

Mormonism was exciting and fun, an expression of faith that must be joyful, rather than anxious. I am glad to have spent most of my life in the room that Truman built.

Truman G. Madsen: A Glimpse from the Extended Family

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On the occasion of his fortieth birthday, Truman Madsen wrote my grandmother, Dessie Grant Boyle, a very long letter. She had raised Truman after his mother (and her sister), Emily Grant Madsen, died shortly after the birth of his younger brother, Gordon. Emily, on her deathbed, said she had no worries about her three sons because her sisters would raise them. Truman was two and a half when he came to live with the Boyles. Dessie already had four daughters and a son, Doug, who was just four months older than Truman. His brothers, Grant and Gordon, were taken in by different sisters.

In this letter, which my grandmother let me read, he talked about what it had been like growing up in her home. I learned a great deal both about him and about my mother's family. He always claimed that he was the 'goodie-goodie' and that my Uncle Doug got blamed for all of their misdeeds, which, Truman claimed, were legion. Gram would often say, "Go see what Truman and Doug are doing and tell them to stop!"

I remember from the letter Truman's comment that few families would have split infinitives as the topic of conversation at the dinner table. He also said he had few memories of fighting but knew there must have been some because my mother, Betsy, who was ten years older than Truman, got a broomstick in the face once. He didn't say who was wielding it.

My grandmother told me that her worst moment during those years happened one afternoon when she walked into a third-floor bedroom in their home on South Temple. Truman was balanced on the window sill with nothing in front of him but open air. If

she'd screamed, he would probably have fallen out. She moved quietly until she could grab him and yank him back into the room. Then she went to pieces.

This living arrangement lasted for approximately seven years. At that point, the boys' grandfather, Heber J. Grant, told their father, Axel Madsen, that he thought they should be raised as brothers. Axel bought a house, hired a housekeeper, and brought his three boys together. My grandmother never quite got over "losing" Truman, and he continued to be a regular in her home.

When Truman and Ann married, I was a young teenager. Ten years later he was the New England Mission president, and I arrived in Cambridge to begin graduate work at Harvard. They took me in from the first and treated me like immediate family. I was invited to stay occasionally in the mission home at 15 Hawthorn, and travel with them to missionary conferences. I took copious notes on Truman's talks. I was amazed that his missionaries, for the most part, were not scribbling away as I was. They were overwhelmed by his eloquence, as most people were, and probably thought they'd never forget what they were hearing.

Truman had the great gift of extemporaneous brilliance. The things I heard him talk about as a mission president were both profound and immediate. He tried to record all of his speeches and, as became his practice, drew on his inspiration as a speaker as the basis for his extensive writings. His missionaries worshipped him, and most seemed to think he'd either be translated or called as a General Authority when he was released as mission president. The combination of his natural gifts and the focus of his interests produced a body of work that will be fresh for generations. Many people have commented on his voice, which was deep and powerful. It may be that his tapes and videos will outlast his books. Vast numbers of people were touched by the projects he undertook.

When the Madsens went to the BYU Jerusalem Center in the late 1980s, it added a new focus and depth to their lives and gave Ann her own academic areas for specialization. It also expanded the number of people who came into contact with them. Both Truman and Ann had the natural gift of friendship, and over the decades they made literally countless numbers of friends both on a personal level and for the Church.

In September of 2007 the Madsens came to the Cambridge Reunion held in the Longfellow Park chapel which was destroyed by fire just eleven days before Truman's death. The day after the reunion, speaking in sacrament meeting, both reminisced about their early married lives in Cambridge and their habit of returning over and over again to the area. Present at that meeting was a couple from New Hampshire whom the Madsens had first met and befriended when they were presiding over the New England Mission. The couple joined the Church and through them many others had been converted. It's a scene that was probably reproduced everywhere they went.

One of Truman's first published works was a small book called *How to Stop Forgetting and Start Remembering* (1964). It was based on talks he'd given at BYU Education Weeks. He noted that he didn't have a photographic memory but recommended a number of techniques which could be substituted. These techniques were certainly the way he remembered all the things he read and learned about Joseph Smith. He often said he tried to learn something new about the Prophet every week. It was probably more like every day.

In one article, Truman created a new version of the account of Ulysses and the Sirens from the *Odyssey*. Rather than have young Latter-day Saints put beeswax in their ears, as did Ulysses's sailors, to shut out "the world," Truman suggested that the gospel message really positions a better band in the front of the boat which drowns out the tempting songs of the Sirens. That was, finally, one of the things that he did best. Those who heard him speak or who were touched by his lectures, his books, and his videos were given a "better sound" which could overcome the contrary messages of the world.

Mormon lore tells us that as we die and move into the next life, we are greeted by those we "have loved long since, and lost a while" (Hymn #97). That moment for Truman might have been the first time in his clear memory he saw his mother's face. And right behind her, my grandmother, the only mother he ever knew. What could be sweeter?