

BY VICKI H. BUDGE

(Based on a true story)

*I'll walk with you. I'll talk with you. That's how I'll show my love for you* (Children's Songbook, 140–41).

**W**hen I woke up the first morning of summer vacation and remembered where I had to go, I felt nervous. I was going to visit a man named John.

My Primary teacher, Sister Chichenoff, had asked each person in our class to “adopt” a grandparent at a nearby nursing home. She told us if we learned to love one another like Jesus taught, we would find real joy. At first I thought her idea was good.

Sister Chichenoff had made it sound like a privilege. “Hey, Nick,” she said. “I assigned you to a special person. This man could really use a friend.”

“You can count on me,” I said. “I’ll be his friend.”

“He doesn’t mix with other people much and he only has one leg. He could use someone who cares about him and will push him around in his wheelchair.”

“I’ll do it,” I said.

Sister Chichenoff reached out and took hold of my arm. “This man doesn’t like people,” she said. “He doesn’t like to talk to anyone, and he doesn’t like to go in his wheelchair. In fact, they tell me he is quite a grouch.”

“Why give him to me?” I asked.

“Because John needs someone to talk to,” Sister Chichenoff said. “He is a lonely man, and I told the administrator *you* were the person John needs.”

I was afraid to meet someone who didn’t want me to be there.

I wondered if he’d yell at me. By dinnertime, I was so afraid that I went in my room and prayed. I knew Heavenly Father wasn’t afraid of John.

Sister Chichenoff met us that evening with her husband. Brother Chichenoff was funny, so I asked him to stick with me. He was also big, and I planned to hide behind him if John yelled at me.

When we walked into John’s room, he did not yell. He didn’t say anything. He sat in his bed and ignored us.

My friends and I liked monster riddles so I decided to try one.

“What do sea monsters eat?” I asked.

John glared.

“Fish and ships.”

Brother Chichenoff broke out laughing but John kept glaring. I changed the subject. “Um—how about a ride through the nursing home?”

To my surprise, John nodded yes. The evening didn’t turn out as bad as I thought it would.

The next week I didn’t want to go back, but I

# A Friend in Need



wasn't afraid. When we got to the nursing home, John was already in his wheelchair.

"Been waiting for you," he said.

"How about a ride?" I asked.

"Sure. Let's go."

Brother Chichenoff and I still did most of the talking, but John grumbled a few words. When it was time to go home, he motioned for me to come closer.

"What happened to the apples on the monster's apple tree?" he asked.

"Well, I . . . um, I don't know."

"They all grue-some. You know—g-r-e-w-some." John chuckled at his joke. Brother Chichenoff and I laughed.

After that, I looked forward to Thursdays.

John's face lit up like a lightbulb when I walked in. And each week he had a riddle for me.

John told us stories of fishing and hunting years ago. He told us how he cut his leg on an old camper door and it got infected, and that's why he had only one leg.

Several months later, John told me a secret. "Hey, Nick. Guess what's two weeks from tonight? My birthday. I'll be 88."

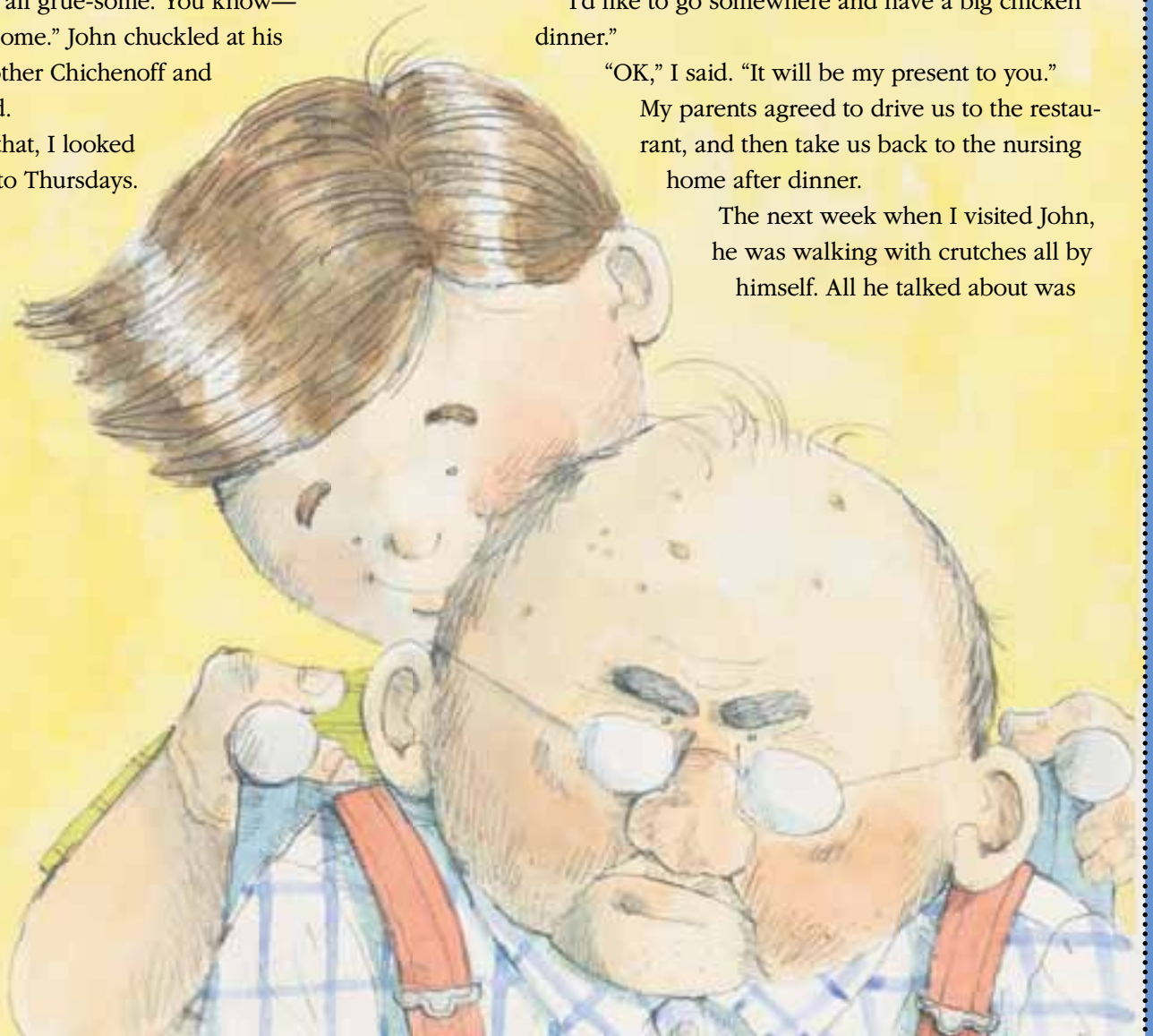
"Wow! Let's do something special," I said. "What would you like to do?"

"I'd like to go somewhere and have a big chicken dinner."

"OK," I said. "It will be my present to you."

My parents agreed to drive us to the restaurant, and then take us back to the nursing home after dinner.

The next week when I visited John, he was walking with crutches all by himself. All he talked about was



going out next week for his birthday dinner. He was so excited. I was too.

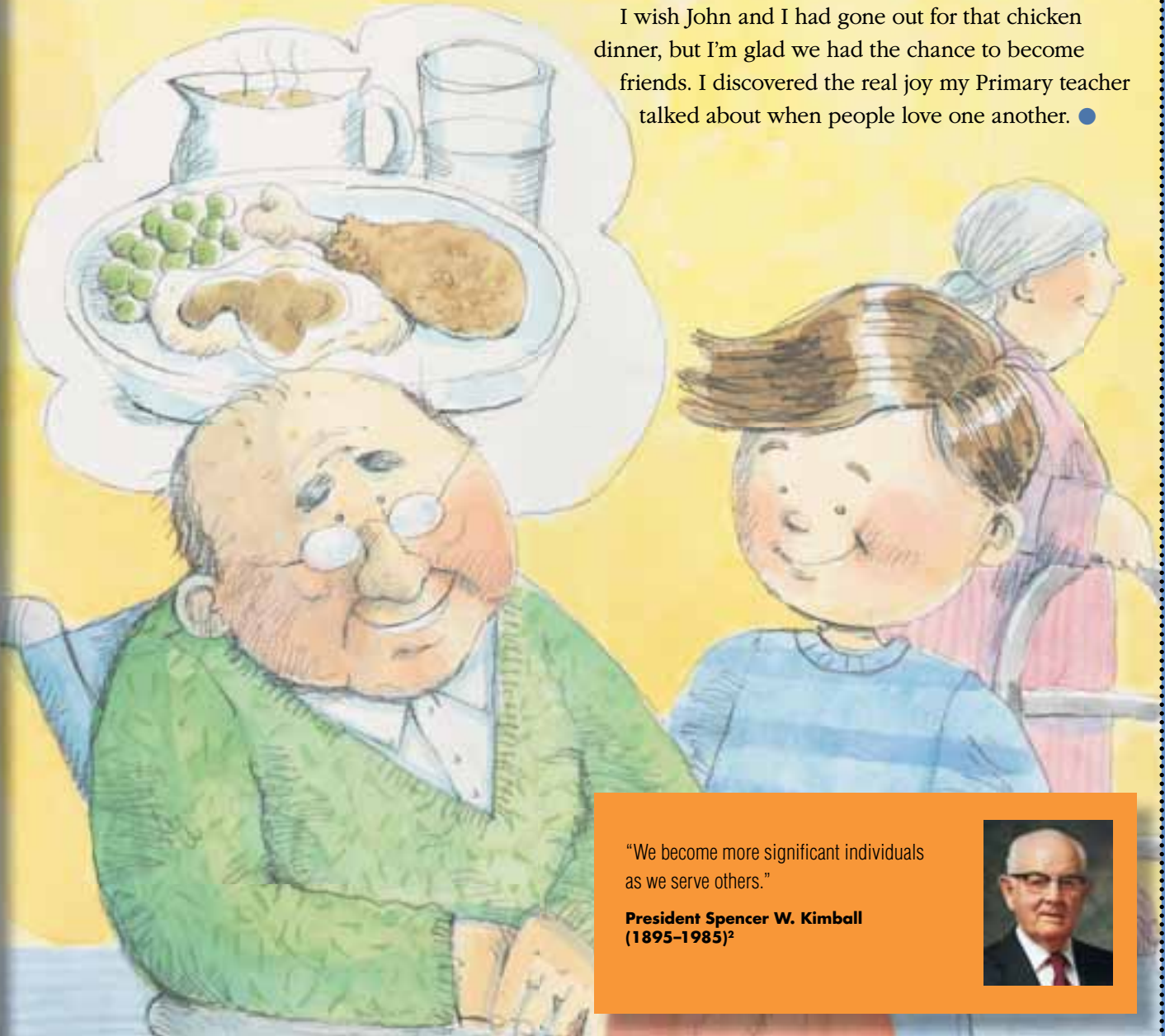
A few days later, the phone rang early in the morning. It was Sister Chichenoff calling to say that John had died during the night.

On John's birthday, I sat in the nursing home with the Chichenoffs, my parents, and some of the kids from my Primary class. It wasn't evening and it wasn't time to visit our adopted grandparents. It was the middle of

the afternoon and we were attending John's funeral. We were the only people there besides a few who worked at the nursing home.

As I sat there and listened to the story of John's life, it was hard not to cry. The nursing-home workers said his life had changed and gotten better after the children from the "Mormon Church" started coming to visit. I knew my life had changed because of those visits.

I wish John and I had gone out for that chicken dinner, but I'm glad we had the chance to become friends. I discovered the real joy my Primary teacher talked about when people love one another. ●



"We become more significant individuals as we serve others."

**President Spencer W. Kimball  
(1895-1985)<sup>2</sup>**

