

FROM THE EDITOR

YAGOTTAWANNA!

By Elbert Eugene Peck

ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. *1998 Sunstone Symposium*. The preliminary program for this year's Salt Lake symposium, from July 29 through August 1, is available. It includes a cassette order form. If you didn't get a program, want an extra to share, or want one mailed to a friend, contact us by mail, e-mail, or telephone.

2. *Three kinds of kindly, in-kind summer donations*. First, on Saturday, August 1, we'll host our annual art auction, featuring the finest Mormon artists. If you know of people who would (a) contribute art or (b) purchase art, ranging from a Grondahl cartoon to a fine oil painting, invite or contact us, and we'll invite them.

Second, last summer I pared my religious, non-Mormon library by donating the books to Sunstone. They were then sold, at discount, at the symposium. Everyone benefitted: I took a deduction for their used, retail value, symposium attendees got great books at used, wholesale prices, and Sunstone made several thousand dollars. We're making the used, religious book table an annual symposium feature. Donations are needed; drop them off at the office (any time during the year) or bring them to the conference.

Third, the old Sunstone car, an in-kind donation, finally died. We'd like another one. A company car is not a necessity, but it allows staff to walk or bike to work and have a car for Sunstone errands.

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RONALD M. PATTERSON died last month. He had been my mission president and one of the half-dozen local Church leaders whose nurturing leadership changed my life. He was earthy, kind, lovable, wanting the best for everyone, more interested in people than programs—much like Colonel Potter on TV's M.A.S.H.

Halfway into my mission, rearranged boundaries landed me in the new Nevada Las Vegas Mission. Till then, my mission had been an incongruous combination of (a) a bountiful, spiritual, mellow grace and a deep

sense of God's accepting love, (b) a nagging guilt about a terrible, unconfessed, yet abandoned, sin, (c) a deep love for Saints and gentiles, and (d) an estrangement from letter-of-the-law mission leaders, including an authoritarian president, whose response to my inquiry about the difference between mission rules and God's scriptural commandments ("There is no difference.") prompted the writing of my first religious essay.

But as each elder exited his interview with our new president, he basically reported, "Boy, is President Patterson spiritual. He knew my particular sin!" And my horror at his knowing mine increased. When my turn came, Patterson asked, "Elder Peck, have you totally overcome the sin of masturbation?" He indeed did know my sin! But his gentle question was designed to easily allow me to confess and have the joy of forgiveness. Looking back, I realize that he asked us all the same question, and each of us thought he knew our unique temptation. We each also felt his and God's love. Even those who were still struggling with the "sin."

That's a complicated episode for me to make sense of. I don't now believe that masturbation is a sin. But in that social construction, I did; yet I still feel that the spiritual growth from confronting that contrived guilt was genuine. That's a metaphor for much of life and one's religious journey—authentic spirituality occurs in a relative, inescapably arbitrary context; the working through is important, not what we work through. Nevertheless, shining through my murky story of unnecessary guilt/confession/forgiveness/insight is Ronald M. Patterson, working to help me and everyone else feel individual worth and growth, as he understood it.

Later, he called me to be a district leader. I told him, no, I didn't want to play the leadership game, which seemed to bring out the worst in my friends. A half hour later, he called back and said God wanted me to be DL; then he quoted from 1 Samuel 17:7, "God looketh upon the heart," and told me God saw my good heart. I reluctantly told God, yes, I'd be DL. Patterson was always telling us we were worthy, good people.

Yet he knew our human sides. Reflecting in his office, he'd say, with a laugh, "I know everyone's not doing what they should." Pointing to an elder's picture, he'd say, "Elder X is probably riding horses right now. Elder Y is developing film. And Sister Z is baking a cake for Elder Q. But, dagnabit, they're good people, doing the best they can." Patterson also reproved betimes with brimstone. When I ponder the fiery but loving Brigham Young, I reference Ronald Patterson.

Once, at a farewell for an elder, the laziest, most corrupt guy ever to serve in Vegas, Patterson said in front of thirty missionaries, "Elder F, you have served an acceptable and worthy mission. God is pleased with you." We rolled our eyes. Later, Patterson said, "I meant it. If you knew his life before he came, you'd know that no missionary made more progress." With that attitude—of helping us to feel joy in our service and growth, to feel the spirit's acceptance of who we inherently were—he helped the spirit engender in me a deep love for all the missionaries, regardless of their performance. Later, that approach allowed me to feel that same forgiving/accepting love for myself, and it helped pull me out of a deep depression. It's a love, as I learned at a recent reunion, still vibrant and felt by most for each other, no matter how diverse our journeys or how long the years.

Twice, I listened while he took a call from a general authority who chastised him for low baptisms. But he never passed that numbers-oriented approach down to us, never shared comparative companionship statistics. Instead, he preached, and had us preach, gospel-themed sermons because he wanted to prepare us for church service.

He had his faults, and he liked very corny sayings poems and phrases. "Yagottawanna" was an irksome favorite, as in "Yagottawanna get out of bed on time." An Arizona conservative, he sent me home three months before the election of Jimmy Carter, one of the most Christian men ever to be President, believing we were about to elect the devil's assistant. I worked through that misperception, too. My life has been a lived conversation with his impact, a beneficial one. Even though I now disagree with much of what Patterson accepted and taught, I love him dearly.

Mormonism helped Ronald Patterson blossom by asking him to nurture others. Church callings amplify good traits in people, who then testify that the Church is "true" because of the growth and love and connectedness and, yes, greatness it affords them. That's the Church's genius and the best thing about it. Yagottawanna love an organization that is such a force for good. ☐