



Belonging to Heaven

Gale Sears

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Descended from the Hawaiian royal line, Jonathan Napela became one of the first—and most influential—converts to the Church in Hawaii. A man of intelligence, social status, and wealth, he used his considerable position to further the gospel in his native land. He developed a lifelong bond of brotherhood with Elder George Q. Cannon, helping to translate the Book of Mormon into Hawaiian and establish a gathering place for the Hawaiian saints in Laie, Oahu. But when his beloved wife, Kitty, was stricken with leprosy, Jonathan made the defining decision of his life. He would leave his life of privilege to become her caretaker and spend the rest of his life on Molokai, the island of lepers. To those who suffered similar heartbreak and banishment, Jonathan's self-sacrifice became their lifeline. Based on true story, this is an extraordinary novel of a man who chose love in the face of death.

Belonging to Heaven Details

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From Reader Review Belonging to Heaven for online ebook

Julie says

Interesting and enjoyable read about George Q. Canon, one of the first LDS missionaries in the Hawaiian Islands, and one of the first Hawaiian converts, Jonathan Napela. According to the footnotes, most was taken from the journal of George Q. Cannon and letters. Fascinating story.

Jessica says

The first thing I have to say is there is much of the Hawaiian culture that is so beautiful and this book has fueled a desire to learn more.

It was extremely interesting to read (in the first section) about the first LDS missionaries to the Hawaiian Islands and the struggles they met, how they overcame them, and the kinds of things they did, as well as the persecution early members endured. The first section might be my favorite, followed by the third. The leper colony on Moloka'i is so sad to me. The things those people had to endure are heartbreaking.

This author's writing style isn't always my favorite. Sometimes she switches writing from the perspective of one character into that of a different character with no warning or notice; it just changes, and usually to that of a nominal character so you really don't expect it. Also sometimes what is happening is so vague, and all the characters are dealing with this big problem, for pages at a time, without telling us what the problem is until later. That just frustrates me a little. But I do like the level of research into George Q. Cannon's mission, Jonathon Napela's life, and the Hawaiian culture, and all the author's notes at the end of the chapters. I really liked those.

Betty says

I loved this book. My husband and I are visiting Hawaii and the places are familiar. The descriptions were vivid because of our experiences on the islands. We had read Michner's Hawaii years ago, and now I could add the perspective of the beginnings of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints to his history. Sears touched my heart. It's a 3-Kleenex book.

It is well researched. The notes at the end of the chapters gives further information about the historical or cultural facts related to that chapter. There's an extensive bibliography, which confirms its historical contents.

But the thing I liked the best was the story and her writing style. The characters were depicted well, their relationships endearing. The ties that George Q. Cannon and Jonathan Napela wove in Hawaii lasted their entire lives. I thought the book would end at the conclusion of Elder Cannon's mission, but it continued to their older years. It was satisfying to read the whole story of their lives.

I highly recommend this book. Have your tissues ready especially for the last few chapters.

Jennifer says

This was the perfect book to read via audiobook. There were so many Hawaiian words and phrases I would have botched attempting to make them sound right in my head, but instead someone who spoke the language beautifully read them to me. The prologue made all the difference for me and was the cherry on top.

Heather says

I really liked this book. I like historical religious fiction, particularly when it's about a place and people that I know and love. I learned a lot about the history of Hawaii, especially as it related to the early years of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the islands.

I loved hearing about George Q. Cannon's missionary experiences and Jonathan Napela's faith, courage, leadership, service, and sacrifice. It is sweet to see Elder Cannon and Brother Napela's relationship last throughout their lifetime through letters, a visit, and across many miles and trials. It was also sweet to see Brother Napela's relationship with Father Damien in the leper colony of Molokai. Their brotherhood and the way they supported each other was exemplary.

This story helped strengthen my faith and resolve to stay focused on what's most important, making the sacrifices necessary to stand up for what's right.

Here are a few quotes I liked from the book:

I like the missionaries' description of Hawaii when they arrived: *"I think a piece of heaven has fallen from the sky and dropped into the ocean (p. 37)."*

"I heard the Prophet Joseph speak on many occasions. He had less education than me, but when he spoke the words of truth and revelation, they went right through to my heart (George Q. Cannon, p. 69)."

"The hearts of the Hawaiian people are full of goodness, and I am more determined than ever to learn the language so I can speak to them friend to friend (George Q. Cannon, p. 75)."

"Thank you, Father, for this beautiful part of your vineyard and for the privilege I have of meeting your sons and daughters on this island. I know you have prepared someone to receive the truth, and thought I have never seen them in the flesh, I know that when I meet them they will not be a stranger to me. I have tried to be aware of any promptings from the Spirit, but I don't think I have found them yet. I will keep looking. I will keep looking (George Q. Cannon, p. 95)."

"Before closing this letter, Mary, I want to tell you about a great blessing I have received from the Lord. It is something I have been praying about for a long time. I have told you about poi and my inability to even smell it without gagging. It is a staple food in the diet of the Hawaiian people and in their generosity, whenever one eats at their table they always offer poi....I have wanted to be able to eat this food so I won't offend them with refusal....I said a prayer and asked the Lord to make it sweet to me. My prayer was heard and answered. I ate a bowlful, and I positively liked it. It has been sweet to me ever since. I find it a marvel that the Lord is aware of such a small thing (George Q. Cannon, p. 95)."

"The gospel of Jesus that I teach, it shows how we can be a family together when we have walked the rainbow. All of God's children. Ohana. One family (George Q. Cannon, p. 99)."

"'You honor us to learn our language. It shows respect. I wish more of the newcomers were respectful of the Hawaiian people.'

'God loves all his children equally, Brother Jonathan. Can we do less (p. 119)?'"

"For several days the prompting had come to return to Wailuku and continue his preaching to his friends there, regardless of what Reverend Conde had to say. The Mormon missionaries had permissions from the Hawaiian government to preach, a call from Brigham Young, and most important, a mandate from the Lord (p. 142)."

"If you wish to belong to heaven, Brother Jonathan, there is no easy way (p. 160)."

"Just teach them a few simple truths and let the Spirit take it to their hearts (p. 162)."

"I apologize for the length of this letter, Mary, but my heart is overflowing. I am now back in Pulehu, sitting here by myself under a large tree, and looking at the wooden church we are building at this place. I marvel at the power of the Lord, as I think of the hundreds of natives that have joined us. I am continually grateful (p. 177)."

"I think the Lord has chosen you for this, Brother Jonathan. You are well educated. You are a descendant of the old chiefs of the island of Maui, and in your family the language has been preserved and spoken in the greatest purity. Besides, you have thoroughly studied the principles of the gospel. Few in the nation are as well qualified to help me in this work [of translating the Book of Mormon into Hawaiian] (p. 183)."

"It is not easy to be a member of this Church....I know something of persecution and sacrifice. I saw what Joseph and Hyrum Smith gave for their testimonies of this gospel. They gave their lives. Can I offer less? Those of you who have felt the spirit know that there is no other choice. There is no other choice but to join with us and meet the challenges. Other may falter, but we pray for you. We pray that you will find the strength to be faithful (p. 189)."

"'Perhaps I can be like the trickster, Maui. I will stand up on Haleakala, and hold time in place.'

'Or perhaps we could see time the way the Lord sees it, the way it is in heaven--which is, that there is no time. No partings, no comings and no goings (p. 214).'"

"The gospel has a way of changing people--in spirit and body. It is powerful....It changed me. How grateful I am that it changed me (p. 218)."

"'I think all of us [have survived the swim from the boat to the shores of Kalawao], luna. I think all of us. We walked like Peter on the water (p. 341)!'"

"'It deepens my love for the Savior. He actually put his hands on them to cleanse their putrid flesh.'

'Yes. We love Him because He first loved us (Father Damien and Jonathan Napela, p. 355).'"

"Life was difficult, but for some it seemed to be more difficult than for others. Some people suffered challenges silently, while others made themselves verbose martyrs for the world's sympathy. And, here was his dear friend living in a leper colony and excited about a horse. A horse (p. 362)."

"I have requested that there be no rotation. I have requested to live out the remainder of my days at Kalawao (Father Damien, p. 366)."

"We will pray for enough lumber to come so that we can build your house and also a house for the orphans.' Your faith is strong, Brother Napela. You truly believe that if a man asks for bread the Lord will not give him a stone.'

'We cannot escape the trials of life, but our Heavenly Father loves us, Kamiano. This I know (p. 368).'"

"The Mormon chapel was being built by Catholic, Protestant, and Mormon faithful, as well as a few pagans mixed in. Jonathan smiled. All were children of Father in Heaven. All were loved. Even with the dreaded disease, most of the people of Kalawao lived their lives with brotherhood and compassion. Perhaps it was because of the disease that they found a higher vision (p. 388)."

"Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart (p. 408)."

"As President Cannon moved through the city in his shirtsleeves, he received several sideways glances, and many wondered what worry of church or government was weighing so heavily on the leader's mind that he would forget his suit coat and hat. The spectators would have been surprised if the president's thoughts had been opened to them, for they would have seen the vision of two men, one Hawaiian, one haole, rowing an outrigger canoe in rough seas, each with his head thrown back and laughing with the joy of the adventure (p. 425)."

Monica says

Belonging to Heaven is based on the first missionaries and converts in the Hawaiian Islands. Historically researched using journals, Hawaiian, and LDS church records and histories an accurate and chronological base is established. Gale Sears then adds her gift of storytelling creating a memorable and thought provoking narrative. Touching and emotional I would highly recommend this to everyone.

Melanie says

WOW!! This book is amazing! The first part tells the story of Elder George Q. Cannon and his mission to the Sandwich Islands, as Hawaii was known at the time. He starts gold mining in California and it was hard work that wasn't producing many results. When the men's assignment changes to go to Hawaii, the mines miraculously open up and produce enough gold to pay their way to Hawaii. They travel to Hawaii to preach to the white people who were living there, but Elder Cannon strongly felt that they needed to learn the language so they could share the gospel with the Hawaiians. It wasn't an easy language to learn, but they were determined to communicate with the people. It took awhile to get results. Meanwhile, Jonathan Napela had an experience which opened his heart to receive Elder Cannon when he met him and they became fast friends.

Jonathan Napela is a district court judge and a son of Hawaiian royalty. He has a dream about George Cannon and when he sees him pass his house, he stops him and asks him to share his message. He grills him and likes the message he receives. Jonathan Napela receives a lot of opposition and his livelihood is threatened if he continues to listen to the missionaries. He shows his faith and continues to study the gospel

and decides to be baptized and help spread the gospel.

By the time George Cannon returns to Salt Lake City (he was there for four years), there are 3,000 members of the church, some of the Hawaiian men hold the priesthood and are serving as missionaries and the Book of Mormon has been translated (but still needs to be printed). The people are sad to see Elder Cannon go and we learn of the progression of the work through their letters to each other. He had been really close with Jonathan and Kitty's young daughter, Hattie, and they also continued to write through the years. Hattie is amazing. She makes a mistake when she's a young woman that causes a rift between her and her mother and has to make some hard decisions but she has a lot of strength to endure all that she needs to.

Then, the leprosy. Oh, my! I cried or had tears in my eyes from the time we learn of that through the end of the book. My family was wondering if I was okay. This is the first I've read of what day to day life was like for those with leprosy. They were taken from their families, even young children, to live the rest of their life on an island together. The goodbyes were heart-wrenching, especially when Hattie had to say goodbye to her parents. When Jonathan and Kitty got to Moloka'i, the conditions were rough and there was lots of work to be done to make sure the residents had food, shelter and medical care. A Catholic priest, Father Damien, soon joined them and he and Jonathan worked tirelessly to make sure everyone was taken care of and together they loved and served the people well. The ending had me in tears again. I don't want to spoil it but will say that it was touching and beautifully written.

I loved learning more about the Hawaiian culture and history of the church over there. I remember my brother's advice to me when I left on my mission back in 1990: "Love the people." That advice is timeless. It worked in the 1850's for Elder Cannon and it still works today. This book is full of faith, love, compassion and service. If I could give it more than 5 stars, I would. I loved all the people in this story and highly recommend it!!

Mel's Shelves

Nancy says

Descended from the Hawaiian royal line, Jonathan Napela became one of the first—and most influential—converts to the Church in Hawaii. A man of intelligence, social status, and wealth, he used his considerable position to further the gospel in his native land. He developed a lifelong bond of brotherhood with Elder George Q. Cannon, helping to translate the Book of Mormon into Hawaiian and establish a gathering place for the Hawaiian saints in Laie, Oahu. But when his beloved wife, Kitty, was stricken with leprosy, Jonathan made the defining decision of his life. He would leave his life of privilege to become her caretaker and spend the rest of his life on Molokai, the island of lepers. To those who suffered similar heartbreak and banishment, Jonathan's self-sacrifice became their lifeline. Based on true story, this is an extraordinary novel of a man who chose love in the face of death.

My thoughts: The premise of this book is absolutely riveting and fascinating. Jonathan Napela was a pioneer in his own right. Against professional pressure, Napela joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. He was immediately relieved of his judgeship on the Hawaiian Islands. Highly educated, of royal blood, and influential, Jonathan married his wife, of European descent. Theirs is a beautiful love story. While it is unclear whether or not Kitty, his wife, ever joined the L.D.S. church, she was clearly committed to the man she married and endured the hardships with him while he influenced thousands to listen to the gospel. Because of his early and enduring work, the church is strong in Hawaii. There is no doubt most of the

converts of the time can be traced directly back to Napela.

Napela was taught and influenced by the apostle, George Q. Cannon. The story is through the perspective of Cannon, although in third person. This is where I found the story to lose its strength on me. Although Cannon is a key player in the story of Jonathon Napela, the author spends a lot of time including as much factual information and dialogue as possible. I like facts. I like research to be backed up with bibliographies. I don't need every little detail. But that's just me.

Ultimately, this is a love story between a man and his wife. Kitty loved Jonathon enough to support him in his passions and travels. Jonathon loved Kitty enough that, when Kitty contracted leprosy, he would refused to send her to the leprosy colony on Moloka'i alone. He accompanied her to the colony. Not only did he go to the island with her, he insisted on living with her which was strictly forbidden with the understanding that this would be the end of his freedom of travel. He would never leave Moloka'i. He presided over the Latter Day Saints on the island of Moloka'i until his death from the leprosy he contracted on the island.

This is an amazing story and very worth reading if you don't mind extraneous information that adds to the authenticity. Like I said, I like authenticity, but I really want to read a great book. Jonathon Napela, or his real name is Napelakapuonamahanaonaleonalani (I am so not making that up), is a fascinating and extraordinary man. The author definitely chose his subject well.

Kiery says

Amazing book, well written and fantastic story. Wasn't sure I'd like it at first, but I was very surprised! Makes you want to visit Hawaii!

Susan says

Several other reviewers have said what I wanted to say about the story. It's based on the true accounts of George Q. Cannon's LDS mission to the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii), and on Jonathan Napela's lifetime of faithfulness. It was kind of two separate stories, the mission story and the life-long struggle afterward.

Although the writing was good, for me this book gets the five stars because of the emotions it regularly stirred in me. Honestly, part of that was from my personal experience of growing up in the islands of the Pacific, (not Hawaii in my case,) from my ingrained love of islanders themselves and awareness of the deep roots of their faith, as well as the faith required to live the lives the characters did, all of them. WOW. I listened to the audio book recording, and the reader did an exceptional job of reading the frequent Hawaiian dialog (which fortunately is all translated for us,) which added abundantly to the story's integrity for me. I couldn't help but thrill with and mourn in turn with each individual character as they faced life's joys and challenges.

I LOVED this book, and will be listening to it again for sure, and sharing it with many!

Melissa T says

I wasn't sure how to shelve this book, as the story is true, with all the main characters being true, but written as a story. Obviously the author took some liberties with conversations and such, but I'm assuming it's well researched.

I first heard this story at church and was touched and inspired. When I saw this book advertised at Deseret Book, I was excited to read it. That said, I'm not sure I love the way the book was written. If I had to give it a rating on that, it would be closer to 3 stars. However, how can you not love this story? I would be curious to read a biography of these characters. I'm glad I read the book, and I learned a lot. It's one that makes me want to go back to the history and read more, which is exactly what any good historical fiction book should do.

For anyone curious to hear the original story I heard, it was from Elder's Kikuchi's talk "Daughter of God" in April of 1988 General Conference. Here it is:

In 1850, Brigham Young sent ten missionaries to the Hawaiian Islands. Without understanding the language and culture, the missionaries found the work extremely difficult. Eventually they became discouraged, including the mission president. They became so discouraged that five of the ten left to go home. The youngest of the remaining missionaries, Elder George Q. Cannon, was determined to stay. He went to the Lord in prayer. The Lord inspired him to go to Lahaina on Maui. He did so.

As he approached this town, two ladies went screaming into a nearby house and brought out a local gentleman. The previous night, this man had had a dream that a messenger of God was coming to his town and that he must feed him. Elder Cannon was invited to stay and preach in the home of this man, Jonathon H. Napela, who was a very well-educated man and the magistrate of that district (see Alma 10:4).

Subsequently, Elder Cannon and Jonathon Napela became very close friends, like Alma and Amulek in the Book of Mormon (see Alma 10–15). Because of the guiding hand of God and Brother Napela's great help, along with the hospitality and kindness of the Hawaiian Saints, the missionary work began to excel in Hawaii, and the foundation was laid.

His Great and Deep Love

Many years later, in 1873, Kitty, the wife of this great man, Jonathon Napela, contracted leprosy. She was a beautiful and noble woman in the early days of the Church in Hawaii. Today modern medical knowledge has advanced so that this disease is no longer fatal, but at that time, there was no cure for this dreadful disease. In order to prevent the spreading of this disease, once you contracted it you were forced to live on one of the seashores in the leper colony on Molokai. The lepers were taken there by boat. The sailors were so afraid of this disease that they pushed the patients into the sea, forcing them to swim to shore.

Because his wife had to go to Kalaupapa, the leper colony, Jonathon, too, wanted to go. He took her hand and they went there together. Why would he do this? Because he loved her so much! He knew that life is eternal and love is eternal, even through days of "sickness and health."

Oh, how much do I love my wife? Oh, do I love her as a daughter of God, as Jonathon loved his wife? Would I be willing to go to a place like that to be with her? Would you be willing to demonstrate your pure love like Jonathon? Brethren, are we honoring our companions? Are we caring? Are we thoughtful? We must be, because God has joined us together (see Mark 10:9).

History records that this valiant and giant man of God worked in the leper colony and fought to obtain government assistance for the lepers to have a more comfortable place to live. He was a giant in the pure love of Christ for his own people. Oh, I can almost hear the words of Paul to the Corinthians when he said, “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal” (1 Cor. 13:1).

This good brother later contracted that same disease and died even before his wife passed away. She followed him two years later. Husbands, do you love your wife as a daughter of God? Oh, “husbands, love your wives” as daughters of God, “even as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it” (Eph. 5:25).

Faye says

The fact that this book was based on a true story really made a great impression on me. My husband and I listen to the book on tape. I am glad we did because I probably would have gotten lost with all the Hawaiian words and names. It is an amazing story. The author has done A great job of telling this story even with some of the fictitious parts in it. It is a great book I would highly recommend it

Joy says

A sweet story about the preaching of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to the Hawaiian people. The historical fiction concentrates on George Q. Cannon and takes the reader to the leper colonies on Molokai. At the end, I shed a few tears for those affected.

Gail says

This book was recommended to me by Maria Cole, who lived in Hawaii as a child and then again with her own children and husband. It's the story of George Q. Cannon's mission to Hawaii in the 1850s and one of his converts, Jonathan Napela. Jonathan's wife gets leprosy and he moves to Molokai to take care of her. The first half of the book was mostly Canon's mission experiences and the second half about Jonathan's life. I like the first half just fine, but the second half I really enjoyed and the reader was very good at speaking the Hawaiian language and conveying emotion. I was crying several times as I listened. I really wanted to listen to it since I'm going to Molokai next week.

J. says

When your 84-year-old, devoutly-Mormon grandmother gives you a book for Christmas, and then checks-in several times on your progress, just read the damn book.

And even if you quit going to church 10 years ago, and are tempted to write that the book is pure sentimental propaganda, devoid of any real human emotion, serving the fanciful historical views of the famed correlation department, and prostrating to the emotional needs of members whom detest anything more than black-and-

white, the church-is-always-right fan fiction...you don't.

You don't do it because that would make for an awkward run-on sentence. And more importantly, you don't because you love your grandmother. You just say, wow, that was lovely. Uplifting and lovely. And then you run away before she gives you another.
