

Remember the Harbor

MARCOS GALLO

It was almost six years ago that I walked into my first class at BYU: Calculus 1. It took me some time to find the room because back then they did not have the app that shows all your classes on a map. I walked in and found a seat, and then Professor Denise Halverson started leading a hymn. I looked around, and everyone seemed to think it was normal. I was certainly in the wrong class. Maybe religion? But no—I asked someone, and it was definitely calculus.

It was astonishing that I could actually learn a subject so technical with the help of God. These spiritual experiences happened over and over again on this campus, and how grateful I am for them. I came to BYU one year after I was baptized, and my experiences here were crucial to my social, intellectual, and spiritual development. I can say that this is the place where I have come to know my Redeemer.¹

A couple of months ago I was walking by the Creamery on Ninth when the words of Wandle Mace came to my mind. On the banks of the Mississippi River, as the Saints looked

at their beloved city for the last time, he wrote, “Farewell, Nauvoo the Beautiful! The City of Joseph! The home of so much joy and happy contentment, and also of the most exquisite sorrow and anguish.”²

“I am going to miss this place,” I thought. “Also my friends, my professors, the beautiful campus, the classes, the temple, my ward, and Graham Canyon ice cream.”

But what does it mean to miss something? Why do we even feel nostalgia?

The word *nostalgia* is a compound of two Greek words, one meaning “homecoming” and the other meaning “pain.” It is actually very similar to the word *homesickness*.³ But is nostalgia, in fact, a sickness? It turns out that in other languages these same words do not carry a negative connotation, such as the Portuguese *saudade* and the German *sehnsucht*. These imply a deep, underlying love for someone or

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something. These are in some ways an expression of that love, like when you say to someone, “I’m gonna miss you!”

But the role of nostalgia goes beyond demonstrating love. Psychologists have found that those who think about nostalgic experiences feel an increase in positive emotions.⁴ So missing past occurrences is not necessarily bad, especially if we remember that experiences make us who we are. I am who I am today because of this wonderful university. The pioneers would not be the same had they never left Nauvoo and traversed to Utah. We too have left our homes and our friends and have traveled miles to come to this institution.

And we have been stationed here for the past few years, like ships at harbor. It was Elder Claudio R. M. Costa who once read an inscription under a painting of a ship that said, “A ship is safe in harbor, but that’s not what ships are for.”⁵ There always comes a time when the Lord tells us to leave for the open sea. He asks us to face the winds and the waves of the future, and—for us—BYU has been the place to prepare. But how can BYU help us?

It is interesting that many of us come to school during what scientists call the “remembrance bump,” which is the stage of our lives (during our early twenties) of which adults have the greatest recollection of events.⁶ The memories we made here will be with us for years. They are moments of joy and also of adversity, like when we had to sacrifice sleep or deal with difficult roommates. Acknowledging whom we have become partially comes from thinking back on these trials, so hopefully we will also feel nostalgia for them.

Psychologists also found that nostalgia increases self-esteem, perceptions of social connectedness, and perceptions of meaning in life.⁷ Remembering the past is a natural response to situations that might make us sad. So when the hail and the mighty storm shall beat upon our vessels, we can remember those

things on which we have built our foundations.⁸ We can think back on the wonderful lessons we have learned here. We need to remember to always strengthen our spirits, to pursue a character of righteousness, to seek knowledge in every discipline throughout our lives, to learn with the guidance of the Spirit of God, and to seek to serve our fellowmen.⁹ That is the gift this university has given us—principles by which we can chart the course of our lives.

When neuroscientists looked at the brains of people feeling nostalgia in an MRI machine, they noticed that nostalgia enhanced activity in the prefrontal cortex in similar ways seen in people receiving money.¹⁰ So the memories we will keep from this campus are indeed gifts, possibly the greatest gifts this institution could give us.

It is time for us to cast off and face the open sea. Thus I echo the words of Wandle Mace but liken them to me and you: Farewell, BYU the Beautiful! The home of so much joy and happy contentment, and also of the most exquisite sorrow and anguish. Farewell, BYU, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See Mosiah 18:30.
2. *Journal of Wandle Mace, 1809–1890*, 1959 typescript, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU, 207; punctuation standardized.
3. See Clay Routledge, *Nostalgia: A Psychological Resource* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2016), 4, 5.
4. See Routledge, *Nostalgia*, 48.
5. Claudio R. M. Costa, “Ships Are Safe in the Harbor,” BYU devotional address, 2 November 2010.
6. See Ashok Jansari and Alan J. Parkin, “Things That Go Bump in Your Life: Explaining the Reminiscence Bump in Autobiographical Memory,” *Psychology and Aging* 11, no. 1 (March 1996): 85–91.

7. See Clay Routledge, Jamie Arndt, Tim Wildschut, Constantine Sedikides, Claire M. Hart, Jacob Juhl, Ad J. J. M. Vingerhoets, and Wolff Schlotz, "The Past Makes the Present Meaningful: Nostalgia as an Existential Resource," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 101, no. 3 (September 2011): 638–52.

8. See Helaman 5:12.

9. See *The Mission of Brigham Young University and The Aims of a BYU Education* (Provo: BYU, 2014).

10. See Megan E. Speer, Jamil P. Bhanji, and Mauricio R. Delgado, "Savoring the Past: Positive Memories Evoke Value Representations in the Striatum," *Neuron* 84, no. 4 (19 November 2014): 847–56.