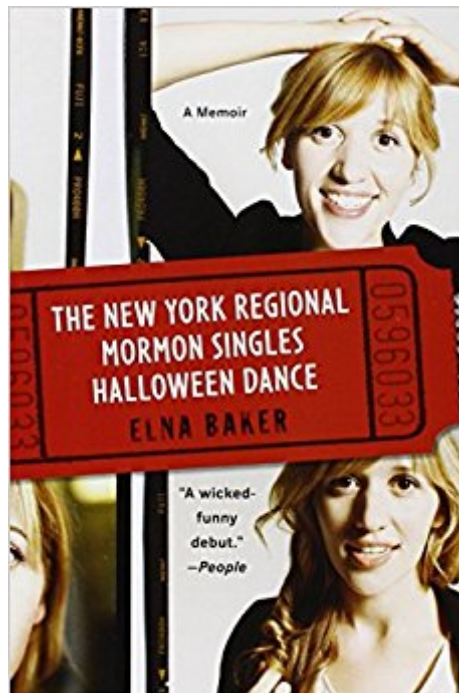




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The New York Regional Mormon Singles Halloween Dance: A Memoir



Synopsis

"A wickedly funny debut. Baker is both self-absorbed and generous, whip-smart and naïf; 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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Customer Reviews

—“An original, witty piece of celibate chick lit. Baker is a fish-out-of-water Mormon NYU grad who loses 80 pounds, tries acting and stand-up comedy and, as you learn in the acknowledgments, ends up chummy with Elizabeth Swados and Ira Glass. She has a genuine but funny take on faith.” —The Boston Globe
—“If I told you that Elna Baker had written a frank and self-deprecating memoir about dating which is unlike any other frank and self-deprecating memoir about dating, you probably would not believe me. However, Baker is a Mormon. A peachy, astute, witty 27-year-old Mormon who has never had sex.” —Louise France, *The Observer* (England)
—“A funny, touching story about coming to the big city, where she

loses the certainty of her beliefs, if not her way. — Sherryl Connelly, New York Daily News — "A wickedly funny debut. Baker is both self-absorbed and generous, whip-smart and naïve; she apologizes for none of it." — People

"Elna Baker's memoirs of Mormon chastity and self-denial are presented with such passion and wit and unbridled effervescence that somehow her life comes out as pure erotic adventure, a romance of wild sunshine hedonism. As she juggles it all before us—her doubt and her deep faith and her lust and longing and fierce discipline—she's a dazzlement, a living breathing paradox and an absolute original and a joy to behold." George Dawes Green, Author of Ravens and The Juror, and Creator of the MOTH. "Is there a stronger subject than the struggle for love, or a better way to face it than to laugh? Baker has got the curse to live absurdly, the gift to tell it honestly, and the nerve to break our hearts. God bless her talent." —Andrew Sean Greer, author of The Story of a Marriage and The Confessions of Max Tivoli --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Really enjoyable book -- funny, and Baker has a nice confessional style. Really interesting glimpses into the psychology of a liberal Mormon, the Mormon singles culture, the anguish of wanting to be thin, the struggle to carve an identity in your 20's. I highly recommend this, with a few caveats. I confess I didn't read this in one sitting, or even one year. I gave up on it after about 40 pages last year, but revisited it this year, got past a boring bit, and devoured it in three days. The book is brilliant at moments, but it's also peppered with flat scenes that make you wonder, why would Baker think this was important enough to tell us? For example, she frequently described bad jokes she made, that didn't work, or that made a conversation awkward, and while that gives us a sense of her personality, after a certain point, I've had enough. They're the kind of things that I can imagine working well in a stand-up routine, read out loud, but just aren't compelling in a book. I think the title is unfortunate -- it's wordy and awkward, and the most interesting scenes and observations are not from the dances. Baker's annual visits to the dance strike me as a forced literary device, rather than something that was really important to her or interesting for her readers.

This was a fun read...but some things in it disturbed me. First the good: it's very funny. I laughed out loud a lot. She's a great writer. Very likeable. I really enjoyed the book. The bad: I was very disturbed by how she lost the weight in the book and it seemed the author had no qualms about it. She starved herself obsessing over every speck of food and I felt really bad for her. But there was no discussion about the toll this took on her, but honestly I felt the real story was right there...in the

fact that she had the self control to lose 100 pounds through extreme starvation and diet pills. I felt sorry for her. I found that disturbing. I hope she is over struggling with dieting and cares more about health than weight now.

I tend to like memoir-style books that take a look at a person's religious upbringing and how that shapes his/her life today. This book just didn't do that good of a job of scratching that itch. I agree with a friend who said, "Sadly, the writer is vain and annoying. But her epic fails at dating are worth enduring her obnoxious character flaws."

I discovered Elna's work through *This American Life* and her story about her cousin the mascot. This book is a great narrative of her life with funny and embarrassing vignettes inserted throughout. I plowed through her book, relishing the comedy, and was caught up in how she literally carves open her life for the reader to examine (ok, not literally, but she does describe her surgery at one point). Elna does have a way of telling stories that draws you in so you become a part of the event. You feel the elation when she's entering a new relationship and then become crestfallen as things begin to unravel. The raw emotion of her stories is not just tangible it's infectious, and I was left wishing there was going to be more. Her memoir left me with a kind of satisfied longing; a sense that I enjoyed the journey but sad it was over. I give this book my highest compliment: I spoke about it to others as I read it, and I will read it again soon.

I fell in love with Elna as she attempted to live life as a devoted Mormon in New York City. Being raised and living as a Mormon myself I understand the dichotomy that attempting to live in two worlds at once creates. I was impressed at how she expressed her love for the gospel, and her love for her family and clearly expressing her wish to be with her faithful family forever, a core tenant of the Mormon faith. I was riveted by her journey from obesity to becoming a knockout. It made me sad as she unfolded the basic human needs omitted from her life due to her feelings of inadequacy tied to her physical appearance before her life change. I was absolutely inspired by her transition from being the lovable fat girl to being the girl that could kiss any boy in the room. The fact that her journey from obesity required more than just the divine power of an omnipotent god, it required her to take measurable, and possibly dangerous steps. Steps that may have been interpreted as forbidden if they were evaluated under the microscope of Modern Mormon culture and tradition. Her most attractive trait is the liberating honesty that she so easily expresses. She is not the cookie cutter Mormon Girl, with fake smiles and plastic personality. I imagine her smiles to be brighter and

her eyes to have a greater light in them. I am so glad to have been given a glimpse into her life. I have learned, like she did, that honesty and sharing things that Mormon culture would forbid leads us into a wonderful journey that we never would have discovered otherwise. I love that she doesn't seem bitter or angry at the church. I don't think that a truly introspective and honest person who was raised in the church could ever feel antagonistic towards Mormonism, not just because of the good things in the gospel, but because all the real problems with the church have to do with the culture and false traditions that have crept in throughout the years. She takes you through her life in a witty and thoughtful manner, bringing you not only into the humorous aspects of her life but letting you see her thoughts as she makes decisions about how she wants to live her best life incorporating these two worlds. Amazing read!

Yes, this book is hilarious. Elna had me laughing out loud in the first few pages, and by the time she stuck a maxi pad to her head in her first romantic disaster, I was hooked. But this book is so much more than just another zany dating memoir. Elna speaks candidly about her Mormon faith and her relationship with God, even while trying desperately to fit in among New York's liberal, intellectual crowd. As her buddy Vinny tells her, "It's always be hard for you to be a Mormon because you're too smart and you ask too many questions." Besides being uproariously funny, Elna is super-smart, and she does ask too many questions. And that's what makes us love her.

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