REVELATION?**

raphy that was written not long before his death and that specifically answered some of the charges his many critics had laid at his door. Now add to this scenario the idea that after being carefully guarded for their entire history, the LDS Church archives would be completely opened to the public. That's about the parallel of this situation. After decades of insularity, Christian Scientists have in the last few years instituted an unprecedented, sweeping change from the top down, with a tremendous emphasis on opening their movement to the world. They have opened the Mary Baker Eddy Library for the Betterment of Humanity, a multimillion-dollar, state-of-the-art facility in Boston, and made *Science and Health* available in bookstores everywhere, not just Christian Science Reading Rooms. Nowadays, any spiritual seeker can have access to Mrs. Eddy's ideas, whether or not they join the Christian Science Church.

What have I learned from Christian Science? While I have deep respect for Scientists' courageous decision to rely upon prayer for healing, I'm a total wimp for pain, and I still reach for the Tylenol bottle at the first sign of one of my headaches. No, be-

something of a siege mentality even while attempting to assimilate into the host culture.

In the last few years, Christian Science has done a 180-degree turn. The Board of Directors has basically leapt out in front of the membership of the church, leading them in a new direction (and one, it must be said, that not all devoted Christian Scientists are embracing). It's a Vatican II, a sea change, a new way of viewing the world. In 2003 at the annual meeting—held in Germany, the first time that the annual meeting has ever ventured outside the Mother Church in Boston—speakers emphasized the need to embrace Mary Baker Eddy's vision of engaging the world, instead of merely hunkering down together to withstand the world's arrows. It was markedly different, powerful rhetoric from a church that has long felt itself under attack.

I've never before had the experience of looking down at a religious movement from the top. As a member of the LDS Church, I experience most things in as grassroots a manner as I can manage—I love my ward but sometimes feel removed from the institutional church hierarchy. But even my limited experience in working with the Christian

or announcing revelation? In the Christian Science example, the leaders are boldly going where some of the members fear to tread. Has that ever happened in our own tradition, or will it? Spending time with the leaders of one denomination has made me more sympathetic to the leaders of my own, and far more willing to give them the benefit of the doubt when complex issues arise.

And of course, spending time with the Christian Scientists as they embrace their new direction has made me wonder about the changes I will see in my lifetime in the LDS Church. In 2003, the twenty-fifth anniversary celebration of the expansion of the priesthood—an event that many thought would never come—prompted many to speculate about where our own movement might be heading. What dreams may come, and what surprises are in store?

So my exchanges with members of other religions continue to challenge and sustain me in my own spiritual journey. But it's not just a question of how my Mormonism is enriched by my interactions with people of other faiths; I think that they sometimes benefit, too. For example, I believe that I first got the Christian Science job because I am a

Mormon. In 1999, I conducted an interview with the tremendously energetic Chair of the Board of Directors of the Christian Science Church. After the interview was over, she and I fell into a conversation about Mary Baker Eddy and Joseph Smith. As we talked and shared our personal experiences of these great but complex spiritual leaders, I felt a kind of connection pass between us. We understood each other; we both knew the joy of our religious traditions and the pain of having them repeatedly misconstrued by outsiders.

This feeling was reinforced when I came to Boston for a research trip not long after starting my project on Mrs. Eddy in 2001. As I sat at a conference table with the archivists, historians, and publishers who would be working with me and helping me, we wrestled with the question of how to explain to the reading public that I was a scholar but not a Christian Scientist. One person suggested that we should mention my LDS affiliation in the author bio. I gently responded that I thought that was a bad idea, because Mormonism is so misunderstood in our culture that people would immediately assume that the author was an idiot. There was a spark of recognition when I said that. "I know exactly what you mean!" said the man across from me. This man, a nationally recognized attorney and philanthropist of tremendous intellect, has obviously had people think he is some kind of simpleton because he believes in healing through prayer.

I believe that being a Mormon has also made me better at my job, which is to evaluate religious books on their own terms. Several publishers have praised my sensitivity to minority faiths and marginalized religions. I tell them candidly that I know, at least in a small way, what it's like to walk in their shoes. I may not be a Muslim woman who is ridiculed for wearing a headscarf, but I've experienced the pain of reading about outsiders who've abused the sacred temple garment. I may not be a Hindu who is wrongly accused of being a polytheist, but Mormons collectively have come under the same false accusation of worshipping many gods. So I understand a bit of the sting. And I draw from that experience in having compassion for those of other faiths, both professionally and in my personal interactions.

#### TOWARD A MORMON STANCE OF INCLUSION

**I**N Mormonism, strains of exclusivism and inclusivism have always been held in tension. From Joseph Smith's First

Vision, in which God told him that other churches were corrupt, to the Church's manuals of today, which increasingly emphasize Mormonism's status as the only true church established by Christ, there has been a message of uniqueness and—it must be said—theological superiority. But God has also repeatedly made it clear that the truth of the restored gospel is unfinished and provisional; we acknowledge that God has yet to reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom—a kingdom which is presumably much larger than one denomination. God has also spoken through the Book of Mormon to remind readers of today of the dangers of supposing we alone possess religious truth:

7. Know ye not that there are more nations than one? Know ye not that I, the Lord your God, have created all men, and that I remember those who are upon the isles of the sea; and that I rule in the heavens above and in the earth beneath; and I bring forth my word unto the children of men, yea, even upon all the nations of the earth?

8. Wherefore murmur ye, because that ye shall receive more of my word? Know ye not that the testimony of two nations is a witness unto you that I am God, that I remember one nation like unto another? Wherefore, I speak the same words unto one nation like unto another. And when the two nations shall run together the testimony of the two nations shall run together also.

9. And I do this that I may prove unto many that I am the same yesterday, today, and forever; and that I speak forth my words according to mine own pleasure. And because that I have spoken one word ye need not suppose that I cannot speak another; for my work is not yet finished; neither shall it be until the end of man, neither from that time henceforth and forever.

10. Wherefore, because that ye have a Bible ye need not suppose that it contains all my words; neither need ye suppose that I have not caused more to be written.

11. For I command all men, both in the east and in the west, and in the north, and in the south, and in the islands of the sea, that they shall write the words which I

shall speak unto them; for out of the books which shall be written I will judge the world, every man according to their works, according to that which is written.

12 For behold, I shall speak unto the Jews and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto the Nephites and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto the other tribes of the house of Israel, which I have led away, and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto all nations of the earth and they shall write it. (2 Nephi 29:7–12)

We Latter-day Saints often assume that this passage refers only to the people in the latter days who will reject the Book of Mormon because they already have a Bible. I agree that it does mean this, but since it is the nature of scriptural prophecy to be multivalent and layered, it seems probable that this is not the only correct interpretation. Could it not also be intended for us, the believing community, since so much of the Book of Mormon is intended for us and directed to us? Isn't God also telling us not to so quickly discount the truths he has cultivated in other cultures, nations, and religious texts?

To me, the essence of learning from other religions lies in reading their sacred texts and being open to the truths I might find there. Joseph Campbell said that it's extremely important that we learn from myths that are not necessarily our own. "Read other people's myths, not those of your own religion," he advised, "because you tend to interpret your own religion in terms of facts—but if you read the other ones, you begin to get the message."<sup>2</sup>

#### NOTES

*An earlier version of this essay was presented at the 2003 Sunstone Symposium in Salt Lake City. This article also includes comments given at the Festival of Faiths in Louisville, Kentucky, in November 2004. The author is also grateful for the invaluable assistance of the online community at [www.timesandseasons.org](http://www.timesandseasons.org), whose members answered questions and offered insights about Mormonism and religious pluralism.*

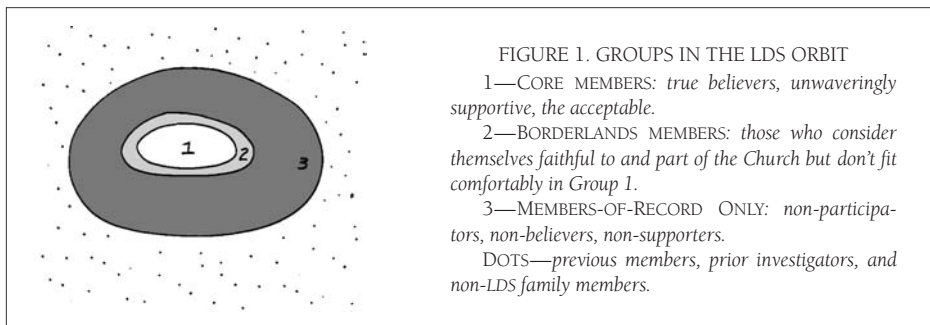
1. Quoted in Karen Armstrong, *The Spiral Staircase: My Climb out of Darkness* (New York: Anchor Books, 2004), 289.

2. Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 6 (my emphasis).

## BRAVING THE BORDERLANDS . . .

## HONESTY

By D. Jeff Burton



IN THIS COLUMN, we explore the stories of Borderlanders in order to learn from the ways others have successfully (or unsuccessfully) dealt with problems and challenges in their church lives.<sup>1</sup> In the previous column (SUNSTONE, December 2004), I introduced a long-term Borderlander who has questions and doubts but remains “in the closet” about them, even to her husband. Here is a short reprise from “Mary Ann” (all names and some details have been changed to protect identities):

I also recognize that I might be a hypocrite. To get a temple recommend, I agree to statements that I don't believe. In essence, I lie. I do not like this, but I do not believe any greater good would be served by my quitting the Church and hurting my husband and children. There is nothing in my lifestyle that would prevent me from getting the temple recommend. Looking in from the outside I am the model Latter-day Saint sister and mother.

Tonight one of my sons (who is almost twenty-two years old) approached me about his going on a mission. . . . He asked me point blank about my feelings concerning a mission and the Church. What I said would have made any bishop in the Church proud. I do think a mission can be a positive thing, but I expressed beliefs to him that were fabrications. Now I feel like my soul is tied between

two poles—one that continues to pretend, and the other that longs to express my true feelings. I am tearing in half.

Another reader, “Bill,” sent the following email:

I am a thirty-nine-year-old male, Utah born and raised, returned missionary, great temple marriage of sixteen years, BYU, three great kids, etc. Thanks for the “Borderlands” column. I have been firmly within the borderlands for a good fifteen years.

I [wonder about] many core [LDS] beliefs but still find the Church a good place to be. Reading about others in similar situations in your column has been insightful and welcome.

I have a comfortable understanding with myself as to my limited beliefs, and don't say more than I feel when speaking. I do feel very uncomfortable with the seeming hypocrisy of my situation, since most other ward and stake members think I am a liberal but faithful member.

Here are some recent questions from a younger Borderlander, “Sierra.” Sierra and her husband have begun to share with others their gospel struggles:

I have a few more questions for you. The first one is regarding coming out of the closet. We've talked with our parents and our

bishop about all of this, but we still feel a sense of duplicity. They perceive this as something we will work through. In reality, I think it is impossible for us to return to the type of belief we had before. I don't know—have we already come out of the closet?

So, what does it take to “come clean”? I don't think we ought to be getting up in sacrament meeting and bearing a non-testimony. I agree with you that it will help us feel better to be honest. But what should we do?

THE full stories of these Borderlanders are instructive, and I hope to share more details in future columns. However, a consistent thread through almost all of the stories Borderlanders have sent to me (and it is approaching forty people) is the issue of honesty. They wonder: Why do we feel a need to be secretive about our true beliefs and feelings? How can we deal with this need? What happens to us if we are not honest with others? *How* honest should we be? And, as asked by Sierra, “What should we do?”

In attempting answers to these questions, I will quote from one of the best essays ever written on this subject, “The Challenge of Honesty,” by Frances Lee Menlove.<sup>2</sup> And I'll borrow a few ideas from the latest edition of my book *For Those Who Wonder*.<sup>3</sup>

We must first recognize that honesty is a complex subject with many meanings, shades of color, and different applications. Think, for example, of the subtle and not-so-subtle nuances associated with the following words and phrases: “emotional honesty,” “personal honesty,” “public honesty,” “blunt honesty,” “radical honesty,” “tactfully honest,” “brutally honest,” “honest with self,” “honest with others,” “plagiarism,” “white lies,” “black lies,” “honest truth,” and “shading the truth.”

Honesty impacts all facets of our lives, not just religion. Menlove writes:

The problem of honesty is . . . shared by all men. Psychologists and psychiatrists have become increasingly concerned with the lack of authenticity and the sham that seems at times to permeate to the very core of Western man. As Mormons, we not only live in a society whose pressures and criteria for success and happiness can foster dishonesty and inauthenticity, but we have, we believe, a pe-

D. JEFF BURTON is an author and a member of the Sunstone Board of Directors.

cular and divine mandate to seek truth and exemplify honesty. For these reasons it is crucial for Mormons to meet openly the challenge of honesty.

Further, I think we can all agree that good communication (or lack of it) impacts our ability to “be honest.” We may have every intention of being honest but be thwarted by inadequate or inaccurate communications.

**G**IVEN these complexities, we must narrow our exploration here to the issues of being open and honest with ourselves and with Group 1 members.

From my long experience in the Borderlands, I have observed that we who are faithful but not quite orthodox usually keep our interpretations and outlooks to ourselves. Sometimes, even our spouses don’t know the extent of our beliefs, doubts, and musings. Why do we feel it necessary to be secretive about sharing our true beliefs and feelings?

First, we fear being ostracized, or worse, being put in the “handle with care” category reserved for investigators or those whom Group 1 members feel uneasy around. Mainstream believers often remain aloof and feel uncomfortable around those who ask too many questions or demonstrate a doubting nature. More serious, believing members often interpret someone’s questioning of their cherished religious beliefs (and myths) as a personal affront.

Second, we fear that our chance for meaningful Church participation might be reduced. More than a few Borderlanders have written me worried that an unsympathetic bishop might deny them a temple recommendation.

Third, the church seems to tolerate divergent beliefs as long as we hold them to ourselves and don’t try to sway others: “Keep your questions to yourself.”

Finally, many sense that it is not their place to say something that might alter the beliefs of another. “Coming out,” they fear, may be too great a shock for those whose testimonies rely to some degree on the strength of others’ beliefs.

So, given this climate, it is difficult to be honest. Our honesty may disturb Group 1 members. It may affect others’ testimonies. It may cause confusion and consternation among friends, family members, and especially, our children.

Clearly, public honesty about our lives requires great care, tact, and timing, but it is nevertheless very important to strive toward. So I advise members like Sierra to cautiously

and judiciously come out of the closet, to move toward full honesty. Being honest with ourselves and others helps us to come to terms with the reality of our experiences and our lives. It allows us to move on. It helps ourselves and others to accept us as we are. It also helps Group 1 members recognize that there is more than one way to be acceptably LDS.

**P**ublic honesty about our lives requires great care, tact, and timing, but it is nevertheless very important to strive toward.

We Borderlanders, therefore, need to learn to speak “truthfully but discreetly”—we don’t need to share everything we’re thinking all at once. For the majority of us in the Borderlands, the specifics of what we believe are constantly being updated. Hence, at first, it’s best to share our changed convictions in general categories. When asked about “testimony,” we might say something like, “I know the Church teaches correct principles. I know that the Lord answers prayers. He loves every person. We must all work out our own salvation.” Can we accept the president of the Church as a prophet, seer, and revelator? Some may say, “Why not? Certainly no one else speaks for God,” or “I can accept the possibility that he is a prophet.” Others may say, “I accept, through faith.”

As long as we remain in the closet, we may enjoy fleeting and temporary seasons of peace, but our movement toward full acceptance (by ourselves and others) slows. Like Mary Ann and Bill, we may come to feel like hypocrites, maybe even liars, and these negative emotions may further estrange us from God, our families, and Group 1 members. In Mary Ann’s words, we may feel like we are being “torn in half.” For some the “lies” become intolerable and they suffer, sometimes injuring themselves and others around them. This suffering is unacceptable. Menlove argues:

There must not be two selves, one outwardly calm and unruffled, basking in the “knowledge” of the gospel, and the other private and

unexplored, pushed to the outer limits of awareness. If the individual does not have an honest relationship with himself, he cannot have an honest relationship with others. If he cannot avoid dishonesty within the Church, he will not be able to avoid it in the secular world. We must attempt to meet

the challenge of honesty, realizing that our honesty is enmeshed within a whole framework of values, and honesty, like truth, is always a partial achievement. There is only the latest word, never the last.

Of course being honest about our feelings and beliefs does not mean we should try to convert others to our ways of thinking. Let’s allow others to have their own beliefs, even when they differ from ours. Support others in their beliefs as long as they don’t hurt people. (Someone’s belief in racism, for example, wouldn’t warrant support). Let other people develop and live their own personal religions. Menlove cautions:

Honesty is often equated with *exposé*. A movie or book advertised as “honest” is often one that merely exposes something previously held secret or private. The notion seems to be that the one who can say the most unpleasant things is the most honest. Honesty can become a billy club, an instrument of aggression capable of destruction. It is just as dishonest to suppress or play down the positive, the hopeful, the good, the real achievements of the self and of the Church as it is to speak only of these.

It is disturbing that we faithful members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints do not at present feel we can be honest about our lives if they do not follow a specific format or do not fully support the policies or

official history of the Church. This says something about LDS traditions which need to change; but for now and for ourselves, we must still strive toward the scriptural ideal: "Speak every man truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another" (Ephesians 4:25).

HERE'S a thought experiment. Imagine you stood up in your ward testimony meeting and said in a loving and caring way something like this: "To me, the question, 'Is the Church true?' is not as important as the question, 'Is the Church good?' And the answer for me and for many millions of others, is 'Yes.' And so I am a faithful member of the Church and love being counted one with the body of Christ, with you, whom I love and cherish. That is my testimony." How do you think your ward, family, and spouse might react? Are you ready to slip a foot out of the closet? Done carefully and at the right time, might this not do a world of good for ourselves and for Group 1 members?

Only when we are honest are we likely to see the borders of acceptability expanded to include us. Frances Lee Menlove wrote, "Members of the church are responsible for the church."

In my next column, we'll explore the Borderland experiences of divorced members who are trying to stay involved and active. If you would like to share your experiences, please send your story to me. ☺

NOTES

1. In my first column (this is the fifteenth), 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. Copies of former columns will soon be available on the Sunstone website, [www.sunstoneonline.com](http://www.sunstoneonline.com).

2. Frances Lee Menlove, "The Challenge of Honesty," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1966): 44-53. This essay was reprinted in a special anniversary edition, *Dialogue* 34, nos.

1-2 (Spring-Summer 2001): 1-9. I have mentioned Menlove's article in past columns. It is one of the most thoughtful and well-written of all LDS papers and has probably had more influence on my life than any other.

3. A draft version of the fourth edition of *For Those Who Wonder* will soon be available via a free download. Contact me at <[jeff@eburton.com](mailto:jeff@eburton.com)>.

Please send me any of your experiences or tales from life in the Borderlands.  
 D. Jeff Burton  
 2974 So. Oakwood Dr.  
 Bountiful, Utah 84010  
[jeff@eburton.com](mailto:jeff@eburton.com)



BON VOYAGE

Earlier I sneaked a photo  
 of you putting on make-up.  
 I framed both your hair—bridal  
 with ribbons and roses—  
 and your black hightops.

Now in brocade pumps,  
 you lounge on the deck  
 in pink sunglasses,  
 hoping your black bruises  
 and red sunburn from camping  
 don't show through lace.

Yours is the first wedding,  
 the captain announces,  
 afloat on the Great Salt Lake  
 in at least a century.  
 Today this is less a surprise  
 than the skies deciding to smile.

When you and he hug for so long  
 after the kiss, union transpires.  
 Then, children at the bow,  
 champagne in the cabin,  
 breeze, sky, and waves;  
 and you, my funny daughter,

rounding the horizon—again.

—LINDA SILLITOE



JEANNETTE ATWOOD

Yes, it's very pretty . . . but I'm still not going to wear it for General Conference.

## MOONSTONE

## THE HIDDEN DIVINE FEMININE

By Maxine Hanks

*If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.*  
—JAMES 1:5

**T**HIS SIMPLE SCRIPTURE was the catalyst for the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith's "First Vision" of God. Of its power, Joseph wrote:

Never did any passage of scripture come with more power to the heart of man than this did at this time to mine. It seemed to enter with great force into every feeling of my heart. I reflected on it again and again, knowing that if any person needed wisdom from God, I did; for how to act I did not know, and unless I could get more wisdom than I then had, I would never know. . . . At length I came to the . . . determination to "ask of God," concluding that if he gave wisdom to them that lacked wisdom, and would give liberally, and not upbraid, I might venture. (Joseph Smith—History 2: 12–13)

Joseph Smith's quest for wisdom led him to a vision of God, recorded in 1832. And his "first vision" led to many more.

A yearning for wisdom may invoke a visionary experience. The words themselves, wisdom and vision, have a connection: "wis" = "know" (Old English) and "vis" = "sight" (Latin) both come from the same Indo-European root "weid" which means "see."

Joseph's first vision unveiled a new wisdom—an unknown God appearing in a new, humanized view of the divine. However, the visions of Joseph Smith revealed more than a masculine god; Joseph also envisioned deity as female. For example:

• In 1834, "Prophet Joseph asked [Zebedee Coltrin] and Sidney Rigdon to accompany him into the woods to pray. . . .

They then saw . . . the Father seated upon a throne; they prayed again and on looking saw the Mother also . . . they saw the Savior added to the group."<sup>1</sup>

• In 1839, Joseph told Zina Huntington "You will meet and become acquainted with your eternal Mother, the wife of your Father in Heaven." Eliza Snow "learned the same glorious truth from the same inspired lips."<sup>2</sup>

• In 1843, Joseph described the Gods as exalted men and women: "which glory shall be a fullness. . . . Then shall they be gods, because they have no end; therefore shall they be from everlasting to everlasting." (D&C 132:19–20)

**A**LTHOUGH these are brief glimpses of a divine feminine, they reveal that she has been with Mormonism from the beginning. Yet she remains veiled in mystery: Mormons never really knew her, nor her name, and decades of silence or avoidance only amassed a lack of access to her.

As a result, Mormon women are left to envision this unknown feminine god for themselves, or not at all. A few brave souls began sharing their vision of her during the feminist wave of the 1970s and 80s.<sup>3</sup> At that time, I had a vision of my own:

I was relaxing one day in 1987, pondering . . . the concept of a female God in Mormon theology. . . . The Mother needs to be revealed to her children, I thought. . . . This realization and need to connect myself to the Goddess seemed essential, basic. I then saw a vision in my mind of a great Woman, arising from among the masses of women all over the earth, rising above the hills to form a great image of woman in the sky. She was the accumulation of all female consciousness and experience."<sup>4</sup>

What I didn't say was that this female World-

Soul spoke to me, personally, and that she had appeared to me in dreams and inner visions from the time I was a young girl. Yet I'd never known her identity—she was a mystery, in visionary form. My yearning to know her invited more dreams and visions, which let me to collect views of the sacred feminine from many women and compile them into a book about feminine theology.<sup>5</sup>

Still, the Woman continued to appear in my dreams. In 1993, I wanted to know who she was; so, within my lucid dreaming, I simply asked her: "Who are you? Can you tell me your name?"

She looked perplexed, as if to say, "You already know me; you've known me all along."

Instantly, I wondered how I'd forgotten the name that sprang forth in my mind: "Sophia."

At that time, I knew little about Sophia—only that Greek intellectuals had revered her so highly, they called themselves *philo sophia* or "lovers of wisdom."

So I sought her in the waking world, in scripture, literature, and images. Suddenly she was everywhere, and I was wondering why I'd never noticed her before. Early Christians had even named their grandest church for her: "Hagia Sophia" (Holy Wisdom) in Constantinople (537 AD). It was the center of eastern Christianity, sister of the western church in Rome.

Knowing that Sophia appears as wisdom in the scriptures, I looked for her other name.

**W**isdom appears in the New Testament as an aspect of God or attribute of godliness, but also as an implied feminine deity.

• "Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shall slay and persecute" (Luke 11:49).

• "The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children" (Matthew 11:19).

• "He began to teach in the synagogue; and many hearing him were astonished, saying . . . what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands?" (Mark 6:2).

• "We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory" (1 Corinthians 2:7).

**I**n the Old Testament, Wisdom plays a bigger role, as a feminine deity with a voice.



MAXINE HANKS is an author, lecturer, and independent scholar who writes about women's issues in Mormon and religious cultures. A former instructor in women's studies at the University of Utah, she is engaged in Gnostic liturgical studies as clergy. She is the coordinator of Mormon Feminist Network and Moonstone. She welcomes email at <maxinne@juno.com>.

• “Wisdom . . . is more precious than rubies. . . . She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her (Proverbs 3:13, 15, 18).

• “Doth not wisdom cry? . . . She standeth in the top of the high places. . . . She crieth at the gates, at the entry of the city. . . . Unto you O men I call; and my voice is to the sons of man. . . . My mouth shall speak truth. . . . Counsel is mine and sound wisdom: I am understanding; I have strength. . . . I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning. . . . When he prepared the heavens, I was there . . . . I was by him, as one brought up with him; and I was daily his delight . . . and my delights were with the sons of men. Now therefore, hearken unto me, O ye children. . . . Blessed is the man that heareth me. . . . For whoso findeth me findeth life.” (Proverbs 8)

I ndeed, there are so many descriptions of Wisdom in Jewish and Christian canonical and apocryphal writings that they form a body of scripture themselves, called the “wisdom literature,” which includes texts such as Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and from the Apocrypha, the Wisdom of Solomon and Ecclesiasticus.

• “As for Wisdom, what she is, and how she came up, I will tell you and will not hide mysteries from you: but will seek her out from the beginning of her nativity, and bring the knowledge of her into light” (Wisdom of Solomon 6:22).

• “I called upon God, and the spirit of wisdom came to me . . . flowing from the glory of the Almighty . . . for she is the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of the power of God and the image of his goodness . . . she maketh all things new . . . holy souls she maketh them friends of God, and prophets . . . she is more beautiful than the sun, and above all the order of the stars” (Wisdom of Solomon 7:7, 25–27, 29).

• “Wisdom reacheth from one end [of the world] to another: Mightily and sweetly doth she order all things. I loved her, and sought her out from my youth . . . she is conversant with God . . . yea, the Lord of all things himself loved her. For she is privy to the mysteries of the knowledge of God, and a lover of His works (Wisdom of Solomon, 8:1,3).

• “O God of my Fathers..who hast made all things with thy word . . . give me wisdom, that sitteth by thy throne . . . and was present when thou madest the world . . . O send her out of thy holy heavens, and from the throne of thy glory, that being present, she may labour with me (Wisdom of Solomon 9:1, 4, 9–10).

• “Wisdom is from the true God, and hath been always with him, and is before all time. . . . Wisdom hath been created before all things. . . . And he poured her out upon all his works, and upon all flesh.” (Ecclesiasticus 1:1)

• “Wisdom shall praise herself. . . . I came out of the mouth of the most high, and covered the earth as a cloud. I dwelt in high places and my throne is in a cloudy pillar. I alone compassed the circuit of heaven, and walked in the bottom of the deep. . . . He created me from the beginning, before the world, and I shall never fail. . . . I am the mother . . . being eternal, am given to all my children which are named of him. Come unto me, all ye that be desirous of me.” (Ecclesiasticus 24:1).

The Gnostics worshiped Sophia or Wisdom as the divine feminine, who strives with humanity, yearning for us to know our own divinity. She calls all souls to our true home in the treasury of light, reminding us that the sparks of light in all people are collectively the *anima mundi* or “world soul.”

• “Out of the infinite, a likeness then emanated from *Pistis* (Faith); it is called Sophia (Wisdom) . . . resembling the primeval light. And immediately her will manifested itself as a likeness of heaven, having an unimaginable magnitude . . . she (Sophia) functioned as a veil dividing mankind from the things above.”<sup>6</sup>

• “First Man is called Begetter, Self-perfected Mind. He reflected with Great Sophia, his consort, and revealed his first begotten, androgynous son. . . . First Begetress Sophia, Mother of the Universe. Some call her Love.”<sup>7</sup>

• “As for the Wisdom who is called ‘the barren,’ she is the mother [of the] angels.”<sup>8</sup>

One entire book of Gnostic scripture speaks with the voice of Sophia throughout. She begins by saying, “I was sent forth from the power, and I have come to those who reflect upon me, and I have been found among those who seek after me.”<sup>9</sup>

N OW, when I return to the scripture that inspired Joseph Smith to have a vision, I recognize the divine feminine hidden in the text, embedded within the genesis of Mormonism:

*If any of you lack Sophia, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraithed not; and she shall be given him.”*

The hidden divine feminine is always with us—in holy writ and wisdom, in prayer

and vision. She has been there all along, in the Old and New Testaments, the prophets, apocryphal gospels, and Gnostic fragments, Christian liturgy and mysticism, in Mormonism, inner vision, and dreams.

We ourselves lift the veil where God the Mother awaits, for God is known in personal vision. “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Proverbs 29:18).

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“I have come to those who reflect upon me, and I have been found among those who seek after me.”  
—The Thunder: Perfect Mind

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Perhaps the reason that scriptural references are vague, historic precedent barely existent, and canonized or authoritative texts patronizing at best, may be that knowing the divine feminine must be a personal endeavor, an ongoing process, like knowing the self. As Joseph Smith said, “If men do not comprehend the character of God, they do not comprehend themselves.”<sup>10</sup>

Yet if we have vision, we have wisdom; and when we have Wisdom, we have Sophia. And when we find Sophia, we have found the divine feminine, in God, and in ourselves. ☪

#### NOTES

1. Zebedee Coltrin, in Abraham H. Cannon Journal, 25 August 1880; also, School of Prophets minutes, 3 October 1883. Both available in LDS Archives.

2. Susa Young Gates, *History of the Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1911), 15–16.

3. This trend is noted in both the introduction and in Linda P. Wilcox's groundbreaking essay, “The Mormon Concept of a Mother in Heaven,” in *Women and Authority: Re-Emerging Mormon Feminism*, Maxine Hanks, ed. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992).

4. Maxine Hanks, “Emerging Mormon Theology,” *Mormon Women's Forum Quarterly* 1, no 4 (Fall 1990):15–16.

5. Hanks, *Women and Authority*.

6. “On the Origin of the World,” 98:13–22, in James M. Robinson, ed, *The Nag Hammadi Library*, revised edition (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990).

7. “The Sophia of Jesus Christ,” 104:6–13, in Robinson.

8. “The Gospel of Phillip,” 63:31–33, in Robinson.

9. “The Thunder: Perfect Mind,” 1:1–6, in Robinson.

10. Joseph Smith Jr., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, Joseph Fielding Smith, comp. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), 343.

## BOOK REVIEW

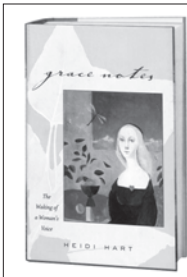
## A GRACEFUL JOURNEY

GRACE NOTES: THE WAKING OF A WOMAN'S VOICE

by Heidi Hart

University of Utah Press, 2004

231 pages, \$21.95

*Reviewed by Alice Foy*

*By avoiding a stance of blaming and victimhood, this story about one woman's journey out of Mormonism succeeds where others have failed.*

QUITE A FEW memoirs have chronicled the liberation of women from their religious traditions, recounting a feminist spiritual awakening. But rarely does the author (or reader, for that matter) find a comfortable journey or, more important, a peaceful resolution. *Grace Notes*, by Heidi Hart, is one of these rare exceptions. Hart is a poet, musician, and convert to Quakerism living in Salt Lake City with her husband and two sons, who are still active Mormons. In *Grace Notes*, Hart recounts the journey that culminated in her finding a new spiritual home among the Society of Friends, while sharing the ways she was at the same time able to renew and deepen her relationships with her Mormon husband and family.

Among past attempts by Mormon women to tell their stories of pain, struggle, and spiritual awakening, two have pushed their way to the fore: Sonia Johnson's *From Housewife to Heretic* (1981) and Deborah Laake's *Secret Ceremonies* (1995). Many remember these stories (and their subsequent press coverage) as both sad and sensationalist—painful accounts of repressed, victimized, or unrealized lives.

Yet after a brief and explosive emergence to a national readership, these works are now largely forgotten, strange little pockets of social history. Those who may at first have been troubled by public criticism can sit smugly with satisfaction at the inability of Johnson and Laake to tarnish the Church's image. Feminists and reform-minded Mormons, formerly hopeful that all that rage might at least create an opportunity for mainstream Latter-day Saints to more critically examine dogma, tradition, and doctrine, are left disappointed.

Johnson and Laake attack the Mormon world whole-heartedly, from a pain so deeply rooted that the reader should be moved by their cry. But while this approach might briefly gain sympathy, and may even persuade readers of the validity of the authors' positions, the unrelenting criticisms and attacks have ultimately prevented these authors from obtaining true legitimacy. For the most part, these works have been relegated to dusty bottom shelves or cheap exchanges on Amazon.com—where, despite their authors' earnest and hopeful intentions, they probably belong.

WHILE Hart's *Grace Notes* tells of a similar quest to fully realize and bring to light the mostly silent suffering of a Mormon woman (herself), it is quite different—and different in ways that I am convinced will create a staying power, perhaps even a whole new category within this genre of Mormon writing. Don't get me wrong: her memoir includes accusation and anger. (Is it even possible to create an honest account of a Mormon woman's experience without a little anger?) But we find also something quite unprecedented: a thoughtful account of a spiritual exodus and reformation—one, moreover, that is focused not outward, to attack, but inward, on her own heart.

Hart is courageous and unapologetic and travels her journey in a writing style that is both gentle and poetic—a pleasant surprise in contrast to many similar memoirs, where scenarios of blame and victimhood are played out in a way that quickly becomes exhausting and even toxic to the reader (like bad therapy sessions that don't end).

In *Grace Notes*, Hart confronts spiritual injustices and is neither passive nor lazy in her judgments of a woman's position within Mormonism. But instead of falling into the trap of ruminating on the perpetration of these injustices and unending documentations of hierarchical abuses, she touches on these only briefly as a way to explore, identify, and redirect her own experience. While she provides criticism, she usually limits it to how it has proven useful in her own life and, in so doing, presents it in a non-threatening manner.

I am particularly moved by Hart's discussion of the temple. She is forthright and frankly shares her reservations regarding much of Mormon ritual and ceremony (which has been treated so heavy-handedly in other memoirs). However, her musings do not feel like an attempt to discredit venerable tradition, just an honest effort at making sense of something that did not meet its intended goal of providing her with peace and sanctity. Her discussion of her personal experience with temple worship is dark and discomfiting at times, yet she still manages to find personal growth and meaning in the experience.

She recounts how on one of her trips to the temple with her husband, they chose to participate in initiatory ordinances instead of the endowment, as they usually did:

Over and over, a temple worker's hands pressed down on my head. This was the one place I'd seen

*ALICE FOY is a native of Moab, Utah, and a graduate of the University of Utah and the Yale School of Nursing. She is a lecturer at Yale University, a former Relief Society president, and currently a Fellow in training for clinical pastoral practice (hospital chaplain).*

Mormon women lay their hands on someone's head and pronounce blessings, a priesthood privilege usually reserved for men. I liked their touch, the sound of female voices in my hair. . . . These women did not know how much I needed them—not because of their blessings, too sacred to be repeated outside the temple, but simply because of their presence. That comfort I could take with me as I reentered my daily life.

ating her loved ones or destroying the delicate and suddenly distressed connections she has with them. Rather, she seeks to recreate and rebuild those relationships, working toward something that feels true to her own experience. Hart's consideration for the ramifications of her journey on her personal relationships is evident from her first visit at a Quaker meeting. There she observes a wedding, during which she not only experiences new understanding of her own life but also meditates on the possibilities for her own marriage:

across our differences, or not. I imagined the two of us standing in silence like this bride and groom. I imagined us speaking the truth to each other. I breathed deeply. My stomach calmed. I couldn't wait to tell Kent about this meeting." (31)

*The beauty of Hart's memoir is her focus on relationship and not ritual; she seeks to recreate and transform.*



**I**N her quest to find her voice, Hart traveled safely in the company of friends, and I wonder if herein lies much of the reason that her journey succeeds where others have failed. Hart turns to her own family history and finds a kindred ancestral spirit, a woman named Catherine who, due to a debilitating condition, literally had no voice. Catherine too became a Quaker, and Hart finds metaphorical parallels between her own life and the experiences Catherine shares in her journals.

The beauty of Hart's memoir is her focus on relationship and not ritual; she seeks to recreate and transform. The resolution to her journey is that there really is no resolution. There are no easy outs and no big questions answered. She could have easily followed a well-worn path to reach the well-worn conclusion that the LDS Church harms women (and she definitely has the insight and experience to move in this direction). Instead she chooses an admirably different approach: "the Church doesn't work for me, but I accept and even support that it works for others, so I'll just get past it and write my own spiritual melody. I'll create my own life." For me, and I believe most of us, this is the best resolution of all. Not only has Heidi found her own voice, but through her writing, her voice has been, and will likely continue to be, heard.

What this temple experience leaves with her is a sanctified memory of "anonymous gentleness" (24–25).

This contemplative approach sets *Grace Notes* apart from its predecessors in the genre of exit memoirs. Instead, Hart's chronicle should be placed alongside more meditative and spiritually attuned works such as *The Cloister Walk* by Kathleen Norris and this reviewer's favorite, *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter* by Sue Monk Kidd. Heidi Hart shares with these authors similarities in the experiences of awakening and finding her voice. Also like them, she does not disregard the spiritual rewards that others find in a religion ill-suited for herself. Hart is especially similar to Kidd in her attentiveness to the effects of her experiences on her family and marriage, realizing ultimately that this journey can be successfully traveled, with much work, alongside her husband, who remains in the Church.

My stomach ached for Kent. I slid down in my chair and tried to release my knotted muscles. It had been so much easier to go to church for my husband's sake. My new freedom frightened me. From now on, my marriage would no longer depend on the Mormon Church to bind it together. I no longer stood in the wedding dress I'd chosen eleven years before, laced so tight I could hardly breathe. Now Kent and I were free to choose each other, to join hands

Herein lies another difference in this memoir. As she examines her family relationships and her marriage from the new perspective of a woman finding her own voice, she resists blaming or alien-

## THE FLOCK

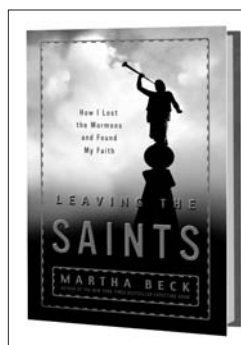
BY JEANETTE ATWOOD



## REVIEW ESSAY

AN EXHAUSTED MEMOIR OF  
READING *LEAVING THE SAINTS*LEAVING THE SAINTS: HOW I LOST THE  
MORMONS AND FOUND MY FAITHby Martha Beck  
Crown Publishers, 2005  
320 pages, \$24.95

Reviewed by Tania Rands Lyon



*The daughter of venerable LDS scholar Hugh Nibley has written an explosive memoir in which she accuses him of sexually abusing her as a child. Is it just another boilerplate ex-Mormon diatribe or a thoughtful and inspiring faith journey? How is the reader to judge?*

ABOUT FIVE YEARS ago, I devoured Martha Beck's first memoir, *Expecting Adam*, a moving, memorable, jaw-dropping, side-splitting account of how she and her husband were pulled up short in the middle of their high-powered Harvard graduate student lives when the child Martha was carrying was diagnosed with Down syndrome. I remember hunching over the book in an airport terminal en route from central Maine (where my new husband had a teaching job) to Princeton, New Jersey (where I was still working on my Ph.D. in sociology), embarrassed to find myself laughing out loud one minute and wiping away tears the next. I was as enamored with the book as I was with the existence of such a writer. Here was a fellow, Mormon-raised, Ivy League sociology graduate student (studying gender, no less—we even had the same subfield!), wrestling with religious truths, mystical experiences, and the tension

between a spiritual, family-centered life on one hand and a rarefied high-achieving academic environment on the other. It was like finding a smarter, more articulate, much funnier version of myself to whom very intense things happened all the time.

Halfway through the book, a one-sentence description of the author's father revealed that Martha was Hugh Nibley's daughter. It suddenly gave the humorous but stinging description of her family greater weight. I felt voyeuristic, like I was reading a tabloid exposé of a celebrity. I marveled at her cutting honesty and wondered what her relationship with her family (and her in-laws) must be like to publish about them so caustically.

Sure, there were some disingenuous moments, like the two women she "met at a party once" showing up suddenly at her door in time of great need. But she was obviously downplaying her Mormonism in the book, and maybe she didn't want to explain the in-

tricacies of LDS visiting teaching to a general audience.

And some of her stories of the people and culture at Harvard were so crazy, my mouth would drop open. Like the feminist graduate student who escorted her home from class one day after she had fainted from morning sickness only to excoriate her for faking something that made all women look weak (80–81). Or her husband's advisor who informed him in shocked tones that to keep a Down syndrome child would cost him his career—after all, the professor had decided his wife should abort her first pregnancy because it didn't fit in with his career schedule (205–07).

I had never encountered anything remotely so extreme at Princeton. But maybe Harvard was much more cutthroat. Or maybe things were different in academia in the late eighties and had mellowed by the time I arrived in my program nearly a decade later.

But what a wonderful writer—what sharp wit, what elegant turns of phrases, what profound insights into the meaning of life, and what a litany of enviable and dramatic encounters with the divine.

In spite of Martha's off-the-charts—but also very funny—caricatures of Utah, Harvard, and her family, I fell in love with the book and came away exhilarated and inspired.

In the years between *Expecting Adam* (1999) and *Leaving the Saints* (2005), I learned a little more about Martha and the Nibley family. I heard that many who knew Martha challenged the honesty of her narrative in *Expecting Adam*. Most notable was a letter from Zina Petersen, Martha's younger sister, written in response to a book review posted to the Association for Mormon Letters (AML) email list.<sup>1</sup> The letter described astonishment that Martha could have recast the events of those months and years leading up to Adam's birth in such a completely different way from how Zina had heard Martha describe them at the time. I remember feeling deeply disappointed that I could no longer quite trust my experience with *Expecting Adam*.

I also heard that Martha had accused her father of sexual abuse. It was a shock, but I knew enough stories of upstanding Mormon men molesting children not to write off the rumors based on Hugh Nibley's status alone. With no other information, I put it on the shelf along with other Bits of Information I Cannot Verify.

In 2002, I read Boyd Petersen's authorized biography, *Hugh Nibley: A Consecrated Life*. It

TANIA RANDS LYON is a graduate of UC Berkeley and Princeton (Ph.D., sociology). She currently works as a consultant for improving health care in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; teaches Gospel Principles in her ward; and is the mother of two daughters.

felt like a fair treatment of a complex person, respectful but not worshipful. Wondering whether Petersen would deal with Martha's claims of abuse, I was interested to find a brief mention in the text dismissing the claim, and a more extended rebuttal in a lengthy footnote.<sup>2</sup> According to Petersen (Martha's brother-in-law as well as Hugh's biographer), Martha used questionable means to recall repressed memories at a time when False Memory Syndrome was at its peak in the U.S. Although family members did not take the accusation lightly, ultimately none of them could corroborate it.

**N**OW *Leaving the Saints* has arrived, and Martha is telling her story her way. The gist of her second memoir is this: In 1988, after Adam's birth, Martha and her husband John left Harvard to finish their Ph.D.s in the more accepting and supportive environment of Provo, Utah. Both began teaching part-time at BYU. In response to the miracles surrounding her pregnancy with Adam, Martha began reading voraciously about mystical religious experience and how to attain it. She frames her personal journey in terms of the Buddhist phases: camel, lion, child. She says she decided to throw herself full force into Mormon religious observance (the camel phase). In 1991, after she observed a confessional classroom discussion of childhood sexual abuse, Martha hit a turning point. She had sudden hemorrhaging that sent her into emergency surgery, where she had an exquisite encounter with a White Light. When she got home, awash in the joy of that experience, she was hit with the first horrific flashbacks of being raped by her father. In her memory, she heard references to Egypt and to Joseph Smith and was under the impression that her father was performing a kind of Abrahamic sacrifice. That's when I had to put the book down for a little while.

Martha claims she meditated, prayed, cried a lot, and gradually found multiple memories and experiences coalescing into a more coherent picture of her past:

- Blood on her thighs and pain between her legs as a five-year-old while playing outside. (115)

- At age ten having nightmares and saying compulsive prayers to ward off Abrahamic sacrifices. (115)

- Pelvic exams during which doctors discuss extensive tearing and scarring that she says doesn't match the small episiotomies she had in childbirth. (116–18)

- Waking up repeatedly in the ensuing years to find her body in the same frog-legged wrists-crossed position of her memories. (119–20)

- A "life-long strange reaction to all things Egyptian," especially images of the crocodile-headed Amut the Destroyer. (146–47)

- A desire to commit suicide dating back to age six, and a life-threatening case of anorexia throughout adolescence. (62)

- A life-long inability to feel emotion, and the sensation of experiencing life through a pane of glass, one step removed. (200)

Over time, she came to believe that she had been ritually raped by her father over the

ring) and circumstantial evidence that her father was the perpetrator (210). She hypothesizes that his horrible deeds emerged out of a particularly volatile stress cocktail. The groundwork for her father's instability was laid by his own sexual abuse at the hands of his mother and posttraumatic stress from his experiences during WWII. The final straw, she suggests, came when Martha was five and the LDS church asked Nibley to translate the newly acquired Joseph Smith papyri and use his scholarship to defend the Church's claims regarding the Book of Abraham. Claiming that this put him in an impossible bind, as Joseph Smith's translation was indefensible, she suggests her father went crazy and she became the unwitting victim of his delusions.

Mixed in with this intensely personal

**By the end of the first reading, I was persuaded. I hated most of the book, doubted many of the details, was disappointed in her relentlessly negative and ridiculous caricature of the LDS Church and culture, questioned some internal consistencies; but I believed that she had been abused by her father.**

course of three years, from age five until right before she was baptized at age eight. One of the most damning accounts in the book describes a phone call she had with her mother not long after the memories hit and she stopped visiting her parents. Martha reports that her mother confirmed her own suspicions that Martha had been abused and seemed perfectly unsurprised to learn the details of how and when, attributing the problem to Hugh Nibley's own sexual abuse at the hands of his mother. But the next day, Martha says, her mother then reversed her position, denying Martha's claims ever after.

Citing her "love affair with evidence" and her rigorous Harvard training throughout the book, Martha claims to have physical evidence that she was abused (the vaginal scar-

story of abuse is Martha's description of her path out of the church of her heritage peppered with wonderful anecdotes, wise quotes, and spiritual insights. One of my favorites is her account of trying to get a famished Adam to nurse even though he lacked the muscles to do so effectively. She has a sudden insight of a God bursting with nourishment to give that we are too spiritually impaired to take in (28). The accounts of how she and her father would communicate entirely via literary allusions are brilliant (63–64). The description of her out-of-body experience during surgery is breathtaking (102–3).

By the end, I was persuaded. I hated most of the book, doubted many of the details, was disappointed in her relentlessly negative

and ridiculous caricature of the LDS Church and culture, and questioned some internal inconsistencies; but I believed that she had been abused by her father.

I was persuaded but also exhausted and sick at heart. Martha managed to end on a note of “moving on, moving up” and did a nice job of carrying her Buddhist-spiritual-stages motif to a neat conclusion—but I did not feel uplifted or inspired. The book was filled with more anger than resolution. As it settled into the pit of my stomach, I realized how little I had benefited from Martha’s story in spite of going in with an open mind.

**M**ARTHA’S story of abuse certainly leaves the reader with an impossible dilemma. Someone is lying, and we’re only getting one side of the story in this book. Either Hugh Nibley was a pa-

passee, an irresistible she-said force meeting an immovable he-said object” (20).

I decided to follow Martha’s own example and put my Princeton sociological training to work to learn what I could. I re-read the book using the content-analysis method I had put to good use in my qualitative dissertation work, watching closely for emergent themes and internal inconsistencies. I read more of Martha’s own published works, pored through what others had researched about her, interviewed family members, and finally spoke with Martha herself.

I soon found myself mired in fundamentally different interpretations of Martha’s life and character. Was she a bright but deeply mentally disturbed woman with an obsessive need to be admired and a mercenary approach to book publishing? Or had she been dogged by mental health problems all her life

then what started as questions began to turn into doubts.

OH, SAY WHAT IS TRUTH?

What exactly is Martha’s belief system on epistemology, truth, and memory? Her narrative contains the following statements:

Mormons tend to know a whopping lot of stuff beyond a shadow of a doubt. I envy them. My whole life is shadowed by doubt. The only conviction I embrace absolutely is this: whatever I believe, I may be wrong. (6)

So even before I grew up and saw for myself, I realized that memory—even the flypaper memory my father and I seem to share—is not the mechanical recording device people often think it is. Memory is anything but constant, anything but indubitable. . . . It fills this room where I sit with my father, who seems as certain of his version of my life story as I am of mine. I don’t know whether to accuse him of lying or accept that he really doesn’t remember. But he offers no alternative explanation for the scars I carry in my flesh, and I have only one set of memories that accounts for them. Of one thing I am absolutely certain: I haven’t invented a single thing. (21)

Her only conviction is that she could be wrong about anything, but she is also absolutely certain that she hasn’t invented a single thing. And although she observes in one breath that memory is not a reliable objective recording device and “anything but constant,” in the next, her own memories trump her father’s as empirical truth.

She also reasons that the very absurdity of the details of her ritual abuse validated it as fact: “The peculiar details of my memories had at first made me doubt myself—they were so weird—but in the end, reinforced my conviction that I hadn’t unconsciously made something up” (146). This thinking also shows up in the Author’s Note at the end of *Expecting Adam*, which was designed primarily to assure the reader that her memoir is “a work of nonfiction, meaning that it contains a rigorously factual account of real events” (327). The final sentences there read: “In other words, the harder something is to believe, the truer it is likely to be. The more I

**She does raise a number of quite legitimate issues about the Church and Mormon culture ... But in the context of such a condescending, sweeping dismissal of Mormonism and the often exaggerated way in which she describes complex issues, Martha damages the debate—a shame for someone of her intellect and spiritual insight.**

thetic, deeply disturbed man living in his own private hell, or Martha has woven such an extensive set of fictions as to defy the imagination. I don’t want to believe either possibility. Intelligent, witty, successful people with marvelous writing gifts aren’t supposed to be pathologically devoted liars. And neither are venerable, faithful, icons of intellect. What’s a reader to do? The book can only become a Rorschach test confirming whichever truth is more appealing to the individual. As Martha puts it herself, speaking about a hotel room confrontation with her unrepentant father: “We have reached an im-

because of the trauma of incestual abuse? Had she interpreted her own overwhelmingly vivid experiences as logically as she could and was now simply trying to heal and help others break the stifling silence that often surrounds abuse? No wonder God warns us not to try to judge each other. I simply cannot know exactly how certain events unfolded.

So rather than judge the empirical truth of Martha’s claims, I can only judge what she has set in the public eye: her book. As I read carefully, I was disturbed by an increasingly lengthy list of internal inconsistencies. And

think about it, the more this seems to be the way things are with life in general” (328). Although this approach to truth-finding could easily be cast as ridiculous, in all fairness, *Expecting Adam* told how Martha grew to reject her Harvard-style religion of scientifically verifiable truth and embrace a belief in God and miracles based on her personal, subjective experiences. I happen to believe that both pathways can legitimately lead to truth. But mixing them can be problematic.

In *Leaving the Saints*, Martha makes frequent mention of her Harvard credentials. She writes: “This strict sociological education served me well in investigating the return of my repressed memories” (209). She explains how she read thousands of pages on the upsurge in sexual abuse claims in the United States, passionately studied the repressed-memory debate, and “considered every possible reason for my experience” (209). In the end, she writes: “When I tried to dismiss the strange things I remembered, everything in my mind and body sent out a silent scream, It happened, it happened, it happened, it happened!” (210).

This may well be what her mind and body told her, but it is not an independently verifiable truth claim and falls well beyond the reach of her sociological training. Ironically, one of Martha’s shocking tales of BYU culture involves her futile attempt to teach one of her classes the difference between faith-based claims and verifiable-knowledge claims (221–22). Yet she herself plays both sides of the net at once, serving with her Harvard credentials and volleying with the assertion that the stranger the product of her mind, the more believable it should be.

The most glaring example of the author’s skillful use of innuendo (as opposed to logic, straight description, and recorded evidence) is the manner in which she extracts paragraphs of information from her interlocutors’ facial expressions. She employs this narrative technique most liberally in the hotel room interview with her father. Here are just a few examples:

“Of course,” says my father, his eyes sharp but a little squinty, like the eyes of a confused eagle. I know that expression from my years at Harvard: it’s the look of a smart person trying to appear familiar with something that has escaped his memory. (107)

His face tenses into an expression that looks like annoyance, but I recognize it as fear. (121)

“Here’s what I want to know,” I say, deciding on a direct frontal attack. “What were you doing with all that Egyptian stuff? I mean, when you were performing your ‘Abrahamic sacrifices’ on me?” The blow lands right on target; my father flinches, his face flashing an expression that tells me a great deal. It isn’t just frightened. It certainly isn’t confused. It’s knowing, in a way that both chills and reassures me. It tells me that while I can’t trust him, I can trust my own memory. (121–22)

He says nothing, but I see in his eyes that he remembers. (271)

In several places, Martha describes her careful preparation to set up a verifiable confrontation with witnesses listening behind closed doors and a tape recorder,<sup>3</sup> but in her writing, it is not Hugh Nibley’s words so much as his facial cues that set the tone and provide the most damning evidence for her claims. Facial cues to which she alone is privy and which she alone interprets. This is a method for drawing conclusions unlikely to get past thoughtful readers, let alone any of the Harvard professors whose rigorous standards she repeatedly refers to as instructive.

I also struggled with Martha’s scholarly credential-waving when confronted with her narrative style of recounting lengthy conversations in dialogue. Of course it makes the story eminently more interesting to read, but I found myself distracted by the knowledge that these detailed conversations, complete with body language, were being reconstructed from memory. In the Author’s Note of *Expecting Adam*, Martha assures readers that she kept a meticulous journal during the years in question: “It was packed with every minuscule tidbit of my thought and experience, including the gist—and often the exact words—of important conversations” (327).

In *Leaving the Saints*, she explains that she is able to render an accurate version of the classroom discussion on childhood abuse that led to her flashbacks because she was taking notes as an observer at the time. The conversation she relates covers three pages of text (95–97) during which she also describes a growing sense of claustrophobia and anger and excruciating pain in her hands making it difficult for her to write. As an experienced interviewer and observer myself, I find it hard to believe that even the most skilled

practitioner of shorthand could have captured such an interchange word for word, particularly under the conditions she describes. She relates other conversations in similarly lengthy detail without the benefit of simultaneous transcription (see, for example, 105–06, 130, 165–67, 184–190).

Her frequent efforts to reassure me as a reader of the accuracy of her reporting actually undermine her credibility in my mind. I don’t know of any competent sociology course on qualitative methods (i.e. interviewing and observing people) that doesn’t start out with a substantive critique of the subject/object split. Researchers no longer hide behind the illusion that they are reporters of “just the facts” (*Expecting Adam*, 327). They disclose their own cultural background, point of reference, ideological baggage, and pay homage to the accepted wisdom that all qualitative research includes some element of interpretation. I would be more trusting of the author if she were more forthright about the inherent biases she brings to her stories and more honest about how much her reported conversations necessarily relied on the filter of memory or simply served as a fictional narrative device.

One of the most glaring internal inconsistencies—something any good editor should have caught—is the account of her visit to the second therapist she consulted for help. She starts out with one of her many pseudonyms: “Let’s call her [the therapist] Rachel Grant” (234). One paragraph later, Martha is sitting in the waiting room having second thoughts and letting her mind wander: “I wondered if Dr. Grant was descended from former Mormon president Heber J. Grant.” She then shares an anecdote about one of her own ancestors accompanying President Grant’s awful singing on numerous occasions. My eyes flicked back to the part where the author had just mentioned that the name “Grant” was fake. I wondered if maybe she had changed only her therapist’s first name. Later research revealed that the therapist is in fact named Ruth Killpack (and is thanked openly in the acknowledgements for *Expecting Adam*). More than anything, this one self-evidently fictitious passage unsettled me about the way Martha chooses to narrate her life. I am left with the feeling that she never lets the facts get in the way of a good story.

#### DESCRIBING THE CHURCH

Another glaring inconsistency in *Leaving the Saints* is Martha’s excessively loose treatment of Mormon culture and the LDS

Church. As other reviewers have pointed out, her description of Mormonism seems to have the requisite cast of characters straight out of nineteenth-century anti-Mormon exposés (secret rites, blood atonement, murderous Danites, and, of course, polygamy). I have read many intelligent critiques of the Church, but this isn't one of them. It is often funny and saucily written—but not intelligent. The shallow account of her temple wedding experience seems shoe-horned into Chapter 2. I imagined her editor sending the manuscript back with a Post-it note: “We need more juicy details about some secret Mormon stuff to hype the book—see what you can do!” It felt like a livelier, wittier, but equally immature version of Deborah Laake's *Secret Ceremonies*.

Of her first temple experience, Martha states, “I'd read enough anthropology to

amples of Mormon culture as to strain the limits of credibility. I often read with confusion, wondering if we had really grown up in the same religion.

- When she goes to get her hair cut short in a Provo salon, the stylist notes her wedding band and requests her husband's approval before proceeding. (193)

- She describes BYU's requirement that men wear socks as originating in the belief that ankle hair is an extension of pubic hair. (77–78)

- A student in one of her sociology classes at BYU stands up to dispute her argument and states “You see, Sister Beck, . . . I hold the Priesthood, and that means I'll always know better than you.” (222)

## I wondered why the author of a book that had championed inner peace, love, and the universality of the divine would consent to the marketing of the next installment of her spiritual journey in such hyperbolic and hackneyed terms.

know that a lot of cultures have initiatory ceremonies, and I was quite fascinated to learn the customs of my own people” (14). How can Martha invoke the field of anthropology, which has learned such hard lessons about respect for the culture of others, and then treat a religious ritual (even if it is her own) with such cavalier derision as to call the LDS initiatory ceremony “a lot of memorized, muttered incantations” (14)? She also makes little distinction between official belief and general practice on one hand, and some of Mormonism's most colorful folklore, on the other.<sup>4</sup>

She takes dozens of pieces of Mormonism and gives them the worst possible spin, or describes them with an exaggerated humor that only insiders would understand, leaving outsiders to scratch their heads over what is a fair representation and what might be over the top. Martha also cites such extreme ex-

- She relates the story of a friend “who'd told her Bishop that Church doctrine made her feel like a second-class citizen. He'd looked at her with wounded confusion and said, “But, Sister, you *are* a second-class citizen.” (222)

All of these examples smell more of urban legend than of true events. In all fairness, Martha is not unrelentingly negative about her ancestral faith. In Chapter 11, she writes a touching tribute to the Oak Hills Fourth Ward, which embraced her family when they moved in shortly after their return to Utah. But this only seems to beg the question—how does she explain an institution that nurtures some and oppresses others?

She does raise a number of legitimate issues about the Church and Mormon culture—issues I continue to struggle with myself, such as: the legacy of polygamy, the

status of women in LDS culture, the Book of Abraham, the Church's response to dissent. But in the context of such a condescending, sweeping dismissal of Mormonism, and in the often exaggerated way in which she describes these complex issues,<sup>5</sup> Martha damages the debate—a shame for someone with her intellect and spiritual insight.

Based on the life wisdom I had found in *Expecting Adam*, I was expecting a “post-Mormon” story and instead found an ex-Mormon version. A friend of mine who left the Church for extremely compelling intellectual reasons a few months into his mission coined this term and explained the difference to me: Ex-Mormons have left the church and are still angry with it. Post-Mormons have left the church but still appreciate all that the Church rendered them along their spiritual journey through life. Mormonism becomes part of a treasured past and textured spiritual landscape, rather than a source of bitterness to be wholly rejected. In a book with a subtitle about a journey to faith, I expected a more sophisticated, bittersweet memoir of Mormonism—not the jarring sensationalism of Martha's narrative.

Martha states clearly in the beginning of *Expecting Adam* that she had originally written the book as a novel, but that editors expressed interest in it only as a nonfiction memoir. She tells us that when questioned by editors and agents about the autobiographical content of her “novel,” she would respond: “[A]side from making John and myself sound much better-looking than we are, I didn't fictionalize anything. It's all true. . . .” (7). This statement has been contested by family members who were witness to the same events.

It turns out that Martha also first wrote *Leaving the Saints* as a 500-page novel with a male protagonist as the abuse victim (since she thought a male voice was more likely to be taken seriously than a female voice) and was again redirected by her editors to own her story and call it memoir.<sup>6</sup>

When I visited the book's website, I was immediately turned off by the wave of self-promotion that seemed to roll off the screen. Martha has now built a career as a life coach and columnist for *O, The Oprah Magazine*. Suddenly *Leaving the Saints* felt more like the latest product of an impressive money-making machine than a heartfelt memoir of spiritual progress.

The sensationalism of the back-cover write-up of my advance reading copy reminded me of a circus barker inviting the crowds in to see some sort of benighted exoticia:

While growing up as “Mormon royalty” within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day [sic] Saints, Martha Beck was raised in a home frequented by the church’s high elders—known as the Apostles—and her existence was framed by their strict code of conduct. . . . She saw first-hand the church’s ruthlessness as it silenced dissidents and masked truths that contradicted its beliefs. . . . [It] is an unforgettable memoir that offers a rare glimpse inside one of the world’s most secretive religions. . . .”

I wondered why the author of a book that had championed inner peace, love, and the universality of the divine (*Expecting Adam*) would consent to the marketing of the next installment of her spiritual journey in such hyperbolic and hackneyed terms.

Knowing that the book started out as a novel certainly explains the narrative style; unfortunately, the translation from fiction to nonfiction is problematic. It may have worked in *Expecting Adam* because the fantastic events readers were presented with tended to be small-scale miracles (people showing up in the nick of time to help), or deeply personal spiritual events (healings, encounters with beings from beyond the veil, etc.). In *Leaving the Saints*, Martha’s story is fundamentally linked to an empirical event—one that is troubling to a Mormon audience and devastating to the Nibley family. Her exaggerated sense of humor often feels misplaced. At which outrageous stories are we supposed to say, “Oh, what a funny joke,” and at which are we supposed to be shocked and overwhelmed?

SO why did Martha write this book? Who is her intended audience, and what does she hope they will gain from her story? These questions are not easily answered from the text. The subtitle, “How I Lost the Mormons and Found My Faith,” points to a saga of surviving organized religion. But the structural framework of the book is her hotel-room confrontation with her father. Mormonism becomes the exotic background for a tale of surviving childhood sexual abuse.

In my conversation with her, Martha described how over and over again Mormons have responded to her story not with sympathy and concern for her welfare but with a knee-jerk questioning of its implications for their own testimonies.<sup>7</sup> She says she was not writing to Mormons at all, and indeed expected to barely cause a ripple in Utah: she

assumed her book would be summarily dismissed. As she puts it in *Leaving the Saints*:

[M]ost of my people, from near-and-dear relatives to the most far-flung Latter-day Saints, will never listen. . . . They will certainly judge me without hearing my case, and it’s virtually impossible that anything will change their minds. (220)

I am a faithful Latter-day Saint who did hear out her case and was even willing to believe her at first blush. I live with the legacy of incestual sexual abuse in my own family (thankfully one generation removed): it is insidious and serious as a heart attack, as Martha might say. It leaves a lot of wreckage behind. Just three days before I opened *Leaving the Saints*, an LDS friend and mother confided to me that she had spent the previous year spontaneously recalling repressed memories of sexual abuse at the hands of her Mormon father. In her case, the abuse was corroborated by other siblings who were similarly molested. I know that incestual abuse in LDS families is all too real, and that even recalled memories can be valid. Unfortunately, Martha’s case against Mormonism is so exaggerated and shallow, the accuracy of her narrative style so suspect, and her use of hyperbole in such a devastating accusation so misplaced, that I believe she is doing the worst possible disservice to the painful issue of abuse. Since Martha’s own reliability does not stand up well under the weight of close scrutiny in the public eye, this book can only damage the credibility of abuse survivors. ☹

#### NOTES

1. Text of this email letter by Zina Petersen in possession of the author.

2. Boyd Jay Petersen, *Hugh Nibley: “A Consecrated Life,”* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2002), 400.

3. She never states that a tape recorder is present but implies that some kind of device is in view: “I . . . suddenly realize that he [Nibley] thinks I’m recording our conversation in order to turn him over to the authorities. . . .” (3).

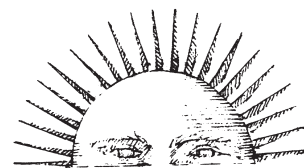
4. See, for example, page 15, where she writes that endowed mem-

bers become “an irresistible target for Satan’s minions” and that garments are said to “repel these demonic spirits.” She also recounts the “faith-promoting rumor” of the naval officer whose head and limbs burned off in a bombing attack while his garment-covered torso remained intact, and the instructions she received about some members who choose to always wear the garment in some fashion, even while bathing.

5. Her statements on many of these sensitive topics are just a little over the top and deserve more context for the non-LDS reader. For example, “eternal unions are expected to be polygamous” (18). Yes, some readings of Church doctrine do in fact imply that eternal unions can and will be polygamous, but most Church members I know would not say that they are “expected” to be so. I will leave an analysis of how Beck treats the Joseph Smith papyri and the Book of Abraham to others who know more about that subject than I do.

6. Phone interview with Martha Beck, 22 February 2005.

7. *Ibid.*



## HENDRICKJE STOFFELS

(*Rembrandt*)

I have stolen the gesture  
of your arms always at that moment  
of opening your body as if it were a baker’s cabinet—  
warm, damp from the breads and pies cooling.

Old habits are harder to break than bone.  
I nap on the studio floor  
though I can feel every crack, every cold day endured  
in the crown of my bones  
bearing my weight against the wood.  
You haven’t said a chiding word.  
Instead, the smell of your zucchini bread I love  
fills the house and wakes me.

You work long hours,  
your forearms dusted with flour,  
your hands smeared with butter.  
I am impatient with the oven and the long wait.

Then you, suddenly, at my door,  
having skipped the third step that creaks—  
why wait so long after knocking?  
The door is open—step in and be my wife.

—STEPHEN FRECH

## COMMENTARY

## TO BELIEVE, OR NOT TO BELIEVE?

By Cherie Woodworth

WOMEN (AND MEN) who have been abused, especially as children, often feel that they won't be believed. Such things are not supposed to happen in families (especially when the Mormon ideal is "families are forever"), and a potential confidant would, understandably, shy away from hearing or facing such a disturbing account.

When our reviewer, after weeks of struggling with the book, eventually came to the conclusion that Martha Beck's claims of abuse were not, on careful examination, credible, we both were concerned about the larger impact this discussion might have on other women's claims of abuse.

In January 2005, after the Sunstone office had received an advance copy of the book *Leaving the Saints* but before the book (and the claims of its author) had received media attention, I spoke with a family counselor who has worked in Salt Lake City and Utah Valley for three decades. The interview, conducted in confidence and summarized below, provides a serious caution for evaluating (or, more particularly, dismissing) claims of sexual abuse.

*Do women make up claims about sexual abuse?*

In general, such claims are not made up. In hundreds of cases over many years, this counselor found only two cases where he thought the woman was lying. In the cases where there were doubts about the accusation, what was it that raised red flags?

(1) The accuser had a specific and strong motive—as in a divorce settlement.

(2) The story told during counseling was inconsistent.

*Why do people often reject an accuser's claims of abuse?*

(1) The whole rest of the family denies it.

(2) People believe that this doesn't happen in good Mormon families, or a re-

spected priesthood leader couldn't do this, or "this particular" priesthood leader couldn't do this (because we know him and respect him so highly in other contexts).

(3) The accuser is obviously messed up, and therefore untrustworthy.

In discussing the first reason, the counselor stated that it is not uncommon for accusations by one member of the family to split the family apart because other family members may completely reject the accuser's claims. Although in some cases the family members may be covering up for a situation they knew was wrong, in other cases, the family may in fact be telling the truth—they had no knowledge of the events and, based on their own relationship with the accused, cannot imagine them happening.

How victims remember trauma, such as early childhood sexual abuse, is one of the most controversial issues in psychology today.

In discussing the second sensibility, the counselor forthrightly claimed that Mormon families are *not* immune to child abuse (physical, emotional, and sexual). We have no accurate way of saying whether child abuse is less common among Mormon families (because there is no way to gather reliable data); but abuse does happen. It happens in families of respected priesthood leaders, and this counselor dealt with at least one case where the bishop strongly protested that the accused, as a highly respected priesthood leader, could not have done it. But the accuser's account was still credible. The general rule the counselor suggests we should

follow is: despite objections, believe the accuser is telling the truth.

In answer to the third objection, childhood abuse often leaves people with emotional and personal instability. Being clearly and obviously "messed up" could just as plausibly be taken as evidence *in support* of the accusations (that is, abuse is the reason the person is so messed up).

From his accumulated experience of counseling hundreds of abuse cases in Mormon families, this counselor maintains that before discounting *any* claim of sexual abuse, one should expect to submit it to a very high standard of disproof. Our SUNSTONE reviewer held to this very demanding standard.

RECOVERED memories do happen—with the events coming to consciousness sometimes even after years. However, memories "recovered" through hypnosis have been shown to be very problematic. Under conducive circumstances, false memories of the past can be created through suggestion that feel just as real as lived events—hence the term "false memory syndrome." How victims remember trauma, such as early childhood sexual abuse, is one

of the most controversial issues in psychology today. The latest research argues forcefully that genuine traumas are never forgotten.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, "dramatic examples of suggestibility have been documented in which individuals seemingly recover vivid, even traumatic memories of events that never happened."<sup>2</sup>

## NOTES

1. Richard J. McNally, *Remembering Trauma* (Harvard University Press, 2003).

2. Daniel Schacter, "When Memory Sins," *Essays in Social Neuroscience* (MIT Press, 2004); see also the extensive research on this in McNally, cited above. The "sins" the author refers to are metaphorical: times when memory fails.

CHERIE WOODWORTH and her husband, Brad, are SUNSTONE's book review editors.

YEA, YEA  NAY, NAY

## IS A “PARADIGM SHIFT” IN BOOK OF MORMON STUDIES POSSIBLE?

By Dan Vogel

PRESENTLY, THE CONTROVERSY between Book of Mormon apologists and critics rages mainly because both are seeking the unconditional acquiescence of the other. At the center of the discussion is disagreement over the historicity of the Book of Mormon and an either/or dichotomy: either the Book of Mormon is real history and Joseph Smith is a real prophet, or, as apologist William J. Hamblin has insisted, the Book of Mormon is fiction and Joseph Smith is a false prophet.<sup>1</sup> Given this binary stance, it is little wonder the apologists for historicity are willing to go to extreme, even unconventional measures to fend off all attacks.

One of these extreme tactics has been to align themselves with philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn's discussion of paradigms, in his famous book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*,<sup>2</sup> as an entry into postmodernist theories of the social construction of truth. Their motivation for so doing seems to be to create a space for their apologetic claims by arguing that if science is actually a subjective enterprise, then believing that the Book of Mormon is historical is neither more nor less “scientific” than not believing.

Although Kuhn's discussion of paradigms remains useful, various aspects of his thesis have been rejected by philosophers of science. Yet it is on these extremely controversial aspects that apologists have placed the most emphasis. They do so as a means to justify mixing religious values with scientific criteria, privileging positive over negative evidence, creating *ad hoc* question-begging responses to counter evidence and, ironically, resisting “paradigm shift.”

This essay examines the apologists' paradigm to show that their appropriation of Kuhn is not only highly questionable but at odds with his original thesis. Drawing on

Kuhn myself, I will suggest another paradigm, one that might actually be a paradigm shift—one, I believe, capable of creating common ground upon which the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith might be more fruitfully approached.

### KUHN'S MIXED LEGACY

KUHN'S signature contribution to the philosophy of science lies in his contention that although science has indeed progressed, its advancement was not simply through a steady “accumulation of knowledge.” An “accumulation” model implies that with each experimental result, science moves toward a more accurate representation of reality. Kuhn argues instead that the historical progress of science is best understood as punctuated by mass conversions to new understandings, sudden “paradigm shifts.” Kuhn argues that new paradigms are often chosen for non-scientific reasons and that switching paradigms amounts to an act of “faith” because an older paradigm always has more evidence in its favor and fewer anomalies, although those anomalies are serious enough to cause a crisis and a search for a better paradigm.<sup>3</sup> Thus, Kuhn explains that the term paradigm “stands for the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of a given community.”<sup>4</sup>

Though Kuhn is clearly right that science has undergone major revolutions—such as the shift from Aristotelian to Newtonian physics, and from Newtonian mechanics to Einsteinian relativity—such examples clearly do not support his non-cumulative theory of scientific progress. Physicist Steven Weinberg has observed that while the “soft” parts of a theory (our *ad hoc* explanations of why the

theory works), the “hard” parts (usually the equations) endure and are incorporated in succeeding theories. According to Weinberg,

Kuhn . . . took his idea of a paradigm shift from the shift from Aristotelian to Newtonian physics . . . which set a pattern into which he tried to shoehorn every other scientific revolution. . . . Revolutions in science seem to fit Kuhn's description only to the extent that they mark a shift in understanding some aspect of nature from pre-science to modern science. The birth of Newtonian physics was a mega-paradigm shift, but nothing that has happened in our understanding of motion since then—not the transition from Newtonian to Einsteinian mechanics, or from classical to quantum physics—fits Kuhn's description of a paradigm shift.<sup>5</sup>

Philosophers of science Ian G. Barbour and Larry Laudan have likewise questioned Kuhn's non-cumulative model of scientific progress. Barbour has argued that there is “more continuity across a revolution than Kuhn depicts; there may be changes in assumptions, instrumentation and data, but there are no total discontinuities,” and Laudan has asked: “Why need cumulativeness be a precondition for objective judgments of cognitive progress? . . . [W]hy should we confuse this arguably sufficient condition for scientific progress with a necessary condition?”<sup>6</sup> Despite such epistemic difficulties, Kuhn's assertion that scientific paradigms are to some degree socially constructed views of reality creates an opening that has been exploited by apologists and proponents of dubious positions ever since.

Kuhn did not intend his new model of the scientific enterprise to be put to use in apologetics. Indeed, Kuhn himself often complained about the spurious ways in which his work was invoked to defend unscientific and irrational positions. He was particularly dismayed by postmodernist Paul Feyerabend's claim that his work was a defense of irrationality in science.<sup>7</sup>

Despite Kuhn's protestations, responsibility for some of the confusion must still be laid at his feet. Physicists Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont have written about the mess of contradictory statements Kuhn left as a legacy in his attempt to carve out a middle position between science as purely objective and science as subjective—between positivism on one hand, and relativism on the other. Sokal and Bricmont have even gone so



DAN VOGEL is the author of the award-winning biography *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004), as well as many other articles and books on Mormon history. He is an independent researcher and currently lives in Westerville, Ohio, with his wife, Margie.

far as to observe that there are “two Kuhns—a moderate Kuhn and his immoderate brother.” The moderate “Kuhn admits that the scientific debates of the past were settled correctly, but emphasizes that the evidence available at the time was weaker than is generally thought and that non-scientific considerations played a role.” The less careful Kuhn makes it sound like “changes of paradigm are due principally to non-empirical factors and that, once accepted, they condition our perception of the world to such an extent that they can only be confirmed by our subsequent experiences.” In Sokal and Bricmont’s view, it is this latter Kuhn, the “immoderate brother,” that has made Kuhn, “perhaps involuntarily, one of the founding fathers of contemporary relativism.”<sup>8</sup>

It is on the questionable legacy of the immoderate Kuhn that religious apologists and fringe scientists have pounced, appropriating Kuhn with such regularity that some have dubbed their arguments the “fallacy from Kuhn.” Creationists are a prime offender. The general outline of the “fallacy from Kuhn” that creationists employ is as follows:

(1) Highlight perceived shortcomings of the neo-Darwinian paradigm—e.g., its inability to answer the questions and make the predictions which the creationists deem most important and significant.

(2) Explain how creationism is the only logical alternative.

(3) Appeal to Kuhn’s discussion of paradigm debates to explain why the scientific community resists a shift to the creationists’ paradigm.<sup>9</sup>

Philosopher and well-known skeptic Michael Shermer notes that “identification of

the Kuhnian paradigm and the call for a revolutionary shift to the believer’s radical idea is made by nearly every claimant who is out of the mainstream, from UFOlogists and psychic investigators to proponents of cold fusion and perpetual motion machines.”<sup>10</sup>

If those on the fringes of science find inspiration in Kuhn’s work, those in the dominant paradigm can also find justification for resisting new paradigms. Kuhn himself said: “If all members of a community responded to each anomaly as a source of crisis or embraced each new theory advanced by a colleague, science would cease.”<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, this is the situation I contend Book of Mormon apologists are caught in. They operate in an orbit between the moon and the sun, resisting the pull of the reigning naturalistic paradigm of secular scholarship while at the same time holding at bay revisionists within the Mormon community who are tugging them to embrace an inspired-fiction model for understanding the Book of Mormon.

The main exploiter of Kuhn among Book of Mormon apologists is Kevin Christensen, who first began using Kuhn in his theoretical reflections on Book of Mormon debates in 1990 and has continued up to the present, including his “Paradigms Crossed” (1995), “Paradigms Regained” (2001), and his critique of my approach to the Book of Mormon published last year in the FARMS Review.<sup>12</sup> The following is an outline of Christensen’s strategy and basic arguments, which he has derived from Kuhn and repeated over the past fifteen years:

(1) Disagreements between Book of Mormon apologists and critics are best understood as an

unresolvable debate between competing paradigms—i.e., ancient vs. nineteenth-century origin.

(2) Paradigms are not chosen according to objective rules, but rather on subjectively assessed criteria—e.g., comprehensiveness, coherence, simplicity, fruitfulness.

(3) Paradigms are unverifiable and resist falsification.

(4) Both apologists and critics assess evidence in a way that is consistent with their particular paradigms.

(5) Both apologists and critics choose which questions are the most significant to have answered and leave others unanswered.

(6) Both apologists and critics use *ad hoc* rationalizations to explain away counter-evidence and anomalies.

(7) Criteria such as accuracy of key predictions, comprehensiveness, coherence, parsimony, and fruitfulness show the Book of Mormon apologists’ paradigm to be superior to the critics’ nineteenth-century paradigm.

While Christensen resists the suggestion that he is guilty of the “fallacy from Kuhn,”<sup>13</sup> I contend that he uses Kuhn primarily in an effort to diminish the significance of counter-evidence to Book of Mormon historicity and to value otherwise weak and unpersuasive apologetic responses. At every turn, Christensen’s use of Kuhn is designed to close the apologists’ paradigm to evidence that would count against it. For instance, to devalue Deanne Matheny’s critique of John

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Sorenson's limited geography model,<sup>14</sup> Christensen argues that "Matheny and Sorenson do not operate in the same paradigm. Their understandings of what constitutes a problem and what constitutes a solution are different."<sup>15</sup>

While both Matheny and Sorenson should be operating in a scientific paradigm, Christensen believes Kuhn's thesis gives Mormon scholars permission to corrupt the scientific method with religious values.<sup>16</sup> This allows Christensen and Sorenson to arbitrarily assign greater significance to positive rather than negative evidence or to explain negatives away through *ad hoc* rationalizations. At the same time, Christensen criticizes Matheny because she "discusses only problems [and offers] no solutions." He also quotes Sorenson's complaint that in Matheny's "dominant concern with 'problems,'" she neglects "the sizable body of cultural information in the Book of Mormon which patently agrees with Mesoamerican culture."<sup>17</sup>

In this view, it is more important to emphasize what the Book of Mormon gets right than what it gets wrong. For example, the Book of Mormon correctly predicts the existence of cement in Mesoamerica but is wrong about the existence of metallurgy and steel; correct about domestication of animals but wrong about the existence of the horse; correct about advanced writing systems but wrong about the existence of Hebrew and Egyptian; correct about domestication of plants but wrong about a biological link to the Old World; correct about the high state of civilization but wrong about the builders having come from Israel.<sup>18</sup>

Another example of closing a paradigm to counter-evidence appears in Christensen's endorsement of Mormon Mesoamericanist Brant Gardner's methodology of "looking for Mesoamerica in the Book of Mormon" in-

stead of "looking for the Book of Mormon in Mesoamerica."<sup>19</sup> This procedure has apologetic advantages because if one looks only for similarities in the text, instead of comparing the text as a whole against what is known about Mesoamerica, historical anachronisms become invisible to researchers and falsifiability becomes impossible. While Gardner's approach might lead to new ways of looking at the Book of Mormon, it cannot compensate for the fact that the Book of Mormon has made no significant contributions to our understanding of Mesoamerican history.

If questions about historical and literary anachronisms can't be asked, how can the apologists' theories be tested? If anachronisms and lack of evidence are not considered counter-evidence, what is? Isn't there a point at which resistance becomes unreasonable and irrational? While certain types of evidence are easier to resist than others, it is not at all inconceivable that hard evidence, such as a stele with several Book of Mormon names in a meaningful context, could create a climate in which resistance to Book of Mormon historicity would become increasingly irrational.

What is true about paradigm verification should also apply to falsification. Granted that a paradigm cannot be falsified in absolute terms because, in philosopher of science Ian Barbour's words, "any particular hypothesis can be maintained by rejecting or adjusting other auxiliary hypotheses."<sup>20</sup> Still, there is a point at which resistance becomes irrational and excuses wear thin. On this matter, philosophers Theodore Schick, Jr., and Lewis Vaughn have observed:

Although no amount of evidence logically compels us to reject a hypothesis, maintaining a hypothesis in the face of adverse evidence can be manifestly unreasonable. So even if we cannot conclusively say

that a hypothesis is false, we can often conclusively say that it's unreasonable.<sup>21</sup>

Even Barbour, who does not summarily dismiss the legitimacy of religious paradigms, acknowledges that "an accumulation of anomalies, or of *ad hoc* modifications having no independent experimental or theoretical basis, cannot be tolerated indefinitely."<sup>22</sup>

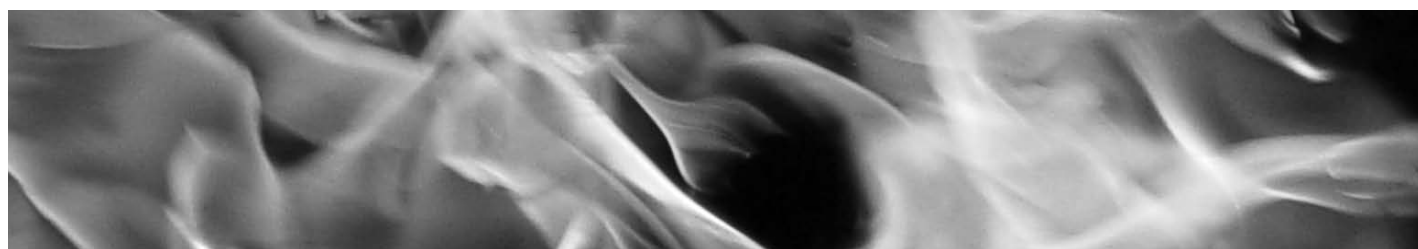
Given the difficulties of proving a negative, critics will never be able to prove the Nephites did not exist. What critics can do is demonstrate that the assertion is unsupported, perhaps even unreasonable and unscientific.

#### RESISTING PARADIGM SHIFT

AT several points in the foregoing, mention has been made of the term "*ad hoc*," as in "*ad hoc* rationalizations" and "*ad hoc* modifications." What characterizes something as an *ad hoc* hypothesis? According to Schick and Vaughn, it "is that it can't be verified independently of the phenomenon it's supposed to explain."<sup>23</sup> In other words, it is untestable and unfalsifiable. Additionally, beyond protecting a central hypothesis from negative evidence, an *ad hoc* hypothesis "has no other explanatory power, that is, no other testable consequences,"<sup>24</sup> or as Barbour said, "no independent experimental or theoretical basis."<sup>25</sup> A closer look at recent hypotheses employed by Book of Mormon apologists will show that they are not simple adjustments to theories to account for new data, but are in fact *ad hoc* rationalizations to explain counter-evidence and anomalies.

*Limited Geography.* In his article, "On Wagging the Dog," in the May 2004 issue of SUNSTONE, Kevin Christensen states that his "preference for the Sorenson model [of a lim-

IF ANACHRONISMS AND lack of evidence are not considered counter-evidence, what is? Isn't there a point at which resistance becomes unreasonable and irrational?



ited geography] simply says that I appreciate the problems that it solves, and I expect that further solutions and refinements will be forthcoming.<sup>26</sup> This statement is based on Kuhn's argument that "a theory must seem better than its competitors, but it need not, and in fact, it never does, explain all the facts with which it may be confronted."<sup>27</sup> But things are not as simple as Christensen makes them sound.

That a limited geography model seems to solve distance problems the Book of Mormon presents when viewed in traditional hemispheric terms is no justification for ignoring the model's serious flaws, namely, its uncomfortable fit with various Book of Mormon passages.<sup>28</sup> But no matter how long one waits, the Isthmus of Tehuantepec will never fit the Book of Mormon's description of a "small neck of land."<sup>29</sup> Christensen sidesteps problems such as this by simply asserting: "No single element of a detailed correlation is more fundamental than the overall conception that a correlation can be found."<sup>30</sup> But an anomaly is an anomaly, and as Barbour said, "an accumulation of anomalies cannot be ignored indefinitely."<sup>31</sup>

Whether or not Christensen sees Sorenson's notion of limited geography as a Kuhnian "paradigm shift," it is doubtful that Kuhn would agree. Sorenson is attempting to replace a paradigm that makes fewer assumptions with one that requires more. Traditional hemispheric geography fits comfortably with the Book of Mormon account with only one flaw—it's not realistic. On the other hand, the limited geography is deemed more realistic but requires specialized and tortuous interpretations to maintain. Chief among the untestable hypotheses is Sorenson's attempt to tilt the Mesoamerican map by "45 degrees or more" to the west, so

that Nephite north corresponds to present northwest. Otherwise the Gulf of Mexico and Pacific Ocean are north and south, instead of east and west as required by the Book of Mormon (e.g., Alma 22:32; 50:34). Such explanations have no explanatory power or testable consequences apart from making Sorenson's model work.<sup>32</sup>

In this sense, the limited geography is not a new paradigm but is an *ad hoc* hypothesis that apologists invented to maintain for a while longer the old and crumbling paradigm of Book of Mormon historicity. For this reason, Kuhn would probably categorize both Christensen and Sorenson with the "hold-outs" who resist paradigm shift. Indeed, Kuhn's description of those "hold-outs" seems especially applicable to the new geographers: "The source of resistance is the assurance that the older paradigm will ultimately solve all its problems, that nature can be shoved into the box the paradigm provides."<sup>33</sup>

*DNA Evidence.* Apologetic responses to recent DNA evidence are also *ad hoc* rationalizations. For example, Michael Whiting, director of Brigham Young University's DNA Sequencing Center, admits that a "local colonization hypothesis," one in which Lehi's colony plays a minor and insignificant role in Mesoamerican history, "makes no specific predictions that can be refuted or corroborated."<sup>34</sup> Not only does such an explanation have no explanatory power or testable consequences apart from salvaging a belief in Book of Mormon historicity, but it begs the question since it assumes what it attempts to prove, namely, that the Nephites occupied a small geographic region and played a minor role in Mesoamerican history. But, as Brent Metcalfe has discussed, without clear refer-

ence in the Book of Mormon to what would amount to a dominant non-Israelite population in Mesoamerica, apologists strain to escape conflicting passages and try to find support for this local colonization hypothesis in vaguely worded passages.<sup>35</sup> The minor subcultural role apologists wish to assign to the Nephites is exactly the opposite of what is described in the Book of Mormon.

#### GOING BETWEEN THE HORNS

**I**S it wise for Mormons to put all their spiritual eggs into the historicity basket? If anomalies such as travel distances and population sizes have caused apologists to change to positions their predecessors never imagined, could it happen again? If apologists find anomalies too difficult to overcome and discover themselves in a paradigmatic crisis, is the only alternative to abandon faith? I think not. As Barbour points out:

Tradition is dynamic and developing, not an unchanging legacy from the past. Like a living organism, it is historically continuous and yet always growing. A community can understand its exemplars and its historic origins in new ways and can adapt to new circumstances and new problems.<sup>36</sup>

Hence, I must ask: Is a "Book of Mormon as inspired fiction" paradigm out of the question?

To some apologists, Joseph Smith cannot be a true prophet if the Book of Mormon is not real history, for God and prophets do not engage in deception. Hamblin emphatically states:

The issue is: if the Book of Mormon is fiction, then Joseph Smith could not be a true prophet, a point tac-

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itly accepted by most of those who reject historicity, since all of their accounts include serious equivocation or redefinition of the key concepts revelation, inspiration, and prophet.<sup>37</sup>

I do not accept Hamblin's either/or dichotomy. Although it presently fuels disagreement over Book of Mormon historicity, Hamblin's dichotomy is false because there is a third and viable alternative: the Book of Mormon as inspired fiction. Ultimately, Hamblin's argument rests on a question-begging definition of "prophet."

Scholars cannot answer questions such as: "Was Joseph Smith a true prophet?" and "Is the Book of Mormon inspired?" The truth claims of a religion are beyond the scope of scholarship, but the historical status of the Book of Mormon is another matter. Historians are free to conclude the Book of Mormon is not historical and, consequently, to revise Joseph Smith's biography. Despite Hamblin's insistence on ontological or metaphysical definitions, a more fruitful and relevant line of questioning for scholars would be: What was Joseph Smith's definition of prophet? Did he believe God sometimes inspires deception? What was his definition of inspiration? And finally, is a non-historical Book of Mormon consistent with Joseph Smith's definition of prophet and inspiration? I believe the answer to this last question is yes.<sup>38</sup>

When Moroni exhorts readers to "ask God . . . if these things are not true" and promises that "he will manifest the truth of it unto you" (Moroni 10:4), the text points to a specific kind of truth. Previously, Moroni represented God as saying: "Because of my Spirit he shall know that these things are true; for it persuadeth men to do good. And whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do good is of me; for good cometh of none save it be of me. I am the same that leadeth men to all good" (Ether 4:11–12). Similarly, Mormon

said: "I show unto you the way to judge; for every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ; wherefore ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of God" (Moroni 7:16). In other words, since all good comes from God, and the Book of Mormon tries to persuade humankind to be righteous and believe in Christ, it is consistent with this line of reasoning that the Book of Mormon is true and inspired independent of whether, in the final analysis, it is considered historical.

This concept of inspiration ties in well with Joseph Smith's self-perception as a prophet. In a letter published in the *Elders' Journal* in July 1838, Joseph Smith responded to the question: "Do you believe Joseph Smith, Jr., to be a prophet?" His answer was: "Yes, and every other man who has the testimony of Jesus. 'For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.' Rev. 19:10."<sup>39</sup> This definition also appears in Alma: "And Alma went and began to declare the word of God unto the church . . . according to the spirit of prophecy which was in him, according to the testimony of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who should come to redeem his people from their sins. . ." (Alma 6:8). And on the Book of Mormon title page: "Written by way of commandment, and also by the spirit of prophecy and of revelation."

To return to Hamblin's definition, I hypothesize that Joseph Smith sincerely believed himself to be an inspired prophet—but not in the way that he encouraged his followers to believe. Why is it impossible to believe that a prophet would engage in deception? It's certainly not without biblical precedent: Abraham and Isaac both lied about the marital status of their wives (Genesis 12:11–13; 20:13; 26:7); Abraham lied to Isaac about the true object of the sacrifice they were preparing (Genesis 22:7–8); Jacob deceived Isaac to obtain the firstborn's blessing owed to Esau (Genesis

27); Moses lied to Pharaoh (Exodus 3:18); one prophet lied to another (1 Kings 13); and Jehu pretended to worship Baal (2 Kings 10).

Unlike Hamblin, Christensen calls the inspired fiction model (which he labels the "mythic approach")<sup>40</sup> to Book of Mormon historicity "valid," but regards it as "suicidal" for the "faith community" and predicts that its adoption would cause the community of believers to "fall apart." Similar predictions were once given by the orthodox who felt threatened by Galileo and Copernicus—and by fundamentalists today who fear Darwinism. I believe Christensen underestimates the resiliency of faith and the hazards of becoming an anachronism to future generations of Mormons who will no doubt tire of holding to the untenable scientific and historical positions of their ancestors. ☞

## NOTES

1. See William J. Hamblin, "There Really Is a God, and He Dwells in the Temporal Parietal Lobe of Joseph Smith's Brain," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 36, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 81.

2. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

3. *Ibid.*, 157–58.

4. *Ibid.*, 175.

5. Steven Weinberg, *Facing Up: Science and Its Cultural Adversaries* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 198–99, 204–05.

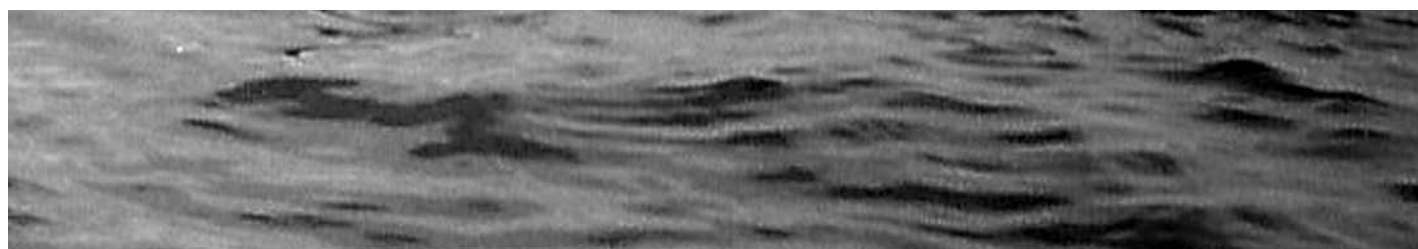
6. Ian G. Barbour, *Myths, Models, and Paradigms: A Comparative Study in Science and Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 107; Larry Laudan, *Beyond Positivism and Relativism: Theory, Method, and Evidence* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996), 22.

7. Weinberg, 193.

8. Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont, *Fashionable Nonsense: Postmodern Intellectuals' Abuse of Science* (New York: Picador USA, 1998), 75, summarizing the observations of Tim Maudlin, "Kuhn Defanged: Incommensurability and Theory-Choice," translated by Jean-Pierre Deschepper and Michel Ghins in *Revue Philosophique de Louvain* 94 (1966): 428–46.

9. For examples, see Michael J. Behe, *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), esp. 28, 97, 215; William

**F**OR BOOK OF MORMON apologists, it is more important to emphasize what the Book of Mormon gets right than what it gets wrong.

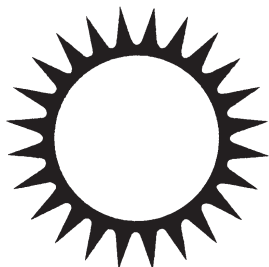


A. Dembski, *Intelligent Design: The Bridge between Science and Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), esp. 119, 216.

10. See Michael Shermer, *Why People Believe Weird Things: Pseudoscience, and Other Confusions of Our Time*, 2nd ed. (New York: Henry Holt, 2002), 311–12.

11. Kuhn, 186.

12. The following is a sample of essays in which Kevin Christensen draws on Kuhn for apologetic purposes:



## SPRING COMES TO THE MING TOMBS

The persimmons are gone,  
those soft suns with  
astringent skins and sweet  
slippery meat that held  
summer past first frost.

The trees are still bare,  
though sparrows and finches—  
singers of early green—  
keep chorus there.

Along the road  
peasants sell Chinese pears,  
sallow skinned from cellars  
dark as tombs.

Beyond the vermilion walls  
acacias scatter buds,  
and the forsythia blossoms  
in tiny yellow butterflies.

Here where royalty once rode  
in golden coaches, stone  
horses and elephants keep vigil.

In their winter caves  
the emperors and empresses  
sleep on.

—ROBERT REES

Review of Dan Vogel, *Indian Origins and the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1986), in *FARMS Review* 2, no. 1 (1990): 214–57; “Paradigms Crossed,” *FARMS Review* 7, no. 2 (1995): 144–218; “Paradigms Regained: A Survey of Margaret Barker’s Scholarship and Its Significance for Mormon Studies,” *FARMS Occasional Papers* 2 (2001); Kevin Christensen, “Truth and Method: Reflections on Dan Vogel’s Approach to the Book of Mormon,” *FARMS Review* 16, no. 1 (2004): 287–354.

13. Christensen, “Truth and Method,” 298.

14. See Deanne G. Matheny, “Does the Shoe Fit? A Critique of the Limited Tehuantepec Geography,” in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*, ed. Brent D. Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 269–328; and John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo: FARMS, 1985).

15. Christensen, “Paradigms Crossed,” 172.

16. Responding to my criticism that his amalgam of faith and science goes beyond Kuhn’s intentions, Christensen argued that philosopher of science Ian G. Barbour “supplies the theoretical justification that I use to apply Kuhn’s model to religion” (Christensen, “Paradigms Crossed,” 294; Barbour, *Myths, Models, and Paradigms*). However, Barbour did not advocate a mixing of science and religion but was comparing similar features of different paradigms. Indeed, he was clear about keeping science and religion separate: “There can be complementary models within a paradigm, but paradigms are evidently not complementary; a person can fully share the outlook of only one tradition at a time” (147). And he insisted that the notion of complementarity “cannot be used to avoid dealing with inconsistencies” (77). This means that when examining Book of Mormon historicity, one cannot resort or retreat to a religious paradigm to escape counter-evidence. I would therefore argue that Christensen needs to keep his paradigms separate, because when he attempts to discuss Book of Mormon historicity, he has tacitly agreed to work within a scientific and scholarly paradigm.

17. Christensen, “Paradigms Crossed,” 172.

18. Sorenson more or less concedes these points when, in his response to Matheny, he argues that despite the lack of evidence for metallurgy in Mesoamerica before about 900 CE, there is no absolute guarantee that scholars are correct on this matter, and he questions what is meant by “steel.” See John Sorenson, “Viva Zapato! Hurray for the Shoe!” *FARMS Review* 6, no. 1 (1994): 319–28. In another instance, Sorenson argues that “Joseph Smith may not have translated every term ‘correctly,’ and tries to replace “horse” with “deer” (*Ibid.*, 344–48). In yet another, he argues that it is false to assume that the seeds brought by the Jaredites and Lehiters “flourished” in the new environment, questions the meaning of “wheat” and “barley,” and tries to substitute “amaranth” and “corn” (*Ibid.*, 335–42). In another instance, Sorenson suggests that a link has not been made between Mesoamerican writing systems and Hebrew and Egyptian, because “nobody has made a serious attempt to demonstrate any link” (*Ibid.*, 358). Elsewhere, Sorenson concedes that the major civilizations of Central America are of Asiatic origin predating the arrival of the Lehiters, and speculates that the Book of Mormon is not a national history but rather an account of a specific “lineage” that lived among Asiatic populations (Sorenson, *An Ancient*

*American Setting*, 50–56).

19. Kevin Christensen, “On Wagging the Dog,” *SUNSTONE*, May 2004, 9; also Christensen, “Truth and Method,” 309.

20. Barbour, 99.

21. Theodore Schick, Jr., and Lewis Vaughn, *How to Think about Weird Things: Critical Thinking for a New Age* (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing, 1999), 156–57.

22. Barbour, 114.

23. Schick and Vaughn, 157.

24. Irving M. Copi, *Introduction to Logic* (New York: MacMillan, 1972), 453.

25. Barbour, 114.

26. Christensen, “On Wagging the Dog,” 9.

27. Kuhn, 17–18.

28. See, for instance, Earl M. Wunderli, “Critique of a Limited Geography for Book of Mormon Events,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 35 (Fall 2002): 161–97. Brant Gardner’s response to Wunderli’s critique, in my opinion, is simply more of the same convoluted and question-begging interpretations. See Brant Gardner, “An Exploration in Critical Methodology: Critiquing a Critique,” *FARMS Review* 16, no. 2 (2004): 173–223.

29. See Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe, eds., *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), ix–xiii.

30. Christensen, “Truth and Method,” 317.

31. Barbour, 9.

32. On orientation, see Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting*, 39–42. Sorenson admits his limited geography model is only “plausible” and that it can’t be “scientifically tested” (xviii–xx).

33. Kuhn, 152, 159.

34. Michael Whiting, “DNA and the Book of Mormon: A Phylogenetic Perspective,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12, no. 1 (2003): 31. Nevertheless, this does not stop him from postulating the loss of Israelite DNA through the “founder effect,” which according to molecular geneticist Rich Deem “would require the simultaneous mutation of at least 5 polymorphic Alu insertions in Lehi’s sons and wives.” Deem contends this theory is not only untestable, it’s “scientifically ludicrous.” Deem’s statements are found in Thomas W. Murphy, “Simply Implausible: DNA and a Mesoamerican Setting for the Book of Mormon,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 36 (Winter 2003): 120n41.

35. Brent Lee Metcalfe, “Reinventing Lamanite Identity,” *SUNSTONE*, March 2004, 20–25. John Tvedtnes attempts a partial response to Metcalfe but, in my opinion, resorts to more convoluted and strained interpretation. See John A. Tvedtnes, “Reinventing the Book of Mormon,” *FARMS Review* 16, no. 2 (2004): 91–106.

36. Barbour, 149.

37. Hamblin, 81.

38. I have explored these questions in “The Prophet Puzzle’ Revisited,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 31 (Fall 1998): 125–40, reprinted in *The Prophet Puzzle*, ed. Bryan Waterman (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999), 49–67; and in Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004).

39. *Elders’ Journal* 1 (July 1838): 43; cf. Joseph Smith, Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 7 vols., 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1948), 3:28; see also 3:389.

40. Christensen, “On Wagging the Dog,” 9.

## UPDATE

## HUGH NIBLEY DIES AT 94

HUGH NIBLEY, ONE OF MORMONISM'S BEST KNOWN scholars, died 24 February at his home in Provo. A die-hard Democrat, avid environmentalist, and staunch defender of the historicity of LDS scripture, Nibley has been both revered and criticized for his apologetic scholarship and his liberal politics. Obituaries appeared in Utah papers, as well as in the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times*.



Hugh Nibley

Nibley's writings are revered among Latter-day Saints for what they say, for what they imply, and sometimes even for what they conceal. For example, his 1975 *Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri* became an instant hit among Mormon readers not because of Nibley's translation of the papyri (which Nibley dismisses as the source for the Book of Abraham), but because LDS members in the know could find unstated similarities between the accompanying illustrations and Mormon temple rituals.

Nibley's 2 March funeral, held in the Provo Tabernacle, was attended by Elders Dallin H. Oaks and Jeffrey R. Holland, both former presidents of Brigham Young University, where Nibley taught for nearly a half-century, and current members of the Quorum of the Twelve. Oaks and Holland spoke at the service, along with seven of Nibley's eight children. According to a story in the *Deseret Morning News*, Paul Nibley's gift to his father was a handmade coffin that followed Egyptian construction methods and had symbolic meaning to his father.

With his formidable erudition, his eccentric personality, and his reputation as an absent-minded professor during his many years at BYU, Nibley achieved a mythic stature. Authentic anecdotes about his life, intertwined with urban legend, circulate still. "Our culture needs someone who can stand as a combination of pure intellect and pure spirituality," Nibley's biographer Boyd Petersen wrote in 2002. "Hugh not only fills that role but actually is that person. . . . He really is a person of mythic stature for Mormon folk" (SUNSTONE, December 2002, 22–23).

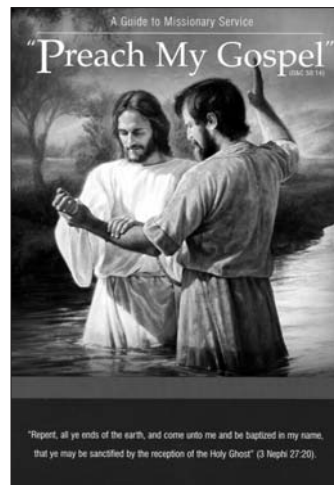
### NEW MISSIONARY DISCUSSIONS RE-EMPHASIZE APOSTASY, RESTORATION

NEARLY TWO YEARS AFTER CHURCH LEADERS announced its impending release (see SUNSTONE, March 2003, p. 74), the new missionary manual is finally available. "*Preach My Gospel*" replaces both the 1986 missionary discussions and the 1988 missionary guide. The new manual is a sturdy, colorful, 200-page publication laid out in a user-friendly style reminiscent of the best computer manuals or the popular *Dummies* series.

"*Preach My Gospel*" is a striking departure from the closely standardized missionary discussions and techniques that the Church has promoted since the 1950s and 1960s. While the manual identifies doctrines and standards that investigators should be taught before baptism, there is no prescribed text to follow. Rather, missionaries are encouraged to "be creative and seek inspiration" in developing individualized lesson plans. "Do not memorize entire lessons," missionaries are told. The new manual emphasizes missionary adaptiveness and shifts away from universal formulas for conversion, teaching, or study.

Another significant change in "*Preach My Gospel*" is that missionaries are instructed to make the apostasy and restoration central to their teaching. "Help investigators see the pattern of apostasy and restoration," the manual says. "Help people recognize that the Church is not just another religion, nor is it an American church. Rather, it is a restoration of the 'fullness of [the] gospel.'"

In the 1986 discussions, teaching about apostasy and restoration did not occur until the third discussion, placing greater emphasis on LDS beliefs about Christ. In re-emphasizing the apostasy, "*Preach My Gospel*" returns to the pattern followed in standardized missionary discussions before 1986.



The new missionary discussions eschew formulaic approaches

### FLDS AWAITING APRIL 6 ANNIVERSARY



FLDS temple under construction in Eldorado, Texas

THE FUNDAMENTALIST CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF Latter Day Saints is building its first temple, and the edifice might be ready as soon as April 6—175 years to the day that Joseph Smith founded the LDS Church. According to stories in

## GOVERNMENT PRODUCES POLYGAMY MANUAL

THE ATTORNEY GENERALS OF UTAH AND ARIZONA have announced the publication of *The Primer*, a manual to help victims of domestic violence and child abuse in polygamous communities. Intended to educate agency workers about Mormon fundamentalist culture, the 50-page document includes a glossary, a brief description of the different polygamous groups, and a list of complicating factors in situations of domestic violence and child abuse.

“Polygamy is illegal in Utah and forbidden in the Arizona constitution,” says the *Primer*. “However, both states have decided to focus their law enforcement efforts on crimes within the polygamous communities that involve child abuse, domestic violence and [welfare] fraud.”

Polygamy received wide media attention last year when it

was revealed that hundreds of adults, young adults, and teenagers were being excommunicated and banished from the communities that the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints maintains along the Utah-Arizona border.

While leaders of the secretive FLDS usually boycott government outreach efforts, Principle Voices of Polygamy member and frequent Sunstone presenter Anne Wilde believes the manual will help build bridges between government agencies and plural wives who live in isolation.

“We want them to know there are people in the government who are willing to help them,” says Wilde.

To view a copy of the primer, visit <<http://www.attorney-general.utah.gov/polygamy.html>>.

### WHAT IS YOUR F. M. S. (FUNDAMENTALIST MORMON SLANG) I.Q.?

*The Primer* includes a glossary of jargon and slang used among Mormon fundamentalists.

Test your own knowledge of fundamentalist culture.

Do you know a slang word that describes. . .

1. An FLDS member?
2. A girl who suddenly disappears from the community to take part in an arranged marriage?
3. Young, unmarried men who are exiled from the community?
4. Accepting assistance from governmental agencies that may otherwise not be trusted?
5. Those who left the FLDS church in 1985 to start the Centennial Park group (derogatory)?

Answers: 1. “Creeker” (from Short Creek, the area where the FLDS movement began); 2. “Poof” (as in, “Poof, she’s gone”); 3. “Lost Boys”; 4. “Bleeding the Beast”; 5. “Second Warders” (those who stayed are called “First Warders”).

the *Eldorado Success*, workers are laboring night and day to complete the temple in time.

It is not clear if the first temple of the secretive FLDS will be merely an assembly place or if ordinances similar to those associated with LDS temples will be performed. The medieval castle-like structure is one of several buildings erected on the 1,691 acre property the polygamous Mormon group recently purchased near Eldorado, Texas.

Some news media have reported that FLDS leader Warren Jeffs believes that April 6 will mark the end of the world. Even though some observers fear “another Waco” (the tragedy that took the lives of seventy-five followers of cult leader David Koresh), the local sheriff downplays the worry. Jeffs once predicted the end of the world would take place in the year 2000.

Jeffs is a defendant in two lawsuits. His nephew Brent Jeffs has accused him of molesting him when Brent was a boy. A separate lawsuit claims that Jeffs forced a group of young men known as the Lost Boys out of FLDS properties in Hildale and Colorado City on the Utah-Arizona border so that they wouldn’t compete with older men in marrying young girls.

## MORMON STUDIES CONFERENCE DEALS WITH SOCIAL JUSTICE

UTAH VALLEY STATE College held its fifth annual Mormon Studies Conference on its Orem, Utah, campus on 3–4 March. This year’s event, with the theme “All Are Alike unto God: Mormonism and Social Justice” was attended by several hundred students, faculty, staff, and members of the community. “Attendance has increased each year,” says Dennis Potter, Mormon studies coordinator, “In the future, we’ll have to reserve a larger room. Students were sitting on the floor in several of the sessions.”

Although this year’s conference dealt with controversial issues such as race, gender, and sexuality, it featured a variety of



BYU law professor Lynn Wardle discusses same-sex marriage

UTAH VALLEY STATE COLLEGE

## People



COMMUNITY OF CHRIST

**Appointed.** STEPHEN M. VEAZEY, 47, as president-designate of the Community of Christ, replacing W. Grant McMurray, who resigned as prophet-president last November (see SUNSTONE, December 2004, p. 73). Veazey, a member of the Council of Twelve since 1992 and president of the Council since 2002, has recently been serving as director of field ministries, where he has helped develop the Community of Christ in countries around the world. His appointment, made by the Council of the Twelve, must be confirmed by church delegates in June.

**Appointed.** ELDER W. ROLFE KERR, of the First Quorum of the Seventy, as LDS Commissioner of Education. An experienced educator and former Utah Commissioner of Higher Education, Kerr succeeds Apostle Henry B. Eyring, who served in this post for the past seventeen years.



WWW.LDS.ORG

LAURA SEITZ  
DESERET MORNING NEWS

**Removed.** From court, alleged Elizabeth Smart kidnapper, BRIAN DAVID MITCHELL, for the third consecutive time, after disrupting proceedings by again singing an LDS hymn. Mitchell's competency continued in his absence.

**Bound over.** For trial, BRIAN SULLIVAN, 40, who two years ago allegedly stabbed his wife and child to death in their West Valley, Utah, home. According to his sister Deborah Herbert, Sullivan maintained he had been visited by Brigham Young and claimed he had killed his wife and their four-year-old daughter following God's order, in a test similar to Abraham's in the Old Testament.



STEVE GRIFFIN, AP

**Deceased.** OWEN ALLRED, 91, leader of the fundamentalist Apostolic United Brethren church. Allred gained respect from state officials and academic researchers by opening the AUB to public scrutiny and denouncing forms of abuse that plague other polygamous groups, such as marriage with underage girls. With some 5,000 members in Utah, Mexico, Arizona, and elsewhere, the Apostolic United Brethren is the second-largest Mormon polygamous group. The AUB's new leader is 70-year-old J. LaMoine Jensen.



SALT LAKE TRIBUNE

**Winner.** Of the FOX television reality show *The Rebel Billionaire*, SHAWN NELSON, a 27-year-old CEO from Salt Lake City. During the twelve-episode reality show, Richard Branson, the billionaire referred to in the show's title, challenged contestants to all kinds of feats, from wing-walking on biplanes to crossing a forty-foot wire suspended one hundred feet in the air. "Everywhere I go I am known as 'the Rebel Billionaire,'" writes Nelson at <www.shawndnelson.com>, "which I find rather funny because, as much as I may be a 'Rebel' by Utah standards, the reality is I don't drink, don't smoke, and am blissfully monogamous." As the winner, Nelson received \$1 million and a chance to work with Branson. One of his new projects involves Branson's companies entering the China markets, which is a slam dunk for Nelson, who served an LDS mission in Taiwan and has degrees in Chinese and Asian studies.



FOX TELEVISION

**Withdrawn.** From the ballot, vice-presidential candidate in the BYU student elections, J. GRIGGS, following reports that he violated BYU curfew. In BYU-approved apartments and dorms, students of the opposite sex cannot stay past curfew. Griggs, who is now on probation from the honor code office, insists he did nothing immoral. "I'm disappointed but not ashamed," says Griggs.

## MORMON DEMOCRATS ORGANIZE CAUCUS

different perspectives. Lynn Wardle of BYU's J. Reuben Clark Law School defended the Church's position on the Federal Marriage Amendment. Jill Mulvay Derr described Eliza R. Snow's views about the role of women in the Church. Darron Smith discussed some of the impediments to full acceptance of African Americans in LDS culture. Keynote speaker Bill Martin, professor of philosophy at DePaul University, challenged Latter-day Saints to make good on the radical elements of their theology and pointed to the social criticism of wealth in the writings of Hugh Nibley as an example of this radical critique.

The Mormon Studies Conference is the brainchild of the late Eugene England, who initiated Mormon Studies at UVSC six years ago. "I think that Gene would have been proud of this conference. This is the dialogue that he envisioned as essential to the intellectual vibrancy of the Mormon community," said Potter.

THREE OF FOUR LDS DEMOCRATIC LAWMAKERS gathered in Washington, D.C., in January to discuss ways to work together on issues related to being a Democrat and a Mormon. Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nevada) met with Rep. Jim Matheson (D-Utah) and Rep. Tom Udall (D-New Mexico). Rep. Eni Faleomavaega, a non-voting congressional representative from American Samoa, says he was unable to attend the first meeting but wants to be part of the caucus.

"Legislation is the art of compromise, and a strong two-party system is fundamental to our democracy," Reid told the *Deseret Morning News*. "I believe strongly that Democrats have many of the same issues at heart as do the membership of the church."

## Solar Flares

**Plato, Nietzsche, . . . Bono?** A Brigham Young University philosophy professor's epiphany about the existential lyrics of the legendary rock and roll band U2 will soon result in a book. According to a *Deseret Morning News* story, BYU professor Mark Wrathall began integrating U2 lyrics into his philosophy classes following a 1997 drive through the Nevada desert in which he began to think about the lyrics' connections with the philosophies of Plato, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Søren Kierkegaard.

Wrathall's use of the band's songs in his classroom became popular, and after several years of honing his lecture notes, Wrathall pitched the idea for a book to Open Court Press, which has a Pop Culture and Philosophy series that already features works on philosophical themes in such pop icons as *The Simpsons*, *Seinfeld*, *The Matrix*, and *Star Wars*. Within hours after submitting his proposal, the press contacted Wrathall and a collaboration began.

The book will feature a dozen or so essays by professors from all over the world, with subjects ranging from Wrathall's reflections on U2 lead singer Bono's existential understanding of Christianity, to the philosophical problem of identity, to the band's political influence.

***Books of Mormon or Book of Mormons? Grammar question halts senate debate.*** According to a *Deseret Morning News* story, a question on Mormon grammar interrupted committee work at the Utah Capitol. During a 23 February meeting, Sen. Howard Stephenson asked Rep. Carol Spackman Moss, who's known as the legislature's unofficial grammarian, the correct form to pluralize book titles such as the Book of Mormon.

Moss, who was presenting a bill on charter schools, recommended Stephenson say, "copies of the Book of Mormon." The grammar tip, however, did not help her win Stephenson's political support: he voted against Moss's bill on budgetary grounds.

## YOUNG MORMON WRITES FOR THE STRENGTH OF GAY YOUTH



A pamphlet for gay LDS youth offers counsel about missions, sex, and more

SHOULD A YOUNG GAY Mormon go on a mission? Undergo therapy? Be sexually active? These are just some of the frank questions addressed by *For the Strength of Gay Youth*, an illustrated guide for young gay Mormons modeled after the popular LDS pamphlet, *For the Strength of Youth*.

"[The official LDS guide] has caused many youth to experience feelings of self-loathing, self-hatred, and confusion," reads the introduction. "It is the intention of the following writing to provide a guide similar to the pamphlet *For the Strength Of Youth*, but modified so that it is especially designed to address the unique concerns of gay and lesbian youth of the Church."

Written by Gay LDS Young Adults founder Aaron Cloward, the 7,300-word brochure deals with some of the most serious issues facing young gay Mormons, from how to deal with families and issues of depression to what to do about the Internet, dance clubs, and dating.

The guide also has a lengthy section about sexuality. "If you decide to participate in sexual activity, educate yourself first about safe sex practices," counsels the guide. "Don't rush yourself, especially with sex. . . . Talk to other gay Mormons for support and advice."

*For the Strength of Gay Youth* can be viewed by visiting <[www.affirmation.org/youth](http://www.affirmation.org/youth)>.

## PEARSON'S MOTHER IS WEAVING ONCE AGAIN

WHEN LDS PLAYWRIGHT CAROL Lynn Pearson stopped performing her one-woman play, *Mother Wove the Morning*, several years ago, many people wondered if that would spell the end of the project. It didn't.

Through the persistence and enthusiasm of New York actor and choreographer Sarah Jebian, Pearson has recently adapted the play for multiple performers, and Jebian has leapt into the role of producer. Jebian has booked the Shetler 54 Showcase Theater in New York City for a six-performance run, May 6–8 and 13–15, has hired director Andrew Dawson, and plans to finish casting the play by early April.

In a brief history of preparing *Mother Wove the Morning* for this new production, Pearson writes: "Revisiting the play at this new level and over fifteen years after the original writing, I am, of course, so aware of the huge distance we have yet to go in bringing the feminine, both mortal and divine, to a safe place in this world. But I am also deeply gratified to see the good signs. The world was outraged at the extent to which Afghan women had been rendered powerless. Dan Brown's *The DaVinci Code* has speeded the conversation. What have we lost on earth—women and men together—by allowing the loss of our Mother? Thank you to Sarah, Andy, the cast and crew, who bring their skills and their hearts to this invitation for Her return. And to you, the audience, I extend my hand, grateful to be with you on this splendid journey."

More information about the coming production can be found at <<http://www.jebian.com/mother>>.



Media Watch**NIBLEY DAUGHTER PUBLISHES  
CONTROVERSIAL MEMOIR**

A NEW MEMOIR MAKES SHOCKING ALLEGATIONS against the LDS Church and Mormon scholar Hugh Nibley. Among other charges in her book, *Leaving the Saints: How I Lost the Mormons and Found My Faith*, *O Magazine* columnist Martha Beck suggests that modern-day Danites are alive and well in Utah and accuses the Church of wire-tapping phone lines of those it perceives as enemies. She also claims that in the early 1990s, she recovered memories of having been sexually abused by her father, renowned LDS scholar Hugh Nibley. According to Beck's account, Nibley came under great stress from being unable to authenticate Joseph Smith's translation of the Book of Abraham, lost his mind, and sexually abused her between the ages of five and eight in a ritual reenactment of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac.



Martha Beck

At <[www.hughnibleydefense.com](http://www.hughnibleydefense.com)>, the Nibley family denies the book's allegations against Hugh and expresses sadness for the book's "errors, falsehoods, contradictions, and gross distortions."

According to a *Salt Lake Tribune* story, the Nibley family has hired Christopher Barden, a psychologist and lawyer who specializes in False Memory Syndrome, and is now considering legal action against Beck or her publisher Random House. Because of Beck's association with Oprah Winfrey's magazine, Mormons from across the country have sent some 35,000 emails to Winfrey asking her not to promote Beck's book on her popular daytime show. (For the SUNSTONE review of *Leaving the Saints*, see pages 62–68).

**BYU GRADUATE MAKES DOCUMENTARY  
ON HOME TEACHEE ARTHUR KANE**

DESERET MORNING NEWS

GREG WHITELEY WAS BLOWN away by his film's positive reception at the 2005 Sundance Festival in Park City. *New York Doll* is a documentary about Arthur "Killer" Kane, a renowned punk guitarist for the New York Dolls who converted to the LDS Church.

Whiteley met Kane when he was assigned as Kane's home teacher in Southern California. "All I could think when I met him was, 'He's such a quiet man.' You'd never know, never believe, that this humble, soft-spoken guy used to be a cross-dressing, glue-sniffing glam-rocker."

Shortly after meeting Kane, Whiteley began filming interviews with Kane on digital video equipment. One of the film's highlights is of a 2004 New York Dolls reunion concert in which the now-Mormonized Kane leads the band in a heartfelt prayer before taking the stage. Whiteley's film also features

interviews about Kane and the Dolls with The Smiths vocalist Morrissey, Boomtown Rats founder Bob Geldhof, Pretenders singer/songwriter Chrissie Hynde, and The Clash vocalist/guitarist Mick Jones. The film also includes footage and interviews of Kane and his co-workers at the Los Angeles LDS Family History Center—the place where Kane volunteered and did genealogy work during his final years.

Because he died of leukemia last July, Kane never saw the finished film.

**AUTHOR OF DNA BOOK TOURS U.S.**

THE AUTHOR OF A BOOK THAT USES DNA studies to challenge LDS claims about Book of Mormon historicity made about a dozen presentations during a January visit to the United States. An Australian microbiologist of LDS background, Simon G. Southerton is the author of *Losing a Lost Tribe: Native Americans, DNA, and the Mormon Church* (Signature Books, 2004).



Simon Southerton

In the 270-page book, Southerton concludes that Asians, not Jews, are the principal ancestors of the native Americans. Southerton puts this conclusion in the context of other evidence against the Book of Mormon's historicity and recounts efforts made by LDS apologists to reframe traditional claims in light of new scientific evidence.

After Southerton's presentation in St. George, a member of the audience proposed that God may have changed the DNA of the Lamanites when he cursed them. "Why would God change the DNA so it matches Asian DNA?" Southerton responds at <[www.signaturebooks.com](http://www.signaturebooks.com)>. "As Latter-day Saints, we have already offended Blacks and Indians. Are we going to offend Asians now, as well?"

**LDS FILM FESTIVAL BIGGER THAN EVER**

WITH SCREENINGS AT THE PROVO LIBRARY AND University Mall Cinemas, including four feature-length films by Mormon directors, the LDS Film Festival took place in Provo on 20–22 January.

This year's festival screened more than eighty short films, and offered twelve presentations by filmmakers such as Eric Hendershot (*Down and Derby*), Michael Flynn (*The Best Two Years*), Chris Wyatt (*Napoleon Dynamite*), and J Bateman (*Saints and Soldiers*).

First place in the festival competition went to Marcus Cano for *American Made*. The twenty-minute film depicts an Indian-American family confronting issues of tradition, faith, conformity, and sacrifice after the youngest son accuses his turban-clad orthodox father of looking like a terrorist while the two are stranded on a remote desert road.

"The festival will continue to showcase feature films," says Christian Vuissa, festival founder and director. "In only a few years, we'll be able to start a feature film competition."

Information on the festival is posted at [www.ldsbox.com](http://www.ldsbox.com).

## AN OLIVE LEAF

## THE SWEETEST THING IN HEAVEN

By Eugene England

*Martha Beck's Leaving the Saints (reviewed on pages 62–67) is the most recent book to claim that LDS doctrine teaches that all celestial marriages with be polygynist. Hence, we felt it was a good time to share an excerpt from Eugene England's classic article offering arguments to the contrary, "On Fidelity, Polygamy, and Celestial Marriage" (Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought 20, no. 4 [Winter 1987], 138–54).*



love differs from mortal love not because it includes a larger group of individuals but because it includes more kinds of love than any other relationship—sexual love and quite idiosyncratic “liking” as well as charity or Christ-like love. But those unique and exclusive extra qualities, which give married love the greatest potential of any relationship, require the fully mutual fidelity only possible between one whole woman and one whole man.

Such fidelity, I believe, moves us beyond polygyny or polyandry, beyond patriarchy or matriarchy, even beyond priesthood in its

**M**ARITAL FIDELITY IS CENTRAL to mortal joy and eternal life, even godhood. . . . It is the key to our concepts of sexual morality before and after marriage. [But] there is, I believe, a serious danger to the ideal of fidelity—and thus both to our sexual morality and to our concepts of ourselves as eternal men and women—in the expectation, shared I fear by many Mormons, that the highest form of marriage in the celestial realm is what is technically called polygyny, plural wives for a single husband.

I believe official Mormon polygyny, as it was practiced in the nineteenth century, was inspired by God through his prophets. I am the descendant of polygynists. I honor those literal ancestors and my many spiritual ancestors who lived that law—faithfully, morally, and at enormous costs to themselves and the Church. . . . And when that practice had achieved its purposes, limited to a specific historical period and place, God took it away. . . .

[The] scriptures, together with the teachings of modern prophets and the temple marriage sealing ordinance, support a theology of absolute and equal fidelity between a man and a woman as the basis for sexual morality, marital happiness, eternal increase, and, in its fullest implications, for godhood itself, the creative power that makes all existence possible. This theology of marriage is unique to Mormonism and is to me the most attractive and impressive part of the gospel—after the atonement of Christ. And just as the atonement is the key to our salvation from sin and death in this life, so celestial marriage is the key to exaltation, our eternal progression in the life to come. . . .

Eternal marriage uniquely includes all the elements of love: the exclusive as well as the inclusive and unconditional. Although it can expand to include sacrificial love for populous worlds of spirit children, it will nevertheless be injured by forces that weaken by division the powerful bonds of filial obligation and sexual fidelity. In other words, celestial married

usual functions and meaning. It seems to be that those are all lower laws, serving their inspired purposes—but only during certain mortal times with their cultural limitations. The ideal celestial order of marriage—of power, of creation, and of administration—will be the one the temple marriage sealing ceremony invites us to look forward to if we are faithful: a full and equal complementarity of a queen and a king, a priestess and a priest. . . .

[S]ome Mormons, assuming future polygyny, practice for it now by diverting their affections and loyalties away from the arduous task of achieving full spiritual and physical unity with the one person they would otherwise inescapably have to face, an imperfect spouse. . . . For too many of us, that expectation undermines the foundations of our present identities as women and men and diverts us from the difficult struggle for complete fidelity in our marriages that the gospel standard of morality and the expectation of celestial marriage as the basis of godhood require.

**I** DO NOT presume to speak for others. My intent is simply to help free us, as Mormon men and women, to think about our marriages and the future with more openness. . . . Certainly none of us can presume an exact knowledge of the celestial order and what we will be capable of there, but our whole religion is built on the assumption that this life is, in its essentials, very much like that future life and a direct preparation for it. . . . Difficult as complete married fidelity and unity is to achieve, there is nothing sweeter on earth than our approximations of it. And we have been given no clear evidence that it will not continue to be the sweetest thing in heaven, the foundation of godhood and a blessing available to all who, freed from this world's limitations, really want it. ☪

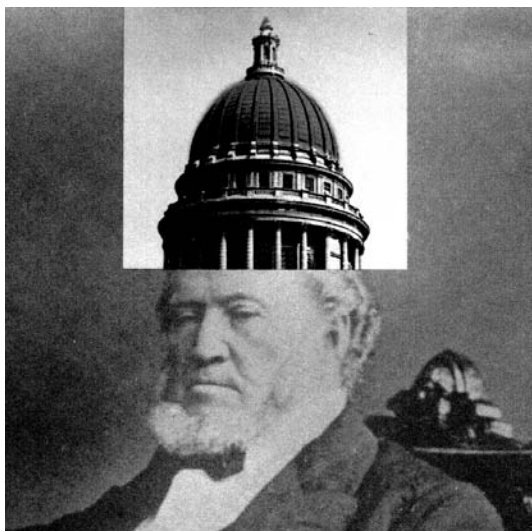
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*Edited by Jeffery E. Sells*



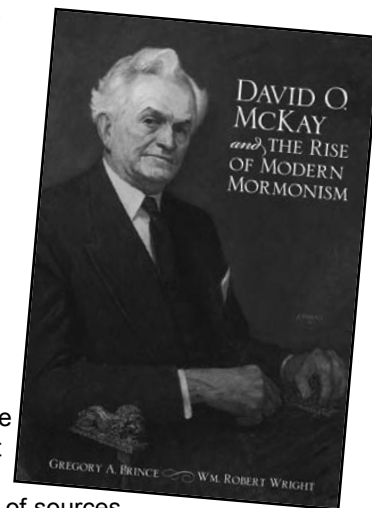
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