

## Movie Night with My Dad

Rebecca Nibley

It's the spring of 1972, and this is my favorite time of year on the grounds of Brigham Young University. The southern portion of the large campus is my favorite spot, for several reasons. Firstly is that I think it is the most beautiful area of the school, with its much older architecture, acres of grass, a quaint babbling brook that meanders beside a natural dirt path, tons of tall trees, flowers, and other vegetation, and even a botany pond where we often go to picnic and to feed the ducks and turtles. Secondly, the long stairway rising from the street on eighth north is just one short block away from our family home, so we kids can get there easily and go there often to play.

But tonight is special because I am alone with Daddy, and I don't get him to myself very often. When we kids walk up the hill with him – he always calls going to his office in the Joseph Smith building “going up the hill “- during the day, he is constantly accosted by students and faculty alike. Bombarding him with questions and running along beside him as he launches into lengthy answers, hard for them to keep up the pace, both mentally and physically. This is impressive because he is 62 years old and should, it seems to me, be much slower.

But right now, he and I are walking slowly on our way down the hill. It is around 10:00 PM and it is dark, quiet, and mostly unpopulated. We've just left the Richards building and are side by side on the sidewalk as the automatic sprinklers quietly spiral, filling the air with the beautiful aroma of spring flowers. Dad knows the Latin names of every bit of flora and fauna. When we go on family hikes, he stops constantly, and a bit annoyingly, to point them all out. But tonight he is unusually quiet. He is probably tired. He is a very busy man these days.

I reach up and take his hand. Two or three times a month during this time of year, he takes me to the “International Cinema” to see a variety of both foreign and domestic films. Because he is a faculty member, we get free admission, and since we have no television in our home, this is my main chance to see anything on screen. Many of the films have subtitles, and many parents might question the appropriateness of taking a 12-year-old to see them. Not because of any R-rated content, but because of the serious nature of most of the films. I've seen Trojan Women, The Bicycle, The 500 Blows, and A Long Day's Journey into Night, among others. These are not your average movies to take one's pre-teenage daughter to, but Dad feels that I can handle it. As an actress, I have already performed in some pretty serious stuff anyway.

Tonight, the film that we have just watched is “Guess Who's Coming to Dinner”, with Sidney Poitier. I identify with the daughter, of course, who is engaged to a handsome young black man. Since Dad is not speaking, I decide to start the conversation.

“Isn't it silly, Daddy, that someone's color should be such a big deal? I mean, any girl would be lucky to get a guy like that.”

My question is met with silence. I am a little taken aback. For once in his life, Daddy seems hard pressed for words, or at least reluctant to share them. There is a slight frown on his face, and his brow is furrowed. It appears that he is struggling with a mental dilemma. Then it occurs to me that he is identifying with the Spencer Tracy character, the dad, who really struggles to accept his daughter's choice. In our church, the church for whom my father works, men of African heritage – specifically black men, could not then hold the priesthood. This thought makes me angry. I love my church, and I love the Book of Mormon, but this seemingly arbitrary and racist rule makes a little sense to me. My older sister Christina, who is 21, has already fallen in love with her future husband, who is from Yugoslavia and not a member of the Church. But my father has accepted him with open arms as an outstanding young man and has no reservations about his marrying his oldest daughter.

And yet, I get the distinct feeling that if, in a few years, I were to bring home a Sidney Poitier, Dad would have a rough time with it. I know that my Dad is one of the least racist people I have ever met, so I persist with my query.

“Dad, why can't they have the priesthood? It just doesn't seem right.”

After another awkward pause Dad finally responds, “It isn't, Becky. It isn't.”

“Do you think it will change, Daddy?”

“Yes it will, and that change is coming.”

“How quickly?”

“I don't know, but I think it will be pretty soon.”

Silence again. I guess this means it is the end of the conversation. In my mind, I think, 'pretty soon isn't soon enough', and I realize at that moment, that as perfect as I think my dad is, he was born in a different time, and even he is a bit of a product of the privileged upbringing and the culture in which he was raised. so I decide that, rather than press the issue further, I will put the question “up on the shelf” as Camilla Kimball used to say, and wait till my Dad was ready to share more of his thoughts about this with me.

I didn't have to wait very long. The following year, in 1973 Dad's silence was broken when he expressed himself in an article dedicated to the subject of the priesthood restriction. His personal feelings on the matter became clear when he wrote:

Nothing could be easier than to join in the chants of unison that proclaim the perfect equality of all men in all things that are fashionable at the moment; that way we could proclaim our idealism to the world while continuing, like the rest of the world, to treat our fellow man much as we always have. As C. S. Lewis used to point out, the test of the Christian is not to conform with commandments and accept teachings which are perfectly right and sensible to any normal way of thinking; if the Gospel consisted only of such convenient and

unobjectionable things, we could be quite sure that we were making it up ourselves. It is the very contrariness and even absurdity of the Christian teachings that provide, for him, the highest proof of their divinity—this is no man's doing. In the efforts of every President of the Church to explain our position to the world ... we see the admission that this thing is not the invention of those men—they are embarrassed by it, and they all pass the acid test for honesty when they refuse to put their own opinions forth as revelation—which in their case would have been an easy thing to do. ...

So now the whole issue boils down to asking whether it is really God and not man who has ordered this thing. ... And so it gives me great pleasure to be in a position to answer the question with an unequivocal affirmative: it is indeed the Lord's doing. How do I know it? By revelation— which I am in no position to bestow upon others; this goes only for myself. ... Left to myself, the last thing in the world I would do would be to advocate polygamy or impose any limitations whatever on the Negro—and I have often heard the Brethren express themselves to the same effect. ... The Lord told Joseph Smith "Hold your peace until I shall see fit to make all things known unto the world concerning the matter" (Doctrine and Covenants 10:37). Granted that this puts us, as it put the Prophet, in an uncomfortable and even dangerous position, still it provides the best possible test for our faith, our hope, and above all our charity (Nibley, Hugh W. 1973. "The best possible test." In *Temple and Cosmos: Beyond This Ignorant Present*, edited by D.E. Norton. The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley 12, 532-40. Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1992, pp. 534, 539).

In 1978, Dad was thrilled when President Kimball announced that all worthy men would now be eligible for the priesthood. This is now part of our scripture, Official Declaration Two in the Doctrine and Covenants. But Dad wouldn't live to see the day when a man of African descent would become our president for eight years. Obama was elected in 2008, just three years after the passing of my Dad. But I'm sure that Daddy was cheering heartily from heaven when he got to witness his own wife and children being given the opportunity to vote for President Barack Obama. But even more consequential from an eternal perspective, he now rejoices, as do we all, in the rapid growth of the Church among black members worldwide, participating in every calling, blessing, and ordinance of the Gospel. These faithful members, many of whom have embraced the Gospel despite great hardship, are reputed Churchwide for the strength of their faith and example.

In the future, I believe that the Lord will continue to reveal other great things, if and when the members are ready to receive them. In the meantime, I still look to my Dad for advice and comfort as I face the spiritual challenges of this difficult life.