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“...delightful...laugh out loud....this tale is, at heart, a reflection, 40 years later, on how life doesn’t always follow the rules set out by statisticians and spiritual advisers, and how growing up away from home can be profoundly unsettling. A thoughtful, wonderful read.”

—***Publishers Weekly* Starred Review**

“By turns amusing and tender, an unvarnished and introspective reflection, humanizing a little-understood religion.” — ***Booklist*** (American Library Association)

“...a fine mix of pathos and hilarity....An unvarnished, mostly bewildered and touchingly human memoir.”—***Kirkus Reviews***

### **New Memoir by a Real Live Mormon Missionary Recounts Door-to-Door Adventures and Misadventures**

Many of us have answered the door to find two clean-cut young men in crisp white shirts and name tags hoping for a few minutes to share their faith. Historian Craig Harline was one of those earnest Mormons, stopping every person he saw to tell them about his church while serving in Belgium in the 1970s. He tells the story in a new memoir: *Way Below the Angels: The Pretty Clearly Troubled but Not Even Close to Tragic Confessions of a Real Live Mormon Missionary* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., \$22.00 hardcover, August 15, 2014).

Brought up on a mission narrative in which missionaries go forth boldly testifying and winning converts, returning home as heroes from the “best two years of their lives,” Harline set off for the Belgium Antwerp Mission with big dreams of doing miracles and converting the Catholic population. What he found instead was dreary weather, one-sentence conversations with irritated people, and silly squabbles with fellow missionaries.

Missionary training had not prepared Harline for being kicked — literally, foot-to-behind — out of someone’s home, for the constant rejection, or even for arguments with fellow missionaries about such earth-shattering matters as what God really wanted from Donny Osmond. He spent hours each day engaged in “tracting” (going door-to-door) and ATAP (talking to people about the Mormon faith “any time any place”) and was rejected thousands of times. “A retrospective estimate is 6700,” he says. “Ten rejections a day times the number of days I was there (which estimate could of course only be too low).”

Instead, Harline was converted by the Belgian people—not away from his own faith, but to an appreciation of the goodness expressed through their kindness and hospitality to a young man far from home. “Chunks of whatever good I have inside me came from the unusually big- hearted people of Belgium,” Harline says. “They shaped my views without ever trying, more than I shaped theirs while actually trying.”

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Though he was initially thrilled by the challenge of attempting to convert people in a Catholic country, Harline learned that many of the people he met “were good not in spite of their Catholicism, but because of it.”

It took almost 35 years for Harline to come fully to terms with his mission experience. Troubled by a recurring bad dream about going on another mission, he asked other former missionaries about it and found he wasn't alone. That freed him to “admit embarrassing things like how hard a mission often was for me or how guilty I felt for falling short.” And it helped him to understand how he was shaped by his time in Belgium: “Going on that mission gave me something approaching genuine faith, even if it wasn't the sort of faith I expected to get.”

**Craig Harline** is the author of *Sunday: A History of the First Day from Babylonia to the Super Bowl* and *Conversions: Two Family Stories from the Reformation and Modern America*, which was named one of 2011's Top Ten Books in Religion by Publishers Weekly. He teaches European history at Brigham Young University. His wife and three children have also served abroad as Mormon missionaries.

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*Way Below the Angels:*  
*The Pretty Clearly Troubled but Not Even Close to Tragic Confessions*  
*of a Real Live Mormon Missionary*  
by Craig Harline

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