

News and Views

by Carl Sorenson

It's been six months since the first installment of my newsletter, so it is time for an update! If you missed the last edition, you can find a copy on my website (more about that in a minute).

Six months ago I was just starting my new job with Feld Entertainment, Inc., the parent company of Ringling Bros. circus. Most people I talk to think I am joking when I tell them I work for the circus, but it's true. We're the ones with the clowns and elephants and everything. I don't actually see them, because I do software development, but still.

You might be surprised how much programming there is to do for the circus. I am doing work on our web sites (general sites, media guides, marketing pages), intranet, and internal web applications, as well as making code libraries, windows services, and defining our standard operating procedures for the web team. And I'm having a blast—this is exactly what I wanted to be doing!

My job site is located in traffic-clogged Tysons Corner, so I have been biking there part of the time (and showering at the Gold's Gym). By January I had gone more than 1400 km! I even bought a new bike. I love being in the outdoors and bypassing the traffic. I am also telecommuting several days a week and experimenting with hybrid bike/bus commuting.

To give you a sense of how the past half-year has been for me, I'll just say that my theme song for the third quarter was Collective Soul's **Better Now**. Just before that it had been **Better Days (And the Bottom Drops Out)** from Citizen King, so you can see that things were looking up in the third quarter. Q4 wasn't quite so hot (and didn't have a theme song), but it's over and I'm looking forward to 2007.

Web site updates

I have made some significant updates to my personal web site, which is at <http://eshp.us>. You can find samples of my writing, including opinion and essay pieces, my fiction, and the previous issue of *News and Views*, as well as samples of the songs mentioned in this newsletter. It also has links to my various pages. Check it out! More writing is hopefully coming, too.

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Predictions desk

We already see the commonly-held view in society that religious inclinations and experiences are merely the products of brain activity. I can only assume that this belief will continue to gain currency. Our understanding of the brain is very limited right now, and could expand dramatically in the next few decades—bringing new challenges to faith, in some instances.

Already we have seen the blurring of the line between free will and an organic explanation for things such as addiction and criminality. At what point will we be able to modify brain activity as we currently modify blood chemistry? These will be tough issues for the future.

Fine arts and pop culture in 2007

I was listening to the radio some time ago, and for some reason the radio show had a poetry reading. It got me thinking: who reads poetry in 2007? It seems like this part of the fine arts is pretty quaint and irrelevant to most of us now.

But then I realized I was overlooking something big. Most of us consume a vast amount of poetry set to music (another fine art). Music is huge—a lot of people run their iPods practically all day. So, poetry is very much alive.

I think there are a lot of people in the Church who equate “music” (or at least “good music”) with classical or vocal performance. Personally, I love rock, and I have no interest in performing. A lot of the songs say something in addition to just sounding great. For example, I can't imagine a better expression of moral outrage than The Cranberries' **Zombie**. Any Mormon with an understanding of the Atonement should be able to have a special appreciation for **So Far Away** from Staind, if they can catch the lyrics.

It isn't just these fine arts that are so healthy. In my opinion, much of the popular fiction of the past few decades is at least as high-quality literature as the “classics”. I am partial to science fiction—some of it is excellent.

And the visual arts? Some comic strips are fantastic art and great writing. The quality of cinema has never been higher (if you see good movies, that is). I never realized how much of an art connoisseur I was!