

SEVEN TENDER Miracles ALONG THE WAY

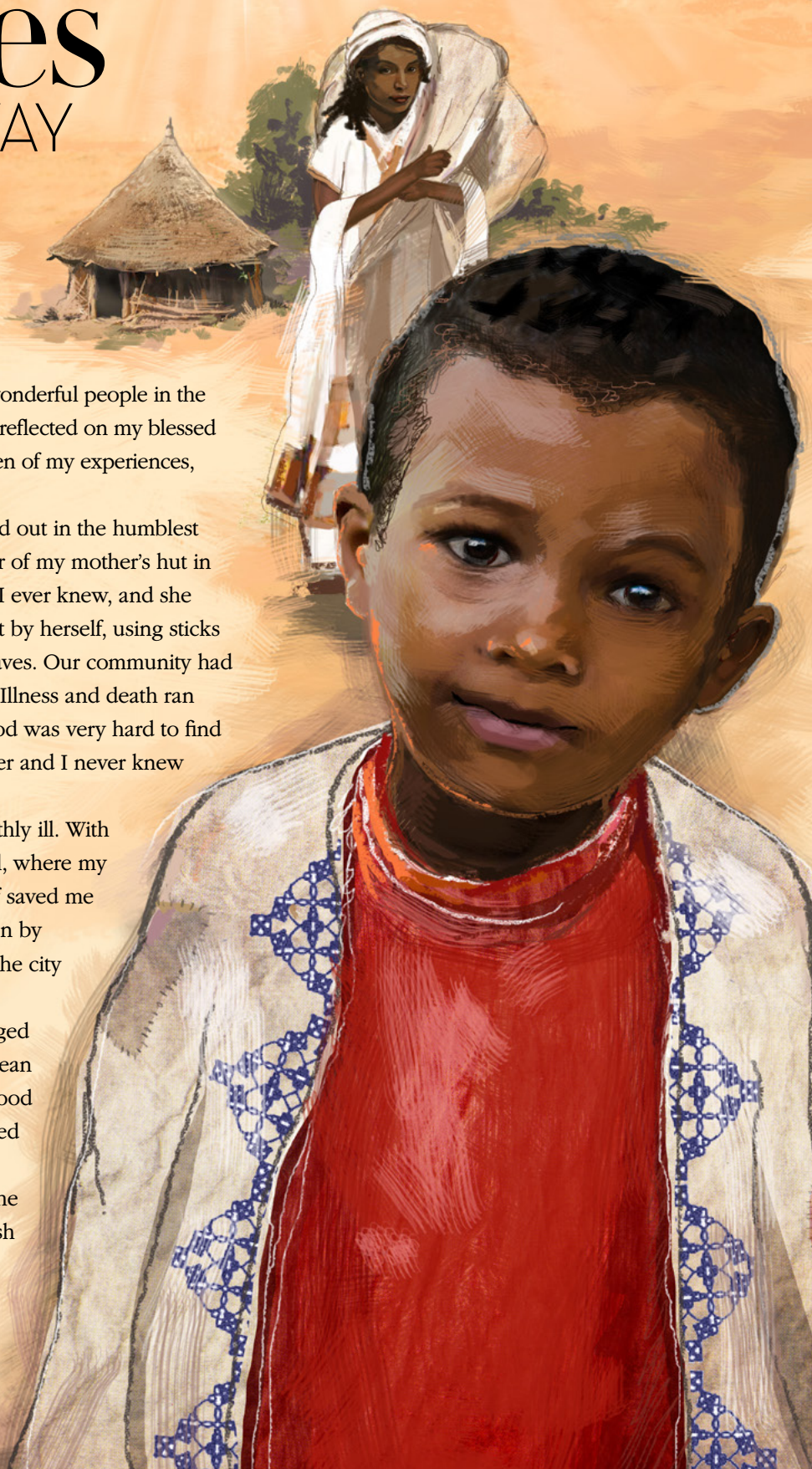
By Ephrem Smith

While teaching and serving many wonderful people in the Texas Fort Worth Mission, I often reflected on my blessed life. I marveled particularly at seven of my experiences, which I consider to be miracles.

First, I survived my early life, which started out in the humblest of circumstances. I was born on the dirt floor of my mother's hut in Dessie, Ethiopia. Mom was the only relative I ever knew, and she built our eight-foot (2.4 m) dome-shaped hut by herself, using sticks and mud that she covered with grass and leaves. Our community had no running water and no restroom facilities. Illness and death ran rampant in our *kebele*, or neighborhood. Food was very hard to find and impossible for us to purchase. My mother and I never knew a day without hunger.

When I was four, my mother became deathly ill. With her last bit of effort, we trudged to a hospital, where my beloved, weary mom died. The hospital staff saved me from life in the streets and death by starvation by arranging for me to live in an orphanage in the city of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital.

The second miracle came as my life changed dramatically. In this orphanage I lived in a clean building, slept in a real bed, and ate all the food I wanted. Other orphans had also experienced the loss of a loved one, and they taught me how to deal with the loss of my mother. In the evenings we gathered to sing songs in English and pray in Amharic, our mother tongue. We prayed for each other and asked God to bless us to be adopted into "nice, kind,





The Lord has blessed my life with miracles that have helped me follow the path He has for me.

loving homes.” Both the music and the prayers impacted my life in a huge way. I never quit praying.

Third, I was introduced to the missionaries and the Church when I was eight. I was invited to see the dedication of the first LDS Church building in Ethiopia on Sunday, November 30, 2003. At the dedication I felt the powerful influence of the Holy Spirit, and the missionaries in attendance radiated joy, happiness, and that same powerful spirit. I remember thinking that I wanted to be just like them. But I had no idea how I could ever reach this goal.

The fourth miracle came soon after. A family in the United States adopted me. My new father picked me up from the orphanage and took me home. We started the process of becoming acquainted, and I began to settle into my new environment.

Numerous challenges surfaced immediately upon my arrival. Everywhere I went people laughed at my English. My limited education caused problems in school. I prayed for help, and then I worked harder and smarter to close the knowledge gap, especially with English. Once again Heavenly Father answered my prayers. Two years later I proudly skipped a grade.

Then my home life fell apart. Prayers to the Lord, high personal goals, and a deep desire to succeed carried me through that extremely tough time. Finally, with a social worker’s help, my father and I agreed to terminate the adoption. This was a time for prayer, patience, faith, and help from Heavenly Father.

Now 15 years old, I went to live with a foster family for about a year. That was when the fifth miracle came.

While sleigh riding with two friends, I met an LDS family with two nice daughters. During the ride home, one of the daughters spoke up, saying, “I think the Lord wants us to adopt Ephrem Smith.” Remarkably, the other three members of the family had also received the same inspiration. The father worked with the Department of Social Services, and soon I moved to my new home. From the very beginning my amazing new father gave me agency. For example, he explained that their family goes to church on Sundays. He allowed me to choose to join them or stay home; he said that they still would love me if I chose not to attend church. I chose to attend church, and I have since made many other righteous decisions.

Miracle six came as I received a testimony of the gospel. One Sunday I sat in sacrament meeting singing “I Stand All Amazed” (*Hymns*, no. 193). Huge tears began running down my cheeks as I received a personal testimony that Jesus is the Christ and that the Church is His Church.

Finally, nine years later, I knew how to become like those missionaries! The missionary age was now 18, but my adoption had not yet been finalized. I waited seven long months until my adoption was completed. Finally, my missionary papers could be submitted. Four days later I received my mission call. In just one week the Lord blessed me with final adoption papers and a mission call. I treasure both papers exceedingly! They are my seventh miracle. Yes, indeed, it took many miracles along the way from that mud hut in Ethiopia to my treasured mission. ■

The author lives in Nevada, USA.