

has restored my vision. While putting mother to bed that night, a task that had become so laborious, I was filled with calm. Could this epiphany—certainly a miracle in my life—have been what the Master meant when he spoke of a mighty change of heart?

Surely so. Nevertheless change is a thing with precipices all around it. And though I have begun to look differently at my circumstances, at my parents, my sisters, and others around me—I am finding that weakness becomes strength slowly and against difficulty.

One of the precipices for me is the silence in the gospel regarding unmarried women. And attitudes of Church members are not encouraging.

In the autumn following the broadcast of Brother Sill's simple story and my improved vision, I returned home alone from a meeting one evening, where the audience had been encircled with peace, and an amusing thought popped into my mind: These experiences had come to me because I was specializing to become a ministering angel. Perhaps if my work were well done upon the earth, as my parents taught, provision would be made for me to choose the persons I will attend. Who will they be? My father, mother, sisters and their families; an aunt, her husband and their nine daughters; a missionary companion who found her husband "in due time" at the age of forty-five; and an elder in our mission who has grown with his family into a high Church position. What hope does the Church hold for me—for this world or hereafter? Everything is for the married woman: a share of her husband's priesthood. The Church should have a more prominent place for the "Mormon Nun," a term borrowed from a cousin, but a good one. There is a too-common attitude that the single woman is inferior. She feels apologetic and a little guilty, when actually she is often superior intellectually, in accomplishments, in compassion, in generosity, in plain goodness. Surely there is justice somewhere.

VICKY

Anonymous

"We were in prison and ye came unto us."

On our way to the Utah State Prison that first Monday night there were some final questions the family needed answering. No, we wouldn't have a regular family night presentation this time; we'd begin that the following month after we were better acquainted. Yes, there really would be plenty to talk about for an hour and a half. We could each tell her some-

This Saturday it will be time to scour the veranda. The concrete floor and railing around the sides of the porch will be washed several times by hand. It takes six long hours to wash away the yearly accumulation of dirt, and help is hard to find. Young girls want to spend their time talking about their boy friends; older women prefer to work in new pretty homes. Our covered porch is a gathering place for family, relatives, friends, and renters who have known us over the years and who come home to see the parade on the Fourth of July. Our town has four days celebrating our national birthday, with many and varied activities planned for every age group. We extend invitations to many persons to join us for the noonday meal which we eat "right after the parade." Again this year I shall be in the kitchen preparing a huge dinner. The peacemaker will prepare the stuffed turkey. I will cook ham, a beef roast, and dozens of hot rolls. We will have vegetables, salads, relishes, soft drinks, and watermelon for dessert. Sisters will help as they can, while greeting friends and putting "Mormon bandages" on minor hurts of their children. Mother will ask if I have made enough rolls and father will be in a chair, with a lap robe, holding a great-grandchild. He will draw young and old around him as he begins talking. "Now when I was about fourteen and rode the range, I had a beautiful sorrel mare who was named Nell. . . ."

For the past fifteen years a group of elderly women has gone to the market with me each Saturday afternoon. One of the ladies is my aunt. Recently she said, when I picked her up first, "Your parents are more healthy than mother was at their age." After hearing the compliment I thought, "Shoulders are made to handle their burden. The yoke is almost filling a need for me. What can I say to this regal person?" My words came quickly, "You are very alert yourself, Aunt Elsie. Grow old slowly, I will need someone to care for when father and mother are gone."

thing about our special interests. And there was a lot to learn about her. All we knew so far was her name and that she was young, Black, and not a member of the Church. No, we weren't going there to convert her—just help her. . . . We might help by just being her friend, so she wouldn't get discouraged and . . . yes, that's right: we would definitely help her when she started a new life after she was released. But of course we could only do

that if we were the type of people that appealed to her. Maybe if she sensed that we got along well as a family and had fun together . . . true . . . "and lived the teachings," . . . right . . . "and liked her a lot," she just might want to be our friend.

They were satisfied for the moment. But a quiet excitement mounted as we glided along the freeway past Pleasant Grove and American Fork towards the Point of the Mountain.

I recalled the morning almost three months earlier when the bishop indicated he had something "special" he wanted to talk with us about after Sunday School. When we met, I learned the stake needed two families to participate in an unusual Church Social Services program. If we accepted, we would be assigned to an inmate at the state prison and would hold monthly home evenings with him or her. There would be an orientation of course, but aside from the family night service we would simply offer our friendship to someone. An hour later when the bishop reached us at home, I reported how eagerly every member of the family had accepted.

A three or four hour orientation at the prison a few weeks later greatly altered our perspective, but not our enthusiasm. Bishop Heber J. Geurts and the prison chaplain detailed the scope, restrictions, frustrations and rewards of our involvement. A written statement by the LDS Social Services Program indicated the program was prepared to help rehabilitate Mormon inmates "and those non-LDS inmates who seek us out. We do not proselyte in prisons." We were informed, too, that inmate leadership in religious services was encouraged: "All inmates regardless of race or religion are afforded equal opportunities and responsibilities in the Church program, as a means of rehabilitation. This differs from missionary effort among inmates which is not to be done."

Happily we noted there were no gimmicks, no formulas or special techniques to be assimilated and implemented. We were simply to abide by institutional rules: "Nothing in—Nothing out/No gifts, no money, no messages, no thing!"

But the assignment was awesome indeed. In addition to visiting the prisoner and holding a family home evening with her once a month, we would work with her family in community, social and religious areas. If her family were not available, we would become her family away from home. We were expected to be both exemplary and reliable. Since release from prison normally results in adjustments even greater than those faced inside, there would probably be a continuing involvement over a long period of time. It became clear that this was a commitment which could alter our life as well as the prisoner's.

In addition to instruction on the local prison system and prison regulations, we were impressed with the impact of the program and the assignment of families to inmates.

And now we were approaching the prison tower. After being cleared, we were directed to the women prisoners' "dormitory." How we hoped this first visit wouldn't be too awkward. We were quickly admitted, and there she stood, smiling. Somehow we recognized each other without any introduction, and she embraced us. She told us how impatiently she had awaited our visit and how much our coming meant to her. Following opening exercises held conjointly with six or eight other families and their "adopted" inmates, we separated into small rooms for home evening discussions. Our years in Africa made her immediately special to us. But we were hardly prepared for her remarkable buoyancy and optimism. After we told her a little about ourselves; she eagerly explained how fortunate she was. Among other things, she had learned to crochet in prison, and had designed and crocheted the outfit she was wearing—for this very occasion, her initial meeting with her "Church family." She also explained that she was completing her schooling, doing lots of reading, and now looking forward to visits from us.

The hour and a half raced by, and too soon we were on our way home. All of us were talking at once. Aside from complaints about having to wait a whole month to return, everything was superlative: Wasn't she cute and fun! Wasn't it remarkable how much she was gaining from her prison experience? How was it possible for her to love her so much after only one visit? We were unanimous in feeling that somehow we had gained far more from her than she could possibly have gained from us. The Lord had clearly sent Victoria to us, and not us to Victoria.

Though immediately impressed with our charming inmate, I was early on guard and somewhat introspective. Could it be she wanted to use us, ask us for money or request special favors, like others we had heard about? And why were we so excited with the assignment? Was visiting a prison simply an exotic and daring experience? Was there a pious condescension in helping someone incarcerated? And did these visits to a Black girl constitute primarily a romanticized flight back to our beloved Africa?

But she made no requests—except that she longed to see us more, and the introspective doubts vanished. "Victoria" became "Vicki." We became "Mom" and "Dad," and she became part of the family. The once-or-twice-a-month visits multiplied to three or four, and before long it was rare if we didn't see her weekly. She participated quite naturally in our family home evenings, and afterwards

teased and joked with the children. One family night she announced with pride she had begun reading the Bible. Back home we prayed ". . . bless Larry [our son] on his mission, and Vicki that she'll be happy and be with us soon; and bless grandma and grandpa. . ."

The children spoke proudly of their new Sis, Vicky, but were icy in their reply to "What's she in there for?" Such a question was regarded as both irrelevant and impertinent: "We haven't really discussed the matter. Anyway, she's a much better person than almost anyone we know on the outside."

Earlier this year when the *National Observer* featured a lengthy article titled "These Contenders All Win," the entire family gathered excitedly to hear how successful the home evening program was:

. . . the idea is spreading to prisons outside Utah and now is being adopted in the Federal prison system.

Smith, of Norwalk, Conn., is one of 60 Utah State Prison inmates in a family-centered "adopt-a-prisoner" program that is attracting the attention of sociologists and penologists nationally. Its participants' lack of recidivism so far makes the program look impressive: Of 140 released inmates who have been "adopted" by volunteer families in the past five years, only 2 have been convicted of subsequent crimes and returned to prison. That recidivism rate of less than 2 per cent is far below the 55 per cent for the whole prison and the rate of nearly 80 per cent nationally. . . . (June 9, 1973, p. 1).

Easter Church services at the prison were memorable: the talk on the hope for new life in the spring, the hymn by the inmates, and Vicky's powerful uninhibited poetic rendition of the Creation.

Vicky's Mother's Day letter became one of our real treasures. Its very personal nature admits of only brief quotation:

Some people think that a mother is just anyone who has children, but it goes a lot deeper than that. You are all the things that a mother should be. You're kind, loving, understanding, and most of all you care. There haven't been very many people that have cared about me. . . .

One of our proudest moments was attending Vicky's graduation at prison. She delivered a beautiful, memorized address that she had composed herself. I recall an observation early in her talk: "I was told there would be stereophonic sound to amplify my weak voice; would that there were electronic equipment that could amplify my feeble thoughts." Despite this protestation she stirred her audience with her insight, her positive point of view and her eloquence. She urged

fellow inmates to seize their "time" and use it profitably in lifting themselves from their present state. The address made her an immediate celebrity with the media, officials, and inmates: but she managed to extricate herself to be photographed with her Church family. That night she penned an almost lyrical letter to us:

I was almost speechless because you were so proud of me. That made me feel so good inside! I couldn't help but be happy! I wanted you to be proud of me, and when I saw you were I was so overwhelmed with joy! that I couldn't concentrate.

I came to my room and said a prayer thanking our Heavenly Father for such wonderful loving parents, and such a beautiful night in my life.

On graduation night Dad said something that I shall forever treasure. He said, "We're so proud of you!" Those words made my night perfect. Very few people have ever told me that. It made me want to cry. I will always be the very best person that I can be. I will never go backwards but always forward, for myself, for my children and for you. . . .

Still another highlight was our appearing with Vicki before the Parole Board. We strived for as much objectivity as our love would permit, so that it wouldn't appear we were simply being manipulated by our inmate. During the long wait we discussed many things, including our awareness that she must be undergoing some rejection and scorn as a result of her attachment to her white "Church family." The following lines were written to reassure us:

To: My Family With All My Love
THIS LOVE

I must place a kiss upon your cheek,
I must whisper I Love You in your ear.
I do not care where we are:
I do not care who is near.
For my Love knows no certain moment:
It is here all the time.
It's very strong,
It's very sincere.
I do not care who knows.
For it is the Love we have
That has changed my life
From a half of a life to a whole.
It is this Love
That makes me want to kiss your cheek,
To whisper in your ear,
Makes me smile when you're near
My love is yours: Your love is mine;
It is a precious gift
I never dreamed I'd find.
Those who look upon us with distaste,
Let them go their separate ways.
For what we have is beautiful,

And clean, and sweet.
It's very dear to me.
I'm sure they would but understand:
If they could but see:
The love my heart feels for thee.
Vicky
May God Always Bless You

For Vicky, difficulties and disappointments in prison have been as numerous as her achievements. She has been sustained not only by her Church family but also by relatives, some understanding matrons and inmates, case workers and her own remarkable inner strength and faith in the Lord.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Since the last issue, the following changes have occurred in the *Dialogue* staff:

Davis Bitton has relinquished his position as Book Review Editor, a position which he filled with distinction for over three years. He will stay on as a member of the Board of Editors.

Edward Geary, who has served on the *Dialogue* staff variously as Copy Editor, Manuscript Editor, Book Review Editor and most recently Associate Editor, replaces Davis Bitton as Book Review Editor.

Maureen Derrick Keeler joins the staff as Associate Editor. A graduate of the University of Utah, Maureen has taught English at BYU and the University of Washington and served for four years on the staff of former Congressman David S. King. Currently, Maureen is doing research and writing on single people in the Church, taking care of her two daughters and, with her husband, Robert, trying to enjoy living in Los Angeles.

Gary P. Gillum joins the staff as Assistant Editor. A reference librarian at BYU, Gary is responsible for the index in this volume and is working on a cumulative index of *Dialogue*. Gary's autobiographical sketch appears in *No More Strangers*, Vol. 2, edited by Hartman Rector, Jr.

JAMES B. ALLEN is Assistant Church Historian and Professor of History at BYU. He was co-editor of the special issue of *Dialogue* on Mormonism in the Twentieth Century and is currently working on a history of the modern and contemporary Mormon Church.

KENNETH E. BOULDING is a distinguished economist at the Institute of Behavioral Science of the University of Colorado at Boulder. He is recognized as an authority on the economic and social implications of population growth and has published extensively in those areas.

JOHN CAUGHEY, past president of the Organization of American Historians and the Western History Association, was long-time editor of the *Pacific Review*. He is the author of *California*, the standard history of the state, and many other books and articles.

JULIE G. CHRISTENSEN teaches French in Salt Lake City schools and has written reviews for *Utah Holiday*.

ROBERT CHRISTMAS is an itinerant song writer and salesman living in Los Angeles. His poems have appeared in a number of issues of *Dialogue* as well as in other publications.