

Eagle Scout. Missionary. Husband. Father. . . . Human.

CONFESSIONS OF A MORMON BOY

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ONE-MAN PLAY
WRITTEN, CREATED, AND PERFORMED
BY STEVEN FALES

Original Utah Version

Confessions of a Mormon Boy began as a reading at the 2001 Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium and had its world premiere at the Rose Wagner Performing Arts Center in Salt Lake City, 23 November 2001. The two-week run sold out, and an additional performance was added to accommodate the demand. The Salt Lake Tribune called it “unflinchingly honest, wistfully comic, a compelling play, an enormous . . . achievement.” The Deseret News declined the invitation to review the play.

Since its beginnings in Salt Lake, the play has undergone significant rewrites. Much of the original Mormon in-humor has been taken out (including the Pre-existence and the theatrical convention of using St. Peter) but is preserved here. The play now details more about what it took for Steven to leave his “gay adolescence” behind and reclaim a life of integrity. The updated version has gone on to play highly successful runs at the New Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco and the Coconut Grove Playhouse in Miami. The run in Las Vegas coincided with the 2002 National Affirmation Conference (Gay and Lesbian Mormons). As with the original, there continues to be no swearing or nudity in the production.

The San Francisco Examiner recently said the play (now titled X'd) is “A story that must be told! One of the best new plays . . . seen in a very long time.” The Miami Herald called it “honest, moving, whimsical, sobering, tender, and cathartic,” with the South Florida Sun-Sentinel calling it “a coup de theatre.” It is now in pre-production for an Off-Broadway run to be directed by Tony Award-winner Jack Hofsis (The Elephant Man).

Steven considers Confessions a “valentine” to Mormonism. He further explains, “What I’ve tried to do is illuminate, with warmth and humor, the dilemma of those struggling to reconcile their dreams of becoming straight with the realities of being gay and what it costs to accept or deny that truth—especially when children are involved. As I’ve performed across the country, it’s been rewarding to have audience members—gay, straight, male, female, old, young, religious, non-religious—tell me how much the play has meant to them. I’ll often hear, ‘You’ve told 99 percent of my story!’—and that person will be Catholic or Baptist or Jewish.”

Steven claims to now have an extraordinary relationship with his ex-wife, actress/writer Emily Pearson, and his former mother-in-law, Carol Lynn. Emily is the co-founder of Wildflowers, a support network for women currently or formerly married to gay men (see <www.WeAreWildflowers.com>). The play is dedicated to Steven’s children.

THE PLAY IS PERFORMED WITHOUT INTERMISSION

(A backdrop of stars somewhere in eternity. A flashlight appears. A voice is heard in the dark.)

EXCUSE ME, ST. PETER? IS HEAVENLY MOTHER there? I’d like to talk to Heavenly Mother. Could you please tell her I’m here? You don’t know who that is? Look, pal, I know you’re the only one up here that’s not a Mormon, but you really should know who your Heavenly Mother is—the wife of Heavenly Father. Could you please turn

on some lights? I know I’m in Outer Darkness, but this is ridiculous! (Blinding lights come up revealing Steven in a white penitentiary jumpsuit with black “jailbird” stripes and a huge pink triangle on the back. He is holding a backpack filled with personal props, a bouquet of daffodils, and, of course, the flashlight. The stage looks like an opening night party for a new nightclub or Broadway musical. There is a red carpet downstage roped off with white velvet ropes and stanchions, ficus trees with lights, a cocktail table with a white satin tablecloth, fresh white roses, and votive candles. There is a disco ball hanging and a poster that reads, in large gold letters, “Celestial Kingdom—SOME Visitors Welcome.” Steven



Excuse me, St. Peter? Is Heavenly Mother there?

continues to address St. Peter.) Thank you!

Heavenly Mother said she would put my name on the list for her Celestial Tea Party, just in case the Judgment didn't go well for me. It obviously *didn't*. Am I on it? Brother Fales, Steven H. I'm not? Oh, she must have forgotten. It's an easy mistake. I'm sure it's

okay. Yes, I know homosexuals aren't allowed to go to Heaven, but this is an exception. I have permission from the glorified, resurrected Diva herself. She invited me *personally*. I promise I'll leave just as soon as it's over. Now don't tell me it's not going on. I saw the flyers down in Hell. I know it's today. And my kids are in there. So I'm coming in! (*Steven steps on the red carpet and burns his feet. Sirens go off.*) Ouch! Hot! Hot! Hot! Hot! Hot! Hot! *Good grief!*

Look, I came all the way from the Telesstial Kingdom to be here. I had to sneak past security. Then I rode a million light years up the escalator through the Terrestrial Kingdom where I finally found the glass elevator to the Celestial Kingdom. Oh, St. Peter, don't tell me you don't know about Mormon Eternity! (*Steven turns over the poster and draws the Plan of Salvation with bionic speed.*)

The Celestial Kingdom, Heaven, where you're here standing guarding these Pearly Gates? That's only for the really good Mormons. (How did you get here? Even the popes live down with me.) The Terrestrial Kingdom is where the okay Mormons go. And the Telesstial Kingdom, Hell, is where the really bad Mormons (and everyone else) go.

Heavenly Mother told me in the Pre-existence that I was invited to her Celestial Tea Party. The *Pre-existence*. Oh, you Catholics don't know anything! The Pre-existence is where we lived with Heavenly Father and Mother before we came to Earth. You know, where everyone was *Mormon*. We all smiled like this. (*Steven flashes his "Mormon" smile.*) It was the coolest place. Kinda like Krypton, where Superman lived before he came to Earth in that egg-ship. Everything was in its perfectly created pre-mortal form, and everyone was friendly and happy because nothing bad had ever happened to anyone. And just like Superman had to watch all those videos about trees and

Shakespeare and stuff, we had classes to learn about mortality while we anxiously waited to go down to Earth, where we would gain a body and suffer. Except when we got there, we would forget it all. Except for me. I remember *everything*.

I remember I was in love with Jimmy Flinders. The first time I saw him was at a class we were taking on dating and eternal marriage. I was there with my best friend, Emily. We were learning how to get a husband down on Earth. We were chatting away like we always did, when Jimmy walked in the Pre-mortal Conference Center. Talk about a First Vision. He was blonde, blue-eyed, 185 pounds, six feet tall—tanned, toned, tight muscular swimmer's build. There was no question he was the tops! I wanted so bad to be his husband . . . his wife . . . his *eternal companion*. (After we finished our two-year missions on Earth, of course, and our degrees in music/dance/theatre at Brigham Young University. You know, "the Lord's University"?) Emily and I were fighting over him, "He's mine!"

"No, he's mine!"

"He's looking at me!"

"He saw me first!"

After the closing prayer, we jumped out of our seats and raced towards Jimmy. I was afraid Emily would get there before me. I could never compete with her. She was blonde and absolutely gorgeous, not to mention the nicest and funniest girl in the Pre-existence. If she talked to him first, I would lose my chance. I was in the lead, but as I rounded the refreshment table, the director of the Pre-mortal Mormon Tabernacle Choir, Brother Lockhart, stepped in front of me. I crashed into the punch bowl. Red punch and Oreos went flying everywhere. Sure enough, Emily got a date with Jimmy to the Pre-mortal Gold & Green Ball. All I got was a mop and a seat in the alto section in the choir.

Do you have time for this, St. Peter? Good. Time doesn't exist here anyway, you know.

The pre-mortal premiere of the long-running, smash hit, Mormon mega-musical *Saturday's Warrior* had just ended. Jimmy had made quite a name for himself as a leading man in that production. I was a dancer in the chorus. But I didn't mind the chorus, as long as I could watch Jimmy from the wings as he gave them his big solo number in the second act. "I'll wait for you, Jimmy!"

Now auditions were being held for the revival of my favorite Mormon musical, *My Turn On Earth*. It was clear that Jimmy was going to play the male lead—*again!* You know, the Jesus part who then gets to play the husband part who marries the female lead, Barbara? Brother Stanislavsky said Jimmy naturally acted the part better. *Whatever!* Jimmy didn't even like acting or the theatre. He just stood there and acted all butch so everyone would fall in love with him. That's not acting. Me playing butch—now *that* would be acting!

So I decided I wanted to play the *Barbara* part. Not only would I be playing a leading part worthy of my talent, but on

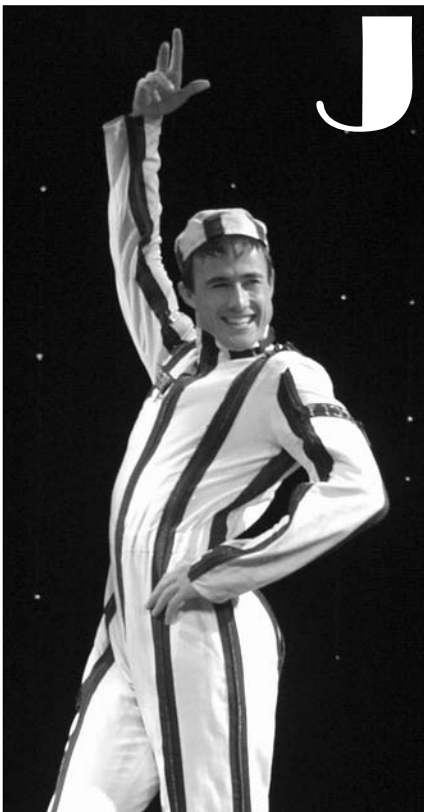
stage I would get to marry Jimmy. At the audition, I just kept thinking of him: *(Sings)*

*In these dreams I've loved you so
That by now I think I know
What it's like to be loved by you.
I will—*

“Next!”

Can you believe they cut me off?! I didn't even get to sing my high note, for Pete's sake! (Oh, sorry. I didn't mean to take your name in vain.) So guess who got the part? Emily. *Again!* I mean, just because her future mother would write the show was no excuse. I could belt higher than any of the other girls, and I had the best split leaps in my primordial dispensation—not to mention they should always give the role to the best actress!

Well, I did get cast. You know the part I got? *Satan*. He doesn't get to marry *anyone!* Now I would never get to marry Jimmy! So you want to know what I did? I learned the entire Barbara part behind Emily's back just in case she got her orders to go to Earth in the middle of a performance. Someone would have to fill in, and I would be ready! *(Sings)* “Emily, time to go home!”



Just tell St. Peter you're here, and I'll have him buzz you right in!

Getting sent to Earth at a moment's notice was always a possibility. Once, during a particularly long candy-wrapper matinee, we were all on stage singing: “*The world turns 'round like a merry-go-round. It lets some off, and it takes some on.*” There we were: Jimmy, Emily, Dave,

Marci, and me. And right in the middle of the number, Marci starts floating up out of the theatre and down towards Earth with a look of utter surprise on her face. *(Sings)* “*It ends with death. It begins with birth. And it's my turn—Goodbye, Marci! (Goodbye, bass section.)*” Then, as Dave and I are doing the dance lift Marci and I usually do, he starts to go, too. But he's

determined to finish the number. So, he's clinging to me, clawing at the scenery, grabbing whatever he can to stay on stage—chairs, a table. “Have a nice life, Dave! *(Sings)* *It's your turn on Earth.*” (Minutes later a pregnant woman in a remote village in Madagascar gave birth to a boy and two chairs. Now *that's* the magic of live theatre!)

I knew Dave wasn't a good performer because only the really bad ones (and lemurs) go to Madagascar. If you didn't want to end up there—or another non-elect country—you knew you had to razzle-dazzle 'em. There was no way I was going somewhere *non-elect*. I was going to Broadway! That's why I made sure my Satan was especially wicked every time. Like in the War-in-Heaven scene, where Jesus and I battle over whose plan everyone should follow down on Earth. *(Sings in a sexy, exaggerated style)*

I have a plan.

It will save every man.

I will force them to live righteously.

They won't have to choose—

Not one we will lose—

And give all the glory to me.

Give it to me!

Of course, Jesus always won that scene in the show. But since Jimmy was so cute playing Jesus, I didn't mind a bit.

ONE DAY AFTER rehearsal, I ran into Jimmy who was practicing the love duet he sings with Barbara, “Eternity Is You.” He was having difficulty with the harmony.

“Want some help?”

“Sure. Thanks, dude.”

(Sings) “*Looking at you I can see right through to eternity.*” We blended so well together. And

as I looked into his eyes “*Eternity is you,*” I could swear I saw eternity. So I kissed him. *Hard.* He was surprised. I could tell. *He decked me.* I went flying across the rehearsal cloud.

“Well, someone had to do it. And it wouldn't be right if it was Heavenly Father!”

I begged him, “Please don't turn me in to Heavenly Father!”

He didn't. He turned me in to *Heavenly Mother.*

I was summoned to the Pre-mortal Lion House. Heavenly Mother was holding high tea in the Celestial Tea Room (where they serve that delicious non-caffeine Celestial Seasonings chamomile tea). She was finishing her weekly support group for all the women who would be polygamist wives. It was getting really heated in there, so I just waited in the lobby where I watched *Who Wants to Be a Mormon Millionaire?* until the sisters finally came out. There was Emma Smith. “Hi, Emma!” (Boy, did she look pissed.)

I was a little nervous. It was so rare to actually see Heavenly Mother I forgot what she looked like. She came sweeping into the room. “Is that my little Steven? Welcome back, *dahling!*” Now I knew why they never talked about her. *She's fabulous!*

She was Auntie Mame, Betty Davis, Martha Stewart, and Oprah Winfrey all rolled into one.

We immediately hit it off. I complimented her ZCMI tea set and offered a few decorating tips as I rearranged the flowers on the table. Then I helped her pick out her veil for the Pre-ordination High Priest Gala to be held later that evening. She said, "Why do I always have to sit in the back and wear a veil? I am the mother of all Creation, dagnab it! Where are we, Pre-mortal Afghanistan?" She was also upset she didn't have her own email address on the Celestial Internet. She laughed as she told me that she'd secretly gotten hold of Heavenly Father's password. "Just four simple letters. Now I can send inspiration to my children whenever the heck I like!" We spent the rest of the time swapping Jell-O recipes and reciting our favorite Carol Lynn Pearson poetry: "Today you came running, with a small specked egg warm in your hand. . . ."

Before we knew it, it was time for her to go. I think she forgot why I'd been summoned to meet her. I rushed to help her put on her veil, her gloves, and her black mink stole. "Thank you, my dahling boy. (Pause) Steven, is there anything special you'd like down on Earth? Anything at all! A share at Fire Island or a Prada gift certificate perhaps?"

"I just want to marry Jimmy Flinders."

"Yes, he is a stud, isn't he? Well, don't tell your Heavenly Father, but I'll see what I can do. You must join me and the entire Relief Society for my Celestial Tea Party when everything is all said and done. You'll fit right in. Oh! If the Judgment doesn't go well for you, I'll leave your name at the Pearly Gates. (Would you be a dear and light this for me? Thank you, dahling. Can you believe it? I'm as old as time, and I'm still sneaking cigarettes!) Just tell St. Peter you're here, and I'll have him buzz you right in!"

I AM TELLING the truth, St. Peter. You think I just made all this up? Could you please check the list again? Brother Fales. F as in Frank. Not F-A-I-L-S. F-A-L-E-S. Fales is an old Welsh name meaning "son of Fagel." Fagel is spelled F-A-G-e-l. Fagel, sometimes pronounced *feyghella*, also means "to be glad," which is a synonym for happy or gay—and that's why I smile like this. (Smiles) So am I on the list? Steve Young, Donny Osmond, Orrin Hatch. . . . That's the *Terrestrial* list. I'm on the *Telestial* list. Well, tell them to find it and fax it up! Please! (Sighs)

I can't wait to see my kids again. It feels like twenty millennia have passed. But who's counting? Judgment Day was the last time I saw them. What a fiasco! My attorney was late, and my star witness testified against me—bitter old queen! I was screaming bloody murder when they tore me away from my kids. They sentenced me to eternal damnation with no visitation rights until the end of eternity! They let me keep this picture of them though. (Pulls frame out of backpack and shows



was in love with Jimmy Flinders.

to St. Peter) I keep it by my cot in my studio apartment on the Lower East Side of Hell. This is Christian and Tara when they were five and three. See the light in their eyes?

I tried to be a good father. We'd wrestle, put puzzles together, jump on the trampoline. I'd read them *Harry Potter* books. I even taught them Shakespeare monologues when they could barely even speak. I know my son would have

preferred to go to a Yankees game instead of the Metropolitan Museum when they came to visit me in New York, but that Jacqueline Kennedy exhibit was not to be missed! I took them to their first Broadway show, *The Lion King*. I was Mufasa. They were my Simba and Nala. Our favorite thing to do was to put on the ABBA CDs and dance around the living room. (Sings) "Angel Eyes, one look and you're hypnotized. . . ." We'd fly and fly. Oh, I can't wait to see them!

Now where was I? The Pre-existence! So anyway, I left the Celestial Tea Room so excited. The first thing I wanted to do was find Emily and tell her what Heavenly Mother had said about Jimmy and me. I thought I'd cut across Pre-mortal Temple Square. The trees were all lit up. (They keep it Christmas all year 'round so they don't have to take the lights down.) Everything was still. A hazy white mist descended and hovered over the ground like the Holy Ghost. I could hear crying. I followed the sound toward the temple. As I got closer I could make out the figure of a little girl who was sobbing on the steps. No one is supposed to cry in the Pre-existence! I put my hand on her shoulder. She looked up at me with the most beautiful brown eyes.

"What's wrong?"

She just handed me her golden envelope. That's the envelope your orders to go to Earth come in. It's where you learn all the horrible things that are going to happen to you. It's like a patriarchal blessing *before* you go to Earth. You're not supposed to be sad or question your assignment or where you are sent because we are told that everyone will suffer. Can you believe I still have it? (Reads)

Dear Sister 967,000,100,003:

Having been true and faithful in many things, we desire to give unto you your orders to go unto Earth. You will be one of ten children who will have the gospel literally beaten into you by your parents in Reno, Nevada. Without knowing how to balance a checkbook, you will be married off before your high

school graduation. Everyone will expect perfection from you as you raise six children. Don't expect much help from your husband. He will be busy going to medical school, delivering babies, fulfilling Church callings, caring for his horses, and doing genealogy in all his spare time. After your divorce, with no degree or skills, your health failing, and an abusive second marriage, you will fight depression, want to die most of the time, and be thought of by everyone as crazy.

You're a real trooper, Sister. 'Preciate ya!

—Your Heavenly Father and Uncles

I said, "That's pretty bad. It must really suck to be a girl. I'm glad I'm not one. (I only act like one.) But, hey! I can go down and help you through the hard times. I love to cook, clean, and sew. I'm great at curling bangs and changing diapers. When you're pregnant, I'll bring you pans to throw up in so you won't have to crawl to the toilet. I'll be there for you when your husbands are not, and I'll treat you the way you deserve to be treated. Let's hang out. It'll be fun!"

So she agreed to be my mother, and we filled out the paper work. As soon as she signed her name, she floated up past the illuminated spires of the temple and out of sight.

I thought, "This is *great!*" Not only did I know who my husband was going to be, I knew who my mother was! I couldn't wait to tell Emily. But when I found her on the Pre-mortal BYU campus, I could tell something was really troubling her. She had just gotten *her* orders! She told me that her father, whom she would love more than anyone in the world, would die of a disease called AIDS when she was only sixteen. This would send her into years of depression. To top it off, she would have this terrible condition that would make her want to win an Academy Award, which would take her to Hollywood where her butt would be on *Baywatch*. Then she would escape to Salt Lake City and fall in love with the man of her dreams. But after a short time, he would die in her arms of cancer. But the very next day she would meet her first husband. He would be a very cute boy who liked ABBA songs and who reminded her a whole lot of her father. Especially the part about being gay. (I thought, "Cool! What a cool thing to marry someone *happy!*") They would have two incredible children and together would endure poverty and graduate school in the backwoods of Connecticut (where the ward was nothing like the wards in Utah). Then after being married six years, they would both stop smiling because—

Just then, a messenger handed *me* a golden envelope. My orders! I was so excited I ripped it open:

Brother Fales:

Having been true and faithful in many things, we desire to give unto you your orders to go unto Earth. You will be gay. Good luck!

Gay? Cool! But why do you need good luck if you're going to be *happy*? Didn't Emily's orders say something about happy, too? Her gay father? And the father of her children? *I* liked ABBA songs. What if I was to be Emily's "happy" husband?

(Pause) Yuck! We were far too good of friends to let *that* happen! Besides, I already knew who I was going to marry. Heavenly Mother said!

Emily went back to reading me her orders: "Then after being married six years, you will both stop smiling because—"

"Jimmy!" There he was coming out of the Pre-mortal Marriott Center. "Jimmy, wait up! You'll be all right, Em. We all will. I just know it. I've gotta run. You're my best friend, Em. I'll see you when we get back from Earth. Can't wait to see your fabulous butt on *Baywatch!* Look for me, Em. I'll be the happy one with good luck—on Broadway! Hey, Jimmy! *Dude!* Wait up!"

I didn't even reach Jimmy before I started to float away into the starry black sky toward Earth. Down, down I floated, across the Atlantic. There was Broadway! Yes! But, no. I kept floating west over the Rocky Mountains, where I landed in Utah County Hospital in Provo, Utah. The last thing I remember, I was looking around for Jimmy. Where was he?



AM I BORING you, St. Peter? Well, you were yawning. I bet you don't see many gays up here do you? Oh, I know, "Hate the sin; love the sinner." More like "hate the sin; *ignore* the sinner." You probably think I had a choice down on Earth, don't you. That I wasn't gay in the Pre-existence and that I thought I'd just be clever and use my free agency to ruin everybody's life on Earth because it might be fun, huh? Outer Darkness, please! (*Lights go out. Steven makes monster face with flashlight and speaks with authority.*)

God made no man a pervert. You should rid yourself of your master, the devil, Satan. You do his bidding. You are in abject bondage, a servant compelled to do the will of Lucifer. The death penalty was exacted in the days of Israel for such wrongdoing. When the spiritual death is total, it were better that such a man were never born. Remember, homosexuality can be cured. You may totally recover from its tentacles. Don't be selfish, lazy, and weak. How can you know you cannot change until your knees are sore from praying and your knuckles bloody from knocking on the Lord's door for help?

Would you like to see the scars on my knuckles? If you only knew how hard I tried to prevent this. Believe it or not, I never asked to be gay.

AFTER SIX YEARS of marriage, except when we looked at our children, Emily and I *did* stop smiling. That's right. I married my best friend. We were living in Storrs, Connecticut. I was the only graduate school actor I knew in his twenties, married with two children. I think most people at school thought I was crazy. Not only were we broke and crazy, we were exhausted. It's exhausting trying to be perfect. Life was taking everything out of us. But our hardships were nothing like what the early Mormon pioneers had to endure: house burnings, tar and

made no man a pervert.

featherings, sweating and freezing across the plains, crickets! Grit was in our genes. My father used to say, "Who does the hard thing? He who can! Feel the pain, and do it anyway." And the Church taught us from a very early age to deny the pain and smile anyway: (*Sings*)

*If you chance to meet a frown,
Do not let it stay.
Quickly turn it upside down,
And smile that frown away.*

Remember that song from Primary? (Oh, I keep forgetting—you went to Catechism.)

One day, driving home from another pointless open call in New York, it was revealed to me, as head of the house and patriarch of my home, that we should move. I hadn't yet had sex outside of my marriage, but I felt I was a walking time bomb. It was only a matter of time before it would all blow up. And I didn't want it to blow up on Emily on the East Coast where we didn't have any family or close friends. In my head, I was confident and optimistic that I could keep it all together, but in my heart, I knew I was only postponing the inevitable. How long could I suppress what the Church called my "same-sex attraction"?

I started to blame my career choice for everything. Acting was the culprit. Working in the theatre and commuting to New York City presented many hazards to my eternal salvation. The male dancers in tights at auditions started to look intriguing, the porn shops on Eighth Avenue, inviting. So I thought I'd just take myself out of the situation entirely and move to where none of that existed—Salt Lake City (where Jews are considered Gentiles). I was bringing my wife and kids home to the land of green Jell-O, "the everlasting hills," "the crossroads of the West," "the city of the Saints"—Zion! (*Sings*)

*I'm goin' home to Utah.
I've gotta find my soul.
I'm goin' where the girls are real
And the men are whole.
I'm goin' where the sun shines high
And a cowboy can be true.
I'm goin' home to Utah
And I'm comin' home to you.*

*I miss the Rocky Mountains.
There's nothing quite as tall.
And summer wildflowers—
Aspens in the fall.
But most of all I miss your touch
And the wonder of your smile.
A life with you in Utah
Is really more my style.*

*Utah and me and you.
Utah and you and me.
I'll trade these lights for stars,
Trade your kisses for these scars.
There's no question now
What I should do.*

*You and Utah,
You never let me down.
Oh! You are all the reason I need
For leavin' this old town.
Don't you worry,
I'm gonna see this through.
Just stay right there in Utah.
A life with you in Utah.
I'm comin' home to Utah.
And I'm comin',
I'm comin' home to you.*

I wrote that song and sang it over and over to convince myself that moving was the right thing to do. Utah was going to solve all our problems. Utah was not going to let us down!

We got there—and I hated it. I loved the mountains and seeing Emily so happy, but I was miserable. (*Sings*) "I'm so depressed in Utah. I think I've sold my soul." I'd been away too long. I wasn't perfect anymore. I was a Democrat.

I made the most of it, and eight months later, we finally got into a house. But as I scraped off the old wallpaper and popcorn ceilings and painted and pulled out overgrown bushes, with every brushstroke, every repair, every shovel of dirt, I knew I was not going to be living there for long. But I wanted the house to be nice for Emily. She deserved that. And I especially wanted things to be nice for my kids. I wanted them to have a place they could be proud to bring their friends home to play.

Early one Sunday morning, after we'd been in our new house about two months, I had an epiphany. I wanted to articulate it to myself by writing an email to a friend who had been a confidant and sounding board. I went downstairs to the basement, where the computer was, and turned it on. I entered my password ("just four simple letters"), H-E-L-P, and began typing. Can you believe I printed it out? (*Pulls it out of his pocket and reads*)

Sometimes I think I can have it all, but I'm finding I'm not a very good actor offstage. Adulterer is too difficult a role for me. I think Emily suspects something is going on. The strange incoming calls on my cell, all the closing shifts at the restaurant, and you won't be-



How did you get here?
Even the popes live
down with me.

“Several.”

“How many men?”

“Twenty.”

“It’s over, Steven. *It’s over.*” Emily wailed through the house and went to church alone. It had finally all blown up.

So like the good Mormon boy I was, I turned myself in. “Bishop, this is Brother Fales. We shook hands once at church. I’m sorry to call you so late. I’ve been unfaithful. And it hasn’t

been with a woman. Get a blood test? Okay. Tomorrow? Sure. Two o’clock? I’ll see you there.”

The bishop took time out from work to meet me at his office. He had white hair and a kind, round face, sorta like Santa Claus. He said, “Steven, we all have something in this life that we have to overcome. I deal with . . . swearing.” When we finished our interview, he stopped me and pointed to the picture of Christ on the wall. I call it the Mel Gibson Jesus. He’s handsome, rugged, all-American. He said, “I like *this* picture of Jesus because he’s not portrayed as a wimp. We should all look to *this* Jesus for guidance.” (The bishop and I go for the same type!)

I was then sent on to the next ecclesiastical leader, the stake president. If you’re a serious sinner like me—the sin against nature herself—he takes over. Like the feds taking over from the local sheriff. It’s a pretty big deal. The stake president represents Christ himself and has the keys to bind or loose all my blessings and covenants. He had the authority to blot my name out on Earth—and Heaven.

St. Peter, you gave that authority to Joseph Smith, the prophet of the Restoration in the Dispensation of the Fullness of Times, who then passed it along till it reached my stake president. Thanks a lot! What? Don’t you remember? You were there, for Pete’s sake! (Oops, I did it again! Sorry, St. Pete!) I guess that’s why they keep you around! Have you ever thought of joining the Mormon Church?

I REMEMBER WALKING into the painted cinder block stake presidency wing of the stake center next door—one of the conveniences of living in Utah. I checked in with the executive secretary who sat *behind* the glass. It felt so clinical. I couldn’t believe it was actually me sitting there. Would I be excommunicated? Wasn’t excommunication for the *wicked*? How had I come to this? I had only ever wanted to be a good boy and do what was right. My dad’s sister told me when I was little I used to say, “Aunt Linda, I just feel Heavenly Father with me all the time!”

lieve this, but she found the condoms in my bag when I got back from that trip to New York. (He was this hot guy I met at Splash!)

I’ve been experimenting with this “gay thing.” It’s amazing that after sex with a guy, we can talk and talk. Of course, there have been guys that I’ve fooled around with that I didn’t really want to talk to. It’s not like I’ve made passionate love to all these guys. Some have actually been kind of gross.

(I hope I’m not grossing you out, St. Peter. I don’t have to finish this. You *want* to hear more?)

I’ve discovered moments where the kissing and full expression of who I am makes me feel so complete, so natural. It’s not just about sex. It’s an intimacy, an expression of my whole soul. It has been about an emotional connection from the beginning. You wouldn’t believe how many married gay men there are here in Utah! I meet them on this local gay chat line.

But it’s got to stop! Now that I’ve had my masculinity validated many times (especially by that hot doctor with the Porsche who looked like Tarzan and thought *I* was so masculine!), I don’t have the drive I did to have sex with guys. The attraction to have sex with men may always be there, but now maybe it won’t be as strong. I think I’m going to be able to be true to my wife now. Sex with her will have to be enough. Not as exciting and passionate, but fulfilling. I have been true to myself the past six months, and the result is I may never need to “act out” again. I think I’m going to be able to keep my family together and keep a smile on my face. I think I’ve faced my—

“Who are you writing to, Steven?”

I shut off the monitor. “No one.”

“Are you having an affair?”

I couldn’t lie anymore. “Yes.”

“With whom?”

Memories of my years of church participation flooded me. Like most Mormons, church was my life! My baptism when I was eight. Passing the sacrament when I was twelve. Ward Christmas parties, stake roadshows, youth dances, and fire-sides. Good times. *Good people*. And the temple. Everyone dressed in white. I loved just sitting in the chapel listening to the hymns played on the organ. Quiet, peaceful, holy. "Holiness to the Lord." I believed it with all my heart.

I especially loved the Primary songs I learned as a child. (A recording of Steven as a boy plays.) This is me. I was nine. This was my favorite song. I sang it all the time. This was recorded at my cousin Joshua's funeral. He drowned. He was only two.

*I wonder when he comes again,
Will herald angels sing?
Will Earth be white with drifted snow,
Or will the world know spring?
I wonder if one star will shine
Far brighter than the rest;
Will daylight stay the whole night through?
Will songbirds leave their nest?
I'm sure he'll call his little ones*

(Young Steven on recording breaks into sobs. Steven continues singing the song.)

*Together 'round his knee,
Because he said in days gone by,
"Suffer them to come to—"*

Just then the stake president opened his office door and stepped out. "You must be Brother Fales. Welcome. It must be very difficult for you to be here. Thank you for coming. The Lord loves you."

That's what I *imagined* him saying. What I got was, "Now, what's your name?" I was stunned. Surely my name was on his FranklinCovey Planner. All he'd have to do was glance down on his desk before he came out and greet the *only one* sitting there. Was I one of dozens of homosexuals he was seeing that day? Would he have forgotten my name if I were a client at work or a potential new convert? I told him my name. I went into the office and sat down. "I can't believe you didn't know my name. Do you even know why I am here?"

"Yes, I know why you're here."

It was a little thing, not knowing my name, but for me, it was huge. It summed up my whole experience growing up in the Church. I always felt I needed to win some leader's approval. I wanted desperately to be like them, for them to like me—to be noticed. I was invisible. No matter what I did or how well I did it, I felt I was never appreciated or accepted for who I was. I felt I knew what it must be like to be a woman in this Church.

We didn't start off well. There was no opening prayer offered, and he proceeded to ask me to define sin. How did I feel about sin? Did I think I had sinned? We weren't getting anywhere. I didn't know the right answers anymore. I couldn't say what he needed or wanted to hear. I said, "Mister Stake President, where is the love? It's been doctrine this and doc-

trine that my whole life. Work, work, work out your salvation, never being worthy enough of God's love. Where is the love?" He told me he needed to keep the Church pure. I told him the Church was a socio-economic-political-tax-exempt-multi-national-corporation posing as the Kingdom of God on Earth. He wanted to have the Church court right away.

I was throwing a birthday party for Emily the Sunday he wanted to have it, so he postponed it a week. I was working three jobs and was daddy in all my spare time. And in the midst of everything, my Church membership and my marriage were at stake. No, my marriage wasn't just at stake. It was over. I had never seen Emily with such resolve.

The birthday party was a huge success. A friend twisted my arm to sing. I looked Emily right in the eyes as I sang her the song I had sung at our wedding reception: (*Sings theme from Love Story*)

*How long does it last?
Can love be measured by the hours in a day?
I have no answers now but this much I can say—
I know I'll need her 'til the stars all burn away,
And she'll be there.*

WHAT DID YOU say, St. Peter? The list came in! Finally! Oh boy, the lucky ones from Hell who get to go to the party: Sonja Johnson (Isn't she still fighting for E.R.A? They let *her* in?), Emma Smith (Brigham Young said she was going to Hell in a handbasket), Elton John! I guess Princess Di arranged for him to play. You know, she was baptized for the dead in the temple after she was killed—so she's Mormon now. You see, if you're not a Mormon when you die, you go straight to Spirit Prison—kinda like Purgatory. There you wait to be baptized by proxy in a big baptismal font in a temple down on Earth. If you accept that baptism, it's like a get-out-of-jail-free card. You can bet that anyone famous, the Church did their work for them. Elvis, Judy Garland, and all the signers of the Declaration of Independence. . . .

I'm not on the list?! HEAVENLY MOTHER!!! *Don't* you shush me! I'm telling you, *I was invited*. Would you please send some cherubim, seraphim, or sing-an-hymn and just tell her I'm here. Thank you! I know we're here for eternity, but does *this* have to take that long?

You want to hear about my Church court? Well, I'll tell you anyway. It was set for Sunday, July 16, 2000, at 7:00 a.m. I was exhausted. I had played Perchik in *Fiddler on the Roof* at Sundance the night before. That's why I had a beard at the time. Mormon men are supposed to be clean shaven. (How did you get to keep *your* beard?) I put on my brown suit with an off-white shirt and brown tie. I was ready, beard and all, when the bishop came by the house to escort me to my disciplinary council, or "court of love," as they call it. When the high councilmen all arrived (the grand jury), I was led into the room. There must have been about twenty men all dressed in dark suits and power ties. They all rose. I thought, "Now *this* is the way to get a straight man's attention." They led me to the head of this enormous oak table where I sat next to the stake

president. He asked the secretary to read the charge: "Homosexuality." Then they turned the time over to me, the guest of honor. I was allowed to tell these men, whom I had never seen before, my story.

WHEN MY MOTHER found out she was pregnant (two weeks after the honeymoon, at eighteen) she went home to her dark, basement apartment in Provo, Utah, and in her desperation and loneliness, she threw herself on the bed and cried, "Please, God, send me a friend." When I was born, she says it was as if a ray of sunshine had burst through the clouds. (*A recording of Steven as a boy plays.*) This is me. I think I was about five years old. I just made up songs like this.

*If you are singing about flowers,
You are singing about joy.
You are the only one
That changes the world.*

(*Steven picks up bouquet*) These are my favorite flowers, daffodils—'cause they're yellow. They're also called narcissus. They're for my kids!

*If you are playing,
You pick flowers
For your mom or dad
Or baby sister.*

I got them from the Korean deli at 83rd and Amsterdam. (Hell uses the same grid system as Manhattan.)

*If you are singing,
Sing about flowers.
If you are singing,
Sing about joy.
If you are singing,
Sing about the whole world.
So be sure to sing about the flowers.*

"And then my heart with pleasure fills, and dances with the daffodils." With a song like that, could there be any question in anyone's mind that I was gay?

I was one of those perfect children who never even cried. My mother says the only time I did was when the mailman would leave after dropping off the mail. She also says that each year she would be amazed I was still alive. She says I was too good for this Earth. I don't think the stake president was in agreement. I could see one of the men checking his watch. They did have many meetings ahead of them.

My father really poured on the steam when I was about eight years old. He taught me how to run and act like a man. He also taught me about sex. He took me out to the cows and told me how that one Black Angus was going to put his penis in the other. He said one day I'd do that to my wife and it would feel really good and warm. ("Moo! Moo! Mooooooooooo!!!")

I was in Little League and Scouting. I became an Eagle Scout. I promised to keep myself "physically strong, mentally awake, and morally *straight*."

After my mission, I transferred to BYU. I was on scholarship to the Boston Conservatory my freshman year of college, but that was just a little too Babylon for me. The real reason for going to the "Y" was to find a good Mormon wife. Meanwhile, I knew I was on the fast-track in the music/dance/theatre department when I made the Young Ambassadors. The Young Ambassadors, or Y.A.s, was an elite group of performing missionaries that the Church used to charm nations that had not yet been receptive to letting the missionaries proselyte. They poured tons of money into our shows, which were a kaleidoscope of music, dance, colorful lights and costumes, and above all—*smiles!* It was a cross between Lawrence Welk, *The Donny & Marie Show*, Disney, and the worst of Andrew Lloyd Webber. "Meow!" Not only did you have to be young, beautiful, and talented to be a Y.A., you had to adhere to the highest moral standards as set forth in the Honor Code: namely, no sex, drugs, alcohol, tobacco, caffeine, R-rated movies, tattoos, piercings, facial hair, or shorts above the knee.

So, naturally, it was on tour with Y.A.s that I had my first homosexual experience. This guy was so straight acting you never would have known. And such a good kisser! I was floored when he turned our friendship sexual. (Homosexuality wasn't supposed to exist at the Lord's University!) The few times we got together were incredible. I remember one morning, in Salinas, Kansas, walking from our motel room to the tour bus with the biggest smile on my face. I understood what all the love songs were about! I thought: How can I be feeling what I recognize as the Spirit so strongly when I've just done something so abominable? The closer we got to Provo, the more the guilt set in. When I told my BYU bishop what I had done, he told me he would gladly pay for my therapy and to stay away from that predator! I started going to a clinical hypnotherapist:

"We're gonna have to work on your S.S.A."

"My what?"

"Same-sex attraction! You see, you have a compulsive sexual addiction. Do you look at pornography?"

"No! But once I got turned on watching a BYU football game."

"Tsk, tsk, tsk, tsk . . . S.S.A.! What about self-abuse?"

"Masturbation?"

"Shhh! Uh-huh."

"Once in a while . . . but I didn't even touch myself the first eighteen months of my mission."

"Self-abuse causes homosexuality."

"Then wouldn't *everyone* be gay?"

"Not necessarily. Have you ever been sexually abused by anyone other than yourself?"

"No."

"I knew it! Denial! Suppressed memories! Be brave. You can face this. Take some deep breaths. We are gonna find out who violated you as a child!"

And so we probed my early childhood, went down every path of memory we could. But we still couldn't uncover who made me gay.

"There is still a way. Give me permission to 'muscle test' you."



Am I boring you, St. Peter?

talked about Heavenly Mother. So she wrote this wonderful one-woman show called *Mother Wove the Morning*—sixteen women throughout history in search of the female face of God.

But her most famous work was her autobiography, *Goodbye, I Love You*. It told the story of her relationship with her gay husband, Gerald. After four children, they divorced but remained close friends. He was part of that first wave of men in San Francisco who contracted AIDS. Well, she brought him home to die. This was in the mid '80s when no one was talking about AIDS—let alone from the Mormon perspective. The book was published by Random House, and it put her on all the talk shows from *Oprah* to *Geraldo*. Their story was featured in *People* magazine. Their wedding picture even replaced Batboy on the cover of *Weekly World News*, “Wife Brings Gay Hubby Home to Die of AIDS!” It made her the patron saint of gay Mormon men and women.

So as we started to get more serious in our dating, I thought I’d read up on Em’s family. I started reading the book at eleven at night and finished it at four in the morning. I couldn’t put it down. From the first sentence, it was as if I were reading my own story. “Gerald shone.” When I got to the end, I just wept. What was I *thinking* dating this girl? What kind of joke were the gods playing on us? For what it was worth, Emily and I were falling in love!

I had to tell her what I had done in Young Ambassadors. It was all over with and repented of, but I had to tell her. When I said we needed to talk, she said, “I know where!” She took me to the park across the street from where she grew up as a little girl in Provo. The same house where Emily’s mother had found out that her husband had been cheating on her with other men. I told her—*everything*. But I was also confident it would never happen again. I left it in her hands and let her decide if she still wanted to continue to date. To my relief, she did! We went to pre-marriage counseling and talked it through. Our Church leaders assured us and gave us the okay.

Just before we got engaged, we flew to California to meet her mother. There I was sitting on the beach, with *the* Mormon matriarch with her signature short white hair and sparkling blue eyes. I told her I had been really moved by her book. She said, “Well, Steven, if there’s anything we need to talk about on that subject, now would be a good time to do it.”

I laughed, “Oh, no! Not me! I would never do that to Emily and you.” Emily was sitting next to me and watched on as I brushed her mom’s question aside. We had decided together, before we got there, *not* to tell her mother. We were going to write a different story. We had faith in this new reparative therapy, in the Church, and in ourselves. We could lick it! We were *supposed* to be together. We had fasted and prayed. We had all the right confirmations. We would succeed where the previous generation had failed. We would defy *Goodbye, I Love*

By rubbing her fingers together she could determine—by the change in texture of her skin—the answer to *anything*. She discovered that I had been aborted “one, two, three, four, five, six, seven—*seven* times before finally making it to Earth. That’s very traumatic for a fetus!” She also discovered (to her delight) that my father sexually abused me before I was one. I wanted a second opinion.

So I went to LDS Social Services to find a *real* psychologist. He proceeded to tell me all about Pavlov’s dog: “The dog would salivate just hearing a bell. Homosexuality is the same way. Just change the stimulus, and you’ll stop salivating. I used to get a hard-on every time I saw a motorcycle.” I decided *not* to go back.

I was then given a book, *Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality*. It said homosexuality was preventable and treatable. It gave me hope. My parents encouraged me. I got blessings from my dad. I was going to be okay.

After I felt God had forgiven me, I threw myself into school and dating girls. The girls I dated wanted to marry the butch MBA majors with the new SUVs. I didn’t even have a car. After one particularly devastating break-up, I said, “Lord, if I’m going to be single, just help me be chaste and send me good friends.” A year later, I met Emily Pearson. What a friend. What a catch! We could talk for hours on end—about anything. She was talented, gorgeous, funny, spiritual, cosmopolitan, *and* domestic. And because her mother, Carol Lynn Pearson, was a famous Mormon writer, she was what we call in Mormondom, *Mormon Royalty*.

Carol Lynn was the Eliza R. Snow of the twentieth century. Her poetry had sold hundreds of thousands of copies and had inspired a generation of converts. She wrote the children’s musical *My Turn On Earth*. I used to listen to it over and over as a child and just feel the Spirit. She was concerned that no one

You and write *Hello, I Love You*. I proposed on Mt. Timp-anogos. When we finally made it down the mountain, it was pitch black, and the ranger had towed my car.

We were married by the same General Authority who had married her parents in the same exact temple.

AFTER GRADUATING FROM BYU, we moved to Las Vegas (where I grew up). I was working at the university there. One morning, I was taking some books across campus to another department and discovered that the Bi-Gay-Lesbian-Transgender Association had put all these banners up: “National Coming Out Day. Show your pride by wearing purple.” I was disgusted. I thought, “How *dare* they infect this campus with their politics!” And then as I walked along, I noticed purple flyers taped to the sidewalks. “Ugh!” And then, looking down, I noticed *I was wearing a purple turtle-neck!* “Eek!” I looked around. Had anyone seen me? I raced home and changed my shirt.

Later that night, I was at my dad’s house and we were outside in the back. “Dad, I . . . I just don’t know if I can do this. I . . . I think I am *gay*.”

“Steven, you *can* do this. You are *not* *gay*!”

We became pregnant. We got the ultrasound, and we were having a boy. I thought, “Oh! How can *I* be a father to a *boy*? I don’t know how to do this!” I wasn’t able to be like (*Sings from Carousel*), “*My boy Bill, I will see that he’s named after me!*” But I just committed to loving him. Every night when I would come home from work, I would pick up my sleeping son from his crib and just hold him. How I loved holding my children.

I decided to get a master of fine arts in acting (whatever that is). I had to be selective about which program to attend. They’d have to be tolerant of my being Mormon and *straight*. The University of Connecticut gave me a full ride. We weren’t in Happy Valley anymore. We were in New England. And the religion practiced on campus was *Humanism*. I didn’t want to believe I was human. I hated humans. They were so . . . *human*. I was *Mormon*. And above all, dang it, I was a *straight* Mormon!

I had to navigate treacherous waters. All the classes seemed to blend into one long three-year course: postmodern-existential-iconoclastic-deconstructionist funk. But on top of it all, my S.S.A. got more intense. I thought I’d conquer it by trying something I had never done before: *pornographia heterosexualis*. I hadn’t read or been exposed to *any* pornography growing up. Certainly not gay porn, let alone the *appropriate* porn. I thought about it for a while and finally got up the courage to prove I was straight. I went out at age twenty-seven and bought my first *Playboy*! I took it home and secretly pulled it out one night. There I was, masturbating with all my heart to this voluptuous blonde in the centerfold. It seemed to take *forever*. Until that blonde began to look a lot like . . . Jimmy Flinders.

Now my theater department wanted to do *Angels in America*. I begged them not to do it. I just winced when I read it. First of all, I was a Republican. Reagan was Moses in my family. I was sure to be cast as the Mormon who ends up

leaving his wife for another man. And my pregnant wife was sure to be there opening night! So, luckily for me, they decided to do a new adaptation of the musical *Hair* instead, (in which they took everything Vietnam out and put everything HIV *in*). And they thought, “Wouldn’t it be clever if we took that wholesome Mormon boy and cast him as Woof, a Catholic gay activist? Let’s have him sing ‘White Boys’ and ‘Sodomy!’”

So rather than wage another fight with the head of the department, I thought I’d show them what this wholesome Mormon boy could do. Then, like the good M.F.A. actor I was being trained to be, I decided to do a little character research on the *homoerotic*. I went and rented a male strip video. It was the closest I would go to gay porn. One night, when Emily and the kids were visiting her mother in California, I put it in. As soon as I pressed play, I found myself pre-cumming all over the place. I was leaking out of control. A woman had never done that to me before. *Never!* What do you do with *that*? (I don’t mean you personally, St. Peter. I mean spiritually, not temporally . . . er . . . I mean figuratively, not literally . . . er . . . not . . . never mind.) That’s when I knew I was really in a bind. If you took a *Cosmo* and *Men’s Muscle & Fitness* and put them in front of me, there was no question which magazine cover my body would point to.

So I did the show. The reviews simply said, “Fales’s performance is a howl!” Each night at the curtain call, I felt this rush of electric authenticity. “Good Morning, Starshine!” It was so *freeing*. But it was so scary. I had *way* too much at stake to be feeling this free. So after the production, I slammed the door on exploring my sexuality any further. After all, we were expecting our second child—and I was the Providence Rhode Island Stake music chairperson.

Shortly after another graduation, the choice often became either commute into New York for auditions or buy diapers. One day, since it was a callback, I scraped together the spare change and drove two-and-a-half hours into the city. Then, after the audition, I decided to go really off budget and bought a half-price ticket to the play that had just won the Tony Award. (A professional actor needs to keep up on the scene, even though he’s paying off student loans and supporting a wife and two children!) I deserved a good Wednesday matinee before I drove back to the hard, cold realities of being a waiter in Connecticut.

I went in, sat down, and dived into the program. And this *guy* came and sat right next to me. He was so good-looking—so open and friendly. He had this great energy.

“Altoid?”

“Do I need one?”

“No.”

“Sure.”

We started talking. I didn’t mention my wife and children like I usually did. I wanted to see what would happen if I didn’t hide. There was an instant connection. It was so hard to focus on this dark Irish play when I was so lit up by this dirty blond.

At intermission, I decided to move up to some better seats that were vacant. I asked him if he wanted to, as well. To my

delight (and horror), he said, “Yes.” We lingered a bit after the show, then walked to Times Square. He asked if I wanted to go meet a *friend* that worked at the *hotel*. I just played naive. “No. I’ve got to drop these resumes off at my manager’s on Christopher Street.” So we wished each other well and shook hands with a little more intention than normal. We went in opposite directions.

When I got to the 42nd Street subway, I turned around and I could see him looking for me through the crowd. I thought, “Joseph ran! He left his garments in Potiphar’s wife’s hand and ran.” So I did—to the end of the platform—and turned my collar up and my back to the crowd. I was so relieved when the subway finally came. I got off at Christopher Street (where the Gay Rights Movement had been born), and he came bounding up from underground. “Steven! I don’t usually do this. But I’ve never met anyone like you! Ever! Here’s my address and phone number. If you’re ever in L.A. . . .”

“I’m sorry, I’m married with children. I’m flattered, but I can’t reciprocate.”

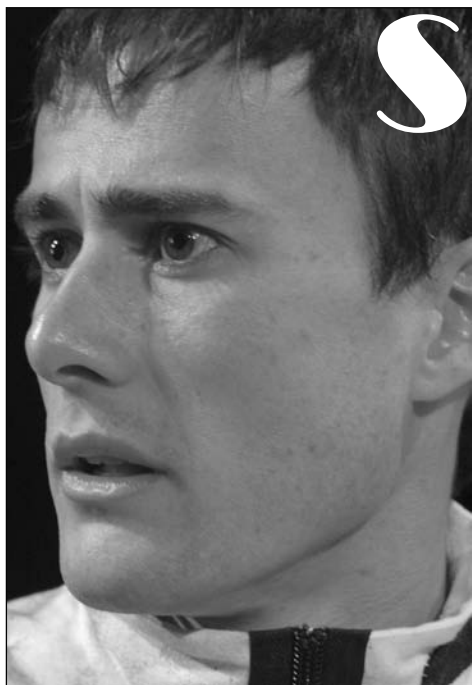
“Oh. (Pause) Well, if you’re ever in L.A. . . . I’ll be staying at the Hilton ‘til Friday.”

I took the show ticket with his name and address on it. “Thanks.” After I saw my manager, I walked back to the parking garage. Like a good husband, I tore up the ticket, hopped in the minivan, and hightailed it back to Connecticut. On the Merritt Parkway, I couldn’t stop thinking about him. Fantasizing. Blown away at his response. These close encoun-

This scared me into going back into therapy. I felt I had just put a Band-Aid on this issue and it was now time to buckle down and eradicate it once and for all. The theory behind reparative therapy was that homosexuality was caused by an overbearing mother and a failed relationship with an emotionally absent father resulting in an impaired sense of masculine identity. By developing close friendships with salient, straight men, masculinity would increase, and the “reparative” drive to fill the masculine deficit by merging sexually with another man would decrease or disappear altogether.

I went shopping for the best possible therapist. I looked in the back of a guide put out by Focus on the Family called *Setting the Record Straight*. It listed the National Association of Research and Therapy of Homosexuality, or NARTH. I called the number in California, and they gave me a list of psychologists in my area that administered the kind of therapy I was looking for. After interviewing in person with three local therapists, I decided to do phone therapy with the president of NARTH himself. I liked his Brooklyn accent and his gay jokes. I was willing to do or say whatever he wanted me to. The cure would cost me only the long-distance phone bill and \$135 for each 45-minute session.

He said I needed to be involved with an ex-gay men’s support group. So I drove an hour twice a month to HOPE ministries in Springfield, Massachusetts. All these married men, sitting around overcoming their same-sex attraction—together. I never missed a meeting.



on, we need you. We need you to cry and fill this gorge so we can swim across.

ters were happening to me all the time. It was following me wherever I went. I was tormented. Why wouldn’t it leave me alone? I wasn’t cruising. I just wanted to see a matinee. “No! I do not want to be gay!” I hit the steering

wheel. “No! No! God, why me? Why! No! No! No! No! No! I do not want to do this to my family!” I got home late. Emily was cool and went upstairs. I was so lonely. I thought, “I just need good friends. That’s all he has to be.” I stayed downstairs and called every Hilton in Manhattan—‘til I found him. We just talked about Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*. But I had crossed the line.

My therapist suggested I go to a “warrior retreat” in Pennsylvania. You know, men hugging trees and beating drums in the forest? At the end, they had an initiation ceremony. It was freezing cold this one night as they led me and the others blindfolded into a lodge. I could smell the sage smoke and hear chanting and beating drums. When they took off my blindfold, there was every man who had ever taken the course dancing around this bonfire—naked! I was called up before the Elders. They had me take off *my* clothes. They gave me a new name: Buck! They eagerly congratulated me on getting my balls back.

My therapist gave me a list of books to read. One book said that real men shouldn’t drink sissy drinks. That you should have hard liquor on the rocks. I didn’t drink, so that wouldn’t be a problem. (You Catholics have all the fun! We can’t even drink Coca-Cola!) I re-read *The Miracle of Forgiveness*. It talked of mastering yourself. It quotes Plato, “The first and greatest victory is to conquer yourself; to be conquered by yourself is of all things most shameful and vile.” I agreed, but wasn’t Plato gay?

Above all, the books suggested I needed to build straight, salient male friendships. I was the home teacher to a man who was a football coach at UCONN. He didn't know it, but he was going to be my salient male. One night I just popped over, like home teachers do, to see if he needed anything from the Church or if I could do anything for his family. He was watching "plays of the day" on ESPN. We just sat there and watched . . . and watched . . . and watched as I waited . . . and waited . . . and waited to turn straight.

Under the direction of my therapist, I wrote a letter to my mother. In it, I blamed her for my homosexuality, and I told her not only to stay out of my life, but my son's as well. I was afraid she would turn Christian gay, too. My son couldn't figure out why his beloved Grandma Butterfly seemed to disappear.

It came down to "pay rent or pay for therapy." I finally broke down and went to the bishop. I had paid tithing and fast offerings my whole life. Could the Church please help me pay for this therapy to help prevent me from turning gay and keep my eternal family together? The bishop didn't know much about what I was dealing with, so I bought him books to educate him. He never asked how the therapy was going. He just cut the checks.

I was seeing my Catholic therapist under the sound science of NARTH. I had my evangelical Christian ex-gay men's support group and my neo-pagan warrior community. Everything was financed by Mormon money. You see, it takes a village to make one straight!

WITH MY MOTHER out of the way and my new straight friend, my own superhuman strength, and moving back to Utah to join Evergreen, I was on my way to heterosexual wholeness. I was acting more straight than ever. I went in my closet and threw everything out that might fit tightly or was purple. I stopped taking an interest in any activity or skill that had a gay association. I stopped working out so I wouldn't be attractive and so I wouldn't be attracted to men doing squats at the gym. I started listening to Michael McLean instead of Bernadette Peters at Carnegie Hall. I lowered my voice. Steven became *Steve*. I was becoming this tightly coiled, homophobic *homosexual*—with no sense of humor. They said *this* was my true self. But doesn't your true self smile? And shouldn't my true self find my stunning wife—who looked like Nicole Kidman—or *any* woman attractive?

After all the time and money and energy, I still had to fantasize about a man to ejaculate while making love to Emily. That was our *reality*. The therapy wasn't helping. We both knew it. We didn't talk about it. We just pressed forward. I took my temple covenants seriously. Especially when I looked at our children: (*Sings*)

*Families can be together forever,
Through Heavenly Father's plan.
I always want to be with my own family,
And the Lord has shown me how I can.
The Lord has shown me how I can.*

So, when we got to Utah, I decided to join Evergreen International. That's the unofficial ministry for gay Mormons struggling to overcome same-sex attraction. I wanted to be their poster child. They should call it *EverQueen*. I had never seen more rainbows, earrings, or tight jeans in my life! I played the piano for the opening song, and we had a devotional on sexual addiction. Then we divided into groups where everyone told their titillating stories of sex-behind-their-wife's-back that week. One guy hadn't been in a year. This other guy leaned over to me and said, "Last time he was here he was caught giving this other guy a blow job right here on the church grounds!" (You think *you're* disgusted, St. Peter!) I left the meeting *alone* and vowed never to return. I was far too advanced in my recovery for this crowd. And way too busy to join their basketball team.

The annual NARTH convention got too many threats to be held in Los Angeles, so it had been rescheduled for Salt Lake City. "Go straight. Go NARTH!" I was asked to be a panelist for a session on men who had overcome their same-sex attraction. (Dr. Laura was going to be accepting an award.) When I saw my therapist in person for the first time, I went over to him and touched his arm. "Hi, Doctor. I'm Steven Fales."

"Oh, hello. You look skinny. Steve, we need yoose to help with the cause. We need men who have succeeded in therapy to take part in this liberal study that's tryin' to discredit our work. Don't tell them *we* referred you. Just tell them you heard about the study from . . . a *friend*."

So I called this enemy doctor in New York. He asked me all these questions. I told him all the *right* answers (inflating the truth when necessary).

"Do you feel isolated?"

"Of course not. Maybe if I lived in Chelsea or on the Castro, but . . ." But I was lying. I was isolated in *Zion*. I had never felt more alone in my life. I can't tell you what it cost me to lie.

So I had a choice to make. The ancient Greeks said, "Know thyself." Shakespeare said, "To thine own self be true." And in the Mormon temple ceremony it said that "through their experience, they will come to know." I was tired of theorizing and philosophizing. I had to *viscerally* know who I was. And so I chose knowledge—like Eve. I partook of the fruit, ignorance fell from mine eyes, as I waited to be cast out of the Garden.

WHEN IT BLEW up with Emily, I called my best friend from high school. He was straight and knew I was struggling. He was heading out the door but said he would be sure to call me the next day. He never called. Who was checking in on me? My lovers—and not to have sex. "Steven, I really hope you and Emily can work this out. Is there anything I can do?" The straight men in my life at that time just weren't there for me. This fact was driven home at that very moment in my trial by one of the high councilors. He had fallen asleep.

Then they wanted to ask me a few final questions.

What was my mission like? Hard. But wonderful. I went because I believed that "Christ takes the slums out of people and people take themselves out of the slums." I loved Portugal. I was known as the elder who played the piano and could sing:

(Sings “How Great Thou Art” in Portuguese)

*Canta minha alma
Então a ti, Senhor.
Grandioso es tu,
Grandioso es tu.*

I baptized a lot of people. But my greatest accomplishment came in helping one particular companion. He was gender-disoriented. He was gayer than I was. He wasn't at all happy, and one night, we talked about it. Just talked! We didn't kiss, or fall in love, or have sex. And later, when we'd see each other at mission conferences, we'd give each other a big hug, look each other in the eye and just . . . *know*. And at the end of my mission, when you have that final interview with the mission president, I offered the closing prayer in Portuguese. All I could say through my tears was, “*Nosso Pãe, Sou grato por minha missão.*” Heavenly Father, thank you for my mission.

What was my most spiritual experience? My wedding day. Kneeling across the altar with Emily. I was crying through the whole thing. I felt God had given me such a precious gift. Who else would marry a gay man? I never wanted to hurt her. I intended to be with her forever.

Is being in the arts causing my homosexuality? I only sleep with doctors, lawyers, and cowboys—never other artists.

Have I ever had sex with a minor? No. I'm into men.

Have I ever sexually abused my son? I was as good a father as anyone in that room. Did they ask that question to straight men? Did they ask if they had ever sexually abused their daughters? I looked them right in the eye and said, “No.”

Then they asked me if there was anything else I'd like to say. I answered, “Yes,” then told them about a dream I had.

I dreamed I was on the farm in Wyoming where my father grew up. There the land is flat, except for Heart Mountain standing alone, like a bear tooth, in the distance. A dry, harsh country, where summer is short and crops of sugar beets and pinto beans need irrigation to survive. I walked into this abandoned barn filled with cobwebs. In the corner was this dusty wooden chest filled with tack: saddles, halters, leather bridles. I opened the chest and picked up one of the reins, and instantly found myself riding across the high desert plains on horseback. My horse was magnificent. We were galloping at this exhilarating pace. I soon noticed I had been joined by my father on his horse and my grandpa on his, and then his father and his father's father. And soon I was riding with multitudes of my ancestors, racing ahead, leaving a dust cloud behind us that extended for miles. I didn't know where we were going or why we were going so fast, but it felt amazing to be part of this



Steven, I know who you are, and I am so much bigger than this Church.

family of fathers and sons all united with this incredible sense of urgency to get *some-where!*

Then all of a sudden, we came to an abrupt stop. Just a foot away was the deepest, widest gorge I'd ever seen. It reminded me of the Grand Canyon. It seemed a matter of life and death that we get across, but there seemed to be no possible way. Then one of the men, who

seemed to have the authority to speak for the group, got off his horse and walked over to me. “Son, we need you. We need you to cry and fill this gorge so we can swim across. We gotta git there. We've worked and sweat our tears dry and have nothin' left. Will you fill this gorge for us?” And so I did. I cried and cried and the canyon filled with warm, sweet, salty tears—for sweat. Sweat for tears! We swam across. It was green on the other side. And there were my children.

After I finished, I was asked to leave the room so they could discuss and pray. “Emily'll be well provided for. She can do better than stay with that unrepentant homosexual.” I knew they were not trying to talk her into working things out. At the same time, I knew some Church leader somewhere was counseling some gay young man to go ahead and get married. Another daughter in Zion would be sacrificed to straighten her husband out. And when would the next teenager come home after the Sodom and Gomorrah lesson in seminary and try to commit suicide?

They brought me back after ten minutes. The stake president said that they had decided to excommunicate me. Then he proceeded to pronounce my sentence in a formal declaration they are required to read to everyone. I just closed my eyes, folded my arms, and bowed my head. His voice became full and resonant, “This is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It is the Kingdom of God on Earth. . . .” I can't remember all that was said; I just remember how I felt. I didn't expect to feel this way. *His* voice faded out, and a warm feeling of peace and truth washed over me as *another* voice said, “Steven, I know who you are, and I am so much bigger than this Church.” (Pause) I knew God loved me.

When it was all over—it took three hours—the high councilmen lined up at the door to shake my hand. I had just been kicked out of the Church, yet they were all smiles and eager to wish me good luck. One brother gave me a big hug and said,

“You’re going to be okay!” Another brother just shook my hand and sobbed. I noticed he’d been crying throughout the whole Church court. I couldn’t help wondering why.

That night, as I slept again in the basement, I just basked in that warm glow. The feeling continued throughout the entire week. Until the letter from the Church declaring me officially excommunicated came in the mail. There it was in black and white. I was excommunicated for “homosexuality.” I got so angry. I couldn’t figure out why. Then I realized it was because *I was excommunicated for something the Church said didn’t exist.*

The words homosexual, lesbian and gay are adjectives to describe particular thoughts, feelings, or behaviors. We should refrain from using these words as nouns to identify particular conditions or specific persons. It is wrong to denote a condition, because this implies that a person is consigned . . . to a circumstance in which he or she has no choice.¹

I hadn’t been excommunicated for adultery or immorality or heresy or just wanting someone male to hold me in his arms. I was excommunicated for a small but quintessential part of who I *am*. I was tried and excommunicated as a noun even though I was supposed to be just a modifier. I wanted to sue for malpractice, but how do you tell God his chosen, anointed servant has his parts of speech mixed up?

THEY’RE BACK? WHAT do you mean they can’t find her? How hard can it be to find the Queen Bee herself?! Do you mind if I try? (*Steps on red carpet*) Ouch! Hot! Hot! Hot! I know! *My kids!* Go tell my kids I’m here. They can go find Heavenly Mother for me. Christian’s tall. Blond. Smart. Tara’s gorgeous. Dark hair. Clever. They’re both witty and talented and have my brown eyes. Please hurry! I really don’t have all eternity.

I’d rather be excommunicated a hundred times than have to repeat the day we told our children we were getting divorced. It was Emily, Tara, Christian, and me. I didn’t know how to explain something like this, but I still was the dad. I felt it was my duty to break the news. They were too young to know everything, and yet I didn’t want to blow it off like nothing was happening. (I knew from experience what it felt like to have your parents break up.) I decided to make the incision swift and clean. “Mommy and Daddy are getting divorced.” My son’s head shot to attention. He was only five, but he knew exactly what that meant. He put his hands to his ears. “No! No! No!” He ran to his room. Em and I followed. He was in there praying, “Please, Heavenly Father. No. They’ll ruin my life. They’ll ruin my life. No! No! No! No! No!” He echoed the same words I yelled as I hit the steering wheel during my Gethsemane on the Merritt Parkway.

As the divorce got closer, I got confused and scared. I didn’t know how to be alone, and I didn’t want to give up “hugging time.” Emily and I shared a tradition her parents had started. You know how early kids wake up? Well, we would try to sleep in—trying to put off their needs as long as we could. Then, when we couldn’t put it off any longer, we’d yell out, “HUGGING

TIME!” In our two children would run and jump on the bed. We would then hug and kiss and snuggle—all warm and safe and happy. How many gay men get to experience that? Let alone watch their children being born. Couldn’t I give it all up for the sake of hugging time? I was going to fight for hugging time!

I turned it all on Emily. It was *her* fault! *She* never wore lingerie! *She* wouldn’t watch the better-sex videos I ordered from the back of GQ. Emily knew going into this marriage it might come to this. And now that I’ve finally cracked, she’s going to just throw me out?! How *dare* she watch *Will & Grace* and laugh when I was trying to change! She had failed me!

I got in touch with the Church’s main psychologist. “Steven, if I could just lower your I.Q. by ten points, I could save this marriage.” He said I could still change. I confronted Emily.

“Go ahead, Emily. Go be single like your mother! Go be Carol Lynn Pearson. You’ve got blood on your hands. I want to work this out. You’re just a wimp!”

But no, Emily was not responsible for my homosexuality. She wasn’t meant to be an Evergreen daughter *and* an Evergreen wife. She deserved to have someone ravish her in the bedroom, to celebrate her femininity the way only a straight man could. Emily deserved to have her life back. She deserved to smile again. And so did I. But at the last minute, I didn’t want to sign the papers. I wanted more time. It was all happening too fast. So I refused. When Emily threatened me with alimony, I ran to get my signature notarized. As I handed Emily the papers I said, “Anything I ever do will come second to loving you.”

I didn’t want my kids to miss me, so I left as many things as I could. I planted daffodil bulbs all over the yard so that in the spring, they would come up and my kids would hopefully feel my presence. We went on one more family outing before I moved out. We went up to Sundance and rode the chair lift together. “That’s Mt. Timpanogos! That’s where you proposed to Mommy, right, Daddy?” When I moved out, Emily and the kids were away for the afternoon. As I shut the door, I just held the doorknob. I couldn’t take my hand off. I had tried so hard. I wasn’t straight enough. “Bless them. Oh, bless them.” When I let go, I knew it was over.

OUR DIVORCE WAS easy. We didn’t need an attorney. It cost \$150, and it took only three weeks to process. She got the house, the minivan, the prints, the piano, the furniture, the CD collection, the books—and all our mutual friends. I left with all the debt, child support, two suitcases, a box—and all the guilt. Emily had come to life in Utah, but I had to leave. I decided to stay in Salt Lake through the fall to help my kids transition. After Christmas, with a one-way ticket, sixty dollars in my pocket, and my smile—I moved to New York City.

(*Steven unzips the jumpsuit and steps out to reveal a sexy, black, tight T-shirt with “Mormon Boy” in rhinestones and tight black clubbing pants with “I Love UT” on rear pocket. Techno music plays, disco lights. It’s gay night at the famous Roxy nightclub.*)

“Hi, New York! I’m here! Validate me!” (*Steven dances wildly*)



Hi, New York! I'm here! Validate me!

like a go-go dancer. Then he meets and leaves with a series of men in a balletic montage.)

“Hi. Sure. Vodka and tonic. Thank you. Really? I’m sure you say that to all the girls. Hot yourself. Where do

you work out? Me, too. Hi, Chuck. *Steve*. Texas! Utah. No way, my dad’s a doctor! Upper West Side. You? Closer. Shall we go?”

“Vodka and tonic. I’m sure you say that to all the girls. Hi, Jeff. *Steve*. Seattle! Utah. Shall we go?”

“Vodka and tonic. Hi, stud. Utah. Shall we go?”

“Vodka. To go!”

(Club scene fades out. Steven makes a series of calls.) “Hi, this is Steve. I just wanted to call and say, ‘Hi’ and that I had a great time with you last night. You are so hot. I’d love to get together again. Like you said, maybe this time we could eat out. I know I gave you my number, but just in case, it’s (212) DO-ME-NOW. Hope you’re doing well. Give me a call. *Ciao*.”

“Hi, it’s Steven. I don’t know if you got my last message, but it would be great to see you again. Hope you are doing well. Give me a call. *Ciao!*”

“Hi, it’s me. Give me a call. *Ciao*.”

“Hi, it’s me—*again*. I’m a little confused. You said to give you a call and we’d go out sometime. I thought we really had a connection. Or was that just the ecstasy talking? I don’t let just anyone *do* what you did to me. So do give me a call, okay? Even if it’s to say that you’re too busy. Or have a boyfriend. Or a husband. Or a wife! Hope you’re doing well. Give me a call, damn it. *Ciao*.”

(Techno music plays even louder.) “I gave up hugging time for this? NOOOOOO!!!! JIMMY, WHERE ARE YOU?!!!” *(music and lights out.)*

SORRY, ST. PETER. I forgot about the dress code. Do you want me to put the jumpsuit back on? Whew! Thanks. It’s so hot.

I went down to the Chelsea Health Clinic to get my free test results. When I got there, the counselor flippantly said, “I’m sorry, yours are the only ones that isn’t come back.”

“That means I’m positive, doesn’t it? They’re re-testing it because I’m *positive!*”

“Not necessarily, *amigo*. *Mirá*, calm down! Come back tomorrow!”

That was the longest night of my life. I had to take two Excedrin PM to knock me out. I didn’t have anyone to go with me the next day, so I took this picture of my kids. They’re all I had in the world. I got on the subway and just sat there holding them. When I got there the counselor came in, and I just stared in their beautiful brown eyes. “Don’t die, Daddy. We need you.” When I was ready, I said, “Okay. What is it?” *(Pause)* I was negative.

At the pier dance, after my first Gay Pride parade, I officially declared the end of my gay adolescence. I couldn’t believe how many of us there were. *Thousands*. Did God make this many mistakes? When it got dark, they set off fireworks with the national anthem playing. We all stopped to watch arm in arm. Me and all my gay brothers and sisters. Right there, I got an impression to call Emily on my cell. “Hi, Em. Em, your dad wanted me to call you and wish you a happy Gay Pride.”

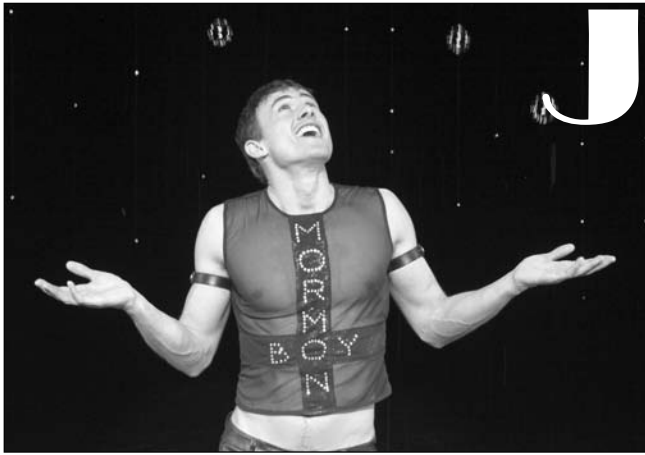
She started to cry. “Thank you, Steven. *(Pause)* Thank you.”

I was recently re-reading *Goodbye, I Love You* down in Telestial Central Park. When I finished it, I wept even harder than before. What were we thinking? Except for the AIDS part, Emily and I had relived her parents’ story, sometimes word for word—just on opposite coasts. Why did this have to happen? I take one look at our children, and I know the answer.

You want to borrow my handkerchief, Brother St. Peter? Can I call you brother, St. Peter? It’s okay, really. Everything’s gonna be just fine. *(Steven looks up to see his children have arrived.)*

KIDS! WOW, YOU look great! How are you? How’s the party? Yeah, Elton John’s a good friend. Heavenly Mother invited me, but I guess she forgot to put my name on the list. But I really only came to see you guys. Brother St. Peter, could you . . . uh . . . could you leave us alone? Just for a few minutes. Thanks. ‘Preciate ya. *(St. Peter leaves.)*

How are Grandma Blossom and Grandma Butterfly? Good! And your mother? Great! Hey, I thought maybe sometime you guys could get a special day pass and come down and visit me. Your Grandpa Gerald is there, too, and all your other wicked relatives. It’s really hot, but it just feels like another circuit party in Miami. Do you still know your Shakespeare? “Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow. . . .” Terrific! Hey, I brought the ABBA CD’s! I snuck them through the check-in. I thought they’d be a nice change from *Afterglow*. I know it’s been tough. I’m sorry I was so . . . *human*. I just hope you don’t think you were a mistake or that I abandoned you. I brought you these! *(Holds up daffodils)* I guess all I really wanted to say was hello . . . and . . . I love you.



Just four simple letters. How could I forget? I knew the password the whole time!

Oh, my gosh! *That's it!* That's the password! Just four simple letters. "L-O-V-E." How could I forget? How could I be so stupid? I knew the password the whole time! Quick! Enter it in the computer before St. Peter gets back!

(Disco ball goes and ABBA music plays "Angel Eyes." Steven steps on the carpet, but this time it does not burn his feet. Standing now inside the Pearly Gates as bubbles fall from Heaven.)

Shall we dance?

(After dancing with his children, Steven looks up and sees someone from his past.)

Jimmy!

(Blackout)

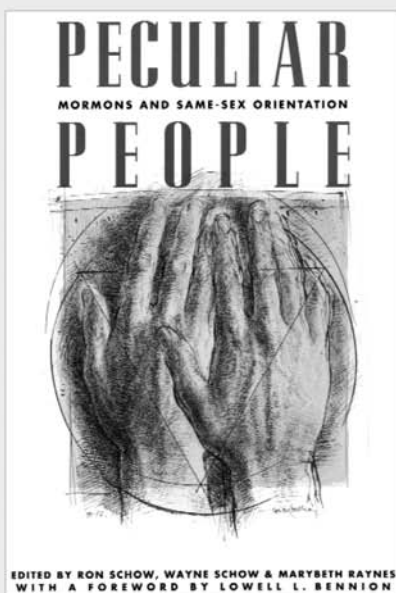
NOTE

1. Dallin H. Oaks, "Same-Gender Attraction," *Ensign* (Oct. 1995): 7.

STEVEN FALES bases his career in New York City where he has performed Off-Broadway and done his oxy-Mormon comedy at *Caroline's*, *Stand-Up NY*, and *Don't Tell Mama*. Regional credits include *Pioneer Theatre Company*, *Sundance Theatre*, *Utah Shakespearean Festival*, *Connecticut Repertory Theatre*, *New Harmony Theatre*, *Stages St. Louis*, and others. He holds a B.F.A. in music/dance/theatre from *BYU* and an M.F.A. in acting from the *University of Connecticut*. In addition to acting and writing, he is a public speaker. Steven is an active member of *Affirmation and Gamofites (Gay Mormon Fathers)* and can be reached through his website, <www.MormonBoy.com>.

Photos by KEITH JOCHIM

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PECULIAR PEOPLE: MORMONS AND SAME-SEX ORIENTATION
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Lowell L. Bennion, foreword
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