

## FROM THE EDITOR

## SEEING BEVERLY

By Dan Wotherspoon

*Thanks so much to great friends who played key roles in organizing and making our two recent regional symposiums so successful! In San Francisco, the amazingly energetic Richard Rands, who co-organized the 2001 Sunstone West symposium and, without waiting to be asked to help again, called us last fall to say he'd picked a date and had already arranged for the hotel! He and other committee stalwarts—Janet Brigham Rands, Glenn Cornett, Sterling Augustine, and Kim McCall—then fielded the bulk of the proposals and outlined a great conference before we in Salt Lake even had to do a thing! They also helped cheerfully through all the “less fun” stuff—such as dealing with us headquarters folks and all our stressing over costs, attendance, and the minutiae of preparing abstracts and other program essentials. I too often fall into an exaggerated kind of editor’s “Stop the presses! This can’t stand!” communication style, but Richard and the others smilingly accepted my apologies and kept moving forward.*

*We were blessed again this year to have help from Becky and Kirk Linford in organizing the Washington, D.C. symposium. The Linfords have been regional symposium gurus for years, first in Chicago and then, after moving, in Washington, D.C. We’ve caused them a ton of stress through the years, and this year, Becky was in the end-game stages of completing her doctoral dissertation! Still, they always responded with love and good humor. In fact, if you buy—uh, I mean, when you buy (we’re a non-profit organization, after all)—the tape of Robert Kirby’s wonderful talk about coping in the “Merry Old Land of Odds,” the incredible, booming laughs you’ll hear above the rest are Kirk’s. Thanks, you two, for your many gifts.*

*Huge thanks also to Doug and Pam Condie and to Gary and Berenice Theurer who opened their beautiful homes for “focus group” meetings the evening before our symposiums. Both gatherings—with the Condies in Oakland and the Theurers in Darnestown, Maryland—were energetic, thoughtful discussions about Church and Sunstone issues. Thanks to you and the many bright, forthright friends and thinkers who participated, we have many new ideas to chew on as we continue to focus on ways to make Sunstone more effective in its outreach and desire to host discussions that will energize both minds and hearts. Our thanks also to Steve Mayfield, SUNSTONE’s faithful friend and photographer/taping maestro, for joining us and working so hard at both symposiums.*

AS SOME OF you may have heard, I wasn’t able to attend this year’s Sunstone West symposium because of the sudden passing of my mother, Beverly Wotherspoon, 16 April. She began her week feeling just a little sick. She became worried enough about her increasing discomfort to agree to go to the hospital, as it turned out, less than twenty-four hours before she died of a fast-moving infection—undiagnosed until too late to treat. To those of you who learned about our family’s loss and sent comforting wishes and blessed us with so many other kindnesses, please know how much we appreciate your friendship and support.

As my feelings for my mother and her life are still very tender and haven’t yet settled into ordered lines or clear frames suitable for sharing in a column like this, I’ve decided to reflect instead on her final few days and the sweet week our family shared following her passing. Beverly will show up, of course, in a

few glimpses, but I’m writing more about friends and strangers who pass through our lives and leave indelible marks on our hearts.

THE LAST FEW years of Beverly’s life were spent at a rather slow pace. Decades of struggles with weight had left Mom, at age seventy-two, somewhat confined to home, or at least limited to adventures that didn’t involve a lot of walking. Still, she loved to read, to think, to visit with kids and grandkids, friends, and anyone whose path crossed hers. She was by nature social; but by circumstance, her world of relationships had shrunk dramatically from those of her more enthusiastic and energetic years.

Even though her life’s circle had shrunk and her mind’s vision had narrowed a bit, Mom still wanted to share. And, for some reason, she got on a missionary kick. She had ideas about how the work should be done, how she might friendship people herself,

what her ward ought to get cracking on—you name it. Beverly was an idea factory. But deeper than that, she was Christian. She’d try to tell those of us who worried from afar that she was too trusting of some people, too ready to invite them into her home, that her goal in helping was all part of her missionary work. But the truth is she simply saw their goodness, even when it was hidden from most others. Mom’s desire to share stories and ideas and wisdom came from a deep soul and good heart. My sister Sharon shares those same qualities, and this story owes much of its joy to their habits of seeing spirit and of always finding good in people.

MOM died on a Wednesday, following a joyous Sunday. Three years after their friendship had begun, Matt had come to Church with her. And he had felt great about it—even moved. Matt is one of several people Mom and Sharon had invited into their San Diego home through the years. They’d helped him clean up and dry out, only to be disappointed time and again as he backslid into his rages and other self-destructive habits. He is sweet but broken. Sunday was exciting for Mom, for “missionary Bev,” but it was mostly a good day because a man’s spirit had triumphed, even if just for too-fleeting a moment, over his demons.

Beverly’s Monday began with a happy surprise, a call originating in the Salt Lake airport. Grandson Patrick—I mean, Elder Kennedy—was calling his mom, Sharon, as he and other missionaries from his MTC district prepared to board a plane for the Tennessee Nashville Mission. Beverly answered the phone and had the chance to talk with her grandson. But things got tougher. Mom had a stomachache—not too bad at first, but by day’s end, it had reached the point where she couldn’t find a comfortable resting position. Sharon began to worry and decided to stay home from work the next day.

Tuesday morning, the two of them decided they should head to the hospital. The phone rang. It was the Relief Society president. Mom’s visiting teacher had been meditating and felt a strong impression that something was up with Sharon. She had called the Relief Society president, who had called Sharon. “Yes, something is wrong. I need to take Mom to the hospital.” The reply was immediate: “I’ll be right over to help.”

After talking in the waiting room for thirty minutes or so, Sharon and the president heard a “code blue” announcement but didn’t know it was for Beverly. They were still

chatting ninety minutes later when the social worker came out to explain that Mom's breathing had stopped for a time and she was now on a ventilator. The worker's job parameters prevented her from being too specific, but she did indicate that Beverly's condition seemed serious.

Then Dad called from Sacramento. Sharon's cell shouldn't have been on in the hospital, and he never calls during the day, but he wanted to clarify Sharon's travel plan for coming to Sunstone West on Friday. Four Wotherspoons—Dad, Sharon, Dan, and Jeanine, who lives in the Bay Area—were going to have a small reunion. After receiving the news from Sharon, he immediately called me, Jeanine, and our brother, Steve. "Beverly's sick; they're not sure what's up, but it's not looking good."

A couple of hours later, the practical-minded wife of Beverly's faithful home teacher arrives. "How are you holding up? I've brought some water and power bars." Soon, Mom's intuitive visiting teacher shows up. The group is together as the doctor advises that Beverly likely won't last through the night. The bishop arrives, passing the doctor in the doorway.

Calls are made. Jeanine, a registered nurse, scrambles to get on a plane. Steve will get off work and hurry over. I pull my name and Jeanine's off the Sunstone West program and do my best to give John, our symposium coordinator, all my "don't forget" list of things to do, since they'll be his now. I won't be able to fly to San Diego until Thursday. Sharon's ex-husband, Vince, calls his wife Diana to bring the grandchildren to the hospital, then trades out the rest of his firefighter shift and rushes to the hospital himself.

**A** FEW hours earlier, in Beverly's ICU room, veteran nurse Judy notes the doctor's orders for stepping down the medications sustaining Mom's life. She knows Jeanine is desperately trying to get to Mom's bedside, and she decides to delay implementing the orders until Jeanine arrives.

About 4:00 a.m., Sharon, Steve, and Jeanine are gathered at Mom's bedside. Mom is comatose; her temperature spikes. Knowing the infection's typical course, Judy had expected it. "Bev, I think we should give you a sponge bath and see if we can bring down your temperature." And for the next hour or more, someone none of us had ever before met, slowly, lovingly, gave our mom a bath, swabbed the inside of her mouth, pow-

dered her, cooled her, prepared her for passing. Sharon spoke the feelings of our family heart in saying that Jesus Christ himself could not have received more loving care than our mom was given. Clearly, Judy shared Beverly and Sharon's gift for seeing beauty in things not outwardly lovely, for seeing something divine in those she met. A few hours after this anointing, beautiful Beverly was soaring.

**F**INALIZING funeral and burial arrangements, my sisters worry some about dressing Mom in her temple clothes. The bishop makes the perfect call, asking a wonderful sister from the ward to join us for the day. She knew some of the tricks and "just in case" thought to bring a portable curling iron. The end result was perfect.


We returned home to a surprise. Maggie was busily cleaning Mom's bathroom and closets. Maggie is another friend Beverly and Sharon had made along the way. She is good-hearted yet frustrating in her obsessive-compulsions. Half-hour-long conversations with her might never stray from an original two-thought theme. She brings a suitcase full of books wherever she goes. But we were truly stunned by her gift that day and for the next several days. "You know," she declared, "Beverly would not have wanted anyone but me to clean those rooms." As confused as Maggie is most of the time, she was right.

Beautiful services follow beautiful service. A stranger, a compassionate healer, had laid her hands on a head and dying body, and salvaged a family's grief through her washing and honoring of our mom's beauty. A caring ward had known my mom and sister and couldn't help responding, matching their gifts. Circle closed. Mission complete. Beverly is laid to rest.

**A**S I watched and reflected on all that had unfolded in the nine days between Mom's happy Sunday and her sweet memorial service, I couldn't help

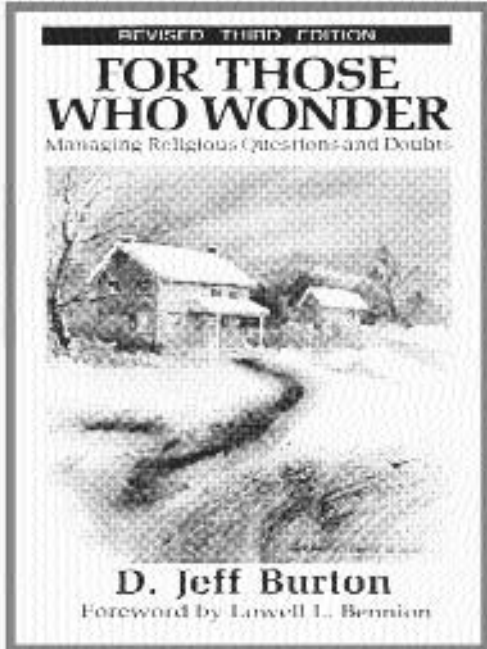
but recall the analogy at the heart of Barbara Kingsolver's wonderful novel *The Bean Trees*. The story's protagonist, Taylor Greer, is a young woman on a cross-country adventure who, by journey's end, has adopted an abandoned child she names "Turtle" and has forged a simple but light-filled life with a small cast of friends, each of them gifted but not whole, but whose failings and odd ways are still somehow ennobling. While Taylor and Turtle look together at pictures in a library reference book, Turtle recognizes a plant that looks like the bean trees that grow near their home. She's partly right, for wisteria, the plant she points out, is also in the legume family.

The analogy's beautiful secret unfolds as Taylor reads how wisteria is able to thrive even in poor soil because of microscopic bugs, rhizobia, that live on the plant's roots. The rhizobia draw nitrogen from the soil and convert it to fertilizer that feeds the vines.

"I like this," I told Turtle. "There's a whole invisible system for helping out the plant that you'd never guess was there." I loved this idea. "It's just the same with people. . . . The wisteria vines on their own would just barely get by, . . . but put them together with rhizobia and they make miracles." 

**AFFIRMATION**  
**Gay and Lesbian Mormons**  
announces its 2003 Conference to be held  
**10-12 October, Salt Lake City.**  
FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT <WWW.AFFIRMATION.ORG>

**A Gift of Peace**  
REVISED THIRD EDITION  
**FOR THOSE WHO WONDER**  
Managing Religious Questions and Doubts



**D. Jeff Burton**  
Foreword by Lowell L. Bennion

**\$7 • LDS Bookstores**  
**ISBN 1-883992-06-0**