

My Mother

# LOST HER SHOES

## in the Susquehanna River

By Richard E. Ardmore

*One lost pair of shoes eventually led our family to the Church.*

It wasn't until I had children of my own that my mother shared with me her conversion story. She grew up shortly after the Great Depression. When she was young, her parents could not provide food for their children, and they were sent to live with friends and relatives.

My mother, then Dorothy Smith, was sent to live with a family in Pennsylvania. But she didn't have any shoes.

ILLUSTRATION BY SCOTT GREER



Eventually her parents sent her a pair of shoes, but they were too big. The father of the family told her to sit on the dock of the nearby river and soak her shoes so they would shrink. The name of that river was the Susquehanna River, the same one in which Joseph Smith was baptized.

She did as she was told, but the river was rain swollen and swift. No sooner had she put her feet in the water than the powerful current ripped the new shoes off of her feet and they were gone, sinking out of sight into the muddy water. To her and the family, it was a tragedy. She again had no shoes.

Years later when she was a young mother living in southern California, Dorothy and some neighbor ladies were taking missionary lessons. While walking home one of the ladies said, "How do we know if any of this stuff is true? How do we know if Joseph Smith really saw God or even if there was a Susquehanna River?"

My mother piped up at that moment and said, "I know that there is a Susquehanna River, because I lost my shoes in the Susquehanna River." The moment she said those words, the Spirit bore witness to her that all the rest of what the missionaries had said was also true.

My family was later baptized when I was about eight. After my mother passed away, it slowly occurred to me what the impact was of her losing her shoes in the Susquehanna River. All of her other family members eventually joined the Church. Many of my relatives and I went on missions and baptized many people, which in turn led to others going on missions and baptizing even more people. Many of my relatives and I have served as ward mission leaders multiple times in our respective wards. All in all, I estimate that about 2,000 people have been led to the gospel of Jesus Christ because my mother lost her shoes in the Susquehanna River. It is a marvel to me that a series of tragedies such as the Great Depression, which led to a family being separated and then my mother losing her only pair of shoes, would lead to such a marvelous blessing in the lives of so many.

As I was growing up, I was concerned about my family's lack of pioneer ancestors or connections to early Church founders. I made it a matter of earnest prayer and study. I received a deep spiritual confirmation that the rich pioneer heritage was a heritage for all people who join the Church, not just descendents of pioneers. The sacrifices that were made were for all of us. The strength of today's Church is *our* heritage. **NE**



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