



Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011

Volume 17 | Number 1

Article 7

1-1-2005

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Taggart, Gregory (2005) "How Martha Wrote an Anti-Mormon Book (Using Her Father's Handbook as Her Guide?)," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011*: Vol. 17 : No. 1 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr/vol17/iss1/7>

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY • PROVO, UTAH

Title How Martha Wrote an Anti-Mormon Book (Using Her Father's Handbook as Her Guide?)

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Reference *FARMS Review* 17/1 (2005): 123-70.

ISSN 1550-3194 (print), 2156-8049 (online)

Abstract Review of *Leaving the Saints: How I Lost the Mormons and Found My Faith* (2005), by Martha Beck.

HOW MARTHA WROTE AN ANTI-MORMON BOOK (USING HER FATHER'S HANDBOOK AS HER GUIDE?)¹

Gregory Taggart

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“It is understandable that nearly all the standard exposés of Mormonism have been written by women.”²

Hugh Nibley

I'd Rather Be Fishing

First, let's deal with the elephant in the room: If Martha Beck's allegations of sexual abuse against her father are true, he deserved every punch she threw in her newest book, and she deserves our sympathy. Abuse of any kind practiced on child or adult is offensive to both God and humanity.

That said, I don't think her allegations are true. In fact, given the many distortions, misrepresentations, and outright absurdities in her book—about facts that we can check—I see no reason to believe her

1. See Hugh W. Nibley, “How to Write an Anti-Mormon Book (A Handbook for Beginners),” in *Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 474–580, which was a tongue-in-cheek exposé of anti-Mormon techniques.

2. Nibley, “How to Write an Anti-Mormon Book,” 556.

Review of Martha Beck. *Leaving the Saints: How I Lost the Mormons and Found My Faith*. New York: Crown, 2005. ix + 306 pp. \$24.95.

side of her alleged “she said/he said” incidents. None. Thus, my sympathies are with her recently deceased father and with her family—all of whom deny the abuse ever took place.³ As I provide evidence to back up my contention, I hope I can walk the fine line between love and humor, concern and fact—a line her father walked quite well.

When I first decided to review Martha Nibley⁴ Beck’s new book, *Leaving the Saints*, I was certain that I wanted to use her father’s humorous handbook for aspiring anti-Mormon writers as a guide. After all, I had discovered, her book is not much more than an anti-Mormon book, masquerading as a journey from abuse to newfound faith and freedom. However, as I assessed the poor quality of her evidence, I was often pulled in other directions. At one point, I drifted toward the courtroom model, where I could employ the cross-examination skills of a trial attorney to shine a bright light on the many contradictions in her book, much as her father did with nineteenth-century anti-Mormon writers in his book *The Myth Makers*.⁵ At another point, frustrated by Martha’s apparent unfailing ability to read minds, hands, and facial tics in ways that always supported the case against her father or the church, Nibley’s pamphlet *No, Ma’am, That’s Not History*,⁶ a response to Fawn Brodie’s psychobiography of Joseph Smith, seemed like the better model. In the end, I decided to see how closely Martha followed her father’s thirty-six rules for beginning anti-Mormon writers. The circumstantial evidence indicates that she must own at least one copy of his handbook.

As its title suggests, Martha’s book is the story of her becoming disenchanted with the faith of her fathers, then of finding new faith and hope as she leaves Mormonism behind. However, the title does not tell the whole story. First, she devotes virtually every other chapter of her book to a lengthy confrontation that apparently took place

3. See *Hugh Nibley Defense* at www.hughnibleydefense.com (accessed 18 August 2005).

4. As with her more recent books, Martha dropped her middle name for this one, going it alone as Martha Beck and in some small way preserving her father’s anonymity. Unfortunately, her graciousness ended on the book’s cover.

5. Hugh Nibley, *The Myth Makers* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1961).

6. Hugh Nibley, *No, Ma’am, That’s Not History* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1946).

between her and her father in a hotel room in 2001 when she was 39 and he was 91. In the book's other chapters, sprinkled among the hotel chapters, she relates the story of her return to Utah in 1988 with her husband John and their two children shortly after the birth of Adam, their Down syndrome child, and their five-year stay in Provo as she finished her dissertation and worked part time at Brigham Young University. Whereas she uses the hotel chapters to lay out the "facts" and theory of her case against her father, she uses the other chapters to give the reader a guided tour of her dysfunctional birth family and the even more dysfunctional Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, commonly known in anti-Mormon circles as "one of the world's most secretive religions" (dust jacket).

Leaving the Saints is a frustrating book. It is also a dishonest book, calling to mind Mary McCarthy's famous critique of Lillian Hellman's writing: "Every word she writes is a lie—including 'and' and 'the.'"⁷ Ms. Beck caricatures sacred ordinances and doctrines, fabricates dialogue,⁸ turns the silliest myth into organizational policy, and creates

7. Mary McCarthy, statement given on PBS's *Dick Cavett Show*, 18 October 1979. See www.kirjasto.sci.fi/marymcc.htm (accessed 12 July 2005).

8. Many reviews of Martha's book have praised her writing; I'm not so enthusiastic. She's often too cute by more than half. But the most disconcerting thing about her writing is her dialogue. It's often wooden, unbelievable, and too pat (by pat I mean that the people in her book always say just what needs to be said at exactly the right time). Not surprisingly, those three characteristics show up together. For example, her mother supposedly tells Martha, "Think how many people's testimonies of the Gospel depend on your father," and then asks Martha, who wants to talk to a counselor about her abuse, "What about the *therapist's* testimony?" When Martha says that she'll go to someone who's never heard of her father, a non-Mormon even, her mother replies, "There is no one who has never heard of your father" (p. 139). This is bad dialogue. It's pat and only serves the purpose of making her mother appear strange and her father appear essential to the mission of the church, both of which are important to her case. In another instance of bad dialogue, "I'll call her Laura," a Boston psychotherapist, cautions Martha, "Maybe this is your mission, to protect the Church. To honor the secret" (p. 140). Honor what secret? The only "secret" I have ever been asked to honor is what goes on in the temple—a "secret" that Martha is obviously not concerned about, despite her protests to the contrary (pp. 14–17). Other examples abound. Her father saying "sternly" to Martha, "Well, yes . . . but we must serve the Gospel first" (p. 245). Serve the Church. Serve the Lord. But serve the Gospel? She has her stake president asking John about his decision to leave the Church, "Were you wearing your garments when you made this decision" (p. 258)? I can imagine a stake president asking John whether he'd stopped wearing his garments in an

events out of whole cloth with an aplomb that boggles the mind. To give just one example, she describes a meeting that took place between her, her husband John, and their bishopric after John had submitted his letter of resignation from the church. The bishop had come to make sure that John understood the consequences of his decision—standard church policy. Having determined that John understood what he was doing, the bishop turned to Martha and asked, “Is there anything I can help you with right now? Any questions you want to ask?”

Martha, describes herself as looking at him wearily. “Where to begin?” she asks herself.

“Well,” I said, “I guess I’d like to know why the Church keeps attacking anyone who has material evidence disconfirming Mormon scripture. I’d like to know how people who talk all day about Truth can spend all their time trying to hide it.⁹ I—”

But there was no point in going on, because the good bishop had literally stuffed his forefingers in his ears. “I can’t hear you, I can’t hear you, I can’t hear you,” he chanted.

I am not making this up [she assures the reader]. (p. 257)

Yes she is. And if you believe her, she has a bridge, er, book for you. It will include the likes of this little gem about life at Brigham Young University: “Men must also wear socks, on the premise that the hair on human ankles can be thought of as an extension of pubic hair” (pp. 77–78). Of course, she gives no source for this absurdity (and if she had, you can be sure the source would be something like “one BYU administrator told me”).¹⁰ Now is there some crazy aunt in BYU’s attic

attempt to ascertain where John stood in his decision to leave. But after Martha’s earlier discourse on the magical powers of garments (pp. 14–15), I think she’s simply piling on here. The stake president looks silly asking that question in the manner she has him asking it, and our writer knows it.

9. This is strange stuff from a writer who continually sics her attorney on organizations or people who question the assertions in her book. See Boyd Petersen, “As Things Stand at the Moment: Responding to Martha Beck’s *Leaving the Saints*” (presentation, FAIR Conference, Sandy, Utah, 5 August 2005, unpublished copy in my possession).

10. “Martha Beck Responds to Boyd Petersen” (10 March 2005, unpublished copy in my possession), 18 (hereafter “Beck Responds”). In Martha’s unpublished written response to Boyd Petersen’s review of her book that was originally posted by Sunstone

that might have uttered such nonsense? Possibly. Did some student or faculty member ever joke that maybe that was the reason behind the policy? Surely. Does any sane person believe that was the real reason behind the policy? No, and that includes Martha Beck, a woman who constantly reminds the reader that she is a Harvard-trained sociologist (p. 126) who is in a “love affair with evidence” (p. 5) and who tries not “to jump to conclusions” (p. 207). Yet she blithely states this absurd rationale for the socks policy as fact.

Caveat Lector—I Mean It!

Before we go too much further, I must stress one point, something I will discuss in greater detail below: There is not one source or footnote in Martha’s book other than a reference here and there to Shakespeare or Sartre or some such. None, or virtually none—it is hard to keep track—of the people she quotes or paraphrases has a real name with the exception of her husband and children. Certainly everyone who is anyone in Martha’s little book is either unnamed or has a pseudonym. Thus, whenever anyone talks, the only one you can be sure is talking is Martha. She is the puppet master. And frankly, I was often unsure if, when she quoted herself, she was quoting accurately. The dialogue is that pat.¹¹

Ostensibly, the unstated reason for all secrecy is to protect people’s privacy. In some cases, that may have been a judicious choice. However, in other cases it allowed her to pad the events in her story and to have people say things that are convenient to her storyline. For example, she tells the story of an abuse panel she actually moderated

and is now on FAIR (www.fairlds.org/Reviews/Rvw200504.html; accessed 12 July 2005), she claims that “The ‘leg hair is pubic hair’ argument was legendary at BYU in the 1980s [who said it wasn’t?]. I heard it repeated by many people, from many different places in the university. I included their comments because I thought the explanation an amusing illustration of life at BYU. . . . But I do understand it is embarrassing for some BYU partisans when the outside world hears about some of the more bizarre aspects of BYU living.” She also mentions a posting on Amazon.com that “confirms that this story was common knowledge.” The point is not that there was no “story” about the reason for the socks policy. The point is that ankle/pubic hair was not the official reason for the policy; rather, it was a ridiculous rumor that you would expect a Harvard-trained PhD to understand.

11. See note 8 above.

at the 1993 BYU Women's Conference with two other panelists: a Utah medical doctor and a counselor in the general Primary presidency. However, in Martha's version there are three panelists in addition to her: a Utah medical doctor, a "midlevel Church authority," and "the daughter of an apostle" (pp. 263–64). And no, the Primary counselor who was actually there is not an apostle's daughter. In other words, Martha misrepresents both the identities and the number of the participants on the panel. According to the actual panelists, she misrepresents them as well.

You see, I have spoken with both the doctor, John C. Nelson, current national president of the American Medical Association (at the time, he was a Salt Lake obstetrician/gynecologist and was studying for his Master's of Public Health), and to Ruth B. Wright (second counselor in the general Primary presidency at the time, a University of Utah graduate, and a former fifth-grade teacher). They disagree with virtually all but one quotation from Martha's version of the panel.¹²

First, Martha begins her tale of the session by telling us about a conversation she had with the Utah doctor who told her that he had "become obsessed with preventing sexual abuse" because he'd seen so much of it in his practice. He also explained that he'd taken his concerns to the General Authorities, one of whom told him, "The Church is not run by doctors." "It really reminded me not to interfere with God's authority," Martha quotes the doctor, and then helpfully adds, "I suspect [he meant] in the doublespeak of Mormon dissidence, *I hate those controlling bastards*" (p. 264, her emphasis).

Well, in fact, he didn't mean that, and he is not a dissident. Rather, Dr. Nelson says:

I did speak to Elder Neal A. Maxwell, a fellow ward member and a man for whom I have immense respect, admiration, and love. When I shared with him what I knew of abuse in the Church and asked what the Brethren could do, he answered that this was an especially sensitive area and that since we

12. Greg Taggart, telephone interviews with Dr. John Nelson and Ruth Wright, 8 March 2005, transcripts in my possession. They do agree with Martha on certain incidental facts such as that the panel was well attended and that there were many questions.

are a worldwide Church that any response to abuse needed to be at a high enough level to account for cultural differences. He said nothing to condone abuse in any form. Significantly, not many months after this [abuse panel], President Hinckley announced the Proclamation on the Family. There is specific reference to abuse near the end. I have always felt that the message passed on from Ruth Wright to the Brethren [see below] helped make this statement possible.¹³

In a later e-mail Dr. Nelson spoke to the alleged “The Church is not run by doctors” comment:

As a gynecologist, I feel I know women rather well. I do recall some nervous titter as [Martha and I] spoke about some very difficult subjects, but not nearly the reaction described by Ms. Beck. Elder Maxwell had a most sensitive and kind heart. He was reminding me gently that the Lord and the Prophet were perfectly capable of leading the Church. I appreciated his advice.

During the Q&A that followed the panelists’ prepared remarks, both Sister Wright and Dr. Nelson recall that near the end, Martha did stand up, take the microphone, and say that she was sexually abused as a child, much as she said in the book (pp. 263–69). They both remember that the room was completely full and abuzz, much as Martha said. They both agree that there were a lot of questions on child and wife abuse, again much as Martha said. But they both disagree with the words Martha put in their mouths.

Sister Wright, for example, told me that her short speech that preceded the Q&A session appeared in a book of speeches that the Women’s Conference publishes after each conference and, though it was edited slightly for publication, represents fairly what she said.¹⁴

13. John Nelson, personal correspondence to Greg Taggart, 10 March 2005, copy in my possession.

14. “Beck Responds,” 13. Apparently, Martha is under the mistaken assumption that there is no paper trail for this panel. In her response to Boyd Petersen, “Response to Martha Beck, *Leaving the Saints: How I Lost the Mormons and Found My Faith*” (hereafter

And what she said was “Child abuse is increasing in frequency and intensity throughout the world, even in the Church.” She quoted scripture, “But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6), and then something from President Monson:

The Church does not condone such heinous and vile conduct [speaking of child abuse]. Rather, we condemn in the harshest of terms such treatment of God’s precious children. . . . Let the offender be brought to justice, to accountability, for his actions. . . . When you and I know of such conduct and fail to take action to eradicate it, we become part of the problem. We share part of the guilt. We experience part of the punishment.¹⁵

She then laid out a four-point plan to follow if a child claimed abuse: (1) “Understand that disclosure is the beginning of the healing process,” stressing that how an adult reacts to the disclosure is important to the child’s ability to trust. (2) Respect the child’s privacy and confidence. “Children seldom lie about being assaulted or sexually abused.” (3) “Support the child’s decision to tell the story,” making it clear that it is “the right thing to do.” (4) Finally, “it is vitally important to explain to the child that she or he is not responsible and has done no wrong.”¹⁶

Dr. Nelson told me that he didn’t recall saying anything that would have made any woman believe that she would have had a difficult time going to her bishop. He did tell them that there were at least two avenues that needed to be dealt with: the physical or emotional facet by the medical and counseling community and the ecclesiastical part by

“Petersen Response”), she says that “some [conference] addresses were published, but not all, and none of the panels I was on were published.”

15. Ruth B. Wright, “Precious Children: Responding to a Disclosure of Abuse,” in *Women in the Covenant of Grace: Talks Selected from the 1993 Women’s Conference*, ed. Dawn Hall Anderson and Susette Fletcher Green (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 140–41.

16. Wright, “Precious Children,” 141–42.

the appropriate priesthood authority. He didn't remember exonerating anybody or saying that forgiveness would solve everything.

I am exquisitely sensitive to the idea of blaming the victim. So if I did make any reference to the victim, it would have been in the context of forgiving the abuser NOT acting as if the victim needed to be forgiven. That would suggest that I blame the victim, not the abuser, which is not the case at all. In fact, that was a key point that had been stressed in the Master's of Public Health program that I was enrolled in at the time.

I didn't want to downplay abuse. I wanted to suggest that while this is something that is difficult to talk about, there are significant medical and sociological consequences, and that people who are victims have to have a safe place to go, and the two places that were safe places to go were to their physician and their bishop. That's what I said. I'm not going to excuse an abuser, but I'm also not going to talk against the Brethren. I'm not.

Dr. Nelson's wife also attended the panel and agrees that his "comments [were] sensitive, clinically correct, and respectful of the Brethren."¹⁷

17. John Nelson, personal correspondence to Greg Taggart, 9 March 2005, copy in my possession. In a later e-mail (16 March 2005), Dr. Nelson continued, "It is never fun to talk about abuse. It is even more difficult to speak about it in front of sisters, particularly in this instance because given the title of the presentation, the panel would likely have attracted more abuse victims than would be normal in an audience that size. As part of the presentation, someone had a group of teen-age girls do an interpretive dance. I recall looking at my watch and noting that all three of us speaking, including the dance, took 31 minutes. I was excited that we would have an hour to respond to questions. Runners brought us written questions, and a lot of them were along the lines of 'I have talked to my Church leaders (of all kinds) and he/she did not believe me.' Recall that when a victim comes forth and is not believed that makes the victim feel that she is to blame for the abuse. It is interesting that my wife Linda, Sister Wright and I have similar recollections of what happened so very long ago, but one person recalls it quite differently. 'In the mouths of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.' I have a strong testimony of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I am concerned that our sisters are not immune from the horrors of abuse. There needs to be an increased sensitivity towards those who come forth. Professional help is likely to be needed by nearly all victims. And those who have been called by our Heavenly Father need to be especially in tune as they attempt to

Both Dr. Nelson and Sister Wright agree that they looked at the pile of questions¹⁸ that the runners brought to the panel, of which the first thirty or so were about women or children who had been abused and felt that that it had not been addressed adequately by their priesthood leaders. And both agree that they said to the crowd, through the microphone, that they were going to take the unedited questions to the Brethren. “I said I would take all the questions and hand them to Elder Maxwell myself,” said Sister Wright, “and I did.”¹⁹

And how did Martha report the story? Besides not naming anyone on the panel, adding a nonexistent participant, and misidentifying some of the panelists as well, she says that before the Q&A, the doctor

help these fragile sisters. I wish that I could say that the patients I have seen who are abuse victims are not members of the Church. But most of them are. It is important to state that I sustain President Hinckley and the Twelve (including Elder Maxwell at the time) and would not wish in any way to state or act in such a way as to make anybody feel otherwise. Sister Beck is apparently in deep pain, and I do not know the reasons. I wish I could help her.”

Also, according to written comment on the conference by a sister from Idaho, Martha was less than respectful of the Brethren. “I found this panel discussion to be informative, and I particularly appreciated hearing the remarks of Dr. Nelson, himself a convert to the church whose occupation brings him into very personal contact with victims of abuse, whose anonymous situations and comments he used to help bring this unpleasant, yet pervasive problem into focus. I was, however, somewhat disturbed by the almost ‘Anti-Priesthood’ feeling that seemed to pervade the atmosphere. Also, the moderator, Martha Beck, seemed perhaps a little overzealous in her desire to eradicate the problem by means of some overwhelming force (?), which, if it could only be managed and brought to bear by people such as herself, might somehow cure everything. When someone demanded to know, ‘And what is the Church doing about all this?’ Sister Beck responded emphatically, ‘Not Enough!’” (Women’s Conference comment on “Abuse and Healing in LDS Homes” panel, copy in my possession).

18. Carol Lee Hawkins, the person in charge of Women’s Conference that year, said that virtually every panel that dealt with family and family issues generated lots of questions every year and that several of those questions were often very personal in nature. The abuse panel was not exceptional in that regard (personal telephone conversation, 20 April 2005).

19. An interesting side note shows that, contrary to Beck’s unsupported assertion (p. 247), Mormon men do listen to Mormon women. For instance, Dr. Nelson suggested that they “distill” the comments and take them to the Brethren. Sister Wright said no. They would deliver the actual unedited comments. And that’s what they did. In reporting this, I don’t mean to imply that Dr. Nelson’s intent was to cover up anything. He was simply thinking of putting the comments in a more manageable form (phone conversation with Ruth Wright, 8 March 2005).

and the apostle's daughter (and the midlevel authority, even though there wasn't one there) read "carefully worded statements that tactfully acknowledged the possibility of abuse within Mormon homes, without explicitly stating that it really did exist" (p. 265).

She quotes the "midlevel church leader" as answering one question by saying that "we must consider the issue of blame. Most scenarios we call sexual abuse have at least two participants, and we must be very careful to make sure that everyone involved takes full responsibility for his—or her—participation" (p. 266).

She quotes the doctor as saying, "What we have to focus on, again, is forgiveness. Yes, terrible things do happen to children—I've seen evidence of that in my practice. And those children, even when they're grown, have to pay special attention to Christ's teachings. Seventy times seven, we must forgive those who harm us. We must turn the other cheek, go the extra mile" (p. 267).

Or as Martha unhelpfully characterized her fellow panelist's efforts, "Everything that had been said in the meeting reinforced my own suspicion that if the whole Mormon establishment had witnessed what was done to me as a child, they would respond by saying, 'Oh, my goodness, this is terrible. What do we have to do to make that kid shut up and take it'" (p. 267)?²⁰ In short, Martha's version—the one without sources or named participants, the one that includes a nonexistent participant and that conveniently makes the church look bad—is almost entirely different from the version described by the other two panelists.

Do two named witnesses who are on the record trump a puppeteer who would put such nonsense in the mouths of her unnamed, and one too many, panelists? They do in my opinion. Should the reader keep in mind Martha's penchant for using no names or pseudonyms as she or he reads Martha's book? You bet, because Martha uses the same methods throughout her book. As her father might have said

20. This is one of many instances where Martha is setting the reader up for the inevitable: Her family's denial that the abuse took place and their claim that her story has changed over time.

when he wasn't chanting the Egyptian mumbo jumbo she put in his mouth when he allegedly abused her, "Caveat lector."

More Impeaching Evidence

If the reader needs further evidence that Martha the writer can't be trusted, here are two more examples of things that she gets wrong in her book (intentionally, in my view). Once again, these are things we can check. Though they don't relate to the abuse case, they do speak to Martha's credibility and trustworthiness.

In the first, she claims that when she was doing research on Mormon feminism in 1991, she discovered that BYU had removed all references to Sonia Johnson, the infamous and self-described Mormon "heretic,"²¹ from the microfilm of all newspapers and magazines in its periodical room. Further, "not a single reference to her showed up on the library's retrieval system" (p. 83). When I read that, I immediately sat down at my computer and did a search of Harold B. Lee Library's (HBLL) online catalog. At least eight books and interviews by and about Sonia showed up, all but one published before 1988, the year Martha and her husband returned to Utah Valley. Then I called Sandy Tidwell, a reference librarian at BYU's HBLL, and asked her to do a quick search of the HBLL's microfilm for me. In the short time she had, she turned up nine listings in the 1979 New York Times Print Index, six in the 1979 Los Angeles Times Print Index, three in the Chicago Times, and two in the Christian Science Monitor Print Index. The HBLL has microfilm for all four papers. Sandy only had time to check the actual microfilm for the first three articles in the Los Angeles Times Print Index. Surprise. All three were there and had been since the articles were published.²² I have no doubt that the other articles would be there as well.

21. Sonia Johnson, *From Housewife to Heretic* (Albuquerque: Wildfire Books, 1989).

22. Sandy Tidwell, personal correspondence to Greg Taggart, 28 February 2005, in my possession. See also the thread titled "M. Beck's Claim re: BYU's Purge of Sonia Johnson, I decided to take a look . . ." at www.fairboards.org/index.php?showtopic=7424&hl= (accessed 18 August 2005) for the search results by another party interested in Beck's allegations.

Next, in the epilogue to her book, Martha reviews what has happened to some of the church's critics, including Steve Benson (President Benson's grandson) and Deborah Laake (who is famous for writing a book mocking the temple ordinances). The last person she mentions is described only as a "Mormon geneticist in Washington State" who was threatened with excommunication in 2003 "after studying the DNA of several American Indian populations and discovering that they were of ancient Asian ancestry, without a trace of Middle Eastern blood" (p. 305). Other than the fact that Thomas Murphy (he's unidentified in Martha's book) is from Washington, she gets everything else wrong. His stake president said only that he wanted to talk to him. The "threat of excommunication" is the spin Murphy's supporters put on the affair. Second, Murphy held a master's degree in anthropology at the time. Though he finally has his PhD, he is an anthropologist, not a geneticist. Finally, he didn't study the DNA of American Indian populations; he studied only the literature on studies done by real geneticists, none of which related to the Book of Mormon, and thus he didn't discover anything.²³ Apparently, Martha needed a geneticist to make her case against Mormonism. Rather than find one, she made one up.

There are many more examples of twisted, distorted, and made-up facts in her book, but time is short. If you are interested, compare her version of her father's near-death experience (pp. 108–11) with the one he tells in the video *Faith of an Observer*²⁴ or check her representation of her father's study of Egyptian (pp. 148, 156–60) against his biographer's version.²⁵ In each case, you will find that her version is twisted to support her case. The careful reader should wonder why he

23. Daniel C. Peterson, "Prolegomena to the DNA Essays," *FARMS Review* 15/2 (2003): 25–34.

24. See *The Faith of an Observer: Conversations with Hugh Nibley*, DVD (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2004). See also Gary P. Gillum, *Of All Things! Classic Quotations from Hugh Nibley*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1993), 68.

25. Boyd J. Petersen, *Hugh Nibley: A Consecrated Life* (Salt Lake City: Kofford Books, 2002), 141, 275, 307, 312–13, 415–17; "Petersen Response," 4.

should believe Martha's abuse story when she gets wrong so many of the things he can check.

Watch Out Obediah, Here Comes Martha!

Now what about Martha's nineteenth-century version of Mormonism that we haven't seen the likes of since Eber D. Howe, Pomeroy Tucker, and Obediah Dogberry? Well, like the works of those pre-eminent adversaries of Mormonism, Martha has written a book that strictly abides by virtually every one of the thirty-six rules her father, tongue firmly planted in cheek, laid out for writing a good, even great, anti-Mormon book.²⁶

"Rule 1: *Don't be modest!*" According to Nibley, it's important that the budding anti-Mormon make clear from the start that he or she is the man or woman for the job. As Martha points out in the beginning of her book, "There are layers and layers of Latter-day Saint culture, and niceness is only the top layer. . . . No one talks about the layers that lie beneath the surface, so most outsiders never know they exist" (p. 11). But readers should not worry, former Sister Beck assures them, because in returning to Utah, she "felt like a salmon swimming home to the stream where I was spawned, guided by some built-in homing device, genetically bent on reproducing in a familiar environment" (p. 10). Can there be any better guide? Martha thinks not.

"Rule 2: *A benign criticism of your predecessors* will go far towards confirming your own preeminence in the field." In some respects, Martha stands alone in this field. Hers is, after all, the only book out there that accuses her father, a prominent Mormon apologist, of sexual abuse. Still, she makes clear on the inside flap of the book's dust jacket that her little tome "offers a rare glimpse inside one of the world's most secretive religions," as if her book is one of a few to dare tell those secrets. Well, as Grant Palmer, Jon Krakauer, Jerald and Sandra Tanner, James White, Sally Denton, and a host of others²⁷ might say, "Get in line." The words *rare* and *most secretive* were

26. See Nibley, *Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass*.

27. Grant H. Palmer, *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002); Jon Krakauer, *Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith* (New

first applied to Mormonism more than a century ago²⁸ and are almost always displayed prominently on any anti-Mormon book worth its weight in fool's gold.²⁹ Secrets sell.

“Rule 3: *Curtsies and bouquets to everyone* can be delivered in a profuse and unctuous appendix or introduction and go a long way toward establishing the image of the writer as a really good fellow who admires and respects everybody and is therefore the last man in the world to distort or exaggerate.” Martha keeps this rule without breaking a sweat. She expresses her gratitude to “the Utah friends who helped me negotiate the events described in this book . . . I won't blow your cover here,” and she acknowledges the contributions of her “beautiful, hilarious, and ever shapely-cousins ‘Diane’ and ‘Miranda’ *Nom de Plume*,” and “the Princess of Pink (not her real name),” among others. She even thanks the people at R&R Ski Lodge. Would anyone so grateful ever distort or exaggerate?

“Rule 4: *Proclaim the purity of your motives*, especially your freedom from mercenary considerations.” Though Martha's not shy about peddling her book(s)—she reminds the reader that she's already written a book about her son Adam, “you're more than welcome to read it” (p. 9)—she's even quicker to assure you that she did it all for you, the reader: “They say that religion is for people who are afraid of going to hell, and spirituality is for people who've been there. If you're in the

York: Doubleday, 2003); Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *The Changing World of Mormonism* (Chicago: Moody, 1981); James R. White, *Is the Mormon My Brother?: Discerning the Differences between Mormonism and Christianity* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1997); and Sally Denton, *American Massacre: The Tragedy at Mountain Meadows, September 1857* (New York: Knopf, 2003).

28. For example, J. H. Beadle, *Polygamy: Or, the Mysteries and Crimes of Mormonism* . . . (Cincinnati, OH: National, 1882); E. D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled: Or, a Faithful Account of That Singular Imposition and Delusion* (Painesville, OH: the author, 1834); W. S. Parrott, *The Veil Uplifted, or the Religious Conspirators of the Latter-day Saints Exposed* (Bristol: Taylor and Sons, 1865).

29. See, for example, Pamela McCreary, *Out of the Shadows: A Rape Victim Examines Her Life in and out of Mormonism* (iUniverse: 2004): “An insider's glimpse of life in the secret society of Mormonism”; Richard Ostling and Joan K. Ostling, *Mormon America: The Power and Promise: A History of the Mormon Church* (San Francisco: Harpers, 2000): “Well-guarded secrets” front cover; Richard Abanes, *One Nation under Gods* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2003): “Rarely discussed aspects of Mormon history”; “known only to serious investigators.”

second category, this book is dedicated to you” (p. v). After all, though the details of her story are unique (to say the least), she is “sure the pattern is not” (p. 306). In other words, having been there and done that, she’s there to guide you. Besides, as her cousin “Diane” pleads to Nibley, “Martha loves you. She has nothing to gain by making this up” (p. 220). And you might believe her too, unless you saw her on “Good Morning America” on Monday, 7 March 2005, or read the promotion schedule on the back of the review copy of her book: “20-City Morning-Drive Radio Satellite Tour, 6-City Author Tour; New York, Phoenix, San Francisco, Washington, DC, Advertising; *USA Today*, Outreach to Ex-Mormon Community . . .”

“Rule 5: **Proclaim your love for the Mormon people.**” If there was ever a clarion call of anti-Mormonism, this is it. J. Edward Decker of *The God Makers* fame begins his pamphlet *To Moroni with Love* by saying, “It is given to you, my LDS friend, in love and in Christ. If you are a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, you may doubt the sincerity of that love, but I assure you that it is real and it is honest.”³⁰ Berean Christian Ministries, an outreach ministry to Mormons, says much the same, “We have nothing but warm regard for most of the Mormon people; they make good neighbors, citizens, friends and co-workers.”³¹ These guys are right at home in Martha’s world. On “Good Morning America,” she was virtually a Mormon Tabernacle Choir as she sang the church’s praises. “I think it’s a wonderful religion, and I love the people of Mormonism. . . . Mormons are people who get up everyday and try to do their absolute best,” she tells Charlie Gibson.³² The Latter-day Saints, Martha assures us in her book, are “so earnest, so guileless, that they had virtually no defense against cynicism” (p. 35).

In fact, Martha and John returned to Utah because she knew the Utah Mormons, unlike the Harvard crowd, would happily accept her Down syndrome child (pp. 8, 57). According to Martha, the people of

30. J. Edward Decker, *To Moroni with Love*, pamphlet found at www.saintsalive.com/mormonism/tomoroniwithlove.htm (accessed 18 August 2005).

31. FAQ at www.bcmmin.org/ (accessed 18 August 2005).

32. Transcript of *Good Morning America* appearance, 7 March 2005, copy in my possession.

Provo, her hometown—“an incredibly nice place”—“are so nice they make the Trapp Family Singers look like Hell’s Angels” (p. 11). And the Oak Hills Fourth Ward was a veritable house of love. In fact, upon hearing that the ward had been praying for her son Adam, Martha’s “eyes filled with tears as I remembered the long, cold months when I had felt so isolated. . . . all that time . . . these gentle people had been silently sending me their support. . . . It felt like a miracle to be so welcome and so safe. . . . Nothing I could ever do would set me outside the circle of their acceptance” (pp. 57, 59).

Of course, as in all good anti-Mormon books, even first efforts, the love fest is short-lived since the author is there to make a point. By the next sentence, Martha manages to wipe away her tears and intone forebodingly, “Looking back over the various illusions I’ve harbored during my lifetime, I would have to say that this was one of the very, very best” (p. 59).

By page 250 of her tome, Martha says that the good folks of Oak Hills “who had embraced us at church meetings now turned away, showing us their backs until we were out of sight” in a scene she describes as *mura hachibo* or “expulsion from the village,” a scene evidently intended to plant the idea in the reader’s mind that Mormons practice a form of ritualistic shunning (pp. 240, 242, 250). Martha sets this little scene up on page 242, when she wonders whether distant relatives or friends had decided to “shun” her (quotation marks in original). And note that she doesn’t say “some” or “many.” Assuming anyone actually turned their back to her, could there possibly be any other reason? No, in Martha’s world of Mormonism, they don’t get to act uncomfortable when something untoward happens in their ranks. They can’t be at a loss for words in the face of tragedy. No, they simply “turned away, showing . . . their backs”—shunning her, in other words—because that’s what religious fanatics do.

“Rule 6: ***Allow the Mormons a few normal human failings.***” How else, asks her father, can anti-Mormon writers show that they are tolerant? However, I hasten to add, make sure those failings play to your case. For example, when Martha is wondering whether her relatives might be shunning her, she wonders as well “if they were simply afraid

someone would catch them speaking to me” (p. 242). Thus, she uses fear, a normal emotion, to support her paranoid contention that the dreaded Mormon Church was keeping tabs on her and her friends.

Martha does the paranoid two-step again when she meets with her stake president. As Martha might say, “Let’s call him President Dick.” (Ever the humorist, she gives her bishop the pseudonym Harry.) President Dick has come to see if he can “keep John in the kingdom” (he’d recently “resigned” from the church) and asks questions such as “Were you wearing your garments when you made this decision [to resign]?” as he glares at John.³³ Dick then turns to Martha and asks, “What’s the state of *your* testimony? . . . Exactly what do you believe?” Martha tells him that there’s a lot of good in Mormonism and that the leaders are probably very good men, but “if one of them ordered me to do something that I felt in my heart was wrong, I would refuse.” Then President Dick leans toward her and whispers, “Well, privately, I agree with you,” because he’s human, you know, but only for an instant because Martha’s got a case to prove. According to her, he then “reared up again, ‘But if you ever make a statement like that in public, the Church will have to take action against you’” (p. 258).

“Rule 7: ***Furnish documents!***” Nibley’s seventh rule called for imaginative photos (or engravings, in the nineteenth century) to help the reader get as near as possible to the source. Once again, Martha obediently follows the rule, using a shadowy photograph of the Angel Moroni atop the Salt Lake Temple on her cover and a reproduction from the Joseph Smith Papyri of a figure of the body of a snake walking on two legs to help the reader “see” Mormonism (p. 171). She even provides commentary on the snake, taking a cheap shot at a good man—Oliver Cowdery—to get an easy laugh. The joke, however, is on her, as we shall see in her rigid adherence to the next rule.

“Rule 8: ***Avoid footnotes!***” This is the safest route, Nibley cautions the budding anti-Mormon. And apparently his daughter took him seriously. Martha, who fails to document even the most minor element of her story—there is not one footnote in the book (see rule 10 for more on her use of sources)—takes pains to introduce us to

33. See note 8 above.

Tweedy—a pseudonym, of course—who slaved away for Nibley’s publisher, checking his famously prodigious footnotes. “Your father is a liar,” Tweedy says to her in the grocery story after drawing a deep breath. “He makes them up . . . his footnotes. He makes them all up.” And if you don’t believe the anonymous Tweedy, surely you’ll believe the rest of his equally anonymous “team.” “We all [helped cover it up],” Tweedy continues, “everyone on the team.” Tweedy finally backed down, just a little, saying only 90% of them were wrong, “conservatively” (pp. 165–66). Even the mysterious Tweedy obeys our Harvard-trained puppet master.

Of course, you won’t find a source for that allegation, but you will find many sources who dispute it. Boyd Petersen, Nibley’s son-in-law and biographer, has personal correspondence from Todd Compton, Glen Cooper, William Hamblin, Stephen Ricks, and John Gee, scholars all, and all of whom vouch for the fact that Nibley did not make up his sources. In fact, Gee checked the footnotes in one Nibley essay and found that “87% of the footnotes were completely correct, 8% of the footnotes contained typographical errors, 5% were wrong in some way.” Todd Compton, who was critical of Nibley’s interpretation of some of his sources, nevertheless wrote, “I believe that saying that 90% of his footnotes were wrong is a wild overstatement.”³⁴ But then, that’s par for the course that Martha’s playing on.

“Rule 9: *Be lavish in your appendix!*” Martha chose to abide by this rule in her acknowledgments. There she thanks her Utah friends, her therapy group, the Bensons, and various others, who get none of the blame for her book “but all of the credit for anything worthwhile that may have strayed onto its pages” (pp. viii–ix). Interesting word choice, “strayed.” Maybe Martha forgets that writing is an intentional act, one where writer and editor strive for accuracy in the facts and

34. “Petersen Response,” 30 n. 17. In Martha’s response, she dismisses all these scholars by saying “The fact checkers Boyd spoke to obviously knew him as a devout follower of Hugh, and of Mormon dogma. It is possible that some of these fact checkers fear they will receive the reaction I am getting if they speak frankly. I believe the admission that my father ‘got sloppy at times’ is their way of speaking the party line (i.e., don’t go against the church scholar). When I spoke to the fact checkers I knew, who may or may not be the same people who spoke with Boyd . . .” (pp. 16–17). Well, you know the rest.

beauty in the telling. Apparently, since she named them immediately after “the great O,” she is most grateful to her editors for letting her write an entire book without naming a soul, other than her husband John, who might verify any of her claims. John, by the way, disputes a number of her claims.³⁵

“Rule 10: *Be a name dropper!*” Martha’s editors must have a copy of Nibley’s guide sitting on their bookshelves next to Strunk and White’s *Elements of Style* and Fowler’s *Modern English Usage*. How else can you explain a book that basically names Shakespeare, Sartre, and her editors, but literally gives no name (to her immediate family members, including her father; a skeptical Egyptologist; BYU faculty, administrators, and students; and church administrators) or pseudonyms (to Tweedy, other BYU faculty, church leaders, therapists, doctors, and the like) to the sources who either back her claims or supply her with gossipy “facts” about Mormonism? She does name her children, her husband, and the “gentle force that put [her] back together” (p. ix).³⁶ Rosemary Douglas, her friend in the Oak Hills Fourth Ward; Mona, her first therapist; Scott, the colleague with the red bow tie; Elder Clements, the apostle; Orin Hicks, who criticized Elder Clements’s master’s thesis in print; Rachel Grant, her second therapist and the one with the telltale mark of the garment: all get pseudonyms.

The pseudonym she chose for “Dr. Rachel Grant” may warrant moving Martha from the ranks of neophyte anti-Mormon writers to the big leagues. As she’s sitting in Dr. Grant’s waiting room to see her for the first time, Martha “wondered if Dr. Grant was descended from former Mormon President Heber J. Grant [a real name for once]” because Martha’s grandfather had played an embarrassing joke on him many years before. “If [Dr. Grant] was the grandchild of Heber J. Grant, maybe she would want revenge,” she worries (pp. 234–35). Yes, that might be the fake Dr. Grant’s first inclination if her name really

35. John Beck, “Discrepancies,” his view of *Leaving the Saints*, posted as a “Spotlight Review” of Martha’s book at www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0609609912/qid=1121734275/sr=1-1/ref=sr_1_1/102-0150380-8186574?v=glance&s=books (accessed 18 July 2005).

36. Footnotes are superfluous here. Virtually every page of her book has her referring to someone by a pseudonym or saying “let’s call him”

was Dr. Rachel Grant. Unfortunately for Martha's credibility and fortunately for you evidence hounds out there, the good doctor's real name is Ruth Killpack.³⁷

Martha even gives her cousins pseudonyms—the ones she had hidden in or just outside the hotel room when she confronted her father so she would have witnesses to the event. "I'm making sure there are witnesses to every word we say. Everything" (p. 2; see pp. 3, 5). Most importantly, if the reader is interested in evidence, Martha fails to name any of the three doctors who she says examined her and found vaginal scarring, the linchpin of her allegations against her father. You have to wonder at the value of witnesses with no names or fake names.

"Rule 11: **Control your sources!**" Of course! One of the benefits of not naming your sources is that you can control what they say so much better. If you need your cousin "Diane" to back you up when you read your father's facial tics and thus know he's lying, you can suit "Diane" up and have her shake her head "to tell [Martha] that she, too, has the feeling my father is fibbing" (p. 272). Or if you need support for your crazy theory for why your father did what you claim he did, you can turn to "Diane" again and have her smile lovingly at Nibley and say, "You have such a big, fat, whopping case of posttraumatic stress syndrome" (p. 287).

Martha is an equal-opportunity controller. When she's not using her unnamed and fake-named characters to convict her father, she is using them to take potshots at everything Mormon, especially Brigham Young University and the church's Strengthening the Membership Committee. To paraphrase Art Linkletter, grown people say the darndest things, at least when they don't have to account for it; thus, we get to listen in on a Sociology Department faculty meeting

37. Boyd Petersen, personal correspondence to Greg Taggart, 7 March 2005. Martha doesn't miss a beat explaining this lapse. "The therapist I called 'Dr. Rachel Grant' was named neither Rachel nor Grant. However, the story of my grandfather accompanying Mormonism's singing prophet Heber J. Grant has been popular lore in our family for years and my father particularly enjoyed telling this story. There was a therapist named Grant whom I considered seeing, but decided not to, thinking she might be related to Heber J. Grant." The correct response to her explanation is "What?" ("Beck Responds," 5).

where the department chairman says, “I’m sure you are all aware that the brethren in Salt Lake are asking BYU faculty to refrain from publishing in any journals that are considered ‘alternative voices.’” I know, you’re thinking, “That’s true. The Brethren did counsel the faculty to avoid publishing in *Sunstone* and *Dialogue*. I remember hearing about that.” Yes, you did. But apparently, Martha didn’t hear it that way (she writes that “alternative voices” are anything “not approved by the Church authorities, from the *Christian Science Monitor* to *Hustler*”), and neither did Scott, the professor in the red bow tie. Pay attention to the words Martha puts into his mouth: “But that’s ridiculous! Where are we supposed to publish? Nobody takes church journals seriously. I mean, *I* don’t take them seriously. They’ll never let us tell the truth” (p. 79). Neat trick, that. In one little made-up conversation, Martha manages to belittle the church, denigrate a university, and caricature its faculty. And she did it all by controlling her sources.

Martha starts early and controls often, putting words in the mouths of her grade-school teacher after she had befriended a Catholic girl at school (“Now, Martha, considering who your father is, don’t you think you can find other girls to play with?” [p. 33]); of an unnamed adviser on the proper way to advertise for a babysitter in Utah County (“we were told that ‘nanny’ was forbidden—Mormon women are expected to raise their own children,” [p. 66]); of a young, unnamed, male BYU student (““You see, Sister Beck,’ he told me in an earnest voice, ‘I hold the priesthood, and that means I’ll *always* know better than you”—of course, the puppets in the “class nodded sagely in agreement,” as Martha pulled their strings [p. 222]); and of the bishop of a close friend who had just told him that the church’s doctrine made her feel like a second-class citizen (“But, sister,” he told her, “you *are* a second-class citizen” [p. 222]). Now, I realize that there are Mormons who have said the darndest things. I’ve heard some and said some myself. But Martha is a magnet for the weird, so much so that she has to reassure us, “I am not making this up” (p. 257). I repeat—yes, she is.

“Rule 12: ***Wave your credentials!***” When Nibley established this rule, he recommended “remind[ing] the reader from time to time of your ‘years of intensive research.’” Martha took him seriously. She

reminds us all the time. Starting on page three, she touts her Harvard education, her sociological training, and her “love affair with evidence” (pp. 3, 5). And she relentlessly beats that drum to the end. She tells us that she follows “the Baconian model of believing nothing until it was proven true” (p. 9); that she commuted from Provo to Harvard to work on her PhD (p. 49); and that she’s a Harvard-trained sociologist who’s “used to fighting” (p. 126). She can’t remind us enough that her “psychological training tells” her something or other, typically, a signal that she’s reading minds or interpreting comments to suit her purposes (p. 148). Finally, she assures us that she’s “trained as a social scientist, which means that [she tries] very hard not to jump to conclusions” (p. 207). I guess her objective in flashing her credentials in her readers’ faces is an appeal to authority: You can believe me because I went to Harvard. She may have achieved an unintended effect: How does a Harvard-trained PhD in a love affair with evidence and who tries very hard not to jump to conclusions write some of the things she does with a straight face? How does a Harvard-trained sociologist show so little sensitivity and respect for the culture she’s studying?

“Rule 13: ***Establish immediate intellectual ascendancy*** by opening your book, as is the fashion, with a tremendous blast of meticulous erudition to intimidate the reader and discourage any smart-aleck questions.” Does the writer take too long to establish that ascendancy if she waits until say, the second paragraph, first sentence of her book to say, “A Shakespearean phrase pops into my mind: ‘ . . . a world too wide/For his shrunk shank.’ From *As You Like It*, I think” (p. 1). Does she wait too long if she waits until page two to mention Santayana? If she waits until page four to point out that scholars have dismissed the Book of Mormon because of DNA, is she waiting too long? If her first reference to her Harvard education finally appears on page five? If her bold, self-serving admission on page six that “The only conviction I embrace absolutely is this: whatever I believe, I may be wrong”? (And does it matter if fifteen pages later, she writes, “Of one thing I am absolutely certain: I haven’t invented a single thing” [p. 21]?) In any event, within six pages, the reader should be sufficiently cowed that

he or she will buy anything from this writer. And that's good because she's in a rush to comply with rule 14.

"Rule 14: *Have something new to sell.*" And the product is, of course, her alleged abuse at the hands of her father and an insider's view of one of Mormondom's most prominent families. The rest is twentieth- and twenty-first-century Mormonism trashed with nineteenth-century tools.

"Rule 15: *Get an inside track!*" And it's available, Grant Palmer having left the scene. Now, it's Martha's turn. Strong Mormon pedigree (p. 32). Educated. Witty. And a room with a view into the tiny "swimming-pool blue" house (p. 42) with the large family, a position at BYU, and connections to the inner workings of Salt Lake City that the Tanners would kill to have (p. 32). Tout your apostasy (p. 20), become a "hiss and a byword" (p. 7), be "far more vocal about [your] beliefs than most [dissidents]" (p. 237), and you've got the inside track all to yourself—until the next guy.

"Rule 16: *Don't answer questions!*" Quoting A. E. Houseman, Nibley lays out something that Martha must have counted on when she wrote this book:

The average reader knows hardly anything about textual criticism, and therefore cannot exercise a vigilant control over the writer: the addle-pate is at liberty to maunder and the imposter is at liberty to lie. And, what is worse, the reader often shares the writer's prejudices, and is far too well pleased with his conclusions to examine either his premises or his reasoning.³⁸

Thus the reader doesn't ask, and Martha doesn't answer, why not one of those omniscient and omnipresent church authorities in her book ever gets an opportunity to tell the church's side in Martha's little drama; why nary a BYU professor with an opposing view is allowed to speak; why only the silliest things ever emanate from a BYU student's mouth (p. 82).

38. A. E. Housman, *Selected Prose* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 136, as quoted in Nibley, "How to Write an Anti-Mormon Book," 494–95.

So let me take this opportunity to lend a helping hand, as it were. First, I'd like to ask her if I could get the names of her students who took the following test, so I could ask them why only three of forty students "got it" (in case you're Mormon, the answer in each case is "scientifically indeterminable"). Ms. Beck's test question was "Determine whether each statement was true, false, impossible to determine from empirical evidence" (pp. 221–22):

1. God has blue eyes. (true, false, scientifically indeterminable)
2. The Three Nephites live in the United States. (true, false, scientifically indeterminable)
3. Polygamy is the eternal order of marriage. (true, false, scientifically indeterminable)

Another question would be, "As a part-time instructor at BYU with an at-will contract in an at-will state, why do you say that BYU would 'have a hard time legally firing me'" (p. 259)?

And another would be, "Would you mind naming names? For example, name the teachers who almost every year 'would privately instruct [you] not to play or speak to the non-Mormon'" (p. 274). Surely you don't want to protect such mean-spirited people who may have preyed on the biases of little children.

Another would be about that intrusive hairdresser. Just how wide do your nostrils have to flare before a Provo hairdresser will back down and allow you to have your hair cut short without your husband's approval (p. 193)? Would you mind telling me the name of the salon, so my wife can avoid it? I kind of like her hair short, but I don't want to interrupt my busy day to exercise my priesthood just to say "yes, she can get her hair cut short."

And while we're on the subject of short hair, what do you mean when you say that "boy-short" hair is "technically permitted under the dress code, but clearly unsettling to the Man" (p. 193)? If it's "technically permitted," is that the same as saying it's permitted? Maybe you could show us a copy of the dress code from which you derive all of this technical mumbo jumbo? When my wife, a BYU student, cut her hair short, should I have called our bishop and asked him to hold court?

Why was it necessary for you to add polygamy to the mix in that story of the guy with five wives who visited your father to discuss doctrine and then not long after shot himself? Then, according to you, his wives pushed their children to their death “from a tall building in Salt Lake City, then jumped to their own deaths” (p. 224)? Were you aware that the actual story involved a man and his only wife and that the man asphyxiated himself in Little Cottonwood Canyon rather than shot himself?³⁹ Given that he did not have five wives, wasn’t a polygamist, and did not shoot himself, can we safely assume that he didn’t visit with your father either?

Why do you say that you “didn’t know anything about the [Joseph Smith] papyri” (p. 146) when in fact you helped illustrate your father’s book *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*, published in 1975 when you were approximately thirteen?⁴⁰ Why do you contradict yourself a mere eleven pages later when you write, “I grew up hearing stories from Saints (my father’s acolytes) who were particularly interested in the discovery of the Joseph Smith papyri” (p. 157)? Why do you ask us on the one hand to believe that as a six-year-old you were perceptive enough to know that your father “was horribly afraid of death” (p. 89), but at age ten—the age you say you drew those drawings⁴¹—you were not perceptive enough to gather that they concerned the Joseph Smith Papyri (JSP)?

And another: You do a relatively decent job telling the basic story of the Joseph Smith Papyri, so I’m bewildered by your statement that it “took much longer to learn [the story behind the story] than it will to tell” (p. 150). Were you unfamiliar with the many books and articles, including some your father wrote for the *Improvement Era*, *Dialogue*, and *BYU Studies*, that tell much of that story?⁴² Why do you make

39. Cynthia Gorney, “The ‘Prophet’ Who Failed: Immanuel David’s Tragic Journey,” *Washington Post*, 11 August 1978, B1, B3.

40. Hugh Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975), xiii.

41. “Beck Responds,” 3.

42. Peterson, *The Story of the Book of Abraham*; Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*; Hugh Nibley, “A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price,” *Improvement Era*, January 1968 through May 1970; Petersen, *Hugh Nibley: A Consecrated Life*, 275, 307.

it sound as if the church lied about the disappearance and probable destruction of the JSP (p. 156)? Were you playing up the sinister implications of the quotation “People underestimate the capacity of things to disappear” that you attribute to your father and which you repeat in your book (pp. 4, 83)? Do you have evidence to back up this claim? Can you explain how the church simultaneously kept the JSP “under lock and key, shown only to those who could be absolutely trusted to support Joseph Smith” (p. 158) and yet published color reproductions of the JSP in the February 1968 issue of *The Improvement Era*, less than three months after the church announced the acquisition of the JSP?⁴³ Assuming for sake of argument that the church was a bit slow for your tastes in publicizing the JSP, is there possibly some other explanation for the delay other than the sinister one you give?

The questions just keep coming once you get the knack of this critical text stuff: You refer a couple of times to how DNA has essentially disproved the Book of Mormon (pp. 4, 305). Have you interacted at all with the scholarship on this issue? What is your opinion of the articles written in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* by Dr. Michael Whiting, who holds a PhD in entomology from Cornell, is a recipient of multiple National Science Foundation grants, and an expert in DNA, and by Dr. John Butler, who holds a PhD in chemistry from the University of Virginia and is the author of the acclaimed book, *Forensic DNA Typing: Biology and Technology behind STR Markers*?⁴⁴

Given that Utah consistently ranks among the top states in which to do business, according to *Fortune Magazine*,⁴⁵ and given the fact that Provo and Orem consistently rank among the most livable cities

43. H. Donl Peterson, *The Story of the Book of Abraham: Mummies, Manuscripts, and Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995), 236. That announcement came after negotiations between the church and New York’s Metropolitan Museum that lasted about a year. See “The Facsimile Found: The Recovery of Joseph Smith’s Papyrus Manuscripts,” *Dialogue* 2/4 (1967): 50–64.

44. Michael F. Whiting, “DNA and the Book of Mormon: A Phylogenetic Perspective,” 24–35; John M. Butler, “A Few Thoughts from a Believing DNA Scientist,” 36–37, both in *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12/1 (2003).

45. See www.fortune.com/fortune/print/0,15935,397793,00.html (accessed 16 March 2005). Women-owned businesses also fare well in Utah, according to *Fortune*: found at

in the United States, according to *Forbes*, *Money Magazine*, and others,⁴⁶ can you explain the quotation you put in Allen's mouth, "Oh, yeah. Tell that to all the non-Mormons who've been run out of business in this state" (p. 185).

As a Harvard-trained sociologist with a PhD who has a love affair with evidence, do you feel that you have adequately and fairly treated the doctrines and beliefs of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in your book? Have you presented the church's story with the sensitivity and respect that a scholar would give it?

Finally, you state in your book that your mother threw a fit when you were admitted to Harvard (p. 45). According to your family, your mother filled out your application to Harvard because you were too busy to get it done.⁴⁷ Which one of those statements is closer to the truth?

"Rule 17: *In place of evidence use Rhetoric!*" Nibley suggests that the writer should abide by two basic principles of classical rhetoric: (1) build up the "case not on facts but on probabilities," and (2) appeal to "familiar stock phrases to avoid thought" and use "emotive words of tested reliability to avoid evidence."

Martha's case against her father and the church is just that: all probability—from the first "perhaps," (p. 6) to the last "I am convinced" (p. 303)—and stock phrases. For instance, female Mormon missionaries don't walk around Temple Square, they "prowl." And when she says that only the most attractive are called to Temple Square, she says that "on good authority" (p. 12).

Inside the temple, it's "holy underthings" and "entrails" (p. 14). Martha chooses each word for its rhetorical effect: to ridicule Mormonism, to stop thought, and to avoid the need for evidence.

www.fortune.com/fortune/smallbusiness/articles/0,15114,645906,00.html (accessed 16 March 2005).

46. See Provo City Web site at www.provo.org/econdev.Media_Recognition_main.html and Orem City Web site at www.cedo.org (accessed 18 August 2005). See also "Mormons, Mountains, Startups," *Business Week Online*, 12 July 2005 at www.businessweek.com/smallbiz/content/jul2005/sb20050713_158581.htm (accessed 13 July 2005).

47. Personal conversation with Boyd Petersen, 20 April 2005, notes in my possession.

At “the Lord’s University,” it’s more of the same: “official Mormon perspective” (p. 77), “church’s code of conduct” (p. 77), “religious loonies” (p. 81). Martha looks at the campus and marvels how clean the buildings were. “**Probably** because they *had* just been washed—an **administrator** once told me that the windows and floors were cleaned **up to** six times a day” (p. 78, bolded emphasis supplied). Note just how well Martha caught the spirit and letter of rule 17. First, there’s the requisite study in probabilities. Next, we have an unnamed administrator furnishing the story. Finally, . . . well is there a finer set of weasel words than “up to”? The reader is left wondering whether Mormonism holds a particular attraction for obsessive-compulsive janitors. As Nibley warned, under rule 17, every sentence is speculative, every word is an escape hatch.

“Rule 18: *Use lack of evidence as evidence!*” Our Harvard-trained PhD scores a perfect 10 on this rule. She very quickly lets the reader in on a Mormon secret, quoting her father as saying “People underestimate the capacity of things to disappear” (p. 4), and then uses that quotation as a lead-in to an experience she had at Harvard where a professor criticized a paper she wrote because her “language was duplicitous, and [her] evidence shadowy” (p. 5). In short order, the reader knows that Martha loves evidence, but that Mormons don’t. So don’t be surprised if the only evidence she ever offers is her word of honor: The cravenness of Mormonism? “An all Mormon jury convicting me of murder by conversation—and don’t think they wouldn’t” (p. 20). Socks policy? “I don’t know what group . . . made this determination, but whoever they are . . .” (p. 78). Her father’s mental health? She simply hints and lets the reader do the rest: “Whatever his mental illness, whatever his repressed or forgotten past . . .” (p. 23). Her evidence to support her claims? “Could I possibly be so sick, so fundamentally evil, to invent fantasies of abuse by my own father and then imagine that my mother believed me” (p. 138)? (Don’t miss the irony of her preferred answer to that question: No, but my entire family is sick enough to deny it.) Her father’s dilemma when he received the assignment to defend the Book of Abraham? “I have no trouble believing that . . . he felt caught in a trap from which there was no exit” (p. 169),

hoping her readers will follow suit in spite of the lack of evidence. How the church dealt with those it excommunicated? “By privately hinting that all the accused were adulterers” (p. 240). If it was a private hint, how does she know?

Time after time, Martha gives the reader less than promised but leaves them thinking they got more than they bargained for. Finally, she tells us that “[she is] convinced” that her story is true (p. 303). Could the reader possibly want any further evidence than that? Why, when they can follow Martha into the anti-“Mormon gossip system” (p. 238).

“Rule 19: *Use the unfulfilled condition* to make out a case against the Mormons where there is neither evidence *nor* absence of evidence, i.e., where *nothing at all* has happened.” In other words, spread rumors. And Martha offers up a ton of those. Orson Hicks (not his real name—surprise), a BYU professor, is rumored to be up for excommunication. Martha wonders, “‘They would actually ex someone for hating Elder Clement’s [also not his real name] master’s thesis?’ I couldn’t believe it,” Martha tells us (p. 188). No, but she hopes the reader does. And she also hopes the reader will believe that the Danites are up to no good: “‘I wonder when they call out the Danites,’ said Scott [not his real name either]. I stared at him. ‘The Danites still exist?’ My friends stopped laughing” (p. 190). And where’s an ex-Mormon when you need one to start a rumor? Heck, you can find one right at Martha’s elbow to offer up some spine-tingling hooey after Martha told her that she had decided to write the book under review: “‘They’ll kill you,’” she tells Martha without a trace of levity (p. 191). And obviously they all mean it because even now, Martha claims she still receives death threats.⁴⁸

“Rule 20: *Be generous with hints*—they are very effective and you never have to prove anything.” Martha is no beginner when it comes to hinting. And she spares nobody and nothing as she goes wink, wink, nudge, nudge with her reader. “Judging by what [she] knew of [her father’s] history and personal quirks, [he] was a walking textbook of unhealed incest wounds,” she intones (p. 137). Why sure, she must

48. Transcript of *Good Morning America* appearance, 7 March 2005, in my possession.

know something or she wouldn't have said that. And when she confronts him later about the Joseph Smith Papyri, "the whole issue . . . seems to create unbearable anxiety for him. . . . Anyone who knows Mormon history would understand" (p. 149). That hint's a twofer, and it illustrates Martha's pro status. In those few words, she "supports" her abuse theory and "proves" that there is something unsavory in Mormon history that would create that anxiety that she senses in him, all with hints and without evidence. But she can't stop there. No, in the next sentence she writes, "Now, it's true that the Church has done a good job of making sure that this particular part of Mormon history remains obscure even to most Latter-day Saints" (p. 149). Once again, Martha scores a twofer. This time she "proves" that the church has obscured the history of the JSP and at the same time ensconces herself as one of the chosen with an insider's view—a lot of that going around lately. Unfortunately for Martha's "truth," publications about the Joseph Smith Papyri—defending it and decrying it—abound.⁴⁹ Evidently, the church has done a very poor job of obscuring the truth after all.

"Rule 21: *Use quotations marks without sources*—the most effective hinting device, and the most popular with anti-Mormon writers." "A source, a source! My kingdom for a source!" the thinking reader will cry (apologies to William Shakespeare). The only thing more prominent in *Leaving the Saints* than the number of pseudonyms is the number of quotations without a source. Not to worry, Martha assures us she's on the job. In at least one case, she reminds us that "I was taking notes [so] I have a record of the conversation" (p. 95). There are lots of conversations

49. On defending the Book of Abraham, see Louis Midgley, "Hugh Winder Nibley: Bibliography and Register," in *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 1:xlvi–lxv in particular, which includes references to everything Nibley wrote on the Book of Abraham; John Gee, *A Guide to the Joseph Smith Papyri* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000). On decrying the Book of Abraham, see Charles M. Larson, *By His Own Hand upon Papyrus: A New Look at the Joseph Smith Papyri* (Grand Rapids, MI: Institute for Religious Research, 1992). Responding to Larson: John Gee, "A Tragedy of Errors," review of *By His Own Hand*, by Larson, *FARMS Review of Books* 4/1 (1992): 93–119. For an extensive list of articles and books on the Book of Abraham, see farms.byu.edu/publications/bookofabraham.php?selection=abr&cat=boa (accessed 10 October 2005).

in her book—the hotel confrontation with her father takes up almost half of the book and is virtually all dialogue—so she must have developed a bad case of writer’s cramp. Nevertheless, she gives us apparent verbatim accounts of her meeting with Dad, the Sociology Department meeting, her extended conversations with her mother, meetings with her bishop and stake president, and more. And with no more assurance that the conversations are real than “I am not making this up” (p. 257).⁵⁰

“Rule 22: *Discuss motives; read minds!*” Martha got so good at reading minds because she started early, very early. “I knew that he was horribly afraid of death. . . . People think a six-year-old can’t understand these things, but I did.” Of course she did. “So did [her] sister—even at age four” (p. 89). And why should we doubt this pre-Harvard-training six-year-old sociologist? Reading minds is really not that difficult.

From the get-go, she knows that her “father understands the way [she thinks]” (p. 1). In another instance, her father “looks as though he’s about to bolt” (p. 37). In still another, she can tell by looking at his fading smile that he’s “ashamed at having complimented himself” (p. 64). She even has her own personal lie detector that allows her to imagine the shade of blue a person would turn, depending on the gravity of the lie. And when Nibley says that he doesn’t fear death, her lie detector goes off the scale. “I squint at him, because in my mind’s eye, the skin all over his entire body has just turned as blue as his eyes” (p. 88). At other times she sees “fear” in her father’s expression (pp. 121, 127) or takes comfort when her father “flinches” because it tells her she can trust her memories (pp. 121–22). In one case, she manages to see “in [her] mind’s eye” her mother scowling at a book while they’re talking with each other on the phone (p. 137).

Of course, we all speculate like this. We all read minds and judge motives, but in this case it’s important to remember that these speculations—and that’s all they are—are being used to convict a good man of sexual abuse.

50. For the sake of irony, I’ve not footnoted the conversation references in this case.

“Rule 23: *Be cute!*” What can you say about a book that glad-hands the author’s mother in one instance—when her mother essentially agreed that her father had abused her, *according to Martha*—yet describes her as having “personally ejected over eighty pounds of human being into the universe [nine children each weighing over nine pounds]” (p. 43)? I guess that when Martha wrote that she “will always, always be grateful” for “those words [that] were a gift [from her] mother,” a rope to a drowning child (p. 131), she was using “always” to mean ten to fifteen years.

Now, I admit that I’m not a fan of this book, but neither am I humor impaired. Many examples in the book prove that Martha is witty and can turn a phrase with the best of them; however, portraying her mother as a human cannon is one place where Martha is too cute for her own good—and for her mother’s. Another would be where she portrays the Mormon temple endowment ceremony as an aerobics exercise (p. 17). And the world wonders why Mormons would prefer to keep its sacred ordinances safe from a voyeuristic public. Imagine sharing your most intimate secrets and sacred thoughts with a stand-up comic only to discover that he’s decided they will make great material for his routine, and then you will have some idea how most Mormons will feel about Martha’s little book. Sensitivity. Respect. Indeed.

Moreover, to me at least, her humor often hurts her case. Does this Harvard-trained writer not have any idea when less might be more? I ask as she interrupts her medical flashbacks with “I must interject here that I realize that there is only one thing less appealing than mentioning one’s own intimate body parts in public, and that is mentioning them in conjunction with the word *polyp*” (p. 116). I’m reminded of E. B. White’s first rule of style: “*Place yourself in the background. Write in a way that draws the reader’s attention to the sense and substance of the writing, rather than to the mood and temper of the author.*”⁵¹ In *Leaving the Saints*, it’s all Martha, all the time. Center stage. What does E. B. White know about style?

51. William Strunk Jr. and E. B. White, *The Elements of Style*, 4th ed. (New York: Longman: 2000), 70.

“Rule 24: *Make atmosphere your objective.*” Martha’s goal is to prove her case against her father, so it helps to have him attribute her scarring to “the Evil One” (p. 3). Put those three words in anyone’s mouth other than Keanu Reeves, and you’ve painted him as a religious fanatic, capable of, well, anything a religious fanatic would do, and we can all imagine what that would be. Want to diminish him further? Call him a mere apologist for the Mormon Church (pp. 3–4). Then Martha pulls off the hat trick of anti-Mormonism when she finishes her first chapter by predicting the reaction to her allegations and thus winning the hearts and minds of her readers when she says that she has the “sickening conviction that no one will ever take my word over his” (p. 6).⁵² Add a dose of forgiving heart (p. 2)—the writer’s, of course—and Martha has set the ambience just right. The reader has no doubt that this is a book about little versus big, good versus evil, forgiving Martha against unrepentant father. How can the reader not believe everything she says from then on?

“Rule 25: *Attack not the thing but the Image!*” “It has been the practice of religious polemic in every age to attack not what the opposition practice and preach but our impression of what they practice and preach,” says Martha’s father. For example, he continues, Fanny Stenhouse wrote that “Brigham Young . . . preached ‘a blood-atonement’—in other words, the *duty* of assassination.”⁵³ To Nibley, the key lies in phrases such as “in other words” because they allow the writer to interpret for the reader. For Martha, the chance to use “in other words” and such comes attached to the hip of polygamy and everything salacious and ridiculous that represents. She introduces the subject innocuously enough. The home she was born into was a “polygamist’s hand-me-down” (p. 46). But she quickly creates a polygamous straw man to fit her purposes. “Mormons believe in a literal Father and Mother in Heaven. (In fact, a whole bunch of heavenly mothers, since the Father is supposed to be impressively polygamous . . . the more chicks per man-God, the better)” (p. 75). This

52. She does that a lot. For example, she speculates that her family won’t believe her because of the group therapy session gone bad at “Mona’s” (pp. 213, 216). And surprise! They don’t.

53. Nibley, “How to Write an Anti-Mormon Book,” 512 n. 80.

is the “implied” version of “in other words,” unless you believe that a Mormon prophet actually said, “the more chicks per man-God, the better.” Men who successfully pursue many chicks in this life—that is, live the “true and eternal principle of plural marriage”—have a place reserved in the central zone of the celestial kingdom, according to Martha, for them and their endless progeny (p. 87).

Martha’s comedic version of the doctrine of polygamy and eternal increase has a purpose. You see, she really wants to talk about how Mormonism “has a long-standing, proud tradition of lying about sexual behavior” (p. 176). Thus the grand doctrine of eternal increase began not as a religious doctrine but as a religious excuse for Joseph to have sex with many women—secretly! If you don’t believe her, she’ll prove it by quoting the scripture behind it—sort of. Martha’s version of Doctrine and Covenants Section 132:61 is the bolded portion of the following actual verse:

And again, as pertaining to the law of the priesthood—if **any man espouse a virgin, and desire to espouse another,** and the first give her consent, and if he espouse the second, and they are virgins, and have vowed to no other man, **then is he justified; he cannot commit adultery for they are given unto him;** for he cannot commit adultery with that that belongeth unto him and to no one else.

Her version short-changes the reader’s understanding of the doctrine by forty-nine words, words that clarify meaning that she was attempting to obscure. She also inserts no ellipsis points between the bolded portions of the verse that would indicate that she’s left words out. This is not honest quoting. Consequently, you are justified in ignoring Martha’s pronouncement on polygamy in the next paragraph in which she asserts that “plural marriage is still official Mormon doctrine [, a]lthough the Church officially renounced polygamy in 1890” (pp. 177). I’m feeling a mighty young fifty-three right now. I’m also wondering how a church today can have an “official” doctrine that it “officially renounced” 115 years ago.

If Martha actually cared whether her reader understood the doctrine of plural marriage, she might take an approach similar to the late Professor Eugene England's essay in the Winter 1987 issue of *Dialogue*, "On Fidelity, Polygamy, and Celestial Marriage," which looks at the doctrine seriously, with respect, and with footnotes.⁵⁴ But then that would not work for Martha because England contradicts her comic book version:

In [this essay] I explore an idea—the general Mormon expectation of future polygamy—that has important religious and moral implications but about which there is little definite scriptural direction and *no clear official doctrine*. . . . [Polygamy is] a practice I believe was divinely inspired but also *divinely, and permanently, rescinded*.⁵⁵

I refer to England's essay not because he is correct in his analysis—though he may be—but because he is correct in his approach, respectful of his subject, sensitive to Mormon culture, and truly interested in the truth—and he gives his readers a source or two to keep himself honest.

Martha might also take note of the way England quotes section 132, the same verse she deliberately misquoted:

If any man espouse a virgin, and desire to espouse another [by the law of the priesthood], and the first give her consent, and if he espouse the second . . . then he is justified. (v. 61)⁵⁶

Note the difference in approach. First, England gives chapter and verse. Second, he preserves the meaning of the verse, all without quoting the entire verse, and he uses ellipsis points to indicate omitted words. Prior to the quotation, he also provides context for that and other verses. In other words, England, a Stanford-trained English scholar, was someone who actually was in love with evidence.

54. Eugene England, "On Fidelity, Polygamy, and Celestial Marriage," *Dialogue* 20/4 (1987): 138–54.

55. England, "On Fidelity, Polygamy, and Celestial Marriage," 138, emphasis added.

56. England, "On Fidelity, Polygamy, and Celestial Marriage," 147.

“Rule 26: *Enjoy the prerogatives of ‘unequal scholarship,’* i.e., ‘the scrupulous straining at small historical gnats which diverts attention from the silent digestion of large and inconvenient camels.’” As Nibley explains, here the “scholar” can show her stuff on the little things in hopes the reader won’t notice that she has no evidence for the big things. Thus we have Martha sounding scholarly and bound by evidence as she speaks of DNA and the Book of Mormon (p. 4), of the fact that strict Mormons won’t drink Dr. Pepper (p. 44), of the cover-up of the Mountain Meadows Massacre and Joseph Smith’s marriages (p. 176),⁵⁷ and of the fact that more Prozac and chocolate donuts are consumed “in Utah County than anywhere else” (p. 186). One can only imagine the research it must have taken to gather all these facts—insignificant in most cases, disputed in some, and in all cases irrelevant to the case against her father. And while readers watch Martha chew on these gnats, she hopes that they are swallowing her camel whole.

“Rule 27: *Be literary!*” That is, make it up. And how Martha excels! In my view, her book is a masterpiece of fiction. Tweedy, invitations to baptism parties, pubic hair on the ankles, and so forth. Many complain that such absurdities are not so absurd after all. “Have you ever heard of the baseball baptisms?” asked one poster on a message board I occasionally visit. A poster on another message board alleges that he (she?) was at BYU in the 80s and heard the ankle hair justification for the socks policy. The only answer to these assertions is “You’re right. Some absurd things do happen in a church of twelve million people. And some absurd things are merely urban legends. But have you ever heard of them all happening to one person?” Nobody’s life is that interesting, and neither is Martha’s, so she chose the literary route to tell her story.

For example, in their hotel confrontation, Martha tells her father that when she moved back to Utah in 1988, she “wanted to know every

57. Mountain Meadows must be the most widely discussed, yet stubbornly obscure, event in Mormon history—obscure if you believe detractors like Martha; and Smith’s marriages, again well covered in Mormon history, are mentioned in whispered tones by the same detractors as if they’re also a secret.

spiritual practice from every culture anywhere,” going on to explain that she checked out all the “**obscure books**” she could find on religion, mysticism, and shamanism. “And a lot of times, when I signed my name on the **check-out card in the back** of the book, there was only one other name there. Yours” (p. 37, emphasis added). That’s a great story.⁵⁸ It causes the reader to pause and consider these two souls as cut from the same cloth. But there are a few problems with that story, according to Kathy Hansen, Access Services Department chair of the Harold B. Lee Library:⁵⁹

1. Library circulation has been automated since about 1982. Prior to that, the library did use a two-part carbonless form, a copy of which went into the back of the book after the patron filled it out. When the patron returned the book, the library removed the slip; thus, there was no ongoing record in the back of the book of who had used that book previously.

2. To Hansen’s knowledge, the library has never used the type of check-out cards Martha describes for books in general circulation (but see below). In fact, Hansen personally went through the stacks in and around obscure books on Shamanism, the Kabbalah, and the like, examining more than one hundred books published as early as 1874 and no later than 1988. She specifically examined only books that had their original bindings. She found no evidence of a pocket to hold a check-out card.⁶⁰ She says that there may be some books in general circulation with a pocket in the back, but that would be because the

58. Who knows, maybe Martha simply borrowed a true story from BYU Professor Stephen Ricks and changed the facts to fit her purposes. Ricks often checked out books from the Berkeley library and could ascertain from the date stamped there (and the unmistakable pencil marks in the margins) that the last person to check them out before him was Nibley. Once he got a book on interlibrary loan and was positive that he had finally found something that Nibley hadn’t beaten him to; however, Nibley’s marginalia again challenged that idea.

59. Personal conversation with Kathy Hansen on 13 March 2005 and personal correspondence dated 14 March 2005, in my possession.

60. I performed a similar search of the relevant stacks later the same month, pulling some fifty to seventy-five books published no later than 1985 from the shelves and examining their inside covers. I found no evidence of a card or a card pocket in any of them—no glue marks, no fading, no rips, no tears, nothing.

library purchased them from other libraries, not because they were used to hold check-out cards at BYU.

3. The one other exception is the reference desk where Martha could have checked out a reference book for a two-hour in-library period. There the process included a card that the patron would sign (it no longer does). The patron would then give the card to the reference desk with his or her student ID. I went to the humanities/religion reference desk the other day to see what kind of reference books they had behind the desk and to which this policy applied. There were no more than thirty books, including a current almanac and a student copy of the Doctrine and Covenants, and of course, reference books related to other disciplines in the humanities. According to the librarian, most, if not all, the books behind the desk are also in the reference stacks. (Yes, I realize that things may have been a bit different in 1988–93, but I doubt by much.) There was nothing I would call “obscure” behind the *reference* desk.

Based on this information, I find it hard to believe that Nibley and Martha checked out “a lot” of the same “obscure” books on “shamanism and mysticism and religion” using a check-out card. It’s even harder to believe, given her track record of getting various stories wrong in her book. At best, she may have checked out, say, one *reference* book that her father had also checked out. Using that as her touch point, she then turned creative, embellishing the story—much like the other stories in her book that don’t add up—and used two related names on a check-out card as a literary device to create the illusion of similarity between her and her father. In her book, she often appeals to that illusion. In one scene in the on-going hotel confrontation, she writes, “He runs his hands through his hat-mussed white hair, and I have that strange sense of looking in the mirror. That’s exactly how I smooth my own hair into place.” Later in the same chapter, she writes, “I can feel my facial expression become a mirror of his. . . . Then, at almost the same time, we both raise our hands and rake them through the hair above our ears, and I catch myself” (pp. 192, 198). But not before she tells another story.

“Rule 28: *Develop a special vocabulary of loaded and emotive words.*” “As a literary artist,” Nibley reminds the reader, “you have this prerogative.” Did he and she have a mind meld in that hotel room? This writer comes chock full of emotive and loaded words. For example, as Martha and her family approach Provo, she describes how she’s done a 180-degree turn from the Baconian model—believe nothing until proven—to where she decided to “believe anything—*anything*—until it was proven false” (p. 9, emotive emphasis in original). *Anything?* readers may wonder. You can almost hear them salivating. “You mean like wire taps and abuse and bishops with fingers in their ears?”

Want to set the stage for your comic-book caricatures of Mormonism? Call “*Walt Disney’s Mormon wife*” to the stage (p. 33, emphasis added). Trying to denigrate your father’s scholarship even as you demean him? Say that his “mind seems to be caught in the Egyptian stuff like a *rat in a blind maze*” (p. 38, emphasis added). In Martha’s vernacular, Mormon women don’t have children, they “breed. . . in captivity” (p. 45); Mormons have an “official Mormon perspective on human knowledge” (p. 77); and everything is secret, as in “To protect the Church. To honor the secret” (p. 140). Of course, the writer must make sure that any time the speaker uses the word *secret*, it must be in a whispered or soothing voice.

In Martha’s world, Mormon leaders don’t just hold papyri, they clutch them to their breast (p. 156). Want to make Mormons appear credulous? Compare them to your ever faithful beagle (p. 170). And if you really need support for your case, bring in Hitler (pp. 174, 194) or Red China (pp. 80–81) or Communism (p. 242).⁶¹ And don’t forget the old standbys, polygamy (discussed above) and patriarchy (p. 71).

The coup de grace of emotive and loaded language is to insert a death threat with the image of a man being dragged behind a pickup “right out of Utah.” Again, make sure the anonymous threat is “whispered” (p. 241). Next thing you know, anti-Mormon writers will be comparing Utah Mormons to convicted racist murderers from Texas.

61. What’s the saying? In an argument, the first person to compare his or her opponent to Hitler loses.

“Rule 29: **Study the techniques of gossip.**” Martha failed to follow her father’s warning about this rule: to “scrupulously avoid ever using the word [gossip], which would be sure to let the cat out of the bag.” As she tells the reader, “I couldn’t expect all the other clients [in her therapy group] to refrain from leaking information about me into the Mormon gossip system” (p. 238). But by then, we already knew the system existed. Otherwise, who would her mother contact during her supposed “phone campaign to discredit [her]” (p. 131)? And where would we get those juicy stories about Nibley’s mother (pp. 131–32)? And how would Martha become “a hiss and a byword” (p. 7)? How would Mormons know when the Danites were back in business if it were not for the “Latter-day grapevine” (p. 190)?

In fact, Martha is quite adept at gossip herself. Virtually her entire book is gossip, complete with gossipy taglines such as “don’t think they wouldn’t” (p. 20) and passive voice constructions like “we were told” (p. 66).

“Rule 30: **Preserve a gap between your readers and the Mormons.**” This is necessary, says Nibley, otherwise “even the most obtuse reader might boggle at the sheer excess and enormity of your tale.” And so readers are reminded constantly who Martha is and, therefore, why they should trust her. “Some of my earliest memories are of adult strangers crowded around me, quizzing me about my father” (p. 32), she tells us. “People I’d never met knew me on sight” (p. 33). Later she lets us know that he “rubs shoulders with the brethren on a regular basis” (p. 39). It doesn’t take much of a leap to think that not only did she bask in her father’s glory when she was young (p. 32), but that she’s using it now to preserve that gap, to preserve her status as the resident expert on things Mormon. And if that’s not enough, she can always say that she’s been there, done that. “I should know,” she reminds us (p. 250).

“Rule 31: **Learn when to be silent.**” This rule is related to rule 16: Don’t answer questions. As our guide reminds us, “Nothing you say about the Mormons can be more damning than what you fail to say.” Martha’s discussion of plural marriage is an excellent example (see rule 25). So is her frequent comment that BYU is a dead-end

institution and that therefore BYU professors had better mind their Ps and Qs (pp. 232–33). So is her dismissal of Book of Mormon apologetics (pp. 4, 172) and her mockery of the temple (pp. 12–18). She constantly and consistently tells only enough to support her version of Mormonism or things Mormon, rarely if ever attempting to show all the evidence. For example, the other side of the story would show that David Knowlton (Orson Hicks in Martha’s drama) is now employed at Utah Valley State College (p. 188).⁶² Cecilia Konchar Farr, another professor who left BYU during the time Martha was there, is a professor of English at the College of St. Catherine.⁶³ The other side of the story would show that members of BYU’s Sociology Department regularly receive job offers elsewhere. Some go, and some choose to stay.⁶⁴ It would show that BYU professors routinely publish in non-church publications—that, in fact, it is a requirement to do so. For instance, Dr. Michael Whiting, an expert on DNA, has been published in the prestigious science journal *Nature*—twice—and my neighbor, Dr. Richard Davis, recently gave me a copy of his new book, *Electing Justice: Fixing the Supreme Court Nomination Process*, published by Oxford University Press.⁶⁵ The other side would show that the debate

62. This is where Martha discusses Hicks’s job prospects in the community. See also www.uvsc.edu/catalog/schools/hass.html (accessed 14 March 2005).

63. See minerva.stkate.edu/offices/academic/English.nsf/pages/farr (accessed 10 March 2005). In both the Konchar Farr and Knowlton cases, I’m not taking a position on whether they were treated fairly by BYU. I’m only noting that if BYU were a dead-end institution, they would not be working in their fields. Further, I’m disappointed that Martha Beck used her book as an opportunity to create a straw man out of the events that she uses as a backdrop to the larger story of her alleged abuse. The turmoil at BYU over the firing of Knowlton, Konchar Farr, and others would make an interesting story without twisting the facts and otherwise embellishing, as would a story about the Strengthening Church Members Committee or the church’s handling of sexual and other physical abuse. As with all good stories, there are two sides. With Martha, we too often get one side.

64. Cardell Jacobson (BYU Sociology Department), personal conversation with Greg Taggart, 19 April 2005.

65. Michael F. Whiting and Ward C. Wheeler, “Insect Homeotic Transformation,” *Nature*, 21 April 1994, 696; Michael F. Whiting, Sven Bradler, and Taylor Maxwell, “Loss and Recovery of Wings in Stick Insects,” *Nature*, 16 January 2003, 264–67; and Richard Davis, *Electing Justice: Fixing the Supreme Court Nomination Process* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

over Book of Mormon archaeology and historicity is hardly over,⁶⁶ and neither is the Book of Abraham the slam-dunk issue she makes it.⁶⁷ The DNA debate is, however, over.⁶⁸ Finally, her mockery of the temple is sad. Any fair reader should recognize that there has to be another side to that story as well, but practicing Mormons won't tell it outside the temple. (Neither will most inactive and even ex-Mormons. They continue to honor, if not respect, the sacred nature of the covenants they made in the temple.)

“Rule 32: ***Be bloody, bold, and resolute!***” “What the public wants in an atrocity story is straight horror, not namby-pamby explanations,” Nibley instructs. And Martha delivers. Her telling of intrigue, mystery, Danites, wiretapping, death threats, and the like is chilling. “The Church gets pretty much anything it wants, and it wants your father protected,” Tweedy warns her. “I felt sick to my stomach,” Martha tells us. “You don't think that's a little paranoid?” she asks Tweedy. “‘You don't understand,’ Tweedy nodded. ‘In this state, you don't just go around spouting stuff that may be a problem for the Church’” (p. 166).

66. See the list of FARMS publications on Book of Mormon archaeology and historicity at farms.byu.edu/publications/bookofmormonview.php?subcat=100&cat=1 and at farms.byu.edu/publications/bookofmormonview.php?subcat=144&cat=5 (both accessed 10 October 2005). See also Paul Hoskisson, ed., *Historicity and the Latter-day Saint Scriptures* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2001).

67. See “Beck Responds,” 3.

68. On the DNA issue, see articles in the *FARMS Review* 15/2 (2003), including Daniel C. Peterson, “Prolegomena to the DNA Essays” (pp. 25–34); David A. McClellan, “Detecting Lehi's Genetic Signature: Possible, Probable, or Not?” (pp. 35–90); Matthew Roper, “Nephi's Neighbors: Book of Mormon Peoples and Pre-Columbian Populations” (pp. 91–128); Matthew Roper, “Swimming in the Gene Pool: Israelite Kinship Relations, Genes, and Genealogy” (pp. 129–64); Brian D. Stubbs, “Elusive Israel and the Numerical Dynamics of Population Mixing” (pp. 165–82); and John A. Tvedtnes, “The Charge of ‘Racism’ in the Book of Mormon” (pp. 183–97). Articles in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12/1 (2003) include John L. Sorenson and Matthew Roper, “Before DNA” (pp. 6–23); Whiting, “DNA and the Book of Mormon: A Phylogenetic Perspective” (pp. 24–35); Butler, “A Few Thoughts from a Believing DNA Scientist” (pp. 36–37); and D. Jeffrey Meldrum and Trent D. Stephens, “Who Are the Children of Lehi?” (pp. 38–51). See also Dean H. Leavitt, Jonathon C. Marshall, and Keith A. Crandall, “The Search for the Seed of Lehi: How Defining Alternative Models Helps in the Interpretation of Genetic Data,” *Dialogue* 36/4 (2003): 133–50.

Though I'd read Martha's book twice and paged through it numerous times as I wrote this review, I'd forgotten how downright scary she makes Utah out to be until I thumbed through my note cards for this particular rule. "I suspected that even though the Mormon powers that be might not actually threaten my life, they would probably try to ruin it. Yes, these suspicions were outlandish. Yes, they were paranoid. And yes, they were completely accurate," Martha warns (p. 182). How do you answer a convoluted statement like that? As a strict Mormon might say—as he cleans the blood off of his Bowie knife—"You're darned if you do and darned if you don't."

Martha virtually has the CIA running what she calls the Strengthening the Membership Committee rather than the Brethren, including at least one apostle (p. 189),⁶⁹ and taking down license plate numbers of the people who visit "rebels' houses" (p. 189) (a reference, I'm guessing, to a purely local story out of Manti a few years ago). She talks about how "rumors of Church-sponsored espionage continued to fly," then states as fact that "two university administrators told me [there's that name dropping again] they'd been 'called in' after their home telephones started making strange clicking sounds." But she lets herself off the hook (and hopes her readers swallow the story whole) by saying, "I didn't know whether to believe these accounts. I didn't know what to believe" (p. 221). Yes she did.

But if you, like Martha, had doubts about that wiretapping story, it's certainly confirmed later by another. This time Martha and John hear an intermittent clicking sound when they're talking to each other on the phone, he from his BYU office, she from home. They later discover that their phone line had been crossed with another in a "phone junction box at the nearby Mormon chapel—something, the repairman said, that could not have happened accidentally" (p. 233). Later she hears the clicking again and a voice saying, "I think that people who speak out against the Gospel shouldn't be Church members. They

69. See www.byui.edu/News/NewsReleases/graduationsummer.html (accessed 12 July 2005). See also Eugene England, "On Spectral Evidence," in *Making Peace* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 37–38. Again, England is instructive in the sensitive and respectful way a true scholar might treat the Strengthening Church Members Committee.

should be dis-membered” (p. 234). Maybe so, but what do you do to people who write dialogue like that? John, by the way, using his own voice, has denied there was any wire tapping.⁷⁰

In her book, Martha gets threats written in magic marker (p. 223) and letters from students criticizing her lack of moral fiber (p. 237–38), and she imagines that someone left her dead cat on her pillow, courtesy of the Mormon mafia or Danites, I can only suppose (p. 239). And why not? As Martha the Harvard-trained sociologist in a love affair with evidence will tell you, “every now and then, Utah papers record murders with uniquely Mormon flavoring (death by temple-sanctioned methods, for example), and the word that goes out on the Latter-day grapevine is *Danite*” (p. 190). As I write this, I feel somewhat like Martha—compelled to say, I am not making this stuff up.

“Rule 33: ***Uphold the tradition! Correct and improve the legends!***” The goal here, according to Nibley, is “to devise ways of making the old stories believable; progress in anti-Mormon studies is necessarily in the fields of *technique*—the very techniques we have been discussing.” Later he explains, “The discovery of one new document, or even a new slant given to an old familiar document, is enough to justify the reprinting of six hundred pages of old stuff.” Martha has no new documents, but she does have a new slant on an old one, the Joseph Smith Papyri, which figure prominently in her theory for why her father supposedly abused her.

“Rule 34: ***Be patriotic.***” Finally, we have a rule that Martha ignores. She takes no time to wrap herself in the flag. For this we can be thankful.

“Rule 35: ***Join the ladies.***” Irving Wallace, the writer whom Nibley panned in “an Anti-Mormon Book,” retold the story of Ann Eliza Webb Dee Young Denning, a former of wife of Brigham Young; thus, Wallace had joined the ladies, hidden behind their skirts, according to Nibley. Martha is a woman who can stand on her own, though her story of sexual abuse at the hands of her father and emotional abuse at the hands of a patriarchal church certainly plays to the sympathies

70. Personal correspondence with Boyd Petersen dated April 2005, copy in my possession.

of most feminists and to the sensitive New Age guys among us.⁷¹ By standing with or behind the ladies, the anti-Mormon writer can create comic-book versions of plural marriage, priesthood/patriarchy, stay-at-home moms (and the prophets who ask them to do so), and any outlook or belief that goes against the prevailing winds. Martha has done just that throughout her book. For example, she states that Mormon women who had been abused and sought ecclesiastical help “were most often told to be silent, keep their secrets, and ask themselves whether they were really sure it wasn’t their fault—or their imagination,” with only a vague reference to some unknown social work journal (p. 182). Is she telling the truth? Does the journal exist? We don’t know. She gives no source—did the journal request anonymity too?

Apparently, Martha hopes that her audience will be so eager to believe negative things about patriarchy and priesthood and anything related that they’ll agree that when Martha speaks, the fact finding has been done. And so it goes. If she gets away with mocking the sacred Mormon temple, it may be because there she vowed to “follow the law of my husband” (p. 204).⁷² If Mormonism in general is fair game, maybe it’s because women on the outside can’t abide a church where “female opinions are . . . easily dismissed in Mormon culture” (p. 247).⁷³ Martha stands shoulder to shoulder with the ladies.

“Rule 36: *Your target is Mormonism!*” In the end, Nibley reminds us that “anti-Mormon books are not written to describe or discuss the human foibles of any group or individual but to discredit a doctrine. Every episode, however trivial, irrelevant, or fictitious must be made to serve as the text for a single sermon—the monstrosity of believing in revelation.” Thus a temple worker supposedly lunging at Martha “hissing like a puff adder” is not mere set decoration (pp. 16–17). Nurse Bethany’s using the “Mormon form of polite address” when she cautions “Sister Beck” is more than a bad attempt at dialogue (p. 76). And

71. An ironic hat tip to Christine Lavin and John Gorka, composers of the song “Sensitive New Age Guys”; see at www.christinelavin.com/00031704snag.html (accessed 18 August 2005).

72. This is one of two places where she is apparently trying to get the temple ceremony right, yet gets it wrong. The other occurs at the beginning of chapter 35.

73. See discussion of abuse panel, pp. 127–34 above.

Martha asking herself whether giving her children “frozen waffles” or using “day care” or “drinking a Coke” makes her the antichrist is not just a weak attempt at humor (pp. 224–25). Each implicitly and sometimes explicitly denigrates the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and calls the restoration into question.

I repeat that I am quite aware that absurd things happen to and are spoken by members and, sometimes, even leaders of the church. Like everyone else on this planet, we are human, after all. For example, I asked my sister and brother-in-law the other day if they’d ever been addressed as Brother or Sister in a professional, nonchurch setting. Both responded yes, maybe once or twice. That’s my experience as well. But in Martha’s world of Mormonism it’s a “Mormon form of polite address,” evidently used regularly anywhere, everywhere, and all the time. In the real world, it’s an attempt to make us look quaint and more vulnerable to attack.

It’s not that such things don’t happen; it’s that they all happened to Martha in her book. Think about it: wiretapping, “Sister” Beck (and “Brother” Beck a few pages earlier) in a hospital, intrusive hairdressers, death threats, fingers-in-the-ears bishops, stake presidents who agree with you then whisper “but don’t say this in public,” invitations to baptism parties, friends ritualistically shunning you, whispers of Danites, students trumping scholarship with the priesthood. Martha’s next book should be her life story because she’s already experienced a full life of Mormon absurdities—if you believe her. I repeat: I don’t, largely because I don’t recognize the church she describes. I don’t recognize the lay members. I don’t recognize the leaders. I don’t recognize the intelligent and discerning students who attend Brigham Young University. And I don’t recognize the fine scholars who teach there either. Finally, the way she explains it, I only vaguely recognize the doctrine of the church. To be blunt, I expected fairer treatment from a Harvard-trained PhD. Not kid-glove treatment, mind you. Just fairer treatment.

Frankly, I’m at a loss to explain this book. Martha’s case against her father might have been more compelling if it had not been undercut by so many things that she got wrong—apparently intentionally in

some cases—that were irrelevant to her allegations. Why not tell her story straight up? For example, the BYU dissidents’ story told honestly, but from a perspective sympathetic to the faculty who lost their jobs, would have made interesting reading and would not have detracted from the larger issue. Instead, she chose to embellish that story and others beyond belief and thus made the allegations against her father much less than credible. The net result is that she wrote a nineteenth-century anti-Mormon book, and a poor one at that. It doesn’t help her case that her mother, her late father, and all seven of her siblings deny her allegations and that she got many of the facts wrong on things that were relevant to her abuse allegations as well. Martha, her editors, and Harvard should all be embarrassed.