

**THEATER**

**Reality theater**

Confessions reveal the true story of a spiritual survivor

BY TIMOTHY KRAUSE

Steven Fales says he's an "oxy-Mormon." He was once the epitome of a nice straight boy—Boy Scout, missionary, husband and father of two. When he began to explore his sexuality, however, the Mormon Church quickly excommunicated him, and his family subsequently abandoned him.

He journeyed to New York to start anew as an actor, writer—and gay man. Lonely and broke, Fales turned to prostitution and drugs. Only after a life-changing moment amid a cheesy self-improvement workshop did the young man again find his "smile," that uniquely Mormon manifestation of integrity itself.

Fales, who recently relocated to the Portland area, shares his personal transformation in *Confessions of a Mormon Boy*, an autobiographical one-man show that plays May 14 to 29 at Hollywood Theatre before stopping in Salt Lake City on its way to an off-Broadway run.

Fales first performed *Confessions* in Portland last November as a staged reading to benefit Basic Rights Oregon. In January he moved to Clackamas to live with his partner, Jared Ivie, a fellow Brigham Young University alumnus who shares many of Fales' experiences with the Mormon Church. The two met at a national conference for Affirmation, a queer Mormon support group, and now are engaged to be married.

Which is a long way away from living the prescribed American Mormon dream in Utah.

"Being a gay Mormon, trying to be straight—that wasn't who I was," says Fales. "Putting on that Mormon smile, but inside feeling like I'm a phony, like I'm a fake, not having any full self-expression to express that part of me—you stop smiling."

As a teen-ager, Fales questioned his sexuality more than once. "I felt the weight of having to pretend way early.... One of my favorite things to do growing up was to watch the *Donny and Marie* show. While most boys my age wanted to be Donny [or] marry Marie, I wanted to marry Donny and be Marie."

But Fales was firmly instructed that homosexuality doesn't really exist within the context of Mormon culture. Rather, "same-gender attraction" is a condition to overcome. "In our

religions, we make it wrong, and it doesn't need to be wrong," he comments.

Ever faithful, Fales tried to be straight and, in a strange twist of fate, married the oldest daughter of Mormondom's leading literary light, Carol Lynn Pearson.

Pearson's best-selling memoir, *Good-bye, I Love You*, tells the story of her relationship with her ex-husband, who also was gay and died of AIDS in her home. From the beginning, Fales had been upfront with his wife about his same-sex attractions but explains, "My ex-wife, Emily, and I had the audacity to think we could write a different story from her parents."

Fales underwent reparative therapy with Joseph Nicolosi, well-known anti-gay author and president of the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality.

Nicolosi's simplistic premise argues that absent fathers and overbearing mothers lead to a fractured masculinity that causes homosexuality. Fales was told to distance himself from his mother, leading him to write a scathing letter to



Visitors welcome! to Steven Fales' *Confessions of a Mormon Boy* May 14 to 29 at Hollywood Theatre

port, he soon fell into a "gay adolescence" that began with a newfound taste for sex, alcohol and, later, crystal meth.

"I was always an overachiever in other things, so I was going to overachieve in this way, too," he jokes. "I was panicking but determined to survive.... So I had an interview with one of the town's best escorting agencies at midnight and—boom!—I'm in all the penthouses in New York: \$500 an hour, \$2,000 overnight. I'm not wearing Payless shoes anymore—I'm buying Prada."

But then life got darker and darker, he says, because once again he was pretending. "Sex work is another pretense. You're selling your affections—the most human thing you have."

The freedom he worked so hard to get suddenly felt worthless. He tried giving up drugs and the sex once—cold turkey. But 9/11 hit, and life again became desperate.

A phone call one day from old friends convinced Fales to attend one of those weekend courses promising to change one's life. And, for Fales at least, it did.

"I had this huge aha! ...I was looking for my father's love and money in the penthouses of New York. I was being a victim of the church of all these different things. I had this huge awakening, and I never went back to sex work after that," he says.

Through writing, he has started healing. And helping. "I have seen so many Mormon boys in sex work—taking their pain and anger, being a victim of it all," Fales notes. "One of the things that became very clear after this course is that you're nothing you've ever done, good or bad."

That message is at the heart of *Confessions*, which he wrote for his kids—to let them know how much he loved them and to have the opportunity to relate the story of his transformation in his own words. Telling his experiences with warmth and humor, Fales says he strives to illuminate the dilemma of those struggling to reconcile their dreams of becoming straight with the realities of being gay and what it costs to accept or deny that truth, especially when children are involved.

"The play is a valentine to Mormonism and my escorting past," he says. "I'm in a unique position. I don't fit the stereotypes, although I could define both groups externally. The Mormons kicked me out for being gay, and the gay scene doesn't quite know how to react to a father of two."

In that regard, Fales notes: "The play challenges the ultra-right and the ultra-left. I guess that's why the play seems to speak to so many, gay or straight." □

CONFESSIONS OF A MORMON BOY plays 7:30 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays from May 14 to 29 and 2 p.m. May 23 at Hollywood Theatre, 4122 N.E. Sandy Blvd. Tickets are \$15 from the theater, Gai-Pied or [www.ticketweb.com](http://www.ticketweb.com).

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her demanding that she stay out of his and his son's life. (He was convinced she would influence his son's sexuality, too.)

"I had done all this reparative therapy and tried to be straight, and I realized I was not going to be smiling the rest of my life," reveals Fales. "So, I started to explore what that was behind my wife's back, and I was very out of integrity in my marriage, and when I came clean to her, it all blew up."

Fales' swift excommunication, divorce and abandonment pushed him to New York to start over. Both without financial and family sup-

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