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The mission of The Sunstone Education Foundation is to sponsor open forums of Mormon thought and experience. Under the motto, "Faith Seeking Understanding," we examine and express the rich spiritual, intellectual, social, and artistic qualities of Mormon history and contemporary life. We encourage humanitarian service, honest inquiry, and responsible interchange of ideas that is respectful of all people and what they hold sacred.

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EVEN THE SNAKES

MY DEEP THANKS TO H. PARKER Blount for his eloquent essay, "The God of Nature Suffers" (SUNSTONE, December 2005). May it be prayerfully read by all who desire to grow in spirit!

As a small girl who by age eight knew that God loved her, I was nevertheless slow to realize the extent of his love for all creation. At twelve, I had my Wyoming grandfather's permission to borrow the .22 and spend the afternoon alone killing ground squirrels. It was a lot of fun. At fifteen, I accompanied my boyfriend on rabbit hunts and thoroughly enjoyed dissecting his kills, thereby learning something of anatomy. In my thirties, living rurally, my husband and I both occasionally killed snakes, raccoons, and bats to protect our children, pets, and chickens; but killing had begun to pain me deeply. Then, one time, I had an epiphany.

A feral tomcat had torn all but one of a litter of new kittens into pieces. I was so furious at the carnage I borrowed a rifle from a neighbor. I determined to shoot the predator the next night, assuming he would likely return to the scene. He did. I had him directly in my sights. I hated him but couldn't pull the trigger. No word of the Spirit forbade me to shoot the cat; instead a realization surprised me. In spite of my hot temper, I had too much compassion for him to do it. It shook me how much my commitment to Jesus Christ had slowly changed my heart. Mentally, it was almost like a physical kick in the head because "I had him." Yet I chose only to chase him off and move the mother cat and kitten inside the house.

By the time I joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I was primed for a prophet who didn't kill rattlesnakes. Bless my non-Mormon husband's heart, he began—at my instigation—to shovel up coiled rattlers and put them in a bucket for me to release later in more remote areas. I've taken a lot of razzing from my neighbors and have been called the "snake lady," but my spirit has sailed much higher ever since.

The world remains a dangerous place for us humans and for other beings. But little by little, and particularly by immersing myself in the gospel, I've moved away from mindless killing. If I'm going to kill anything, it's going to be with kindness. And when the Earth groans, I attempt to speak in its behalf.

MARYLEE MITCHAM

Golden, Colorado

WHO WILL REMIND US?

H PARKER BLOUNT'S CALL FOR AN enlightened ecotheology in the December 2005 SUNSTONE is most welcome—and long overdue! It was apparently not read by the Utah legislature, however, which, piqued by pesky environmentalists, recently adopted a bill to require non-profit organizations to post a bond before suing under federal or state environmental laws to block roads, bridges, or shopping centers. Utah's governor wisely vetoed the bill.

Blount asks, "If not Church leaders, who will remind us of how we should feel about Earth?" One answer is that humanist organizations have long advocated protection of our environment. For example, in its most recent iteration of the *Humanist Manifesto* signed by seventeen Nobel laureates among many other distinguished persons, the American Humanist Association included the "planetary duty to protect nature's integrity, diversity, and beauty in a secure, sustainable manner." And in its statement of principles, the Council for Secular Humanism includes its desire "to protect and enhance the earth, to preserve it for future generations, and to avoid inflicting needless suffering on other species." Religious leaders reach far more people than humanist organizations do. The Earth desperately needs their support.

EARL WUNDERLI

Cottonwood Heights, Utah

PRESENTISM

I'M WRITING IN REGARD TO HUGO Olai's essay, "Joseph Smith, Revised and Enlarged" (SUNSTONE, December 2005). While I am sympathetic to Olai's idea that the institutional church is prone to a certain presentism in public discussion of Joseph Smith Jr., I worry that Olai's present views are being imposed on the events just as aggressively as are the official Church's public relations materials.

Two quibbles: Olai complains that an interaction between Joseph the father and Joseph the son on the elder's deathbed (the Prophet promises his father that Joseph Sr. will be Alvin's father in the afterlife) is a clear anachronism because the sealing of children was not actively practiced until late in the nineteenth century. Olai is wrong on three counts. First, the belief in family reunions, particularly the reunion of parents with chil-

dren, was widespread in the Protestant milieu in which the Smiths lived [Philippe Aries, *The Hour of Our Death* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1981), 452, 460, 471; Sheila Rothman, *Living in the Shadow of Death: Tuberculosis and the Social Experience of Illness in American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 90–91; Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang, *Heaven: A History*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), xiv, 236, 260, 268, 270]. Despite culturally scripted vocal bereavement, contemporary sources allow little doubt that the Smiths believed in future family reunions, just as their Protestant peers did.

Second, in his preaching, Joseph Jr. himself made it quite clear that he understood the resurrection to be emphatically about reunions of loved ones [Scott Faulring, *An American Prophet's Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith, Jr.* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 145–46].

Third, though he nods toward the development of baptism for the dead, Olaiz seems to misperceive its significance for the Smith family. Joseph Sr. desperately wanted Hyrum baptized for Alvin so that Alvin would be in heaven with his father. The visitation of Alvin to Joseph Sr. at his moment of death would provide further support for the dramatic license taken in the Church film. While we have no primary evidence that such words were spoken at Father Joseph's deathbed, the implication that the Prophet's promise to his father is an anachronism is incorrect. In fact, a careful reading of the deathbed scene in Lucy's memoir underscores just how significant the eternal integrity of the family bond was to the Smiths long before 1841.

My other quibble concerns the lynching of Joseph Jr. Olaiz complains that "Mormon triumphalism [is] no longer able to stomach its founder's death" because the camera work suggests the perspective of Joseph's soul ascending to heaven as his body drops to the

earth below. This complaint misses entirely the interpretation that Joseph's murder was seen as a martyrdom from the very moment of his death. His followers never doubted, even in June 1844, that he ascended directly to heaven. While his corpse was with them, the fact of his martyrdom was of almost overwhelming significance to them. Hence I would argue that the camera work is more consistent with the nineteenth-century view than our current preference to focus on the gritty realism of a corpse dropping from a window.

While sympathetic to Olaiz's concerns about excessive hagiography, I think we ought to be open to understand events the way those present at the time experienced them. And, at least in these two cases, the LDS Church film (by Olaiz's report; I have not seen it myself) seems to get it just about right.

SAMUEL BROWN
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Hugo Olaiz responds:

I appreciate Samuel Brown's well-reasoned comments, and I especially welcome his substantial first "quibble." In that part of my essay, I was trying to deal with a very complex topic, namely, the evolution of the doctrine of eternal families. In my effort to be succinct, I may not have been as clear as I might have.

In a paper to be presented this August at the Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium, I will suggest that, if left uncensored, the statements that Joseph Smith made regarding the sociality of heaven bear little or no resemblance to the now-ubiquitous slogan "families can be together forever." Smith's "vision" of the afterlife stands in strong tension with that of the contemporary Church.

As I wish to keep this response brief, let me simply re-emphasize a more general point and then hold my peace til August: By



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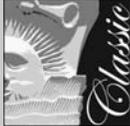
9. **TRACKING THE SINCERE BELIEVER: "AUTHENTIC" RELIGION AND THE ENDURING LEGACY OF JOSEPH SMITH**
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SUNSTONE Classic

5. **PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS OF MARRIAGE, LIFE, LOVE AND DEATH**
Carol Lynn Pearson, 1986 Salt Lake Symposium

6. **MORMONISM'S ANTI-MASONIC BIBLE** Dan Vogel and Daniel Peterson, 1989 Salt Lake Symposium



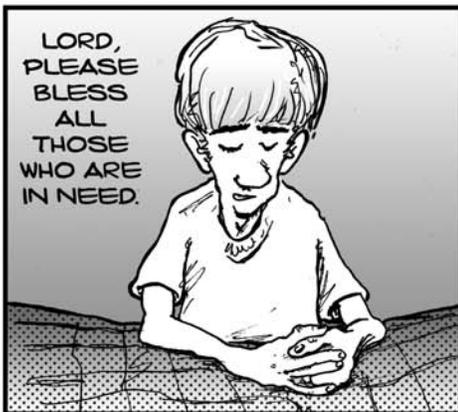
SUNSTONE Lit

4. **LISA DOWNING**
Interview with author Lisa Downing









PRIVATE RETREATS WITH
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*I Want to Write • Staying in a Religion (or not) and
Making it Work • Loving our Gay Family and Friends
Magic and Meaning of Coincidence • This Business
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PLUS: FUN • JOKES • HIKES
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*Wheat for man (D&C 89:17)
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putting words in Joseph's mouth that suggest the Church's present-day "families are forever" rhetoric, the filmmakers are doing what Thomas G. Alexander lamented in his groundbreaking 1980 essay on the reconstruction of Mormon doctrine. That is, they are interpreting older revelations through the lens of current doctrinal positions.

LOGICAL DECISION

I COMMEND SUNSTONE FOR GIVING Blake Ostler what Tom Kimball, in his letter (SUNSTONE, December 2005), calls "unfettered access" to SUNSTONE's pages in order to reply to fraudulent arguments about the way DNA findings impact the Book of Mormon. These arguments are well-rebutted by Ostler, and SUNSTONE's editors were right to give him the right of instant rebuttal—a rebuttal that courteously and exactly repeats Southerton's arguments in precise detail before presenting their problematic foundations. Nipping DNA fallacies in the bud is important in order not to allow logical nonsense to mask itself as "science," as Kimball seems to wish to do.

It is unfair for Kimball to criticize Ostler for his ostensible lack of DNA expertise.

Kimball apparently doesn't see that Ostler's arguments with Southerton have nothing to do with science and more to do with logic—wherein Ostler is an "expert." Ostler has correctly seen fallacies inherent in assumptions about DNA's relevance to the Book of Mormon that Southerton has not disputed (and I would declare, *cannot* dispute). There is no dispute between Ostler and Southerton about the nature, principles, and relevance of DNA as a science.

Without "unfettered access" by Ostler to SUNSTONE's pages, DNA might well have impressed (depressed) LDS believers into (mistakenly) thinking DNA is actual scientific "evidence" against the ancient origins of the Book of Mormon. With time, these fallacies might well have begun to "snowball" into a rolling DNA impetus, much like similar fallacies have done with Joseph Smith's "money-digging trials." Kudos to SUNSTONE for not allowing DNA fallacies to snowball in this way.

GERRY L. ENSLEY
Los Alamitos, California

NO APOLOGY

I HAVE CAUTIONED MYSELF REPEATEDLY as I've thought about writing a response to Frances Lee Menlove's devotional address, "Walking the Road to Emmaus" (SUNSTONE, September 2005).

While I have been profoundly affected by Menlove's comments about our responsibilities as disciples of Christ to open our eyes and hearts on our personal Emmaus roads, I have been equally troubled by her conclusions and judgments regarding homosexuality. Her statement, "Homosexuality is a given, not a chosen" is a blatant regurgitation of pop culture psychology and is a complete contradiction of the words of modern prophets.

May I remind readers that "gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose" and that "marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity" ("The Family: A Proclamation to the World").

I could not agree more with Menlove's statement that "The Road to Emmaus happens every day." I even used her address to prepare a talk I gave in our stake priesthood leadership meeting. But I believe a more appropriate scriptural story to describe the difficulty LDS people have in dealing with homosexuality is found in the Book of Mor-

mon. It is found in the story of King Lamoni's father, who, when he hears the words of a prophet, prays: "O God, . . . I will give away all my sins to know thee, . . . that I may be raised from the dead, and be saved at the last day" (Alma 22:18).

I fail to see the prudence of SUNSTONE magazine's being the forefront of gay and lesbian activism for LDS people. As SUNSTONE perpetuates feelings and teachings that are clearly against established doctrines, it alienates the vast majority of Church members from continuing their subscriptions. While many articles in the magazine chide LDS leaders for presenting Church tenets only in the most positive light possible, SUNSTONE makes no apology for its publishing only one side of issues when it comes to Church doctrines and principles that it finds difficult. Clearly I feel strongly about this particular topic of homosexuality and make no apology for those feelings.

EVAN LEFEVRE
Hyrum, Utah

Frances Lee Menlove responds:

I thank Evan LeFevre for his thoughtful response to my devotional.

I chose the homosexuality example because my profession as a psychologist, my experience, and my conscience tell me that homosexuality is one of nature's many variations, a trait that appears regularly. Research in the last decade indicates that basic homosexual orientation is beyond choice.

In each generation, issues arise in which Church authority is held in tension with the demands of an informed conscience. Slavery is a good example. I chose the homosexuality example as an obligation of conscience. I believe that the gospel of Jesus is a gospel of radical inclusivity, and my guess is that God has greater tolerance for diversity than we do.

The gospel is not fragile. Thanks to SUNSTONE for providing this forum where all parties can express their opinions freely on difficult issues like this one. And thanks again to Evan for his response.



Letters for publication are edited for clarity, tone, and space. Send them to EDITOR@SUNSTONEONLINE.COM.

If you wish to write letters to authors, address them to that author, care of SUNSTONE, 343 N. Third West, Salt Lake City, Utah 84103. We will forward them unopened.

IN MEMORIAM

VALEEN TIPPETTS AVERY

By Jan Shippo

ON 7 APRIL, worried that they had not heard from their mother in several days, Valeen Tippetts Avery's son and daughter drove to her home outside Flagstaff, Arizona, to see if Val was OK. She was not. Although she was lying peacefully across her bed, her heart had stopped beating sometime between Monday night, 3 April, and the time they found her that Friday. A vital and incredibly dynamic woman whose persona gave meaning to the expression "full of life," Val retired from teaching at Northern Arizona University at the close of last year. Her husband Brian Short had died three years earlier following a severe illness, but Val's death was both sudden and entirely unexpected.

On 24 March 2006, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* published an extended and very appreciative article about Laurel Thatcher Ulrich that described her as a "well-behaved" Mormon feminist. Val's death represents the passing from the scenes of Mormon and Western history and women's studies a scholar who was likewise a Mormon feminist. In the eyes of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, however, this one was not so well-behaved.

VALEEN Tippetts Avery was a gifted biographer with a special interest in the lives of women. She was the co-author with Linda King Newell of *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith, Prophet's Wife, Elect Lady, Polygamy's Foe* (1984), and author of *From Mission to Madness: The Last Son of the Mormon Prophet* (1998). Both biographies won the Evans Award for the best biography in Western history. Val was also the author of many articles, reviews, and commentaries.

Just as Laurel Ulrich's career did not follow a conventional path, Val's career did not move in the ordinary fashion from college to graduate school to a university post. She reared four children and cared for an invalid husband in an astonishing house that she built—yes, she did the building herself—outside Flagstaff. While still "just Mormon housewives," she and Linda Newell wrote the biography of Emma Hale Smith that is still the standard work on this impor-



tant woman's life. While she was working on this manuscript, Val entered graduate studies in history at Northern Arizona University and earned her Ph.D. there. *Mormon Enigma* was published by Doubleday, selling more than 10,000 copies in hardback. Then in 1994, the University of Illinois Press published a second edition of this work. This same press published Val's second book, and both continue to sell well.

In the years immediately following the publication of their biography of the Mormon prophet's first wife, Val and her co-author Linda Newell became popular

speakers, especially to Mormon women's groups. But probably because their book told the story of early Mormonism from the distaff side so that it seemed quite different from orthodox accounts, LDS general authorities "silenced" the two authors. They were forbidden to speak to any Latter-day Saint group—most particularly Mormon women—who gathered under the official auspices of the Church. Interestingly enough, the edict by which they were silenced did not reach them directly; it came down to them, as the Saints say, "through the priesthood." Despite this ban, Val was elected to be the president of the Mormon History Association in 1987–88, and she served on its awards committee for well over a decade.

Although the ban against their speaking was later lifted, it is likely that the Church's reaction to her work was the main reason that Val became an "inactive" Mormon. But if she was no longer a part of the Mormon worshipping community, this intrepid scholar went ahead to write an extraordinary biography of the Mormon prophet's posthumous son who suffered so severely from mental illness that he spent the second half of his long life in a mental institution. At the time of her death, Val was preparing to deliver the "Distinguished Senior Scholar" lecture to the annual meeting of the John Whitmer Historical Association. She was also scheduled to join her friends and colleagues at the Mormon History Association meetings in Casper, Wyoming, in May. Val's family has decided to donate her papers to Special Collections at Utah State University.

IN many ways, Val's death from a heart arrhythmia was simply a tragic loss to her family and a huge array of friends throughout the historical community. But her death also closed the door on the signal career of a brave scholar and extraordinary woman.



Val's casket was lovingly built by her three sons and transported to the gravesite on her father's classic red truck, which he had used on the feedlot on the ranch in Montana where Val grew up.