

LDS HISTORIAN

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OUR NEW YORK FAMILY

MEMBERS OF THE NEW YORK STAKE LEAD VARIED AND EXTREMELY INTERESTING LIVES. EACH PERSON HAS A STORY TO TELL ABOUT HOW THEY JOINED THE CHURCH, HOW THEY CAME TO NEW YORK, OR WHAT EVENTS LEAD THEM TO WHO THEY ARE TODAY. IN AN EFFORT TO CAPTURE THESE STORIES AND TO HELP THE MEMBERS OF THE STAKE KNOW EACH OTHER BETTER, THE NEW YORK LDS HISTORY COMMITTEE INTERVIEWED A NUMBER OF PEOPLE. THIS ISSUE IS DEVOTED TO THESE FABULOUS SNAPSHOTS AND INCLUDES STORIES ABOUT HOW PEOPLE WERE CONVERTED TO THE CHURCH. AS WE GATHER MORE STORIES, THEY WILL BE HIGHLIGHTED IN FUTURE ISSUES OF THE LDS HISTORIAN. WE HOPE YOU ENJOY THESE STORIES AS MUCH AS WE HAVE, AND WE HOPE YOU WILL LET US TELL YOUR STORY IN A FUTURE ISSUE.

PATRICIA SPIVEY*by Ben Ungruen*

Patricia's granddaddy was a high official in the Post Office system, which gave their family enough prestige and income to live in the Sugar Hill section of Harlem. "My grandparents, because of their status, were called bourgeois." Their apartment building had famous African-Americans such as Harry Belafonte and Sidney Poitier living within its walls. Patricia has fond memories of the Cavalier club—a classy African-American club of the time, where her granddaddy went along with other the well educated and well-paid. "They were all my daddies. I was the little princess. I have pictures of me in long fluffy gowns, you know—debutante balls."

Patricia's paternal granddaddy taught her that the power was in herself to accomplish whatever she wanted in life. In junior high, she participated in Track and Field, carpentry, and the martial arts. She proved to be skilled enough in this last area to win a national martial arts competition in Michigan. "Girls go for cheerleading; I go for throwing your butt all over the floor." Patricia gives a hearty laugh as she thinks back to those days. "My daddy said I should have been born a boy, not a girl. That was just me."

But her social status required that she learn other skills as well. "I was raised with learning how to properly set a table. Formal tables: hors d'oeuvres and cooking and the whole set-up kind of thing for entertaining."

Her father's mother taught her to sew. Her mother's mother taught her how to say the Lord's prayer. Her mother had been raised a Baptist, although many in her family were Methodists. Her granddaddy, on the other hand, was an atheist, and her father's mother was



a Catholic. Their son—her father—took the middle ground and declared himself an agnostic. “I always had the freedom to find my own faith. I was never imposed on as to have to belong to one or the other. But we were exposed to thought; we were allowed to free think.”

Patricia began to explore her religious thought with her high school best friend Patty Smith. Patty was a Jehovah’s Witness, and the two studied religion together. When an older member of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, Sister Robinson, was able to address some of Patricia’s concerns about evolution she started studying seriously, and as a senior in High School decided to be baptized:

I get to Yankee Stadium; it’s a bright summer day— thousands and thousands of people sitting up in the bleachers. Some more thousands waiting to get into this mass baptismal font.

I’m in my whites. I’m walking, a choir’s singing. I even had a part of my family in the bleachers that were members of the Jehovah’s Witnesses. They were so happy—I was going to get baptized.

I walked all the way up the steps and got to the front. And there was this funny light on the water. It didn’t look right to me, this weird light on the water. I hit the first step and froze.

The man in the water doing the baptisms asked Patricia if something was the matter. Patricia told him she wasn’t going in. “I walked down and went back to the lockers. I changed my clothes, walked out of the stadium, and I did not look back.” Whatever the light was, Patricia took it as a sign that she shouldn’t be baptized into their church. “I had it all up here,” she explained, pointing to her head. “But it didn’t move here,” pointing to her heart. “It did not give me that poom-poom-poom-poom feeling.”

Shortly after graduation and uncertain about school and religion, Patricia went to the Vietnam war. She was a nurse and remembers meeting a wounded soldier who was in tremendous pain but never complained, saying that “God will take over from here.”

She returned home from the war and married her high school sweetheart. The two of them—angered by the terrible things they had experienced firsthand in Vietnam—became Moslem and joined the Nation of Islam. “Because I was militant,” she explained,

Her war experience got her promoted to an MGT—a Missile Girl Trainee, “and I was a captain.” She trained other girls how to be good soldiers. She also wore a veil. For three years, “you could only see my eyeballs!” she recalled.

Patricia left Islam when she and her husband considered moving into an Islamic compound in Brooklyn. On a tour of the compound, she learned that the men, women, and children all lived separately and would no longer specifically belong to each other. Patricia realized that the women were essentially a part of a “harem” and that she would only be allowed to see her children when the leaders said she could. A “typical male,” her husband was all for it, but Patricia had a different opinion. “You’re not going to disrespect my womanhood, and definitely not going to disrespect my motherhood.” She picked up the kids and walked out. “I got home, took off the veil, and never looked back.”

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By 1979 their marriage was in bad shape; he had become abusive, and one day, without notice, Patricia took their three children and left. She lived with her mom for two months and then took her youngest daughter and moved into a shelter. After four months her daughter had the horrific experience of witnessing a murder in the shelter. “That could have been us,” Patricia remembers thinking. “I just walked out of there. Packed up my daughter and left. I didn’t need nobody’s permission to tell me when I can go.” She returned to her mother’s for two more months, then found a job with NYCHA, the New York City Housing Authority. She could finally afford a place to

live, and moved out with her three children. She divorced her husband and worked with the NYCHA for over a decade, working as a union representative.

Her kids now grown, Patricia retried and moved out to the Bronx for a change of atmosphere. “I liked it—it was quiet, clean. There were trees.” There she met the missionaries on a Sunday morning. They were walking their bikes down the sidewalk, and she commented on their “gorgeous legs.” They consequently stopped to talk to her:

They were real; they weren’t like, beyond beyond. It wasn’t like that—it was just massive love. I never felt that before. And it wasn’t coming from my head; it was coming from my gut. It was coming from my heart. And I felt lonely when I wasn’t in their presence. I felt lonely when I wasn’t at the Church.

After five months, Patricia was baptized on Christmas Eve. “If I was going to get born again why not Christmas Eve? She was confirmed a member the next day. “And I have not looked back.”

Less than a year after her baptism, Patricia was diagnosed with cancer. She wanted to go through it alone. “I didn’t want my kids around crying. All my hair came out. You know, the whole fifty yards.” When things got really bad, however, the members were there for her:

When I wasn’t sure I was going to make it through it, they were there. I had my family, but [the members] became my family. The love—wow. And it grew so fast.

Patricia sees herself as still in the process of conversion. You go from crawling to walking to running, she explained to me. Patricia has gotten past the crawling stage—“I’m slowly walking. Slowly earning His trust in me.”

We all convert. To convert simply means to change from an old to a new. But conversion is a slow process. Slow, learned, patience, enduring, not looking back at, but fully accept that which is coming forward. No more regrets. That’s when you have fully begun to absorb the gospel into your life—as your life source. That’s the conversion process. It’s slow and compassionate. And growth. And trusting.

“I found my light,” she concluded. “And I don’t want my light to go out. That’s basically where I’m at, at this point.”

DELORES ZECCA

by Ben Unguren

“My background has no meaning except when I was a kid.” While the physical scars from her childhood have faded, that Sunday morning in 1940 has been forever marked in Josephine’s memory. She wanted to go to her mother’s church that day—the Baptist one. She had friends there, and it was closer than the Methodist church that her father attended. But he insisted, so she walked with her brother unhappily, towards the Methodist building.

Sundays had always been the highlight of eight-year-old Josephine’s week. The whole town was in a good mood, a tight-knit community of Italians and Poles in South Jersey. “Maybe at the most there were three black families,” including her own, she recalled. But it was the unity within the neighborhood that she recalls the most. Religion especially drew the community together. The Baptist church, for instance, had a present for every child in the neighborhood at Christmas time, whether they were Baptist or not. Congregations arranged their schedules so that parishioners of one church could attend the other churches’ Sunday School lessons. Everyone knew everyone.

So it was no surprise when Ira, one of the townsmen, stopped and offered them a ride. They got in the car. When he pulled in across from the church, Josephine—still unhappy about her father—hopped out into the street without saying thank you.

And then, without warning, she was hit by a car.

Josephine doesn’t remember the accident. She remembers Ira’s shirt covered with blood, as he held her in the back seat. She remembers the driver yelling at people to get out of the way. She screamed for her daddy. She wanted ice cream. “Sure, baby. Real soon,” Ira told her.

Josephine remembers being in the hospital for six months. It would take years for everything to heal. She had to re-take the third grade. “I blamed my dad. I was very angry with him...Why would religion mean so much that you would put that much pressure on an individual?” Her religious experience as a child pivots around the accident. A small crack had emerged between Josephine

and her family, her religion, her community.

That crack became wider in her early teens, when she learned that she had misunderstood her place in the family. She was not a daughter, but a granddaughter; the man she had been calling “father” was, in fact, her grandfather; her brothers were actually uncles; and her sister was her mother.

In the summer of 1932, when she was 6 months old, the extended family decided that Josephine’s mother was too young to care for her. “It was a choice of the male people in the family that this was the best thing at that time.” Her mother—her real mother—had little choice; they would be known as sisters. The family even changed her birth name—her mother had called her Delores; they called her Josephine.

At sixteen Josephine Smith left the community of her childhood—her parents, siblings, friends, churches—and moved in with her real mother, now in Philadelphia. She changed her name back to Delores, got a job, found a boyfriend, and adjusted herself to her new community. The many years that followed were absent of religion except when a brother-uncle would occasionally pay her a visit to remind her (and her friends) to live up to the family’s standards.

Eventually Delores Smith became a responsible adult, fell in love and married her Italian husband, Gina Zecca. They started in the Bronx then moved to 96th street in Manhattan. Life was sweet with her companion until his untimely death in 1980. Josephine Smith—now Delores Zecca—had approached another fracture in her life. Again she needed a community where she could love and be loved. Delores recalled “the grief, the separation of not having him. I remember that the Catholic Church doors were always open. Any day of the week you could go into a Catholic church. So I used to go in and just sit there and pray...I felt a great comfort.” Delores again felt a connection with God that she first encountered in her childhood. “It was always there, you never lose that.” Additionally, her deceased husband had been a Catholic—not a practicing one, but a Catholic all the same. It was the right place for her.

She frequented the church of the Holy Name on 96th street and Amsterdam. There, Delores became good friends with Father Kenneth Smith, another Italian Catholic, who became her teacher and bridge with

the Church. Once when a friend expressed doubts concerning Delores as a Catholic, Delores went to Father Smith and expressed her second thoughts. “Without warning, he put his hand on my forehead and started to pray. Wooh! I can remember that handprint on my forehead.” The experience had a lasting impression on Delores, and she joined the Catholic church.

Father Smith took a central role in Delores’ faith. “I have strong ties to Father Smith. You have no idea.” After her baptism, Father Smith engaged other members of the parish to involve Delores in activities. One time he even rigged a game so that Delores would win (she learned about it well afterwards). He held her up as an example for other converts to the faith.

Years later the Holy Name church had to undergo renovations. The resulting financial stress required that it be sold to a group of Franciscans. Father Smith had to leave. Delores was crushed. “When he was transferred to some other place, I just thought I lost a family member. It was horrible.” Delores did not get along with the new Franciscans. “They were cold, like ice.” Delores’ attendance at church dwindled. Once again, it seemed, her community was being taken away from her.

It was during this time that Delores saw a TV commercial for a free copy of the Book



~ DELORES ZECCA ~

DELORES AGAIN FELT A CONNECTION WITH GOD THAT SHE FIRST ENCOUNTERED IN HER CHILDHOOD. IT WAS ALWAYS THERE, YOU NEVER LOSE THAT.

of Mormon. An avid reader (her apartment is filled with books and newspapers), she called the number. “I wasn’t looking for a change. I just wanted the book.” Strangely, before she received the book, suddenly “it flashed in my head that Joseph Smith was connected to that book.” For Delores, this connection between Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon was timely and inspired. As a child, she once overheard her father-grandfather, speaking with friends about religion, say, “I like what Joseph Smith has to say.” He had never mentioned the Book of Mormon, and the commercial hadn’t mentioned Joseph Smith. There was nothing in her past that would put the two together. “I connected the dots after I’d spoken on the phone; that’s what was weird. I don’t even know how I connected the dots—I really don’t.”

From the outset, then, Mormonism had a mysterious connection with Delores’ past. She began a serious study of the Church and made friends. When she discovered that she had the capacity to live the Word of Wisdom, all was ready; on a Wednesday evening in 1996 Delores was baptized. “When you’re baptized, you’re in another realm. I’m sure it must happen to everybody. You’re just on a high; you don’t want to come down on earth because you feel so good and you want that feeling forever.” She was immediately called to be a Stake Missionary, and later became a part of the Harlem Bridgebuilders, where she met with local leaders and government officials to strengthen LDS relations in Harlem. One of her duties as a member of the group was to train with the Citizen’s Police Academy.

With ten years behind her in the Church, Delores is proud of her membership. “It’s been good. I have good memories.” The only thing Delores hasn’t liked about her Church experience are the frequent changes in callings and ward boundaries. “If I like something, I don’t want it to be moved. It does something to you; it sort of takes the soul out of you. Especially with people that you grow close to.”

Delores remains in touch with “people that [she] grew close to” from throughout her life. She is in touch with the communities of her past. She keeps a part of her former identities whenever she returns: her friends and family in South Jersey still call her Josephine; New Yorkers and Philadelphians call her Delores. Her Catholic identity, however, is difficult to navigate, especially with her mentor,

Father Smith. “He does not know, even to this day. I don’t ever expect to tell him. He definitely does not know. I think he’d be very disappointed....I felt like I walked away from him.” Anonymously, however, Delores has alerted Father Smith about her conversion to Mormonism: “He’s gotten invitations from our Church to come to special affairs but he doesn’t know why. He doesn’t know it has something to do with me.” Delores hopes the topic won’t ever come up, but “if he ever asks me I would just say ‘You know, after you left, there wasn’t another Father Smith.’”

PAUL CABELL

by Marci Stringham

Paul Cabell was born April 22, 1951 in Birmingham Alabama. Paul’s growing up years included traveling to many states as his father tried to make a living to support a family of six. Paul’s growing up also included a religious life as an Episcopalian. As a youngster going to church in Alabama in the 50s Paul went to a full service with Sunday school and communion. It was only a two hour block and Paul had lots of friends. But in Kansas, in the 60s, everything changed. At that point Paul was only attending a 1/2 hour communion service at 7 am. He says, “I only went to take the wafer and wine.” At that particular church there was no real contact with the other church members and Paul didn’t have any friends at church. Paul says that at that time he started experimenting with different churches just like Joseph Smith had done. From the 1960s until 1982 Paul attended Methodist churches, Southern Baptist congregations, Jewish synagogues on Friday nights, a non-denominational Christian church, Holy Roller, and a Pentecostal church.

When asked why he was searching for a new church Paul said, “I wanted to get right with God and Jesus Christ and have a better life; have a renewed, faithful life. I also figured if I messed up in one church and went to another no one would know about it.” Looking back now Paul can see that the elements that were missing from these various churches were the Priesthood, the activities to draw members closer together, and drinking wine instead of water. Paul especially missed the church activities. He said in the

Episcopal church the pastor wouldn’t make house calls or check on you during the week. “Everything was just spread out and there was no unity in the Episcopal Church in the 60s.”

When he was 19 Paul graduated from high school and went to work in Chicago. That winter he was homeless.

I couldn’t get a job. I had been working at a job and I was attacked on the South side of Chicago by a black youth group. They didn’t like that I was white. I left the telephone books that I had been delivering and ran away. They threw bricks and bottles at me.

When Paul told his employers what had happened they just let it go, went back to get the phone books, and dropped him from the job. Paul went back to the employment offices to see if they had any other work and walked a loop looking for want ads for different positions in the stores. Paul continues,

It just didn’t happen for me. I slept in train stations and ate in missions and even got in a fight with a wino over a ham sandwich. I was very hungry and the other guy picked up the sandwich first. I tried to pull it away from him and we got in a fight over it.

The pastor had to come and split them up, and then he took the ham sandwich and split it in half and gave half to each man. In an effort just to survive Paul ended up stealing candy bars from Woolworths. He was kicked out of all the major hotels and bus stations by security for loitering. Paul mentions a few close calls he had while homeless. “Once a couple of rough necks got a hold of me and worked me over pretty good in a private alley. I thought with every punch that they were going to pull out a gun and kill me, but some guy came out and told them it was a private alley and I had a chance to escape from them.” Another time a guy pulled a knife on Paul but since it was only the two of them in an open space in the early morning hours Paul was able to just turn and run away.

Paul says his family wouldn’t help him through this difficult time because he was very radical and was not a very nice guy. As a teenager (he was a boxer when he was 15) he would get in fights, even physical fights, with his family members and others.

Finally Paul broke down physically and mentally. He went to the police and they asked if he wanted to see a doctor. He said he



~ PAUL CABELL ~

did and ended up in a hospital for a couple of months while he recuperated. After the hospital he was able to go back to Alabama where his family let him live at home and he got a job working six days a week.

The family moved to Iowa in August of 1971 and Paul worked in Des Moines for 6 months and then joined the army. In 1972 and '73 he was sent to Germany where Paul had his first experience with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He met another soldier who ended up being LDS. Paul comments, "He was different. He didn't drink or smoke like I did. He just set an example and so we roomed together because I noticed something different about him."

After the army Paul decided to try an acting career and moved to Hollywood. In 1978 Paul was standing in line on Memorial Day to get into the Tonight show and ended up next to two ladies from Salt Lake City. They talked to Paul about the LDS church and asked if he would like to meet with the missionaries. Paul said yes and did end up meeting with the missionaries and even attended the Hollywood ward for a short while. However, Paul didn't think the church was for him at that point and told the missionaries that he didn't want any more discussions. He says that church was three hours and three hours at Church "was too long for me on a Sunday." He would rather watch the Dodgers baseball games on TV.

The next few years were very difficult and Paul suffered many hardships. He had lots of problems with drinking and smoking while

he was looking for acting work. Paul talks about the acting work, "They weren't accepting me for jobs and I wasn't good enough to get the jobs; or there were other problems as well. I mostly ended up doing extra work in films, movies, and TV commercials. But I couldn't get a speaking part. I was King of the Extra Work." Paul ended up as an extra on General Hospital and The Dating Game in 1979. Unfortunately the people that he was hanging out with from the film industry were drug addicts and alcoholics and they were a bad influence in Paul's life.

During that time Paul knew one person who had joined the Church. This man kept telling Paul about the Church and how he should look into joining it. Paul had signed up with a job factory in Santa Monica, CA and they sent out a flyer each week. One week Paul noticed an ad for jobs in Yellowstone for the summer. Paul thought, "This would be great for me! I could get out of Hollywood and out of all of this trash and garbage and renew myself in some clean, pure air." He sent in his application and they accepted him. "All systems were go."

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Paul decided before he went that he would join the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when he got to Yellowstone. Paul says the Church just kept going through his mind and Paul was at a point where he wanted a renewal in his life.

He knew that Yellowstone had clean fresh air and he was tired of going through various mishaps. He wanted to join the Church and become new, wash away his sins. When Paul got to Yellowstone he sought out the Church and was baptized a week later on June 13, 1982. He was baptized in the Firehole River in Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming at 8:05 am Mountain Standard Time. Paul says,

I felt brand new when I came out of that river. I felt all my sins and everything I

had done in my life was washed away and I was a clean person. It was a new birth.

After the summer Paul still wanted to make it as an actor and he had an aunt who wrote TV commercials for Ogilvie and Mather. Paul knew she lived in New York and was hoping she could get him a job. So Paul came to New York in September 1982 in hopes of making it as an actor on Broadway. Unfortunately when he got to New York his aunt told him there was nothing she could do for him. She put him up at the YMCA on West 63rd Street for four nights and then she let Paul stay in her beach house on Long Beach.

At first Paul had a hard time fitting in to the Manhattan 1st Ward. There were so many law students and people with busy schedules and stressful work situations. Eventually Paul got used to the Manhattan 1st Ward and made a good friend in Bishop Cottam.

Bishop Cottam was very friendly. When he had free time he would go on walks with me, or we'd go to movies, or he'd have me over for dinner where we'd play with the children. I was financially strapped and he'd lend me money to get by on.

Paul's acting career never took off but he found something far more valuable in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Paul says that now he feels the Spirit and does what is right. He stays away from violence and doesn't watch TV that much (except an occasional movie on the movie channel or a game on the sports channel). He comes to Church on Sundays and says, "I do my best."

JOSE NUNEZ

Testimony May 23, 2006

I became a member of the Church when I was 13 years old (March 24, 2006 in Los Mina, Ozama Stake in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic). Nevertheless, it wasn't until I was 17 years old that I started to feel a great desire to know the mysteries of God. Two friends and I started studying the Book of Mormon. This book helped me to come out of the darkness and gave me a great desire to study the scriptures to know the will of God.



I left on a mission without knowing that difficult situations would be coming, only with a desire to be a useful instrument in the work of God. I will never forget the experiences that I lived through there; the impact that was left on me from the faith of those I was teaching. It is true that the Lord's spirit has filled the earth. God requires hearts and minds willing to serve him.

I have had a few callings, like being a counselor in the Young Mens, serving in the Sunday School and serving in the Elders Quorum, being an executive secretary for the ward, being a full time missionary (2002-2004), being a stake missionary and a ward missionary, and serving as an orientation teacher.

I am grateful to live in this dispensation, in the fullness of times; I have been blessed by God in all things. I don't have everything I want, but I love all I have, and one of those things is the Church.

AGNES MARTINEZ

by Jenny Reeder

"I was a bit arrogant and rude when the missionaries came," Agnes recalled. She had attended the Holy Rosary church as usual on Sunday, but had returned "feeling very empty." It was 1991, and Agnes retreated to the bedroom of her first-floor apartment in Spanish Harlem where she still lives today. She knelt down and said a prayer.

I asked God if he could show me the right way to go, what I needed to do, because I'm not getting anything out of being in church." The next day, two Mormon missionaries showed up for a meeting they had scheduled with her oldest daughter, Elena. But she

wasn't home. "Yep. She 'juke'd' them," Agnes recalled, using the word New York missionaries employ for a missed appointment. "I know all the terms," she explained.

"They were riding bicycles, and they had been on the other side of town." Agnes invited the tired missionaries in to take a breather. "I took them in the kitchen and said, I hope you don't mind, I'm doing some breakfast. Would you like to join me? And then I became very sarcastic and rude. And I said, 'Tell me something I don't know.'" And so, over French toast, the missionaries started teaching Agnes about the Church. This first meeting, they taught her about the restoration of the gospel.

"You went on a mission, right?" Agnes asked me. I replied that I did. "So there's a thing that you guys do with a piece of paper and then you cut it into pieces and then it becomes a cross and all." I told her I hadn't done that before. Agnes was surprised. "You've got to learn that one!" She explained to me how it worked: They took the scattered pieces that had been cut away, and "when they put it together they said, 'See, we spoke about this, and that,'" arranging the pieces on the table. "And we told you about this, and you said this." And then it turns out to be a cross." Their object lesson impressed Agnes enough that she agreed to listen to their message. The missionaries taught her about prophets and apostles, and "something happened. A peacefulness came over me from within." Agnes told the missionaries that she had been hoping for "something to come into my life that would teach me the truth, and I guess you guys are it."

The missionaries started visiting regularly—Agnes made waffles for their discussions. After only a few visits, Agnes had decided to be baptized. The day of her baptismal interview was nerve racking. "Scared to death," she started to have second thoughts. "Had I really felt the Spirit? Did I really understand?" A janitor at the church on 65th and Columbus where her interview was going to take place noticed Agnes' unease. Lucy, the chapel's janitor, encouraged Agnes to talk openly about it and pray about it. Agnes decided to face her fears, and walked into the interview with Stake President Stone and Bishop Gunther. She asked them if they could have a prayer; as they prayed, her fears went away; they "had been more interference than truth," she realized, and she went ahead and joined the Church.

Harlem, where Agnes became a member in 1991, was also the place of her birth. As a young child, Agnes would wander the paths of the market—the open-air market—absorbing its sounds and smells. She would imagine that she was in Puerto Rico, where her family had come from. In those days, Agnes recalled, the apartments were only four or five stories high, and everybody took care of everybody. But the cost became too high for Agnes' mom—a single parent—and so they moved out to the South Bronx when Agnes was five to save money.

In the Bronx, Agnes attended a Catholic school, St. Pius, where the nuns forbade her to speak Spanish. Her mom worked and her beloved grandmother, Nicoletta, took care of her. While in her early teens, riots broke out in the Bronx. A young black girl, apparently high on LSD, had fallen off the roof of a police station and died; some of the community blamed the police. "They would knock on your doors, make noise in the hallways," Agnes remembered. "They would throw things so that it would sound really loud, and I was a little girl so I would stay in my room. And have a doll. My grandma made a dress for the doll out of one of my old dresses that I couldn't fit into any longer. That was my comforting zone." Her grandmother was so frightened that she was sent to Puerto Rico. Then Agnes and her mother moved to Jersey; they all left before the riots ended.

Agnes did the rest of her growing up around Jersey City. Eventually she married Jose Rivera and they moved into a house in rural New Jersey. "Greenwood Lake was a township. It's like country. It is country. I loved it." Agnes and Jose had four children; Agnes felt her husband was working too hard for the family, so when the opportunity came up, she earned a degree in social work in a pilot program with Cornell University at the local community college. Then she began working as a social worker for Head Start. Jose wasn't happy. "He wanted to be the sole provider. We argued about me working. I won. He walked away; he didn't want to stay with me because I was working. But then he saw that it was the right thing to do." Within a week they had made up, but only a few days later Jose died of a massive heart attack while at work. The community rallied around her, but in the end she had to move back to Jersey to make ends meet.

Agnes married again and had three more kids, making seven in total. Unlike her first



~ AGNES MARTINEZ ~

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marriage, which for the most part had been a pleasant experience, after a few years her second marriage turned sour. “He put a bow and arrow to my head in front of the police,” Agnes explained, adding, “I think that was time enough to go.” She took her kids and fled to a shelter in Harlem. The husband was arrested but released the next day. “There were not too many laws against domestic violence in the state of New Jersey,” she noted.

Agnes wanted to be back on her feet again, but the shelter felt like an obstacle to her autonomy.

I was willing to commute to go to work. But they said, no, they can't help me if I did that. So I had to leave my job; I had to leave everything. I had to go into a shelter that was very, very dangerous. We had to walk through a morgue in order to go into an area to make a phone call, so they could open up that floor.

But Agnes was determined to get out of the shelter. She learned how the shelter func-

tioned, became involved with many of the shelter's programs, and soon found a nearby apartment that was available, and left after only nine months. “Most stories that I've heard, they stay for a year or two. I was only there for nine months. I was out.” Then she was hired by the same shelter to teach people about how to become self-sufficient. Agnes reflected on some of the difficulties that have arisen from that experience. “I didn't want to deal with anybody that was a man...I didn't get involved with another man, and I still haven't. I'd rather be alone. No offense to no one.”

The experience has also made Agnes more involved in community action. When in the shelter she wasn't allowed to tell her extended family where she was located, but they saw her on the TV news, yelling at the head of Welfare for not listening to her complaints about the management of shelters. Today, she also works to improve the quality of living in the buildings where she lives. Agnes is also a member of the “Harlem Bridge-builders,” a group of members who represent the Church at a community level. “It was difficult to be a member of the Church here in Harlem” at the time of her baptism. “It's different now. Then, though, we had all sorts of persecution: people calling us fascists, slave-drivers, and bigamists on the street and in the community board meetings. I wouldn't trade their insults. I am proud to be a Mormon.”

Now Agnes is surrounded by her grandchildren. “You love offsprings of your children like no other love that you can really explain. You appreciate life a lot more.” Agnes looks back philosophically on her past experiences. “I really feel that I had to go through whatever I had to go through in order to find the truth.” Throughout her entire adult life in New Jersey, missionaries never knocked on her door, never talked to her on the street. “I see all the missionaries now in Jersey; I bump into them all the time.”

Agnes recollects that time when she finally did meet the missionaries. “They left me wanting to learn more, wanting to understand better. Wanting to face up to what my responsibilities are. To me and to Him. And it's hard. At times I pray and I say, ‘You know, you're really a tough cookie.’ Other times I just sit down and talk with Him. Like when I'm really frustrated or angry or disappointed. That's what I do. I like speaking with Him.”

ARTHUR SHERRY

by Tom Plummer

Arthur Sherry's path to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was one of searching and experimentation. His parents divorced when he was 13-years old and left Arthur confused and fragile. He lived with his father, who was a submarine officer in the navy. Although his father taught him wood-working, fishing and rudiments of navigation, he was “distant and didn't like to talk much.” Arthur turned to drugs for comfort.

When his father retired as a rear admiral, Arthur moved from New London, Connecticut to Rockland, New York where he enrolled in Rockland Community College. Arthur recalls that even before this move, he had felt “a connection with faith—that there was a greater power—some spiritual level to life.”

He remembers the first time he said a heartfelt prayer: “I had a bottle of slow gin and was sitting on the side of the bed thinking about that higher power.” I had a strong desire to know.

Soon after he was sitting in the college hangout—the Sub—when some born-again Christians came in. “They were very friendly and I liked the spirit about them. They were just regular kids, not out to be missionaries, but firm in their beliefs,” Arthur recalls. “They invited me to go to a Friday night rock'n roll worship service at the Church of the Nazarene in Oradell, New Jersey. I condescendingly agreed but didn't really plan to go.”

That Friday night he finished a discussion with a professor and headed for his motorcycle where the born-again Christians were waiting for him. They were excited that he was going with them. He says, “I was caught up in the spirit and the love, which was a different kind of love than I felt at home or with my friends.” He sat on a rock with a guy in the band, who said, “I don't know where this is in the Bible, but Jesus says, ‘Behold I stand at the door and knock.’”

“He said it with such conviction, it went to my heart,” Arthur says. On another occasion he was “caught up in the spirit—an overpowering feeling of love, a touch of the spirit.” He performed with the group on his guitar a couple of times and wrote a song

about Job, his trials and his redemption.

He had a dream: “I was riding along on my motorcycle with a girl on the back. We were on a winding road and we had a spill. I pulled the bike off to the side of the road, and we stood on a little bridge to gather our senses. I flagged down the first car that came along, a white station wagon and asked the driver to take us to Davies’ farm, so I could call my father. At the end of the dream came a clear admonition: “If you forget about me, this is going to happen.”

Arthur did forget about Jesus: “I became involved with a girl and went back to my old ways. A couple of months later, I was riding my motorcycle down a winding road with a girl on the back. We had a spill. We got a ride in a white station wagon to the hospital.”

He decided to go back to church, but he couldn’t find his Christian friends and was unsure where the church was located. He took a leap of faith and drove in the general direction deciding that God would get him there. He came to a Y in the road and took one way . A Volvo coming the other way almost hit him. It was painted with day-glow colors and had on the trunk was this sign: “Jesus Loves You.” Arthur turned and followed the car directly to the church.

He went to this church and several other churches, but he didn’t feel like he understood the gospel as it was presented. Then he made visits to several Christian camps, one in Ithaca, one in Buffalo and ended up at the base of Pike’s Peak with the Children of God, 60 people under 25 who lived in the mountains. Arthur was 19. They studied the

Bible and preached that, “all were together and had all things in common.” It was like living the United Order. He saw it as a tight-knit, loving group. They believed in their prophet, Moses David and principals of the Bible. He saw the power of faith work among them. The only way they received food was leftovers at stores and restaurants. Once there was a shortage and the group prayed for food. The next day a hunter dropped off two deer. There were many experiences like this proving Lehi’s prophecy: “By small things, great things come to pass.”

He had a dream where he was in a boat rammed by a whale and fell into the water. A man named Abinidi pulled him out but he fell back into the water.

When winter came, the cabin could not support all of the commune, so on order of the prophet, Arthur left for home. He heard of a colony of Children of God in Ellenville, New York. He visited and a man named Abinidi was there. He was tempted to stay, but his mother talked him out of it: “I thought of the dream. I fell back into the water.

It took another couple of years to find the missionaries. Arthur sang with the All Souls Unitarian Church, which held new-age type meetings. They held classes in the occult, facial reading and tarot cards. On one occasion they had a meeting with diverse groups of believers: Hare Krishna, Buddhists and three Mormon missionaries. He says, “I avoided the Mormons, because I’d heard about them. On my way out the door I felt I ought to give the Mormons a chance, so I sat down with a cup of coffee and spoke with Elder Elden Christensen. An hour later, I left



~ ARTHUR SHERRY ~

THEY WERE VERY FRIENDLY AND I LIKED THE SPIRIT ABOUT THEM. THEY WERE JUST REGULAR KIDS, NOT OUT TO BE MISSIONARIES, BUT FIRM IN THEIR BELIEFS.

with an appointment and a gold copy of the BOOK OF MORMON. The appointment was in mid-October, 1977, and he was baptized December 24, 1977.

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