



CORNUCOPIA

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Lighter Minds

WRITE YOUR OWN OBIT FOR PEACE OF MIND

The following is a reprint of popular Salt Lake Tribune humorist Robert Kirby's 30 May 2002 column. Reprinted by permission.

WITH MEMORIAL DAY WILTING IN THE SUN, now seems a good time to practice writing our own obituaries. After all, next Memorial Day it could be us getting the flowers.

This is not as morbid as it sounds. The obituary section is one of the most popular sections in any newspaper. While part of the reason may be a preoccupation with death, the biggest reason is life. If the dead themselves don't care how their lives are remembered, their survivors do. That's why the obituary page is a collection of short stories or biographies. Some are longer stories than others, not only because some lives were longer, but also because objectivity is not a requirement when it comes to eulogizing the departed.

Ever think about how you will be remembered? You may want to start. Not only are you going to die someday, chances are that the task of writing your obit will fall to the family member who likes to write, or in other words the very one you won't want writing about you.

If you want to write your own obituary, there are a variety of styles to choose from. Just open this paper to the obit section and choose one you like. I prefer short, to-the-point obituaries with real information about the departed, as in, "Ralph was a lifelong model train builder, a member of the LDS Franklin-Covey 25th Ward and is survived by his dog, Beano."

I hate obituaries that read like blatant applications for sainthood: "After long and faithful service to mankind here on Earth, Edward continues his mission for the Lord by carrying the Word of Life to the less-fortunate spirits in . . ." If not that, then an obituary that reads like a padded resume: "Janet began her brilliant climb to vice-president in charge of public relations for Whicker, Bartle and Wallace with a stunning election to president of her Second Grade class, after which she became lead hall monitor." We won't talk about bad poetry, worse pet names and unconscionable delusions of grandeur such as becoming a bright star somewhere in the universe.

But then that's just me. Frankly, I don't want to be remem-

bered by someone else's definition of well, I want to be remembered right. That's why I'm writing my own obituary. Obviously, it will need to be fine-tuned. But this is what I got so far:

Robert Lynn Kirby, 49, died May 30, 2002, in Springville, Utah, of injuries suffered doing something his family told him not to do. Robert was born Feb. 31, 1954, in San Bernardino, Calif., to Robert L. and Eris Felt Kirby. Robert attended various schools while being forcibly dragged throughout the world by his military family. He barely graduated from Skyline High School in 1971. He served in the Utah National Guard for eight years, twice achieving the rank of Specialist 4. He was a former police officer. He was not an Eagle Scout.

Robert served an LDS mission in 1975 to Uruguay, where he met his future wife, Irene. The couple had three daughters, Christie (Scott) Morgan, Autumn, and Virginia, as well as one granddaughter, the beautiful and highly talented Hallie E. Morgan.

A columnist for the Salt Lake Tribune, Robert loved traveling, The Simpsons, and provoking the self-important. He hated broccoli, Sunday school, and bureaucrats. A funeral service will be conducted at the Spring Creek Stake Center at 1 p.m. on Saturday, after which his ashes will be dumped alongside an undisclosed Utah road.

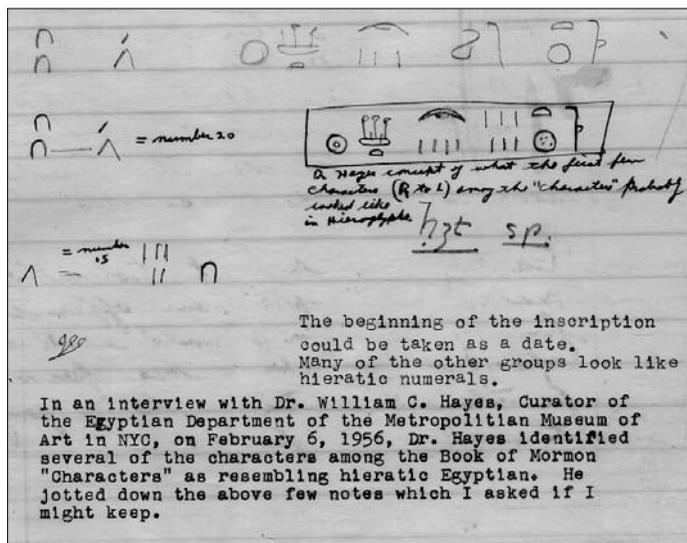
How's that? I tried to keep it short. Obituaries are expensive. I figure this one will cost, along with a photograph of me not holding a Pulitzer Prize, about 300 bucks.

Scripture Chase

A VISIT WITH DR. HAYES

WAY BACK IN 1956, I WAS WORKING ON A Ph.D. in history at Columbia University when I started looking into the story of Professor Charles Anthon, who taught at Kings College—Columbia's forerunner. He was the one to whom Martin Harris showed a copy of some "characters" copied by Joseph Smith from the "Reformed Egyptian" of the Book of Mormon plates. These characters eventually became known as the "Anthon Transcript," a document that has defied translation to the present day. Indeed most Egyptologists do not take the transcript seriously. Mostly they either ignore it or disparage it as "deformed English." In any event, it is considered too short to work with successfully.

Undaunted, however, on 6 February 1956 at 2:00 p.m., I met by appointment with Dr. William C. Hayes, curator of the Egyptian department of the Metropolitan Museum of Art



Jottings of Dr. William C. Hayes concerning the “Anthon Transcript” and notes of the meeting typed by Stanley B. Kimball

in New York City. I submitted to him a facsimile of the Anthon Transcript, gave him a brief history of its provenance, and asked what his opinion of it might be.

I was somewhat surprised and extremely pleased that he did not show me the door or berate me for wasting his time (and mine) with such nonsense. He studied the transcript for a while and scribbled a bit on a yellow legal size pad. His premise was that the transcript was in hieratic characters and, as is standard practice, he first transcribed the hieratic into hieroglyphics. He then concentrated on the first few characters (first line, right to left) and concluded that the beginning of the transcript might be a date and that other groups of characters in the transcript could also be taken as numerals. I was delighted with his opinion and asked if I

could keep his jottings, which he graciously gave me (see reproduction above).

In the almost fifty years since my appointment with Professor Hayes, LDS scholars have progressed little with the Anthon Transcript. The famous faked transcript by Mark Hofmann “discovered” in 1980 (and known as the “Hofmann Transcript”) has come and gone. But, oh, what fun it was while we were able to take his “discovery” seriously. (All that fun ended quickly, of course, when the bombings began, leading to Hofmann’s conviction for murder in 1987.)

Maybe the ghost or spirit of Dr. Hayes, however, will inspire other Egyptologists, especially qualified Mormon scholars, to give the Anthon Transcript one more look. If the Anthon Transcript is an obvious fake, why did a famous scholar examine it seriously? Was he just being polite, at no cost to himself professionally, to a nice, eager Mormon elder? If I ever see him on the other side, I will ask.

STANLEY B. KIMBALL
St. George, Utah

Margin Notes . . .

DIVINE MUSIC

Suddenly, the face of the world grows dim
The Beloved appears from behind his veil
How my heart shivers and burns for Him!
All the nine heavens shine sad with love
—RUMI (from *Speaking Flame* by Andrew Harvey)

A POET MENTOR ONCE ADVISED ME TO MASTER the skill of communing with God while scrubbing toilets. Initially, my look of utter disbelief made her throw

Mormon Media Image

“THE MORMON TWINS”

IN STEVEN SODERBERG’S REMAKE OF THE CLASSIC Frank Sinatra film, *Ocean’s Eleven*, when Danny Ocean (played by George Clooney) needed drivers to help pull off a \$160,000,000 heist of three Las Vegas casinos, he didn’t have to look very far. The helpers he found hail from . . . Provo, Utah? That’s right, Ocean’s partner, Rusty Ryan (Brad Pitt), informs him he has already lined up the Malloy’s. “You mean, ‘the Mormon Twins?’” asks the incredulous Ocean.

One thing’s for certain, no one will mistake this portrayal of Latter-day Saints on film for any of the characters in *God’s Army* or *The Singles Ward*. Fraternal twins Virgil and Turk Malloy (played by Casey Affleck and Scott Caan) don’t enjoy a great deal of scene time in *Ocean’s Eleven*, and when they do show up, they are usually portrayed as typical bickering brothers, (once to good—uh, we mean *bad*—effect as their staged argument successfully distracts casino security). Still,



The “Mormon Twins,” Turk (left) and Virgil (right), listen to the details of the plan to rob three casinos in one night

even in just the few scenes of the twins, their hometown gets a plug (of sorts). Chatting with one of his fellow con-artists, the old-pro, Saul (Carl Reiner), Turk suggests, perhaps in reference to Utah’s reputation as a great place to run scams, “I think you’d really dig Provo.”

back her head and belly-laugh, but then she explained that if I could develop a sensitivity to Deity during *that* chore, then I could hear the Divine anywhere and see the Divine in anything. This is not to say that I am against formal modes of prayer, or that I believe in God's material omnipresence. But the task of communicating with God may be far different from our yearning to commune with Him.

We Latter-day Saints have so much advice on how to converse with God. We speak in terms of "daily prayer"—where to pray, when to pray, why to pray, how to pray, to whom to pray, in what order to pray. We discuss our use of honorific pronouns, semantics, tone, and whether to stand, sit, or kneel. Our prayer conventions clearly label us as new or old to the faith. We commonly profess that all of our prayers are heard, but is that truly our common experience? What do we really think when our prayer formulae for where, when, why, how, to whom, in what order, and in what position don't "do the trick?" Is this system of evoking a communion with God more like incantations and spellcasting? As if saying the correct words in the correct order will achieve the predicted and desired results?

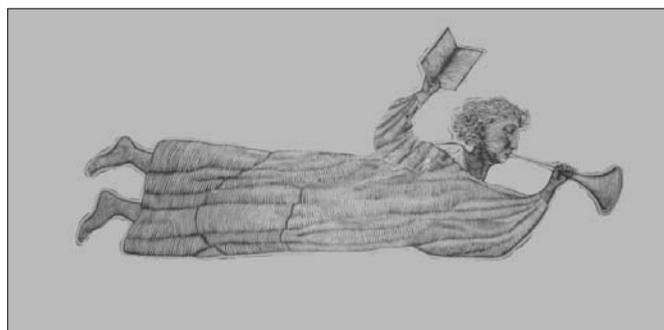
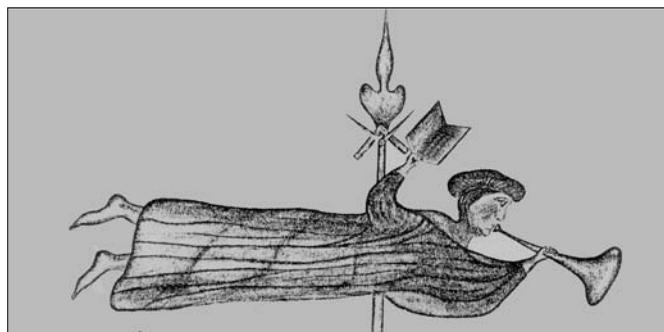
The scriptures clearly outline some strategies for personal and public prayer (our ways of communicating with God), but too often when we seek to commune with Him, we want that interaction to sound like an extended hall-mark card with all the well-worn pathos of boldly-inked calligraphy and pale pastels. Yet if God's ways are indeed "higher than our ways" (Isaiah 55:8-9), then it may be that His ways of communing with us are different from what we expect. We invent amazing ways of coping with our suspicion that our communication is going "unanswered." But if we are to stop cursing God, cursing ourselves, coercing God, and grappling with His "absence", this may require an effacement of our power-based illusions and a reverent acquaintance with the veil that separates us from Deity.

Is it possible that we need to seek a kind of "emptying out" (of expectations, conventions, and obligations) before God's ways and God's language can fully commune with the godliness within us? After all the time we spend talking about the motives for, methods of and miracles by prayer, can we detect the subtleties of God's touch if He doesn't announce his presence with intellectual or emotional fanfare? Have we become too manically communicative to relate to the very God whom we "burn" and "shiver" for?

Perhaps the path of true communion lies away from personal petition, away from ritualistic repentance, away from bartering superstition, and toward something like quiet, slowly ripening co-existence. Perhaps we need to lose our interests and our voices in the resonance of divine music. Perhaps we should live for moments of awestruck wonder when "the face of the world grows dim" and we can "be still and know that [He is] God" (D&C 101:16).

ALISON TAKENAKA
Essex Junction, Vermont

All-Seeing Eye



ANGEL MAKEOVER

HISTORICAL PURISTS WHO WERE DISAPPOINTED when the Church decided to place a vertical angel Moroni atop the newly built Nauvoo Temple rather than attempt to replicate the original Moroni who flew horizontally and doubled as a weather-vane, (see uppermost image above), might feel even worse now as the nineteenth-century version has been re-stylized (and displayed without commentary) for the Nauvoo exhibit now on display at the Museum of Church History and Art, in Salt Lake City (bottom image). Remember your old *Highlights* magazine? How many differences can you spot between *these* two pictures?

Sunstone Top Twelve. . .

SUNSTONE WINTER OLYMPIC SPORTS

DURING THE 2002 WINTER OLYMPICS IN SALT Lake City this past February, it was all the rage to create lists of specifically Mormon winter sports events. We at SUNSTONE couldn't resist churning out our own list, but of specifically Sunstone-type (or Sunstone *stereotype*) events. So, direct from our home office in Mercur, Utah—the top twelve Sunstone Winter Olympic Sports:

12. Elbert to Dan Torch Relay
11. "Figure It Out" Skating

10. Freestyle Theologizing
 9. Curling (up with a Good Book)
 8. *Robertasledding*
 7. Cross-country Symposiuming
 6. “Left-turn-only” Luge
 5. Downhill Fundraising
 4. Short Track (to Apostasy) Speed Skating
 3. “Ask First, Shoot Later” Biathlon
 2. “Didn’t Brigham Smoke a” Half Pipe?
- ... and the number one Sunstone Winter Olympic sport:
1. “Thin Ice” Dancing

The Rest of the Story

UNACCEPTABLE?

IT IS DIFFICULT FOR US TODAY TO GRASP THE religious and political implications of the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem for the ancient Hebrews. Prophets and priests had spoken for centuries of God’s covenant with his people, a covenant that implied divine protection for Israel from her enemies. Then, inexplicably, God permitted Nebuchadnezzar to conquer Jerusalem in 587 BC and take the Israelites into captivity.

For the next several centuries, prophets sought to understand why God had permitted this catastrophe. Jeremiah and Ezekiel declared that Israel and Judah were destroyed for worshipping “false gods” (Jer. 16:10–13; Ez. 6:1–7). The “priest and scribe of the law of the God of heaven,” Ezra, came to believe that the primary reason for the destruction of Jerusalem was the intermarrying that had occurred between Israelites and “the people of those lands,” listed as “the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebushites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites” (Ezra 9:1-2). He believed this intermarrying had polluted God’s priesthood (2:62), in effect, breaking the covenant.

To remedy this loss of favor, Ezra began to require all men to divorce and expel from their families wives and children who were not pure Israelites. With the preaching of this new law, all the wives and children of mixed lineage were, in fact, expelled (Ezra 10). Of special interest here is a decree that anyone with any Moabite or Ammonite blood be among those cast out (Nehemiah 13:1).

Ezra’s decision to expel wives and children simply because of their lineage seems to have offended the sensibilities of at least one member of the Israelite community. This individual—whose identity is unknown today—decided to compose a story, a piece of historical fiction, as an act of protest against Ezra’s policy: the book of Ruth. (In using the term “historical fiction,” I do not mean Ruth never existed, rather that the dialogue and many other components of the story were created to convey the writer’s own message.)

Ruth is a tale of the very type of marriage outlawed by Ezra. Elimelech, the family patriarch, dies soon after taking his wife

Naomi and their two sons to Moab, and his sons find wives among the Moabites (Ruth 1:1–4). One of these Moabite wives is Ruth. Before long, both of Naomi’s sons die, and Naomi tells her daughters-in-law to leave her, since there is no point in their remaining with her (1:5). Orpah leaves, but Ruth covenants to remain with Naomi, crying: “Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God” (1:16).

Ruth, whom the writer refers to often as “the Moabite” (1:22, 2:2, 2:6, 2:21, 4:10), marries Boaz, one of Naomi’s relatives. Boaz recognizes Ruth’s righteousness and dedication, telling her, “It hath fully been shewed me all that thou hast done unto thy mother-in-law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust” (2:11–12).

The writer has crafted the book of Ruth very carefully to win our sympathy and admiration for Ruth. Although we are reminded frequently that she is “a Moabite,” we recognize and agree that she should have a place among God’s people. We cheer as Boaz decides to marry Ruth and rejoice when Ruth obtains a child, a son, who is called Obed.

Had the writer stopped there, the message subverting Ezra’s policy would have been strong. God accepted Ruth, a Moabite, and blessed her marriage to Boaz with a son. But the writer strikes an even greater blow, continuing, “And they called his name Obed: he is the father of Jesse, the father of David” (4:18). The message of Ruth is unmistakable: If Ezra had lived in the days of David, the greatest king of Israel, his policies would have resulted in not only Ruth but also David himself being expelled from Israel and the entire Davidic monarchy cast aside as unacceptable to God.

BRIAN H. STUY
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The Mormon Universe

CHOOSING SIDES



*** left (left), adj. the side of the political spectrum extolling freedom from the narrowness of tradition and prejudice; the advocates of progressive change.**

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