

# Sisterhaters

Teresa P. Carr

I AM, AND PROBABLY ALWAYS WILL BE, a sisterhater. In fact, many church members are sisterhaters without even realizing it. A sisterhater is, simply put, someone who can't abide sister missionaries.

As a sister in Zion, being an active sisterhater has been my dirty little secret for as long as I can remember. In my younger years, I would sit through sacrament meeting and look at those frumpy sister missionaries on the stand, and I knew why they were sister missionaries. I mean, who would want to marry a girl with unkempt, out-of-style hair and long frumpy skirts that accentuated the twenty pounds she needed to lose? I felt that such eyesores *should* be sent away. Perhaps the year-and-a-half of spiritual growth would increase their appeal, so at least the ugly guys would have someone to marry. I was definitely relieved that my brothers were the ones required to go on missions and that, due to my gender, I wasn't. Nothing sounded worse than having to interact with those shapeless masses of womanhood on a daily basis.

With a small sense of loyalty toward my gender, I hoped that when I "grew up," I would suddenly realize the shallowness of my thoughts and begin to appreciate the role of sister missionaries in the work of the Lord. But this did not happen.

As I began dating, my sisterhating became more sophisticated and turned into a valuable tool. Missionary experiences were a common topic of conversation among male returned missionaries. With understanding in my eyes, I would listen to numerous anecdotes about the hard working elders and the slacking sisters. I would quickly reassure each of my dates that I would never stoop to the position of "sister missionary." Quick to build on common beliefs, we would then sister-bash together at any opportunity.

Just before my twenty-first birthday, I was dating an avid sisterhater. As I was still unmarried with no proposal evident on the horizon, I decided that a threat of going on a mission would nudge my "sister"-phobic boyfriend enough to make him pop the question. Before taking the gamble, however, I decided to say a little prayer to add weight to my

threat. The prayer went something like this, "I really, really, *really* want to marry Burt, and I think that it is the right thing to do, but since I'm almost twenty-one years old and he still hasn't asked the question. . .do you think I should go on a mission?" Well, I quickly learned not to ask the Lord a question if I didn't want to hear the answer. Throughout that entire day I felt like Jonah running from the Lord. "Yes!" he was telling me emphatically, "You need to serve a mission!"

Hhhmmmmpphhh! This was not what I was looking for, so I spent the next couple of days trying to understand why the Lord would wish something so horrible on his favorite little girl. Then with sudden inspiration—or desperation—I saw the Lord's plan. The only reason I was told to go on a mission was so that I could, with forthrightness and honesty, manipulate Burt into asking me to marry him. Of course! It was brilliant, flawless! No wonder the Lord is in charge! Burt was a fervent sisterhater; I knew my caring boyfriend would never let me commit such social suicide. That night I dressed with extreme care: I chose my cutest little short skirt—definitely not garment length—and got my hair trimmed and highlighted. I was ready for the proposal.

After a few kisses and appetizers, I mentioned to Burt that I was going to turn in my mission papers. But rather than looking stressed or worried, Burt actually looked relieved. And things quickly went downhill. Suddenly a big proponent of the value of a mission, he told me that he strongly supported my decision. He was also quick to let me know he couldn't promise to be around when I got back. My stomach sank. Things were definitely not going according to the Lord's plan. We finished the evening by picking up the mission papers and filling them out together. As I watched him do the writing for me and tell his roommates the "good" news, I knew I was in deep trouble. Suddenly I, the biggest, most willing sisterhater in the world, found myself trapped by my own guile into going on a mission.

In an effort to mask my sisterhating, I bravely went to my temple preparation classes and tried not to think about the cute tank tops and shorts I would have to leave behind. It may not surprise you that I didn't get a lot of support from my male friends. "OOOooooo! Teresa's taking a step down," they said, or "Better practice making cookies for the elders," or, a personal favorite, "Don't go on a mission! If you're that desperate, I'll marry you!" Unfortunately, that last one wasn't uttered by the love of my life. Pride sent me on my mission. . .along with a small hope that I would receive a proposal by mail.

Now I have to confess that my sisterhating did not end with my entrance into the mission field. It was common practice for the elders to gather and mock the sister missionaries. And although I had folded, come on a mission, and become one of the mockees, I was always more than willing to sit with the elders and spend a ward picnic venting frus-

trations about the sisters. I could see and confirm that sisters were taking up valuable apartment space for the real servants of the Lord. The belief I had most in common with those boys in ill-fitting suits was a conviction about how horrible sister missionaries could be. I would often instigate such discussions by sharing the more intimate details of slacking among sisters. It was in those few glorious moments of gossip with the elders that I was able to find the person I had lost in all the extra folds and layers of garments and ankle-length skirts.

Such comfort was short-lived. Two elders soon made clear to me that I'd been making common cause with an enemy. Calmly they described for me the three types of sisters who serve missions and, to my horror, lumped me into the mix along with the rest. There are, they explained, the baking sister, the unmarriageable sister, and the priesthood-craving sister.

The baking sister is the least scorned because the elders benefit most from her talents. According to these elders, the one thing sisters are truly good for is baking brownies for the elders and their investigators. (Obviously, keeping a portion for themselves—thus, reaping the extra twenty pounds most "sisters" need to lose.) At least the bakers stayed out of the elders' way and let them do the real work.

The unmarriageable sister has failed to receive a proposal during her freshman or sophomore year at college, so she goes on a mission to meet the most eligible bachelors where there is little competition from other girls. This sister spends most of her time flirting with the elders, using the spirit to reel in an unsuspecting mark. Often a transfer follows any success, but steamy letters are secretly exchanged at zone conferences to keep the passion alive.

The priesthood-craving sister is the curse of the zone. This sister spends most of her time telling the elders how best to run a district, zone, or branch. Any mistakes made by the elders are immediately noted and shared in her weekly letters to the mission president. The threatened elders immediately detect that any such sister is lobbying for women to receive the priesthood.

Those were the categories. The definitive set. Not much of a baker myself, and certain of proposals in my future, I realized that those elders had dumped me into the category of priesthood-craver. Couldn't they see I had never wanted the administrative jobs and titles elders fight for? I just wanted to run circles around every missionary in the country. I wanted everyone to see what a "good" sister could do. I wanted to show them there were some of us who hadn't come on missions to get Betty Crocker Awards, that some of us would not let our companions even turn on the oven, and that we went out every day and knocked on doors to share the message of hope and love. There were a few of us who worked so hard we would come home exhausted to the point of tears. I

was depressed to think there could be so many bakers staying in their apartments making cookies, or so many unmarrieds dreaming up excuses to have elders over for a blessing and dinner.

I made a resolve and assigned myself the task of reforming the mob mindset against sister missionaries. To do that, I put myself in charge of whipping the sister missionaries into shape. I would call sisters who, I had heard, were making too many cookies and tell them to get *up* and *out* of the apartment and *on* with the work! Luckily, every companion I had was ready to work hard, and we "returned with honor" at the end of each day, knowing we had tracted until we couldn't lift our arms to knock another door. At some point during my condescending phone calls to other sisters in the mission, I recognized that, in fact, we were all working hard in our different ways. We were all on missions because we felt that, love it or not, we had been called to be servants of the Lord. I gave up reforming the sisters to get back to my own calling. And the truth is that such a calling has its price: My hairstylist was my companion, who used an old pair of scissors we found under the couch; my favorite outfit, one I wore about three times a week, consisted of a long brown skirt with an elastic waist, a white t-shirt, and brown Doc Martins worn with white socks. I ended my mission in those clothes. I keep them even now to remind me of my investment in a work of such importance that nothing else mattered.

Returning home at the end of my mission, I clung to the memory of working for a greater good as I stepped off the plane and saw an all too familiar look in my little sister's eyes. I knew I looked exactly like those sister missionaries who had disgusted me for so many years. My little sister had just graduated from high school, which put her directly at the hub of fashion, and before I had been home twenty-four hours, she had me in a new outfit (one of her cast-offs) and dragged me on a trip to overhaul my hair. When I looked in the mirror, I was once again the sassy cute thing I had once been. Before the end of my homecoming reception, I had a date for the next day with an elder from my mission. Oh, the sweet taste of vindication! For a year-and-a-half I had been a genderless cookie-cutter sister missionary, and now suddenly, with a change of clothes and hair, I was someone to flirt with, someone to ask out.

On that first date I realized my dating rhetoric had changed significantly. Rather than obliging and confirming how useless sister missionaries were, I argued for their effectiveness. My dates thereafter ended with a missionary handshake rather than a steamy embrace. This soon became a concern in the singles ward I attended, and in an effort to help me with my transition into "normal" life and reduce the number of eternal companions I seemed to be casting aside, roommates and friends would whisper in my ear which guys were manifest sisterhaters, advising me to keep the fact that I'd served a mission to myself. I'm afraid I

wasn't very amenable to advice. Most of my dates would consist of comparing missions, baptisms, and the roles of sister missionaries. It definitely kept conversation lively.

And still does. Eventually, I fell in love with—and married—a sister-hater. In my defense, Dave's tactics took me off guard. Missionary work never even came up in our conversations. We played roller hockey rather than attending ward prayer; we went for hikes rather than walks past the temple; we discussed current events rather than proselyting styles. When, after a couple of months, it did come up that I had served a mission, he told me he thought it was great. He conceded he'd hated the sisters in his mission, but had to admit, in the same tactical way perhaps that I had once accepted a mission call, that all sisters weren't bad and that they certainly couldn't all be lumped into just three categories.

So why am I still a sisterhater? Perhaps it's because my hair is a little too cute and my clothes a little too stylish. Or maybe it's because I am jealous that I am no longer the object of so much disdain. Or maybe I just loved being on my mission. To tell you the truth, I miss the antagonism just a little bit. And I am very, very proud to say that not once did I bake anything for anyone.