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## My Many Selves

Wayne C. Booth

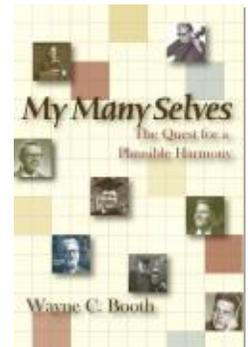
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## Chapter Seven

# The Puritan Preaches at the Luster While the Hypocrite Covers the Show

*My mind and my body hate each other.*

—Charlie Brown in *Peanuts*

*Our souls are hideously subject to the conditions of our animal nature!*

—George Meredith, *The Egoist*

*The expense of spirit in a waste of shame  
Is lust in action; and, till action, lust  
Is perjured, murderous, bloody, full of blame,  
Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust.*

—Shakespeare, Sonnet 129

*[In eternity] . . . worms shall try  
That long preserved virginity:  
And your quaint honour turn to dust;  
And into ashes all my lust.*

—Andrew Marvell, “To His Coy Mistress”

*Make me chaste and continent, but not just yet.*

—St. Augustine

*You don't have to be taught that you feel desire. You do have to learn what to do about it.*

—Eugene Goodheart, *Confessions of a Secular Jew*

I often have wondered whether the fact that I've had only one "consummated affair" in my life—my marriage to Phyllis—should just wipe out this chapter. How can full monogamy in two descendants of polygamists be anything but boring? Or does the fact of my having had "real sex" with only one beloved woman grant the chapter an interesting escape from the floods of boring accounts of *unloving* sex? Probably not. My hope is not that my routine masturbative escapes from doing harm can prove interesting but that the perpetual battle between Puritan-Booth and LusterB will prove at least representative of this book's theme. I can't resist imagining that even the most aggressive womanizers have experienced some dim echoes of my conflicts.

You decide now whether to skip forward.

Like every "normal" male, I experienced sexual arousals and lustful temptations early on. And like all those raised in Puritan cultures, I was hectored from the very beginning to believe that to be lustful was a sin—"naughty." As Christ and President Carter put it, to *think* lustfully is as sinful—well, maybe *almost* as sinful—as to act it out. No one even hinted when I was a boy that, after marriage, sex would be not merely OK but almost divine. I can't remember ever wishing to have been born a few decades earlier when the Mormon polygamy doctrine would have taught me, implicitly, The more the better. No. From earliest memories on, the message was: *All sex (and thought about sex) before marriage is sinful, and after that it's purely for procreation.*

*Age Four (most of what follows is memory; the journals are silent until late teens)*  
Mama is drying me after bathing me in the round, zinc-plated tub in front of the kitchen fire (we have no bathroom). She stands me on an old trunk and dries me, coming to my balls.<sup>1</sup> I giggle, delighted. She rebukes me sharply. I have done something very naughty, something I must never do again.

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1. My word for them then? I'm pretty sure it was.

*Age Four-and-a-Half*

I am playing with neighbor kids—one boy, two girls—in a shed behind our apartments. We begin exploring our crotches, some of us pretending to be doctors. Mama somehow catches us—and I am in the doghouse for what feels like weeks.

*Age Six*

Grampa Booth and I are peeing together in the police station toilet. I lean forward hoping to see his penis—the first (except mine) I’ve ever seen. Even Daddy has kept his parts private. Grampa snarls at me, “What you think you’re doin’?” and twists his body away.

*Age Seven*

I am playing with Cousin Lucy, one year younger, around the vegetable cellar at Grampa’s. She is visiting from Idaho—I always long for these visits, with the intense games and quarrels she and I engage in for hours at a time. I am coaxing her to let me see under her dress, under her panties. She won’t. I still coax. She resists. I playfully try to pull up her dress. She gets angry. I stalk away, trying to look proud but knowing that I have been very naughty.

*From Age Five Until Phyllis Turned Up*

Throughout my childhood and youth, I can remember trying to catch glimpses of the vulvas of naked babies and of the breasts of women. (I don’t think I then had any term for what I was seeking to see. Crotch? I don’t think so.)

Some women back then still nursed their babies openly in Church services, and I couldn’t resist twisting around to stare at them, with Mama jerking me back straight. Was I actually aroused? Can’t remember. In fact, I can’t remember having an actual erection at any time until my teens, though there are many memories of mysterious feelings in my groin.

*Age Nine or Ten*

I ask Mama why I sometimes, when I squeeze my knees together lying in bed, feel a funny feeling “in my stomach.” Can’t remember what she said, but her manner was embarrassed, dodgy.

*Ninth Grade*

Two friends and I have figured out a way to get our first full view of female bodies. Our gymnasium has an attic. We sneak into it when no one is

around and grind out a peephole over the girls' shower room. Then, at the right hour of the day, we crawl together and peer down at the girls as they shower. What a revelation!

Would the longing to see breasts and genitals have been less if I'd been raised in a culture that permitted nude statues and paintings in museums and television? I think so. At least I'd have known what other people's bodies look like.

#### KNOWLEDGE ABOUT SEX

Unlike almost all American kids these days, the Mormon boy was given absolutely no information or instruction about sex—except that even to mention it was forbidden.<sup>2</sup> But then things started to happen, breaking the silence.

##### *Age Ten*

I have noticed that my Aunt Zina seems to be wearing a pillow under her dress, on her stomach. Is she ill? A bit later I learn that she has just had a baby, her second child. Could that pillow have been it? I feel that I must now find out about all that, and I corner Mama in her bedroom (which she shares with six-year-old Lucille). “Mama, am I right in thinking that babies are not really delivered by storks?” She is fairly frank about it: babies do indeed come out of their mamas' “tummies.” Nothing is said, though, about how babies are really made. God creates them.

Surely by age ten I should have heard enough even from other kids to know all about it. Maybe I had, but I certainly had no sense of knowing anything about *human* birth until that day. On the other hand, I must have been fully informed, in a sense *unconsciously*, since we were in a “farming culture”; I had witnessed the birth of calves and piglets. How could my mind fail to relate that to childbirth!

The passion to learn what one couldn't talk about lasted a long time. Why, for example, is the following memory one of the most vivid of my entire life?

##### *Age Eleven*

Uncle Joe is to take our cow Blackie to the bull, and after I coax a bit, I am allowed to go along. We walk her three blocks to where the bull is, with me

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2. When I was writing the first draft here, I assumed that the suppression of sex talk would be surprising to anyone not raised in an enclosed culture like mine. Instead it's been surprising to hear reader after reader report similar silence; one, a Catholic, reports his ignorance as lasting much longer than mine.

wondering all the way about what is going to happen. I watch in utter amazement as the bull mounts her, all of us stooping and squinting to see how the huge penis enters; this is my first sure knowledge of how impregnation takes place.

## ADOLESCENT DISCOVERIES

A key example of what it's like to be an *ignorant* male virgin comes when my first pubic hair appears. Had I ever expected it? Don't know, but think not; males' bodies were as hidden as females'. What I'm certain of is that when the first hairs appeared, I soon took a razor and shaved them off. When I told Uncle Joe about it and questioned him about the hair, he again mocked me as a knuckleheaded idiot.

But here's a far more striking example of ignorance. Imagine if you can an ignorant Puritan who had his first wet dream without knowing that males produce semen. (Actually two readers of this chapter as manuscript have reported similar ignorance until puberty ambushed them.)

### *Age Fourteen*

I wake up and as I start dressing I'm suddenly aware of some large caked spots on my underwear. (I never had a pair of pajamas until perhaps five years later.) I examine the sheets and see not just dried cakes but some moist spots. Alarm! Am I ill? Have I issued some form of colorless blood? I leave my basement cubbyhole, go to Mama's bedroom, and ask her about it.

The only thing I can remember is the embarrassed look on her face. What did she tell me about it? A while later she insisted on a "serious conversation," and she told me that Daddy before he died had said to her, "Lillian, I do hope you can warn Clayson against sinning the way I did when I was a lad. Tell him that I have always regretted some of the things I did." She never explained what those "things" were, but it is all clear to me now; I was supposed to understand that any effort to produce the kind of flow my wet dream had produced would have been considered by my beloved father as the ultimate in sinfulness.

As every reader will expect and everyone except for some extremely rare orthodoxites will forgive, masturbation soon followed.<sup>3</sup> I can't reconstruct

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3. I know that many who have indulged in masturbation will still be disturbed by open discussion of it. When I was being prepared for my two years of total "purity" as a missionary, our supervisors did not mention masturbation even once, except with the oblique allusions again and again as they advised that we must "come home clean." I wonder if any young men manage to do it?

how long afterward, but suddenly my journals reveal that the young hypocrite—in public, pure as the driven snow—was grappling with irrepressible lust. Somehow by sixteen, the journals suggest, a genuine “man” should feel free to discuss masturbation directly—even if behind everyone’s back. Obviously I felt that I was maturing fast and could reveal some of the embarrassing facts I recorded about the last two or three years. That sort of surprises me, even now when historical studies of masturbation reveal that in ancient times masturbation was taken for granted as in no way immoral. Oh, how I wish I could have read such a study back then.<sup>4</sup>

That’s not how it had felt to the earlier diarist, who first reveals only superciliously that something new is going on: “After dinner took a nap.” “Fooled away most of the day, instead of accomplishing anything.” But suddenly the sixteen-year-old decides to be frank.

*July 27, 1937*

I think I am a normal human being. I have, for quite a while, over a year & a half, been developing sexually, with the normal (I think) sexual desires to suppress. I have periodical sexual excretions, coming up to about a month ago, of natural causes. At that time, it was in what you would call a moment of temptation or weakness, I purchased, in mother’s absence, a licentious, suggestive, sensual book of stories, with pictures. I don’t know why I was so dumb, but I read it, got in more of a sexual condition of passion as I progressed until finally, unable to resist, I, by violent physical agitation, produced the flow of the fluid (I still don’t know whether I should write this or not. I wish that I had a more adequate brain to be able to know what to do.) Immediately after I gained control of myself, I felt ashamed of myself. I cannot blame this sin on not knowing of its being a sin, because I knew it was so, I had held in contempt boys who had admitted of the act to me and yet I succumbed. I have heartily repented and have tried & succeeded to keep from repeating. Another thing I have stopped is thinking before going to sleep of suggestive scenes & acts [with girl friends I felt desire for], a practice which I almost acquired a habit of. I am going to, I hope to, live to be able to warn my boys [sons] against such practices. If I had had a father to tell me not to do such things I would, out of respect for him, have refrained.

Mother talks to me freely but of course knows nothing of many of the practices that go on and that have to be guarded against. [Where did he get that notion?] I sometimes wonder why our gospel doctrine, Word of Wisdom or something does not contain a warning or command against bad

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4. Thomas W. Laqueur, *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation* (New York: Zone Books, 2003).

sexual habits. Maybe they do. . . . I hope whoever reads this will look at it in the right way, will realize that this is an age of temptation, that girls deliberately try, at least it seems so, to make boys look at them wrongly, by wearing scant clothing, etc. . . . It seems that I have so much wrong with me that it would take forever to cure me, and yet I am so much better than most boys my age (no conceit intended) that their is no comparison.

Does he mean that he is less lustful than the others? Or does he know that others were not resisting?

The masturbation inevitably continued, with increasing frequency and always with strong attacks from PuritanB and continuing successful efforts by HypocriteB to keep it secret. On August 28: "After dinner played one thing or another till 6:00." A day later: "Laid down most of afternoon." Only rarely does he provide more direct clues. Sometimes he writes at the top of the page, "J.O." for "jacked off." How could he ever have thought that God, who ordered us all to keep honest journals, wanted a record of *that*?

*1936 or 1937*

I have been on the toilet, reading a pornographic magazine and masturbating; have cleaned up the semen. I leave. Suddenly remember that I've left the magazine on the floor. I rush back to get the dirty rag (and it was indeed dirty, in two senses—"soiled" with semen marks and full of what memory sees as cruelly chauvinist images, the male as seducer or near-rapist. I'd bought it from Virginia Thornton at her father's drugstore; they kept the copies out of sight in those days, but poor Virginia, fat, unloved, sold them to us boys, with a leer.)

To my shock, I find the door locked; my sister, four years younger, is in there. Panic! Terrible sense of disaster looming. She'll see it, she'll learn from it what I am. She'll report me. Utter misery.

"Lucille, come out."

"I'm not through yet."

"Well, hurry up." Pacing the floor, desperate, blushing with shame. She'll tell Mama; she'll surely tell Mama. Misery, more misery.

She comes out, not carrying the magazine, looking absolutely normal. No reproach, no blushes, no special looks.

She leaves, I scramble into the bathroom; the magazine is on the floor, apparently on the precise spot where I'd left it. Has she seen it? How will I ever know?

Many decades later I ask her about it. She has no memory of the episode at all.

1937

I had been “chosen,” as my proud diary put it, to go to the National Boy Scout 25th Year Jamboree in Washington, D.C. Actually, all it took was a parent’s willingness to pay the fee, \$125!<sup>5</sup>

Feeling honored, important, enjoying a public reputation as a model boy, I felt guilt ridden about many things, but especially about the frantic and frequent masturbation. Twice a day, thrice, I pounded away, often dangerously close to being caught. I felt quite certain that the genuinely pious boys were not guilty of this sin—only we bad ones. (Would my life have been improved if I could have read Philip Roth’s *Portnoy’s Complaint*? Who knows?)

As the Washington trip approached, I swore to myself that it would bring masturbation to an end; I would turn over a new leaf. The oath was soon broken (you surprised?). In my one-boy tent in Washington, perhaps a week after leaving home, I one night had a wet dream and the next night once again flogged away, no doubt with a memory of the kind of magazine that I had been using in the bathroom at home.

I can still remember some of the fantasies derived from those magazines—comically bland by current standards. What appalls me now is the effect of those stories on the young male’s attitude towards women. I unconsciously imbibed from them a sharp division between two kinds of women: the saintly pure ones offered by my religion, suitable as wives, and the sinful nymphomaniacs I met in the magazines, the kind a true male really desired, worthless as human beings, useful for lusters.

Such a memory might lead you to a sharp question, Why, Booth, do you not have a separate chapter entitled something like “The Male Chauvinist Pig vs. the Defender of Feminism”? Well, yes, I was for a while in many ways a chauvinist. But I have become an ardent defender of feminism. Phyllis and Kathie and Alison were crucial in my steady learning about just how show-vain-istically I had sometimes behaved.

It’s hardly surprising that almost all of HypocriteB’s entries about girls are on the completely “pure” side, with no mention of lust.

*April 27, 1937 [age 16]*

I have never really liked one girl any more than several others. In other words, I have never suffered from “puppy-love.” The reason that I take Maxine whenever I take anyone [out] is that I respect her more than any

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5. How could Mother possibly have afforded that, more than a month’s salary? Did she ever do anything comparable for poor Lucille? I’m painfully sure that she did not.

other girl of the school, that is, she is more conscientious and intelligent, higher in character than any girl I know. However, I intend to change off before long, as I don't want to stick to one girl yet.

The remembered situation was utterly different. LusterB was pursuing many other girls—phoning them flirtatiously at night, discussing “biology” after their biology class (I never took the class), reading pornography with the wilder girls and fondling them in the school halls, dreaming of them, night after night. And meanwhile PuritanB was flooded with guilt about all that “sin,” yet always trying to project to the girls the image of a powerful lover. LusterB was proud of wearing swimming trunks reduced almost to a jock-strap, exhibiting himself on the edge of the pool—like some medieval knight or Renaissance dandy with a prominent codpiece. PuritanB would later pray for forgiveness for that sinful display.

Yet through all that, HypocriteB was officially dating Maxine—as the most “conscientious, intelligent” girl and of the highest character. Actually, she was the girl who aroused me least, and I was *using* her as a screen. I'm pretty sure, now, that she thought I was seriously interested in her, even though I hardly ever kissed her—and kissed her “seriously” only once. We did talk, one time, about what marriage would be like, but the talk was totally sexless. Meanwhile I was fantasizing about sex with girl after girl.

The battle between PuritanB and LusterB became more and more troublesome as the years went by. Just before my seventeenth birthday, I revealed myself almost torn apart by the conflict, though in language that disguised the lust problem by calling it “uncontrollable, masterful passion.”

[Age 17]

There are many minor things which I don't like in books; heavy love sentimentalism—probably arising from the fact that I have never been in love and consequently don't believe in there being such an uncompromising and masterful passion—I hate to think that there is such a thing uncontrollable; I want to be able to use my head instead of my heart, as the saying goes. I don't mind the thought of falling in love, but I hate to think of marrying an inferior girl just because I am blinded by love so as not to be able to see her faults; while another girl, superior and probably as likely to be a good wife, goes unnoticed. I realize that in my extreme inexperience I may be talking through my hat; preaching what I won't practice, but at present, I doubt it. However, I am proceeding on the assumption that there is a passion which hits you between the eyes when your not looking, and am associating only with those girls whom I would not mind being in *love?* with or marrying. In that way, I think I am safe, barring stories of love on first sight. Right now, I

believe I could fall in *love?* easier with Nan<sup>6</sup> than any other—she is the prettiest, sex-appealingest (to me at least), likes me more (I think) than anyone else, but her background is different than mine. She isn't a Mormon, her mother has been divorced etc. I'm not saying she or her folks are not as good as mine, just born and raised under different standards. So I am, while not avoiding her, being careful not to encourage any association with her, and still am trying to remain a friend. Maybe I should just let things come as they would (If I'd let myself I'd have a date with her every night) and chance the consequences, but I don't know.

Thus, to maintain his image as a pious Mormon, HypocriteB conceals his true interests and goes on dating Maxine.

The journal entries are full of promises of total chastity. The most amusing one was written on my seventeenth birthday, after PuritanB read Benjamin Franklin's unfinished autobiography.

Like Benjamin Franklin, [I] would like to become as nearly a perfect human being as is possible. (An absurd desire as far as hope of completion, yet very sane as a goal to work to. . . .) Franklin's plan for self-improvement was one of the best to be found. He listed thirteen virtues . . .

I then wrote out a description of each virtue as an explicit exhortation to myself—for example, "*Chastity*:—Stop sexual-abuse in the form of forcefully bringing about the ejection of the sexual fluid. Avoid bad thoughts." Then I constructed a full chart, for a day-by-day grading of my achievement on each virtue. Like Franklin, I was to concentrate for one full week on each of the thirteen. At the top of the chart I explained that inserted X's would indicate a "falling down" in the virtue.

In the only full week that I recorded (in which "Temperance" was designed by Franklin to get the most attention), there are failure X's for all the virtues except Cleanliness (the blank must have been a deliberate lie), Dependability (probably a lie), and Chastity (no X's, and scribbled in is the word "Unnecessary"). A really comic bit of hypocrisy.

*Sept. 19, 1938 [half a year later, when we've moved fourteen miles away]*  
Maxine has been going out [with others] some recently (not much). When I was in Idaho she went several times with Lyle Tregaskis, and I approve very heartily. . . . I like her more than any other girl I know.

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6. Nan Chipman, with whom I'm still sort of in touch because she married my second cousin, T. Y. Booth, now dead.

Others excite me more but I curb myself from ever going with those that do, as it is dangerous, I believe. As I look at things now, I don't want to get at all serious with any girl for at least 7 years, but if I did want to, Maxine would be the one, & I believe with more constant association, I would love her, although my ideas about what love is are very vague. It can't be anything more than something built up in the individual's own mind, by himself and fed by constant association and encouragement from the one supposedly loved. It doesn't worry me, however, and won't until a long time has passed. I firmly believe I can stay out of love as long as I want and when I get ready can regulate conditions so as to fall in love.

Despite the rigorous Mormon code, "absolutely no sex before marriage,"<sup>7</sup> the actual practice was complex and, to me, often puzzling. A fair number of the girls in my class had dropped out before graduating to get married—many for "shotgun weddings." A careful study done at BYU in the late 1930s in my county found that 60 percent of first births occurred within the first seven months of marriage. So, while all of us were pretending to be virginal, many of my buddies and girlfriends were, like President John Adams and Abigail (though unlike me), going all the way. All of us were hypocritical, especially those of us Puritans who barely managed to draw the line. Just what is it about PuritanB that at this point, in 2005, resists reporting some vivid memories of . . . ?

HypocriteB intrudes steadily, not just here but again in his "private" journal. The daily masturbator steadily expresses the desire not for sex but for a virtuous (but beautiful) wife. Here's how the male chauvinist put it just before turning nineteen.

*Jan. 6, 1940*

I would like to find a wife, (or rather, at present, a girl friend) who could and would meet me on my own ground, who would be good looking (not beautiful), sensible, a piano-player, an inveterate reader of good books, etc. etc., a good cook . . . a *clean*, morally & physically (this includes an absence of gum chewing) girl, yet not a prude, a girl who would unintentionally make me want to love her physically and yet make me respect her enough to cause me to hold back, of my own accord, etc.

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7. The standard definition of "having sex" (only behind the barn called fucking or screwing) was—as for President Clinton—not just orgasm but full penetration. Oral sex? I never even heard of it until after marriage, and "blow jobs" were never mentioned in public, as I remember, until the Clinton fiasco.

And PuritanB always finally triumphed.

*August 19, 1940*

I have just been attacked—one of Lucille's 'friends', an over-sexed, boy-crazy, bold, brazen, senseless, and ripe young woman, just came in the house. My bedroom door was open, and I had jumped up and closed it when I saw her enter the front door. Nothing daunted, she opened my door, backed me (in the silliest kind of confusion) into my chair and proceeded to ask me what I was doing. . . . I suppose she must have observed my obvious distaste, but she continued questioning, moving toward me, with only mumbled answers in response, until finally, satisfied I suppose, she jauntily walked out of the room and closed my door. The huzzy—she was clad in practically nothing—a sun-suit, I believe it was—bare-back, bare legs, practically to the crotch, and breasts accentuated shamelessly or shamefully. Horrors. She *is* sexually attractive, but I would like nothing better than to spank her hard, or, best, to apply a rifle bullet to an appropriate place. How is it that such a positive abhorrence can exist in company with such animal attractiveness? Phooey—what a come-down from the Plato I was reading when she arrived.

His anxieties about similar experiences led him a few days later to attempt a poem:

My dear, dear girl,  
 I'm sensitive.  
 Not only that, I'm delicate,  
 And I like to pride myself a bit  
 On being sensible.  
 This being true,  
 My dear, dear girl,  
 I'd just a little rather  
 That you make a slight attempt to hide  
 Your amorous intentions.  
 In other words, and far less kind,  
 Hands off, until I say the word.

#### CONTRASTING INTIMACIES, MALE AND FEMALE

For a year or so, through the five years at Grampa's starting at age seven, I had played more games with girls than with boys: jacks, jump the rope, roller-skating. As a weeper one year younger than everyone in my school class, I

somehow didn't fit in with the male gangs. But then there quickly arose a series of close male bondings, a bit puzzling, considering my steady lusting for females. In fact, until Phyllis, almost all of my closest friends were male. As I read journal entries about my friendships now, it's striking to see how my affection for the men is accompanied by endless sexual fantasies not about them but about more than a score of girls I was "almost in love with."

My two closest friends through almost two decades were male: the somewhat feminine Junior Halliday—the "best friend" whose death at fourteen I reported in chapter 3—and then, as top of the lot, Max Dalby, with whom I exchange frequent emails and still meet at least once a year. Max, who became central to my life in my second college year, was not at all "feminine," though some machos in Utah might have called him that because of his intense interest in art and music.

He was in fact my first *real* love—without a hint of homosexuality. As I turned twenty, the diary reveals entry after entry about my longing to be with him every day, all day. I'll trouble you with only one report, which would probably be interpreted as gay by most readers these days.

*August 23, 1940*

Yesterday was one of the important days of the Summer, or of my life. I visited Max on his 20th birthday—even wrote him two pages of poetry as a gift.

It was wonderful; we discussed everything. . . . He played the Firebird Suite, Stravinsky (\$6.50) which he just recently bought. It was extraordinarily beautiful.

Max is so fine. As I went in to meet him . . . the blood rushed to my head and I felt giddy; it is like I want to feel with the girl I marry.

We burnt at fever pitch all day, riding, talking, eating. I don't suppose I'll ever forget any of the details of the day. We practically wept at parting—it sounds silly but it wasn't.

And I later even wrote about that relation as "almost like a love affair"—even as I began serious courting of possible wives and continued fantasizing about sex with girl after girl.

## THE RESCUE

It was only after the two totally virginal (though often longing) years as a missionary that the battles between LusterB and PuritanB achieved a kind of truce: *genuine love took over*. As soon as missionaries return home, pursuit of a mate, licit or illicit, almost always takes over. Young puritans deprived of all



Phyllis Barnes in Long Beach, age 16

sexual contact for two straight years are desperate to find a legitimate mate.<sup>8</sup> Most returning missionaries are either married or guilty of unmarried fornication within about a year. (Can I prove that claim with a scientific study? Hardly.)

Returning to the BYU campus, I found myself surrounded by hundreds and hundreds of girls longing for dates; all of the “qualified” men had by 1944 been drafted. I dated and dated, fondled and fondled. And then one day I attended a chamber music concert, and there she was on the stand, the most beautiful girl I’d yet seen, even among the hundreds of “available.” And she was playing the viola in a Mozart flute quintet. After the recital, my sister introduced me to Phyllis Barnes, and the three of us chatted a bit. A day or so later Phyllis played a violin solo at my missionary homecoming, and we went for a walk on “lover’s lane.” I quickly realized that I’d found the idol of my life. (It took her a lot longer to see me as her unbreakable choice.)

As I courted her and as she became more and more interested, there was no full sex, only “petting” and “necking” and “pitching woo” (we, of course, didn’t have later terms like “smooching” or the British term—what is it?—snogging?). Though I was constantly nagged by PuritanB about the temptation to “go too far,” LUST and LOVE were finally in harmony. When we parted, I declared myself fully “engaged,” while granting her the privilege to do whatever dating attracted her while I was away.

Within six weeks I was drafted, and I managed to visit Phyllis only a few times during the next few months before being shipped overseas. Soon I found myself in Paris, surrounded by sexual invitations but determined to be faithful to Phyllis.

The conflicts for a virginal soldier in Paris were a lot sharper than for a missionary in Chicago. The streets were lined with prostitutes; my buddies were commenting daily about this or that successful or botched bit of fucking. Our officers were taking it for granted that all of us guys had to have our cocks checked regularly for foul consequences. And all I had, really, were my daily letters to Phyllis, which I filled with sexual allusions and jests. Fairly typical are these two from the spring of ’45.

*March 15*

Dearly Beloved,

. . . [yesterday one of my buddies said] “Now, what *I* always say is, how will she look when she wakes up in the morning. No use going to bed with a china doll and waking up with a rag one.” . . .

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8. As you’d expect, there are many violations of the rules even during missions, sometimes confessed only forty years later.

The four volumes of the pornographic “My Life and Loves,” by Frank Harris, now sell in Paris for 100 francs each. Harris moved among the celebrities of England and the continent several generations ago, and wrote up all of his seductions of the great ladies and ladies of the great in livid detail. As I see it, the main attraction of the book is the announcement on the front cover, “This book not permitted in the United States or England.” Being banned lends a kind of dignity to a book. . . . Incidentally, remind me when I seduce you to use the Harris technique.

*April 15 [following a discussion of differences between American and French sexual mores]*

For the fellows who are out for what they can get, the situation [here] is marvelous; the girls who can be had can be had quickly and without tedious preliminaries. “Mais pourquoi pas?” the cleaning woman at our billet said to me when I declined her kind offer to sleep with me [in exchange] for three bars of soap. “C’est bien naturelle, pour vous aussi bien que pour moi. Je vous aime beaucoup.” (“But why not? It’s very natural, as much for you as for me. I like you very much.”) I had seen her three times before this, and talked to her all of five minutes; yet she is not exactly a whore, exactly, because she obviously was considering the pleasure more than the three bars of soap.

I resist repeating the heavenly bliss of returning to Phyllis and marrying within two weeks; it would read like the climax scenes in thousands of novels these days. Nor will I bother you with a list of women who, over the years, have aroused my “interest”—especially when Phyllis was pregnant and not wanting any sex. Just record again the miracle, perhaps puzzling to many of you: fifty-nine years of genuine, mostly blissful monogamy, with LusterB and PuritanB united. (Anyone feel envious? VainB hopes there are a few among you.)

#### HOW THINKERB INTRUDES WITH IRRESISTIBLE REFLECTIONS

What do I think now about how I might have lived or should have lived during those years of unconsummated longing? Would I now prefer to have been out seducing girls during high school, as many of my buddies did, some of them then trapped into “shotgun weddings”? Do I wish that I had accepted the “offer” of X, Y, or Z, and had thus been more sexually skillful when we married? Do I wish that I had been in the culture some of my friends have reported, in which uncles or older friends or even fathers take the boy to visit a prostitute to learn the best ways of quenching unquenchable adolescent

fires? Would I prefer to have avoided masturbation by living as promiscuously as many do these days? What kind of life would it be to screw 1.2 women per day, as the famous basketball player Wilt Chamberlin has claimed, with a total beyond twenty thousand? How would it feel in later life to look back on that and consider what effect you had had on the lives of those women and their other lovers?

Considering it now, I think that the effect of such a life would be tragic or, at best, pathetic, marked by the loss of what it has meant and still means to have a lifetime loving companion—not to mention what it would have done to those one-night, cast-off girls.<sup>9</sup>

Such moralizing talk seems increasingly out of fashion, except in the more conservative religious circles. Everybody knows that the explosion of talk about President Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinsky has shattered many of the rules that once governed public discussion of sex, and many fear that that discussion has lowered even further the standards of what's acceptable—both in discussion and in behavior. A few years ago it would have been unthinkable for *Meet the Press* to discuss the question of whether Monica experienced orgasm. Before the scandal, the "respectable" media had never explicitly mentioned oral sex or semen spots. In earlier decades it was unthinkable to discuss in any "respectable" publication how many women President Kennedy had sex with or to ask whether President Johnson or Governor Bush committed adultery. Though the word "fuck" still cannot appear in *The New York Times* or the *Chicago Tribune* or on most national TV channels, it's now on every fourth page of *The New Yorker*—according to my most recent painstaking survey.

Such changes deserve and receive endless moral speculation about the effect of public discourse on private life. Resisting a full chapter of speculation about the radical differences between the lives produced by my puritan culture, including the guilt and hypocrisy, and the lives our so-called free culture encourages, I offer just one final bit of sermonizing.

I can't think of any fully coherent way—other than happy marriage—to reconcile masculine lust with what is for me the supreme moral commandment: thou shalt not, in pursuit of your own current pleasure or profit, harm other people or your future Self. What I do not question—what produces not the slightest Self-Splits (except, the Honest Self intrudes, the many times

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9. In most current novels I read these days, there's not a hint of anything wrong with "sleeping with" whoever is available. In John le Carré's *Our Game* and Jane Smiley's *Good Faith* all characters, male and female, do comfortable one-night stands with no hint of any moral judgment against it (except for mild suggestions that sex *with love* is a bit better).

when LusterB's eye has been momentarily distracted)—is my slow discovery that monogamy, *sexually faithful* monogamy, is a much neglected rescue from life's many threatening disasters. In other words, the nagging from PuritanB has helped me, over almost six decades, to avoid "affairs" that might very well have destroyed our marriage as they have destroyed so many others. That fifty-nine-year harmony (not yet quite the harmony sought through this book) seems, as I wait impatiently for Phyllis's return from conducting a weeklong workshop in Finland, the greatest rescue from dangerous cultural indoctrination that any man could ever experience.

Would Phyllis's and my polygamist ancestors scoff at that claim just as vigorously as promiscuity celebrators will? Possibly.