

# After the

By Elyssa J. Kirkham

*When their bus and belongings went up in smoke, the youth of the South Jordan First Ward found a way to carry on.*

The young men and women of the South Jordan First Ward stood on the side of a highway in Wyoming as the bus that had been transporting them to Martin's Cove turned into a blazing inferno.

The fire started with an overheated rear wheel and spread, getting so hot that it melted part of the freeway asphalt. Everyone made it off the bus safely, but there was not time to retrieve their backpacks or other belongings. Within 12 minutes the bus had burned down to its metal frame, along with many of the belongings the group had packed for their pioneer trek.

## Pressing Forward

The youth were in shock and sure they would have to forego the trip. This wasn't quite what they had in mind when they'd fasted for a special pioneer trek experience a few weeks before. Most personal items the youth had packed were burned in the fire, including scriptures and journals. A few youth even lost their shoes.

But tents, food, sleeping bags, and other supplies were safely stowed in a trailer separate from the bus. Bishop Brad Wardle confirmed that they had enough supplies to continue the trek, though it would be a challenge. The youth and their leaders had prepared carefully and wanted to continue.

They wouldn't let any hardship keep them from having an uplifting trek. The group rallied, and they chose to have a good attitude.

"Pray and smile," said Walter Evans, a priest from the South Jordan First Ward. "That's pretty much what I did through the whole thing—just pray and smile."

## Rescued by Angels

While the fire burned their personal supplies, the outpouring of love that followed warmed their hearts. When they speak of the trek, most of the group remember first the kindness and generosity they received from others who heard of their hardships and wanted to help. To the South Jordan First Ward, these helpers were rescuing angels.

On the first night of the trek, the couple missionaries at the Mormon Handcart Visitors' Center scoured their cabins to find any supplies they could loan or give to the group, including blankets, pillows, and sleeping bags.

"It just felt like we had a trek experience all our own, and we felt so blessed for our hardships, like the Willie and Martin handcart companies did," said Caleb Clarke. "And while we weren't in dire trouble, we had to be helped by others and rescued by them."

Other rescuers included the American

# FIRE



*Right: The bus after being destroyed by fire.*

*Below: These trekkers learned that they could face adversity with faith and come away strengthened.*



Fork 13th and Heber 11th Wards. They were in the area for their own treks and donated their unused supplies and clothing to the South Jordan First Ward, including socks, shoes, jackets, sunscreen, bug spray, and medical supplies. The spirit of charity and giving stayed with both the rescued and the rescuers.

### **With Steadfast Faith**

Like the pioneers, this group of trekkers had to make do with less. One instance of improvisation was their treatment of blisters: “Everyone had duct tape all over their feet, and we thought it was pretty funny,” said Grace Loertscher. “But when we thought about it, the pioneers didn’t even have duct tape.”

For Michael Broadway, the experience gave him a sense of the spiritual legacy modern Saints have inherited from the pioneers. “When we were pulling carts, going up the

mountain and having fun, I began to feel the Spirit,” he said. “Even though my family are [first generation] members, I realized I still have a pioneer heritage.”

These experiences were a testament of the gospel and the pioneers’ faith. “It just made me think. There is no way this Church isn’t true,” Kailie Fennell said.

### **All Is Well**

“You never know what life is going to throw in front of you, but you can always know that He’ll help you through it,” said Geoff Kroll. “Though our stuff was gone, we still were blessed by people who gave us so much. When you have adversity, know that you’ll come out of it—and when you do, you’ll be better and have a better relationship with Heavenly Father and your Savior.”

The youth of the South Jordan First Ward saw, as the pioneers did, that “sacrifice brings forth the blessings of heaven” (“Praise to the Man,” *Hymns*, no. 27). Trekkers came away feeling uplifted and strengthened, despite how their trip began. The lesson learned, for many, was that when they had faith, they could face their adversities without fear. As they turned to the Lord, He provided. Like the pioneers, when the trekkers sang “all is well,” they knew it was true (“Come, Come Ye Saints,” *Hymns*, no. 30). **NE**

