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Title Sidney B. Sperry: Memories

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Abstract Personal reminiscences about Sidney B. Sperry.



Sidney B. Sperry: Memories

Carma deJong Anderson

I was acquainted with the Sperry family throughout my childhood, since I often played with their daughter, Phyllis, in grade school and junior high. Only occasionally did I ever see Brother Sperry at his home on Seventh North, but when I did he was reading in his living room to the left of the front door. We kids spent most of our playing time outside under the huge trees that shaded their house, or at my house half a block away by the “lower campus” of Brigham Young University. About the time I was ready to graduate from high school, I sometimes walked to the “upper campus” to the beautiful new Joseph Smith Building, seeking greater excitement at the only branch of the Church on campus, which was held in the auditorium and was composed solely of students. Often I would see Brother Sperry plodding up the hill to the Smith building to study and write on Sunday in the solitude of his private office. Solitude was rare on school days.

The summer before my third year at the university (1950), my intended husband and I spent a great deal of time discussing aspects of the gospel and the latest research with various scholars on the faculty. We were quite often in the office of either Hugh Nibley or Sidney Sperry; they were right next to each other. The welcome given my boyfriend, the budding scholar Richard L. Anderson, and me, the old friend, was warm, and these two great minds of the Religion Department shared some very personal insights with us.

One day, as Brother Sperry was busy filing papers around his room, Richard and I had perched on his desk, and there, in the brilliant sunshine filtering through the tall sculptured junipers at the spacious window, we listened to a pivotal dream which had come to Brother Sperry when he had just finished graduate work in Chicago.

I was ready to begin teaching and connecting myself with a university that valued scholarship, and I seriously considered staying somewhere in the east, at a larger, more prestigious center of learning. The desire to do this was very strong, and I didn't really think I would ally myself with Brigham Young University because it was still so small and so far from other great universities and libraries. I was thinking that perhaps I could be a Mormon scholar "out in the world," and thereby have an influence for good among non-Mormons. Then one night I dreamed that I was up high, looking down on the foothills of Y mountain, but it was a time farther in the future. The campus I saw was not the tiny cluster of buildings I had known, but a great array of many, many buildings. Some very big, like none yet seen in Provo, and there were tall buildings in the shape of towers. Yes, tall towers! I was amazed at Brigham Young University, and I thought, "How much is going on in those buildings, with thousands of students and teachers, and much research. What a power for good it is!"

Then I scanned the foothills and saw that the university spread northward, with many more buildings, and most of the structures were white. They reached the point where they adjoined a white temple, and I thought, "So we will have a temple here as predicted!"

We broke in and asked, "Then the temple wasn't in the middle of the campus? Brigham Young University has been built on 'temple hill' as the pioneers called it, and we always thought there would be a temple in the center of this hill." He answered:

No. I saw the temple at the end of the great white buildings, farther north in the foothills. The white of the buildings shone with such a light in that dream that later, when Architect Markham began using tan colored bricks for some of the buildings I was very upset. Of course, this beautiful cast stone Joseph Smith Building is white! [This was long before the present Smith Building was built.] But can you imagine [he mused] those tall towers gleaming white—for little Brigham Young University?

We left that day seriously considering coming to teach at Brigham Young University as a base for our work also.