For and In Behalf Of

Allan Davis

For the premiere production held in the Cafritz Foundation Theatre at the University of Maryland, College Park on December 10–12, 2014. The production was supported by the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center's Second Season Program and the School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies of the University of Maryland.

Directed by Jessica Krenek
Choreography by Christina Banalapoulou

Allan—Allan Davis
A—Zach Harris
B—Christina O'Brian
C—Patrick Young
D—Parisa Bayenat
E—Brian Novonty
F—Amee Walden

I. In the Beginning . . .
II. The Fall
III. A New Skin
IV. Consecration
V. Circumscribed into One Great Whole

I. In the Beginning . . .

[*Prelude music fades. House lights drop. Projection reads: "I. In the Beginning . . ." Lights rise on two figures who are both dressed in white clothes.*]
A: "My son,"

B: says the Christian father—

A: "you should not attend a theatre, for there the wicked assemble; nor a ball room, for there the wicked assemble; you should not be found playing a ball, for the sinner does that."

B: Hundreds of like admonitions are thus given, and so we have been thus traditioned; but it is our privilege and our duty to scan all the works of man from the days of Adam until now, and thereby learn what man was made for, what he is capable of performing, and how far his wisdom can reach into the heavens, and to know the evil and the good.

[*Light fades on A. A exits.*]

B: Upon the stage of a theatre can be represented in character, evil and its consequences, good and its happy results and rewards; the weakness and the follies of man, the magnanimity of virtue and the greatness of truth.

[*Projection reads: "Upon the stage of a theatre can be represented [. . .] the weakness and follies of man, the magnanimity of virtue and the greatness of truth."—Brigham Young, on the dedication of the Salt Lake Theatre, 1862*]

B: Brigham Young, 1862.

[*Light and projection fade as B exits. Projection returns to reading: "In the Beginning . . ." Lights rise as Allan enters.*]

Allan: I am a card-carrying Mormon; the thing is the card's expired. I was born of goodly parents who raised me in Florida and taught me the faith of their parents. My father blessed me as an infant, giving me the name of his father. My father baptized me into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when I was eight. Dressed in white, we stepped into a font at a church building. He invoked my name and that of God. "Allan Nathan Davis, having been commissioned of Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen." Then he buried me in the water.

Four years later, my father placed his hands upon my head and ordained me, conferring the priesthood, the authority of God. I followed the plan pretty well: ordained a deacon when I was 12, a teacher when I was 14, a priest when I was 16, and an elder when I was 18; received my temple endowment and served a mission when I was 19; hell, I graduated from Brigham Young University twice by the time I was 25.

But it was all the way back when I turned eight, I was taught, that a part of me would die: my innocence. Before this age of accountability, any personal imperfection or mistake was swallowed up in Christ. But at eight, I would be capable of discerning right from wrong. So I received one of the most precious gifts God could bestow: agency—the power to choose. As a child of God, I had already received an amazing gift: my physical body, something that made me like my Heavenly Father and my Heavenly Mother. I was alive on Earth to gain a physical body and to learn how to use it, how to endure it, and how to enjoy it. But at eight, I was given a related gift: the capacity to choose—the weakness and follies of man OR the magnanimity of virtue and the greatness of truth. My baptism would be my first chance to exercise my choice to make a covenant with God.

As my father lowered me into the water, the innocent child that I was died. I could not breathe and darkness engulfed everything. But he raised me up and I was born again into a life of responsibility.

Resurrected into agency. It is a ritual that I have seen repeatedly: siblings, my niece, converts I taught. But throughout my life, I witnessed the rehearsal of this ceremony most in temples, when Mormon youth stood in proxy for the dead.

[*Projection: The Last Word with Lawrence O'Donnell, Holocaust Victims, and Elie Wiesel, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4F8XdqmtFRw (0:00–0:28).*]

Allan: It's not a practice without its critics. Mormons take on the identities of others. They represent others and are baptized for them. This violates the agency, the convictions, and the cultural memory of the dead. The wound is significantly poignant when we are discussing those that died for their religious beliefs. What gives Mormons the right to act in the place of others against their will?

And yet, at the risk of sounding like an apologist, I feel it necessary to highlight for Mormons, the baptism does not destroy agency, but creates it. Unlike most Protestant or Catholic perspectives on baptism, the event itself is not immediately efficacious. When an infant is baptized Catholic, in the worldview of the faithful, that child is thenceforth Catholic. But for Mormons, a person has to choose to accept the work, that ordinance. In other words, Mormons believe they need to be baptized for others not to make the dead Mormon, but to give them access to the choice to be Mormon if they so desire.

This is not to dismiss the critique of the practice, but to emphasize that both sides are speaking in the same language. Choice. Will. Self-determination. Agency. It's important to the critics and the proponents. Both cherish and champion the principle. But what does the ritual do to the memory of the dead? I still want to and very often do see beauty in a people that have an impulse to honor and remember the dead. But it makes me wonder how anything we do to remember the dead alters them for us.

And like I said earlier, while I have my card, it's expired. And lest there be any confusion, I am not speaking metaphorically; the card-carrying activity is not just a figure of speech. I actually have my card in my wallet if you would like to see it.

[*Allan removes wallet from back pocket and takes out temple recommend.*]

Allan: This is my temple recommend. Once upon a time, it would have let me into any LDS temple in the world. The temple in Orlando, Florida, I grew up going to as a teenager. The iconic granite temple in Salt Lake City. A more modest one in Medford, Oregon. That's the one illustrated on the cover of my recommend holder. Even DC, the one I assume most of you are familiar with. Visible from the Beltway; it would be that giant white edifice my roommate refers to as the "Fortress of Solitude."

[*Enter C.*]

Allan: It's very simple, really. When one has a recommend, he or she simply goes inside the temple, approaches a reception desk, and hands a temple worker his or her card.

[*Allan hands C his temple recommend. C begins to look it over.*]

Allan: The temple worker takes the recommend. He scans the barcode printed on the recommend, like a library card. Come to think of it, it's like when I go to research at the Library of Congress.

[*C pantomimes scanning the card.*]

Allan: After scanning the card, the temple worker hands the card back, shakes your hand, and generally says something like . . .

C: [*shaking Allan's hand*] Welcome to the temple, Brother Davis.

Allan: I can honestly tell you that of the many times I went through that routine to get in, it never felt rote. It was a sincere

welcome every time. Entrance into the House of the Lord—a place of contemplation, of revelation, of peace.

[*C exits.*]

Allan: The recommend lasts for two years, at which point it needs to be renewed. But it has almost been that long since I have let it expire. Buried in my wallet, but always with me. When I was a teenager, if I wanted to go to the temple I had to have an ecclesiastical interview for every temple trip. This let me get a limited use recommend. Recently, I found one of these training wheel recommends.

[*Allan pulls out paper recommend.*]

Allan: It's flimsier. The other recommend permitted access to the entire temple, allowing me to participate in all of the ceremonies that take place there: the initiatories, which include washings and anointings; the endowment which is a lengthy ceremony built around an allegorical dramatization of the story of Adam and Eve; and then sealings where couples and families can be bound together as a family unit for eternity. This one, however, only allows teenagers or recent converts to go into the basement level of the temples to participate in the baptisms for the dead.

It's some nice architectural symbolism: the baptismal font is subterranean, buried in the earth like those it is designed to serve. And these fonts, they are pretty large, usually elevated and stationed on top of the backs of twelve oxen-shaped statues. I've taken some poetic license. Each ox represents one of the twelve tribes of Israel and they face the four corners of the world to signify the gathering of Israel, the entire human family, on both sides of the veil of death.

[*Enter A, B, C, D, E, and F. C enters the font. A and E stand upstage from font, one on each side. D and F both stand upstage center of the font, holding towels. B waits to enter font.*]

Allan: When Mormon teenagers arrive, they go downstairs and change into white clothes. They sit on the edge of the font to wait their turn. It is a space of reverence, of stillness. If there are conversations, they are generally whispered, covered by the sound of splashing water. There are four adult men and two or three adult women present. Of the men, one officiates the baptism, one serves as a record keeper, and the last two serve as witnesses to make sure all goes correctly with each baptism. If something goes wrong—a missed word or a stray toe popping out of the water—the ordinance is repeated. The women stand to help the proxies into and out of the font, providing towels to dry off.

[*B gets into font with assistance of D.*]

Allan: When it is your turn as proxy, as you enter the water, the person performing the baptism usually asks for a confirmation of your last name.

C: Sister O'Brian, right?

B: Yeah.

Allan: The baptizer places the proxy's left hand on his left forearm and their right hand in his left hand. One hand for support for when it's time to be pulled out of the water and one hand primed to hold your nose. The baptizer then raises his right hand, and speaks the words of the liturgy, addressing the one being baptized and names the person for whom the ordinance is performed, and then plunges the proxy all the way into the water.

[*C baptizes B. A and E approve of ritual.*]

Allan: This is repeated another eight or twelve times. It depends on how many people came on the temple trip and if someone had been doing family history recently.

[*F and D help C and B dry off. All exit.*]

Allan: When I was home recently, I attended the funeral of a friend. I noticed a lot of things. I had spent my summer writing this piece about what any of us do with the memories of our dead loved ones. And in my mind that meant dealing with my grandparents. But I woke up one morning in July, rolled over in the dark, and checked my email on my phone. Before I understood what was going on, I was reading a message from my friend Cory. Emma, his sister-in-law, the wife of one of my best friends in college, had died. Emma was 26 years old, pregnant with her second child. She wasn't elderly, battling a disease, or a victim of an accident. Her heart just stopped. And it just doesn't make sense.

When I attended Emma's memorial services, I noticed how much we bring stories to the dead. Stories of their lives. And stories about a much larger cosmology. At Emma's services, there was an ecclesiastical leader who shared remarks about the plan of salvation: what Mormons see as God's restored explanation of where we all come from, why we are here, where we are going, and in terms of something like a funeral some sense of why unexplainable shit happens or how you deal with it. I have trouble believing the literality of the story, but you know what? It's a beautiful vision of humanity, of God, of life. Adam fell that men might be; and men are that they might have joy. The story is healing. Stories and memories of our dead loved ones—it's what we do.

When I was a small child, I had asthma. I inherited it from my dad and his mom. Sometimes when I'd have an attack my dad would take me outside into the night air hoping that might help. He'd hold me in his arms and walk around our little boxed-in yard.

[*Enter E, pantomiming holding a small child, humming "Ten Minutes Ago I Met You."*]

Allan: Sometimes he would sit in a metal folding chair that he pulled from inside. At the time I would have been four or five, so he was not exactly cradling an infant. Sometimes he'd alternate sitting and standing, sitting and pacing, for however long it took

my breathing to regulate. I can't remember what it felt like having trouble breathing. What I can remember is my dad holding me, rocking me, and singing to me.

E: [*singing*] Ten minutes ago, I saw you / I looked up when you came through the door / My head started reeling you gave me the feeling the room had no ceiling or floor. / Ten minutes ago, I met you, / and we murmured our how-do-you-dos / I wanted to ring out the bells and fling out my arms and sing out the news.

Allan: "On the Street Where You Live" from *My Fair Lady*; "My Favorite Things" from *The Sound of Music*. Thanks to my father, my lullabies were show tunes. The one I remember the most though is "Ten Minutes Ago" from Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Cinderella*. From what I'm told, he sang it to my mom the night they got engaged.

E: [*singing*] In the arms of my love, I'm flying, / over mountain and meadow and glen. / And I like it so well that for all I can tell I may never come down again. / I may never come down to earth again.

Allan: It's not a particularly great song; the lyrics are lazy. But it's the one I remember. When my dad sang that to me he wasn't much older than I am right now. In his arms, I did not feel anxiety at all. Only protection and peace. My father is alive and well. But I know one day that will change—we will be left to remember, to forget, to make sense of what remains. Bodies die. But my parents gave me their faith. And by that tradition, I learned to celebrate the physical body as a way of conveying truth. [*Indicating E*] I don't know if I can offer a better articulation of Mormonism's view of God. A parent and a child. Intimate connection; physical immediacy. For Mormons, the physical body is at the heart of the purpose of life. In my father's arms, I learned that what made me like God was having a physical body.

[*Enter A, D, and F. D and F are wearing black missionary name tags and carrying copies of the Book of Mormon; A is to the side.*]

Allan: It is an image of the character and nature of God made flesh in the words of Mormonism's founder Joseph Smith and rehearsed daily by generations of LDS missionaries, myself included.

D: In 1820, Joseph Smith was fourteen years old. He wanted to know what church to join, but there were many faiths. He did not know which one was the right one.

[*Enter A, pantomiming Joseph Smith, kneels to pray.*]

D: After reading the Bible, he decided to pray and ask God what he should do. Joseph Smith later described in his own words what happened next.

[*C enters and stands next to E, upstage of A. E shifts from pantomiming Allan's father to pantomiming Heavenly Father as the following vision is described. C is Christ in this tableau.*]

F: He said, "I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me. When the light rested upon me, I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name. . .

E: Joseph . . .

F: . . . and said, pointing to the other . . .

F and E: This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!"

[*Exit A, C, D, E, and F.*]

Allan: Usually, a missionary then uses the event to talk about Joseph Smith's call to be a prophet, to restore the Church, to translate the Book of Mormon. But me, what I love is this vision of an embodied God—twice over. What some scholars have referred to as Mormonism's insistent collapse of the sacred

and the profane. That with the physical body as the thing that makes us like God comes an entire culture that values ways to use and celebrate the body, including performance. Mormons love theater and dance. My dad sang show tunes to me. Like me, he grew up in a church that for a long time mandated the construction of theater stages in church buildings. Brigham Young once said that theater offered more immediate benefits to society than scientific research.

[*Enter B and E, wearing ballroom competition numbers, begin dancing. Song: "La valse d'Amélie (piano)" from* Amélie *soundtrack. A rehearsal for the choreography of this can be seen here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yLBpRHoPKcM.*]

Allan: When my dad went to BYU, his mom encouraged him to join the ballroom dance team. I grew up watching old tapes of my dad's performances. Lots of Mormon kids have been going to dance classes since they were young teens, on the days that they didn't have youth temple trips. And baptisms for the dead and dancing are connected. Both reflect a vision of the human soul as a divine integration of body and spirit. The dead do not have bodies to make decisions. They cannot dance unless one of the living invites them, stands in place for them, not unlike when Christ stood in for all mankind. How many times I heard that this would let me be a savior on Mount Zion—that Christ brings salvation, but expects the rest of us, a full community and ensemble of the saints, to administer it. By the actions of our bodies, we offer the chance of salvation to strangers. Such a body should move at all times and celebrate life. Dance, theater, performance—they're just ways to act like God; they're the way to be divine.

[*Exit B and E.*]

[*Lights fade. Allan exits.*]

II. The Fall

[*With lights out, projection reads: "II. The Fall." Chuck Berry's "Back in the USA" begins to play. Lights rise on female figure.*]

F: As my sister and I drive along the Trail of Tears, the most happiness I find is when we're in the car and I can blare the Chuck Berry tape I brought. We drive the trail where thousands died, and I listen to the music and think what are we supposed to do with the grisly past? I feel a righteous anger and bitterness about every historical fact of what the American nation did to the Cherokee. But, at the same time, I'm an entirely American creature. I'm in love with this song and the country that gave birth to it.

[*Music playing: "Back in the USA" by Chuck Berry.*]

F: Listening to "Back in the USA" while driving the Trail of Tears, I turn it over and over in my head. It's a good country. It's a bad country. Good country, bad country. And, of course, it's both. When I think about my relationship with America, I feel like a battered wife. Yeah, he knocks me around a lot, but boy he sure can dance.

[*Projection reads: "What are we supposed to do with the grisly past? [. . .] I turn it over and over in my head. […] When I think about my relationship with America, I feel like a battered wife. Yeah, he knocks me around a lot, but boy he sure can dance." —Sarah Vowell, 1998*]

[*Lights up on Allan as he enters.*]

Allan: As a historian, I kinda wish everyone were Mormon. Mormons take the notion of the book of life pretty literally. In addition to genealogy or keeping track of the dead that are baptized in temples, journal keeping has been admonished heavily as a cultural practice, as a way to produce personal scripture for subsequent generations. Every quotidian action of a person's life

has the potential to be consecrated to the building up of the kingdom of God, so even the most mundane activities can be sacred. The point is to raise up the earthly and to make it holy. Journals or ledgers for business transactions can be akin to holy writ. This perspective translates into some wonderfully exhaustive archives. My archives, too. My journals account for every day of my mission. I have large binders at home filled with letters I received from family and friends, as well as copies of the letters I wrote. After I wrote a letter, I would photocopy it. I wanted a record of my time and service in Oregon.

[*Enter A.*]

Allan: When I was home recently, I looked through the folder with letters from family—organized separately from the friends' binder, mind you—and I found a letter to my maternal grandmother. In the summer of 2005, I wrote:

A: Dear Grandmother Crews, I'm going to make my request of the past. I'd like to know about you, where you came from, what you've done in life. At this time I request the story of you. This is pretty vague I suppose, but basically I just want to know as much about my grandparents as I can because I'm realizing that, in the grand scheme of things at this time I know nothing of them. Right now, I'd be really interested in hearing anything and everything about your conversion story: missionaries involved, how you were introduced to the Church, who baptized you, what things were like with you (what you felt about the whole experience) and Grandpa Crews. In ways I feel quite connected to the man in ways that don't always make that much sense to me. In other ways, I don't really know anything about him. I know in a way it isn't fair, but I guess I'm asking for both the story of your life *and* the story of his. So there's my request. I hope it makes sense. Just write what you feel inspired to record. That's what I usually do.

[*Exit A. Enter B.*]

Allan: Because I grew up where my mom grew up, there were many people around at church who knew my maternal grandfather. While I was a teenager, I heard about how much I looked like and sounded like their friend Chuck. But he died when I was nine. I knew snippets of the man—he played the banjo, he hosted a morning radio show long before I was born, and a lot of people admired him—but to me there was little more than a thin sense of who he was. Thankfully, in my little orange binder of an archive, I found my grandmother's response:

B: Dear Elder Davis, what an awesome letter from a grandson to his grandmother. It warmed my heart to hear you wanted to know me better and learn of events that helped shape my life. Most important is the fact that I relied on Heavenly Father and the Holy Ghost to guide me in decisions from an early age.

I should tell you, my sisters married very young. Most likely trying to escape the hardships after our family home burned down in a fire. Just overnight they went from having plenty to being *very poor*. Dad had his money in the attic, that's where the fire started. The three older sisters married men that drank and beat them. Once I had to take a second look to recognize my sister; she had to drink out of a straw for two weeks. I can remember when I was in the second grade walking to school praying for a good husband when I grew up.

I continued this prayer for nineteen years. Never dated anyone that drank, smoked, or used bad language. When I saw Coleman across the room, a thought came to me: "There is your husband." I scolded myself, "Betty, when do you go around picking out husbands?" A year later when we had been married about three months, I was saying my 1:00 prayer and that thought came back to me: then I knew it was the Holy Ghost that had prompted that thought. I always treasured the fact that Heavenly Father answered my prayer. Coleman was the best husband anyone could ever have.

I will stop here and continue my novel later. It is so much to write or leave out! Much love, Grandmother Crews. I pray for your success! I won't proofread, afraid I won't get it in the mail.

[*Exit B.*]

Allan: She never did end up writing another letter, though I would have loved to receive it.

However, she did give me a surprise gift of open memory one day at church. When I came home from my mission, I was asked to speak a few times. Missionaries get asked to speak in church fairly frequently. And I will not lie, as you have probably noticed, I like to talk, so I often enjoyed it.

But after I spoke that time, my grandmother found me afterwards in the hallway. I can still see the enthusiasm in her eyes. I don't know that I ever saw her with such energy and excitement. I think her pride in me fell away in the presence of something far more commanding: in me she could catch a glimpse of her Coleman.

[*Enter F.*]

F: That's my handsome grandson. Such a strong missionary. Reminds me of all the sets of missionaries your grandfather went through. One summer when he was working, I went up to North Carolina to visit my sisters. I didn't know it at the time but my sister Beulah had joined the church. So I was sitting in her living room and while she was in the kitchen, I noticed that she was making dinner for more than just the two of us. I asked her about it and she just said that we'd be having company join us. And an hour or so later, there were the missionaries. At the time your grandfather and I were looking for a church to go to, but he just knew his Bible so well, because for a while he was thinking of being a minister. But then whenever we went to a church, eventually Chuck would hear something that he knew didn't agree with what he had been reading in the Bible. So

pretty soon we'd stop going to that one. And I told him, honey, eventually you're just going to have to pick. So I went up to my sister's a few more times and met with the missionaries there. And then one time I asked your grandfather if he wanted to go up to see her with me. And while we were there, he noticed Beulah and I were making more food than would feed the three of us; and when he asked about it, we just said that we'd be having company join us. And then soon enough, there were the missionaries. And your grandfather just laid into them. He kept asking them questions and they kept showing him scriptures. It went on for hours. Eventually they gave us a Book of Mormon and a phone number for missionaries in Jacksonville. When your grandfather actually called them, I tried not to get my hopes up. But he invited them over and they talked. And he'd ask them questions; they'd answer and leave him with something to read. Now he must have gone through at least six or eight sets of missionaries. But that was Chuck; he was so determined to prove that they taught something wrong just like the other churches we had gone to. But you know, one night, he came into our room, he sat next to me on the bed and said, "Betty, I think it might be true." And all I said was, "Well, it's about time."

[*Exit F.*]

Allan: From all accounts, my grandfather was a great man: kind, giving, a devoted husband and father, a loyal friend. However, I also know that my grandfather was very much a man of his time, a man that grew up in Georgia and northern Florida in the mid-twentieth century. That is basically to say that he was pretty racist. I remember growing up hearing the terms "nigger-rigged" and the rhyme "Eeny-Meanie-Miney-Mo" including the hauntingly violent image of "catch[ing] a nigger by the toe." And for the most part, there's a simple narrative you come to learn in the South that lets you reconcile yourself to this messy history: "They're from an earlier generation, they didn't know better." But something about that is not enough; I still struggle with what exactly

I am supposed to do with this strain of mortal imperfection that disrupts the vision of familial sainthood.

To be honest, I much prefer whitewashing the memory of my grandfather's racist convictions—it's just more pleasant to remember the more uplifting qualities of the man, of which there were plenty. I mean really, don't most of us want in some way to redeem our ancestors or loved ones? How many eulogies erase flaws ironically in honor of memory? I am not alone in this. How do you deal with your progenitors' own falls from grace?

Growing up in the South provided me some sense of how to address the messy history, but for some haunting reason, something I just can't quite put my finger on, there's an extra wrench when you throw Mormonism into the mix.

[*Projection: "I Believe" from* The Book of Mormon. *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GVJgmp2Tc2s 3:26–3:52.*]

Allan: Oh yeah, that's the reason. That's from *The Book of Mormon* musical. And let's be honest, that's a funny ass joke. I laugh every time I hear it. Until 1978, black men and women could be baptized into, and confirmed members of, the LDS Church, but the men could not be ordained like their white counterparts, which meant they could not serve in ecclesiastical or leadership positions at local, regional, or general levels; could not represent the church by serving missions, perform baptisms, bless or pass the sacrament, ordain others, provide blessings of healing or comfort; or participate in any temple rituals for themselves or as proxies because you have to hold the priesthood to enter the temple. This temple ban also prevented the participation of black women in such rituals despite the fact that their white female counterparts, who are also ineligible for priesthood ordination, could always participate in temple rituals. In the 1950s and 1960s, some prominent church leaders discussed how they asked for revelation to change the policies; others taught it was the order of heaven and that it would never change.

And then in 1978, it did. In the broad cultural context of US American religious—particularly Christian—history, Mormonism's ban on priesthood ordination based on race is sadly representative of the rule rather than the exception. That's not to excuse what was undeniably a racist practice, but just a means to indicate Mormonism was by no means special. For example, Southern Baptist Conventions addressed similar changes around the same time. Both religious communities were a just bit late to the Civil Rights Dance. But I must confess there are other elements going into why that joke in that song in that musical is so damn funny. The decision and the change in 1978 were arrived at not because a faith community necessarily worked through its theological and social concerns regarding race (say like other Christian denominations and eventually the Southern Baptists did), but rather because leaders said God revealed it was time to change … and so they did. There's no sense of struggle; no real consideration of the racist work the ban did in Mormon culture or theology; no apology for the discrimination that many men and women faced. Everything just changed and that was it.

[*Enter A, B, C, D, E, and F for choreographed movement inspired by the gestures and physicality of ordination and ministration of Mormon ordinances. Music: "Summer 78" from the* Good Bye Lenin! *soundtrack. This will happen concurrently with next part of the monologue. A rehearsal of the choreography for this dance can be seen here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ft9AN-nAGI.*]

I look at 1978 as this step forward for the institutional LDS Church where it ended its discriminatory practices—perhaps not thoughtfully, but it did stop discriminating at least. And as a gay, progressive, heterodox Mormon, 1978 is this watershed moment of potential—where everything you thought was impossible could become reality and the order of God. So when I stand alongside Mormon women seeking equality in the LDS Church through true universal priesthood ordination, it's not like there isn't precedent. And as I move forward with other LGBTQ Mormons who envision a day when they do not have to choose between

their religious and their sexual identities, it's not like there isn't precedent. Because of the belief in ongoing, modern revelation, God can change his mind about a lot of things. But that's how I see 1978: more than a joke, it's hope.

That's not how my grandfather saw 1978. For him, it was a church he converted to, asking him to do and believe something really hard. My mother has told me it did not make sense to him, he didn't like it, it made him question his decision to join the Church. He thought about leaving the faith. Besides the family he was raising, none of his family was part of the LDS Church. He did not have deep generational roots. And remember, he was a convert that spent a lot of time looking for what he felt was God's one correct church on the earth and just fourteen years in, it changed on him in a pretty fundamental way. And in terms of an on-the-ground application of the revelation, it affected northern Florida a lot more than it did Utah. As an ecclesiastical leader, my grandfather would be responsible for ordaining black men to the priesthood, preparing black men and women to go to the temple. He would be laying his hands upon their heads conferring authority. He would be the very instrument of the thing he could not agree with. The 1978 revelation asked him to confront his convictions head on and sacrifice his own pride or way of seeing things for Zion. See, I think 1978 is great because it asked the Church to change and start believing what I believe; for me it's easy. But when have I been asked to repent so fundamentally?

That song from the musical is a funny joke, but behind it there are people: the ones who suffered discrimination for generations; the ones who benefited from discrimination; the ones who are left to figure out what exactly to do with the grisly past; and the ones who lived in the transition and struggled to figure out what to do in a complicated present.

[*Enter A, B, C, D, E, and F. A and C enter font.*]

C: Brother Zachary Harris, I baptize you for and in behalf of William Coleman Crews, who is dead . . . Amen.

[*C baptizes D. Lights fade. All exit, except D.*]

III. A New Skin

[*With lights out, projection reads: "III. A New Skin." Lights rise on female figure.*]

D: I don't care what anyone says: Clothes *make* the man. Naked people often have little to no influence in society.

[*Projection reads: "I don't care what anyone says: Clothes* make *the man. Naked people often have little to no influence in society."—Mark Twain, 1905*]

D: Mark Twain, 1905.

[*Light fades on D. D exits and Allan re-enters. Lights up on Allan.*]

Allan: Two years ago, my best friend invited me to participate in his wedding. We needed to find suits. I reflected on my own wardrobe and upon asking his opinion, Brett observed that I did not necessarily dress poorly—things . . . matched—but I didn't exactly wear things that either flattered me or stood out. I realized I had not purchased any new clothes in four years. It had been a full presidential term.

For someone from an upper-middle-class background that does something as bougie as study theater history, this is downright anathema. But I had my reasons for not shopping. Thanks to my fiscally conservative Mormon upbringing, I know not to spend more money than I have. Frugality is next to godliness. Second, I knew nothing about fashion. This bred insecurity about making any wardrobe choices. And finally, I'm colorblind. I didn't feel comfortable making any choices; and because I was frugal I was

convinced any choice I did make was going to be a faux pas *and* a financial disaster. It was best just to leave it all alone and to go on wearing what my former mentor at BYU referred to as the "same damn orange sweatshirt every day."

However, wedding party responsibilities called. A few days later, I went to Dillards with my roommate and his fiancée, Chelsea. We were there to look for Brett's new suit. I was along in a merely auxiliary capacity; but you know, why not peruse some options? So I looked at the suits. My selection was going to be limited to a grey palette since orange and grey were the wedding colors. But there were a surprising number of grey suits available. And while I was looking around, I noticed they had some vests. You know, I had always kinda wanted a vest, but I was sure they were expensive. And we kept looking around and, well, there were just so many ties. And the fluorescent bulbs accented how each one seemed to pop in its own particular way. We were inside but there was just this intense brightness reflected by the sea of neckwear. And then we got to the white button-up shirts. Some have openings for cuff links, and some just have buttons on the sleeves. Some have lines that are part of the design; and some don't have any lines. Some of the necks of the shirts seem normal, but then there are others with very narrow necks for skinny ties and some are very wide for larger ties—at least I think you wear a larger knot tie with a wide neck shirt. Maybe? Or do you do the opposite to accent each? So I'm standing in the department store, holding a suit, with a vest, a tie, and a few shirts in plastic bags, and I don't know if I'm allowed to take the shirts out of the bags. What if they have pins in them? Am I allowed to take the pins out to try on the shirt? I don't know the rules of the department store. What are the rules? If I pull the damn pins out of the shirt, does that mean I have to buy it and spend money I don't feel like I have? By the time I get to the dressing room, I realize that I have stopped breathing. For the first time in my life, I am having a panic attack.

And I know, even in that moment, how *ridiculous* this all is. I am freaking out and having trouble breathing because there are

too many *shirt* options. And as I sit in the dressing room, in my underwear, with my head between my knees, I fight the urge to cry. Unsuccessfully. I suppose we all have our first-world crosses to bear. After a while Brett and Chelsea investigated why I had not emerged from the dressing room yet. Through tears, hyper-ventilated breaths, and snot, I tried to explain to them where I'm *at*. Chelsea's response: "Let's start with something easier." We left Dillards and found me my first pair of boat shoes and other casual apparel—Allan selected, Chelsea and Brett approved.

Over the rest of the summer, Brett introduced me to other stores: American Eagle, Eddie Bauer, Macy's. But one store, above all others, stood out to me. Banana Republic. I had heard of this store before. Jack from *Will & Grace* worked there and Brett had some sweaters. Though it seemed a bit pricey, still the siren began to sing. After returning to the DC area, I happened upon the local Banana Republic—13th and F NW—and spent the better part of two hours deciding whether or not to get a $75 sweater marked down to $20. When I came home, my roommate informed me that my cerulean purchase was indeed an excellent color and a good purchase. I did it. By myself. I was ok.

Then I went home for Christmas. And one fateful day, I traveled to the Banana Republic outlet store in St. Augustine. I decided then and there to sign up for the Banana Republic credit card. And lo, the walls of Jericho came tumbling down! Sweaters, chinos, a plethora of gingham quickly followed. I believe it took me about four weeks before I spent enough for my member status to be upgraded. You know, retrospectively, I might have come out of the closet at that time because there just wasn't any room in there for both me and my wardrobe. I had four years' worth of savings I could use to go on what I like to call my roaring rampage of sartorial self-discovery. By about March of 2013, I was not merely a citizen of the Banana Republic; I was the representative from its sixth congressional district.

When I think about this new skin, sometimes I think about my maternal grandmother. Of all my relatives, she had the most elegant and cultivated sense of fashion. I like to think she would have enjoyed seeing my selections. She's the one that taught me how to fold a suit so it doesn't get wrinkles in a suitcase. If I had to pick one word to describe her, I feel I would be hard-pressed to choose between "classy" and "resourceful."

She was a beautiful woman. Not only did she go to modeling school, but she actually worked as a model. Recently, my mother told me that my grandmother organized fashion shows at church during the 1970s: mother/daughter affairs designed to instill modesty. But my grandmother did not just model or construct the clothes. No, my grandmother used her carpentry tools to build the elevated modeling platform that the mothers and daughters walked on. She went to modeling school after playing on her high school basketball team. As handy with a rifle as she was with a needle and thread.

[*Enter D.*]

Allan: The kind of person at the end of her life you are convinced can pretty much do anything, I imagine her resourcefulness and talents were born out of necessity. That letter I mentioned and quoted from earlier—in it she talks about some of her early hardships.

D: I was born in Farmer, North Carolina, to a successful farmer. My mom and older sisters have told me about that life. The house had thirteen rooms, with a huge walk-in fireplace in every room, even in the kitchen. Mom was most proud of the porch that circled the entire house. I was number eleven of thirteen children and a couple months old when a fire started during the night. The smoke woke Mom. Everyone got out safely, running out onto the ice-covered ground in their night clothes.

The house burned to the ground. It was 1936. There were no fire stations out in the country; everything was lost. They turned

the livestock loose and never got them back: horses, cattle, pigs, chicken, geese. A farmer heard of this tragedy and came about thirty miles and took the whole family to live in one of his tenant houses (three rooms). Later some cousins gave my mom some pictures they had of our family. She treasured these.

Allan: My maternal grandmother was a woman that treasured life. Lived it fully. And gave so much. While always appreciating the scarcity of things. Perhaps she converted so readily to Mormonism because self-sufficiency came naturally to her. That was one of Brigham Young's primary teachings as he led Mormonism into one of the most compelling social experiments in communitarian living. For a time in Utah, the Latter-day Saints lived under the United Order, a radically communitarian attempt to ensure that the Saints had all things in common among them and that no one suffered the trials of poverty. Young felt capitalism fostered the type of individualism and selfish isolationism that I often hear my academic colleagues critique when they discuss the impact of neoliberalism and Reaganomics in the twentieth and twentyfirst centuries. Of particular disdain to Young were large Gentile department stores that moved into the Utah Territory at the end of the nineteenth century. He would have hated my conversion to the Banana Republic. Young argued that Mormons needed to be self-sufficient, construct their own clothes, and do all things that would serve the collective interests of the group. Selflessness. My grandmother excelled at that. She provided a lot of service to the Church throughout her life. She was often in leadership positions of the women's organization, the Relief Society, at local and regional levels, where her talents shone. Ever classy. Ever resourceful. It's what makes the way my mother and her sisters decided to honor their mother's memory incredible.

[*B enters with the Grandmother Crews pillow. B hands pillow to Allan. B exits.*]

Allan: A few months after my grandmother died, I received this pillow in a package from my mother. She explained that it was made from the clothing that my grandmother wore. When I look

at it, I can remember seeing her in some of these shirts in the pattern. The back is made from the soft velvet pajama pants she always wore. The stuffing inside includes some other scraps of clothes that my sister, my mom, and her sisters could not fit into the external patterns. I think my favorite touch is these accented pieces. These are from a shirt that my grandfather wore. After he died, my grandmother started to wear it. I can remember her giving me haircuts in her kitchen while wearing this shirt. Sometimes she would wipe her scissors against it to get pieces of my wet hair off the blades.

This isn't part of some traditional Mormon mourning process. There's not a ton of Mormon pillows decorating beds or couches in Utah and Idaho. It's just something my family did. That said, it is completely something Mormons would think of doing. Humans make clothes, but in more ways than we imagine they make us. They are a material thing that connects us. They are as mundane and as holy as anything else in life.

For all her service, talents, and leadership, because she was a woman, my grandmother would never be ordained to the priesthood. Not in the regular operations of the LDS Church, anyway. But in the temple and in the covenants my grandmother wore to her death, she wore the power of the priesthood and acted in its authority.

[*Enter B and F.*]

Allan: But I think I would like you to learn about that from two women who have often been close to my family. This is Sister Kelley and Sister Jensen.

B and F: Hi there.

Allan: I was hoping you wouldn't mind telling them how you know me and my family, maybe a little about the temple, particularly

the garments, and maybe how you helped dress my grandmother before her funeral.

B: [*laughing*] Oh wow. Well, that's a lot.

F: Allan, I don't know that we should talk about some of these things outside of the temple.
Allan: Oh no, they're good. And just share whatever you feel most comfortable talking about.

B: Well, hi. My name's Susan. I guess Allan grew up knowing me as Sister Kelley.

F: And I'm Minty Jensen.

B: We both grew up with Allan's mom when they lived in our ward. And then after Kathy moved back . . .

F: That'd be Allan's mom.

B: Right, when Kathy and her family moved back into the area, well we all had children about the same age. My youngest, Amos, was about Allan's age.

F: And my daughter Hillary was a year younger.

B: I remember being their primary or Sunday School teacher. I guess you see how that just makes things full circle since we knew Kathy's mom when she was our Young Women leader. I feel like Betty, well, she was just like a second mother to us. So when she died, Kathy and her sisters asked us if we would help them dress her before the funeral.

Allan: When Mormons who have been endowed die and have decided to be buried after embalming, family members or close friends dress the dead in their temple garments, white clothes, and other sacred clothing worn during temple ceremonies.

F: When you go to the temple, you enter into certain covenants. The temple is a very sacred and holy place; it is the House of the Lord. But we can't live there every day. We have to live in the world and it can be a hard and tempting place. We wear the garment to remind us of the promises we have made to God and the protection and blessings he has promised us if we remain worthy.

Allan: Garments—the vestments referred to as sacred underwear—they are representations of the cloaks of skin that God gives Adam and Eve when he drives them out of the Garden of Eden. In some Christian interpretations, the skins of these sacrificed animals are emblematic of the sacrificed body of Christ. So to wear a garment in similitude of those Adam and Eve received is to put on, if at least symbolically, Christ every day.

Material culture is just so fascinating. And that's the thing, unlike the special robes that one puts on during the ceremony of the endowment or at a sealing, garments are ever present, part of the quotidian dress. They are a perfect articulation of Mormonism's impulse to make all things sacred in this world, even our material surroundings. Where there is no distinction between the sacred and the profane, even underwear can and should be holy. All things reflected upon. All things made common among us.

[*D, wearing nude/skin tone colored underwear, brought in on gurney by A and E. A and E exit.*]

F: When you go to the temple, you are promised that if you live your life righteously, you will be raised in the first resurrection.

B: Every person that has ever lived will be resurrected, just at different points in the millennium.

F: We dress our loved ones who have been to the temple in the garments and temple clothes so that when they are resurrected, they will be dressed in glory.

B: When I think about how Betty taught me as a young woman, preparing me to go to the temple before I went on a mission, and then how she was present the day I was sealed to my husband, I think of her in her temple clothes. I hope that's how my boys see me.

F: Depending on who a funeral is for, men dress the men and women dress the women. You have to wear gloves as you touch the body because of the chemicals. And sometimes it can be difficult because moving a loved one's body can be a physical challenge. But it means a lot to be asked to provide that service, especially when it's not your own mother or sister. But I guess in every way that counts, she was.

B: She did so much for us in our lives. This is the least we can do.

[*B and F move to D and dress her. A, C, and E appear and hum "Come, Come, Ye Saints."*]

Allan: My father dressed his father when he died. My mother dressed her mother. I don't know how it will be to dress my family. I am in awe of the intimacy required by this practice.

All except D: [*singing*] And should we die before our journey's through, / Happy Day! All is well! / We then are free from toil and sorrow, too; / With the just, we shall dwell! / But if our lives are spared again / To see the Saint their rest obtain, / Oh, how we'll make this chorus swell— / All is well! / All is well!

[*Allan will place the pillow on the gurney. Cast, except for B, move D and the gurney offstage.*]

Allan: For Mormons, death is only the beginning.

[*B lies on floor. Music plays, Arvo Pärt's "Spiegel im Spiegel." With the music, B begins a dance of resurrection. Cast joins one by one into male/female pairs. After a full sequence, rearrange to male/female, male/male, and*

female/female pairs. A rehearsal of the choreography of this can be seen here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UYJqBV7UiX4.]

Allan: This is my favorite song. It's by the composer Arvo Pärt. This piece is called "Spiegel im Spiegel." Which from what I understand translates to "Mirror in Mirror." It refers to the effect of placing two mirrors across from each other so that whatever is placed between the mirrors is caught in a never-ending reflection, reaching into eternities in either direction. Musically, that's how the song is written: the piano begins, then a string instrument—cello or violin—mirrors the piano. But like a mirror the reflection is more a refraction. It is similar to it but slightly off. The piano responds to what the violin plays, refracting that. And so on and so forth. Each instrument forever dancing with the other.

It is soothing. It is peaceful. It is contemplative. But I fully recognize that part of the reason I love it is because of my faith tradition. Every sealing room in the temple is decorated with two mirrors. When a couple goes to get married, they kneel at an altar, but when they stand and look into the eyes of the person they love, each one sees not only the face and the eyes of their spouse immediately before them but also, peripherally, in the mirror images that repeat for eternity. It is a physical manifestation of faith that death is not the end of this family.

In Mormon theology, resurrection is an ordinance, just like baptism. And while the power and authority to raise the dead come from God through Christ, in execution, resurrection is far more personal and hands on. Family members resurrect each other. Fathers resurrect their children; husbands resurrect their wives. It's complicated; it's messy; it's patriarchal. I know it's problematic. But damn me if I can't help but find it beautiful, moving, inspiring.

[*C and D move into the font.*]

Allan: Where the distance of eternity is collapsed. And that through the touch, the care, the service of a loved one, we might all put on a new and everlasting body of skin and bone.

[*Projection reads: baptismal prayer.*]
C: Sister Parisa Bayenat, I baptize you for and in behalf of Betty Lou Bryson, who is dead . . . Amen.

[*C baptizes D. Lights fade. All exit, except E.*]

IV. Consecration

[*With lights out, projection reads: "IV. Consecration." Lights rise on male figure.*]

E: It is essential for any person to have an actual knowledge that the course of life which he is pursuing is according to the will of God to enable him to have that confidence in God without which no person can obtain eternal life. Such was and always will be the situation of the Saints of God. Unless they have an actual knowledge that the course they are pursuing is according to the will of God, they will grow weary in their minds and faint. Let us here observe that a religion that does not require the sacrifice of all things never has power sufficient to produce the faith necessary unto life and salvation.

[*Projection reads: "Let us here observe that a religion that does not require the sacrifice of all things never has power sufficient to produce the faith necessary unto life and salvation." —Joseph Smith, 1835*]

E: Joseph Smith, 1835.

[*Light fades on E. E exits. Allan reenters. Lights up on Allan.*]

Allan: So my name is Allan Nathan Davis. I love each root of my family tree on both sides of my family. However, I inherited all three parts of my name from my father's father's side. There's

the surname Davis: that's from my dad . . . and his dad . . . and his. Then there's my middle name Nathan—in honor of Nathan Davis, the first Mormon convert in the family. I would regale you with legendary, faith-promoting accounts from his life involving snow, famine, disease, or miracles—as that tends to be the way Mormons talk about pioneers—but Nathan Davis was not that kind of Mormon. He joined the church in the 1860s and moved to Utah after the completion of the transcontinental railroad. I am not the stuff of wagons and handcarts; we Davises are strictly train people. However, I can tell you that Nathan Davis owned a company in Utah that produced the materials for the roof of the Salt Lake Temple. And he cast the metal for the baptismal font in the Manti, Utah Temple. I think he might have provided the metal casting for the oxen in that font. I guess I'm not the first one in the family to build a font.

But it's Allan Mervin Davis, my paternal grandfather and most immediate namesake, I want to tell you more about. He traveled by train from Salt Lake City to Rochester, New York after finishing medical school at the University of Utah. Dr. Allan Davis and his wife eventually raised ten children in Florida; seven still live there, my dad included.

Like me, Allan Mervin Davis grew up the middle child in a family of three children. Like me, he always wore glasses. Like me, he was reticent and studious. In an opposites-attract sort of way, my paternal grandmother is a social force, a gregarious woman whom "outgoing" does not begin to describe. She loves sports, camping, and large social gatherings. Each of their children seemed to inherit her personality. A Davis, by definition, is engaging and rambunctious; except, of course, for the patriarch Allan Davis, a reserved man who went camping and attended sporting events as a supportive father. He preferred to play the piano at home.

As a child, when I expressed disinterest in camping or spending time outside, my parents noted the similarity with my namesake.

When I realized sports—playing or watching them—were not my cup of tea, everyone knew I was my grandfather's grandson.

[*Enter E.*]

Allan: When adolescence brought both insularity and academic achievement, I approached clone status. Even my faults were his faults: I remember my father telling me one time,

E: You're like your Grandpa Davis. Instead of dealing with your anger, you bottle it up until you explode.

[*Exit E.*]

Allan: The loneliness of adolescence—the moments when you think you are the only one who is not like everyone else—visited me as they did most of us. However, the pangs of peculiarity were swallowed up in my grandfather. He wasn't like everyone else either. He and I were not like others. We were different and alone, together. To be a Davis meant something; to be Allan Davis meant something different.

As anyone might surmise in a family of ten children, I am not the only grandson to bear the patriarch's name. I have three cousins who boast it as a middle name. Yet it was not until I was twenty-one that I learned we were not the sole inheritors. When I returned from my mission, a giant three-inch folder sat waiting for me at home. It was filled with emails and letters I had sent. Tucked in the back flap of the binder was a hidden printout announcing the marriage of a girl I dated my first year at BYU. My mom placed it there. I imagined the invitation was sent as a polite formality. . . . "pleased to announce the marriage of Kathryn Michelle Oliver to Thomas Allan Zane." I stared at her husband's name and thought, "Oh, that's funny: his middle name is Allan. And it's spelled the same way I spell it." Not A-l-a-n or A-l-l-e-n, but A-l-l-a-n, the least common way to spell Allan in America.

[*Enter F.*]

Allan: A few days later, I brought up the quirky coincidence in a conversation with my mom. "Isn't it strange that Katy married someone whose middle name is Allan, and that he spells it like Grandpa Davis and I do?" That was when my mom—without any appreciation for either her role as an oracle or the grandeur of the revelation she was about to dispense—nonchalantly mentioned:

F: Oh, yeah. Funny story: he's actually named after your grandfather.

Allan: What?

F: Yeah, his dad, Tom Zane, was friends with your dad and your uncles in high school. When they were at BYU and before you were born, sometimes your dad and I would babysit Tom.

[*F exits.*]

Allan: Ultimately, I realized that the wedding invitation was not addressed to me, the former boyfriend, but to my dad—the friend of the groom's father, a son of Allan Mervin Davis. During the 1960s and 1970s, the Zane and Davis families lived in Daytona Beach, Florida. When they were teenagers, Tom Zane developed friendships with my uncles and my dad. They invited Tom to play basketball and baseball where they played, to go camping with the scouts they camped with, to have fun where they had fun. It happened that for the Davis family, all of those activities were connected to the LDS Church. By his senior year, Tom Zane decided he wanted to join the Church. This decision prompted Tom's parents to disown him. They did not want him living in their home. My grandparents "adopted" him—they took the recent convert into their home, fed him, disciplined him, and provided some financial support when he decided to serve a mission.

Adoption was not alien to the Davis household. My grandparents raised five kids and then adopted five more. Tom Zane's "adoption" was less official. He was one of a third batch of four or five kids whom Allan Davis cared for. Kids who needed shelter from the world and found it under Allan's roof and counted his name blessed. Tom, like my other uncles, gave his child the name Allan as a middle name.

"Allan Davis" is a testament of faith. It signifies service and sacrifice. It represents a legacy for Thomas Allan Zane, my cousins, and me. "Allan Davis," in short, embodies the principle of consecration—the last law that Mormons covenant to live in the endowment ceremony. That we will give everything we have to build the Kingdom of God on earth. It's a beautiful, powerful vision—mighty enough to compel a man who only wanted two kids to become a father to so many more.

But, if we were to stop in the ecstasy of elegy, only honoring the man and the faith that shaped the name, it would be a disservice to the man and the faith. I could balance the elegy of Allan Davis with instances when my grandfather did not live up to the name; but, instead I posit, Allan Davis can be understood in an instance where cruelty worked under the character of kindness. When I was about thirteen or fourteen years old. I remember how the envelope had his personalized address hand-stamped onto the upper left hand corner. I received similar envelopes later on my mission. I was not sure what was inside; it wasn't time for my birthday or an early Christmas card. When I opened the letter and started reading, the content and tone surprised me. Allan Davis said that my parents were concerned about me, and he felt impressed to write to me about the LDS Church's definitive stance against homosexuality.

When I was a kid, I debated with my parents about the acceptability of homosexual couples marrying and adopting children. When I was an adolescent, I did not understand why homosexuality was

considered a sin and I was quite vocal about that. But the letter seemed seated in a different place, in a related but different concern. I am not sure what prompted the letter or what exactly concerned my parents. They never talked to me about it. But let's be fair to their observational skills: as a child, I loved listening to Madonna. I could not get enough of shows on Lifetime like *Designing Women* and *The Golden Girls*. I developed an interest in theater. And possibly the kicker, when I was a kid playing make-believe, I felt just as comfortable pretending I was a female character as a male one. Sex and gender did not matter to me. Being Batgirl or Rogue was just as fun as being Donatello or the Blue Power Ranger. As a teenager, the only reason I could think that my grandfather was writing me were my politics; but of course I was full of anxiety that I had been found out. All the more confusing because it was something I did not know myself.

All I knew was that I was different. But I had thought it was okay to be different because Allan Mervin Davis was different, too. One letter indicated that this was not necessarily true. Something about me—what I said or how I was—concerned my parents enough to seek the help of an authority who could outline correct morality to me. Homosexuality was a sin. We should not condone it or tolerate it. We should not advocate it and certainly not embrace it. None of us ever said anything about the letter.

I was angry. Allan Davis was an old man who held on to a homophobic way of thinking that was just as wrong as racism. And not to be too off-color, but just as a side note: Dr. Allan Mervin Davis was a urologist. The irony that a man whose job it was to look at penises all day would be concerned that his grandson might like them too much is not lost on me. Point is, I recognized the statements as homophobic even as a child. But that's not to say the capacity for critical thought prevented hurt or, to be quite honest, its intended result—it would be twelve more years before I could admit to myself something as huge and as insignificant as the fact that I like boys.

In a single letter, Allan Davis indicated that to be different and to think differently wwere not necessarily what it meant to be "Allan Davis." My name no longer meant what it once did. I used it, but it didn't connect me to my past, my faith, or my peculiarity anymore. I thought about going by Nathan for a while, but I never did. I was confused. So much was said without anyone ever speaking a word. Trust no longer felt possible. I held on to that letter for a few years, but I think I threw it away when I left for college.

And despite what you might think about BYU, I could not have found safer spaces. I was in a theater department (perhaps a cliché, but at BYU a real haven for LGBTQ students); my roommates were all liberal, progressive Mormons; one of them not only came out while we were roommates but started the closest thing the school has to a gay-straight alliance. And I was an original member; but as far as I was concerned as a straight ally. And it's not because I agreed with my grandfather, thinking homosexuality was a sin. I never believed that. But I can't dispute that that letter probably played a role in reinforcing a voice in my head telling me that was not who I was.

Even before that, my mission blessed me. The gospel I taught changed me as I administered it and that was enough to make me question my pride, my angst, my hurt, and my suspicion. For many men and women in my position, this is not the case, but for me, serving a mission was healing to my soul. It was a time of consecration. I gave all of my time, my talents—all that I had—to build up of the kingdom of God as I covenanted to do. And I felt richly blessed. There were moments of service and ministry that I still believe saved me.

Yet there were moments of confusion and darkness and loneliness. There's always one that comes to mind. I was in La Pine—the middle of nowhere, Central Oregon. A flat high desert with roads that stretched beyond the horizon in the type of tiny town you drive through on a long distance road trip sort of way. You might stop and wonder how people live out there but before that thought has

completely crystallized, you've already passed through the town. My mission companion and I had a car, but we were supposed to limit our use of it so we biked around as much as we could.

[*Enter A and E. E lies on his stomach on the floor. A stands to the side.*]

Allan: One afternoon, we came home exhausted from biking. I sat in the chair by my desk as he collapsed onto the ground. We had a half hour before we would be leaving for a dinner appointment. And I sat and I asked:

A: Do you want a massage?

Allan: The intent was innocent. It sprang from a pure desire to serve. And he said yes but it was more of a . . .

E: [*with uncertainty*] I guess?

Allan: It was only massaging his shoulders. We had been carrying backpacks; I assumed since that's where I felt soreness, that's where his pain would be. Pretty soon, we got up and we went to dinner. But later that night, when we were back in our apartment, and writing in our journals or letters home, I eventually asked,

A: Would you like me to give you another massage?

Allan: This time I asked without any hesitation or sense that this would be a weird request. I mean I could recognize that some forms of physical intimacy between men could be precarious, but we were friends and it felt established that this was not an odd thing to do or offer. It felt innocent, devoid of sexual connotation.

And yet, I can't tell you how he responded in the affirmative because mostly I did not care as long as he did. It might not have started from a desire for closer physical intimacy but as I touched his shoulders, and his back, and his legs, that is what I wanted. And I could feel my body tell me that's what I wanted. And I didn't need

anything in return, just a chance to serve and enjoy some measure of fraternity. It is a story that embarrasses me: not just because it is about my sexuality or because it feels like such a cliché about a sexually-repressed, gay, Mormon missionary, but because I could not see it for what it was. It stared me in the face and I felt it in every part of my soul but I could not fathom what it meant.

[*Reposition A and E into some other position on stage.*]

Allan: The next morning, while my companion was in the shower, I saw the letter he had been writing his sister the night before. In it, he expressed:

E: I am pretty sure that my companion right now is gay. How do I handle that?

Allan: Suddenly, I was fourteen again—reading the letter from my grandfather, mortified that someone close to me would think that, feeling I had been misunderstood, and probably wrestling with a fear that I had been found out. It is terrifying to consider that others know you better than you know yourself, that they have some power over you as they name you. In the conversation provoked by the letter, I tried to find out what behavior—besides just giving a massage—to curtail so others wouldn't make the same mistake he obviously was making. I don't remember what he said, just the embarrassment and the vulnerability. Something not unlike what I am feeling now.

[*Enter C.*]

Allan: It would be easier to characterize the letter my grandfather sent me so many years ago as spiteful and indicative of the psychologically harmful consequences meted out by those holding religious convictions. That certainly makes for an easier narrative. People who profess love for God are judgmental hypocrites. Done. But Allan Mervin Davis was not a caricature of hate. How does one reconcile this moment of clinical condemnation with the

earlier feat of Christian charity? How do I harmonize the actions of Allan Davis? his faith? . . . my faith . . . me?

It wasn't until my grandfather died in 2012 that I finally stopped running around in mental circles, explaining in a convoluted way why it was my eye might wander in a locker room. Death breeds stillness. It is, as is said in one of my favorite movies, the road to awe.

[*Music begins to play: Clint Mansell's "The Last Man" from* The Fountain *soundtrack.*]

[*Allan dances with E, then A, then C, then self. In this dance, Allan will change into clothes for baptism. This will mean part of the practical purpose of this scene is going to be an on-stage costume change. Allan's shirt and pants will be removed; he will be wearing garments. He will then put on a white shirt and white pants. Allan and C should be near the font; D and F should be in place with towels. A rehearsal of the choreography for this can be seen here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pXgeT4ahZ1M.*]

Allan: When my grandfather died, I took the chance to live.

[*Projection reads: "Having been commissioned of Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."*]

C: Brother Allan Davis, I baptize you for and in behalf of Allan Mervin Davis, who is dead . . . Amen.

[*C baptizes Allan. Lights fade. All exit, except for C, who this time remains standing in the font.*]

V. Circumscribed into One Great Whole

[*With lights out, projection reads: "V. Circumscribed into One Great Whole." Lights rise on male figure standing in the font.*]

C: The plane leapt the tropopause, the safe air, and attained the outer rim, the ozone which was ragged and torn, patches of it as threadbare as old cheesecloth and that was frightening. But I saw something only I could see because of my astonishing ability to see such things. Souls were rising from the earth far below, souls of the dead, of people who had perished from famine, from war, from the plague, and they floated up like skydivers in reverse, limbs all akimbo, wheeling and spinning. And the souls of these departed joined hands, clasped ankles, and formed a web, a great net of souls. And the souls were three atom oxygen molecules of the stuff of ozone and the outer rim absorbed them and was repaired. Nothing's lost forever. In this world, there's a kind of painful progress. Longing for what we've left behind and dreaming ahead. At least I think that's so.

[*Projection reads: "Harper: . . . a great net of souls . . . the outer rim absorbed them and was repaired. Nothing's lost forever. In this world, there's a kind of painful progress. Longing for what we've left behind and dreaming ahead." —Tony Kushner,* Angels in America: Perestroika, *1992*]

C: Tony Kushner, 1992.

[*Enter A, B, D, E, and F. Perhaps entrance will be in succession after each one completes a story. Stories will be work shopped in early parts of rehearsal where A, B, D, E, and F discuss their relationship to the content of this show.*]

B: My grandmother died this past April, at the very end. And that was kind of incredible because I was dancing in a piece that my dad said reminded him specifically of her while he was watching it. It was the time period, the dresses we were wearing, the music we were playing, and everything. Well, she was sick already and at the end. So she was on the forefront of his mind, but it did call that to mind. And it was the last piece of the show. And when we came out and talked to them immediately after the show, my dad was on the phone with my aunt who was saying that my grandmother had passed away just minutes ago. And he asked around when and it was around ten, which is when I would have been

dancing in that piece. So that was . . . her. And then I got a thing about this show the next day. And it was like ok . . .

I hadn't heard of proxy baptisms before the show. I guess I don't have super strong feelings about it. The idea of covering your bases makes sense to me. But at the same time, if they were devoutly something else, it does seem to disrespect the choices that others made. And that's the biggest thing: it's all a high stakes thing. It's not just about what makes people feel comfortable. It's like it's either God is there and we have eternal life or he's not and it's all useless. And either way it's going to dictate how you live your life.

The theology of it doesn't quite make sense to me completely either. That you can't accept God unless you've had this sacrament. And that's not just Mormonism, I mean baptism for any religion. With my Catholicism . . . I am very interested in Catholic theology and knowing what the faith teaches to understand it completely so I am not living as a cafeteria Catholic. That doesn't make sense to me. I feel as if there are things you don't understand, you need to figure them out. And if you still don't understand, maybe somebody is wrong, but there's not personal preference in truth. That's not a thing. So I want to learn more about baptism.

E: My grandfather passed away in the spring. He's the only one I have a conscious memory of before he died and that he died. It's been a weird process, like the whole grief thing. And I feel bad saying this, but I felt a lot worse when my dog died. I mean I probably felt a little bit better with my grandfather because I was mentally prepping myself for a long time. He died in hospice care. The weirdest thing that happened was after he died and we were preparing things for the services, I was in the basement watching Netflix and my dad came down and asked, "Do you mind reading over the eulogy I wrote?" My dad and I aren't the closest, but we're close enough to have frank conversations. But I may have been too frank about what I thought of what he wrote in the eulogy because I went into editor mode. I outlined that his point was X, Y, and Z and put a big X on his third paragraph,

saying it had nothing to do with points X, Y, and Z. So I guess that was me dealing with my grief in some way.

My dad said he was fine with my comments, but in this whole ordeal, after my grandfather died, I learned that he had suffered from depression. I knew my dad had, but not that his dad did too. And my dad and I had a conversation about it later and I told him, "I feel like I should feel worse about this." And the statement that finally set me off on a realization that maybe I should explore seeking medication for my depression was when my dad said, "Yeah, that's just how Novotny men deal with things: we just internalize." And as we're talking, I'm nodding along, thinking, "Yeah. I do that." But in the back of my mind I'm also thinking, "That's really not healthy Brian." But yeah, me and my dad never cried through the process. That was the thing that threw us off the most I think.

Proxy baptisms for the dead is a really interesting idea . . . like intellectually. Agency is something I would never consider for the dead. In English and theater classes, I'm used to writing about agency. I mean I wrote about whether or not the female characters in *Into the Woods* have agency. It's usually something that comes up in any form of art, but not usually for the dead. From my perspective there probably isn't an afterlife, so is it taking or giving agency . . . ehh???

D: In Iran, we had a war for ten years with Iraq. I was really little, only nine years old. But I remember seeing things on the news or in the city. And people would be carried in the city. And it was really sad. I remember it being really sad. And if they couldn't find the body of the soldier, they would present just a watch or just a necklace. Just a necklace as a body.

So yeah, it was interesting for me after reading Allan's text because I found several common things between my religion and Allan's religion. So, it's totally different. You know there's Muslims and there's Mormons. Mormons have this thing where people are

baptized. We have this thing where if someone is dead, we have to wash him or wash her with water. So the water, it's the same thing. So we wash hair, face, all of the body. And then the family can watch that or not; it depends if you want to see it.

The other thing that was interesting to me was how for Allan he's a second generation of Mormon so he doesn't practice it. Exactly the same way with Muslims. Like the second generation, like me, we don't practice. I mean it's not just me. Ninety percent of people, of Muslim people in my country, they don't practice. When I was young, when I was in school, I practiced it, because in school they train you in religion in school to pray to God, and they would have you pray three times in a day. So it forced us to pray but then I got older and I wondered, "Why do we have to do these stupid things?" And then I just thought, "No, I don't want to do this. I'm just going to be a good person in my life. Why do I have to do this?" So I just stopped. So I found this similarity in the religions very interesting.

I think all religion is the same. Seriously, it's the same. If you want to pray to God, God is God—just one thing. But you have a different way to pray. You have a different way if someone is dead how you would deal with that. We wash. You might baptize. Before I had no idea what Mormons did about it, then I just thought, "Oh my God. It's really common things between my religion and Mormon religion." I don't practice Islam, but if I was thinking about my grandfather and Allan or someone came up to me and offered this baptism and explained it was a prayer and a good thing and that it would bless him I would accept that, because I think it's the same thing. Because I just want God to bless my grandfather. It doesn't matter which way. If I cannot be in Iran and I cannot do the things we would do, it would be something I could do here. But again, I'm second generation.

F: From my experience, Mormonism is not a bad religion. I think all religions are kind of silly. But I had a good upbringing. I have fifteen brothers and sisters. They are beautiful people; they have

beautiful families. But I was the first to leave the LDS Church when I was eighteen.

And baptisms by proxy really upset me. On many levels. Partly because of the way that Mormons talk about this. That it's so beautiful and it's such a gift. They believe they are giving to all these people—with very little recognition of what the family unit was before 1830. So that's a huge struggle for me. Mormons look at the baptisms from the perspective of "I have a family. I love my family. I would never want to break up my family." So then, "if I've had a good experience with it, everyone else must have had a good experience with it." So pre-1830 what if you were molested by your father or beaten by your brother. Or even currently now, if you're waiting in purgatory, or what do they call it? Spirit world. You're waiting in the spirit world to be baptized so you can be sealed to your family for time and all eternity, you're essentially shackled to the criminal that heinously destroyed your life. I just really struggle with this very one-sided perspective of truth, this one-sided perspective of happiness, this one-sided perspective on life and death. That my truth, my experience, must be your truth and your experience. I struggle with the fact that other religions believe just as vehemently in someone's personal practices and their burials, their gifts they give people during their lives, the way they are left as a legacy. And we just take that away from them. We say it doesn't matter. We are now appropriating your life and forcing you to be us. And I guess that is very American.

I had a good upbringing, but my experiences with the religion, after I left, were shockingly painful. Having someone spread lies about me because they didn't want me to take the sacrament, literally taking the tray out of my hand just in case. I couldn't do it myself; I couldn't make that choice myself. And I did end up deciding to take my name off the LDS Church membership records. I knew I could not die with that legacy. That even if I left the Church would still claim me. And I couldn't do that. I couldn't let them use my name to bolster their name, a name I don't agree with, a name that I can't agree with.

But I still go home. I still attend church when my family has something happen. My husband and I are still very respectful. He comes from an equally devout Catholic family. When we got married, it was out in the forest. And we created our own ceremony and our own spiritual rituals.

A: I never met my granddad, but in my mind, he embodies the possibility of change. When he was born, acceptance of black people or a whole other range of things wasn't a way of thinking. So while at first he rejected the ideas of tolerance or interracial relationships when it came to his daughter, to the point that he disowned her when she was in a relationship with my dad, by the time he died in 1992—like if he were living today, I know he would love me. It's not one of those things like he would stay deeply rooted in the things he learned, because by the time he died, he knew he was wrong. I didn't see the process and my mother was never specific about it, but she just said he changed. I think with all of the turmoil that happens around us today, I always look upon him as someone to look up to when it comes to change, because there are not many people who changed as drastically as he did. When it comes to proxy baptisms, I don't have a strong opinion on them. I think if I were to do a proxy baptism for the dead, I think it would be cool to do one for my grandfather—for like what that would mean to me, but also because it could be a sort of symbolism thing. Like, "Oh hey, he's changed. An African American is doing his baptism." I think it could be a really beautiful thing, but I don't think I know enough to have a really strong opinion.

My aunt Sue was one of the only family members who stayed in touch with my mom after she got disowned from her family. It wasn't like they stopped loving her, but my grandfather was very much the patriarch of his family and everyone did what he said. But she died in 2001 of breast cancer. Her funeral was the last time I saw extended family. Everyone says she's where I got my singing voice. We even have the same ear problem. I didn't get to know her very well either; in 2001, I was seven years old. But she means a lot to me. She gave me my first haircut. She's the one that

helped my mom become the mother she is. She wrote songs and poetry; I remember her singing and playing at her organ. When it comes to performing arts, I always think of her, always and forever. And when I have to make a bio in a program, I usually give her a shout out, because according to my mother I wouldn't be able to sing without her.

[*Enter Allan.*]

Allan: My junior year in college, I volunteered as a temple worker. A year off my mission, I effectively traded my black name tag for a white one that indicated I was a veil worker. As a veil worker, I would sit in the hallway, reading scriptures, thinking about my week or talking with other volunteers. And then every twenty minutes we would be called up to assist patrons across the veil as they reached the end of their endowment session. Each experience at the veil consists of three individuals: first, the patron who is usually standing as proxy for someone who is dead; second, a guide at the veil, a male or female temple worker representing an angel introducing the patron to the veil; and finally, the veil worker, who stands in for God, the Father. The veil represents Christ and itself corresponds with the appearance of the temple garment, so to approach God in the ritual, one must put on Christ in a way that will be reenacted every day when a Mormon puts on his or her temple garment. Part of this process contains imparted recognition: that one day all things, all light and truth, will be circumscribed into one great whole. It's a universalist confession: Mormonism does not hold all Truth but hopes to one day possess all truth and voices gathered through revelation, science, experience, or other religions. It pronounces the need to strive—to push out the stakes and enlarge the tent. To absorb the outer rim and be repaired.

Once a week, I committed three hours of my time to play God. To rehearse a holy ritual with words that breathe life into a vision of a glorified, resurrected body. In the endowment ceremony, Mormons may hear the most beautiful poetry describing an exalted,

everlasting body. One that will last for eternities, ever moving, ever working, ever dancing, ever loving. Flesh made whole, present and now.

It's a vocabulary that resonates with me still. A vision of a human family and community that is no longer certain to me but one I can't stop hoping to believe in. A scholar named Joseph Roach has said that it is human for us to make effigies in our lives, to make things stand in as surrogates for something else that we would like to attain or bring back particularly from the past, from the dead. But he explains that such acts of surrogation rarely succeed. They fail constantly, but in a way that almost encourages us to attempt the effort again and again and again. Every time there is a proxy baptism or crossing at the veil for some unknown relative generations ago or an individual who has no say in the matter, it might be more about reaching for the touch of a parent, a sibling, a child, a friend, a spouse. Mormons stand in proxy for the dead, but we make the dead we don't know stand in proxy for the dead that we do.

I am left wondering what to do with these echoes and spiritual repertoire disciplined into the bones of my body, the sinews of my soul. I wonder, still, if the dead can ever be free of the living. And if we can still yet make a great net of souls.

[*Allan steps into the font; cast surrounds font in semi-circle.]*

Allan: Now behold, a marvelous work and a wonder is about to come forth.

[*Projection: "Brother Patrick Young, having been commissioned of my own will, I baptize you for and in behalf of all who are here in this room and live, in the name of all light and truth that might circumscribe us into one great whole."*]

Allan: Brother Patrick Young, having been commissioned of my own will, I baptize you for and in behalf of all who are here in

this room and live, in the name of all light and truth that might circumscribe us into one great whole. Amen.

[*Allan baptizes C. Lights fade to black.*]