

Missed Opportunities

J. CRAIG McILROY

It is my great privilege and honor to represent the Brigham Young University Alumni Association. I take personal pleasure in seeing Rachel Wilcox on the stand with me today. Her family is from Denver, and I am delighted that she is here to represent us and our fair city. Her uncle, Kenn Thiess, preceded me in this assignment more than a decade ago. Her family has a long and loyal heritage of support for this fine institution.

It has been a very busy summer at the alumni association. On June 23rd, as President Samuelson mentioned, the university broke ground for the new Gordon B. Hinckley Alumni and Visitors Center. A year from now, when you come back to campus, you will find this new building waiting for you. I hope you will each feel very much at home in this new facility and I hope you will come back to visit often. It will be a gateway to the campus for our visitors as well as a home for all of you, our beloved alumni, and a tremendous tribute to our dear prophet.

The work of funding this project continues. No tithing monies will go into the construction of this building. Many of you have participated in this effort through the Choose to Give campaign and the Annual Fund. We are most grateful for your assistance and appreciate

your sacrifice. We have made excellent progress, and the work of identifying funds goes forward. If you have not yet had the chance to assist in this fine effort, you can find that opportunity on BYU's Web site.

Over the years many foreign language missionaries have taken classes at BYU in their new tongue upon returning home to campus. I, along with many of my friends from German-speaking missions, took such classes.

At that time we studied on the fifth floor of the library, surrounded by stacks of books on German language and literature. We went there to study and to capture any drops of inspiration and knowledge that might be left oozing from the books around us. There were so many incredible authors. I'm sure some of you here today have utilized this process of "osmosis" as you've sat among the stacks in the Harold B. Lee Library.

While there late one evening, my friend Joel Bryan pointed out a short story by Franz Kafka, a German-born, Polish Jew who wrote during the 1920s. He had an unusual talent, but his prose was often hard to understand.

J. Craig McIlroy was president of the BYU Alumni Association when this commencement address was given on 17 August 2006.

The exciting thing about the story for me at the time was not the content but the fact that it was only one and one-half pages long. For a student still working through his organic chemistry, zoology, and physics homework at 10:45 p.m., such a short story was welcome indeed. I read the story in haste.

Surprisingly, Kafka's story has stayed with me much longer than the organic chemistry homework or the principles of physics that I studied that night—both very valuable subjects, I assure you.

The story is called "Before the Law." The tale opens as an unsophisticated country farmer visits the county seat to do some business. As he walks up the steps approaching the side door of the courthouse, he sees a guard there who blocks the open passageway and demands to know why the farmer wants to gain entrance.

The farmer explains very simply that he has business to accomplish, but the guard refuses to let him in. The farmer, not being well versed in matters of municipal government, sits on the steps of the courthouse and waits a while, trying to figure out his next move. He petitions the guard continually for days, weeks, and months without rest or going home—all to no avail.

At one point, a visibly annoyed guard tells the farmer that if he believes he is strong enough to get past him, he should know that beyond him at each interior door in the courthouse is a guard much larger and more terrible than he.

And so the bewildered farmer sits on the steps and waits. In his waiting he consumes all that he has in this life.

Finally, realizing that the end for him is near—his vision dimming, his body unwilling to move—he beckons the guard close to ask one final question before his death.

"How is it," he pleads, "that in all these years no one else has come to beg permission to enter the county courthouse by this door?"

"Ah," bellows the guard in disgust, "that is very simple. This door was meant for you alone to enter. And, because you have not done so, I'm now going to lock it" (see Franz Kafka, "Before the Law," *The Trial* [1925]).

In the course of our daily experiences we sometimes walk past—or around—opportunities because they may seem too difficult or daunting. I think of this story whenever a new opportunity, challenge, or problem arises. I hope that when you are at the end of your days you will not have walked past opportunities that you should have taken or challenges you should have accepted. I hope you will draw each day upon your secular and spiritual knowledge to find your way in faith.

You have been able to glean a sterling education while attending this great university. I trust that you have felt the Spirit of the Y while here—both in and outside the classroom. From this day forth you carry the pleasant burden of being keepers of the Spirit of the Y and assisting in this institution's ongoing success. Come back and see your alma mater frequently and speak positively of her to all you encounter. Reconnect with her as often as possible. Represent her well as you work to represent yourself, your good family name, and your church in similar fashion.

As president of your alumni association, I hereby confer on each of you lifetime membership in the Brigham Young University Alumni Association. Congratulations, and welcome into this great association of nearly 360,000.

That you may be successful in all your worthy attempts in this life is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.