

Encircled in the Arms of Love

SHANNON STIMPSON

Elder Clayton, President Samuelson, faculty, graduates, family, and guests: It is an honor to stand before you today on this momentous occasion. I am grateful for this opportunity to share a few words with you.

Several months ago I embarked on one of the longest drives I have ever made by myself. A dear friend had passed away, and I was determined to attend his funeral, even if that meant traveling alone. I confess that as I prepared to leave home, I felt some strong misgivings about the upcoming journey. Our car is not the most reliable, and I doubted my ability to effectively handle our vehicle if an emergency should arise. Although I had carefully studied a map and tried to familiarize myself with the route, I feared road conditions that I could not foresee or anticipate. I expressed my concerns to my husband, who quickly assured me that everything would be all right. But his reassurances did not assuage my fears nor make me feel better about the upcoming trip.

Sensing my unspoken discomfort, my husband asked if I would sit down for a few minutes before my departure. “Shannon,” he said, “I can’t come with you, but let’s practice the drive together.” He stood behind me, put his arms around me, and instructed me to pre-

tend like we were in our car. My protestations that I felt very foolish were of no avail; my husband gently insisted that we practice the route together. As I held an imaginary steering wheel, he asked me to verbalize the directions and to move my hands and feet the way I would if I were really driving.

We practiced the entire trip together, rehearsing every turn, every stop, and every exit. It was comforting to feel and hear my husband, who knew the roads, give me a clear picture of what to expect. At the end of our pretend drive, my husband once again expressed confidence in my ability to complete the journey and promised me that if I had any problems, I could always call him.

During the actual drive, when doubts arose, I felt the memory of my husband’s arms around my own, guiding and comforting me. The trip started smoothly, and I was finally beginning to relax and even enjoy the ride when I discovered—to my great anxiety—that I had taken a wrong turn and had gone many miles in the wrong direction. I called

Shannon Stimpson spoke as the representative of her graduating class at BYU commencement on 12 August 2010.

my husband and frantically explained my situation. With his help I was eventually able to get back on course and arrive safely at my destination.

Today we are assembled to celebrate our graduation from this great university. Perhaps many of us feel that we have finally reached a long-anticipated destination. I am sure that, for each of us, our years at BYU have presented challenges and expectations that have stretched our capabilities both intellectually and spiritually. Although our personal progression over the past few years may sometimes have felt lonely, we have been surrounded by marvelous family members, friends, professors, mentors, and spiritual leaders who have helped us navigate the obstacles of college life: companions who have—in effect—put their arms around us and guided us so that we might be prepared to stand confident in the face of an uncertain future. How grateful we should feel for those whose experience and support during our times of need have given us foresight, wisdom, and strength to do all that has been required of us.

For most of us, graduation heralds a challenging new beginning filled with unknown variables and weighty responsibilities. I know that as I have made preparations for the next stages of my life, I have had doubts that have caused me to wonder if the future is really as bright as our leaders assure us it is. During these periods of worry and sometimes even anguish, the memory of one who perceives “sorrow that the eye can’t see,”¹ even Jesus Christ, who has personally traveled the roads

of my life, has reassured me that “all is well”² and that with His help I will be able to complete my goals with excellence and honor.

We may be assured that our all-knowing Heavenly Father is likewise well aware of the stops, the right turns, the wrong turns, and the exits that await us. We can feel certain that as we turn to Him in full trust, laying before Him our innermost feelings and thoughts, He will lead us by His hand and “will take [us]”³ and encircle us “about eternally in the arms of his love”⁴ and direct our paths⁵ for our good.

Our educational experiences here at BYU have prepared us to be leaders in whatever capacity we will serve. Of our generation the Lord has repeatedly expressed His absolute confidence that we can and will achieve great things and overcome insurmountable odds, even if the journey is daunting. The awareness of God’s love for us, of His unreserved guidance and support, should inspire us to likewise extend our reach to those who look to us for direction and relief. In our gratitude for those who have so faithfully traveled with us on our own life’s journey, let us also extend all that we have to offer to our families, our friends, our communities, and the world.

Notes

1. “Lord, I Would Follow Thee,” *Hymns*, 1985, no. 220.
2. “Come, Come, Ye Saints,” *Hymns*, 1985, no. 30.
3. Abraham 1:18.
4. 2 Nephi 1:15.
5. See Proverbs 3:5–6.