

BYU professor celebrates 90th birthday
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He has been described as a one-man campus, an icon and an absent-minded professor, but Hugh Nibley prefers to describe himself as a "doorkeeper in the House of the Lord," according to editor and former student, John W. Welch, a BYU law professor and editor of BYU Studies.

Nibley, a former BYU professor and renowned religious scholar will celebrate his 90th birthday Monday. He grew up in Oregon and southern California, and then served a mission to Switzerland and Germany at age 17. Nibley graduated from UCLA and UC Berkeley, and came to BYU in 1946 after serving in World War II with the army.

It was at BYU that Nibley became known as a one-man campus, according to a 1997 BYU Studies article titled "Youth and Beauty: The Correspondence of Hugh Nibley." While at BYU he taught courses in Latin, Arabic, Greek, Russian, Hebrew, Old Norse, early Christianity, ancient history and Near Eastern religion and the Book of Mormon.

Because of his intellect, people tend to regard Nibley as an enigma - a person who is so complex others are forced to reduce him to an icon, Welch said.

"He's a very caring person, but his mind is so active, and he ranges over such a wonderfully broad field of interests that most people see him more as an icon than as a human being," Welch said.

One common thread in people's description of Nibley is the passion he has for life and learning. Boyd Petersen, Nibley's son-in-law, said he feels it is Nibley's passion that captivated students rather than his teaching skills.

"The passion is what captivates people," he said. "It's so contagious that he's turned into being one of the best teachers BYU has ever had even though he violates everything the education department would tell you on how to teach."

Brent Laycock, a former Book of Mormon student of Nibley's from Calgary, Alberta, Canada, agreed.

"He was impressive because of his intellect and his breadth of knowledge," he said. "You were kind of in absolute awe. I still remember a lot of stuff from that class."

Nibley is also known among his colleagues and friends for his sense of humor and his ability to converse easily. Welch said Nibley loves a good time and is never at a loss for words.

"He just loves to talk," he said. "He loves to be asked questions. He loves to share his knowledge."

Petersen was also quick to point out Nibley's sense of humor.

"He's as comfortable quoting Shakespeare as he is quoting Beavis and Butthead," he said.

With all of his knowledge and learning, however, Nibley shuns the limelight and remains a very genuine person. Petersen pointed to Nibley's consistency throughout life as evidence of his genuine personality. According to Petersen, who is writing Nibley's biography, Nibley hasn't really changed a whole lot since he was very young. He also said he was amazed that there wasn't even a slight gap between Nibley's public life and his private life.

"I think he's an incredibly consistent person," he said. "His public persona is consistent with his public persona. He seems very consistent that way."

"Hugh Nibley is a genuinely sincere human being who does not like to be thought of as an eccentric," Welch said.

He cares deeply about the ideas and their eternal consequences. That's why he loves the gospel so much. He is focused on things that ultimately matter."

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