

Gardenias in January

BY WENDY FOUTZ MCKINNEY

A few years ago I purchased a lovely gardenia plant. I kept it in a large pot and tended it with care, enjoying the fragrant blossoms that came once a year. Gardenias typically bloom mid-spring and lie dormant the rest of the year.

One year the plant did not produce many blossoms. I wondered what was wrong. I took it inside for the winter and placed it in a sunlit spot, as I normally did.

To my surprise, the plant began budding right after Christmas. In January it produced fragrant blossoms. While admiring the beautiful plant, I thought of my friend Anita, who was at home enduring the end of a long battle with cancer. Despite treatments, the cancer had returned three times. Though Anita was only in her 30s, doctors predicted she did not have much time left. It struck me that she might like this hint of spring in her home.

I took the gardenia to Anita. When I arrived, she said, "How did you know gardenias are my favorite flowers?"

"I didn't," I replied, "but Heavenly Father knew. These gardenias bloomed in January just for you."

We were silent for a while marveling at the little miracle. Then she said, "I needed this reminder of spring. Thank you."

Anita passed away in February, but during the last weeks of her life, she enjoyed the sweet fragrance of her favorite flower. Her husband even pinned one of the gardenias on the inside of her casket.

I'm thankful that I was able to witness how the Lord can bless those He loves during their most difficult hours. He gave Anita joy during her pain. He gave her gardenias in January. ■



THE SWEETNESS OF TENDER MERCIES

"When words cannot provide the solace we need or express the joy we feel, when it is simply futile to attempt to explain that which is unexplainable, when logic and reason cannot yield adequate understanding about the injustices and inequities of life, when mortal experience and evaluation are insufficient to produce a desired outcome, and when it seems that perhaps we are so totally alone, truly we are blessed by the tender mercies of the Lord and made mighty even unto the power of deliverance (see 1 Nephi 1:20)."

Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "The Tender Mercies of the Lord," *Liahona and Ensign*, May 2005, 100.