

ICE CREAM



SIESTAS  
& TIED QUILTS



OR  
HOW I  
MADE IT  
THROUGH  
LIFE



WITHOUT MISSING  
A SINGLE

GUILT



TRIP

BY DOROTHY BLACK



**Y**OU don't grow up a Mormon without feeling guilt. Like right now, I feel guilty even writing that. What if the bishop knew I thought that? "Dorothy," he would say, "being Mormon should not be a source of guilt." I would have to say, "Yes I know," and then I would feel guilty that I had ever felt guilty.

The temple recommend interviews are the worst. Take the question, "Are you honest with your fellow men?" I go to say yes and immediately I think of Rob Segmiller. He calls me on a Saturday afternoon to ask if I can take him to the airport at nine. He's in town for three days, doesn't come to see me or anything, and then he wants me to take him to the airport. I told him I had a date. So now because of Rob Segmiller (who I won't see or hear from for another year) I'm no longer honest with my fellow men. I look at the bishop and decide that Rob Segmiller doesn't count. But then I think of my age and I'm in trouble again. "I lie about my age," I tell him. "I tell people that I'm twenty-three but I'm really twenty-five." "Does it injure other people?" he asks. "I don't think so," I say, "but the thing is I'm planning to be twenty-three for a long time." I usually end up feeling guilty that I said yes to the bishop about being honest which now makes me a dishonest person even to the bishop.

It's not the bishop who makes a Mormon feel guilty though. Mormons really don't need anybody to make them feel guilty. I think it's inherent in the religion. Take my dad. He hates the Newmans. They're our next-door neighbors and he calls Mr. Wayne Newman "Wayne the Stain." Any Mormon will tell you that you're supposed to love your neighbor. But what about the Newmans who constantly call our house late at night? It's always an emergency and my dad will have to get out of bed and go down to his office to fix Cindy or Lyle Newman's aching tooth. What really kills my dad though is that when the whole family comes for an examination and are told what work they need done, they say they can get it done cheaper in Idaho Falls where Mrs. Newman grew up. My dad never talks about the Newmans without first saying, "I know I shouldn't say this," or "I know I shouldn't feel this way." Still, he won't let any of us say that he's home if it's a Newman on the line and lately he's begun to avoid old Wayne the Stain in church.

It's at church where you learn about everything you're supposed to do and everything you're not supposed to do. Last week the bishop came into Relief Society for his annual morality talk. He always starts out lecturing us about making out. "Until you are married," he says, "kissing should be like how a father kisses his daughter." At that point there is no longer anyone in the room who

can feel good about herself.

The bishop speaks in generalities because I guess he doesn't quite know how to talk specifically about sex to a room full of young women. He usually ends his talk by saying something about ice cream. "It is very difficult to resist eating ice cream if you are hungry and in the kitchen with a spoon in one hand and the ice cream in the other." Then he suggests that if you don't want trouble you shouldn't invite a boy into the kitchen. I usually sit there feeling like I have enough problems handling myself and that if the boy stumbles into the kitchen he should be responsible for his own ice cream. Last week I was going to raise my hand to ask for some clarification, but then I realized that if I raised my hand everybody would wonder why I needed some clarification.

Besides, as a returned missionary, I shouldn't really be having problems. I spent my mission in Argentina. Most missionaries come home and say that being on a mission was the best eighteen months of their lives. They learned stuff like patience, and diligence, and obedience, and how to get along with companions, and how to have meaningful relationships, and how to have meaningful discussions, and how to have meaningful prayers. I worked toward those things but I guess a lot depends on where you're sent.

I don't know what the other missionaries prayed about on their missions, but I spent a lot of my time praying that the people we had made appointments with to teach wouldn't be home. By the time I had adjusted to giving spiritual advice in my not very clear Spanish, I was given Sister Hernandez for a companion and suddenly had to adjust my prayers: On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays I prayed that she would be transferred. On Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays I prayed that I would be transferred. And on Sundays I prayed for forgiveness for the previous week's worth of prayers.

I should have done better with Hermana Hernandez. Before we ever met the mission president had talked with me about her. I think he tried to warn me. "Hermana Black," he said, "It is in the hard times that we grow the most." I sat across from him wearing my dark blue skirt and white blouse and waited for him to go on. "Hermana Hernandez has had some difficulty working closely with a companion," he continued, "and I know that I can count on you to help her have a successful mission." That was it. I began to feel guilty for his thinking I was the kind of missionary that he could count on. I tried to explain. "President Vargas," I said, "I have a hard time getting up at six-thirty. It's usually

There was no way on earth that I could ever bring myself to write on a piece of paper which a district leader, a zone leader, a mission president, and (if it was the right time of year) a visiting General Authority was going to see that I had slept seven hours during the night, two hours during the siesta, and an hour on the bus.



quarter to seven before I even get out of bed." He just nodded and I knew I wasn't getting through to him. I became *very* honest. "Sometimes during the siesta I don't study. I take a nap." He looked like he was waiting for me to say something else. I became desperate: "President Vargas, I have a Barbra Streisand tape in my suitcase." "Do you listen to it?" he finally responded. "Well no, not yet. But I think about it all the time." Nothing affected him. He just stood up and took me by the hand. "Remember Hermana Black, patience." And with that he walked me to the door. "I'll do my best," I said.

I ended up throwing my Book of Mormon at Hermana Hernandez. I'm not sure why it happened. I think the pressure of being in charge finally got to me. That, and the fact that Hermana Hernandez hadn't spoken to me for two days except to tell me that unless she spoke to me, would I please not speak to her. It happened during companion inventory, that's the time when you sit down with your companion and plan the coming week and air any problems or offer any suggestions you might have for each other. After that you tell your companion how much you love and appreciate her. We never got to the appreciation part. Hermana Hernandez broke her silence to accuse me of talking about her to Elder Clarke at a district meeting that we had had two days earlier. She was right, but I thought it was a stupid reason to stop talking to your companion. She was pretty upset about it and kept making it into a big deal until I got upset. I opened my journal to show her that what I had told Elder Clarke was nothing compared to what I had written, and then she called me a few Argentine words that you can only pick up off the street. That's when I threw my book. She just sat there with her chin quivering. After a while she said she wanted to see the zone leader. I said fine and left her sitting on the bed.

It was evening and I went hunting for the zone leader. I walked along just waiting to be killed. Every missionary knows that the number one rule in the mission field is never, never, never under any circumstances go anywhere without your companion. I walked along a dirt road headed for town. I knew that I deserved to be murdered. I just hoped that Hermana Hernandez would feel so bad she wouldn't tell President Vargas that one of my last acts as a missionary was to hit her in the chest with my scriptures.

Hermana Hernandez had all sorts of problems and she probably wanted to see the zone leader to say she was going home. Everything I had done in the mission field would be annulled. I would be responsible for making a

missionary quit. She wasn't even a bad missionary and still had eleven months left. I walked along the road and figured it out. If she baptized three people a month for the next eleven months that would make thirty-three people. If each one of them brought one more person into the Church that would be sixty-six people. Sixty-six souls had just been lost because of me, and I hadn't even counted the children of all those people who would eventually come into the Church.

I never made it to the zone leader's apartment. I took a bus downtown and caught a movie instead. Afterwards I went back to the apartment and told Hermana Hernandez that I had talked with the zone leader. The zone leader had straightened me out, I said. I told her that when President Vargas transferred me we had chatted about my inability to get along with my companions. I looked her straight in the eye: "He said that he thought you were the only one who could help me have a successful mission." Then I lowered my eyes and in a soft whisper I said, "I guess he was wrong."

Hermana Hernandez responded wonderfully. She felt so guilty that she offered to forget the whole thing and promised to help me with my Spanish every day. We spent another two months together without much mishap. We didn't do a lot of teaching although we worked hard. Hermana Hernandez could never figure out why we weren't baptizing. I didn't have to wonder, though. There's a little sign sitting on the desk of President Vargas which reads, "AN OBEDIENT MISSIONARY IS A BAPTIZING MISSIONARY."

It was never easy filling out weekly reports during that time. There are lines on the report form to show how many hours you spent studying and a line for how many hours you spent contacting people on the street. There's a line for how much money you spent and even a line for how many hours you slept. The mission president said there was nothing to fear from the weekly reports if you were a conscientious missionary. I tried to be one, but there was no way on earth that I could ever bring myself to write on a piece of paper which a district leader, a zone leader, a mission president, and (if it was the right time of the year) a visiting General Authority was going to see that I had slept seven hours during the night, two hours during the siesta, and an hour on the bus. I set a goal to do better but for some reason I was never very good in the mission field with goals.

Every week we met with the district to learn important things. The district leader would usually get up and talk about goals. He emphasized the importance

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of setting realistic goals and then he would say, "My companion and I have prayed and we feel strongly that there are fourteen people out there waiting to get baptized this month." Nobody ever baptizes fourteen people in one month. The district leader then said that he and his companion would be by on Thursday and would we please pray and decide how many people we were going to baptize during the month.

We went home and prayed for a week. Every night I got in bed and stared at the ceiling waiting for the number to come to me. Once my companion jumped out of her bed in the middle of the night and screamed at me to give her a number. Confused, I screamed back fifty-two. On Thursday the district leader and his companion came early and asked for our number. I had planned on getting up extra early and really praying for the number but had slept in. The district leader was waiting. My companion looked at me and finally said, "Fifty-two." We missed it by fifty.

It took me about three months to adjust to the mission field. It took me about eighteen months to adjust to coming home from the mission field. I feel bad about it. I think I made a poor adjustment. I have a feeling it's because I'm not married. Single, Mormon and twenty-five is not a good place to be. Nobody has come out and said it but I know it borders on being sinful. My mother feels responsible. It's not her fault though; I need to work on my marketability.

On my last date Roger picked me up at seven and we were supposed to go to a movie. We got out to the car and he said, "Let's skip the movie. I think it's time we talked. So, what do you think about kids?" Roger was the direct type. I should have been prepared for his question. Mormons generally have large families, but the truth of the matter is I've never held a baby that didn't spit up on me. My mother says they're like horses and they know if you're afraid of them. I looked at Roger. "Babies are a kind of tradition at my home," I said. "There have been babies in my family as far back as we can go. My own sister has five of them." Roger nodded his head, "That's great."

He was quiet for a moment and then asked, "See this shirt, do you like it?" It was a plain shirt and there was a string hanging out of the armpit. "It's very nice," I said. "Thanks my mom made it." I should have known. "She makes your clothes?" I asked. "Yep," Roger answered, "there are seven of us and she keeps us all looking nice." I hated to sew. In eighth grade I cut through my darts and when it came time to hem my jumpsuit the body was too

long and I ended up hemming the crotch. I looked at Roger and felt awful. The blessing of marriage was possibly within reach and it was my duty to reach out and take it. "I used to tie quilts all the time," I said. Actually once a month for a year I had gone to the church with the other girls and sat around the quilting frames. Everybody tied right-handed and I was left-handed making the little strings on the quilt lean in the wrong direction. This bothered some of the girls so they put me in charge of keeping the quilting needles threaded.

Roger looked pleased that I could tie quilts and I thought I was doing all right until the next question. "What is your major?" he asked. "English," I said. Roger looked concerned; he probably expected me to major in child development and family relations. This conversation was starting to bother me. "I want to be able to read to my babies," I explained. "Are you planning on graduating?" "I think so," I said, "and then I've thought of getting a master's degree." "Why?" he asked. It was too much. "So I can work and contribute something to society while my husband is home with our two children." "Two?" Roger managed in a quivering voice. "The two I'm not going to have until a couple of years after I'm married," I explained. Roger gasped, "You mean birth control?" "I was thinking of adoption," I said. "I hear having a baby feels like taking your bottom lip and stretching it over your head." I knew I was getting carried away, but I couldn't stop myself. "I thought it would be nice to adopt two little black babies and live abroad."

Roger was nice enough to walk me to the porch. Closing the door behind me, it occurred to me I may have blown my chance for eternity. I don't deserve to have the opportunity to marry.

No, you don't grow up Mormon without feeling guilty. I think it's the most contagious part of the whole restoration. You can get it from Beehive goal booklets, Family Home Evening (or not having Family Home Evening), Sunday School, paper stars glued to your forehead, two-and-a-half minute talks, and in certain places in Utah you can even get it from the water. But unlike a lot of stuff you catch that way, guilt is a lot harder to cure. At a fireside the other night, the speaker said that "guilt can be a healthy thing if it motivates you to change." Maybe, but if I got rid of all my faults, I'd probably end up feeling guilty—for not feeling guilty.

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