

# *“Faster Alone but Further Together”*

HILLARY NIELSEN

Good morning! You 2023 graduates and your loved ones are a beautiful sight. It is my privilege to speak to you today on behalf of the BYU Alumni Association. Our motto is Connected for Good. We keep our alumni connected to each other, connected to the students on campus, and connected to the many communities that they inhabit the world over.

During the pandemic, as one of two people who can read my dad’s cryptic penmanship, I found time to transcribe my father’s journal that he kept during his freshman year at BYU. There was a particular entry that touched me that he wrote just a few weeks after buying the journal at the BYU Bookstore. After dealing with a tough situation that day, he wrote: “I was proud of my actions earlier tonight. It showed me how much I have changed since I came to the Y. I thank God again for the Y.”<sup>1</sup>

May I share a little background? I have been working on my father’s history since he passed from this mortal life almost twenty years ago. Getting to know my father by collecting his history and transcribing his writings has been inspiring. My dad set a goal when he was young to go to college and to serve a mission—both

firsts for his family. Since his family lived under meager circumstances, he worked hard to be at the Y. Through diligence and hard work, by the end of his junior year in high school, he had saved up enough money for a few years at BYU and for his entire twenty-seven-month mission. Shortly thereafter, the local savings and loan in southern Idaho failed, leaving him with next to nothing. He did not give up, and he worked multiple jobs furiously on very few hours of sleep to try to replace what was lost. During that time, with many noted miracles, he was able to earn enough for a year at BYU and for his mission.

Because of the personal work and dedication that it took for him to come to BYU, he was so grateful for the opportunities this unique institution afforded him. Like President Russell M. Nelson, my dad recognized that “gratitude . . . provides us with a greater perspective on the very purpose and joy of life.”<sup>2</sup> He recognized this early in his life, lived it, and taught it to his family. My father left BYU and became an influencer. Professionally, he touched lives by helping women through pregnancy and health challenges. He delivered babies. He inspired his children and grandchildren. He used his experience to touch

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*Hillary Nielsen, president of the BYU Alumni Association, delivered this commencement address on April 27, 2023.*

lives for good. BYU's unique, spiritually infused education gave my father and all of us the chance, the space, and the fuel to grow as disciples of Christ and children of God serving in this world. I also thank God for the Y.

It is now my privilege to confer upon you a lifetime membership in the Brigham Young University Alumni Association and welcome you into an organization of more than five hundred thousand individuals connected for good around the world. This also means that you have a lot of people interested in your journey. Wherever you end up, look for the BYU Alumni Association chapter and get involved.

As you leave this beautiful campus and go forth to serve, there will be opportunities to join fellow alumni in meaningful activities. We encourage you to become involved in one of our eighty-six regional chapters or participate in one of our twenty-six professional chapters. Just imagine all of the incredible things that can be accomplished with our BYU alumni connecting for good throughout the world—just like the proverb “You can go faster alone but further together.” As President Spencer W. Kimball envisioned, you have been prepared at this university “to take [your] place in society as thinking, thoughtful, and sensitive individuals who . . . [are] dedicated to love of God, pursuit of truth, and service to mankind.”<sup>3</sup> You are individuals who desire to serve to benefit the world. Together “we can multiply our influence and give hope.”<sup>4</sup>

Let me share with you just a few things our alumni have been engaged in over the last year. We have sponsored Cougs Care tailgate service projects at away football games, collecting diapers, books, gloves, socks, clothing, and food to support local community organizations that benefit refugees, homeless families, and other marginalized populations.

The BYU Alumni Association also gives out almost \$1 million in replenishment grants to students each year. Many of these dollars were raised by local BYU Alumni chapters.

Our efforts in spreading goodwill have even recently helped recruit some football players by handing out free ice cream to the opposing team's fans at our home football games. Perhaps our

second motto should be “Never underestimate the power of free ice cream.”

Join us on BYU Connect to be a mentor to current students or to connect with and be mentored by amazing alumni already in your desired field. Did you know that statistically it is the acquaintances or friends of your friends that get you jobs and help you find your spouse? The spouse tip is only for those who haven't completed that special connection here.

With BYU Alumni added to your list of identifiers, you will be a representative of BYU wherever you go and in whatever you do. And it is my hope that you generously contribute your time, your talent, and—whenever possible—your treasure as you actively seek opportunities to utilize your BYU education to benefit others.

Your special accomplishment that we are all celebrating today represents a lot of work and dedication. I applaud each of you. You were supported by family and friends. I know that you are grateful for this support and for the unique opportunity to learn and grow at BYU. I pray that you share the unique light of BYU, a light that I can see emanating from each of you. Take that unique light and share it with your world. Become an influencer for good—lift and light wherever you may be.

Well done, class of 2023. Please come back to campus to visit and join us in our alumni activities across the world. And may you always be connected for good. Thank you.

## Notes

1. Journal of David Lynn Hatt; private document in my possession.
2. Russell M. Nelson, “The Healing Power of Gratitude,” video message shared on social media, Church of Jesus Christ, 20 November 2020. Transcript available in Nelson, “The Story Behind My Global Prayer of Gratitude,” *Inspiration* (blog), 20 November 2020, Church of Jesus Christ, [churchofjesuschrist.org/inspiration/the-story-behind-my-global-prayer-of-gratitude](http://churchofjesuschrist.org/inspiration/the-story-behind-my-global-prayer-of-gratitude).
3. Spencer W. Kimball, “The Second Century of Brigham Young University,” BYU devotional address, 10 October 1975.
4. Kimball, “Second Century.”