



By Janet McClellan

I was sitting at the piano in Primary when a teacher quietly said in my ear, “Austin ran off. I followed him out of the building, but he was already across the street on his way into the park.”

Our son Austin has Down syndrome and loves to head out on his own whenever he can find the chance. I immediately ran out to find him, and as I arrived at the park, I saw 10-year-old Austin running across the lawn toward the little stream that runs through the park. I kicked off my dress shoes and started to run. “Austin!” I hollered as I ran after him. “Stop! Wait for Mom!” But on he ran, over the bridge to the rocky embankment on the opposite side of the stream.

I was suddenly stopped in my tracks by shooting pain in my feet. There, along the edge of the cultivated lawn, between me and Austin, was a large expanse of thorny weeds. I decided to walk through the thorns anyway, but the pain was too great and my feet too tender.

Freeing myself from the thorns, I ran back to retrieve my shoes. I quickly put them on and resumed my frantic chase. I ran over the thorns and across the bridge, then began to ascend an embankment.

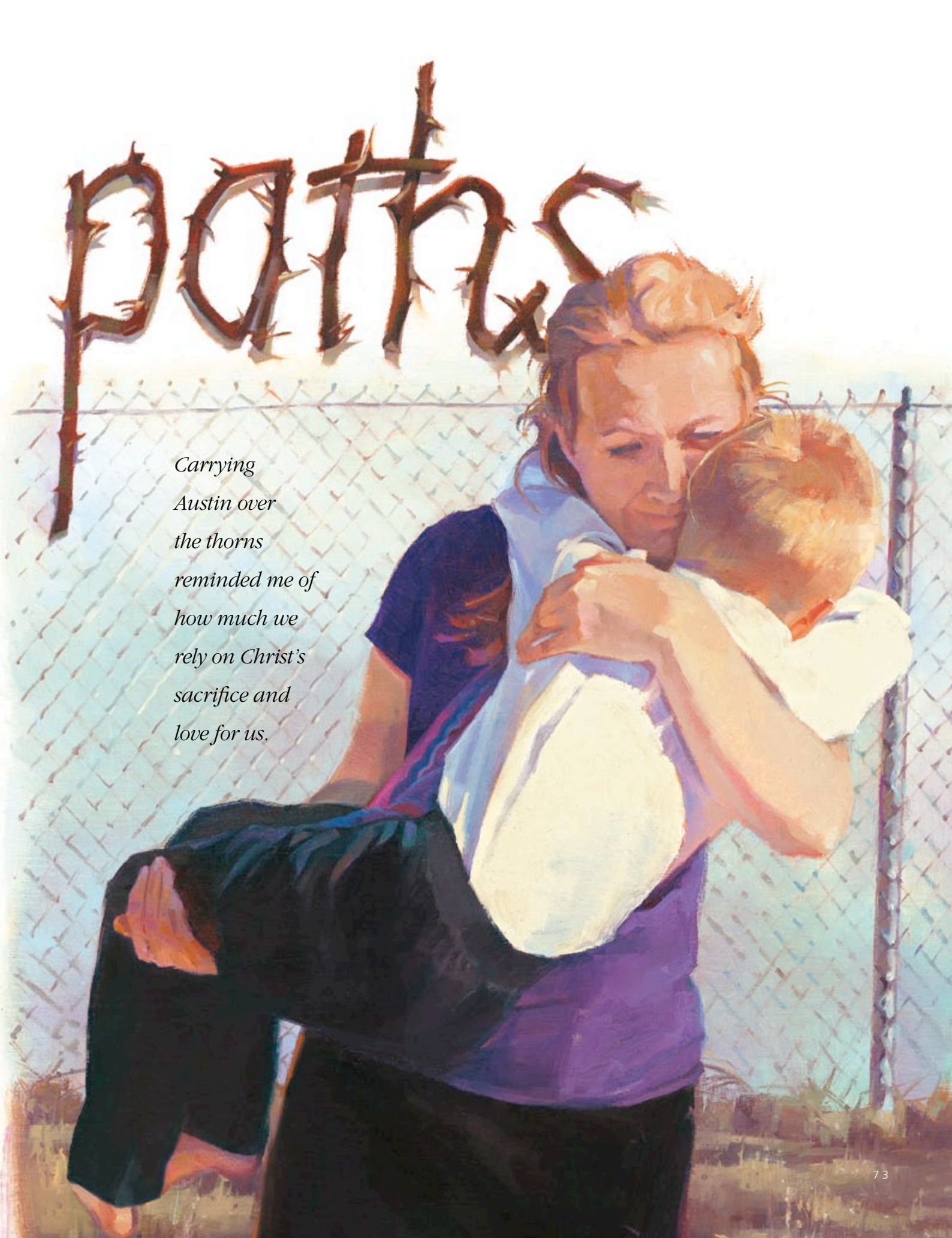
Again I hollered for Austin, but my strong-willed boy did not answer. The embankment crested, and I found myself looking through a chain-link fence. The property next to the park was a drainage area with steep, grassy slopes leading to a grate at the bottom. A large horizontal pipe opened over the grate, and sitting on top of the grate was Austin. He had removed his clothes and was looking in the pipe with determined curiosity.

“Austin!” I shouted. “Don’t go in there!” I began to army-crawl through an opening under the fence where the ground was hollowed out, and I realized that this ground too was covered with painful thorns that were digging into my knees. I tried to brush some thorns out of the way and prayed I would fit through the opening. Thankfully I did, and I emerged just as Austin disappeared into the pipe.

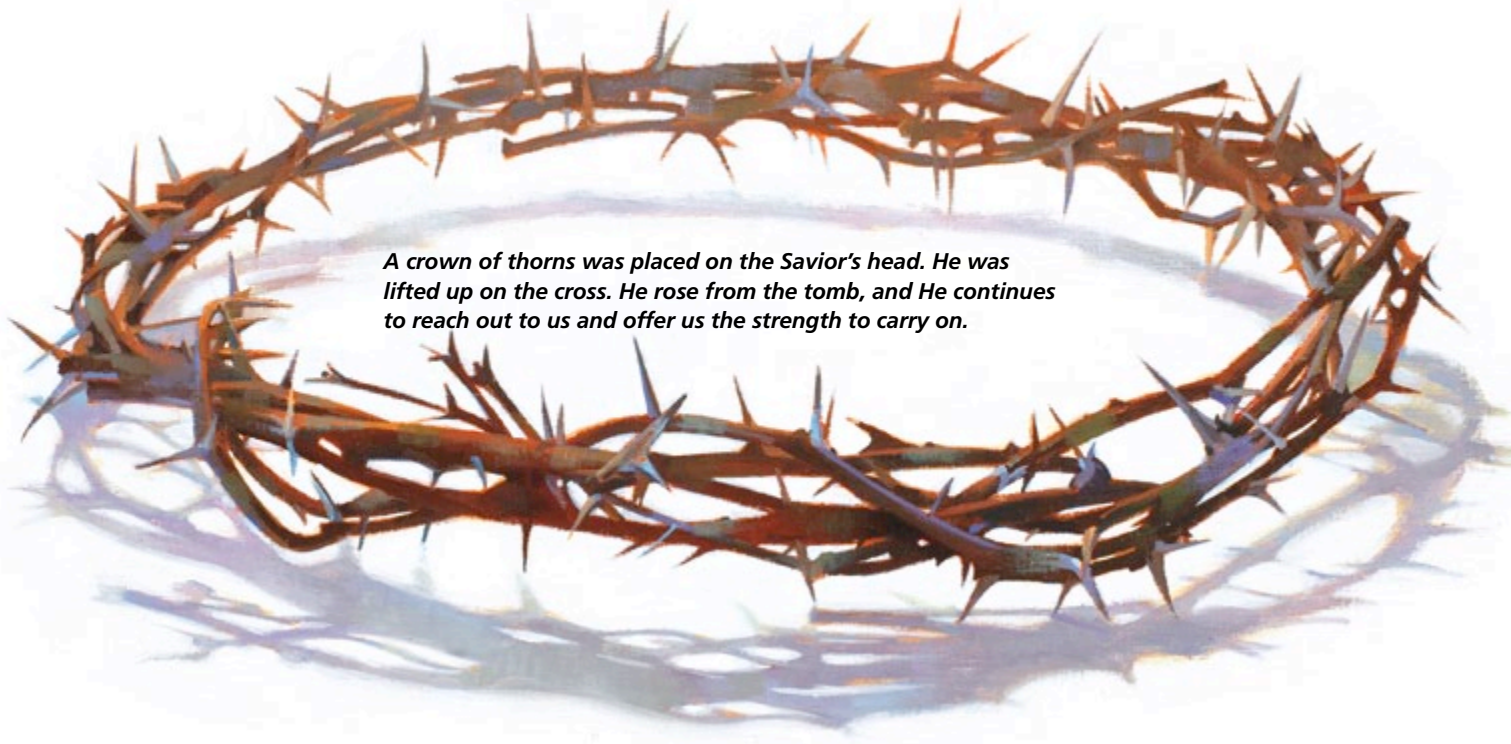
“Austin! Come out of there! You will get hurt!” No response. I half ran, half slid down the steep hillside until I reached the grate where Austin’s shirt and pants lay crumpled. I sat down on the grate and pleaded with Austin to back out of the pipe. Strong resolve echoed back down the pipe in Austin’s resounding, “No! I can’t!” which I knew meant, “I don’t want to.”

Realizing that I needed help, I bowed my head and prayed. In a short moment, Austin began backing out of the pipe. I hugged him and told him I was so glad he wasn’t hurt. As I helped him get dressed again, I asked him where his shoes were. He pointed through the grate, and there, a few feet beneath us, were his brand-new church shoes and socks. Frustrated, I told him he’d just have to walk barefoot.

We began to climb up the steep hillside, but Austin took only two steps before he cried out in pain. Looking around, I realized that this was not a grassy slope but a well-mown thorny slope. I thought about the pain I had felt as the thorns in the park had pierced my feet, and I knew that Austin could not bear that much pain as we climbed up the steep ground. I bent low and helped Austin climb onto my shoulders.



*Carrying
Austin over
the thorns
reminded me of
how much we
rely on Christ's
sacrifice and
love for us.*



A crown of thorns was placed on the Savior's head. He was lifted up on the cross. He rose from the tomb, and He continues to reach out to us and offer us the strength to carry on.

Slowly and carefully, I began to climb up and out, carrying Austin. My shoes had slippery bottoms, so it was difficult. I was afraid I might drop Austin or that we both might fall and tumble back down to the bottom. But with a prayer in my heart and on my lips, I carried Austin to the top of the slope. As I reached the top with him still perched on my shoulders, I bent down and cleared all the thorns away from the opening in the fence, then set him down. He said, "I can't!" but I convinced him that he could and that I would be right behind him.

Finally back on the safe side of the fence, I held Austin in my arms as I walked across the thorny ground. At last, we hit grass, and I set Austin on the cool comfort of it. Off he ran, with me trailing behind. I had thorns in my hair and my dress, and I was exhausted.

As we sat in sacrament meeting later that day, I was still a bit shaken up and pre-occupied with my adventure with Austin. Suddenly, I saw clearly in my mind a picture of the Savior carrying a lamb over his shoulders. I realized that in our lives we sometimes run headlong into dangerous situations. We may be warned by family,



REST TO OUR SOULS

"I testify of our Savior, Jesus Christ, whose teachings and example we seek to follow. He invites all of us who are heavy laden to come unto Him, to learn of Him, to follow Him, and thus to find rest to our souls (see Matthew 4:19; 11:28)."

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "Followers of Christ," *Ensign*, May 2013, 99.

friends, and Church leaders, yet we often fail to heed their call, stubbornly believing that our desires will not lead us into danger. At times we get so far into trouble that we simply cannot get out on our own and we must rely completely on the Savior.

Many paths can lead us astray, and we sometimes feel the pain of thorns so deeply that we seem paralyzed and unable to move back to the paths of righteousness that we desire. But Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer, with all the great and godly love He has for us, longs to stretch out His arms and guide us back. If we but exercise our faith, completely turning to Him, He will strengthen us and help us overcome our deepest woes.

Though I was unable to bear the pain of those small thorns that pierced my feet, Jesus was not only able but *willing* to suffer pains beyond my own weak comprehension for the sake of me and all of God's children. A crown of thorns was placed on His head. He was lifted up on the cross. He rose from the tomb, and He continues to reach out to us and offer us the strength to carry on. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.