

“Seek the Truth. Tell the Truth”
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2007 College Honored Alumni Lecture Series
College of Fine Arts and Communications
Pardoe Theatre, Harris Fine Arts Center
Brigham Young University
20 September 2007

Just over a year ago, I had the opportunity to be in the celestial room of the Sacramento Temple, sitting 12 feet away from the living prophet of God, waiting for one of the dedicatory sessions to begin. I recall thinking at that time, How did I get here? I feel somewhat the same today—how did I get here—standing before you as an example of the Homecoming theme Come Full Circle.

The last time I was on the Pardoe Theatre stage was 25 years ago. I am appreciative of the opportunity to come back to this stage and share with you what I have done with the stewardship of my BYU education. To a certain extent the reason perhaps I'm here is that I have a successful career in show business and I have a current temple recommend.

While I was in graduate school here at BYU, I attended a workshop about acting in commercials taught by a well known commercial actor and at the end I told him I was finishing my master of fine arts in acting— now what do I do? He answered simply, “Go with the flow.” So I took his advice. Though as I look back on it, I believe that what I have done has been to follow the spirit. I have had many experiences with the spirit guiding me. I have sought and found truth in artistic endeavors as well as in daily life.

This pattern of being guided by the spirit is what has led me to where I am today. I started out wanting to be a musician when I was seven. I don't know why, but I asked my mother if I could take organ lessons. I eventually studied piano and I played several instruments in school bands. My goal at that time was to become a music director for Broadway shows. That idea came to me by watching musicals at a local professional summer theatre. After my mother passed away, I decided that I could not afford to rent a band instrument, that I needed to go home right after school and band required an after

school commitment. So for some reason I signed up for a drama class. A few months later I auditioned for a musical and I was cast as the male lead. During the rehearsal process, I decided that acting may be what I want to pursue and if so, then before college I am going to get as much experience as I can, fast as I can. So at 16 I auditioned for a summer theatre company and moved away from home for ten weeks and performed in two musicals and worked in the business office and box office the rest of the time. I even house managed a couple of shows and supervised staff considerably older than me. It amazes me that my father let me go away on my own at 16. As I have seen my children grow, I can't imagine letting them do something similar, but I believe the Lord was looking out for me and he was preparing me. I finished high school and was accepted to UC—Santa Barbara where I majored in drama with an emphasis in acting as well as extensive involvement in the music department as a singer.

During my junior year I felt a huge void in my life. I had been active in another faith, but I did not feel the same when attending church locally. So one day out of the blue I asked my acting teacher if I could go to church with her. I had friends in high school who were Latter-day Saints and I was curious to know more. After my professor got over her initial shock of one of her students asking to go to church, we made an appointment to attend church together. I still remember the first time. I don't remember what was said, but I remember the feeling I had. I knew that the spirit was there and that the church's focus was about Jesus Christ and that I felt that all in attendance knew why they were there. I could not wait to go back.

A year later I attended BYU education week and determined that I needed to learn as much as I could before school started again, so I met with the missionaries and took the lessons in a week as I had to begin rehearsals for a couple of shows the next week. One of my most profound experiences came during the missionary discussions when I was taught the plan of salvation. It occurred to me that several years earlier when my mother passed away from cancer, I had a distinct impression that there was more to our experience than just this life and that I would see her again. I had not been taught this principle until the missionaries presented it to me. The spirit bore witness that what I felt at 15 and what I was being taught at 21 was true. I was baptized and I never looked back.

During my senior year I decided that I wanted to attend graduate school. I had been to BYU and had seen the great facilities. It was affordable and I wanted to study theatre in the light of the gospel. When I applied for the MFA acting program, there wasn't anyone else in that program. I didn't know that at the time. The department chair called me and said, "Are you really sure you want to come here? We are isolated from centers of professional theatre activity and we don't have any contacts and are you sure?" I said, "I will give you a year, if you give me a year." And so off I went.

I got involved right away. My first involvement was playing the Rogers theatre organ that was here in the Pardoe theatre. I played underscore music for a production of *Dracula*. My favorite moments were playing strong chords for the killing of Dracula, playing heartbeat sounds for one scene and then playing *Peg o' My Heart* when the audience was leaving. I don't think anyone knew that I was playing that, but I got a big kick out of it.

I was cast in a production of *The Merchant of Venice* directed by a member of the Royal Shakespeare Company, also a convert to the church, and then I was cast as Tommy in a community theatre production of *Brigadoon*. So I felt I was well on my way. Over the course of the three-year program I had many great acting opportunities. I had the chance to teach a variety of courses and to direct and music direct. I discovered that I loved being involved with theatre, but it didn't matter what I did in it. I remember hanging out with other students in the tunnel outside of the rehearsal hall and we would talk about running our own theatre company and hiring all of our LDS friends and doing good work. I realized that I wanted to have more control over my life and I have observed that actors really have little control. They serve at the whim of a producer or director. So I had an impression that I would like to become the kind of artistic leader that I would want to work for. I had no idea how that was going to happen.

When I joined the church, my passion for acting shifted in favor of a passion for the Restored Gospel and striving to become like the savior. Acting no longer was the driving force in my life. When I came to BYU, I had opportunities to do so many things and I pursued them all, including starting a family. My wife, Paula, and I met on my first day of classes. She was finishing her degree in directing and we became friends through working together and within the year we married in the Salt Lake Temple. When I

finished my MFA, we did what any respectable artists would do, we moved into my father's home. Within a few months, Paula became an apartment manager and so we were out on our own. I worked at a restaurant as a host and so I was really living the theatre dream. In early 1984, I became an instructor at a local community college teaching acting. A full-time teacher became ill and my degree and preparedness and availability helped. I was in the right place at the right time. As the semester was ending, I told the dean that I was interested in teaching for the summer. She said that I could have the assignment of coordinating the internship program at Music Circus on behalf of the college. So I went from knowing no one in the business to being involved with the business. I grew up in Sacramento and I grew up attending Music Circus. The name comes from the fact that when it started in 1951, and up until five years ago, we performed musical productions in the round in a tent. A 2,500 seat, canvas chaired tent. The tent went up at the beginning of the summer and went down at the end of the summer. I think the producers felt like "we don't know if we will be here next year, we don't want to be too permanent." Well, we have become very permanent. We built a permanent, state of the art theatre in the round and just completed our fifth season in that facility. This is the same professional theatre that I attended as a child that inspired my interest in becoming a Broadway music director. The founders of Music Circus were Broadway and national tour producers—very old school, tough producers. The associate producer was also the director of all eight plays at that time. For some reason he was impressed with me, and so one day as we were having lunch, he said, "What do you want to do with your life? Where do you want to go? What do you want to do?" and I said, "Your job" and he said, "I thought so." Gradually I worked my way up from coordinating interns to being his assistant to general manager. He later became the CEO and when he retired, I took his place as the artistic director. I have done almost everything in the company: telemarketing, wrote, directed and produced television commercials, edited the house program, worked as costume dresser, stagehand, acting coach, casting director, driver, ad layout and the list goes on. And sometimes I did many of those things all at the same time. Many things I did for free or I negotiated for money to pay for babysitting when our first child was born.

When I first started working at the theatre, it was only a summer operation. In 1986 I got my first full-time job as assistant professor of drama at University of the Pacific in Stockton, California. Being a professor, though respected, was not lucrative. So in order to support my family, I worked in retail, I cleaned airplanes in the middle of the night, did telemarketing for the theatre, and whatever else it took to make ends meet. I was there for seven years, received tenure and a promotion to associate professor and then was offered a full-time job as general manager of California Musical Theatre when it became a year-round theatre company. I was ecstatic when I only had to have one job and my wife was even able to stay home and raise our family.

So what do I do? I am responsible for the artistic activity of California Musical Theatre. We present two seasons, the summer season is known as Music Circus and the fall/spring season is Broadway Sacramento. We have an annual budget of 20 million dollars – 95% from box office revenue and 5% from fundraising. That is significant in the nonprofit world. We just finished our 57th summer season, my 24th, and we are going into our 18th season for Broadway Sacramento. I am responsible for the day-to-day management of that organization. I do things I never imagined I would be doing when I first began my journey in the theatre. I hire and discipline and evaluate the employees, I evaluate workloads and I provide training and encouragement. I am involved with strategic planning, developing and living by budgets (not always easy for an artist). I negotiate contracts. I have been involved in the designing of a theatre, as well as an upcoming building to house studio space and offices for an unprecedented collaboration with the ballet, the philharmonic, the opera and my theatre company. On the artistic side, I select the season of musicals that we produce in our 2,200 seat theatre in the round and give input to the selection of Broadway tours that we present in the 2,400 seat proscenium theatre. I select the artistic staff and cast the actors (I audition over 2000 performers a year and cast about 125). And I do what is needed to ensure a successful production. I do a lot of problem solving and make a lot of choices. I strive to be patient and calm no matter how intense the schedule. Opening night will come no matter what. In our summer schedule—we do seven shows in seven weeks—it's intense. I believe that everything we do in the organization has an effect on what we do on the stage. From accounting to the performers, everything influences the success of the production. So I

have tried to create an environment where staff and artists feel safe and can do their best work. We strive to make sure all are treated with respect and trust. I feel that when we pay attention to the human being first, then the tasks that are performed are better executed. It is not without its challenges, but we have grown from a summer only operation to a year round endeavor, and we attract the best actors and creative staff from the theatre industry. I am proud that when we have the president of Actors' Equity Association in one of our productions, we don't have to change how we operate. We take good care of everyone involved. We are the summer job to get. My competition for actors is usually Broadway and national tours. We have had Tony nominees and Tony winners on the stage and award winning designers, directors, etc. and we have a high rate of returning staff and artists.

I learned at BYU to "let the work speak for itself." That is a challenge sometimes when an audience member is extremely critical or the newspaper critic gives a less than favorable review. My responsibility is to offer to the audience our best work and then let them respond as they will. I will listen and learn and then take what will help the next offering to be better. My first experiences with this principle began here at BYU and it has served me well.

As I have taken this chance to look back at my life, I can see that my education here at BYU formed the foundation of what serves me now in my career. As with many people who work in the theatre, I started out wanting to be an actor. As a result, I tend to look at things from the point of view of an actor. I research and observe and listen and pay attention to detail. I direct from the point of view of an actor; I give notes to the directors and other creative staff from the point of view of an actor. But to me the most significant addition to the way I look at things that comes from my training as an actor, is my understanding of the gospel and my faith in Jesus Christ. It was here at BYU that I discovered how to incorporate my faith into my work and that is what guides me everyday of my life. I discovered how to incorporate into my work the scripture found in Alma 17:29, where Ammon says he will win the hearts of his fellow servants and then lead them to believe.

This college serves diverse artistic pursuits. Though we choose different media, we all have stories to tell. What we all have in common is that at the very core we are all

creative artists. We are eternally involved in the process of creating who we are meant to be. When discussing the process of carving marble, Michelangelo stated that he was only carving away the stone that was covering the David; he was only revealing what was inside the marble. He reportedly said, “Carving is easy, you just go down to the skin and stop.” Well I think we do the same as we go through life experiences and carve away that which is covering our true authentic self. Perhaps it could be said, “we just go down to the soul and stop.” I am engaged in a life long pursuit of becoming a better me. My discoveries of self have come through my participation and appreciation for the arts. It is through the engagement in and the viewing of the arts that I have seen what I can become and what I don’t want to become. It was the theatre that led me to embrace the restored gospel and become a member of the Church of Jesus Christ. My faith has guided me in the pursuit of a career, but more importantly to become the person I am meant to be—doing what I am meant to do.

Sometimes we become consumed in what we are creating and we neglect to look for the truth in our work or in other’s artistic expressions. It is with the spirit that we need to approach any artistic experience. Also, we need to be mindful that when we are looking for truth, we are seeking to know, not to disprove.

In a talk entitled “The Truth Shall Set You Free,” James E. Faust stated, “Some people in their searching, however, are not seeking for truth but are given to contention. They do not sincerely seek to learn; rather they desire to dispute, to show their supposed learning and thus cause strife. The Apostle Paul said to Timothy, “But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes” (2 Tim. 2:23).

Elder Faust goes on to say, “Searching and inquiring are a means of coming to a knowledge of all truth, whether that truth be spiritual, scientific, or moral. The restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ and all that it means to us came about because of the inquiring after truth of the 14-year-old Joseph Smith, guided by the passage, “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (James 1:5). Since each one of us has his free agency, the ultimate determination of what is inspired of the Lord, what is right and wrong, true or false, can be made by each of us. Each must bear the accountability of accepting or

discarding the values of truth, which values if followed will produce his greatest happiness.”

I look for truth in all things. I find it in the shows I produce or that I see in New York and throughout the country. I look for it in the new works that are being created and that I from time to time have a chance to give input. During this season alone, at a turning point in the play *1776* one character quotes Edmund Burke, “I learned that a representative owes the people not only his industry but his judgment and he betrays them if he sacrifices it to their opinion.” I found that truth to especially resonate as I reflect upon my responsibility as an artistic director. I have to be true to myself as an artist and not be swayed by what might be easy to sell. In the best of all possible worlds I want to produce productions that will entertain and enlighten. I set the standard of excellence that we strive for in the company and I set the artistic vision for the company. It is informed by my training, by my tastes and by my religious values.

And then in *Les Misérables*, I am especially moved by Jean Valjean as he tells Cosette, “You will learn, truth is given by God to us all in our time, in our turn,” and the summation of the whole production, “To love another person is to see the face of God.” And these truth discoveries are from just one season of my 24 seasons total. So far I have been involved in producing over 150 musicals, 35 of which have been since becoming artistic director.

I find truth in the words and wisdom of others. One of the most authentic people I have ever met was Fred Rogers of *Mister Rogers Neighborhood*. So I have an affinity for his insights such as:

“There would be no art and there would be no science if human beings had no desire to create. And if we had everything we ever needed or wanted, we would have no reason for creating anything. So, at the root of all art and all science there exists a gap – a gap between what the world is like and what the human creator wishes and hopes for it to be like. Our unique way of bridging that gap in each of our lives seems to me to be the essence of the reason for human creativity.”

There are many stories I could tell about the 20 years with the theatre company before I became the artistic director. There were many sacrifices. It was hard work and long hours and little or no money. The hours are still long, but the financial rewards have improved. The experience was profound and I practiced what I learned at BYU. To some extent it was simple. I showed up on time, prepared, and willing to work. We have been counseled to have balance in our lives. I have invested my time in my job and my church callings and my family. It is a challenging balancing act and I am fortunate to have been blessed all along the way by the Lord. My three children have a testimony of the restored gospel. My daughter is a BYU graduate. My son is in his freshman year here, and an Eagle Scout, and I was able to ordain him an elder. My youngest child is bright and healthy, except he wants to become an actor. Oh, well. Paula and I have made it possible for all of them to pursue their interests wherever that leads them. I once told a reporter that I have one son who wants to be a filmmaker, another son who wants to be an actor, and a daughter who wants to be a social worker so she can provide counseling for her brothers.

I have not done this alone. The Lord knows me and he has given me opportunities that have shaped me and He continues to do so. My wife has been a great companion, who keeps me humble. My children have been great supports and great reminders of what is really important. I travel a lot for my job and I miss them all, but I am grateful that I have been able to provide stability in a traditionally unstable profession.

One of my greatest experiences started two years ago when I was approached by Kieth Merrill, a distinguished filmmaker and alum of BYU, to see if I would be interested in being involved with the Sacramento Temple youth cultural celebration. He had accepted the assignment to write and direct and was now looking for a producer. We met while I was in the throes of a final rehearsal for *West Side Story*, show number two of seven and I was in the bishopric, so I was pretty busy. So when he asked if I would have time to serve as the producer, I said no, but that I will do it anyway. Shortly thereafter I was given the assignment by my stake president and released from the bishopric and I was now to do something for which there was no handbook. All that I have learned about effective management and leadership has come from my experiences in church service. This event was now a test of my faith to see if I could put into practice the principle of

truly being guided by the spirit in all things. So Kieth and I set out to create what turned out to be a musical theatre production and it was performed by 5000 youth from Northern California including five horses and a stagecoach – Kieth insisted on the horses. He wanted 15 and I was able to negotiate the number down to five. Anyway, I assembled a committee of church members who composed music and wrote lyrics, by inspiration. Kieth wrote the script by inspiration. Then we worked with about 80 plus music people and 80 plus choreographers and coordinated the rehearsal process that allowed for three months of rehearsal twice a week of the individual segments, culminating in one and two-thirds rehearsals with everyone together on the day of the event and then a miraculous performance that accomplished what we set out to do—give the youth an experience that would tie them to the temple, draw them closer to the Savior, and to the prophet and make them feel good about who they are—and to have fun. I will never forget after a year of challenges, obstacles, sacrifices by so many, and the miracles that occurred, I looked up into the stands and saw 5.000 youth depending on me to carry this off, because I promised them that we would and I realized that the Lord will make sure that this will work, because of the faith of all involved. The youth will tell you that the first rehearsal was scary and the second rehearsal improved and that the final performance was perfect. I believe that feeling they had of being perfect was that they were able to see through spiritual eyes that their service had been accepted by the Lord. This experience of serving so many revealed to me how I had been prepared all my life for this event and that through service the capacity to love those you serve increases. This was the theatrical and spiritual highlight of my life so far. Now since I am still here, I know that this unique experience has prepared me for whatever is next.

So the truth I seek is discovered as I open myself to the promptings and witnessing by the spirit. The truth I tell is that the spirit does guide us to becoming what we are meant to become. The Lord knows his children and we have the blessing of being a part of the artistic experience that explores and reveals truth in such a variety of ways.

These are the truths I have discovered through the course of my career so far.

- Be willing to work—there is work for you to do, you just have to be willing to do it.
- Be willing to learn

- Be positive—there is no place for cynicism or being “over it.” We don’t have to be Pollyanna about life, but we can always see the good in all things.
- Be idealistic. Don’t let the environment of your work bring you down.
- I do believe that every true thought is truly communicated.
- I believe that what you do in rehearsal is what you do in performance—and taking it further, what you do in school is what you do in your professional life. Now is the time to prepare. What you are doing now to be successful are the same things you need to do in your chosen career.
- You will make mistakes—own up to them and learn from them and then move forward.
- President Hinckley says we can be a little bit better each day. That encourages me. That each day I can strive to be a little bit better than I was the day before. He does not ask for perfection, only greater effort. I find that helps me to start each day with hope.
- Remember to include the audience— this is critical. Without the audience it is only rehearsal, a draft, it is when the audience is present that the artistic experience becomes complete.
- If it is getting difficult, you are probably doing something right.
- Working hard is not a guarantee of anything. Working hard is a given, talent makes a difference, attention to detail makes a difference, doing your best or being your best self makes a difference.

I’m studying the piano again after stopping lessons nearly 35 years ago. My right little finger is weak and I am really working on technique. I have played for years for musicals and accompanying singers, etc. but I really want to be better. It occurred to me that living the gospel is like working on getting my little finger to become stronger. There are parts of living the gospel that we are strong in and those that are difficult. As I have been working on it, it is difficult and I would like to give up, but I want to be better so I keep at it. What is already strong gets stronger and as I pay attention to this detail it improves. Living the gospel is like this exercise to strengthen my technique. We are all learning technique so we can let it go and be free in creating. We cannot truly be free as

artists without the technique; we cannot truly be free without living the truth of the gospel.

- Strive for excellence in everything—each day, each task, each assignment. Don't settle for average or just nice. Be bold in your choices, but make sure those choices keep you close to the spirit.
- Live the principles of the gospel. I think in an effort to please and be accepted in the arts we think we need to compromise our standards in order to move ahead and gain opportunities. It is being true to our faith that brings opportunities and that is what allows us to be the artists we are supposed to be and creating the work that will make the greatest impact.

I was fortunate to have attended BYU and to have been taught by the spirit and to have learned by faith. I follow the charge given to us all at the entrance to campus “Go forth to serve.” All that we do is service. As I have done my best to live up to the covenants I have made to my Heavenly Father in the temple, I have been blessed with success in my professional and personal life. By staying true to my faith I have been able to surround myself with like-minded people, both in and out of the church. I know that I have been a conduit for the spirit to touch the lives of many of my theatre colleagues.

There is a quote by President Kennedy, engraved on the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., that captures best what keeps me engaged in what I am doing and inspires me to always improve. He states,

“I am certain that after
The dust of centuries
Has passed over our cities
We, too, will be remembered
Not for victories or defeats
In battle or in politics,
But for our contributions
To the human spirit”

I stay true to my faith by asking myself on a regular basis, What am I doing to include the Savior in my life? In my work?

We are blessed to see the world from an artist's perspective and with spiritual eyes that allow us to communicate in ways beyond the ordinary. I pray that we all use the gifts and opportunities given by the Lord to tell the truth. The truth that God lives and is actively engaged in our lives. Be bold in declaring, by the spirit, that Jesus is the Savior of the world and that you are a disciple. This declaration can be seen in how you live your life, how you treat others, how you serve in your profession. Hold onto your ideals. Faith in Jesus Christ and the daily living of the gospel will enable us to be what our Heavenly Father had in mind for us when he sent us here to this experience. May we be able to return and report that we became what he envisioned. Stay true to the faith and you will become a powerful servant, a powerful voice, a powerful artist. You will contribute to the human spirit and you will make a difference.

It is a privilege and a responsibility to represent the values of BYU and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There is life after school. And it is fulfilling and wonderful as we are ever mindful that we are to serve the Lord in all that we do. No matter the audience, no matter the means by which you tell the story, as artists who are faithful Latter-day Saints we can win their hearts, and in so doing lead them to believe.

In the sacred name of Jesus Christ. Amen.