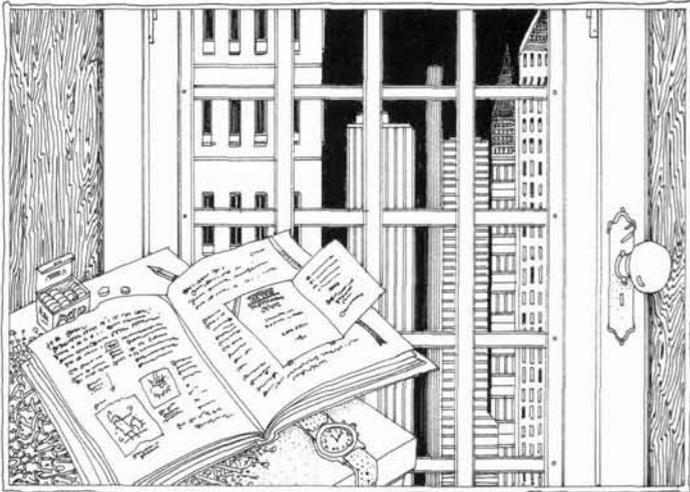




CORNUCOPIA



I don't keep this book out of duty. I keep it because I want to remember that when I took Emma to the Met in her backpack, she clutched my braid like reins.

WRITING EMMA

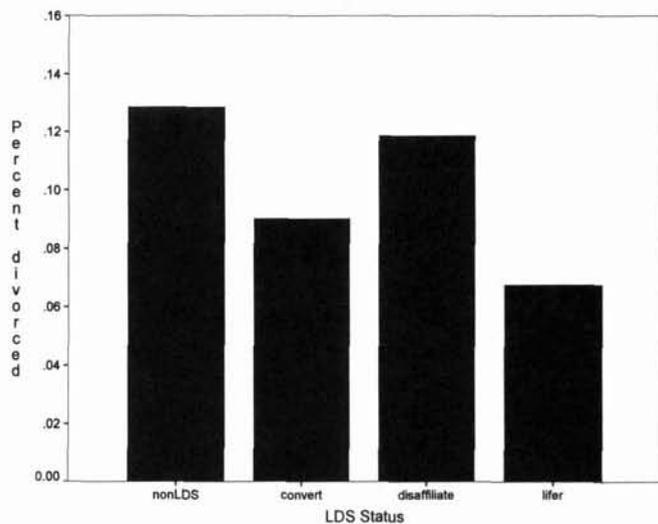
IT'S SUNNY THIS FEBRUARY NOON, SO I'VE TAKEN Emma out to our backyard. That is, I've slid back the steel accordion gate, and we've crawled out on the fire escape, seven floors above Manhattan. At ten months my daughter is the consummate mimic. I point to the scenes I see—the yel-

low taxi coming up our street, the recycling truck that beeps as it backs up to the curb, the kids playing tag on the roof across the street. Emma listens solemnly and mimics, pointing and jabbering nonsense. She reaches to touch the double-parked cars, reminding me that she still has no depth perception. She finds the screws that hold the bars together and focuses, probing them with pudgy fingers. And I remember this moment because of Emma's book. It's a commercial green journal, generic Mormon wares by its look, but in it are glimpses of Emma's life.

I bought the journal in the BYU bookstore last year, the week I found out I was pregnant. It's no organized baby book with uniform dates or neat entries—I'm no good at remembering the traditional events like first smiles. But it is the best record I know how to keep. The entries are short. There are nine similar paragraphs, for example, written on consecutive nights at 2 A.M. when I was up with third-trimester heartburn, eating antacid and watching cooking shows. There are pictures drawn by Emma's three-year-old cousin, with earnest, dictated captions: "Emma is little and her has foots but her can't walk." There are many entries jotted down in less than a minute: "Can't crawl forward but can back under the couch and cry." And "At Riverside Park I put Em in the toddler swing. She was so utterly delighted—she squealed at the top of her lungs. Swinging was absolute, uninhibited joy."

And there are long passages of advice, written by great grandparents who may not be around by the time Emma can

Peculiar People



LDS LESS LIKELY TO DIVORCE

LIFETIME MEMBERS OF the LDS church are less likely to be divorced than are residents of the United States in general. Disaffiliates report higher levels of divorce than converts, and both of these groups fall in between lifetime members and the national population.

Results were obtained by combining many national probability surveys of adults taken by the National Opinion Research Center between 1970 and 1991. Respondents were classified on the basis of religious affiliation at age 16 and at the time of the survey. "Lifers" reported being LDS at both times. "Converts" were not LDS at 16 but had joined by the survey date. "Disaffiliates" said they were LDS at age 16 but no longer are. Everyone else was classified as non-LDS.

read. Those entries were written on holiday afternoons when nothing else was pressing, and they remind me now of pumpkin pie spice and wassail and Lion House crescent rolls.

I don't keep this book out of duty. I keep it because I want very much to remember that when I took Emma to the Met in her backpack last fall, she clutched my braid like reins. I want her to know about the freedom I felt our first months in New York, and how I missed late nights chattering from a barstool in my mother's Provo kitchen.

I worry that Emma might feel ambivalent about me twenty years from now. I write because I want her to know that I adored her with complete abandon, loved her more than I have ever loved anything, from long before she was born.

I think sometimes of Omni, and after him of Amaron, Chemish, and Abinadom. These Nephite record keepers have nothing but eleven verses to sum up their lives, and much of that is spent apologizing for not writing sooner. I think of Sariah. How did she feel as she packed up the camels? Did she feel homesick for Jerusalem once they had left? Which did she miss more, the fountain in the garden or the herbs she tended there for treating illness? And what about Nephi's wife and the other silent women of the Book of Mormon? How did they feel about their daughters? What did they do on sunny winter days?

I have no illusions that Emma's book will be in any way more complete than the gaps in the Book of Mormon, or even that I will keep it up past her first year. I just want to note things in it for now. Then I'm going to put it away and save it for a special occasion—college graduation, or marriage, or maybe just a time of need. I'm sure the time will come for me to give it to her. And when she needs it, I want her to hear her mother's voice from now.

—LUANA ULUAWE

Book of Mormon Musings

THE WRITING ON THE WALL

I am Amulek; I am the son of Giddonah, who was the son of Ishmael, who was a descendant of Aminadi; and it was that same Aminadi who interpreted the writing which was upon the wall of the temple, which was written by the finger of God. (Alma 10:2.)

WHenever I read this statement about the writing on the wall of a temple, I think of Daniel 5:5–6, which reports a similar event:

In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the king's palace: and the king [Belshazzar] saw the part of the hand that wrote. Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another.

I wonder if this similar incident about Aminadi was recorded in the lost 116 manuscript pages of the Book of Mormon tran-



Sometimes stories are passed around to the point that there really is no more reliable substance to them.

scribed from the large plates of Nephi? Or is this just another incidental story—like the story of Abish and her curious conversion caused by a vision of her father (was it her vision or her father's?)—left in for our curious delight in discovery? In any event, apparently it was a rather famous story in the locale of Ammonihah since Amulek uses it as a reference point in his introduction. While I believe there are indeed parallels between the story nearly related by Amulek and the story of Belshazzar in the book of Daniel, I often wonder if perhaps there are many points of difference as well.

One thing that isn't clear is whether any Nephite actually saw a hand floating in the air writing mysterious inscriptions on the temple wall, or whose temple it was. And we don't know what the writing meant. Maybe Aminadi interpreted the writing, but no one wrote down the interpretation. It does seem clear that at least the writing was felt to have been divine in nature, being "written by the finger of God," but we don't really know whose opinion of the divine nature of the writing is reported by Amulek. For all we know, Aminadi gave an inspired interpretation of an ancient Jaredite temple inscription. I, for one, hope that at the very least, someone's knees smote together when the writing was discovered or when Aminadi spoke.

I anticipate that many may become impatient with my meditations on this story. Some might believe it nearly irreverent. My only point is that sometimes stories are passed around to the point that there really is no more reliable substance to them than can be gathered about Amulek's unfinished story concerning Aminadi. I really have no reason to doubt Amulek's version, told or untold, of Aminadi and the writing on the wall. That the story appears in the Book of Mormon should give one assurance that, subject to the faults of men, it is true. However, I do have reason to doubt from time to time the stories I hear and am tempted to pass on without verification of their sources. I am not talking about gossip either; I am talking about so-called "faith-promoting-rumors." What can be so bad about these stories so long as they confirm our faith? I imagine

that if Amulek's story about Aminadi had been discovered to have been embellished in its many tellings, it would definitely have been used against him and his otherwise truthful and important message at Ammonihah.

—EDGAR C. SNOW JR.

Twenty Years Ago

ARTICLES OF FAITHFUL PUBLICATION

THE FOLLOWING LETTER FROM EUGENE ENGLAND appeared in SUNSTONE's first issue: "It was a great thrill for me to learn of your plans to publish an independent journal of arts and letters for young Latter-day Saints. . . . Perhaps I could venture one suggestion, the fruit of . . . twenty years of personal struggle. You are taking hold of sacred things when you presume to publish—to give them indelible and widespread existence—ideas and expressions about what is in fact the Kingdom of the Lord, and you are venturing out on extremely risky ground when you presume to do that without the direct guidance of the Lord's Priesthood leaders. I believe it is worth the risk, because there are important things you can do with an open forum to build the Kingdom (not better, but *other* things) that the Church's official publications cannot do. That's of course why the Lord told us to be anxiously engaged in the work and do many things of our own free will, because "the power is in [us]." But my suggestion is that you remember in all you do that it is the Lord's work, that to succeed in any meaningful sense you must have his help and must seek it in prayer as you work alone and together and must take that help when it comes—even when it comes in the form of inspiration from him or counsel from his servant that requires you to put your loyalty to his work of saving souls above everything, above your own prestige and ambitions, your academic standards and esthetic values, even the journal's very existence, if it comes to that. Such painful choices will be very few, I believe, fewer than we faced with *Dialogue's* pioneering effort, but if you are not prepared to make them, even better perhaps than we did, you will not succeed—and you *should* not.

"Those of us in the Church who need and value such things as SUNSTONE—because of our nature, our special intellectual gifts the Lord has given us to complement the equally valuable gifts he has given others in the Kingdom—tend to value highly and quote often the last part of the Thirteenth Article of Faith: 'If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.' We need to remind ourselves that there are twelve and a half Articles of Faith which precede that stirring capstone declaration, and unless we are struggling to understand and live by all of those others (for instance, 'We believe in the gift of tongues, prophecy, revelation . . .') we have no right to adopt that motto for our intellectual and artistic endeavors—and little good will come of those efforts."

SAINTS IN AMERICA



JOAN MARCUS

Does Kushner, author of Angels in America, know Mormons?

ONE EVENING, SEVERAL months ago, after long hours exploring New York's traffic-choked streets, a friend and I relaxed on the rim of Central Park's Bethesda Fountain, cartons of lemon chicken and copies of the *Village Voice* in hand. Practically reenacting the parting scene in the second *Angels in America* play, *Perestroika*, our conversation turned to Tony Kushner's *Mormons*. Does Kushner really understand Mormons, or were they merely an easy framework to explore what happens when conflicted sexuality and any conservative religious tradition collide? In the middle of our

discussion, my friend stumbled across an ad, buried at the bottom of an inside *Voice* page, announcing that the Pulitzer Prize-winning Kushner was speaking right then at a local Jewish community center. Still deconstructing the gay-themed play, we bolted for a taxi.

We found seats in an oval-shaped auditorium that was flanked with racks of the Torah and ceremonial robes. A charismatic and engaging Kushner spoke to the standing-room-only crowd on Jewish identity and then took a few questions; the first one gave us some insight. Kushner said his research on Mormonism was basically limited to two books: Fawn Brodie's landmark, if flawed, *No Man Knows My History* and Wallace Stegner's even-handed *Gathering to Zion*. He said he tried to read the Book of Mormon but found it to be, as did Mark Twain, "chloroform in print." Kushner added that his Mormons were mainly informed by his associations with various Saints in Utah—most of them disaffected and angry, even antagonistic toward the Church, much like the disenfranchised Catholics he knows. Clearly, Kushner doesn't know Mormons.

The only time the seemingly unflappable Kushner appeared frustrated was when an older, orthodox Jewish woman told Kushner, who hadn't been to synagogue for years, that she did not see him as Jewish. "It really hurts when people tell me that," he said. "I deeply cherish my religious tradition." That was the first time I suspected Kushner, at least partially, understands *Angel's* core offense to some Mormons: as theater critic Michael Evenden puts it, Kushner accepts Mormons so long as they agree to leave their religion behind. While *Perestroika* ends with all the play's Mormon characters either crazy, rejected and out of the picture, or decidedly New Yorker secular, perhaps Kushner's had a change of heart: rumor has it that Joe Pitt, the Mormon lawyer who leaves his wife for a gay man in *Angels*, part I, remains sane, on the scene, and Mormon in the forthcoming part III.

—BRIAN KAGEL