

Junior Relief Society

By Maryssa Dennis

(Based on a true story)

Manti, Utah, USA, 1869

Lorena Washburn watched her mother get ready for Relief Society. “Can’t I come just this once?” she begged.

Mother smiled. “You can come when you’re grown.”
“I *am* grown! I’m nine years old.”

Mother kissed Lorena’s head. “Perhaps a little *more* grown, then.”

Lorena decided to visit her friend Anna while their mothers were at Relief Society. Back in those days, Relief Society was held on a weekday. The girls played jack-straws and talked about what it would be like when they could finally join Relief Society.

Anna sighed as she flicked a piece of straw off the top of the pile. “I wish we had our own Relief Society.”

Lorena paused. “Why don’t we make one?”

“Our own Relief Society?”

“Yes!” Lorena jumped up. “We could make a Junior Relief Society!”

Anna jumped to her feet too. “We could!” she said. “We should talk to the other girls to see what they think.”

Lorena and Anna went around the neighborhood and invited the other girls to Lorena’s house. When they had all arrived, Lorena told them about her idea. They were all so excited to have their own organization!

“My mother is the Relief Society president,” Lorena said. “When she comes back, I’ll ask her for permission to organize our Junior Relief Society.”





Lorena Eugenia Washburn
as a young girl.

When Mother came home, she was surprised to see 25 girls crowded into the parlor. Lorena stood up tall and straight. “Mother, with your permission, we want to organize our own Junior Relief Society.”

Mother’s eyebrows flew up. Lorena was worried that she would say no, but instead she smiled.

“I think that’s a wonderful idea,” said Mother. “I’ll pay Bishop Moffatt a visit right now and see what he thinks.”

It felt like years before Mother came back, but finally she did.

“What did the bishop say, Sister Washburn?” Hannah asked eagerly. Lorena held her breath.

“He gives his hearty approval!” Mother said. The girls cheered.

Lorena was so excited that she asked if the girls wanted to organize right then and there. They chose Lorena as president, Anna and Alice as counselors, Hannah as secretary, and Sally as treasurer.

“We should invite all the other girls our age too,” Lorena said.

Alice frowned. “Even the ones we don’t really like?”

“Yes!” said Lorena. “We wouldn’t want to leave anyone out, would we?”

“You’re right,” said Alice. “I’m sure we could all get along.”

“We should make it a rule,” Lorena said. “No one should say an unkind word to or about anybody while we’re in our meetings.”

And with that, the Junior Relief Society had begun. They met every Saturday at two o’clock in the Washburns’ grain house. They worked hard like they had seen their mothers work in Relief Society. They started making their very own quilt. Every week they brought cloth and thread and even eggs to trade for calico fabric from the store. They eventually presented two fine hand-sewn quilt tops to the Manti Relief Society.

The girls loved to sing while they sewed. Lorena and Anna wrote a special Relief Society song just for them:

Hurrah, hurrah, our quilts we have begun!

Hurrah, hurrah, we are having lots of fun!

*And while we are united, together we will come
In the old board granary of Washburns.*

After a few years, Lorena moved away, and the Junior Relief Society came to an end. Lorena was sad to leave her friends behind. But she got to visit often, and it was always like coming home to family.

Several years later, in 1878, President John Taylor approved a new organization for children called Primary. Today you can be part of a strong group of friends at Primary and activity days. Together you can learn to work hard, be kind, and follow Jesus Christ, just like Lorena and her friends did! ♦

The author lives in Texas, USA.

This month is the
175th anniversary of
the Relief Society!

