

WALKING IN THEIR FOOTSTEPS

Could our broken-down car be an answer to prayer?

BY SERENA KUGATH

When the Church celebrated the sesquicentennial of the pioneer trek across the plains, my family “adopted” pioneer ancestors, read accounts of their bravery and sacrifices, and participated in a four-day reenactment of the trek. With our daughters, ages seven, five, and three, we walked a hard and dusty road to Casper, Wyoming, dressed in period clothing, learning quickly to love our fellow travelers. But all too soon it was over.



When I saw my oldest daughter carrying her tired little sister, I tried to stop her. She told me that some of the pioneer children carried their siblings every day.

started seeing blessings. Realizing I could not always ask friends to taxi me around, I quickly found a bike trailer at a garage sale and resumed grocery shopping and other errands. Transporting groceries in a bike trailer forced me to be selective in my purchases. No more frivolous extras—I began using our stored powdered milk and making bread at home.

Before long I became an expert at substituting anything I was missing because biking to the store for only one item was not

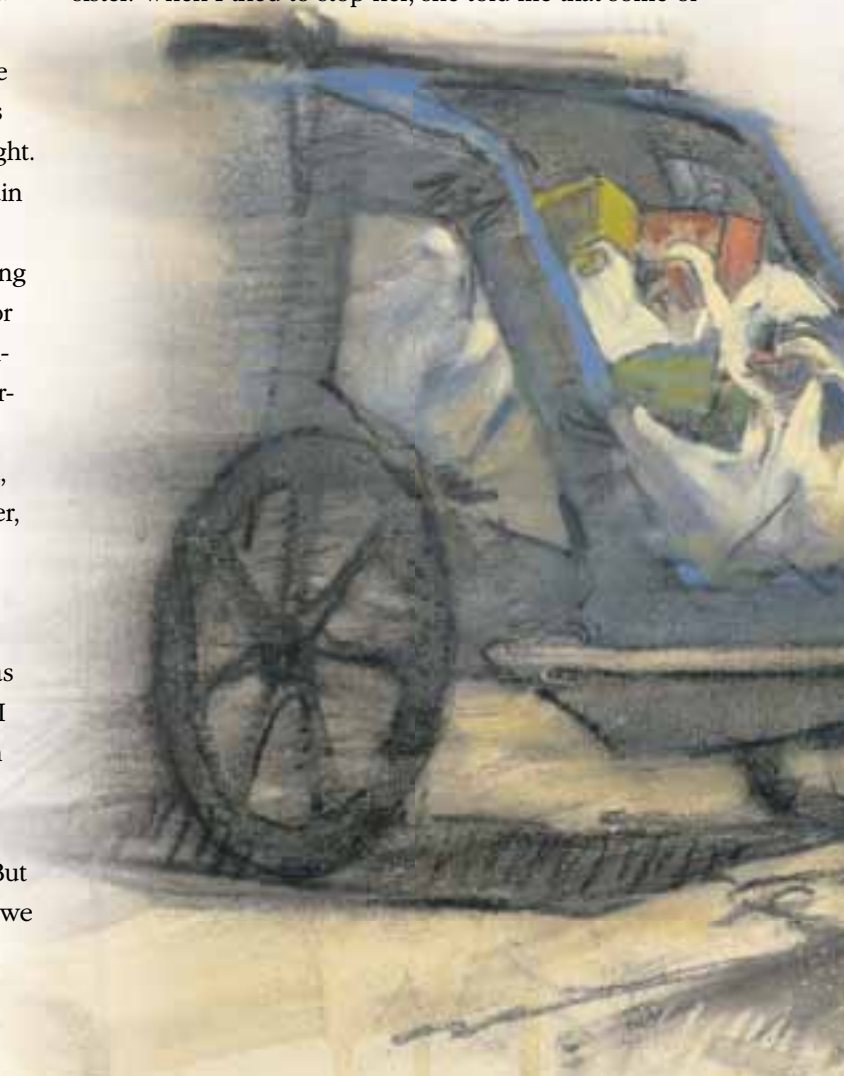
worth it! Fast food was no longer fast when walking everywhere, and we found ourselves at home in the evenings more than before, playing games and reading books aloud together. As we walked places together we had time to talk, listen, laugh, and sing. One of the sweetest moments was seeing my oldest daughter, Jessica, carry her tired little sister. When I tried to stop her, she told me that some of

Driving home in our comfortable, air-conditioned vehicle, I thought about the life we were going back to. Reflecting on our frantic daily schedule, coupled with the convenience of easy transportation and fast food, I wanted to emulate the pioneers' frugal, close, hardy lifestyle. "How can I make this experience last?" I asked in prayer. "We personally have no pioneer heritage. Wilt Thou give us a pioneer experience this year as we try to teach our children about the dedicated and devout early settlers of the Church?" The car was dark, the stars bright, and the kids quiet as we quickly and easily covered the miles that night.

A few weeks later, that prayer forgotten, we were again on the road, happily anticipating a holiday weekend. Twenty minutes out of town, we began to smell a burning odor. My husband, Steven, and I looked at each other for one long moment, and then the car lost power. The temperature gauge had malfunctioned, and the car had overheated so badly that many parts melted and the engine cracked. We could not add a car payment to our budget, and we had little savings. With no car during the summer, we would just have to walk.

I couldn't get over the feeling that we were being punished. Our small town had no bus system, and we had three young children and another on the way. But as I prayed that night, I felt the sweetest impression that if I would allow it, this experience would bless us and even answer my earlier prayer. With this witness I awoke the next day excited to face our challenge.

For the first couple of weeks we were all very tired. But as our bodies grew hardier and our attitudes improved, we



the pioneer children had carried their siblings every day.

It was certainly hard at times. Living in a college town, I would often see young students driving new vehicles, and I would have to stifle my grumbles as I pedaled from place to place. At the beginning of October the weather began growing colder. One evening I dressed the girls in their Sunday best and curled their hair for a special event at my husband's work. On the way there, a cold rain began to fall. The faster we walked, the faster it fell. The wind picked up, and I struggled to push the stroller up the slick grass. Muddy and stumbling, I was ready to cry when I remembered the pioneers scaling Rocky Ridge. I laughed aloud—my life was not in danger, and I had a warm, dry building a hundred yards away.

A few weeks later snow began to fall, and I once again turned to the Lord. It was no longer safe to bike

around town, and for the first time I was not sure how much longer I could keep it up. "Lord," I prayed, "I think we've learned the lesson of the pioneers. We don't have enough saved for a new car, but wilt Thou help us?"

The next day my father-in-law called. He had seen some good used vehicles in the paper, and within 48 hours of my prayer, we sat in a white van. Not until our daughter said it looked like a covered wagon did I realize that we had been without a car for almost 111 days—the same number of days it took the first wagon train to go from Winter Quarters to the Salt Lake Valley.¹ ■

NOTE

1. See Gordon B. Hinckley, *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (1997), 450.

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