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*Elna Baker*

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"A wickedly funny debut. Baker is both self-absorbed and generous, whip-smart and naïve; she apologizes for none of it."

*-People*

It's lonely being a Mormon in New York City. Every year, Elna Baker attends the New York Regional Mormon Singles Halloween Dance. This year, her Queen Bee costume (which involves a funnel stinger stuck to her butt) isn't attracting the attention she'd anticipated. So once again, Elna finds herself alone, standing at the punch bowl, stocking up on Oreos, a virgin in a room full of thirty-year-old virgins doing the Funky Chicken. But loneliness is nothing compared to what Elna feels when she loses eighty pounds, finds herself suddenly beautiful...and in love with an atheist.

Brazenly honest, *The New York Regional Mormon Singles Halloween Dance* is Elna Baker's hilarious and heartfelt chronicle of her attempt to find love in a city full of strangers and see if she can steer clear of temptation and just get by on God.

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## The New York Regional Mormon Singles Halloween Dance: A Memoir Details

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Author : Elna Baker

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## From Reader Review The New York Regional Mormon Singles Halloween Dance: A Memoir for online ebook

### Lucy says

I've waited for over three months to write this review so that I can be a bit more objective about it. After all, it's not like I know Elna Baker, author and comedienne living in New York City. So, why would her memoir about balancing her doubts with her faith within her sparsely-populated Mormon world have me feeling all kinds of righteous indignation? I can only compare it to the feelings that arise when listening to someone else complain about your own family. Oh, no you didn't! Only I get to rant and whine and poke fun at our flaws and imperfections. You can sympathetically nod in understanding, but there is no speaking. There is no voicing of your own opinions.

Honestly, even though I don't know Elna Baker, the fact that she is mormon, and I am mormon gives us a common bond stronger than most outsiders would realize. While she made a decent effort to describe some of our positive, like the strength she receives from her parents, her family and her faith, her expose and hatchet job on some of the negative, poorly understood and sacred felt like a betrayal. Who is this girl anyways? How did People Magazine get wind of her book? And why is she telling the world that she let a guy from work she didn't even like touch her boobs because of a bet?

O.K. Those three months might not have been enough time. On one hand, I really enjoyed this book. Baker is funny, smart and real - all qualities I admire and appreciate. The early chapters of the book are filled with a light, self-deprecating humor that I find appealing. Although it's not all sunshine and roses as she describes a humiliating (but really, really funny) awkward moment with her high school crush, struggles with her weight and the feeling of loneliness when you're the one that's not quite like the others, her attitude and ability to laugh make her a heroine any reader wants to cheer on.

On the other hand, however, there are so many things that really bugged me about this book - from its premise to ultimate purpose. Why did Elna Baker write this book? To make money? To further her career in comedy? Does she really struggle with her faith, as she claims, or is that a ruse to excuse some pretty bad behavior? I can't figure it out because by the book's end, Baker herself still seems unable to figure it out. I'm not faulting a person for questioning her childhood faith, nor do I find the circumstances Baker finds herself in to be all that unusual (except for being propositioned by an unnamed Warren Beatty-esque celebrity in a bar. That was weird). Enjoying the attention that comes from being considered attractive by the worlds' standards is very natural. Wanting to have sex with someone you are attracted to and, moreover, really like, is pretty normal. If her point was that mormons have hormones too, then she made it. And made it. And made it.

I hate to punish Baker for publishing her experiences and feelings, because, like anything author, she has that right. But, with her title and blanket statements about what we do and don't do, believe and don't believe, she managed to lump the rest of us mormons into her book as well and I, for one, didn't hire her to be my religious ambassador. Her apathetic attitude towards honesty annoyed me. She "ha ha"ed it by saying she likes to say, "Yes" whenever she can, but when her "yesses" land her on a cruise ship, making motivational toasts because she yessed her way up the corporate ladder, I actually call that lying. Call me boring and no fun, but I do. And, Elna, guess what? You forgot to mention that mormons aren't supposed to lie. You frequently pointed out all our other "thou shalt nots" (drink alcohol, smoke, have sex before marriage, have dances that are actually fun) but somehow, that whole "Be Honest" slipped your mind. So did honoring your mother and father. Really, apologizing to your parents before the book even starts for using the F-bomb

seven times doesn't actually make it better.

Oh, I had so much more I wanted to say, but I'm tired and waiting for three months has blurred a lot of details. Read it. Don't read it. It doesn't really matter much.

But, if you do read it, please know that the vast majority of mormons I know, even those that are single, don't spend an inordinate amount of time thinking about becoming a God or Goddess. We're a little weird, we make mistakes, sometimes really big ones, but most are basic, decent people who are trying to do our best to follow the commandments we believe our Heavenly Father gave us, even the super dorks who seem to find their way to dance after dance after dance.

I hope Elna finds her place. I hope she uses her obvious light and talent for good. And I hope that when she does eventually wear lingerie, at the right place and at the right time, that she wears it as its meant to be worn and not how she describes it in her book. Believe me, Elna, your husband will appreciate it.

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### **Emily says**

Elna Baker is not your stereotypical, sweet spirit, Molly Mormon. The first hint of that is the dedication page to her mom and dad where she excludes the "nine F-words, thirteen Sh-words, four A-holes, page 257, and the entire Warren Beatty chapter" from the parental dedication. I'm sure she was very aware that there were many Mormons who would not appreciate the foul language, several of her occasionally risque exploits, or the mocking of certain cultural aspects of Mormonism. But I get the sense that those are not the people she wanted to impress, anyway.

I found this to be a refreshingly honest memoir (ironically, she's very open about her almost pathological lying!) about a young adult trying to figure out who she is, what she believes and how to reconcile her warring, seemingly contradictory desires for her life. She's right. Being Mormon "requires major commitments: It asks for your life." And as such, it deserves careful consideration. I appreciate the active thoughtfulness with which she approached her spiritual life. She relates answers to her prayers and spiritual confirmations she received. And she discusses her moments of doubt. She claims she's simply being honest by acknowledging those times: "I don't think doubting makes you bad. I think it makes you smart." I'm inclined to agree with her. Having doubts or questions, recognizing them, and working through them, makes my faith stronger in the end. It would have been relatively easy to just give up and say it's too hard, the reconciliation is impossible, but she keeps trying to find the peace, unwilling to give up either part of herself.

Most of the time when she described Mormon doctrine, I thought she did so accurately and matter-of-factly, though most Mormons I know do recognize the seven "days" of creation to be metaphorical rather than literally 24 hours and don't find dinosaurs to be out of harmony with gospel teachings. And at one point she misquoted a Primary song(!).

The essays in this book cover almost a decade of her struggles to figure out where she fits. That's a long time. I know I changed a whole lot between the ages of 18 and 27, I like to think for the better. Throughout, Elna seemed obsessed with finding a boyfriend and I cringed every time she molded herself into whatever she thought the boy-of-the-moment was looking for. I hated that. But, then again, I know lots of young women (myself included) who did that at 18, too. And by the end, I think she'd learned better. After breaking up with an atheist she truly loved and the perfect Mormon boy she really didn't, and kissing lots of other guys, she articulated her discovery: "I was in charge of my own happiness."

Earlier in the book she describes her philosophy of saying "YES!" whenever possible (since Mormons so often say "NO!" to sex, drugs, alcohol, etc.) and all the adventures that opened up for her. At the end, however, she acknowledges that "I'd been seesawing between two completely different lives...I'm doing this to myself...I'm refusing to choose which kind of person I want to be. I'm saying yes to way too many things...I've spent a decade saying yes to both sides, stalling and questioning, not ready to choose and watch my life become simpler and more ordinary." I'd love to know how she's doing now and if she's become any more comfortable with the ambivalence in her life.

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### **Chrisitna says**

Due to language, some sexual content, and irreverent humor, I wouldn't recommend this book to many of my LDS friends. Those who are able to read this book with an open mind and without total offense know who they are.

My feelings and thoughts about this book are very mixed.

I love Elna's free spirit. I hate Elna's continual need to lie. I liked Elna's spontaneity. I detested her selfishness. I relate fully to some of her doubts and questions and insecurities. I find her approach to dealing with above mentioned issues as fruitless. She seems to do more and more things to make herself unhappy.

Her relationship to Mormonism bothers me simply because she is ashamed of it, yet doesn't want to stop being Mormon. Yes, this dichotomy and her suspension between two worlds is the crux of the book, but it seems so immature. She wants the best of both worlds, but can never have it.

Many of her feelings and doubts about Mormonism are things that I have felt or still feel, yet she doesn't seem to approach this conflict with any purpose or clarity.

Also, the way that she presents her understanding of many basic gospel principles seems immature and pathetic. For example: She claims that Mormons don't believe in evolution or the dinosaurs, yet many Mormons do believe that the earth wasn't created in 7 days and many Mormons don't have a problem with evolution or dinosaurs. Her representation of Mormons is from some outdated filmstrip from the 50's and very narrow.

Obviously this is an identity crisis book, but it is hampered by the authors immaturity and total self centeredness. I read this book looking for enlightenment (and laughter) as to how another woman deals with being unique and being Mormon. Unfortunately, I came away disappointed and confused.

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### **Lance says**

I'm not sure whether I want to refer to the author as Elna or Sister Baker. On the one hand, referring to her as Elna creates a feeling of familiarity and informality, which in some respects I don't want because we should not be too informal in our treatment of the ideas embodied in this book. On the other hand, if I refer to the

author as Sister Baker I could unintentionally create the feeling that the author's actions in the book are representative of young people in the Church, and my own experience doesn't agree all that much with hers.

I certainly don't agree with how she communicates Church doctrine and belief. She seems to have taken it upon herself to explain the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints to all of her friends of other faiths. Okay, that's great. More Latter Day Saints need to be more vocal about the beliefs of the Church. In fact, the Church did a survey back in 2009 and found that, while the LDS church is the fourth largest religion in the United States, less than 25% of all Americans actually know anything about what Latter Day Saints believe. That's an incredible statistic. So if the author wants to be a more vocal member missionary, there is a lot of justification for moving in that direction.

But when I look at how she explains the doctrines and practices of the Church, her explanations and descriptions are all skewed. I won't say that they are completely false because there is some truth to what she says. But they are not completely true either. For example, the vast majority of her explanations of belief are based in the physical body. We Latter Day Saints don't do what we do because of our beliefs about the physical body. We do what we do because we have made covenants with God that we want to keep. She completely misses that covenant angle, and it is at the core of what drives truly committed Latter Day Saints to be committed.

And this author is anything but committed to her religion. Hence her constant descriptions of feeling torn between two different directions. Of course she feels torn if she has one foot in Zion and the other in the world. One moment she is describing her struggles to search after spirituality, then the next we see her blatant use of profanity and avid descriptions of her experiences violating the law of chastity. Why someone like that would be the ideal spokesperson for the faith escapes me.

And yet this is where I am torn because I couldn't agree more with her descriptions and condemnation of the subculture within the faith. Yet even in these parts I could not escape the irony. Here was someone criticizing another member of the faith for acting inconsistent with her covenant beliefs, and yet she herself cannot distinguish the culture from the covenant!

From early on the book I could sense that the author was not truly converted to the faith, yet I continued reading because of the hope that she would become converted, that something would happen that would cause her to ask herself what she really truly believes and that the answer would be commitment to the faith. I never found that. Right to the very end I kept hoping and was horribly disappointed to see that in the end she was much too in love with the world and its ways to ever let go of it completely. She feared that by letting go of the world she would not be able to say "Yes" to as many things, that her life would become smaller by surrendering herself to God. And that's the great secret that her skewed vision and inability to focus on the covenant could never reveal to her. By surrendering oneself to God, life becomes much, much bigger.

I will give this book an extra star because, despite the inaccurate and misleading portrayals of Church doctrine combined with the more accurate and yet in some ways still misleading descriptions of the subculture within the Church, the book is very beautifully written. The author clearly has talent. As a reader, I was anxious to keep reading right to the very end, and such a quality is a hallmark of good prose. Yet I was disgusted to see at the end that, when all was said and done, the author was just another member of the Lost Generation. If you have a specific reason for reading this book, such as performing research for a subject treated in the book, it might offer flashes of insight. But even under those circumstances, I can't really recommend this book. There is so much more wrong with it than there is right.

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## **Shelah says**

A few years ago, I was listening to a podcast of The Moth while running one morning. Many of the storytellers at The Moth sound like they've been around the block a few times, but this girl sounded so sweet and squeaky-clean. It was a huge change of pace to hear her after stories of alcoholic parties and attempted murders (more typical topics for The Moth). As I listened to the girl talk about how her parents married young and had five kids, I said to myself, "Wow, this girl has GOT to be Mormon." And sure enough, a sentence or two later, she outed herself as one of the tribe. I've been a fan of Elna Baker ever since, and couldn't wait to get my hands on The New York Regional Mormon Singles Halloween Dance (which I'm sure would have come through on my reserve list much more quickly had we still lived in Texas, less competition than in Utah).

In New York Regional.... (the title is stupidly long) Elna talks about trying to live life as a faithful Mormon while living single in New York City. It's sort of a Sex in the City (without the sex, but making out aplenty) meets The Singles Ward (although Elna would have a much hipper soundtrack). Elna honestly talks about her doubts about her faith and her desire to cling to both her beliefs and her culture, and the obstacles that make staying faithful in her profession and at her stage in life difficult while living in one of the most worldly cities in the world. She also writes about her battle with her self-image (she lost 80 pounds in her early twenties), and her family relationships.

As a Mormon, I'm firmly in Elna's camp. I think the book is funny, well-written, and shows that there are lots of different ways to be LDS, and that it's possible to explore doubt and stray occasionally from the straight and narrow without wanting to leave it permanently. Yeah, it's a little bit self-absorbed (but c'mon, it's a memoir!) and there are some places where a conservative Mormon might roll her eyes and wish that a lesser-known publisher had released the book, but overall, I'm proud of one of my girls making it big!

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## **Lisa Nelson says**

So, I've been carrying Elna around for the last couple of days. We've been making it okay because she lost 80 pounds in the book (way to go!) and I've been doing a crossfit work out for the passed couple of months so I'm getting much stronger. I just can't get this girl and her story out of my head. I don't think I've ever had such a difficult time in rating a book as well. I would go from 2-5 stars the entire time I was reading and I am still uncertain about how I feel about her memoir overall. I settled in on 4 because it will help the overall average and I just can't help but root for Elna.

This book is hilarious, and I devoured it in less than 48 hours. The author is honest and candid in a way that was truly refreshing. The chapter on baby Nubbins at FAO Schwarz, and the scene where she is on a date and has to pull out a maxi pad to stop her bleeding head were comic genius. Oh, I can't forget to mention the dirty cookie chapter!

I could relate and empathize with this author on so many levels. She had some very poignant moments as she grapples with issues of faith and doubt. I thought she did a good job of really letting me as a reader into a very personal struggle. The Mormon church has young adults leaving the church in huge numbers in this age group. This gave me a front row seat to how difficult it is to be a young single woman in a very married church. I was right there with the author up until the end where I felt a bit disappointed. I think I was hoping for more. I wanted her to hone her inner feminist or at least her lessons from Young Women on Individual

Worth and ugh, grow up a little more. Her obsession with her self-image, and her desperate pleas to be loved saddened me. The worst part for me was when she followed up on the advice from a book called, "The Fascinating Girl," from the seventies. It suggested reverting back to the submissive style of the 1920's. I don't know what was harder to watch, her shamelessly tripping on purpose or the guy falling for the act.

There are a lot of inside jokes that you will clearly laugh harder at if you are a Mormon (even though the author doesn't think Mormons laugh at themselves very well, come on give us some credit,) but this is really a book that the masses will enjoy. A word of caution: the author states right on the dedication page that there will be some swearing (big ones) and some chapters that she thinks her parents should skip. If you are squeamish you should skip those right along with Mom and Dad or skip it altogether.

One last word about Mom and Dad and the rest of the family. While they are not perfect and Mom skewed view of the world, they were so endearing. I mean what kind of Dad gets restless and tells the kids to go and grab their passports, head to the airport and look for the cheapest flight and jump on with only the clothes on their backs. Time after time I found myself falling in love with this incredible magical family.

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### **Jill says**

Okay, I'm going to break down and actually review this book. There were some great parts in it. Elna has a fun style of writing and sounds like a really fun-loving person. What bothers me most is the idea of someone who is not LDS reading this book and assuming that most of Elna's lifestyle conforms to LDS teachings - that she's simply having a bit of an internal conflict, but is a good, practicing LDS. However, it is painfully obvious to those who are LDS that despite the implication of her trying very hard to live in accordance with her religion, there's not a lot of evidence to support this. It's reflected in many ways, including the ultra-casual and resentful way she writes about things meant to be sacred. Because most of these references would only make sense to an LDS person, I'll use other examples: She didn't know pornography could be found on the internet? Apparently she's missed at least the last decade of General Conference and as many years of any sort of church publication and/or church meetings. Internet pornography is an amazingly prevalent topic, because of problems stemming from it. Being a practicing LDS and managing never to have heard any mention of internet pornography until her age is a remarkable feat indeed. I found very disconcerting this sort of idea she implies that the law of chastity as taught by the LDS church means nothing more than simply abstaining from fornication, when in fact, it involves a great deal more - also that an eternal family requires only a temple marriage (that is only the beginning). She seems to have had a fairly decent LDS education, but not much application. I couldn't help feeling like obedience and modesty in particular were viewed as a great big chore and a gross inconvenience. Despite "hours of scripture study," it was ironic that of all the scriptural references she uses, there was a rather glaring omission of the highly relevant reference "No man can serve two masters," which perhaps would have done nicely as a theme. The thing is, I like her. I would love to hear that she's worked out her conflict. I have close friends very much like her and imagined their publishing a book like this, and how I would feel about it. The answer is very sad. Mostly it just makes me sad that the whole point has been missed. Having said that, it certainly took a lot of gumption for her to out herself as she did, knowing she'd likely be very harshly judged. The reviews talk about a hopeful "reconciliation" between the world and Elna's church, (which it seemed she was still searching for at the end). The thing is, reconciliation is not possible. It's one or the other. Always has been. I wish her luck.

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## **Debbie says**

I think it's great that a book by a Mormon about being Mormon has been released by a mainstream publisher. Elna Baker is a 20-something single woman living in New York City and trying to figure out who she is and what she believes. Baker is a stand-up comedienne, and her stories are hilarious even while they're thought-provoking or uncomfortably familiar.

Not that I have many experiences in common with her, because even though I'm a 30-something single woman in DC, I am boring and unadventurous. If I had found a name badge for someone attending a 7-11 convention, I would not have used it to go to the convention and then make a toast during the dinner. But I sure enjoyed reading about her doing it. I also don't have anything approaching her experience with boys (or older male celebrities). I have been to Mormon singles Halloween dances, though, and I know what she means when she talks about how the new boy in the ward is always promptly surrounded by girls.

Even though Elna lies a lot to people in this book (sometimes quite creatively), her narrative feels very honest. And she never lies about the church or about God, either when explaining church doctrine to people or when describing her doubts, her religious experiences or her questions.

I really liked the parts about her family (again, so much more adventurous than mine). Her love for them and theirs for her are strongly evident, even when she's talking about her mother's concern that she will become a lesbian if she moves to NY, or when she's telling the story of a self-absorbed breakdown on a family vacation.

Probably not for your mother's Relief Society book group. Contains swearing, frank talk about sex, a few dirty jokes and an absolutely lovable atheist.

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## **Annalisa says**

Baker likes to sit in the in-between, neither committing herself to one side or the other. I find myself feeling the same way about her book, with things I both like and dislike about the book and her. And so she gets a non-committal three stars from me.

I'm a very trusting person and I always expect that other people are telling me the truth. But I think Elna Baker lied to me. A lot. You would think that the confession that she was a pathological liar would be the thing to clue me in, but it wasn't. It was the inconsistencies in her story that gnawed at me until she states she went to the temple to pray about marriage. She *can't* go to the temple. Even if she hadn't made it very clear that she had not been through, she wasn't worthy of a recommend unless she lied, which I am aware she was capable of, but she didn't want to commit herself to that. She wants to live in the in-between where she could go either way and that would put her definitely in one camp. Unless she sat in the lobby, she lied to me. And if she lied about that, what else about her story did she invent or twist just because it makes a better story?

A lot of the book, I found very entertaining and even laughed out loud at times. The bit about the dirty cookie was her best comedic piece. I wish all her sections had been as well developed. I say that because I don't see this as a "memoir" as much as a stand-up comedian's skewed take on something rooted in actual events but without the honesty of a memoir. While I appreciate her candidness about her spiritual doubts, sexual frustration, and struggle to stay faithful in New York, especially after she lost weight and wanted to

flaunt her new-found sexiness, I don't think Baker is ready to be honest with herself, much less the world.

By the end I was mad at Baker. I'd be lying if I said the mockery of religion didn't play a small role in that, but that's not it. I actually enjoyed much of her self doubt and only thought she crossed the line once or twice. I can sympathize with the desire to differentiate herself with extreme Mormons and I think everyone should question what they believe. Sometimes her pathological lying bothered me, mostly that she thought it was funny and without consequence, but that wasn't it either. I wondered if it were the f words she planted just before she introduced Mr. Atheist Right as if to say, "but I'm not really a goody-goody Mormon so it's okay if I stray," but that's not the answer either. I kept going back to the dedication to her parents and that she doesn't seem to understand how much this will sadden them, that she seems like such a child, immature and irresponsible. That's when I realized, I wasn't mad at her as much as disappointed. I liked this girl and in the end I wanted her memoir to show that she had grown up: to take a stance one way or the other, to stop lying and realize life has consequences, to be something more substantial than "I'm an actor; look at me!" I wanted the memoir to be raw and real and make her realize something about herself, but she ended it just as naive and indecisive as she started.

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### **[Name Redacted] says**

*"Garcin, come and lend a hand. Quickly. We'll push her out and slam the door on her. That'll teach her a lesson... Don't listen to her. Press your lips to my mouth. Oh, I'm yours, yours, yours."*

**--Estelle Rigault, *No Exit* by Jean Paul Sartre**

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I knew Ms. Baker for several years back in NY. She was in my circle of acquaintances and I went to a few of her stand-up shows. As a result, my reading of this book is informed by personal encounters with and observations of Ms. Baker, and is therefore potentially biased. I should also point out that I find David Sedaris a tremendous bore. Here is what I got from her book, which, I must remind you, is intended to be a quirky comedic autobiography:

Elna Baker is a tragic figure, desperate for attention. Any attention. From anyone. For just about anything. She reminds me of Estelle Rigault from Sartre's "No Exit", a woman hopelessly seeking to define herself through the eyes and approval of others, but doomed to unending torment because the people whose approval she seeks are not looking at her, and she cannot bear to truly look at herself.

She never really understands the religion with which she half-heartedly identifies herself (and which she frequently misrepresents). She never really grasps anything beyond the broad caricatures of it which she sees in popular culture, or in the non-religious cultural practices which she seems to mistake for the religion itself. It's rather like a nominally observant Jew believing that eating Chinese food on Christmas and listening to the Maccabeats are what defines "Jewishness". She makes no efforts to see anything beyond her a priori assumptions. This book left me with the distinct impression that all of her willfull ignorance and indolence were the result of the fact that doing anything more would require a level of introspection and genuine interest in other humans which is somehow beyond the author.

As many other readers have noted, Ms. Baker comes across as a tremendous narcissist, and it is truly disturbing how much time she spends deceiving others, either to win their approval and acceptance...or to

simply amuse herself at their expense.

Much of what she does also seems to be a sort of sub-conscious "striking back" at the strawman she has created out of the jealousy she felt towards her sister -- blow after blow leveled against a villain who never existed anywhere outside of Ms. Baker's own psyche. Elna seems to deeply resent her successful, supportive, loving sister, not for anything her sister has actually done or said, but for the simple fact that Ms. Baker believes that her sister is/was the more physically attractive of the two. And in a remarkably anti-feminist twist, being seen as sexually attractive makes up a good deal of what really matters to Ms. Baker. In this respect she also reminds me of the Dwarf/Thespian in C.S. Lewis's "The Great Divorce", so caught up in her posturing and self-pity that she cannot see that she has only ever been diminishing herself and driving away those who truly loved her. (see also Pink Floyd's "Outside the Wall")

As I said, she is a tragic figure, but she is unaware of this fact. She thinks she is being bold and daring -- that she is some sort of incredible rebel -- but it's immediately clear that everything she does and says is designed to get attention and assuage her ever-growing insecurities. Deep down, Elna Baker is terrified of herself, and terrified of having to choose a side. "LOVE ME!" she cries, "But don't look past my surface, and don't make me look at myself either!"

I hope that I am wrong and that I have somehow disastrously misread this book. But more than that, I hope that some day, as an older, wiser, stronger, healthier adult, she will look back at this and say "Good riddance!" to the sort of girl she used to be.

UPDATE: An acquaintance recently informed me that Elna Baker now proclaims herself an "ex-Mormon". In response to the question "But what will Elna write about now?" that acquaintance commented wryly: "Oh, but don't you know? Apparently being an EX-Mormon makes you a better expert on being Mormon than any actual Mormon." I think that really does put the whole thing into perspective.

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### **Gina says**

Someone set this aside for me at work a few days ago--probably as a joke, but I was actually pretty excited to read it after hearing her fantastic and funny story "Babies Buying Babies" on "This American Life" last year. The idea of a Mormon memoir that wasn't put out by Deseret (the LDS publishing house) was appealing, especially one written by someone who didn't fit the stereotype of Republican/BYU-educated/forced polygamist bride/fill-in-the-blank. A "famous" Mormon that wasn't Mitt Romney, Orrin "I Write the Songs" Hatch, or Marie Osmond sounded good to me. Finally a representative without soap opera hair. Unfortunately, this book was not what I was hoping it would be.

What I liked about this book:

Many scenes were cringingly familiar, especially when she wrote about all the cultural nonsense that crops up whenever you get groups of Mormons together. I laughed out loud when she mentioned the song "Cotton-Eyed Joe" being played at the church dance and when she described the apartment she visited for FHE. I have been in many, many apartments and homes with those same decorations, especially during my time at BYU, and I expect to visit many more in the future. These parts of the book will probably be far funnier to members than to other readers.

Elna's accidental vagina costume was hilarious.

Elna is really honest about her struggles with her weight and being a "big girl" (I don't remember if she actually used that ridiculous term, but I know it was on the dust jacket somewhere). She's torn between feeling that she should love her body because it's a gift from God and hating it because it doesn't look the way she wants it to. I think that this part of the book might have actually been the most honest. When she cut short her date with the jerk who didn't know she had been fat I wanted to cheer for her. I honestly hadn't expected her to do that, given that most of the book was about her desperate attempts to be liked.

What I didn't like:

For someone who has been raised in the LDS church, Elna seems to not actually know much about it. For her, being a Mormon means that 1. She says she's a Mormon a lot. 2. She doesn't have pre-marital sex. Everything else this religion entails she's either unaware of, or doesn't take seriously. Or she just gets it wrong.

While it's difficult and probably somewhat unfair to assume too much knowledge about a person based on less than 300 pages spanning several years, Elna seems painfully immature and that doesn't change over the course of the book. Maybe part of the problem is that she wrote a memoir in her mid-twenties and just hasn't had time to figure out who she is yet. I guess by saying this I'm kind of arguing with one of the main themes of the book--Elna's questioning of her beliefs, but I felt like that part kind of went nowhere. She's Mormon! But then she decides she's not so that she can sleep with Matt the Atheist. When he questions her motives (Matt seems like a pretty decent sharp guy) she thinks that maybe she'll still be Mormon so that she can be in the temple when her siblings get married (that is not exactly how things work).

She's naive about some things to the point that I actually felt she might be lying to make a better story (does she really truly think that an LDS woman would never, ever wear lingerie?) And I know I'm the millionth person to harp on this point, but how on earth did she not know that you could find porn on the internet?

I can certainly empathize with Elna, but I finished this book mostly just feeling irritated and a little sad for her. There's a line in "Babies Buying Babies" where she's talking about bugging people at FAO Schwarz as a toy demonstrator and how it's like telling them, "I'm an actress, and I need attention." I thought this was a pretty good description of the tone of the book, which was something along the lines of "Look at me! Like me! I'm funny and I'll be whoever you want me to be!"

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## **Doug Bradshaw says**

I want to bear my testimony as to the truthfulness of this book!! My wife and I read it out loud on a recent trip from SLC to San Diego. We laughed out loud, we cringed, we shed a couple of tears and had a great journey into Elna's life. We found it refreshing and honest that she was able to talk candidly about sexual things and the pressures of today's normal world. We loved her introspectiveness and her wondering and questioning about the religion. I think there is too little open talking about sex in the church. It's kind of taboo. And yet, there it is in the kid's faces with the internet, "hooking up" and on almost every other ad in magazines and on television. We also enjoyed her thoughts on obesity, being accepted, loving yourself, and other fun philosophical issues that almost everyone goes through growing up.

Elna, we're looking forward to more fun and thoughtful things from you in the future. Thanks for have the guts to write this great book.

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### Alea says

The New York Regional Mormon Singles Halloween Dance is a fantastic example of why I love memoirs! It has everything you would want in an entertaining memoir, things such as hilarious work stories (my favorite part of the book *Babies Buying Babies*), to relationship problems, to questioning one's faith, to major weight lose. Elna Baker covers a lot of ground for someone so young.

Elna is a Mormon and it was really interesting to learn more about Mormons and also how it played a part in Elna's life. She's constantly challenging her religion and I thought that was a really honest depiction of religion.

This is probably one of the best memoirs I have read in the last few years, when I saw it and I read the title I knew this author would have a great sense of humor and she definitely did. I was also glad that there were serious parts to her story as well, that she could jump back and forth from something hilarious to something heartbreaking shows just how much talent she has.

I really can't put into words how much I liked this so you are just going to have to trust me. I found Elna pretty likable and very talented and definitely hope she continues writing!

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### Petra CigareX says

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The author is in high school. She is extremely overweight, has low self-esteem and is mad keen to be kissed. She is also the only Mormon. Once a week she has a long chat with the school heartthrob on whom she has a terrible, tremendous and desperate crush. Remember what that was like. What they talk about is rel

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### Carole says

This is a book by a single Mormon girl who is exactly my age and she's writing about what her life is like. Theoretically, I should be able to kind of relate to this girl. But the thing is, she and I have faced a lot of the same decisions and I've tended to chose the opposite of what she has. I disagree with her about a lot of things. And she's not advocating the choices she's made. She's just telling her story and she's telling it honestly. But still, I felt maybe a little judged. This is a girl who's gone through a lot of effort to not be like one of those lame Mormon girls from Utah. You know, like me.

It's well-written and, as a character in a book, this girl is very likeable. But when I was finished reading, I got kind of annoyed with her. There are a couple of places where it seems like she's saying that the reason she doesn't fit in with all these crazy Mormons is that she's smarter and better than them.

Her understanding of her own religion is at about a 3rd-grade level, so subjects like cloning and the age of the earth throw her for a total loop. She's pretty naieve about the rest of the world too. For instance, when

she's complaining to her friend that she wouldn't know what to do if she wanted to have sex, he suggests she tries watching porn. Her response is, "Where would I even find porn?" He suggests she try the internet, and she's all, "There's porn on the internet?" Really, Elna? Really?

I would maybe recommend this book to some people. Maybe to Caroline. It's a fun, interesting read and it was pretty thought-provoking, even if some of the thoughts it provoked were along the lines of, "Why on earth did you think that would be a good idea?"

I wouldn't recommend this book to my non-Mormon friends because I think it reflects poorly (and inaccurately) on my demographic and, by extension, me. If you do read this book and you aren't Mormon, come talk to me about it. There are some things I'll want to clear up.

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