



Brother John's Fast Offering

By Greg Burgoyne

I couldn't believe my eyes. There he was, standing at the pulpit. I had never seen Brother John at church before, let alone heard him bear his testimony. A month later he came to church and bore his testimony again.

It all started one Sunday morning in priesthood executive committee meeting. I was serving as Young Men president. We had just read from the *Church Handbook of Instructions*, and the bishop was sitting quietly, pondering. Then he looked up and said, "I want our Aaronic Priesthood brethren to begin collecting fast offerings from less-active members." He asked us to involve the teachers and priests.

I was surprised. In Cape Town, South Africa, most members live far from each other. It takes about 35

minutes to drive from one side of our ward to the other. The young men had never collected fast offerings before because they couldn't walk to members' homes—the distance was too great, and we were concerned about their safety.

As a committee we came up with a plan as we discussed how we might overcome these obstacles. The elders quorum agreed to assign brethren to take the young men to several homes on the Saturday before each fast Sunday. We split the ward into areas and assigned each companionship to visit a few active families and a few less-active families. We realized that our plan would be a good opportunity for the brethren to get to know the youth and for the youth to receive counsel from the elders.

When we presented the plan to the young men, they were eager to try it. We reminded them to wear Sunday clothes and that this was part of their sacred responsibility to watch over the ward.

I was assigned to take my younger brother, Andrew. The following Saturday we visited everyone on our list, but most people weren't home. The last member we visited was Brother John, whom we didn't know well.

Andrew got out of the car, knocked on the door, and waited. He was just about to return to the car when the door opened. Andrew shook Brother John's hand and said, "Hello, my name is Andrew, and I'm from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Tomorrow is fast Sunday, and the bishop has asked us to visit members to receive any fast-offering donations they wish to make."

He handed Brother John an envelope. Brother John was surprised, but he walked inside with the envelope.

After a few minutes he emerged from the house with a smile. He politely thanked Andrew and handed the envelope to him. I got out of the car, and we three chatted for a while. As we were leaving, Brother John waved good-bye and said, "Make sure you come next month." Andrew was excited all the way back to the chapel, where we turned in our envelopes to a member of the bishopric.

The next month we made sure to visit Brother John. Again he was friendly. After a few months he began attending church on fast Sunday. Our Saturday visits reminded him of his Sunday meetings, and he would come the next day.

We were excited when Brother John became active in the Church. We felt a special bond with him. Words cannot express the joy that came to us because one soul had returned to the fold. Within a few months, he was attending regularly, and soon he was called to serve in the elders quorum presidency.

For us, the highlight of this experience came when Brother John was asked to speak in sacrament meeting about tithes and offerings. At the end of his talk he spoke about Andrew's first visit.

With moistened eyes he said: "Andrew, you will never know the impact you had on my life that Saturday morning when you came to my door with that blue envelope. You may have thought it was a waste of time, but blessings came into my

life because you provided me with an opportunity to pay my fast offering. Your service is one reason I am here today." ■

Lemonade and a Loaf of Bread

By Anabela De León

When I was six years old, my family moved to a new house in our hometown of Quetzaltenango, Guatemala. On the day we moved in, we were tired and thirsty. My older brother took me into the kitchen to get me a glass of water, but the utilities had not been turned on yet.

We didn't know what to do. It was late, and we didn't know anyone. Just then, someone knocked on the door. It turned out to be a pleasant and smiling older lady. "Welcome to the neighborhood," she said. "I'm your neighbor, Tenchita. I thought you probably didn't have any water, so I brought you some lemonade and bread."

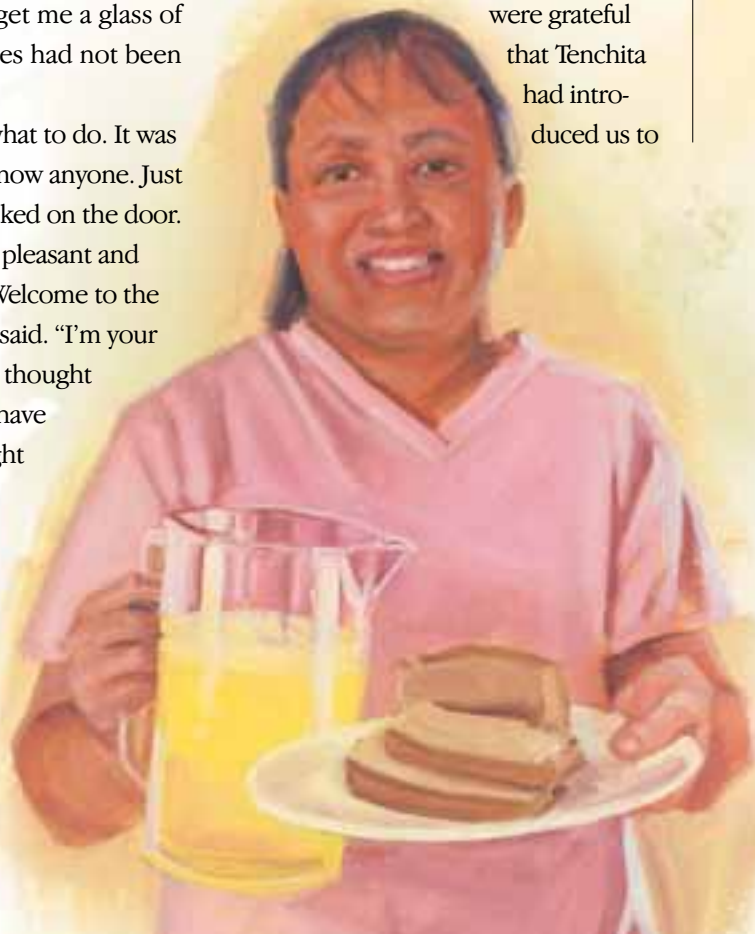
I was so happy to see the lemonade that I smiled a huge smile. A few days later, Tenchita invited us

to attend The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and gave us a copy of the Book of Mormon.

We soon took the missionary discussions, and three months later the elders challenged us to be baptized. My five older siblings accepted the challenge, but my parents didn't feel ready. They continued to attend church, however, and they and I were baptized and confirmed two years later, when I was eight.

I was young, but I could see the changes the gospel of Jesus Christ made in our family. Like all families, we had our problems, but communication and harmony increased in our home, and we trusted that solutions would come because of the teachings we received in the true Church. We

were grateful that Tenchita had introduced us to



the gospel, but she soon moved, and we didn't hear from her again.

Thirteen years later, my family was sealed in the Guatemala City Guatemala Temple, and I decided to serve a mission. In my first area in the Guatemala Guatemala City South Mission, we often visited members who were ill or less active. One day the bishop asked us to visit an elderly sister who was sick and couldn't leave her home. He told us that this sister's favorite drink was lemonade.

When my companion and I arrived at the house, the sister was ill in bed, but I recognized her immediately and gave her a big hug. Sister Tenchita didn't know me at first, but after we had talked for a while, her eyes shone in recognition. She smiled and said, "I brought you lemonade and bread."

I thanked her for also bringing me the gospel and making it possible for me to serve a mission.

Giving a glass of lemonade and a loaf of bread is easy and inexpensive, but giving them the way Sister Tenchita did—with affection and concern for our eternal welfare—truly made them valuable. She changed my life and the lives of members of my family. Likewise, we can all change people's lives by helping them find their way to the "living water" and the "bread of life" (John 4:10; 6:48).

Today my family and I don't share just lemonade and bread with our neighbors; we also share the true gospel of Jesus Christ. ■

You'll Take Good Care of Me

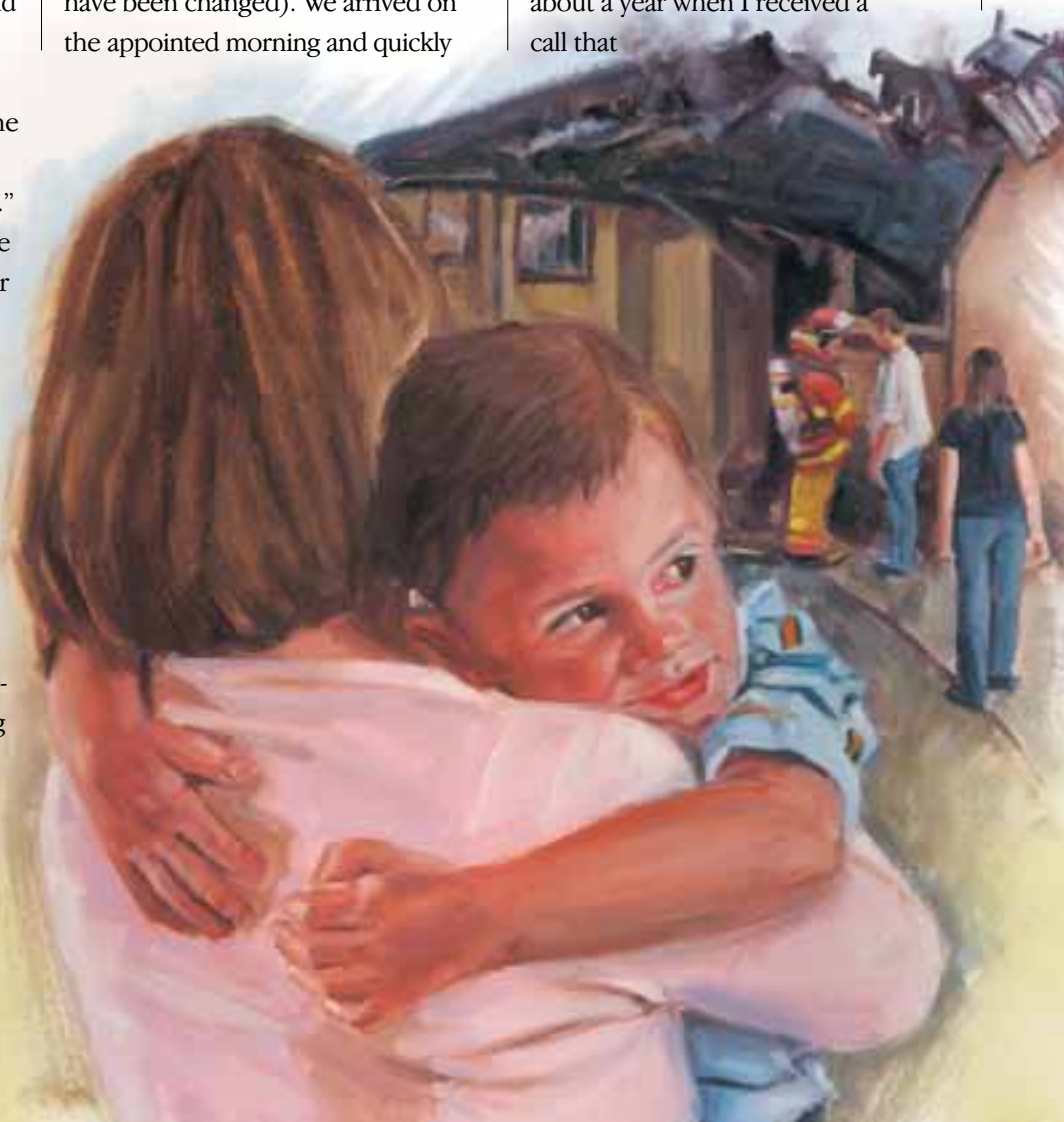
By Elaine Pearson

As I looked over my new visiting teaching assignment, I saw the name of a new member of our ward. I felt apprehensive about calling someone I didn't know, but my companion and I made an appointment to visit Jane (names have been changed). We arrived on the appointed morning and quickly

said a prayer before approaching the door. We found Jane and her three young sons waiting for us.

As we grew closer to Jane through our monthly visits, we also tried to get to know her sons. The two youngest would sit next to my companion and me, and we would read them books and play with them. But four-year-old Alex, the oldest of the three, was not so eager to warm up to his mother's frequent visitors. He was independent and hesitated to become friends with us.

I had been Jane's visiting teacher about a year when I received a call that



Jane's house was on fire! My husband and I felt prompted to grab crackers, bottled water, and toy cars and to hurry over to see if we could help. We found Jane standing on the sidewalk across from her smoldering home. Jane's husband had joined the firefighters to take stock of the damage while Jane comforted their three crying children, who were clinging to her knees.

When we spoke to her, she told us she was eager to join her husband. We took her two youngest children to our car. They were hungry and thirsty, and I was grateful for the inspiration of the Holy Ghost to bring food and water. They were soon content. But Alex, still sobbing, held tightly to his mother. Jane could not take him with her, and she felt torn between going to her husband and comforting her son.

I encouraged her to go and then leaned over and asked Alex if I could hold him while his mom went to find his dad. To my surprise, he agreed. When I scooped Alex into my arms, he rested his head on my shoulder, and I rubbed his back. While Jane went to find her husband, I whispered comforting words into Alex's ear. I could feel his sobs slow and his breathing relax.

As we stood on the sidewalk, Alex said softly to me, "You'll take good care of me 'cause you're my mom's teacher."

I quietly shed tears as I realized that Alex knew we were important in

his mother's life. He recognized that he could trust and rely on me to take care of him too 'cause I was his mom's teacher. ■

The Gift I Can't Remember

By Gary R. Wangsgard

One of the greatest gifts I ever received from my father is one I don't even remember.

He never talked about it. That was Dad's way. I learned about it many years later from my mother.

Both my mother and father had been raised as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but Dad's habit of smoking had kept them from being married in the temple. The loving bishop who performed my parents' civil ceremony encouraged them to set a goal to marry in the temple before their children came. They were still working on that goal when I joined the family.

By the time my second birthday was approaching, my parents still had not been to the temple. Mom really wanted to be sealed as a family before a second child came, but Dad was still using tobacco.

Sometimes I wish I could remember what happened on my second

birthday, because that's when I received the gift. My father came home from work that night in early November, and after setting aside his lunch bucket and taking off his coat, he picked me up. "Gary," he said, "I have a special birthday present for you." Mom said she was surprised because she knew Dad didn't have extra money to purchase a gift for me.

Reaching into his shirt pocket, Dad took out a partially used packet of cigarettes and handed them to me. Mom started to object, but Dad held up his hand as if to say, "This is between my son and me."

Quietly, he then said to me, "I have thought about this for several days. I have decided I don't want you, my son, to ever remember your father smoking. My gift to you today is that I am giving up my cigarettes, and I will never smoke again."

And that was the end of his tobacco habit. He must have struggled to quit smoking so abruptly. Although I don't remember it, that was his special gift to me. But it was more than that.

A few months later, with my mother pregnant with my brother, we made our way to the Logan Utah Temple, where we were sealed together as a forever family.

I am truly grateful for that gift given many years ago from my loving and caring father. ■

