

Preface

I came to know Hugh Nibley through his daughter. In January 1983, I had returned to Brigham Young University after serving in the France Paris Mission. There a friend recruited me for his College Bowl team—a sort of game-show version of Trivial Pursuit. I was a lousy addition to the team; but Zina Nibley was also a member. I fell for her brains (it's true) and her blonde hair. She liked me because I didn't know who her father was. She was suspicious of boys who were interested in her only because they wanted to meet her famous father.

I met Hugh first at the blessing of one of his grandchildren in October 1983. And while I really didn't know why Hugh Nibley was famous, I had heard the name many times, had been told that he was the smartest man alive by several friends, and was quite intimidated about meeting him. When Zina introduced us, Hugh endearingly apologized for the suit he was wearing. It was really quite typical of all of his suits, but it was obvious that he was as nervous about meeting me as I was about meeting him. That same day, Zina and I became engaged.

This change in my status brought up a new question. What should I call her father, who, at seventy-three, was old enough to be my grandfather? “Brother Nibley” sounded too stuffy. “Hugh” sounded too chummy. I could hardly call him “Daddy” as Zina did. To avoid the awkwardness, whenever I wanted to talk to him I would just look in his direction and start talking. As long as he looked up, it worked fine. Then one day he called me on the phone. He needed a ride to the garage to pick up his car. I answered the phone and the familiar voice on the other end said, “Hi, Boyd. This is . . . uh . . . Nibley.” Obviously, he didn't have any idea what I should call him either. I suddenly felt relieved.

I started reading Hugh Nibley's books soon after Zina and I married in May 1984. I felt that if I was going to be in the family I should know a little about why my father-in-law was a local celebrity. It was in his books that I discovered not only great depth and wisdom about the gospel, but a certain “hipness”—a youth and vitality—that makes reading him fun. Hugh Nibley combines both arcane tidbits from such sources as the Dead Sea Scrolls or the *Patrologia* with quotes from pop culture like “The Muppet Show” or “Hill Street Blues,” sprinkling in references to *Popular Science* or a current fashion magazine. In talks I've even heard him impersonate Beavis and Butthead as examples of light-mindedness. This ability to put old things in context with the new was not only interesting, but entertaining. It helped me see that these ancient texts are really dealing with