

AN OLIVE LEAF

RELUCTANCE

By Elbert Eugene Peck

Shortly after Elbert Peck's resignation, Sunstone held a celebratory "RetrosPECKtive" banquet 10 August 2001 as part of its August symposium (tape SL01–291). Following many moving and funny tributes, Elbert offered the brief remarks printed here.

MY COMMENTS WILL BE THE BRIEFEST tonight. Thank you very much, I am overwhelmed. This has been a great experience.

As an undergraduate at BYU, I remember hearing Professor Britsch speak on the need in the future world for people to be generalists—and that rang true to me. I thought, that's what I am: I am a generalist. And this idea gave me passion to pursue my general education much further than BYU required me to.

Another word for generalist is a lay intellectual who knows a little about everything. But what Sunstone has allowed me to do is pursue my general education way past my college graduation. One day I get to talk with sociologists, another day with historians, another day with the organizational behaviorists and the literature people, and all the different disciplines—and I am interested in them all, and I have just a brief knowledge of them all. I think I have a pretty good sense of the standards of each of them, and because of my general interest, I have a little bit of interest in art, in aesthetic design, in humor and cartoons, a little bit of interest in this and that. Sunstone has allowed me to develop more so than most vocations do, allowed me to express and develop and expand so many facets of my personality, and I have been very grateful for that. It's hard for me to imagine any other job that would give me such an opportunity for such creative associations in many areas. And more importantly, it has put me into contact with and helped me develop friendships with people who are of such high caliber. People whom I know here in this room and through Sunstone are just the most excellent people in the world. I don't have a Ph.D., and I wouldn't be at a university because of that—and I am not a scholar. I am a cause fighter, as it has been noted, but I want to be an informed, enlightened cause fighter, and this has allowed me to talk to some of the best thinkers in Mormonism and to know them and to become friends with them, and my life is so rich because of Sunstone and because of you. So, thank you very much.

I WILL CLOSE with two quotations that I like. The first is from Joseph Smith that I learned because I heard Hugh Nibley recite it once in class.

The things of God are of deep import; and time, and experience, and careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts



can only find them out. Thy mind O man! if thou wilt lead a soul unto salvation, must stretch as high as the utmost heavens, and search into and contemplate the darkest abyss, and the broad expanse of eternity—thou must commune with God (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 137).

I think that is what Sunstone is all about. The celebration of the highest heavens, our faith and our belief, and also the lowest considerations of what we are as humans. To confront that honestly—I think those both are the things of God, and they both need to be involved in Sunstone.

Second, I stared memorizing poems because on my mission, I saw a stake president recite, in its entirety, "The Touch of a Master's Hand"—you know, that violin auction story. So I determined. "Well, that's great; I need to be able to do that because I can deeply move people." But the first poem I memorized was the last stanza of a Robert Frost poem, which I quoted in my farewell talk as I left the mission field. Since then, I have memorized the entire poem, and I'll conclude with that. It's called "Reluctance."

Out through the fields and the woods
And over the walls I have wended;
I have climbed the hills of view
And looked at the world and descended;
I have come by the highway home,
And lo, it is ended.

The leaves are all dead on the ground,
Save those that the oak is keeping
To ravel them one by one
And let them go scraping and creeping
Out over the crusted snow,
When others are sleeping.

And the dead leaves lie huddled and still,
No longer blown hither and thither;
The last lone aster is gone;
The flowers of the witch-hazel wither;
The heart is still aching to seek,
But the feet question 'Whither?'

Ah, when to the heart of man
Was it ever less than a treason
To go with the drift of things,
To yield with a grace to reason,
And bow and accept the end
Of a love or a season?

