

My Mission Decision

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Note: Some of my fellow carousers mentioned in the following account have become pious over the years and may not desire to be reminded of their adolescent foibles; hence, I have given them pseudonyms.

October 1954. I am age nineteen and in Clark's Barbershop with Lloyd for his weekly duck's butt haircut. He's reading the *Salt Lake Tribune* and I am turning magazine pages. A coupon says, "Play a guitar in six weeks." I nudge Lloyd, "My convertible needs a guitar player."

"Sure." He smiles.

I'm tearing out the guitar coupon when Lloyd says, "Look. They're killing the G.I. Bill." He turns the paper so I can read: "G.I. Bill to end January 15th, 1955."

Lloyd hands me the paper as he climbs into the barber chair; I read of the demise of the G.I. Bill. Ever since graduating from Blackfoot High in 1953, I've considered joining the army to get the bill; it pays college tuition, books, and \$110 per month for living expenses, \$220 for married students. But I hesitate. Although I ranked high on the standard exams, I graduated in the fourth quartile of my high school class. My senior year was my worst with a GPA of 1.5. And my one semester at college makes me wonder if I could pass college courses.

I tried college last January. On a Saturday night, I was riding around town and telling Jon about losing my job as a blacksmith apprentice because of the railroad switching from steam to diesel. He said, "Try college;

winter semester just started." Jon had entered Idaho State College in the fall and completed one semester. We cruised our town of 5,000 from the fairgrounds to the railroad tracks, talking and drinking Schlitz. We stopped for the traffic light on Bridge Street and watched singles and couples scurry along icy sidewalks to and from the Silver Spur, Snowballs, Ted's Place, and Stockman's Bar. As the Model A idled, the crisp, uneven exhaust from the full-race V8 engine caused the bar hoppers to look our way. We waved at our basketball coach and his wife, and they waved back. We couldn't join them because we were under age. When we got tired of cruising, we talked with friends over milkshakes at the ice cream parlor. We ended the night at Maxie's, Blackfoot's pool hall for teenagers. Before we returned to my cold car after midnight, Jon had convinced me to take the classes he had finished and buy his books and drafting instruments.

On Monday morning I was in Pocatello at Idaho State College. The north wind was whipping soil and snow into dirty white waves along the sidewalk on the unfriendly campus. In the line of latecomers, I overheard a student from California say he chose Idaho State because of its pharmacy program; he and another student talked about college and careers. I didn't know what to study and had no career plans. I had simply been talked into taking Jon's classes and buying his books. I wanted to leave the line and head for the snow-covered grain fields to hunt ducks and geese.

I paid my tuition, sixty bucks, and went for the English exam. To my surprise, I bypassed bonehead English, which Jon had had to take. Walking to my car, I resolved to study, just as I had resolved to study each September in high school. But this time would be different.

On the first day of my speech class, twenty students sat in the front rows of a circular theater, while the professor at the podium on the stage lectured on introductory and acceptance speeches. "Public speaking is fun," he said. "You'll see and don't worry." He motioned two advanced students to the stage to demonstrate the speeches; both made us laugh. It did look easy and fun. The professor said we'd each give a two-minute speech at the next class and had us choose a partner: one would give each type of speech. The student beside me became my partner; and before leaving, we decided that I'd nominate him for chairman of the Blackfoot school board, and he would accept. We'd meet and rehearse our speeches an hour before the next class.

I wrote my speech and memorized it but could not force myself back

to class. After missing a few times, I dropped the class and never saw my poor partner again.

College was looking like high school: I had memorized lines from *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar*, lines carved into my mind forever like, "Is this a dagger that I see before me, the handle . . . ?" and "Friends, Romans, Countrymen, lend me your ears. I come to bury. . . ." But I could not bring myself to recite the lines in class and instead pretended not to have memorized them.

In English class, Dr. Gee wet his left thumb on his tongue then thumb-and-fingered to the next page in *The Good Earth*, using only his left hand. His right arm lay lifeless in his lap as he sat in his wheelchair; only his head, hand, and book showed above his desk. Gee's son wheeled him into class; someone else would wheel him from class to his office and to other classes. Gee closed the book and gave us our first writing assignment, a five-hundred-word essay, due in a week. I had never written an essay.

At home I opened my spiral notebook and wrote a title in the middle of the top margin, "The National Guard." The next sentence was: "I joined the National Guard in high school." I liked this sentence but saw where I could add words and inserted them: I joined the National Guard [when I was a junior] in high school." I wrote each sentence, reviewed it to find places for more words, and inserted them:

Captain [Daniel] Worsencroft came to our high school and said if we joined [the National Guard before the 15th of] June of 1952] they could not draft us. 30 of us joined [the National Guard]. That made 60 [in our unit]. We had an inspection.

The inspector was a full colonel. He asked all [of the] new members [of the National Guard], "Why did you join the National Guard?" They all said, "To gain military experience, sir." He came to me and I raised my M1 and opened the bolt [and stood at attention]. He grabbed the rifle [from me] and looked down the barrel [to see if the barrel was clean]. He said, "Why did you join the National Guard?" I said, "To avoid being drafted, sir." He didn't say anything. The officer from my own [National Guard] unit was standing behind the colonel [and he was smiling a big smile on his face] and he almost laughed. [His name was Lieutenant Woods]. . . . I am glad I joined the National Guard because now they can't draft me.

Two days before the essay was due, I inserted more words and counted all of them twice: 509. Done. I copied the essay onto clean sheets of loose-leaf paper with pen and ink. I was proud of my essay, didn't know

I could write so many words. Dr. Gee gave me a C minus and wrote a lot of pen scribbles in the margins, references to sections in our composition book. Not too bad, I thought.

The first two weeks at Idaho State, I studied all morning in the recreation room, determined to be a serious student, while some slept or played pool, poker, or pinochle. During the third week, a student asked me to join him and two others in a game of four-hand pinochle. I was up on my studies so I nodded, recalling winter nights in high school. We lived on seven acres and Dad, my brother, and I would finish with the cows and hogs each night and head for the house to play cards with Uncle Spence. We had no ashtrays, so we gave Spence a dessert bowl. He'd fire up, put his cigarette down, get caught up in the game, and let his Pall Mall burn into a gray caterpillar with a filter-tip head.

We four students sat at a table, arranged our cards, and began bidding as smoke snaked up from four ashtrays. After a few hands, I was recalling key cards played just as Dad had taught me. My partner and I won. Our group gathered regularly and I began cutting classes. Geometry passed from planes to solids and I could barely do planes. A few weeks into solids, geometry proved futile. In June, finals arrived, and I took them without reviewing the books or previous exams. I turned in my ROTC uniform and shiny black shoes, sold my books, and drove home from Pocatello with my drafting instruments, free again.

* * *

I put down the *Tribune* and sense the snip-snip of the barber's scissors, the reflection of Lloyd in the wall of mirrors, the in-rush of arctic air as customers open the door to enter and leave. I want to try college again; maybe I can learn how to study. But without the G.I. Bill, I might not have the money for another attempt.

Saturday morning, Lloyd and I are in Idaho Falls talking with recruiters. An army sergeant with an airborne insignia on his jacket shakes my hand as I say, "I'm interested in your electronics program." He says, "Pass the exam and you're in." I could even take the exam before enlisting to make sure I qualified before signing on for two years, and he says my years in the National Guard will increase my pay. As I leave, he hands me a brochure, saying, "Think about it." I can see myself leaving the army as an

electronics technician in two years and entering college to study engineering.

We drive the twenty-five miles back to Blackfoot on two inches of hard-packed snow under low-hanging clouds, passing by snow-covered grain fields, potato fields, tall naked poplars looking down on the farmhouses they surround, frosted sagebrush along the railroad tracks. Lloyd is dreaming of sunny San Diego, Japan, and girls. "After boot camp it's a piece of cake," he says, "I may stay in the navy forever and see the whole damn world." Lloyd can hardly wait to board his ship; he's too contented. I say, "I wonder how much of Tokyo you can see from a porthole?"

* * *

One week before Christmas 1954, Brent flies home for the holidays to visit his folks and friends in Blackfoot. Brent was my best friend in high school; and shortly after our graduation in 1953, he moved to Seattle to work for Boeing Aircraft Company. More than six feet tall, he had been the star of our basketball team and wore nifty Navy T-shirts. His older brother—a Sea Bee building airstrips in the Philippines during the Korean War—gave Brent the shirts. The shirts had "U.S. Navy" below a U.S. flag, anchor, and swarm of bees. He looked cool in the shirts, and they enabled him to buy beer. Brent would place a case on the checkout counter, look down on the cashier from his freckled, whiskerless face, and smile as he opened his wallet and said, "How much, *amigo*?" If the cashier asked for ID, one of us would point to the flag on Brent's shirt and say, "You mean a man who's fighting for his country can't buy beer?"

I pick up Brent at his parents' home. My '50 Ford convertible with a Lincoln engine and Smithy mufflers surprises him. He's been gone for seventeen months, and we haven't written each other in a year or more. As he drives my car around town, I ask if he's ready to join the army with me to get the G.I. Bill. He's thinking about the bill, but he is thinking more about serving two years as a missionary. As our conversation proceeds, I perceive that Brent is not Brent anymore. Getting away from jack Mormons in Blackfoot and mingling with devout Mormons in Seattle, especially a convert named Darlene, have changed him. He hasn't been in a bar in a year, and he's been hanging out with missionaries.

We park and talk and Brent mentions our responsibility to God. He

is concerned about me. "When you enter a bar, your priesthood goes with you," he says. "You don't leave it behind in your convertible."

I was age twelve when a man from church visited our home and told my dad I was old enough to receive the priesthood. Dad should ordain me, but he had not been ordained himself and had no plan to get that way. On religion, he'd say, "I'm a damn good jack," then he'd laugh. So, on a Sunday morning, the bishop placed his hands on my head and uttered the words to convey the priesthood to me. I took my duties seriously and joined the other deacons in my ward on Sundays to distribute the sacrament to the members of the congregation, first the trays with pieces of white bread, then the trays with tiny cups of water. At fourteen, I was ordained a teacher, which authorized me to also prepare the sacrament: place the cups in the trays, fill them with water, place two slices of bread on each tray, and position the trays on the sacrament table. At sixteen, I was ordained a priest, which further authorized me to break the bread into small pieces and to read the prayers over the trays of bread and water before the deacons passed them up and down the rows of members seated on benches.

Like all other Mormon males who have the desire and are living their religion, I had been ordained to the priesthood but without feeling the profound responsibility Brent now feels. I believe what he is saying, know he is right, but I don't want to believe him, do not want to think about taking my priesthood into unholy places, do not want to hear religious talk about changing. Brent feels obligated to help me change.

"I sometimes feel I've gone too far," I say.

He says, "I did worse than you; God will forgive any of our sins if we repent." He says it was hard for him to change; he couldn't have done it in Blackfoot around his old friends.

I feel a confusion of feelings and ideas, and in some sense, I feel betrayed, feel as if he is not Brent but posing as Brent. Maybe he will end up like Don.

* * *

Last year, Don left Blackfoot to attend Brigham Young University for spring quarter. He was known for his de-fendered '34 Ford coupe, his fighting prowess, and his capacity for beer. He weighed 300 pounds and

could put away a case in an evening. At Brigham Young, he wrestled and became the heavyweight intramural champion.

In June, Don returned. In a few days he ran into my group. Late one evening six or seven of us were sitting on the fenders of our cars across from Modern Motors, where some of us worked. We were talking when Don swooped in to a stop and stepped out of his coupe. We howled a hero welcome and offered him a beer. He refused the beer, said we were sinners, and said his old friend Harry was immoral.

Uneasy silence. Then a voice said, "Hellooo, Bishop."

Don retorted, "It'd be an honor to be a bishop some day." He was different; only his girth was the same.

I didn't see Don for weeks, didn't look for him. Then someone said Don was back on beer. I figured it was gossip; but before summer was over, his drinking became common knowledge. He was one of us again, only we kept calling him "Bish."

* * *

I drive Brent to the Deleta Ballroom in Pocatello, where we had roamed together on Saturday nights our senior year in high school, less than two years ago. We park among the cars of our friends: Al, Morris, George. Morris smiles and waves us into his car, where he draws deeply on a Pall Mall and hands us a beer.

"Thanks," Brent says, "but I quit drinking."

"Get religion?" Morris says, half joking.

"Yes," Brent says and his voice tightens as he tells Morris about getting religion in Seattle.

I'm uneasy, feel this is not the place for such talk, and besides, Morris knows a lot about his religion. His father is a stake patriarch and Morris has learned religion at home, at church, in seminary classes during high school. Morris practiced until his late teens. We still believe our religion but we have chosen not to practice, at least for now, or maybe we feel beyond redemption. Regardless, how does one deal with an old friend who has returned to religion and feels compelled to bring you back too?

Morris says to Brent, "You have a point."

Morris and I down our beer and we all leave for the dance hall. Inside the Deleta, couples dance. Women and men mingle as smoke diffuses upward into mist in the dim ceiling lights. I see Brent talking to Al.

They finish, and Al walks over to me and says, "What's happened to him? He used to buy our beer." The night wears on.

I come upon Brent and George and hear Brent say, "I'm sorry you're thinking divorce. Can't you work it out?" The night wears on. Each of his old buddies talks to Brent and reacts to one another in private. As the "Tennessee Waltz" dances the night to an end, we do not see ourselves hanging out much with Brent anymore.

In the parking lot, we look out over shiny cars, some with many coats of lacquer and modified motors, a few brand-new 1955s. Their drivers are igniting them to life with groans, growls, and roars. Lee Wooley has the fastest car, a straight-eight Buick with eight exhaust pipes. He raced it at the Salt Flats, got an article in *Hot Rod* with a photo of himself and his car. A guy who works with him says Lee's a fanatic; when he changes oil, he leaves the drain plug out for days to get rid of the last drop of dirty oil. Lee is the only guy I know who doesn't believe the V-8 engine design is superior to the straight eight.

Cars head for the exit. The first screams south for downtown, tires smoking and pipes rumbling, and the next screams north. A police car arrives, and the drivers calm their cars. The fabric creaks as the top of my convertible whines up in the crisp air. I creep to the exit, turn north and begin the twenty-five miles to home. No reason to go downtown tonight. My Smithys roar across the Bannock Shoshone Reservation in the cold, still air, and soon we are crossing the Blackfoot River and pulling up at the home of Brent's parents.

Brent opens the car door, pauses as his breath turns to fog, and breaks the silence, "Pick me up for church in the morning."

I feel like telling him to go to hell but he catches me off guard; then he's gone.

At 7:45 in the morning, I'm at Brent's and tired. We drive to the Fifth Ward chapel and enter the back door into the basketball court, where our ward holds priesthood meeting. Bishop Clarence Cox, in his sixties, wears wide suspenders to keep his suit slacks centered on his stomach. The bishop looks up at Brent's face, shakes his hand, and fusses over him. I'm next. Bishop Cox grabs my hand, looks into my face, and says, "I want you on a mission in March, as soon as you turn twenty." His eyes pierce mine and he does not smile.

I smile, ill at ease, and wax poetic, "Your nose knows I'm in no condition for a mission."

"Then, get in condition."

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Mission took on meaning for me at a Church meeting in 1948, not before, and history explains why. In December of 1941, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, exploding into World War II, nine months after my sixth birthday. Men were drafted into military service on reaching age eighteen and women were offered jobs previously restricted to men. The war effort required every able body to fight or work and to work overtime. Some days my dad worked on the boilers of steam engines for sixteen hours straight for the Union Pacific Railroad in Pocatello, and my mother went to work for Simplot in Blackfoot, dehydrating potatoes for the troops. From the attack on Pearl Harbor until the end of World War II in the summer of 1945, no one left on a mission from our ward. Late in 1945, Richard Brown, Lewis Elison, and Orson Hofer left for Sweden. I do not recall their farewell, but I'll never forget their return in 1948. I was thirteen and may have become aware of mission and missionary for the first time at their homecoming.

In the half-circle brick tabernacle built in 1919, I sat on a curved brown bench. Richard, Lewis, and Orson took turns at the pulpit in front of ginger-colored organ pipes reaching to the ceiling. Each talked of deep snow and skiing to cottages to teach people the gospel and of taking steam baths and jumping out of the steam into a cold river in the winter, told of places none of us hoped to visit, ever. While speaking, Lewis paused, looked puzzled, turned to confer with Richard and Orson seated behind him—we in the congregation of half circles of benches sat wondering. Lewis returned to the podium, said he had forgotten how to say something in English. We had never heard of forgetting your own language.

Bishop Noack asked each one to relate his testimony in Swedish and they did and it was like sounds all running together, not separated into words like English. Richard, Lewis, and Orson spoke before the other wards in Blackfoot and to all the wards together at the following stake conference. At age thirteen, I decided to serve a mission, be just like them.

Years passed and I attended some missionary farewells and saw scared boys mumble through talks, then saw them return two years later, grown up and able to speak with confidence. Similar stories abounded about everyone who served a mission in my town.

I don't know where it began. Maybe I inherited this fear from my dad and mother; they were afraid to talk in public too. I recall our family going to Sunday School only once as a child, and we left early, Dad pulling me by my hand and Mom pulling my little brother, walking briskly to our 1930 Model A sedan. Dad was repeating, "That son of a bitch." Dean McClellan, a Sunday School officer, had asked Dad to say the closing prayer. Maybe he got Dad mixed up with his sister, my Aunt LaRue. Dad had never prayed in public in his life, had never stood before a congregation, had not attended church more than half a dozen times in his life.

Maybe I wouldn't be afraid to talk in public if I'd attended Sunday School as a child. Aunt Mary Jane from Los Angeles came into my life at age four or five. She enlivened our home with her jovial presence for a few hours, and as she was leaving, she pointed at me and said, "I'm going to take that kid to Sunday School with me." I didn't know what she meant. She said, "It's like school and you'll meet other kids."

I didn't like the idea, felt uneasy, hadn't been anywhere without my parents. On Sunday, Mother heated water on the stove, bathed me in a round galvanized metal tub, and dressed me in clean clothes, saying, "Don't get dirty." Mary Jane entered the driveway, and I ran out the back door and hid in the grassed-over ditch, which carried water behind the house and onto the front lawn once each week. Mother found me.

Aunt Mary Jane and I walked the mile or so to the First Ward Chapel, next to the Elks' Club. Inside the chapel, Mary Jane put me next to my teacher on the front row, and abandoned me. I felt strange among ten kids and gawked at strange objects: stained-glass windows, towering organ pipes, a pulpit. My world of buildings had included only houses, out-houses, pigpens, granaries, and barns.

I felt something grab my feet and looked under the bench. There was a kid with an egg-shaped head, down on his hands and knees. I moved my feet out of his reach, and he stood up behind me and pulled the short hair at the back of my head. I looked at the teacher; she did not see him. I did not tell her.

We went to class and learned about Jesus. The next week Aunt Mary Jane went back to Los Angeles, and I didn't attend Sunday School again for years. My parents didn't know what I was missing: at age four, kids were learning to pray before their classmates and to recite a sentence such as "I am responsible for my choices" before the congregation from time to time while their parents beamed.

At age seven or so, I attended Primary once with Calvin, a neighbor kid, and the teacher asked me to pray. I shook my head no, and she said all I had to do was stand by her, fold my arms, bow my head, close my eyes, and she would whisper what to say. I refused again. She asked Calvin, and he didn't want to pray either because she had asked me first; but he relented, and she whispered in his ear. He repeated the words with his arms folded and his blue eyes wide open, looking at me from a square face below a head of curly, dark brown hair.

The neighbors began taking my brother and me to Sunday School, and from time to time the teachers asked me to give the two-minute children's talk. I always said no. Aunt LaRue became my teacher. She wrote a talk for me and asked me to stand at the pulpit and just read it. The sheets of stationery, adorned with script in blue ink, lay on the shelf of the cook stove and got stained before Mother gave them back to Aunt LaRue, unread.

In my junior year at Blackfoot High School, I began working at Albertson's evenings and weekends, causing my church attendance to slip and my interest to wane. I began to smoke and felt uncomfortable at church, had the idea church was for those who lived what was taught there.

And even when I do attend church, I'm still afraid of being asked to talk or to pray. My parents dropped out of school in the eighth grade. I graduated from high school and I'm still afraid to talk.

* * *

Bishop Cox has lived across the street since I was six; he's seen my car tracks across his lawn in the snow when I skidded off the icy road into his yard coming home on Saturday nights. I am surprised he asked me to serve a mission. My life seems stuck in the spider web of my peers, and Bishop Cox is the only one with confidence in me. His asking me to serve a mission brings together my missionary memories, making me aware of a dormant desire to break from my friends. My attitude toward Brent softens.

* * *

For the rest of the holidays, Brent and I ride around in our spare

time and consider our options: join the army to get the G.I. Bill and serve a mission later, or serve a mission now and forego the bill. Brent decides to leave on a mission as soon as he can. He encourages me to do the same; maybe we can even serve in the same mission; we'd choose Australia.

The holidays come to an end and Brent flies back to Seattle, leaving me without a peer to encourage me toward a mission. A week later in the evening, we hear a knock at our door. Mother ushers the army recruiter from Idaho Falls into our front room. He happened to be in Blackfoot and stopped by to ask my thoughts about the electronics program we had discussed in his office. "I'm in a quandary," I say and mention the possibility of a mission. He comes up with a new idea: the chaplain assistant program. From his briefcase, he pulls out a page and says, "This program will help you prepare for a mission while you earn the G.I. Bill."

The recruiter finishes describing the program, and Dad says, "That's the cat's whiskers." I think so, too. Two years working with a chaplain would immerse me in religion and teach me the scriptures. And I feel I need two years just to prepare for a mission. This program might interest Brent, too. Enlist together? In half an hour the recruiter has to leave. We are excited and thank him as we say good-bye. Having more time to prepare for a mission appeals to me, gives me a sense of relief. Not more than two minutes later we hear another knock.

Mother goes to the door and I hear, "I'm looking for Henry Miles." Mother says, "Which one?" A man of twenty-five or so in a blue suit and tie enters, holding out a coupon and says, "The one who mailed this to the Diesel Institute of Seattle." Mother seats him in the corner of the front room in Dad's easy chair, and we sit on the couch and watch the diesel man.

He opens his briefcase. The inquiry about diesel mechanic training had slipped from my mind completely. "My plans have changed," I say, "now it's the army or a mission for my church and I only have until January 15th to decide." I mention the education benefits I don't want to miss, and he is looking from file to file in his briefcase, as if he's not listening, so I stop talking. He finishes with the files and closes his briefcase. He's ready to leave. He says, "Go on a mission. Nothing is more important. You'll make it through college without the G.I. Bill."

He unsettles me. The diesel man does not talk about diesels; he says his father has served five missions. When the diesel man was called on a mission, he asked his father to be his first companion. They got permis-

sion from the Church and his father took time off from his farm so he could serve with his son for the first five months of his mission.

The diesel man—who grew up in Star Valley, Wyoming, a hundred miles east—seems like a neighbor. He fascinates us with missionary stories. His last story regards a bus ride in rural Minnesota, where many of the older people spoke only Scandinavian languages. On buses, he and his companion would sit in different seats so they could teach passengers sitting beside them. On one trip, his companion sat in the seat behind him, and an older woman sat down beside the diesel man. As the bus sped down the highway, the diesel man and the woman drifted into a conversation. He noticed passengers turning their heads toward them. Thinking they were curious about Joseph Smith and his vision of God and Jesus, the diesel man spoke louder so they could hear. In two hours, the two missionaries stepped from the bus in a small rural town and faced each other.

“Did you understand what that woman was saying?”

“Of course,” said the diesel man. “Why?”

“Because she was speaking a foreign language.”

The passengers, hearing the conversation in two languages, had kept looking at them, because each seemed to understand the other and they continued talking in different languages for the entire trip.

The diesel man leaves and Dad says, “That was some guy.”

His stories are similar to stories I have heard at Church, but this is the first time I’ve heard such a story from someone who lived it. I believe the diesel man’s stories, and I believe his arrival tonight was not a coincidence.

The next day, I’m at work on my temporary job on the railroad section gang and longing for a cigarette. While sweeping newly fallen snow from a railroad crossing at the north end of Blackfoot, we watch a new Buick slow down for our flagman and move to the other side of the street to pass by us. Inside the car is the diesel man. I wave and he waves back, and I wonder if he recognizes me. I refrain from asking a co-worker for a smoke.

That evening at home, I watch from our kitchen window for the bishop to return home from Cox Motors, his dealership for DeSoto, Dodge, and Plymouth. He turns into his driveway. I walk to his alcove porch and ring the doorbell. We sit in his front room on the couch, and I tell him about the visit of the diesel man and end by saying, “I’ve decided to put my life in order and serve a mission.” Bishop Cox puts his hand on my shoulder and doesn’t say anything. We sit in silence and serene con-

cern eases over me as I consider my commitment—the talks I'll not be able to elude, and how long it will take for cigarettes not to loom larger than the people smoking them.