

LETTERS

Leave the Soft Porn Out

After reading "Wide Angle," by Sean Ziebarth, and "Cordoba," by Sam Cannon in the spring student 1997 issue, I went back to the front of the journal to check the statement of purpose. Supposedly *Dialogue* was "established to express Mormon culture and to examine the relevance of religion to secular life."

I see no correlation between these stories and the statement of purpose.

I came up with the following possible explanations:

1. The editors ran out of articles that met the stated purpose.

2. The editors needed more pages to keep the usual thickness of an issue.

3. The editors have decided to increase readership by including articles that would be found in magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*.

4. Mormon culture has changed, and these articles reflect the world of the majority of Mormons.

I have a suggestion for future issues. Leave the soft porn out. I would rather have a thinner issue that is consistent with the original purpose of *Dialogue*.

Howard T. Nelson
Florissant, Missouri

Rustin Kaufman Goes on the 1997 S.U.P. Pioneer Trek

Conversation during the Utah War: Army wagon master: "For God's sake, don't burn the train." Lot Smith: "It's for his sake we are."

While the much publicized 1997

"Wagon Train" participants traveled in real covered wagons from Nauvoo, Illinois, our S.U.P. group came west in air-conditioned busses—ugly black and yellow busses. A truck in Echo Canyon honked at us several times; but otherwise we were unrecognized as "trekkers."

Fifty years earlier it had been a different story for the Sons of Utah Pioneers (S.U.P.). We had fixed up our cars to look like covered wagons, with plywood oxen jutting forward from the front fenders. We had slept in sleeping bags, within the encircled "wagons." Lionel and I (for we were the "two boys") had blown our bugles to wake the camp, and had played "taps" to put it to sleep. People had stood along the route for hours, waiting to see us.

But now we were nobodies. Instead of having the exact number, representing the "advanced party," which we had in 1947 (143 men, three women, and two boys), we now had about 172 traveling with us—mostly older folks with their spouses. Back in 1947 I had killed a rattlesnake in Wyoming with the pioneer sword that was part of my costume. And I scared an unsuspecting Dorothy Kimball Keddington (Dyer) with it. Now, in 1997, the most exciting thing that happened was getting from Lander to Rock Creek, where we were to meet Elder Russell Ballard for an outdoor sacrament meeting. He was there, but where were we?

From my journal:

We journeyed southwest over a high pass to a dirt road which took us to South Pass City [sic for "City"]. We pushed along to South Pass, and to a paved road which led us to the dirt road which took us back to South Pass

City, where we turned around and took another dirt road to Atlantic City, where we turned around again and returned to South Pass City, where S.U.P. treasurer Richard Steed offered up a prayer for guidance. But none of us was worried, for Brother Berrett had assured us all that we were merely lost.

As it turned out, shortly after Treasurer Steed prayed, a Bishop Anderson found us and led us to Elder Ballard at Rock Creek. The apostle had gone ahead without us, then was obliged to start the meeting all over again and have the bread and the water blessed a second time.

"How did you hear about this tour?" I was asked by participant Robert Fotheringham, who does P.R. work for the church. I explained that in 1996 I had addressed the 1947 trekkers. Dorothy Kimball Keddington Dyer (who reminded me about the rattlesnake and her fright) had told me there were plans for a 150-year "trek" and that I should contact President Hinckley if I wished to be on it. So I did.

I was clearly the maverick of the 1997 trek. For one thing I almost always wore shorts, which was contrary to the advisory, which I hadn't bothered to read. I reverted to being Rustin Kaufman—that hiss-and-byword guy who had plagued *Dialogue* for twenty years, with his misplaced humor. And I had *failed* with *Dialogue*, for I had never written the books I had promised to write:

On Mormon history—*The Uncovered Wagon*

On Mormon doctrine—*Questions to Gospel Answers*

On the Mormon system of birth control—*No Man Knows About My Hysterectomy*

On the status of blacks—*A Marvelous Shirk and a Blunder*

Many trekkers were excited when our 1997 group came to Scottsbluff, Nebraska, because they heard that part-Lamanite Nedra Rony was to address us and bring along her Lamanite Dancers from the BYU. They announced that she had flown in the dancers in her jet, but they didn't say whether it was her big jet or her smaller one. I half expected to see white Indians, transformed to that hue by her Nu Skin products, fulfilling a pre-1981 promise in the Book of Mormon. But no ... They were all about the color of the illegal immigrants who have been pouring up from Michuacan to Redwood City, California, where I teach history in a small college.

Back in 1947 there had been 8,000 people living in Grand Island, Nebraska, and there were 40,000 people on the streets to see us come through in our pioneer clothes and made-over cars—and to see our play we were to put on, about Mormon doings in that town. Our great actor, Francis Urry, would take the stage (he was as much at ease giving radio addresses for an absent Salt Lake City mayor Glade as in portraying the prophet Joseph). But now in 1997 there were no crowds to meet us. The "Wagon Train" had preceded us, and had stolen all the thunder.

Yet we *were* met, at each stop, by the local stake people, who not only fed us in the stake houses, but put on entertainment for us as well. And after a while we figured out who we were: We were a professional traveling Mormon AUDIENCE, no doubt contributing to the intra-stake cohesion. Young people practiced and

practiced in anticipation of our coming. At Grand Island we heard a lovely young BYU co-ed sing sweetly, in a voice nearly trained. She was the *best*. But not the most impressive.

Most impressive were the young people at Lander, Wyoming, perhaps eighty strong, who sang song after song (most of them hymns), using at least eight different accompanying pianists from among their own number. Three girls played flutes. Bill Child (who had sold out his eight R.C. Willey furniture stores to the country's third richest man) saw it the same way I did: "Look what fine young people they're raising around here," he said. And it was so true. None of them was talented, but all of them were such great kids! Elder Ballard, and later President Hinckley, remarked on the great leadership of Riverton Stake president Lorimer, in getting the genealogy done for the perished souls of the Martin and Willie handcart companies. But that wasn't the greatness of Lorimer; the greatness was his raising up those enthusiastic clean-cut kids in the wilds of Wyoming.

We had two leaders, one of our movements, and the other of our minds. The first was Elliot Cameron, former president of the S.U.P. and ex-Dean of Students of the BYU. He had worked tirelessly for two years, putting in place the logistics of our journey, traveling back and forth from Nauvoo to do it. Our mind man was retired professor of church history Lamar Berrett—a man who knew where all the bodies were buried. I think he could probably track down the Three Nephites if he set his mind to it. He talked over a microphone on Red bus, which came on, for five-minute intervals, on busses Black,

Green, and Yellow as well. Sometimes, though, he got carried away talking about his books, as was the case when we dropped over the rim of the Great Basin, in Wyoming—the highest point on the trail—higher than South Pass, higher than Big Mountain. Sure, he had told us this before we got there; but when we were there—there on the rim—he was talking about his book on Israel, and about his upcoming trilogy on the Mormon trail. The Israel book, he said, cost only \$12.50. At dinner I suggested to him that he let Nedra market it for \$112.50, using a pyramid scheme.

Back at Council Bluffs, Iowa, I had blown my cool when I had intervened after the telling of the Mormon Battalion story. The received story: Captain Allen came riding in demanding that the Mormons contribute boys for the Mexican War. And so they did—500 of them—boys needed badly to push the wagons West, now lost to the train. But it was a test of Mormon patriotism, and the Mormons rose to the challenge, proving their chauvinism. So of course I couldn't stand by and let them get away with it; and I told everybody that Jesse C. Little had gone to Washington to see if the government couldn't help the impoverished Saints find some money. The government agreed to take 500 Mormon boys into the army so their pay and rations could be used by Brigham Young to move the Saints westward. A few people confided in me that they were glad I spoke up. But I had told them only half the truth: We weren't trying to be patriotic. We were going West to try to carve our own *country* out of territory belonging to Mexico. Don't any of these people read Klaus Hansen?

The other anomaly Brother Ber-

rett told us was that on Windless Hill, windlasses had NOT been used to let down the wagons. Instead, he said, it was named that because somebody thought you ought to have a windless with you so that when you dug a well, you could wind up the water. At the next stop I showed him a maker that said different.

But there were errors all along the way, usually not the fault of our narrators. For example, at the Caspar Museum, at Casper (sic), Wyoming, there was a sign that said that the "advanced party" of Mormons numbered 143 men, *two* women, and *three* children. I complained to the director, who promised to change the numbers. That was more than I had gotten from the editor of the *Daily Illini* when I taught at Champaign, Illinois. His paper had said that with the coming of *The Marriage of Figaro*, soon the walls of Kranert Auditorium would be ringing with "Figaro, Figaro, Figaro." When I called to tell him that that aria was from *The Barber of Seville*, he refused to print a correction, saying (to me), "Nobody around here would ever know."

While Apostle Spencer W. Kimball had been with us on the 1947 trek, we had along with us, on our last excursion, Richard Eyring Turley, a new member of the Second Quorum of Seventy (whatever that is). He was on the Yellow bus with me, as was his son by the same name, keeper of the historical archives of the church. I came to realize both of these were good men and true. They even had senses of humor. For example, Turley Jr. facetiously pretended to be interested in working with me on a *Handbook for General Authorities*. Rick has a degree in English, so he was sympathetic to my insistence upon pointing

out social urbanisms (e.g., "Are you going to town with Bill and I?") and singular/plural mixings (e.g., "Each man should do their best").

Lamar would do his best to inculcate an appreciation of the gospel, the general authorities, the principle of authority. Example: He said that in Israel the late counselor in the First Presidency, Nathan Eldon Tanner, said, "If you follow your bishop, and he turns out to be wrong, you are still right."

Right!

Two elderly people from Manti got sick before the trek began; so they sent their grandsons (twenty-three and fifteen) in their places. Delightful young men. I walked up to them while they were playing basketball, outside one of our motels, and asked them if they would like to play against a couple of sixty-five-year-olds. They laughed. So Richard Horsley and I took them on, and WON, for Dick used to be the center on our East High School (Salt Lake City) basketball team. All I had to do was to feed the ball to Dick.

But there were other youngins as well. Bill Child brought his children (twenty-three and nineteen). There were two valley girls from Los Angeles. And there was a fourteen-year-old boy from Boise, traveling with his grandmother. All these kids sat together on our Yellow bus most of the time.

Up the dirt road from Henefer we went, moving toward Big Mountain. I had *walked* that trail in the dead of winter, as an Explorer Scout, using fur climbers on my skis. I had slept on top, when it was four degrees below zero. Our scoutmasters (including my dad) had stayed up through the night heating bricks to put in our sleeping bags, to keep us from freezing to

death. So when our trek leaders told us of the hardships of the Donner-Reed Party, and of the Advanced Party, I just laughed.

After crossing from Parley's Canyon to Emigration Canyon, our bus people looked left toward the valley, while I looked right to where Pinecrest Inn had been, where I used to meet the church's girls to take them on hikes up there. We had a cabin near that hotel, where I had spent every summer of my childhood. And I knew those mountains well.

We stopped near a beer hall to view Brigham Young's last encampment spot. But I was looking at the beer hall, where I had once won money on a slot machine. Later I made the mistake of telling my father about my success, and he, being a Third District Court judge, called the sheriff and had it removed.

The "Wagon Train" had preceded us, meeting enthusiastic crowds at This Is The Place Monument. We came through later, when everyone was gone. We didn't even stop there, which made me sad because I wanted to show a few people my name on the small monument, next to the big one, commemorating the 1947 trekkers. Once I had stood there listening to a guide tell visitors that all that crowd was dead, he guessed. So I whipped out my wallet and showed them my driver's license, and then my same name on the monument. They laughed at the coincidence. (I still have a full head of brown hair.)

I think I've been a bit hard on Brother Berrett. Actually I liked him more and more as we went along. He was funny, and very knowledgeable! He was the best guide our group could have found. That's for sure. I liked his wife too. They grew up liv-

ing only a few blocks away from each other, out in Riverton, Utah. Wonderful people.

And maybe I've been too disparaging of Nedra as well. After all, who can argue with tons of money? Maybe Nedra is in the vanguard of Saints moving West. "Westward drifts the course of empire," said Lord Berkeley. And our church moves WEST! First it was New York, then Ohio, then Illinois, then Utah. Next stop—Lhasa, Tibet—right in the middle of those teeming billions in Asia, waiting for conversion. We could make use of our nineteenth-century polygamy and have our missionaries stay in the field forever and never come home, going from one woman to the next, like my ancestor George A. Smith, setting up southern Utah. And this would be fine with the women of Tibet, for their tradition is polyandry, where one woman has several husbands. She could greet one missionary after another.

Then on to Palestine, where we could arrive to make the area our headquarters, just before the great war. Lastly, we could move the main offices to Jackson County, Missouri, for the Millennium. And THIS will be how we shall return to Jackson County—from the EAST!

And for all this we can eventually thank Nu Skin; for they were the first to soften up Asia, with their 400,000 distributors there, in preparation for the church's moving its headquarters to Tibet. In the imperialistic nineteenth century, Christian missionaries went into Asia, followed by armies. In the twenty-first century, it will be Nu Skin, followed by the Latter-day Saints. Do you think?

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