

WHAT LITTLE WE HAD WAS ENOUGH

By Sueli de Aquino

Christmas was coming, but this year we were not going to celebrate with an abundance of food and toys. Papa had passed away, and Mama had begun receiving a small pension as a widow, along with a little rent money.

We were in the living room of our apartment, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The room was quiet. Then suddenly we heard a sound as if someone had arrived outside the building.

I got up and looked through the blinds of the window, from which I could see the entrance to our building. I saw a homeless woman. She had a few bags and wore tattered clothes. I observed her for a few moments, curious to see what she would do. She opened a small paper sack, took out a few cookies, and began to eat them. Soon afterward she opened another little sack that contained a few coins and began to count them.

My young heart was moved, and I softly called to my mother, "There's an old woman outside. Come and see." My mother looked, and she also was moved. She asked me to get the can where we kept a little money, and without making a sound, she left our apartment and

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silently dropped the bills from the building's hallway window.

I stayed by our window and watched the bills fall. The old woman saw one fall and then another and another. Trying to discover where the money had come from, she looked at the windows of the building. They were all closed. Then something

wonderful happened. She looked to heaven and extended her wrinkled hands. Then she placed her hands on her chest and gave thanks for the gift she had received.

Behind the blinds of the window, we wept in gratitude that the little we had was enough to give joy to someone who had less. ■



CAROLS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

By Heather Beauchamp

Music and singing have always been very important to my family. While I was growing up, my sister would play the piano while my five other siblings and I gathered around and sang our favorite Church songs. These times are among my fondest memories.

After graduating from high school, I lived near my family until I married a wonderful man who was stationed in our town with the U.S. Air Force. A year and a half later, my husband and I, along with our two-month-old daughter, were transferred to a base across the country. We had another child, and with all the expenses that come with two babies, we had not been able to return to visit our families. With six children still at home, my parents couldn't afford to visit us either. Living so far away from my family and missing my husband due to his frequent military assignments, I was often subject to feelings of loneliness. Holidays were especially difficult.

On Christmas Eve in 1996, while my husband and I were taking part in our traditional Christmas Eve activities with our two young children, my thoughts kept turning to my parents and siblings. I gazed at

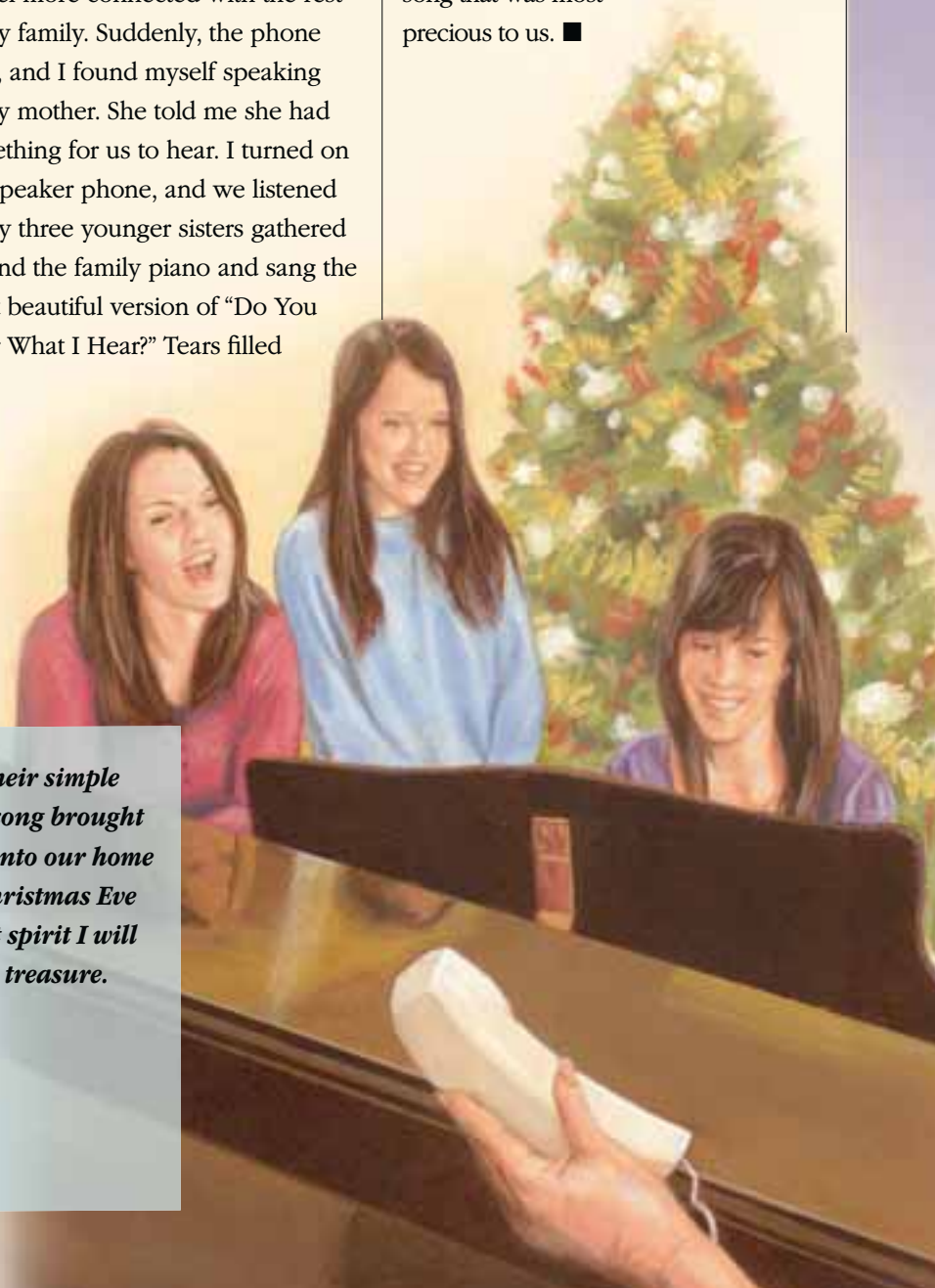
the clock and knew they would all be sitting down on a blanket laid carefully out on the floor and eating a "Christmas feast picnic" of fruit, little sausages, cheese, and crackers while my father read the account of Christ's birth from the scriptures. In my mind I pictured their faces. Mine would be the only one missing.

As I pondered, I prayed for a way to feel more connected with the rest of my family. Suddenly, the phone rang, and I found myself speaking to my mother. She told me she had something for us to hear. I turned on the speaker phone, and we listened as my three younger sisters gathered around the family piano and sang the most beautiful version of "Do You Hear What I Hear?" Tears filled

our eyes as my husband and I listened to the three-part harmony coming from our phone. We could almost feel my family in the room with us.

Their simple song brought into our home that Christmas Eve a sweet spirit I will always treasure. Of all the gifts we received that Christmas, many purchased from stores and carefully wrapped and labeled, it was that sweet song that was most precious to us. ■

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MY BEST CHRISTMAS GIFT

By Ketty Teresa Ortiz de Arismendi

I was barely two years old when my mother became seriously ill. Because she had no one to leave me with, she took me with her to the hospital in Tupiza, Bolivia. She died shortly thereafter, leaving me all alone.

During my childhood and early teenage years, I was passed from one place to another, never knowing what it was like to have a family, never receiving any kind of gift—not even for my birthday or for Christmas.

Left on my own, I faced a lot of challenges and dangers while growing up. It was only later that I learned I was never really alone and that an invisible hand was watching over me.

When I was 15, I was invited to live with a Latter-day Saint family. Their daughter, slightly older than I, took me to Mutual. Everyone there welcomed me and paid attention to me. For the first time in my young life, people treated me with love and kindness.

I was introduced to the missionaries, who began teaching me. Soon I realized that I had a loving Heavenly Father, who had protected me throughout my life. I accepted the gospel and was

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baptized on Christmas Eve 1978. That evening I received my first and still most cherished Christmas gift: membership in the Lord's Church.

Other gifts followed. Two years later I met a young man who was not a member of the Church. I took him to church with me, and after he made his own baptismal covenants, we were married. Later Heavenly Father blessed my husband and me with three children, who were sealed to us for time and all eternity in the Buenos Aires Argentina Temple.

When I was young, everyone called me “the poor little orphan girl.” When I recall this memory today, I feel grateful because I have the blessing of knowing that I have a Father, who has always loved me. I have also tasted of the Savior's infinite love. He restored His Church through the Prophet Joseph Smith, who was chosen in the premortal world and labored diligently to translate the Book of Mormon. I know that it contains the fulness of the gospel.

I received my first and best Christmas gift at age 15 and have enjoyed the Lord's tender mercies ever since. I still feel gratitude in my heart for that gift and strive to keep my gaze fixed on the next life, where I hope to thank the Father and the Son and live forever with my beloved family. ■

AN UNEXPECTED LESSON

By Erin Wilson

After making a career move to New York City, I was out shopping one December evening for items for my new apartment. A storm had recently hit the city, and knee-deep snow lined the streets. I was bundled up in a warm down coat as I made my way to the train with a bustling crowd of holiday shoppers.

I waited impatiently for the train to arrive, thinking about my shopping list. When the train finally arrived, I stepped onto the car, scanning the seats for a place to sit. The nearest seat was directly across from an old homeless man. He had no warm coat or heavy clothing. He just had some plastic bags filled with trinkets.

I did not want to sit near his offensive odor, and his rugged appearance made me wonder if he was dangerous. Mostly, I did not want to be hit up for cash. I abruptly walked to the other end of the car and took a seat. All the other passengers also filed to the end of the car, leaving the man alone.

Soon a young man boarded the train and settled down in the seat directly in front of the homeless man. Without hesitation, the young

man extended a welcoming smile, a handshake, and a jolly hello. The man's face brightened, and they began a pleasant conversation. They talked for the next 15 minutes, enjoying each other's company.

As I watched, I was reminded of the true spirit of the Christmas season. While deeply engaged in conversation, the young man stood up and removed his vest, shirt, and a second long-sleeve shirt he was wearing underneath. Standing in his undershirt, he then handed the long-sleeve shirt to the homeless man. The old man accepted it graciously, and the two continued their conversation. I stepped off

the train at the next stop, touched by the young man's kindness. I felt guilty for my selfishness, but I had a desire to be a better person.

The King of kings came into the world in the most humble of circumstances, in a lowly stable. The world was given a precious, saving gift—the Son of God. I am grateful for the gift of the Savior in my life and for the reminder of His infinite love and compassion for God's children. That Christmas season, I felt a renewed desire to be kinder, more selfless, and more like my Savior, Jesus Christ. ■

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