

The Weight of Priesthood

Stephen Carter

I WAS EIGHT YEARS OLD one March Sunday. The chapel curtains were bright with the springtime sun, as if angels were standing outside. The church itself was new, built only a year or two before out in the middle of some farmland. Cows were the closest neighbors. The brown bricks and stoic wood paneling gave the building a solid feel—unlike my stomach, which was clutching and jerking. One of my buddies, David, was sitting on a chair at the front of the chapel, and large, suit-coated men had gathered around him. I was next in line.

My whole extended family had come to see me. After all, I was one of the first grandchildren to go through a confirmation. Later we'd all get together at our house and eat sandwiches, but first, I had to take the hot seat. I was a little frightened. But it was a fear that had never entered my heart before. I knew the metallic pang from the anticipation of a parent's wrath. I understood the snatch of panic when older kids came after me. But this was the first time I had the fear of God in me.

Is that what you call it? Fear? I can't call it respect or awe; those seem passive nouns. I need something active to describe the feeling of coming up against the major powers I had heard about all my life. Fear is when you are going to do something and you don't know exactly what will happen as a consequence. It's when you wonder if you are in over your head. When you wonder if you might lose something. Or be crushed by what you are given.

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Weight. Yeah, there was a lot of weight to this whole process. It had started the day before that fateful Sunday when I stuck my toe into the baptismal font water, warm as amniotic fluid. I felt the pull of the water as I walked down the stairs. The legs of my white jumpsuit flowered out, and air blew out of my collar as the water gained ground. By the time I had hit the bottom step, I was in almost up to my chest. It was a little hard to breathe. I had to hold my arms up to keep them clear of the water. My dad took my hands in the way we had practiced. I looked up at the mirror that hung over the water. It was there to help the people in the back see what was going on. It gave them a bird's-eye view. Kind of like how God was seeing me, I guess.

Dad held his arm to the square and said a short prayer. It told me that I was being baptized by someone who had authority from God. Then I went down. The idea, I was told, was to bend your knees and lean back. Kind of like doing the limbo. That way none of your hair sticks up, or your belly. You have to be totally immersed; otherwise you have to do it again. And as even an eight year old knew, a second time is anti-climactic. Under the water, I heard the gabble of bubbles and a rushing sound. I felt completely alone. Then I thought, "I wonder when I'll come up again?" and the world exploded around me. I was back with water in my eyes and the jumpsuit clinging to my body. I couldn't see much at all. Not even all the little kids that had scooted to the font so they could see better. I stumbled out of the font. Pure.

Well. That was it, I guessed. I was clean. No sins clung to me. It was a pleasant feeling for a second or two, until I started shivering in my wet clothes. My dad led me into the changing room where David and his dad were . . . well, changing. I had not anticipated this situation. The last time I had been anywhere close to naked in the church was two months before when I had made my trial attempt at using the standing urinal, not realizing that one did not have to pull down one's pants in order to use it, though the people waiting in line may have understood that principle. But that was behind me now. I was clean. Except for the fact that I had to take off my jumpsuit and change into clean underwear in front of three other people. I shot a furtive glance at David. He was watching me out of the corner of his eye, suited and shivering like me. I looked at my dad, hoping for a clue. Hmm. David's dad seemed to be doing the same thing. I

had never seen so much hair in such unexpected places. Perhaps I could study the tiles and make conversation until everyone was done changing—except that Dad was patting me on the back and telling me to get moving.

David and I locked eyes—just daring each other to look. I unzipped mine. He unzipped his. As long as I watched him, I was sure he wouldn't do anything funny. One arm. Steady. Down the torso. Hips. Oh my gosh. Underwear doesn't come on easily when you're sopping wet. But we made do.

Dang. Did this mean I had already committed a sin? It was kind of hard to tell. David better just keep his mouth shut.

But here I was, Sunday, sitting on a hard chair at the front of the chapel in the center of the circle of men. I was staring at their belt buckles and smelling their Old Spice. They went into blessing stance: left hand on one another's backs, right hand on my head. The weight of the priesthood was upon me. My dad started praying, telling me to receive the Holy Ghost. I waited. Nothing palpable—except the weight. There must have been ten right hands on my head, all charged with the priesthood of God, and a few pounds each. He said more, but I didn't quite catch it all. Then the prayer ended, and the second, unessential, but traditional ordinance started: the shaking of hands. Why did we feel compelled to do this? Well, first, all Mormons do it after a blessing. Kind of a thank-you gesture. The blessing just doesn't feel finished otherwise. Perhaps it's another contact, in case the head wasn't clean enough. One more circuit for the Spirit of God to enter through.

I bore my testimony that day. I don't remember what I said, but the weight of the priesthood stayed with me. Mostly in my neck. That was the thing I remembered. To receive God is to receive weight. It had been in my wet clothes and in the hands of the priesthood bearers. And then, ten years later, in my bones.

I was an elder. They announced me in stake conference. I stood so everyone could see me. I had a new white shirt and tie for the occasion. The whole extended family was there, because, once again, I was the first. We gathered in our living room a few hours later. I sat in a chair and the men moved in around me, forming a circle and placing left hand on backs, right hand on my head. Now I looked at their chests. But the weight was exactly the same, though my neck held up better. This time it wasn't the spirit of God I was receiving, but His priesthood. An eighteen-year-old

with God's power? It seemed as likely that He would give an eight-year-old His spirit. But that's what they had told me for years. Those men, so ponderous and steady, had latent power rippling under their skin. The kind of power that could heal the sick, comfort the downtrodden, and call down the might of heaven. As the prayer began, the fear entered me again. An active fear of a God who was acting upon me. Their hands lifted from my head, and I was returned to my normal gravity. I stood to complete the circuit. And felt something. The marrow in my bones seemed heavier, solid. Normally a skinny, geeky kid, I suddenly felt as if there was a live wire strung through my joints. I sat down and put my arm around my girlfriend's shoulders. And for the first time, I felt that I could actually protect her. That I was a real man. A priesthood bearer.

Except it took a while to turn on the juice. This happens to me a lot. I get all psyched—spirit in my britches—and then the laundry needs doing for the next six months. The boil slows to a simmer. For a long time after my ordination, there weren't any dead who needed raising. The sick, having heard of my new powers, had not shown themselves at my door. The gravity melted slowly, or else my muscles adapted. Whichever. But I knew there was a catch to getting the priesthood. The Church just doesn't go around ordaining eighteen-year-olds to be elders for nothing. You have to sign your name to something else first: mission papers. In order to be a real man, you've got to head out into the world for two years under the Church's flag. You have to join that army of boys with black nametags and ties. And when you go out into the world to preach the gospel, you really should have some idea of how to use the priesthood.

At least, I thought so. There are two great story settings in the Mormon Church, the pioneer trek and the mission field. In both of these dramatic settings, a person is not surprised to hear about miracles. They are those uncharted countries where ordinary life is exploded. Where there be dragons and cherubim. What Mormon has not heard of the packs of demons attacking Heber C. Kimball and his companions as they proselytized in England? How the hooked shapes leapt at them, and how the elders fought them off with their own fists and the priesthood. Who has not heard of a child being brought back from death's door by the ministrations of two twenty-year-old missionaries? But it is one thing to hear those stories from the mouths of missionaries returning home from the mission field or from teachers in Sunday school. It is another to actually enter them. God has to fill your bones.

I wanted to rev the divine engine, prime the priesthood pump. Get that power moving. I figured, since God gave it to me, maybe He'd also give me a chance to use it. So I asked Him about it for a few weeks. It was a half-hearted request because, frankly, the thought of administering to someone scared me to death. Large, Old Spiced men with heavy hands gave blessings. I was as close to the Atlas Body Building Program's derided ninety-eight-pound weakling as one could be, and I wore Speed Stick. Certainly I didn't qualify. But the fact was, I had the priesthood.

One evening, a few weeks before I left for my mission, I was sitting in the chapel of the Manti Temple. This temple is located in a tiny town in the middle of miles of Utah's sagebrush and sun. The original settlers built a temple—the second to be dedicated in Utah—on the hill east of town. It's an odd building, a kind of mutated Puritan-style church house, or diminutive castle, with towers on each end of the building. But instead of being steepled, they end in a trapezoidal taper. The whole building is made of limestone, solid as the mountain it's built upon. During the day, its silhouette is visible for miles. At night it lights up, stunning the whole valley. It's my favorite temple. I'm not sure there are any Mormons from Utah who don't have a pioneer-built temple as their favorite. There's an element of sweat and studiousness that draws us to them. Men and women sacrificed to build those early structures. Some of them are our own flesh and blood. A million stories surround each one of them. And you can feel it. Like priesthood.

I was dressed in my white clothing, waiting for the next endowment session to start. I was looking forward to the ritual. In the Manti Temple, it is especially dramatic, as the walls and ceilings of the large rooms are painted with scenes from the creation, the Garden of Eden, the telestial world, the terrestrial world, and finally God's kingdom. As you move from room to room, the light increases, giving you the feeling that you're getting closer to God with each step.

But that was the night the lights went out in Manti. A storm had chased us there, and apparently it had struck something important. My mom, dad, and aunt were sitting with me when the room went black. As the little emergency lights came up, one of the temple officiators walked in and told us we'd have to wait till the electricity came back before we could start our session. My dad and aunt walked the halls to console my dad's bum back. A car accident early in his twenties had doomed him to a life of back pain and periodic migraine headaches. I moved to the back of

the chapel to get away from the tapestry at the front. It's an attempt at a Raphaelesque group with women and children. And it's awful. The people's noses are huge, and the babies' heads are deformed. But the pioneers did it. So we keep it. After all, they did a great job on the building itself.

I talked to God in the dark of His temple. I gave Him the low-down again: I'm headed out and I don't want to be a total greenhorn, okay? Just give me something to break me in. I'll take anything.

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The lights came back on. The air conditioning started pushing the air again. I walked up and sat next to my mom. She leaned over and said, "You know, your dad's back and headaches have been hurting him a lot lately. I bet he'd appreciate a blessing from you."

Well, there you go.

I wasn't familiar with the biblical parable of the sleeping housemaster at the time. If I had been, I might have looked on this incident a little differently. Jesus said that prayer is sometimes like a fellow going to a man's house to ask a favor—except that he's doing it in the middle of the night. He annoys the housemaster with his request until the housemaster gets fed up and gives it to him. What the man actually gets is never made clear.

So I guess I got my chance. I set a date with my dad to give him a blessing, then proceeded to worry myself sick about it. When the day came, I fasted, hoping to have God's spirit with me. Because, when you give a blessing, there's no telling what's going to happen. Sometimes nothing happens. But someone doesn't ask for a blessing without thinking something is going to happen. So the blesser is in a double bind. On the one hand, he's not sure God is going to will anything to really happen. On the other hand, the blessee is really counting on the blesser to bring those blessings down. I retract—the blesser is actually in a triple bind, because he doesn't know if it's right to invoke healing upon the person. It seems a little presumptuous to tell a person he or she is going to be healed without the go-ahead from God. The problem is, you don't know what God has in mind until the oil has been applied, the hands are on the head, and the blessing is being spoken. Everything hangs on the spur of the moment. Are you ready to receive whatever intelligence it is God is willing to send down? Sheesh. Talk about a burden. I found out later that Joseph Smith had some of his apostles do a healing blessing over and over again until

they finally got the Spirit. But that's just not done these days. It's kind of like baptism: You want to get it right the first time, because after that, it gets plain embarrassing.

Besides that, it was my dad. And I happened to like my dad. I knew that he had suffered from back and head pain for his whole adult life. I really wanted to be part of a process that might heal him.

Finally, the actual minute came. We were gathered in my dad's bedroom. He was sitting in his rocking chair. Another priesthood holder had anointed my dad with consecrated olive oil, and now my hands were on my father's head. I felt my position distinctly. My father had often given me blessings of healing. And every year on the Sunday before a new school year started, he would give each of his children a father's blessing to help them get started (though my math grades never improved). Now I was the one giving the blessing. I cleared my mind and allowed myself a bit of time to listen. By "listen," I mean to God. I was a piece of beeswax waiting for any sort of impression to come. And I was desperate enough to take anything.

Turned out, my dad wasn't slated for immediate miraculous healing. Or even postponed, medically assisted healing. Or anything. In fact, I told him this pain was a test, and he needed to suffer through it. You'll find stuff along the way, I said, that will help alleviate the pain, but for now, God loves you. Keep a stiff upper lip. And all that.

Which reminds me, there's another gremlin hanging on the back of the blesser's mind. Namely, what if I don't have enough faith? Maybe I went into this whole deal not believing enough. Maybe I am the cause of the defusing of this blessing. Maybe a mustard seed could leave me in the dust. And, of course, this worry seemed the most probable explanation to me as the blessing ended. Perhaps my faith had failed.

So far I was batting nothing. I decided to just keep this whole incident in my pocket as I went off on my mission to Toronto and be really careful about whom I agreed to bless. I hadn't lost faith in the power of the priesthood, but you could say that I became a kind of deist. I started thinking of blessings as moral support rather than a transaction from God, because the few people I blessed always felt the quiet goodness of the Spirit afterward, but the effects didn't last long. I figured this was all right. We'd stick with what we had. But the old stories still knocked around in the back of my mind: those missionaries who actually called the power of God down from heaven.

One day I received a letter from my mom. She told me something weird—that my first blessing was actually seeing some action. Dad had figured out that eating mint or sage brings on a headache. “Remember,” she wrote, “that you told him he would find ways to alleviate his pain; well, here it is.” I was surprised. Maybe there was something to this blessing thing after all. Then a few months later, my mom wrote again to tell me that Dad was installing a Jacuzzi, which apparently does wonders for an aching back. It sounded a little on the worldly side to my poverty-ridden missionary sensibilities, but God is reputed to work in mysterious ways.

About eighteen months into my mission to Toronto, my companion and I were dawdling away a muggy summer afternoon knocking on doors inside a large apartment complex. It was tedious going. Hardly anyone was at home. In fact, at one door, a housecleaner answered and gave us a royal chewing out for awakening the apartment’s occupant, a woman dying of cancer. She slammed the door and we walked down the hall, feeling like scum, but seeing nothing else but to stump ahead. What else were we going to do, preach on a street corner in heat so wet your shirt stuck to your skin? No, we preferred this air-conditioned somnambulism. It was not a little annoying to hear the door open behind us again. No doubt the housekeeper was going to inform us that she had called the manager and that we were to be expelled at any moment.

“Hey, come back,” she said.

We looked back. Her face seemed different. She told us to come in and pointed at the woman lying in a rented hospital bed. She was a short, round Guyanese woman in her sixties. Her dark skin contrasted the white floral print gown she was wearing.

“Elders,” she said, “Elders, Jesus brought you. Thank you, Jesus.”

Apparently Jesus had brought us to that apartment. But now what were we supposed to do? The first thought that comes to any missionary’s mind when he is in a situation like this is, I wonder if this person wants to be baptized? It’s not a subtle thought, but missionary work is not a subtle job. The problem was, I had no idea what this woman was trying to say. She had a thick accent and couldn’t get too many words out at a time. I thought about just teaching her the first missionary lesson when my companion finally got what she was saying.

“She’s a Mormon.” He picked up a book from the shelf, and sure enough, it was that distinctive navy blue cover with gold lettering. Admittedly, my heart fell a little. We hadn’t baptized someone in a while, and I

was hoping this encounter was the answer to our prayers. We found out that her name was Evelyn and that she had been baptized a few years ago, but had moved, contracted cancer, and lost contact with the Church.

Over the next few weeks, we became regular visitors and started to meet Evelyn's family. There was her husband Raja, her son Rohan, and Gita, his wife. Rohan and Raja had also been baptized into the Church, but Gita, being a new member of the family, was Hindu, which turned our missionary meters right back on. But for some reason, we never really got around to having lessons with Gita. Whenever we visited, we talked with Evelyn. The only thing she wanted to do was pray with us and tell us about Jesus—and we thought *we* were the missionaries. It was a strange, exhilarating experience to sit next to her lump of a body, sizzling with cancer, and listen to her praise Jesus. It was all we could do to agree with her as quickly as she praised.

The months wore on, and November arrived. The humidity now cut through clothes and iced everyone who was silly enough to be outside, meaning, of course, the missionaries. Evelyn's health followed the decline in weather. More often she would be asleep when we came over, and she would wake only briefly from time to time. No one complained, though; sleep is certainly preferable to pain. One day we stopped by for no particular reason. The odor of deterioration hit us as we walked in. We found Gita, a stick-thin girl with large black eyes and lips perpetually formed into a kiss, trying to comfort Evelyn, who was groaning and rolling her head from side to side. Her fingers were crushing Gita's tiny hands.

"She hasn't slept for days," Gita told us.

Evelyn saw us and gurgled, "Elders, come pray over me." What she meant was, "Give me a blessing." This time the stakes were way up. My dad's pain of a few years ago had been almost theoretical to me. It was something he could take care of, a sort of test case for me. But now I saw Evelyn sunken so far that she was barely coherent. There's a certain feel to the area around someone in complete pain. It smells, oddly, like the flesh of a child. The pained skin gives off an almost electrical charge. Your own nerves vibrate sympathetically with the pain. We put our hands on Evelyn's head. Since my companion was a new missionary, he wanted me to give the blessing—coward. But I did it. And I said, "The pain will lift. You will sleep. God is watching over you."

Her hands loosened their grip and her eyes closed. She fell asleep saying, "Thank you, Jesus." I swear this is true.

We weren't always so helpful. A week later we stopped by Evelyn's house to sing some Christmas carols. My companion, Elder Christopherson, happened to be an opera singer, fullback, and retired illegal fireworks smuggler. When we had finished, one of the more long-winded members of our quartet said a closing prayer; and during it, Evelyn lost her breath. She gasped and coughed with a vigor that meant she needed a hospital. But our prayer-giver didn't seem to notice and droned on while Evelyn's family rushed to her rescue and called the fire department. The medics carried her out on a stretcher, and we were left to wonder if our rendition had really been that bad.

The mission office transferred me out of that part of town a few days later. A week after that, I got a call from Elder Christopherson; Evelyn had passed away. But not, he told me, before he gave her a blessing. She'd been in a coma for a week. But when he blessed her, she came out of it, grabbed Elder Christopherson by the shirt and said, "Fat Man, baptize my family." Then she talked lucidly with her family for a few moments, closed her eyes, and died.

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I'd really like to end the story there. It's a good, happy ending. Boy gets priesthood, boy struggles with priesthood, boy succeeds. The problem is, life goes on. Things change.

Most of the people I had baptized on my mission have fallen away from the Church. Even Evelyn's family. They all either wandered off or rejected the Church outright. I'm still not sure what to think of that. I had been part of the great story: healing, blessing, converting—exercising the priesthood of God. I had made covenants, and I had helped other people do the same thing. And somehow it had all blown away. My priesthood legacy.

There's a popular saying in the Church that a person's mission experience is the high-water mark in his or her spiritual life. You'll never really progress beyond the faith you gain in the mission field. As disheartening as that idea appears, it seemed true to me during the five years after my mission. Mainly because I finally had the time to doubt.

Doubting is a difficult business in Mormonism, especially if you were raised in the Church. There's a sense that the whole gospel, from Joseph Smith's first vision to the latest general conference talk, is completely intertwined. That you can't remove one thread from the tapestry, or the

whole thing will unravel. I don't know how many times I taught potential converts that if they believed the Book of Mormon was scripture, then Joseph Smith, who brought it forth, must be a prophet. And if Joseph Smith is a prophet then the church he started must be God's true church. And that was only the beginning of this giant game of dominoes.

Not only is the Church a unified work, it is also based on the assumption of eternity. Everything you do has an eternal consequence. That's made more than clear in the temple ceremony. The entirety of eternity is spread out, from the creation of the universe to your own personal entrance into God's kingdom. You make covenants there. And since the temple is, after all, God's house, He's there witnessing every one of them.

But there is also an element of chaos. A popular story used in sermons tells about a young priesthood bearer who watched one of his buddies get struck by lightning. He ran to his friend's side, laid his hands on his head, and healed him. What would have happened, the speaker will ask, had that young man not been worthy at that moment?

Don't get caught with your priesthood down.

The doctors found a tumor growing on my mother's brain a few years after I returned from Toronto. It messed with her gyros and deadened her hearing. And, if it didn't get taken out, it would eventually kill her. My mom has always been a big one for blessings. She once told me that when she receives a blessing, she can feel a conduit reaching from inside her, through the blesser, into heaven.

So naturally, when she found out about the tumor, her blessing rate skyrocketed. And it seemed to work because the doctor's blade didn't slip, he filleted the tumor nicely, and she lived to tell the story. I wasn't close by during this period, so my dad gave her most of the blessings. But a few weeks after the operation, she called on Dad and me to give her another blessing. Recuperating from brain surgery needs all the help it can get.

I entered her dim bedroom. She was sitting in the same chair my dad had been sitting in when I had gone on my maiden priesthood voyage. She asked us to sit down, and then, with a right angle of black stitch marks striding across her head, she asked us to bear our testimonies.

When people have been strapped to a stainless steel gurney and wheeled to the edge of death and then wheeled back to life again, they're changed. It doesn't matter if they didn't see a light at the end of the tunnel or angels descending. There's just something about being there, doing that, having the scars to show, that gives this particular kind of traveler a

third eye. The kind, I thought as I sat in my parents' room, that can see into your soul. Perhaps it's all the time they've spent in solitude, pain whitening away their bodies so all that's left is spirit. And now, though my mother's eyes were closed, I thought that I could feel this heightened sense turned on me. And that I didn't measure up. I wasn't the person I had been when I was a missionary. I no longer had that singleness of heart or that purity of faith. It had been alloyed with doubt, disappointment, and questions. I certainly hadn't shaken off any of my Mormonness. When you grow up listening to stories from the Book of Mormon and the Old Testament, they never leave you. The heroes still bang around in their armor, and old bearded men prophesy in Hestonian tenors. But I was different.

I stumbled through a testimony that sounded nothing like the confident assertions of faith we hear every month in testimony meeting. It was full of hopes and wishes, but no beliefs or confessions. All I could call myself was a Mormon by yearning. My dad, on the other hand, said simply, "I know God lives and that through His Son Jesus Christ, I can be saved from my sins." The brevity clinched his surety, and my mother settled into her chair, sustained.

I anointed my mother, placing a drop of consecrated oil on her head and rubbing it into her scalp. But that was all. My father gave the actual blessing; and during it, even though my hands were on my mother's head, I felt that I was watching from outside the circle. I wanted to be inside; but wanting wasn't enough. I couldn't be a pure conduit for my mother. She wouldn't have been able to feel it.

Yeah. The priesthood is a weight.

Sometimes I wish I didn't have this weight. Sometimes I wish I could drop it: the power, the responsibility, the tradition, the expectations. I wish I could cut all the ropes and just fly for a little while, scope out the scenery, and choose a nice place to visit. Sometimes I envy the people who can leave the Mormon Church, who can forget about their priesthood, who can find a new tradition that suits them better, or create their own. What would happen if I didn't have to wrestle this angel anymore?

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I admit that one reason I hold on to my priesthood looks a lot like superstition. And it might be. There is a piece of my heart that believes (irrevocably, I think) that this priesthood will one day save either my life or

the life of someone I love. And as I've pointed out, perhaps it already has. I can't imagine holding the sick or dying body of one of my children or my wife and not being able to bless them. There's this chance that God will reach down through me, if I have the faith of a mustard seed. Perhaps it is a weakness in character to feel that way. Maybe I'm using my idea of the priesthood as a crutch. As if I'm hanging on to God and my priesthood like an old salad shooter, hoping it will come in handy someday.

But, then again, the priesthood could be a social construction, something that keeps Mormons organized and the men on top. After all, my polygamous ancestors firmly believed that people who didn't enter into plural marriage were unworthy of the highest orders of heaven. I'd like to think that perhaps they were a little wrong about that as my monogamy is pretty well in place. I want to tell myself that plural marriage was a social construction helpful in keeping the Mormons organized and the men on top. But you don't practice plural marriage unless you believe in it. There has to be some unquestionable core, something transcendent that gives all the pain and wondering some meaning. If I believe in the priesthood only as a social construction, I wonder if it will fail me because I failed it. In which case, why hold on to superstition? It won't work anyway.

This is reality: I doubt. I yearn. My doubt is not going away any time soon. Things I once thought were permanent fade. My stories, which once fit into the larger story, are becoming too complex.

It's anticlimactic to start over, I know. You can't keep the original drama, and you run the chance of boring the audience. But what if I cleared away all the scenery? What if I emptied the whole room and left all the stories behind? Is there any place I can begin again?

Well, sometimes, at night, I crawl over to watch my two boys as they sleep, and I can't resist the impulse to lay my hands upon the head, first of one, then of the other. Though one hand can cover most of the top of a small head, I use both hands. At once I feel completely connected with them—as if I am in the midst of the most intimate gesture that can occur between two people. And it seems, during those moments, that the weight is lifted, or shared, or completely buoyed. No healings. No miracles. No stories.

I'll start here.