

Chapter 4

Growing Up in Los Angeles, 1921-27

Hugh turned ten in 1920. The next seven years—he left on his mission at age seventeen—were years of explosive intellectual growth and almost complete liberty to experience the California environment—both its beautiful woods and its commercial urban landscapes. During these broadening years, he also found the intellectual and spiritual moorings that set his course for the rest of his life.

For an energetic and alert teenager, Southern California offered an unparalleled panorama of experiences to sample. Indeed, its business was booming. Already known as a vacation site, Los Angeles saw thousands of tourists flocking to the area each year. The burgeoning motion picture industry, only a few years old in 1920, became a billion-dollar industry during its first decade. By 1920, Los Angeles had its first aircraft factory and would become home to more before the decade ended. And the Los Angeles harbor, which opened in 1914, had become a major port on the Pacific. Traffic congestion was already a concern in 1920, with 160,000 cars on the road. Some things really haven't changed. But other industries—quite successful then—have since died out in Southern California. For example, oil drilling rigs sprouted at Long Beach, Huntington Beach, and Santa Fe Springs, turning Southern California into the producer of one-fifth of the world's oil supply. Times were good. And with more and more business came more and more people. During the decade, the population of Los Angeles more than doubled and the population of Burbank increased five times. This meant that real estate was booming; 11,608 acres were subdivided in 1923 alone.² “Stock was shooting up and everybody was getting rich,”

²E. Caswell Perry, *Burbank: An Illustrated History* (Northridge, CA: Windsor, 1987), 45.

³Hugh Nibley, “Faith of an Observer,” 169, compilation of interviews, ca. 1983-84 for a video documentary of the same name aired in 1985, photocopy of typescript in my possession, pagination added.