



Riding in the Shadows of Saints: A Woman's Story of Motorcycling the Mormon Trail

Jana Richman

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“In the ten years that I’ve been riding, I’ve been asked often why I ride a motorcycle. I have struggled but failed to come up with a satisfactory one-sentence answer for those who seem genuinely interested. Lately, however, the most logical answer seems to be, ‘I grew up Mormon.’ ”

This is the story of Jana Richman’s journey on a motorcycle across the Mormon trail in search of her roots and an understanding of the faith that brought peace to five generations of women before her.

Mormonism is one of the fastest growing religions in the United States, and one of the least understood. Written with searing candor and a beguiling lack of sentimentality, *Riding in the Shadows of Saints* is rich in history and detail regarding the origins, beliefs, rituals, and social mores of the Mormon culture. Richman, born into the Mormon Church but no longer a member, explores the meaning of faith and the perils of middle-age motorcycling with equal aplomb.

Four generations ago, seven of Richman’s eight great-great grandmothers walked all or part of the 1,300-mile Mormon trail, from Nauvoo, Illinois, on the Mississippi River to Salt Lake City. Traveling on faith and little else, they endured unfathomable hardships—bitter cold, extreme heat, mud, icy river crossings, blizzards, buffalo stampedes, disease, hunger, and exhaustion—never stopping until they reached their promised land where they could be free to practice a religion that few outsiders understood and many violently condemned. Between the years 1846 and 1866, about 50,000 Mormons traveled the Mormon trail, burying more than 6,000 of the faithful along the way.

One hundred and fifty years later, Jana Richman packs maps and a laptop computer on the back of a motorcycle and follows their route, searching for the peace and faith the women before her carried with so much confidence. She also searches for a clearer understanding of how her devoutly Mormon mother is able to reconcile an independent spirit and enormous inner strength with her intense belief in a patriarchal institution.

Traveling blue highways into the nation’s heartland, visiting graveyards, chatting with missionaries, and soaking in the rituals of the faith she so casually shrugged off as a teenager, Richman begins to unravel her family’s mysteries and confront her own long-held prejudices about the Mormon Church.

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