

The Letter I



Didn't Receive

NAME WITHHELD

My roommate's unspoken comfort helped me feel I was not carrying my burden alone.

During my freshman year at Brigham Young University, the Relief Society leaders of my singles ward decided to organize a special fireside celebrating the relationship between mothers and daughters.

At the end of the beautiful program, one of the organizers announced that they had privately contacted our mothers and asked each mother to write her daughter a letter. One by one, each young woman received a letter. Tender feelings rose to the surface, and I could hear sniffles throughout the room as the Relief Society sisters read their mothers' words. As the stack of letters yet to be handed out grew smaller, I developed a knot in the pit of my stomach. I wondered if the program organizers had been able to contact my mother, who for the past several years had lived an unstable lifestyle. At times *I* didn't even know where she was, and my efforts to contact her were often unfruitful.

After the last letter was handed out, I sat empty-handed. Then, almost apologetically, someone handed me an envelope with the bishop's handwriting on it. Although I appreciated the kind words in his letter and have kept the letter to this day, it is hard to describe the intensity of painful emotions that swept over me like a wildfire. Embarrassment, humiliation, anger at my mother's choices and the pain they had caused me, and a feeling of rejection all seared my heart. While tearful women shared unspoken, tender moments with their mothers, I felt as if I were at a feast but not allowed to eat.

I struggled to control my emotions as I stood and found the nearest exit. I increased my pace and walked as quickly as I could to my dorm, not wanting my emotions to spill out in public. Tears still trickled out, despite my efforts to hold them in.

I reached my dorm room and broke down in sobs. My heart wrenched with the pain of being the only woman in the ward whose mother hadn't written. As I sat there drowning in my pain, a sympathetic figure quietly came in and wrapped her arms around me. My roommate, Brenda, held me close and cried with me.

A visit from an angel would not have been sweeter. I still felt the pain, but I no longer felt I carried it alone. That simple yet divine act gave me insight into what it means to mourn with those who mourn and comfort those who stand in need of comfort (see Mosiah 18:9).

Since that time I often ponder the occasion when Jesus came to see Lazarus four days after Lazarus's death. Even though Jesus knew that Lazarus would soon be raised from the dead, He felt compassion for the sorrow of others and wept (see John 11:32-35).

Although I am far from perfect at putting this principle into action, I have learned that the greatest gift we can give someone who is suffering isn't advice about how things will get better, how we should be grateful it isn't worse, or how we need to have faith. Sometimes the things we say in our efforts to help actually come across as judgmental or trivialize the depth of sorrow the person is experiencing. The greatest gift I ever received in a time of pain came in the form of a sweet roommate who shared the pain with me, dividing it up between the two of us so it would be easier for me to carry. ■