

Pioneer Night

By Nettie Hunsaker Francis

(Based on a true story)

"Whenever I think about pioneers, I think of brave women and men" (Children's Songbook, 222).

"Mom, what are we doing for family night?" Benjamin asked as he and his younger brother, Sammy, walked into the kitchen for a drink.

"Do you mean Pioneer Night?" Mom said with a smile.

"What?" Benjamin asked. "I thought today was Monday. You know, *family* night."

Mom nodded. "It's Monday all right. But tonight we're having a special Pioneer Night."

Benjamin frowned a little. He liked family night. He wasn't sure he wanted to do anything different.

"What's Pioneer Night?" Sammy asked.

"Well," Mom said, pulling out a kitchen chair and sitting down at the table with them, "one hundred and seventy years ago, Mormon pioneers crossed the plains in wagons and handcarts to get to Utah. On July 24, 1847, the first pioneers arrived in the Salt Lake Valley."

"Wait. Isn't today July 24th?" Benjamin asked.

"Exactly! It's Pioneer Day. In Utah it's even a state holiday," Mom said. "There are parades and fireworks to honor the pioneers."

"But we don't live in Utah," said Benjamin.

"Well, that just means we have to think of creative ways to celebrate," said Mom. "So we're having Pioneer Night. Will you help me get ready?"

Benjamin and Sammy nodded. As they helped Mom, Benjamin felt more and more excited. Soon Dad got home from work.

"What's this?" he said when he saw the kitchen table



set with checkered napkins, glass jars, and pie tins.

"It's Pioneer Night!" Benjamin said, handing Dad a red bandana to tie around his neck. He and Sammy were both wearing cowboy hats from their costume box.

"This looks fun!" said Dad. Then he sniffed the air. "And something smells really good." Mom was stirring a pot of stew at the stove.

"Before we eat, we have to make butter for the cornbread," said Sammy.

Mom poured cream into a jar and screwed the lid on tight. After shaking for a few minutes, she handed the jar to Sammy. They all took turns shaking until there was a lump of butter inside!

After dinner they had a special family night. Dad showed them a black-and-white picture.

"This is Joseph Francis, your great-great-grandpa," Dad said. "He came to the United States with his family when he was 13 years old."



Dad talked about how Joseph sailed from England and then worked in a factory to earn money to cross the plains. Benjamin couldn't believe a boy who was just older than he was had done so many hard things.

Then Mom shared a story from her family history. "My mother, your grandma Hunsaker, met the missionaries when she was 13 years old. When she prayed to know if their message was true, she felt the Holy Ghost tell her to be baptized. Because of her decision, I grew up knowing about the gospel. My mother is a pioneer because she set a righteous example for others to follow."

Benjamin liked that. Maybe there were ways *he* could be a pioneer! He was still thinking about it when Dad said it was time for the closing song and prayer.

"Now we can have the treat!" Sammy said. Mom handed everyone a cookie, some candies, and a few other yummy things. She showed them how to make wagons with marshmallows like white canvases on top.

"These wagons sure taste good," Sammy said as he took a big bite. "I'm glad the pioneers went to Utah."

"And I'm glad we don't always have to make our own butter!" Benjamin said with a laugh. His life was different from the early pioneers, but he knew they all had one thing in common: they all believed in the gospel of Jesus Christ! ♦

The author lives in Nevada, USA.

Turn the page to see how to make your own wagons!



"We follow in the footsteps of the ultimate Pioneer—even the Savior—who went before, showing us the way to follow."

President Thomas S. Monson

"True to the Faith of Our Forefathers," *Ensign*, July 2016, 4–5.