

One Bad Experience

01-31-95

“All priesthood holders stand and raise your right hand to the square. Now repeat after me, I swear allegiance to the presidency of this stake.” I couldn’t believe my ears, and so remained seated. I was the stake clerk. The authority at the podium then went on to dictate the obedience required of the assembled brethren. I looked around. Men looked at each other. Some at the back of the room near the exits walked out.

This is just one example of the authoritarian, officious behavior of this stake presidency. Prior to being the stake clerk, I had been a high councilman. We had excommunicated a number of young people. An example of an irrelevant discussion cited for excommunication was, “He’s guilty. Just look at his long hair.” This presidency would not tolerate much discussion in high council meetings. On one occasion, I asked for a clarification on some matter. Immediately, the second councilor said, “We must have a word of prayer.” So we all knelt down around the council table while he offered a prayer. You know what he requested? He called for the Lord to condemn the dissenter among us, namely me!

This presidency let it be known, on more than one occasion in high council meetings, that they were seeking high positions in the church. They openly told us that they would get special tickets at conference time and make it a point to shake the hands of as many General Authorities as possible. The purpose of this was to get to be known so that the chances of becoming a General Authority would be enhanced.

While I was clerk, it was made known that I should not enter into any of the presidency’s discussions. That was okay with me. Several things really bugged me, though. For example, the presidency would just be sitting around in the office telling jokes for 15 minutes or more while church members were waiting. I urged the president to let them in. His reply was, “Let them wait!” And he did this all the time. All I could figure out was that it gave him some sense of power to keep people waiting. Another thing that they would do in their private meetings was to disparage women. Women were definitely to be kept in their place. They also engaged in unorthodox things to hasten the establishment of Zion on the earth by requiring such things as weekly home teaching.

On another occasion, while walking along on the BYU campus, the president spotted a person that he wanted excommunicated. So he stopped at the office of some professors who were on the council. There were now five of them. I got this information from one of them. They took the young man to an empty room and excommunicated him on the spot. No clerk, no quorum, no record.

About one year later the president received a letter from the young man requesting restoration of his priesthood, membership, and blessings. The president gave me the responsibility of handling the matter. I went to Salt Lake headquarters to investigate the situation. There was no record whatever of his excommunication. Well, that is not hard to understand. As I said before, no clerk, no quorum, no record! He had never lost his membership. Another time, a ward bishop was over \$1,000.00 short in tithing. I was also the stake auditor, but the president would not let me investigate the situation.

The final straw that broke the camel’s back for me came when the presidency called a special meeting to test the faith of the stake and ward leaders. They scheduled

the meeting time to coincide with the scheduled time for man to land on the moon. The presidency said that God would never allow this, and that NASA would make a fake movie to show that it happened when it really didn't.

I showed up at the meeting, and stayed just long enough to have time to get to Jens Jonsson's house. He had a TV and we did not. On Sunday, July 20, 1969 at 8:56 and 15 seconds Mountain Time, we watched one of the most remarkable events in all of history. The Eagle touched down on the moon. Shortly thereafter, Neil Armstrong declared, "It's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind!" Our family and Jens' watched this historic event together.

I was too chicken to complain to the authorities about what seemed to me to be improper behavior, but somebody did. A few weeks after the "Raise your right arm to the square" episode, General Authorities completely reorganized the stake with new personnel.

I had a very hard time coping with my situation. It was the most miserable of all my church experiences. Every other calling that I have had in my life-long church responsibilities has been joyous, uplifting, comforting, and eternally rewarding.

I've wondered if there is a message for me in all of this. If there is, I hereby state my position. It is my testimony that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has been restored in these latter days and that Jesus Christ is at the helm. There may be aberrations along some of the lines that I have recorded above, but I must remember that what men may do will not influence my testimony.

I hope that this story may have value in that it will influence my posterity to take the course that I have followed. If one person strays from the Church, hundreds of descendants may never have the opportunity of belonging and enjoying its blessings.

There is one of these situations in Ida-Roses' family. Abraham Vaughn Caldwell was the husband of Mary Margaret Langford, who was the daughter of Fielding Langford. Fielding is Ida-Rose's great, great-grandfather who joined the church in 1836.

A ward bishop arbitrarily went to Abraham's farm and took his prize bull for tithing. Abraham was incensed and quit the Church. Now, hundreds of descendants are not Church members. However, the oldest boy, Abraham Vaughn Caldwell, Jr., married Mary Margaret Langford and moved to Canada before the bishop took the bull. The only descendants in the church have come from this young couple that went to Canada.