

Pillars of My Faith

Mormonism is the spiritual language I was given at birth. Like Joseph, whenever I find something that is true by all the exacting standards I require, I simply graft it onto my faith and call it Mormon. By this means, it becomes the only true church.

TALES OF A TRUE BELIEVER: PICKING UP FAITH ALONG THE WAY

By Peggy Fletcher Stack

OUR SEVEN-YEAR-OLD SON'S FRIENDS CALL HIM "the believer." When I asked him why, James replied, "It's because I believe everything. I believe in God and Santa Claus and magic and miracles and time travel and angels. Everything."

I told him I am a believer, too.

Believing could be a matter of temperament or inclination. It could be a genetic legacy. Or a gift. Or maybe a curse.

I sense a grander design in events than my poor eyes can recognize. It is this hope that helps me deal with loss and injustice, absurdities and stupidities.

It is this faith that has come with me on my journey and has calmed my heart at moments of doubt. It is integral to my story and my beliefs.

EVERYTHING I NEED TO KNOW I LEARNED FROM MOM AND DAD

MY parents gave me a dual legacy: faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ and a healthy skepticism about the claims of human beings. Robert and Rosemary Bennett Fletcher taught, by word and example, commitment to the Mormon church while exploring the wider world of ideas.

I remember watching general conference with my parents.

PEGGY FLETCHER STACK, SUNSTONE editor and publisher from 1978 to 1986, is currently a religion writer for the Salt Lake Tribune. She and her husband Mike are the parents of four children—James, Suzanne, and twins Karen and Camille. Camille died at two after a lifelong struggle, and Peggy chronicled the medical and spiritual odyssey in a series of Tribune articles. A version of this speech was given at the Pillars of My Faith session at the 1991 Sunstone Symposium in Salt Lake City.

They would listen with respect and reverence but then assess the ideas and presentation. And occasionally my mother would say, "Oh, Bruce McConkie. What does he know?" Once I heard my parents talking about Joseph Fielding Smith's comment that astronauts would never reach the moon. My dad, a scientist, said, "Well, he's wrong about that."

But they would never consider turning it off or organizing a boycott of conference.

My mother served in leadership positions in every Church auxiliary. But she had a particular flair with teenagers. She regularly tried to adapt Church programs, designed in Salt Lake, to the needs of kids in New Jersey. One particular plan troubled her. It was called "the individual award," where teens were honored in sacrament meeting for attending a certain percentage of Church meetings and paying tithing. Mother worried about teens who didn't come from stereotypical Mormon homes.

"These kinds of programs reward children from active families," she said. "Kids might be dragged to Church kicking and screaming but meet the attendance requirements. Kids from single member homes or those who joined the Church on their own who make a great sacrifice to get to Church once a month should be getting the honors." She refused to reward rote behavior.

My mother used programs to develop relationships. She takes seriously her visiting teaching assignments, thinking always how she could turn a duty into love. She still sends Christmas cards to women who have long since moved away but who were once just "assignments."

So I learned from my mother that there is nothing sacred about Church programs. Programs are for the people, not people for the programs.

A pivotal experience of my young life was when the

Egyptian papyri were found in a New York museum. My parents had subscribed to *Dialogue* from its beginning, and I always read it. When I read the articles about the papyri, which said basically that Joseph Smith's translation did not match the Egyptologists', I said to my father, "Okay, which church do we join now? This one is obviously false." He calmly sat me down for a talk about the nature of revelation and scripture and prophesy. He treated me like an adult with reasonable questions. He shared his own faith in the Book of Abraham and how it might have come to be. He never said, "You are wrong or evil or disloyal for having questions." He never said, "The Brethren have all the answers, just trust them and don't think."

My dad taught me that God expects us to use all our gifts, including our minds, to understand truth. He introduced me to the concept of a lifelong search for truth, an odyssey that is everchanging as experience and information enlarge our understanding and take us down new avenues.

But both my parents insisted that the search must be accompanied by commitment and responsibility. Church callings were unhesitatingly accepted. Church meetings were important. Tithing. Temple attendance. Lifting the burdens of fellow believers. These were the obligations of believing.

FOR THE STRENGTH OF YOUTH

IN my high school yearbook, the editors chose quotes to accompany each photo. By my picture, it said: "For we are all one people, and our diversity amazes me." At first, I was a tad disappointed. The sentiment is hardly one of great promise or achievement. But soon I felt honored that the editors had noted my chronic awe at our unity in the midst of diversity.

My lifelong interest in diverse beliefs and behaviors has taken me to unexpected places. I studied American religions briefly at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley,

California. Some friends and family questioned my decision to go there. When you have the truth, they asked, why study a bunch of falsehoods? Many worried that I would lose my Mormon faith. What I discovered in Berkeley was a bedrock respect for other people's beliefs, as well as a much deeper understanding of our commonalities. But I also learned that the LDS church is not the only one screwed up; all churches have

their strengths and their problems.

I had the chance to attend the World Council of Churches meetings in Vancouver, British Columbia, in 1983. Christians of many different stripes came from all over the globe to talk and to worship together. I breathed in the atmosphere, overwhelmed by the spirituality I sensed in the attendees. I met Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa (this was before his Nobel Prize). He was a small man with a large sense of humor. Possibly for the first time, I realized that religiousness need not be so earnest all the time, that self-effacing humor is a Godlike quality.

Sunstone gave me the opportunity to meet many remarkable believers, both inside and out of the Church. They told me their stories and shared a piece of themselves to help me. I found that I was most drawn to people who remain involved with their faith community, even if it

is a struggle. I say especially if it is a struggle, because out of the tension between belonging and conforming is born creativity and growth.

Living in Africa with my husband, Michael, I saw the beauty of simple belief. And, though such simplicity is no longer possible for my kind of believing, I recognize it as a strong and viable form of faith. African Mormons and Catholics humbled me with their devotion in the face of adversity. So many we met were embodiments of hospitality and sacrifice. In their faces, I glimpsed God and winced at my own shallowness.

New York City offered a whole new taste of religious pluralism. I worked at a medical ethics think tank, which showed

PEGGY AND PARENTS: Engaged Questioning



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statements are all personal."**

me the problems of trying to develop ethics without God. The intellect alone is incapable of understanding the mystery of life and death. It is too easy for human beings to be pawns in the philosophical chess game.

I worked for United Methodist Communications, preparing, among other things, a research report for Nelson Mandela's visit to Riverside Church on the Upper West Side. There, a delightful mentor, Bruno Caliandro, taught me about full-blooded church service, Protestant-style. I also worked for a witty, provocative magazine called *Books and Religion*, where I learned again the value of linking spirituality and humor, and gracefulness under pressure at the feet of Chris Bugbee, the editor.

Throughout our five-year stay in New York, I was surrounded by a host of unusual friends with lively minds and good hearts. Friends came often to our place to challenge our assumptions, to replenish our well of understanding and to offer gifts of the spirit.

All of which led me to my current work as religion writer at the *Salt Lake Tribune*. My job, even with its stresses, allows me to experience the quiet goodness of religious folk nearly every day. In the midst of a chaotic newsroom, I often feel a divine presence.

And then there was the life and death of our beloved daughter, Camille. This child took me to a place I would have done anything to avoid, a place I never would have gone on my own, but a place more wondrous and complete than anywhere I had ever been. She was born with severe heart defects and lived only two years, half of which were spent in intensive care units of various hospitals.

Life with Camille was like climbing through the back of the wardrobe into the land of Narnia. She taught us about pain and suffering, hope and miracles. We looked into the souls of the people around us, saw the heroic nature of some and the closed pessimism of others. I spent more time on my knees than I had ever done before, trying to compel a loving deity to let her live, to let her grow and thrive, to let her know her twin sister and other siblings. I had to learn to trust and to let go. My faith faced its greatest test.

When I created the Pillars of My Faith panel at the Sunstone symposium, I imagined that participants would list their personal articles of faith, create their own creeds, so to speak. But instead, nearly everyone has offered an autobiography, telling the stories of their lives. I finally came to realize that for us Mormons, theology is biography.

We come to believe what we have known or experienced. Without creeds, our faith statements are all personal. And the stories of our lives parallel the stories of religion, from deities to prophets to fallen angels.

All Christians accept the story of Jesus Christ, that he was a man and a God at the same time. It takes place in time and space, and is filled with literal events. Did Jesus live? Did he perform miracles? Did he say, "Turn the other cheek"? and, "Blessed are the meek"? Or, "Sell all your possessions and follow me"? (See Matt. 5:39, 5:5, and 19:21-22.) Did he rise from the dead? Those who believe this story do so not because

it's a persuasive set of facts, a rational account, but because something in their experience confirms it.

Mormons have two other stories that must be confirmed. First, the Joseph Smith story. It is a story of the farmboy-who-talked-to-God. Do we believe that individual, lowly human beings could have a face-to-face encounter with God? Do we believe a boy like Joseph did? There are many unbelievable aspects to his tale.

We are also asked to believe the Book of Mormon accounts of a historical people who lived on the American hemisphere, and who received a visit from Jesus Christ after his resurrection. It won't do to say these are faith-promoting stories but not literal events. We are supposed to find out not by any scientific method but by study and faith. "The truth will be manifest to you by the power of the Holy Ghost," the prophets promise. (See Moro. 10:4.)

I can believe both the Christian story and the Mormon stories because I, too, have experienced the miraculous, the unlikely coincidences, the seemingly irrational. And the Spirit has confirmed to my heart what my eyes have not seen nor my mind understood.

I have also known bigotry and arrogance, deception and hypocrisy, apathy and insensitivity, all in the name of God. I have been ashamed of my own and my fellow believers' blindness to the needs of others, our competitiveness and self-righteousness. But none of this dissuades me from believing.

So here is my list of beliefs and why I hold to them.

I BELIEVE THAT GOD EXISTS

I DIDN'T come to this belief easily. My parents taught it to me. They certainly believed it. But I wanted evidence or experience; I wanted assurance. In high school I had a mentor who was also an atheist. He grilled me endlessly about my beliefs, and I had no easy comebacks. While other Church members bore testimony month after month, I could not testify with any certainty.

My first year in college was spent at Brigham Young University. I felt that I was constantly arguing with people. I was troubled by the push towards unanimity and conformity, and all the judging of those with different views. I hated that bells rang to wake us up for Relief Society, or that the cafeteria was closed on fast Sundays to ensure religious obligations. I wanted to be a peacemaker, but found myself instead causing disagreements.

One day during Thanksgiving break, I was arguing with a friend in the library. We were reading Church materials for some reason, and I turned to an article in the *New Era*. It wasn't particularly profound, but mentioned something about the gospel being a "pearl of great price" to be treasured above all else. While I was sitting there, I heard a voice in my head saying, "Peggy, stop fighting me." A calm washed over me. I knew it was from God.

I also knew it was inside of me and not out there. But it didn't feel like I had manufactured it. I excused myself, climbed up to the top of the Wilkinson Center, went out on

the roof, got on my knees and said, "Okay. I'll stop fighting you." I made a promise that day that I would not forget or try to explain away that experience—which is a strong temptation for an older person looking back. We look back at things that happened on missions or at peak times and dimension them. But it was real to me then, and I never again doubted that God exists.

WHAT IS GOD LIKE AND WHAT DOES GOD DO?

MORMONS teach that God is a resurrected man. That holds a certain appeal to me because it elevates the place of human beings. We are made in his image; we are valuable in all our bodily-ness. To become like God means to be the best humans we can. It does not require us to change into something else. But God as father figure—a man with dark hair and a beard, twin brothers with Jesus—is an inadequate image for me. I'm not sure how I add to it, but my imagination requires more.

I believe God occasionally intervenes in our lives. We feel God's influence in little ways, promptings to help others, a whispering campaign urging us towards our best selves. One clear intervention in my life was getting me together with my husband, Mike. We met at Sunstone. Before he worked there, I had a policy of not dating fellow employees. But when I laid eyes on him, I decided that was a dumb policy. I knew then, and I know now even better, that God sent him to me. The circumstances drawing us together were so unlikely that I have no other explanation. Every day since we married, I have felt that I won the husband lottery.

It is impossible, of course, to understand why God would jump into our world to give me an extraordinary husband and let all the Somalis starve to death.

Or, closer to home, why God would surprise us with twins and then allow one to die. What commands God's attention and why? I wanted Camille to live more than I've ever wanted anything in my life. I employed every ounce of faith and every

scriptural promise of healing. Camille was given numerous priesthood blessings. And still she died. But while she was alive, we saw mini-miracles along the way. There were several occasions where she seemed doomed and then rallied.

On September 11, 1993, we were advised by the doctors to remove her respirator, that she was at death's door and it would be cruel to prolong her life. We agreed. We gathered our family around and prepared for our good-byes.

That night, I lay awake all night, crying and praying. I reminded God how important she was to us, how much it would hurt to lose her. I begged, I whined, I cut deals.

The next morning, Sunday, we encircled her bed and Mike offered a remarkable prayer. He asked God to help Camille on her journey, to let her carry our love with her, to be buoyed and comforted by it. And then, he added, "But if it's your will that she stay with a bit longer, we would certainly be happy."

And so she did. Much to everyone's astonishment, Camille lived five months longer, mostly free of pain and enjoying her life more than she ever had. Those five months were a miracle and a treasure.

We cannot compel outcomes. We cannot explain why God apparently doesn't intervene. We can only testify to the ways in which God helps us, small

or large. And then acknowledge our own limitations of perception. Whenever we recognize God's hand in our lives, we must respond, then witness to others, saying, "It is real. I don't deserve it. I don't understand it. But I believe it."

JESUS LIVED, PERFORMED MIRACLES, TAUGHT THE TRUTH, WAS CRUCIFIED, AND WAS RESURRECTED

I WAS always terrified of death. While living in New York City, I kept an informal list of bizarre ways people were killed in the city. Elevators plunging, building parts falling off, cranes landing on people, muggers, accidents, taxicabs—

SUNSTONE EDITOR: The Conservative Radical



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the list was endless. I feared my own death, its pain and suffering, as well as the terrible loss of those closest to me, my husband, my children.

But through it all, I believed completely in Jesus' resurrection, not as a symbolic act but as a real event. I reasoned that if death was humanity's greatest fear and insecurity, a loving God would allay that fear by offering real evidence that life continues. He allowed his son to suffer and die on the cross, so he could show the world what comes next—rebirth. The continuity of life makes complete sense to me.

My belief in resurrection was only theoretical until Camille's death. I had never been faced with any real sorrow. My faith was smug and easy. But when we held her in our arms for the last time and then she slipped away, my fears went with her. Her life was at times very hard, but her death was easy. I had a palpable sense of her relief to be free of her body.

In an instant, my hypothetical belief was transformed into real faith, capable of steadying me through the dark times ahead. And it did. I do not fear death any more: my baby daughter led the way. She became the teacher and I the pupil. She gave me a gift, like Jesus gave all of us. My only fear now is that by my weaknesses and failings, I won't find the place where she is.

JOSEPH SMITH WAS A PROPHET OF GOD

LIKE most educated Mormons, I've probably read and studied almost everything that has been published about Joseph Smith, pro and con. I've considered the view that he was a cult leader, a demon, an egomaniac, driven by nature, or a divine puppet, with no thoughts or actions uninspired. Nothing would surprise me, and still I believe he was a prophet. I also believe he was wrong about a number of key issues, and that he messed up in a lot of ways.

Like Harold Bloom, I believe Joseph was a religious genius. He was imaginative and energetic and confident. So confident that he could say, "God told me to say this. Take notes." I don't have that kind of confidence; I don't think many do. But it would be essential for any prophetic person to trust his inner voices. And because of that faith, he believed that every impulse he had came from God. They hadn't, of course, but God needed a person like Joseph to break through the heavens. How many of us would be as focused and responsive to the voice of God? This was his strength and also his weakness. In some fundamental way, most prophets are flawed. David, Moses, Moroni, Paul, to name a few. With great gifts come great temptations.

I remember visiting the Joseph Smith farmhouse outside Palmyra when I was a child, in which, at the time, guides taught that the Smiths had lived during Joseph's youth. I come from a big family and certainly never had a room of my own. I noted that Joseph was a member of a big family, too, and that the farmhouse had only one bedroom upstairs. It occurred to me then that Joseph probably didn't have his own room either. Then how in the heck did the room light up like noonday when Moroni visited, without anybody else waking up?

In that moment, and I was only a child myself, I realized that Joseph was in some kind of altered consciousness during the Moroni visits. I asked my father, "If someone else had walked through the Sacred Grove at the same time Joseph was seeing God the Father and the Son, would he or she have seen the same thing?"

"No," my father answered. "That vision was for Joseph."

I believe in Joseph's unusual ability to peer into another world. Perhaps it is because I feel the presence of infinity and other-worldly beings all around. I, too, have glimpsed eternity here and there.

And because I believe what the angel told Mary, that "with God, nothing shall be impossible." (Luke 1:37.)

THE BOOK OF MORMON IS A TRUE BOOK OF SCRIPTURE

THE BOOK OF MORMON tells the truth about spiritual things. It teaches us about our relationship to God and each other. Of particular importance to me is that, more than other books of scripture, the Book of Mormon warns of cycles of righteousness and falling away. If there is one message in the book, for me, it is that human beings have trouble being good for very long.

I believe that truth is slippery, hard to grasp for long. Someone once told me that the Church used to teach that the Great Apostasy happened not at the death of the apostles, but when Constantine made Christianity the state religion. Now there's an interesting proposition that makes sense to me (whether it was ever taught is another matter). When truth becomes the majority view, it gets lost in the culture. When truth is too closely wedded to the material world, it cannot stand. When religious leadership is mixed up with secular power, it is abused, and truth is withdrawn.

The Book of Mormon teaches me to be on guard, never to be too complacent. Apostasy among believers, even from the very top, is always possible. The righteous and unrighteous can switch places at any time. It is not outward signs but inward love that determines one's place with God.

WE ARE UNCREATED, ETERNALLY EXISTING ENTITIES, SAVED BY THE QUALITY OF OUR RELATIONSHIPS

THE uniquely Mormon idea that we exist forever appeals to me. It feels like a linking of Eastern and Western religions. Who we are today is connected to who we have always been and to the choices we made before this life. But we don't just cycle endlessly; we move forward in infinite progression.

On our honeymoon, Mike and I had a sort of joint spiritual revelation while hiking in Snow Canyon in Southern Utah. We had an impression of past lives, not as other people, but as ourselves, though apart. We felt we had been looking for each other through eons of time before this life. We made promises that if we were ever separated, we would begin the search for

each other again. It was an unforgettable vision, cementing our bonds for all time.

To me, this is what temple ceremonies are all about, though I wouldn't limit it to marriage. Eternal marriage is a symbolic way of expressing the belief that relationships persist beyond this life. This includes friendships, good and profound. It is true of common law marriages, where the commitment is deep and real. I am skeptical of family structures working in the eternities (it seems kind of mathematically impossible), though it's a lovely idea.

I am not interested in speculating about the exact nature of the hereafter and what we'll be doing there. I am not drawn to kingdom building or big houses or missionary work or even constant sex (though it's wonderful here). All I can believe is that in some form or other, we go on. And we continue to relate to, interact with, learn from, and love others.

Sacred rituals help us order this world. Temple ceremonies explain to us our place in the eternal scheme, and they link generations. The living and the dead become united. But are the rituals necessary for exaltation? I am not sure. Rituals are to help us move toward godliness here. I can't believe in a God who would keep a pure-hearted person at a distance because he or she came to the requisite goodness in a different way.

I am also troubled by the move to use temple recommends like club membership cards in order to manipulate believers. When leaders withhold recommends for perceived disloyalty, or reward members with recommends for "acceptable" beliefs, the temple experience is tainted. Instead of a welcoming sanctuary from a distracting world, the temple becomes a stick to enforce "right thinking" or empty loyalty; instead of temple rituals being offered for the Saints' edification, they become a badge of the self-perceived righteous elite.

Nor do I like the emphasis on quantity. If temple attendance is a spiritual refreshment, by all means, let's drink. But the frequency and number of sessions should be completely a personal choice, not a choice of competitive pride.

THE CHURCH IS A FINE ORGANIZATION FOR PERFECTING THE SAINTS

I CELEBRATE the Church structure for its ingenious way of putting us together with people we would never choose as friends. We are thereby forced to see others in their most

fleshed-out selves, not as the caricatures we have created to maintain our distances. My ward in Manhattan consistently chose the most conservative visiting and home teachers for us. And, though our arrogant selves resisted, we learned much from those kind, patient teachers. And I would not have it any other way; I am not interested in a Sunstone ward.

At the local level, Church members minister to each other. Callings are rotated to maintain the utmost humility. Someone could be a bishop one day and in the nursery the next. A nursery leader could become Relief Society president at the nod of her head. We must learn through the system; it is not the office but the service that bestows honor on its holder.

Being divided into geographical units, especially outside of Utah, is good for us. If we don't like a particular leader, we must stay and work it out. Tithing teaches us to put a ceiling on our spending, to sacrifice for the common good. And even the hierarchical structure forces me to take the Church leaders seriously,

to respond to issues and to them. I didn't vote for them, and I can't vote them out. So I am in an inescapable, ongoing relationship with them. Like other permanent relationships—with parents, spouse, and children—we are enlarged by the association.

THE STACKS: Mormon Poster Family



"Whenever we recognize God's hand in our lives, we must respond, then witness to others, saying 'It is real. I don't deserve it. I don't understand it. But I believe it.'"

IS THE LDS CHURCH THE ONLY TRUE CHURCH?

MY answer is yes and no. First, I don't believe that all roads lead to heaven, or that it doesn't matter what we believe as long as we are good people. Beliefs matter. What we believe makes us who we are. Good people are capable of great evil, if only by their apathy. What we believe purifies our hearts or it doesn't. What we believe leads us to act lovingly or it doesn't. All truth is not relative; some things are clearly more true than others. A great deal of silliness is masquerading as religion these days.

But when Christ spoke of the strait and narrow path that few find (see Matt. 7:14), I think he meant that a few in every religious tradition, or even in no religion, will find it. What makes me trust so much in the truthfulness of this church is my reading of Joseph Smith and his example of eclecticism. Mormonism is the spiritual language I was given at birth. Like Joseph, whenever I find something that is true by all the exacting standards I require, I simply graft it onto my faith and call it Mormon. By this means, it becomes the only true church.

For example, I take to heart the Christian Science view of the power of prayer to heal and change the world. I love the Jewish way of making every day sacred by ritualizing the ordinary. I like their notion of sacrificing convenience for belief. Belief was never meant to be easy. I embrace Protestant humility, a recognition of God's grace to his children. I appreciate Catholic ethical thinking, the willingness to stand by unpopular social positions. I also enjoy Catholic sensibilities for the sights, smells, and sounds of worship, the value of ritual. I love the Seventh-day Adventist emphasis on the Sabbath. I truly believe in Buddhist self-forgetfulness and Muslim self-discipline, and I am drawn to Navajo beliefs because they are as sponge-like as mine.

AND so, I come back to the yearbook quote: "We are all one people, and our diversity amazes me." It is God's work to bring us all back to into his presence. It our work to help each other along the road, to share truths as we discover them. I am grateful for all my fellow travelers. For children who keep me from taking myself too seriously as a competent adult; for siblings who teach me the value of diversity; for a husband who gives me daily joy; for my husband's family who teach me unconditional love; for parents who gave me life and examples of thinking, doing, and being; for ancestors who gave up their comfortable lives in their search for the truth; for co-workers who show me regular kindness; and for a church that sends me challenges and callings to make me more than I could be by myself. Most of all, I am grateful for an elder brother who felt my sins and my sorrows, who faced death and showed me it can be overcome, that my beloved daughter is still alive somewhere. And for a God who forgives me constantly—picks me up out of the hole into which I've fallen, brushes me off, whispers, "Stop fighting me," and prods me on my way.

I do not understand much about God's mysteries, but I'm a believer. 



HOVENWEEP

Ice crusts the deep-scarred wombs of cinder cones, cool clusters of dead black beehives, my memory of Craters of the Moon. Even in that lavic landscape where nothing grows (high piles of ash blow back down) I felt the lure of Hovenweep, the desolate place at the furthest corner of the map: *dirt roads, impassible in winter and in wet weather.*

From Mexican Hat to Brigham City there is nothing but fruitless toil, tiny outposts of a rash empire. Near Capitol Reef, where reds dominate wind-chiselled sandstone monoliths you can see for miles, and even imagine draped in shades of sunset, pioneers planted apples, pears, and apricots.

Old orchards give wilder, smaller fruit and deer, feebled by motorists out to foreground them in front of the most famous of the red buttes, don't even quiver anymore at a touch. Utah juniper and box elder shake in a vigorous breeze, but they stand their ground—like so many white spindles, tall and clean, reaching up, each lightning rod a center of a new compass: *here we were*, these churches seem to want to say. Moab is entrance and exit to their dream of cultivation; now it is a city of gentiles, of forgetting: *We can multiply our dreams, repeat the pattern of our burden, that small speck of desire.*

Moab is a living epitaph surrounded by eroded monuments. Far from the poison lake, the Wasatch with their blade-sharp teeth, this gathering place of red rocks and dust once was the Old West for many movie producers and their hapless viewers. I sent a postcard to one I thought I loved of great arches framing lurid sky. Those who seek Hovenweep, to take in forlorn glances of lizards, heat echoing off dry canyons, leaning towers of sandstone and mortar, promises cut open at the heart, receive emptiness, the nothing-left of unforgotten and repeatable desire. There, shimmering on the Southern horizon, looms Shiprock, a vague red hope, a Navajo shrine, holy for being holy, proclaiming itself a destination. Landscape can lead us to grace, getting us out of any body.

—KARL ROSENQUIST