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BORROWED TROUSERS

Diary of a Mormon Missionary

Volume II of In Polygamy's Shadow

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TRANSCRIPTION NOTE

I have transcribed my father's journal exactly as he wrote each entry - with one exception. The word black has been substituted for the racial terms of the era. His choice of grammar and punctuation—or lack of punctuation—and his misspelling of words have not been corrected.

The pseudonyms for his given name and that of my mother used in my memoir *In Polygamy's Shadow* are used throughout *Borrowed Trousers*. The true initials of my father's first, middle, and family name have been used. All other names, titles, abbreviations, dates, locations, and places are as he wrote them.

— Maggie Rayner

A Black Volume with Record Book Stamped on the Front

I stumble through the dark in my nightgown, bare feet sticking on warm parquet. I'm at Mom's house in Penticton and still half-asleep. When I get to her bedroom, it's hot and close, even with the window wide open. The scent of lilacs and dry grass hangs in still air. Her bedside lamp spills light onto her head and shoulders. "I'm so glad you finally heard me calling," she says. "I can hardly breathe and my heart is beating so fast, it hurts." My stomach lurches. Her breathing is labored, more like a pant, and her face glistens with perspiration.

"Mom, I'm going to call an ambulance."

"No, dear, there's no need for that. Now that you're here, I'm sure I'll feel better. I feel better already."

Aah! What should I do? I'm sure she's hoping that this latest ambush on her body will magically disappear. Her doctor has already told her that with her high blood pressure and failing heart, she needs to be in a care home. So far she's resisted. If I telephone for an ambulance, this will probably be her last night in her own bed.

"Wait a bit," she implores. "Read to me, dear. That will make me feel better." Reading out loud or being read to have always been her solace. But reading is no match for ninety years of wear on her body. "I'm just having a little trouble sleeping. Go look in

the box of books in my office . . . on top is your father's mission journal . . . now seems the time to give it to you . . ." Her voice stalls, then gasps, "I'm sure I can sleep if you read to me."

This is the first time I've heard of Dad's journal. I didn't know he had one. That's no surprise. Of his seven children, I'm the one he barely took notice of. He left it to Mom to teach me what they both thought I should know: how to take care of a house, a husband, and children, how to bake bread, how to can fruit. Dad valued his sons. My two sisters and I were, well, girls, helpmeets to be trained up to serve priesthood-holding husbands and to bear their children. Why has Mom never mentioned that Dad kept a journal? And why does she want me to have it now? A lump rises in my throat.

I *should* be firm with Mom, ignore her wishes, and call for help. Instead, I turn on the light in the spare bedroom. Inside are a desk and chair, Mom's file cabinet and typewriter, and a bookshelf for her Mormon church books. The bookshelf is just about empty. There are a few open cardboard boxes in the middle of the floor. Always organized and meticulous, she's started to pack up her life.

Dad's mission journal, a black volume with Record Book stamped on the front, is easy to find. On the first lined page, with his name and the date February 20, 1937, Dad has taped cut-out slips of paper with mottos typed on them: *That which we persist in doing becomes easy to do; not that the nature of the thing has changed, but that our power to do has increased, and Begin—The rest is easy.*

Back in Mom's bedroom, I sit on the bed beside her with the book on my lap and flip through the pages looking for her name. Dad wrote in India ink, using a fountain

pen. His handwriting is smooth and fluid, rhythmic from page to page, easy to read. Beautiful. It's his grammar that's terrible, and his spelling is about the same.

Mom was a twenty-one-year-old spinster passed over for marriage when Dad began courting her. He was twenty-six and breaking horses in the foothills of Alberta. Every Sunday he came into town to go to church and have dinner with Mom and her elderly parents. Before he left on a two-year Mormon mission to Texas and Louisiana, he and Mom came to an understanding: when he returned, they would marry.

During my childhood, Mom told me stories of his courtship, like a treasure that never tarnished. "He rode into town bareback on a half-broken gelding with only a rope halter. With his sun-bronzed skin and waist-length black hair, he looked as wild as the gelding." Dad sold his horses to pay for his mission. Mom stayed loyal to him when her boss at the Cardston municipal office, where she worked as a secretary, tried to set her up with a banker. How different her life would have been if she'd married the banker. Mine too.

I find Mom's name a few pages in and read her the short entry, then look for another. She tries for a smile and struggles to shift her pajama-clad body. I plump up pillows to support her back and ease her onto them. But she can't settle and she doesn't fall asleep. Her breathing becomes more labored.

"Mom, we can't wait any longer." My eyes hold hers in a firm, no-nonsense look. Her eyes turn liquid: she swallows, blinks, and nods in resignation. Sudden faintness leaves me weak. As dawn streaks the sky in pinks and blues, I take a deep breath, grip the telephone, and dial for an ambulance. We wait without words, my hands cradling hers, for the knock on the door. . .

On my drive back to Vancouver, Dad's journal keeps me company on the empty passenger seat beside me. I'm keen to read it, while thinking how odd it is that I'm the one to have this intimate part of Dad's life in my possession. If he were alive, he wouldn't think it seemly to share anything about the missionary program with me. To begin with, I'm a woman and not one of his priesthood-holding sons. Add to that, I'm an ex-Mormon. I have no inkling that I'm about to learn a whole lot more than how the missionary program is run. The systemic abuse of poorer missionaries by the Mormon Church, an organization comprised of many multi-billion-dollar corporations, is about to leap off the pages.

For young priesthood holders in the faith, serving a mission is the foundation for respectability and advancement in the membership's hierarchy. The pressure to fulfill a mission is intense. The age for leaving home and going on a mission today is eighteen: ensuring there's no time to mature or question church and family expectations.

According to Mormon belief, volunteer service, tithing, and donations are necessary to make it into Mormon heaven. Eternal salvation through Christ's crucifixion, as promised in the New Testament, isn't deemed sufficient. Missionaries must pay their own living expenses while they're away from their families for two years. They're paired with companions that are changed every so often, and they don't receive any money for their service. They're required to turn their lives over to salaried leaders. Failure to follow exacting mission rules can result in excommunication and being barred from Mormon heaven. Young women also serve missions, subject to different rules and requirements.

Inside my father's journal, I find stories of my father and each of his companions living in poverty amid bedbugs and cockroaches, *when* they can afford lodgings at all. They struggle to subsist on one main meal a day. Unable to afford a vehicle, they walk and hitchhike throughout the states of Texas and Louisiana, as directed by their leaders. They're required to maintain contact with existing members and look for new ones, while keeping detailed records. During his mission, my father has his tonsils out and suffers with athlete's foot, corns, callouses, blisters, bleeding feet, an ingrown toenail, ongoing colds and digestive ailments, headaches, and toothache; and he contracts malaria, which gives him nausea, dizziness, chills, and fevers. His companions don't fare much better. On occasion three missionaries share a bed; other times they sleep rough or shelter at night in the backseats of cars in car lots.

I'm saddened when I read of my father and one of his companions wearing trousers belonging to other missionaries while the only suits they own are cleaned. And I'm enraged to find that they must assess members' tithing and collect it for the church. As I read, it occurs to me just how much a new convert is worth, in volunteer hours, tithing, and donations, over the course of a lifetime. I begin to think of the Mormon church as obscenely bloated with wealth.

Missionaries are pitted against each other by their leaders to baptize the most converts. My father is inundated with feelings of shame and inadequacy for falling short. Yet he never grows bitter or questions his faith. I watch him develop confidence as he overcomes homesickness, learns to concentrate, and studies missionary manuals for hours at a stretch. I cheer when he no longer needs mottos to get him through each day. I smile as his grammar and spelling improve, slightly.

And I gasp when I discover that he fell in love with a woman who is not my mother, and proposed marriage.

Stavely, Alberta

I left my home on January 26, 1937, having been called to fulfill a mission to Texas. Arriving by train in Lethbridge, Alberta. One thirty p.m. In company with Elder Hugh T. Stanford, who was also called to labor in Texas.

Secured lodging in a second class hotel, where proprietor refused to call us, neither of us having a watch and both being keyed up about leaving home. We arose to catch the train which left at 7.50 a.m. to find it was just 3 a.m. after having gone part way to the station. Back to bed to await 7 a.m. and out on a slow train to Rosemond myself on to Cardston.

After having a good visit with folks at Cardston left Monday morning train being a day late, having been snow bound. Some snow drifts 20 feet on tracks, requiring extra engine and a snow plow. . .

(DAILY ENTRIES BEGIN FROM FEBRUARY 1, 1937 to APRIL 1939. FOR THE PURPOSE OF THIS SAMPLE A FEW RANDOM ENTRIES FOLLOW.)

Friday, February 5, 1937

Salt Lake Mission Home - Devotion at 8. And every one to the Temple for endowments. Some of the Elders & L.M.s received theirs before. Some of the Elders were getting married before they left for their missions — ha-ha What a wonderful thing the Temple is. How can anyone betray their father in heaven after several trips through the temple? Received a letter from Marnie today. A big long one, it was sure welcome. Answer it tonight. . .

Wednesday, February 17, 1937

Salt Lake Mission Home - Arose 6.45. A very fine hour of testimony bearing and instruction to start day.

At 9.30 a.m. all missionaries went to Church offices to receive last-minute instructions and to be set apart. Charles A. Callis and Rubin S. Wells spoke. Very inspiring thoughts from both missionaries and their folks. I was set apart by Bro. Callis. These men are certainly inspired of God. What a queer feeling it gives one. President Callis, without many superfluous words, set his fingers directly upon my greatest weaknesses.

“Be diligent in my work, avoid putting things off.”

“Avoid the wiles of women who do not heighten ones morals.”

“Do not be extravagant.”

“ Do not worry about folks at home”

“God will look after everything — He calls one where he is most needed.”

Promised to be lead to those who have never heard of the Church of Christ. In the afternoon washed clothes and fixed clothes in readiness to leave. Elders & L.M.'s are running and shouting here & these trains are leaving loaded with missionaries from now til tomorrow night. Studied & wrote letters. . .

TEXAS MISSION FIELD . . .

Friday, February 26, 1937

Abilene - A cold day, that damp cold sure penetrates one. Hands and feet get cold and numb. Elder Bodine and I hunted all morning. Located a very small room. From a young couple named Martin. Just moved over from Dallas. Mrs. Martin down with a

broken leg. She is very nice. Drove us all up to north end of town to see his house. It's just being papered and overhauled. Paid \$3.00 one weeks rent. We are to move in Monday. . .

Monday, April 26, 1937

San Angelo - Spent night alone in quarters with Elder Stanford — Holt & Bodine going to home of Saints. Took Hiway and without much trouble arrived about 1.30 p.m. together at home of Henry Click, great uncle of Elder Bodines. A typical Texas household. Four generations in one house. People marry young & without a great deal of education in rural Texas. A definite line generally between urban and city folks. Although some are not so illiterate. These people of course consider us as city slickers but treated us very fine, give us a good bed when I'm afraid some had no bed. Ate Catfish & cornbread, sourgram & beans. I don't know whether we made any impression with our religious message or not. Men folks are hard to talk to much. . .

Wednesday, May 12, 1937

Abilene - Studied a lot today. A big meal at noon with just a sandwich for supper & no breakfast is our daily menu but it seems eating is a hard habit to get out of. . .

Saturday, June 5, 1937

Abilene - Rode with a boy going to a rodeo in Merkel, a few miles beyond Abilene, an amateur show. I was sure tempted to go on over — mount money is paid. I would be sure of making something. But knew I must not, against orders. Arrived in Abilene about 10.30. Dinner at Ghormalys. — A pile of welcome mail. Room hustled all after noon, finally decided on a housekeeping room — close in \$3.00 per week. Met some Mia

people this afternoon, going to call it tracting. Took advantage of some Saturday specials, with most of all Elder's remaining money.

Wednesday, June 9, 1937

Abilene - A hot day. Couldn't get any spirit into my tracting. Still haven't lived down that trip I guess, so I laid around and rested this afternoon a while, during the heat. Then we went out and seen Choneys. These poor children, a hair-lipped baby and a crippled rickets case a pitiful sight, combined with Mrs. Choney's tall angular uncleanliness, sure gives one a feeling of depression.

Ambition is a Good Substitute For Luck.

Thursday, June 10, 1937

Abilene - Threatening rain all day. Holding classes these days with a real spirit. Have been broke for quite a time, watching the mailman, living on potatoes and cornbread with an egg once a day — a slim starchy ration, but goes all right with some gravy. Our Room is nice & cool two windows on one side and three on the other. See everyone and everyone can see us. With blinds and windows up our little room resembles a second story screened-in porch.

Thoughts are ancestors to Actions and Actions are us

Friday, June 11, 1937

Abilene - Studied good & hard today. Got a check from home, paid debts and bought groceries. Calling Mrs. Ghormaly up she told us about a Mormon lady at the Grande auto Courts, who had applied to the city for relief. The welfare board wishing to slide out and knowing the Latter-day saints boasts of taking care of our needs, phoned her up and told her. We went to the welfare lady at the courthouse and Elder proceeded

to unburden himself to the lady to the affect that the Church looks after no member except in populated centers (Salt Lake, I guess, ha-ha) of the church & then only if they've been tithe payers within past years.

The influence one's bringing up and surroundings during early life sure affect their view point of life. This old boy wouldn't give his ground for anything — However the lady is a small woman from Salt Lake, not a good member. She has three children and expecting another soon. She is used to the good living and isn't destitute yet. Admits her husband is inclined to gamble. He's a travelling salesman. Hasn't sent his money or word for three weeks. She pays a terrable high rent where she stays. What she needs most is advice. Mrs. Gotz — A junior Elder is not supposed to know anything however, I will endeavor always —

To Think unbiasedly

Saturday, June 12, 1937

Abilene - Elders Stanford & Bickmore here this afternoon. We walked to Ghormalys about four and met them. Elder Stanford came back to our room. The three of us got a big watermelon and ate watermelon. No work today — studied for some time & fixed clothes.

Study And Work — Study And Work . . .

Thursday, December 2, 1937

Amarillo - A cold foggy day — studied till noon. Out and seen a funeral-home manager to offer our services free to anyone who might want them at services. I'm afraid we'll be having funeral services to preach soon from our interview.

Out to Brothers for a while this evening.

Friday, December 3, 1937

Amarillo - A beautiful day for dec. Studied & tracted a bit this morning. Went to Griggs Funeral Home to offer services.

Read at the library for quite a while, while Elder went to a show and then we both went to Louises.

Big letter from Marnie which helped a lot.

Saturday, December 4, 1937

Amarillo - Washed & washed, wrote & studied. Walked out to hold a street meeting, but found it too cold. Over to the depot, I think our literature there is going out & doing good.

A party at Louises, only Higles come out. They had a "pounding" for us & gave us piles of good things to eat, from quite a few of the people here — a fine gesture, which was appreciated. And a surprise too.

Sunday, December 5, 1937

Amarillo - Fair SS. this morning. Apparently Sister Louise had her feelings hurt over last night's party because no one come, And she didn't mind telling people. "War in Camp, the cloud burst."

Sister Haine arranged the "pounding." Sis. Brothers was to do the inviting, & fell down through some mixup.

Sister Louise got sore because even the investigators didn't come. So after sunday school, found tears & words in Sis. Henry's car. In the midst of which came a special

delivery letter for me to go to Ft Worth. "There goes that pile of good things for another hungry elder Bro."

We've done our best toward righting the battle — so funny, two boys fixing up quarrlls for people old enough to be our parents.

At sac. meeting Relief Society put on the program — which was fine until Mays and my parts come. May tried to tell a story and stage fright got her, she collapsed and cried, poor kid, shes such a baby & so emotional.

And so when I tried to give a few good bye remarks being poor to begin with, May crying behind and Blair Higle getting sick in front it was very sloppy.

Monday, May 9, 1938

Poly - Up late, no class.

Seen a show "Buccaneers" between 11.30 & 2. Went tracting and came home at 4.30 for more literature to find elder Morgan & elder Holt & two more elders unloading grips at our home.

And was I more surprised to hear I had been transferred to La. They are making two districts out of Louisiana splitting it up. Elder Nelson a married Elder who has been teaching school at Kesle, Tex is to take my place here — "woo, watch sparks."

A first rate street meeting tonight a crowd of us. Elder Stone, D. P. from Dallas, has really got power.

I & elder Cowlshaw went with the LMs to hold a class at Mrs. Johnsons, which wasn't so good.

We went to the LMs room & visited for an hour. I hate leaving Ft Worth after just getting acquainted.

It's been hard playing "wet blanket" here among these missionaries. I know elder Nelson can do it better. Met my wife here in Ft Worth, She's not just like I thought she would be, but she's swell & I can't even tell her because I'm a missionary here for one purpose & I haven't the heart to hinder anyone else from being the same.

Tuesday, May 10, 1938

Poly - Took Elder Nelson around my tracting district and acquainted him with some of my investigators. He's a good missionary and think I've left him a good district. He may change his view after meeting a few of those who are not so good.

A lost class and I gave a poor talk. A lost mutual and I taught a good class in the adult class. I hate leaving Ft Worth in a way, but I think it may help me out of the rut I'm in.

Good byes are hard — home late.

Wednesday, May 11, 1938

Hiway - The Elders carried my grips out to the hiway. Dallas hiway comes right out through Poly. But touch luck attended me it seems and I have too much luggage. Night overtook me about 40 miles east of Dallas with blisters on my hands from carrying my bags. I put them in a dime locker and went and seen a show then got a room in a cheap hotel from a half undressed woman who would no doubt have slept with me for an extra dime the way she acted. But I told her all I wanted was a good sleep. The bed was good and clean and I did sleep well. . .



Maggie Rayner lives on the West Coast of British Columbia with a view of the ocean. Kayaking, biking, and hiking endure as passions. Creating beautiful interiors for herself and others is a dream realized.

For further information visit the website www.maggierayner.com