

SUNSTONE GALLERY


STORYTELLER

ARE THE GIFTS visible? Are they what we catch in her gaze, her watcher's eyes, her eyebrow so slightly raised? Perhaps they are what we sense in her quiet, her patience, her calm?

For Louise Degn, the journalist's gifts—the drive, the guts, the adventurousness, the heart—have always been there. At age ten, sitting transfixed in front of the television as the world's events unfolded before her eyes, she knew she would someday tell those stories. She felt them stirring throughout her teens as she would write for advice from television's pioneering newswomen. The feelings surged even stronger as she worked on the newspaper and yearbook at Ogden High School in Ogden, Utah. She could scarcely contain them as she studied political science and asked question after question of the dignitaries and scholars who visited her beat, Utah State University in Logan, Utah. Her gifts matured as she worked on a master's of journalism studies at Northwestern University covering Chicago's education wars and then while stringing for a Utah radio station while apprenticing in Washington, D.C., for a term. She cracks: "I got that job because I knew the correct way to pronounce 'Tooole.'"

There, at last, someone else recognized her gifts. Degn was "discovered" by Wes Vernon, the Bonneville Communications Washington bureau chief, who told her to hurry back to Utah and call on KSL. The stars were aligned; she became only the second woman reporter to work for KSL,

the only one at the time, and Salt Lake City's sole female television or radio reporter for the next year. The gods watched, and ten years later, in 1979, trusted her to break a silence, the hush surrounding depression, and the secret that it could affect even Mormon women. "Remember, this was pre-Oprah, pre-Prozac. No one talked about these kinds of things then." The hour-long feature she produced helped us understand that the spiritual and the emotional are not one and the same, and that admitting your needs in one area are not being fulfilled does not denigrate the truth or power of the other. That's the storyteller's greatest gift . . . to be the eyes and the heart of a community, to tell its tales and, in so doing, help heal its wounds.

Isn't it natural, then, that the journalist, the storyteller herself would find her own best medicine in community as well? From playing the bells in a marching band, to living with sorority sisters, to spending a summer as a kibbutznik in Israel, to singing in choirs, to organizing "Sunday gatherings" so friends who feel disconnected from their religious tradition can still share their spiritual lives with others, to teaching the storyteller's arts to tomorrow's journalists, Degn has always known the importance of our binding ourselves to others. And after years of exploring, learning, and watching, and even with her penetrating eyes wide open, she declares that her Latter-day Saint community is still a most comfortable home. "It's a good place, a place that makes good people." 



PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL SCHOENFELD