

BECOMING BRIGHAM, Fireside1—FINAL TRANSCRIPTION

Date of Fireside: 1/3/12026

Location: Orem Lakeview Stake Center

(Music)

Shirley Ricks

Good evening. I'm glad to welcome you all here this evening. Thank you for your presence. We'd like to thank the Orem Lakeview Stake for allowing us to use this facility, this evening. I am Shirley Ricks. I'm a member of the Board of Directors of the Interpreter Foundation, whose mission is to faithfully support the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints through scholarship.

Please note that this evening's events will be recorded and filmed, and your presence here denotes your agreement to be filmed, your permission.

There will be note cards that will be passed around so that if you have questions, you can write them during the fireside and pass them to the end of a row where they'll be picked up and can perhaps be addressed.

We'll begin this evening with a prayer offered by Ed Snow, after which we'll have a special musical number, which is "Oh, My Father" sung to Brigham Young's favorite tune, by Camrey Bagley Fox, John Donovan Wilson, and Twyla Wilson, and accompanied by Vicki McMurray, who also provided our prelude music. Following that, Dan Peterson will offer some introductory remarks, and then we'll see part of a video clip from the series, and then we'll have a panel discussion led by Mark Goodman.

(Music) (Background Noise)

Dan Peterson

I regard that song as a real discovery. For me it is, anyway. Beautiful, beautiful piece. It was apparently not the most popular tune in the 19th century among the Latter-day Saints, nor is the one that we use, typically, but this was Brigham Young's personal favorite, set to a tune from Stephen Foster called "Gentle Annie."

Now, I'm not going to take very long. I can't find my old high council talks. So, I was thinking of unveiling one of those. I put a lot of work into those at one point, and I also developed a dramatic reading of the book of Leviticus that most people really seem to enjoy.

But I'm not going to do that, so I just want to talk briefly about this project. I have been interested in film for a long, long time. I never did anything serious with it, but I always thought that film was a remarkably powerful way of reaching people and getting a message across, and especially in what some people are describing now as our post-literate age, where people don't read books very much. We can still reach them in other ways, and part of the mission of the Interpretive Foundation is to reach people any way we can.

But I think I'm going to give you a, you know, I served a German-speaking mission, and I love these long composite German words. Richard Wagner, the great opera composer, German opera composer, who was actually kind of a slimeball as a human being, but nonetheless, I don't know if that word is often used from the pulpit in, you know, stake centers, but it fits him. Anyway, he described what he called a Gesamtkunstwerk, it's all one word, which means a total work of art. And he meant by that a work of art. He had opera in mind. That's the best he knew at his time that would combine the elements of literature, you know, text and music and visual art with scene, set design, and so on. And he would have loved film, I think.

I shudder to think what kinds of films he might have made. But nevertheless, always been interested in filmmaking and in the movie art. And then at one point, I remember talking with Russ Richins, I believe, and Russ is over here, he's one of our core of filmmakers, about the need to make good Latter-day Saint films and get the message across, tell the story of the Latter-day Saints. We still have a huge story to tell, a great story. Bernard Devoto, who grew up in Ogden, became a literary critic on the East Coast, described that he was very hostile to the church, but he described the story of what he called "Mormonism" as "the greatest story I will never tell," with angels and prophets and westward migrations and all these sorts of things.

So, we began talking about what might be done. And we got started with a piece that is up on the Interpreter website. It's not easily found, I think, but it's there. We did a profile, it was about a half an hour long, of Robert Cundick. He assembled the film crew he'd been working with, the people he'd been working with for a long time, who are somewhere around here. Mark Goodman's here, and James... behind the camera. Oh, right there, behind the camera, right there. Yeah, and so they did that, and it turned out, I thought, amazingly well. It was shown on BYU TV, and about Robert Cundick, who'd been a tabernacle organist, and he was a composer.

We were able to incorporate some of his music. I loved it. I thought it turned out extremely well. And so, I thought, "Wow, we can do great things." Well, eventually, and I won't get into the story, but eventually we came up with the idea, they sort of did, of doing a film about the witnesses to the Book of Mormon. That was music to

my ears, because I've always been absolutely fascinated by the witnesses. I find them extraordinarily persuasive and powerful. So, we did that. We did a documentary based on it called *Undaunted: Witnesses of the Book of Mormon* which is available at no charge online.

That was exciting, really exciting. And I never pictured myself really as a movie mogul. I still think I need to get a Lamborghini and some bling and dress the part. But then we began thinking, what else could we do? Should we do? We were pleased with how that turned out.

Several ideas came along. I'll mention one. We thought of doing a film about the conversion of C.S. Lewis. And then some "villainous" evangelicals, a group called The Fellowship for the Performing Arts, came out with a movie called *The Most Reluctant Convert* about the conversion of C.S. Lewis. I went and saw it the first day it came out, and I thought, "Dang! They did a really good job." And at every point where I, who am a C.S. Lewis fanatic, would think, "Okay, at this point I would quote this." Then they would. "At this point I'd tell this story." Then they did. Just all the way through. Check, check, check, check. They'd made my movie, and they did it really well. So, forget that. So, the next idea that came up was the notion of the succession crisis of 1844 when Joseph Smith and Hyrum Smith were killed. Where will the church go?

And I'll be honest with you, I don't even know if I've told our three amigos here that, at first, I thought, "Well, okay, okay. I'm not sure it's as necessary as the witnesses." But I've rethought that. I really think that it's a crucial story that had to be told, and that we have to emphasize. And here's why. It seems to me that if you're thinking about the Restoration, the first decision you have to make is, "Was God involved in this at all?"

Well, to me, the witnesses are probably the best single bit of secular evidence, if you will. That is, not the Holy Spirit speaking to you, but the best bit of secular evidence that could be admissible in a court.

For the involvement of the divine in the Restoration. I mean, they see an angel. They hear the voice of God, all these sorts of things. It's pretty powerful stuff, and they are reputable and sane and steady in their testimony. So, I thought, "Well, that's really important." And we've now kind of in a way done that.

So, what is the next fork in the road? It seems to me that then 1844 is that fork in the road. If you've accepted the claims of Joseph Smith, claims of the Restoration, you're there, you join up, and then Joseph and Hyrum are killed. What do you do? Where do you go? Which direction, if any, does the Restoration go?

And there were a lot of voices, and there was a lot of confusion. And so, the question is, should we even continue with the Gathering? It's always caused trouble. Should we continue building the temple? Should we go west, as Joseph was talking about?

It seems to me then you have a fork in the road, another fork in the road where you have to make a decision. Are you going to go with Brigham and the Twelve, or are you going to go with James Jesse Strang a little bit later, or even later with Joseph III and the Reorganization, which has now become the Community of Christ? Does it go on? Should we just give this up?

One of the most important things said in one of the interviews that I was able to participate in for this, that will eventually appear in our series, was with Ron Esplin, who is the premier authority, bar none, I think, on the succession crisis of 1844 and the assumption of authority by the Twelve. And he actually wrote an article that I think is the definitive piece on that, published in a book, a two-volume book that Interpreter published, called Joseph Smith, A Life Lived in Crescendo. It's a really wonderful chapter. A chapter—it is long, but it really deals with those issues. And Ron's comment to me in the interview, one of them that stuck out in my mind was, "If you were a Latter-day Saint, you wanted to continue with the program of Joseph Smith, with what Joseph Smith had been emphasizing in his Nauvoo period, you had only one choice, really. That was Brigham and the Twelve. Every other claimant to the leadership of the church wanted to chuck one part, or both parts, or all parts of what Joseph was teaching. There were two fundamental things. Joseph wanted to finish the temple, and then, somewhat paradoxically, he was talking about going to the West and abandoning it. I mean, on secular terms, that doesn't make much sense. But that was the program.

Now, the only game in town, the only people in town who were willing to see that through to its completion, were Brigham and the Twelve. Sidney Rigdon wasn't really taken with the temple, apparently. He'd never received the keys. That's interesting. The Twelve had the keys, but Sidney did not. And then Sidney didn't want to go to the West. He wanted to go to Pennsylvania, which is where he eventually did end up going. So, it seemed to me important to make that point.

Now, I won't be going on much longer. I just want to say something here about the reaction so far to Episode 1. Some people have been very positive. Some, rather predictably, have been very negative. I've had people write to me, and I've seen them online saying, "Why defend this odious man, Brigham Young?" Well, hey, you are part of the reason we're doing it. Because he was not an odious man, and I want to make that statement plain. One actually said, "Well, you know, to compare him to Hitler is a little strong." Do you think? "To compare him to Hitler is a little strong, but to defend such a person says something about the morality of the person doing the defending."

Okay, I'm willing to put up with that and go forward. But there was a more interesting criticism that struck me. From someone whose intelligence I respect, and he's a former believer. He's now quite out of the church. But he says, "I just don't have the stomach for this kind of hero worship that they're doing of Brigham Young. It's a cult of personality. Why defend him?" He says, "I study..." He's in Classics. "I study Julius Caesar and write about him and write about Constantine. I have nothing invested in whether they were nice or anything like that. I just let the chips fall where they may. Why should Latter-day Saints care about whether Brigham and Joseph and people like that were honest, decent people?"

It's important to defend the character of the early witnesses to the Restoration because a lot depends upon whether they're credible. If Joseph Smith was a known habitual liar, well, that kind of weakens our confidence in him, right?

Brigham Young proclaims revelation. He does, more than you might think. Is he a believable person when he talks about his witness of the truth? Is he believable? I think much rests on that. Not everything rests on Joseph Smith alone. That's one of the points of the movie, *Witnesses*. The striking thing is Joseph almost never has an experience after the first vision where it's alone. First vision and Moroni's visit. After that, there's almost always somebody there with him. Oliver or Sidney or somebody who sees, hears, experiences the same thing. It's not all resting on Joseph, but a great deal does. Okay, now this is the quote that struck me, that I was reminded of when I read this comment, that we have nothing, no reason to invest in the character of someone like Brigham Young. This is from a letter that Oliver Cowdery wrote to Phineas Young, Brigham's brother, on the 23rd of March, 1846. And Oliver was wanting, he was wanting now, he's talking about coming back to the church, but there are certain charges that were made against him when he left the church that were harmful. And they were almost certainly false, but in the heat of the moment, people were saying nasty things about each other, and nasty things were said about him. And he insisted before he came back that he wanted those charges cleared up. He wanted people to admit that they were not true. He was not a counterfeiter. He was not a liar. He was not, so on and so forth. And this is what he says, and eventually, you know, he does come back to the church, and we show that scene in the movie *Witnesses*.

He says, and let me see if I can make it clear through this 19th century prose, Oliver was very florid in his prose,

"I have cherished a hope, and that one of my fondest, that I might leave such a character, as those who might believe in my testimony, after I should be called hence, might do so, not only for the sake of the truth, but might not blush for the private character of the man who bore that testimony. I have been sensitive on this subject, I admit; but I ought to be so—you would be, under the circumstances, had

you stood in the presence of John, with our departed Brother Joseph, to receive the Lesser Priesthood—and in the presence of Peter, to receive the Greater, and looked down through time, and witnessed the effects these two must produce,— you would feel what you have never felt, were wicked men conspiring to lessen the effects of your testimony on man, after you should have gone to your long sought rest.”

Well, to me, it's important that we rise up to defend these witnesses, the witnesses to the Book of Mormon, Brigham Young, and others, that these were men of good character. They were honest, they were believable, and many kinds of slander have arisen since Brigham's death, and during his lifetime, certainly, against him, and I think it's time to stand up and defend him. I believe that's part of our responsibility to do so. And the fact is, the facts are on our side. The Brigham Young who emerges from the research that's now being done, he's not perfect, he would never have claimed to be. But I sometimes think we overdo it when people say, "Well, he was a flawed man." That's sometimes almost meant to imply that he was really flawed. Well, he was a flawed man in the sense that we all are, including his critics, but he was a good man. He was trying to build Zion, trying to do the right thing, and I want to bear testimony in film and every other way I can that that's the truth. And I want to leave that with you in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

And now we're going to see a clip from one of the future episodes, and we'll give you a flavor of what's coming. There's a lot of good stuff coming.

(Video Clip from one of the episodes of *Becoming Brigham*.)

Camrey Bagley Fox

Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints represent a faith practiced by millions, a faith which has also inspired its share of controversy.

Casey Griffiths

I think if you look at Brigham Young's whole life, well, it's a conundrum.

Camrey Bagley Fox

It almost seems like he's a human. I'm Camrey Bagley Fox, and together with John Wilson and Professor Daniel Peterson, we work to uncover unexpected twists in the character of a man that we thought we already knew.

(Music)

John Wilson

What are you doing here? You guys are crazy.

(Music)

Camrey Bagley Fox

Oh, Dan, you better have a good reason for bringing us out here.

Dan Peterson

Oh, I do, of course.

John Wilson

What a lovely spring morning.

Camrey Bagley Fox

Yeah, it's April. What the heck?

John Wilson

I should have brought my shorts.

Dan Peterson

Well, welcome to beautiful balmy Mendon, New York.

John Wilson

Oh, my favorite city. It's freezing. Let's go to Kirtland.

Dan Peterson

Yeah, I think we will do that, but not today. Well, this is the John Young home. This is a place where Brigham eventually came. He was born in Whitingham, Vermont in 1801 to John and Nabby Young. And by the way, at about the age of 16, his mother died, and his father told him, "You know, you're old enough to go make it on your own."

John Wilson

Really? That young?

Dan Peterson

Yeah, so he was out of the house, and by the age of 17, he already served apprenticeships in carpentry and painting and so on.

Camrey Bagley Fox

That's right. Susan Easton Black mentioned that in our interview. Guys, did I tell you that she was the first female religion professor at BYU? She's so cool.

Dan Peterson

Kind of historic.

Camrey Bagley Fox

We got a lot of good stuff in our interview. Now, let's go somewhere else.

John Wilson

Inside.

Camrey Bagley Fox

Anywhere indoors!

(interview)

Camrey Bagley Fox

I'd love to learn more about Brigham Young's early days. What was his youth like?

Susan Easton Black

I think it was his mother, seems to at first to be more religious. Brigham Young appeared to very much listen to his mother, who suffered for years from illness; it was difficult for her to speak. For his family, after his mother dies, his father will remarry, and by the time Brigham's 16, his dad is saying, "I'm going to cut you loose." And as time comes and goes, he's in various towns, and in one of those towns in New York, he meets a woman named Miriam Works. And Miriam is 18. He's 23. She's a singer in the choir, and suddenly Brigham Young is a singer in the choir. So, the religion kind of thing brought them together, and the singing, they will marry. They will have child one, child two. And like his father, Brigham will move. So, during their five years of marriage, their first five years, he's moved four times.

Camrey

Wow.

Susan Easton Black

And each time he's, you know, building a small little house, setting it up, and then trying to be a carpenter-painter-glazier, right?

Camrey Bagley Fox

So, at what point in Brigham's religious search did he actually meet Joseph, and what led him to Joseph?

Susan Easton Black

Okay. It begins with a young man named Samuel Smith, who's a brother of Joseph Smith. So, we know that the church was organized April 6, 1830, and by the end of April, we know that Samuel Smith has been called as our first missionary. And he doesn't have a companion. He doesn't have a time length of service. And so, it's kind of like you served a mission till the Lord told you to come home. For some of us, maybe it would have been the same length as Samuel

Smith. Samuel Smith's first mission is three days. He's to sell copies of the Book of Mormon for, you know, maybe three dollars if he can, two dollars if he must. But Samuel Smith now heads out, and he comes to a town named Mendon, New York.

Dan Peterson

So, in April of 1830, a 22-year-old preacher shows up in Mendon, New York, and he goes to the Tomlinson Inn looking for a bite to eat. And he was bringing the message of the Restoration. This is really, really early, when you think about it, the church was founded April 6 of 1830.

John Wilson

Already?

Dan Peterson

Yeah, right off the bat.

John Wilson

That's amazing.

Dan Peterson

Yeah.

(Footsteps)

Camrey Bagley Fox

So that preacher that you mentioned, that was Samuel Smith, right? Right. Joseph's brother?

Dan Peterson

Yeah, yeah.

John Wilson

He meets at the Tomlinson Inn is Phineas Young, who is Brigham's brother.

Dan Peterson

Which to me is really interesting. I don't know what this means, but you've got representatives of the family of the first prophet of the church and a brother of Brigham Young, the second prophet of the church. So really early, a lot of the major pieces for the 19th century history of the church are being moved into position.

John Wilson

That's crazy.

Dan Peterson

Which is really striking to me. So, Phineas himself was a Methodist exhorter, a preacher, a traveling preacher. A lot of people did that. They were religiously serious. They'd go out when they didn't have to do chores or harvest or sowing. They'd be out preaching. But Phineas is interested, but not maybe for the reason that Samuel would have hoped.

John Wilson

Oh, really?

Dan Peterson

He's heard of the book, and he wants to examine it and point out its errors. He's pretty sure that this thing is going to be an obvious bit of con-artistry, and so he's going to show, based on his knowledge of the Bible, that it's false.

Camrey Bagley Fox

So, he gets a copy of it?

Dan Peterson

He does.

Camrey Bagley Fox

Samuel's probably like, "Yes, finally!" And then what does Phineas think of it?

Dan Peterson

Phineas studies it pretty intensively, I think, for about a week and doesn't find the obvious errors that he was expecting to find, and even begins to suspect, "Good grief, this thing may be true." And so, he gives it to his father, John Young, who of course is also Brigham's father. And so, John looks at it, and he has something really interesting to say. He says he thought it was the greatest work and the clearest of error of anything he had ever seen, the Bible not excepted. Eventually, a copy finds its way to Brigham himself, and I think you have some quotes from Brigham Young on his reaction to the book.

John Wilson

So, this is Brigham. "Says I, wait a little while. What is the doctrine of the book and the revelations the Lord has given? Let me apply my heart to them, and after I had done this, I considered it my right to know for myself."

Dan Peterson

Brigham had built a home on the property of his father, John Young. And it was about a half mile northeast of where Heber Kimball and his wife were living at the time. And they became inseparable pretty early on. And Heber was a potter and a good manual craftsman, so was Brigham Young, an expert woodworker. It's

interesting to note that Brigham and Heber are only 13 days different in age. And even closer, Brigham Young's wife and Heber's wife are six days apart in age.

Camrey Bagley Fox

Wow.

Dan Peterson

I'm sure that's not the only factor.

John Wilson

That's you showing up in the ward and being like, "Hey, we're the same."

Camrey Bagley Fox

Joint birthday parties. But that's really cool that they then got to learn from the missionaries together.

Dan Peterson

Yeah, it's really interesting. They were so similar. They came into the church together. They served together for the rest of their mortal lives. I think you have some more quotes.

John Wilson

I do. I have a quote that you gave. So, this is Brigham. Brigham said, "If all the talent, tact, wisdom, and refinement of the world had been sent to me with the Book of Mormon and had declared it in the most exalted of earthly eloquence, the truth of it, undertaking to prove it by learning and worldly wisdom, they would have been to me like smoke which arises only to vanish away. But, when I saw a man without eloquence or talents for public speaking who could only say, 'I know by the power of the Holy Ghost that the Book of Mormon is true, that Joseph Smith is a prophet of the Lord,' the Holy Ghost, proceeding from that individual, illuminated my understanding. And light, glory, and immortality were before me. I was encircled by them, filled with them, and I knew for myself that the testimony of that man was true."

It just gives you that sense that what Brigham valued was that straightforwardness and that lets you know that he was that kind of a guy. It wasn't eloquence, elaborate logic or anything. It was simplicity and honesty that spoke to him.

(music)

Dan Peterson

Well, there's one more place that I wanted to show you here and I think you'll recognize the name on the tombstone.

John Wilson

Oh, is this Miriam's grave?

Dan Peterson

This is Miriam's grave. You know, a tragic time for Brigham and for his family. Brigham was out doing missionary work, but that came to an abrupt halt when he found out that she contracted tuberculosis, right? And there was no cure for that in those days. And so, as she gradually worsened, you see Brigham in a role that I think a lot of people don't imagine him in. He became the doting husband and the father. He prepared the breakfast. He prepared the dinners. He prepared the children in the morning. He took care of everything. She was increasingly bedridden. And despite all their hope, she passes away eventually. And he is devastated. He sells off much of what he has. He stops doing missionary work and he's got to take care of his two little girls. But there's one other thing that I wanted to point out. Brigham was baptized not very far from here in April of 1832. It's almost the same day that we're standing here. It was snowy weather. And so, imagine yourself being baptized by immersion outdoors in weather very much like this. I know you're enjoying it right now. But think about being wet.

Camrey Bagley Fox

Oh, my gosh.

John Wilson

Wild.

Dan Peterson

And then after he's baptized, he comes out and he's confirmed by the water's edge.

John Wilson

Well, I love that because that to me again is painting the character of this man who took his time studying it out. But once he knew, he knew, and he couldn't wait. He couldn't wait. It's like it's a storm. So be it. That's right. I'm going to get baptized.

Dan Peterson

He is serious about it. He took a long time to make the decision. When he makes it, you know, he never looks back.

Camrey Bagley Fox

You going in, Johnny?

John Wilson

I'm going in. Well, that to me, that sort of speaks to the fire of the testimony.

Dan Peterson

I think it does.

John Wilson

Like he couldn't wait.

Dan Peterson

He had walked—

John Wilson

-once he knew.

Dan Peterson

He had walked a considerable distance to get to the baptismal site.

Camrey Bagley Fox

Speaking of fire of testimony, I have a testimony that we should go find a fire, inside.

Dan Peterson

Right.

Camrey Bagley Fox

And warm up.

John Wilson

Well said. To the inn!

(End of Video Clip)

Mark Goodman

What do you think, huh? Well, you want to do another one.

Mark Goodman

Hey, thank you so much for being here tonight. I'm so grateful for this opportunity, grateful for the Interpreter Foundation and the opportunities that we have had at this point in our careers. We're three old guys, three bald old guys. But to have this opportunity to bear testimony continually with our work is a great blessing. So grateful for that.

I got a text yesterday from a guy. I served with him recently. He was an elders' quorum president. And this is this is what he said, "Have you seen the new series on YouTube, Becoming Brigham? It has the actors who played Brigham and Emma in your movie." My response was "Hallelujah! The word's out." I was so surprised. But grateful again for these opportunities and that the word's out. So please, would you tell everybody you know, "Have you seen the new series, Brigham, Becoming Brigham?" Please do that. We're going to do a little Q&A here. And I'm going to start with a couple of questions that I have. So, I need the three of you. Yep. Come on right up here, Dan. Come on over.

I'm going to start here with Camrey. Camrey, I came across this.... Are we good? Johnny, would you keep a hand on Dan, so he doesn't fall off the stool?

All right, Camrey. I came across this. This is something you posted recently.

Camrey Bagley Fox

Oh, no. I'm being called to answer for my words.

Mark Goodman

Yes, you are.

Camrey Bagley Fox

Go ahead, Mark.

Mark Goodman

"Been church history site hopping this past year for this project that I was honestly hesitant to jump on board with."

Mark Goodman

Camrey, we're paying you.

Camrey Bagley Fox

I'm just being honest.

Mark Goodman

That's Camrey. She is honest. Throughout this series, you will find she is honest. "I haven't loved all that I've learned about Brigham prior to this and didn't want to have to fake that I was a big fan girl. But it has been so fascinating what I've learned this past year. He both is and isn't everything history paints him to be. And the Interpreter team has allowed us to dive into all sides of him, excited for more people to dive in with us. Episodes drop in every week and we're still filming them."

Yeah, Camrey, tell me a little bit about that post.

Camrey Bagley Fox

OK, so I did Witnesses back way back when, before I had any children. So, like six years ago. And I told this team at the end of that, I was like, I love you guys and I will do anything. Any, anywhere you want to take me, you want to make me like the rock on the side of the screen. I will be so happy to work with you. And they took me up on that. Thankfully, they've worked with me. I helped with the Witnesses' interviews and then did Six Days in August. And then when they called me and Johnny together to meet about this project, I went home after and I was like, oh, hmm.

Because I dove into church history from the lens of Emma. That was like my, my big introduction into church history. And Emma and Brigham did not always see eye to eye on things. And, you know, and that and various other things, just, you know, polygamy is always a hard one. And that's that's heavily intertwined with Brigham and his his history and heavily intertwined with Emma and her history and that. And that, you know, some of

Mark Goodman

Camrey, just just a reminder that—

Camrey Bagley Fox

We're on a time limit?

Mark Goodman

Well, that too, but polygamy is hard for all of us. I want you to know that.

Camrey Bagley Fox

Yeah. Yeah. Well, just for you. Some of you are allowed to have multiple spouses and some of us aren't allowed to have multiple spouses. So, as I said, she's not quite on an equal playing field.

Mark Goodman

She's always truthful.

Camrey Bagley Fox

But what I trusted about these guys was that they would let me be honest, that that they weren't going to make me be like, oh, yeah, I'm so grateful for polygamy. And I'm so grateful that Brigham had some issues with race that were complicated. I'm so grateful for that. That they were going to let me honestly dive in and ask questions. And so, I trusted that that would be the case. And I signed on. But I told I was like talking to my mom and sisters and I was like, guys, I'm a little bit apprehensive about this because I'm not like, yay, Brigham Young. I'm like, I believe he was a prophet, but I have a lot of complicated feelings about him.

Mark Goodman

I can attest that Camrey, a couple of times during our interviews, has unleashed on the people that are being interviewed and they go out of there thinking . . . they didn't know what just happened.

Camrey Bagley Fox

They didn't know what they were signing up for. But these guys did, these three. They knew what I was when I when they picked me up.

Mark Goodman

I have to warn you that we will do some editing on you.

Camrey Bagley Fox

I know I'm not I'm not going to be able to watch the episodes because I'll be like, oh, now they're making me to seem like a Brigham Young fangirl. No, but, but it's been fascinating. It's been really, really fascinating, too. And this has been my experience throughout all of church history that I've dived into all because of Witnesses. It all started there. You know, you dive in for character research, and you go deeper and deeper, that the more you get to know about any single individual, the more you like them and understand them and don't like them. But like you, you come to see them as a whole picture instead of just latching on to one aspect and letting that be inflated to everything you think about them. So, it's been so fascinating.

Mark Goodman

Thank you. One of my favorite things about this is we started this and I put together a little script and give them kind of some talking points. But what's happened as we have evolved through this and we've been working on it since March, and we have about 40 episodes that we've shot. And what I didn't expect to happen and what I love is that the three of them, number one, they genuinely like each other. And they are so good together.

Camrey Bagley Fox

I don't like Johnny, but I like Dan.

Mark Goodman

Two of the three genuinely like each other. And that comes across. But beyond that, they start into these conversations, and it becomes real. And one of the things that I love is as they bat it back and forth, is that we see them sharing experiences, sharing testimony. And Johnny in particular has a tendency to—Number one, he's

so articulate. I just can't believe it. But he gets started and then—he has bought into—I don't know.

My question for you, Johnny, is your relationship now with Brigham at this time? Because I have seen you get emotional as you speak his words. Tell us a little bit about it.

John Wilson

It's been amazing. I grew up first generation—like born in the church, is that what you'd say? My parents were converts, right. My dad was in the military, so we moved around. My church experience and exposure was essentially just what happened in the home, more or less, all the way through the time until I was sixteen or so. So, I had no context, like we were in small branches, hotels, things like that. I had no context for really anything other than just the principles and things I was learning in the church. Then I went to BYU and was like, oh, my gosh, what's going on? So many Mormons here!

They kind of had my mind blown about the scope and sort of the grandeur of what this thing was. And then I served my mission and I was lucky enough to serve in upstate New York and around Palmyra and got to serve in the church history sites. I started pursuing the arts in high school. And once I did and those two kind of came together, I was like, oh, maybe I'll get to play Joseph someday—was sort of my thought, being tall and blonde and that kind of thing. Never ever for once, ever did I ever consider “You know what, I'm going to be Brigham Young.”

And so, when Six Days in August rolls along and the auditions come through our agents and it's like, well, let's just roll the dice. I know I'm way too tall for that role. And it worked out and Mark told me I was too tall and I'm sure Dan was like, “You know, this guy's too tall?” We're going to have to put everybody up on boxes, which they did.

Camrey Bagley Fox

And we heard that note at every historic site we visited.

John Wilson

Every dear missionary says, “You're a little too tall to be Brigham.” “Yes, yes, I am.” But over that experience has been this like profound, opportunity. To pretend to be someone. It's a very strange thing that we do as actors, and not that it's special, it's just strange. And when you do that and when your desperate prayer, especially during Six Days, was “please let me, please don't let my weaknesses get in the way of portraying this individual as they really were.” And

when that's your prayer and when you have five, six, seven, eight weeks to be nothing but pretending, you get to start to have a special connection, I think. Not that I claim anything beyond what it is just personally to me, but I have a testimony, of him. I have a testimony of him in that intimate way that that he was, he was a great man. That he wasn't, was a dude who was put in an absolutely absurd circumstance, tasked by God to carry what Joseph had laid—thousands of miles, and establish it in such a way with a foundation so deep that the global church could rest and expand upon the things that God laid with his hand. So, imperfections aside, I know that that's an incredible guy. And it's been a pleasure to get to understand him more layer by layer with everything that we've done.

Mark Goodman

Thank you.

Dan. The more I get to know Dan, the more I am amazed at. Number one, he knows everybody and he gets phone calls from people. I'm going, is that really the king of Siam or whatever? So, when we approached Interpreter and we wanted to do something different this time around, we had done a group of short videos before, after Witnesses. And we wanted to kind of take it to the next level by getting a group of hosts and taking them to sites and, you know, really just taking the next step. Dan, I think you were surprised when we suggested that we needed a resident expert and that expert should be you. But didn't you really always want to be an actor?

Dan Peterson

No. No, I did not. I was surprised.

Mark Goodman

Tell us a little bit about your journey. I'm sure you had better things to do than traipse around with us and work on these. What has been your experience?

Dan Peterson

Yeah. I mean, I did one little bit of acting in high school and this will tell you how serious I was about it. My high school did a performance of Li'l Abner. Now I was at the time the student body president, so they chose me to come out and flex my muscles on stage. That's it. I just stood there in an old-fashioned swimsuit and flexed my muscles on stage.

Mark Goodman

And we all wish we could have seen that.

Camrey Bagley Fox

And we're planning that for a future episode.

Dan Peterson

There is no film with this that I know of. And anyway, but then as a further joke, they inaugurated me into the theater Hall of Fame there at the high school for that. So, everyone knew it was a joke from the start. But no, I've always been interested in film, but I never had the hankering to act in it. And I was really quite surprised to be asked, but it's been a lot of fun.

I've been to Nauvoo more times in the past 12 months than I'd ever been in my life before that. I've gotten to know the sites pretty well from an... And to know all the fine dining establishments in Nauvoo.

Mark Goodman

Tell me, have your feelings changed about Brigham?

Dan Peterson

I think I've developed a stronger testimony of the rightness of his choice as the successor to Joseph Smith. And I've learned a lot of things about him. I knew before that he was thoroughly dedicated to carrying out Joseph's wishes and instructions. Submissive to Joseph in a way that he was probably to nobody else. I've told a story. It's been in one of the church manuals about Joseph at one point rebuking Brigham publicly. And I'm sure everybody around me...he had this reputation as "the Lion of the Lord", I mean, they're all kind of waiting for an eruption. And his... Brigham's next words are, "Joseph, what would you have me do?" I mean, I don't think he would have submitted to anybody else that way. But that has been really, really moving to me.

And his dedication to the idea of the temple. I grew up with the notion that to the extent that I grew up in the church, I grew up in a part-member family, marginally active at best. But, I grew up with the notion that Brigham Young was an admirable man because he was an organizational genius, the great colonizer, practical man of action, so on and so forth. But then I began to learn more about Brigham and his devotion to things like the temple. And we showed that at the end of Six Days in August. Here he is. He should be out there outfitting wagons and doing all those practical things that a man such as he would naturally want to do. He's in the temple making sure that the saints get the ordinances of the temple. When he comes out to Utah, one of the first things he does is, strike his cane in the ground and say, "Here we will build the temple of our God." I mean, he was all for practical

things, taking the saints out west, so on and so forth, building communities. But it was to establish Zion. It was to gather the saints and to build temples.

And that I think, I hope, will come through clearly in what we've done.

Mark Goodman

Right, thank you.

Camrey, as you have been through this journey, you've had opportunities to talk to several, quite a few church scholars. Has your opinion evolved?

And I know from what I continue to hear that you still have issues with Brigham. I understand that, and I understand also that's probably not going to change. But have your feelings changed?

Camrey Bagley Fox

One hundred per cent. And it's, when you say I have issues with Brigham, I feel like what has shifted is that now I don't feel like I have issues with Brigham. I have issues with some of the situations that were occurring at that time. And things like that, I may never understand, the tricky things about polygamy that happened during that time with Joseph and Emma and Brigham and all that stuff. I may never understand that. And I may never understand why we're still dealing with racism today and why that has hurt people over the last, forever. But what has shifted is that now I feel like I know Brigham well enough to understand that he's a good guy. That it's like he genuinely was devoted to God and devoted to helping the saints. And was doing the best he could with the situation that he was in. So, I wouldn't even say that I have issues with Brigham at this point with everything that I've learned. I don't love every choice that was made. I don't love how everything was handled. And I'm sure that people will say the same about my life, right?

Unfortunately, you guys wish I wasn't saying all the things I was saying in this fireside right now. But, I think it's been so interesting talking with the historians. And I think it's so important to dive in. If you're going to dive into church history, to have it be effective, you have to dive all the way in, right? You can't just get bits and pieces of, "Oh, Joseph had multiple wives. That's shocking and that's horrific and all these things." You have to actually get in. If you're going to cast the judgment, you need to try to really get a full picture before doing any of that because it's going to change the way you look at these people. Because they're real people, dealing with these real circumstances the best that they knew how. And it's been incredible, the shift. Because I for sure was one of those people who was like, "Well, I believe that Brigham was the prophet that was needed for that time because we needed to move the saints west. And I have a testimony of that. But my testimony has shifted to Brigham as a spiritual leader and not just as the person who was needed at that time, but the person who was ready to father the saints in

the time that they'd lost their leader and to move forward with love and care and devotion to God.

Mark Goodman

Thank you. Johnny, you did an interview, I can't remember who it was with, but on Brigham Young and the Native Americans. And I remember coming away from that interview and going home and thinking, "Wow, that was hard." It was hard to listen to. It was hard to understand what happened with the saints as they came into the valley. And understand that it wasn't everything we would hope it would be. So, as you've had these opportunities to do these interviews and learn more, how do you personally get beyond some of those hard things?

And if you want, I'll go to Dan and then you can come back.

John Wilson

No, it's...I don't know. It's the same thing that Camrey said, right? Like if anybody was going to make a movie about your life, would you feel comfortable? Probably not. If the research was being done about every misstep, to find the drama to tell the story, you'd probably be like, "No, thank you. A million dollars? No, thank you." And that's just what we're doing and what people do and things. And so. I think for me, it's just been to allow it to be complex. Right?

The interview about the saints' interactions with the Native Americans upon moving in and the next couple of decades was just wild. And it was wild because it was heartbreaking because you understood both sides. You understood the plight of the people who were being usurped. You understood the plight of the saints who were being...You know, it was like, "Well, we were told to be here. What are we going to do?" And the humanity behind it all, it's like we could spend the next two decades making movies about this and never run out of dramatic material.

But just to allow it to be. Because it is, right? It's like you think about 1 Nephi and you know what that is? It's a story about an abusive family. A severely abusive family, right? Like chapter three, and we're beating each other with sticks at this point to the extremity that an angel has to intervene. And then we're tied up in chapter four and so on and so forth. The Book of Mormon begins with some... we're beheading people and all this kind of stuff.

So, it's like that is the tapestry upon which God dances and weaves the story of everybody's individual salvation. That's the game he plays.

And the beauty of his orchestrations is that he takes everything he can say through Lehi to Jacob. "I know your life has been awful. That from the days you've been able to understand, man, you've been exposed to such depravity and vulgarity and

physical abuse that would mess up even the best of kids. But I know that God can take what you've received and turn it for your good, Jacob."

That's how great he is if you'll lean on him. So, I think that is the great advice is to not pretend like it doesn't exist but to know that God's majesty is the ability to transform all of that to his success and his glory both on a macro stage of him unrolling the restoration and on an individual stage of individual lives.

Mark Goodman

Thank you. Dan, as we've filmed now about 40 episodes, what would you tell the critic who says you're whitewashing the stories?

Dan Peterson

It's just not true. We're getting cutting-edge historians talking to us very frankly about things. The Native American situation is one of them. Some of those interviews are agonizing. There were things that were done on both sides, including the Latter-day Saint side, that are brutal and vicious and awful.

And so, we're not going to whitewash that. We're not going to try to make that go away. We're going to tell the story the way it is. And there's a reason for this. A, because we're honest, but B, because we know it would be stupid to try to whitewash it in this age with internet resources available to anybody. Some of them not very dependable. But there are always going to be people out there who say, "They didn't say this. They didn't tell the truth about that." And so, nothing is worthy of the church that we belong to beyond the truth. I mean, it has to be the truth.

And so, we're not whitewashing it. We're not deliberately trying to portray him, Brigham Young or any of the other leaders of the church, badly. But we're going to let the story go the way it goes. President Hinckley, when he authorized the research and publication project that culminated in studies of the Mountain Meadows Massacre, said, "If it points to guilt on the part of the Latter-day Saints, tell it."

We want to tell the story honestly.

And they did. And the fact is that when you tell the story honestly, my conviction is the Saints come off looking pretty well. Brigham Young looks pretty good.

But will he be flawless? Will the Saints be flawless? No, they won't be. But it makes a believable story because it's true.

Camrey Bagley Fox

Can I chime in? But I think in both of these situations, one of my takeaways has been that we may not be able to change what happened in the past. We may not be able to change those difficult things. But what we can do is take what we learn from what we view as mistakes and say, "How can we move forward? What can we learn from this? And how can we take that and make the changes that we feel are needed that we wish had been made back then? How can we move forward with that?"

Mark Goodman

Yeah, I liked—one of the things that Matt Grow told us was that, particularly with regards, he said that the church doesn't have the answers for some of these things. We don't know why Brigham did what he did. And we— Yes, okay, and it was on racism. That's right. And we were simply not going to know. And he talked about—we asked him, "How do you move on personally?" And he said, "You know what? We have so many words from Brigham. We have decades of his teachings. You can go through those teachings." And he said, "A very small part of them are controversial, and those are the ones we tend to focus on." What he did was teach the gospel of Jesus Christ from a point of view in which he was absolutely devoted to the gospel from the time he joined the church.

And he said, "I have other questions that I don't have answers to." And these are one of the—you know, I don't know why Brigham did what he did. And perhaps someday we'll have an opportunity to answer those. So, we're out of time. So, I've got a bunch of questions here, and I'm hoping that the others who have questions, will you give these to me? We're going to figure out how to get these answered. Maybe we will post them on our website or do something where we can get answers to you. I'd love to do that.

I just have one last question for whoever wants to answer that. That is, "Why should we care now who Brigham was?"

John Wilson

I've got one answer, and it has to do with—to me at this point has been one of the most poignant experiences we've had along this journey. Among the different areas we visited was Winter Quarters.

And that was a period that the—from Nauvoo to Winter Quarters is things that we know maybe a little bit less about. We talk about going through the mountains and showing up in the valley, but that first part, right?, was just unfathomable. So, we talk about like they—it got cold enough to cross the river, but then it got warm enough that it rained so much the mud was like two feet deep that the progress was a quarter mile a day, right?

For days on end, they've got this statue in the visitor center of these guys like waist-deep in mud yanking on a wagon, and I just thought to myself, "What the—how could you keep going under those circumstances?" But then we—there's a grave site right next to the temple where they have buried a large number of individuals who passed away at Winter Quarters. And you look at the placard that has the list of everybody on it, and you're, you know, like Granny Sue, who was 76, and so on and so forth. But among the names, you'll come across little Benny, who was two, and little, you know, Jenny, who was six months old.

And adorning this site is a statue of a nameless father and mother holding each other, looking down, and in this shallow grave is the child, right? An infant, clearly, only a couple months old. And we just sat there for a while and looked at it, and I was just overwhelmed with the notion that normal people don't do this, what the saints were doing. Any rational human being could have easily said, "Good idea, Brigham. Have fun. Go West." But they didn't.

They went with him. So, to me, in that moment, I was like, "Man, there's really only two possibilities. One, Joseph and Brigham were, to quote you earlier, Hitler-level masterminds of manipulation, of human manipulation, to get people to do what they did. It's like serious, super-cult genius, one after the other, right? That's the only explanation except for the fact that it's true.

The only thing that would ever persuade me to walk that far and to bury my child, because it wasn't just like, you think about it, modern day, you know, parents, you know, we've got our young kids, and the big scare of the modern day is SIDS, right? The fear that you walk into the room and your child is no longer alive, right? It's a terrifying notion. But this was weeks of walking, watching your child die. Mothers so starved that they couldn't produce milk for their kids, right? Watching. And they said, like, the scurvy, you would watch their skin turn black and their limbs start to fall off. Like, this is horrific. The only thing, other than mass manipulation on an unfathomable scale that would motivate people to do what they did, was a testimony that it was true. That Brigham was a prophet. That the Twelve did hold the keys. That salvation and Zion was where they were going. And that that made it worth it. To me, that was just, that was profound. There really is no other explanation for what is happening here.

The foundation that we stand on was built by those people who knew what they knew, independently. And they followed Brigham and they loved him. Thank you.

Mark Goodman

Thank you again so much for being here with us. Let me just leave you with my testimony. I love the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I love our prophets, both past and present. I've had wonderful opportunities, in this case, to study Brigham, to write, and learn, and grow, and I've come to love Brigham. And I invite you to view these

episodes and you make your decisions. And I leave that with you in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Shirley Ricks

I'd like to thank all the participants in word and song for the spirit and testimony that they have brought to us this evening. The episodes, you'll note, the first episode came out this last Monday. The second episode is this coming Monday. Every Monday there's going to be an episode coming out and they're the short, brief videos. Go to becomingbrigham.com. It's the easiest way to find those.

Please note that as the Interpreter Foundation, we can always use volunteers. So, if you've got a skill or a talent you'd wish to share, that would be lovely.

Afterwards, there will be refreshments in the cultural hall. To close this fireside, we will sing "Let Us All Press On," hymn number 243, accompanied by Vicki McMurray and led by Twyla Wilson. And afterwards we'll have a closing prayer by Steven Densley.