

Finding a Place to CALL HOME

*Tommy hadn't been active in the Church for 20 years.
His wife, Arlene, was a member of another faith. Moving
to a new apartment complex changed everything.*



When Tommy and Arlene Womeldorf moved from South Boston to Weymouth, Massachusetts, USA, in 2005, they found what they felt was a perfect apartment for their family.

And then the lease fell through.

Frustrated but needing to settle down somewhere, the Womeldorfs located an apartment in another complex and moved in. Little did they know the changes that were about to come into their lives because of where they lived.

Visiting the Church

Tommy had been raised in the Church but hadn't been active for over 20 years when he met Arlene and her daughter, Sophia, in May 2002. Arlene had been raised in another faith. At the time, both she and Tommy were looking for religious stability in their lives. Each had participated with a number of congregations of various faiths. Their search continued—sometimes together, sometimes separately—after their marriage in 2004.

The following spring, the Womeldorfs visited Tommy's brother in California, USA, where they attended Latter-day Saint worship services with the family. Arlene, who had never experienced Primary before, was impressed by "how clearly they were explaining the gospel to small children."

"Our oldest daughter, Sophia, went to Primary, so I went too," she explains. "I was absolutely in awe. I thought, 'This is a great thing!'"

Tommy remembers feeling somewhat irked by his wife's enthusiasm. "She really liked church," he recalls, "and I remember telling her that she didn't have to like my family's church to get their approval; they already liked her." But Arlene told him that her feelings were genuine.

Meeting the Neighbors

The Womeldorfs returned to Massachusetts from their vacation; a few months later they moved into the apartment in Weymouth. Not long after that they met their neighbors, Rick and Moshi Doane, who brought over some treats. When the Doanes left, Tommy told Arlene, "I bet they're Mormons."

He was right, as he learned soon after when he saw Rick again at the local train station. A short time later,

Rick and Moshi invited the Womeldorfs over for dinner.

Rick, who was serving as the ward mission leader in their ward at the time, recalls that he and Moshi didn't set out to do missionary work; they were simply trying to be friendly. "The stake public affairs committee had set a goal for the members of our stake to get to know 10 families each—not necessarily so that we could preach the gospel to them, but just so that we could better know our neighbors and be more involved in the community," he says. "Moshi and I thought we'd start with those we lived closest to. The stake's emphasis was on building relationships, and that's all we were looking to do."

The Doanes, of course, didn't yet know that Tommy had been raised in the Church or that Arlene was already interested in it. But the topic came up at dinner, and Arlene surprised Rick by asking, "Is there an LDS church nearby?" Determined to "take this carefully" and perhaps invite Tommy and Arlene to attend church "in a few weeks," Rick told them where the local meetinghouse was located and didn't push the subject further.

Trying It Out

So he was even *more* surprised when, on the next Sunday, Tommy and Arlene were already at church when he and Moshi arrived.

Tommy admits that when Arlene suggested going, he was a bit hesitant. "I knew that being active in the Church was demanding. I had spent 20 years trying easier things," he says. "But Arlene felt really strongly that we at least should try it out, and I wasn't going to stand in her way. So we went."

"I told Tommy, 'Let's go check it out to see if this is something we really want to pursue,'" says Arlene. And although she didn't realize it then, Arlene now acknowledges that the urgency she felt was prompted by the Holy Ghost.

Throughout church that day, Arlene kept remembering her "profound experience" at the ward in California, and she was equally delighted with what she found in the Hingham Ward. "It was a beautiful experience," she recalls. "I especially loved that we could participate as a whole family."



SIMPLE AND CLEAR

“Remember, brothers and sisters, we’re not marketing a product. We’re not selling anything. We’re not trying to impress anyone with our numbers or our growth. We are members of the restored Church of Jesus Christ, empowered and sent forth by the Lord Himself to find, nourish, and bring safely into His Church those who are seeking to know the truth.

“Viewed from that eternal perspective, what we are to do seems so simple and clear.”

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “The Essential Role of Member Missionary Work,” *Liahona and Ensign*, May 2003, 38.

Learning More

When Rick and Moshi asked whether the Womeldorfs would like to learn from the missionaries, Arlene told them: “Let us think about it.” She remembers that she felt excited but “not quite ready” to meet with the elders.

In the meantime, the Doanes and the Womeldorfs continued to build their friendship. Rick received permission from the bishop to teach Tommy and Arlene informal gospel lessons using *Preach My Gospel*, which they usually did on Monday nights for family home evening.

Moshi says that the evenings the two families spent together were the start of a good friendship, especially for her and Arlene. “Having the Womeldorfs in our home learning about the gospel was wonderful,” says Moshi. “I think it’s definitely easier to have an initial conversation with friends. We were just regular people talking about things that are simple yet so important.”

Tommy adds that for him, the experience was not necessarily one of learning but of remembering what he had been taught in his youth. Feeling the Spirit, he says, helped him build his faith.

In time, Arlene felt ready to learn from the missionaries. “Elder Marchant and Elder Beaver were wonderful,” she says. They taught her about the plan of salvation, the Prophet Joseph Smith, and the Book of Mormon, the last of which particularly touched her. “The elders were very patient, so I never felt overwhelmed,” she adds.

Over several months, both Tommy and Arlene felt that they were, as she says, “building a foundation.”

Building Friendships and Solidifying Testimonies

That foundation continued to be strengthened by the friendship of Rick and Moshi, as well as other members of the Church, like Rick’s parents, Bruce and Betsy Doane, who had joined the Church years earlier.

“Knowing them was one thing that really helped Arlene and me,” Tommy says. “I think it’s important that in sharing the gospel, we come off as more than good people or good neighbors or even good members of the Church. It’s also important that we just be real people who aren’t judgmental and who are truly loving and patient. And that’s what Bruce and Betsy did for us.”

Betsy notes that she had people who did the same thing for her when she was a new member of the Church. “I simply wouldn’t have made it without those friends,” she remembers. “I was so intimidated coming into the Church—everyone seemed so perfect—I felt like they had it all together and they understood everything there was to know. But having good friends in the gospel

helped me work through those feelings.”

Bruce adds that it’s important that members of the Church “welcome people as they are while still encouraging them to grow” as disciples of the Savior. Genuine friendship—both at and outside of church activities—plays a crucial role in that process. “It’s what Tommy and Arlene needed,” he says. “It’s what we all need.”

The Womeldorfs’ conversion continued “little by little,” Tommy says, because “we kept going and meeting new people. The Lord was helping things happen in our lives.”

Another one of the “new people” who helped things move forward was the bishop of the Hingham Ward, Leif Erickson. “Initially, Arlene was pulling me along,” recalls Tommy. “And then one day, the bishop, who had worked with me this whole time, invited me in for an interview.

“I told him that I didn’t feel I had much of a testimony at that point. I told him that I didn’t argue with anything the Church taught, but I didn’t have the burning feeling that so many talk about.”

Over the next several weeks, Bishop Erickson and Tommy talked about the connection between belief and hope and about other areas where Tommy had concerns.

By the time Arlene was ready to be baptized, Tommy was ready to fully return to activity in the Church.

Finding Place

Arlene was baptized on February 19, 2006. “The day made me think about my own baptism,” says Tommy. “It also made me think a lot about the 23 years I was inactive. I had a really rough time for those years. There were some fun times, but I paid a lot of big prices.”

“We spent all this time shopping for churches,” says Arlene, “and we never felt in place. Now we did.”

Among the things Arlene cherishes most about her membership in the Church are the ones that bless her family. “It’s amazing to me when we can all be together on a Monday night,” she says. “We’re not perfect at family home evening, but when we do our best and it comes together, it’s wonderful.”

Life still has its complications, Tommy adds. “Of course we’ve had small struggles here and there. Life challenges don’t go away. But with the big things, life has been amazing.”

Being Sealed in the Temple

One of the reasons the Womeldorfs call their life “amazing” is because of the sealing ordinance. A year after Arlene’s baptism, in February 2007, the family—which at that point included daughters Sophia and Julia—was sealed in the Mesa Arizona Temple. (They moved to Arizona in August 2006.) Since that time, two additional daughters—Fiona and Lola—have been born to Tommy and Arlene.

“Being sealed in the temple was a beautiful, wonderful experience,” says Arlene. “People who don’t realize what the possibilities are for an eternal family are really missing out on something. It was incredible to be with people I love and who love me and to feel so close to them.”

“The temple experience really was amazing,” Tommy agrees. “And it was great to have a lot of support from friends in our new ward.”



Tommy, Arlene, and Sophia Ryan Womeldorf, center, with neighbors Rick and Moshi Doane on Arlene's baptism day in 2006.

Acknowledging His Hand

Arlene feels grateful for what she has found. “The Spirit is real to me. The truth is powerful to me. And my experience has taught me that if your faith is what keeps you standing, you shouldn’t hide it from others. The gospel is what has made me strong inside and out.”

Tommy says that it’s still hard to believe that things happened as they did. “In Massachusetts, there aren’t very many members of the Church. Those who do live there are spread out. What are the chances that we would move right across the hall from a couple who were Latter-day Saints?”

“We had a good life before I came back to church and before Arlene joined,” Tommy continues, “but there wasn’t as much happiness. Before, we lived by searching around and hoping that what we were doing was what we should be doing. But now we *know* that we’re in the right place, working toward the right things. Now we’re *sure*. We know now that when we stay open to the Lord’s will, He blesses us far beyond even the best things that we can imagine for ourselves.” ■

Editors' note: visit ensign.lds.org to read more from the Doanes and Womeldorfs on sharing the gospel easily and naturally.