



SAINT UNSHAMED: A GAY MORMON'S LIFE

Healing from the Shame of Religion, Rape,
Conversion Therapy & Cancer by [Kerry Ashton](#)

KIRKUS REVIEW

Ashton's (*Red Hot Mama*, 2015) memoir tells stories of his troubled childhood, the excitement of being an aspiring actor in New York City, and his first real love for another man.

Growing up in the heart of Mormon country in the 1950s, or the "LDS yellow brick road," as he calls it, Ashton spent his early childhood gravitating toward performance, music, and theater—all subjects that earned him scorn from his conservative father. These painful early years also resulted in him having deep shame about his sexuality and his desire for men, which he couldn't even admit to himself. The memoir shifts between Ashton's first few years at Brigham Young University, where he began to make a name for himself as one of the most talented actors on campus, and memories of beatings from his father and of the erosion of his family, due to fear of sin.

During college, he made forays into sex; once, he endured a brutal rape, which he willed himself to forget. However, at Brigham Young, he also met a strikingly good-looking young man named Harlan, who took young Ashton under his wing, and with whom Ashton fell deeply in love. He also experienced the devastating conclusion of his long relationship with Harlan.

In Ashton's post-college life, he tried to break onto Broadway and come to terms with the psychological damage he endured in the LDS Church.

Ashton has clearly led a long, fascinating life. The care and detail he brings to his childhood and first years in New York, feature wonderful run-ins with celebrities, such as Bette Davis and Stephen Sondheim. The memoir's structure is smart, as it allows Ashton to develop a single, riveting story about his growing love for Harlan and his battle with BYU's unrelenting moral standards. Along the way, he adds rich perspective as he alternates between the troubled child he was, and the proud, openly gay man that he eventually became.

A moving coming-out story with an intriguing narrative structure.

Pub Date: April 27, 2019

ISBN: 978-0-692-17051-9

Page count: 348pp

Publisher: Lynn Wolf Enterprises

Program: [Kirkus Indie](#)

Review Originally Posted Online: Dec. 19th, 2018