

A NAME

on the

BY SEDLEY PARKINSON

How was I going to approach a total stranger and ask him to come to church?

He was just a name on a list until I got to know him.

My priests quorum was pretty much like any other quorum. We had an adviser, inspiring lessons by the bishop, assistants to the bishop, and then the rest of us. Our ward was neither huge nor small, but we had a number of members who seldom or never came to any meetings. In one particular quorum meeting we spent a lot of time discussing those young men who had not been to church in a while. Brother Wheeler, our quorum adviser, had prepared a list.

When I was young, many considered me shy and quiet, and I did not especially go out of my way to make noise or be seen. I was not the first to volunteer to visit the young men on Brother Wheeler's list. All he was asking was for us to pick a name, make a friendly visit, and invite them to our upcoming weekly activities.

Hands went up when Brother Wheeler called out names from this list. He said it was a plus if you were already friends, neighbors, or schoolmates. I started to feel guilty as the list grew smaller and smaller. Finally there was one name left. The other boys were chatting about their plans of how they were going to take care of this

assignment. Brother Wheeler looked at the name on the list and then at me. I lifted my hand. Smiling, he wrote down the boy's name and sketched a map for me. He said the family had moved in a while ago and a visit could really benefit the young man.

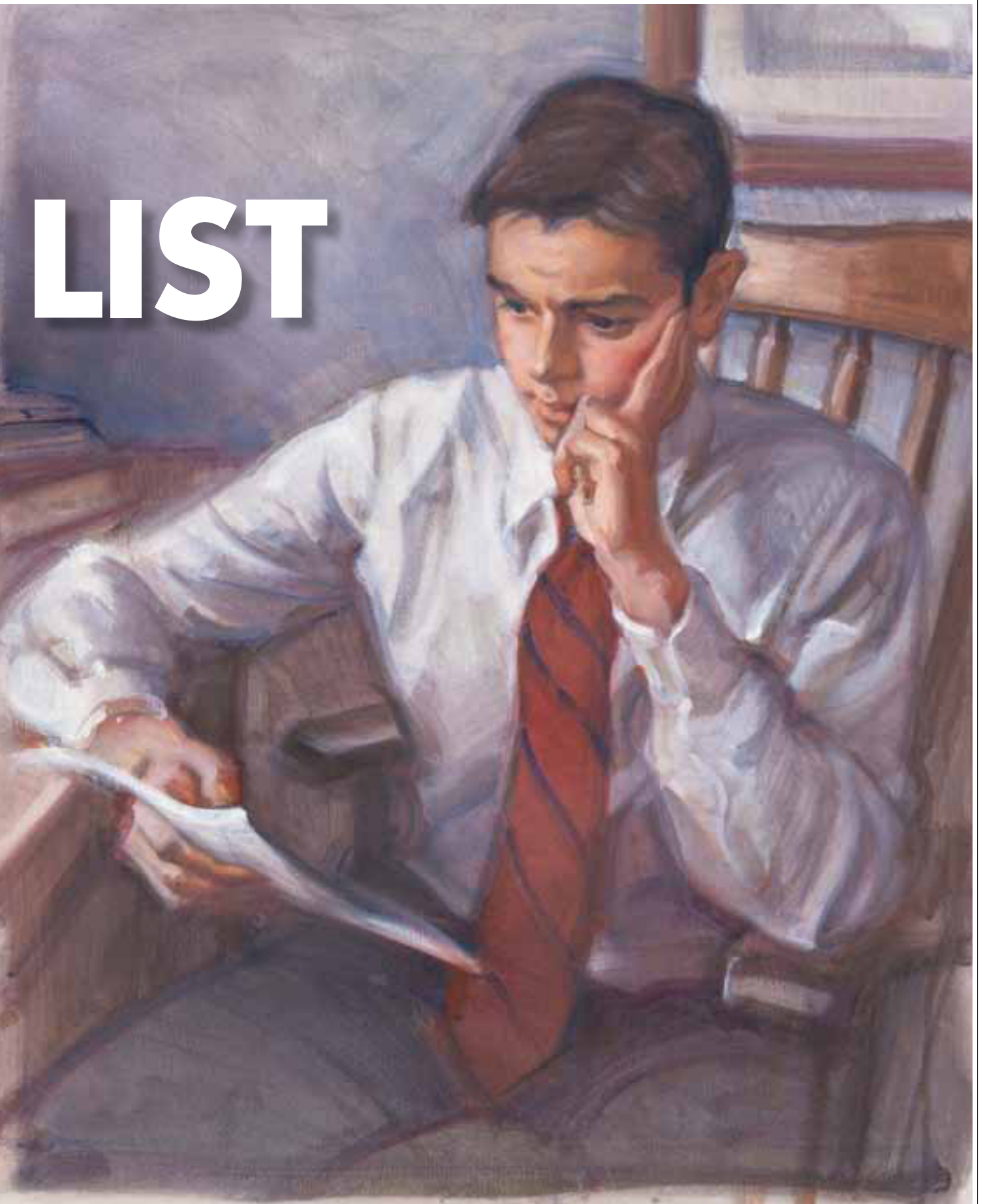
We lived in an area of southeast Idaho where it was a mixture of farms and homes. Many of the parents commuted to work in town. As in many communities like this, we were fairly close-knit, and everyone pretty much knew everyone else. But I didn't recognize the name I was given, nor did anyone else in our quorum.

Sunday passed, and I considered the name I'd received. Monday came and went. I still considered. Tuesday passed, and I considered with increasing gravity. How was I going to approach a total stranger and ask him to come to church?

Wednesday came, and my consideration began to change into worry. The week was already passing by, and all I could consider was a gut feeling of dread. This young man I was to visit had never been seen at church, he had never been seen at Scouts, he had never been seen at school, he had never even been seen, period.

The school bus dropped me off at my house. I pulled out the folded note I had been carrying with me since Sunday. The

LIST



young man's house was about two-and-a-half miles from mine. I wanted to get it over with and release this burden. I told my sister where I was going and, with grim determination, headed out.

Imagination fed on anticipation. I pictured a family where the dad answered the door with a shotgun in his hands and vicious dogs were ready to attack. I walked half a mile. I pictured a family that only spoke Russian. I walked along. I pictured a family with so much wealth that they only wore tuxedos and ball gowns. Was this how Nephi and Sam felt while they were on their way to get the brass plates? Or worse, perhaps this is how Laman and Lemuel felt. Suddenly, there I was in front of the house.

I rang the doorbell. I heard heavy footsteps. The door swung open, and an older man stood there. He looked at me. "Hello," he said.

A rush of relief came over me. He was not holding a shotgun, he spoke English, and he was not wearing a tuxedo. "Uh, can uh . . ." I looked at my note. I couldn't remember his name. ". . . Bill . . ." I couldn't think straight. ". . . play?" I finally blurted out. I felt like a little kid. What kind of word had I used? "Play?"

The man looked very surprised.

"Is Bill . . . available?" I corrected myself. Did I read the map wrong? Was I at the wrong house? "Does a Bill, Billy, or even a William live here?"

The man's expression changed from confusion to smiling enlightenment. "Oh, yes, of course. Come in. You must be from the ward. Brother Wheeler called last week and told me someone would be coming."

An entire flood of relief swept through me. I followed the man through the front room, past the kitchen, down a hallway, to a bedroom. The house was neat and modest. I saw a picture of the Salt Lake Temple on the wall. The *Ensign* magazine sat on the kitchen table, opened. I saw scriptures on the shelf. "But these people never come to church," I thought with more than a touch of confusion. And what about Bill, who was a total hermit apparently—and a very lazy one, because it appeared he was still sleeping.

The man softly knocked. "Billy?" he said as he gently opened the door.

Instantly everything was explained. I felt so small. A

wheelchair and a hospital bed sat in the center of the room.

An emaciated boy lay there staring out the window. He turned his head to look at us. His eyes widened. "Help me sit up, Father. Do I have company? What is your name?"

I did not have to worry about carrying the conversation; Billy was very good at assisting me with that. I returned regularly to his house for the next several weeks. I brought various games; he especially liked chess. I learned that he was actually a foster child and had not seen his birth parents for years. Billy's disease was critical, and the older couple he was now with had taken him in so that he wouldn't have to stay by himself in the hospital. He was a member of the Church but could only remember being baptized.

Brother Wheeler arranged for us to have our priests quorum meet for class at Billy's home. His bed had been moved to the front room to help accommodate the extra visitors. Our bishop came and even helped bless the sacrament for Billy and his foster parents.

I felt pretty good about the whole thing. Over the past few months I had made a friend, and I had helped this friend make other friends in our quorum. I did not anticipate the phone call I received from the bishop later that week. He told me he had interviewed Billy and found him worthy to hold the Aaronic Priesthood. Billy had asked the bishop if I could ordain him.

We held our priesthood meeting again at Billy's house the following Sunday. I do not remember what I said during the ordination. I do remember Billy's smile and the tears he was pushing back—the tears Brother Wheeler, the bishop, and all of us were pushing back.

A few weeks later, Billy was not available for "playing" anymore. His condition had worsened, and he spent most of the time in the hospital. About six months from my first meeting with Billy, he died.

Now what I remember most about Billy is not what I did for him on my visits, but what he did for me. A young man whose name I came to know from a simple list had become one of the most treasured memories of my youth. **NE**

Read about the Aaronic Priesthood in Boyd K. Packer, "The Unseen Power," *New Era*, May 2007, p. 2.



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