

SUNSTONE

SCOTT KENNEY

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“Oh,” lamented Job, “that mine adversary had written a book.” Logic and syntax—even basic facts—which are unmistakably clear and irrefutable in manuscript form have a way of breaking down when committed to print. And when they do hold up, one can always find typographical errors, printing smudges and design problems. Something of a poet himself, Job understood the hazards of publishing. But apparently he had never heard of nonprofit quarterlies, for publishing problems are multiplied a hundred-fold when trying to meet three-month deadlines with no paid staff, new writers and illustrators with every issue, printing delays, subscribers who seem to move weekly without notification, computers that are always “down” and endless forms to fill out for the Post Office, the IRS, state and local tax boards and the copyright office.

How sweet would have been Job’s revenge had he been able to get his adversary into publishing! Not only are its afflictions legion, but publishing is addictive as well. Once printer’s ink begins to course through the veins, not even insomnia, chronic headaches, assorted nervous disorders and paranoia can induce one to give it up. If one is also religiously motivated, publishing can become an obsession bordering on demonic possession.

To this day I am not sure what started *Sunstone*. Some good intentions, I think, mixed with a lot of optimism and obvious naiveté. Originally the idea was to mimeograph a modest newsletter in religious studies for circulation among Latter-day Saints. I had just completed my second year at Berkeley’s Graduate Theological Union, and I had discovered several friends at Harvard Divinity School and others in social work, law and medicine who were willing to support a regular periodical. I had big plans for a bi-monthly, to begin in January, 1975—after just four months’ preparation! Fortunately, cooler heads prevailed, and we settled on a quarterly, to begin only when funds were available. All agreed there was a need for a publication where young people could express themselves, sharing their discoveries and concerns without being intimidated by the professional literary and academic standards of the established journals or the editorial mauling associated with some church publications. We wanted to be able to experiment. No doubt some tares would sprout with the wheat, but we were prepared to make mistakes. Our organizing group had very little editing experience and no publishing experience, but that inexperience kept us from taking ourselves too seriously.

The first name selected for the publication was “Whetstone.” It seemed to express our desire to provide a forum where new ideas could be produced and refined through free exchange and discussion; and it had possibilities for visual imagery which could convey attachment to our pioneer heritage. Unfortunately, it also had

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the potential to work against us, for as *Dialogue's* Bob Rees pointed out, the first time we printed an article someone didn't like, the word and the picture would be out, "Whetstone is sharpening its knives to stab . . . in the back." Bob suggested "Sunstone," and it stuck: Nauvoo temple, light, truth, intelligence, sun/Son.

While discussing a name, and roughing out a loose editorial policy, we began to look for funding. In November, Susan Hobson suggested using old photographs from the Church collection to produce and market a Mormon history calendar. Church Archives granted permission; Maria Humphrey (Sanchez) put up the \$800 down payment for the printer, and she drove the finished product from San Jose to Salt Lake City in a rented station wagon, arriving December 22, 1974. The calendar season was long past, but we had enthusiastic friends who helped with sales. As inexperienced in business as in publishing, we set the price too high (\$5) and alienated some by lowering it to \$3.50 in January after they had twisted arms for the higher amount just a few days earlier. Except for that unfortunate happening, sale of the 1975 calendar was successful. We paid all our bills and banked several hundred dollars for promotional work in the spring.

Though we had no organizational ties with *Dialogue* editors, when they heard of the project, they offered valuable advice and support. Not only had Bob helped with the name, but Eugene England—whom I first met while selling calendars in front of a Salt Lake supermarket—spoke to a group of *Sunstone* workers one Sunday evening after Christmas. By spring, we were ready to use the *Dialogue* mailing list generously offered by Bob. Five thousand fliers were mailed and distributed by hand in Salt Lake, Provo, Logan, Palo Alto and Berkeley. The results were gratifying—600 subscriptions arrived at the Berkeley post office (which we anxiously checked twice daily) through the summer of 1975. But the 600 proved a mixed blessing—enough for a hopeful beginning, but not enough to sustain us. Without institutional funding or large donations, we have had to scramble from issue to issue to stay out of debt and keep up a fairly regular publication schedule.

Our original intention was to direct *Sunstone* at college-aged Latter-day Saints, but in spite of expensive advertising efforts on Utah campuses, our subscription list remains fairly consistent at two-thirds non-students. We have therefore come to think of ourselves as a youthful magazine for Latter-day Saint students of all ages. Each issue has contained a variety of Mormon experience, scholarship, issues and art.

With Volume II, Number 2 a major change was made: from a journal to a magazine format. To a great extent the change was dictated by financial pressures. The larger size with a stapled binding saves several hundred dollars and nearly doubles the article space we can afford. The journal format may have been too pretentious, too academic-looking for a publication directed at a general readership. In addition, the larger format provides greater opportunity for graphics, a strong element from the beginning.

It may be that some subscribers feel a bit unsettled by the continuing changes in *Sunstone*, but our 33% increase in readership over the past two years seems to indicate that most find the changes are for the better, and we look forward to more growth in the future. After all, for all *his* trouble, "the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning."

Note: As this issue goes to press, Sunstone has made yet another change. It has merged with The New Messenger and Advocate, as a bimonthly under the direction of Scott Kenney, Kevin Barnhurst and Peggy Fletcher. The first issue under the new format carried advertising and was sent free of charge to 10,000 Mormons.