

IN MEMORIAM

ELDERS NEAL A. MAXWELL
AND DAVID B. HAIGHT

By Blake T. Ostler and Charlotte England



ELDER NEAL A. MAXWELL of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles died on 21 July after a long battle with leukemia. Maxwell earned a master's degree in political science from the University of Utah and served as legislative assistant to Senator Wallace F. Bennett. He later served as executive vice-president at the University of Utah and commissioner of education for the LDS Church Educational System. In 1974, he was appointed a general authority, and in 1981, he became an apostle.

Author of some thirty books, Maxwell will be remembered as a prolific writer and a gifted speaker. His general conference sermons are known for their conceptual complexity, linguistic richness, and skillful use of metaphors.

AT THE PASSING of my friend Elder Neal A. Maxwell, I feel both immense sadness and incredible joy at the magnificence and gifts of his life. We have all been blessed by the generosity, intelligence, and sheer graciousness of this great man. However, I have been particularly blessed to know him personally.

Perhaps the best glimpse into my love for Elder Maxwell is illustrated by my experience upon first meeting him. While a student at BYU, I had written a paper arguing that God is not timeless. My philosophy teacher, Truman Madsen (who himself is a Mormon legend), asked me if I would be willing to discuss this issue with Elder Maxwell, who had recently written a book suggesting that it is God's timelessness that helps us have greater faith in him. Needless to say, I was stunned. However, at that point in my life, I was too stupid to be humbled at the prospect of discussing this issue with Elder Maxwell. I was actually going to straighten an apostle out on an idea that he seemed to get wrong. (Imagine the kind of pomposity that such an attitude expresses—nevertheless, that was my mindset at the time.)

Elder Maxwell's secretary established a time, and I took a beloved friend, the inimitable Wallace Johnson, with me. It was an incredible experience. Elder Maxwell ushered us into his office. He then sat down, took off his shoes, and put his feet upon his desk. As best I recall, he began by saying, "From my discussion with Truman, I under-

stand that there must be something that I am just not getting."

I launched into a discussion of why, from an LDS perspective, it makes little sense to suggest that a corporeal being such as the Mormon God could be outside of time in the sense that Boethius, the renowned Catholic philosopher, had argued for. Elder Maxwell had quoted Boethius in his book to support his view of God's timelessness. Elder Maxwell listened patiently for about thirty minutes. When I concluded my observations, he said something that stunned me:

You know, it's kind of amazing. When I was first made a general authority, I was a member of the Assistants to the Quorum of the Twelve. Nobody really cared what I thought or what I said. That was a great time because I was pretty much free to say what I wanted. One day I was a member of the Assistants to the Quorum and nobody paid any attention, and the next day, I was made an apostle, and suddenly everything I say is scrutinized so much that I don't even dare say it.

Elder Maxwell very graciously and humbly explained that he did not know the theological framework in which Boethius had written and that he could see that such a framework was quite inconsistent with LDS theological commitments. He asked if he could write a letter to me, which I could

quote, that would say so. Part of that letter is quoted in a footnote in my article, "The Mormon Concept of God" (*Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 17, no. 2 [Summer 1984]:65–93). Imagine an intellect as great as Elder Maxwell humbly listening to a pompous undergraduate student about a theology that he understood far better than I have ever begun to grasp it!

Other interactions with Elder Maxwell followed. After I wrote the article, "Book of Mormon as an Expansion of a Modern Source" (*Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 20, no. 1 [Spring 1987], 66–123), he called me and asked if we could meet. In our meeting, he very gently cautioned me to not assume too much of Joseph Smith in the Book of Mormon. He acknowledged that there may well be a good deal of Joseph Smith's own personality and character in the phrasing and language, but to focus on that is like "starving from nearsightedness because one cannot see the banquet of food on the table right before them." Somehow he always had a phrase that stopped me dead in my tracks and caused me to think about what I wasn't seeing. He would often urge me to "fly the flag of faith." I would respond by suggesting that I would stand steadfast in the solace of the spirit but I would probably choke on my own tongue from too much aliteration.

NEAL Maxwell possessed one of the finest minds that the restoration has been blessed to know. More important, he had a humble heart. At one point in my life, I thought that my whole world had ended. Somehow he simply knew. He called me out of the blue and asked if he could be of assistance. There was no way he could have known of my personal trial because I had not told anyone—but he knew anyway. I never had an illusion that he knew everything or that he was somehow omniscient. However, from this experience and others like it, I knew that he was always intimately attuned to the service of others.

Neal also manifested a certain largess and nobility of spirit. It was never more evident than when he confronted cancer. How can I explain what it is like to be with a friend who is facing death—and yet who is focused on the well-being of others? How can I express the depth of feeling in a man who loves purely and tenderly? And how can I convey to you the certainty of knowing that God is here, now, in every word, every gesture, every sweet breath of life of this remarkable man? Perhaps he could have found the words that eclipse the barrier of any limita-

tions. The only expression I know is to weep with sadness at his passing, to weep with gladness for his life, and to cry from the depths of my soul: "Thank you, my Father."

So with his passing, I thank God that my life was blessed by being able to interact with Neal Maxwell. He was not only an apostle with extraordinary gifts and talents, he was also a friend.

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NOTES TO GOD - 6

Aspens shiver
in fall wind,
wave
thousands of bright
flags to the blue
band of sky.

I am acquainted
with this family
all the trees related
and from a common
seep root;
this canyon clone
shakes
in the remnant wind
of glacial pasts.

When limbs fall
marks like
bird wings
flutter
and ascend
from bark, fly
to the falling sun.

Carvings I made
fifty years ago
are sealed and fading
in the soft, white bark.

—MELVIN ADAMS



ELDER DAVID B. HAIGHT passed away on 31 July. He was 98 years old, the oldest apostle or prophet in the Church's history. After earning a business degree from Utah State Agricultural College (now Utah State University), Elder Haight started a career in retailing, working for ZCMI and later for Montgomery Ward. After moving to the San Francisco Bay Area, he became involved in civic affairs and held positions in the Palo Alto Red Cross, the Stanford Area Boy Scout Council, and the Palo Alto Chamber of Commerce. He also served two terms as mayor of Palo Alto, California.

In 1976, Haight put his business interests aside to become an apostle. In his advanced age, he became hard of hearing and nearly blind. Since he could no longer read a teleprompter, he often delighted Church members with his candid, off-the-cuff sermons.

WHY DO THEY call him "President Hate" when he's so nice? It was the 1960s in Palo Alto, California, and our eight-year-old Jennifer had just heard our stake president speak. We explained to her the difference in the spelling of "hate" and "Haight," and she soon became comfortable calling him President Haight or Mayor Haight. We were fortunate enough to have him leading us in our town as well as in our stake.

Just being around Elder Haight gave us all a sense of peace and acceptance. He had a cordial and kind manner. He was always ready and willing to discuss an idea or thought, or just to share an experience. I remember one Sunday afternoon when Gene and I were standing outside the Palo Alto Ward building with Elder Haight discussing the latest issue of *Dialogue*, of which Gene was one of the founding editors. Elder Haight was a great supporter as well as subscriber. He told us of the strengths he saw in the journal, and as he spoke, he put his hand on Gene's shoulder and told him what a great and needed job Gene was doing. Elder Haight felt that keeping up a dialogue between people with differing perspectives could only help bring about understanding and acceptance of one another. His words were validating and comforting. From that time forward, every time Elder Haight spoke from the pulpit, whether in our stake or from the Tabernacle or Conference Center, I was reminded of that Sunday afternoon in Palo Alto.

A few years later, our family left Palo Alto so Gene could take a position at St. Olaf's College in Minnesota. We spent five great years there before deciding to make our home in Utah. Soon after we arrived in the state, we built a cabin on the Upper Weber River above the town of Oakley. The river ran through a beautiful valley full of quaking aspens. Elder Haight and his wife Ruby had a cabin on the other side of the river. One night, they invited us for an evening of conversation over Ruby's

delicious cookies and pineapple sherbet ice cream. There was an easiness to the evening as we talked about our favorite foods, the joys and challenges of building our cabins, and Gene's and Elder Haight's shared love for fishing. As we talked about our favorite foods, Elder Haight mentioned that he liked beef stroganoff. When Gene told him that I made the best stroganoff, Elder Haight's face lit up. We felt it only natural to invite the two for a dinner of stroganoff. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, this dinner never took place. It soon became a running gag between us, so that even years later, every time we saw Elder Haight he would remind me that I owed him a stroganoff dinner.

Elder Haight loved his cabin so much that he'd often make a retreat even during the winter months when the roads were covered with snow. He'd drive as far as he could. Then he would park the car on the main canyon road, climb over a fence, cross the river, and hike up the hill to his cabin. Gene and I knew this was not an easy hike, for we had often made the same exhausting trek to our own cabin. In heavy winters, the snow could be up to our hips. I sided with Ruby when she chided, with obvious affection and concern for her husband's welfare, that it was foolhardy for him to make the trek.

ELDER Haight truly lived the words he spoke. "The Lord isn't going to be concerned about whether you were a bishop or a stake president or an apostle. He's going to be concerned about how you treated people" (*Ensign*, September 1986).

Elder and Sister Haight's graciousness and apparent love for each other put us at ease and made it a delight to be in their company. We will miss him.

CHARLOTTE ENGLAND is an artist, chef, musician, teacher, and grandmother extraordinaire. She is a member of the Sunstone Board of Directors.