

Adding Burnish to BYU

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To those who graduated before you, you owe a debt of gratitude. Because they have used their talents and educations to add to the reputation of the university, you and I can take pride in associating the name Brigham Young University with our own names and reputations. We can write BYU with confidence on applications to graduate schools, on résumés, on job applications, or on paperwork for professional societies.

The university has long been recognized for producing women and men of integrity. BYU graduates are known as outstanding employees, notable scholars, and respected leaders. You are among those who have been grounded and rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

President Hinckley in media interviews used to note that we are, as a people, not perfect. He would say, “We make mistakes, and we have failures.” Then we would add, “Yes, we do.”

Our claim is not that we have arrived in any state of perfection but that it is before us as a goal. I believe the majority of BYU graduates the world over are worthy citizens and advocates of what is true and right. They are Church members and others who live their religion the best they can and stand by a high standard of

morality and conduct. This adds *burnish* to the name and perception of the university. It is this ideal of burnishing BYU that I hope you will think about.

Years ago I collected horse brass. Most of the ones I own are copies. A horse brass is about half the size of the back of a man’s hand. Made of brass to adorn horse harnesses, they bear family crests, likenesses of royalty, animals, and a myriad other creative symbols. The point is that for the brass to have a sheen and deep glow, it must be polished or burnished. So it is with our lives. When we as individual graduates of this institution grow and progress, we add luster and patina to our alma mater and to the Lord’s Church.

Today you will formally complete this phase of your education. Armed with BYU degrees, you will leave this place that has grown sacred to you because of the academic and spiritual opportunities you have been afforded here. You too carry the responsibility to add burnish to the name Brigham Young University.

Bruce L. Olsen was president of the BYU Alumni Association when this commencement address was given on 14 August 2008.

It now becomes your time to demonstrate to your employers, your graduate school professors, your business colleagues, your neighbors, and your friends what a BYU education truly means.

You will represent the university and the Church in such a way that people not only will note your talents and your character but also will underline in their memories the fact that you are a product, a graduate, a representative of BYU. As Dr. Kaye Hanson of the Marriott School tells her students, “For the rest of your life, you represent BYU, whether you’re a member of the Church or not or whether you want to or not.”

Let me illustrate how some of the graduates of this great school have added significance and burnish to the reputation of the university named after Brigham Young. Each year the Alumni Association accepts applications for its highest designation, the Outstanding Alumnus Award. I have served on a number of selection committees through the years with the arduous task of designating a handful of graduates for this special honor given at Homecoming time. Those who are considered for this designation are from all fields of endeavor—people who have made a difference in their professions, their wards and stakes, their communities, and their families. Often their prominence and contributions have reached national and even international significance. They don’t nominate themselves—usually it is professional colleagues, family members, or fellow alumni who recognize the exceptional contribution of a BYU alumnus.

Stop and think for a moment what your achievements in your chosen profession may be in the next 25 to 30 years. What difference will you have made in your families, in your communities, in the Church, in your professions, or in your service to mankind?

I want to share with you a few comments made about one of our graduates who, through a life of service, has helped to burnish the

Brigham Young University name. This was written by one of her seven children—six sons and one daughter—who nominated their mother for the Service to Family Award:

[Alice Schindler Cannon] *graduated from BYU in 1958 and went to law school at Duke University. Because of a long-distance courtship with our father, she moved to Illinois and graduated from the University of Illinois as a lawyer. During this time they married, and upon graduating our mother decided not to begin a law practice because she was expecting her first child. Her priority was family.*

The letters of recommendation noted that tragedy struck this family in 1993 when an accident took their father. It was then that the award nominee assumed the role as head of the household and monitored the family construction business as secretary / treasurer. Her family further notes that she has served in virtually every Church organization and calling, including Relief Society president twice, both stake and ward Young Women president, and Primary president.

At her daughter’s report to the high council after her mission, the stake president asked this outstanding mother and BYU graduate where she had sent her children on their missions. After she replied, with tears in his eyes the stake president noted, “Sister, you have sent your children to all parts of the world to teach the gospel, and the men and women of this world honor your name.”

As a graduate, when you bring quiet or heralded honor to your own lives, you add honor to the university, to the Church, and to our Eternal Father, in whose image we are created. As your reputation grows for the good you do and the service you render, the reputation of BYU grows brighter and brighter. As noted in the Doctrine and Covenants:

That which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth

more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day. [D&C 50:24]

Let me mention another graduate who will be honored here on campus in October. Michael K. Young has also added luster to BYU. This Distinguished Service Award recipient has served as the president of a university and the dean of a law school, chaired a major commission for the United States government, raised a wonderful family, and served in the Church. He, too, once sat among those graduating from BYU. Through his career and service he has added burnish to the name Brigham Young University.

From the early days of Brigham Young Academy, presided over by Karl G. Maeser, came a justice of the United States Supreme Court, George Sutherland. From the days of BYU President Franklin Harris came Ezra Taft Benson, U.S. secretary of agriculture and president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-

day Saints. From the days of President Cecil O. Samuelson will come from your very class mothers and fathers of distinction, leaders of the Church, men and women of such standing that people will say, "He or she is a graduate of Brigham Young University." You will have added to the luster and reputation of your alma mater. You will have burnished the sacred name of Brigham Young University!

As president of the Brigham Young University Alumni Association, I hereby confer on each of you lifetime membership in the Brigham Young University Alumni Association. Some 370,000 alumni worldwide join me in offering our congratulations and welcome. Throughout your lifetime you will have many opportunities to join with alumni groups across the world in meaningful activities associated with this great university and in accomplishing much good. May the Class of 2008 burnish the name of Brigham Young University, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.