

STANDING UP

FOR CALEB

BY AMY S. TATE

Based on a true story

"Remember . . . brotherly kindness" (D&C 4:6).



It started out like any other day at school. Our teacher, Miss Blackstock, was writing on the chalkboard while I sat daydreaming at my desk. Then our principal walked in with a boy I had

never seen before. The principal whispered something in Miss Blackstock's ear, and everyone got quiet trying to listen.

The boy stood at the front of the classroom while the other kids stared at him. His faded plaid shirt hung loosely. There was a hole in the knee of his pants. With slumped shoulders, he dug his hands

"We should always think about how others feel. We should be kind to everyone, as Jesus was. He loves all of us. It doesn't matter how we look."



Cheryl C. Lant, Primary general president, "The Savior's Love," Liahona, Mar. 2006, F15; Friend, Mar. 2006, 9.

deep into his pockets and stared at the floor.

After the principal left, Miss Blackstock said, "Class, I would like you to meet Caleb Sanders. He recently moved here from Montana. That is quite a distance from here! Caleb, you may take the seat next to Luke."

She pointed to the seat next to mine, and the class watched as Caleb nervously made his way down the aisle. As Miss Blackstock turned back to the chalkboard, whispers filled the room. Some of the kids were saying mean things about the way Caleb was dressed.

"Look at those weird boots," someone said.

"He could hike up the Himalayas in those!" another boy chimed in.

I glanced over at Caleb, but he just sat there staring at his blank notebook page and clutching his pencil. I knew that he must have heard them because I saw him shifting uncomfortably in his seat. Then a couple of boys snickered so loudly that Miss Blackstock stopped writing.

"I see that everyone is eager to talk to Caleb, so let's have him come up here and tell us a little bit about himself," she said.

The class got quiet and stared at Caleb. I felt sorry for him. The boy who sat behind him kicked the back of Caleb's chair and jeered, "Go ahead, mountain boy."

Caleb slowly made his way to the front of the class. His hair partly covered his eyes, and his boots scuffed the floor when he walked. The kids around me snickered again. I knew that Miss Blackstock was trying to help, but I was afraid this would only make things worse.

One boy raised his hand and asked, "Where did you live in Montana, under a rock?"

The class burst into laughter.

The girl on the front row asked, "Does everyone in Montana dress like you?"

I felt my face getting hot as anger welled up inside me. If someone didn't stop this, I knew Caleb would remain an outcast for the rest of the school year. But if I stuck up for him, the kids might laugh at me too.

Then I remembered what my stepmom told me when I tried out for the soccer team. She told me about David in the Old Testament. David was the youngest of all his brothers, but the Lord chose him to be king. It didn't matter what he looked like. Sometimes people judge others by their appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.

I knew Caleb needed help, so I raised my hand. Miss Blackstock called on me. Caleb didn't look up. He probably expected me to make fun of him too.

"I've heard that there are some cool parks in Montana with great hiking trails. What are they like?" I asked.

The class got quiet. I felt my face turning red again, but Caleb smiled. I could see that he was relieved to answer a kind question. In a quiet voice he started to speak.

He told us that his family had lived on a large ranch in Montana, and he had even owned a horse. He told about his favorite trail in Glacier National Park and how he had encountered a real live bear. As he told more and more about his home, the other kids began asking questions about the bear, the hiking, and the rock climbing.

After school I wasn't sure if anyone would sit by me on the bus. I held my backpack close and stared out the bus window. Suddenly, I felt a tap on my shoulder. It was Caleb.

"Can I sit here?" he asked shyly.

"Sure!" I said, moving over to make room.

I never would have guessed how that day would turn out. I am glad I had the courage to be nice to Caleb. Now he has many friends—and I'm proud to be one of them. ●