

Chapter 1 Zion, Here I Come!

The Matrix is everywhere. It is all around us; even now, in this very room. You can see it when you look out your window or when you turn on your television. You can feel it when you go to work... when you go to church... when you pay your taxes. It is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth.

Morpheus ~ The Matrix

I didn't see the telephone pole coming until it slammed into the front of my car. Actually there wasn't much damage, and it wouldn't have been so bad except for one minor detail; I had just turned sixteen and was taking the driving exam to get my license. I was trying to impress the test administrator with my amazingly skillful maneuvers while making a U-turn. Somehow the turn wasn't tight enough, and before I could hit the brake I hit the pole.

The humor of the situation struck me so profoundly that I could barely contain my laughter. Subdued chuckles burst from me every few minutes on the drive back to the Department of Motor Vehicles like geysers at Yosemite National Park. Surely the examiner would write this off as some freak incident recited from Murphy's Law of Teenage disasters, like waking up on the day of junior prom with a zit bigger than the double-bacon-grease-burger you ate the night before or some other once-in-a-lifetime misfortune.

I kept glancing at the man, searching for any hint of a smile, but all I saw was his hands, white from gripping the seat belt too tightly, and a pained expression on his face that led me to believe he needed a bathroom *fast*. Being a keenly observant and astute young woman, I surmised that he wanted me to keep my eyes on the road. When we got back to the Department of Motor Vehicles' parking lot (and after he leapt from the car) I asked him with unabashed expectation if he was going to give me my license. He mustered up a polite smile and told me to come back when I knew how to drive.

Six months after finally getting my license I returned to the DMV, this time armed with a motorcycle belonging to a friend. I wanted to be as versatile as possible and get as many permits as I could. Weaving in between the little orange cones was no problem. Executing skillful and smooth turns was a breeze. Coming to complete stops at the proper markings in the test area was a flawless feat no less professional than what you would see at a police academy

for training traffic officers. What presented a problem was driving in a straight line back to where the examiner was standing, at which time I side-swiped a parked car with my knee, resulting in a slow motion, sliding crash. The last thing I remembered was hearing my friend, David shouting, "Catch her! She's fainting!" and waking up on the hood of a random car.

It was reminiscent of what you'd find in a romance novel. Not the crash itself, but being swept up into the arms of the hero after you've fainted and being gently laid down on the hood of a car (a sports model no doubt) and waking up to gaze into the eyes of...the handsome hero? Not this time. The eyes I gazed into belonged to *the same guy who gave me my driving exam six months earlier*. That was not romantic; it was a nightmare! I'm sure visions of monster telephone poles flashed across his mind when my helmet was removed and he recognized my face. Clearly I didn't pass the test. After being assured that I would survive, he turned without a word and walked back inside, probably to arrange for his family to move out of state and away from any roads I might be driving on.

Eventually, I got my motorcycle permit and life in Utah continued to be a wonderful adventure. The move from Canoga Park, California eighteen months prior was exciting for my whole family, but especially for me. You see, I planned on marrying my Prince Charming, Donny Osmond, and living happily ever after. My heart was set on this teenage heartthrob, the seventh of nine children born to George and Olive Osmond. In my estimation Donny was the handsomest one of six performing brothers who made the Top Ten pop charts numerous times during the 1970's. The Donny Osmond dream didn't work out so well for me, but in time the "happily ever after" began the day I met my eternal king; the Prince of Peace. I guess I should start at the beginning.

I was raised by my mother, aunt, and maternal grandparents until my mom remarried when I was nine years old. As an only child I was precocious, spoiled, and curious about the world around me. Except for my baptism in a Methodist church and brief attendance at a Baptist Sunday school when I was quite young, I had very little formal religious training and was left to my own devices on how to find spiritual truth. Intrinsicly I knew there was an All-Powerful God, but He seemed a little scary to me.

My mother bought me a book of Bible and faith stories with pencil-sketched illustrations in it. The drawing of Noah's Flood depicted terrified naked people crawling over each other to escape the rising waters. One story in the book told about a sick boy in the hospital who saw Jesus by his bedside before dying, which in my young mind meant if you see Jesus when you're sick,

watch out! The couple of times I had been to a Catholic Church for a relative's wedding or confirmation, I saw a porcelain figure of a bruised, broken, and bloody Jesus hanging on a cross mounted to the wall of the sanctuary. Frankly, as a child with no understanding of these things, the pictures and stories frightened me.

I had a typical American upbringing. Although there was some alcohol, cigarettes, and occasional swearing in the home, I had no desire to do any of those things. I was loved and well cared for. My mother conscientiously sheltered me from the social chaos of the sixties and early seventies. I only became aware of the Vietnam War when I entered junior high school in 1972. Bumper stickers were as abundant as hip-huggers and bell-bottoms. Almost every locker had one plastered on the front reading "Bring Home our P.O.W.'S" or "God Bless the M.I.A.s."

It was 1974 when my best friend began asking me to attend the Mormon Church with her. Every Wednesday Liz would invite me to a mysterious meeting called "M.I.A." (*Mutual Improvement Association*).¹ I asked her what the acronym stood for and she didn't know. The only thing I knew was that M.I.A. meant *Missing in Action* and I wasn't about to go to some strange church meeting that used non-descript acronyms. Eventually though, common sense won out and when Liz invited me to a square dance at her church my love for dancing prompted me to accept the invitation. It was incredible! I felt like I was coming home. The people were warm and friendly, the kids my age were accepting and not driven by worldliness. The local Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was an organization full of people just like me. It felt so wonderful to fit in.

When I got home from the dance that night, I excitedly told my mother I wanted to get baptized. She wisely advised me to wait until I knew more about the Church, and no amount of pleading would change her mind. Disappointed, I said that all I wanted for my fourteenth birthday was to be baptized Mormon. Mom gave me permission to continue attending. I jumped into full church activity with my whole heart and soul, becoming the darling of the Canoga Park Second Ward.²

During the following four months I asked any adult in the ward who would listen all about the gospel. By the time my birthday approached I was considered a "dry Mormon."³ Bishop Aylesworth informed me I was required to take the formal missionary discussions before my baptism. At that time there were seven official lessons which were taught once a week to prepare an "investigator" for baptism and membership in the Church.

The missionaries assigned to me were two young men about 19 and 21 years old. I was surprised they both had the same first names, Elder Peterson and Elder Backsendale, until they explained that “Elder” was a title. They taught me the basics of LDS doctrine; however, I kept plying them with questions about concepts I had heard at church, such as the Second Coming, the millennium, the New Jerusalem, getting one’s “Calling and Election made sure,” the white stone we’re given in the next life, and other things I had heard about from Church members. Much to my dismay they insisted on sticking to the official lesson plans, stating they weren’t supposed to teach me deeper doctrines. I had a voracious appetite for knowledge, but especially for spiritual knowledge. The elders advised me that I needed “the milk before the meat.”

It meant so much to me to be “spiritually re-born” on the day I celebrated my physical birth that the Stake⁴ changed their customary baptism schedule so I could be baptized on my birthday. My baptism was held on the sunny Saturday afternoon of my fourteenth birthday. About forty people were in attendance to see nine of us getting baptized; four children of record⁵ and five converts. When everyone began singing the LDS hymn *The Spirit of God Like a Fire is Burning*, the air felt electrified to me, like angels had joined in the chorus to celebrate the occasion.

As a true-blue Latter-day Saint, I began to have longings to join the bulk of Church membership in Utah, which I equated with “Zion.”⁶ Particularly, I wanted to live in Provo, affectionately nicknamed Happy Valley by Church members. I recall a young man in my California ward being called to serve a mission in Provo, Utah. The whole congregation burst out laughing when the announcement was made over the pulpit because we all “knew” the only people living in Utah were Saints. Who was this poor boy going proselytize, farm animals?

My family had grown weary of smog, crime, and traffic congestion, so in August of 1975 my grandparents and parents put their houses up for sale and by the end of September I was living in Zion! My dreams of Utah, meeting Donny Osmond, and living happily ever after were about to come to fruition, or so I thought. I began attending Provo High School and set about making friends. Much to my dismay, I noticed there was a difference between Utah Mormons and “mission field” Mormons. Instead of finding everyone excited about living the gospel, it seemed to me that many Utah Mormons were complacent about their faith.

Prior to moving, when my aunt and I took our first trip to Provo to see what it was like and talk to a realtor, we drove to the Riviera Apartments on Canyon Road to find the Osmond family. They owned the apartment complex and lived on site to manage it. As soon as I walked into the

office, George Osmond greeted me warmly from behind the counter. I introduced myself, telling him my family was thinking of moving to Provo from Canoga Park. I asked him where there was a ward we could attend that Sunday and he invited us to visit the ward his family went to. Thus, after moving to Provo I began attending the Pleasant View 2nd Ward in the Sharon East Stake, even though I lived outside the ward boundaries.

Every Sunday was a thrill, especially sitting as close to the front as possible, hoping to catch Donny's eye as he sat at the Sacrament table.⁷ Once in a while I would be rewarded by his captivating smile. Gathering up all the courage I could muster, I even invited Donny to a Girl's Choice dance being held at Provo High School. To my surprise he smiled and said yes! Unfortunately, he had to break our date a couple weeks before the dance because he was leaving town on tour. Another chance to go out with him never arose, as Donny was often traveling with his family. The opportunity for him to fall in love with me quickly evaporated, so I decided to settle for a mere ordinary man. My first priority, however, was getting my family to convert to Mormonism.

¹ M.I.A. was the name of the LDS youth program at one time. Now it's just called the Young Men's and Young Women's programs. When I was a young teen in the 1970's we met on Wednesday nights, separating into various age groups to be taught a lesson or have an activity.

² "Ward" is the term for an LDS congregation. Wards are determined by geographical boundaries set by the Church. Members attend the ward in which they are assigned, based on where they live.

³ "Dry Mormon" is a term applied to an un-baptized believer in Mormonism.

⁴ A Stake is a larger "precinct" or zone of church members. A stake is generally comprised of between five and ten wards.

⁵ "Children of record" or "Child of record" mean children who are born into LDS homes. This designation applies before they receive baptism at the age of eight.

⁶ In Mormonism Zion can mean "the pure in heart," as well as a specific place appointed by the Lord where his saints are to gather.

⁷ The Sacrament table is close to the front of the sanctuary. It holds trays containing bread and water to be "blessed" (prayed over) by the priests (16 and 17 year old boys) and then passed out to the congregation by deacons (12 and 13 year old boys).