



FREE TO Smile

After years of repression, Edit Kiss Kerbs learned from the missionaries to have faith in God. Her work at Deseret Industries helped her have faith in herself.

By Allie Schulte

Edit Kiss* sat in her family's apartment, staring out the window at the wide blue Hungarian sky. Suddenly, the eight-year-old was overcome with a feeling. "One day," she thought, "I will travel far from this place, and I will help people."

Nothing in her situation at the time made such a hope plausible. Travel to other countries was tightly controlled, as were many other things in those days—unless you were a member of the privileged class. Theoretically such a class didn't exist, but Edit saw how some children received preferential treatment from the teachers while her own hard work went unnoticed. Even within her extended family, an uncle with government influence dispensed jobs and other favors to relatives but treated her family as being beneath him.

Edit's parents were hard-working, charitable people

whose actions could often be described as Christian. Yet they did not believe in God, and religion was not discussed in their home. Edit, however, influenced by a grandmother and other relatives who did believe, also came to believe that there is a God. Still, she knew little about her relationship to Him and had many questions—questions that would become more urgent in her early adult years.

Finding the Answers

Edit was married and had a young daughter, Szilvia, when her mother died. Not long afterward, Edit's troubled marriage ended in divorce, leaving her to provide for herself and her young child. Despite the divorce and the financial challenges, it was the death of her mother that affected Edit most deeply.

"I was taught that there was nothing more after death, but I could not believe my mother was truly gone," Edit says.




As Edit learned English, she was offered a job as a cashier for Deseret Industries. She was nervous but her friends at work encouraged her to try. Eventually, she was promoted to a position in the Church's Welfare Services Department.

She searched unsuccessfully for answers until one day, on the street, she met two young men dressed in suits standing at a table stacked with blue books. Curious to see what the books were about, she allowed the missionaries to visit her.

“There was something different about them,” Edit recalls. “As they taught, I felt like a little girl when she hears a wonderful story.” When Edit heard about the plan

of salvation and the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ, she found the answers to lifelong questions. The missionaries promised her that Heavenly Father would help her feel that these things were true as she read the Book of Mormon and prayed.

Edit doubted that she could receive such an answer. “In my mind, Father in Heaven was far away and had



more serious things to do than to answer me,” she says. “I felt like a nobody.” Yet that night Edit read the Book of Mormon until finally drifting off to sleep at 2:00 a.m. Two hours later, she was suddenly wide awake and filled with a feeling similar to the one she had felt as an eight-year-old at the window, years before.

“That was when I knew that Heavenly Father knows me and cares about me and that He can reach me, no matter how low I am,” she says. “I still had no idea what was in the Book of Mormon, but I knew it was true!”

Journey to that “Far” Place

Edit began to make changes in her life. She met with the missionaries regularly, began reading the Book of Mormon, and attended church with Szilvia. Three weeks later, Edit was baptized.

About five years later, Mitchell Kerbs, one of the missionaries who had taught Edit and who had later baptized Szilvia, returned to Hungary and visited their city. Edit and Mitchell had not corresponded during those years, Edit says. “I remembered him as a great missionary, but I thought surely he was already married.” Nevertheless, she continues, “He came, we talked, and the same night we knew we were going to be married.” Soon after, Edit and Mitchell were married, and less than a year later the family of three moved to the United States so that Mitchell could finish school there.

The Challenge of Freedom

Life in the United States was much different than Edit had expected. In the grocery store, the variety and affordability of goods was overwhelming, the employees helpful and trusting. She wasn’t constantly asked to show identification as she went about her daily business. Unaccustomed to so much freedom, Edit felt insecure and unsure of herself. “I had been repressed by a lack of choices,” she says, “and by people who always told me ‘you cannot do this or that.’”

The friendliness of complete strangers also unsettled Edit. She was used to being treated as a second-class

citizen. Now she found herself envying these people who smiled so easily, and she wished she knew what they knew—how to be happy.

In Hungary, Edit had learned six languages and worked in a bank. But she knew very little English, and so, needing to help with family finances, Edit found work in a factory. The job paid well enough, but the work environment was negative. Her boss demeaned her and mocked her broken English, and after five weeks, she felt forced to quit.

Finding Self-Worth

Fortunately, Edit had heard about the Deseret Industries vocational rehabilitation program, which could provide her with work and teach her skills to prepare her for future jobs. Despite initial fears of failure, Edit enrolled in the Deseret Industries program and began working in the sales department. The associates there cheered her on in her quest for self-confidence. In many ways, they reminded her of the missionaries who had taught her. “They treated me like a daughter of God,” Edit says. “They cared about me, they listened to me, and they always had time to help me. It is truly an inspired program.”

With the help of her Relief Society president, Edit also enrolled in English classes. As she studied and practiced the language with her husband, her English improved, and soon Edit was offered a job as a cashier for Deseret Industries. “I was nervous about speaking to people,” says Edit, but again her friends at work encouraged her to try. After some time, she moved from working as a cashier to customer service, and then to a position in the Church’s Welfare Services department.

“Because of my experience at Deseret Industries, my eyes were opened, and I could see beyond my childhood indoctrination,” Edit says. “I finally stepped out of the shadows because my feelings of self-worth did not depend upon social standing, money, or opinions of others. My self-worth depends upon the Lord, and knowing that has set me free to create my own happiness.” ■

**Pronounced eh-DEET KEESH. It is the Hungarian equivalent of her name.*