

I arrived at Genova a worn-down missionary. With six months left I knew it was going to be the last area I served in. I had come through 18 months of discouragement, having failed to bring anyone to the gospel, and thus failed in being a worthwhile servant of the Lord. I had taught roughly one discussion per month, which meant that most of the other 259 work hours were spent looking for people to teach. I read and re-read my patriarchal blessing, as well as my father's blessing in which I was confirmed an elder, and both spoke generously of the multitudes I would bring to Christ. Despite how strictly I would follow the rules and how laboriously I would try to spread the word in the streets and on the rooftops, I had failed to live up to the Lord's expectations.

What's more, I had failed to live up to the expectations of my mission president. Just four months prior to this transfer he had promised me that I would get to train a brand new missionary. This was something I had always wanted to do, and I was looking forward to it immensely. Now, two companions later, he had yet to answer on that promise. My new companion was smack dab in the middle of his mission, like all my other companions had been, and like some of the others, this one was chronically depressed.

We had an investigator, though, and what was more he actually seemed excited about the gospel. Teaching the gospel was what I lived for, and considering the fact that I rarely got to do it, this was a huge boost for my morale as a missionary. Within a few days I taught him the second discussion, after which he emphatically accepted the invitation to be baptized. I was floating on cloud nine. God had seen to it to allow me to fulfill the purpose of why I had sacrificed two of my best years to Him. We took this investigator to church and he hit it off beautifully with the faithful members. He had such charisma, wit and goodness, we knew he would someday make a wonderful bishop.

By the fourth discussion our golden investigator had disappeared. He was nowhere to be found. We tried calling him and going to his house, but even his car was missing. Where could he have gone without letting us know? The answer hit us when we visited the home of a family in the ward. Their teenage daughter had disappeared at the same time.

Putting the pieces together we realized that our golden investigator was, in fact, a con man, and had used the church to get close to this particular young woman. She was so bright and lovely; the only way he could hope to get into her pants was to lend a sympathetic ear toward her religion. His scheme had worked. The evidence that this man was involved with the mafia also started adding up, but we decided to pursue our investigation no further. We had better things to do with our time.

However we had no investigators to do them with. It was a dark time for my mission. As a result of our stress my companion's physical health took a turn for the worse. We found it more and more difficult to find the motivation to go outside each day and endure rejection by strangers for ten hours. We would look at our day's schedule each morning, and when it was blank (as it most often was) my companion would develop splitting headaches and horrible nausea. He would lie in bed for days on end, unable to move.

I would still wake up at 6:30AM and go through my ritual morning study. When 9:30AM arrived and I could still not awaken my companion I would then commence further study, reading through works such as Jesus the Christ and Articles of Faith. I found a stash of old Ensigns in the closet and pored through them in my search to better understand church doctrines. I also looked through old area books and called phone numbers I had discovered, sometimes even numbers straight out of the phone book. I made it through all the A's. I was content that I could still be looking for people to teach while in my apartment.

This didn't please the zone leaders or mission president. As senior companion it was my responsibility to be sure that we were outside working hard and reporting high numbers. The doctor had reported that my companion's symptoms were psychosomatic. Thus, if I didn't motivate him to go out and work, the blame fell on me.

But try as I might, I didn't have it in me to force the guy to do work that he didn't want to do. I tried encouraging him and setting a good example, but he knew that as long as he wasn't dressed and ready, I wasn't going to force him out the door. Once again I felt a constant daily failure for not being a good enough senior companion.

One day I had an unsettling experience. While my companion was in bed suffering I found a disc-man with earphones lying in an empty room. I knew that my companion sometimes got up in the middle of the night to do things, though I didn't know to what extent. I figured he must have been listening to some music in this room the previous night. Curiosity and plain nosiness got the best of me. I put the earphones on and pushed play. The loud heavy death metal music that assaulted my ears nearly caused me to jump out of my pajamas. I turned the bad influence off immediately and put the disc-man back where it had been.

I became concerned about what my companion was doing at night while I was asleep. I took a small fragment of paper and placed it on the front door handle in such a way that it would only be disturbed if the door was opened. When I woke up the next morning I found the fragment on the ground several feet away.

The weeks of my mission ticked by with nothing to show for them but rebukes from my zone leaders and despair for my companion. The zone leaders did splits with us in order to figure out what we were doing wrong and help us do better – in my case to be more aggressive, and in my companion's case to do any work at all. On one such morning the zone leader and I stopped by the local bread store to get some focaccia before starting our proselyting. The lady behind the counter lived in the same building as us. I'll never forget what she said.

"Oh, it's you. I saw your friend on the balcony smoking a cigarette last night. How are you doing?"

My zone leader and I were perplexed. We doubted this lady's sincerity, so we asked some questions to see if we could discredit her story. Was she sure that it was my companion?

"The one you usually go around with? Oh yes, it was definitely him."

Was it cold? Could it have just been misty breath?

“No, it was definitely a cigarette. I know the difference.”

As my zone leader walked out of the store I could tell that he was very concerned. So was I. “I’m sure it was just his breath in the cold” he said to me, and we didn’t discuss it any further.

Of course the other zone leader returned with my companion and a lovely report of how many people they had talked to and how much work they had done. “You see elder, you just have to go out and do it.” His words stung.

I reported my concerns about my companion to my mission president in personal letters, citing the evidence I had found that concerned me. Undoubtedly the zone leaders were giving him status reports as well, saying they were able to get my companion to work just fine. My mission president never responded to me, except that in a subsequent personal interview he stressed to me the importance of being assertive towards my companion.

I had three months left on my mission, and still nobody to teach the gospel to when I received my last companion. Rather than being the brand new missionary to train as the president had personally promised, it was a missionary well-known for ending other guys’ missions. It hurt to have the mission president renege on his promise to me like that. It hurt a lot. Clearly he felt there was something seriously wrong with me.

On top of that, I was made junior companion “to help train him for the senior companion role,” my mission president told me. I was ashamed to the point of humiliation. I had received word that the last guy in my original MTC district of eight had been appointed as a zone leader. All seven of them were zone leaders now, leading the mission, and I, the last one, was a junior companion.

My previous companion was sent to the mission home to work directly under the supervision of the mission president, apparently so the president could get a direct feel as to what was going on with him. What better way to get him in line than to constantly supervise him?

I swallowed my disappointment and relished in the rare opportunity to have a hard-working companion. It was night and day for me. We exhausted ourselves working the streets and houses. We even devoted one week to be our 100-hour week. We figured that if we worked 14.5 hours each day, giving ourselves 1.5 hours to eat and get dressed, etc..., and 8 hours to sleep, we could pull off the triple digits. We were on track by Thursday before we caught the flu from exposure and overexertion. In the end, for the sake of our health, we had to settle for 87 hours.

We even reactivated an entire family – mom, grandma, and three children. With no priesthood in their home, our visits were held in such high esteem that they developed the motivation to come back to church on a regular basis.

Our zone leaders, however, weren’t satisfied. The mission had just come up with a new emphasis, and that was a concept called “golden questions.” By decree of the mission president, we

would no longer report hours, discussions, Books of Mormon, or anything besides baptisms and golden questions (ie. an invitation to someone to hear the discussions).

My approach to people was not conducive to golden questions. Rather, my approach was to get to know people on a personal level and teach them gospel principles. Then if they showed any interested whatsoever (which in 99% of cases they didn't) I would invite them to learn more. I wanted to make sure I played on people's desire to learn the gospel, and not try to force it on them unwillingly.

This meant that we didn't report any of our 87 hours. We didn't report the reactivation of that family, and we didn't report any of the thousands of people we went out of our way to talk to because we weren't asking golden question to each of them. Despite my new heightened level of good work, the reports to my zone leaders and mission president were still abysmally low. Not just this – they were low despite the fact that I had been given the hardest working missionary in the mission.

One month into our term together Elder Cunningham joined our companionship. Elder Cunningham had come directly from the mission home and was preparing our area to open a new companionship. This was wonderful news. I had closed my companionship in my last area, meaning that my companion and I were both transferred out and nobody took our places. My previous two companionships before that had also both ceased to exist since I had left. The church was reducing the missionaries in Italy, and had even closed the mission I had originally been assigned to. The fact that a new companionship was opening in my area was very encouraging.

Elder Cunningham's reports from the mission home were not as encouraging – for me anyway. My previous companion was doing very well. So well, in fact, that the mission president could find nothing wrong in his work ethic. Since going under the president's scrutiny he had done nothing but impress. "All he needed was a push" Elder Cunningham would repeatedly tell me with a smile.

Elder Cunningham was a golden question god, and our zone leaders loved him. Two words couldn't come out of his mouth without inviting someone to hear the discussions. After two weeks as our third wheel our numbers were through the roof and he received his very own companion – a greenie straight out of the MTC. The irony of that coupled with my mission president's failed promise to send me a greenie hurt almost worse than I could bear.

I now had only six weeks left of my mission, and nothing to show for it. This transfer period would be my last. Had I know that at the end of it the president was going to close my companionship and replace it with Elder Cunningham's - his intention all along - I would have been pissed.

It was around this time that my zone leaders called and asked me to give a lesson on member missionary work at our next meeting with all the missionaries in our zone. Having just reactivated an entire family and shown that members of the church in general trusted me, they figured that giving me the opportunity to teach other missionaries would help me develop as a missionary myself. I prepared a lesson as best I knew, outlining all the points that I thought were the most important,

including showing members that you cared about them personally, encouraging them, befriending them, and not pushing them beyond their comfort limits. Then they would open up to you in wonderful ways, as I had seen happen.

I felt the spirit strongly within me as I taught the lesson, but was puzzled that the zone leaders would not match my gaze. When my lesson ended they hesitantly began a lesson of their own. A new policy had come down from a traveling apostle, and the purpose of the meeting was to tell us that our mission was to put it into effect immediately. The policy was that we not spend longer than one hour in the homes of members of the church, and that while there we were not to discuss anything that was not gospel-related. They then gave a lengthy and well-planned lesson about how spiritual relationships were far more effective and compelling than personal ones, and that we were forbidden to waste time “making friends.” Each word stung as it fell in utter contrast with everything I had just taught and ever learned.

I struggled with this directive. I struggled with many things during that life-changing portion of my mission. My two years were a complete failure. Despite my daily struggle and desire to work hard I had not brought anyone to Christ, nor was it looking likely that I would. I had actually gone backwards in leadership roles. I was considered an indolent missionary by my superiors. My zone leaders were constantly trying to encourage me to shove the gospel down as many throats as possible to keep my numbers high. The spirit kept bugging me that my zone leaders and mission president were wrong. I prayed and prayed to know if I should follow the command of one of the Lord’s twelve living apostles, and the spirit kept telling me no, so I kept praying as if it was my job to “correct” the spirit. My branch was nasty and bigoted and I was sure they would drive away any new investigator that we brought to them anyway. Most of my pen-pals had stopped writing. Above all, I had failed in my dad’s specific prophecy that I would baptize people on my mission. I had given my mission up for a complete failure, and was ready to go through the motions for 6 more weeks just to get the waste of time over with.

I almost didn’t even realize what was happening when we started teaching the discussions to a bright 20 year-old girl named Vanessa, a cousin of the family we had recently reactivated, and a direct result from us having “made friends” with them. Her investigation of the church was making such progress, in fact, that it seemed likely that if we didn’t suffer the usual setbacks we could get her baptized before I went home. I couldn’t believe what was happening. Every time we asked her to read, pray, or make some other commitment, she would actually follow through and receive the promised results.

The setbacks did come, however, in the form of her parents. The Catholic Church was such an integral part of their lives that they fought tooth and nail to convince her that the Mormon Church was evil. She was still living with them, and without a job, so they threatened to throw her out of the house and never talk to her again if she were baptized. Vanessa was the second child and her older sister could do no wrong in the eyes of their parents. Suddenly our discussions would begin with a bath of tears as she expressed her fear and despair about joining the church. She didn’t want to be the problem child that tore the family apart, and didn’t know how she would get by on her own. We then filled her mind with the glories of heaven and encouraged her that to follow God was true life, and

worth any sacrifice necessary. The words sounded grandiose coming out of my mouth, but I felt like garbage inside as I spoke them, knowing what they would mean for Vanessa and her life.

I did end up baptizing her two weeks before the end of my mission. The members of my ward strongly protested, saying that she was not ready for the gospel, and that her commitment wasn't sincere. The bishop warned her in a personal interview that the gospel seemed magical now, but over time her faith would slacken. I knew better, and I knew that despite how mean the members of my ward would be to her, and how horrible the loss of her family would be, her faith would endure.

As I walked out of the church with her after that baptism I expected to feel that satisfaction that I had so long waited for, knowing that I had fulfilled the blessings I had received and that the joy of bringing save one soul unto Christ would be mine. I looked at Vanessa's face. She looked so innocent and pure, like an unseen light was shining upon her. And I thought about the future that awaited her and all I felt was regret. There was no joy.

Because my companion and I were both transferred out at the same time (to rid the mission of our blighted work and let Elder Cunningham and his greenie take over), I had the unique experience of sharing part of my journey home with him, relaxed and free from the pressure to proselyte. In addition to this, due to a little bit of coincidence and a little bit of finagling, Vanessa was on the same train as well. As I joked and reminisced with the two of them, leaving my mission behind, I thought to myself, this must be what the celestial kingdom is going to be like. It wasn't overly emotional or anything, just a couple of my best friends spending an enjoyable ride with me. I couldn't wait to be with them again in the eternities.

I left the problems of my mission behind when I went home. I so quickly learned the joys of a free life that my mission soon became like a long lost memory of an unhappy time. I listened to the stories of my friends and the multitudes they had baptized on their missions with indifference. I let all their expressions of "the best two years" bounce off me. I had learned to care about people, and I had brought one soul unto Christ. That was good enough for me.

Occasionally, though, my carefree lifestyle was interrupted by a depressing e-mail from Vanessa. Things had gone from bad to worse after I had left. Her best friend from childhood had been killed. Distraught, she went to her bishop. He was very compassionate to begin with and tried to help her, but as soon as he found out that the friend who died was gay he lost all empathy and said that, if he was gay, then he deserved to die.

Her e-mails seemed to alternate between being in an amazingly good mood to being in an extremely depressed state. She suffered from anorexia, physical abuse and chronic illness. The other members of the church increasingly alienated her until, in desperation, she wrote to me "Life is really hard here. I'm so tired. I'm writing to ask you for help. Please help me understand and go on. I don't know why I'm here on Earth anymore. I just want to die. I beg you, please help me find some reason to keep living, because I don't know anymore. I'm desperate. Ciao."

I panicked. I was a starving BYU student and had no experience or skill in handling people with suicidal thoughts, much less from a distance. I did the only thing I could think of and forwarded the message on to my last mission companion with the simple directive, “help.” He was still in Italy, perhaps he could find a way to get to her.

It was ill-timed, however. He was going through a difficult spell of his own with a young companion who, for five weeks, insisted that everything he did and every decision he made was wrong. When my old companion spoke to him in English, he would respond in Italian, and vice versa. At church the young missionary would get into arguments with the members and tell them how much he hated his companion, and this had destroyed any chance they had at productivity together. So, in desperation my old companion had talked to the mission president about the situation, and the president had promised him that if he was strict and exercised firm leadership over him, his companion would straighten out. My companion heeded the advice, and things got much worse.

This baffled my companion. How could a mission president chosen by God make promises that failed so woefully? Every day was a living nightmare and he didn’t know what to do, so he decided to let the young missionary be senior companion for a week, just to give him a chance to show my old companion what he thought they should be doing. As it turns out, the young missionary did exactly what they had done their first week together, and this caused my old companion to lose his mind.

In the middle of this week my old companion received the e-mail from me about Vanessa. He immediately called the mission president, but the president did not give him permission to go visit her, even though she was only three hours away. Leaving his proselyting boundaries was strictly against world-wide missionary policy. The president instructed him to write her a single letter, and that he would personally ensure that the sister missionaries in the area hand-delivered it to our convert. Then she would have his words of comfort and encouragement and hopefully not go through with suicide. Two months later my old companion ran into another missionary and discovered that the letter still hadn’t been delivered.

My companion had a nervous breakdown after that. He kept trying to work. He woke up on time, studied like he was supposed to, went out with his companion, but for about a month he couldn’t bring himself to talk to anyone about the gospel. He walked around in a sort of stupor and let his companion do all the talking, unable to focus on anything anyone said. His thoughts swarmed with guilt over his own inadequacy, fearful that perhaps he hadn’t had enough faith. Otherwise he would have gotten along with his companion like the mission president promised. Otherwise he would have had the strength to open his mouth and continue talking about the gospel.

Three months after my e-mail he met a sister missionary who was serving in Genova and she told him that they had given up on Vanessa because she had been “offered the blessings of the gospel and rejected them.”

I was in radio silence. I sent Vanessa numerous e-mails, but never received any response. Months turned into years. Once I even found myself in the same BYU class as two of those missionaries in Genova that had given me a hard time – Elder Cunningham and one of the zone leaders. It was surreal. They discussed our days in Genova with reverence and glory, confident that they had done the Lord a great service. The zone leader noted my lackluster enthusiasm and asked if he had offended me. I didn't want to answer, but I lied "no." My years at BYU were full of the glories and truth of learning about the restored gospel, and yet I found myself growing increasingly skeptical about things I had previously taken for granted.

A few years after I graduated from BYU I came to the realization that the LDS church is a complete fraud and my mind went back to my lone convert. I thought of all the damage that I had caused her in the name of the church, and how I had personally driven a wedge through her family. I considered it ironic to find that, in my own exodus from my life's faith, many members of my own family became guilty of the exact same things I had so criticized Vanessa's family for. And yet I had told her to stick to her new faith. I found myself in the same situation, but with reversed roles.

I found the courage to make one more attempt to find her, six years after her last e-mail. For two months I checked my inbox with no response, and ultimately gave up and retired that e-mail account. For all I knew she had been successful in the suicide she so earnestly desired.

I found my old mission companion again on Facebook, but was hesitant to reach out to him. After all, I was an apostate now, and he reminded me of one of the worst experiences of my life. There was nothing we could talk about.

Another year passed and, on a whim, I checked my retired e-mail account. To my great surprise I saw a response from Vanessa! She was alive! I shook with excitement as I read her message, telling me about how she had abandoned Mormonism long ago and was now happy, working in education teaching small children. Tears sprung to my eyes as she sympathized with my own journey out of the church and shared some comforting anecdotes.

Shortly after this I happened into a unique Facebook discussion with my last companion and, after some careful testing of the waters, discovered that he was having serious doubts about the church as well. I sent him a few links and shortly thereafter he became a full-fledged apostate too. Our friendship flourished as we shared our struggles together, our fears and excitement, and we have become great friends - even business partners.

Over the past few years I've helped many people transition out of Mormonism, and I still occasionally think back on that train ride home from my mission. I laugh at the irony that all three of us that were on that train have become apostates, and yet are happier than we've ever been. If the church is right and we're on a train headed to the Telestial Kingdom, then I still can't wait to spend my time with them there. Perhaps the scriptures were right after all when they said "how great shall be your joy."

EPILOGUE:

Through correspondence my companion learned other details about Vanessa's brush with the brink of suicide and her family situation, many of which he promised he would never tell anyone, including me. Even he, I'm sure, doesn't know the full story. Despite my limited information, though, I still shake whenever I go back and re-read what I did learn, much of which I didn't even mention in this story for brevity's sake. Here is what my companion had to say about the whole affair, years later:

I hate the church for having lied to us and then encouraged us to spread those lies about. If we had told her that Joseph Smith had translated the Book of Mormon by placing his face in a hat and looking at a stone, she may have made a different decision about joining. If we had told her that Joseph Smith couldn't remember how the first vision supposedly went and told four very different versions of it, she may not have joined. If we had told her that the prophets after Smith who have discussed it all deny having seen or spoken to God, she may not have joined. If we had told her the truth about polygamy (which she asked about, but we only knew the church's PR lies), she would never have joined the church.

I'm also still irritated about the fact that the church encouraged us to get her to join even though it meant convincing her to leave the family she had to join the church. We essentially said, "You can live forever with your family. All you have to do is renounce what they believe in until they disown you and it can happen." The fact that I thought that her willingness to do that was inspiring, rather than disturbing, still bothers me.

Acting on behalf of the church, we convinced her to do something that ruined her life and then the church abandoned her, leaving her to bigots and self-centered, arrogant people for support. And it was obvious from the beginning that things would get tough for her and the local leadership and the mission leadership set her up to fail. I am still appalled by what she gave up to join the church and how the church members and the missionaries who replaced us mostly turned their noses up at her as soon as those difficulties came. That experience was definitely one of the first big experiences to teach me that the church is not inspired and that it is dangerous.

I was in a situation where I could have actually done something useful. I could have, if nothing else, gone down there (with my companion) and chatted with her to give her encouragement right after I found out about her email. It was less than a 3 hour train ride away and could have been done in one day. It took me 4 hours to take the train to the members at the other side of my district and the president had no problems with me doing that once every transfer. It would have been far more effective than whatever it was I did do the next day. Stupid rules were more important than doing everything possible to try to help save a young woman's life. And, if I had been able to take a more active role in helping her, instead of having to sit on the sidelines and hope that things would work themselves out, I may not have had the nervous breakdown. I still can't think about it without getting really fucking angry.

I had forgotten much of what she said until now, but she had her wisdom teeth taken out and got an infection that nearly killed her. Because her friend had died, and her other best friend was in the US, and the church had abandoned her, her cousin couldn't help her because she had too many things on her plate, and because of joining the church her family had abandoned her, she was sick and incredibly lonely. The fact that she turned to someone (me) whom she hadn't known that long or that well, and who lived thousands of miles away, really shows how alone she was.

I recently started this thread to delve into the topic of how the church has a dark nasty side to it. It's a cult. It is dangerous. I am haunted by every story I have been told about people being led to suicide by the church (whether they went through with it or not). I am haunted because I've seen how it happens and I unwittingly played a part in one of those stories.*

***Excerpts from my old companion's thread:**

-This is something that has been bothering me for some time. With people I know saying, "I don't care if the church isn't true - it makes me happy," I've come to realize that many Mormons are completely unaware of how much harm the church does to people. So I would like to do a quick survey with one question: How many people do you know who have tried to commit suicide or who have succeeded in killing themselves because of, or in part because of the church? Don't include anyone you never met in person. I've known at least 4 or 5 for certain, but it could be as many as six. Of those, one succeeded. The stories of every single one of them haunts me still...

"I have known 3 gay Mormons who killed themselves, including Stuart Mattis. I'm pretty sure none of them would have done it if they had been accepted for being gay, and their families' homophobia came prepackaged from LDS, Inc." –anoner2day

"Four in my neighborhood. All Mormons, one mega turbo tbm father. All males. One in his early twenties. This right in the core of tbm ville. I could have been in this list had I not figured out what was making me unhappy." –jong106

"Sorry to say that I attempted as a fairly new convert. Sat in front of the temple consuming pills." –tiptoes

"One in the Midwest." –xmofrmks

"I am one of those statistics." –Scissors not-logged-in

"I'm pretty sure a woman I knew couldn't take the pressure anymore and had an accidental situation." –templeendumbed

"I attempted suicide 3! Effing! times. Afterwards, I was still pissed I couldn't pull it off. How screwed up is that?!" –alphonso

"In 1999, a woman in a N.J. ward I was in killed herself." –Carol Y.

"My favorite Uncle. That fucking cult ripped his soul apart. Poor guy." –whodat

"I'm a statistic, too. Was trapped in an abusive temple marriage, and saw suicide as the only to stop the torture. In those days, with my TBM family, divorce was not an option. I was the first.

A close friend committed suicide after his mission. He was just quiet, and wouldn't talk to any of us. He would still come to church activities. Maybe his TBM parents forced him to. I used to go over and just sit with him, and not talk. He was a brilliant, wealthy young man, would have gone to an Ivy League university in the fall. What a waste of talent and goodness.

His sister attempted suicide a few years later. The prominent TBM family called it a "nervous breakdown," but we knew she was depressed. She was bright, pretty, and talented, and everyone in our snarky ward was jealous of her. This popular girl felt alone, that she had no real friends--and maybe she didn't. I was her friend, but I was several years younger than she was. She would hand down all her (designer) clothes to me. She is famous now.

My 21-year-old TBM niece was at BYU. Her bishop father had cheated on her mother, and her mother was quickly re-married to a High Priest, who was abusive. This happened all within 18 months. My intelligent, beautiful niece had an affair with a married man, who broke up with her. She wrote a letter about how she had committed adultery. She quoted 'Miracle of

Forgiveness' about how that was a sin next to murder. She wrote that no one loved her, or ever would love her. She went into her room and took sleeping pills and tranquilizers, and died. She was in therapy. No one knew she was unhappy.

My husband's cousin killed himself when he was 24 years old. His TBM mother divorced her TBM temple husband, after having his child. The con-man father took most of the mother's money, moved to Utah, married another woman in the temple, had about 8 kids, got divorced and married another woman in the temple. He ignored our cousin, except to remind him and his mother that they were still part of his 'eternal family.' His mother's second TBM husband was abusive, and beat our cousin, while pretending to be perfect Mormons. Our cousin left home to go into the military, and when it was time to come home, he shot himself, at age 23.

In these cases, there was a lot of cover-up, denial, and phony play-acting, by everyone involved. All of us left behind keep thinking, 'There was probably something I could have done, if I had only known!' It is so tragic.

Mormonism robs one of all hope. Now, and for all eternity. No hope. No love." –Joy

*"When I was 23 I was going to a singles ward near Ashburn, VA and the Bishop's son was in an Alcohol/abuse clinic and the guy actually seemed like a happy-go-lucky person and seemed Happy to my perspective. (I was a convert, so the fake-happy routine didn't compute to my personal learning of Mormon-behaviour at that time just yet) Anyhow, it was quite a Shock when the guy hung himself. The Bishop seemed like a nice bishop, gave some good advice to me about positive thinking. (small treasures of good advice from people in mormonism) - and mormons tend of (semi-consciously copy each other) so there were several false -suicide threats which were for attention, not actually suicidal people. But the Unbelievably High-Expectations and very few positive social rewards for being Mormon are a contributing factor in Drug abuse and Suicide within mormonism. The only way I liked being Mormon is by ignoring the negative words and opinions of people. I liked being around people and it's hard to resist someone who **seems** positive. Little did I know a lot of that Smiley happy-joy B.S. is actually fake." –anonymust*

"I can only add people I knew. My oldest son and 3 others. These people never felt good enough. I could not save any of them...I tried to save all four. My son was the first." –oldlunker

"This thread is making me cry. So much pain in the church and for what? Nothing. I'm one. When I was in the psych-hospital I met at least 10 others." –starkravingmad

"I know two people that committed suicide. Both hang themselves. Both were Mormons. One was my brother-in-law the other was a friend that was the bishop's wife. Both were adult 'converts'. I think that the so-called church played a part. But other facts contributed to it. For example, both had been abuse in their youth." –quebec

"Our neighbor in our last ward killed himself. He was an active member. Car in the garage with the exhaust tube hooked to the tailpipe. Not sure if that is a painless way to go... When I was a kid another neighbor, down the street, active Mormon, blew his brains out on the driveway." –elciz

"The mormons themselves recognize the problem. My uncle wrote his dissertation on suicide amongst the religious (at a church school, this meant mormons). His conclusion? Obviously they lacked the faith to seek their leaders for counsel, and if only these poor suffering people would just open themselves up more to the very thing that hurts them, they would be saved. I was disappointed to find his essay. But he must have been touched, either himself or people close to him, by the desperation this institution engenders in people. Recognized the problem, failed to put forth a good solution." –WinksWinks

"Two. Both victims of the Mormon mindfuck." –Bamboozled

"I know of three separate people one checked into suicide watch, another made a very serious attempt, the last made two very serious attempts. Thank goodness they are all okay. Although one was very TBM and his situation is the same so I wonder how 'better' he is really as no one really knows why he attempted the first time." –mymaid

"My brother's favorite son. Great kid loved by all. They were best friends. He shot himself due to church rules about dating. My bishop's 'wayward son'. Never good enough." –AmIDarkNow?

"Two nieces and one nephew in the last five years--recently returned from Utah for a memorial for one niece. The two nieces were sisters both divorced, both with children. My nephew was buried on his 22nd birthday--unmarried--life over before it began. All three raised in large TBM families and lived in Utah. My BIL blames the bishop for his daughter's suicide a few years ago as there was some disciplinary action being taken. I don't know if the church was directly responsible for the other two deaths--but certainly indirectly." –iris

"I recall two...a young teenage girl (here in Germany), who suffocated herself with a plastic bag. An old friend from her ward told me the horrid details - I spare here. She was attractive and I still have super-8 mm film footage that show her alive. On my last visit to the US in 1999 I met the missionary who had baptized my father. He came from a large family in AZ and told me that his brother killed himself for not being able to cope with being gay. My friend was very sad about this and quite angry about the church for many reasons. I can't reveal his identity here. I guess he was semi-active at best back then." –Ramses

"I was there. I can't tell you the number of times I have asked myself if today was the day. In fact, this board literally talked me out of it one day. Mormonism was a big part of that. My life is nothing like what I imagined and wanted it to be because of guilt, fear, and shame." –icanseethelight

"My TBM ex knew a RM who committed suicide after the mission. I didn't know this person, and my ex didn't say if he returned early or anything, other than this person had untreated bipolar disorder. In my case, I developed depression, and the antidepressant I ended up on did make me suicidal at one point. In the end, the depression was because as a female convert, I never felt worthy enough. Once I divorced my TBM ex and resigned from the cult, my depression went away, and it's been now 11 years since I last had any antidepressant." –adoylelb

"Too many gay people I know of to count. One straight person: my younger sister. She was 39." –PapaKen

"Good friend's 17 year old son in Rexburg, Idaho. I suspect he was gay and couldn't see a way to hide/handle it anymore in that small, cloistered community." –iflewover

*"Personally knew three. I was right there myself, then I found this board . *literally * saved my life. How anyone can think the church is a benign force for good is... It makes me feel physically ill. If the true numbers of people who committed suicide because of the cult were known, all kinds of hell from the wider world would rain down. This board is a good start. Thank you for sharing your experiences. I hope it helps those who are struggling." –nolongerambivalent*

"The following people I know personally killed themselves because of the church (at least in part):

*My mother--her problems went beyond the church but it certainly was a hindrance rather than a help to her mental health
An acquaintance from BYU--he had participated in a fairly serious crime and he really wanted to repent (including turning himself into the authorities), but his parents and church leaders swept it under the rug and pressured him hugely to go on a mission. He killed himself after coming home.*

A woman from the first ward I was in after I moved to my current city--she joined the church in her 60s, mostly to try to get a sense of community, and was treated very poorly." –stbleaving

"Kip Eliason was my cousin, you can google his name and find out a bit about his story. His father, Gene, was a piece of @#%& who is as much to blame as the mormon church. He was a sweet kid." –Hermes

If you or someone you know is struggling with suicidal thoughts, please call this number:

1-800-273-TALK (8255)

<http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>