

Spending time at lunch with Duane changed how I looked at those who could use a friend.

A FRIEND

By Sara Wright

in the Hallway

When I was a sophomore in high school, I often found myself seeking a quiet place at lunch. I would sit with my friends at a table, but I didn't enjoy the chaos of the lunchroom and would sometimes retreat to an unused hallway where the noise was less deafening.

I hadn't been doing this for long when I noticed a young man, probably a junior, who would also find an abandoned corner to eat his lunch. He was unkempt, his hair unruly, his clothes visibly secondhand. He wore thick glasses, smelled of cigarette smoke, and mumbled to himself about one thing or another. When I saw him around school, no one seemed to even notice he was there. He walked the halls with his eyes down and never said a word to anyone. He was sometimes the object of cruel pranks and generally didn't fit in.

We were studying the Book of Mormon in seminary that year. We talked about Mosiah 18:8–9, which mentions part of our baptismal covenant. Here, Alma reminds us what we commit to as members of Christ's Church. In verse eight it says we "are willing to bear one another's burdens, that they may be light."

I was by no means the most popular girl in school, but I was no outcast either. As I saw the indifference and even revulsion that my fellow classmates showed toward this young man, the Spirit would not let me rest. I knew he needed a friend. I determined to do something about it.

One day at lunch I excused myself from my friends' table and quietly made my way to the corner where I knew the boy would be sitting. I felt awkward and

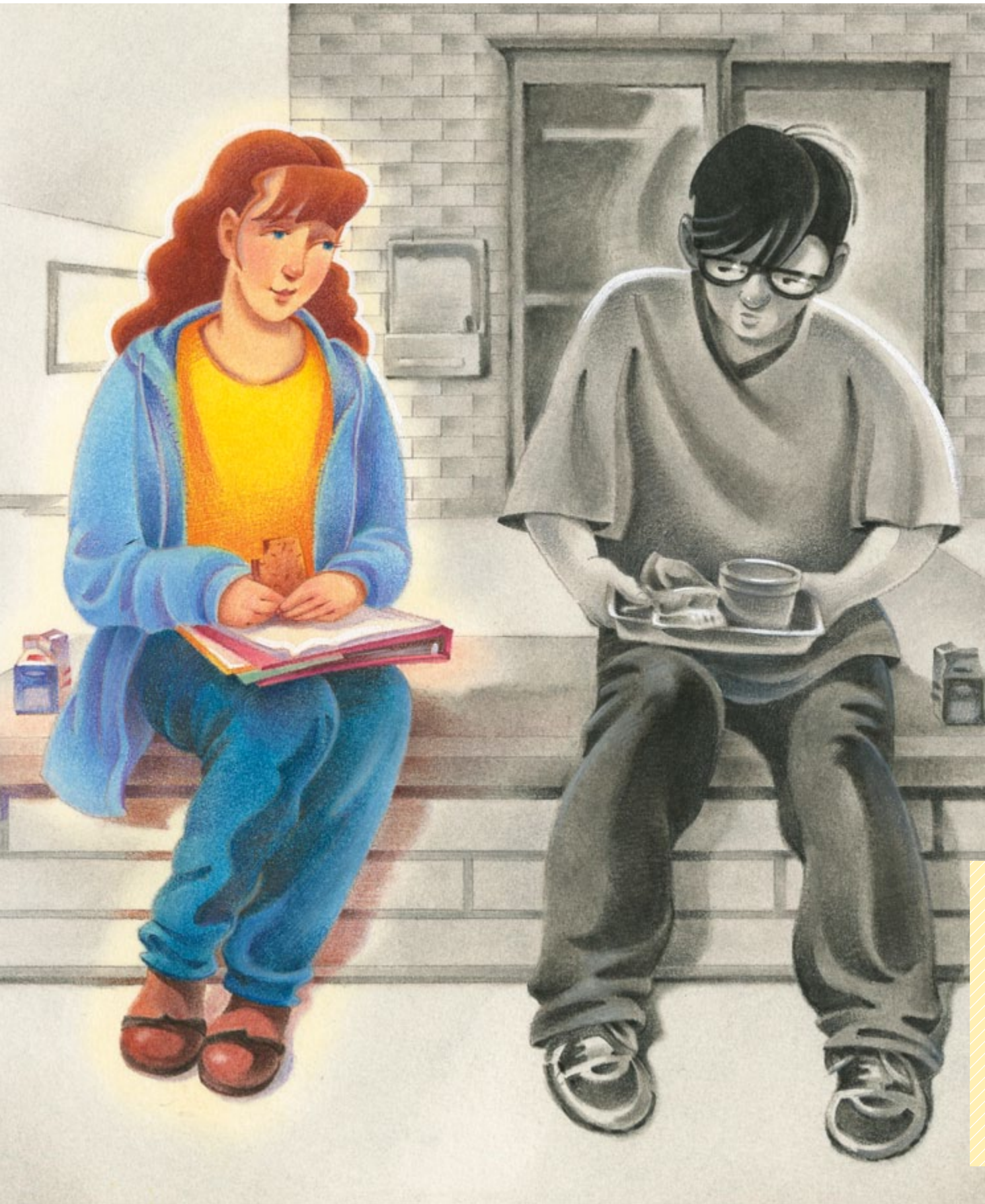
nervous as I timidly asked if I could share his corner. He didn't speak but just looked at me and shrugged. I asked him his name, but he shyly shook his head and did not reply to any of my attempts at conversation. When lunch was over, I called out a vague, "See you around," and I went to my class.

The next day, I again felt like I should go sit with him, so I did. This pattern went on every day at lunchtime for more than two weeks before he very quietly whispered that his name is Duane. As we sat, I would talk about anything that came to mind. He rarely responded. But as time went on, I guess my little efforts made some impression. I noticed a change in him. He seemed genuinely happy to see me at lunch. When I would see him in the halls, I would greet him with a wave or call, "Hey, Duane." He would make eye contact and even smile occasionally.

I told my friends what I was doing, and they also began to go out of their way to say hello. This didn't bring us any popularity, and I became the subject of many juvenile remarks as well. But I knew that what I was doing was right.

Our friendship remained casual, with Duane speaking only occasionally. He never became part of the "popular crowd" or suddenly became an outgoing guy. But I began to truly enjoy our lunches, and he did too.

Around March, I was approached by one of the school counselors. She invited me to come speak with her. In her office, I learned that Duane is an only child and that his mother had died several years earlier. His father worked three jobs, so Duane was often left alone at home late into





THE DOCTRINE OF INCLUSION

"If we are truly disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, we will reach out with love and understanding to all of our neighbors at all times, particularly in times of need. . . .

"That is our doctrine—a doctrine of inclusion. That is what we believe. That is what we have been taught. Of all people on this earth, we should be the most loving, the kindest, and the most tolerant because of that doctrine."

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "Doctrine of Inclusion," *Ensign*, Nov. 2001, 36–37.

the night. He had struggled in school for years and would sometimes do himself harm.

"I have rarely heard him say more than a sentence or two when I have met with him," the counselor said. "He is normally extremely shy and withdrawn. But in the last few months, he has begun to actually talk a little. He mentioned that he eats lunch with a sophomore girl named Sara. He even went so far as to say that he likes the company. I just wanted to express my appreciation for what you are doing. It may seem small, but you are changing

Duane's outlook. He is happier than I have ever seen him."

At that moment, tears came to my eyes, and I knew that Heavenly Father and His Son were pleased with what I was doing. And I knew that I was keeping my baptismal covenant. At the end of the year, I had Duane sign my yearbook. He grinned and wrote a simple, "Have a great summer. Thanks for the lunches. Duane."

Duane did not return to school after that year, and I heard that he had moved to another city. I genuinely prayed that he would continue his progress to happiness. I have never heard more about him, but I know that Heavenly Father and the Savior are watching over him. I'm sure he found new friends.

I was changed forever by those few minutes at lunch. Since then I have tried to look for those who need comfort, especially those who normally go unnoticed. Though I am by no means a perfect example, I have felt the love of the Savior for these special brothers and sisters. I have learned that keeping our baptismal covenants can sometimes be uncomfortable, but the Spirit brings a joy that will surpass all discomfort. **NE**

