

LEFT WITH A VIOLIN AND A HYMNBOOK

When our van burst into flames, we thought we had lost everything.

BY LINDA REHART

As night descended, our family set out on a long-awaited vacation to Utah, a trip that would include taking two of our daughters to college. Our minivan was filled with suitcases, boxes, dishes, a violin, a computer, and more—vacation needs for seven family members and college necessities for our daughters.

As we crossed the California-Nevada border, all of us were asleep except for one of our daughters who was driving. Thirty miles east of Las Vegas the van jerked suddenly, so my daughter quickly pulled over to the side of the road. Steam emerged from under the hood. My husband jumped out of the car to inspect it and immediately returned, yelling for the fire extinguisher. We were so dazed from sleeping that he had to alert us to the problem. As soon as we saw the flames darting from under the hood, we jumped out of the van, grabbing everything we could. Then we watched in horror as the fire spread to the grass, and then to our cargo resting on the ground nearby. Helplessly, we watched as the fire consumed most of our things.

My immediate concerns were transportation logistics and the loss of needed vacation money. But my children felt anxious over the loss of clothing, pictures, and precious possessions, particularly the loss of one daughter's needed medication.

By the time the firemen arrived and finally extinguished the fire, nothing was left of the van but a burned-out shell. It took some time for the remains of our belongings to cool so that I could sort through the rubble to see what we could salvage. I found my purse partially burned. Reaching for my wallet, I saw that all the contents were singed or moderately

burned, except for one pristine, undamaged item—my temple recommend. At that moment I suddenly realized I had been focusing on the wrong things. The most important things—our testimonies of the gospel and our personal safety—were intact.

We called a tow truck as well as a friend in the area who agreed to pick us up. While we waited, I continued sifting through our things. In one box I discovered a daughter's music, including a hymnbook. Seeing this, another daughter said, "Oh, Alison, play some hymns!" During all the commotion Alison had somehow kept her small case and violin with her.

Our family sat in a circle on the ground while Alison started playing hymns. Gradually the rest of us began to sing. As the music filled the air in the early morning light, the most incredible feeling of peace came over us. The highway patrolman who had been standing nearby was amazed that we could be so calm. When the tow-truck driver arrived, he surveyed the scene in disbelief and, to our astonishment, said, "How can you be happy? Are you Mormons?"

Shortly thereafter our friend arrived and took us to her home. Throughout the days that followed, we were able to continue our trip to Utah and home again because of generous Church leaders and friends who provided transportation and other needed supplies. We even received donations from complete strangers to replace items we had lost in the fire.

This family experience, though challenging, strengthened our testimonies of our Heavenly Father's love for His children. Whenever I think of that trip, I recall the peace of the Spirit we felt that early morning, and I picture our family sitting in a circle on the ground singing the hymns of Zion as a new day dawned. I am grateful for what our experience taught me about keeping an eternal perspective. ■

