

# PATRIARCHS TO PRESENCE



*a testimony*

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TO  
PRESENCE

*a testimony*

P. SEUDONYM

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My hair is wet, but at least I'm on time. I take a seat across from a man I've never met. He asks, "What can I help you with, Patty?" I've heard this question before, years ago in the office of another stranger. The situation is eerily familiar, except I know myself better now.

I answer, "I have symptoms of OCD." The man in front of me says nothing, allowing me to go on. Although I crave confirmation, I find his response appropriate. It's what I've come for: As a psychologist, he's trained not to agree with me, blindly. He'll take his time.

I try slowing down to match his pace, but eagerness overwhelms me. I blurt out, "I've struggled since I was nineteen. *Yes*, I'm forty, and I've never been in therapy." I add, "But there is a reason for it." The psychologist sits.

From my bag, I pull out an old, yet well-cared for set of papers. Seeing them, I shudder inside (and perhaps on the outside too). The words on those pages no longer affect me in the same way, but their memory lingers...I read aloud from the page in my hands. The psychologist listens, saying little.

Conversation makes its way back to my symptoms. Our session runs over. And although I don't want to hold us up any longer, there is one more thing that I want to say, that I need to get out. Gathering my things, I squeeze it in: "I'm going to write about what happened to me." In response, he brings up our next appointment, then walks me to the door. This man knows that I'm not ready for a book.

At least, not yet.



FOR MY MOM

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# OPENING



The year 2021 rocked my world. I turned forty. I explored darker shades of hair dye. Then bought a new car. And in that shiny Palisade, I drove myself to therapy. I was turning over a decade with a fresh look. I was taking charge of my life. It was a time to celebrate.

Still, I felt disappointment. OCD found its way into my day, my home, my family's day, and I had allowed it to stay without professional help for twenty years. I was a middle-aged woman who had ignored a problem, a mess who should have gotten help much sooner. I had a bad track record, regrets, and a desire to dump the ugly contents of my life onto the internet in an e-book.

I wanted to write about obsessive-compulsive disorder. But not in the form of a self-help guide. Or as an overview of life with OCD. I wanted to put together an I-can't-believe-I-missed-the-signs-of-a-disorder-and-went-for-so-long-without-treatment kind of thing. I wanted to write a book about failure.

In 2021, after admitting that I needed help, I combed through two decades past. I found missteps and misconceptions. I had believed the memes and adopted pop culture's view of a disorder. I could pinpoint my mistakes. I saw things more clearly than I had in years, for the most part.

Thinking over my experience, I couldn't make sense of an obstacle that I had faced, and it stood out. I tried bending, molding, and twisting the situation. Each time, I came up empty-handed; I couldn't explain how I'd ended up *lost* with something that was meant to help.

I was raised as a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, often referred to as the Mormon Church. My symptoms of OCD, as I know them today, began in 2001. Looking for relief, I visited a stake patriarch to receive guidance (from God) in a blessing that is common practice within the church. I relied on the ordinance—and stumbled. It wasn't until 2021, after questioning that blessing's value, that I found an effective path to address OCD.

As I drove myself to therapy, the words of a patriarch sat folded in the envelope that I'd once nervously awaited. I now had explanations for my behavior, treatment that I needed. I thought about the change from my earliest memories of Mormonism to my days in therapy. I had failed. I wondered to what extent a church had failed me.

“SOMETIMES A SINGLE  
PHRASE OF TESTIMONY  
CAN SET EVENTS IN  
MOTION THAT AFFECT  
SOMEONE’S LIFE FOR  
ETERNITY.”

Dieter Uchtdorf

Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

# DISRUPTION



Sitting in the pew, Mom whispered, “The chapel in New England looks the same.” I smiled, not in agreement—I’d never been to church in another state—but because Mom said this all the time. She seemed at ease. Mom counted on our faith; she’d been counting on it for as long as I could remember.

Mom talked about church, a lot. More than my four siblings. Our dad. Or anyone I knew. I didn’t understand much about Mormonism. (Nor did I know many people.) But growing up, I’d heard enough to agree: We were a part of something. While my mom pointed out similarities between one church building and the next, the bishop at our pulpit spoke of growth, of congregations gathering elsewhere for the gospel. Mormonism allowed for worship in similar fashion, different location, and we stuck to it as a family.

Not long after marrying, our parents had converted to the church. They were newlyweds turned Latter-day Saints. In their earliest years together, they’d found a new religion, one

that served them later when my dad took a job with a railroad company.

The position called for a transfer: from his wife's home state of Connecticut to Maryland. "Uprooting," as Mom tells it, was hard but manageable; she had no trouble finding a Mormon meetinghouse. (Complete with burlap walls and green hymnals.) Quickly settled, my parents had me and bought a house not far from the chapel.

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Six years passed. "We're having a yard sale," Dad announced. I had no idea as a first grader what that meant. Still, I didn't ask. I barely heard Dad over the morning cartoons. He interrupted. And by the time I thought to ask, my parents were busy racing in and out of the house.

Outside, I found my older brother. He was standing in a pile of toys on the driveway. I stood, watching. As if his behavior weren't weird enough, he started to arrange everything—strategically. A lot of questions lingered. But there was no need to ask them; without hesitation, my brother shared what he'd managed to find out: Mom said he could sell his stuff and *keep* the money.

My brother cleared the space next to him as I ran inside.

Excitement was contagious. Once we were selling other things, however, I knew the mood wouldn't last. A yard sale had been the start of a change, and it wasn't good. Before long, our larger car was gone, our home sold, and our belongings

packed. Disruption followed us into a rental house. To this day, we rarely speak of it...

Calls to the landlord went unanswered. The property needed work, and ideally, we needed more space. My brothers slept on a sofa bed in the living room. Down the hall, I squeezed in bed with my older sister. Neither option was good but still better than the basement; nobody stayed down there, except for our cat who took care of the mice.

My dad no longer worked for the railroad; he had two jobs. My mom, for years a stay-at-home parent, began working night shifts. With extra work hours, one might expect extra income. For our family there was none. I remember overhearing: Relatives had given us money needed for the few gifts under our Christmas tree. The family car was now smaller, unreliable. My dad's job issued him a van, for work, but we used it for travel. The van was roomy, having only two seats. Dad put in mattresses before a six-hour drive to Connecticut to visit family. Mom prayed for our safety.

While much had changed, church was still part of life. Money was scarce, but we paid tithing—ten percent of income—to the church in what we viewed as a commandment from God. Although exhausted, our parents brought us to three hours of Sunday meetings and volunteered there. Soon church held more space in the day than I was used to: Food with the label “Deseret” showed up. At my age, I knew that it came from the bishops’ storehouse, a part of the church welfare program. Mom and Dad didn’t want to draw attention to the cans in our kitchen; everyone noticed.



My parents avoided a lot of conversation. But I didn't want to talk with them either. I felt ignored and cheated. I grew closer with my older brother, angrier with other family members. While our mother was at work, my teenage sister would pull the phone cord under her bedroom door. Once a call started, my older brother and I would leave the house. We entertained ourselves outside for hours on end: walking miles to go sledding, rolling down hills in a barrel, building a treehouse...having a bonfire with the torn-down treehouse. These (arguably dangerous) activities went largely unsupervised.

It would be unfair to say that my parents didn't care at all even though I felt that way at times. Wanting more for us, my dad pushed himself hard for a new employer. The company offered him additional work, and after two long years, we found a much better place to rent.

Before I started fourth grade, our family moved again.

\*\*\*

I remained curious. Years later, I asked my mother, "Why did we sell our house when I was seven?" She tearfully explained:

With work, our dad was away a lot and had stopped going to church. He left the railroad but couldn't find a new job for six months. We lived off credit cards. The debt grew. Without income to stop it, our family could no longer afford the home that we had owned.

My mother ended her explanation, saying, “I know you understand, Patty.”

I nodded, as an effort to stop Mom’s tears. In truth, I didn’t understand. Dad loved us. Why would he quit a job that paid enough money? I thought that we’d come to Maryland for Dad’s work, that he enjoyed what he did. Travel was part of his job, but the benefits seemed worth it. I missed our house. And Dad spoke fondly of the railroad—long after quitting.

# ESSENTIAL DETAILS



Fourth grade marked the start of happier years. I tell stories to my own children, absent the adventure in an empty house (rumored to be haunted). We had moved to a neighborhood full of school-age kids, who walked to school together and found each other after. Whereabouts weren't *always* known, but parents did know that their children were with friends.

Fun had returned at home. And we had room to enjoy it. With less stress, Dad found time to paint my room and money to furnish it—with a waterbed. We picked one from a store where he had once worked part-time. (Although no longer an employee, he managed to get the discount.) Everyone was more relaxed during holidays. I spied Mom on Christmas Eve carrying a birdcage under a towel to protect a live gift: His name was Fester.

Enjoying life, I kept record.

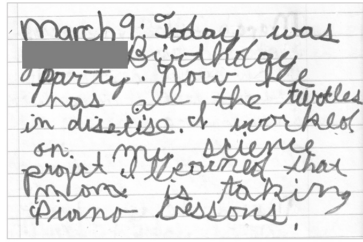
April 5 Today I didn't  
play cause it was  
raining. My dad  
got played so  
we got to go  
grocery shopping.  
April 6 Today was  
hot. I got my  
skip stick. I  
jumped alot.

March 31 Today was  
easter. I got 2  
dollars and  
candy, dragons  
and a chocolate  
bunny in my  
basket.

I'd learned to write watching my mom. In between meals, our dining room table served as an office. And in between volunteer work, housework, and "regular" work, Mom took a seat at the family typewriter. Her dream was to be author. With what little time she had, she happily typed or moved over when we asked for a turn.

One night, I discovered my mom in a new space: She'd been taking secret piano lessons from a friend at church. When offered a used piano at a low price, Mom came to us for support. Money remained tight. Still, Dad agreed to her request—the piano was a great bargain—and with it, we furnished our empty living room.

I think my mom felt guilty taking time for herself. She practiced, but when I walked in the room, she stopped mid church hymn. As Mom reached to close the hymnal, I smiled to remind her that it was okay.



*March 9: Today was [brother's] Birthday party. Now he has all the turtles in disecise [sic]. I worked on my science project. I learned that mom is taking piano lessons.*

\*\*\*

The piano and typewriter followed our family as we bought a house nearby. Instruction no longer fit into my mom's day, but she let others play her piano. A computer soon arrived; Mom remained loyal to our typewriter. Church friendships came too, with my dad doing the selling (of pets that were no longer wanted, cage included) and my mom giving the lessons (on family history).

Mom took interest in the family history center: a resource room added to our church. Since my best friend lived within a short walk, I was busy in the new neighborhood. As teenagers populated the house, a new madness emerged, most of which wasn't surprising given our ages: My sisters and I fought over clothes; with my brothers, it was the volume of their grunge music.

One conflict was odd. While I expected a sibling squabble over a sweater or the latest Nirvana CD, never would I have imagined an argument with my mother about school, at least not when I was doing *well* in it. Mom became prickly when

I worked hard at school. Surprisingly prickly. If anything, I thought she would be enthusiastic about my effort. Mom regretted never finishing her own degree in English—she talked about it. Yet that didn't seem to matter anymore.

Something shifted between us. There wasn't total lack of support; she still offered input on term papers, when asked. There was disagreement: My mother thought I was spending too much time on homework, not enough on faith.

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The afterlife is a prized topic in Mormonism. Leaders teach that to access heaven's *greatest* blessings, a person must complete *specific* church ordinances. The task is meant for Earth, but Mormonism provides a “workaround.” If someone dies without committing to the church, ordinances (such as baptism) may be done on their behalf. By acting as a proxy for their dead relative (in a temple), members can provide departed family with the chance for blessings otherwise lost in the afterlife. My mother took the job seriously, and to begin, she needed the right information.

One July, when I was in grade school, our family drove to Connecticut. Mom said the trip would be fun; she never mentioned we'd be stopping at graveyards. While she wandered—looking for essential details on dead relatives—my older brother and I sat together in the back of the car. Trunk popped open. We referred to that period as the “cemetery summer.” Our mother found the name endearing; she was the only one.

By the time I reached high school, our car was parked year-round at the church family history center. Leaders had asked my mother to help others with their research. At that point, her focus stretched beyond our own ancestors.

As a teenager, I went to the church one evening with my mother. The idea of going didn't thrill me, but I decided to attend an activity while she volunteered in the family history center. Youth group was uneventful; as for the rest of the night, I remember it clearly.

Ready to leave, I went looking for my mother in her usual spot: at the microfiche reader. She wasn't there. Thinking that she had to take a break, I checked the bathroom, with no luck. I moved on to the chapel where she sang with the choir. Although they didn't meet on weekdays often, I looked in anyway. The room was empty.

It was time to call my older brother for a ride; I reached in my pocket. I was out of patience—and unfortunately, quarters for the pay phone. I walked around again, this time looking for spare change. With a coin (from one of the few people still in the building), I managed to call home. After a few rings, my mother picked up. The call confused her. She asked, “Where are you, Patty?” “You can't be serious!” I screamed. “I'm at the church. YOU brought me here and left without me!” My mother came back to collect her angry teen. The next day, she knocked on my bedroom door and left a box of chocolate with a note that said “You will never be forgotten.”

Sunday services, family history, and youth activities were calling our family to church. During high school, I was also expected at the building for scripture study classes, known

as “seminary.” When school was in session, seminary would begin on weekdays at 6:30 a.m. After, students went on with their normal day.

Swamped with homework, drained from school and a job, I had no desire to get up earlier than I already had to. I also lacked desire to fight with my mother every morning over seminary. The mood between us wasn’t good; my failure to graduate from seminary made it worse. I did graduate from school with good grades, acceptance at a university, and a generous financial aid package (a relief to my dad).

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Before heading to college, I agreed to one last church event for youth: a campout. Although I hated sleeping outdoors, I loved the idea of spending two days away from family, friction. I went. And I even enjoyed that peace—until adult leaders distributed letters, from our parents.

Envelopes in hand, we were told to separate in the woods. Once alone, I opened mine. Dad’s note was fine; he said that parents had been asked to write some spiritual thoughts for their teenager, then kept his message brief. But my mother’s ramble exhausted me. Her focus on faith was already too much. Seeing it hurt. I closed my eyes and waited for the whistle back to camp.

I left for school that fall. The letter from my mother stayed behind, in a box.



July 8, 1999

Dear Patty,

We've been asked to write a letter to you and one to [REDACTED] expressing our love and appreciation for you as well as our concerns, hopes, and other personal "stuff". I know you find these things a little superficial, as do I, but I welcome the chance to tell you how much we love you and stand in awe of the great potential that you have. Believe it or not, we probably were friends in the preexistence..I believe that very strongly..I also know that I "knew" [REDACTED] the others, I have no such feeling about. That doesn't mean I didn't know them but I am not so sure about it..The Spirit is a wonderful thing..it is to be cherished and nurtured..always listen to its promptings..I know in the rush of everyday living there isn't always time to reflect and find peace and inspiration. But prayer is fundamental to everything. Pray always. Pray in private as well as in our family and in Church. Pray in the morning when you first get up before you even eat anything so that the spirit will flow into your heart and your mind and fill it with the understanding and peace you will need to sustain you throughout the day. Pray in the afternoon to do a kind of "how am I doing, Lord?" and then of course before you go to sleep. The Lord is mindful of all our thoughts and attitudes and deeds. Please be more patient with your family. We are all quite aware of our own frailties, we don't need to be constantly reminded of them. All that does is frustrate and cause contention which I know defeats your purpose. Be aware that everyone thinks differently, especially the male species..be especially kind and patient with them and you will be able to see the good in them and the great power they possess in the priesthood which they hold. I know you probably think our family is somewhat dysfunctional at times and I see it too but its because of circumstances. The Lord will test and try us until we want to scream. How we cope with it is what we will be judged on, nothing else. Please know that I am sensitive to your feelings and frustrations but there are some things I can't possibly know unless you tell me. Please let your family get to know you. You have always been a great joy to our family and the Lord has placed you here for a reason. Treat others as precious spirits of our Heavenly Father and you will be blessed. Obtain your Patriarchal blessing when you feel the Spirit prompt you to do so and then follow its guidance to the letter. It is your one chance to get a personal audience with the Lord..a progress report..a map and a blessing of joy and comfort. The Church is true..I KNOW that..I love the gospel and the Church..no, the members are far far from perfect but we need to treat one another as though we were all angels sent from heaven to help one another. The Temple will bring you great blessings. Please encourage [REDACTED] to follow the Savior and to honor their priesthood.

I would die for you if I needed to, I hope you realize that. We really don't want you to go away to school for we will miss you too much but letting go is part of being a parent as you come to find out. You are so beautiful in spirit, body and mind.

Love you Mother.

# AIR MAIL



“**W**ere you *born* talking?” people ask. That would have likely been the case if it were possible. (I did talk a lot from a young age.) It was a matter of keeping up with a pack of siblings, at first. With that under control, I was ready for our guests. As a little girl, I followed my older sister’s friends around the house...years later, they still brought up my childhood chattiness.

Family and visitors were the earliest to point out the chatter. My graduating high school class voted me “Most Talkative.” A love for words was apparent in my education too; I enjoyed taking Spanish. I was eager to converse—in either language—about (most) anything.

But I eagerly *avoided* the topic of patriarchal blessings. I was capable of conversation; we’d learned about them at church. In my understanding, a patriarchal blessing was a special type of guidance available to Latter-day Saints who wanted to find happiness, to discover their potential in life. It was a “map”

with personal direction from God. Male church members, found worthy of the job, would serve as “patriarchs.” Acting on spiritual inspiration, a patriarch would receive and deliver God’s messages.

As explained to me, a patriarchal blessing had layers. It would list promises available to me if I agreed to be obedient, to follow the will of God. The “map” would suggest a path to those promises and mark hazards along the way. I was told: The words of a patriarch referred mostly to time on Earth, with possible extension to a period beyond.

I could have gotten a patriarchal blessing. I understood how, after watching my siblings go through the process. I had also observed my mother—alongside them. My mother knew their patriarchal blessings. She memorized phrases and often shared them aloud with our family. Participation was her style; independence was mine. So, I stayed without a patriarchal blessing throughout high school and into college.

The delay troubled my mother. She continued to ask, “Patty, have you thought about getting your blessing?” Her reminders irritated me, but I couldn’t change her. To keep the peace, I answered with a simple “I’m not ready yet, Mom.” Over time, she realized that she couldn’t change me either and dropped the subject.

I hadn’t lied to my mother; I wasn’t ready. A patriarchal blessing stayed off my radar but not because I had missed the point of one; I did care about my future. I simply hadn’t felt the need. Church taught that “spiritual promptings” would help us to know when to get a blessing. And I had yet to experience that internal nudge, at home or school.

One week on campus was all it took for someone to notice the chattiness. A professor pulled me aside after our first class. She commented on my (excessive) effort that day, then asked if I'd considered studying Spanish. Although we'd just met, her question didn't surprise me; I'd heard it once...or twice.

I confirmed my interest in Spanish, and the professor and I became close. She later suggested a study abroad opportunity for my junior year. Taking her advice, I committed to a program in Madrid. Excitement—and two jobs—occupied the months leading up to departure.

Something else filled that spring and summer, something strange. It was a feeling of discomfort. Thoughts of flying, making decisions, and moving made me anxious. Headaches brought (unnecessary) trips to the doctor. I worried about my health, my safety. I struggled to be in my dorm room at night, even though our building was teeming with people, and to calm myself, I tried singing church hymns. Rarely did I sing on Sundays in the chapel, let alone in my bed at midnight.

The situation was strange. But when framed in faith, it didn't seem *entirely* strange. I didn't need to understand everything, not yet at least. And perhaps that was the point: Maybe the change in my behavior was right on time. Remembering my upbringing, I thought, *God is aware of my place in life, my need for direction.*

After my twentieth birthday, I committed to a patriarchal blessing. Independence may have been my style, but I'd make an exception, for God. To prepare, I took some of the usual steps: praying, paying tithing, and fasting. My intentions were sincere.

The bishop interviewed me and gave his recommendation. “Ticket” in hand, I could schedule a meeting with the local patriarch.

Other things that I did weren’t so typical. Most church members receive patriarchal blessings as teenagers. Sharing the occasion with immediate family is okay, even encouraged; I planned to go alone. Although not the only person in history to get a blessing in secret, I was the only member of my household to do so. Being home for summer break made the process tricky, but not impossible. Without explanation, I borrowed the minivan.

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It was Sunday, late afternoon. I’d never met a patriarch. Nor had I been in this meetinghouse, a bonus given that my mother had often lingered in our building, well after hours.

Before taking a seat in his office, I handed the patriarch my recommendation from the bishop. He took a few minutes, to ask questions about my family, my state of mind. Although nervous, I answered with honesty: I had some health and safety concerns, big career decisions ahead of me. After our chat, he started a tape recorder and put his hands on my head, ready to act on God’s behalf.

The patriarch touched on my health. *Check.* He mentioned my education. *Check.* He then emphasized that I should get married and have children. That seemed *reasonable*. I’d grown up with happily married parents and enjoyed being around kids.

Still, I hadn't said anything to the patriarch about a husband. Or motherhood.

I had worried about migraines.

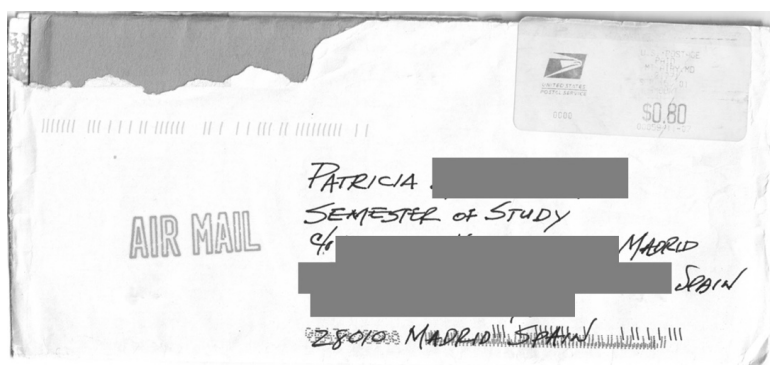
And wondered if I should apply to grad school.

But no matter how awkward, I don't think that any suggestion would have deterred me in the moment. Or on that day. Because as the patriarch spoke, I cried; I'd been crying from the start of our meeting, and since I'd never been moved that way at church or in personal prayer, I took it as a sign: I was where I needed me to be.

The patriarch continued, sharing further promises in life. As we finished, he asked, "Can I help you with anything else?" I thought it over; he had addressed the concerns I'd shown up with (and provided relief that I craved). Through teary eyes, I replied, "No. You've done so much for me already." In response, the man looked confused. *Odd*, I thought. I wasn't sure why my gratitude affected him that way, but I left and thought nothing more of it.

\*\*\*

I stayed quiet about my time with a patriarch. Absent Snap Maps, nobody knew where I had been, and I didn't have to bring it up, with anyone—still, a problem loomed: The patriarch was to send a written copy of my blessing. I would be home to intercept it, but only for a couple more weeks. My parents might leave the mail unopened, no guarantees. I had an idea.



*Really?! Only \$0.80 to mail an international letter!*

I moved to Spain. A few weeks later, the copy arrived in my student mailbox, as requested of the patriarch.

My year in Madrid wasn't easy. (I'd never lived in another country.) Although anxious, I managed with a guidebook... and a map from God. When walking alone at night, setting foot on an airplane, I thought of my patriarchal blessing. Its messages hinted at years of life ahead of me and calmed my fear as needed.

Once back in the United States, on firm ground, I applied to a doctoral program in Spanish and accepted an offer: Philadelphia would be home after graduation. I even found a summer job near the city. My college roommate no longer needed the summer work that she'd been hired for. She quit, then told me to apply for the opening. They hired me. Perfect timing, it seemed.

THE CHURCH OF <b>JESUS CHRIST</b> OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS		<b>Patriarchal Blessing</b> Date of blessing (day, month, year) <b>September 2001</b>		Patriarchal blessing number [Redacted]
Recipient (first, middle, surname) <b>Patricia [Redacted]</b>		Birth date (day, month, year) <b>July 1981</b>		
Birthplace (city, county, state/nation) <b>Maryland</b>		Father's name (first, middle, surname) [Redacted]		
Mother's maiden name (first, middle, surname) [Redacted]		Patriarch [Redacted]		
State <b>Maryland</b>		[Redacted]		

Sister Patricia [Redacted] by the power and authority of the Holy Melchizedek Priesthood and by virtue of my calling as Patriarch in the [Redacted] Maryland Stake of Zion, I humbly and prayerfully lay my hands upon your head and give you your Patriarchal Blessing.

Patricia, your Father in Heaven has a desire that you be aware of the great love He has for you as one of His daughters. He wants you to have joy here in mortality and be able to face the challenges that will come to you, with the same degree of valiance that you did while living in His presence.

Patricia, your lineage is the Tribe of Ephraim, out of the House of Joseph. This lineage will afford you all the blessings promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob by the Lord Jehovah, for it is the birthright tribe and received all the blessings promised to the Patriarchal Fathers. Also Patricia, Ephraim is a tribe of leadership and your Father in Heaven will expect you to be valiant in serving in all the capacities that will be afforded you as you continue your journey here on the earth.

I bless you that, you will have a strong desire to continue on the path you have chosen and you will use the attributes you have been given and all the strength and power of your testimony to set aside those temptations that will be placed there by the adversary.

Patricia, you are greatly blessed to be here with a mortal body, to have been born of righteous parents and to be a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and to have a living Prophet, Seer and Revelator to give you guidance and counsel. You are also blessed Patricia, to be of sound body and mind and I promise that if you will be faithful in living the Word of Wisdom, you will continue to be blessed and your body will be free of many of the infirmities that could otherwise strike you.

Patricia, it is important for you to continue your education, gaining all the secular knowledge you can and it will be of help to you as you have additional challenges of being an eternal companion to a son of God and being a mother in Zion. Also, Patricia, it is important for you to continue to grow spiritually. Read the scriptures, be prayerful, and attend the meetings that are there for you, that you may build upon the testimony you now have and that you will always be worthy to have the attendance of the Holy Ghost, to help you in facing the challenges that will be there.

Patricia, you have your free agency and your Father in Heaven knows you will have temptations placed before you. But He will bless you with the wisdom that is necessary and the power to make the right choices on all those occasions when a wrong choice would lead you away from the strait and narrow path which you must follow.



I bless you Patricia that, you will continue to enjoy the health you now have. I bless you that, you will be aware of the promptings of the Spirit. I bless you that, you will continue to develop strengths and attributes that will help you to be a valiant daughter to your Father in Heaven and a help to your fellowmen as you serve in those callings that will be placed before you by those who are in authority over you.

Patricia, as a daughter of God, your primary mission here upon the earth is that of becoming a mother. This is one of the greatest challenges you will have for it will place upon you the responsibility of rearing those children in righteousness. I bless you that, you will set goals before you and you will strive to gain them in the timetable that will be most suitable to you. I promise that, as you are faithful, you will be guided by the Spirit and you will have the help of all those with whom you associate with in the church in being able to fulfill your mission here upon the earth.

Patricia, it is important for you to be very selective in your association with your fellowman. As you seek to find an eternal companion, it should be a son of God who holds the priesthood and who is worthy and honors that priesthood and who would be the type of eternal companion you would like to have as a father to your children. Patricia, your husband will be the patriarch in your home and it is incumbent upon you to give him the support and encouragement and all the help that is necessary for him to be valiant and to be successful in the callings he will have, particularly that calling of being a righteous father.

Patricia, there will be many temptations before you. There will be trials and tribulations, but your Father in Heaven will always bless you with the strength and the wisdom you need to continue on a righteous path.

I bless you Patricia that, you will find great joy in serving your fellowmen. I bless you that, as you are found worthy to go to the House of the Lord that you will go with the power of discernment and be able to have an understanding of the teachings you will receive within those walls. You will then be able to make eternal covenants with your Father in Heaven, covenants that will help you, not only to have exaltation, but eternal life. Also, Patricia, you will then be able to serve as a proxy for those sisters who have passed on who never had the experience of knowing the gospel or having received the ordinances that are necessary for them to be able to have eternal life. This is a great and sacred work and you will be privileged to serve as a proxy for those sisters who have need of having this very important work done for them. You will not only receive joy, but will feel of their spirit from time to time, and you will have the blessing of the Spirit of your Father in Heaven and elder brother Jesus Christ, in being there with you. There will be times when you will be able to sit in the Celestial Room in one of the temples and receive answers to the problems that may be before you. Many times, you will find being in the House of the Lord, will bring you closer to those eternal blessings than anything you may do.

Again, Patricia, your Father in Heaven loves you with a deep and abiding love. He will always be at your side to give you answers to your prayers. You will find comfort and solace as you go to Him and ask for the help that He can give you. Also, Patricia, you should be aware that there are brethren here upon the earth who can be of great service to you. The Prophet, Seer and Revelator of the church is the mouthpiece for your Father in Heaven, as are all those who have been called as special witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ. Listen to and heed the counsel that you will receive from them from time to time, for they will never be permitted to teach doctrine that would lead you away from the strait and narrow path which you must follow. Honor your parents and seek counsel from them when it is appropriate. They have experience and wisdom beyond yours and there will be many

Patricia [REDACTED]

times when they can be helpful to you. Honor your heritage. There are many who have gone on before you who have set the way and it is important for you to recognize the great value they are to your life.

Patricia, you are a pleasing daughter to your Father in Heaven and I bless you that, you will always have that desire to once again return and reside in His presence and that you will have the goal of doing it with an eternal family. There will be no blessing that will be withheld from you as you continue upon this path. I promise that, you will be among those in the days of the first resurrection who will be welcomed back with the greeting that you have been a choice and faithful daughter and servant. I seal this blessing upon you, promising you all the fruits of the first resurrection and I do it through your faithfulness and in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

[REDACTED]  
Patriarch

[REDACTED]  
Scribe

# MIXED MESSAGES



People procrastinate. Seasonal romance isn't uncommon. When I left my summer job with an unopened book (and a boyfriend), it shouldn't have been a concern. The situation sounds cliché—boring, even—and it may have been, if not for one detail: I had no business being there. Looking at my patriarchal blessing, I belonged elsewhere. I was *supposed* to enjoy reading for grad school. I was *meant* to find a Latter-day Saint. Strangely, I hadn't touched the book, and somehow, I'd fallen for someone else.

At the end of the summer, I went home. What I wanted was time to think everything over. There was none. I'd signed a lease and committed to a school in Philadelphia. Putting the situation on hold, I repacked my bags.

After moving, I found time. But it didn't help. Class confirmed that a doctoral program (a career in research) wasn't for me. I saw my boyfriend with growing frequency, interest. My feelings hadn't changed: unhappy in graduate school,

happy in relationship. They were clear. My patriarchal blessing was also clear. It had outlined a place for me in life, and I wasn't there. How did this happen?

I paused to take another look at my "map." At the start of our meeting, I told the patriarch that I was considering graduate school. In my blessing, he included a message: "it is important for you to continue your education, gaining all of the secular knowledge that you can." To me, this sounded like an answer to my question. A PhD was the upper limit of education, so I applied. Sitting in class, I disliked the program. The patriarch also spoke about relationships. One phrase in my blessing stuck out: "as you seek to find an eternal companion, it should be a son of God who holds the priesthood." To me, the line looked like a reference to *dating* and an expectation to be with a *church member*. There I was in love with a non-member. Was my map upside-down?

I remained confused, but not discouraged. It occurred to me: Maybe I had been a bit near-sighted. I was taught that events mentioned in a patriarchal blessing might happen later. Feeling more flexible, I left school and got a job. With time, I found another graduate program in Elementary Education. My choice seemed reasonable. The phrase "secular knowledge" could apply to other subjects. I'd also enjoyed being around kids and saw my interest as a talent to explore.

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Doubt stuck around.

With work and school settling, uneasiness lingered in the relationship with my boyfriend. The same phrase in my blessing continued to bother me: “as you seek to find an eternal companion it should be a son of God who holds the priesthood.” I still equated “seek to find” with dating and “son of God who holds the priesthood” with a Latter-day Saint. I couldn’t twist words to mean something else—useless. I tried ignoring them—also useless. The line haunted me.

Dating outside of Mormonism was strange, but the idea of leaving my boyfriend because he wasn’t a member seemed stranger. Soon after we met, I remembered my favorite song from the children’s program at church, *I’ll Walk with You*.

If you don’t walk as most people do,  
Some people walk away from you,  
But I won’t! I won’t!  
If you don’t talk as most people do,  
Some people walk and laugh at you,  
But I won’t! I won’t!  
I’ll walk with you. I’ll talk with you.  
That’s how I’ll show my love for you.  
Jesus walked away from none.  
He gave his love to ev’ryone.  
So I will! I will!  
Jesus blessed all he could see,  
Then turned and said, “Come, follow me.”  
And I will! I will!  
I will! I will!

I'll walk with you. I'll talk with you.  
That's how I'll show my love for you.

I thought of the lyrics when we were together. Looking past our differences in faith, my boyfriend chose to stay with me too.

My parents opened their home to people from outside of church. I would have counted on them to welcome my boyfriend, absent a dilemma: I had yet to tell anyone about my patriarchal blessing. My mother talked about my siblings' blessings. I knew that she would read mine thoroughly if given access to it. What I didn't know was how she would react.

My mother put a lot of emphasis on a patriarchal blessing. In her letter to me during high school, she described it as my "one chance to get a personal audience with the Lord...a progress report...a map and a blessing of joy and comfort." My mother also instructed me to "follow its guidance to the letter." She valued patriarchal blessings, but she also cared about others. Her extended family were non-members. Many of her children's closest friends weren't Latter-day Saints either. Mom made room for everyone.

In the choice to be with my boyfriend, I wasn't following a patriarchal blessing "to the letter," but I was following love. The words of a patriarch were important to my mother. So was acceptance of others. I wasn't sure how to present my relationship to family. I could introduce my boyfriend and keep the advice I'd been given—from God—a secret. Or I could share my blessing and *hope* for approval.

Either way felt like a gamble (against my nature as a Latter-day Saint), but knowing love had brought me this far,

I'd continue to bet on it. With no mention of a patriarchal blessing, I told my mother I had met someone. I shared that my boyfriend was not a church member. For whatever reason, I then said to my mother, "He smokes cigarettes." At least, at the time he did. Maybe I felt obligated to give fair warning—the habit was taboo in our church circle—in response, however, Mom said nothing. Even after they met, I never heard her say an unkind word about my boyfriend. Membership (and Marlboros) didn't matter.

My parents believed in us. When I quit the doctoral program, they asked if I was staying in Philadelphia for "this young man." "Yes," I replied. The decision didn't surprise them. When we got engaged a year and a half later, the call to ask for my hand in marriage came as no surprise either. My dad never wondered if it was going to happen, just when.

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Growing up, I'd learned about temple weddings, conducted when both parties are church members. This wasn't an option with my fiancé, but thinking long-term, I accepted it. We had all the time in the world to figure things out. Our love would do for now.

We asked the bishop of the singles ward, where I attended church, to perform a ceremony for us at an outdoor venue. We'd never met, but during our initial visit and future times together, he accepted us. The bishop and his wife agreed to be part of our day.

Personal exchanges were warm. But group conversation was different. At church, two couples got engaged at around the same time that I did. They planned to marry in a temple. As expected, teachers talked during class about their courtships, and in the chapel, leaders endorsed their upcoming weddings. I understood the importance of temple marriage in church doctrine. There was something that I didn't understand: As members, we also learned about "love," but my relationship didn't matter at church. Sitting in the pew, I waited for someone to announce my engagement. Every Sunday.



# BUMPS



Like most couples, my husband and I annoyed each other at times. As conflicts came up, we took a level-headed approach. We talked and offered apologies. We changed behaviors and moved on, or at least we tried to.

Memories are normal. People reflect. Or reminisce. When reminded of a past conflict with my husband, I *obsessed*. I struggled to think about anything else. As distractions, I turned to music, even yoga. But they did nothing; in between songs and stretches, my mind still drifted back to the past. Out of ideas, I figured: Maybe I could focus on the fact that we had solved the problem. Pushing the “rewind” button, I found a previous apology. Sometimes nerves would calm.

Other days, that strategy didn’t work. While recalling a conversation, I questioned my judgement, my memory. Doubt shoved me towards my husband—in person. I wanted to talk. He then issued a repeat apology about an incident, from weeks, months, or years ago. Time was irrelevant. The only thing that

mattered was to hear his words again in the moment, on the day that I felt uneasy. When some of our talks ended, I walked away.

After other talks, my mind kept racing. I'd spotted a "discrepancy." In an earlier apology, my husband had explained his behavior, and although his answers were consistent, they weren't identical. The difference in word choice forced me back to my husband—with a new question. We then talked about the previous offense, for longer. I promised that it would be the last replay, the final question. My behavior did improve at times. Until it got worse. Like a broken record (or glitch on an iPhone), the repetition went on...

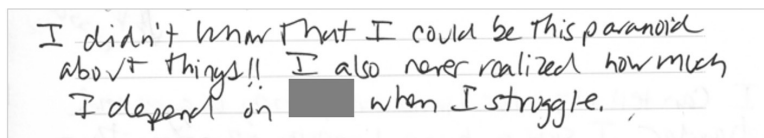
Unable to stop on my own, I looked for a more structured approach, a troubleshooting guide. My upbringing as a Latter-day Saint offered insight. I found lessons on weathering the storms of life then applied their message: We all hit bumps in the road. My trials weren't unexpected, their fluctuation not uncommon. I'd also found a faith-based explanation for my struggle to let go of things. Thinking that a misunderstanding of "forgiveness" was to blame, I printed church articles on the topic.

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Thoughts of past arguments disappeared one day. No notice given. Or needed. My husband and I were both happy to see them go. Their departure even coincided with my first pregnancy. *Right on time*, I figured; without distraction, I could read about motherhood.

Learning was (brief) fun. In the first trimester, I became preoccupied with new things. Food troubled me, but the trouble went beyond nausea, aversions, or cravings: I'd seen horror stories of pregnancy gone wrong—many about foodborne illness.

I hosed down produce. I overcooked meat. Bacteria was known to hide in unpasteurized foods but with the right plan could be avoided. With help, I made sure that everything on my plate had gone through the pasteurization process. I checked food packages. My husband confirmed with restaurant staff that food was “safe.” I researched company webpages. While at the beach, he contacted a fudge factory when the box failed to provide enough detail. A surge of questions flooded our days and the pages of my journal. Prior to pregnancy, I had never looked for the word “pasteurized.”

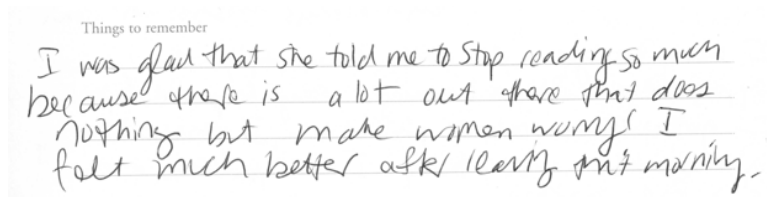


I didn't know that I could be this paranoid about things!! I also never realized how much I depend on [redacted] when I struggle.

*I didn't know that I could be this paranoid about things!! I also never realized how much I depend on [husband] when I struggle.*

My husband wasn't the only person to notice my behavior: During a prenatal check-up, I verbally vomited a pile of concerns as the doctor came into the room. With a tone of frustration, she asked, ‘Have you been reading pregnancy books?’ I admitted to obvious participation. She then said, “They give women too many things to worry about,” and instructed me to get rid of the books. Her explanation sounded fair.

Once home, I worried that I was worrying too much (yes, that's a thing). But I handled the issue by leaning on my conversation with the doctor. To me, it looked like other women went through pregnancy in a similar way: anxious, glued to their reading. My experience appeared normal.



*I was glad that she told me to stop reading so much because there is a lot out there that does nothing but make women worry! I felt much better after leaving that morning.*

With pregnancy books off-limits, I found “permitted” material to calm myself. (The doctor had said nothing about a patriarchal blessing.) On bad days, I looked at its references to motherhood, children included, as confirmation from God that my baby would be fine. Sure enough, she was.

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I stayed home with my newborn. I'd enjoyed working in local schools, but the work was short-term. I left teaching. As our daughter went off to preschool, our son was born. My second pregnancy wasn't as stressful as the first. I felt calmer as a parent on *most* days.

Our neighborhood was safe, our locks secure. I knew this, but logic didn't matter if my husband was away overnight. In his absence, I turned on extra lights and inspected the house

from the bottom floor up for signs of a home intruder. There was no need to tell neighbors when my husband traveled; our porch was illuminated. Although my behavior was a little much, I chalked it up to growing up in a big family (then asked Mom to sleep over). After a few years, I expanded my effort—and our alarm system—to include sensors for all ground-level windows. With the new measure, bedtime came a little sooner.

I still invited my mom to stay overnight, for special occasions. We had a space for her: a guestroom that we had dubbed “Nana’s Room.” She loved our time together. I listened to her comments on how fortunate my children were, how she admired me. Mom was happy for us, but during those chats, she wasn’t always happy herself. She recalled being unable to afford pajamas for her children. I’d seen my mom cry before, but as a parent, her tears hit me hard. Ending the conversation, she said, “We couldn’t give you much, but we gave you the gospel.”

“Grandpa” blessed both my kids as infants and baptized my daughter at age eight. I brought my kids to church; my husband came along. He supported us in his own way, making friends and attending some meetings. He hadn’t joined the church. Nor had we married in a temple. I had accepted this; we were close as a couple. But on Sundays, our bond seemed to fall short. Mormonism teaches: A family’s closeness in the afterlife depends on participation in temple ceremonies. At church we were odd, and everyone knew our “status.”

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Clearing one hurdle, I stumbled on another. My latest behavior was embarrassing. (More so than calls to a fudge factory.) I asked a doctor about recurrent trips...to the bathroom. He listened, as I explained. Unsure if I'd emptied my bladder, I kept going back to try after having just gone. To move on, things had to feel "right." As we spoke, I squirmed, but discussion didn't faze the doctor. He saw a lingering effect from pregnancy and sent me home with a print-out of common pelvic exercises.

The doctor hadn't suspected anything serious. No one gave me reason to worry. Still, bladder control and other health matters preoccupied me. I found myself at times wandering back into the bathroom. Other days, I sat at my computer to scour the internet for "answers." In those moments, I remembered where I was taught to seek comfort.

My patriarchal blessing waited. I opened it, and a single line stood out: I was blessed "to be of sound body and mind." God's hand appeared to be in my life. I viewed his message as an effort to comfort me, as a sign that he knew of my worries. Wanting to help, God also told me how to stay healthy. My blessing said that by living the church's standards, I would "continue to be blessed." I kept them—not using tobacco, drinking alcohol or coffee. With that personal message, I concluded: (Actual) problems with my health were unlikely.

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Through the highs and lows, our family went to church. I was volunteering there with young women, ages twelve to eighteen, in winter of 2020. One Sunday, a regional leader visited our classroom to give a lesson on temple marriage. She shared her story:

During college, she met a man who was a Latter-day Saint. They dated. Curious about his faith, she investigated and soon joined the church. They decided to get married. A temple wedding would exclude her family who weren't members, but believing the ceremony to be God's plan, she moved forward with it.

After class, the teacher pulled me aside to talk.

She knew that my husband and I hadn't married in the temple, but she thought highly of us as a couple, of my husband as a person. Her apologies continued. It was strange; the teacher didn't want to upset me as we spoke, but I was never in tears. *She* was. As people left the room, she broke down and described another side of her wedding: the rift in a family whose parents missed seeing their daughter get married. Temple marriage hurt.

# THE STRANGEST WEEK



With the awkward conversation at church behind me, I now lived in an uncomfortable situation: the COVID-19 pandemic. No one knew exactly what to do; guidelines kept changing. Our family chose the “bubble” route. With the two nearest households, we created a larger backyard. I loved it.

Soon, the world changed (again). The kiddie pools now empty, the balloons and glow sticks collected, and the bouncy house deflated, things progressed toward “normal.” Adults went back to work, and kids returned to school. Before long, church reopened too, and members filled the pews...so I’d been told.

As in-person meetings resumed, I chose to stay home. I didn’t want to be in a place I once attended, regularly. That discomfort had grown throughout the pandemic. I opted not to participate in Zoom meetings, but the idea of going



to church was even more unsettling. I couldn't explain my feelings. Avoiding discussion, I made up excuses for my absence and used them into spring of 2021. Some were really a stretch: an offhand reference to not trusting the ventilation in the building, for example.

I know nothing about ventilation.

Spring was bizarre and not just in church matters. Past concerns were bothering me, even though I hadn't thought about them—in years. Why was I worrying about contamination? Or intruders? I wasn't even pregnant, and we'd expanded our alarm system, on multiple levels.

Hoping for an answer, explanation, or anything that would calm my nerves, I talked with my husband. He responded, "You have nothing to worry about." Believing him, I left the room. But belief never lasted. When fear set in, I ran back with another question to a husband, who had grown tired, frustrated.

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Worrying, I stood again outside of our home office. It was one of *those* days, but that afternoon in May would be different; it had to be different. Remembering our last conversation, the look on his face, I walked in to find my husband.

We talked. Instead of acting on the urge to make sure everything was okay, I sat listening, squirming as my husband asked me the questions. He wanted to know, "Why do you *ruminate* so much?" and I couldn't answer.

I'd never thought of the word.

Troubling thoughts didn't leave, but later that week, I sat alone entertaining another idea. It was one that needed attention: I'd lost control, pushed people away. I'd tried to stop worrying but failed. I'd failed to consider that behind those worries was a reason. I *wasn't* okay. Admitting this, I set down my patriarchal blessing to reconsider the possibility of a problem. I stopped reading the words "of sound body and mind" and began researching the term "rumination."

I started with a general search online. On several pages, one result came up: Rumination is a common symptom of *obsessive-compulsive disorder*. A reference to my habit of dwelling on things seemed odd; I thought OCD was linked to only a few behaviors: handwashing, organizing, counting.

Symptoms of OCD varied, a lot. While browsing, I found more that fit my life. "Reassurance seeking" was one. Although the term was new to me, the behavior was not. For years, I had acted that way, asking questions of others and looking for validation in uncomfortable times. Reassurance seeking hadn't struck me as a possible symptom of OCD either. I printed (some) information and shared it with my husband before heading to bed.

## Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) self-help guide

Work through a self-help guide for mild-to-moderate obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) that uses cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT).

Section 2 of 20

### 2. Symptoms of OCD

Do you often do the same thing over and over again, even when you don't want to?

Do you feel like you have to get things "right", even if you know there's no real need to worry about getting them right?

Do you spend a lot of time worrying that you said or did something you shouldn't have?

Do you worry about throwing things away?

Do you frequently worry about dirtiness or contamination and have to clean? Do you have to clean things in a certain way to make sure it's "right"? For example, you have to wash your hands a certain way every time you feel they might be dirty.

Do you frequently have to check things or perform rituals, or you worry that you, or someone you care about, will be harmed? For example, you have to check the front door is locked a certain number of times or you worry your home will be burgled.

Do you have to do things in your mind in order to feel safe, or avoid worrying someone you care about will be harmed? For example, you have to count steps in your mind when you walk or something bad will happen to a member of your family.

Do you focus on items being laid out a certain way, and try to organise things based on counting or symmetry? For example, when you set the table there have to be an even number of places, and the cutlery all has to line up in a certain way.

Do you feel like thinking or doing certain things will cause bad things to happen, and you have to "undo" thoughts or actions with rituals? For example, if you read an upsetting news story while thinking about a loved one, you have to think about them while reading something positive to avoid your loved one being harmed.

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, you might have symptoms of OCD. There are different types of OCD symptoms. It's possible to have a number of different symptom types, or for all of your symptoms to be the same type.

*Printout date.*

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Section 2 of 20

### 2. Symptoms of OCD

I resumed my search. The first hits confirmed what I'd already seen. By mid-morning, something new popped up: a list of stressors that could, in theory, trigger the onset of OCD or increase its severity. "Major life changes" were included. I went numb.

That night, I acted on instinct:

My husband sits reading in our home office. I walk in, take my usual spot, and say the most unusual thing. I have spoken a lot of words, but never have I needed to reach so deep to say what I want to. I can't look at my husband, who is right next to me, as I utter something that sets my life on a new course. I first remind him that I likely have OCD. I then say, "You know that patriarchal blessing? This all started back then. God, Jesus, they're not there. Love isn't in the church." In shock, my husband quietly agrees, "No, it's not," as I begin to sob.

My husband and I sat together for hours.

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Over the weekend, I reflected. In the hardest of times, I had leaned on lessons of love. In those times, I had also looked to the words of a patriarch. Following love led to happiness, but following the patriarch led to confusion. His blessing was intended to give me direction in life, but with it, I was spinning in circles. Given the patriarch's message on my health, I had convinced myself that all was well—it was not.

I couldn't understand: Why would a patriarch, speaking on God's behalf, mislead me?

I attempted to make sense of the situation. Promises are supposedly fulfilled if a person follows the path in their "map." I had followed my instruction to receive blessings of health; I had lived by church health standards. Yet I still struggled.

Someone could try to explain my problem by zooming out, looking at the larger picture. I hadn't followed every direction given to me by God. I had been told to marry a Latter-day Saint. Maybe the blessings weren't available because I chose a non-member. I believed, however, that a problem existed before my wedding. I saw a difference in my behavior during early 2001: a period with *major life changes*. Symptoms of OCD were appearing prior to my visit with the patriarch. I had an issue regardless of the decision to be with my husband years later.

Perhaps a broader approach would work: God had tested me, and I failed. Maybe he knew about my disorder and planned to heal me if I followed my blessing; when I did otherwise, he left me with OCD. As I thought about my choices, my marriage, I couldn't agree with that reasoning either. I was embracing Christ-like love, what I assumed was most important, when marrying my husband. I didn't associate *punishment* with love.

I took one last step, applying the most flexible point of my understanding of patriarchal blessings: Maybe in the next life, everything would be explained, or I'd be healed. But that idea didn't cut it. It looked like a catch-all, to avoid conversation about a church ordinance. Discussion is easy to dodge when

postponed—for an eternity. My mental health might improve in the “next life.” I refused to wait.

# UNRULY GUESTS



Summer came. Our family no longer went to church. Earlier in the year, we had (coincidentally) planned a trip to the five National Parks in Utah, where the LDS organization is headquartered. Bryce Canyon was our final stop.

With the kids settled at the park's lodge, I went alone on a hike along the canyon rim. Once stopped at a lookout, I sat down to rest; instead, I cried. I'd been through a lot, and emotion overwhelmed me. But as I sat there, those years didn't matter. They weren't the reason for my tears: Despite the past, there was still beauty in the world. I was looking at it.

Wanting to see more, my husband and I set a goal to visit all the National Parks. We do realize it's complicated. There are sixty-three, some much harder to reach than others. Still, we haven't questioned our decision; we'll get there somehow.

Setting this goal, I felt motivated. But I knew that I still had a problem: I wouldn't be able to find joy there unless I could manage a disorder that would be on the journey with me. I

needed treatment—and the name of a professional. I'd never worked with a therapist. Although I didn't want to spend summer looking, I committed to find help before the season ended.

Still in shorts, I arrived at a specialty center and introduced myself to a psychologist. We sat down to talk. I told him about myself, my symptoms; he told me that OCD revolves around “uncertainty.” He may have taught me something else after that, but I wouldn't have noticed. I was busy, worrying: Is a minivan okay to drive in Death Valley? Should I book an SUV? Which is the ABSOLUTE safest? I left our session that day, suspecting I'd be back.

I was diagnosed with obsessive-compulsive disorder. Many of my behaviors fit into OCD and made sense as I continued meeting with the psychologist. Even my frequent bathroom trips—that's right, a bladder issue—could be attributed to obsessive-compulsive disorder. Before going into (less embarrassing) detail, an important note: I'm not a licensed mental health care worker. My experiences and observations are not intended as a form of care. I'd suggest that anyone who may be suffering seek professional advice.

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Every day, we have thousands of thoughts. Some good; some not so good. Unsettling thoughts that pop up suddenly are common. These uninvited guests also tend to leave as quickly as they came, causing little trouble for most people.

But for me, it's not that simple. As someone with OCD, I am burdened by intrusive thoughts. They don't just show up



without warning, then leave; they stick around—and behave like unruly guests. Intrusive thoughts that relate to my fears are uncomfortable. They may only be ideas, but logic doesn't matter. With OCD, I see those thoughts as threats. And take action. As a defense I create “rituals,” physical or mental strategies, to extinguish the unwelcome thought.

A ritual seems to work. But that relief is temporary. As I try to push the intrusive thought away, it pushes back. Even harder. Thoughts and rituals go on, prolonging discomfort. Ignoring unwanted thoughts doesn't help me; they will come back. I *can* learn to break the cycle, with help from a professional.

Together, we use an evidence-based therapy called exposure response prevention (ERP). My goal is to welcome an intrusive thought and related fear as a possibility. No rituals allowed. In time, those thoughts lose their effect on me. It's like allowing unpleasant company to stay, listening to their crazy ideas, and resisting the urge to argue. Eventually, the troublemakers leave because they realize I'm no fun: I won't fight with them. ERP therapy may seem odd, but I find it effective.

The psychologist and I got started with an intrusive thought: Someone left the water running at home, potentially causing a flood. I aimed to expose myself to this idea without a ritual. When the thought set in, I was confirming with someone that they had turned off a faucet, or I was looking at the fixture myself. My new objective: to leave a room without checking the status of the water. I sat with the possibility of a flood...

And went on with my day.

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I made progress. With that success, however, disappointment lingered: I wished I had gotten help sooner. The loss of time was brutal, and nothing could change it. Losing decades of my life to intrusive thoughts was bad; mourning the loss of those decades was worse. I wanted to move on.

I committed to learn more about obsessive-compulsive disorder. Limited knowledge was behind my failure to seek care early on. A lot of symptoms fell under the umbrella of OCD, many of which I hadn't experienced. Or heard of. But even after I'd discovered a (long) list of symptoms, I saw more reasons behind my delay. The perceptions I'd held as a Latter-day Saint seemed *suspect*.

At age nineteen, I worried about things that had never crossed my mind. Raised as a church member, I perceived the sudden thoughts as "spiritual promptings." That year was full of change, big decisions. I figured, *God was aware of my place, my needs*. Church doctrine had taught me to act on feelings. I got a patriarchal blessing and referred to it for direction and peace.

Later, once diagnosed with OCD, I saw the sudden ideas not as spiritual promptings but as intrusive thoughts. At age nineteen, I was preparing to live overseas, choosing a career, and planning life after graduation. People with OCD are prone to have intrusive thoughts during stressful, uncertain times. My circumstances triggered an invasion: I experienced unwanted ideas about health, education, and safety. These thoughts suggested (possible) problems, which seemed like threats to me.

In response, I had created a ritual for comfort. With OCD, my desire for certainty is strong. So strong that I could see why I'd been drawn to the prospect of a plan from a higher power.

From a patriarchal blessing, I sought reassurance that life would be okay. My blessing offered “proof” that bad things wouldn’t happen. When faced with unwelcome thoughts during and after college, I turned to (what I believed to be) a map from God. It did offer temporary relief, but greater discomfort went on for years.

Intrusive thoughts would come and go. I attributed the flare-ups to an idea from my youth as a Latter-day Saint: We all face challenges along the way. Hard times would pass, and I assumed that I had weathered the storm. It *was* a storm, a cyclone of sorts. People with OCD can experience an ebb and flow of symptoms over time. For two decades, I was in one cycle after another with my “thoughts.” I didn’t know intrusive thoughts were a thing.

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With therapy, I had started small. Facing fears and ditching rituals seemed okay when we talked about faucets. When reaching other topics, my opinion changed. OCD attaches to things that are important to me and superglues to things that I value most. Still, I wanted relief, especially from the more frequent, frightening thoughts.

ERP therapy offers hope. It also requires a commitment to work (insanely) hard. The exercises assigned by the psychologist come with potential—and a catch: I’m told to confront an intrusive thought without a ritual. When fear strikes, rituals alleviate my discomfort in the moment. Without rituals, discomfort spikes.

Things would get ugly.

During the process, my feelings were no secret: I told the psychologist that his exercises “fucking sucked.” The homework was rough, at first, but soon enough the level of suck dropped to “tolerable.” With exposure to the fear sans ritual, my discomfort lessened. ERP therapy was working. One week at a time, I practiced and watched as the method grew into a tool to carry with me: When reminded of my fears, I could face them without getting stuck.

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Mom and I spoke sometimes, not often. We could have spoken more and likely would have if not for one topic: my decision to leave the church. I hadn’t shared it with my mother. Nor did I want to. Her reaction was a wild card. Afraid of rejection, hurt feelings, or worse, I put off discussion. When the subject had come up, I used a pandemic to explain my absence from meetings. That excuse was valid, for a while.

Post-COVID, I found new ways to dodge conversation with my mother. Visits were few. When we did see each other, I kept distance. Phone calls were brief; I made them on drives to the store, giving an excuse to hang up once parked. Our interaction had changed, but not for the better. I was avoiding more than the topic of church: I avoided my mom, period. The circumstance made me nervous. And sad. I missed her.

Dodging family was tough. Hiding from a therapist was impossible; we met weekly. The “church” predicament came up. He listened then said, “Patty, if you don’t approach your

mom, you'll likely push yourself away further." I thought over his advice—running was exhausting—then committed to take the risk: I'd tell my mom that I wasn't going back to church.

I considered what to say, what not to say, and how to say it. No option is perfect. Choosing text message, I crafted an answer to Mom's question (one I had ignored for a month) about when my son would be baptized. I showed it to my husband, then asked him to tap "send."

Mar 15, 2022 at 4:53 PM

Hi, mom! I've been thinking about how to answer your question about [REDACTED] baptism. I respect your right to be involved in the LDS organization. I have not been back to church since the start of the pandemic. I do not plan on returning. I am exercising my right not to practice religion. [REDACTED] will not be getting baptized. We will not be raising our children as a part of any faith. I understand that this may be a difficult change for you and that you may worry. [REDACTED] the kids and I are doing fine. My intent is not to hurt anyone by sharing this. I'd like to maintain a relationship with you and dad. I believe that we can do that without a focus on religion. I'd prefer not to share the details behind my personal decision right now. I'd like to give you some time and space to process this.

Mom didn't answer.

On edge, I jumped into the car and drove my son to karate. While gripping the wheel, I heard the chime of an incoming text. The wait was nerve-wracking. Once stopped at a traffic light, I took a breath in and saw her simple response:

Mar 15, 2022 at 6:15 PM



I exhaled. Shortly after, she sent a follow-up:

I already knew that; not  
because anyone told me but  
because I am your mother.  
We will always love you, all of  
you, unconditionally!  
I'm here if you want to talk. My  
life would be so empty without  
you in it! ❤️  
How was your CA trip?

Relief washed over me, pushing out the need to distance myself. Mom and I could focus on the things that were important to both of us.

# BAD STUFF



I kept in touch with my mom. She came to our area for a school event, and we saw her after a knee operation. Potential for fun during visits was uneven. But that didn't stop Mom from trying. Fresh out of surgery, she checked on us (to confirm our favorite cheesecake flavor ahead of arrival).

Conversation carried on, without mention of my decision to leave the church. It was as if it had never happened. My mom was sending me the typical texts: photos of birds in her tree, a question about National Park merchandise for Christmas, and emojis.

After the holidays, she apologized for being unable to chat with my daughter one night:

Sun, Jan 8 at 8:37 PM

Please tell her I am sick or I  
would call her

I thought little of it, until I got a text that was unlike Mom:

Tue, Jan 10 at 3:35 PM

Talk later?

She never *asked* to call.

We spoke soon after. My mom had been hospitalized. There was effort on her part to steer conversation towards the hospital stay itself: to the food, the boredom, the food Dad had brought instead, the card games she had to occupy herself. (Mom rarely played cards.) She apologized for calling, saying that she didn't want to ruin anyone's day. Only as a mumbled add-on to admission that doctors had found some bad "stuff" did she mention the word "cancer."

The radiologist had located a mass in my mom's abdomen, explaining the pain that pushed her to seek emergency care. No one had done a biopsy due to the hospital's limitations. Staff had, however, run enough tests to believe that she had cancer. A biopsy could be scheduled elsewhere—with treatment to follow—but it would take some time.

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Mom came home from the hospital. After discharge, I visited. My mom was propped up in bed, where I had known her to sit reading. But this time was unlike others: Mom wasn't reading; she was struggling to stay awake. I looked once at my mom and thought, *She's not going to live much longer*. She appeared so weak already.



Leaving her room in shock, I found my older brother alone in the kitchen. He looked up from the stove briefly, to acknowledge my presence. We both knew why I was there. I shared my thoughts. He responded, “Mom has stage 4 metastatic pancreatic cancer,” then looked down again at his effort to make something she could eat.

I returned to the bedroom to be with my mom. She still avoided talk of cancer. Instead, she complimented my appearance and thanked me for the visit. Hearing this, I asked my mom, “Do *you* need anything?” Bored yet too tired to focus, she requested travel magazines with mostly photos—adding that I not spend any money. Mom hated to be a bother.

While together, I noticed a burden on my mom: She was adjusting a nightgown to cover her temple garments. These are “sacred,” relatively long underclothes that adult church members are expected to wear every day after making promises in a temple. Taking the commitment seriously, my mother often left stores empty-handed...she would, in contrast, smile about the shortness of her skirts before converting to the church.

I’d been on failed shopping trips. And seen Mom’s old photos. The struggle wasn’t new. Still, it bothered me more that day in her room than in the past. Looking for comfort, my mother wore a nightgown, but as she moved, the gown moved uncovering her temple garments. There lay a woman—with cancer—fighting two battles.

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The pain hit a point that family could no longer manage. Mom needed stronger medication than what had been sent home, stronger than what could be sent home. She was hospitalized again, with hope of draining fluid and starting chemotherapy, but after a week she showed no improvement.

Doctors could barely get her to eat.

I once again drove to Maryland. My mom was drifting in and out of consciousness in a hospital bed. Although she spoke little, everyone stood by her. Knowing my mom's wardrobe was limited, I brought longer nightgowns. We managed to have a brief conversation about the gift. I had spent time picking something to her taste, and as I delivered the nightgowns, she said, "Oh, they are my colors. Thank you," before falling back asleep.

No one ordered a biopsy.

The next morning, news came from the oncologist: Mom was terminal. The cancer had already won, stealing her appetite and devastating her health in three short weeks. Aware of the circumstance, she asked for a move to in-home hospice care.

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Friends from church brought meals. Family took turns by my mom's side. In the front room of the house, I found her in a borrowed hospital bed. She no longer spoke. Her eyes remained closed. Still, she knew when someone was there.

Once visitors had gone home for the night, I sat alone with my mom. Unable to respond with words, she listened as I shared a message:

Mom, it's me, Patty.

I know that you love Dad and that you worry about him.

He won't be alone.

People will take care of Dad, like you took care of us.

My family won't forget you.

My kids asked if we could still call the guestroom in our house "Nana's Room."

I said we always would.

I know how much you loved butterflies.

We spend a lot of time outside.

Whenever a butterfly lands on one of us, it will be like a hug from you.

Thank you for loving my husband, telling him that he's a great dad.

Since he didn't have a dad, it means a lot to him.

He is going to wear purple for you, and we have purple pins for everyone.

Our family is going to donate money in your name to fight cancer.

I have the stories that you wrote and sent to me.

I'll read them.

I'm happy to call you mine.

Thank you for sharing this world with me.

Thank you for loving me and teaching me how to love.

There was no talk of heaven nor of goodbyes. Before leaving, I placed my head on her chest, kissed her forehead, and said, “I love you, Mom.”

A few days later, she died.

# SMALL CRACKS



It was 2023. I hadn't been to an LDS meeting in almost three years. The idea of setting foot in *any* church was unsettling. Plans to attend a funeral in *the* church—from childhood—overwhelmed me. With help, I would get through my mom's service. I sat down with the psychologist. Listening to my concerns, he suggested, "Focus on what is meaningful to you that day."

A slideshow of photos greeted me in the lobby. Most images were of my parents' trips to Europe. My dad had always wanted to visit Ireland. The country held my mom's interest too. (We have Irish ancestors.) Knowing this, I had offered to send my parents there. They jumped on the opportunity, applying for their first passports at ages sixty-seven and sixty-four. Mom had later said to me, "Patty, the trip was the type of honeymoon we had never been able to go on." Ireland left an impression on my parents...and on their kitchen walls, to this

day still adorned with Costco prints of favorite scenic spots. Seeing those images again, I continued into the church.

Photos of earlier years, flowers, and thoughtful touches filled the viewing room. As promised, my husband wore his purple tie, and I gave him a cancer awareness pin. Looking around, I turned to see my best friend walk into the room. We had lived in the same neighborhood—and pretty much the same house—throughout middle and high school. My mom would have expected us to be together.

I needed my friend, husband, and therapist (who was obviously absent, so I'd settle for his prior advice) because the day was about to get harder. Across the room stood Mom's casket. Knowing her appearance would upset me, I'd stayed away. I also knew that I would be upset if I left without seeing my mother.

Before its closure, I inched my way to the casket. My mother was dressed in temple clothing. Burial in that fashion is common practice for Latter-day Saints, but it didn't fit Mom as I had known her; white and green would not have been her first pick outside of the temple. My mom was partial to turquoise and pink.

Troubled by temple clothing, I thought of my mom's last words to me: In the hospital, I had given her nightgowns; she thanked me and loved that they were her "colors." Too weak to change out of a hospital gown, Mom never wore the gift. But she knew that I cared.

Standing over her casket, I noticed two hummingbirds embroidered in the lining. My mom often sent photos she had taken of a tree in our front yard. I smiled. Of all the birds who

stopped there, hummingbirds were her favorite. My mom's favorites were obvious. On most days, she wore a headband identical to one of mine. She purchased hers soon after my headband's debut. It was love at first sight. I looked once again at the headband holding back her hair as she lay there and thought, *Mom would be happy with the choice for the day.*

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Friends filled the chapel, a reflection of forty years in the area. Family volunteered to share a few words at the service there. Not wanting me to feel left out, they extended an invitation to participate. Given my discomfort, I declined.

My niece spoke first. With their houses only a few miles apart, my mom had watched her (oldest granddaughter) as needed from day one. They both loved reading and writing and were known to swap stories. I listened as my niece described their bond. Although nothing she said surprised me, one memory shared stuck out: A few years ago, my mom had given her a graduation card with a simple note, "Write your story." Maybe it was hearing Mom's words, but I felt different in the chapel, if only for a moment.

Without a script, my older sister stood up to express gratitude for church and for our parents' love. I managed to smile at times; after her remarks, that smile faded. A woman was performing a solo of my mother's favorite hymn, *If You Could Hie to Kolob*. I squirmed. The song went on—like Sunday afternoons that my mother stretched out to include choir practice, after hours of *regular* church. My mother rarely

missed an opportunity for musical worship...I found myself explaining her passion to friends when I borrowed the minivan and forgot to eject the Mormon Tabernacle Choir cassette. I sat uneasy in the pew until the hymn finally ended. It was someone else's turn at the microphone.

My oldest sister touched on our parents' conversion to the church, then narrated our mother's devotion to family history. Listening was a struggle, but with a change of topic, comfort returned. My oldest sister joked how people were always welcome in our childhood home. She talked about her close friends; I looked at the space next to me, where my best friend since age eleven sat, and laughed.

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A longtime, family friend looked for me during the reception. He wanted to tell me, "I know you haven't lived here for years, but your mom talked a lot about you. She was proud of the person you've become." While some faces were familiar, others were new. One woman, whom I'd never met, walked up to me and gave me a big hug. She thanked me for "sharing" my mother. Hearing this, I took a seat at dinner.

Before heading home, I took a moment away from the group. Lights grew dim as I wandered to the building's far end. I stopped at the door to the family history center, where my mother did research for herself and others. She was also working here when she forgot me as a teenager. The space looked as it had years ago, only my feelings had changed: Standing there, I no longer felt anger; as an adult, I felt sadness.



At her funeral, Mom's dedication to family history was apparent. Photos of relatives covered the room. People talked about my mother's research, her mastery of microfiche. As a gift, someone brought extra copies of the local newspaper featuring her obituary. It noted how she had "spent many years" and "countless hours" on ancestral work.

My mom also loved poetry and storytelling. Two of her poems filled the day's small cracks: one printed in the program for the service, the other displayed on centerpieces at the reception. I was happy to see Mom's poems, but I had hoped to see more. Greater devotion to one pursuit saddened me.

# BROWN SUITS AND BUTTERFLIES



The weeks went by. I'd talked about ways to remember Mom, only to talk myself out of them soon after. Chiming in, my husband suggested that we publish one of her poems or short stories posthumously. His proposal was thoughtful, if not endearing; I had no objection to it but feared we'd come up empty-handed.

My dad had his hands full, left with a family history "collection." The volume of loose papers, books, and artifacts he'd inherited was enough to fill a bedroom. (By a bedroom, I mean my old bedroom.) Mom had called to ask if the space was available when I graduated college. I agreed to give it up—without explanation.

For years, my mother had learned everything she could about genealogy and shared it with everyone she knew. She organized workshops and volunteered in the temple. She took

courses online. And in her prime, she managed to catch people after church to see if they'd "given any thought... to the dead."

When she wasn't helping others with their lineage, my mother worked on ours. On occasion, my older brother and I were "recruited" to do proxy baptisms. Before starting a session, our mother would explain which relative was which. She never failed to document the work; I gave up trying to keep it all straight while being dunked repeatedly in the baptismal font.

My mother also loved a good, *leafy* family tree. Her standards were high: No branch was to remain without a name. Our tree was filled, framed, and hung on the wall. I imagine Dad was grateful for the floor space as he worked on a storage plan.

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I searched for my mom's writing. Digging through old emails, I found a limited selection. There was her short story set in the Revolutionary War. I had read what there was to it, but publishing an unfinished piece wasn't the route that I wanted to take. One other message was in my box, also a story written by my mom, except this piece wasn't fiction: It was a personal account of her conversion to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

I remembered receiving Mom's email in 2018. I knew that she and Dad had joined the church during their brief time in New York; other details were fuzzy. Although that type of story wasn't what I had in mind either, I decided to read it again.

## Stuff that Matters

Mon 7/23/2018 10:17 AM

To: [REDACTED]

Cc: [REDACTED], Patricia [REDACTED]

We were asked to share this with our son-in-law, [REDACTED], who had to give a Pioneer talk today on modern pioneers and thought of all of you, for some reason, and wanted to share.

CONVERSION TO THE CHURCH OF JESUS-CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS, [REDACTED] 1974, [REDACTED]

In December, 1973, living in [REDACTED], Connecticut, and being a member of the Lutheran faith, I felt a yearning for answers to Truth, something that I had never before experienced. It was so strong that I prayed for an answer to know if there actually was a "true church" which held the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ on the earth. With all my heart, I needed to know. My husband, [REDACTED] and I now had a young daughter, [REDACTED] who was still a toddler. [REDACTED] and I had been married in the Lutheran church in 1971 and both felt empty in matters of faith.

Just one month later, [REDACTED] was offered a job opportunity in Update New York and so on a bitterly cold, January day, our little family found ourselves driving on a somewhat treacherous highway, the New York turnpike, heading North. We were moving to a small village that was located between Rochester and Syracuse, and ten miles east of Palmyra, New York.

The closer we came to our destination, the more I realized how very remote this area of New York was, especially compared with what I had been used to in New England. The one thing I remember the most distinctly as we approached Newark, was a large, brown billboard which read, "Welcome to Palmyra, Home of the Prophet, Joseph Smith".

I turned to [REDACTED] and with some skepticism said, "Hmmm.. What do you know about this prophet?" He then began to tell me about how, when he was thirteen years old, being raised in [REDACTED] Maryland, some Mormon missionaries had moved in very near him and that he remembered his Dad giving the Elders free haircuts, not that he was a barber! He continued to tell me what he had learned about the Prophet Joseph Smith. He sounded to me as if he really believed what he had heard. I was still skeptical but we agreed that when and if it ever stopped snowing up here in this wasteland that we would explore the Palmyra area and the Hill Cumorah, and learn more about the Mormon Church. [REDACTED] warned me though, that if we did this, we would most likely end up being somehow pursued by the Mormons and we might even join their church!

I grew to love Newark and the countryside, that was actually quite beautiful. But something strange was influencing me all through that snowy winter. I had the most uncomfortable feeling when [REDACTED] and I were home alone and also at night when it was dark. I always told [REDACTED] I wanted to sleep with the light on because I felt like there was some unwelcome presence with us. This was an experience that was very foreign to me and to my nature. [REDACTED] may have thought I was just homesick.

The feeling didn't leave me until one summer day, I late June or early July when we finally visited Palmyra and then the Hill Cumorah Visitor's Center.

The older missionary sister, who greeted us at the door of the Visitor's Center, talked with us for a few minutes and then scoffed when we told he we were Lutherans, as if there was something wrong with that. But, being young and a true New Englander, I shrugged it off because I was seeking truth

and would do what I felt was right in the eyes of the Lord. About an hour later as we looked at various exhibits, an older missionary, a very sweet man with kind eyes, started telling us about The Book of Mormon and how it contained not only the fullness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but also the history of the ancient Native Americans. He had my attention. This was a piece of history that I had been unable to unravel on my own, wondering exactly where the Native Americans had come from, who they were and how they fit into a larger picture of mankind.

This Elder then told us that we would find in The Book of Mormon a narrative, written by ancient prophets, of Jesus when he visited this land of the Americas, after His death and Resurrection. The people living at that time beheld the face of our Savior. He taught them and He spoke with them and I knew in that very moment in Time, that we had found Eternity. This man was telling the truth.

We filled out a referral card before we left, requesting to receive more information. A week or so later, two young men in brown suits knocked on our door. They were not much younger than I was and their faces looked quite innocent. I didn't have a bad feeling about them at all but wasn't sure about the brown suits! They just seemed out of fashion.

They said they were from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and started talking to me about something called Family Home Evening and refreshments. I was confused. Besides, I was waiting for Mormon missionaries to come to our door, not realizing the official name of the Mormon Church.

Still, when they asked if they could come in, I asked them please come back in the evening when my husband would be home. Their faces seemed to light up.

I laughed when I told him about our visitors and he said, "I hope you didn't send them away. Those were Mormon missionaries!" I assured him they would be coming back that evening.

We found out later that these two missionaries had left our apartment and then when they returned to their own apartment later that day, they opened their mail and found our referral card. They told us later that we were "golden", whatever that meant!

They came that night and taught us and answered our questions. They also came the next night and the next and the next. Two weeks after they knock on our door, we were baptized members of the Church, in The Palmyra Ward, right near The Hill Cumorah.

But before we agreed to being baptized, I needed to know of a surety that this was what the Lord would have us do. Alone, one afternoon, while driving, I pulled to the side of the road and began to pray. With all my heart and strength I wanted to know if this church was what it appeared to be. I told the Lord I would do whatever He wanted from me; I would even die for Him, although I did not want to leave my dear family; I said I was willing to follow Him, no matter what. Because I missed Him and wanted to be back in His presence.

MY answer came quickly in a most miraculous way. I will; share what happened with anyone who asks me, if I feel it is appropriate to do so. But, I will say, that I then knew my heavenly Father loved me; that only Pure Love and Peace surround Him, and that we were on the right path.

We didn't stumble into the Church or casually seek the truth. Our conversion to the Church was deliberate yet prompted by and guided by the Spirit, all the way.

As the poet, Robert Frost said, in one of his more famous poems, "And, that has made all the difference".

I paused. Mom and I were different, but while reading I saw a parallel between our lives. She was entering a new phase of life at age twenty-four: away from family in a strange place, a young first-time mother. Discomfort overwhelmed her when alone and at night. She chased truth and found her struggles odd, unlike anything before. At age nineteen, I was coming

into a period full of change. I craved peace, direction. Fear had never affected me that way.

A lot had changed since 2018, when I first read Mom's email. Her conversion story and mindset during that time now reminded me of my struggles in college. At age nineteen, my behavior had signaled...a problem.

I closed my email. I didn't want to read anymore. Through heavy tears, I *couldn't* read anymore. My reflection on the past had sparked a thought. Given our similarities and genetic risks, I considered the possibility: My mom had suffered from obsessive-compulsive disorder.

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I combed through memories. The effort uncovered resemblance between Mom's behaviors and my own. Parents worry about their children, but my mom displayed irrational fears. She also coped with her fears in specific ways.

When I traveled, Mom approached me with questions. Although some level of curiosity was to be expected—my mom knew little about the destination—these inquiries were unfounded. And urgent. She imagined dangerous scenarios where I'd (somehow) end up, then texted me at odd hours. I had tried to calm her, repeating my answer: "Mom, kidnapping is *not* an issue there." Perilous travel wasn't the extent of her concerns. She envisioned unlikely economic disasters and asked about them, frequently.

My mother sought reassurance from me and from (what she believed to be) communication with God. In my teenage

years, she had described prayer as “fundamental to everything.” My mother prayed a lot, often in a routine fashion. She said a prayer for our safety before every road trip, regardless of distance. Without it we could not depart. Outside of the family car, she prayed for our individual needs.

In stressful, uncertain times, my mother also went straight to her children’s patriarchal blessings. These documents offered (what she viewed as) direction from God. She memorized and recited lines from them—when possible. My mother sought more reassurance from me about my life than she did from my siblings about their lives, and perhaps for good reason. With me, she lacked access to the level of peace she so desperately craved: I never shared my patriarchal blessing with my mother.

Family was a meaningful part of Mom’s life, and her fear of something happening to them was apparent. The year before I was born, her sister, Patty, unexpectedly died at age twenty-nine. My mother took her sister’s death hard and often mentioned her in conversation about family history. She had served as a proxy for Patty in a temple baptism. With this, my mother believed that she could potentially be closer to her sister in heaven.

I now saw temple work as a possible ritual that my mother used to soothe herself. The idea of being without Patty may have terrified my mother, pushing her to what (she thought) would allow for the closest reunion possible. The untimely loss of her only sister was heartbreaking to my mom. She managed, it seemed, by focusing on temple baptism for Patty.

But to me, temple work brought more heartbreak in my mom’s life. She completed temple baptisms for our entire

extended family, then helped others to baptize their ancestors. Proxy ordinances require more than temple attendance. Prep work is needed: For temple access, church members are to pay tithing; for access to certain temple blessings, like eternal marriage, members are also expected to wear garments under their clothes daily. My mom wouldn't have missed the opportunity to be with her husband for eternity. In meeting so many demands, however, she missed out on other things: time with family, time for herself, more clothing choices, and money to invest elsewhere.

I had watched Mom struggle in so many ways. A self-proclaimed “worrier,” she was somewhat aware of her mental health. Even so, my mother sought help from the teachings of her faith, not from a mental health professional. Her behaviors warranted evaluation for a possible disorder and treatment plan. Options exist, but no longer for my mom.

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As we sat together for the last time, I made promises to Mom—many already kept. One remained outstanding. Her love for butterflies was known to family. I had shared intentions to remember my mom saying, “Whenever a butterfly lands on one of us, it will be like a hug from you.” After her passing, I gave the idea a try.

It was sweet, yet impractical; butterflies refuse to cooperate. Maybe they would with time, but I wanted to feel warmth from my mom sooner. I settled on buying a necklace



with a butterfly. While I was browsing online, one option stood out: a gold medallion.

When I was part of the youth group in the 1990's, the church used a program called Personal Progress. The program centered on "values," and we were to do related activities, chosen mostly from a manual. Our incentive: three possible medallions each with a different church-themed image. The third medallion, typically earned at age eighteen, was gold and featured an LDS temple.

Looking back, I no longer found the name "Personal Progress" fitting; I'd rename the program *Temple Progression*. It focused on church standards, the baseline for temple admission. As a teenager, I never earned the last medallion. Thinking about my mom, what she lost with temple attendance, I felt comfortable leaving the program unfinished. I also felt confident in shopping for a necklace of my choice. Butterflies suggest freedom. Believing that my mother would have enjoyed more freedoms had she not dedicated her life to the temple, I bought and wore the gold butterfly medallion.

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Out of interest, I went searching for my old Personal Progress manual. I dug through boxes without any luck; I must have tossed it. I tried locating a digital version, again with no success. The church had scrapped the program over time for some reason.

I stayed online, reading what I was able to find. The church's webpage unsettled me. Although leaders discontinued the

Personal Progress program, I saw a campaign for temple work among members. I also found material dedicated to patriarchal blessings. The church continues to encourage practices that brought trouble to my family. I wondered how many Latter-day Saints have experienced the same.

My mom's life would never change. Still, I thought of her. I sifted through the messages she'd sent me, what little there was. It wasn't what I'd had in mind. But while looking back on her conversion to the church and the years that followed, I had an idea—maybe Mom's email was just what I needed.

# “RULEBREAKERS”



Before my mom died, I had considered writing about the journey with OCD. I typed (and abandoned) one page of thoughts in 2021. Once I was in treatment, a book seemed like a great idea one minute, a terrible idea the next. Sitting with the psychologist, I talked for months about the “possibility.” In response, he finally said, “Patty, if you had wanted to do it, you would have done it already.” He was right.

My interest in writing bounced back and forth. But after I found my mom’s conversion story, meetings with the psychologist were different. I went into his office one day and said, “I started my book, and I’m dedicating it to my mom.” In reflecting on her life, her losses, I had found motivation to write.

I felt optimistic. I didn’t have to create content per se; my life is the content. I was also nervous. Unknown or stressful situations can bring waves of symptoms for someone with OCD. I had written school papers, never a book. A few people, not a public audience, knew about my mental health. When

attempting a first book about personal matters to be shared online, I held my breath and waited for a tsunami.

I drafted an introduction on May 20, 2023. The severity of my disorder did increase with the task at hand; not fun, but tolerable. I'd had enough practice—in managing doubt. Before writing, I created strategies to deal with the expected rush of symptoms. My start date marked two years from admission that I needed help. Armed with a purpose and a plan, I was ready to give writing another chance.

My fourteen-year-old daughter expressed interest in my story as I worked. We spoke about the content, the goal. After our chat, I sat alone at my computer while my mind drifted to her *age*.

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A few years ago, I volunteered with the youth at church. During an adult leadership meeting, someone quoted “fourteen” as our target age for attendance. The plan didn’t faze me at the time—my daughter was only ten—but looking at her life now, I found it odd. My teenager’s days are already overloaded. As a parent, I was curious: Why did leaders expect more from youth during a busy stage of life? This approach wasn’t new; it was apparent when I was fourteen.

Age seemed to matter. I paused to consider its relevance in a patriarchal blessing. Although there is no “set” age for a blessing, a lot of members receive one during teenage years. A teen will likely share the occasion with people at home, namely their parents. But my case was different.

I got a patriarchal blessing at age twenty, without telling my mom and dad. I'd arrived solo at the patriarch's office. And requested that the copy of my blessing be sent overseas, not to my parents' house. Thinking back to the private nature of our meeting, I questioned something: Why did the patriarch encourage me to "seek counsel" of my parents? The phrase sounded out of place, until I realized: The patriarch knew my parents were church members. He'd asked about membership at the start of our meeting. Reference to my parents now struck me as intentional, not random. It felt like a push to follow in their footsteps.

I sat with my memory. A patriarch's effort to involve others had no effect on me, but I was an "old" recipient of a blessing (at age twenty). I asked myself: Could a patriarch count on parental support with a younger crowd? Was there a deliberate push for patriarchal blessings among teenagers? Something about age and patriarchal blessings didn't sit right with me; there appeared to be a lot of *pushing*.

With hope that research would clarify something, I read about patriarchal blessings online. More than enough examples were available for viewing. These blessings were open to interpretation, and as I compared them, I found... trouble.

When I received my patriarchal blessing, it was presented as "unique." In front of me now, however, I saw similarities across multiple blessings. The observation puzzled me: Why were so many blessings nearly identical? At church, I was told not to compare blessings, not to share them outside of immediate family. I speculated: Why the instruction to keep a blessing

secret? Was the goal to hide overlapping messages? A lot of “rulebreakers” were on the internet, maybe with good reason.

Deciding to make use of the “offense,” I looked again at patriarchal blessings online. My reading unveiled a theme: Most blessings suggest temple marriage. That action requires both people to be Latter-day Saints. I wanted an explanation: Why prompt members to marry only each other? Isn’t Christ-like love meant to be inclusive? The church’s name features the words “Jesus Christ,” yet love wasn’t present as I had expected. At least, my version of love wasn’t.

Exclusive marriage seemed to be the norm for a patriarchal blessing. Mine was no exception with its basic instruction: Find a Latter-day Saint. The patriarch’s emphasis stood out to me years ago; I’d come to his office with a list of concerns unrelated to getting a husband. Instruction to marry (a church member) no longer surprised me. Still, I remained curious.

As our meeting ended, I thanked the patriarch, saying that he had “done so much for me.” He looked confused. At the time, I had noticed but didn’t give much thought to his reaction. Paying it more attention now, I asked: Why did my gratitude confuse the man? Was there nothing special about what he gave to me? I had expected a personal message from the patriarch, but I’m not sure how much, if any, originality was in my blessing.

Patriarchal blessings continued to fall short of my expectations. From my earliest years as a Latter-day Saint, “agency” was common topic in church. Leaders presented it as an ability to make choices. I got the idea, but it clashed with other things at church (like patriarchal blessings). Along with

advice on a future spouse, one blessing spoke of family size suggesting that its recipient would have “boys and girls.” The phrase caught my attention: Isn’t that an expectation to have at least four children? I questioned the impact: What would the person have to *give up* when having four-plus kids? The patriarch’s message didn’t seem compatible with “agency.” Family size can affect other choices in someone’s life: home purchase, vehicle options, leisure time, career—to name a few.

Troubled by the words of a patriarch, I tried looking to church leaders for advice. These leaders encourage members to take (some) charge of their lives. For example, they suggest that Latter-day Saints get mental health care if needed. That message didn’t bother me—in theory—but in practice I found it hard to follow. The church directs members to multiple sources of support, including patriarchal blessings. An ordinance, which is still common, had affected my road to better health. In time of need, I brought my concerns to a patriarch; he assessed my health and offered a positive outlook. Given his response, however, I failed to spot a disorder.

With that experience, I wanted to know: Do leaders train a patriarch in mental health? What happens when a patriarch misses the mark on a member’s life? How can someone seek help when the church’s guidance is masking their condition? I felt...lost.

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I was left with a pile of conflicting concepts. Still, I was grateful for the availability. I thought about my mom, her conversion

story. She joined the church at a time when information wasn't as widely available as it is today. In the 1970's, few people had the internet. My mom was at a vulnerable point in life, with big changes and a possible mental health disorder. She craved comfort and answers. My mother had access to members in a church visitor center, but not as much access to other points of view.

Over time, publications have suggested different angles on the church's historical claims that my mother heard decades ago. Even the organization published a series, titled "Gospel Topics Essays," as an effort to address inconsistencies in its own history. I wondered: *What if* my mom had been able to find more information in 1974?

Uncertainty is a bitch sometimes.





*Inspiration Point, Bryce Canyon National Park*

Life was changing. So was nineteen-year-old Patty. To keep up, she looked to a patriarch's blessing, to the words she believed were divine direction. What could offer more peace than a message from God? Or so Patty thought.

For years, Patty lived with untreated OCD. At age forty, therapy offered her truth. And understanding. Both of which had been missing from Patty's life. Over time, she made progress—and the decision to share that journey.

*Patriarchs to Presence* is one woman's effort to shed light on a disorder and on the troubled relationship between mental health and religion. Heartfelt and human, her testimony holds promise for those who struggle with inherited beliefs, live with hidden pain, or long to regain control of their lives. May it be enough to make a difference.

