

## TOUCHSTONES

## STAYING / LEAVING

STAYING FOR  
THE SACRED

I am well aware of most of the controversial issues in the church, including the Book of Abraham, DNA, Book of Mormon historicity, and polyandry. Church books lined the shelves of my childhood home: from Maxwell, Nibley, Quinn, and Compton to Will Bagley and Simon Southerton. Some issues bother me more than others. I could not support the Church on Prop. 8. I will probably never understand in this life why we are discouraged from praying to our Heavenly Mother, or why women are no longer allowed to bless the sick. I could go on.

I occasionally receive suggestions that if I have concerns or disagreements, I should leave the faith. Others may think I should try harder to procure answers for my questions. I have pondered the first option, and I tried out the second for a while. Neither has been even remotely satisfying.

I was raised by a saint of a mother and an intellectual yet very spiritual father. On hunting trips, my father would sometimes shoot his buffalo in the name of Allah (in Turkish) so our good Muslim friends could enjoy it with us. As bishop, he helped countless families regardless of legal status, blessed a neighbor's sick cat, and was a safe haven for gay members to turn to. My par-

ents left their ward a few years ago to attend a Hispanic branch where they can do a lot more than debate gospel minutiae in Sunday School. They taught me by word and example that serving and loving others always trumps theology.

As a priest, I loved blessing the sacrament. It was probably the first time I felt a significant sense of the sacred—it was intoxicating. Those intense feelings took me completely by surprise because, like many teenagers, I did not think I was worthy. I often felt a sense of awe watching the RMs come home. I wanted what they had. My father called it “spiritual muscle.” I didn't feel that strength when I began my mission, but talking with my parents when they came to pick me up two years later made me realize that by the end, it was pouring out of me. Scriptures rolled off my tongue, but I had also never felt more humble.

The Book of Mormon has a special place in my life. One experience reading King Benjamin started what became a small series of nearly indescribable positive spiritual experiences. I had been taught often in seminary that if you pray, you can find out for yourself. I had prayed, but didn't feel anything for a long time. Then one day, without asking, it came.

I enjoy the temple ordinances—I expect that they will continue to evolve, and I look forward to it. I see Christ and relationships in everything about the temple. It can be

different—even awkward—at first, but looking deeper provides inspiration and insight that stabilizes my life. My belief in Christ is very Mormon. He inspires me to goodness. He is my answer to the question of evil, tragedy, and suffering. He unconditionally loves everyone. His revelations are in the Church, in books, in the rocks, and I hope in my dissertation in a few years.

Some stuff about the Church bothers me, but more of it inspires me: eternal marriage, growth and progression, innate goodness in everyone—they give meaning to my life and family. They have been the source of experiences and growth that I cannot reject or ignore. So here I am, staying for the sacred—in the Church, good and bad, best and worst, awkward and inspiring.

ADAM FISHER  
*Spokane, Washington*

ALL THAT IS  
LEFT BEHIND

I have a rich family heritage of both leaving and staying. My thoughts often turn to that great-great-grandfather who left wife and two daughters in Sweden. Just left them behind because they wouldn't go with him to America to await the end of the world in a safe place among the Saints. There's a great-granduncle who left behind “a fallen prophet” to continue practicing “the Principle.” And a great-grandfather, grandson of Brigham, who, overcome with grief, just checked out—haunting the poolrooms and pubs of Salt Lake City. They still haunt my mind. Leaving seemed the right choice for them. It was a price they felt compelled to pay.

In the past, I have chosen to follow the example and admonitions of those who stay. They say staying is good; the price of leaving, too great. I was taught to always honor the sacrifices of those who leave the world to join the Church, as if the price of what was left behind is virtually inconsequential in comparison to the reward. It was a compelling value proposition. And so I agreed to let the mysteries of those who reject the reward remain in that box under the bed where dust bunnies play tricks.

But then fate and I pulled out the box, chased away the dust, and wept with those who left.

Of all the choices in life, leaving must be the hardest. By nature, we want to honor our people and traditions. We want to stay, and that wanting makes the choice easier. I

**T**OUCHSTONES is a SUNSTONE section that debuted in the December 2005 issue. It was inspired by “Readers Write” in The SUN magazine. TOUCHSTONES topics are intentionally broad in order to give room for personal expression. Writing style is not as important as the contributor's thoughtfulness, humor, and sincerity. SUNSTONE reserves the right to edit pieces, but contributors will have the opportunity to approve or disapprove of editorial changes prior to publication.

To submit a reflection, please send it typed and double-spaced to SUNSTONE, 343 North Third West, Salt Lake City, Utah, 84103. Electronic submissions can be sent via email to Touchstones editor Cheryl Bruno at: [cbruno@hotmail.com](mailto:cbruno@hotmail.com). Due to space limitations, submissions should be kept somewhere around 400 words, but we are willing to make exceptions for exceptional pieces. Please submit right away for upcoming topics.

*Upcoming Topics:* BIBLES  
HE SAID/SHE SAID: POLITICS

wanted to please my parents, so I chose to attend church as a child. I wanted to honor the wishes and judgment of my elders, so I chose to be baptized. I wanted to be accepted by my people, to do what is right before my God, so I chose to serve a mission and to marry in the temple. I wanted to stay, and so for most of my life, I made the corresponding choices. And those choices were comforting.

Then the comfort went away. There's not much left at this point but to be true to the whole story. Leaving *and* staying. Because for every member not born into the Church, leaving is at least half of the story, the most traumatic, the price they have to pay for the flawed pearl they now hold. It's time for me to honor the memory of those who left and the full value of what they left behind. To hold it in my hands and contemplate: Were they right? Am I wrong?

Yes, I'm in the process of leaving. The threads of my faith have become as bare as the threads of my garments. Yet I still wear them. The last few threads are like steel that bind my heart to those who stay.

I have not found a reason sharp enough to cut these last threads. So I remain in the process of leaving, unwilling to pay the price asked by my great-great-grandfather's God.

MATT ELGGREN  
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## LEAVING TO STAY

I chose Palio's, a small Italian restaurant, to break the news to my dearest friend that my husband would soon be transferred to Hawaii and that we'd be leaving before the summer ended.

She'd been raised on Oahu, very near where we would be transferred. Over the years, she's told me stories of her growing up that made it very plain that those friendly Hawaiians who place a lei around your neck when your plane arrives are not the same Hawaiians who fill the public schools. Her worst story is of being encircled by native classmates who, because of her pale skin, brutally punched and kicked her and called her names while a teacher, an islander, walked past, chuckling. I knew that Kill Haole Day was a state "holiday" on which mainlanders should take cover.

I have a seven-year-old second-grader. A blond.

"Lisa," she began, "this is what you need to know." She began rattling off information I would need to protect my child. Survival advice.



I knew that my husband could refuse the transfer, but he'd been at his present duty station, a federal prison southeast of Dallas, for seventeen years and had had his fill. He reaches his retirement mark in a handful of months, but the mortgage on our home prevents him from separating from the Public Health Service. He thought a change of environment, especially to a beautiful setting, might make it easier for him to keep his shoulder to the wheel.

So I told myself I could home school. My son and I would hop the islands and have educational adventures at every turn. We'd bond. It'd be good for my husband and, therefore, my family.

But no matter how rosy a scenario I conned myself with, I always came back to the image of a knock-kneed Maryann being kicked and punched and ridiculed as a teacher walked away.

Then, one evening, I climbed as usual onto a chair so I could pray with my seven-year-old as he lay in his loft bed. He folded his arms, but before his hand rested above his elbow, he rolled his fingers, extending one at a time like an infant. And it struck me how fragile he is, how small. When we finished praying, he whispered, "Mom, I don't want to move to Hawaii. My friends are here."

That night in bed I prayed, "Father, I don't want to go to Hawaii. My friends are here."

I slept fitfully. Then around four a.m., I woke with a clear thought in my head.

Cash out. Sell the house with the mortgage and buy a smaller home that will leave you with little or no debt. Free your husband. Give your family their friends, their good schools, their security.

So I began to Google. When my husband woke up, I handed him MLS flyers for several homes within the boundary of my son's elementary school. He looked through them, then looked again, lingering each time over one particular home.

"I have a good feeling about this one," he said.

We drove by each house that night, saving that one for last. We were charmed by the home's exterior and arranged for our family to view it the next evening. No sooner had the door opened than our family issued a collective gasp. We were home. Within forty-eight hours of my son's post-prayer declaration, we had a contract on a house a mile away from where we live now. We close on it next week, and we will leave this place—yet stay right here at home.

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