

AN ANGEL IN CAMELOT

A NOVEL BY

George Durrant

This work of fiction is loosely based on the life and mission presidency of George Durrant

“You can relate many truths in a work of fiction, but you must not include fiction in a work of truth.” Matthew Durrant

THE CALL

March, 2007

After driving my cub scouts home from our failed kite flying expedition, I pulled our ten year old van into driveway of our small home in Sugar House, Utah.

Marilyn bounded down the stairs and greeted me as I opened the car door. "Guess what?" She asked with almost uncontrollable excitement. Then without letting me guess, she blurted out, "The secretary of The Second Counselor in the First Presidency called, and he wants to see us tomorrow in his office!"

I got out of the car, but I could scarcely walk. My knees felt like rubber, and I felt faint. "What could this wonderful leader want with Marilyn and me?"

Maybe the parents of my Cubs had called him, and told him of my lack luster leadership. Now, he wanted to personally release me from my call of Cub Master.

I would have been more understanding of that than I was with what really happened.

The next day, we entered The Elders office. After a brief greeting, he called me, the failing Cub Master, to be a mission president.

After the meeting, Marilyn and I rode halfway home in silence. I then spoke to Marilyn who was still in shock, "Is this just a scary dream or what?"

Marilyn assured me that we were not asleep and so it must be a reality. I then said, "I can see why they would call you, but me?"

Marilyn smiled as we drove though Sugar House.

As we pulled into our drive way, I took a deep breath and said, "Well, we have been called." As we walked toward our front door I said silently, "I pray to God that somehow I will be qualified."

THE ARRIVAL

When the eight children, Marilyn and I, got off the airplane in Louisville, Kentucky, we were met by Elder Bryan and Elder Flake, the two assistants. I was wearing a suit that that was called a “western cut.” It looked like a normal suit, just a little different style. Unbeknownst to me the mission president had made a decree throughout the mission that the Elders could not wear such a suit. And here, getting off the airplane was their new president wearing such a suit.

An hour later we arrived at the mission home on Tarton Way. The children could not believe we were moving into such a large and spacious house. To me it looked like a seminary building. As we were getting out of the two vans, President Knight who we were to replace hurried out the front door and was soon at my side with a most enthusiastic handshake and greeting. “Hello President. Welcome to the world’s greatest mission! You won’t know until three years from now how glad I am to see you!”

I liked him right off. I could see by his robust physical appearance and his booming voice why he commanded such great respect from the missionaries. He embraced Sister Durrant and hugged her tightly. I wondered what she thought of that as she did not like being hugged in such a manner. But she acted like she did not mind.

Soon Sister Knight had made her way to our side. She was a lovely lady with coal black hair that contrasted with the grey hair of Sister Durrant. She was more reserved in her greeting.

When we entered the front door of our new mansion the children hurried in every direction to claim bedrooms. Never before had each one had his or her own room. I could hear them shouting, “Wow! Look at all the bathrooms. This front room is as big as our whole house.”

We had never had a house with more than three bedrooms and two baths. We were moving up in the world.

“As Sister Knight showed Marilyn and me around we entered the large kitchen. There busy cooking was a large black lady. Sister Knight announced, “This is Teddy. The finest cook in the world.” Teddy smiled and it was love at first sight for both her and us. She looked like Aunt Jimima on the pancake box. Sister Knight then said, “And Teddy. This is brother and Sister Durant. You’ll meet their eight children after they have explored the house.”

So we were home. This place would take some getting used to but it was home. The Durrants had arrived. Missions were supposed to be a time of sacrifice but this house gave us the impression that we had just fallen into the lap of luxury.

President Knight came into the kitchen and said, “President Durrant, let’s you and I go over to the mission office and Sister Knight and your wife can talk about the duties of the mission

mother.” Sister Durrant smiled, but I knew she did not like the idea of being called the mission mother.

We jumped into the Sports Van. I was impressed with the leather seats and the amazing dashboard. I asked, “Is this your private car?”

“It is for one more hour and then it is yours.”

“Mine?”

“Sure. I apologize that it’s more than two years old. We have a new one on order that you should get in the Fall.”

I sat back into the depths of the seat. “And thought, I’m liking this call, but it sAbout ten minutes later we arrived at a little office building. Across the parking lot was a rather small ward chapel. The trees were enormous. I could see squirrels jumping from limb to limb. I wondered, “Is this heaven or what.”

We entered the front door. The two office couples left their desks and hurried over to greet me. President Day said with his enthusiasm at a high volume, “This is Elder and Sister Stratton. And over here are Elder and Sister Garr. They will make you job here so easy you will never have a minutes problem with anything.”

Elder Stratton said, “We are so glad you have been assigned to you. You are famous around our house. Our children have all heard you speak. They told us you are an amazing man.” Both couples said many complimentary things about what they had heard about me.

I told them how glad I was that they were there and I knew they would be patient and make sure I got off to a good start. I said to myself, “Either one of these men would make a better president than me. They were both so impressive and each of the wives looked like perfection.

President Knight led me into the small office. He insisted that I sit in the big chair. I hesitated and told him to sit there. He forcefully announced, “No. Your now the president.”

I found myself feeling, “I don’t want to be the president. This great man looks and acts like a president. And I ‘m not sure that I do.”

On th opposite wall I saw huge board. It was filled with small photos. When I first saw it it I sort of gasped. I meekly raised my hand and pointed and said meekly, “Is that... Is that the missionaries.”

“It sure is, they are the best in the world.”

I stood and made my way around the desk and past the president and walked closer. I stood in awe and looked up and down and across. I said nothing and neither did the president. I just looked. There were so many. They looked so real. So alive. So good.

Finally President Knight spoke, “They are the best. In the month that ended they performed a miracle. They brought One hundred souls to the Lord.”

Finally I turned and began to return to my new desk. As I did he said, “they will do the work. But it is up to you to motivate them. They will do what ever you demand them to do. They are all young. But if you crack the whip they will act like men.”

President Knight then showed me the financial records and had me sign a few papers. I could scarcely pay attention to what he said. I just kept gazing at the pictures, the missionaries, my missionaries. It all seemed so real now. Up until now it had been like a whirlwind dream. But now it was real. I was the president. This is my chair. This is my office. These are mine. I almost trembled as these thoughts and responsibilities passed through my mind.

I could scarcely think as president Knight said., “Well that’s it. It is all yours.”

I stood and embraced him. I did not want him to go. I wanted him to go. I had been told that he was tough and legendary, He had phenomenal success as president, and the missionaries loved him. I was a bit different than him. He had proven his worth. He had succeeded. But would I?

MEETING THE MISSIONARIES

Two days later the assistants and I left for my first round of Zone Conferences.

As we drove along, I was told the land was beautiful. I scarcely looked up as I had a little book that the assistants had made for me. It contained the pictures and names of the 180 missionaries. I was totally engaged in learning names and fixing the names to the pictures. I particularly concentrated on the 36 missionaries who would be at this first zone conference.

Finally, after more than an hour driving the car came to an abrupt stop. We were at the Lexington Stake Center. Elder Bryant turned and looked at me in the backseat and said, "Here we are president."

I looked up from the picture book. There were several missionary cars there. They had all arrived earlier. Suddenly I felt almost a feeling of panic. I had met the missionaries who came into the office during the two days I was there, but I had never met a group of missionaries who were actually out in the field. Sort of real-live missionaries in the wild. I guess it was my insecurities that made me hope with all my heart that they would like me. Elder Bryant left the front seat of the car, came back and opened my door, I looked up at him and said, "I don't think I want to go in."

"You've got to go in he said laughingly.

I smiled and replied, "Why?"

"Because you're the president."

"I don't want to be the president."

"Well you are."

As we walked in I was trying to cover up my fear with humor.

"What if they don't want me to be their president?"

"They have to want you. You are the only president they have."

By now we were to the door. My heart was pounding. This was really the beginning. As we crossed through the foyer, I looked down I down the hall. There lined up against the wall were 32 elders and two sisters. I was almost overwhelmed at seeing them there. Suddenly all fear was cast out by a feeling of total love. These were indeed my missionaries.

For a moment I was frozen in place by the vision of these glorious missionaries. Then I step forward and stood in front of the first one. I reached out and shook his hand. I'll never forget shaking his hand. First things are thrilling things. I looked into his eyes, and he into mine.

Something very real went between us. Without looking at his name tag I said, "Hello elder Clark." I paused for a second and then continued, "I'm your new mission president." I had never said anything that thrilled my soul as much as telling him that I was his new mission president. His eyes fixed on mine as he said, "I'm glad you're my new mission president. Welcome president Durrant."

It was hard for me to turn away from him-- my first missionary. Slowly I moved a side step and stood in front of the second one. He looked as noble as the first. As we shook hands I looked into his soul. I could somehow see beyond his physical appearance. I spoke, "Hello Elder Carlson." He didn't reply he just looked at me I could see moisture in the corner corners of his eyes. I spoke again, "How is it going?"

"It's going real good president. Welcome." I had a feeling that maybe he would be my favorite. After looking at each other one more time, I moved on. This may take all day. I went to third one, "hello Elder Roundy. I'm President Durrant." I was getting used to calling myself by my new and meaningful name. At first it seemed awkward to think of me as "president." But in this sacred situation I knew what "president" really meant.

President did not just mean somebody with a bunch of authority. That was the least of what it meant. It was somebody who missionaries needed to stand by them, to stand up for them. To stand with them and love them and encouraged them.

I moved on to the next. and the next and the next. The missionary who stood before me changed but the thrilled never lessened. This was a deeply emotional experience for me.

I made my way down the line I felt totally sustained. Finally near the end of the line I came to the two Sisters. As I stood in front of the first one, she was the first sister. I looked into her eyes and said, "I'm so glad you came on a mission I love sister missionaries and I love you. I know your name is Sister Call. I have a feeling you and I will be dear friend Sister Call."

She tenderly replied, "It would be an honor to be your friend President Durrant." I then turned to her companion called her by name, "Hello Sister James." Once again it was instant love. She seemed speechless I smiled and said, "We'll have an interview later and talk. Thanks for being on a mission. I'm glad you came here."

Finally I had greeted all the missionaries and I was exhausted. I was almost feeling I was in heaven. We all moved into the Chapel

Elder Flake conducted the meeting. I sat there looking out at these noble missionaries. When we sang, I sang with great gusto, "Called to serve thee Heavenly King of glory," They sang the same way. I felt as though I was not standing on the floor. I was floating above them in the air. It was some unexplainable thing.

I felt I could reach out and touch the Heavenly King of Glory.. I recognize that I was His servant-- his leader to these glorious people with whom I saw singing. We all felt as one-- in perfect unity.

After the opening prayer Elder Flake introduced me, "I think you're all going to like president Durrant. I sure was thrilled to meet him at the airport with his wife Marilyn and their eight beautiful children. You'll like his children. They're really something. President Durrant is a great speaker. I think Heavenly Father must love us a lot to send this special man to be our leader. President Durrant this is an amazing zone. I used to work in this area. I love Lexington. So without saying any more, President Durrant the time is yours.

Again I felt a slight degree of panic I wanted to make a good first impression. I stood up straight and tall. With one hand on both sides of the pulpit, my eyes swept across these valiant souls After this silence, I spoke the words which Heavenly Father put into my heart, "Elders and Sisters I love you." I could feel the sincerity of my words for they had come from the very bottom of my heart. I knew immediately that I would never again say anything as important to them as what I just said. I knew that they knew that my words were true.

After telling a little about myself, I then began to speak according to the feelings of my heart. I said:

Elders and Sisters I want to tell you something that is very sacred to me. I once saw a movie titled, "Camelot." It was about King Arthur. Arthur was just a humble fellow with no particular talent other than his personal virtue. Because his heart was pure he was able to do what no one else could do. He was able to pull the sword from the stone. By that act it was known by the people that he was to be the King. He wasn't at all certain that he could be a king. He didn't feel he had the knowledge or the ability to do what kings do.

Until I met you today I was not certain I could be a mission president, but now, with the strength you have given me, I know that I can.

King Arthur did not have a commanding personality. So it came to him that the kind of king he wanted to be was a king who loved and trusted his people. Who wanted them to share the kingdom with him. He wanted them to be at his side as his equals. He wanted them to be his Knights. "Knights of the Round Table." A round table. A roundtable where there was no head. Everybody around the table was to be equal. That's what he wanted. All he asked of his Knights was that they have integrity and honor. That way he knew they could share the responsibility.

That is the way I want it to be here in this mission. I want it to be a roundtable I want to work with you at my side I don't want to be your commander. I want to be your colleague. I want you to be equal with me and me with you. But I know I must lead. I want to lead according to your prayers, according to your love according to your honor, according to integrity.

Together we can do this I don't want you depending upon me to tell you every detail of what you are to do. I don't even want any rules. I want all of us to live by principles of truth that I will follow. The principles that God would have us follow. So we won't talk about what time we get up. We will get up on time because we know that we must arise early and prepare for the day through study and prayer. We will get up early so that when Christ, who gets up early, passes by in the early morning we can walk with him into our duties.

We will just do what's right because it is right. I will not use my might to get you to do right. Because we will choose the right we will all have might. As King Arthur said, "Right makes might. We will be mighty.

I could sense of the missionaries were hanging on my every word and so was I. I looked into their eyes again and said:

I trust you. Some wise man said, "It is a greater compliment to be trusted than to be loved." Don't disappoint me. If you do, I have no punishment to give. Perhaps the worst I could ever give, and I would not choose to do it, would be that I would lose my trust in you. That would break my heart. Don't let me down. I promise you with all my heart I won't let you down

Then I smiled and said, "You Elders are my Knights. You sisters are my Knights. You are the Knights of the Round Table. From this time on, we will look upon this mission as being a spiritual Camelot. And in the years to come, you'll say to others," Ask every person if they've heard the story. Tell it loud and clear if they have not. That once there was a sacred bit of glory called Camelot."

"Of course I will play the role of King Arthur," I said jokingly. But then I sobered and said, "The real King Arthur will be our Savior Jesus Christ. He's the one who sits with us at the round table. I will sit at his side so will you. We share this great honor, not that of being Knights of the round table, but that of being the Elders and Sisters of Israel.

So that's my message.

God blesses each one of us as we labor in this glorious cause of truth.

I then had a glorious experience of interviewing "my" missionaries

Each of the interviews was long. I wanted to get acquainted. It is good to tell a group that you love them, but not nearly so good as sitting alone with each and telling him or her of your love.. I couldn't help but prophesy to each one of them about his or her glorious future. I never repeated to one what I had said to another. Then we talked a little bit about their parents, and their brothers and sisters and their former life back home. They told me of their concerns and joys.

Then, they did something that I knew not of. They all stood in the cultural hall and formed a large circle. They told me to join in the circle. Then Sister Bratihwate, went to the piano and began to play. They all sang as they swayed back and forth;

Twas in Kentucky and Tennessee,
My Heavcenly Father
called my to servve.
I met kind people'
the greatest ever'
and formed new friendships
so dear to me
Kentucky and Tennessee
Was where I labored
And formed new friendships
So dear to me.

They repeated the words and many tears were shed. I will never forget that song which we sang at every zone conference we ever held.

We made our way out out to our cars. The missionaries ingered. I lingered. EarlierI had tried to imagine what a zone conference would be like. But I never could imagine the joy I would feel in being with my Knights, my Angels.

Finally they were all off. I was ready to go when a car full of Elders came back. One in front seat rolled down his window and called out, "We just came back to tell you again that we sure love you." With that they drove away. I half smiled and half cried as I shouted,"I love you too."

The other zone conferences were not quite as special, but nearly so. By the time the zone conferences had ended I had been able to call each missionary by name. The greatest lesson we can teach another person is that we remember their name and that we remember the heartfelt things that we know about them.

After five days we returned to Louisville. I was tired beyond any tired I had ever before known. I was almost giddy from the thrill of being mission president the thrill of having 180 missionaries loving me and praying for me. King Arthur had never had it so good.

That night, before Marilyn and I retired, we talked. She asked, "How did it go?"

"Oh Marilyn I wish you could of been there." With that great emotion swept into my heart. I needed you there. It was nearly perfect in every way. But I longed for you to be at my side. I'm only half myself when I am not with you."

She spoke, "Tell me about it."

"You know how I am about names. I studied their names all the time I was driving. I didn't see any scenery. My face was always in my little book with pictures. When we went to Lexington, I was able to call them each one by name I sensed it meant so much to them. I told them of my feelings about Camelot and King Arthur.

Marilyn, they really responded. They seem to be on fire with this. I feel like I can do this. I can do this with them as my knights of the round table. With Jesus Christ at my side. I know now that we can do this. We can really do this. It is wonderful. Now I know why the Lord sent us here. This is our place. These missionaries need us. We are in the right place."

"I knew the missionaries would love you. Where ever we've gone the people love you."

"I know they love me at first, but I also know by the time we leave here I'll be second-place to you. Everybody who gets to know you Marilyn, loves and respects you with all her heart. I just want to thank you for what you're doing with the children. I know this is hard on them, but they have the best with you as their mother. I know Matt wishes she could go home. Kathryn wonders Devin wants to quit basketball. With you at their side, they will will make it. I'm so glad we are here. I love to I have never loved you as much as I do now."

We prayed and thanked the Lord for our blessings. We asked him to bless our children and our missionaries. I prayed so often for out missionaries but I never spent as much time praying them as I did for our children.

We retired. I look forward to tomorrow. I looked forward to the next thirty three months.

The Early Days

The next few weeks filled with excitement. We attended stake conference. We took the whole family. The Saints were so impressed that we had eight children. They sensed that we were sort of common folks-- nothing pretentious, just ordinary people like them.

I was asked to speak at the stake conferences. I asked Marilyn to come and stand at my side. I told of my love for her. I called the children up and introduced them and told something about each of them. I said, "My oldest son, Matt, can't ever get a date. Could any of you help with that?" I told the children, "We are now standing in front of best people in the world."

When I spoke I didn't have much time as there were other speakers waiting their turn.. So I spoke with great speed. I wanted to gave my fifteen minute talk in five minutes. I spoke of the joy of having a family. I spoke to the joy of family life. I spoke of our family life. I told stories. The people related to what I was saying. They had to listen intently to keep up with me. I hardly took a breath and neither did they. Children began to sit still and to concentrate. Babies ceased to cry. The audience was spell bound. They laughed at my humor. They shed tears at my tender comments. I testified of eternal things with great enthusiasm and great conviction. I felt spirit of the Lord and so did those who were there. We understood each other and we were all edified.

At the conclusion of the conference we were surrounded by loving Saints. They wanted to meet us. They wanted to encourage us. They wanted to tell us of their love. These Kentucky people they were our kind of people. We were there kind of people. On that day we began to build a relationship that we shall treasure forever.

The only troubling we faced in those early days along with homesickness we all felt. Particularly the desire of Matt to return to Utah. I felt that given time even that would change.

We were off to a marvelous start with the missionaries and the saints.

Only one haunting problem troubled me. The missionaries were not getting the results in bringing people to Christ that they had achieved under President Knight. In July the mission had an all time low of just fifteen. Then in August it was only twenty. And the early weeks of September were not promising any better results. What was wrong? I wanted with all my heart to be successful in this assignment. And by many measures I was. But in the thing that mattered most, I was failing. I began to wonder where the whip was that President Knight had used to get the amazing results he had achieved. Maybe I should go the movie General Patton and save King Arthur for my life at home.

The Area Authority

Airport in Louisville, Kentucky November, 2008

President Durrant had not been this nervous since his high school prom when he sat in the living room of the richest family in town and waited for his date to appear. He now sat in the Standiford Airport waiting for a man he had never met to arrive. A man who could save him. Finally coming down the escalator, he saw what he knew had to be Elder John Riggins. At the same time the stocky and balding Elder smiled as he knew this man must be George Durrant, the president of the Kentucky Mission. President Durrant moved forward to the bottom of the moving stairs and nervously extended his hand. The gregarious Area Authority took the much taller president in his arms and pulled him into an almost crushing embrace.

President Durrant wanted to make a good first impression. But he still felt like a sophomore basketball team candidate performing for the first time in the presence of the all powerful basketball coach. The insecure president said unconvincingly, "Welcome to the world's greatest mission—the Camelot Mission."

"What mission?" the confused authority asked.

The President felt embarrassed at what he had said, and instead of answering asked, "Do you have any other luggage?"

"No I've traveled all over the world with my business and I know how to pack light."

Soon the two men were in the parking lot opening the doors of the large white Toyota SUV.

Upon seeing the gleaming vehicle Elder Riggins said, "Wow! What you got here. I didn't know there was a need for one of these in Kentucky."

President D. replied in an embarrassed tone, "I inherited that from President Knight."

"You never know what those brethren in Salt Lake City who over all the cars will send you. I've written to them and told them to get German cars. They cost a lot, but in the end it would save the church a lot of money. But like usual those guys do things their way even if it does not make sense."

An hour later the two arrived at the mission home on Tarton Way. Upon seeing the home the surprised authority asked, "Is this where you live? Looks like a seminary building at East High School. What do the brethren let their building guys buy things like this? You ought to be in a rambler out in the suburbs. I made sure when Joan and I went that they sold the old two story thing and bought nice one in a quiet neighborhood. You ought to write a letter and demand, I mean suggest that you want to move to house not a seminary building." With that Elder Riggins laughed boisterously. He then added, "Don't you think this looks like a seminary building?"

"That is what I thought when we got here. But it serves our purposes real well for a family of ten."

"Ten!!!! How many kids have you got?"

"Eight."

"Eight! How many are here with you?"

"All eight," The president answered with a tone of pride in his voice.

"All eight here with you. How can a man with eight kids serve as president of a mission? I'll tell you sometimes I just don't know what those who run the missionary department are thinking. Eight kids! That is ridiculous. You ought to be back home until the kids are raised."

The president answered softly, "It works all right. I guess."

"You guess? You know it's a burden."

As the two entered the front doors, the president shouted, "We are home."

Sister Durrant hurried from her office near the front door and greeted the two.

She was a tall, blondish woman with a soft voice. "Welcome Elder Riggons. We are so glad you have come to help us."

The two shook hands and Elder Riggons said, "It sure is good to be here. I just hope I can help. I have heard that your husband is the greatest teacher in the church. So it is him who will likely be teaching me?"

Sister D. spoke, "You must be tired. Let's show you your room and you can get a little rest before dinner."

As she led him toward the room, he asked, "You sure you have room for me? Your husband says you have eight children here."

"Oh sure! Our motto is that there is always room for one more."

"We will have supper in an hour. You can meet the children then."

"No that's all right. I have brought some stuff to work on. I had some food on the plane. So you just go ahead, and I'll see you in the morning."

"Are you sure? Teddy, our cook has cooked some spare ribs. She is quite a cook. You'll love them."

"No I'm really not hungry. Let the hungry eight have my share," he said laughingly. You have enough without me. With that he slowly closed the door.

She returned and told her husband that the Elder would not be with them at dinner. The president was disappointed, but a bit relieved. There was something about Elder Riggons that unnerved him.

Sister Durrant said with some distress. "You would never do that. He should have let us know before we prepared the dinner. The kids need to meet him. Maybe he could help them with the adjustment of being here." Then with marked disgust she ordered, "I just don't appreciate this. Go tell him to come to dinner."

"I'm not going to tell him anything. He is here to tell me not to be told anything by me. He might not be personable. But he is one of the most successful executives in the country. He did not come here to help the children; he came here to help me. And goodness knows I need help."

"What is wrong with you George. At home you were free and easy and nothing upset you. But here you are a nervous wreck. This mission call seemed like a dream job. But you are making it into a nightmare."

"Forget it. You take care of things at home and I'll take care of things in the mission."

With that she gave him a look of disgust and turned and walked away.

The President and the authority were up at five to set out for Lexington. Elder Riggons was in the front room reading yesterdays paper. Sister D approached him pleasantly and asked, "What can I get you for breakfast?"

The Elder arose and smiled the most charming smile she had ever seen and said, "You don't need to go to any trouble for me. You have the appearance of royalty. I can't have a queen waiting on a commoner such as me."

He then added, "I'll just fix myself a bowl of cereal and you get ready to go."

"I'm not going."

"You're not going? A big zone conference and you are not going? The missionaries need to see you. My wife went to every zone conference with me. We were a team."

"I'll attend the zone conference next week when it is here in Louisville. In the mean time, I'll just be mom."

A knock came on the door. She hurried to answer. It was the two zone leaders—Elders Flake and Bryant. She introduced them to Elder Riggons. As Elder Bryant shook hands with the important visitor he said, "A friend of mine served in your mission. He told me you had the reputation of being the most productive mission president in North America. He loved you and tries to act like he is you."

Elder Riggons, obviously very pleased, said, "Well I appreciate that. What was his name?"

"Tyler Gray. Elder Tyler Gray. You would be proud of him. He is now married and has a little boy."

"Oh sure Elder Gray. The tall Elder from California."

"No you are thinking of someone else. He is short and husky and was a college wrestler. And like I said, he is from Burley, Idaho."

"It's been a while. But I think I know who you mean. We had so many."

"Anyway, he says you really got the missionaries going and the baptisms poured in."

Elder Riggons chuckled and replied, "I just motivated them and kicked them in the pants and they did all the work. So give them the credit and not me. We never got below a hundred a month."

Elder Flake spoke up, "We got a hundred the month before President Knight left."

But since then it has gone down really fast for the past five months. I think it is because the stakes are not helping us like they should."

President Durrant had heard the last part of this conversation. He interrupted and said, "It's nearly time to head out. You had better get your cereal. It will be a long day."

As the authority hurriedly ate, the president said, "The two assistants will drive us over and we can sit in the back seat and talk?"

"Couldn't they take their car and we can ride a lone and talk in private?"

"Well they could. But I'm not sure I could get from the freeway to the Lexington chapel."

"Hey! I've got GPS on my phone. Elder. Would you Just tell me the address and we will be home free. I'll drive president, and you can be my guest. After all, I'm here to serve."

With that he turned and said, "Elder could you also put in there, 'Churchill Downs,'. I used to own a couple of thorough breads and I've always wanted to see where they run the derby."

The Elders who both loved technology were thrilled to help this important man.

President Durrant sat in the passenger side and silently felt a bit like a little boy in the presence of a mighty man.

Fifteen minutes later the two were at Churchill Downs. The authority jumped from the car and announced, "There it is! I've seen the Tasma Hall of India, the Pyramids of Egypt, and the Elephants of Africa. But this tops them all! The home of the derby! Wow! President can you believe that two country bumpkins like us are standing here in the shadows of those sacred towers "

The president tried to stand in awe. But his main concern was that they would be late for the zone conference in Lexington.

Soon the two were in the car and headed east toward the horse country of Eastern Kentucky. As they road along the authority spoke, "President, I've been told you are struggling a bit. How do you feel about your first five months here?"

President Durrant nervously replied, "Well, I sort of think that..."

Before he could say more, the authority interrupted and said, "You don't have to say more. I know how you feel. I have known some failures in my day. It is no fun to know you are failing. But we can solve all that. So don't feel bad. Better days are coming."

With that the authority smiled his comforting smile of reassurance, tapped the president on the knee and said, "So settle down my boy. And together will change things around a bit. It won't take much. I've been told you are a beloved man back home. That will soon be the case here. Now you just sit back and I'll tell you how I see the role of a mission president."

For the next forty minutes the Authority recounted his experiences in the Seattle Mission. The only words the anxious president heard were the words, 'Then I...', and again, 'Then I...', and again and again, 'Then I...'

President Durrant was beyond grateful when the green grass and white fences of the horse farms began to appear. "Wow!" Shouted the authority. "Would you look at that? I've got to redo my whole place down at Manti."

After a pause he said, "So these are the big boys! Someday I'll get them. I'm a competitor. I can't stand to be second. That is the way I am in business and I was the same way as mission president. You've got to be like that president. We will make you like that. After our time together, You'll make President Knight look like a piker. One hundred baptisms will be your minimum. Then the brethren will be raving about you instead of wondering about you. With that he sped up to overtake a fast car that had passed him a few seconds before."

President Durrant tried to look enthused as Elder Riggons looked over at him and smiled and said, "How about it, President, do you want to run with the thorough breads are the nags. It is up to you. Which one?"

The president did his best to smile and replied, with little conviction, "The thorough breads" "Come on president. Let's see a little enthusiasm. It all starts with enthusiasm."

Just then the voice of the GPS took over and the two rode in silence to the Lexington Stake center. President Durrant was studying a sheet of paper.

"What's that?"

"The names of the missionaries who will be here. I like to call them each by name."

"Don't they have name tags?" Don't worry about their names. The only names that are important are the names of the folks they have scheduled for baptisms."

They were 30 minutes late. As the two entered the stake center the 36 missionaries stood. They were in awe to be in the presence of greatness. The president wondered about the greatness part, but he too was in awe.

The assistants who were conducting the meeting moved aside and the president came to the pulpit. He was deeply touched to be in the presence of his magnificent missionaries. For a few seconds his emotions formed tears in his eyes and a lump in his throat. Finally he spoke of his love for them and of his gratitude for all they were doing in this glorious cause.

He then said, "Early this morning I was thinking of the Savior. I thought of the song, 'I need thee. Oh I need thee. Every hour I need thee.'

I need the savior. I have never felt such a need for him. Again the president's emotions took over and he could not speak. He gathered himself together and spoke again.

"We are his spokesman. We do not speak in our name we speak in his name. He then told this story.

"When I was in high school there was a girl I really liked. I was thrilled when I was assigned a seat right behind her in the back of the room. But I was afraid to talk to her. I liked her so much that I just sat in silence.

Then one day, a guy named Don, (Dons were the popular guys in those days. He was big and blonde and athletic and the girls love him.) Anyway, one day Don sent me a note that said, "Ask Susan if she will go to the movie with me Friday night?"

With the note in hand I was no longer afraid. I tapped Susan on the shoulder and she turned around and looked at me. Still not my usual nervous and fearful self, I asked boldly, "What are you doing Friday night?"

"Nothing.' She replied with a bit of enthusiasm.

"Would you like to go to a movie?"

"Yes I would."

"Okay. Old Don right over there wants to take you."

The missionaries groaned and laughed.

I noted that the authority, sitting on the side bench of the front row did not laugh. He was occupied by hurrying through the pages of his scriptures.

I went on. We each have a note from the Savior saying, "Ask the people to be baptized in my name."

So you do not speak in your own name. That would be frightening. We speak in the name of Jesus Christ. So we have no need to fear. We are not self confident. We are Christ confident."

I spoke of our lack of baptisms. Their eyes that had been looking up, looked down.

I knew the authority had much to say so I closed my remarks and introduced him with these words.

Elders and Sisters, We are honored to have with us one of the great men of the church. He has done many things in his life. His company has achieved world wide success. But even more important he has been a valiant servant in the work of the Lord. He served as young missionary in the Northern Stakes Mission. Five years ago he served as president of the Colorado Denver Mission. His work there become legendary. He has served as an example to many mission presidents and now to me. He is much loved by the leading brethren of the Church. He could never bring himself to believe that the great harvest is over. He took a struggling mission, and

turned it into the highest baptizing mission in North America. He is a doer. Now let's really listen as he tells us how we too can be doers of Christ's words to go forth and baptize. Elder Riggons the time is yours.

"I appreciate the kind words of your beloved president. I have known of him for years. His personable style of speaking, his humor, his many books that he has authored, have made the name of 'George Durrant' an almost house hold word.

My son had him as a teacher at BYU and told me that Brother Durrant was the most popular teacher at BYU. He had as many as 600 students in his classes each semester and he learned the names of each one.

So you are blessed to have such a man as your president.

The only thing that I can offer you that he can't is the idea of a 'Bottom Line.'

Each month in business you can look at the bottom line. If it is negative you are failing. If it is positive you are succeeding. The bottom line in the work we are doing are baptisms. We are not out here to help people, although we do that. But we are here to baptize them. If we are not doing that then let's call the Peace Corps and have them take over and we can all go home. Now your baptismal record in this mission is dismal. President Knight, under whom many of you served, understood the bottom line. I'm sure you have never had such a happy month as you had last May when you baptized 100 souls. You can do that again. That can be your minimum. And who knows what the maximum will be?

All that is needed is to be obedient. If you don't want to do that. Go home. President Durrant will approve that. (with that he looked at me and waited for a response. I felt pressure to say yes but I could not. And he went on)

Then we need to focus on baptisms. Nothing else matters. Set goals. The president's job is to help you set goals. The reason he interviews you is not to hold your hand and tell you are special. He interviews you so he and you can see how you are coming in your baptismal goals. To see how well you are keeping the rules.

I'm working with president Durrant. He is telling me things that will help me. I'm telling him things that will help him. Things that will help him help you. We will have an honor roll and you can get on it by meeting your baptismal goals. There are a number of tricks I learned to keep the missionaries high in the Rockies of Colorado. "Our theme song was, "Rocky Mountain High." He then asked them all to stand. He challenged them to vow to keep each rule with exactness. He asked each to shout out, "Here here!" as a symbol of their pledge. He then challenged them to agree to set a goal that only them and the Lord could achieve. He asked them to agree by saying, 'Here here!'

They all did so.

With that the Elder smiled and his magnificent smile that caused the missionaries hearts to melt. Now more than ever they sensed his greatness. He quickly told them of his love for them.

The meeting ended on a high note. This was truly a new day in the Kentucky Mission.

It was time for the interviews. President Durrant interviewed all thirty six. Many could not wait to tell him of their problems and concerns. He impatiently listened and hastened to get to the

real reason for the interview. He focused on goals and rules, but his heart was far from his knights, his angels.

As final good byes were said, “Elder Riggons asked the zone leaders if they knew where the horse statutes of Man of War and Secretariat were located. Elder Bell was an expert on horses. He and Elder Reynolds were invited to get in the car. Soon they pulled into the horse farm which had once been the home of Man of War. There in a prominent place was the heroic sized statute of the horse that many considered to be the world’s greatest horse.

Elder Riggons was in heaven. He said, ‘You know, This year ‘Take Me Home’ won the Derby in the fastest time ever. He also won the Preakness and the Belmont—the whole “Triple Crown. He then paused and said, “You know horses Elder Bell. Don’t you think there is a new, best horse of all time—Take Me Home?”

Elder Bell considered the matter and finally spoke, “Well Elder Riggons, we just do not know the answer to that. We won’t know how great Take Me Home is until we see how his children and grandchildren do. That will take time and then we will know how he stacks up with man of War and Secretariat.

Elder Riggons looked at Elder Bell and said, “I’m not sure your criterion for greatness is correct.” Then as if he was thinking of another place and time he said, “I kind of hope that same rule does not apply to a man.”

I dreaded the hour and one half journey back to Louisville. This man was just not my kind of guy. The only redeeming thing was that he could not make me feel anymore lost than he had already made me feel.

Once we were on the freeway, he started in. “I did not hear much of your talk because I was busy preparing my own. But what I did hear concerned me a bit. You get choked up pretty easily don’t you?”

“I guess I do.”

“Some feel that tears is a sign of feeling the spirit. I don’t agree. It is just your own emotions getting the better of you. You might want to watch that.”

President Durrant had been told that before, and had come a long ways in such control. But he still suffered a bit from that supposed malady. He knew he could do better.

The authority spoke again, “You are a bit self demeaning. In that story you should have said that you were “Don” and not the timid guy. The missionaries need you to be their hero and not someone they feel sorry for. Besides you only have so much time with the missionaries. You don’t have time for a bunch of touching stories. Get to the goals. Keep focused. That way you will gain their respect.”

I’ve been told by a stake president that when you got here you were dressed in a suit that was a style that the former mission president forbid the missionaries to wear. What is with that? If you are a rebel what do you think they will try to be?”

President Durrant did not offer any counter opinions. The man was probable right. But in his heart the president wondered, “Is there only one way?”

"I was also told that you announced to your missionaries in your first meeting with them that you were doing away with all rules. Tell me that is not so."

I sat looking straight ahead and did not reply.

He continued, "I'm sure you agree that the salvation of a mission are the rules and the strict enforcement of those rules. Don't you agree?"

"Sure I agree whole heartedly. But what I really said was that we were going to follow principles, not rules. If we followed correct principle we would follow the rules. I was telling them that we must live above the rules. We must have honor. We will just do the right things for the right reasons and not because of compulsion."

"That sounds good. But there is only one problem. It won't work! The mission will continue on its downward spiral"

"Well I feel no one will get to the celestial kingdom by force."

"No they won't, but these missionaries don't understand that kind of stuff. They are telestial dwellers, and you have to treat them that way. Don't preach a bunch of idealistic stuff to them. If you do you will end up with a night mare. Can't you understand what I'm saying?"

My emotion was rising as I meekly replied, "I know you have a point. But I just don't operate that way. I feel missionaries can be trusted and they will be their best self."

"Hey get real. These guys are nineteen. They are men at times, but they are mostly boys. Like one of our leaders said, 'Being a mission president is like being a scout master and your have nearly 200+ boys on a two year camp out and the girl scouts are camped just across the stream. So act accordingly.'"

With some degree of abruptness I replied, "I don't agree with that. That is repulsive to me. If that is true I should not be here. I see them as men. I see them as noble knights of a glorious round table. I see them as angels."

The authority was deeply amused and began to laugh almost uncontrollably. He then said, "And I suppose you are King Arthur. Oh that you were right! Now I can see why you are so loved. Who would not love a man who has such a ridiculous opinion of those around him. You have succeeded as a teacher and youth leader with such an idealistic foundation. But now you are in the real world. And let's face it. You are failing."

I looked out the window and remained silent. To me he was wrong about a lot of things, but he sure was right about me failing.

He said nothing more for the next ten miles. The president, desperately tried to calm his troubled soul. He had never failed before. This was new to him. It hurt more than any pain he had ever felt before. To himself he said, "I can't go home. Marilyn would not allow that. I would not allow that. God would never allow that. But what...? I began to wish I had gone to the movie about General Patton and had never heard of King Arthur.

Then the authority spoke in a softer tone, "I have been too hard on you. But I have done it out of love. I feel I have been moved upon by the Holy Ghost to tell you these things. You are a great man. I know changing your ways will take you out of your comfort zone. But the test of a man's metal is his ability to take criticism and change his ways and keep going. You will do that President Durrant, and you will end up as the best president these folks have ever known.

He then changed the subject and told me stories of his youth and marriage and business. He was a fascinating man. I could sense his goodness—his greatness. He had a softer side. There was a bit of an angel in him. He would ask me to tell him about my family and my life and how it was to be a teacher. But before I could get three sentences in to my life, what I said reminded him of something about himself. And off we would go on another adventure of his. I'm a listener and he was a talker so for the last 30 miles we made a great team. But my pain did not lessen.

The other five zone conferences were much the same. I spoke only briefly and tried to control my emotions. I tried not to tell any little stories. Tried to avoid humor. Tried to be like him. Felt a bit phony.

Finally we were at the airport. I remembered how excited I was to have him come. But that excitement was dwarfed by my joy at seeing him leave. But as I walked from the airport to my car, I had never felt so alone.

I was glad that tomorrow would be another day. Maybe then I could somehow be another president. Surely for the next two and one half years I could be somebody other than what I had forever been.

Things not so good at home.

When I arrived back home from the round of zone conferences, I was totally exhausted and discouraged. It would be good to be back home again in the security and comfort of home.

I entered the house at just before six in the evening and shouted with a degree of false enthusiasm, "Let's all be glad. Daddy has just come home."

Marilyn looked a bit bedraggled, and said with the enthusiasm that matched mine. "Thank goodness. Another minute and I would be a case for local asylum. I hugged her tight and we silently wondered together.

One year old Mark saw me and ran toward me. He tripped and fell right on his face and screamed in pain. His mouth was bleeding. Our most sure bit of sunshine was now behind a cloud. Sarah saved the day by moving close to me as I held a towel over Mark's bleeding mouth and said, "Hello daddy."

The way that she said it, and her beautiful four year old face caused me to take her up in my free arm, and hold her so close that she wondered why so tight.

Warren and Dwight came in from playing. They saw me and said, "Hi dad." They acted as if I had never been gone.

Marinda was the most glad to see me. She was deeply dependent upon me. All her life she was so glad I was her dad and best friend. She excitedly told me, "My teacher told me I was too smart for the 5th grade and she wanted to move me to the 6th. I don't have to do that do I?" It would make me so nervous. I'm not that smart. Please don't let them do that.'

"Never!" I replied with no reason other than I did not want her to be distressed.

I asked 7th grade Devin if he wanted to shoot a few baskets. He told me, "No reason for that. I've decided to quit basketball. The coach is a not a human. He is a monster. He looks like the wolf man and acts like Jack the Ripper. I'm afraid of him. I'd sooner just play over at the church."

Kathryn, our 15 old, who never asked nor received much, said everything was all right until her little possum had disappeared and she spent the whole night looking for it in every place in the house. I could tell she was deeply sad about this. I told her I'd get her a horse to replace it and she said, "Sure you will dad. Sure you will." She loved horses, but knew there was no place for a horse on a mission.

I asked about sixteen year old Matt. Marilyn replied. "You better go see him. He is in his room. I've never seen anyone as upset as he is."

"Why? What happened?"

"He won't tell me'" He just says that life is not worth living. But right now dinner is on the table. Maybe you can just call him and he will come up and you can find what is wrong. He won't talk to me."

I smiled and said, "Other than all that I've seen and heard since I got home is all else well?"

She smiled and we both laughed a quiet laugh of love. She replied with a twinkle in her eyes, "Other than that we may be the happiest family in Kentucky."

I called Matt to come. He did not.

I felt I should eat with the family and then go to Matt's room and find out why he was so troubled.

A half hour later I stood in his doorway. He was lying on his bed turned away from me and toward the wall. I sat on his bed and asked, "What is wrong?" He did not reply.

I touched him on the shoulder and he pulled away, and said in sorrow, "Nothing is wrong. Just leave me alone."

"Come on. What happened?"

He was silent. "You have to tell me, or I can't help."

"I said nothing is wrong."

"I'll just sit here and you can think about things and maybe you could at least give me a clue."

It must have been five minutes of the most silent silence I have ever heard. Then he turned toward me, and I saw a deeper sorrow than I had ever seen before.

He shook his head from side to side, took a deep breath and said, "I got cut."

"You got cut."

"Yeah, Cut from the team."

"I could have been a star back home. But not here. Nothing good is here. This place is hell to me."

He then became silent. And I did not know what to say. Just then Marilyn called down the stairs and said, "There is an Elder on the phone. He says his companion is gone and he does not know where. He needs to talk to you. "

"Tell him to call his zone leader. No tell him. Tell him I'll be right there."

Matt had turned back to the wall. I said, "I'd better go but I'll be back in a minute we will talk some more."

"You don't have to hurry. I got nothing else to say now or ever."

Marilyn said, as I came up the stairs, "Did you have your phone off all day? There have been four others trying to get you. Their numbers are all on the desk in my office. Oh! and Sister Pryor is having emotional problems again. We better get her to that Jewish doctor who understands how to counsel our missionaries. He ought to be a Mormon."

An hour went by before I could go back downstairs. Surely I was the worst father in the world. Maybe eight children were too many to have out here?

Matt seemed a bit better when I returned. I asked him if he was hungry for a good burger and fries? He smiled. We jumped in the car. Seven voices cried out, "Can I come." I did not answer. Triage told me that Matt was at this moment the most seriously injured by our call to Kentucky.

Matt ate his burger like a dog eats. He told me he had been fasting and had not eaten in two days. I was so sorry for him. I was tempted to ask him if he still wanted to go home and live with his best friend's family in Salt Lake. But I held back. I could not bear it if he went home. Better that I should go home than him. He did not bring it up, but if he had I would have made a phone call to that willing family.

When we got home Marilyn told me, "Sister Pryer is missing. Thinks you are persecuting her because of her seeing visions. The assistance are looking for her."

I did not know what to do. I went out side and with the sound of crickets accompanying me from every direction, I knelt under the big tree and prayed.

I asked for help. I received a revelation. Just a simple revelation. It was as small voice said, "George, my son. You are tired. Go in the house, and go to bed."

I rose from my knees and was soon in bed. Somehow sleep came more quickly than it had in several nights.

The Area Authority.

Airport in Louisville, Kentucky November, 2008

President Durrant had not been this nervous since his high school prom when he sat in the living room of the richest family in town and waited for his date to appear. He now sat in the Standiford Airport waiting for a man he had never met to arrive. A man who could save him. Finally coming down the escalator, he saw what he knew had to be Elder John Riggins. At the same time the stocky and balding Elder smiled as he knew this man must be George Durrant, the president of the Kentucky Mission. President Durrant moved forward to the bottom of the moving stairs and nervously extended his hand. The gregarious Area Authority took the much taller president in his arms and pulled him into an almost crushing embrace.

President Durrant wanted to make a good first impression. But he still felt like a sophomore basketball team candidate performing for the first time in the presence of the all powerful basketball coach. The insecure president said unconvincingly, "Welcome to the world's greatest mission—the Camelot Mission."

"What mission?" the confused authority asked.

The President felt embarrassed at what he had said, and instead of answering asked, "Do you have any other luggage?"

"No I've traveled all over the world with my business and I know how to pack light."

Soon the two men were in the parking lot opening the doors of the large white Toyota SUV. Upon seeing the gleaming vehicle Elder Riggins said, "Wow! What you got here. I didn't know there was a need for one of these in Kentucky."

President D. replied in an embarrassed tone, "I inherited that from President Knight."

"You never know what those brethren in Salt Lake City who over all the cars will send you. I've written to them and told them to get German cars. They cost a lot, but in the end it would save the church a lot of money. But like usual those guys do things their way even if it does not make sense."

An hour later the two arrived at the mission home on Tarton Way. Upon seeing the home the surprised authority asked, "Is this where you live? Looks like a seminary building at East High School. What do the brethren let their building guys buy things like this? You ought to be in a rambler out in the suburbs. I made sure when Joan and I went that they sold the old two story thing and bought nice one in a quiet neighborhood. You ought to write a letter and demand, I mean suggest that you want to move to house not a seminary building." With that

Elder Riggons laughed boisterously. He then added, "Don't you think this looks like a seminary building?"

"That is what I thought when we got here. But it serves our purposes real well for a family of ten."

"Ten!!!! How many kids have you got?"

"Eight."

"Eight! How many are here with you?"

"All eight," The president answered with a tone of pride in his voice.

"All eight here with you. How can a man with eight kids serve as president of a mission? I'll tell you sometimes I just don't know what those who run the missionary department are thinking. Eight kids! That is ridiculous. You ought to be back home until the kids are raised."

The president answered softly, "It works all right. I guess."

"You guess? You know it's a burden."

As the two entered the front doors, the president shouted, "We are home."

Sister Durrant hurried from her office near the front door and greeted the two.

She was a tall, blondish woman with a soft voice. "Welcome Elder Riggons. We are so glad you have come to help us."

The two shook hands and Elder Riggons said, "It sure is good to be here. I just hope I can help. I have heard that your husband is the greatest teacher in the church. So it is him who will likely be teaching me?"

Sister D. spoke, "You must be tired. Let's show you your room and you can get a little rest before dinner."

As she led him toward the room, he asked, "You sure you have room for me? Your husband says you have eight children here."

"Oh sure! Our motto is that there is always room for one more."

"We will have supper in an hour. You can meet the children then."

"No that's all right. I have brought some stuff to work on. I had some food on the plane. So you just go ahead, and I'll see you in the morning."

"Are you sure? Teddy, our cook has cooked some spare ribs. She is quite a cook. You'll love them."

"No I'm really not hungry. Let the hungry eight have my share," he said laughingly. You have enough without me. With that he slowly closed the door.

She returned and told her husband that the Elder would not be with them at dinner. The president was disappointed, but a bit relieved. There was something about Eder Riggons that unnerved him.

Sister Durrant said with some distress. "You would never do that . He should have let us know before we prepared the dinner. The kids need to meet him. Maybe he could help them with the adjustment of being here." Then with marked disgust she ordered, "I just don't appreciate this. Go tell him to come to dinner."

"I'm not going to tell him anything. He is here to tell me not to be told anything by me. He might not be personable. But he is one of the most successful executives in the country. He did

not come here to help the children; he came here to help me. And goodness knows I need help.”

“What is wrong with you George. At home you were free and easy and nothing upset you. But here you are a nervous wreck. this mission call seemed like a dream job. But you are making it into a nightmare.”

“Forget it. You take care of things at home and I’ll take care of things in the mission.”

With that she gave him a look of disgust and turned and walked away.

The President and the authority were up at five to set out for Lexington. Elder Riggons was in the front room reading yesterday’s paper. Sister D approached him pleasantly and asked, “What can I get you for breakfast?”

The Elder arose and smiled the most charming smile she had ever seen and said, “You don’t need to go to any trouble for me. You have the appearance of royalty. I can’t have a queen waiting on a commoner such as me.”

He then added, “I’ll just fix myself a bowl of cereal and you get ready to go.”

“I’m not going.”

“You’re not going? A big zone conference and you are not going? The missionaries need to see you. My wife went to every zone conference with me. We were a team.”

“I’ll attend the zone conference next week when it is here in Louisville. In the mean time, I’ll just be mom.”

A knock came on the door. She hurried to answer. It was the two zone leaders—Elders Flake and Bryant. She introduced them to Elder Riggons. As Elder Bryant shook hands with the important visitor he said, “A friend of mine served in your mission. He told me you had the reputation of being the most productive mission president in North America. He loved you and tries to act like he is you.”

Elder Riggons, obviously very pleased, said, “Well I appreciate that. What was his name?”

“Tyler Gray. Elder Tyler Gray. You would be proud of him. He is now married and has a little boy.”

“Oh sure Elder Gray. The tall Elder from California.”

“No you are thinking of someone else. He is short and husky and was a college wrestler. And like I said, he is from Burley, Idaho.”

“It’s been a while. But I think I know who you mean. We had so many.”

“Anyway, he says you really got the missionaries going and the baptisms poured in.”

Elder Riggons chuckled and replied, “I just motivated them and kicked them in the pants and they did all the work. So give them the credit and not me. We never got below a hundred a month.”

Elder Flake spoke up, “We got a hundred the month before President Knight left.

But since then it has gone down really fast for the past five months. I think it is because the stakes are not helping us like they should.”

President Durrant had heard the last part of this conversation. He interrupted and said, “It’s nearly time to head out. You had better get your cereal. It will be a long day.”

As the authority hurriedly ate, the president said, "The two assistants will drive us over and we can sit in the back seat and talk?"

"Couldn't they take their car and we can ride a lone and talk in private?"

"Well they could. But I'm not sure I could get from the freeway to the Lexington chapel."

"Hey! I've got GPS on my phone. Elder. Would you Just tell me the address and we will be home free. I'll drive president, and you can be my guest. After all, I'm here to serve."

With that he turned and said, "Elder could you also put in there, 'Churchill Downs,'. I used to own a couple of thorough breads and I've always wanted to see where they run the derby."

The Elders who both loved technology were thrilled to help this important man.

President Durrant sat in the passenger side and silently felt a bit like a little boy in the presence of a mighty man.

Fifth teen minutes later the two were at Churchill Downs. The authority jumped from the car and announced, "There it is.! I've seen the Tasma Hall of India, the Pyramids of Egypt, and the Elephants of Africa. But this tops them all! The home of the derby! Wow! President can you believe that two country bumpkins like us are standing here in the shadows of those sacred towers "

The president tried to stand in awe. But his main concern was that they would be late for the zone conference in Lexington.

Soon the two were in the car and headed east toward the horse country of Eastern Kentucky.

As they road along the authority spoke, "President, I've been told you are struggling a bit. How do you feel about your first five months here?"

President Durrant nervously replied, "Well, I sort of think that..."

Before he could say more, the authority interrupted and said, "You don't have to say more. I know how you feel. I have known some failures in my day. It is no fun to know you are failing. But we can solve all that. So don't feel bad. Better days are coming."

With that the authority smiled his comforting smile of reassurance, tapped the president on the knee and said, "So settle down my boy. And together will change things around a bit. It won't take much. I've been told you are a beloved man back home. That will soon be the case here. Now you just sit back and I'll tell you how I see the role of a mission president."

For the next forty minutes the Authority recounted his experiences in the Seattle Mission. The only words the anxious president heard were the words, 'Then I...', and again, 'Then I...', and again and again, 'Then I...'

President Durrant was beyond grateful when the green grass and white fences of the horse farms began to appear. "Wow!" Shouted the authority. "Would you look at that? I've got to redo my whole place down at Manti."

After a pause he said, "So these are the big boys! Someday I'll get them. I'm a competitor. I can't stand to be second. That is the way I am in business and I was the same way as mission president. You've got to be like that president. We will make you like that. After our time together, You'll make President Knight look like a piker. One hundred baptisms will be your minimum. Then the brethren will be raving about you instead of wondering about you. With that he sped up to overtake a fast car that had passed him a few seconds before."

President Durrant tried to look enthused as Elder Riggons looked over at him and smiled and said, "How about it, President, do you want to run with the thorough breads are the nags. It is up to you. Which one?"

The president did his best to smile and replied, with little conviction, "The thorough breads" "Come on president. Let's see a little enthusiasm. It all starts with enthusiasm."

Just then the voice of the GPS took over and the two rode in silence to the Lexington Stake center. President Durrant was studying a sheet of paper.

"What's that?"

"The names of the missionaries who will be here. I like to call them each by name."

"Don't they have name tags?" Don't worry about their names. The only names that are important are the names of the folks they have scheduled for baptisms."

They were 30 minutes late. As the two entered the stake center the 36 missionaries stood. They were in awe to be in the presence of greatness. The president wondered about the greatness part, but he too was in awe.

The assistants who were conducting the meeting moved aside and the president came to the pulpit. He was deeply touched to be in the presence of his magnificent missionaries. For a few seconds his emotions formed tears in his eyes and a lump in his throat. Finally he spoke of his love for them and of his gratitude for all they were doing in this glorious cause.

He then said, "Early this morning I was thinking of the Savior. I thought of the song, 'I need thee. Oh I need thee. Every hour I need thee.'

I need the savior. I have never felt such a need for him. Again the president's emotions took over and he could not speak. He gathered himself together and spoke again.

"We are his spokesman. We do not speak in our name we speak in his name. He then told this story.

"When I was in high school there was a girl I really liked. I was thrilled when I was assigned a seat right behind her in the back of the room. But I was afraid to talk to her. I liked her so much that I just sat in silence.

Then one day, a guy named Don, (Dons were the popular guys in those days. He was big and blonde and athletic and the girls love him.) Anyway, one day Don sent me a note that said, "Ask Susan if she will go to the movie with me Friday night?"

With the note in hand I was no longer afraid. I tapped Susan on the shoulder and she turned around and looked at me. Still not my usual nervous and fearful self, I asked boldly, "What are you doing Friday night?"

"Nothing.' She replied with a bit of enthusiasm.

"Would you like to go to a movie?"

"Yes I would."

"Okay. Old Don right over there wants to take you."

The missionaries groaned and laughed.

I noted that the authority, sitting on the side bench of the front row did not laugh. He was occupied by hurrying through the pages of his scriptures.

I went on. We each have a note from the Savior saying, "Ask the people to be baptized in my name."

So you do not speak in your own name. That would be frightening. We speak in the name of Jesus Christ. So we have no need to fear. We are not self confident. We are Christ confident.” I spoke of our lack of baptisms. Their eyes that had been looking up, looked down. I knew the authority had much to say so I closed my remarks and introduced him with these words.

Elders and Sisters, We are honored to have with us one of the great men of the church. He has done many things in his life. His company has achieved world wide success. But even more important he has been a valiant servant in the work of the Lord. He served as young missionary in the Northern Stakes Mission. Five years ago he served as president of the Colorado Denver Mission. His work there become legendary. He has served as an example to many mission presidents and now to me. He is much loved by the leading brethren of the Church. He could never bring himself to believe that the great harvest is over. He took a struggling mission, and turned it into the highest baptizing mission in North America. He is a doer. Now let’s really listen as he tells us how we too can be doers of Christ’s words to go forth and baptize. Elder Riggons the time is yours.

“I appreciate the kind words of your beloved president. I have known of him for years. His personable style of speaking, his humor, his many books that he has authored, have made the name of ‘George Durrant’ an almost house hold word.

My son had him as a teacher at BYU and told me that Brother Durrant was the most popular teacher at BYU. He had as many as 600 students in his classes each semester and he learned the names of each one.

So you are blessed to have such a man as your president.

The only thing that I can offer you that he can’t is the idea of a ‘Bottom Line.’

Each month in business you can look at the bottom line. If it is negative you are failing. If it is positive you are succeeding. The bottom line in the work we are doing are baptisms. We are not out here to help people, although we do that. But we are here to baptize them. If we are not doing that then let’s call the Peace Corps and have them take over and we can all go home.

Now your baptismal record in this mission is dismal. President Knight, under whom many of you served, understood the bottom line. I’m sure you have never had such a happy month as you had last May when you baptized 100 souls. You can do that again. That can be your minimum. And who knows what the maximum will be?

All that is needed is to be obedient. If you don’t want to do that. Go home. President Durrant will approve that. (with that he looked at me and waited for a response. I felt pressure to say yes but I could not. And he went on)

Then we need to focus on baptisms. Nothing else matters. Set goals. The president’s job is to help you set goals. The reason he interviews you is not to hold your hand and tell you are special. He interviews you so he and you can see how you are coming in your baptismal goals. To see how well you are keeping the rules.

I’m working with president Durrant. He is telling me things that will help me. I’m telling him things that will help him. Things that will help him help you. We will have an honor roll and you can get on it by meeting your baptismal goals. There are a number of tricks I learned to keep

the missionaries high in the Rockies of Colorado. “Our theme song was, “Rocky Mountain High.” He then asked them all to stand. He challenged them to vow to keep each rule with exactness. He asked each to shout out, “Here here!” as a symbol of their pledge. He then challenged them to agree to set a goal that only them and the Lord could achieve. He asked them to agree by saying, ‘Here here!’”

They all did so.

With that the Elder smiled and his magnificent smile that caused the missionaries hearts to melt. Now more than ever they sensed his greatness. He quickly told them of his love for them.

The meeting ended on a high note. This was truly a new day in the Kentucky Mission. It was time for the interviews. President Durrant interviewed all thirty six. Many could not wait to tell him of their problems and concerns. He impatiently listened and hastened to get to the real reason for the interview. He focused on goals and rules, but his heart was far from his knights, his angels.

As final good byes were said, “Elder Riggons asked the zone leaders if they knew where the horse statues of Man of War and Secretariat were located. Elder Bell was an expert on horses. He and Elder Reynolds were invited to get in the car. Soon they pulled into the horse farm which had once been the home of Man of War. There in a prominent place was the heroic sized statue of the horse that many considered to be the world’s greatest horse.

Elder Riggons was in heaven. He said, ‘You know, This year ‘Take Me Home’ won the Derby in the fastest time ever. He also won the Preakness and the Belmont—the whole “Triple Crown. He then paused and said, “You know horses Elder Bell. Don’t you think there is a new, best horse of all time—Take Me Home?”

Elder Bell considered the matter and finally spoke, “Well Elder Riggons, we just do not know the answer to that. We won’t know how great Take Me Home is until we see how his children and grandchildren do. That will take time and then we will know how he stacks up with man of War and Secretariat.

Elder Riggons looked at Elder Bell and said, “I’m not sure your criterion for greatness is correct.” Then as if he was thinking of another place and time he said, “I kind of hope that same rule does not apply to a man.”

I dreaded the hour and one half journey back to Louisville. This man was just not my kind of guy. The only redeeming thing was that he could not make me feel anymore lost than he had already made me feel.

Once we were on the freeway, he started in. “I did not hear much of your talk because I was busy preparing my own. But what I did hear concerned me a bit. You get choked up pretty easily don’t you?”

“I guess I do.”

“Some feel that tears is a sign of feeling the spirit. I don’t agree. It is just your own emotions getting the better of you. You might want to watch that.”

President Durrant had been told that before, and had come a long ways in such control. But he still suffered a bit from that supposed malady. He knew he could do better.

The authority spoke again, "You are a bit self demeaning. In that story you should have said that you were "Don" and not the timid guy. The missionaries need you to be their hero and not someone they feel sorry for. Besides you only have so much time with the missionaries. You don't have time for a bunch of touching stories. Get to the goals. Keep focused. That way you will gain their respect."

I've been told by a stake president that when you got here you were dressed in a suit that was a style that the former mission president forbid the missionaries to wear. What is with that? If you are a rebel what do you think they will try to be?"

President Durrant did not offer any counter opinions. The man was probable right. But in his heart the president wondered, "Is there only one way?"

"I was also told that you announced to your missionaries in your first meeting with them that you were doing away with all rules. Tell me that is not so."

I sat looking straight ahead and did not reply.

He continued, "I'm sure you agree that the salvation of a mission are the rules and the strict enforcement of those rules. Don't you agree?"

"Sure I agree whole heartedly. But what I really said was that we were going to follow principles, not rules. If we followed correct principle we would follow the rules. I was telling them that we must live above the rules. We must have honor. We will just do the right things for the right reasons and not because of compulsion."

"That sounds good. But there is only one problem. It won't work! The mission will continue on its downward spiral"

"Well I feel no one will get to the celestial kingdom by force."

"No they won't, but these missionaries don't understand that kind of stuff. They are telestial dwellers, and you have to treat them that way. Don't preach a bunch of idealistic stuff to them. If you do you will end up with a night mare. Can't you understand what I'm saying?"

My emotion was rising as I meekly replied, "I know you have a point. But I just don't operate that way. I feel missionaries can be trusted and they will be their best self."

"Hey get real. These guys are nineteen. They are men at times, but they are mostly boys. Like one of our leaders said, 'Being a mission president is like being a scout master and your have nearly 200+ boys on a two year camp out and the girl scouts are camped just across the stream. So act accordingly.'"

With some degree of abruptness I replied, "I don't agree with that. That is repulsive to me. If that is true I should not be here. I see them as men. I see them as noble knights of a glorious round table. I see them as angels."

The authority was deeply amused and began to laugh almost uncontrollably. He then said, "And I suppose you are King Arthur. Oh that you were right! Now I can see why you are so loved. Who would not love a man who has such a ridiculous opinion of those around him. You have succeeded as a teacher and youth leader with such an idealistic foundation. But now you are in the real world. And let's face it. You are failing."

I looked out the window and remained silent. To me he was wrong about a lot of things, but he sure was right about me failing.

He said nothing more for the next ten miles. The president, desperately tried to calm his troubled soul. He had never failed before. This was new to him. It hurt more than any pain he had ever felt before. To himself he said, "I can't go home. Marilyn would not allow that. I would not allow that. God would never allow that. But what...? I began to wish I had gone to the movie about General Patton and had never heard of King Arthur.

Then the authority spoke in a softer tone, "I have been too hard on you. But I have done it out of love. I feel I have been moved upon by the Holy Ghost to tell you these things. You are a great man. I know changing your ways will take you out of your comfort zone. But the test of a man's metal is his ability to take criticism and change his ways and keep going. You will do that President Durrant, and you will end up as the best president these folks have ever known.

He then changed the subject and told me stories of his youth and marriage and business. He was a fascinating man. I could sense his goodness—his greatness. He had a softer side. There was a bit of an angel in him. He would ask me to tell him about my family and my life and how it was to be a teacher. But before I could get three sentences in to my life, what I said reminded him of something about himself. And off we would go on another adventure of his. I'm a listener and he was a talker so for the last 30 miles we made a great team. But my pain did not lessen.

The other five zone conferences were much the same. I spoke only briefly and tried to control my emotions. I tried not to tell any little stories. Tried to avoid humor. Tried to be like him. Felt a bit phony.

Finally we were at the airport. I remembered how excited I was to have him come. But that excitement was dwarfed by my joy at seeing him leave. But as I walked from the airport to my car, I had never felt so alone.

I was glad that tomorrow would be another day. Maybe then I could somehow be another president. Surely for the next two and one half years I could be somebody other than what I had forever been.

THE NEW MISSIONARIES.

The ten new missionaries would be at the airport in two hours.

President Durrant wanted his children to be part of the greeting party at the airport. He hoped that the excitement of seeing the new missionaries arrive might help them feel better about being on this mission.

Nearly two hour later the assistants, the two senior office Elders, President Sister Durrant, and the eight children were ready to depart in three mission vans for Standiford Field, the airport in Louisville Kentucky. Because of getting everybody together the greeting party got off to a late start. At they entered the freeway the traffic was heavy . It was soon obvious that they would arrive at least a half hour late.

Meanwhile, the ten missionaries landed on time, and made their way off the airplane. They came into the lobby of the airport and looked around in vain for their Mission President. They had been told that he would be there waiting for them.

Somewhat bewildered, they wandered into baggage claim to wait for their luggage to arrive. Nearly a half hour had passed since the landing and still no sign of anyone from the mission office! Finally, with their bags in tow they made their way outside. There they waiting silently and hoped for the best. Another missionary, sitting on a bench nearby, stood up, and casually wheeled his bag over and joined the new arrivals.

Then, without saying a word, he knowingly pointed in the direction of a nearby roundabout. The ten follow the trajectory of his finger. There they saw the mission van skid around the corner and screech to a halt directly in front of them. President Durrant, riding on the passenger side, hurried out of the van door. Out of breathe and apologetically, he was the first to greet the missionaries.

Sister Durrant's, riding in the second van arrives a few minutes later. She is visibly irritated and her first words are, "Elder Flake you were way over the speed limit all the way here. If you don't start driving slower, I'll see to it that you don't drive anymore."

The president introduces Sister Durrant and the eight children to the missionaries. The third van pulls up behind. The two assistants and the senior Elders whisk the bags into the back of the vans. The airport policeman who is at some distance walks over to tell the party that they are parked illegally. The President hurries everyone into the three vans.

The Assistant who is driving the first van hits the gas just as an Airport Policeman comes running up waving a ticket. The other two drivers follow in quick order. The Assistant on the Passenger's side hands the angry cop A Pass Along Card as they motor past him.

The President breathes a sigh of relief before turning around and facing his new missionaries. With a warm and friendly grin on his face, he says, "Welcome, dear Elders and

Sisters. Welcome to Camelot! We love you ten all ready. I have been praying for you to come to help us in this great work.”

An hour later, back at the mission home the Assistants start filling out paperwork, It is then for the first time, they realize that they have transported eleven missionaries from the airport. They are a bit confused as they were only expecting to receive ten. They report this odd fact to President Durrant. He touches his chin and says, “ Really! Are you sure?”

“Yeah! There were two Sisters and seven Elders. We just counted them.”

“Well lets not worry about it now. There must be a mix up with the paters. Let’s not worry about it. We will sort things out over dinner.”

In the mission home, Sister Durrant directs the two Sisters to an upstairs bed room, the ten or eleven Elders downstairs to the dormitory. As they passed by the president he called each of the two sisters by name, and then the eight el Elders the same. H had memorized their name. But the eleventh Elder seemed to understand when the president just stood there silently. He then looked at this one’s his tag and read, “Elder Marcus Snedden.” He then smiled and said, “Welcome Elder Snedden.”

The Elder smiled but made no reply. As the two stood looking at each other, the President was struck by Elder Snedden’s distinguished appearance—his blonde tightly curling hair, his deep blue eyes, his strong chin, his perfect teeth, his warm smile all made him “movie star” handsome. His immaculately navy blue suit, which did not appear to come from Mr. Mack, was made to look even more missionaryish by his maroon tie. The President found himself wishing that this young man’s picture could be sent out with all mission calls. Then each one would know how they’re supposed to look. This mysterious Elder Snedden just looked like an angel-- I mean like a missionary. I ask him where he was from. He didn't reply.

Teddy te mission home cook, who looked like Aunt Jimima on a pancake box, had prepared turkey and dressing, cranberries and all the fixings. All twenty three of us sat around the big table. The children were excited to be with the new missionaries.

The President called the group to order and said, “I will call upon my favorite child to lead us in prayer. This child is our most intelligent child. He or she is our best looking family member.” By now all the children were saying, “I said the prayer last time.” Then he called on Warren.

All of the other children said in unison, “It did not sound like you were talking about him.” All the missionaries laughed and so did I. Warren prayed.

As we ate Elder Bryant spoke up, “You have all heard that Kentucky is part of the Bible Belt. I’m here to tell you that this place is the ‘belt buckle’ of the Bible Belt.” One smaller Elder from Mud Lake, Idaho seems to cower at such an announcement. Elder Bryant continued, “These people around these parts really know their Bible. But don’t worry, they know very little about the Book of Mormon.” We all laughed. After that there wasn't too much talk as we ate.

I noticed Elder Snedden had immaculate manners. I couldn't keep my eyes off of him. He never said anything, and did not laugh at Elder Bryant’s humor. He then stood and went into

the kitchen. Teddy was trying to unclog the sink. As he watched her efforts, he pulled the plunger from her hand and then placed his finger in the drain. Immediately the water made a real sucking sound as it rushed down the drain. Teddy looked at him and said, "Well I'll be. You got some kind of power in that finger!" He smiled with such warmth that Teddy nearly melted.

He then helped her bring out the desert to each guest. I could tell that Sister Durrant was in awe at such unsolicited behavior. When she was about to stand Elder Snedden hurried behind her and pulled her chair back as she stood. She seemed overcome with emotion at his graciousness.

After dinner Elder Snedden gestured for the other missionaries to assist him in clearing the table.

The next order of business was for me to interview the missionaries. I learned that the first one had been a former all-state football player and had a scholarship to BYU. He was quick to tell me these things. The second had been student body president of Ely, Nevada High School. He didn't tell me about this, but I have a way of learning about people. The third told me he had a girl friend to whom he was informally engaged. He asked how often he could write to her seeing as they were to someday be married. The fourth said he had five girlfriends at home. I hoped he was not from Short Creek. He said he had a deep desire to be assigned to the place where Elvis Presley was born. He wanted to have Elvis baptized as one of the dead. He was disappointed when he found Memphis was not in our mission.

The first Sister was an English teacher but wanted to serve a mission. The second was shy and I could learn very little about her. I knew it would not be easy for her to be bold. All in all, they looked like a wonderful group of missionaries.

I was a bit nervous when Elder Snedden walked in. I didn't know why, but he made me nervous. I felt he could look into my soul. I sensed that he knew I was struggling as a mission president. I don't know exactly what integrity looks like I felt it looked like him. I felt I knew what humility was, and I could tell he was deeply humble. I kind of know what love is, but I had never before felt such love from any person.

"How is Elder Snedden?" I asked as I shook his hand. He didn't reply. His handshake was firm. When I was ready to withdraw my hand he continued to shake my hand. Then sensing it was all right to do so he embraced me. I felt strength, physical strength, mental strength emotional strength, and most of all spiritual strength.

I took a seat on the side of the desk. I ask him where he was from and he produced a card upon which was written, Elder Marcus Snedden. Home town: Gloriousville. But there was no other address. I smiled. I told him how happy we were to have him in the mission. He closed his eyes and nodded his head to let me know he was glad to be there.

Elder Flake knocked on the door and said, "We need Elder Snedden to go tracting with us. We want to get these guys—I mean these greenies—I mean these young Elders and Sisters broke in today before they hit their beds."

Elder Snedden with great enthusiasm hurried out the door. I've never been as mystified as to just what was going on and who he was. I picked up the phone and dialed my contact, Ned Winder, in the missionary department in Salt Lake City. In addition to his work at Church Headquarters, Ned and his family owned a dairy, a bakery and a cemetery south of the city. When he knew it was who was that calling, he said, "Drink our milk and eat our bread and let us

bury you when you are dead.” After a hearty laugh, I asked him to check the records and see if there was any Elder Snedden on the list of those who came to our mission that day?”

“Elder who?” He asked.

“Snedden.”

As he searched on his computer he said. “Snow. Let’s see. No there is no Snedden. How do you spell it?”

“‘S N E D D E N.’ He says he is from Gloriousville.”

“That is what I thought. Nobody even near that name. In your mission or any other mission. And I’ve never heard of Gloriousvill. Sounds like it would be up by Paradise or Providence or Eden up in Cache Valley. Talk to him and find out more about him and call me tomorrow. And remember, ‘Drink our milk and eat our bread and let us bury you when you are dead.’”

“But Ned. That is part of the problem he can’t talk.”

“Can’t talk!” President are you all right? Take your temperature, just don’t make sense.” With that the phone went dead. Ned Winder had hung up.

The next morning Brother Winder called me back. He asked me, “Did you know the Jazz lost last night. Do you want me to send you the remainder of my season tickets?”

Before I could respond he asked, “Were you dreaming last night when you called me? Did Elder Snedden fly away last night? If he is still there, you have an imposter on your hands. Buy him a bus ticket to Gloriousville, and get back to work.” He hung up again.

At breakfast the next morning Elder Snedden was in the kitchen helping Sister Durrant make oat meal. I was not sure if I was happy or disappointed to see he was still there. All the other Missionaries still seemed half asleep, but not Elder Snedden. He was rubbing his hands together with enthusiasm. He was ready to go.

That morning before leaving home, I had polished my shoes a little brighter. And I had put on a darker tie. I would act a bit more sober and tone down my sense of humor. I would be more demanding.

The next morning the eleven new arrivals and the President and his staff were at the mission office. There they met the Sister and ten Elders who would be paired off with each of the new ones and would train them in the ways of a missionary. After two hours of instruction, the ten trainers and their ten trainees were off to their assignments in various cities in Kentucky.

Soon only Elder Snedden remained. No trainer had been prepared to receive him as no one knew he was coming. The president invited him to return with him to the mission home until we it could be determine where he would be assigned.

On the drive home, it came into the president’s mind that Elder Snedden should labor with two of the best Elders in Stinsonville. These two Elders were called and late that afternoon. Because these two missionaries had a long drive back to their area, it was felt best that they spend the night and then go on their way home in the morning.

My oldest son Matt had not gone to the airport. He was supposed to but he refused. When we came home, I saw him sitting alone reading the Courier-Journal newspaper. I knew that I would need to spend some time with him, but not until after dinner. Elder Snedden came

into the room. He went directly to where Matt was sitting and sat beside him. Matt continued to read. Elder Snedden then arose and stood directly in front of Matt. Matt still did not look up. Then the Elder reached down and pulled at the paper until he had removed it from Matt's hand. Matt was irritated by what had happened, and for the first time looked, with a bit of anger, at the intruding missionary.

The Elder then folded the paper neatly and placed it on a nearby table. Matt still did not know what was going on. The Elder then reached down and took Matt's right hand in his. The look of anger seemed to disappear from Matt's expression. Now a look of sadness filled the fifteen year olds' eyes. Matt was tall, but now nearly as much as Elder Snedden.

Elder Snedden then moved back and the two looked at each other. Matt then smiled. Elder Snedden smiled and bowed to Matt.

The Elder then picked up the news paper and turned to the page Matt had been reading. He beckoned Matt to be seated. He then handed the paper to Matt and walked over to the stairs and departed to the dormitory.

Matt just sat there as though he was in a daze. Then he arose and came over to where I stood in somewhat of a daze myself. He asked me, "Who is this guy?"

That night Sister Durrant asked "Who is this Elder Snedden?"

"I don't know. Salt Lake doesn't know. He was not on their list of those to come here. The other missionaries who came said he was not with them in the MTC. And he was not on the airplane. He just showed up at the airport. One of them said, "We were all standing there wondering what to do. He raised his arm and pointed to where we saw you coming." I then told Sister Durrant, "So I don't know if he is a fake, or an actor, or who knows? Maybe he is an angel."

Sister Durrant smiled and reached out and put her hand on his shoulder and said, "There is only one angel around here, and it is you."

The next morning Elder Snedden and his two companions were gathered to depart. Elder Snedden placed his bags in the trunk and got into the back seat. As usual he was ready to go. The president took the other two Elders aside and said, "I know this will be a bit tough on you. I've never heard him say a word. I know he's a special Elder. So have patience. My prayers are with you. Keep in touch."

Just then the President was called to the telephone. It was Ned Winder who said, "Well president if you still got, what is his name? Elder Harvey the Rabbit, or Eldon the Phantom Fortie or what's his name, Elder Snedden, send him to the Jazz front office. They need some new players." Then he added, "According to all our research, there's no such Elder. So if he's not just a figment of your imagination, you better send him back to wherever he came from. We can't have a missionary out there representing the Church when we don't even know who he is."

The president looked out the window and the Elders were driving off. I didn't try to stop them.

Stinsonville.

The two other missionaries were quite amused by Elder Snedden for their first two days with him. One said in a letter home:

Dear Folks,

I'm now in a threesome. Elder Snedden is with us. He can't talk, but he is a good missionary.

We went tracting and he got in every door without saying a word. He seems to smile with the spirit of the Lord. When we teach, he just sits there on the front edge of his chair with his head pointing right at the people. He nods his agreement to everything we say, and the people agree with everything we say.

At study class in the morning he reads along with us, but never reads out loud. He seems to have the entire Book of Mormon committed to memory.

He cleaned up the fridge and does all the cooking. Man! Can he ever cook!

I'm doing fine. I've got to go Elder Snedden is waiting at the door ready to go knock on doors. Love,

Elder Clark.

But two days later things were changing. Elder Davis phoned and said.

"President Durrant, I hate to bother you, but we've got a problem up here in Stinsonville."

"What is it?"

"Well, Elder Snedden is kind of getting on our nerves."

"Why?"

"He thinks he is the boss. He took my girl friends picture down, and threw it in the waste basket. I was about to punch him out. But he does things like that all the time. He gets up a half hour early and turns on all the lights."

"When we go to teach, he won't say anything. It drives me crazy. "

"Does he bother the people you are teaching? I mean because he never talks?"

"I'm sure it does. When he is around they never say "no" to anything we ask them to do. One guy had told us never to come back. But we did and when he saw Elder Snedden, he invited us in. So we do all right in our work. It is just that being around him is more than I can take. Elder Clark is the same way I am. I mean, I like him President, but he just makes me think I can't really measure up."

"Well give it a few more days. I know what you are saying. Just hang in there. Transfers are coming in a week and we will see then. He has got to speak someday. Maybe tomorrow!"

Two days later at ten at night the phone rang again.

"President Durrant. I hate to tell you this but we lost Elder Snedden.

"What do you mean you lost him?"

"We took a bus out to Sydney to see a referral out there. When the bus came, we got on and we looked and he hadn't got on. So we jumped out and went back, and he was just standing there like nothing had happened. We saw a lady across the street walking with a limp. He was staring at her and we could tell he was praying. Then she walked off and was not limping at all.

I was so mad I really got after him. I called him some bad names. I shouldn't have, but I did. We had to walk seven miles home. We didn't say a word all the way home, and of course he didn't either.

When we were nearly home, he took off toward the center of town. We should not have done it, but we just let him go.

President we have looked all over the place. He's gone. I think he may have left the mission. We talked to somebody at the bus station who said a missionary got on a bus headed for St Lewis. President we really tried. I know you're disappointed in us."

Just before I hung up they said, "And one more thing. We found this little drawing on our table."

"What was it?"

"It's is real little. But man! Is it ever good? It's a picture of Wilford Woodruff, standing there alone and preaching to bunch of people near a court house like the ones in Kentucky."

"Bring it with you when you come to the next zone conference. I want to see it."

After the President hung up, H knew he should call his home, his bishop, his stake president. But who? He could ask the operator to connect me with "Gloriousville." But good luck with that!

Somehow although the president was worried, I felt at peace! H knew that all was well. Elder Snedden, whoever he was, would be all right.

Meanwhile back at the mission home.

The President did not report Elder Snedden's sudden disappearance to the leaders in Salt Lake City. After all they did not even know he existed. Even Ned Winder would not want to know anything more.

As the days passed the president hoped that there would be some word of Elder Snedden. But there was nothing. He wondered what he could do. Should he contact the police? Or was all this just some kind of a joke?

Marilyn had saved me some dinner but I did not feel hungry. She with great excitement's announced, "A fruit vendor came by today. I bought a bushel of apples from him. After he left I found this little drawing on top of the apples."

It looks like a picture of Matt smiling."

I interrupted and asked, "Smiling! Are you sure it is Matt?"

She continued, "He is standing before a group of students behind him is a sign saying, 'Seneca high school Student Council.'"

"Where is it? What else did the man say?"

"Nothing. I gave the picture to Matt. He took it to his room."

The president hurried and entered bathroom Matt was sitting on his bed looking at the picture. He held it out for his father to see. It was beautiful. He asked, "What do you think it means?"

The president replied I don't know. What do you think it means?"

"I don't know. But I feel it is really important."

Some how it came into the President's mind that Elder Snedden was still alive. He did not know why he felt that but he just did. This drawing had the same look about it as the one of the swing.

It had been two weeks from the time of the delivery of the first picture to the delivery of the second one. Maybe the fruit vendor came every two weeks. Marilyn spent the whole day waiting out front for the appearance of the old truck. Suddenly it came around the corner when the driver saw her he turned back onto the main road and drove away. She ran to get his license number but was unable to do so. All she could see was a sign on the back which said, "Jonah Fruit's."

As time passed The president could tell that the drawings were done on a high quality drawing paper. On a whim he visited the largest art store in Louisville. He showed the clerk the two drawings. She was amazed at the quality of the work. Her words were, "Are you selling these?"

"No I just wondered if you know any artist who draws this way?"

"No I wished I did. I, myself, am an artist, but I, nor no one else I know, could paint this well and so tiny. These are masterpieces."

"Have you seen anyone in here buying this kind of watercolor paper?"

"You know someone was in here. He bought whole package of those small pieces of watercolor paper, but I don't think that man painted these. He said he was a fruit vendor from out town; and he wanted to take these back to a friend there."

The president felt he shouldn't have done it. He had better things to do. But he went to the police department. One of the bishops in the stake was a police detective there. The president was shown to his office. He told him the story of the amazing paintings, and showed them to him. He replied, "Who did you say painted these?"

"That's what I want to know. These have been mysteriously given to me and my family. I'm here to ask you to find out who it is that painted them. And who it is that's giving them to us." The president told him the story of the fruit vendor. He said we needed to go to the licensing department of the city. He went with me. We inquired about fruit vendors.

The clerk told us that licenses were needed, but that no there were no fruit vendors in Louisville. And if there are some here, they are illegal and coming from out of town. The detective, the Bishop, could see that the president was distressed. He told the president that he would put every policeman on the alert. If they saw this fruit vendor delivering Jonah Fruit's, they were to arrest him and call the president.

But weeks went by and there was no arrest, nor any phone call.

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Mean while back to Elder Snedden

It was some five months later when the following story was told to President Durrant by Matilda Burnham. Until he heard this story, President Durrant had no information about the whereabouts or the experiences of Elder Snedden.

Matilda was the first person who Elden Snedden talked to after he left the two elders in Stinsonville and disappeared in the Kentucky night. These are Matilda's own words:

I think Elder Snedden came to our little town, Ninevah, by bus. I believe he was really headed to St Lewis. He likely caught the bus in Stinsonville. Just north of there the bus turns East onto a country road and heads some twenty miles to our town. You see, some sixty years ago the bus company agreed to come to Nineveh because of some kind of federal program. And though the years they have tried to get out of the deal they made. But they are legally bound to keep coming over to our town.

After nearly an hour on the winding, narrow road, I'm sure Elder Snedden was tired of being on the bus. So when it got here he got off and would not get back on. Of course we believe he got off because the Lord told him to get off. The Lord knew we needed Elder Snedden and all he had to teach us. I'll get to that later.

Maybe before I go any further with this story, let me introduce myself. My name is Matilda Burnham. I'm a single mother and have four children. My mother, Amanda, also lives with us. As you can see I'm black. About twenty percent of the folks in Nineveh are black like me.

I need to tell you a little bit about our little town before se go on. "Well let's see? What can I say about Nineveh? We are just a small Kentucky town that was established more than two hundred years ago. It was once the largest settlement in that area. So it became the county seat. Later other larger towns within ten miles of Nineveh grew but we did not. But we remained the county seat.

Anyway, last September, in the late afternoon I finished my shift as a checker at the Bowser grocery Store. I was just leaving the store with my two bags of groceries when I saw the bus pull in. I saw this tall blond fellow get off. He seemed bewildered as he looked around. I don't think he had ever seen a town this small. The driver called for him to get back on the bus, but he just walked away.

He came toward me. He had on the finest dark suit I had ever seen in our town. His shoes were like they glowed. As he came closer I felt a feeling of his goodness. You know how some folds radiate goodness. He did not speak, but just reached out and took from me the two bags of groceries. After standing still for a brief time I sensed that he wanted me to lead the way to where ever I was going.

We walked the four blocks to my house without saying a word to each other. We walked up the dirt path that led to the porch. He made no attempt to leave. I opened the door and entered, and he followed me. I was not fearful of his entry for I felt totally safe in his presence. He placed the groceries on the kitchen table

I walked back to the front door and opened it to let him out. He did not leave. Instead he made himself right at home by taking a seat on the couch. Mary, my eight-year-old daughter came in to the house from the backyard. She was startled to see him and asked, "Who is he?"

I replied, "I really don't know." Then I turn to the stranger and asked, "Mary asked a good question. Who are you?"

He did not respond, but pointed to a crayon painting on the wall that Mary had done. He stood and went close to the painting. He pointed at it, and then at Mary. He nodded his approval. He saw some crayons and paper on our little table. He began to paint a painting. In just a matter of minutes he had produced a small painting of our house. Only it did not look dilapidated and unpainted. It made our house look like the cutest little cottage you have ever seen. I still have that painting. He had not only won my admiration, but also Mary's. She sat by him and he gestured for her to produce a painting. She did and it was better than she had ever done before.

I asked him if he would like to stay for dinner. I expected him to say something like, "I sure would ma'am." But he merely smiled and nodded his agreement.

Just then my mother woke up from her nap and walked into the room. She is the kind of person who loves everybody. Even she was shocked to see a stranger sitting there like he was a long lost cousin. But when Elder Snedden saw her he went right to her and shook her hand. She announced, "I'm Amanda, Who the heck of you?"

Of course, Elder Snedden didn't reply. Except for that famous smile of his. That smile is better than all the words in the world. I could tell that mother liked him right off. Course, everybody likes Elder Snedden. And Elder Snedden liked her. Course everybody likes my mom.

Mom began to prepare dinner. Elder Snedden came into the kitchen and began to peel potatoes. Mom was amazed that he peeled the whole potato in such a way the whole peeling was in one piece. A few minutes later my three sons, Seth age 12, James age 11 and John age 10, all came home from playing with their friends. Each of the three of them came into the kitchen and asked, "Who's he?"

Elder Snedden, the stranger, was still wearing his suit coat. He replied by pulling a card from his shirt pocket. Seth read the name aloud, "Elder Marcus Snedden." It was the first time that I had ever heard his name.

My husband, of course, did not come home. He had been killed three years ago in a hunting accident. When we all came to the table and prepared to eat, Elder Snedden bowed his head and I could sense that he was offering a silent prayer. We were not in the habit of offering thanks for our food so we just sat silently until he lifted his eyes.

We ate in silence. The food was delicious. My mother was the best cook in Nineveh. She loved good food. And that showed as she was an extremely large lady. When we finished, Elder Snedden stood up and began clearing the table. Mary, who seemed greatly impressed by Elder Snedden also stood up and began to help him. Soon the two of them were in the kitchen washing the dishes.

By now the sun had gone down and it was beginning to get dark. I asked Elder Snedden, "Where are you going to stay tonight?" He replied by saying nothing. I could tell he had no idea where he would spend the night. I led him to a small workshop that my husband had built in our backyard, I told him it had a heater and he could stay there. He seemed grateful. I went

back into the house and brought him some blankets and a small mattress and pillow. Tears filled his eyes as he took my two hands in his and thanked me silently.

The next day was Saturday. Thus the children did not go to school. When I had awakened that morning I could smell food cooking. I went into the kitchen where I knew I would find mother. But there was Elder Snedden cooking pancakes. Mother was sitting in the corner watching him admiringly. Soon the family was all gathered and we had breakfast together. James eating vigorously said, "Grandma these are the best pancakes you have ever made," Grandma replied, "Yes I'm, getting better." And then this jolly lady nearly fell off her chair with her robust laughter.

That morning, Elder Snedden went outside, found a rake and began cleaning up the yard which was well littered with papers, cans and all sorts of stuff. Soon the three boys joined in the clean up. They seemed to gravitate toward this remarkable stranger.

Elder Snedden, while raking under the wooden porch found a half inflated basketball. He called Seth over and passed the ball to him. Seth didn't expect the pass and dropped the ball. Elder Snedden smiled, stooped over, and picked up the ball. Again he passed the ball to Seth. Seth dropped it. Elder Snedden nodded his head up and down. He could tell that this young man was not a gifted athlete.

He then put his hand on the young man's shoulder and pointed at a service station just through the block. He picked up the ball and headed toward the station. He beckoned for Seth to follow him. At the service station they inflated the ball

Elder Snedden dribbled the ball behind his back and then between his legs. Then he spun the basketball on his finger. Seth was amazed and smiled broadly. Elder Snedden handed the ball to Seth and gestured, "Go ahead show me what you can do the ball." Seth tried to dribble, but the ball bounced away. Elder Snedden doubled over with laughter. Together they walked to get the ball. On the way home Elder Snedden dribbled the ball part of the way. He then handed it to Seth who dribbled it successfully until he reached home.

The grounds of the elementary school were just two blocks the other direction. Elder Snedden beckoned for the boy to follow him and they went there. There were two basketball standards. Elder Snedden took the ball and after dribbling like a Harlem Globetrotter, backed way off and shot the ball dead center. Seth was amazed. Elder Snedden retrieved the ball and handed it to the young man. He shot and missed. Elder Snedden handed the ball to him again. Again his shot missed. Elder Snedden showed him how to hold the ball in his hands and to bend his knees when he shot. This time he missed, but it came really close. Just as Elder Snedden supposed, this boy had skill, he just had never developed.

Seth was having a good time. Together the two played for the next hour.

They returned home to where Amanda had prepared sandwiches. Elder Snedden Seth spun the ball on his finger and then handed it to Seth. He tried, but no success.

Matilda reached out and grabbed the ball. Then to the amazement of all she spun the ball on her finger. She announces she learned to do that when she played for Murray State. As the family ate the sandwiches there was great joy in the home.

The next day was Sunday. Elder Snedden came in from his shed and seemed surprised to see that none of the children appeared to be getting ready for church. It was not the habit of

Matilda and her family to go to church. Grandmother Amanda was an avid churchgoer. So she and the Elder walked back to the center of town and one block north to the little white church.

Not more than a dozen folks came to church. Everyone greeted Amanda. She was obviously the most popular member of the little church. She introduced her new friend by saying, "This is Elder Snedden. He has come to live with us. He stays in the shed behind the house. Our family really likes him. He wanted to come to church and so here he is." People swarmed around Elder Snedden. And with his graciousness they were all impressed. But some wondered why he didn't say anything.

The people sang but not with much fervor. Elder Snedden followed all of the words in the hymnal and almost sang the songs through his silence.

A minister stood up and preached. He seemed to have more questions than answers. There was not much inspiration or information in the sermon.

On the way home Seth gestured by holding his hands out to the side of his head in wonderment. Grandmother sensed that he wanted to know why the congregation was so small and why the minister was so unconvinced. Amanda led him two blocks north to a cemetery. There she took him to twenty one graves. All had died on the same date: April 20, 1984. There was the grave of a four year old boy. Two teen age girls. Three people named Wilson who all seemed to be from the same family and many more.

She then led the Elder to a bench under an oak tree and began to speak, "On that horrible Sunday 23 years ago a Tornado swept through our little town. Many of us were in church. The church was totally destroyed. Fifteen folks were killed right then and there. Eight more died along that street. We buried the dead. We rebuilt the church and the town. But we were never again able to build the faith the people had once had. Our town became a Godless town. Oh! a few of us kept the faith, but most of the people have never come back to the church.

Our minister was among the dead. A man from the community college moved into town. He was a lay preacher. But we could not understand if he believed in God or not. I think he said he believed man was the measure of things and not god. He taught us to do good and to make the world a better place. But he did not say much about God or church.

As Amanda and Elder Snedden walked home they passed by the Bowser grocery store which was open on Sunday because Bob Bowser could see no reason to close. Amanda led Elder Snedden to the back of the store. They found Bob Bowser. Bob, very gracious man shook Elder Snedden's hand. Elder Snedden looked deep into Bob's eyes.. The two seem to have a certain understanding even though they had just met.

Amanda told Elder Snedden that Bob had been an All-American at Kentucky Western. Bob seemed embarrassed and stood on one foot and then the other. He had gained a bit of weight since his basketball playing days and had a bit of a protruding stomach. Elder Snedden acted like he was dribbling without a ball. Then he acted as though he was spinning a ball on his finger. Bob could understand what he was saying without talking. Both men knew that they each had a new friend.

The Grandmother and the Elder left the store and returned home. Matilda had cooked a delicious dinner and life seemed better than it ever been at the Burnham household.

Monday morning, Elder Snedden walked up to the grocery store where Matilda was working the day shift. Bob Bowser greeted them at the door and called Elder Snedden by name. Elder Snedden could tell that Bob Bowser was a very good man. In a prominent place in the store there was an announcement on a piece of paper that it was time for tryouts for this year's Little League basketball team. Elder Snedden pointed at it and pointed at Bob.

The Elder read the time of the tryout. And when that time came he was there with Seth, signed him up for the team, and paid the \$20.

At the practice the elder watched practice and could tell that Billy Bob Burnham was destined to be an All-Star basketball player. He could dribble; he could run like a bolt of lightning. And he could jump out of the gym.

Seth seemed embarrassed to be there because his lack of know-how. Elder Snedden took him over in the corner and they threw the ball back and forth. The Elder jumped and touched a place on the wall. He invited Seth to do the same. He was amazed at Seth's jumping ability. They then practiced bounce passes. And then then dribbling, and then shooting short shots. Because he didn't have enough players Bob needed all the players he could get. He was glad to have Seth--even though it was obvious Seth had never played the game before.

As the two walked home, Elder Snedden reached out his hand, and put it on Seth's shoulder. Seth had never felt much fatherly love from anyone even while his father was alive, he was not much father.

That night in the shed Seth turned on the light bulb that dangled down from the ceiling. He then pulled from his meager belongings a small watercolor set and a small brush. In the dim light, he began to paint a small painting. The next day at breakfast he presented the painting to Seth. It was a mature basketball player. In the background were the words "Kentucky Western." And 'skying' high above the basket, ready to dunk the ball was a grown-up Seth. And on the back of the jersey you could barely read the words Seth Burnham. He presented the painting to Seth who was amazed at what he was seeing. Elder Snedden then pointed at the man playing ball and pointed at Seth indicating, "That's you."

In the next two months Seth's progress in basketball was amazing. Bob Bowser was elated. With Billy Bob Burnham and Seth Burnham, he would surely win the district title. Each night at practice Seth was there. He helped the other young men learn to be better. He was an excellent assistant coach. He never shouted at the referee. Bob Bowser and all the team loved him. Seth spent all of his spare time over at the school grounds shooting and dribbling. He was highly motivated and was getting better each day.

For the next weeks, Elder Snedden continued to live with Matilda and her mother and her four children. Elder Snedden painted his old shed. He found some lumber and purchased, it and begin to fix the place up. He even added another little room. Matilda didn't mind. She was fascinated by how handy Elder Snedden was. He put on shingles so that the place would not leak. Pretty soon it was quite a cottage. It looked like Elder Snedden was settled in; and nobody in the Burnham family minded that.

Just North of Nineveh, about 2 miles, Elder Snedden on one of his daily walks found an orchard. He could tell there were many varieties of fruit trees there. Across the fence, near the center of the trees, he could see a man pruning. He crossed the fence and went to where the man was. The man was just a little bit of a fellow. He had a black mustache and black curly hair.

He spoke with some kind of an accent. Elder Snedden reached out and shook his hand. The man quickly announced, "I Flip Flamingo. Who you?"

Elder Snedden smiled and remained silent. The two were instant friends.

Elder Snedden, seeing an extra pair of pruning shears began to help. It was obvious that the Elder had done some pruning before and had great expertise.

Elder Snedden walked up to the orchard each day to help. Soon the man kind of depended upon Elder Snedden, and offered to pay him. The Elder refused to take any pay.

Each day Elder Snedden would see the Flip in his rickety old truck come down the road past Matilda's to go on to the main road that led down toward Louisville. In the back of his truck he had produce that he would take to Louisville to sell. One day Elder Snedden stood out on the road thumbing because he wanted to go with Flip flamingo down to Louisville.

But when they got there he was greatly alarmed when he found that Flip's main area for sales was in that same area of the mission home. He quickly gestured to Flip, by using his hands, that they shouldn't go that way. Flip understood and turned the truck another direction.

Elder Snedden was pleased to know that he now had a way of communicating with president Durrant. But he did not want President Durrant to know where he was. He knew he had much to do in Nineveh and if president Durrant knew where he was he would insist that Elder Snedden come back to the mission.

Each Sunday morning Eder Snedden went to church. As the meeting ended he stood at the door and smiled at each person and shook each one's hand. He became extremely popular with the congregation. And the Minister, who had great insights into human character. The minister had great regards for Elder Snedden. Many of the townspeople were impressed that someone would have the first name, "Elder." Elder Snedden had some flyers printed and took them door to door to invite the people to comet church. He was the official greeter at the door of the church. The congregation began to grow.

The next day Commissioner Cedric Burnham walked past Matilda's house with his German shepherd dog. He saw Elder Snedden sitting on the front porch with the children. He came closer and then stood and said, "I don't know who you are. But I want you to know you are not welcome in this town. And furthermore I don't want you around my grandchildren. I have been told that you are living here I assure you if that continues on I will have Officer Harley arrest you. Is that clear?"

The dog pulled at his tightly held leash. Straining to break loose and put a loud "amen" to all that his master had told Elder Snedden.

Elder Snedden stood, walked closer to the Commissioner and smiled. He then walked right toward the vicious dog. Commissioner Burnham shouted, "You idiot. Don't get any closer to that dog are he will take your arm off. Elder Snedden continued toward the huge animal. Suddenly the big dog ceased snarling and began to whimper. Elder Snedden came close to the dog, bent down and rubbed the docile hound's ears and head.

He then turned toward the Commissioner and walked forward with his hand extended in a friendly gesture. The flustered Commissioner quickly turned away and continued to walk. While continuing to shout, "My daughter in law, Matilda, does not own that house. I own that house. And if you are not off my property by tomorrow night, I'll have you thrown in jail."

As Sedric continued on his way the dog broke loose and came and sat on the porch next to Elder Snedden. The commissioner shouted at his dog to come back, but the dog did not budge. Later that night the Elder and the children took the dog to its home and tied it up there. The dog whined to come with them. The next morning the dog was at the front door of Matilda's house and paid little heed to her shouts, "Go home." After that the dog would not leave the elder's side and much to the consternation of the commissioner would not have anything to do with his former master. Even when Officer Harley came and took the dog home the big beast was back at the elder's side in 15 minutes.

When the children went to school Elder Snedden walked with them. And so did the dog. After school was well started Elder Snedden entered the school building and took a seat at the back of the classroom. Mrs. Fortner, the school principal, seeing the Elder enter the classroom, quickly came in to see what was going on. She being a Baptist had seen Seth in church. She knew he was staying with the Burnham family. She was a Matilda's best friend. She too was a black lady.

The teacher, Mrs. Tidwell, wife of the head man at the sewing factory, invited the children to begin reading from their books. Elder Snedden observed that all were reading except one 10-year-old boy. The elder beckoned the boy back to an empty chair by his side. He then opened the book and pointed at the words but the boy did not read. The teacher came back and spoke softly to Elder Snedden and said, "Johnny can't read." The Elder nodded that he understood.

As the boy watched, the elder moved his finger across the words. Because he could not speak; he thought of each syllable of each word and somehow was able to transfer that thought into Johnny's mind. After doing this for two lines, the boy spoke then spoke. Slowly, at first, "Th th th t the ho ho hor horse wa was a be aut y. And yo ung Phi lip dre amed that some day he would have a horse." The boy was reading. Soon not a single word was beyond his ability. Mrs. Tidwell was amazed.

Seth then came to the front of the room where the teacher kept a box full of art supplies. Fortunately, Mrs. Tidwell's hobby was watercolor painting. She often stayed after school and painted. She had a large easel, and a master size piece of watercolor paper that was attached to a large water color board. Elder Snedden reached in his wallet and gave her a \$20 bill to pay for the supplies.

He then began to draw. The teacher was enthralled at what was happening and told all the students to gather around and watch. Soon the image of Jesus Christ appeared on the paper. I was as though he was in reality right there.

In not more than one half hour Elder Snedden had painted the most glorious painting in all of the history of Nineveh. When he was finished he noted that Mrs. Tidwell had tears in her eyes. The children all applauded.

The students asked, "What is it a picture of? Elder Snedden." Elder Snedden with perfect penmanship then wrote in the foreground the words, "The future of Nineveh."

Sister Tidwell had a framing business. And that night she framed the picture. Soon it was on display in the front window of the Bowser grocery store. Rumors of the painting swept through all of Nineveh in a matter of hours. Soon many people were coming downtown to see the sacred painting.

Elder Snedden, though he could not talk, soon becoming a legend in Nineveh

That Sunday at church, Reverend Fortner stood at the pulpit reached down and held, for all to see the painting Elder Snedden had painted. He then read a Scripture from James one and five which said, "if any man like wisdom let him ask of God who giveth to all men liberally and upbradedth not. And it shall be given him."

The Reverend then said, "Yesterday, when I went to the Bowser's grocery store I saw this painting. I could not get it off my mind. That night I went to the Lord in prayer. As you know, I came to town as what the world calls a Humanist. I was not sure there was a God or a Christ.. But I was unsettled. I know that the way we can find the truth is to ask God. As I prayed I came to know that there is a God and he has a son, Jesus Christ. I know that what we see in this painting is Jesus Christ. I feel His presence here with us. I feel that this painting by Elder Snedden is a message to all of this that we must seek the truth through prayer. We must come unto Christ."

That week as the parishioners departed from the chapel Elder Snedden stood and shook hands with each departing friend. He knew in his heart that soon the Lord would pour out his Spirit upon these dear people.

The next day Elder Snedden walked 2 miles to the sewing factory. He entered the door and was met by Jarvis Tidwell the owner and manager of the factory. Jarvis was a good man, a man of integrity. But even before the tragic tornado he had lost his faith. He greeted Elder Snedden warmly. Elder Snedden beckoned that he would like to see the people at work. The two of them went back where 30 or so women were working at sewing machines making clothing for little children. Several men were moving large boxes and doing other work. Altogether the factory employed more than 50 people and was the biggest employer in Nineveh.

Just then it was break time and all of the women left their machines to go outside and get a breath of fresh air.

While the women were gone Jarvis and the Elder talked. Jarvis said, "They are a great group of workers. We make some wonderful children's clothing. But we are falling behind time. Styles are changing. We are selling less and less and so we're sewing less and less. I fear that because of the way things are going within the next month we will have to close down."

Elder Snedden was greatly saddened, for he knew that many people in Nineveh needed the money they earned in the sewing factory. That night in his little room, he took his pencil and paint in hand and began to work. He worked clear through the night. He used every piece of watercolor paper he had. He drew some 20 children dressed in some of the most amazing children's clothing that had ever been seen.

Then before sunrise he went to the sewing factory and left an envelope filled with these pictures on the front step. He addressed the package to Jarvis Tidwell. When Jarvis came to work, he went to his office and opened the envelope. He couldn't believe what he was beholding. He knew that if he could make these clothes, his business would be saved. These clothes were way out in front of any of the fashions even the big guys in New York were making.

All Jarvis needed to see was a picture and his ability would enable him to make patterns. Within a week the new dresses and other clothing items were in production. A week later Jarvis

had traveled to Louisville and Lexington and had received enough orders to keep the factory open well into the future.

Jarvis wondered where this gift from heaven had come from. He inquired of his wife. She said, "There's nobody in this town that could produce such a glorious ideas with such beauty in each of these little watercolors. Or is there?"

She then added, "Could it be..."

Jarvis smiled as he said, "it must have been."

By now, Elder Snedden now knew the names of every man woman and child in Nineveh. People liked to see him at church or at the Bowser store so that they could write the names of each of them.

Jeff Call and his wife had six young boys. The Calls were not sure what church they should attend to raise these boys. When they walked into the Bowser store, Elder Snedden was just leaving. He stopped and stood in the middle of the boys and wrote on a paper, starting with the oldest: Ryan, Braden, Landon, Austin, Carson, and Jansen." Jeff and his wife were amazed. They asked the Elder if he would give them the names that he had so beautifully written on the paper. He smiled and handed it to them. They asked him what time church started in the church that he attended. He held up his ten fingers and they understood and said, "We will see you there."

On the way out of the store they looked at the painting Jeff said to his wife Cheron, "I know that that painting depicts the kind of religion we want for ourselves and for our children."

The next week the calls were at the church. They saw the new sign that said, The Church of Jesus Christ. They could see Elder Snedden sitting near the back and Jeff could not keep his eyes off from Elder Snedden. Somehow he knew Elder Snedden had the keys to the future he sought for his family. The calls were not alone in the feelings that were stirring in the hearts of all the folks in Nineveh.

Elder Snedden had noticed that Louise, the 15-year-old daughter of coach Bowser, was going astray. He could see in her face the negative feelings she had toward her family and the church. She came to church, but the Elder could see she was forced to do so. He always greeted her, but she refused to look at him.

Elder Snedden was told by others, that at high school over in Carwin she was ashamed to admit that she was from such a hick town as Nineveh. She dreamed of the day when she could leave home and move to Louisville and go into show business. It was obvious that she was beautiful enough to do that. She now dressed in a way that made her mother upset. The two of them had a very difficult time communicating.

Coach Bowser, the happy-go-lucky fellow, wished his daughter would not be so full of rebellion, but he sort of took her attitude in stride and said to his wife, "Relax honey! Kids will be kids. Stay off of from her back and she will get over all this stuff."

Elder Snedden worried about the welfare of all of his friends in Nineveh. But his main concern was for Louise. He didn't like to admit it to himself, but he sometimes thought of her in a romantic way. He dreamed of someday being married and this girl, or someone exactly like her, would be a wonderful partner.

He never mentioned this to Matilda. Of course he never mentioned anything to anybody. But in the deepest part of his heart, he had the beginnings of a different kind of love for Louise.

But because he was who he was, he knew he had to push such ideas aside.

He sensed, with every person he met, how he could reach out to them with the feelings of his heart he could, without words, cause them to want to do better and be better – to fulfill their great destiny. But with Louise he just did not know what to do.

Finally for himself more than for her he did a watercolor painting that came from deep within his heart. He painted a painting of the large building with six spires reaching toward heaven. Atop one of the spires he painted something very special. It was almost a painting of him.

Down at ground level, near a large door at the top of a stairway, he painted a beautiful girl. He painted Louise. He painted her in the most beautiful white dress that could ever be imagined. He then began to draw himself standing close to her. Then he knew he had to erase that part of the painting from the painting and from his heart. For he knew that that was not the reason for his being in Nineveh.

The next Sunday he brought the painting to church. After everyone had departed the church grounds he noticed Louise walking slowly, her head hanging down, her shoulders slumped, toward the family car. He hurried to her side. She looked over and if looks could kill, Elder Snedden knew that he would be dead.

He moved directly in front of her so she had to quit walking. He then, for the first time, was able to win her gaze. As the two stood face-to-face looking into each other's eyes, Elder Snedden reached into his pocket, and pulled out the painting.

She reached out and received it. Then she hurried away. When her parents had joined her in the car. Elder Snedden walked back the other direction. But he felt impressed to look back. He caught a glimpse of Louise looking back at him.

The next week at church, Elder Snedden noticed that Louise had on a different dress, a different style. He noticed that she was singing. She was very responsive to the Reverend's appeal to set high goals and to aspire to be the very best that we can be. The reverend then announced that he felt that in each of us there is an Angel that needs to come forth, and our task is to bring that angel to the forefront in all we do.

When Elder Snedden heard the word Angel his heart pounded. He noticed that Louise looked very much like the Angels he had seen before.

When church ended and the dear people were departing, Elder Snedden noticed that Louise was tarrying. After he had greeted everyone he waited. Soon Louise came out the door. She walked toward him, she stared at him, and finally she smiled at him. Then she said, "That building! Where is that? I love that. Thanks for making me look so beautiful. But why am I standing there alone in that wedding dress. Why isn't someone else standing at my side?"

Elder Snedden did not reply. Elder Snedden never replied. And he was glad that on this occasion he was glad to be silent.

Louise turned and walked away. Her shoulders were back, her head held high, and she walked with the grace of an Angel.

For just a brief moment Elder Snedden was tempted to retrieve the painting and complete it. But he turned and walked the other way.

Flip Flamingo looked forward to the time when Elder Snedden would come and help him with his orchard and his produce business. He felt Elder Snedden was the only one in Nineveh who really welcomed him. He had come to this country from Italy and did not speak good English. He purchased the orchard several years earlier and moved to the little house on the property. He was suspicious of all the Ninevehites. But he knew without question that Elder Snedden cared for him deeply.

On this day when Elder Snedden walked down the dirt road toward the orchard he noticed Flip's truck parked alongside the road. When he got to Flip's house and inquired about the truck, the discouraged orchard man said sadly, "The old truck has about had it. It broke down there and I had to walk on home."

Elder Snedden went to a nearby shed where he knew his friend kept his tools. He took the toolbox and went back to the truck and for the next three days he worked on the old truck. He was able to get new spark plugs and other things from the local service station. But more than that Elder Snedden just knew how to fix old trucks. Soon the truck was as good as new.

Each time Flip was scheduled to go to Louisville, Elder Snedden would paint a picture to be dropped off at the mission office. He wrote a note to Flip which said, "Take this to the 16 Tartan Way in Louisville. But don't let the people there know who you are, or where you come from, or I will have to leave this place."

Flip gladly delivered these paintings, but he never allowed himself to be identified. He even picked up the whole supply of watercolor paper for his dear friend Elder Snedden.

The next Sunday Flip Flamingo was at church. He found that he had far more friends than just Elder Snedden.

Each week Louise was changing. She entered a beauty contest over in Carwin. Elder Snedden learned of her plans and went to her home. Then feeling that he might make a fool of himself, he began walking around as if he were a female model. He stood straight and tall. He held his head high. He continually smiled. He walked one way, pivoted and walked another way. The family was in great laughter. He beckoned Louise to stand up and walk the way he walked. She did. She smiled like he smiled. She felt confident. She reached out and before the Elder had even noticed she was dancing with him. He did not want the dance to end. But he knew the rules and smilingly disengaged himself.

The next week Louise won the beauty contest.

Every week that passed Elder Snedden became closer to the Burnham family. They loved him as part of the family. Grandmother Amanda was particularly fond of him. She often referred to him as her Angel. Matilda pretty well shared this opinion. Her children had become so much happier with Elder Snedden nearby.

Seth was now a star basketball player. The talk of the town was how Seth Burnham and Billy Bob Burnham would lead Nineveh to its first junior basketball crown. Then a bit of tragedy struck. Cedric Burnham, County Commissioner, issued a statement to Bob Bowser that his grandson Billy Bob would no longer play on a team on which somebody as trashy as Seth Burnham played.

Coach Bowser could not believe what he was hearing. Both of these boys were Cedric's grandsons. Why the irate favoritism toward Billy Bob. But coach Bowser sort of knew the reason. It was well known in Nineveh that Cedric hated the idea that his son had married a black lady – Matilda. He hated Matilda from the very first. He regretted having to give his son a plot of land and a small house. When his son was killed he hoped Matilda would take the children and move to Louisville. But Matilda stayed and Cedric despised her and her mother and even his own grandchildren.

His hatred became more intense when he saw Elder Snedden living on the property and influencing his grandchildren. He had been greatly enraged when the Elder did not leave town as he had been ordered to do. The Commissioner from that time on was determined that Elder Snedden had to go. And because of his spite, he issued the ultimatum that his grandson – his real grandson Billy Bob – would not play on the team with Seth.

Coach Bowser had become quite a hothead in his playing days at Western Kentucky. It was his temper that probably kept him out of the NBA. In a moment of rage he shouted in the face of Commissioner Burnham, "I don't tell you how to run this county, and don't you try to tell me how to run my team. The only thing you're any good at is making everybody in this town as miserable as you are." With that Bob boozier walked away knowing that his time in Nineveh had just become very short.

This incident added to Commissioner Burnham's deep feelings that he had to destroy not only Elder Snedden but also Bob Bowser.

Finally Commissioner Burnham had all he could take he ordered officer Harley to arrest Elder Snedden on charges that Elder Snedden was squatting on his land and was also corrupting his grandchildren. Officer Harley hated to do what he was commanded. He brought Elder Snedden to the courthouse and to the office of Commissioner Burnham. There the Commissioner ordered Elder Snedden to either go to jail or to leave Nineveh forever. Elder Snedden smiled, reached out to shake the commissioner's hand. But there was no response other than hatred.

Elder Snedden reached in his pocket and pulled out a small painting and placed it gently on the commissioner's desk. After Elder Snedden had departed the Commissioner looked at the painting. The Commissioner was a harsh man but he had a bit of culture. He had traveled to Europe and had seen many of the famous art galleries across the world. He immediately recognized that this little painting was world-class. He wondered if he now held the very key to ridding Nineveh of Elder Snedden. Surely Elder Snedden had stolen this painting. Now all he had to do was prove that.

He knew that the local schoolteacher was an artist. She had studied art history at the University of Indiana. Two days later, at his beckon call Mrs. Tidwell was in his office. He asked her if she had ever seen such artwork for he feared it was a stolen painting. Mrs. Tidwell replied, "There is only one person in this town who could paint it that. It is someone we all loved and respected with all our hearts."

Commissioner Burnham could not wait to ask her who that would be so that he could go to that person and a report that Elder Snedden had stolen the painting from him." He was greatly disappointed when Mrs. Tidwell announced that the artist was, "Elder Snedden."

The disgruntled Commissioner would have to find other ways to indict the hated Elder. He could not help himself from looking several times a day at the painting. Then he recognized that the man in the painting was him and around his head was a very visible halo. In the background was a picture of Jesus Christ pointing at him. He wondered, "What does this mean?"

It was rumored in Nineveh that they were the perfect location for a Wal-Mart Store. Some officials came to investigate that possibility. They said Nineveh was sort of in the center of a whole group of small towns who could very well support a Wal-Mart.

Of course the officials went first to the office of the Commissioner. They explained to him their plans and asked what he considered a suitable plot of ground for their endeavor. The Commissioner told them he had just the right place

They drove out near Matilda's house. There surrounding her house was about 10 acres of unused ground. The officials were elated and said that this would be the perfect place for their store.

They then said, 'That little house will have to go.' The Commissioner rubbed his hands together and announced, "I own all of this land including that house. It can all be yours, but it is very valuable land and you will have to purchase it at a very high cost."

"Cost is no problem for us," they announced. It was decided to draw up the papers. It would be easy to evict Matilda and the children. The Commissioner said he would find them a place in Stinsonville. He rejoiced that the idea that they would soon be gone.

But the property belonged to Matilda and it was not as easy for the Commissioner to say than to do. He called the judge and told him to draw up the papers to have Matilda evicted. The judge surprisingly refused. Commissioner Burnham was incensed. He threatened to have the judge impeached. But the judge stood his ground.

Then the Commissioner devised a plan whereby he would condemn the land because of the deteriorated and distressed look of the entire property. He announced it was a disgrace to the city of Nineveh to have such a place in their city limits.

The city officials felt that the Commissioner was right. They still did not know if they really wanted to evict Matilda. She was much loved in the community. But the land was a disgrace and the home was the biggest slum in their fair city. It was decided that a city meeting would be held to make a final decision on condemning the Property.

Matilda was beside herself with sorrow and anger. She poured her heart out to Elder Snedden. The Elder then hurried to the grocery store. He talked to Bob Bowser and asked if Bob would take him in his pick up over to Carwin to the hardware store and lumberyard. Bob agreed. Late that afternoon they set out for Carwin.

Using his credit card Elder Snedden began to make purchases. He purchased, shutters, new shingles, a new front door, new windows, 20 gallons of white paint, 25 flat stones for a driveway, and a multitude of other wonderful things. The next Sunday Elder Snedden attended church. He had a video he had made from the home makeover television show. He gave it to the minister and the minister put it on thinking it was some kind religious show. The people watched it. And to them it was a religious show.

Elder Snedden then beckoned the congregation to follow him. They walked three blocks to Matilda's house. There he showed them all the things he had bought for the interior and

exterior of the house. He then gestured that they will fix up this house. The people understood what he was saying. The minister said "Rubin you're a plumber. Jake you are a painter. He said every night after work we will all come here. And they did, and the house became beautiful-- perhaps the most beautiful little house in all of Nineveh.

The Commissioner when he learned what had happened was beyond anger he was as they say livid. Of course, the town Council said they could not condemn such a beautiful home. And Matilda and her family were safe.

The minister Spoke in church that week. He announced, "As you all know Elder Snedden came to our community from we know not where. Adding to the mystery was the fact that he cannot speak and only rarely does he write notes. But I believe we all know he did not compare by accident. He came to our community because we needed him. It is my belief that he was sent here by God. In the time he has been here he is touched each of our lives. It is amazing how someone can teach so much by the way he is rather than by the way he speaks. We have come to know that Elder Snedden is much like an Angel.

We all know of the beautiful painting that is in the window at the Bowser grocery store. The man in that picture who saw God must surely be a prophet. For many centuries we have not had a prophet on the earth. I have always thought this to be strange. For why would God have prophets in the olden days and not now? Surely we need to profit now more than ever. It is my belief that Elder Snedden represents someone with authority. You will recall that John the Baptist had authority given to him by God. And with that authority he baptized Jesus Christ.

I do not like to admit it, but I feel I have no authority to baptize. Yet I want to be baptized and I want all of you to be. Our congregation has been greatly enlarged since Elder Snedden came here. I see some of you who have formerly been Catholics others who have been strong Baptists and some who didn't seem to have any religion at all. You have all come here and we have worshiped together. We love each other and we love our Heavenly Father and his son Jesus Christ. I feel we should all be baptized. The only person I feel that has the authority to perform these baptisms is our dear friend Elder Snedden. The whole crowd shouted out, "Amen,"

Elder Snedden smiled and could see in his mind Wilford Woodruff. So it was decided that all those over 8 years old should be baptized in Nineveh Lake.

Elder Snedden now had the trust and the adoration of everyone in Nineveh with the exception of Commissioner Burnham. And the Commissioner was still bent on having him out of town.

Elder Snedden had been impressed with the town historian Jewel Templeton. He loved old folks. But he particularly loved this noble lady. One night he asked Matilda to accompany him by grabbing her hand and leading her out of the house. They made their way to the other side of town and knocked on Mrs. Templeton's door. She greeted them and invited them in. Elder Snedden saw on her table the book, "The history of Nineveh." He picked it up and looked through the pages. He pointed at a picture of the first County Commissioner whose name was Burnham. She looked at Elder Snedden, but hesitated to say more. Then she began to speak. She told Elder Snedden and Matilda this story.

You may wonder why the Commissioner Burnham has such disdain for religion. And why he so dislikes you?

I've been told, secretly, that many years ago, around 1894, a Mormon missionary came to our town. He was traveling alone and had preached at our little one room school. Many were impressed with this message. This happened at a time when there was great hatred toward the Mormons in these parts. Two Mormon missionaries had been murdered down in Tennessee. The only thing most of the people here could agree on was their hatred for the Mormons.

The leader of the people who most disliked the Mormons was a Burnham. I believe he was the fourth great grandfather of Cedric. This Burnham man gathered a small mob to do whatever it took to get this Mormon missionary to leave the area. However this missionary was stubborn and refused to leave. He called down the wrath of God on the mob. That angered them so that they bound him and carried him 10 miles to the river. There they told him to swim for the other shore. When he refused, they bound him and together they threw him out in the deep water. Of course he was never seen again. I believe that through the years the Burnham family knew that this happened. But they kept it a secret. And the other men involved did also. Somehow this incident seemed to leave a curse on our town and on the Burnham family. They are such outstanding people, but they all seem so miserable. Anyway, maybe I shouldn't be telling you these things. But I think that's why Cedric is such a bad man. I think he feels the guilt of the past.

Then Jewel said,

"I think I tell you all this Matilda because, I don't know if you know, but I get these strong feelings that Elder Snedden is a Mormon. I've known Mormon people. You can tell by watching them that they are Mormons. They are just different. Wonderfully different. Their beliefs go so deeply. And I can just tell that Elder Snedden is one of them. Am I right Elder Snedden?"

Before you answer, I know that the word Elder is not your first name. It is your authority in the Mormon Church. That is why our minister knows that you have authority. . And that beautiful painting of the young man seeing God and Jesus Christ is a picture of your first prophet – Joseph Smith. So are you a Mormon Elder Snedden?"

Matilda looked glaringly at Elder Snedden. Elder Snedden looked first at her and then at Jewel. He then nodded his head up and down in holy agreement with her assessment.

Jewel continued, "I think you're the first Mormon to ever set foot in this town since that terrible night so many years ago. I feel like Elder Snedden has been sent here to help us be forgiven as a community and as a people. And especially to help the Burnham family make the changes necessary to be a happier people.

As Elder Snedden listened, tears ran down his cheeks.

Jewel spoke again, "You knew he was a Mormon, didn't you Matilda?"

Matilda did not know, and for a moment she was a bit stunned. As a young lady she had been taught that the Mormons had a dislike for all black people. But after a pause she said, "I don't know about the Mormons of the past, but I do know that the most loving person I have ever met is Elder Snedden. And if he is a Mormon, and other Mormons are like him, then I know that the things I have heard years ago are not true. And when he is ready to baptize me I will be the first in line."

Jewel replied, "I will be the second."

Someone had seen Elder Snedden and Matilda visit with Jewel. They told the Commissioner. He began to be suspicious. He had never trusted Jewel. She knew too much. But what if she had told Matilda and this Elder? Then what? The Commissioner had long felt that it would do him great harm if the truth was known about his family background. He felt he could not risk this. He must do something about Elder Snedden.

Finally the copies of the book of Mormon arrived at the little local post office. The postman master was a bit shocked at seeing so many copies of the Book of Mormon. He thought to himself, "Mormon? We have no Mormons in this town. Or do we?"

The postmaster was sort of a town gossip. He knew it he took this book to Commissioner Burnham, it would put him in good favor with the Commissioner. He hurried to the County Courthouse and presented the book.

The Commissioner examined the book carefully. He had heard the Mormons every since he was a boy. Now, he had heard too much about them.

That name Mormon had brought shame to his family. Then it hit him like a bolt of lightning. Elder Snedden was a Mormon. He smiled a sinister smile. Finally he could rid the town of this imposter. But he wanted to do secretly. For he did not want a new rumor regarding him or his family.

The next night as Elder Snedden returned from the grocery store with his usual bag of candy, a stranger came out of the darkness and tackled him. Another hit him on the head with a block of wood. Elder Snedden was unconscious. A note was attached to his beautiful navy blue suit which said, "Neither you, nor no other Mormon will ever be welcome in this town. If you and those Mormon Books are not out of town by the time the **sun** goes down tomorrow night you will leave this town in a wooden box."

When Elder Snedden did not return home, Abigail sent Seth to go find out what was keeping him. The boy found the Elder on the ground in a vacant lot a block away. He quickly ran to Matilda and she and her children carried Elder Snedden home.

They phoned Officer Harley, and he was on his way. However, his police car was stopped by a man standing in the road who said, "If you go down there, your life is in danger." Officer Harley wanted to go on, but knew he shouldn't.

Seth had read the note and asked Matilda, "Why did they call him a Mormon? What is a Mormon?" By now all the children were listening with great concern.

Matilda spoke softly, "Yes Elder Snedden is a Mormon."

Seth spoke again, "What does that mean?"

"It means he is a good person. I've been told that there is not a finer group of people in the world that Mormons. Elder Snedden is like an Angel to us. So all I can say is that I want to be a Mormon, and I want all of you to be Mormons because I want all of you to be just like Elder Snedden."

Now the attention was fully back on Elder Snedden's grave condition. It was doubtful in Matilda's mind that he would live. Her emotions were deeply troubled. She embraced her mother and wept uncontrollably. And Grandmother Amanda returned the tears.

The hour was very late and Matilda called her family to the bedside Elder Snedden where they all fell down as he had taught them to do. Matilda Burnham's prayer, "Oh dear God.

We cannot bear the thought of losing Elder Snedden for to see is an Angel. Please let down with great mercy and he'll this wonderful man who was introduced us all to more happiness than we have ever known before."

The children were then set off to bed only Matilda and Grandmother Amanda were at the bedside of Elder Snedden. Amanda had many home remedies and she mixed up concoction that she spoon-fed into Elder Snedden's mouth he had no choice but to swallow the nasty ointment. Now all it could be done was to wait and watch and pray.

After two hours Matilda became so weary that she fell asleep. Grandmother Amanda covered her over with a warm blanket. Then she went close to Elder Snedden and lifted him from his bed she carried him to a nearby rocking chair and took him up into her gigantic lap with her his head resting on her shoulder.

She then gently song sung to him as she pushed his hair back from his for head and prayed silently for him to awake.

As the cuckoo clock on the wall was striking why A M Elder Snedden began to stir in the why arms of his adoptive grandmother. Soon he was fully awake and had asked for a drink of cold water. Amanda hurried to the sink and on the way back she shook Matilda who awoke.

Matilda turned on a nearby lamp so she could see him more clearly. He smiled. He seemed to glow. Oh how she admired this gentle stranger. Then, to her total amazement he said, "Matilda."

Elder Snedden could speak! Somehow the blow to his head had reawakened within him the ability to speak. And once he began to speak, Oh the wonderful things he said!

He told of his intense desire to be a missionary. But when he was interviewed by his Bishop who hardly knew him because he just moved into that area, the Bishop was astonished that he could not speak. There was no way such such a person could serve a mission. After all, missionary work was all about talking. So the Bishop refused to send his recommendation on to the stake president.

Elder Snedden continued, "My heart was broken I wanted to serve so badly. But I knew there was no hope. Then, more than ever, I longed to be able to speak, but alas there was no way, for one reason or another, that I don't even remember or understand I just could not speak. And because I could not speak I refused to learn to write much more than my name is. I felt if I learn to write there would never be any chance in my entire life that I would be able to speak.

Because I could not speak nor write, I developed special sensitivities beyond the five senses which enabled me to communicate with people. You know, you've heard stories of how blind people develop extra senses. That's what I did. I found that with my eyes and my heart I could say things that even those who could speak could not say.

Because of my special needs, I developed a deep faith in God. I asked Him for special powers that would enable me to help people and to do good. He gave me those powers.

There was no way I could explain this to a Bishop or any other person. Then after much prayer I devised a plan. I feel the Lord inspired me in my thinking. I decided I would do all I could to prepare myself to be a missionary. I read the Scriptures. I knew every chapter of the

Book of Mormon. I love that book I have never been so touched by any other book as I was by the Book of Mormon I was ready to serve the mission but there was no way.

It was then, like I told you, that I came up with my plan. I would find a place where missionaries were newly arriving, and I would make my way to that place. I bought my navy blue suit. I had my hair cut shorter than it has ever been. I even found a place where I could have a name tag made. That made me look just like a regular missionary.

I decided the place I wanted to serve was in the Kentucky. I found a young man who was going to that mission and found out from his parents exactly when he was going to fly to Kentucky I flew out the day before, and the next day at the airport, I joined in with the other six missionaries.

I loved the missionaries I met in that mission. I loved President Durrant. He was a fine man. I knew that somehow he knew I really belonged in his mission.

I was only with President Durrant a few days, but I saw him change. I saw power come into his teaching. I saw love come into his heart. I saw his faith increased 100 fold.

I was sent to Stinsonville with two of the best missionaries to ever live. They treated me well at first. But because I could not speak I was a great burden to them. I didn't blame them I blame myself.

Finally my presence was intolerable for them. So I climbed on a bus to nowhere and ended up in this wonderful place called Nineveh.

So that's how I got here. Matilda. I know that none of this happened by accident. It was all orchestrated in heaven."

The children arose the next morning. Elder Snedden prepared his famous pancakes. While they were eating. Elder Snedden came silently into the room and said, "Are those the best pan cakes you guys have ever eaten or what?" At first they just kept on eating. But then little Mary almost scream as she said, "Elder Snedden just spoke!"

The other children realized what had happened and they began to jump for joy. I was finally able to tell how much I love them. The next day, when the children have gone to school Matilda asked, "But just who are you? And why can't you speak? And why do you know so much?"

I smiled and said, "Oh my dear Matilda. Does it really matter who I am? Does matter where I came from?"

She replied, "I guess it doesn't really matter. But I just feel like I have to know. Please tell me."

Elder Snedden asked me to sit down. He then pulled his chair right in front of me and began to speak. This is what he said:

I was born to a young unwed mother from Ogden, Utah. She was sent to Portland, Oregon where I was born. I was adopted by young LDS couple, who were one year later both killed in an auto accident. I then began to live with my grandfather who was a University Professor of Philosophy. He was retired and personally taught me in a home school. He and I traveled all over the world and saw each of the Seven Wonders of the World. I learned to speak seven languages. I was taught everything."

Matilda asked. Everything about what?"

Elder Snedden replied, "Everything about everything."

Matilda then said, 'I was entranced by what I was hearing. None of it surprised me.'

Elder Snedden continued: "while in India. I died and when I came back in another life. I was a Mormon Missionary."

"No way!" I said. You are kidding me. Who are you really?

Elder Snedden became very serious and said. "Nobody knows who I am. Even I do not know."

"That is all he ever told me about. Who he was."

It was soon noticed among all the inhabitants of Nineveh that Elders Snedden could now talk.

The Baptist minister invited him to speak on the coming Sunday to his congregation. When others heard about this they wanted to be at the meeting to hear their saintly Elder speak. Because of the large crowd that would gather a microphone was set up outside and bleachers were built.

When all were gathered, the entire group sang the great hymn. "How great thou Art." It was stirring. The Reverend then prayed and thanked the Lord that Elder Snedden could now speak. Matilda then sang a solo, "I Walk Today Where Jesus Walked."

Then the minister said, "it is now going to be our pleasure to hear from our Elder who has miraculously had restored to him "the gift of tongues."

There was a bright sunshine everything seemed like a new world. When all were settled Elders Snedden began to speak. I wished I could tell you all he said. But some things are too scared to be spoken.

Then Elder Snedden spotted Commissioner Burnham in the back part of the group of people. He invited this man to come to the front and stand at his side. The commissioner's heart was softened by this invitation, and he bowed his head and made his way through the people to the front.

When the two stood side by side, Elder Snedden reached out and put his hand on Brother Burnham's shoulder and pulled him close. Elder Snedden then said, "Dear friend I can now see the halo around your head. And Brother Burnham, Jesus Christ came to atone for the sins of all mankind. Matter what those sins were, if we come to Christ and truly repent and be baptized those sins can be forgiven. And if any man in the past ever committed any sin he can in the spirit world repent of those sins and hereunder we can be baptized for these people and they can be forgiven of all their sins."

Tears streamed down Commissioner Burnham face as he requested the microphone. He then said, "My dear friends there are so much for which I'm sorry. I have long been a tyrant in this community. I was in a position to do good things for each of you. But all I ever did was bad things. I am so sorry. I am so glad Elder Snedden came. I am so glad I read The Book of Mormon. At first, I only read it to be able to find out it was a fraud. I wanted to be able to report the many things it said that proved to me it was not true.

But as I read, I came to know that this book is true. As the book says, 'If any person would read it and ask God he would tell them whether or not it was true. I did that. I know it is true. I have learned so much about Jesus Christ from that book. I have seen Elder Snedden go

forth in our community doing well. He is a pure example of everything Jesus Christ wants us all to be. To me Elder Snedden is an Angel"

Elder Snedden then read to us from the book of acts and the day of Pentecost. The spirit of the Lord filled each of our hearts. It was as though we had just all stepped into heaven. We all called out to Elder Snedden and asked, "What shall we do?"

Elder Snedden then replied, "My dear brothers and sisters of Nineveh in the name of Jesus Christ, I invite each of you to be baptized by immersion for the remission of your sins."

Elder Snedden then said, "I came here under the direction of President Durrant and of Our Heavenly Father. I know that Heavenly Father wants all of you to be baptized. But before that happens, there is something we must all do. We must learn more about the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.

You have all seen the painting I did of young boy out in the woods praying.

Elder Snedden then held that painting in his hands and said. "This young man in the picture is Joseph Smith. Joseph went to inquire of the Lord which church was true and which he was to join. He was told that none of them were true but that through him the true church would be restored to the Earth. Later angels appeared to Joseph spent and line upon line precept upon precept the gospel of Jesus Christ was restored to the Earth. The name of that church is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The church is commonly called the Mormon Church. It is called that because of the sacred book that was revealed to Joseph Smith titled the book of Mormon. We have had delivered to our little town 200 copies of that book. That is enough books for each family in our town.

So before we are to be baptized we must each read that holy book. As you leave this meeting you will be given a copy of the book. And the next two weeks you and your family should read it from cover to cover then you will know enough that you can be baptized members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Elder Snedden then said, "How many of you are willing to do this?"

Every person assembled their race the right hand that they would be willing.

The clothing factory was commissioned to make white clothing for every man woman and child over the age of eight. There was great excitement in the town as all were preparing to be baptized.

Then on a beautiful warm day everyone gathered at the Bowser grocery store where the white clothing was distributed to the townspeople. The next Saturday I'll of them assembled at Nineveh Lake for the baptism.

Elder Snedden announced that the first good person to be baptized with the Matilda. The next would be Jewel. Then we will baptize Commissioner Burnham. At that announcement a loud shout of hosanna was heard from all the townspeople.

So they baptism proceeded. It took five hours and 40 min. for Elder Snedden, who had the authority of Jesus Christ, to baptize some 213 people.

Elder Snedden then announced that the next day he would go into Louisville with flip flamingo in the produce truck. His purpose in going would be to advise Preston Durrant that there were now 213 members of the church in Nineveh. And 46 children under the age of eight.

This would be enough people to comprise a branch of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

A loud cheer, a reverent cheer, a cheer of joy went up from all the people

The next day Elder Snedden left for Louisville and we waited eagerly for his return with President Durrant

Time went by and we heard nothing more from Elder Snedden. Then Brother Bowser read in the Courier-Journal of the death of Elder Snedden. In less than 5 min. everyone in this town knew that their Elder was gone. The whole town mourned

We read of the coming funeral and that's how come we all came to Louisville to pay our final respects to our Elder Snedden.

When the Matilda finished everyone in the chapel was filled with pure joy. President Durrant again went to the pulpit and said, "Tomorrow I will drive to Nineveh. I will be at the Bible Church in the minister's office. One by one, I will interview each of you and tomorrow afternoon. Then I will be able to choose a president for the Nineveh branch of the church

Then president Durrant said, "I have been thinking, while Matilda spoke, about the question she asked Elder Snedden, as to who he was. I have come to know that we will never know who he was. But it seems to me if there was ever an Angel among us it was Elder Snedden. Perhaps that is why he was able to recognize the Angel in each of you. I don't think there's ever been anyone who has been in the presence of Elder Snedden who didn't feel like Elder Snedden made him or her want to be an Angel.

So good bye Elder Snedden. We don't know where you came from but our hearts are filled with gratitude that you came among us. And because you did not of us will ever again be the same

That was the final answer all felt satisfied that now they knew who Elder Snedden really was.

So that month we had 284 baptisms. When the report went into or area authority, it cause quite a stir. How could it have happened? I was asked to report that in the next mission president's seminar. But I just said that somehow it all just came together and the Lord blessed us. That was all I felt I should say. For how could I ever explain Elder Snedden?

Thing like this will appear throughout the book.
Interviews—their Flavor.

(Never across a desk. But sitting facing each other.)

Senior Sister, "President I could not wait for you to come. That is why I asked to be your first interview. I'm so mad at my thoughtless husband. I have been upset for three days. Do you have any idea what he has done?"

President: "What did he do?"

"You will never believe this, but it is true."

President squirms in his chair and waits.

SS continues in as tone of anger, "Well I will get right to it."

"Saturday morning we were getting ready to go to the afternoon session of Stake Conference. I had my hair fixed the night before by Sister Baum. I went to take a shower. I turned on the water. My husband had left up the little button thing on the faucet. The water poured down on me. Before I could turn it off my hair was drenched. Can you believe such a thing? I was so mad I sat in the bathroom and cried. You must talk to him president. Let him know that such behavior is not acceptable."

Pres. "I'll do that. That really surprises me."

"Well I just wanted you to know."

President picks up an envelope and pulls out a folded letter and says, "In this letter he sent me, maybe he does not tell the whole truth. Let me read it to you."

Dear President Durrant,

My wife and I have never been so happy. I know you admire Sister Durrant. But I'm telling you, my wife, Sister Sikes, is the most perfect person I have ever known. She is like an angel. The people here in Dexter love her. We are having great success. The little chapel once so empty is now so full. The saints are now on fire with the gospel. Old family feuds are now forgotten. But it is not because of me. It is because of her. I love her with all my heart. I'm so deeply grateful that she and I will be together forever.

Just thought you ought to know,

Elder Clifton Sikes.

The president folds up the letter in silence and then looks up at Sister Sikes. She is wiping the tears from her eyes with a laced handkerchief.

Pres. "Elder Sikes is coming in next. I'll get after him real good. He'll never leave that thing up again."

Sister Sikes appeals, "Well, don't be too hard on him. Most of the time he is a good and kind man."

"Yes, I know that, but what he did is inexcusable. I can't have that sort of thing going on in this mission."

"Well...Maybe... Why don't you let me talk to him. Why don't you forget what I said. He loves you so dearly. Please President. Don't get after him. I know I told you this. I don't want to hurt him." Then amidst her tears she said, "I love him with all my heart and soul. I'm so grateful to have him as my husband."

As she leaves the room, the President sees her out in the hall embracing her companion.

An Elder who has lived in many foster homes and finally with a Mormon family.

President, I'm leaving here tomorrow to go to Kansas."

"Why? You are on a mission. You can't just pack up and leave."

"No matter what you or anyone else says, tomorrow I am out of here."

"Why Kansas?"

"That is where my brother is in prison."

"Prison? What did he do?"

"That doesn't matter. What matters is what he is going to do."

"What's that?"

"He gets out next month and he is going to Colorado to murder the man who sent him there."

"How do you know that?"

"He told me that in a letter."

"He won't really do that."

"You don't know my brother."

"So what can you do about that?"

"I can talk some sense into him. So I'm on my way."

"I can't give you permission to do that."

"I could care less about permission."

"Could we help in any way?"

"No. It is up to me. I don't need any help."

"Elder, I love you. I love you with all my heart. How long will this take?"

"A week."

"Then will you come back?"

"You don't want me back. I'm not much use to you or to anyone else."

"You are of great use to me. I need you. The Lord needs you. I understand how you feel."

The elder sat silently. Finally he looked up into the eyes of the president. That something that can only go between a mission president and one of his missionaries went between them.

Then the President spoke, "Here is my phone number. You call me each night and tell me where you are. I'll pray for your success. But when you have set your brother straight, you must return. There are people here that you need to set straight. Promise me that you will return."

Tears welled up in the eyes of the Elder. After several seconds of silence he looked up and said softly, as he nodded his head up and down. "Yeh. I'll be back." The two embraced.

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A missionary who had arrived a month ago comes in. He sits down and says, "President. There is something you should know. I'm not my brother. So don't expect me to be like he was when he served his mission in Japan three years ago."

The president noticed that the Elder shook with emotion. He asked, "Do I know your brother?"

"Everybody knows him. He was an amazing missionary. I'm sure you have heard of him. I know you feel I will be as good as he was. Well I won't be!"

"Okay. But you say you are not like him. Tell me about that."

The elder began to choke up. He spoke as he pulled his handkerchief from his pocket. "He was straight A in everything. He won all the honors. My parents were proud of him. But I'm not him. I hope you know that president. I am not him!"

The Elder blew his nose.

Then the president said softly, "I'll always remember that you are not him. And guess what Elder, I'm glad you are not him because I like you just the way you are."

The elder began to sob. The two stood. Amidst his tears the Elder spoke again, "Thanks. I just wanted you to know that. I'll do my best."

"I know you will. I know you will. I love you. Tell your bother Hi from me. Okay!"

The president smiled and so did the Elder.

Another Elder who came last month came in. He had been a college wrestler. He focuses his eyes on the floor just in front of his chair. He stares at that same spot all the while he says: "I don't know why I came. I don't have a testimony or anything like that." He pauses and continues: "I was pretty lucky at wrestling and got all these scholarship offers. I finally went to college. With a few breaks I was able to win the conference in my weight.

"I met this girl in college and I really liked her. We went to the April general conference because she wanted to. We arrived at the Conference Center at four in the morning and eventually managed to obtain a seat in the balcony.

"The President of the Church was talking about missionary work. He said, 'Every worthy young man ought to go.' We were holding hands and she tightened her grip on me when he said that.

"After the meeting we were sitting on the lawn by the Visitors Center. I had not really planned on a mission. My parents aren't active and they sort of wanted me to keep going to college on my scholarship.

"I asked my girl friend if she felt I ought to go. She replied that she had always wanted to marry a returned missionary. Before I knew what had hit me, I told her I was going."

The Elder now looked up and as he did he said, "President, I don't know why I'm here." Tears caused his eyes to glisten as he said: "I miss her so much. I wish I were home." He didn't speak for a few seconds and the room was filled with perfect silence. Then he drew a deep breath and squared his shoulders and said: "But I'm here and I'm staying. I'll just do my best and see what happens."

AN ANGEL IN CAMELOT
A NOVEL BY
George Durrant

This work of fiction is loosely based on the life and mission presidency of George Durrant

“You can relate many truths in a work of fiction.” Matthew Durrant

Reader. This is the first few chapters. See what you think. Please let me know as soon as possible. George Durrant.

Chapter 1

Airport in Louisville, Kentucky November, 2008

President Durrant had not been this nervous since his high school prom when he sat in the living room of the richest family in town and waited for his date to appear. He now sat in the Standiford Airport waiting for a man he had never met to arrive. A man who could save him. Finally coming down the escalator, he saw what he knew had to be Elder John Riggins. At the same time the stocky and balding Elder smiled as he knew this man must be George Durrant, the president of the Kentucky Mission. President Durrant moved forward to the bottom of the moving stairs and nervously extended his hand. The gregarious Area Authority took the much taller president in his arms and pulled him into an almost crushing embrace.

President Durrant wanted to make a good first impression. But he still felt like a sophomore basketball team candidate performing for the first time in the presence of the all powerful basketball coach. The insecure president said unconvincingly, "Welcome to the world's greatest mission—the Camelot Mission."

"What mission?" the confused authority asked.

The President felt embarrassed at what he had said, and instead of answering asked, "Do you have any other luggage?"

"No I've traveled all over the world with my business and I know how to pack light."

Soon the two men were in the parking lot opening the doors of the large white Toyota SUV. Upon seeing the gleaming vehicle Elder Riggins said, "Wow! What you got here. I didn't know there was a need for one of these in Kentucky."

President D. replied in an embarrassed tone, "I inherited that from President Knight."

"You never know what those brethren in Salt Lake City who over all the cars will send you. I've written to them and told them to get German cars. They cost a lot, but in the end it would save the church a lot of money. But like usual those guys do things their way even if it does not make sense."

An hour later the two arrived at the mission home on Tarton Way. Upon seeing the home the surprised authority asked, "Is this where you live? Looks like a seminary building at East High School. What do the brethren let their building guys buy things like this? You ought to be in a rambler out in the suburbs. I made sure when Joan and I went that they sold the old two story thing and bought nice one in a quiet neighborhood. You ought to write a letter and demand, I mean suggest that you want to move to house not a seminary building." With that Elder Riggins laughed boisterously. He then added, "Don't you think this looks like a seminary building?"

"That is what I thought when we got here. But it serves our purposes real well for a family of ten."

"Ten!!!! How many kids have you got?"

"Eight."

"Eight! How many are here with you?"

"All eight," The president answered with a tone of pride in his voice.

"All eight here with you. How can a man with eight kids serve as president of a mission? I'll tell you sometimes I just don't know what those who run the missionary department are thinking. Eight kids! That is ridiculous. You ought to be back home until the kids are raised."

The president answered softly, "It works all right. I guess."

"You guess? You know it's a burden."

As the two entered the front doors, the president shouted, "We are home."

Sister Durrant hurried from her office near the front door and greeted the two.

She was a tall, blondish woman with a soft voice. "Welcome Elder Riggons. We are so glad you have come to help us."

The two shook hands and Elder Riggons said, "It sure is good to be here. I just hope I can help. I have heard that your husband is the greatest teacher in the church. So it is him who will likely be teaching me?"

Sister D. spoke, "You must be tired. Let's show you your room and you can get a little rest before dinner."

As she led him toward the room, he asked, "You sure you have room for me? Your husband says you have eight children here."

"Oh sure! Our motto is that there is always room for one more."

"We will have supper in an hour. You can meet the children then."

"No that's all right. I have brought some stuff to work on. I had some food on the plane. So you just go ahead, and I'll see you in the morning."

"Are you sure? Teddy, our cook has cooked some spare ribs. She is quite a cook. You'll love them."

"No I'm really not hungry. Let the hungry eight have my share," he said laughingly. You have enough without me. With that he slowly closed the door.

She returned and told her husband that the Elder would not be with them at dinner. The president was disappointed, but a bit relieved. There was something about Eder Riggons that unnerved him.

Sister Durrant said with some distress. "You would never do that . He should have let us know before we prepared the dinner. The kids need to meet him. Maybe he could help them with the adjustment of being here." Then with marked disgust she ordered, "I just don't appreciate this. Go tell him to come to dinner."

"I'm not going to tell him anything. He is here to tell me not to be told anything by me. He might not be personable. But he is one of the most successful executives in the country. He did not come here to help the children; he came here to help me. And goodness knows I need help."

"What is wrong with you George. At home you were free and easy and nothing upset you. But here you are a nervous wreck. this mission call seemed like a dream job. But you are making it into a nightmare. "

"Forget it. You take care of things at home and I'll take care of things in the mission."

With that she gave him a look of disgust and turned and walked way.

The President and the authority were up at five to set out for Lexington. Elder Riggons was in the front room reading yesterdays paper. Sister D approached him pleasantly and asked, "What can I get you for breakfast?"

The Elder arose and smiled the most charming smile she had ever seen and said, "You don't need to go to any trouble for me. You have the appearance of royalty. I can't have a queen waiting on a commoner such as me."

He then added, "I'll just fix myself a bowl of cereal and you get ready to go."

"I'm not going."

"You're not going? A big zone conference and you are not going? The missionaries need to see you. My wife went to every zone conference with me. We were a team."

"I'll attend the zone conference next week when it is here in Louisville. In the mean time, I'll just be mom."

A knock came on the door. She hurried to answer. It was the two zone leaders—Elders Flake and Bryant. She introduced them to Elder Riggons. As Elder Bryant shook hands with the important visitor he said, "A friend of mine served in your mission. He told me you had the reputation of being the most productive mission president in North America. He loved you and tries to act like he is you."

Elder Riggons, obviously very pleased, said, "Well I appreciate that. What was his name?"

"Tyler Gray. Elder Tyler Gray. You would be proud of him. He is now married and has a little boy."

"Oh sure Elder Gray. The tall Elder from California."

"No you are thinking of someone else. He is short and husky and was a college wrestler. And like I said, he is from Burley, Idaho."

"It's been a while. But I think I know who you mean. We had so many."

"Anyway, he says you really got the missionaries going and the baptisms poured in."

Elder Riggons chuckled and replied, "I just motivated them and kicked them in the pants and they did all the work. So give them the credit and not me. We never got below a hundred a month."

Elder Flake spoke up, "We got a hundred the month before President Knight left."

But since then it has gone down really fast for the past five months. I think it is because the stakes are not helping us like they should."

President Durrant had heard the last part of this conversation. He interrupted and said, "It's nearly time to head out. You had better get your cereal. It will be a long day."

As the authority hurriedly ate, the president said, "The two assistants will drive us over and we can sit in the back seat and talk?"

"Couldn't they take their car and we can ride a lone and talk in private?"

"Well they could. But I'm not sure I could get from the freeway to the Lexington chapel."

"Hey! I've got GPS on my phone. Elder. Would you Just tell me the address and we will be home free. I'll drive president, and you can be my guest. After all, I'm here to serve."

With that he turned and said, "Elder could you also put in there, 'Churchill Downs,'. I used to own a couple of thorough breads and I've always wanted to see where they run the derby."

The Elders who both loved technology were thrilled to help this important man.

President Durrant sat in the passenger side and silently felt a bit like a little boy in the presence of a mighty man.

Fifteen minutes later the two were at Churchill Downs. The authority jumped from the car and announced, "There it is! I've seen the Tasma Hall of India, the Pyramids of Egypt, and the Elephants of Africa. But this tops them all! The home of the derby! Wow! President can you believe that two country bumpkins like us are standing here in the shadows of those sacred towers "

The president tried to stand in awe. But his main concern was that they would be late for the zone conference in Lexington.

Soon the two were in the car and headed east toward the horse country of Eastern Kentucky. As they road along the authority spoke, "President, I've been told you are struggling a bit. How do you feel about your first five months here?"

President Durrant nervously replied, "Well, I sort of think that..."

Before he could say more, the authority interrupted and said, "You don't have to say more. I know how you feel. I have known some failures in my day. It is no fun to know you are failing. But we can solve all that. So don't feel bad. Better days are coming."

With that the authority smiled his comforting smile of reassurance, tapped the president on the knee and said, "So settle down my boy. And together will change things around a bit. It won't take much. I've been told you are a beloved man back home. That will soon be the case here. Now you just sit back and I'll tell you how I see the role of a mission president."

For the next forty minutes the Authority recounted his experiences in the Seattle Mission. The only words the anxious president heard were the words, 'Then I...', and again, 'Then I...', and again and again, 'Then I...'

President Durrant was beyond grateful when the green grass and white fences of the horse farms began to appear. "Wow!" Shouted the authority. "Would you look at that? I've got to redo my whole place down at Manti."

After a pause he said, "So these are the big boys! Someday I'll get them. I'm a competitor. I can't stand to be second. That is the way I am in business and I was the same way as mission president. You've got to be like that president. We will make you like that. After our time together, You'll make President Knight look like a piker. One hundred baptisms will be your minimum. Then the brethren will be raving about you instead of wondering about you. With that he sped up to overtake a fast car that had passed him a few seconds before."

President Durrant tried to look enthused as Elder Riggons looked over at him and smiled and said, "How about it, President, do you want to run with the thorough breads are the nags. It is up to you. Which one?"

The president did his best to smile and replied, with little conviction, "The thorough breads" "Come on president. Let's see a little enthusiasm. It all starts with enthusiasm."

Just then the voice of the GPS took over and the two rode in silence to the Lexington Stake center. President Durrant was studying a sheet of paper.

"What's that?"

"The names of the missionaries who will be here. I like to call them each by name."

"Don't they have name tags?" Don't worry about their names. The only names that are important are the names of the folks they have scheduled for baptisms."

They were 30 minutes late. As the two entered the stake center the 36 missionaries stood. They were in awe to be in the presence of greatness. The president wondered about the greatness part, but he too was in awe.

The assistants who were conducting the meeting moved aside and the president came to the pulpit. He was deeply touched to be in the presence of his magnificent missionaries. For a few seconds his emotions formed tears in his eyes and a lump in his throat. Finally he spoke of his love for them and of his gratitude for all they were doing in this glorious cause.

He then said, "Early this morning I was thinking of the Savior. I thought of the song, 'I need thee. Oh I need thee. Every hour I need thee.'

I need the savior. I have never felt such a need for him. Again the president's emotions took over and he could not speak. He gathered himself together and spoke again.

"We are his spokesman. We do not speak in our name we speak in his name. He then told this story.

"When I was in high school there was a girl I really liked. I was thrilled when I was assigned a seat right behind her in the back of the room. But I was afraid to talk to her. I liked her so much that I just sat in silence.

Then one day, a guy named Don, (Dons were the popular guys in those days. He was big and blonde and athletic and the girls love him.) Anyway, one day Don sent me a note that said, "Ask Susan if she will go to the movie with me Friday night?"

With the note in hand I was no longer afraid. I tapped Susan on the shoulder and she turned around and looked at me. Still not my usual nervous and fearful self, I asked boldly, "What are you doing Friday night?"

"Nothing.' She replied with a bit of enthusiasm.

"Would you like to go to a movie?"

"Yes I would."

"Okay. Old Don right over there wants to take you."

The missionaries groaned and laughed.

I noted that the authority, sitting on the side bench of the front row did not laugh. He was occupied by hurrying through the pages of his scriptures.

I went on. We each have a note from the Savior saying, "Ask the people to be baptized in my name."

So you do not speak in your own name. That would be frightening. We speak in the name of Jesus Christ. So we have no need to fear. We are not self confident. We are Christ confident."

I spoke of our lack of baptisms. Their eyes that had been looking up, looked down.

I knew the authority had much to say so I closed my remarks and introduced him with these words.

Elders and Sisters, We are honored to have with us one of the great men of the church. He has done many things in his life. His company has achieved world wide success. But even more important he has been a valiant servant in the work of the Lord. He served as young missionary in the Northern Stakes Mission. Five years ago he served as president of the Colorado Denver Mission. His work there become legendary. He has served as an example to many mission presidents and now to me. He is much loved by the leading brethren of the Church. He could never bring himself to believe that the great harvest is over. He took a struggling mission, and

turned it into the highest baptizing mission in North America. He is a doer. Now let's really listen as he tells us how we too can be doers of Christ's words to go forth and baptize. Elder Riggons the time is yours.

"I appreciate the kind words of your beloved president. I have known of him for years. His personable style of speaking, his humor, his many books that he has authored, have made the name of 'George Durrant' an almost house hold word.

My son had him as a teacher at BYU and told me that Brother Durrant was the most popular teacher at BYU. He had as many as 600 students in his classes each semester and he learned the names of each one.

So you are blessed to have such a man as your president.

The only thing that I can offer you that he can't is the idea of a 'Bottom Line.'

Each month in business you can look at the bottom line. If it is negative you are failing. If it is positive you are succeeding. The bottom line in the work we are doing are baptisms. We are not out here to help people, although we do that. But we are here to baptize them. If we are not doing that then let's call the Peace Corps and have them take over and we can all go home. Now your baptismal record in this mission is dismal. President Knight, under whom many of you served, understood the bottom line. I'm sure you have never had such a happy month as you had last May when you baptized 100 souls. You can do that again. That can be your minimum. And who knows what the maximum will be?

All that is needed is to be obedient. If you don't want to do that. Go home. President Durrant will approve that. (with that he looked at me and waited for a response. I felt pressure to say yes but I could not. And he went on)

Then we need to focus on baptisms. Nothing else matters. Set goals. The president's job is to help you set goals. The reason he interviews you is not to hold your hand and tell you are special. He interviews you so he and you can see how you are coming in your baptismal goals. To see how well you are keeping the rules.

I'm working with president Durrant. He is telling me things that will help me. I'm telling him things that will help him. Things that will help him help you. We will have an honor roll and you can get on it by meeting your baptismal goals. There are a number of tricks I learned to keep the missionaries high in the Rockies of Colorado. "Our theme song was, "Rocky Mountain High." He then asked them all to stand. He challenged them to vow to keep each rule with exactness. He asked each to shout out, "Here here!" as a symbol of their pledge. He then challenged them to agree to set a goal that only them and the Lord could achieve. He asked them to agree by saying, 'Here here!'

They all did so.

With that the Elder smiled and his magnificent smile that caused the missionaries hearts to melt. Now more than ever they sensed his greatness. He quickly told them of his love for them.

The meeting ended on a high note. This was truly a new day in the Kentucky Mission.

It was time for the interviews. President Durrant interviewed all thirty six. Many could not wait to tell him of their problems and concerns. He impatiently listened and hastened to get to the

real reason for the interview. He focused on goals and rules, but his heart was far from his knights, his angels.

As final good byes were said, “Elder Riggons asked the zone leaders if they knew where the horse statutes of Man of War and Secretariat were located. Elder Bell was an expert on horses. He and Elder Reynolds were invited to get in the car. Soon they pulled into the horse farm which had once been the home of Man of War. There in a prominent place was the heroic sized statute of the horse that many considered to be the world’s greatest horse.

Elder Riggons was in heaven. He said, ‘You know, This year ‘Take Me Home’ won the Derby in the fastest time ever. He also won the Preakness and the Belmont—the whole “Triple Crown. He then paused and said, “You know horses Elder Bell. Don’t you think there is a new, best horse of all time—Take Me Home?”

Elder Bell considered the matter and finally spoke, “Well Elder Riggons, we just do not know the answer to that. We won’t know how great Take Me Home is until we see how his children and grandchildren do. That will take time and then we will know how he stacks up with man of War and Secretariat.

Elder Riggons looked at Elder Bell and said, “I’m not sure your criterion for greatness is correct.” Then as if he was thinking of another place and time he said, “I kind of hope that same rule does not apply to a man.”

I dreaded the hour and one half journey back to Louisville. This man was just not my kind of guy. The only redeeming thing was that he could not make me feel anymore lost than he had already made me feel.

Once we were on the freeway, he started in. “I did not hear much of your talk because I was busy preparing my own. But what I did hear concerned me a bit. You get choked up pretty easily don’t you?”

“I guess I do.”

“Some feel that tears is a sign of feeling the spirit. I don’t agree. It is just your own emotions getting the better of you. You might want to watch that.”

President Durrant had been told that before, and had come a long ways in such control. But he still suffered a bit from that supposed malady. He knew he could do better.

The authority spoke again, “You are a bit self demeaning. In that story you should have said that you were “Don” and not the timid guy. The missionaries need you to be their hero and not someone they feel sorry for. Besides you only have so much time with the missionaries. You don’t have time for a bunch of touching stories. Get to the goals. Keep focused. That way you will gain their respect.”

I’ve been told by a stake president that when you got here you were dressed in a suit that was a style that the former mission president forbid the missionaries to wear. What is with that? If you are a rebel what do you think they will try to be?”

President Durrant did not offer any counter opinions. The man was probable right. But in his heart the president wondered, “Is there only one way?”

"I was also told that you announced to your missionaries in your first meeting with them that you were doing away with all rules. Tell me that is not so."

I sat looking straight ahead and did not reply.

He continued, "I'm sure you agree that the salvation of a mission are the rules and the strict enforcement of those rules. Don't you agree?"

"Sure I agree whole heartedly. But what I really said was that we were going to follow principles, not rules. If we followed correct principle we would follow the rules. I was telling them that we must live above the rules. We must have honor. We will just do the right things for the right reasons and not because of compulsion."

"That sounds good. But there is only one problem. It won't work! The mission will continue on its downward spiral"

"Well I feel no one will get to the celestial kingdom by force."

"No they won't, but these missionaries don't understand that kind of stuff. They are telestial dwellers, and you have to treat them that way. Don't preach a bunch of idealistic stuff to them. If you do you will end up with a night mare. Can't you understand what I'm saying?"

My emotion was rising as I meekly replied, "I know you have a point. But I just don't operate that way. I feel missionaries can be trusted and they will be their best self."

"Hey get real. These guys are nineteen. They are men at times, but they are mostly boys. Like one of our leaders said, 'Being a mission president is like being a scout master and your have nearly 200+ boys on a two year camp out and the girl scouts are camped just across the stream. So act accordingly.'"

With some degree of abruptness I replied, "I don't agree with that. That is repulsive to me. If that is true I should not be here. I see them as men. I see them as noble knights of a glorious round table. I see them as angels."

The authority was deeply amused and began to laugh almost uncontrollably. He then said, "And I suppose you are King Arthur. Oh that you were right! Now I can see why you are so loved. Who would not love a man who has such a ridiculous opinion of those around him. You have succeeded as a teacher and youth leader with such an idealistic foundation. But now you are in the real world. And let's face it. You are failing."

I looked out the window and remained silent. To me he was wrong about a lot of things, but he sure was right about me failing.

He said nothing more for the next ten miles. The president, desperately tried to calm his troubled soul. He had never failed before. This was new to him. It hurt more than any pain he had ever felt before. To himself he said, "I can't go home. Marilyn would not allow that. I would not allow that. God would never allow that. But what...? I began to wish I had gone to the movie about General Patton and had never heard of King Arthur.

Then the authority spoke in a softer tone, "I have been too hard on you. But I have done it out of love. I feel I have been moved upon by the Holy Ghost to tell you these things. You are a great man. I know changing your ways will take you out of your comfort zone. But the test of a man's metal is his ability to take criticism and change his ways and keep going. You will do that President Durrant, and you will end up as the best president these folks have ever known.

He then changed the subject and told me stories of his youth and marriage and business. He was a fascinating man. I could sense his goodness—his greatness. He had a softer side. There was a bit of an angel in him. He would ask me to tell him about my family and my life and how it was to be a teacher. But before I could get three sentences in to my life, what I said reminded him of something about himself. And off we would go on another adventure of his. I'm a listener and he was a talker so for the last 30 miles we made a great team. But my pain did not lessen.

The other five zone conferences were much the same. I spoke only briefly and tried to control my emotions. I tried not to tell any little stories. Tried to avoid humor. Tried to be like him. Felt a bit phony.

Finally we were at the airport. I remembered how excited I was to have him come. But that excitement was dwarfed by my joy at seeing him leave. But as I walked from the airport to my car, I had never felt so alone.

I was glad that tomorrow would be another day. Maybe then I could somehow be another president. Surely for the next two and one half years I could be somebody other than what I had forever been.

Chapter 2

When I arrived back home from the round of zone conferences, I was totally exhausted and discouraged. It would be good to be back home again in the security and comfort of home.

I entered the house at just before six in the evening and shouted with a degree of false enthusiasm, "Let's all be glad. Daddy has just come home."

Marilyn looked a bit bedraggled, and said with the enthusiasm that matched mine. "Thank goodness. Another minute and I would be a case for local asylum. I hugged her tight and we silently wondered together.

One year old Mark saw me and ran toward me. He tripped and fell right on his face and screamed in pain. His mouth was bleeding. Our most sure bit of sunshine was now behind a cloud. Sarah saved the day by moving close to me as I held a towel over Mark's bleeding mouth and said, "Hello daddy."

The way that she said it, and her beautiful four year old face caused me to take her up in my free arm, and hold her so close that she wondered why so tight.

Warren and Dwight came in from playing. They saw me and said, "Hi dad." They acted as if I had never been gone.

Marinda was the most glad to see me. She was deeply dependent upon me. All her life she was so glad I was her dad and best friend. She excitedly told me, "My teacher told me I was too smart for the 5th grade and she wanted to move me to the 6th. I don't have to do that do I?" It would make me so nervous. I'm not that smart. Please don't let them do that.'

"Never!" I replied with no reason other than I did not want her to be distressed.

I asked 7th grade Devin if he wanted to shoot a few baskets. He told me, "No reason for that. I've decided to quit basketball. The coach is a not a human. He is a monster. He looks like

the wolf man and acts like Jack the Ripper. I'm afraid of him. I'd sooner just play over at the church."

Kathryn, our 15 old, who never asked nor received much, said everything was all right until her little possum had disappeared and she spent the whole night looking for it in every place in the house. I could tell she was deeply sad about this. I told her I'd get her a horse to replace it and she said, "Sure you will dad. Sure you will." She loved horses, but knew there was no place for a horse on a mission.

I asked about sixteen year old Matt. Marilyn replied. "You better go see him. He is in his room. I've never seen anyone as upset as he is."

"Why? What happened?"

"He won't tell me" He just says that life is not worth living. But right now dinner is on the table. Maybe you can just call him and he will come up and you can find what is wrong. He won't talk to me."

I smiled and said, Other than all that I've seen and heard since I got home is all else well?"

She smiled and we both laughed a quiet laugh of love. She replied with a twinkle in her eyes, "Other than that we may be the happiest family in Kentucky."

I called Matt to come. He did not.

I felt I should eat with the family and then go to Matt's room and find out why he was so troubled.

A half hour later I stood in his doorway. He was lying on his bed turned away from me and toward the wall. I sat on his bed and asked, "What is wrong? He did not reply.

I touched him on the shoulder and he pulled away, and said in sorrow, "Nothing is wrong. Just leave me alone."

"Come on. What happened?"

He was silent. "You have to tell me, or I can't help."

"I said nothing is wrong."

"I'll just sit here and you can think about things and maybe you could at least give me a clue."

It must have been five minutes of the most silent silence I have ever heard. Then he turned toward me, and I saw a deeper sorrow than I had ever seen before.

He shook his head from side to side, took a deep breath and said, "I got cut."

"You got cut."

"Yeah, Cut from the team."

"I could have been a star back home. But not here. Nothing good is here. This place is hell to me."

He then became silent. And I did not know what to say. Just then Marilyn called down the stairs and said, "There is an Elder on the phone. He says his companion is gone and he does not know where. He needs to talk to you. "

"Tell him to call his zone leader. No tell him. Tell him I'll be right there."

Matt had turned back to the wall. I said, "I'd better go but I'll be back in a minute we will talk some more."

"You don't have to hurry. I got nothing else to say now or ever."

Marilyn said, as I came up the stairs, "Did you have your phone off all day? There have been four others trying to get you. Their numbers are all on the desk in my office. Oh! and Sister Pryor is having emotional problems again. We better get her to that Jewish doctor who understands how to counsel our missionaries. He ought to be a Mormon."

An hour went by before I could go back downstairs. Surely I was the worst father in the world. Maybe eight children were too many to have out here?

Matt seemed a bit better when I returned. I asked him if he was hungry for a good burger and fries? He smiled. We jumped in the car . Seven voices cried out, "Can I come." I did not answer. Triage told me that Matt was at this moment the most seriously injured by our call to Kentucky.

Matt ate his burger like a dog eats. He told me he had been fasting and had not eaten in two days. I was so sorry for him. I was tempted to ask him if he still wanted to go home and live with his best friend's family in Salt Lake. But I held back. I could not bear it if he went home. Better that I should go home than him. He did not bring it up, but if he had I would have made a phone call to that willing family.

When we got home Marilyn told me, "Sister Pryer is missing. Thinks you are persecuting her because of her seeing visions. The assistance are looking for her."

I did not know what to do. I went out side and with the sound of crickets accompanying me from every direction, I knelt under the big tree and prayed.

I asked for help. I received a revelation. Just a simple revelation. It was as small voice said, "George, my son. You are tired. Go in the house, and go to bed."

I rose from my knees and was soon in bed. Somehow sleep came more quickly than it had in several nights.

Chapter 3

The next morning when Sister Durrant went out on the front porch to bring in the milk, she found an envelope between the gallon containers.

She brought both the milk and the envelope into the kitchen. It was addressed to "President Durrant." She quickly made her way to the open door of the bathroom where he stood shaving. She announced, "I found this letter with this morning's milk. It is addressed to you."

"Who is it from?"

"I can hardly read writing on the envelope, but it seems to read, E., then S, but I can't read the rest."

"Put it on the bed, and I'll read it in just a minute."

A few minutes later the president enters the bedroom, picks up the letter. He too could not read the return address. He gently tears it open. He pulls out a small stiff piece of paper. He is surprised to see a miniature painting. He sits on the bed, and stares at the small masterpiece. It is a scene of a large tree, and dangling from a high limb is a very long rope with the seat attached to the bottom. It is a swing.

The president lays the painting on the bed, puts on his white shirt and tie. Then he sits on the bed, and picks up the painting and wonders, "So, what's this all about? Who sent this and why?"

He recognizes in the background of the painting the part of the building as being the garage door of the mission home. He quickly makes his way to the front door and goes out into the yard. As he looks, he is astounded as he realizes the tree in the painting is the very tree near the north side of the mission home, "But why the swing?"

Then realizing that he has an appointment at the office, he puts the small painting in his shirt pocket and returns to the house to say goodbye to his wife.

That morning one thing happened after another and the president had no time to think anything about the mysterious painting.

At noon Sister Stratton, a senior missionary, brings president a salad she purchased for him at McDonalds. As he stirs in the ranch dressing, he remembers the painting in his pocket. He pulls it out and has a strange feeling that there's some hidden message in all this.

He began and ends eating the salad without even tasting it. His thoughts are totally on the small painting. It fills his mind with wonderment.

Then in one of those moments of the reception of a pure idea, he says aloud to himself, "I could build a swing just like the one in the picture!"

He shouts, "Elder Stratton come in here a minute."

As Elder Stratton enters the president excitedly says, "We've got to build a swing."

Elder Stratton, a bit dumbfounded, asks, "Build a what?"

"A swing"

"A swing? Maybe next week, but not today. You have a thousand things to do and so do I."

"A thousand things can wait. But the swing can't. Let's go!"

A few minutes later the president and elder Stratton arrived at the Home Depot. They quickly make their way to the place where the ropes are.

"It has to be strong enough to hold a 300 pound man," the president explains to the clerk.

"How long's she got to be?" asks the clerk.

"At least five yards."

"Five yards! What are you building, a gallows?"

"Building the biggest swing in all of Louisville."

After buying the rope and a small block of wood for the seat, Elder Stratton and the president arrived at the mission home.

As they get out of the truck and unload the rope and wood, Elder Stratton looks at his watch and says nervously, "We better get back to the office. You got that appointment at one o'clock."

"Forget the appointment! This is more important than any appointment."

Just then two elders pull-up in their Toyota. As the two young men get out of the car and come toward the president, he shouts, "Which one of you guys... excuse me... you elders is not afraid of height?"

"I'm not," shouts the smallest of the two.

"Can you climb a tree?"

"I sure can."

"Then climb that tree and hang this rope on that limb that goes way out there. But be careful, I'd have a hard time telling your mother why you were up the tree." The president says as he points at the chosen limb.

The elder makes his way up the tree so fast that the on looking squirrels feel a bit jealous.

The rope is soon bound to the limb in an Eagle Scout manner. It dangles down. "Just the right length," the president shouts with the joy of a child.

Elder Stratton finds a drill and soon a large hole is made in the block of wood. The bottom end of the rope is pulled through the hole. A large knot is tied so the rope cannot be pulled back through. The swing is ready.

The president looks at the painting again, compares the two and says "That's the right swing all right."

The president hurries in the front door and shouts, "Sister Durrant! Come and have a look!"

"A look at what? I'm talking to Doctor Glade about an Elder he treated today."

"Tell him you will call him back. This is important. Come see! A swing! I built a swing!"

Sister Durrant adds, "Sister Stratton called and says you need to get over there right now."

"Hey! This is important."

Soon the two were gazing at the giant swing. Sister Durrant asks, "Who's going to be brave enough to ride on that?"

"I'm going to be the first," the president announces with glee. He quickly moves to the swing and puts his legs over the block of wood. With a big smile—the biggest he has smiled since he left Salt Lake City, he shouts, "Elder Stratton, pull me back and then push me forward with all your might!"

As the swing moved forward it took the president's breath away. He shouted, "Push me higher!" Elder Stratton used his full strength and sent the president soaring.

"Be careful, George if you fall off it will kill you," Sister Durrant shouted as she held her hand over her mouth.

Finally he said, "Slow me down Elder Stratton"

"My turn!" Elder Stratton shouted.

Soon he is on his way into the atmosphere. He shouts, "This is better than Disneyland!"

Finally they persuade Sister Durrant to climb on board. She agrees only when there's an agreement that they won't push her very high.

As she begins her journey through space she shouts, "Push me higher! Push me higher?"

The president tells Elder Stratton, "Go back to the office and tend to the business there. You can handle things there as well as I can. I'll stay here. I'll be back over there in the morning."

The president can hardly wait for the children to come home from school. He wants to wake little Mark up from his nap. But Sister Durrant will have none of that.

An hour later little Mark awakened and just as he did Sarah, Warren, Dwight and Marinda opened the front door. They had returned from school. Fifteen minutes later, Devin, Kathryn and Matt return. Now that they were all home president Durrant paraded through the house shouting, "Time for a big family meeting! I have a major announcement!"

He then moved to another part of the house making the same announcement. And then to another. The children moaned and groaned at what could be so important as to take them away from TV.

President Durrant looked happier that he had looked in months. He instructed The family, "Settle down, I have a major announcement that will affect the lives of each of you. When you came home today you failed to see the most important thing I have done since we arrived in Kentucky. You know the big tree out front? I have hung the world's largest swing in that tree. In just a minute we will all go to the front and see this wonder of the world. You will be amazed. All right if you're already we will all walk in an orderly manner out the front door and lay our eyes on this mighty miracle."

Matt said in an unenthusiastic tone, "Big deal a swing." Finally the family had all made it into the yard. They all looked and could not believe the length of the rope hanging before their very eyes.

Matt shouted enthusiastically, "I am the oldest child. I have the birthright. It is my right to be the first to ride on this Durrant family swing." No one dared to suggest that they go ahead of their older brother. Soon Matt took his seat on the swing.

Devin shouted, "I will push you." With that he pushed forward and ran under the swing. Then he returned to push Matt again and again and again. Soon Matt could look down on the roof of the mission home. He shouted with glee, "This is the most amazing ride I have ever been on."

Soon Kathryn began to appeal, "You have had your turn it is time for me."

Matt reluctantly left the seat saying, "How did you do this dad? It's the best thing you have ever done. You deserve a medal." Kath rode like a rodeo queen"

The president humbly stated, "I just climbed that tree and tied that rope and made the swing."

Sister Durrant added, "Sure you did George. Sure you did."

Soon Devin was on swing. And then then Marinda. And then Dwight. And then Warren. And then Sarah. And then little Mark. Sister Durrant had no restraints for the older children, but she would not let them push her little Mark very high at all.

A car pulled by and suddenly screeched to a stop. It was the beautiful Karen Bybee. Matt had wanted to get her attention, but thus far had failed. But the swing caught her attention. She parked the car, jumped out and raced over. Matt moved forward to meet her and shouted, "Would you like to ride on my swing?"

Karen, batting her eyes said, "I sure would Matt."

Matt moved toward the swing and announced to Mark, "Your turn is over." He lifted the crying Mark off the swing and dumped him onto the ground.

Soon Karen was in the swing. The afternoon sun gave the appearance of her having a Halo. She was truly beautiful. Matt held his hands on her waist and pulled her back and pushed her forward. It was hard to tell who was the most thrilled: Karen because the swing forward or Matt because he had had fulfilled his dream of holding Karen in his arms.

Soon all the neighborhood children were there. Suddenly the Durrant family had arrived. There front yard had become a park.

Devin went close to his father and said, "Thank you father. This is great. You are a world's finest father." He then said, "Now that we got the swing our place is a park, how about putting a basketball standards there on parking place in the corner of property?"

President Durrant looked that direction and said, as he put his hand on Devin's shoulder, "Why not ? Why not?"

Little did President Durrant realize that this truly was the beginning of a better day. He pulled the little painting from his pocket, looked at it, and said a very quiet, "thank you. Whoever you are."

Chapter 4

We were out at the swing until dark. There were still some young folks who had not had their turn. We invited them to come back tomorrow.

That night, as I lay in my bed I smiled broadly. I had just had the most successful day I had had in the past 150 days.

I was shocked into consciousness by the ringing of the phone. For a minute or two I didn't know where I was. I looked at the clock and it was 4 AM. I brought myself up onto one elbow, and said, "Hello."

I heard a voice on the other end say, "Oh George, did I wake you? It is seven o'clock in Utah. What time is it there?"

"That's okay. Who is this?"

"It is your brother Duane. I have some very sad news. Mother just died, and I thought you would want to know."

I was silent for several seconds and then I asked, "What was the problem?"

"I think she just wore out. And she missed you so much."

"When is the funeral?"

"It will be sometime later this week. We are not sure just when yet. We know you won't be coming home, but we will be thinking of you. We will make a recording of the funeral. We are so proud of you. We all know how much mother loved you, and how much you loved her."

"I sure did love her. I sure did. Thank you for calling me. She was a great lady."

"If you want to send a letter we would read it at the funeral. Just do whatever you think is best."

"I'll try to do that."

"Sorry I woke you up. I just thought you should know as soon as possible. So I will let you go back to sleep. I love you my dear little brother, George."

I rose from my bed and made my way into our large living room. I went and sat on the couch, lowered my head into my hands and softly wept. My mind was flooded with memories of my mother. I was the youngest of her nine children. People said she spoiled me. But I told them, "I do not mind being spoiled. Mind your own business."

I thought of my teenage years; years wherein I felt so insignificant. I would come home from school, and she would make me a peanut butter sandwich. I would sit on her lap. She would run her fingers through my hair and tell me I was special. I don't know how I could have made it in those days without her gentle reassurance.

I recalled leaving on my mission to England. I was so excited to go, but I didn't know if I could bear being away from my mother.

When I arrived in England, I was perhaps the most homesick missionary the church has ever had. It was Christmas time in England. I received no Christmas cards nor presents because the people back home did not know my address.

The only thing that saved me from giving up all hope was that my landlady reminded me of my mother. She was a large lady, as was my mother. I sensed that though this lady, Sister Deyes, had had many missionaries live with her and her husband in their little house. I was the most vulnerable, and thus her favorite. Just like I had been the favorite of my mother. Sensing my distress at being away from home at Christmas this wonderful landlady was very kind to me, and reassured me that all would be well. But just before Christmas she was taken to the hospital. I went there with my companion and we gave her a blessing I promised her that she would become well. But later that night she died.

I was heartbroken. I felt like such a weak missionary. I knew so little and there was so much to know. Two years seemed like such a long time. I knew I could not return home. But I wondered if I could stay there?

I remembered leaving on my first mission. How happy my mother was to see me get on the train. But this second mission had been hard on her. She loved the days when Marilyn I and the eight children would go visit her. She lived for those days.

At the time for my departure, Her mind was failing and she could not understand when I told her I would be going away for three years. The day we came to tell her our final goodbye each of the eight children said goodbye and left the room and went to the car. Then Marilyn told her goodbye and departed. Then it was just my mother and me all alone in the big kitchen of the old home. The home that meant so much to me. I embraced her and tearfully told her of my love. When I tried to withdraw, she held me close and cried. She begged me not go. After some time I physically pulled her hands away and departed. There was no choice.

I wondered if I appeal to the brethren if they would let me come home for the funeral. But I knew they would not. Nor would I asked. Two hundred missionaries need a president every day, 24 hours a day. It is not so much the man they need as it is the position. Missionaries need a president.

My missionaries needed a president. Even a president who was as ineffective as I was. Perhaps there is no position on Earth where a man is so indispensable as in the case of a mission president. The missionaries count on him. They know that he holds so much of their fate in his hands. They love him. I could not leave them.

I could think of nothing for the next hour or so than my mother. I missed her so deeply. I remembered that Christmas day do long ago in England when I missed her more than I could ever tell.

On that cold, damp day in 1953 I had a cold. The other missionaries were invited to dinner, but I could not go because of my illness. So I was alone with Pop Deyes who was in his room mourning. I was all alone on Christmas. I felt no one had ever been as alone as I was. I wanted to be at home sitting on my mother's lap.

There was a Bible nearby. I did not want to do so, but I decided to read. I read the Books of Matthew and Luke. I read the account of the things leading up to the birth of Christ. It mentioned Angels. I remember thinking to myself, "Are there really Angels?" And I heard a still small voice say, "Yes George there are Angels."

I read of the birth of Christ. His mother being Mary. But Joseph was not his father. I had never known, with such conviction, that his Father was Heavenly Father. Jesus Christ was the son of God, and on that Christmas day, I knew it.

I spent that Christmas with Christ and it was the most wonderful Christmas I had ever spent. I knew how much this memorable day would mean to my mother. So in the evening I penned a letter to her telling her of my Christmas day. I told her of my love for her. I told her of the landlady who I had come to love because she reminded me of her. I told her of sitting close to this lady and having her tell me she thought I was special just like my mother used to tell me. In the days and years that followed, I was still homesick. But with my feelings toward my Savior I was strengthened. My mother had such great faith. I would miss her. I was so glad she had lived as long as she did. If she had died when I was a child or youth I don't know if I could have gone on living.

So mother was gone. My father had died earlier. I knew that they were both on the other side cheering for me

That afternoon new missionaries would come. There is nothing as renewing as having new ones come. I prayed that they would be well prepared. I loved them even though I had never met them.

I prayed that somehow with them added to our numbers I could be a more effective president. With the Lord's help I could be more direct. I could be more demanding. I could be more the kind of mission president I felt I should and that my immediate leader told me I should be. Then somehow, I was no longer praying, I was just thinking in harmony with God. After this little side trip, I returned to my praying. I said to the Lord, "I'm thinking about who I really am. I'm just old George Durrant, Cub Scout master who has suddenly been called to be a mission president. I've never been a leader of a great company, or presided over a high organization in the church. I'm just a teacher--a teacher who loves the students more than the subject. I'm a gentle man who doesn't know how to get after people. I'm kind of a softy. But if you'll help me Heavenly Father, I'll change. I'll be what you want me to be.

As I said that, I suddenly felt distant from Him. I sensed His disappointment in me.

I felt He was asking, "Why do you think I called you. If I had wanted someone who is different than the way you are, I would have called them and not you?"

Then I thought I had best change the subject. I said Heavenly Father you told me when I was a young homesick missionary in England that there are Angels. Could all twelve of these new missionaries somehow be angels. Or maybe among them you could send me one Angel—a full-blooded genuine bona fide Angel. An angel who could set an example for us all.

But I know that perhaps I ask a foolish thing. I guess all I really ask is for you to send me your best. And that will be plenty good.

Thank you for giving me such a magnificent mother. When I think of her, I could say back to you, "Yes Heavenly Father, there are Angels. My mother is one of them."

By now it was getting lighter outside. Morning had now officially arrived.

Thing like this will appear throughout the book.
Interviews—their Flavor.

(Never across a desk. But sitting facing each other.)

Senior Sister, “President I could not wait for you to come. That is why I asked to be your first interview. I’m so mad at my thoughtless husband. I have been upset for three days. Do you have any idea what he has done?”

President: “What did he do?”

“You will never believe this, but it is true.”

President squirms in his chair and waits.

SS continues in as tone of anger, “Well I will get right to it.”

“Saturday morning we were getting ready to go to the afternoon session of Stake Conference. I had my hair fixed the night before by Sister Baum. I went to take a shower. I turned on the water. My husband had left up the little button thing on the faucet. The water poured down on me. Before I could turn it off my hair was drenched. Can you believe such a thing? I was so mad I sat in the bathroom and cried. You must talk to him president. Let him know that such behavior is not acceptable.”

Pres. “I’ll do that. That really surprises me.”

“Well I just wanted you to know.”

President picks up an envelope and pulls out a folded letter and says, “In this letter he sent me, maybe he does not tell the whole truth. Let me read it to you.

Dear President Durrant,

My wife and I have never been so happy. I know you admire Sister Durrant. But I’m telling you, my wife, Sister Sikes, is the most prefect person I have ever known. She is like an angel. The people here in Dexter love her. We are having great success. The little chapel once so empty is now so full. The saints are now on fire with the gospel. Old family feuds are now forgotten. But it is not because of me. It is because of her. I love her with all my heart. I’m so deeply grateful that she and I will be together forever.

Just thought you ought to know,

Elder Clifton Sikes.

The president folds up the letter in silence and then looks up at Sister Sikes. She is wiping the tears from her eyes with a laced handkerchief.

Pres. “Elder Sikes is coming in next. I’ll get after him real good. He’ll never leave that thing up again.”

Sister Sikes appeals, “Well, don’t be too hard on him. Most of the time he is a good and kind man.”

“Yes, I know that, but what he did is inexcusable. I can’t have that sort of thing going on in this mission.”

“Well...Maybe... Why don’t you let me talk to him. Why don’t you forget what I said. He loves you so dearly. Please President. Don’t get after him. I know I told you this. I don’t want to hurt

him.” Then amidst her tears she said, “I love him with all my heart and soul. I’m so grateful to have him as my husband.”

As she leaves the room, the President sees her out in the hall embracing her companion.

An Elder who has lived in many foster homes and finally with a Mormon family.

President, I’m leaving here tomorrow to go to Kansas.”

“Why? You are on a mission. You can’t just pack up and leave.”

“No matter what you or anyone else says, tomorrow I am out of here.”

“Why Kansas?”

“That is where my brother is in prison.”

“Prison? What did he do?”

That doesn’t matter. What matters is what he is going to do.”

“What’s that?”

“He gets out next month and he is going to Colorado to murder the man who sent him there.”

“How do you know that?”

“He told me that in a letter.”

“He won’t really do that.”

“You don’t know my brother.”

So what can you do about that.”

“I can talk some sense into him. So I’m on my way.”

“I can’t give you permission to do that.”

“I could care less about permission.”

“Could we help in any way?”

“No. It is up to me. I don’t need any help.”

“Elder, I love you. I love you with all my heart. How long will this take.”

“A week.”

“Then will you come back?”

“You don’t want me back. I’m not much use to you or to anyone else.”

“You are of great use to me. I need you. The Lord needs you. I understand how you feel.”

The elder sat silently. Finally he looked up into the eyes of the president. That something that can only go between a mission president and one of his missionaries went between them.

Then the President spoke, “Here is my phone number. You call me each night and tell me where you are. I’ll pray for your success. But when you have set your brother straight, you must return. There are people here that you need to set straight. Promise me that you will return.”

Tears welled up in the eyes of the Elder. After several seconds of silence he looked up and said softly, as he nodded his head up and down. “Yeh. I’ll be back.” The two embraced.

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A missionary who had arrived a month ago comes in. He sits down and says, "President. There is something you should know. I'm not my brother. So don't expect me to be like he was when he served his mission in Japan three years ago."

The president noticed that the Elder shook with emotion. He asked, "Do I know your brother?" "Everybody knows him. He was an amazing missionary. I'm sure you have heard of him. I know you feel I will be as good as he was. Well I won't be!"

"Okay. But you say you are not like him. Tell me about that."

The elder began to choke up. He spoke as he pulled his handkerchief from his pocket. "He was straight A in everything. He won all the honors. My parents were proud of him. But I'm not him. I hope you know that president. I am not him!"

The Elder blew his nose.

Then the president said softly, "I'll always remember that you are not him. And guess what Elder, I'm glad you are not him because I like you just the way you are."

The elder began to sob. The two stood. Amidst his tears the Elder spoke again, "Thanks. I just wanted you to know that. I'll do my best."

"I know you will. I know you will. I love you. Tell your bother Hi from me. Okay!"

The president smiled and so did the Elder.

Another Elder who came last month came in. He had been a college wrestler. He focuses his eyes on the floor just in front of his chair. He stares at that same spot all the while he says: "I don't know why I came. I don't have a testimony or anything like that." He pauses and continues: "I was pretty lucky at wrestling and got all these scholarship offers. I finally went to college. With a few breaks I was able to win the conference in my weight.

"I met this girl in college and I really liked her. We went to the April general conference because she wanted to. We arrived at the Conference Center at four in the morning and eventually managed to obtain a seat in the balcony.

"The President of the Church was talking about missionary work. He said, 'Every worthy young man ought to go.' We were holding hands and she tightened her grip on me when he said that.

"After the meeting we were sitting on the lawn by the Visitors Center. I had not really planned on a mission. My parents aren't active and they sort of wanted me to keep going to college on my scholarship.

"I asked my girl friend if she felt I ought to go. She replied that she had always wanted to marry a returned missionary. Before I knew what had hit me, I told her I was going."

The Elder now looked up and as he did he said, "President, I don't know why I'm here." Tears caused his eyes to glisten as he said: "I miss her so much. I wish I were home." He didn't speak for a few seconds and the room was filled with perfect silence. Then he drew a deep breath and squared his shoulders and said: "But I'm here and I'm staying. I'll just do my best and see what happens."

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Start here.

. The missionaries learned we had arrived. They all lined up along the wall in the hall. The whole hall was filled with about 40 missionaries standing side by side. I entered the door and there they were.

A reverent hush fell over each of them and me.

I walked to the first one and looked into his eyes and called him by name I loved him and I could feel his love for me. I moved on to the next, called him by name, looked into his eyes and loved him. I went on down the row-- shook hands with each of them and called him or her by name. It was the singular most moving few minutes I had on my entire mission. These magnificent missionaries were like angels. They were my knights. And I, King Arthur, had arrived.

The car crash was more symbolic of my first few months as mission president than was my glorious first meeting of my missionaries.

I gradually found out that my kind of leadership results in many problems. At that time I didn't know that other types of leadership also results in problems. Problems are a wonderful inheritance for each mission president be he an Arthur or a Patten or somewhere in between.

All I knew is that with me and my missionaries things were not going as well as had hoped.

At the first round of zone conferences, I told the missionaries my story of Camelot. I told them that there would be no more rules. Now I didn't mean there would be no more rules, I meant that

their living would be based on principles and integrity and doing the right thing rather than a set of rules. I told them about King Arthur. I told them I would never punish them by demoting them or sending them to a terrible place. I told them that if they did wrong, my only punishment would be that I would lose my trust in them. I told them, tearfully; that I didn't know of any punishment could be as serious as that. I would not want to lose my trust in them, but I would even though I didn't want to.

They listened with rapt attention and they were amazed. I realized that I was going out on a limb of faith. But for me that was the only limb on the tree. My assistants were amazed, and I learned later that they really wondered about the sanity of their new mission president.

As weeks went by, using that kind of leadership, things began to deteriorate. Baptisms the month before I got there (100) were the highest they had ever been. The missionaries were thrilled about that. The first month I was there, baptisms had gone down to 35. That really bothered me even though I knew the total mark of success was not measured in the number baptisms. But in reality I felt it was.

I began to feel that perhaps we could get more baptisms if I wore a darker suit and darker stockings and polished my shoes and became more firm. I kind of got lost in between two styles of leadership.

The next month the baptisms were down to 20; the next month 10. A general authority came to our regional meeting. I gave a talk about how the missionary work was going. I sadly said, "If it keeps on this way, we'll all be able to go home." The stake presidents felt sorry for me because it was obvious that I was stressed. The general authority told me as they do, that I was just fine and things would turn around and all would be well. He was trying to bring out the angel in me. He did in a way because I never got over his kindness and his faith in me.

Though the general authority had brought out a bit of an angel in me, I still felt there was a real problem with me. One of my missionaries who was quite astute told me in an interview, "President Durrant you are making a big mistake. You're treating us missionaries as if we were 'celestial.' You're teaching us to be celestial, to be a bunch of angels. But I'll tell you something, we aren't 'celestial.' We are 'telestial' and the only way you are going to get us to perform-- to get this mission going again, is getting down and treating us like we're 'telestial.'" You've got to start being firm! You have got to start getting after us. We need to be praised, but more important than that, we need to be commanded. You better start doing it."

Then he added, "I've got a friend down in Atlanta, and they're getting 10 times the baptism we're getting. I think we just need to make some changes, and I for one, I would love to be told what to do. Most of the missionaries like what you say but we feel like we don't have to worry."

That was the interview. I thought, "Well maybe he's right!" So maybe I should change.

I went to my office really early the next morning, and there was a letter attached to the mission office door. In the letter, this fellow said:

Dear President Durrant,

I just got back last month from my mission in Mexico. Recently I attended one of your zone conferences. Your talk was inspiring. The missionaries love. But you totally wrong in the way you approach the work. You need to change. .

My president down there was tough; he was kind, but he was tough. And we were getting 100 baptisms a month. Here you are getting 15 or 20."

I know everyone kind of likes you and loves you. But is that what you really want? Or do you want results? What're your goals anyway?"

He signed the letter and said, "PS. I hope you take this in the spirit that it is given because I know you've got it in you, President Durrant. I think you can make the changes you need to make and then you will be a truly great mission president.

Well I shouldn't be influenced with things like that, but I've always been influenced by things like that. I can't just pass it off, I'm a worrier. I get so concerned. I wished I didn't - I had a mission president who went out the same time as I did. Late I had told him of some of my concerns. And he said, "You worry too much, don't worry, you'll do all right," He added, "I'm like the swimming coach who when asked how he was doing said, "Well we haven't won any of our matches, but none of our swimmers have drowned."

I laughed and thought, "How would it be just to laugh, and let the criticism go off your back like water off a duck's back but that's not how I am. I care a lot and others do too. But I don't think anyone else worries as much as I do.

At that time, we had a few missionaries that were doing dumb things. I thought, "Maybe I need to come down on them really hard, maybe some of them needed to go home.

I thought, "How can I change? What shall I do?"

A Mission Representative of the Twelve came to our mission to give me a hand. I was so glad to have him come. I thought, "Maybe he can give me some ideas."

We went around the mission, and he was a happy man. The missionaries really liked him. He had been a mission president in California, and had been a good one.

As we traveled together from zone to zone, I would want to talk to get help. I'd bring something up and he would say, "The answer to that..." and he would tell me how he did it in California. I just wanted him to listen to me. I felt, 'You can't make an angel out of me by telling me how you did it; you have to listen to me. And then talk.'" He wouldn't listen."I was glad when he left because I was not him and this was not California. But I sure did wish I could have succeeded like he did.

So there I was, about five months in--and a bit lost.

I still talked some of Camelot, but not so boldly anymore. Thus I lost part of my power. I was no longer the real George Durrant. I didn't really know where I stood

My oldest son longed to return home where he was "a big man on campus." And where he had a future as a star basketball player. Now he was out here and miserable. I talked to him and he said, "We've had open gym and the coach pays no attention to me." He was just beside himself with sorrow.

By now twenty of old missionaries were going home and the next afternoon, we would receive twenty new ones.

Then next morning, with the new missionaries coming on my mind, I went to my office in the early morning and prayed. I believe I said something like this:

"We've got to get a new spirit in the mission. Send me some missionaries who can relate to what I'm trying to do. Send me some missionaries such as Stephen Covey, Robert Bennett, Mahlon Edwards, Robert Cutler and Kenneth Blair. Send me the kind of missionaries President Reiser had. Send me some of those missionaries. Maybe if you want, you could even send me an angel."

The new missionaries were to come in six hours.

Now let's take a "time out" for a little fun. Let me now insert a **fictitious** story of what would have happened had the Lord answered my prayers, and sent me an angel. At the end of the "time out" we will return to the rest of the true story.

AN ANGEL IN CAMELOT

The six new missionaries would be at the airport in two hours.

I wanted my children to be part of the greeting party at the airport. Maybe seeing the new missionaries arrive would help them catch a vision of the work and would help them feel better about being on this mission.

Nearly two hour later the assistants, myself, Sister Durrant and the eight children were headed in a car and a van for Standiford Field, the airport in Louisville Kentucky

We got a late start and the traffic was heavy. So while we were in route, the six missionaries landed, and made their way off the airplane, and came into the lobby of the airport. They looked around in vain for the Mission President. They had been told that he would be there waiting for them.

They wander in to baggage claim to wait for their luggage to arrive. Still no sign of anyone from the mission office! Finally they wandered outside with their bags and hoped for the best. Another missionary, sitting on a bench nearby, stood up, and wheeled his bag over to join them.

Without saying a word he knowingly points in the direction of a nearby roundabout. The newly arrived missionaries follow his finger's trajectory just in time for the mission van to skid around the corner and screech to a halt directly in front of them. President Durrant, riding on the passenger side, hurries out of the van door to be the first to greet the missionaries.

Sister Durrant's, driving the family car arrives a few minutes later. She is visibly irritated and her first words are, "Elder Flake you were way over the speed limit all the way here. If you don't start driving slower, I'll see to it that you don't drive anymore."

The president introduces Sister Durrant and the eight children to the seven missionaries. The two assistants whisk their bags into the back of the van before The airport policeman can ticket them for stopping too long in an unloading zone.

The seven missionaries jump inside the van and the Assistant who is driving hits the gas just as an Airport Policeman comes running up waving a ticket. The Assistant on the Passenger's side hands the angry cop A Pass Along Card as they motor past him. The President breathes a sigh of relief before turning around and facing his new missionaries. With a warm and friendly grin on his face, he says, "Welcome, dear Elders and Sisters. Welcome to Camelot! We love you six all ready. I have been praying for you to come to help us in this great work."

Back at the mission home the Assistants started filling out paperwork and, for the first time, realize that they have transported seven missionaries from the airport. They are a bit confused as they were only expecting to receive six. They report this odd fact to me. I tell them not to worry about it. We will sort things out over dinner that night.

In the mission home, Sister Durrant directs the two Sisters to an upstairs bed room, the four Elders downstairs to the dormitory. I called each of the two sisters by name, and then the four Elders the same. I had memorized their name. But the fifth Elder's name I'd never heard of before. I looked at his name tag and read, "Elder Marcus Snedden."

When I said his name he didn't reply with words—only with a smile. I was struck by his distinguished appearance—his blonde tightly curling hair, his deep blue eyes, his strong chin, his perfect teeth, his warm smile all made him "movie star" handsome. His immaculately navy blue suit, which did not appear to come from Mr. Mack, was made to look even more missionaryish by his maroon tie. I found myself wishing his picture could be sent out with all mission calls. Then each one would know how they're supposed to look. This mysterious Elder Snedden just looked like an angel-- I mean like a missionary. I ask him where he was from. He didn't reply.

Teddy our cook, who looked like Aunt Jimima on a pancake box, had prepared turkey and dressing, cranberries and all the fixings. All eighteen of us sat around the big table. The children were excited to be with the new missionaries.

I called the group to order and said, "I will call upon my favorite child to lead us in prayer. This child is our most intelligent child. He or she is our best looking family member." By now all the children were saying, "I said the prayer last time." Then I called on Warren.

All of the other children said in unison, "It did not sound like you were talking about him." All the missionaries laughed and so did I. Warren prayed.

As we ate Elder Bryant spoke up, "You have all heard that Kentucky is part of the Bible Belt. I'm here to tell you that this place is the 'belt buckle' of the Bible Belt." One smaller Elder from Mud Lake, Idaho seems to cower at such an announcement. Elder Bryant continued, "These people around these parts really know their Bible. But don't worry, they know very little about the Book of Mormon." We all laughed. After that there wasn't too much talk as we ate.

I noticed Elder Snedden had immaculate manners. I couldn't keep my eyes off of him. He never said anything, and did not laugh at Elder Bryant's humor. He then stood and went into the kitchen. Teddy was trying to unclog the sink. As he watched her efforts, he pulled the plunger from her hand and then placed his finger in the drain. Immediately the water made a real sucking sound as it rushed down the drain. Teddy looked at him and said, "Well I'll be. You got some kind of power in that finger!" He smiled with such warmth that Teddy nearly melted.

He then helped her bring out the desert to each guest. I could tell that Sister Durrant was in awe at such unsolicited behavior. When she was about to stand Elder Snedden hurried behind her and pulled her chair back as she stood. She seemed overcome with emotion at his graciousness.

After dinner Elder Snedden gestured for the other missionaries to assist him in clearing the table.

The next order of business was for me to interview the missionaries. I learned that the first one had been a former all-state football player and had a scholarship to BYU. He was quick to tell me these things. The second had been student body president of Ely, Nevada High School. He didn't tell me about this, but I have a way of learning about people. The third told me he had a girl friend to whom he was informally engaged. He asked how often he could write to her seeing as they were to someday be married. The fourth said he had five girlfriends at home. I hoped he was not from Short Creek. He said he had a deep desire to be assigned to the place where Elvis Presley was born. He wanted to have Elvis baptized as one of the dead. He was disappointed when he found Memphis was not in our mission.

The first Sister was an English teacher but wanted to serve a mission. The second was shy and I could learn very little about her. I knew it would not be easy for her to be bold. All in all, they looked like a wonderful group of missionaries.

I was a bit nervous when Elder Snedden walked in. I didn't know why, but he made me nervous. I felt he could look into my soul. I sensed that he knew I was struggling as a mission president. I don't know exactly what integrity looks like I felt it looked like him. I don't what "class" is but I could tell he had class. I felt I knew what humility was, and I could tell he was deeply humble. I kind of know what love is, but I had never before felt such love from any person.

"How is Elder Snedden?" I asked as I shook his hand. He didn't reply. His handshake was firm. When I was ready to withdraw my hand he continued to shake my hand. Then sensing it was all right to do so he embraced me. I felt strength, physical strength, mental strength emotional strength, and most of all spiritual strength.

I took a seat on the side of the desk. I ask him where he was from and he produced a card upon which was written, Elder Marcus Snedden. Home town: Gloriousville. But there was no other address. I smiled. I told him how happy we were to have him in the mission. He closed his eyes and nodded his head to let me know he was glad to be there.

Elder Flake knocked on the door and said, "We need Elder Snedden to go tracting with us. We want to get these guys—I mean these greenies—I mean these young Elders and Sisters broke in today before they hit their beds."

Elder Snedden with great enthusiasm hurried out the door. I've never been as mystified as to just what was going on and who he was. I picked up the phone and dialed my contact, Ned Winder, in the missionary department in Salt Lake City. Ne and his family owned a dairy, a bakery and a cemetery south of the city. When he knew it was who was that calling, he said, "Drink our milk and eat our bread and let us bury you when you are dead." After a hearty laugh, I asked him to check the records and see if there was any Elder Snedden on the list of those who came to our mission that day?"

"Elder who?" He asked.

"Snedden."

As he searched on his computer he said. "Snow. Let's see. No there is no Snedden. How do you spell it?"

"S N E D D E N." He says he is from Gloriousville."

"That is what I thought. Nobody even near that name. In your mission or any other mission. And I've never heard of Gloriousvill. Sounds like it would be up by Paradise or Providence or Eden up in Cache Valley. Talk to him and find out more about him and call me tomorrow. And remember, 'Drink our milk and eat our bread and let us bury you when you are dead.'"

"But Ned. That is part of the problem he can't talk."

"Can't talk!" President are you all right? Take your temperature, just don't make sense." With that the phone went dead. Ned Winder had hung up.

The next morning Brother Winder called me back. He asked me, "Did you know the Jazz lost last night. Do you want me to send you the remainder of my season tickets?"

Before I could respond he asked, "Were you dreaming last night when you called me? Did Elder Snedden fly away last night? If he is still there, you have an imposter on your hands. Buy him a bus ticket to Gloriousville, and get back to work." He hung up again.

At breakfast the next morning Elder Snedden was in the kitchen helping Sister Durrant make oat meal. I was not sure if I was happy or disappointed. All the other Missionaries still seemed half asleep, but not Elder Snedden. He was rubbing his hands together with enthusiasm. He was ready to go.

Two hours later, I went to the car to head for the stake center for the first of five zone conferences. There was a piece of paper under the wiper blade. I got out and picked up the paper and examined it. It was a miniature water color painting. It was brilliantly done. I was shocked to see that it was a picture of me standing at a pulpit with missionaries looking up at me. I had a slight smile on my face and a visible halo surrounding my head. I got inside the car and looked at the little painting again. It was clearly me. But a halo! Somebody had the wrong guy.

When I arrived at the stake center. I looked at the painting again. I wondered, "Who did this and what does it mean?"

Suddenly, for some reason I did not understand, I had a feeling of hope and love.

That morning before leaving home, I had polished my shoes a little brighter. And I had put on a darker tie. I would act a bit more sober and tone down my sense of humor. I would be more demanding.

The meeting started and we sang, "Called to Serve." The Sister at the piano played it too slowly for my liking. There was no enthusiasm in the singing. We were off to a bad start.

I stood and welcomed the missionaries. Then the assistants took over. They were two of the sharpest young men I had ever known. I found myself wishing one of them was president. Elder Bryant had a warm and wonderful way of teaching. Elder Flake was redheaded and fiery. They were a great team.

I looked out of the missionaries, they were being asked by the assistance to give their ideas on how to have a joint study time in the morning. I looked out at Sister Redborn. Her head was down. She had psychological problems? Her companion Sister Goodrich was, in my opinion, the best missionary in the mission. Off to my left was Elder Morgan. I knew that when we had our interviews later in the day he would announce that he still wanted to go home. I knew the missionaries a little better now and my love for them was strong.

An hour later it was my turn to talk. I stood at the pulpit and wondered what I should say. As I spoke, I also prayed for the Spirit of the Lord to inspire me. But nothing came. I announced that we all needed to set new goals for baptisms. We needed to be more firm in having our contacts make commitments.

I told a story of Elder McInnis, with whom I had served in England many years ago. He was successful because of his loving boldness. That didn't seem to really hold the groups interest. I could see some of the missionaries looking around to see companions they had once worked with. Then four missionaries from the Ft Knox District came in late and everyone turned to see them.

A bit flustered I reached for my scriptures and there on top of them was the little painting. I smiled as I picked it up. Again I felt a surge of hope and love. Looking at the picture gave me some sort of a spiritual boost and Ideas started coming into my head. They came so fast that I began to speak with great speed. I talked of halos and of angels and of Heavenly father and of Jesus Christ. I said funny things. I said serious things. I said heavenly things. I talked of my love for each of them and of their love for each other. And for the people they were teaching. I could see the missionaries come alive right before my eyes. I picked up the

little painting again and saw there was something I had not seen before—each of the missionaries in the painting also had halos. As I looked up I could see each of them glow. They appeared to be angels.

Suddenly I felt the Spirit of the Lord. I felt power. I felt courage. I felt love.

It was then time for missionary testimonies. I've never heard such power. Each one told of his or her desire to do better. Those who were having trouble with a companion said they would try to get along. Elder Morgan said that he had decided to stay. He and many others expressed their love for me.

It was difficult for me to say goodbye to the missionaries. I wanted so very much for each one to continue to feel the spirit of love and hope and faith. Amidst deep feelings I told each individually of my love.

Elder Snedden lingered as did the other six new ones. Then they and their new companions—trainers-- came forth and they all departed. Only Elder Snedden remained. I had not made any plans for him because I had not known he was coming. I invited him to return with me to the mission home until we could determine where he would be assigned.

On the drive home, it came into my mind that Elder Snedden should labor with two of our best Elders in Stinsonville. These were the missionaries who had been baptizing more than any others. I felt they would be the best for Elder Snedden. Because these two missionaries had a long drive to their area, we felt it best that they spend the night and then go on their way home in the morning.

My oldest son Matt had not gone to the airport or to the zone conference. When we came home, I saw him sitting alone reading the Courier-Journal newspaper. I knew that I would need to spend some time with him, but not until after dinner. Elder Snedden came into the room. He went directly to where Matt was sitting and sat beside him. Matt continued to read. Elder Snedden then arose and stood directly in front of Matt. Matt still did not look up. Then the Elder reached down and pulled at the paper until he had removed it from Matt's hand. Matt was irritated by what had happened, and for the first time looked, with a bit of anger, at the intruding missionary.

The Elder then folded the paper neatly and placed it on a nearby table. Matt still did not know what was going on. The Elder then reached down and took Matt's right hand in his. The look of anger seemed to disappear from Matt's expression. Now a look of sadness filled the fifteen year olds' eyes. Matt was tall, but now nearly as much as Elder Snedden.

Elder Snedden then moved back and the two looked at each other. Matt then smiled. Elder Snedden smiled and bowed to Matt.

The Elder then picked up the news paper and turned to the page Matt had been reading. He beckoned Matt to be seated. He then handed the paper to Matt and walked over to the stairs and departed to the dormitory.

Matt just sat there as though he was in a daze. Then he arose and came over to where I stood in somewhat of a daze myself. He asked me, "Who is this guy?"

That night Sister Durrant asked "Who is this Elder Snedden?"

I replied, "I don't know. Salt Lake doesn't know. He was not on their list of those to come here. The other missionaries who came said he was not with them in the MTC. And he was not on the airplane. He just showed up at the baggage claim. One of them said, "We were

all standing there wondering what to do. He raised his arm and pointed to where we saw you coming." I then told Sister Durrant, "So I don't know if he is a fake, or an actor, or who knows? Maybe he is an angel."

Sister Durrant smiled and reached out and put her hand on my shoulder and said, "There is only one angel around here, and it is you. I've never seen you as inspired as you were today. And I love you my angel."

For the first time in two months I slept like baby that night.

The next morning Elder Snedden and his two companions were gathered to depart. Elder Snedden placed his bags in the trunk and got into the back seat. As usual he was ready to go. I took the other two Elders aside and said, "I know this will be a bit tough on you. I've never heard him say a word. I know he's a special Elder. So have patience. My prayers are with you. Keep in touch."

Just then I was called to the telephone. It was Ned Winder who said, "Well president if you still got, what is his name? Elder Harvey the Rabbit, or Eldon the Phantom Fortie or what's his name, Elder Snedden, send him to the Jazz front office. They need some new players." They he added, "According to all our research, there's no such Elder. So if he's not just a figment of your imagination, you better send him back to wherever he came from. We can't have a missionary out there representing the Church when we don't even know who he is."

I looked out the window and the Elders were driving off. I didn't try to stop them.

Stinsonville.

The two other missionaries were quite amused by Elder Snedden for their first two days with him. One said in a letter home:

Dear Folks,

I'm now in a threesome. Elder Snedden is with us. He can't talk, but he is a good missionary.

We went tracting and he got in every door without saying a word. He seems to smile with the spirit of the Lord. When we teach, he just sits there on the front edge of his chair with his head pointing right at the people. He nods his agreement to everything we say, and the people agree with everything we say. We invite them to be baptized and they look over at him and he nods and they say "yes. We will."

At study class in the morning he reads along with us, but never reads out loud. He seems to have the entire Book of Mormon committed to memory.

He cleaned up the fridge and does all the cooking. Man! Can he ever cook!

I'm doing fine. I've got to go Elder Snedden is waiting at the door ready to go tracting.

Love,

Elder Clark.

But two days later things were changing. Elder Davis phoned me and said.

"President Durrant, I hate to bother you, but we've got a problem up here in Stinsonville."

"What is it?"

"Well, Elder Snedden is kind of getting on our nerves."

"Why?"

"He thinks he is the boss. He took my girl friends picture down, and threw it in the waste basket. I was about to punch him out. But he does things like that all the time. He gets up a half hour early and turns on all the lights."

"When we go to teach, he won't say anything. It drives me crazy. "

"Does he bother the people you are teaching? I mean because he never talks?"

"I'm sure it does. When he is around they never say "no" to anything we ask them to do. One guy had told us never to come back. But we did and when he saw Elder Snedden, he invited us in. So we do all right in our work. It is just that being around him is more than I can take. Elder Clark is the same way I am. I mean, I like him President, but he just makes me think I can't really measure up."

"Well give it a few more days. I know what you are saying. Just hang in there. Transfers are coming in a week and we will see then. He has got to speak someday. Maybe tomorrow!"

Two days later at ten at night my phone rang again.

"President Durrant. I hate to tell you this but we lost Elder Snedden.

"What do you mean you lost him?"

"Well we have so many miles on our car that we took a bus out to Sydney to see a referral out there. When the bus came, we got on and we looked and he hadn't got on. So we jumped out and went back, and he was just standing there like nothing had happened. We saw a lady across the street walking with a limp. He was staring at her and we could tell he was praying. Then she walked off and was not limping at all. I was so mad I really got after him. I called him some bad names. I shouldn't have, but I did. We had to walk seven miles home. We didn't say a word all the way home, and of course he didn't either.

When we were nearly home, he took off toward the center of town. We should not have done it, but we just let him go.

President we have looked all over the place. He's gone. I think he may have left the mission. We talked to somebody at the bus station who said a missionary get on a bus headed for St Lewis. President we really tried I know you're disappointed in us."

Just before I hung up they said, "And one more thing. We found this little painting on our table."

"What was it?"

"It's is real little. But man! Is it ever good? It's a picture of Wilford Woodruff, standing there alone and preaching to bunch of people near a court house like the ones in Kentucky."

"Bring it with you when you come to the next zone conference. I want to see it."

After I hung up, I knew I should call his home, his bishop, his stake president. But who? I could ask the operator to connect me with "Gloriousville." But good luck with that!

Somehow although I was worried, I felt at peace! I knew that all was well. Elder Snedden, whoever he was, would be all right.

Meanwhile back at the mission home.

I did not report Elder Snedden's sudden disappearance to the leaders in Salt Lake City. After all they did not even know he existed. Even Ned Winder would not want to know anything more.

At the Lexington Zone conference and the three others we attended that week, I never once mentioned Elder Snedden's disappearance. I thought that would be best. But everything I did,--speaking, and interviewing; I had him in my mind. I have never before felt the power I felt as I spoke in these zone conferences. And my love for the missionaries was far beyond description

I did keep the little painting in my scriptures. I might be a little vain, but looking at me with a halo and the missionaries the same looking at it made me feel good inside. Sort of like I was surrounded by Angels. It seemed as though the entire mission was on fire with the spirit of the Lord. Oh we still had problems and I knew we were not any better than any other mission. All I knew is something was happening that made our mission far more than it had ever been before.

It was during that week that I really became the mission president. I mean every inch of my soul was mission president.

When I got back to the mission home I had hopes that there would be some word of Elder Snedden. But there was nothing. I wondered what I could do. Should I contact the police? Or was all this just some kind of a joke?

I asked Sister Durrant if any calls had come in or anything I should know about anything. "No, not really. Well, there was one thing! Some fruit peddler came to the door and I bought a bushel of apples. When I paid him he handed me a pretty little painting of our big tree in front. As near as I can tell, you are up the tree tying a rope like you intended to hang yourself or something."

She showed me the painting. It had a familiar style. I looked at Sister Durrant and said, "It looks like me all right. But I haven't felt like hanging myself. At least not lately! But it is me. Maybe I was making a swing. Yeah! Maybe I was making a swing. That tree could hold quite a swing. The kids would love that. Yeah! I'll do that. Only I'll send an Elder up the tree."

Then I looked at the little painting again and asked, "But who painted this. It is so well done. And you say it was a fruit peddler? Did he leave his name? Or an address?"

"No, nothing like that."

Well, I did build that swing. And it caught the attention of every kid in eastern Louisville. Our kids had instant friends. It sort of became my reminder that I should put the kids and family first. And I did. And they all felt at home in Kentucky.

That is all except Matt. Matt was suffering. He became my greatest concern. To top it all off, they held their first basketball tryouts and he was cut after two practices. He said to me, "at-home I would have been a star, but here I can't even make the team. The coach never gave me a chance."

As we talked he lowered his head into his hands and said, "No friends, no nothing!"

I didn't know what to say. I asked him, "have you prayed about it?"

He looked at me with the gaze that told me that he felt my question was ridiculous, and he didn't even answer. It was late at night and I told him of my love and left him alone in his room.

I could not get him off my mind. Baptisms and other such matters held little significance if my own son was feeling such misery. I went to work at the mission office. After an evening meeting with the stake president I returned home.

Marilyn had saved me some dinner but I did not feel hungry. She with great excitement's announced, "That fruit vendor came by again today."

"Did you ask him about the picture?"

"No. He was coming down the street, and he suddenly stopped and turned around and went the other way. I was so disappointed. But in a few minutes a neighbor boy came and lo and behold he handed me another painting. This one is a picture of Matt. Matt is smiling."

I interrupted and asked, "Smiling! Are you sure it is Matt?"

She continued, "He is standing before a group of students behind him is a sign saying, 'Seneca high school Student Council.'"

"Where is it? What else did the boy say?"

"Nothing. I gave it to Matt. He took it to his room."

I hurried and entered bathroom Matt was sitting on his bed looking at the picture. He held it out for me to see. It was beautiful. He asked, "What do you think it means?"

I replied I don't know. What do you think it means?"

It gives me this strange feeling that I'm supposed to be here and be an example of what our church stands for. I've known how I should feel, and I wanted to feel that way. But I just couldn't until this picture came. Now I feel like I should smile like this picture shows; and I should get involved in my school government and other things. After all maybe I just wasn't cut out to be an athlete."

Then he announced. "I know I've been a major concern to you father. But that's going to change. I'm going to try to be like Elder Jibson. He smiles at everybody. I'm going to smile I'm going to be friendly. Everything is going to be different President Durrant. He looked up at me and smiled then he stood. And we embraced.

So that matter seemed to be settled, and I was grateful beyond any gratitude I ever felt before. The picture, showing what Matt could become, had changed everything. But where did the picture come from? I had to know.

It had been two weeks from the time of the delivery of the first picture to the delivery of the second one. Maybe the fruit vendor came every two weeks. Marilyn spent the whole day waiting out front for the appearance of the old truck. Suddenly it came around the corner when the driver saw her he turned back onto the main road and drove away. She ran to get his license number but was unable to do so. All she could see was a sign on the back which said, "Jonah Fruit's."

As time passed I could tell that the paintings were done on a high quality watercolor paper. I visited the largest art store in Louisville. I showed the clerk the pictures I had collected. She was amazed at the quality of the work. Her words were, "are you selling these?"

"No I just wondered if you know any artist who paints this way?"

"No I wished I did. I, myself, am a watercolor artist, but I, nor no one else I know, could paint this well and so tiny. These are masterpieces."

"Have you seen anyone in here buying this kind of watercolor paper?"

"You know someone was in here. He bought whole package of those small pieces of watercolor paper, but I don't think that man painted these. He said he was a fruit vendor from out town; and he wanted to take these back to a friend there."

I shouldn't have done it. I had better things to do. But I went to the police department. One of the bishops in our stake was a police detective there. I was shown to his office. I told him the story of the amazing paintings, and showed them to him. He replied, "Who did you say painted these?"

That's what I want to know. These have been mysteriously given to me and my family. I'm here to ask you to find out who it is that painted them. And who it is that's giving them to us. I told him the story of the fruit vendor. He said we needed to go to the licensing department of the city. He went with me. We inquired about fruit vendors.

The clerk told us that licenses were needed, but that no there were no fruit vendors in Louisville. And if there are some here, they are illegal and coming from out of town. My friend, the detective, the Bishop, could see that I was distressed. He told me he would put every policeman on the alert. If they saw this fruit vendor delivering Jonah Fruit's, they were to arrest him and call me.

But weeks went by and there was no arrest, nor any phone call.

I scoured the neighborhood asking each family if they had purchased any fruit from this vendor. Almost every one of them had, and they announced that they hoped he would return for his prices were so reasonable and the fruit was so delicious. They said they thought it came from some orchards some distance north and east of Louisville. They said they always paid cash because the vendor would not take checks.

I had done all I could do. I had to give up. But I never quit wondering as I looked at the picture of myself with a halo the missionaries with halos and my son smiling and presiding over the student Council at his high school. It appeared the paintings were of great value, but you can be sure I was not going to sell them for any price because of what they meant to me and my family.

By spring time, I had almost forgotten about Elder Snedden. But not completely. There was something about him that made him unforgettable.

In late April, Kathryn, who had been surprisingly happy in Kentucky, asked me, "Could we go to the Kentucky Derby on the first Saturday in May?"

I replied, "I don't think so. We did 't come here to go to horse races."

She then hurried to her room and returned to my side. She announced, "This is why I want to go. I've been looking forward to it every since we got here. I love horses."

She then asked, "Whatever happened to that Elders Snedden?"

"Why do you ask about him? I didn't even know you met him."

"I tried to talk to him. He couldn't seem to talk back. But he sure could smile. I felt something really special about him. But then I never saw him again. But while he was here he gave me this. She handed me a small piece of paper--a very recognizable type of paper. I was amazed when she handed it to me. There on the paper was a painting of the most beautiful horse I had ever seen. And below it were the words, 'You will love this--this the greatest race horse ever-- when you see him.'"

Then Kathryn said, "Tonight, I could not believe my eyes when I looked at the paper and saw this. I can tell it is this horse. The article said, "Secretariat, is going to run in the Derby and is the heavy favorite to win. I just feel I have to be there. You know how much I love horses. Just thinking about the Kentucky Derby has kept me happy every since we got here."

I again looked at the painting, and after a long pause I said, "We'll go."

And we did. And Secretariat won the Derby right in front of our eyes. During the next month he also won the Preakness and the Belmont stakes. And was indeed the greatest racehorse of all time.

I was mystified. Could Elder Snedden have painted these pictures? He was not an artist. Or was he? Could it be? Could it be that Elder Snedden was still alive?

And so it continued for the next three months. Our baptism doubled, then tripled but then went back down. But I knew it was not our fault. We were giving it our all.

And Matt had was now, via a miracle, was now on the basketball team. He had a host of friends. He was happy. And Kathryn was invited to a horse farm in Lexington which was run by a Mormon couple. She was in heaven.

No one had yet fallen out of the big swing although someone was in it twelve hours a day. The children were happy and Sister Durrant was a woman in love with her man, her family and her missionaries.

We still had our problems, but now we had more solutions than problems. We were on the right road and we all knew it.

Then it happened

I had driven home from the mission office for lunch. On the way back I stopped at the post office to mail a letter. I returned to Eastern Parkway and approached the parking lot between the chapel and the mission office. I got out of the car and was about to enter the door. I looked out on the busy street and saw an old truck come to a stop on the other side of the road. I saw on the back of the truck the words, "Jonah's Fruits."

As I was watching someone got out of the truck and the truck dove on down the street. Just then I heard a loud voice, "President! President Durrant!! I looked across and between the speeding cars I could see a missionary. Then I was totally stunned. It was Elder Snedden. I could not believe it was him. I walked as close as I could without being hit by a passing car.

It was indeed my missing Elder. He could not cross because there was one car after another coming at a high rate of speed. He shouted again. "I can't wait to tell you where I have been. You'll be amazed at what I have been up to."

"You can talk," I shouted with joy.

"Yes! It is a miracle. I'll tell you all about it and all about me."

Then there was a brief break between cars. He darted forward. He stumbles. He got up, but it was too late. He was struck by a large semi truck. His body flew through the air like a rag doll.

My heart sank. There was no way he could survive. I ran into traffic with my arms waving for cars to stop. I dragged him to the side of the road and onto the sidewalk so he would not be struck again. I put my hand under his neck and raised his head.

There were severe gashes in his forehead, but there was no blood. His body seemed completely broken. He could scarcely breathe. Tears filled my eyes, and I could hardly see. I bent over and kissed his forehead."

He gasped and then said, "President I'm so sorry. I left my companions. I had been a burden to them."

I told him, "Don't talk any more. The ambulance will soon be here and you will be all right."

But he did talk. "I decided to be like Wilford Woodruff. I would just go off and do missionary work by myself." He then gasped for breath.

I prayed and gave him a blessing, "Please Lord. Let him live!"

He then looked deep into my eyes and said over and over again, "The whole town! The whole town!" He then added in a whisper, "We need to have a ward. I love...." Then Elder Snedden died in my arms. The ambulance came to the scene. But I knew it was too late and I wept.

When the hospital returned Elder Snedden's possessions to me, all that he had was his card: Marcus Snedden, Gloriousville. That was all the identification necessary for someone as wonderful as Elder Snedden. But I was also given an envelope. When I opened it, I found a small painting. It was a painting of Elder Snedden standing in the waters of a clear blue Lake. He was about to baptize a man and standing on the shore, dressed in white, were a multitude waiting their turn.

The funeral

We notified all the missionaries. There was mourning throughout the mission.

Who to notify? That was the question. What about a funeral? There were so many questions. So many tears.

Sister Durrant was really grief stricken. She said he had to have an obituary. I told her, "No one knows him. Not even us. What could we put in an obituary?"

She said, "You just go in your office and start. The Lord knows him. He will tell you what to say."

I began to write."

Dear friends of Louisville and Kentucky. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter –day Saints has 180 young men and women serving as missionaries in this wonderful part of the world. You have seen them, some ride bikes, some walk, some drive cars. I'm their president and I love each one of them.

Today one of them died. He was hit by a truck in Louisville. We invite all of you to join in our grief.

His name was Elder Marcus Snedden. He was a real somebody. He had somehow lost his ability to speak or to write. He communicated through love and through art.

He came to our mission without notice that he was coming. We are not sure just where he grew up or lived. His card said he was from Gloriousville. That sounds to us like anyplace in Kentucky.

Perhaps someone who reads this will recognize him from the photo we took of him when he arrived here three months ago.

If you know him, please come to his funeral which will be held at our chapel on Eastern Parkway. It will begin at 2 pm this coming Saturday.

If you don't know him, we are sorry. You would have loved him as we do and as our Lord does.

All the missionaries who were in nearby areas attended the funeral. A recording was to be made so that all the others could say good bye to Elder Snedden.

Matt asked me if he could speak at the funeral. I agreed. Sister Durrant volunteered to sing. "I'll walk with God."

I would also speak.

We arrived at the chapel an hour before the services were to begin. It was a warm and beautiful day. Sort of what you would call 'a very best day.'

The mortician came with the body. I went to where he was. He asked, "Who is this guy. Something happened at the funeral home that I have never seen in thirty years in this profession."

Just then a car pulled into the parking lot. It had a couple and four children. I had never seen any of them before. The lady asked, "Is this the funeral services for Elder Snedden."

"It sure is," I replied. They headed into the chapel.

"Did you know him?" I asked.

"We sure did. We all knew him and we all loved him."

A van pulled in and four couples and four children got out. The driver asked, "Is this Elder Snedden's funeral?"

Three cars, then two cars, then four cars! The parking lot was nearly full. And the chapel was near overflowing. And not a single soul was any one I had ever seen before.

The funeral began. I wondered what to say. "Were these folks members of the church? Who were they?"

We sang, "I believe in Christ." And with the song books, they all joined in. I thought, "They must be Mormons."

Matt told of his experience with Elder Snedden, and told of how his whole life was changed by the love of this amazing man. The strangers in the chapel were so touched that I could hear their audible weeping.

Sister Durrant sang, "I'll walk with God." In the middle, she broke down and could not go on."

A black lady, I had never seen before, stood and came to her side and began to sing with her. It was so beautiful.

I spoke but I could not think of my prepared words. I looked into the faces of these two hundred strangers and asked, "Who are you people?"

The black lady, who had sang, stood again and said, "We are from Nineveh." She then said, "You are president Durrant, aren't you? We love you because Elder "Snedden loved you. He spoke of you so often and when he did he always had tears of joy in his eyes."

She then added, "After we were baptized he said he would come and get you and you would come and we could be a branch of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints."

Finally she asked if she could come and speak. We loved Elder Snedden and our hearts are breaking today.”

I told her to come up and say all that was in her heart and let others do the same.

The story of Elder Snedden coming to Nineveh

Matilda walked to the pulpit and began to speak, “It will take a bit of time to tell the whole story of Elder Snedden coming to our little town. So do you want the short version which is simply, The Lord sent him to us. Or do you want the whole story?”

She paused and looked back to where I was sitting behind her.

I was totally fascinated by all that was going on and replied. “We have all day. Give us the long version?”

She smile radiantly and said laughingly, “Okay. Here we go. And you other folks from our town can fill in if I leave anything out.”

First let me tell you a little about our town. Have you ever heard of a little place about forty miles north west of here called Nineveh? Have you ever heard of it President Durrant?”

“No I haven’t but tell us more.”

“Well let’s see? What can I say about Nineveh? We are just a small Kentucky town that was established more than two hundred years ago. It was once the largest settlement in that area. So it became the county seat. Later other larger towns within ten miles of Nineveh grew but we did not. But we remained the county seat.

Since we are talking about Elder Snedden, I must tell you how I think he got to our little town. First of all, he came to our town by bus. I believe he was really headed to St Lewis. He likely caught the bus in Stinsonville. Just north of there the bus turns East onto a country road and heads some twenty miles to our town. You see, some sixty years ago the bus company agreed to come to Nineveh because of some kind of federal program. And though the years they have tried to get out of the deal they made. But they are legally bound to keep coming over to our town.

After nearly an hour on the winding, narrow road, I’m sure Elder Snedden was tired of being on the bus. So when it got here he got off and would not get back on. Of course we believe he got off because the Lord told him to get off. The Lord knew we needed Elder Snedden and all he had to teach us.”

All the folks in the congregation were nodding their agreement to what Matilda was saying.

Maybe before we go any further, let me introduce myself. My name is Matilda Burnham. I’m a single mother and have four children and my mother, Amanda, also lives with us. As you can see I’m black. About twenty percent of the folks in Nineveh are black like me.

I won’t introduce all the folks who are here, but you can meet them after the funeral.

Right there, on the front row, is our chief county commissioner Sedrick Burnham. He is my father in law. I married his son who was killed in a hunting accident. That happened four years ago.

There, two rows back, is Robert Bowser. He was a star athlete and played f basket ball for Kentucky Western. He owns the only grocery store in our town. His little league basketball team is the best in the state thanks to him and Elder Snedden. In the past, He didn’t seem to be religious, but he is now. His wife, Ellen, is a hair dresser and used to be a Baptist. Sitting by

them is their seventeen year old daughter Louise. Her heart is broken by the death of Elder Snedden. I think she dreamed of someday marrying him. I shouldn't have said that. Sorry Louise.

And there half way back and in the middle is Steve Harley. He has been the chief of police for twenty five years. He says there has not been much law breaking in Nineveh since Elder Snedden came to town.

And there is Reverend Raymond Fortner our local Baptist/Mormon minister. He loves *The Book of Mormon*. He was baptized with the rest of us. He is married to my best friend Lilly. She is the first black lady to be principal of our elementary school.

Oh and there is Simon Burnham just coming in. He is always late. He will likely be the next county commissioner. Every oldest born Burnham has been commissioner for more than a hundred years. His boy, Billie Bob, is one of the two stars on our little league basketball team.

And there is Jarvis Tidwell; He runs the local sewing factory where many of our people work. He is 55 years old, but looks like he is still 21. He was a Catholic he used to drive twelve miles to Carwin each week to Mass. But since Elder Snedden came to town he no longer has to make that drive.

Oh and I must not forget dear Jewell Templeton. She turned 98 last week and is our oldest citizen. She is our local historian. If you want to know anything—good or bad about the history of our area just ask Jewell.

And those two boys are Seth and Billy Bob Burnham. They are both stars on our little league basketball team. They both want to play for BYU someday. Elder Snedden told them BYU would someday win the NCAA championship if those two sign up. They can't quit looking at the baskets in that big room back there. I think they hope we get a building like this up in Nineveh.

Well I should not have started to mention names. I could go on and tell you something good about all of our townsfolk. They are all great. But we had better move on.

Now let's get back to our dear Elder Snedden—God rest his soul.

Last November, in the late afternoon I finished my shift as a checker at the Bowser grocery Store. I was just leaving the store with my two bags of groceries when I saw the bus pull in. I saw this tall blond fellow get off. He seemed bewildered as he looked around. I don't think he had ever seen a town this small. The driver called for him to get back on the bus, but he just walked away.

He came toward me. He had on the finest dark suit I had ever seen in our town. His shoes were like they glowed. As he came closer I felt a feeling of his goodness. You know how some folds radiate goodness. He did not speak, but just reached out and took from me the two bags of groceries. After standing still for a brief time I sensed that he wanted me to lead the way to where ever I was going.

We walked the four blocks to my house without saying a word to each other. We walked up the dirt path that led to the porch. He made no attempt to leave. I opened the door and entered, and he followed me. I was not fearful of his entry for I felt totally safe in his presence. He placed the groceries on the kitchen table

I walked back to the front door and opened it to let him out. He did not leave. Instead he made himself right at home by taking a seat on the couch. Mary, my eight-year-old daughter came in to the house from the backyard. She was startled to see him and asked, "Who is he?"

I replied, "I really don't know." Then I turn to the stranger and asked, "Mary asked a good question. Who are you?"

He did not respond, but pointed to a crayon painting on the wall that Mary had done. He stood and went close to the painting. He pointed at it, and then at Mary. He nodded his approval. He saw some crayons and paper on our little table. He began to paint a painting. In just a matter of minutes he had produced a small painting of our house. Only it did not look dilapidated and unpainted. It made our house look like the cutest little cottage you have ever seen. I still have that painting. He had not only won my admiration, but also Mary's. She sat by him and he gestured for her to produce a painting. She did and it was better than she had ever done before.

I asked him if he would like to stay for dinner. I expected him to say something like, "I sure would ma'am." But he merely smiled and nodded his agreement.

Just then my mother woke up from her nap and walked into the room. She is the kind of person who loves everybody. Even she was shocked to see a stranger sitting there like he was a long lost cousin. But when Elder Snedden saw her he went right to her and shook her hand. She announced, "I'm Amanda, Who the heck of you?"

Of course, Elder Snedden didn't reply. Except for that famous smile of his. That smile is better than all the words in the world. I could tell that mother liked him right off. Course, everybody likes Elder Snedden. And Elder Snedden liked her. Course everybody likes my mom.

Mom began to prepare dinner. Elder Snedden came into the kitchen and began to peel potatoes. Mom was amazed that he peeled the whole potato in such a way the whole peeling was in one piece. A few minutes later my three sons, Seth age 12, James age 11 and John age 10, all came home from playing with their friends. Each of the three of them came into the kitchen and asked, "Who's he?"

Elder Snedden, the stranger, was still wearing his suit coat. He replied by pulling a card from his shirt pocket. Seth read the name aloud, "Elder Marcus Snedden." It was the first time that I had ever heard his name.

My husband, of course, did not come home. He had been killed three years ago in a hunting accident. When we all came to the table and prepared to eat, Elder Snedden bowed his head and I could sense that he was offering a silent prayer. We were not in the habit of offering thanks for our food so we just sat silently until he lifted his eyes.

We ate in silence. The food was delicious. My mother was the best cook in Nineveh. She loved good food. And that showed as she was an extremely large lady. When we finished, Elder Snedden stood up and began clearing the table. Mary, who seemed greatly impressed by Elder Snedden also stood up and began to help him. Soon the two of them were in the kitchen washing the dishes.

By now the sun had gone down and it was beginning to get dark. I asked Elder Snedden, "Where are you going to stay tonight?" He replied by saying nothing. I could tell he had no idea where he would spend the night. I led him to a small workshop that my husband had built in our backyard, I told him it had a heater and he could stay there. He seemed grateful. I went back into the house and brought him some blankets and a small mattress and pillow. Tears filled his eyes as he took my two hands in his and thanked me silently.

The next day was Saturday. Thus the children did not go to school. When I had awakened that morning I could smell food cooking. I went into the kitchen where I knew I would find mother. But there was Elder Snedden cooking pancakes. Mother was sitting in the corner watching him admiringly. Soon the family was all gathered and we had breakfast together. James eating vigorously said, "Grandma these are the best pancakes you have ever made," Grandma replied, "Yes I'm, getting better." And then this jolly lady nearly fell off her chair with her robust laughter.

That morning, Elder Snedden went outside, found a rake and began cleaning up the yard which was well littered with papers, cans and all sorts of stuff. Soon the three boys joined in the clean up. They seemed to gravitate toward this remarkable stranger.

Elder Snedden, while raking under the wooden porch found a half inflated basketball. He called Seth over and passed the ball to him. Seth didn't expect the pass and dropped the ball. Elder Snedden smiled, stooped over, and picked up the ball. Again he passed the ball to Seth. Seth dropped it. Elder Snedden nodded his head up and down. He could tell that this young man was not a gifted athlete.

He then put his hand on the young man's shoulder and pointed at a service station just through the block. He picked up the ball and headed toward the station. He beckoned for Seth to follow him. At the service station they inflated the ball

Elder Snedden then dribbled the ball behind his back and then between his legs. The Elder then spun the basketball on his finger. Seth was amazed and smiled broadly. Elder Snedden then handed the ball to Seth and gestured, "Go ahead show me what you can do the ball." Seth tried to dribble, but the ball bounced away. Elder Snedden doubled over with laughter. Together they walked to get the ball. On the way home Elder Snedden dribbled the ball part of the way. He then handed it to Seth who dribbled it successfully until he reached home.

The grounds of the elementary school were just two blocks the other direction. Elder Snedden beckoned for the boy to follow him and they went there. There were two basketball standards. Elder Snedden took the ball and after dribbling like a Harlem Globetrotter he backed way off and shot the ball dead center. Seth was amazed. Elder Snedden retrieved the ball and handed it to the young man. He shot and missed. Elder Snedden handed the ball to him again. Again his shot missed. Elder Snedden showed him how to hold the ball in his hands and to bend his knees when he shot. This time he missed, but it came really close. Just as Elder Snedden supposed, this boy had skill he just had never developed.

Seth was having a good time. Together the two played for the next hour.

The two returned home to where Amanda had prepared sandwiches. Elder Snedden told his Matilda, "You should see this guy play basketball! He is really good! Show your Mom how you can spin the ball on your finger."

Seth tried but no success.

Matilda reached out and grabbed the ball. Then to the amazement of all she spun the ball on her finger. She announces she learned to do that when she played for Murray State. As the family ate the sandwiches there was great joy and the home.

The next day was Sunday. Elder Snedden came in from his shed and seemed surprised to see that none of the children appeared to be getting ready for church. It was not the habit of

Matilda and her family to go to church. Grandmother Amanda was an avid churchgoer. So she and Elder Snedden walked back to the center of town and one block north to the little white church.

The church had once been a Baptist church and it was still called that, but the Minister had come to town this and proclaimed that he was changing the church from the Baptist Church to a nondenominational church so that everyone in town could attend. So it was really not a Baptist church and the Minister was not of the Baptist faith. He just believes the Bible and said that their theology came strictly from the Bible.

Everyone greeted Amanda. She was obviously the most popular member of the little church. She introduced her new friend by saying, "This is Elder Snedden. He has come to live with us. He stays in the shed behind the house. Our family really likes him. He wanted to come to church and so here he is." People swarmed around Elder Snedden. And with his graciousness they were all impressed. But some wondered why he didn't say anything.

The minister gave an excellent talk Seth could tell that this man was truly a man of God. The people sang with great fervor. Elder Snedden followed all of the words in the hymnal and almost sang the songs through his silence.

After church, as Amanda and Elder Snedden walked home they passed by the Bowser grocery store which was open on Sunday because Bob Bowser could see no reason to close. Amanda led Elder Snedden to the back of the store. They found Bob Bowser. Bob, very gracious man, handed Elder Snedden's yesterday and Elder Snedden looked deep into Bob's. The two seem to have a certain understanding even though they had just met.

Amanda told Elder Snedden that Bob had been an All-American at Kentucky Western. Bob seemed embarrassed and stood on one foot and then the other. He had gained a bit of weight since his basketball playing days and had a bit of a protruding stomach. Elder Snedden acted like he was dribbling without a ball. Then he acted as though he was spinning a ball on his finger. Bob could understand what he was saying without talking. The two left the store and returned home. Matilda had cooked a delicious dinner and life seemed better than it ever been at the Burnham household.

Monday morning Elder Snedden walked up to the grocery store where Matilda was working the day shift. Bob Bowser greeted them at the door and called Elder Snedden by name. Elder Snedden could tell that Bob Bowser was a very good man. In a prominent place in the store there was an announcement on a piece of paper that it was time for tryouts for this year's Little League basketball team. Elder Snedden pointed at it and pointed at Bob.

Elder Snedden read the time of the tryout. And when that time came he was there with Seth. He signed Seth up for the team and paid the \$20.

The elder watched practice and could tell that Billy Bob Burnham was destined to be an All-Star basketball player. He could dribble; he could run like a bolt of lightning. And he could jump out of the gym.

Seth seemed embarrassed to be there because of his lack of know-how. Elder Snedden took him over in the corner and they threw the ball back and forth. Elder Snedden jumped and touched a place on the wall. He invited Seth to do the same. He was amazed at Seth's jump. They then practiced bounce passes. And then they dribbled, and then shooting short shots. Because

he didn't have enough players Bob needed all the players he could get. He was glad to have Seth. Even though Seth had obviously never played the game before.

As the two walked home, Elder Snedden reached out his hand and put it on Seth's shoulder. Seth had never felt much fatherly love from anyone even while his father was alive, he was not much father.

That night in the shed Seth turned on the light bulb that dangled down from the ceiling. He then pulled from his meager belongings a small watercolor set and a small brush. In the dim light, he began to paint a small painting. The next day at breakfast he presented the painting to Seth. It was a mature basketball player. In the background were the words "Kentucky Western." And 'skying' high above the basket, ready to dunk the ball was a grown-up Seth. And on the back of the jersey you could barely read the words Seth Burnham. He presented the painting to Seth who was amazed at what he was seeing. Elder Snedden then pointed at the man playing ball and pointed at Seth indicated that's you.

In the next two months Seth's progress in basketball was amazing. Bob Bowser was elated. With Billy Bob Burnham and Seth Burnham, he would surely win the district title. Each night at practice Seth was there. He helped the other young men learn to be better. He was an excellent assistant coach. Bob Bowser. And all the team loved him. Seth spent all of his spare time over at the school grounds shooting and dribbling. He was highly motivated and was getting better each day.

For the next weeks, Elder Snedden continued to live with Matilda and her mother and her four children. Bob Bowser sold some hardware supplies and coding paint and brushes. Elder Snedden painted his old shed. He found some lumber and purchased, it and begin to fix the place up. He even added another little room. Matilda didn't mind. She was fascinated by how handy Elder Snedden was. He put on shingles so that the place would not leak. Pretty soon it was quite a cottage. It looked like Elder Snedden was settled in; and nobody in the Burnham family minded that.

Just North of Nineveh, about 2 miles, Elder Snedden on one of his daily walks found an orchard. He could tell there were many varieties of fruit trees there. Across the fence, near the center of the trees, he could see a man pruning. He crossed the fence and went to where the man was. The man was just a little bit of a fellow. He had a black mustache and black curly hair. He spoke with some kind of an accent. Elder Snedden reached out and shook his hand. The man quickly announced, "I Flip Flamingo. Who you?"

Elder Snedden smiled and remained silent. The two were instant friends.

Elder Snedden, seeing an extra pair of pruning shears began to help. It was obvious that the Elder had done some pruning before and had great expertise.

Elder Snedden walked up to the orchard each day to help. Soon the man kind of depended upon Elder Snedden, and offered to pay him. Elder Snedden refused to take any pay.

Each day Elder Snedden would see the Flip in his rickety old truck come down the road past Matilda's to go on to the main road that led down toward Louisville. In the back of his truck he had produce that he would take to Louisville to sell. One day Elder Snedden stood out on the road thumbing because he wanted to go with Flip flamingo down to Louisville.

But when they got there he was greatly alarmed when he found that Flip's main area for sales was in that same area of the mission home. He quickly gestured to Flip, by using his hands, that they shouldn't go that way. Flip understood and turned the truck another direction.

Elder Snedden was pleased to know that he now had a way of communicating with president Durrant. But he did not want President Durrant to know where he was. He knew he had much to do in Nineveh and if president Durrant knew where he was he would insist that Elder Snedden come back to the mission.

Each Sunday morning Eder Snedden went to church at the Bible Church. As the meeting ended he stood at the door and smiled at each person and shook each one's hand. He became extremely popular with the congregation. And the Minister, who had great insights into human character. The minister had great regards for Elder Snedden. Many of the townspeople were impressed that someone would have the first name, "Elder."

The next day Commissioner Cedric Burnham walked past Matilda's house with his German shepherd dog. He saw Elder Snedden sitting on the front porch with the children. He came closer and then stood and said, "I don't know who you are. But I want you to know you are not welcome in this town. And furthermore I don't want you around my grandchildren. I have been told that you are living here I assure you if that continues on I will have Officer Harley arrest you. Is that clear?"

The dog pulled at his tightly held leash. Straining to break loose and put a loud "amen" to all that his master had told Elder Snedden.

Elder Snedden stood, walked closer to the Commissioner and smiled. He then walked right toward the vicious dog. Commissioner Burnham shouted, "You idiot. Don't get any closer to that dog or he will take your arm off. Elder Snedden continued toward the huge animal. Suddenly the big dog ceased snarling and began to whimper. Elder Snedden came close to the dog, bent down and rubbed the docile hound's ears and head.

He then turned toward the Commissioner and walked forward with his hand extended in a friendly gesture. The flustered Commissioner quickly turned away and continued to walk. While continuing to shout, "I own that house. And if you are not off my property by tomorrow night, I'll have you thrown in jail."

As Sedric continued on his way the dog broke loose and came and sat on the porch next to Elder Snedden. The commissioner shouted at his dog to come back but the dog did not budge. Later that night the Elder and the children took the dog to its home and tied it up there. The dog whined to come with them. The next morning the dog was at the front door of Matilda's house and paid little heed to her shouts, "Go home." After that the dog would not leave the elder's side and much to the consternation of the commissioner would not have anything to do with his former master. Even when Officer Harley came and took the dog home the big beast was back at the elder's side in 15 minutes.

When the children went to school Elder Snedden walked with them. And so did the dog. After school was well started Elder Snedden entered the school building and took a seat at the back of the classroom. Mrs. Fortner, the school principal, seeing the Elder enter the classroom, quickly came in to see what was going on. She being a Baptist had seen Seth in church. She knew he was staying with the Burnham family. She was a Matilda's best friend. She too was a black lady.

The teacher, Mrs. Tidwell, wife of the head man at the sewing factory, invited the children to begin reading from their books. Elder Snedden observed that all were reading except one 10-year-old boy. The elder beckoned the boy back to an empty chair by his side. He then opened the book and pointed at the words but the boy did not read. The teacher came back and spoke softly to Elder Snedden and said, "Johnny can't read." The Elder nodded that he understood.

As the boy watched, the elder moved his finger across the words. Because he could not speak; he thought of each syllable of each word and somehow was able to transfer that thought into Johnny's mind. After doing this for two lines, the boy spoke then spoke. Slowly, at first, "Th th th t the ho ho hor horse wa was a be aut y. And yo ung Phi lip dre amed that some day he would have a horse." The boy was reading. Not a single word was beyond his ability. Mrs. Tidwell was amazed.

Seth then came to the front of the room where the teacher kept a box full of art supplies. Fortunately, Mrs. Tidwell's hobby was watercolor painting. She often stayed after school and painted. She had a large easel, and a master size piece of watercolor paper that was attached to a large water color board. Elder Snedden reached in his wallet and gave her a \$20 bill to pay for the supplies.

He then began to draw. The teacher was enthralled at what was happening and told all the students to gather around and watch. The elder began to draw. Soon a grove of trees appeared on the white paper. Then the form of a young man kneeling on the ground was added. Then he began to paint. Through the dark leaves of the trees, he painted bright beams of light. Finally standing above the ground, he painted to heavenly beings dressed in white. Both of these seem to glow.

In not more than one half hour Elder Snedden had painted the most glorious painting in all of the history of Nineveh. When he was finished he noted that Mrs. Tidwell had tears in her eyes. The children all applauded.

The students asked, "What is it a picture of? Elder Snedden." Elder Snedden with perfect penmanship then wrote in the foreground the words, "The future of Nineveh."

Sister Tidwell had a framing business. And that night she framed the picture. Soon it was on display in the front window of the Bowser grocery store. Rumors of the painting swept through all of Nineveh in a matter of hours. Soon many people were coming downtown to see the sacred painting.

Elder Snedden, though he could not talk, soon becoming a legend in Nineveh

That Sunday at church, Reverend Fortner stood at the pulpit reached down and held, for all to see the painting Elder Snedden had painted. He then read a Scripture from James one and five which said, "if any man like wisdom let him ask of God who giveth to all men liberally and upbradedth not. And it shall be given him."

The Reverend then said, "Yesterday, when I went to the Bowser's grocery store I saw this painting. I could not get it off my mind. That night I went to the Lord in prayer. As you know, I came to town as a Baptist. But I was unsettled. I did not know if the Baptist Church was right, or the Catholics or any other church. I read the scripture then that I just read to you today. I know that the way we can find the truth is to ask God. I feel the young man in the painting is doing exactly that. And I have long felt that if we could see God and Jesus Christ we

would see two separate persons. That is what it says in the Bible. Somehow I feel that this painting by Elder Snedden is a message to all of this that we must seek the truth through prayer."

That week as the parishioners departed from the chapel Elder Snedden stood and shook hands with each departing friend. He knew in his heart that soon the Lord would pour out his Spirit upon these dear people.

The next day Elder Snedden walked 2 miles to the sewing factory. He entered the door and was met by Jarvis Tidwell the owner and manager of the factory. Jarvis was a devout Catholic. He greeted Elder Snedden warmly. Elder Snedden beckoned that he would like to see the people at work. The two of them went back where 30 or so women were working at sewing machines making clothing for little children. Several men were moving large boxes and doing other work. Altogether the factory employed more than 50 people and was the biggest employer in Nineveh.

Just then it was break time and all of the women left their machines to go outside and get a breath of fresh air.

While the women were gone Jarvis and the Elder talked. Jarvis said, "They are a great group of workers. We make some wonderful children's clothing. But we are falling behind time. Styles are changing. We are selling less and less and so we're sewing less and less. I fear that because of the way things are going within the next month we will have to close down."

Elder Snedden was greatly saddened, for he knew that many people in Nineveh needed the money they earned in the sewing factory. That night in his little room, he took his pencil and paint in hand and began to work. He worked clear through the night. He used every piece of watercolor paper he had. He drew some 20 children dressed in some of the most amazing children's clothing that had ever been seen.

Then before sunrise he went to the sewing factory and left an envelope filled with these pictures on the front step. He addressed the package to Jarvis Tidwell. When Jarvis came to work, he went to his office and opened the envelope. He couldn't believe what he was beholding. He knew that if he could make this close, his business would be saved. These clothes were way out in front of any of the fashions even the big guys in New York were making.

All Jarvis needed to see was a picture and his ability would enable him to make patterns. Within a week the new dresses and other clothing items were in production. A week later Jarvis had traveled to Louisville and Lexington and had received enough orders to keep the factory open well into the future.

Jarvis wondered where this gift from heaven had come from. He inquired of his wife. She said, "There's nobody in this town that could produce such a glorious ideas with such beauty in each of these little watercolors. Or is there?"

She then added, "Could it be..."

Jarvis smiled as he said, "it must have been."

Matilda and her children had a small colored TV. Elder Snedden always turned it to the nature channel and to children's programs. Wednesday night when they were watching this television, there came under the screen a commercial about the Book of Mormon. Elder Snedden was so excited he could hardly contain himself. A phone number was listed, if you wanted a Book of Mormon, you could call a certain number and the book would be delivered to

you. Two minutes later Elder Snedden had dialed the number. He then gestured to Matilda using his fingers, "two then he made two zeros,"

Matilda told the person receiving the call that we want two hundred of that book for our local that Baptist church. Deliver them to my house" she then gave the address of her home.

By now, Elder Snedden now knew the names of every man woman and child in Nineveh. People liked to see him at church or at the Bowser store so that they could write the names of each of them.

Jeff Call and his wife had six young boys. The Calls were not sure what church they should attend to raise these boys. When they walked into the Bowser store, Elder Snedden was just leaving. He stopped and stood in the middle of the boys and wrote on a paper, starting with the oldest: Ryan, Braden, Landon, Austin, Carson, and Jansen." Jeff and his wife were amazed. They asked the Elder if he would give them the names that he had so beautifully written on the paper. He smiled and handed it to them. They asked him what time church started in the church that he attended. He held up his ten fingers and they understood and said, "We will see you there."

On the way out of the store they looked at the painting Jeff said to his wife Cheron, "I know that that painting depicts the kind of religion we want for ourselves and for our children."

The next week the calls were at the Bible church. They could see Elder Snedden sitting near the back and Jeff could not keep his eyes off from Elder Snedden. Somehow he knew Elder Snedden had the keys to the future he sought for his family. The calls were not alone in the feelings that were stirring in the hearts of all the folks in Nineveh.

Elder Snedden had noticed that Louise, the 15-year-old daughter of coach Bowser, was going astray. He could see in her face the negative feelings she had toward her family and the Bible church. She came to church, but the Elder could see she was forced to do so. He always greeted her, but she refused to look at him.

Elder Snedden was told by others, that at high school over in Carwin she was ashamed to admit that she was from such a hick town as Nineveh. She dreamed of the day when she could leave home and move to Louisville and go into show business. It was obvious that she was beautiful enough to do that. She now dressed in a way that made her mother upset. The two of them had a very difficult time communicating.

Coach Bowser, the happy-go-lucky fellow, wished his daughter would not be so full of rebellion, but he sort of took her attitude in stride and said to his wife, "Relax honey! Kids will be kids. Stay off of from her back and she will get over all this stuff."

Elder Snedden worried about the welfare of all of his friends in Nineveh. But his main concern was for Louise. He didn't like to admit it to himself, but he sometimes thought of her in a romantic way. He dreamed of someday being married and this girl, or someone exactly like her, would be a wonderful partner.

He never mentioned this to Matilda. Of course he never mentioned anything to anybody. But in the deepest part of his heart, he had the beginnings of a different kind of love for Louise.

But because he was who he was, he knew he had to push such ideas aside.

He sensed, with every person he met, how he could reach out to them with the feelings of his heart he could, without words, cause to want each one to do better and be better – to fulfill their great destiny. But with Louise he just did not know what to do.

Finally for himself more than for her he did a watercolor painting that came from deep within his heart. He painted a painting of the large building with six spires reaching toward heaven. Atop one of the spires he painted something very special. It was almost a painting of him.

Down at ground level, near a large door at the top of a stairway, he painted a beautiful girl. He painted Louise. He painted her in the most beautiful white dress that could ever be imagined. He then began to draw himself standing close to her. Then he knew he had to erase that part of the painting from the painting and from his heart. For he knew that that was not the reason for his being in Nineveh.

The next Sunday he brought the painting to church. After everyone had departed the church grounds he noticed Louise walking slowly, her head hanging down, her shoulders slumped, toward the family car. He hurried to her side. She looked over and if looks could kill, Elder Snedden knew that he would be dead.

He moved directly in front of her so she had to quit walking. He then, for the first time, was able to win her gaze. As the two stood face-to-face looking into each other's eyes, Elder Snedden reached into his pocket, and pulled out the painting.

She reached out and received it. Then she hurried away. When her parents had joined her in the car. Elder Snedden walked back the other direction. But he felt impressed to look back. He caught a glimpse of Louise looking back at him.

The next week at church, Elder Snedden noticed that Louise had on a different dress, a different style. He noticed that she was singing. She was very responsive to the Reverend's appeal to set high goals and to aspire to be the very best that we can be. The reverend then announced that he felt that in each of us there is an Angel that needs to come forth, and our task is to bring that angel to the forefront in all we do.

When Elder Snedden heard the word Angel his heart pounded. He noticed that Louise looked very much like the Angels he had seen before.

When church ended and the dear people were departing, Elder Snedden noticed that Louise was tarrying. After he had greeted everyone he waited. Soon Louise came out the door. She walked toward him, she stared at him, and finally she smiled at him. Then she said, "That building! Where is that? I love that. Thanks for making me look so beautiful. But why am I standing there alone in that wedding dress. Why isn't someone else standing at my side?"

Elder Snedden did not reply. Elder Snedden never replied. And he was glad that on this occasion he was glad to be silent.

Louise turned and walked away. Her shoulders were back, her head held high, and she walked with the grace of an Angel.

For just a brief moment Elder Snedden was tempted to retrieve the painting and complete it. But he turned and walked the other way.

Flip Flamingo looked forward to the time when Elder Snedden would come and help him with his orchard and his produce business. He felt Elder Snedden was the only one in Nineveh who really welcomed him. He had come to this country from Italy and did not speak good

English. He purchased the orchard several years earlier and moved to the little house on the property. He was suspicious of all the Ninevehites. But he knew without question that Elder Snedden cared for him deeply.

On this day when Elder Snedden walked down the dirt road toward the orchard he noticed Flip's truck parked alongside the road. When he got to Flip's house and inquired about the truck, the discouraged orchard man said sadly, "The old truck has about had it. It broke down there and I had to walk on home."

Elder Snedden went to a nearby shed where he knew his friend kept his tools. He took the toolbox and went back to the truck and for the next three days he worked on the old truck. He was able to get new spark plugs and other things from the local service station. But more than that Elder Snedden just knew how to fix old trucks. Soon the truck was as good as new.

Elder Snedden painted a picture of Flip in which Flip was dressed in white and was standing in a pond of water. Wading out into the water was Elder Snedden.

When Flip received the painting, tears filled his eyes. Somehow he understood that Elder Snedden knew things that he wanted to know.

Each time Flip was scheduled to go to Louisville, Elder Snedden would paint a picture to be dropped off at the mission office. He wrote a note to Flip which said, "Take this to the 16 Tartan Way in Louisville. But don't let the people there know who you are, or where you come from, or I will have to leave this place."

Flip gladly delivered these paintings, but he never allowed himself to be identified. He even picked up the whole supply of watercolor paper for his dear friend Elder Snedden.

The next Sunday Flip Flamingo was at church. He found that he had far more friends than just Elder Snedden.

Each week Louise was changing. She entered a beauty contest over in Carwin. Elder Snedden learned of her plans and went to her home. Then feeling that he might make a fool of himself, he began walking around as if he were a female model. He stood straight and tall. He held his head high. He continually smiled. He walked one way, pivoted and walked another way. The family was in great laughter. He beckoned Louise to stand up and walk the way he walked. She did. She smiled like he smiled. She felt confident. She reached out and before the Elder had even noticed she was dancing with him. He did not want the dance to end. But he knew the rules and smilingly disengaged himself.

The next week Louise won the beauty contest.

Every week that passed Elder Snedden became closer to the Burnham family. They loved him as part of the family. Grandmother Amanda was particularly fond of him. She often referred to him as her Angel. Matilda pretty well shared this opinion. Her children had become so much happier with Elder Snedden nearby.

Seth was now a star basketball player. The talk of the town was how Seth Burnham and Billy Bob Burnham would lead Nineveh to its first junior basketball crown. Then a bit of tragedy struck. Cedric Burnham, County Commissioner, issued a statement to Bob Bowser that his grandson Billy Bob would no longer play on a team on which somebody as trashy as Seth Burnham played.

Coach Bowser could not believe what he was hearing. Both of these boys were Cedric's grandsons. Why the irate favoritism toward Billy Bob. But coach Bowser sort of knew the

reason. It was well known in Nineveh that Cedric hated the idea that his son had married a black lady – Matilda. He hated Matilda from the very first. He regretted having to give his son a plot of land and a small house. When his son was killed he hoped Matilda would take the children and move to Louisville. But Matilda stayed and Cedric despised her and her mother and even his own grandchildren.

His hatred became more intense when he saw Elder Snedden living on the property and influencing his grandchildren. He had been greatly enraged when the Elder did not leave town as he had been ordered to do. The Commissioner from that time on was determined that Elder Snedden had to go. And because of his spite, he issued the ultimatum that his grandson – his real grandson Billy Bob – would not play on the team with Seth.

Coach Bowser had become quite a hothead in his playing days at Western Kentucky. It was his temper that probably kept him out of the NBA. In a moment of rage he shouted in the face of Commissioner Burnham, "I don't tell you how to run this county, and don't you try to tell me how to run my team. The only thing you're any good at is making everybody in this town as miserable as you are." With that Bob boozier walked away knowing that his time in Nineveh had just become very short.

This incident added to Commissioner Burnham's deep feelings that he had to destroy not only Elder Snedden but also Bob Bowser.

Elder Snedden had a credit card. When he needed something he would go to the Bowser grocery store and purchase it. The first time he did this the clerk questioned the card. She called the number on the card and was told that the holder had endless credit. Elder Snedden often bought groceries for the family. He bought delicious groceries. The children loved it when Elder Snedden went shopping. He liked red vine licorice and so did they. By now Elder Snedden was very much a member of Matilda's family.

Finally Commissioner Burnham had all he could take he ordered officer Harley to arrest Elder Snedden on charges that Elder Snedden was squatting on his land and was also corrupting his grandchildren. Officer Harley hated to do what he was commanded. He brought Elder Snedden to the courthouse and to the office of Commissioner Burnham. There the Commissioner ordered Elder Snedden to either go to jail or to leave Nineveh forever. Elder Snedden smiled, reached out to shake the commissioner's hand. But there was no response other than hatred.

Elder Snedden reached in his pocket and pulled out a small painting and placed it gently on the commissioner's desk. After Elder Snedden had departed the Commissioner looked at the painting. The Commissioner was a harsh man but he had a bit of culture. He had traveled to Europe and had seen many of the famous art galleries across the world. He immediately recognized that this little painting was world-class. He wondered if he now held the very key to ridding Nineveh of Elder Snedden. Surely Elder Snedden had stolen this painting. Now all he had to do was prove that.

He knew that the local schoolteacher was an artist. She had studied art history at the University of Indiana. Two days later, at his beckon call Mrs. Tidwell was in his office. He asked her if she had ever seen such artwork for he feared it was a stolen painting. Mrs. Tidwell replied, "There is only one person in this town who could paint it that. It is someone we all loved and respected with all our hearts."

Commissioner Burnham could not wait to ask her who that would be so that he could go to that person and a report that Elder Snedden had stolen the painting from him." He was greatly disappointed when Mrs. Tidwell announced that the artist was, "Elder Snedden."

The disgruntled Commissioner would have to find other ways to indict the hated Elder. He could not help himself from looking several times a day at the painting. Then he recognized that the man in the painting was him and around his head was a very visible halo. In the background was a picture of Jesus Christ pointing at him. He wondered, "What does this mean?"

It was rumored in Nineveh that they were the perfect location for a Wal-Mart Store. Some officials came to investigate that possibility. They said Nineveh was sort of in the center of a whole group of small towns who could very well support a Wal-Mart.

Of course the officials went first to the office of the Commissioner. They explained to him their plans and asked what he considered a suitable plot of ground for their endeavor. The Commissioner told them he had just the right place

They drove out near Matilda's house. There surrounding her house was about 10 acres of unused ground. The officials were elated and said that this would be the perfect place for their store.

They then said, 'That little house will have to go.' The Commissioner rubbed his hands together and announced, "I own all of this land including that house. It can all be yours, but it is very valuable land and you will have to purchase it at a very high cost."

"Cost is no problem for us," they announced. It was decided to draw up the papers. It would be easy to evict Matilda and the children. The Commissioner said he would find them a place in Stinsonville. He rejoiced that the idea that they would soon be gone.

But the property belonged to Matilda and it was not as easy for the Commissioner to say than to do. He called the judge and told him to draw up the papers to have Matilda evicted. The judge surprisingly refused. Commissioner Burnham was incensed. He threatened to have the judge impeached. But the judge stood his ground.

Then the Commissioner devised a plan whereby he would condemn the land because of the deteriorated and distressed look of the entire property. He announced it was a disgrace to the city of Nineveh to have such a place in their city limits.

The city officials felt that the Commissioner was right. They still did not know if they really wanted to evict Matilda. She was much loved in the community. But the land was a disgrace and the home was the biggest slum in their fair city. It was decided that a city meeting would be held to make a final decision on condemning the Property.

Matilda was beside herself with sorrow and anger. She poured her heart out to Elder Snedden. The Elder then hurried to the grocery store. He talked to Bob Bowser and asked if Bob would take him in his pick up over to Carwin to the hardware store and lumberyard. Bob agreed. Late that afternoon they set out for Carwin.

Using his credit card Elder Snedden began to make purchases. He purchased, shutters, new shingles, a new front door, new windows, 20 gallons of white paint, 25 flat stones for a driveway, and a multitude of other wonderful things. The next Sunday Elder Snedden attended church. He had a video he had made from the home makeover television show. He gave it to

the minister and the minister put it on thinking it was some kind religious show. The people watched it. And to them it was a religious show.

Elder Snedden then beckoned the congregation to follow him. They walked three blocks to Matilda's house. There he showed them all the things he had bought for the interior and exterior of the house. He then gestured that they will fix up this house. The people understood what he was saying. The minister said "Rubin you're a plumber. Jake you are a painter. He said every night after work we will all come here. And they did, and the house became beautiful-- perhaps the most beautiful little house in all of Nineveh.

The Commissioner when he learned what had happened was beyond anger he was as they say livid. Of course, the town Council said they could not condemn such a beautiful home. And Matilda and her family were safe.

The minister Spoke in church that week. He announced, "As you all know Elder Snedden came to our community from we know not where. Adding to the mystery was the fact that he cannot speak and only rarely does he write notes. But I believe we all know he did not compare by accident. He came to our community because we needed him. It is my belief that he was sent here by God. In the time he has been here he is touched each of our lives. It is amazing how someone can teach so much by the way he is rather than by the way he speaks. We have come to know that Elder Snedden is much like an Angel.

We all know of the beautiful painting that is in the window at the Bowser grocery store. The man in that picture who saw God must surely be a prophet. For many centuries we have not had a prophet on the earth. I have always thought this to be strange. For why would God have prophets in the olden days and not now? Surely we need to profit now more than ever. It is my belief that Elder Snedden represents someone with authority. You will recall that John the Baptist had authority given to him by God. And with that authority he baptized Jesus Christ.

I do not like to admit it, but I feel I have no authority to baptize. Yet I want to be baptized and I want all of you to be. Our congregation has been greatly enlarged since Elder Snedden came here. I see some of you who have formerly been Catholics others who have been strong Baptists and some who didn't seem to have any religion at all. You have all come here and we have worshiped together. We love each other and we love our Heavenly Father and his son Jesus Christ. I feel we should all be baptized. The only person I feel that has the authority to perform these baptisms is our dear friend Elder Snedden. The whole crowd shouted out, "Amen,"

Elder Snedden smiled and could see in his mind Wilford Woodruff. So it was decided that all those over 8 years old should be baptized in Nineveh Lake.

Elder Snedden now had the trust and the adoration of everyone in Nineveh with the exception of Commissioner Burnham. And the Commissioner was still bent on having him out of town.

Elder Snedden had been impressed with the town historian Jewel Templeton. He loved old folks. But he particularly loved this noble lady. One night he asked Matilda to accompany him by grabbing her hand and leading her out of the house. They made their way to the other side of town and knocked on Mrs. Templeton's door. She greeted them and invited them in. Elder Snedden saw on her table the book, "The history of Nineveh." He picked it up and looked through the pages. He pointed at a picture of the first County Commissioner whose name was

Burnham. She looked at Elder Snedden, but hesitated to say more. Then she began to speak. She told Elder Snedden and Matilda this story.

You may wonder why the Commissioner Burnham has such disdain for religion. And why he so dislikes you?

I've been told, secretly, that many years ago, around 1894, a Mormon missionary came to our town. He was traveling alone and had preached at our little one room school. Many were impressed with this message. This happened at a time when there was great hatred toward the Mormons in these parts. Two Mormon missionaries had been murdered down in Tennessee. The only thing most of the people here could agree on was their hatred for the Mormons.

The leader of the people who most disliked the Mormons was a Burnham. I believe he was the fourth great grandfather of Cedric. This Burnham man gathered a small mob to do whatever it took to get this Mormon missionary to leave the area. However this missionary was stubborn and refused to leave. He called down the wrath of God on the mob. That angered them so that they bound him and carried him 10 miles to the river. There they told him to swim for the other shore. When he refused, they bound him and together they threw him out in the deep water. Of course he was never seen again. I believe that through the years the Burnham family knew that this happened. But they kept it a secret. And the other men involved did also. Somehow this incident seemed to leave a curse on our town and on the Burnham family. They are such outstanding people, but they all seem so miserable. Anyway, maybe I shouldn't be telling you these things. But I think that's why Cedric is such a bad man. I think he feels the guilt of the past.

Then Jewel said,

"I think I tell you all this Matilda because, I don't know if you know, but I get these strong feelings that Elder Snedden is a Mormon. I've known Mormon people. You can tell by watching them that they are Mormons. They are just different. Wonderfully different. Their beliefs go so deeply. And I can just tell that Elder Snedden is one of them. Am I right Elder Snedden?

Before you answer, I know that the word Elder is not your first name. It is your authority in the Mormon Church. That is why our minister knows that you have authority. . And that beautiful painting of the young man seeing God and Jesus Christ is a picture of your first prophet – Joseph Smith. So are you a Mormon Elder Snedden?"

Matilda looked glaringly at Elder Snedden. Elder Snedden looked first at her and then at Jewel. He then nodded his head up and down in holy agreement with her assessment.

Jewel continued, "I think you're the first Mormon to ever set foot in this town since that terrible night so many years ago. I feel like Elder Snedden has been sent here to help us be forgiven as a community and as a people. And especially to help the Burnham family make the changes necessary to be a happier people.

As Elder Snedden listened, tears ran down his cheeks.

Jewel spoke again, "You knew he was a Mormon, didn't you Matilda?"

Matilda did not know, and for a moment she was a bit stunned. As a young lady she had been taught that the Mormons had a dislike for all black people. But after a pause she said, "I

don't know about the Mormons of the past, but I do know that the most loving person I have ever met is Elder Snedden. And if he is a Mormon, and other Mormons are like him, then I know that the things I have heard years ago are not true. And when he is ready to baptize me I will be the first in line."

Jewel replied, "I will be the second."

Someone had seen Elder Snedden and Matilda visit with Jewel. They told the Commissioner. He began to be suspicious. He had never trusted Jewel. She knew too much. But what if she had told Matilda and this Elder? Then what? The Commissioner had long felt that it would do him great harm if the truth was known about his family background. He felt he could not risk this. He must do something about Elder Snedden.

Finally the copies of the book of Mormon arrived at the little local post office. The postman master was a bit shocked at seeing so many copies of the Book of Mormon. He thought to himself, "Mormon? We have no Mormons in this town. Or do we?"

The postmaster was sort of a town gossip. He knew it he took this book to Commissioner Burnham, it would put him in good favor with the Commissioner. He hurried to the County Courthouse and presented the book.

The Commissioner examined the book carefully. He had heard the Mormons every since he was a boy. Now, he had heard too much about them.

That name Mormon had brought shame to his family. Then it hit him like a bolt of lightning. Elder Snedden was a Mormon. He smiled a sinister smile. Finally he could rid the town of this imposter. But he wanted to do secretly. For he did not want a new rumor regarding him or his family.

The next night as Elder Snedden returned from the grocery store with his usual bag of candy, a stranger came out of the darkness and tackled him. Another hit him on the head with a block of wood. Elder Snedden was unconscious. A note was attached to his beautiful navy blue suit which said, "Neither you, nor no other Mormon will ever be welcome in this town. If you and those Mormon Books are not out of town by the time the **sun** goes down tomorrow night you will leave this town in a wooden box."

When Elder Snedden did not return home, Abigail sent Seth to go find out what was keeping him. The boy found the Elder on the ground in a vacant lot a block away. He quickly ran to Matilda and she and her children carried Elder Snedden home.

They phoned Officer Harley, and he was on his way. However, his police car was stopped by a man standing in the road who said, "If you go down there, your life is in danger." Officer Harley wanted to go on, but knew he shouldn't.

Seth had read the note and asked Matilda, "Why did they call him a Mormon? What is a Mormon?" By now all the children were listening with great concern.

Matilda spoke softly, "Yes Elder Snedden is a Mormon."

Seth spoke again, "What does that mean?"

"It means he is a good person. I've been told that there is not a finer group of people in the world that Mormons. Elder Snedden is like an Angel to us. So all I can say is that I want to be a Mormon, and I want all of you to be Mormons because I want all of you to be just like Elder Snedden."

Now the attention was fully back on Elder Snedden's grave condition. It was doubtful in Matilda's mind that he would live. Her emotions were deeply troubled. She embraced her mother and wept uncontrollably. And Grandmother Amanda returned the tears.

The hour was very late and Matilda called her family to the bedside Elder Snedden where they all fell down as he had taught them to do. Matilda Burnham's prayer, "Oh dear God. We cannot bear the thought of losing Elder Snedden for to see is an Angel. Please let down with great mercy and he'll this wonderful man who was introduced us all to more happiness than we have ever known before."

The children were then set off to bed only Matilda and Grandmother Amanda were at the bedside of Elder Snedden. Amanda had many home remedies and she mixed up concoction that she spoon-fed into Elder Snedden's mouth he had no choice but to swallow the nasty ointment. Now all it could be done was to wait and watch and pray.

After two hours Matilda became so weary that she fell asleep. Grandmother Amanda covered her over with a warm blanket. Then she went close to Elder Snedden and lifted him from his bed she carried him to a nearby rocking chair and took him up into her gigantic lap with her his head resting on her shoulder.

She then gently song sung to him as she pushed his hair back from his forehead and prayed silently for him to awake.

As the cuckoo clock on the wall was striking why A M Elder Snedden began to stir in the arms of his adoptive grandmother. Soon he was fully awake and had asked for a drink of cold water. Amanda hurried to the sink and on the way back she shook Matilda who awoke.

Matilda turned on a nearby lamp so she could see him more clearly. He smiled. He seemed to glow. Oh how she admired this gentle stranger. Then, to her total amazement he said, "Matilda."

Elder Snedden could speak! Somehow the blow to his head had reawakened within him the ability to speak. And once he began to speak, Oh the wonderful things he said!

He told of his intense desire to be a missionary. But when he was interviewed by his Bishop who hardly knew him because he just moved into that area, the Bishop was astonished that he could not speak. There was no way such a person could serve a mission. After all, missionary work was all about talking. So the Bishop refused to send his recommendation on to the stake president.

Elder Snedden continued, "My heart was broken I wanted to serve so badly. But I knew there was no hope. Then, more than ever, I longed to be able to speak, but alas there was no way, for one reason or another, that I don't even remember or understand I just could not speak. And because I could not speak I refused to learn to write much more than my name is. I felt if I learn to write there would never be any chance in my entire life that I would be able to speak.

Because I could not speak nor write, I developed special sensitivities beyond the five senses which enabled me to communicate with people. You know, you've heard stories of how blind people develop extra senses. That's what I did. I found that with my eyes and my heart I could say things that even those who could speak could not say.

Because of my special needs, I developed a deep faith in God. I asked Him for special powers that would enable me to help people and to do good. He gave me those powers.

There was no way I could explain this to a Bishop or any other person. Then after much prayer I devised a plan. I feel the Lord inspired me in my thinking. I decided I would do all I could to prepare myself to be a missionary. I read the Scriptures. I knew every chapter of the Book of Mormon. I love that book I have never been so touched by any other book as I was by the Book of Mormon I was ready to serve the mission but there was no way.

It was then, like I told you, that I came up with my plan. I would find a place where missionaries were newly arriving, and I would make my way to that place. I bought my navy blue suit. I had my hair cut shorter than it has ever been. I even found a place where I could have a name tag made. That made me look just like regular missionary.

I decided the place I wanted to serve was in the Kentucky. I found a young man who was going to that mission and found out from his parents exactly when he was going to fly to Kentucky I flew out the day before, and the next day at the airport, I joined in with the other six missionaries.

I loved the missionaries I met in that mission. I loved President Durrant. He was a fine man. I knew that somehow he knew I really belonged in his mission.

I was only with President Durrant a few days, but I saw him change. I saw power come into his teaching. I saw love come into his heart. I saw his faith increased 100 fold.

I was sent to Stinsonville with two of the best missionaries to ever live. They treated me well at first. But because I could not speak I was a great burden to them. I didn't blame them I blame myself.

Finally my presence was intolerable for them. So I climbed on a bus to nowhere and ended up in this wonderful place called Nineveh.

So that's how I got here. Matilda. I know that none of this happened by accident. It was all orchestrated in heaven."

The children arose the next morning. Elder Snedden prepared his famous pancakes. While they were eating. Elder Snedden came silently into the room and said, "Are those the best pan cakes you guys have ever eaten or what?" At first they just kept on eating. But then little Mary almost scream as she said, "Elder Snedden just spoke!"

The other children realized what had happened and they began to jump for joy. I was finally able to tell how much I love them. The next day, when the children have gone to school Matilda asked, "But just who are you? And why can't you speak? And why do you know so much?"

I smiled and said, "Oh my dear Matilda. Does it really matter who I am? Does matter where I came from?"

She replied, "I guess it doesn't really matter. But I just feel like I have to know. Please tell me."

Elder Snedden asked me to sit down. He then pulled his chair right in front of me and began to speak. This is what he said:

I was born to a young unwed mother from Ogden, Utah. She was sent to Portland, Oregon where I was born. I was adopted by young LDS couple, who were one

year later both killed in an auto accident. I then began to live with my grandfather who was a University Professor of Philosophy. He was retired and personally taught me in a home school. He and I traveled all over the world and saw each of the Seven Wonders of the World. I learned to speak seven languages. I was taught everything."

Matilda asked. Everything about what?"

Elder Snedden replied, "Everything about everything."

Matilda then said, 'I was entranced by what I was hearing. None of it surprised me."

Elder Snedden continued: "while in India. I died and when I came back in another life. I was a Mormon Missionary."

"No way!" I said. You are kidding me. Who are you really?

Elder Snedden became very serious and said. "Nobody knows who I am. Even I do not know."

"That is all he ever told me about. Who he was."

It was soon noticed among all the inhabitants of Nineveh that Elders Snedden could now talk.

The Baptist minister invited him to speak on the coming Sunday to his congregation. When others heard about this they wanted to be at the meeting to hear their saintly Elder speak. Because of the large crowd that would gather a microphone was set up outside and bleachers were built.

When all were gathered, the entire group sang the great hymn. "How great thou Art." It was stirring. The Reverend then prayed and thanked the Lord that Elder Snedden could now speak. Matilda then sang a solo, "I Walk Today Where Jesus Walked."

Then the minister said, "it is now going to be our pleasure to hear from our Elder who has miraculously had restored to him "the gift of tongues."

There was a bright sunshine everything seemed like a new world. When all were settled Elders Snedden began to speak. I wished I could tell you all he said. But some things are too scared to be spoken.

Then Elder Snedden spotted Commissioner Burnham in the back part of the group of people. He invited this man to come to the front and stand at his side. The commissioner's heart was softened by this invitation, and he bowed his head and made his way through the people to the front.

When the two stood side by side, Elder Snedden reached out and put his hand on Brother Burnham's shoulder and pulled him close. Elder Snedden then said, "Dear friend I can now see the halo around your head. And Brother Burnham, Jesus Christ came to atone for the sins of all mankind. Matter what those sins were, if we come to Christ and truly repent and be baptized those sins can be forgiven. And if any man in the past ever committed any sin he can in the spirit world repent of those sins and hereunder we can be baptized for these people and they can be forgiven of all their sins."

Tears streamed down Commissioner Burnham face as he requested the microphone. He then said, "My dear friends there are so much for which I'm sorry. I have long been a tyrant in this community. I was in a position to do good things for each of you. But all I ever did was bad

things. I am so sorry. I am so glad Elder Snedden came. I am so glad I read The Book of Mormon. At first, I only read it to be able to find out it was a fraud. I wanted to be able to report the many things it said that proved to me it was not true.

But as I read, I came to know that this book is true. As the book says, 'If any person would read it and ask God he would tell them whether or not it was true. I did that. I know it is true. I have learned so much about Jesus Christ from that book. I have seen Elder Snedden go forth in our community doing well. He is a pure example of everything Jesus Christ wants us all to be. To me Elder Snedden is an Angel'

Elder Snedden then read to us from the book of acts and the day of Pentecost. The spirit of the Lord filled each of our hearts. It was as though we had just all stepped into heaven. We all called out to Elder Snedden and asked, "What shall we do?"

Elder Snedden then replied, "My dear brothers and sisters of Nineveh in the name of Jesus Christ, I invite each of you to be baptized by immersion for the remission of your sins."

Elder Snedden then said, "I came here under the direction of President Durrant and of Our Heavenly Father. I know that Heavenly Father wants all of you to be baptized. But before that happens, there is something we must all do. We must learn more about the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.

You have all seen the painting I did of young boy out in the woods praying.

Elder Snedden then held that painting in his hands and said. "This young man in the picture is Joseph Smith. Joseph went to inquire of the Lord which church was true and which he was to join. He was told that none of them were true but that through him the true church would be restored to the Earth. Later angels appeared to Joseph spent and line upon line precept upon precept the gospel of Jesus Christ was restored to the Earth. The name of that church is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The church is commonly called the Mormon Church. It is called that because of the sacred book that was revealed to Joseph Smith titled the book of Mormon. We have had delivered to our little town 200 copies of that book. That is enough books for each family in our town.

So before we are to be baptized we must each read that holy book. As you leave this meeting you will be given a copy of the book. And the next two weeks you and your family should read it from cover to cover then you will know enough that you can be baptized members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Elder Snedden then said, "How many of you are willing to do this?"

Every person assembled their race the right hand that they would be willing.

The clothing factory was commissioned to make white clothing for every man woman and child over the age of eight. There was great excitement in the town as all were preparing to be baptized.

Then on a beautiful warm day everyone gathered at the Bowser grocery store where the white clothing was distributed to the townspeople. The next Saturday I'll of them assembled at Nineveh Lake for the baptism.

Elder Snedden announced that the first good person to be baptized with the Matilda. The next would be Jewel. Then we will baptize Commissioner Burnham. At that announcement a loud shout of hosanna was heard from all the townspeople.

So they baptism proceeded. It took five hours and 40 min. for Elder Snedden, who had the authority of Jesus Christ, to baptize some 213 people.

Elder Snedden then announced that the next day he would go into Louisville with flip flamingo in the produce truck. His purpose in going would be to advise Preston Durrant that there were now 213 members of the church in Nineveh. And 46 children under the age of eight. This would be enough people to comprise a branch of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

A loud cheer, a reverent cheer, a cheer of joy went up from all the people

The next day Elder Snedden left for Louisville and we waited eagerly for his return with President Durrant

Time went by and we heard nothing more from Elder Snedden. Then Brother Bowser read in the Courier-Journal of the death of Elder Snedden. In less than 5 min. everyone in this town knew that their Elder was gone. The whole town mourned

We read of the coming funeral and that's how come we all came to Louisville to pay our final respects to our Elder Snedden.

When the Matilda finished everyone in the chapel was filled with pure joy. President Durrant again went to the pulpit and said, "Tomorrow I will drive to Nineveh. I will be at the Bible Church in the minister's office. One by one, I will interview each of you and tomorrow afternoon. Then I will be able to choose a president for the Nineveh branch of the church

Then president Durrant said, "I have been thinking, while Matilda spoke, about the question she asked Elder Snedden, as to who he was. I have come to know that we will never know who he was. But it seems to me if there was ever an Angel among us it was Elder Snedden. Perhaps that is why he was able to recognize the Angel in each of you. I don't think there's ever been anyone who has been in the presence of Elder Snedden who didn't feel like Elder Snedden made him or her want to be an Angel.

So good bye Elder Snedden. We don't know where you came from but our hearts are filled with gratitude that you came among us. And because you did not of us will ever again be the same

That was the final answer all felt satisfied that now they knew who Elder Snedden really was.

So that month we had 284 baptisms. When the report went into or area authority, it cause quite a stir. How could it have happened? I was asked to report that in the next mission president's seminar. But I just said that somehow it all just came together and the Lord blessed us. That was all I felt I should say. For how could I ever explain Elder Snedden?

The end.

Back to Reality.

I had fun writing that story and would that it could have been true. But, alas, as I said, it was pure fiction.

Now let us go back to the true story that also features angels.

Early on, even the first week of our mission, the Lord sent me an angel.

An angel, posing as a lady, came to see me; she announced that she lived locally. She came into my office and said, “President Durrant, I feel impressed to tell you something. I was the mission president’s daughter in Germany years ago, and my father was so interested in being a good mission president that he kind of abandoned the family. I went through hell,”

She started to cry and went on, “I never got over it. It was a terrible experience for me. I just wanted to come to you and tell you that you better watch out, you better take care of your family.”

I needed that visit. I was so anxious to be a good mission president that I wasn’t doing all of what I should be doing at home.

That night when I came home I felt impressed to have a good look at the giant tree that grew in the front yard of the mission home. One limb caught my eye. It was about forty feet high and stretched out like a giant arm. In my mind I could see a swing hanging down. I thought, “My children would love such a swing.”

I, with the help of a daring Elder who could climb trees. Did build that swing. And it caught the attention of every kid in eastern Louisville. Our kids had instant friends. It sort of became my reminder that I should put the kids and family first. Now all children felt at home in Kentucky. That swing became famous when a few months later, at a mission president’s seminar, I told the others “The most important thing I have done so far on my mission was build a swing. A swing that made my children feel at home in Kentucky.” The other presidents and Elder S. Dilworth Young were touched by the story, and soon that swing was spoken of all over the world. But the swing did not solve the problem of my oldest son. That solution would come in the form of another angel who did come with the twenty.

On the night of the arrival of the “twenty” something happened. I could tell they were looking at me as though I had a halo. I could tell that to them I was in deed their president. Being in their presence I felt a new birth.

When I was talking to them I felt that the Lord had answered my prayer Twenty Fold.”

As I talked to them I didn’t see Knights. I saw angels. Not one angel but twenty. In their presence I felt the pure power of love and of right and of God.

I told them that this is a mission of trust; I can see in you that you can do the right things for the right reason. I’m not here to be your boss; I’m here to be your friend. I’ll try to inspire you. But mainly, I’m just going to cheer for you. I’ll be your cheerleader. So you get out there and do this.

We already had some good missionaries, but with these new Knights, we sat around the table and talked. I felt like King Arthur. Better still I felt like Heleman.

I told them about the dreams of King Arthur and what we were going to do and they sat in rapt attention. I told them of Heleman and his stripping warrior.

I was renewed.

I'd heard that you've have to treat missionaries as the kids they are. They are a bunch of teenagers. They said that being mission president was like having the 200 boy scouts across the river from the girls camp. They said, "Being mission president, you just have to tend them." Those comments never did set well with me.

On that night with the new ones, I had a revelation that these missionaries were the noblest people on the earth. And sitting them was like sitting in the presence of angels. And interview any one of them was like interviewing an angel.

I wasn't kidding myself. I knew of their struggles. When you listen you learn of struggles. However, I knew what they had in them-a better angel.

I sometimes heard stories from mission presidents saying, "You'll never believe what this one missionary did, or what this one did."

I like to excuse myself from such unholy conversation.

The saints who were in our mission were on fire with enthusiasm. At stake conferences they wouldn't give me much time. So not wishing to take the time of the stake president, I developed a rapid style of speaking. They were fascinated at how I spoke.

I related to those wonderful people of the south. They loved our eight children and adopted them as their own. They loved the fact that we were humble folks and had never been rich. The stake presidents started to be my number one assistants. I could tell they loved me and they loved my style. I know I'm saying good things about myself, But in my job I still felt as a failure.

The ten zone leaders come to a meeting at the mission office. I told them about my dreams of a Camelot again. I told them they were my knights and I honored them.

I interviewed each one; I could tell that each of them was fully on my side. They wanted to see things go right as much as I did. They wanted to make their president fee; good and look good.

After 3 hours of meetings in the chapel, we drove to Cherokee Park. We walked out in a grove of trees and had a testimony meeting, just those zone leaders they were so noble, so magnificent; King Arthur never had it so good.

Then I asked them to walk out further into the woods. In a secluded spot, I found a log and sat down and said, "I'll tell you something Elders, I need help. I need a blessing. I want you to all gather around me. You'll have to reach out so you can put your hand on my head. I need a blessing and you missionaries hold the power to give me that blessing."

I called on one who I thought was a little discouraged and I asked him to be the voice. I've never received such a blessing as I did as he pled to the Lord for President Durrant to have strength, and inspiration and revelation. He also prayed for the missionaries to rally around me like we were standing around our president now. It was a blessing I'll never forget. From then on I was up to the marvelous tasks that were mine.

Things were really changing, the zone leaders went back and talked to the missionaries and there was much rejoicing in the mission.

My interviews with the missionaries who were not as they ought to be. I spent too much time with each one. I should have been more direct with questions about getting up on time and were they obedient. I should have gone over their written goals.

But I just wanted to know about them. \What their dreams were. What their dad did for a living? How many children were in their family? What they dreamed of becoming after their mission?

We talked and I remembered. I didn't take notes, I just remembered about their brother who played ball, about their sister. About their mother having a new baby, about their dad losing his job. We just talked and I could see the angel in them and so it was.

I'm not saying these things were right, I'm just saying this is the way it was.

I remember riding home alone in the dark coming from a zone conference. I could sense something was wrong in the mission with some missionaries. I didn't know where, but I knew something was wrong. The next week it was reported that two missionaries had problems with some young ladies. We had a disciplinary council. They needed to go home. It broke my heart. I wondered again if it was because of me that they fell. I kept in touch with them and I longed for them to come back. So we had our problems, but we had our moments of glory

.We never really had an Elder Snedden. Instead we had a whole bunch of them. I remember Elder Campbell went to Morgantown and he was kind of angelic to the people in Morgantown fell in love with Elder Campbell. Husbands of LDS sisters started getting baptized, Couples started getting baptized. He was a regular Elder S over in Morgantown. Elder Snedden's story was false, just a parable, but Elder Campbell's story was real.

I wish I could see him. While I was talking of him; it made me well up with emotions. We finally got baptisms back to where they're supposed to be, Thanks a lot Elder Campbell, and all those who learned from him, learned how to talk to people as if they were angels, treat them as if they were angels.

I remember a man coming in to be baptized. The baptismal font was just across the parking lot from my office. He hadn't been interviewed for his baptism – I interviewed him, He said he smoked a cigarette in the car before he came in for his interview. I said, "Is that your last cigarette?" And I looked at him as if he were an angel he said, "That's my last cigarette."

I saw him many years late – his whole family five children had been on missions, that was indeed his last cigarette. He was an angel.

I talked to a missionary once about a missionary who smoked before he came on a mission. One night this Elder smoked right there in their apartment. The companion said, "I'm sure he'll have to go home president, and I shouldn't have told on him, but I felt like you had to know that – you can't have missionaries out here smoking."

So I called the other Elder in. He admitted that he smoked. I said to his companion, "Elder do you have a no smoking sign in your apt?" The Elder said, "No, of course not."

And I said, "Do you think you could print up a no smoking sign and hang it on the wall?"

Then I turned to the Elder that smoked and said, "Elder do you think you could obey that no smoking sign forever?" He cried and said, "I believe I could."

"All right, go back to work."

Oh we could go on and on with such stories, every mission president could tell them.

Maybe there are some peculiar people like me that really can't be commanding officers. We folks will have to make it by just being angel finders.

Now let's get back to my son who struggled.

I remember coming home from zone conferences. I had been gone five days. When I got home Marilyn told me that Matt was very discouraged.

I went to his room and sat on the side of his bed with him. He then said, "I can't do it father, I can't go back to school." He added, "I've prayed until my knees are raw. I just can't do it."

I was not able to help him though I tried.

Later that night I went back to check on him. I sensed that something was different. He announced with a tone of hope. "Something just happen to me. I was praying and I saw Elder Gibson in my mind and he was smiling."

(Elder Gibson was as much like our fictitious Elder Snedden as a missionary can get.)

"Matt continued. "Everybody loves Elder Gibson. He smiles at everybody. And when he does it melts their hearts. I want to have others feel about me the way they feel about him. I'll go back to school, and I'll change. I've been a burden to you President Durrant; I'm going to start being a blessing to you."

He got cut from the basketball team as a junior, but because he smiled at everybody. He became popular. The other players on the team went to the coach and said, "We aren't playing unless you put Durrant back on the team."

He was elected student body president of his school--largest school in Kentucky.

He had great influence with all the students. He loved the black students. He was not only student body president, but was made an honorary member of black student council.

At a student council meeting they discussed who should play at their next dance. The white kids wanted a white group and black kids wanted a black group. The atmosphere became quite heated. Matt then said, "I've got an idea. There's a group in Cincinnati – a group of four Chinese guys. Let's get them," Everyone laughed and calm came back into the meeting.

Because of his Elder Jibson smile and his keen sense of humor everybody loved him. He would drive his car to school and as he was parking he would turn the radio dial to a black station. He would then turn the volume really high and turn off the key.

After school he would give some of his black friends a ride home. As they got in the car he would turn on the key and there would be this real loud black music on the radio. They would be thrilled and say, "Hey man! You listen to good music?"

He gave the address at graduation. The people Louisville people all knew he was a Mormon. Near the conclusion of his talk he said, "Brigham Young led the saints to Utah. When they got there, Brigham said, 'This is the place!'

But then Matt added, "I have been in Kentucky for the past three years. And now and I question if Brigham Young was right. Because I want to tell you something my friends, after being here with you, I feel that THIS IS THE PLACE." The audience stood as one and gave him a rousing, long, standing ovation.

After he and his friends had a party. At former parties some of them drank a little beer. They always good naturedly offered him some. He would good naturedly reply, "The only ever beer I drink is Coors."

In those days you could only get Coors beer out west. And they moan and groan and laughed because they didn't want him to drink beer. It would have hurt them deeply if Matt had compromise his standards.

At this final party his friends had a special surprise for Matt. The father of one of these kids had flown out West and at his son's request had asked had brought back a can of Coors beer. At the party they formally presented the can to Matt.

Matt took it and with as much emotion as he could muster said, "Of course I won't drink this because it's too valuable to me. I will keep it forever as a remembrance of how much I love all of

you guys. It will be kind of a memorial for me of my love for you.” They cheered. There hero had not let them down.

We brought that Coors beer home when we returned to Utah. A few weeks later it exploded in our cupboard.

Kathryn my daughter, who loved horses, attended the Kentucky derby three years in a row. I did too. Some questioned a mission president being at the Kentucky derby, but I quit being a president that day and just became a father. We watched the great horse Secretariat win the Kentucky derby. Later got to go and stay on a horse farm which was managed by an angelic Mormon couple. Being in Kentucky became a glorious experience for us.

Devin learned how to play basketball there. He became a star in Kentucky. The coaches there said, “No wonder you’re good. He comes from Utah and all they do in Utah is play basketball.” When he came home and became a star in Utah the coaches said, “You’re a good player because you lived in Kentucky – that’s all they do in Kentucky is play basketball.

All the children had a daily swing in the giant swing. It wasn’t easy for them to be in Kentucky, but they thrived.

So as King Arthur said, “The old order changes and makes way for the new.” It came time to go home. I was ready to go home. I would move aside from my throne let somebody else become King Arthur or General Patton -whichever one best suited their way.

May the Lord bless us that we will be like Elder Snedden. He couldn’t talk; all he could do was care, and love and listen. All he could do was to be himself and focus on the other person. All he could do was to learn about the other person and be kind to him and to affirm him. All he could do was to nourish people’s dreams, remember their names, and their precious stories. All he could do was care deeply and be friendly All he could do was express love, be genuine and live and act in the name of Jesus Christ. All he could do was perform miracles that matter. All he could do was to be an angel.

All missionaries are angels part of the time, and some turn out to be angels all most all the time. They serve and then they come home and get married.

And they spend the rest of their days striving each day in their callings, and along the way, and in their families to help everyone they meet bring forth their better angel.

It is now more than forty years since I served as mission president. Did the Lord keep his promise made through Elder Monson, "Who the Lord calls, he also qualifies." The Lord called me, but did he qualify me? Was there a miracle?

Was I successful in this glorious call? I'm still not sure. It's difficult for any church leader to feel totally successful in leading and serving others. There is always so much more to do than he or she can do--So much more to feel than can be felt.

I did not lead the missionaries to the greatest number of baptisms since the days of Wilford Woodruff. So in that, I would give myself a "C." But there are other factors to consider in my final grade. And in these factors, I give myself an A. So all things considered, I feel, I was the "greatest average mission president" the church ever had.