



[UFOs](#) | [Paranormal](#) | [Area 51](#)
[People](#) | [Places](#) | [Random](#)
[Top 100](#) | [What's New](#)
[Catalog](#) | [New Books](#)

Search... for keyword(s)

in Book Title/Author

Our Bookstore
is [OPEN](#)

[Mothership](#) -> [Book Catalog](#) -> [Subjects](#) -> [Dell](#) -> [21780](#) -> Here

Book Catalog

Introduction

This book has taken a long time to write, primarily because I have kept losing my nerve. More than once I have stopped stone dead, unable for another moment to reveal such intimate acts in front of an audience I don't know.

But misgivings were temporary. I began to think this was a project worth the effort after a decade of telling the stories of my years as a young Mormon wife to close friends who then reacted with disbelief. If they were surprised by the innards of my early life its marriages and divorces, secret ceremonies, wardrobe peculiarities and supernatural milestones, I was equally surprised by their ignorance of the aspects of Mormonism my anecdotes revealed. How was it possible, I wondered, that such informed people were continuing to take the church of my childhood at face value, as nothing more complex than a likable, family oriented creed that embraces America's most wholesome and unambiguous values? For although Mormonism is benign and even steadying when viewed superficially, it has also long been providing to the world glimpses of the dark disturbances lying just beneath the surface.

How, I wondered, could the church's largely bland image have survived the memory of the murders committed in 1985 by Mark Hofmann, the Mormon master forger who, caught in the act of falsifying historical documents with which he intended to rewrite early Mormon church history, executed with homemade bombs those who he feared might expose him? Or Evan Mecham, an Arizona politician who claimed to have been called to his post by God but who, because he violated state campaign laws and possessed a heart filled with hate, became in 1988 the first U.S. governor to be impeached in nearly seventy years?

Or the murders within polygamous sects that are the offshoots of early Mormonism, most notably the slaying in 1977 of polygamous leader Rulon Allred by Ervil LeBaron, his rival?

Or the excommunication of Mormon housewife Sonia Johnson, a proceeding that in 1979 cracked open a door to reveal a tableau of patriarchy that we might otherwise have imagined doesn't exist in America?

Or the extremism of Bruce Longo, a former Mormon missionary and then a cult leader who believed he was God, who killed himself in 1978, and whose wife commanded their seven children to follow their father into the afterlife by jumping to their deaths from the eleventh story of a Salt Lake City hotel?

Or John Singer, the stubborn polygamist from Marion, Utah, who was shot down by law officers who insisted that his children attend public schools, and whose widow and son-in-law in 1988 commemorated the tenth anniversary of his death first by announcing that Singer would return from the grave to usher in the millennium, then by blowing up a Mormon chapel, and finally by transforming their farm into a firepowered fortress during a thirteen-day siege that ended with one policeman dead?

I understood that while these newsmakers weren't typical Mormons, their shocking stories weren't coincidences, either. Around the roots of all the lunacies were packed typical Mormon teachings, and one teaching in particular: that all Mormon men are "priesthood holders," anointed with the literal, supernatural, nearly unlimited authority to act for God

on earth, and are headed into an eternal life where they will themselves become gods who rule entire worlds. It's a theological concept that, tucked into a brain that's egotistical or unbalanced, is a match to dynamite.

But it isn't widely known. Nor is much else that's fundamental to this metaphysical sect. As my friends reacted with astonishment to even my own stories of unimaginable rituals that had led straight to heartbreak when I was a young woman - quite an everyday version of Mormon life that would never make it into the papers - I saw clearly, for the first time, the extent to which the unnerving, mystical core of my native culture is still hidden, and I longed to bring into the light this piece of social history.

Mormonism is hidden despite a prominence that's startling. The Mormon Church is one of the world's most rapidly growing religions, with a membership of 8.2 million that is increasing at the rate of 300,000 a year because of its perfectly organized, worldwide missionary program that deploys 48,000 missionaries into more than one hundred countries. It is piloted by over one hundred middle-aged and elderly men who are its spiritual leaders, who are mostly white, and who are very often "called" to their honored positions out of business careers; in their hands, the church has grown into one of the most powerful economic institutions in the United States, with vast interests in retailing, broadcasting, insurance, and other areas; its real estate holdings alone exceed \$1 billion. (Although the church leaders issue no financial reports, The Arizona Republic in 1991 undertook a lengthy investigation and estimated that the church's yearly income from members was \$4.3 billion, with another \$4 billion in sales streaming in from its business subsidiaries figures that, if the church were a publicly traded company, would place it with Union Carbide and Borden Products on the Fortune 500 list.) It is a powerful political force in America when it mobilizes its members around an issue, as was true in the late seventies when priesthood leaders scrambled to help defeat the Equal Rights Amendment, and it holds particular sway throughout the American West, where its numbers are most concentrated. It is influential in every presidential administration, particularly when conservatives are in power. It is a rare religion that both started in America and is gaining in relevance here, as our society continues to be deeply divided between the Religious Right, of which Mormonism is a part, and everyone else.

And yet it is still a mystery.

These are political facts, but my book is personal, not political. It is about what happened when I was searching for young love. I have tried to illuminate the deeper nature of my heritage by telling my own story in detail, by struggling to cut close to the emotional bone for the truths that are hard to reach. - DL

[[Parent](#)]

8/16/96