

“College Song”

KEVIN J WORTHEN

Graduation ceremonies have been occurring at BYU since 1877; some have been more memorable than others. The graduation exercises of 1899 were unusual in several respects, especially when compared to the ceremonies we are holding today. The venue was smaller. It was held in the Provo Stake Tabernacle. And the procession was a bit longer. It went five blocks from the Academy Building to the tabernacle. The nature of the student achievements highlighted was also different from what we see today. We have students today who have worked on neonatal ventilators, NASA solar panel arrays, and the search for a cure to Alzheimer’s disease. By contrast, in 1899 the highlight was an “exhibit of handwork of the students from needle work and drawing to hardwood desks and bookcases.”¹ Twenty students were honored in that 1899 ceremony, and only six of those received college degrees.² Today we celebrate more than 6,000 graduates, all of whom will receive college degrees.

One of the other distinctions of the 1899 ceremony was the debut of a song, the lyrics³ of which were written by Annie Pike,⁴ a student who would graduate the following year.⁵

Annie was a non-LDS student at what was then Brigham Young Academy. She was born and raised in Provo, her father having arrived here to serve as the medical superintendent of the Territorial Insane Asylum.⁶ Annie entered Brigham Young Academy when she was sixteen and graduated four years later.⁷ After studying at the University of Michigan, she returned to the Academy to teach in the English Department for a period of time.⁸

Annie had a way with words from an early age. When she was eleven, she issued her own newspaper, “writing the editorials, stor[ies], poem[s], and locals all herself.”⁹ According to one account, Annie would sometimes

*leave her dish-washing [chores] quite unceremoniously and be gone for a number of minutes. Presently some member of the family would find her kneeling at a window sill, writing. “I came to write a line that just popped into my head,” she would say apologetically when discovered.*¹⁰

Kevin J Worthen, president of Brigham Young University, delivered this commencement address on April 26, 2018.

We do not know whether the lyrics to the song sung during the 1899 graduation exercise simply popped into Annie’s head or came by some other means, but we do know that the song she wrote as a twenty-year-old Brigham Young Academy student caught on. It was originally called the “Academy Marching Song,” but it eventually became known as the “College Song.” While not as famous as the BYU fight song, with its familiar direction to “rise and shout,”¹¹ the song was a favorite of some BYU presidents, including Rex E. Lee. The song is kept alive today mainly through the marching band, who, after every football game, temporarily belie their name by laying aside their instruments and then, while standing in place, singing a cappella the “College Song.” Some of you may recognize this:

*All hail the college that we love!
At the throne, the throne of wisdom’s sway,
Oh, let us lift our songs above
The thronging multitude today.
No pride nor riches here may sue:
The head, the heart, the hand
United must be true—
Be true to thee, our white and blue,
When they join our happy band.*

Chorus:

*Then cheer anew for the BYU!
We’ve come to work, to live, to do.
We’ll raise our standard—bear it through;
Our hearts are true to the BYU.*¹²

I share this brief trip down the graduation music memory lane because my short presidential graduation advice comes from two key phrases from Annie Pike’s lyrics in the “College Song.”

My first admonition is found in the phrase “no pride nor riches here may sue.” Notwithstanding the last word in that phrase, I am not advocating a prohibition against certain kinds of legal actions. Instead, I am asking you to not let pride and riches dictate your

future decisions. The same lesson is taught by way of warning in the scriptural injunction in section 121 of the Doctrine and Covenants. We are familiar with the verses, yet we often skip over what may be the most important teaching in that scripture. Beginning with verse 34, we read:

Behold, there are many called, but few are chosen. And why are they not chosen?

*Because their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men.*¹³

I believe that in our rush to learn the one lesson that follows—that priesthood and heavenly power are entirely dependent on adherence to principles of righteousness—we skip over what is so often the root cause of our failure to realize our full potential: that our hearts are set too much upon the things of the world and aspire to the honors of men. In other words, we allow pride and riches to become our motivation. When we are motivated solely by those two things—or either one of them—we lose the ability to call down the powers of heaven, and our eternal progress comes to a screeching halt. That may seem obvious now, but I can assure you from both personal experience and observation that the allure of pride and riches governs more human behavior than any of us would care to admit, and, when it does, we can easily find ourselves in places where we don’t want to be, both physically and spiritually. As you make career and other important decisions in life, I implore you to remember that at BYU we aspire to be a place where “no pride nor riches here may sue.”

The antidote to the ever-present deviating attraction of pride and riches is found in the next phrase from Annie Pike’s “College Song” lyrics: “The head, the heart, the hand united must be true.” When we make decisions that are confirmed by our mind and spirit (our head and heart) and then take action based on those decisions (our hand), we will progress.

When our head, our heart, and our hands align—when they are united—we can know that the course we are pursuing is likely to be true. The Aims of a BYU Education challenge us to provide an education that is “(1) spiritually strengthening, (2) intellectually enlarging, and (3) character building, leading to (4) lifelong learning and service.”¹⁴ In other words, our goal is to provide an education that aligns our hearts, our heads, and our hands in order to make the lives of others better. I hope we have provided you with that kind of education, and I urge you to capitalize on that foundation.

I can predict with a high degree of certainty that there will be many times in your post-graduate life when you will face decisions that will ultimately be determined by whether you are motivated by pride and riches on the one hand or whether you are moved to act consistently with truths that resonate in your heart and in your mind on the other. My simple promise to you is that if you choose the latter over the former, your life will be more joyful, more fulfilling, and more eternally productive. Remember, at BYU “no pride nor riches here may sue: the head, the heart, the hand united must be true.”

Nine years after she wrote those words, Annie Pike (now Annie Pike Greenwood) reflected on the impact that her education at BYU had had on her. She wrote:

I once [had an acquaintance who] hailed . . . from [an ivy-league school and] was very scornful of the Brigham Young Academy, as it was then called.

Upon one occasion, wishing to be particularly scathing, he made the following comment: “I think they must have spoiled you at that Brigham Young Academy.”

It struck me forcibly that he was right. “They” had certainly spoiled me at “that Brigham Young Academy”—spoiled me as mother spoils her child—with kindness, encouragement, appreciation, charity—spoiled me so that I can never be content

to take anything but the best the world has to give nor satisfied to give anything but the best that lies within me. By day and by night it comes upon me that I must fulfill all of which my teachers believed me capable.

*I thank God that hundreds of young people are being spoiled every year in the Brigham Young University.*¹⁵

I hope that you have been spoiled in that way during your time here, that you will never be satisfied to give anything but the best that lies within you, and that you will fulfill all of which your teachers believe you capable. This will happen as you are guided not by pride and riches but by your heart, your head, and your hand united in truth.

We love you. And we wish you the Lord’s blessings in all you do. You have been chosen to come forth at this time to bless the world. That you may do so is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. “Commencement,” *Utah County Democrat*, 27 May 1899, 4.

2. “Commencement,” 4.

3. Originally the music was written by John J. McClellan, a faculty member in the Music Department at Brigham Young Academy. See “Brigham Young Academy Marching Song,” *The White and Blue* 2, no. 13 (1 June 1899): 1–2.

4. See “Marching Song,” 1.

5. See “Mrs. Annie Pike Greenwood,” *The White and Blue* 11, no. 9 (15 April 1908): 206.

6. See Annie Pike Greenwood, *We Sagebrush Folks* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1934), 3.

7. See “Mrs. Annie,” 205–6.

8. See “Mrs. Annie,” 206.

9. “Mrs. Annie,” 205.

10. “Mrs. Annie,” 205.

11. “The Cougar Song,” Clyde D. Sandgren, words and music, 1932; copyright by his son, Clyde D. Sandgren Jr., 1947.

12. "College Song," words by Annie Pike Greenwood (1927); old melody, arranged by William F. Hanson.

13. D&C 121:34–35.

14. *The Mission of Brigham Young University and The Aims of a BYU Education* (Provo: BYU, 2014), 5.

15. Annie Pike Greenwood, in "Greetings," *The White and Blue* 12, no. 8 (27 April 1909): 185.

College Song

All hail the college that we love!
At the throne, the throne of wisdom's sway,
Oh, let us lift our songs above
The thronging multitude today.
No pride nor riches here may sue:
The head, the heart, the hand
United must be true—
Be true to thee, our white and blue,
When they join our happy band.

Chorus:

Then cheer anew for the BYU!
We've come to work, to live, to do.
We'll raise our standard—bear it through;
Our hearts are true to the BYU.

No college emblem half so sweet
As our colors, colors pure and true;
No college banner that we greet,
Like thee, our dear old white and blue.
No youth its beauty e'er denies;
Such thought no maid allows,
For blue is in her eyes,
For blue is in her bonnie eyes,
And of white her thoughtful brow.

[Words by Annie Pike Greenwood (1927); old melody, arranged by William F. Hanson]