

SUNSTONE

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WE at Sunstone have recently become involved in an effort to turn an important and stunning play, *Peculiarities*, into an independent film. It's an exciting project that is well underway, with screenplay, director, cinematographer, production team, and cast in place. Rehearsals have started. All that's needed is more funding—and that's where we and you come in.

Before getting to the nuts and bolts of how you might support this project, let's tell you more about the play and why we think through film festivals, a possible theatrical run, and DVD distribution and sales, a film version of this play could make a splash and generate a fruitful discussion in LDS as well as the wider religious culture.

The play's background, as told by playwright and screenwriter Eric Samuelsen:

Ever since I began teaching at BYU in 1992, I've become a bemused student of Mormon culture, intrigued by its idiosyncracies and oddities and inconsistencies. Every so often, my observations have resulted in plays: *Gadanton*, *The Way We're Wired*, *Without Romance*, *Family*, and others.

Peculiarities is the result of conversations I've had with the LDS young people I teach and interact with. Mormon culture tends to preach a "letter of the law" approach to moral questions, and especially in regards to issues of sexual morality. And so I became aware of some of the peculiar ways in which moral rigidity and sexuality collide in our culture.

- * I know of, and have even met, young men and women who travel together to Nevada, marry, enjoy a romantic weekend, have the marriage annulled, and then return to BYU, confident that they've not broken the law of chastity.
- * I know of, and have met, young people who involve themselves in the strange practice they call NCMO—a non-committal make-out—essentially sexual foreplay with strangers, while still maintaining a committed relationship with someone else.
- * A friend who served in a BYU Relief Society Presidency told me the practice that occupied most of her time in her calling was what she called "sex-less adultery"—married couples who find their closest emotional ties with someone outside their marriage.
- * I also discovered in my reading the appalling stories of LDS married women who become trapped in financial debt, and who turn, in their desperation, to prostitution.

I thought that combining all these stories and practices into a single play might make for a compelling evening in the theatre. I was especially taken with the idea of presenting this material naturalistically, simply showing the stories of these flawed human characters without apology, explanation, or mediation, presuming a morally centered audience and allowing that audience the space to reach their own conclusions about the issues raised by these stories. And so, sometime around 1999, I wrote *Peculiarities*.

THE FILM WILL FEATURE SIX SEPARATE STORIES—explorations of the four scenarios discussed by Samuelsen above, as well as a look at two LDS women in their early twenties who contemplate the probability that they will never find someone to marry along with a humorous thread about an LDS bishop and his wife trying to enjoy a romantic evening together while constantly being interrupted by ward business. Though the storylines are completely separate, the film will cut back and forth between them.



Peculiarities explores these stories and topics not to glorify poor decisions nor make fun of moral attitudes and inconsistencies that lead the characters to make them, but to illustrate and better understand their consequences. Of the importance for Latter-day Saints to tell their stories realistically but still in a compelling, artistic way, LDS author, Orson Scott Card says,

Mormons can no more live by empty, meaningless art that pretends to be moral because it is devoid of any relation to reality than the rest of the world can live by art that scoffs at morality and presents a view of life as a meaningless, pointless, undirected accident.

Peculiarities strives to be moral art that is at the same time effective *as* art.

In an effort to publicize the project, as well as offer wonderful, meaty subject matter for its readers, beginning with the issue now at press, SUNSTONE will run one of the film's principal stories in each of the next five magazine issues. Sunstone and others involved with the film will also work to generate news media interest in the project. In addition, a website, www.apecculiarpeople.com, is currently under construction.

Getting Down to Business.

Your donations, even modest ones, will make the film version of *Peculiarities* a reality. Everyone involved in the film is working for free. The estimated budget of \$10,000 is entirely devoted to paying for the hard costs of film, cameras, lighting equipment, and so forth. Time is of the essence, however, as filming of the first segment is scheduled to begin on 8 April.

All donations for the project can be made to the Sunstone Education Foundation, Inc., a registered non-profit organization. Sunstone will then release the funds for the film. All donations are tax deductible. Should the film become a financial success through festival prizes, distribution deals, theatrical runs, and/or DVD sales, a contract has been executed that directs the ways potential profits will be divided between Sunstone and those who are contributing their time and talents toward making the film a reality. We are not approaching you to consider this as an investment for which you will receive a financial return. Under whatever name or way you direct, your gift will be noted in the film's credits, but this appeal is for you to use your resources in service of a worthy effort—the making of a powerful film, as well as a potential monetary windfall for Sunstone as the film achieves success—rather than as a financial investment.

We encourage you to donate to this project! Please contact William Stanford at the Sunstone offices with any questions about options for giving.

DAN WOTHERSPOON
SUNSTONE editor

WILLIAM STANFORD
SUNSTONE publisher

• PECULIARITIES •

ERIC SAMUELSEN, *screenwriter*

JARRY RAPIER, *director*

MARK BARR, *director of photography*

JAMES HOLMES, *editor*

TAHOE—*Colleen Lewis, Jay Perry*
TEMPS—*Kirt Bateman,*
Christy Summerhays

KISS—*Stephanie Howell, Carl Nelson—*
also Deena Marie Manzaneres,
Teresa Sanderson

CAST

NCMO—*Logan Miller, Melanie Nelson*
PIZZA & TV—*Colleen Baum,*
Chelsi Stahr

THE BISHOP & HIS WIFE—
Anita Boober, Eric Samuelsen—
also Melissa Rasmussen