

# *Wearing the Y*

CHRIS FEINAUER

I am honored to represent the Brigham Young University Alumni Association at these commencement exercises. And, I have to say, you are an awesome sight! My oldest daughter, Mackenzie, is graduating today, so I am especially grateful to be here to express my appreciation for this university and the personal joy our family experiences through having children attend BYU.

Kathy Christensen, the recipient of a scholarship at BYU, thanked her donors by expressing this thought:

*I felt an intense gratitude warm my heart. There is nowhere else I would rather be. BYU has provided an environment in which I have been able to flourish. I have been challenged academically, pushed physically and stretched spiritually. ["Your Gifts Bless Generations," insert, Annual Giving quarterly mailing]*

I hope you feel, too, that you have been inspired and enlightened by your BYU experience. President Hinckley called BYU a remarkable place. I know it is. I hope you feel that as well.

Congratulations on being a graduate of BYU. You have worked hard and passed many tests—some academic and some in other aspects of your lives. As alumni of BYU, it now becomes your responsibility to take BYU with you, to stay engaged with the university, and to return your talent and resources to BYU.

It was 5:30 a.m. on a day in December 2004 when

*Bronco Mendenhall, then the second-youngest Division I head football coach in America, stepped into his office on the still-dark second floor of the Student Athlete Building for his first full day on the job. There was nothing on his desk or shelves. "It was a surreal experience. I was wondering, 'What have I done?' and, 'What do I do now?'" he recalls. "I found myself on my knees within minutes."*

*Sometime around 8 a.m. a knock interrupted his prayer. At his door stood the patriarch of BYU*

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*Chris Feinauer was president of the BYU Alumni Association when this commencement address was given on 21 April 2011.*

football, LaVell Edwards (EdD '78). Edwards set a chair directly in front of Mendenhall's chair, and the two sat down, knee to knee.

"[LaVell Edwards's] first words were 'You have a tough job.' Then there was a pause and silence," says Mendenhall. "It wasn't very comforting to hear that. But then [LaVell] just said, 'But it's a great job.' I didn't know what he meant by either at the time."

Mendenhall has come to consider [Coach] Edwards a mentor and an advocate. "It's nice to have someone who has done the job better than anyone, who clearly understands what it's like to be a head coach here." The relationship has helped Mendenhall frame what a BYU football team ought to be. [Peter B. Gardner, "The Bronco Way," *BYU Magazine*, winter 2007, 22–23]

Coach Edwards was a mentor for Coach Mendenhall. Mentoring is one of the best experiences a student can have at BYU. It can happen anywhere, and it is very powerful. For those who will be staying close to the university, contact your colleges and offer to mentor students. For those who will be farther away, stay close to students when they are home for vacations or to work between semesters. Just an arm on a shoulder, some encouragement and advice, and showing that someone cares about their success is a terrific way to take BYU with you. Be mentors.

I have a BYU ring that I always wear. I was on vacation in Southern California last fall, and it was amazing how many people saw it and told me they were BYU alums or supporters. It was a small thing—only visible if someone saw my hand—yet it generated a lot of discussion and inquiry everywhere I went. That one small ring had a huge effect on connecting people to BYU and to each other. You can have just as much impact and be significant in connecting people for good—just like my ring was to those people I encountered while on vacation—if you "wear the Y" wherever you are.

Wear the Y

in your countenance  
in your speech and communication  
in your example  
in your choices  
in your attitude

You will find that "wearing BYU" will allow you to share the gospel and stay connected for good to the university.

Here are three more ideas to consider: contribute, connect, and serve.

First, contribute annually with your monetary resources. One thing I have learned in my service to the BYU Alumni Association is that every gift to BYU—large or small—is important to the university.

Erlynn Lansing, a grateful alum who graduated in 1974, said this:

*Our experience [at BYU] and our associations at the university have helped us as parents, in our Church callings, and in [my husband's] professional duties. . . . The only way we can adequately thank the Lord and all those who have helped us is to give back so that others may have wonderful experiences like we've had.* [Erlynn Ensign Lansing, "Funding Futures," *BYU Magazine*, summer 2010, 58]

Robbie Ross Tisch, a strategic planning and organizational effectiveness consultant, shared these thoughts on giving:

*Being generous takes people out of narrow, fearful places of scarcity and returns them to the spaciousness of connection and concern about others, into "we-ness" rather than "me-ness."* [<http://www.managementassistance.org/ht/a/GetDocumentAction/i/11015>]

Because of donations, thousand of students receive an outstanding education. Show your appreciation by supporting the financial needs

of BYU. Your monetary resources are vital to the work of the university.

Next, stay connected to BYU by attending BYU-related events, allowing you to enjoy the fruits of what BYU students and alumni have to offer in the way of excellence in sports, performance, and intellectual knowledge. And update your records so we can keep you informed about BYU. Let us know where you are, because we want you to be “connected for good” to the university and to alumni everywhere you go.

And, finally, serve and volunteer.

Linda Palmer, executive director of the Alumni Association, said:

*Service is a core part of being a BYU graduate. It's our charge. We enter to learn; we must go forth to serve. Bettering the world is part of the commitment we make in coming here.* [Linda Palmer, “Enter to Serve,” *BYU Magazine*, fall 2010, 49]

BYU is here to help us all serve the world better. Look for opportunities in your life to be the one who makes the difference in the life of another. Bring light and goodness wherever you are through your service.

Mentoring, wearing the Y, contributing, connecting, and serving—these will keep the Spirit of the Y alive in you.

I conclude with thoughts adapted from a poster hanging in the Gordon B. Hinckley Alumni and Visitors Center. Designed by Chris Giovarelli, a past BYUSA president and BYU Student Alumni Association president, the poster is called “The Anatomy of the Active Alum.”

Here is what you can strive to have:

- A mind that is sharp and dedicated to lifelong learning and service.
- Muscles that are always ready to be flexed for the benefit of others around you.
- Knees that are used for prayer, helping you to remain close to the gospel throughout your life.

- Legs that walk the walk expected of those who graduate from BYU.
- Eyes that focus on the mission of the university to assist individuals in their quest for perfection and eternal life.
- A heart filled with the Spirit of the Y and a passion for all things BYU.
- Hands willing to give time, talent, and resources to the university, to the community, and to those around them.
- Feet solidly planted, enabling you to quickly become an asset to your community, wherever you may land.

As its president, I hereby confer on each of you lifetime membership in the Brigham Young University Alumni Association. We offer our congratulations and welcome you into this great association of more than 370,000. You will have many opportunities to join your fellow alumni in meaningful activities associated with the university.

You have gained a rich heritage from your experiences as a student and member of the BYU community. You can bless others with this heritage wherever you are. Be a light to those who can be lifted, taught, and encouraged. Be proud of what BYU is, for it is much more than you might have seen in your time here. It is a wonderful combination of many colleges, teams, performing groups, clubs, academic associations, and religious affiliations that all combine to meet the needs of the world we live in. That world is begging for bright, wholesome, dedicated graduates to take all the goodness BYU has produced in you to serve the world with your talents and abilities.

May you maintain a meaningful connection to the people, relationships, feelings, experiences, and memories created at BYU. May your Christlike influence be felt wherever you may be found throughout the world, I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.