

## Chapter 18

# The Home Dance: Hugh Nibley Among the Hopi

Hugh Nibley lives in a world of serendipity. I have discovered that, time and time again, he has miraculously avoided some catastrophe or dropped in on some fortunate eventuality. Call it happenstance, fate, or divine will, but these moments of pleasant coincidence have followed him throughout his life. Psychiatrist M. Scott Peck believes that these “miracles of serendipity,” as he calls them, are “amazingly commonplace” and usually “in some way beneficial” to the recipient.<sup>2</sup> Those who don’t experience them, he argues, are simply not aware of them—“serendipitous events occur to all of us, but frequently we fail to recognize their serendipitous nature; we consider such events quite unremarkable, and consequently we fail to take full advantage of them.”<sup>3</sup> While this may be true, I have never known anyone who experiences these moments of serendipity to the degree Hugh Nibley does. More importantly, not only do they happen to him, but he makes himself aware of them.

Although Hugh would not dismiss the significance of any good fortune, to me the most thrilling instances are the times during World War II when, through fortunate synchronicity, his life was spared, sometimes by mere inches. (See chap. 13.) Less dramatic, but no less important, are countless instances of providence in which he has just “happened” upon an important source exactly when he needed it in his research and writing. What is surprising to me is that, despite his gratitude and delight at the happenstances of his life, he never seems shocked or even surprised. Instead, he cheerfully attributes such blessings to God, perhaps as a reward for paying his tithing, doing his home teaching, or performing some other modest act of righteousness. As Hugh wrote to his

<sup>2</sup>M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Travelled* (New York: Touchstone, 1978), 255. This chapter was first published in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 31, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 23-35.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 257.