

THE SPIRIT OF VISITING TEACHING



By Joy M. Gatherum-Hanson

As a mother with five young children, I learned that finding the time for visiting teaching could be stressful but that it was always worth it.

A sister had recently moved to our neighborhood, and I was assigned to be her visiting teacher. When I called to make an appointment, she suggested a later time because her morning schedule was busy with her daughter's "daily ritual." I wasn't sure what that meant, but I agreed to an afternoon stopover.

My companion and I rang the doorbell and were greeted by a small, silver-haired beauty in her early 60s. She introduced herself as Joyce and invited us into her home. There on a reclining bed lay her daughter.

There was no way to miss viewing her daughter because Joyce sat across the room with the bed between us. We tried not to stare. The incapacitated young woman thrashed her arms and legs. A constant drool slipped from her mouth onto the large terry-cloth bib around her neck.

As she wiped her daughter's mouth, Joyce explained, "This is Daisy. She does not communicate in our way."

Daisy wore a flowered pastel dress and had satin slippers on her feet. Joyce explained that Daisy was born blind and severely handicapped, both mentally and physically.

Joyce showed great love and compassion to her 20-year-old daughter. She said that her husband had left them when the burden of Daisy's care became too much for him. Joyce refused to have Daisy institutionalized as the doctors had suggested. The other children were grown and married, so Joyce carried on alone with Daisy's care. Medical expenses had forced them out of their larger home. They now shared a two-bedroom, government-subsidized apartment.

My heart ached for this dear mother, and my companion was deeply touched. Our visit lasted a long time, and we hesitated to leave. We could tell that our new friend truly enjoyed—and needed—the visit.

Months went by, and our visits multiplied. Just one visit a month never seemed like enough. Soups, homemade bread, and cookies were often left for our two new friends. Joyce was so very grateful.

One warm summer day, I was out walking with my children. I pointed out Joyce and Daisy's apartment as we were passing by. The children had heard me speak of Daisy and Joyce before, and now they wanted to know if they could go in and visit. I looked at my watch and saw that it was afternoon. I knew it would be okay to visit.



Spirit spoke to spirit as I visited Joyce and Daisy with my children.

As Joyce opened the door, she radiated delight with her pleasant smile.

“Oh, you brought your children! My daughter loves young ones. They seem to be able to reach her in ways adults can’t. Won’t you come in?”

Walking in, I was amazed that my children seemed so prepared to see the ungainly motions of Joyce’s daughter. They showed no shock at seeing Daisy.

“Can we touch her?” Tom asked.

After being reassured, they touched her on the cheek. She jerked her head to the side where they stood, and my children began to talk to her.

“You have on a pretty dress,” Rachelle said.

“I like the ribbon in your hair,” said Todd.

Joyce smiled as Troy asked, “Does she have a pet?”

“We can’t have pets here, but we had a dog at our old home. When he would lick her face she would always smile.”

My youngest son, John, kept patting

Daisy’s hair softly. I noticed that her thrashing arms and legs had calmed down.

“Can your children sing? My daughter loves to listen to music.”

I asked if the children would sing “I Am a Child of God.” After I gave them a starting pitch, they sang every verse. The Spirit in the room was noticeable. Daisy’s movements stilled completely. When the children had finished, we all noticed the tears running down Daisy’s cheeks. Spirit had spoken to spirit as my children sang.

Several times that summer my children and I visited Joyce and Daisy. Each time, the children and I sang. We all felt kinship with these two sisters as we were welcomed into their home.

Years later Joyce and Daisy moved away, but I will never forget the presence of the Spirit during visits to their home. How grateful I am that I made the time to meet those wonderful sisters. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.



INSTRUMENTS IN THE SAVIOR’S HANDS

“I marvel as I witness the countless acts of charity performed daily by visiting teachers all over the world. . . . To these faithful visiting teachers, I say, ‘Through those small acts of charity, you follow the Savior.’ ”

Silvia H. Allred, former First Counselor in the Relief Society General Presidency, in *Daughters in My Kingdom: The History and Work of Relief Society* (2011), 118.