

Robert L. Bonnell's Encounter with LDS President Thomas S. Monson

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Robert L. (Bobby) Bonnell graduated from Utah School for the Deaf in 1956 and took a job at the Deseret News Press (renamed the Church Publication Cooperation) straight out of high school. He married Roberta Darlene Green (Class of '57) the following summer. Each had been born and raised in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but had become inactive members in early adulthood. With the constraints of the Word of Wisdom lifted, he and Darlene both enjoyed “lighting up” from time to time. Bobby tells the story of how the awkwardness of one particular smoking session foreshadowed their eventual return to the Gospel.

One Friday during the summer of 1964, all workers at the press, both Deaf and hearing, went to Lagoon for an employee appreciation day. Before lunch, Bobby and Darlene sat down to light their cigarettes. The general manager at the time, Tom Monson (the future LDS church President Thomas S. Monson) walked by and saw them lighting their cigarettes. Tom sat

down between them and put his arms around their shoulders. Aware that Brother Monson was no less than a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, they were uncomfortably aware of the lit cigarettes in their hands.

Tom looked them genially in the eye and said, “Hi Brother Bobby and Sister Darlene, how are you? I’m glad you came.” Bobby and Darlene, having read his lips, returned his greeting. Then he added, “By the way, if you decide to be sealed in the temple, let me know and I’ll seal you both.” They mustered an agreeable “okay” and “we will.” As Tom stood up to leave, they noticed their neglected cigarettes had gone



Robert L. Bonnell, 1956 Utah School for the Deaf Senior



Roberta Darlene Green, 1957 Utah School for the Deaf Senior

out. Neither felt comfortable lighting up again.

After Tom left, Bobby was truly impressed with his non-criticism and non-judgmental attitude toward them who had smoking habits. He treated them with equality, as we like to be treated as equally as humanly possible.

It was not for another two decades that Bobby and Darlene would return to church and become active members again. A few dedicated years later, in 1989, they were sealed in the Salt Lake Temple. However, Brother Monson was not available to seal them as previously promised because his demanding calling as a counselor in the First Presidency prevented him from doing so (From 1985 on, Thomas Monson served with Presidents Ezra Taft Benson, Howard W. Hunter, and Gordon B. Hinckley).

Eventually Bobby was called to serve as Branch President in New York City from 1996 to 1998. After the split of the Salt Lake Ward in 1998, he served as bishop for the Salt Lake Valley 2nd Ward until 2002.



Thomas S. Monson about the time of his call to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles Presidents of the Church Manual (2012), 286-310

Note

Robert L. Bonnell, interview by Jodi B. Kinner, “Robert L. Bonnell’s Encountered with LDS President Thomas S. Monson, “June 26, 2011.