

# Singing and Storytelling

By Stephen T. Case

**W**hen my wife, Sandra, and I were called to serve in the South Africa Durban Mission, we began looking for a community service project. I had been a member of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir for over 20 years, and my wife, a library aide, had conducted story time in an elementary school. When our mission president decided to open missionary work in a nearby township, we knew this was our chance.

We visited the township and discovered that there were no libraries in

the schools, just a small community library in the town. The young elders introduced us to the library director. We explained to her that we would like to hold a weekly story time for children. She was skeptical, but after some thought she agreed to get the word out and we could try.

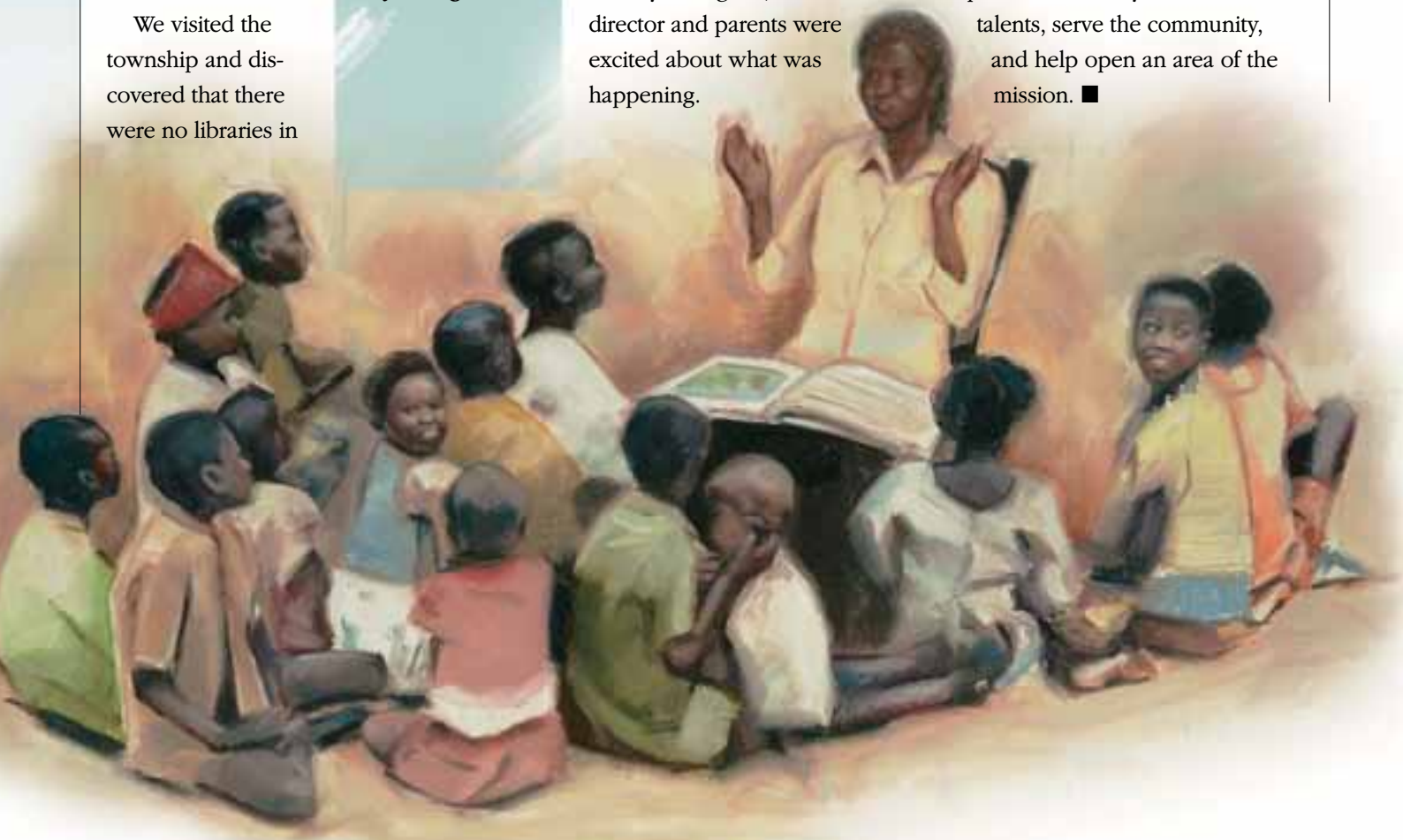
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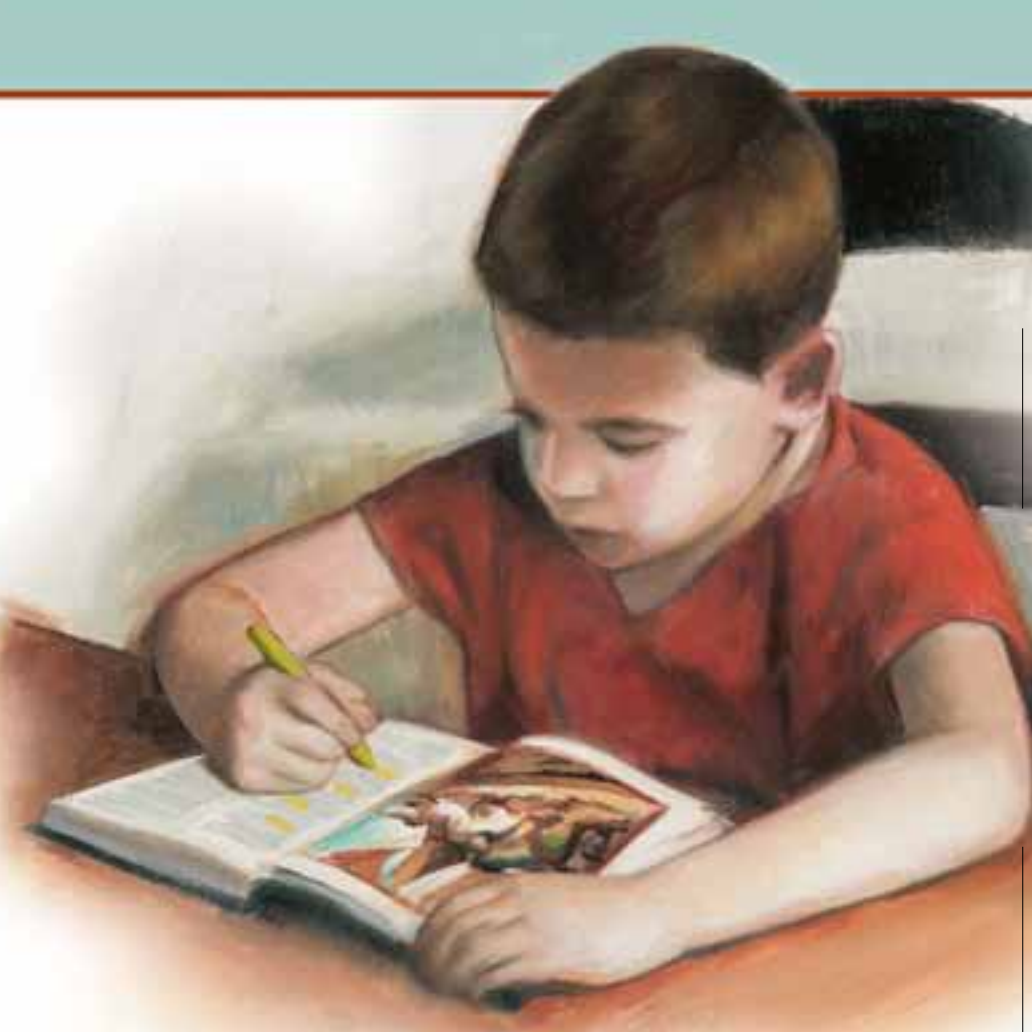
On the first day five children attended. Gradually more came. After several months we enlisted the help of a young lady, a recent convert, who spoke beautiful English and Zulu. Attendance at story time grew, and the director and parents were excited about what was happening.

The Zulu people love to sing, so we added simple songs and rhymes to our story time. By the end of our mission, we were holding two or three sessions of song and story time a week to accommodate the more than 100 children who attended. What a blessing it was when we would see the children elsewhere and they would start singing our songs and reciting our rhymes to us.

Another blessing came out of our service in this area. As the local Church membership grew and we needed a place to start holding our Sunday meetings, the library director insisted that we use the library at no charge.

We are so grateful that the Lord helped us find a way to use our talents, serve the community, and help open an area of the mission. ■





**M**y husband and I challenged our son to read on his own from the Book of Mormon every day.

Soon he moved on to *Jesus*. After that he would pick out words he had seen and ask what they were. He was diligent in his daily reading, and by the end of the year his reading level had surpassed our expectations.

Now our son is in the sixth grade. He is an exceptional reader and helps teach his five younger siblings about the gift he received through reading the Book of Mormon. Each of our children has developed strong reading skills and a habit of reading the Book of Mormon. They are beginning to feel its powerful spirit of truth as their testimonies grow. ■

## The Gift of Literacy

By Lynnette McConkie

**O**ur oldest son loved kindergarten and seemed to do well in school. In first grade, however, it became apparent to us that he was not reading. He could read a few words here and there but struggled with even beginning reading assignments. Months passed, and our son's reading skills scarcely progressed. My husband and I became increasingly concerned.

One day I remembered something my mission president had taught years earlier. I had been called to a foreign-language mission. Learning the Russian language was a challenge of varying degrees for each missionary, and our mission president counseled us to read

the Book of Mormon in Russian every day. He promised us that the power of the Book of Mormon would aid us in our ability to communicate in Russian. He was right. Over time I became better at both speaking and understanding the language, and my testimony grew.

Years after my mission, I found myself thinking, "If it worked for me in Russian, why wouldn't it work for my son in English?" After telling our son about my struggle to learn Russian and my mission president's advice, my husband and I challenged him to read on his own from the Book of Mormon every day. He would spend time highlighting the words *God* and *Lord* as he found them on the pages.

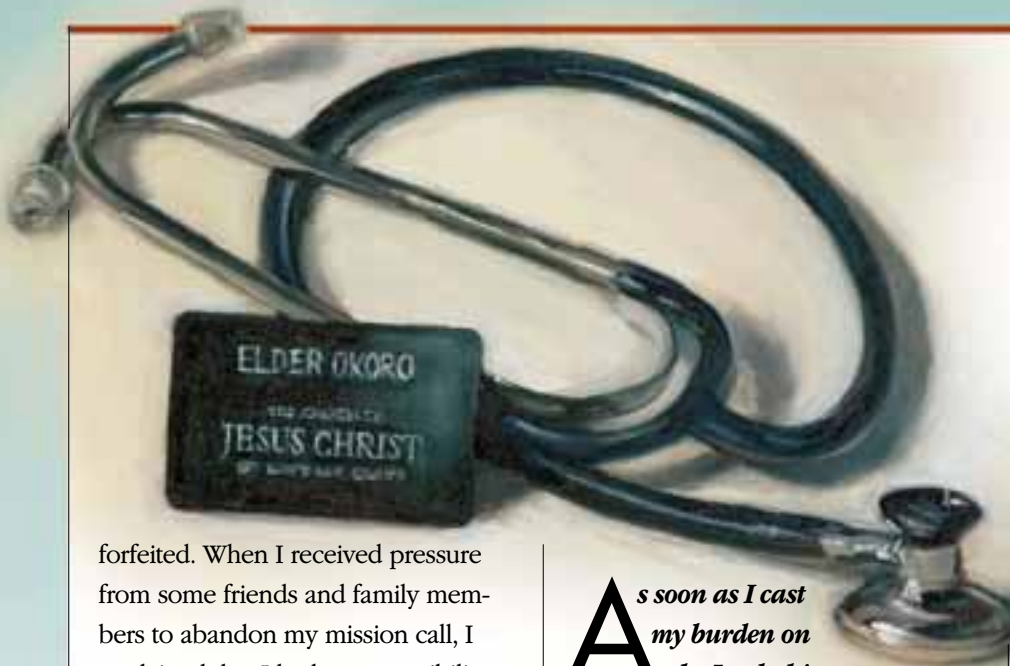
## Should I Give Up School for a Mission?

By Onyebuchi Okoro

I graduated from high school in 1992 and immediately turned in my papers to serve a full-time mission. At the time my call came, I had just been admitted to one of the best universities in Nigeria to study medicine.

In Nigeria admission into medical school is competitive and not to be

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forfeited. When I received pressure from some friends and family members to abandon my mission call, I explained that I had a responsibility to serve and had looked forward to doing so since I joined the Church six years before. I was sure I could get readmitted to medical school after my mission, but many thought I would regret my decision.

I am grateful to the home teachers, family members, and Church friends who supported my decision to serve. Attending seminary, studying the scriptures, and living the gospel enabled me to stand by my convictions.

As a missionary I set personal goals and worked hard. Twenty-four months later I received an honorable release. The Lord blesses returned missionaries but has not promised that they will be immune to trials. For the Nigerian returned missionary, those trials include unemployment and lack of funds for education.

During the first three years after my mission, I took and passed three entrance examinations, but I wasn't readmitted to medical school. During those same three years, I couldn't find a job. I was tempted to believe that some of my friends and family members might have been right and that

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it was a mistake to have forfeited my admission to medical school.

On my mission I learned to cast my burden on the Lord, so I let Him direct my life according to His will. As soon as I did, things started working out for me—but not as I had planned.

One fast Sunday I decided to fast and intently pray for the Lord's help. That evening a knock came at the door. When I opened the door, I was astonished to see an acquaintance I had met during security training I had attended six months before. He told me that an opportunity for a security operative had opened in a company his elder brother worked for and that the company urgently needed to fill the position. I was the only person who came to his mind.

The next day the company hired me. That singular experience confirmed to me that Heavenly Father had not abandoned me and that I needed to trust in Him. The job proved to be a springboard to other jobs.

Divine blessings are not measured by temporal achievements alone. I struggled for years after my mission to find temporal stability, but the Lord blessed me spiritually. My patriarchal blessing directed me to get married and told me that the opportunity of higher education would come. It did.

Though I never went to medical school, I have earned the equivalent of degrees in accounting and mathematics. The Lord eventually blessed me with sufficient material stability that I was able to marry.

If we serve an honorable mission, the Lord is bound to bless us as we seek opportunities for higher education afterward. Nothing in the life of a young man or young woman can surpass the experiences, learning, and blessings of full-time missionary service. ■

## Please Save My Father

By Bernadette Garcia Sto. Domingo

It was my father who searched for the truth and found the missionaries. They taught us the gospel, and not long afterward, we—my parents and five brothers and sisters—were baptized. Our testimonies grew stronger. We learned so many things, especially about the Savior and about families.

In 1992, while serving as bishop of our ward in the Philippines, my father

had a heart attack. He was rushed to the hospital from his office. When news came that he was in intensive care, my family was in great shock. Fear gripped our hearts. My father's chances of survival were only marginal. My mother wept and asked all of us to pray.

I lost track of time after that—so many memories came flashing back. With tears on my face, I knelt to pray. My heart was so heavy, and my chest was ready to burst. I wanted to shout to ease the pain and remove the fear gripping me that day. Instead I simply prayed, "Please save my father." It was a sincere prayer, meant to be heard.

That night I was allowed into the intensive-care unit. My father had slipped into a coma, and my mother and my siblings and I had to brace ourselves for the worst. It was a painful experience for our family. The future looked bleak and uncertain. As I silently bade him goodbye, I remembered our first family home evening. We had watched a Church film, *Families Are Forever*.

Before I went to bed that night, my earthly father silently returned to his Heavenly Father.

My father's death, when I was 22, marked the beginning of hundreds of changes in my life. In his absence I learned that I had strengths I was unaware of. I've done more with my life than I otherwise might have because change and growth were thrust upon me.

When Heavenly Father didn't grant

my prayer, it never occurred to me that He hadn't heard me. I know He was listening. He knew exactly what I was going through. He knew exactly what our family needed at the time, and that was what He gave us—strength to overcome the challenges of life, strength to face reality. He taught us how to face our trials with faith.

More than 15 years have passed since that painful day. I am still learning, and I am still growing in the gospel. I now have my own family, and I am so happy that we are sealed in the temple.

I never take my eyes off the road my father marked for us.

Through the

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Atonement and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, I know that someday our family will be together again. I still have a long journey to go, but I'm happy to think that I will see my father at the end of that journey. ■

