

edge of the purpose of a prophet, seer, and revelator has increased, but my testimony that God does speak to men in this day is primarily based on personal experience with David O. McKay when the Church was little more than a habit in my life.

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PRESIDENT MCKAY AS A NEIGHBOR

[Recorded as told to a group of children at a Family Home Evening]

My grandfather used to say "There's lots and lots of 'man-ism' in Mormonism." Often we see President McKay and we think and talk of him as the prophet. I grew up in the same little valley in Northern Utah where he was from, and we saw him and thought of him as a man, of the real things he did as our neighbor.

You've read a lot about President McKay, heard a lot about him; you hear about him at Church and even in the paper and you read about him even though we live a long way from Utah. I'd like to tell you about a man you've probably never heard about—a man named Jesse Wilbur. Even though you've never heard about him he was a very important person to us. All those who knew him loved him very much, and I should tell you that he was a very good friend of President McKay. Probably they were boys together; they were about the same age. At one time President McKay's father was chosen to be the bishop of the ward in Eden (a small town near Huntsville, where the McKays lived) and for awhile they had sort of a traveling arrangement, so President McKay probably attended church in Eden some of the time and this is probably where he got to know Jesse Wilbur. Jesse grew up and President McKay grew up and became famous and traveled all over the world. Jesse might have taken short trips to Ogden and Salt Lake but he mainly stayed close to Eden. He ran "the shop," that's what he called it. We used to go to the shop lots of times and at the shop he had a forge. He had the gas pumps with gas for the cars, but the really important thing was that he was a blacksmith. If any of the farm machinery needed repairing, he did it. One of my favorite things was to go with my dad when he took our two big horses down to the shop to have new shoes put on them.

Probably the only time that Jesse's name was in the paper was when he died, and many people wouldn't think of him as an important person. But he was an important person to us, and he was always good to us when we were little children. He used to keep candy at the shop so we could have some candy when he came; he'd always talk to us and he asked us about things that were important.

Jesse always used to have a cigar. He didn't smoke the cigar, but he chewed on it and I never saw him without it. He had a big mark on his lips and actually he would chew and eat some of it and probably spit the rest out, I don't know. But it was just a part of Jesse; if you didn't see the

cigar you didn't see Jesse. Jesse was not a member of the Mormon Church and he was one of the very few people who lived up in Huntsville or Eden who were not L.D.S. His wife belonged to the Church and he had his children baptized, but he was never a member of the Church.

President McKay would talk to Jesse about the Church and about the Gospel. All the people who lived there were betting among themselves whether Jesse would join the Church, because they knew he loved President McKay and President McKay loved him and President McKay certainly loved the Church. And so President McKay would come to Jesse and talk and talk and talk. As it so happened, Jesse did not ever join the Church and he died some years ago. Maybe his cigar had something to do with it, I don't know. But even though Jesse was not an important man to lots of other people, President McKay, who at the time of Jesse's death was a very important man who had even met with presidents of the United States and kings and queens, came up to this little town of Eden and spoke at Jesse's funeral. They were very good friends.

Whenever President McKay had a chance, he would bring his horses over for Jesse to take care of. He had a favorite horse called Sonny Boy that he always used to ride and he'd come over and spend the whole afternoon talking with Jesse and sometimes, just by accident, I would happen to be down at the shop when he came to visit. Winter in that valley is very cold, with lots of snow, and the first time I saw President McKay as a little girl (he wasn't President then) he was over at the shop. He looked to me like a giant of a man. When I was older he didn't seem quite as large, but he had big shoulders and big hands and he stood quite tall and even then I remember he had that beautiful white hair. He had a great big fur coat on the first time I saw him, and I'll always remember him in his fur coat because I had never seen a man wear a fur coat. (Not too long ago, I saw a photo of him in the *Improvement Era* and he was out on a sleigh ride in the winter and had on that same fur coat.) While I was there at the shop he spoke to me, although he didn't know my name. He always spoke to all of us there and I remember he put his hand on my head. It was a great big hand; I guess I thought maybe his hand was really heavy because he was such a big man, but he was very, very gentle.

President McKay kept his horses up at Huntsville; he always had Sonny Boy and some other horses and he'd bring his family up in the winter and they would hitch their horses to a sleigh and go sleigh riding and in the summer they would ride the horses. He had a man who happened to be a relative of ours who would take care of his horses when he wasn't there because they had to be fed every day. This man's name was Harold Newly and it just so happened that about four or five years ago Harold Newly had a heart attack and died and his beloved wife was lonesome and upset. There was a big funeral for Harold and all his friends came and all the people came to tell her how much they loved her and that they would help her and all this sort of thing. But then there came a time when all the friends left and she was all alone, and that's the time when it's difficult, when you need someone

to give you love, someone you can really depend upon. She had noticed that a car had been parked across from her house most of the afternoon, and finally after everyone had left and she was alone and feeling the most terribly lonesome, a man got out of the car and came to her doorstep and said that he came because President McKay, who hadn't been able to come because he was very ill then and couldn't travel that much, had sent him, saying that Laverna (that was the lady's name) would need someone very much, after everyone else was gone; he brought a beautiful bouquet of two dozen red roses from President McKay. To me this tells what a sensitive, sensitive man he was, to know that that was the time when she would need him the most and to send the roses.

You know, the people who lived up there were very proud because President McKay was the prophet of the Church, but they never called him President McKay, even when he became president. All the people who lived up in that area sort of felt he belonged to them and so as I grew up I never heard people at home call President McKay by that name. They always called him David O. They never called him Dave, never were disrespectful, but always called him by his first name.

As I said in the beginning, my grandfather always said there was a lot of "man-ism" in Mormonism and sometimes we forget this, that the leaders of the Church are human beings. Not to detract anything at all from President McKay, because he was such a great man, but you know, even though he was the prophet and president of the Church, he had a fault, one fault I knew about. Maybe he had others. But one fault we all knew about. Lots of times when we were either riding down through Ogden Canyon or coming back up from Ogden or maybe just driving around one of these roads, we'd pass him and we always knew him because he drove a particular kind of big black car and we'd see the white hair. That's all we would have time to see because he would flash by as fast as he could go. He had one fault; he liked to drive too fast. And the people used to joke about it because he drove much too fast for safety. They would say, "Well, I guess he thinks the Lord won't let anything happen to him, but what about the rest of us?". As he did become older, I think finally his family insisted that he have someone to chauffeur him. They felt it was not safe because he still drove just as fast though he probably didn't have as good reflexes as when he was a younger man. So later on, everyone felt a little safer when he would come with either his son or someone else in the family driving.

It was not an easy thing for someone from that locality to work for the kind of education he had. In his day he was well educated for that area. It was not a common thing. The majority of the people there might have gone on to some school but the central aim was to go back to the farm for a lot of them, so that it was unusual for him to move out and go into the field of education. He certainly didn't do it because anyone else was doing it. But I never heard anyone in my family resenting his moving beyond. There was a great deal of pride that he was a son of the valley and he had done this.

Those are the things I remember about him and about the little place where I grew up. Growing up there was like being held in a soft cocoon for a number of years, because you were so protected and so many people loved you and cared about you. It was difficult in lots of ways. The worst part of it that I remember was the winter. It was extremely cold and as a little girl we didn't have central heating at all. We had coal, and it was my job and my brothers' to keep the coal bucket full and to bring what we called kindling, the little scraps of wood to start the fire. We always had to get up in the morning to a cold house until the fire could be burning bright, and we always had to go to bed in an icy cold bedroom, so I was always glad when it was spring. When President McKay was a little boy, quite young, his daddy was sent on a mission back to Scotland, and the boys (President McKay had two or three other brothers but he was the oldest) had to stay and do all the farming; that meant all the work to produce the food, go get the wood (because then they wouldn't have had coal), to raise the animals and kill some of them sometimes for meat, and all this these young boys had to do to help their mother. And their mother had to work because their father was gone (for two years as I remember) back to Scotland.

So as President McKay grew up it was not an easy boyhood in lots of ways, and he worked very hard. He always loved his home in that valley and he always thought his boyhood was a great contributor to his success in later life. He never forgot the people who lived there and was always good to them and always loved them. I think growing up there did contribute somewhat to his greatness.

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