

Hamburgers and Smorgasbords

RICHARD L. GUNN

At about the time that you graduates were being born, I was invited to speak at a conference to be held in St. Louis. My wife, Jeanne, thought it was a wonderful opportunity for our children to see the famous Saint Louis Zoo, so I accepted the conference option of applying the cost of an airplane ticket toward driving.

We stuffed the children into our small car and headed east. Our budget-control plan pushed us into hamburger stands for lunch and dinner during our trip. In those days we used to say, “We were broke all week, so we had hamburgers.” Nowadays, with our grandchildren, we say, “We had hamburgers all week, so we’re broke.”

When we arrived at the convention hotel, Jeanne thought we should get something more adequate for the children. After sitting down in the hotel restaurant, we passed out menus and announced that we were going to have a *good* meal. We asked if there was anything they especially would like.

The children enthusiastically clapped their hands and shouted in unison, “Hamburgers!”

I am reminded of another incident that occurred as I was returning from India during

World War II. Our staging area was Karachi, then part of India. At three o’clock in the morning an Indian vendor came down the street awakening us with his one English word: “Hamburgers.”

There was an instant mob scene. Men came pouring out of every building, many clad only in their shorts. (That was a shortsighted maneuver that left some shortchanged.) Back home I had never seen a hamburger that cost more than fifteen cents; these were \$2.50. Eager men snapped them up for three greenbacks if no change was available. They elbowed in with an aggressiveness that if matched on the battlefield would have shortened the war by months. The size of the hamburger did not dampen their interest. A twenty-five-cent coin could cover every part of the meat, and a penny-size dab of mustard on these dinky hamburgers was the total trimming. Soon the echo of empty bins sent the vendor flying for more meat—who knows to what source in India.

Richard L. Gunn was a BYU professor of art history when this address was given on 19 August 1982 at a banquet for graduating students.

Most of you probably remember, as do I, when a big, thick, juicy hamburger was more desired than anything printed on any menu. But I suspect that if you graduates came to this special occasion of a graduation banquet—and many of you are here with relatives and special friends—and if you sat down at a banquet table to face a hamburger dripping on a paper napkin, would you have a different feeling in this hall than you now have?

We can enjoy a hamburger life, and we can live without banquets, special occasions, or bachelor's degrees. But what a loss to special feelings, to our quality of life, to the *joie de vivre*, if we do not partake of a smorgasbord of enriched perceptions, a search for sensitivity, the fruits of work, the arts, and the discoveries opened with bachelor's degrees.

In this 1982 class there may be some among you who are still single—that endangered species group. If any of you young men are about to “pop the question,” surely you want to make the proposal a memorable event. Perhaps you might select a tucked-away restaurant with a romantic atmosphere and plan to have some favorite music floating through a delicate motif, candles reflecting bright sparkles in crystal glasses, silverware gleaming on a Belgian-lace tablecloth, and there, in the middle of a beautiful Dresden china plate, the *pièce de résistance*: a golden-brown hamburger! What a sensitive moment to change her whole life!

Could I suggest that if she comes from an aristocratic family, it might be better to plan on one of the superburgers—do you think a Big Mac has a nice ring to it? Can you picture her as she whispers, “Yes,” with Wendy's famous juices running down her chin? If she is British, you must remember that it is important to build traditions into your marriage; on the first anniversary, a stately Burger King and “chips” might send her into ecstasy. Any young lady not truly thrilled with such thoughtfulness should at least find the occasion memorable.

More Than a Hamburger

As much as I love a hamburger, I think a special occasion needs sophisticated taste at the table, but even more than fine food, a sensitive taste in living can make the whole future a special occasion.

When I am hungry I especially enjoy a smorgasbord. A smorgasbord is always an adventure to me. I can find my favorite foods along the way, and at the same time I can explore for possibilities of new tongue treats. Selecting can be as much fun as eating. In the selecting I wouldn't for a moment want any one of you to sample the sour food found so often today in the decaying parts of our society, but I also hope we will not hang on to a horse-and-buggy taste. I am thankful for a prophet who sees beyond the frostings, for men and women on this campus who have been great ideals to me and who have lifted my taste, and for those in the Church who have been such great examples.

When I was a Boy Scout I had such an example in my Scout leader Bill Dunn. He convinced us that Troop 41 was the best troop in the whole world. We had to be the best to be in the troop. We loved the man.

During deer-hunting season Bill Dunn went up into the mountains and bagged a deer for a big barbecue behind the church. We had a long table loaded with food, and I couldn't resist biting into a big venison sandwich before I reached the end of the table, where Bill stood with a big jug of juice. I didn't know it was apple cider—something I had hated from my earliest recollection. Who wanted to drink old rotten apples? It was simply an icky taste. I said a little limerick in my youth that went like this:

*There was a young lady from Pied;
From eating green apples she died.
While in the lamented,
The apples fermented.
Now there is cider inside her inside.*

And I didn't want any cider inside my inside.

I lifted my tin cup to Bill, and he filled it. One sip and my nose wrinkled all the way out to my ears—"Why, that's apple cider," I sputtered.

Bill had a cup in his hand, and he gulped down half the cup with one swallow and said, "Oh boy, isn't it good!" and down went the rest of the drink. I have loved apple cider ever since!

I usually pass by most of the special cheese plates on a smorgasbord, but seldom without thought. When someone says, "Food for thought," I think cheese. For more than three-dozen years the thought of a refrigerator containing cheese has been stuck into my head with a glue stronger than Elmer's. A friend with high enthusiasm pulled me out to his kitchen to taste a new cheese he had just discovered. In that refrigerator he had at least twenty-one different kinds of cheese. My expertise hadn't gone much beyond noting the difference between cheddar and limburger, and as I tasted one of his great discoveries, I could not taste anything special about it. But I will remember him standing by that refrigerator and his radiation of pleasure.

The thought that has stuck with me for more than three decades is that he was sensitive enough to know the differences among twenty-one different pieces of cheese. That one refrigerator changed my life—not in tasting cheese but in portent. I will always be grateful to a friend for offering me more than a hamburger in his kitchen.

Going the Second Mile

Some of you will live hamburger lives into many tomorrows. Some of you will partake of a smorgasbord that has twenty-one different flavors. Some of you may be leaving BYU better nourished than others, but there has been something more to chew on here at BYU than can be found in most universities

I didn't come for that "something" any more than I went into my friend's kitchen to

enjoy cheese. I came to BYU to learn about art, and I learned more about art than I expected under the warm heart and talented brush of B. F. Larsen. But I am even more thankful in 1982 for the many "somethings" beyond art that I learned at BYU. The spiritual element has many dimensions. Not only was it an important seasoning in most classes I attended, but it reached out beyond classes.

For instance, I never took a chemistry class from Professor Joseph K. Nicholes—I can't even remember how I came to meet him here at BYU. We were all just part of the BYU family. He passed away many years ago, but I never walk this campus without feeling Brother Nicholes walking with me. I respect him; I'd like him to respect me.

One of the most important days of my life was the day we came out of an assembly in the Joseph Smith Building and he put his arm around my shoulders to give me a piece of advice. That commodity is dished out in extra servings during commencement days, but I do not remember giving him the slightest resistance. I do remember the earnestness in his face as he searched my eye for recognition that I understood. The war was on, and many of us had enlisted in the service, but we had been given the opportunity to come back to BYU to finish our bachelor's degrees with an increased emphasis on military subjects, such as math. Then we were to go on to officer training. The program was abruptly terminated, as more men were needed overseas. The assembly was our farewell at BYU before going down to the train for basic-training destinations.

Professor Nicholes convinced me in that thoughtful moment after the assembly that I should try to employ a little scripture from the Sermon on the Mount that urges us to go the second mile (see Matthew 5:41). (That's rather a risky thing to do if the enemy is only a mile away! Of course there is the second mile in the other direction.) It is said that if you cast your bread upon the water it will return a

thousandfold. (Now what in the world can you do with a thousandfold of wet, soggy bread? Perhaps instead of hot dogs, the Marriott Center could sell sog dogs.) In the smorgasbord of experiences here at BYU during my student days, I felt a deep regard for faculty guidance; they fed me well at the banquet that is BYU. They fed me more than the bread of life. Perhaps Brother Nicholes believed that the military is a kind of conformity, different than that of the Jews but at least a denial of the important concept of free agency. The second mile breaks the mental—if not physical—bindings, and a new spirit frees the man in any walk of life.

We could elect our branch of service, and I chose the engineers, hoping I could get into mapping. I didn't know that I really elected the combat engineers, who go ahead of the infantry to clear the mines, build the bridges, etc., etc.! In combat, no engineer dies of boredom.

When I arrived at Fort Leonard Wood, as I sat on my bunk contemplating Brother Nicholes, I noticed some men at the other end of the barracks trying to learn the names of the parts of a gun. I said to myself, "Brother Nicholes, let's get to work on your idea." I found a piece of cardboard, and I made a drawing of a rifle and labeled all the parts. The new recruits tacked it to the wall.

It just so happened that the commanding officer of the unit came by on a quick inspection and found these soldiers studying the chart. He stopped and asked where it came from; they pointed down to me. He asked me many questions, including why I had made it.

The next day he called me into his office and said, "I just noticed your name on the KP list. Now there's no sense putting artistic hands in all that dirty dishwater. Why don't you report to the dayroom instead. We need a little blue sky painted behind the model of the bridge. When you are finished, take the day off."

I was through in half an hour. The man who took my place was awakened at three in the

morning, and he cut butter for thousands and thousands of men—butter, butter, butter, all day long. Some thought that I had buttered up the colonel. I tried to show them the Bible connection, but I could not sell them on the idea. (Did you ever hear about the Buddhist that sold Bibles for his bread and "buddah"?)

During basic training I never did a single "dirty detail." Brother Nicholes was so effective I was embarrassed. But the main event came when I was called to the colonel's office for the last time. Each time I had reported, a new delight awaited me. This time the colonel said that he had just received an allotment for eight men to go to a photogrammetry school in Washington, D.C., and that I could have first choice if I wanted it. I grabbed the chance with both hands and all teeth. I have to acknowledge that it was Professor Nicholes who picked me out of 8,000 men at Fort Leonard Wood.

Leaving the combat engineers, I became a mapmaker in Washington while the men I trained with at Leonard Wood went to Tunisia and fought in those terrible battles on the Tunisian mountains. Sixty percent of them lost their lives in the first month. I wasn't afraid of losing my life, but I have always felt that Brother Nicholes spared it. I was a missionary in Hawaii when Pearl Harbor was bombed, and my companion and I were fully committed to defending with our lives, if necessary, the freedoms of America. Brother Nicholes increased my perceptions of freedom; he also made it so easy.

After Washington we were sent to Louisiana in error. "Who are you?" was the first Louisiana question.

"Photogrammetrists," we replied.

"Don't know anything about photogrammetry; we distribute petroleum," they said. While we were waiting for our overseas assignment, I walked around the base looking for something that Nicholes and I could do. Not much was there except a note on a bulletin board telling of a test that afternoon for a GI driver's

license. I went down; no other candidates were there. They were glad to see someone, so I received extra help in learning how to drive a huge truck around the test pylons. It wasn't an expert performance, but they awarded me an official license that authorized me to drive any army vehicle except a tank.

Meanwhile, some brass decided that they couldn't have all these men just sitting around doing nothing, and somehow they decided that the swamps of Louisiana were worth guarding. It was muddy at that time of the year—mud, mud, mud, up to the knees in some places. The newly assigned guards mucked around their posts for two hours and then came back to the guardhouse for a four-hour rest. It was an unpleasant, dirty job.

At the original briefing meeting it was asked if anyone had a GI driver's license. Guess who was the only one?

"Okay, you are the driver."

When I picked up the guards two hours later, they were so muddy I wouldn't let them get in the clean cab with me. Back at the guardhouse, while they tried to clean the gunk from clothing and rifles, I stretched out on a bunk in clean, dry clothing and read a book. Brother Nicholes helped me read as many books in the army as I did in school. Many thought I was the biggest goofer they knew, but when I opened the Bible again to show the way, they turned aside and went out for hamburgers.

Brother Nicholes gave me many wonderful gifts during the war: Christmas vacation with my family, a special leave to take my family home before leaving for overseas, extra trips to see the Taj Mahal, a trip around the world, a return from overseas months in advance of most men in our mapping unit, etc., etc.

During a transfer from India to Okinawa by way of Kearns, Utah (an overseas replacement center just out of Salt Lake City), we were idle, awaiting flying orders out of California. It was time for a stroll with Brother Nicholes, and when I saw a sign saying Engineers Office,

I walked in and said I knew something about engineering and asked if there was anything I could do for them. They fell over in a dead faint, saying, "Yes," on the way down. I believe the engineers had the only air-conditioned office on the base.

A month later the war ended, and every man in my unit was sent east to man the separation centers for returning servicemen—with my *single* exception. They crossed my name off the shipping list: "He's got a job here." The trains pulled out, and I was left behind in Salt Lake—where my wife was living at home.

Later it was discovered that the Salt Lake airport needed to be enlarged, and maps of the underground systems could not be found. The responsibility was given to me, and with four assistants we moved closer to Salt Lake—giving me an hour more per day with my family. I lived at home for the last months of my military service.

When I told Brother Nicholes about the dozens of great things that had happened to me while following his counsel, he didn't look a bit surprised. A single idea from this campus changed my life. That idea also presented me with my position at BYU with Travel Study.

The BYU Smorgasbord

I asked the students in a BYU class many years ago if they would write a one-page paper on their most aesthetic or sensitive experience. I planned to use these papers as a springboard in exploring a smorgasbord of art and the idea of appreciation.

One of the students wrote:

I am in love! This is the deepest aesthetic experience I have ever had. Surely the realization of being in love with someone is one of the deepest of human emotions. Some may say this is not an aesthetic experience, but I think it most certainly is. It's the same feeling of awe and wonder and joy that one feels upon seeing, hearing, or reading something beautiful but magnified ten thousand times. It's

beautiful. It's soul moving—soul engrossing—and isn't that what an aesthetic feeling is, after all?

I have often been moved by the beauty of a deep, soft, magical snowfall or the white enclosed emptiness of a crystalline fog or the beautiful, wild feeling that being in the country on a cloudy day gives me. (Cloudy days are infinitely more varied and moving than straight sunshine.) I have often felt a sympathetic rush of feeling at hearing some unexpectedly lovely line of poetry or a beautiful passage of music. I love the designs in oil slicks or peeling bark, the iridescent colors of beetles and waterfalls and flowers and insects. I love my pretty little pet chameleon, with his long, delicate toes and his brown and emerald coloring. I can lose myself in front of a sculpture, a painting, a ceramic pot, or a piece of weaving. To quote the popular song, "These are a few of my favorite things." I love such things; I am moved by them. But there is no feeling like the feeling of love for another human being. The realization that one is in tune with another soul, that one is seeing beyond the outward appearance into the essence of a person, is a greater experience than seeing the essence of a sunset or a poem, lovely as these are.

The feeling that one loves another—and is loved in return—is the most profound and beautiful and moving feeling in the world.

I read this to the class, and when I looked up, etched on almost every male face was the expression "Where do I find that girl?" Their eyes were searching the faces of the girls in the room—not for the color of her hair nor the shape of her nose. They were looking for a person who had found at least twenty-one different ways of enjoying life. Who wouldn't want to share a smorgasbord of life with her? By the way, I wrote her some years later and asked if I could quote her paper. She gave an affirmative response but added, "When I wrote that paper I thought I was in love. After three years of marriage with this special man, I'm really in love!"

As I sat in a doctor's office thumbing through some old magazines, I saw an article that asked,

"Would you marry the same person again?" The article quoted several wives. One said:

*When I first met him, he was already in love. After seven years of marriage, he still is. My husband is in love with life. My husband never met anybody he didn't like. He loves a baby—a baby anything. He loves sun, sea, sand, the flowers—and the weeds. He loves the grass, also the crabgrass. He can never quite get over the fact that anything as wonderful as being alive has happened to him. **It is pure joy to live with a man like that.***

How many of you graduates are such a man?

Last January I left with forty-nine students and faculty members for London with a BYU study abroad program. What a smorgasbord of experience that creation is! Living almost around the clock with students also provides a different relationship than we usually have here on campus. This was my fourth study abroad assignment with BYU, and these six-month programs have given me an unusual opportunity for observing students close at hand—in the classroom and the dining room; during family nights and testimony meetings; while touring Europe and Israel, crying on shoulders, laughing at problems, staying overnight in an ancient castle, and so forth—and fostering attachments as close as one's own family.

Some of the students are so near to angel status that the blessings of being near them is personally exhilarating. Some work so hard trying to absorb all the multifaceted educational opportunities of that environment. I have learned much just by tasting the splashes from their plates. I often enjoy quoting a line from Plutarch that he wrote after studying the lives of the great: "The mind is less a vessel to be filled than a fire to be kindled" (from his essay "On Listening to Lectures," in *Moralia*). I have felt kindled in their presence; I have felt their own kindling in Europe's impressive presence. I hope you have been truly kindled at BYU.

Some students only toy with the feast of ideas from the European smorgasbord. Perhaps they were too anchored with the drive-in familiarities of home, and they may have been like the man sitting across the table on a rolling ship at sea. As the man's face became more and more green, he finally rose from his chair, saying, "Please excuse me. I have a previous dinner engagement coming up."

And sometimes there is one who has not found the scriptural implications of a "communion of Saints." How should a student abroad represent BYU and the Church? How will you in the years ahead reflect your affiliation with this campus and an affinity with its destiny?

As our London students were waiting for an airplane, an elderly gentleman from England came over to me and said that he had been watching our students for some time, and he felt he must tell me how impressed he was with these students—with how they were dressed as well as with their manners and their conversation. He felt that if all young people in the world were like these students, all of our problems would be solved. He told me how lucky I was to travel in such an environment. Many times compliments have come about our students and Travel Study programs. I love BYU and the Church, and it is always a joy to me to hear these positive reflections on institutions that I treasure.

On a ship in the middle of the Black Sea just a few days ago, I sat at a table with some other passengers, and they knew from my program on the ship that I was with BYU Travel Study. They couldn't wait to tell me that the best part of the world's fair that they had recently seen in Tennessee was the performance of the Young Ambassadors from BYU. They reported in glowing terms about the quality of these young people and how they had performed.

Lu Sargent in the U.S. Embassy in Beijing told a BYU Travel Study group that she suspected the reason we had the best hotel in town (tourists have no hotel choice—the government

assigns as they please) was because the Beijing authorities had been so tremendously impressed with a BYU performing group.

When I sat nervously at the apex of a long oval table to have my entrance oral examination for the Stanford graduate school, the first question asked was where I had taken my bachelor's degree. When I answered, "BYU," another faculty member said, "We have never had a poor BYU man yet; I have no further questions." I was out in five minutes; the candidate ahead of me was questioned for more than forty minutes.

I have always been grateful for the BYU graduates who went ahead of me. As you go forth, how will you represent these significant institutions and prepare the way for those who follow?

When I thought that a few of our study abroad students were below par in their appearance, I made a few comments in class. Later, around the corner, I overheard one of the students declaring with steel in her voice, "No one is going to dictate to me. I'll wear what I please!" Another student defended my presentation, and the steel-voiced one lashed out at her. I noticed she did not speak to my defendant for more than a week. When I have steel in my voice, I cannot savor tender morsels.

I have learned in observing the lives of many students that when we drop BYU ideals before or after graduation, we inescapably lose some of our sense of taste. I am often surprised at the resistance of those who oppose BYU dress standards. If Jesus invited the Twelve to have the Last Supper at my house, I doubt I would serve hamburgers or come in hamburger dress. Nor could I wear hamburger dress to meet President Spencer W. Kimball or to represent BYU. If we are not sensitive enough to appreciate the contributions of BYU in both the academic and spiritual things of our lives, we certainly reveal our insensitivity when we bite the hand that feeds. Who is so hungry to bite the hand of a prophet?

Hungering and Thirsting After Learning

When the assignment came to guide President Kimball through an Egyptian museum, I immediately thought, “What could I teach a prophet?” I needed not fear; President Kimball had been a student all his life. A bachelor’s degree was not dessert. He wanted to savor each artifact in the museum; he leaned forward with a hunger for learning that anyone with or without a degree might well emulate. President Kimball is a perfect example of one who hungers and thirsts after righteousness (see Matthew 5:6), who hungers and thirsts after learning and appreciating. Your lives are surrounded with such examples, some sitting with you at these tables.

I wish you could have looked with me through my perceptions of the study abroad students of these past years as they have in an intimate environment revealed their tastes and talents. You would be convinced of the virtues of hungering and thirsting. You would be convinced of the values of exploring—sensitively—the smorgasbord of educational experiences. You would be convinced of the flavor to life found in the arts. You would be convinced of the meager potential of hamburger lives.

Some students delighted in enriching their minds; others delighted in decorating their bodies. Jewelry, cosmetics, faded jeans, and hairstyles are no sin, but it is so clearly evident that an emphasis on surface decoration is as debilitating to the real meat of life as it is to the first principle of art design. The most important learning of all my experiences is that sensitive facets under the surface promote the greatest banquet in our lives.

The monotony of surface conformity reminds me of Louis Untermeyer writing about one of America’s popular poets. Untermeyer was not attacking the family when

he syndicated “The Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe” as much as he was attacking the hamburger status we give the arts as well as the family and its members. He wrote:

*It takes a heap o’ children to make a home that’s true,
And a home can be a palace grand or just a plain, old shoe;
But if it has a mother dear and good old dad or two,
Why, that’s the sort of good old home for good old me and you.*

Untermeyer concluded a few stanzas later:

*And when he thinks (as may occur), this thought will please him best:
That ninety million think the same—including Eddie Guest.*

[“Edgar A. Guest Considers ‘The Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe’ and the Good Old Verities at the Same Time,” in Untermeyer, *Collected Parodies* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1926), 54]

We reveal an insensitive taste when we conform to a grubby fad of 90 million; we also do the Church a disservice if we regiment our learnings on this campus to freeze our tastes for the virtue and achievements of those not of this campus nor of our faith. We are not asked before or after graduation to be the dressing of a bunch of turkeys or to camouflage the banner of the gospel’s truths.

As we look forward from 1982, may we savor the ambrosia of an exciting future without losing the simplicity of a bowl of broth at the Last Supper. May we be sensitive enough to avoid a betrayal of trusts with a sop in the dish of the yearnings of our prophet, the goals of BYU, the aspirations of parents, and the sensitive spirit within each of us, I earnestly pray.