

ERLEND D. PETERSON, KNIGHT FIRST CLASS, THE NORWEGIAN ROYAL ORDER OF MERIT

I could not have been more surprised than by being knighted by HM King Harald of Norway. I had met and hosted Ambassador Vraalsen a year earlier and I had seen him several times in Washington, DC. When Ambassador Vraalsen came to Utah in 1996, he was limited to a quick weekend visit, and he was not able to lecture at BYU. However, he promised he would return to Utah, and he would speak at BYU. Therefore, when President Bateman's secretary, Janet Calder, called me about Ambassador Vraalsen coming to BYU to give a lecture, I was not surprised. Janet told me His Excellency needed to be in Chicago on Sunday and in San Francisco on Tuesday. He asked to lecture on Monday. I was concerned about organizing the lecture in the short time they gave me and about it being a Monday lecture when it is difficult to get an audience, but I told Janet I would make it happen to make the arrangements.

On the day of the lecture, Ambassador Vraalsen also arranged an appointment with President Bateman at 10:00 am, just before the 11:00 am lecture. At 9:45 am I went to the parking lot to receive Ambassador Vraalsen and the Utah Honorary Consul for Norway Leif Andersen. When they arrived, I was surprised the San Francisco Norwegian General Consul Hans Ola Urstad was also with them. I greeted them and took them to meet with President Bateman and Academic Vice President Alan Wilkins. We had a delightful visit about the work I was doing with Norway and then we walked to the Kennedy Center for the lecture.

As we walked into the lecture room, I was very happy to see a good-sized audience. However, I was surprised to see my wife and children and many of our close friends. My thought was that Colleen knew how concerned I was about having a good audience she decided to come, bring our kids and invite some of our friends. I was also surprised to see television cameras from three different stations. I was puzzled with the television coverage, but I thought of all the times for them to come I was happy it was for the Norwegian ambassador.

I didn't have time to visit with anyone, since my focus was tending to Ambassador Vraalsen and wanting to start on time to guarantee Ambassador Vraalsen had as much time for his lecture as possible. At the second the clock struck 11:00 am, I leaned over to the new director of the Kennedy Center, Donald Holsinger, and said, "Let's get going." He said in return, "We are supposed to wait for President Bateman." I was surprised and said I was just with President Bateman and he didn't mention anything about coming to the lecture. The director said he would double check with the President's office. He came back saying the President was coming. By now it was 11:05 and I didn't want to lose any more time, so I told the Director to start anyway—which he did.

The Director gave the welcome and turned the time to me to introduce Ambassador Vraalsen. Just as I began, in walked President Bateman, the Academic Vice President and the Associate Academic Vice President. My passing thought was they may have enjoyed the visit with Ambassador Vraalsen so much they decided to come to hear his lecture. I concluded the introduction and turned the time to Ambassador Vraalsen.

His Excellency began by expressing his appreciation about being at BYU and then started talking about me and complimenting the work I had done and was doing for Norway. I intimately thought that was nice since my bosses were in attendance. But he kept going and I thought, enough is enough – if you say too much it may have a negative impact.

At that point the Honorary Consul, Leif Andersen, who was a good friend said: “You know the Ambassador is here for you.” I missed his point and simply replied, “Yes, I know. I invited him to come.” Then Ambassador Vraalsen said, “Not only do I appreciate all that Erlend is doing, but so do those above me, including His Majesty the King.” His Excellency invited me to join him at the stand and he made the formal presentation of me being knighted.

I was shocked. I couldn’t believe what was happening. He pinned the medal on my jacket. However, task-oriented me thought of how much time we had used from his lecture time. I turned and started back to my seat. Ambassador Vraalsen was surprised and said, “Don’t you to say something?” I said, “Yes, but I don’t want to take more time away from your lecture time.” He told me to take all the time I wanted. Ambassador Vraalsen got what he wanted. He totally surprised me! When I sat down, Leif leaned over and added, “You know this is the highest award given to a non-Norwegian citizen.

Little did I anticipate; I also planned the celebration luncheon without realizing it. We went to the Hinckley Center for the luncheon. I appreciated the love and support of BYU and my friends. I was most grateful to His Majesty!

When I told this story to His Majesty King Harald, he got quite a kick out of it.

Regarding the work I had done bringing Norwegian scholars to BYU and helping be an ambassador for Norway has come together in many ways and there are many people I need to thank. First, I was given a Norwegian name, Erlend, which came from the 1928 Nobel Literature Prize book, Kristin Laveran’s Daughter. I was reared by a father who was permanently impacted by his LDS mission to Norway (1933-36) and shared it daily with the family. He also served as Mission President to Norway and Regional Representative to Norway. My mother was a direct descendant of the first resident Norwegian, Svend Larsen, who met Elder Erastus Snow in 1851, to join the Church and he took the first LDS missionary to Norway.

Second, from the beginning of my employment, I always met and friendshiped the Norwegian students attending BYU. Third, I served as Mission President to Norway. Fourth, I worked with two significant donors with Norwegian heritage to establish “heritage-scholarship” programs for non-LDS Norwegian students to attend BYU. Fifth, a donor gave BYU the money for me to establish a BYU Kennedy Center lecture series bringing government and educational leaders to speak at BYU. Sixth, after serving as the chair for the Statehood Centennial celebration year, I continued the Ambassador Visits Program with BYU taking the lead, but also keeping the State of Utah and the LDS Church included. Each visit included a lecture at BYU; a meeting with the Governor and a meeting with the First Presidency. Seventh, I became affiliated with the

Norwegian organization Nordmanns-Forbundet (Norwegian Federation) in bringing scholars, artists and musicians to speak, exhibit or perform at BYU. I am still on the NF International Advisory Board. Eighth, I became a Board member for the U.S.-Norwegian Historical Society. Ninth, I looked for every way I could to promote Norway.

The Ambassador Visits Program and the Norwegian VIP lecture series gave me the most visibility. From 1990 until 2010, I hosted every Norwegian Ambassador to the United States at BYU. It also put me in a close working relationship with the Norwegian Consulate in San Francisco. The Norwegian VIP lecture series took me into the highest inter-circles in Norway. Attached is a listing of the Norwegian VIPs I have hosted. The secret success of the lecture series was the guests would have such a great experience in Utah, they wanted to share that with their closest friends. They would give me a recommendation; approach their friend and get a “yes” that they would accept the invitation; and, then I would extend the invitation. When I told His Majesty King Harald whom I had hosted, he replied that I had hosted Norway’s very finest. Another strong visibility was my work with Nordmanns-Forbundet.

My most happy accomplishment was introducing the Tabernacle Choir to Sissel Kyrkjebø and to see what the Choir has done with her since then...especially these last Pioneer Summer concerts two weeks ago. How is that for Norwegian PR! This will be followed up with the Choir giving a concert in Oslo on July 7, 2020.

There is a strong relationship with my faith and my work. While I am showcasing Norway to all I can, I am also showcasing BYU, the Church and the State to our Norwegian VIPs. One of our early guests was Jens Stoltenberg. He went on to become Prime Minister of Norway for three elections and he is now the General Secretary of NATO.

#### MEETING WITH HIS MAJESTY KING HARALD

His Excellency Tom Vaalsen, Ambassador of Norway to the United States, announced and presented me the knighthood recognition on November 10, 1997, at Brigham Young University. However, the knighthood diploma recognizes the decision was rendered on June 13, 1997.

In receiving knighthood, it entitled me to have a private audience with His Majesty King Harald in a private meeting at the Royal Place. I corresponded with His Majesty’s secretary and an appointment was scheduled for May 31, 1999.

I had spent the month traveling with the BYU Living Legends through Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. Colleen and our son, Drew, flew to Copenhagen and joined me for the reception at the U.S. Ambassador’s reception and the final performance. The following day we drove through Sweden to Oslo. We arrived in Oslo that evening. Our meeting the next day with His Majesty King Harald was at 1:00 pm.

Chief Justice Carsten Smith of the Norwegian Supreme Court had received an honorary doctoral degree from Brigham Young University in 1997. I had nominated Chief Justice Smith to President Merrill Bateman and the BYU Board of Trustees approved the nomination. I hosted

Carsten for that occasion, and we became very good friends. Therefore, I contacted Carsten and had his help in arranging the audience with His Majesty.

We went to the Supreme Court at 11:00 am. I had sent a Navaho sand painting to Carsten to hold for me to give to His Majesty, King Harald. Carsten had unpacked the painting to make sure it had arrived in one piece. Then at 12:30 pm Carsten drove us to the Royal Palace for our appointment. We had stood on the outside on many occasions, so it was really exciting to be able to go into the Palace. We were placed in a waiting room just inside on the ground floor. We were told that at 12:55 pm a person would come and get us and take us to the office of the Secretary to the King, where the Commander would meet us, orient us and present us to the King.

As explained at 12:55 pm the person came and got us. We walked up the stairs to the third floor. Again, it was exciting to be in the Palace and look out the windows toward Karl Johansgata. On the third floor we were at the balcony where the Royal Family stands during the May 17th parade each year. The on-duty commander received us as we entered the Secretary's office. The Commander explained that at 1:00 pm the Commander would knock on the King's office door. The King would invite him to enter. The Commander would inform the King that we were present, and he would ask the King permission to bring me in. I was to walk into the room about three paces and then bow to the King—then he asked if I was comfortable with that. He said I should remain in place until the King came to me, greeted me, and then took me to my seat.

Then the Commander stopped and said, "You understand that the audience with His Majesty is restricted to just the honoree?" I was surprised and in my American way, I responded, "No, I understood my wife and my son could join me." The Commander replied that it wasn't possible. I then explained that I had written to the Secretary and explained that my wife and son would come from the United States just for the purpose of being with me in my audience with His Majesty and I would be greatly disappointed if they couldn't join me. The Commander said that would only be possible with the permission of His Majesty. I paused and boldly said, "That is fine. Will you ask him?" He was surprised I persisted but said he would ask. He disappeared and then reappeared to tell me His Majesty had given permission.

We then followed the procedure the Commander had explained. He knocked on the door; entered; informed the King we were present; and asked permission for us to enter. King Harald gave permission and we entered; took three steps; bowed; and then waited for His Majesty to come and greet us and take us to our seats. His Majesty put me on one side of the table with me next to him and with Colleen to my left. He invited Andrew to sit on the other side of the table next to him, so he was seated at the head of the table between Andrew and me.

His Majesty congratulated me on being knighted. I, in turn, thanked him for the privilege of being knighted. I had asked Carsten to give me some tips for meeting with the His Majesty. Carsten replied that His Majesty was shy and even though I should follow the conversation of His Majesty, I should be prepared to help lead the discussion or the visit would be very brief.

Carsten also said that the King frequently complained that everyone who meets with him is too serious and that I should look for the opportunity to make the King laugh.

With that counsel in mind, I asked His majesty if he would like to hear how I learned I had been knighted. I had fun telling the story and it did make him laugh. It loosened our conversation and it became very comfortable. We then talked about the Salt Lake Olympics and the problems that had developed with the bribery charges. He said he didn't blame the bid committee, anyone who had worked with the IOC understood the pressure the bidders are under.

His Majesty then turned to my son, Drew, and asked him if she still remembered his Norwegian. Drew said he was only five when we came to Norway and he had forgotten much of what he had learned. The King said that it would come back fast and the said he was five when WWII broke out and he, his mother and his sister moved to the United States. He said that after he returned to Norway, he felt he soon lost it—but it came back to him. We concluded our visit by presenting the sand painting to His Majesty. He was very gracious in accepting the gift.

We left the Palace walking on a cloud. It was fun walking out of the Palace and looking down Karl Johansgata. We stopped and took several pictures and reflected on what we had just experienced. We walked through downtown Oslo and then went back to the Supreme court to meet Carsten. Carsten and Lucy took us to dinner that evening at the prominent restaurant near the top of Holmenkollen. We were seated at the window where we could look down on the city and the Oslo Fjord. What a day to remember!!!