

An Unlikely Road of Travel

Address by Douglas E. Bush, CFAC Convocation, 15 August 2013

I grew up in the wilds of western Montana, in the beautiful Bitterroot Valley. Both Lewis and Clark and Chief Joseph and his band of Nez Perce Indians had traveled the length of the valley, adding to its historical legacy. The Bitterroot River, numerous lakes and streams, the Skalkaho pass and Blodgett Canyon—all these were places of wonder and beauty. It was a spectacular place to grow up! We had a farm with milk cows (Guernseys). Dad had a logging truck and, in addition to the farm work, he often worked 13-hour days hauling logs out of the hills. At the age of three I was entrusted with driving the tractor pulling the hay wagon o'er the snow-covered fields while dad fed hay to the cattle.

When old enough to attend school, I went to the small country school in Grantsdale—there were two grades per classroom, and my teacher, Mrs. Hammond, seemed to me a very strict disciplinarian and she must have been about the age of Methusaleh! In the back of our classroom was a contraption which showed the solar system. When one turned the crank, the moon and planets made their journey around the sun, and so we learned about orbits and eclipses.

Back on the farm, when about the age of six, I graduated to driving a horse-drawn hay rake. When it was time for haying, my grandfather mowed the hay, and after it had dried sufficiently, my job was to hitch-up the old black work horse named "Don," and rake the hay into rows, after which it was taken by buck rake to the stacker and stacked as loose hay for winter feed. In the summer months I spent weeks and weeks with my grandparents helping them on their ranch. Hours were spent on horseback, riding the mountain pastures to make sure the cattle were safe from the roving wolf packs. Beaver and beaver ponds, herds of elk

and deer, bears, badgers, mountain lions—all these were common, normal sights.

I loved Indian history and read everything I could find on the Sioux, Nez Perce, Cheyenne, Blackfeet, Apache, Shoshone, Flathead, and other Indian tribes. The Little Big Hole Battlefield, site of a major battle with the Nez Perce was near my home, and that battle, along with the Battle of the Little Big Horn (Custer's Last Stand) were particularly interesting to me. I went to a real Indian Powwow with an older gentleman who kindly treated me like an adopted grandson. He had been an Indian Agent in his younger years. He invited me to accompany him, and to me, going into the tepees, sitting there and listening to him speak to them in their native language, and seeing all their finery was simply magical—an "old west" experience unknown these days—except perhaps in a movie set.

Not as exotic as attending a powwow, but nonetheless a part of everyday life involved helping my grandpa milk seventeen cows by hand (morning and night)—after milking there was the straining and separating of milk and cream, cooling the milk cans in water streams, slopping hogs, gathering eggs from over a hundred chickens that claimed any free spot from the henhouse, to the woodshed, to the loft and mangers in the barn as their nesting territory—places also frequently checked by bull snakes and skunks searching for eggs.

My parents had a half-acre garden, but my grandmother Beattie had a ten-acre garden, with half of it in raspberries. When harvest time came, we all reported for duty to help with picking and canning the vegetables and fruit. When there was free time from chores, my dog and I traversed and explored miles of country, canyons, and streams. In Sunday School I loved singing the hymn:

Sounds among the vales and hills,
In the woods and by the rills,

Of the breeze and of the bird,
By the gentle murmur stirred—
Sacred songs, beneath, above
Have one chorus: God is love.

I believed that then, I believe it now. I loved my family, I loved where we lived, I loved going to Church and was blest to gain a testimony at an early age that would sustain me through trials that would come. Mine was a childhood to be cherished—a time now largely impossible to replicate.

So what has this to do with today, with this festive celebration? Were there no “downers” to the utopia of my young years? It might be considered odd at best, that a boy growing up in that environment would end up on the Fine Arts Faculty of BYU. For all its abundance of natural beauty, my childhood home was not a *cultural hotspot!!!* My dad’s favorite music was, and still is, country western—and he listened to it every day.

For me, there were several teachers, mentors, friends, and experiences along the way that changed my life forever. One of those persons was my High School Choir director. Her name was Virginia Vinyl. Our small concert choir nearly always took the highest awards at the Montana State Choral Competitions, held at the University of Montana in Missoula. She must have been an Episcopalian, because our choir often provided the choral music for special services at the modest Episcopal Church in town. I think she also loved the choral masterworks of the late Renaissance, because we sang the music of Victoria and Palestrina with great frequency. Her patience and persistence in guiding us to a polished performance of their music planted a seed in me. I admired and respected her enormously—if she loved that music, then there was something there to learn and internalize. Mrs. Vinyl is now nearing her 90th year. Whenever I return to my home town, I try to visit her.

My first year of college was at Ricks College in Rexburg. I had hoped to come to BYU, but our family could not afford that expense. What I thought was a second-degree option turned out to be an enormous blessing. I lived with a great aunt—Aunt Leone, my grandfather's sister, and she was a woman "for all seasons!" What a blessing it was to become better acquainted with the siblings of my grandfather and grandmother Beattie. Little did I know then how profoundly that would affect my family history work in later years. At the College, Professor Ruth Barrus became my guiding star. She and her husband, Lamar, invited me to my first-ever orchestra concert, played by the Idaho Falls Symphony. Her husband was a cow farmer, and I could relate to him. I felt honored to accompany them to the symphony—it opened another world of musical discovery. Sister Barrus taught both music and the Humanities, and she introduced me to Michelangelo, many works of art, and many good books. She impressed upon me a statement attributed to Michelangelo: "True art is made noble and religious by the mind producing it. And the mind, the soul, becomes ennobled by the endeavor to create something perfect, for God is perfection, and whoever strives after perfection is striving for something divine."

I worked the summer to earn money for my mission. The call to Switzerland came at the end of August, on a Monday. I read the call, was thrilled, and a week later left to come to the "big city" of Salt Lake so I could go to the temple and enter the Salt Lake Mission Home—less than two weeks after receiving my call. Following a week in Salt Lake and having been set apart by a General Authority, those of us assigned to a German-speaking mission were off to Provo. The German LTM was still fairly new. Having never had any exposure to the German language, and having no idea about the beauties and mysteries of Swiss German that would

soon come, it seemed to me an impossible dream to gain any fluency. Elder A. Theodore Tuttle had set me apart, however, and in his blessing he bestowed upon me the gift of tongues, with the promise that the language would become my own. I trusted in that blessing and in time it was realized. Almost immediately after arriving in the LTM, I met another Elder going to Switzerland, and we became close friends. We later served as companions and then were roommates while studying at BYU. We have worked together nearly all our professional lives. We joined the music faculty here the same time, and even flew here on the same plane for our final interviews! I love and respect this man—his gifts and insights have often lifted me to higher ground.

My mission was pivotal for me in many ways. In addition to all that is associated with missionary work, it opened doors and understanding to innumerable cultural blessings. Among a few singular experiences was a performance in the Zürich Grossmünster of Bach's B-Minor Mass. I had never heard such magnificent music—EVER! Years later I sat pondering Matthias Gruenenwald's Isenheim Altarpiece housed in the Unterlinden Museum in Colmar, France—transfixed by his brilliant use of paint that helped me understand more fully the price of Atonement. Seeing Michelangelo's *David* in Florence, Italy was another unforgettable experience (a great example of sculpture where the artist was striving for perfection); the marvel of San Marco's Basilica in Venice; visiting fabulous art museums in Paris, London, New York City, Moscow, Russia, among others; and the artistic photography of colleagues such as Val Brinkerhoff and John Telford whose work offers a refined lens through which I may view the world around me—all these have blessed my life. My cup runneth over!

I haven't time to mention individually so many who have taught, guided, blessed and

loved me, but they include my family, many of my colleagues seated here on the stand and others now long since “graduated,” and many students—their love, friendship, and patience with me has been remarkable. I have traveled many countries of the world and have dear friends in many of those places. Never in my wildest dreams as a boy, did I ever imagine such a life.

In Book V of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, an angel speaks with Adam and delivers

this wise counsel:

Attend: That thou art happy, owe to God;
That thou continu’st such, owe to thyself,
That is, to thy obedience; therein stand.
This was that caution giv’n thee; be advis’d.
God made thee perfect, not immutable;
And good he made thee, but to persevere
He left it in thy power, ordain’d thy will
By nature free, not over-rule’d by Fate
Inextricable, or strict necessity;
Our voluntary service [God] requires,
Not our necessitated, such with him
Finds no acceptance, nor can find, for how
Can hearts, not free, be tri’d whether they serve
Willing or no, who will but what they must
By Destiny, and can no other choose?

(Book V, lines 520-534)

For many years I have loved Robert Frost’s poem “The Road Not Taken.” I would like to share it with you in closing.

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet not knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

For you graduates, and all of us, there will yet be many roads to travel. When I think back on boyhood days, I never imagined, never had an inkling of where life's road would take me. Due to Heaven's blessings, good and wise teachers and friends, and lots of hard work, it has been an exciting and challenging journey. I am grateful for the road I have taken—it has blessed my life beyond measure. I wish you success in all your ambitions, and I am grateful to have been traveling companions on this part of life's road.