



# Room in the Inn

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Of the Presidency of the Seventy

On a bright, crisp winter afternoon we pointed our van toward the mission home in Bordeaux, France. It was December 24, 1990, and we were on our way home for Christmas.

My wife, Kathy, and I, along with our four children—Camey, age 14, Brandt, 13, Kristen, 10, and Derek, 8—had just experienced a week to remember. Because of the distances involved in our mission, we had not brought the missionaries together for a Christmas celebration. Rather, we had traveled as a family to every city in the mission, bringing a feeling of family togetherness, involving the children in sharing a special Christmas program. Our family had rejoiced with each of the missionaries in the great privilege of sharing the restored gospel of Christ at this glorious time of year.

On our final day we had been joined by four wonderful missionaries. The large blue van, now full, was filled as well with the

Christmas spirit, and Christmas carols and favorite stories made the travel time pass quickly. Kristen and Derek were becoming more excited with each hour as they anticipated the surprises Christmas morning would bring. We could almost smell the turkey dinner being prepared at the mission home by a wonderful missionary couple awaiting our return. The feeling of Christmas was in the air.

It was not until late in the afternoon that we realized there might be a problem. For much of the morning we had experienced some difficulty in shifting our van from one gear to another. We had stopped to check the level of the transmission fluid, but all seemed to be in order. Now, with darkness setting in and our van still two hours from Bordeaux, third, fourth, and fifth gears stopped functioning altogether.

We limped along the tree-lined country road in second gear. It would



*At a time when only our Heavenly Father could bring us home, He had heard our prayers.*



be impossible to drive to Bordeaux in this condition, and we looked for possible help. Our first hope was a convenience store just preparing to close. I asked about possible rental-car locations or train stations nearby. We were far from any city of any size, however, and my questions brought little response.

I returned to the van. The concern and disappointment showed on the faces of our younger children. Would they not be home for Christmas Eve? Would they spend this most special night of the year in a crowded mission van? After they had brought happiness and cheer to missionaries far from home, would their Christmas come alongside a forgotten French country road far from their own home?

Kristen knew to whom we could appeal, and she immediately suggested a prayer. Many times as a family we had prayed for those in need—for the missionaries, the investigators, the Church members, our leaders, the French people, our own family. We bowed in prayer and humbly asked for help.

By now it was dark. The van crept forward, moving at a jogger's pace through the pine forest. We were hoping to reach a little town just three miles (5 km) ahead. Soon our lights caught a small sign with an arrow directing us to Villeneuve-de-Marsan.

We had driven the two-lane road from Pau to Bordeaux many times, but never had we journeyed off the highway to the little town of Villeneuve-de-Marsan. As we hobbled into the town, the scene was like many small French villages. Homes and small shops were attached one to another, crowding the narrow road leading into town. People had closed their window shutters early, and the streets were dark and deserted. The lights in the ancient Catholic church in the center of town showed the one sign of life as they glowed in preparation for the traditional midnight mass. We rolled past the church, and the van hesitated and then stopped. Fortunately, we found ourselves in front of a lovely country inn. The lights were on,

and we determined that this was our last chance for help.

To avoid overwhelming those in the inn, Kathy, Camey, and the missionaries stayed in the van while I took the three younger children inside. I explained our situation to the young woman at the front desk. She could see the beleaguered faces of my children, and she kindly asked us to wait while she called the innkeeper, Mr. Francis Darroze.

Camey came in to see how we were doing. As we waited for Mr. Darroze to arrive, I silently said a prayer of thanksgiving. We might not make it back to Bordeaux for the night, but how good of our Father in Heaven to lead us to a nice hotel! I shuddered as I realized how easily we could have spent the night in the van in a remote area of France. I could see a restaurant in the next room, and I was amazed to see it open on Christmas Eve. We would have a good meal, a hot shower, and a comfortable sleep.

Mr. Darroze arrived in the clothing of a traditional French chef, with his double-breasted chef's coat buttoned all the way up to his chin. He was the owner of the hotel, a man of importance in the community. His warm eyes and quick smile communicated that he was a gentleman as well.

I told him of our dilemma, of the 10 of us in the van, and of our destination in Bordeaux. As he noticed my accent, I added that we were Americans and in one sentence told him why we were in France.

He instantly sought to help us. About 10 miles (16 km) away was a medium-sized city with an active train schedule. He called to ask about the next train to Bordeaux but found that it would not leave until 10:15 Christmas morning. All rental-car companies in that larger city were closed.

The disappointment was evident in the faces of my young children. I asked Mr. Darroze if he would have room in the inn for our family and the four missionaries to spend the night. Although we wouldn't make it home,





**M**r. Darroze quickly shook his head and his finger in disapproval. The spirit of Christmas giving filled his soul. "No," he said, "I will take nothing."

at least it was a great blessing to have found such suitable accommodations.

Mr. Darroze looked at the children. He had known us only a few minutes, but his heart was touched with the brotherhood that crosses all oceans and makes us one family. The spirit of Christmas giving filled his soul. "Mr. Andersen," he said, "of course I have rooms here that you can rent. But you do not want to spend Christmas Eve here in the inn. Children should be home as they await the excitement of Christmas morning. I will lend you my car, and you can go to Bordeaux tonight."

I was amazed at his thoughtfulness. Most people would view strangers, especially foreigners like us, with caution. I thanked him but explained that there were 10 of us and a small French car would never be sufficient.

He hesitated momentarily, but his hesitation was not to diminish the gift but to expand it.

"At my farm about 10 miles from here I have an old van. It is used for farming and has only the two seats in front. It will travel at only about 45 miles per hour (70 kph), and I

am not certain the heater works well. But if you want it, I will drive you the 10 miles to my farm to get it."

The children jumped for joy. I reached into my pocket for my cash or credit cards. He quickly shook his head and his finger in disapproval.

"No," he said, "I will take nothing. You can bring my van back to me when you get time after Christmas. It is Christmas Eve. Take your family home."

Sometime shortly after midnight the lights of Bordeaux came into view. The children and the missionaries had fallen asleep in the back of the innkeeper's van. As we drove the familiar streets leading to our home, Kathy and I thanked our kind Heavenly Father for our own Christmas miracle. At a time when only He could bring us home, He had heard our prayers.

We were home on Christmas Eve, even though in Villeneuve-de-Marsan there was room in the inn. ■

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