A painting of a river canyon. The scene is dominated by warm, golden-brown and orange tones. In the foreground, a small raft with several people is on the water, moving away from the viewer. The canyon walls are steep and layered, showing signs of erosion. The sky is a mix of blue and white, with soft, painterly clouds. The overall style is impressionistic, with visible brushstrokes and a focus on light and color.

A Small and Simple Rafting Trip

By Gary Leikness

An invitation from the bishop turned out to be a life preserver for my family.

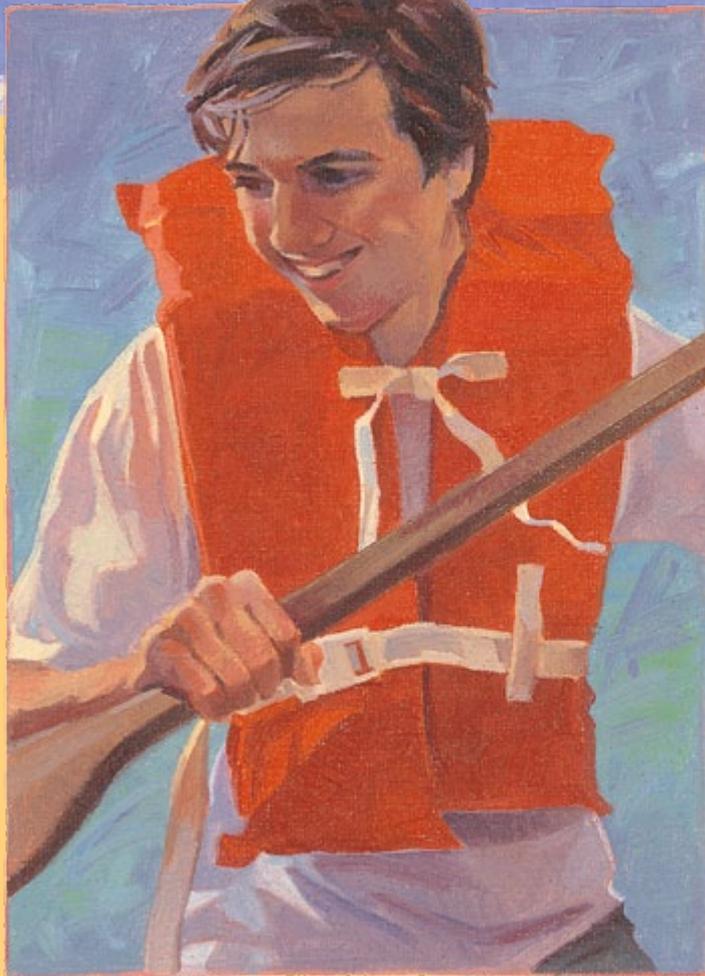
“What?” I said incredulously. “I’m doing what? Dad, how could you?”

My dad just shook his head and waved me off, “Well, I thought you’d like to go on a rafting trip. You weren’t here to say, so I said yes.”

I stomped off angrily. My dad had accepted an invitation from the bishop for me to go on a weeklong rafting trip down the Colorado River with a bunch of kids from church. I had just spent over two weeks waterskiing with some of my real friends. I never expected to come home to the news that I was leaving the very next day to go rafting with the “church people.”

We had gone to church when I was younger, and I was baptized when I was eight. But shortly after that we moved from our old neighborhood to a new development. We slipped into inactivity, and no one seemed to notice. Now I was 16 and thought I was happy with my life. Even though my parents still raised me with high moral expectations like other Mormon kids, I still avoided people from church.

The next morning my parents dropped me at the Scoutmaster’s house. I recognized a few of the faces. I had gone to church with some of these guys when I was



a kid. Some of them even went to my school.

As we started the long drive to the starting point of the trip, I was nervous about how things would be with the other boys. But everyone was cool.

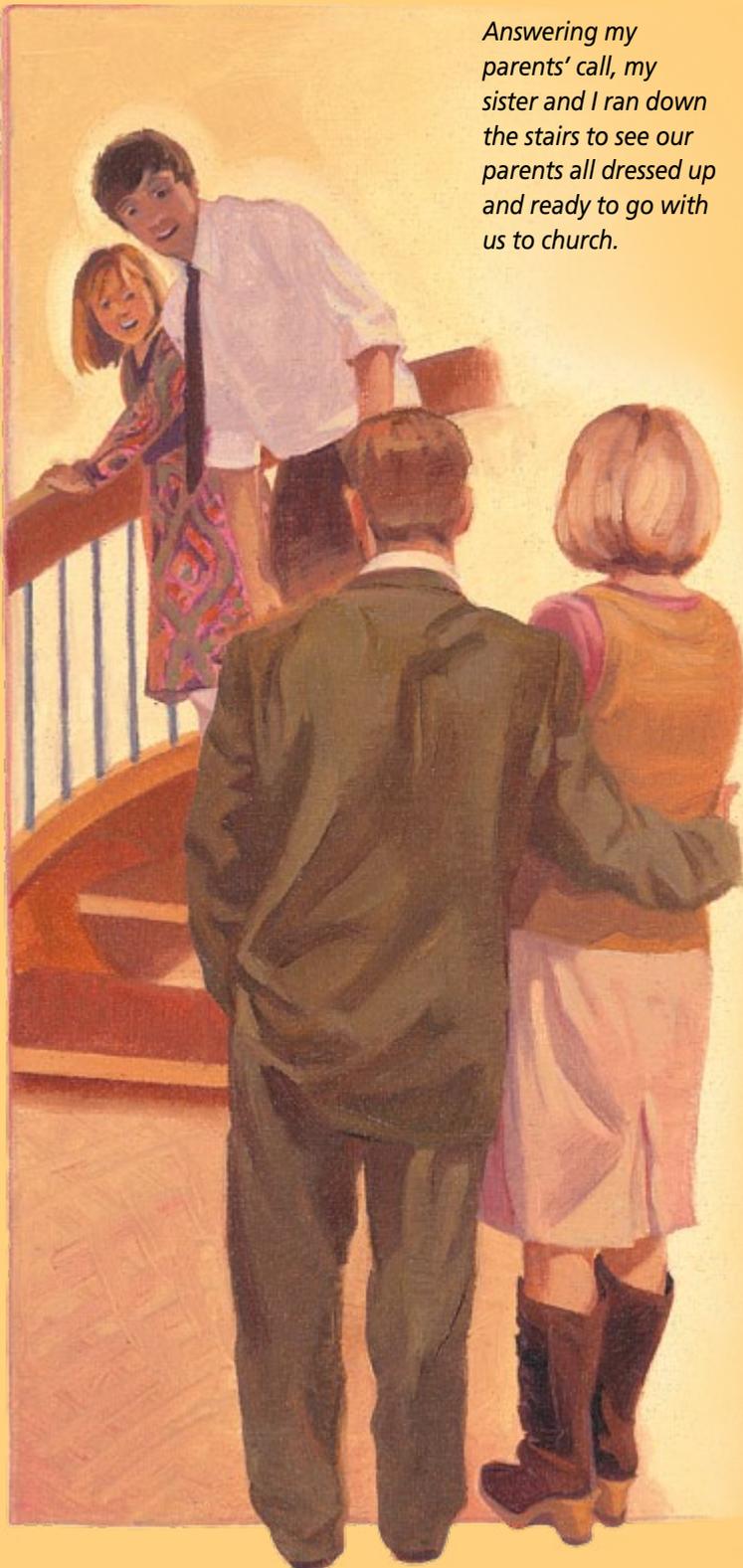
No one treated me like the “less-active kid.” It didn’t take long to feel like I was just part of the group.

I ended up having a great time. I liked these people. I listened to these boys and their leaders pray, and I felt something. Another boy, Todd, and I had become good friends. One day as we were waiting for dinner, we went for a walk. We found a set of train tracks and started walking along them.

We were goofing off and tossing rocks around when Todd suddenly said, “You know, you should come to church.”

I picked up another rock. “Yeah, maybe.” He didn’t say anything else about church then, but I remembered his invitation.

The whole experience was so different from the two weeks I had spent waterskiing. The adults on the skiing trip were always drunk, swearing at each other, and saying inappropriate things. The adults on the rafting trip were respectful toward us and one another. I was



Answering my parents' call, my sister and I ran down the stairs to see our parents all dressed up and ready to go with us to church.

impressed, and I respected them for it.

After I returned home, the next Sunday I got up and got dressed for church. I knew enough to know that I should wear my best. As I came downstairs my mom and sisters were doing the dishes. "Hey, Gary, where are you going?" Mom asked.

"Uh," I paused. "Church." My mother seemed surprised (as did my sisters), but she just nodded. I went to church and sat in the back. For several weeks I went by myself.

Then one Saturday night my sister Patti said that she would go to church with me. Even though we liked the kids at church, we realized that going to church wasn't about fitting in or having friends—church was about how we felt when we were there.

One day Patti and I were getting ready for church when we heard a call from downstairs, "Patti! Gary! We're going to be late." I went jogging down the stairs and saw my parents dressed and standing by the door. Our family was beginning to change.

I believe my bishop was inspired to invite me on that trip, and I believe my father was inspired to accept for me. The scriptures say, "Now ye may suppose that this is foolishness in me; but behold I say unto you, that by small and simple things are great things brought to pass" (Alma 37:6).

One small invitation led a family back to church. I earned my Eagle Scout Award and went on a mission. Patti and I each got married in the temple to returned missionaries. We're now raising our own families in the gospel.

If you invite a less-active person to an activity, it may or may not impact their lives. But if you *don't* invite them, it definitely won't. **NE**