



# He WE FORGOT, BUT REMEMBERED

By Rebecca Arrington

*We were happy for the chance to serve, but we had forgotten about the opportunity to share.*

I always knew God cared about us, but I never realized how much He cares. It took a long day in Mexico for me to even begin to fathom how intricate His designs are.

My family rose on a Saturday morning, so early that the San Diego, California, sky had only just begun to turn the soft gray of predawn June. We packed into the car, all eight of us squashing into every available seatbelt of our van.

Our group—a collection of stake leaders, high councilors, and their families—met up at the church, forming a caravan of nine cars. President Heap had included Project Mercy in the stake calendars with good reason. An isolated Tijuana community needed volunteers to help build houses for their families, and who among us couldn't spare a single Saturday?

The 20-mile (32-km) drive from San Diego to Mexico passed quickly. In the streets of

Tijuana, my first impression was that no one cared about these neighborhoods. Surely, no one looked very hard at them, if they even admitted to seeing them at all.

We reached our destination on the outskirts of Tijuana soon after the sun began rising to greet us. All around we saw clusters of families. Their clothes were worn. Many had no shoes. Dogs trotted through the grounds, unclaimed and uncared for. Each family was delighted at our arrival: today they might have a home.

Our supplies were simple, our directions simpler still. Laborers had poured concrete foundations a month ago. Planks of plywood lay neatly stacked to one side of the road. Build four walls; add a roof; paint the finished handiwork of last week's volunteers. And so we did, bursting into activity. The men immediately pulled on gloves and strapped on tool belts. The women handed out paintbrushes, mixing bright, fresh colors into large paint buckets.

The sun broke over us glaringly. Each and every one of us broke into a hard sweat before the second hour was up, but at the end of the day we left two families with freshly painted houses, and one with a new home altogether. It was still unpainted, but





*We cut lumber while children watched (below). We built walls, raised them, and nailed everything into place (above). Our work made a difference to them and to us (next page).*







I could see that it didn't matter to the father. He looked past the rough surfaces to the stable walls.

This last family transformed my day's labor into joy. President Heap asked to say a blessing over their new home, and they allowed it. We all clustered into its one common room, the father standing beside President Heap. Brother Woods, still fluent from a Spanish-speaking mission, offered words I couldn't understand, but which rolled through the house and left peace in their wake. The family bowed their heads with us in gratitude. The father cried.

After the prayer, we gathered into the cars and reversed down a narrow lane, into a wide, flat area before we could turn and pull onto the road's shoulder. My family, last in the caravan, took the most time in this procedure, our van being the largest car in the group. I reflected back on all I had seen, now mindful of the stability of my own life. I had full access to the "necessities." These families gained them in gradual, lurching steps, always according to the schedules of helpful strangers.

The day left us tired and satisfied, but with one regret: no one had thought to bring a Book of Mormon.

With all the men and women who had come, I wondered how we could have forgotten this single item. Finally our van was turned around, rolling into place on the road. No others from our group left. A hand pointed out an open window, over the tracts of desert.

Hiking across the road, 30 feet behind us, were two missionaries.

President Heap stepped out of his car and waved the missionaries over. They spoke for a few brief minutes, before President Heap pointed them on, smiling, toward the home we had left only minutes ago.

Even though none of us had thought to bring a Book of Mormon for that family, Someone else had thought to provide one.

I recalled my first impression of this place and realized how wrong I had been. Someone had seen this neglected community. Someone had cared.

When we had forgotten, He had remembered. **NE**