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Amy Nelson
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Cross-Cultural Conversion Narratives: An American Missionary in Taichung,
Taiwan

A Thesis

Presented to the
Department of English
Brigham Young University

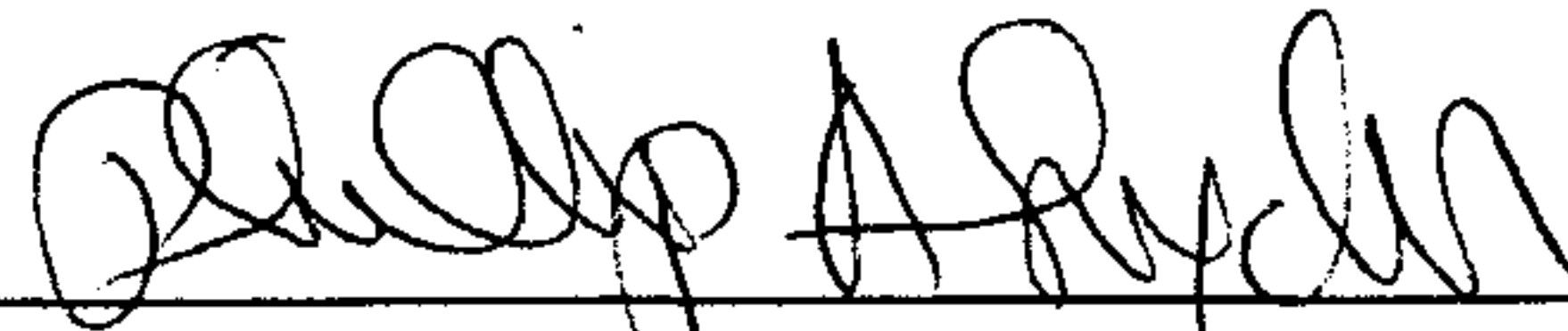
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by

Amy Nelson

August 1998

This thesis by Amy Nelson is accepted in its present form by the Department of English of Brigham Young University as satisfying the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.



Phillip A. Snyder, Committee Chair

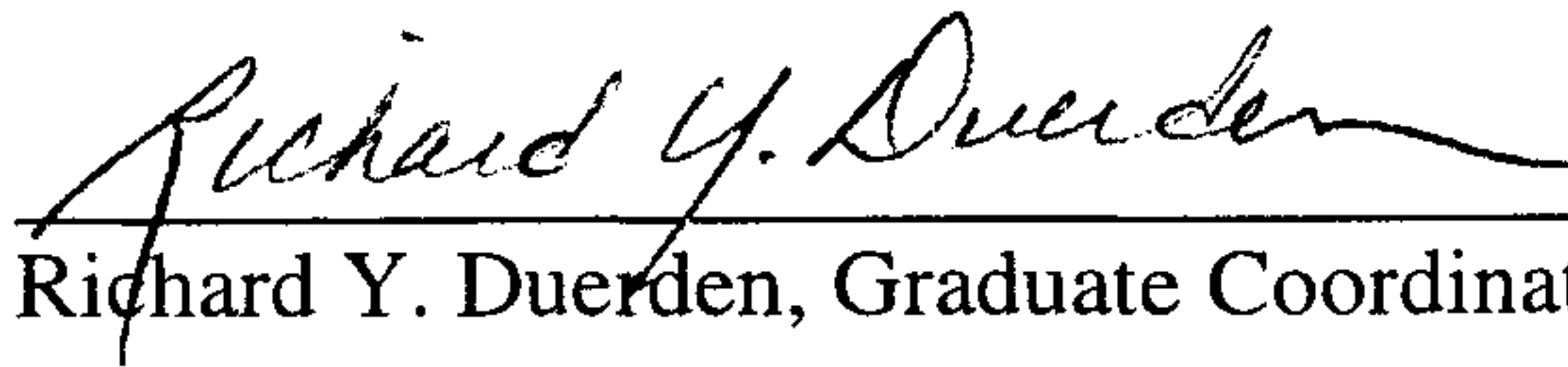


Eric A. Eliason, Committee Member



Jill Terry Rudy, Committee Member

10 July 1998
Date



Richard Y. Duerden, Graduate Coordinator

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**CROSS CULTURAL CONVERSION NARRATIVES: AN AMERICAN
MISSIONARY IN TAICHUNG, TAIWAN**

Telling the Story My Way

*I hope they call me on a mission/When I have grown a foot or two. I hope by then
I will be ready/To teach and preach and work as missionaries do. I hope that I
can share the gospel/with those who want to know the truth./I want to be a
missionary/And serve and help the Lord while I am in my youth.*

Lyrics taken from the song “I Hope They
Call Me on a Mission,” anthologized in the
LDS Primary Children’s Songbook.

Missionary Development

I was baptized a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when I was eight years old. You could say I was sort of born into it, as my father, mother, seven other siblings, and both sets of grandparents are all members as well. I grew up in a small, rural town in Southern Idaho where vegetation is almost as sparse as non-LDS families. As children we were never quite sure which denomination these families belonged to: that they were *not* Mormon was the only distinction we made. As I was growing up my parents saw to it that I attended the three-hour long Church services every Sunday, the weekly youth activities, and our local four-year seminary program. After

completing high school, I chose to pursue my academic studies at two Church-owned and operated institutions of higher learning, first at Ricks College and then Brigham Young University. But it seemed that the pinnacle of my Church education would take place when my twenty first birthday finally enabled me to become a missionary for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

My parents taught my brothers and me about missionary work at a very young age and anything we forgot was repeated every Sunday in Primary when all the children met together and sang songs like “I Hope They Call Me on a Mission” and “Jesus Wants Me for a Sunbeam.” We soon advanced to Sunday school where our teachers would constantly encourage us to share the gospel with our friends and neighbors, thus instilling in us the desire to one day become a full-time missionary for the LDS Church.

Probably better known to people in most parts of the world by its nickname, the Mormons, the LDS Church began as a congregation of six members in Upper New York State in 1830, but has now grown to over ten million strong. Most of this growth has occurred within the last twenty-five years, due in large part to the Church’s concerted and well orchestrated missionary effort. There are approximately 56,500 missionaries serving in countries all over the world, and within the last twenty-five years in particular, the Church’s population has not only welcomed many new converts into the church, but has welcomed converts from many different countries and nationalities as more Church members now reside outside of the United States than within its boundaries.

While in theory the decision to serve a mission is completely voluntary on the part

of the individual, Church leaders strongly encourage every young man who is both worthy and physically able to serve for the allotted two years. The female members of the Church are not held to the same obligation but are allowed to serve if they desire. My parents followed this law to the letter: when Church leaders strongly encouraged missions for men, my parents strongly insisted. From the time they were still shooting marbles, my six brothers all had plans to serve missions, and only the youngest still waits to do so. As the first of my parent's only two daughters, however, I was neither told to go or stay, but as my twenty first birthday neared, I had already made the decision: a mission was not for me.

I can't remember why I so opposed serving a mission at the start, perhaps because I never quite understood this repulsion myself. Missions were no mystery to me, as my four older brothers were replete with stories of the “good old mission days.” As the two years ended and each brother returned home from his different assignment, missionary folklore seemed to fall from their lips as we flipped through stacks of picture albums and I fingered the tattered mission mementos. I remember once when Mark became so frustrated he actually yelled at his investigator while serving in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Kurt related his run-in with a topless housewife while tracting a small neighborhood in Sweden. The two travelling missionaries were also in Gregg’s mission as they left Japan and spent a week in Taiwan, their travel plans only foiled by the unsuspecting ward clerk who mailed both weeks’ statistics to the mission president during the same week. Of course my brother Brett, the social worker, was replete with stories of wayward

companions whom he eventually managed to save from certain dismissal from the cold Canadian frontier mission. Although I often listened to their stories with rapt attention, perhaps it was an inner desire to be different from my brothers, or an inner fear of being labeled a religious fanatic, which spurred my decision to stay home. Maybe I thought it would be too taxing, both physically and mentally, or that preaching the gospel was just plain unattractive. However I defined the real impetus to stay, it was the thought of donning a dress every day for eighteen months and my long-time fear of being called to serve in South America which solidified the decision for me. And, despite all other factors, I had just been begun my Master's studies at Brigham Young University and wasn't about to trade my academic pursuits for some gigantic boa constrictors, a grass hut, and a few little buddies to keep my large intestine company.

But meanwhile, as my younger brother prepared to serve his mission, I began to reevaluate this worst-case scenario. While the chances to end up in the South American Amazon still loomed, the world was large, and I wanted to see it. This mission could be my chance to use the Russian I had majored in at college, or better yet, my ticket to my beloved and exotic Italy, where I would have the opportunity to not only serve my Church, but become better acquainted with the antiquity I had only read about in my literature studies. And as I thought about how a mission to Italy could further these same studies on my return to the university, the whole proposition became most appealing. *Ah, yes, I thought to myself: Venice would be kind to me.*

Perhaps it will be; I have yet to visit. The weeks before my call arrived were

filled with visions of such happy European vacations: places of a certain familiarity and places of personal interest. The morning I opened my call, however, brought all new visions to my head as I sat in my apartment in Provo, Utah, and tried to stare the words of my call into oblivion:

Dear Sister Nelson,

You are hereby called to serve as a missionary of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. You are assigned to labor in the Taiwan, Taichung Mission. It is anticipated that you will serve for a period of 18 months.

You should report to the Missionary Training Center (MTC) in Provo, Utah on Wednesday 14 February 1996. You will learn the discussions in Mandarin.

Somehow, someone had made a big mistake. A year and a half in Taiwan, and I didn't even like Asia. Of course I couldn't truthfully admit my dislike as I knew almost less about the island than did my young nephew who, on hearing where I was going, promptly informed me that was where all his toys were made. Although I did learn it was religiously stable (the first LDS missionaries had arrived on the island about forty years earlier and our Church had built a temple in Taipei), this knowledge did little to allay my fears of living there for eighteen months; it was almost unimaginable. I wondered what kind of members could live in Taiwan, people so far away from mainstream Mormonism, and how they would respond to me as an American missionary. And although learning Chinese intimidated me as well, it wasn't so much I wouldn't be able to understand what

they were *saying*, but that I wouldn't be able to understand what they *meant*. Most of all, I just longed for something more familiar. I longed to be the sister missionary who was bored in the MTC Russian classes, or the newly arrived missionary in Moscow with the phenomenal grasp of grammar and vocabulary. I didn't long for the humility I knew would accompany my Asian experience and the communication barrier I faced.

My attitude toward Taiwan was to get worse before it got better, however. Since my younger brother and I received our calls on the same day, it was only fitting we both received our deadly disease shots together. The list of our combined shots for Sao Paulo, Brazil and Taichung, Taiwan seemed to reach high into the teens, and while I assured myself there were no grass huts, the words "serving in more primitive areas" from my call filled me with apprehension and uneasiness. I could only bide my time and anticipate the worst. My mother began to stalk the sale racks shopping for us both, while my brother and I sat together at home making marks in our new leather-bound copies of the Bible and the Book of Mormon, and said good-bye to friends and family, and to a few of those rare people who are both. In the traditional LDS fashion, a week or two before missionaries leave for the MTC, the first hour of our normal Church service becomes a "farewell meeting" in which departing missionaries either bestow some final words of wisdom on the congregation, or just admit how scared they really are to leave home. My brother and I were saved from a similar fate by a monstrous Idaho snowstorm the night before which piled enough snow in everyone's driveway to cancel all Church meetings. Although we never shared a farewell meeting and bid the congregation good-bye, we still

left for the MTC; my brother a short three days later, and I, two weeks behind him.

I entered the MTC on February 14, 1996, to be exact. When I first arrived, I was put into a district of other missionaries who would be leaving for Taiwan the same day I would, and then our group spent almost every minute of the next two months together attending various Chinese language classes. These classes were scheduled in three hour increments, three times a day, and usually consisted of me and the other seven missionaries in my district making strange chirps and guttural noises which our kindly teachers, all of them returned missionaries from Taiwan themselves, allowed us to believe was Chinese. While learning language basics, we also simultaneously tried to memorize a set of six standardized discussions, first in English and later in Chinese, which every missionary was required to know and teach. Although we were given one day each week to do our laundry, write letters home, clean our room, and enjoy a little free time, we had absolutely no time alone, as mission rules state missionaries must always stay with their designated same sex companion twenty-four hours a day for safety and other reasons. And while the MTC is full of missionaries all dressed in white shirts and ties or dresses, you could make friends in the sea of faces by reading their nametags to be worn the duration of their missions: the men were always elders, the women sisters.

Although the stories of Taiwan our teachers occasionally told us built my excitement to actually experience the island, I still wasn't quite as excited as the rest of my district appeared. Some days I longed to go anywhere but Asia. Whenever I notice a Russian speaking district pass by, I would try and strike up a conversation with them. If

the encounter didn't serve to make me feel a little better about my awful Chinese, I figured our chat at least made them feel worse about their terrible Russian. I either gave the Italian-bound missionaries a wistful look or a dirty glare, depending on how my Chinese was that day. But as the two months of language classes passed by in a blur interspersed with the MTC's Lucky Charms, chicken cordon bleu and a few hours in the gym, I found myself not just anxious to leave the MTC, but excited to enter Taiwan. As my Chinese seemed to be improving daily, and we were constantly learning more about Taiwanese culture and customs, my desire to understand the people was greatly heightened. And then at ten o'clock in the morning of April 17, 1996, my district and I boarded a plane at the Salt Lake airport: a mere thirteen hours later, we were watching the Atlantic ocean become smaller and smaller, and the lights of the Taipei runway become brighter and brighter.

Our mission president, President Koerner, met us at the airport, and as we commenced to travel south to Taichung and mission headquarters, he told us his story. Although he had served a mission in Taiwan many years ago while still a young man, he had been living in Logan, Utah, practicing dentistry when he was called by The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and asked to serve as a mission president in Taichung for the standard, three year increment. As the call was totally unexpected, the Koerner's immediately sold their dental practice and their home, and then he, his wife who spoke less than 10 words of Chinese, and his sixteen-year-old son who wanted to return home before he even left it, moved to Taiwan, about six months before our arrival. As I was to

discover in the next few months, President Koerner had come to Taiwan with some tough shoes to fill. The previous mission president and his family had resided in Asia for several years before they were called to serve as mission presidents. His Chinese was impeccable and, not only could he understand what the Chinese people said, he could understand the Chinese people. As we remained in Taichung for training the next few days, I noticed that President Koerner spoke good Chinese as well, but seemed much more comfortable when speaking English with the non-native missionaries and a lot more comfortable spending time with them.

At the end of our two days in Taichung I met my new companion, Sister Leo, the first of several native Taiwanese companions. Although her English was pretty good and my Chinese was slowly getting better, we often had a hard time understanding each other, not only the words we both spoke, but how those words were spoken and what they represented to both of us. The communication barrier on both levels was just as frightening as I had feared, but we were only together for one month before I was transferred to another part of the island and another native companion. As my second companion, Sister Wang, had recently returned to Taiwan from studies at Brigham Young University, she was much easier for me to understand, and it was much easier for her to understand me. Although we constantly spoke Chinese while serving as companions, she spoke the best English in our mission barring the native English speakers. As my ability to speak and interact with Chinese people improved, so too did my understanding of Chinese culture and customs. But just at the moment I began to confuse independence

with intelligence, I was given the opportunity to learn the difference.

In March of 1997, almost a year after arriving in Taiwan, I experienced a severe case of appendicitis and underwent removal surgery. As surgery left me unable to proselyte, President Koerner suggested that I remain in the mission office and produce a book of Chinese LDS conversion narratives. Shortly after my arrival to the mission office, he sat down with me and related several conversion stories he had heard and noted as quite remarkable, stories mainly related to him by missionaries and other members of the Church in Taiwan. He then asked me to begin collecting other conversion experiences and write them up into a book to be used as a proselytizing tool in the conversion of the Chinese people, as well as in building missionaries' testimonies.

A month later, as the project neared completion, both President Koerner and I had become quite excited and satisfied with the project results. Three days before I finished the book and was preparing to leave the office and move to another part of the island, I was sitting with Sister Wang, my former companion who was now serving as the project's translator, discussing one of the stories in particular when she casually asked, "Why did you write the story from the American missionary's point of view? His Chinese companion was the more experienced missionary. How come you didn't write it from his point of view?" She did not pose the question in an offensive or reprimanding way, but her words seemed to open up a conduit of thought for me, and one question began to lead to many, many others. At the moment of inquisition, however, her question became overshadowed by an even larger one: Why had I avoided speaking with that

Chinese missionary altogether?

At first, I tried to dismiss the matter as I remembered this particular American missionary and his more than thorough recount of the experience. I had already spoken with the convert herself as well and felt that the information gathered was adequate for composing the story. There was also a very stringent time constraint: the entire project was scheduled to be completed in just one month's time. Even as I told myself it wasn't feasible to interview *everybody*, I also admitted that collecting stories from American missionaries had been much easier as well as enjoyable, as I didn't have to translate Chinese over the phone, and I was also allowed to speak English for a change. But the project had already been completed and, as I was transferred and began regular proselytizing work again, the questions Sister Wang had raised were soon forgotten and left unanswered.

The questions raised by the project resurfaced foremost in my mind, however, after I arrived home and continued my English studies at Brigham Young University. These questions only seemed to raise many larger questions, with particular regard to the ethics and methodology of the project. How could I as an American write a reliable account of a Chinese personal conversion experience? How much of how I chose to present the narratives exemplified the way I had been taught to communicate? How do people in a society which doesn't highly value the art of personal expression share personal experiences? These questions led me to examine other ethical questions as well: What was our real motive for collecting the stories? Who possessed rightful ownership

of the stories? If my job was to collect Chinese conversion narratives, why were they first written in English by me and then translated back into Chinese? Ethical questions of how to define culture and religion also arose: Do the narratives I wrote help Chinese people better understand the Chinese LDS experience, or do they better help Chinese people understand an American missionary's fears and biases of their culture? Are the Chinese people who read the stories going away with a better understanding of American culture or of their own? After I began to attending various folklore classes, other questions about the uses and motives of folklore in general began to concern me: If forms of folklore, particularly the conversion narrative, articulate the feelings of a group toward an event or person described, where are the boundaries of that group determined, and how might their reactions to specific events and persons be influenced by the presentation of that event or person? Can folklore also be used as an outlet of a group or individual's fear and misunderstandings of another culture?

As I tried to make connections between these questions and my experiences collecting and editing a book of conversion narratives this thesis was born. Barre Toelken's observation that many people, when working for "a fair pluralism in America have remained generally ignorant of their own worldview and its effects upon their own reactions to others, including those they have sought to 'help'" (267) sounded harsh to me at first, but as I was able to accept his critique of what seemed my own experience as a missionary and apply it to the project I had just finished, my thesis began to take shape. This thesis has helped me recognize my own embedded, ethnocentric values and biases,

and has proven indeed, as Toelken notes, that people are taught by their societies “*how to see*”(265). Not only does the conversion narrative as a text serve several functions within different cultures, close analysis of the collecting process and performance of these narratives serves to reveal both the collector and tale-teller’s psychosocial pressures and intrinsic value systems. It has been interesting to note the differences and surprising similarities between the two cultures and their communication modes, their definition of the narrative, as well as their differing communicative values. This thesis is more than just an intense look into the LDS psyche, as it addresses even the basic questions of narrative, communication, and cross-cultural understanding.

Project Development

In my own naïve way I was very much concerned from the beginning that these stories be as truthful as possible. My own sense of responsibility to at least try and make text represent event was perhaps heightened by the sense of “truth-telling” inherent within the natures of autobiography and biography. According to theorist Elizabeth Bruss, “autobiography’s fundamental conventions [can be seen as] a series of promises” (qtd. in Couser 36), and although Marxist critics may be uncomfortable with the idea of autobiography as a “pact” or contract, I personally like Bruss’s stance. Although I do feel the reader and text should take a more prominent place in literature than the author traditionally held, I also agree with Jeffrey Wallen as he responds to Roland Barthes’ theory with the following: “A too quick acceptance of the ‘death of the author’ only blinds us to the ways in which the author continues to function and to all the questions which

these functions raise” (51). Wallen goes on to suggest that an “abdication of interpretative responsibility by biographers” leads to the blurring between fact and fiction, and ignores questions of meaning and literature (51). As an idealist I still see the need for literature to instill a feeling of trust in readers, especially in the genres of autobiography and biography, as well as folklore collecting and analysis of personal experience narratives. As I noticed the impact that communicative forms and motives often have on a biographer’s ability to portray a “truthful” representation of any subject or self, however, I discovered just how quickly the external can taint inherent aims at representing that purity.

I feel this sense of responsibility was also heightened because of my role as a missionary. As missionaries are taught that obedience is imperative to success, these teachings work to hopefully further one’s integrity and instill in every missionary the need to gain God’s approval. As I was still recovering from surgery, President Koerner commented several times on how strange it was that he had decided to move me to the office and complete the project days before I was even taken ill, and his confession served to convert me further to the project. I felt a great need to interpret my illness as God’s approval of my work and of the project itself, inasmuch as I would have greatly resented being forced to trade my precious proselytizing time to complete the project had I been healthy and able to perform everyday missionary work.

As I came to view this project as one ordained of God I was naturally concerned with representing the stories as ‘truthfully’ as possible, an attitude exemplified in the

short blurb I included at the beginning of the book: “These interviews were very thorough in nature, and the important events and basic storylines of each story were written according to the content of these interviews. The writer was very careful to follow the storylines with exactness, and included all the details . . . given” (project preface). Through precise explanation of the literary license I had taken, I also tried to justify to the reader any and all changes I made to the actual oral narratives recited to me.

Another attempt to validate my interpretation and presentation of these narratives is exemplified by the inclusion of scripture citations at the beginning of each story. These citations validate my writing inasmuch as they connect the narratives to a higher source of authority which not only forces my audience to value the individual narratives more, but respect the project in general.

The basic collection process described below was documented in a personal interview on October 1997, between myself and English Professor Phillip Snyder. President Koerner or other missionaries related to me most of the stories I collected. When starting a new story, the first thing I would do is sit down and make a list of people I knew or thought might have something to do with the story, and then I would call most of the names on the list until I felt I had an adequate feel for the narrative and enough pages of dictation to write it up. It was easier for me to collect from my English speaking informants as the need to translate was gone, but I also found a distinction between the Chinese members and the Chinese missionaries. Whether it was their interaction with the non-native missionaries or their desire for missionary work as a whole to succeed, the

Chinese missionaries were, in general, more willing and enthusiastic to relate their stories to me and help me in any way I might need.

A typical conversation would follow the following format: I would call and ask the person to tell me the story, translating the Chinese in my head and then typing their responses into the computer in English and interrupting them when I didn't understand the content of what they had just said, or I wanted to ask them questions based on the particular story's thematics. For instance, if I was writing a story about parental opposition to a young adult trying to join the Church, I would stop and interrupt their narrative to find out the parent's response to everything that was said or done by the youth, whether my informant felt it was an important detail to include or not.

So that's how we did that. I would just type up the whole [conversation], just pages and pages of manuscript, of just what they said to me, and then I would go back through and reread the stories. So with the English missionaries it was a little bit easier because it was in English coming over the phone. (Interview 10/1/7)

In our interview I continued to describe the collection process to Snyder as follows:

After I interviewed people on the phone, I'd get everything in the computer and then I'd go back through and I'd pick out the parts of the story that were really important, I guess to me, you know, the important climatic point, or the important things they had to overcome, and I'd focus on those and I'd do those kind of like a scene at a time . . . And so, as I was talking to these people, I tried to use the

experiences that seemed to be the most, the parts of the stories that seemed to be the most important to them, and those are the ones I just focus on. (Interview 10/1/14)

A treatment of our motives is imperative here, as it was the project's motives which ultimately determined collection criteria. When the president and I first sat down and discussed the project motives and goals, we decided on the following three: to build missionaries' faith; to build members' faith; and to help investigators view the gospel not as a collection of vague concepts, but as problem-solving, life-changing principles. Missionaries would often meet Chinese people who, partly because of translation discrepancies and the elevated language of holy writ (a problem much exaggerated by their non-Christian backgrounds), couldn't understand the scriptures, and even if they did, they often had trouble making connections between what they read and their own lives. I selected most of the stories based on their content and didactic meaning. When faced with two stories illustrating parental opposition to baptism, I would choose the story which contained the more extreme opposition and then find another story which focused on a different obstacle or challenge to conversion. In this way, no matter who or what the teaching situation, the missionaries could turn to this collection and find a relevant example. I also created the topical index in order to make the book more user friendly, to benefit our missionary audience by outlining which stories illustrated which principles or concepts, and how these stories could better be used as a teaching tool.

Narrative Development and Plot Synopses

“A Mustard Seed.” Although the topical index summarizes the first story, “A Mustard Seed,” as “A Peng-Hu member’s faith to be baptized,” it actually tells the story of a missionary who is struggling with his assignment to begin preaching the gospel on a remote island off the coast of Taiwan and China called Peng-Hu. The missionary’s faith is eventually strengthened as he meets and converts the member mentioned above. Perhaps mostly because of our close relationship, my main informant for this story was the American elder who is represented by the narrator in the story. The subsequent confidence I had in my ability predict his situational responses both as a missionary and as an individual made him an easy character to develop, and thus he becomes a major presence in the story. And while the member related only the bare facts of her conversion story to me, the colorful conversation which existed between myself and this particular missionary seems to continue into the written text.

While it is true this elder did tell me he had been discouraged at the time of the story, I decided to develop this theme in such detail throughout the story, thus changing the focus from the member to the missionary. And how could I resist the irony of the struggling missionary who is taught by his own investigator? For example, in the first scene of this story the speaker picks up a book with the word “faith” in the title which prompts him to think about faith and analyze his lack of it. While my informant did mention experiencing a lack of faith, he never mentioned picking up a book which caused him to go into a long meditation about faith and the meeting and teaching of the

young lady who was to be baptized. However, this fictitious experience in the first scene serves as the glue which binds the whole story together, thematically as well as eventually. It triggers the missionary's musing, prompts him to action when he leaves his reverie, and ties the story together in the end as a didactic teaching tool. This analysis serves as an example of how in reality, a "pact" between reader and writer is not often achieved because of the inherent structure and form to which a genre must give heed and ideas must be communicated.

"The Thawing." President Koerner again suggested that I collect the story "The Thawing" from a sister missionary who was serving in our mission at the time. The story first relates her and her brother's simultaneous conversions to the Church and then both her mother and father's. This sister missionary was my chief informant, as her mother referred me to her husband and he did not take my project seriously. He ignored all of my messages and consented to a brief telephone conversation only after I caught him at work one night.

"When Hearts Prepare." At first I was stubbornly opposed to collecting "When Hearts Prepare," a story about a group of missionaries who, through their diligent work, faith, and prayers, become successful in finding a man willing to listen to the gospel. I felt the story blatantly focused more on the personal efforts and righteousness of the missionaries than on the convert's own narrative, and I felt its presence was defeating the purpose as well as the structure of our project. This story is controlled by missionaries on another level as well, as the story's main informant, the convert, was almost completely

unwilling to express his narrative to me. I tried to follow his scanty details, later fleshing out these details with narratives collected from the missionaries involved in the situation.

“The Sweetness of the Fruit” and “A Road Prepared.” “The Sweetness of the Fruit” and “A Road Prepared” were both related to me by a single informant in a personal interview. “The Sweetness of the Fruit” relates my informant’s experience as he gives a Book of Mormon to a nonmember acquaintance on a bus, and later discovers that the man and his family have been baptized. “A Road Prepared” tells the story of my informant’s own conversion and his subsequent courage in obeying the standards of the Church during his two years of service in the Taiwanese army. My informant had been a strong, active member of the Church for quite some time, longer than any of my other informants, and had weekly interaction with the missionaries. As he had experienced some rather unusual spiritual events, he had written them down and consequently published them in Church magazines. President Koerner first suggested I talk to this man and gave me a copy of some stories he had already written out. I read through the stories a few times to understand the main points, but as he sat in person and related the stories to me, there were obvious discrepancies between the story he had told me and the written copy. For example, in the written draft the man said that the mob of men approached him just after dark as he was outside lying on the ground thinking. But in the oral interview we held, he told me that he was asleep in his barracks in his cot when the men apprehended him and dragged him off. I decided to use his oral version since I collected it in person, its performance making it more vibrant and alive to me.

“The Search.” “The Search” became a sensational story while this project was in process, and my informants were both willing and varied. The story relates how a nonmember woman who had been investigating the Church for almost three years and her husband take a trip to Utah where both of them are converted and baptized on the same weekend they see the Salt Lake Temple for the first time. They returned home to Taiwan just as I was beginning the project, so I was able to speak with the mother who was quite willing to relate the whole narrative to me. Inasmuch as the Chinese family had been staying in Utah with my former companion’s family, my companion and her family were both very willing to share their parts in the story through both letters and telephone conversations. I was also able to speak with the very first missionary who had met Sister Jyan and began teaching her family the gospel, and I also spoke with other missionaries still serving in the mission who had known her and helped to teach her family the gospel as well.

“The Heart and a Willing Mind.” I first heard “The Heart and a Willing Mind” in a Sunday Church service. President Koerner was implementing a new member-missionary program at the time, and to excite members about sharing the gospel, members would be asked to share stories of their successes. I was intrigued as this member stood and related how she had called up an old friend from years before and asked him if she could invite the missionaries over. She did not know at the time that he had just suffered a bad car accident, and it was in this state of mind that he became receptive to the gospel and was later baptized. As I learned more about this member’s

background as a convert herself, I decided to use her narrative. She came to the office for two personal interviews and was my only informant.

“Small and Simple Things.” The story “Small and Simple Things” is about a young Taiwanese woman who wants to serve a mission, but must first overcome her parent’s opposition not only to the Church in general, but to her desire to serve. She is able to meet the prophet of the Church, Gordon B. Hinckley, as he is in Taiwan for a brief stay and draws strength and faith from his promise that one day she will be able to serve. Sister Wang, the project’s translator, related this story to me, as she had just finished serving with the informant. As the sister missionary was my only informant for the story, I called her several times trying to collect her narrative, but each time she was either too busy or didn’t think the project was very important. She was finally able to record her narrative and send the tape to me. Since I found her account very thorough, the audio tape she recorded for me was my only source for this story.

“A Father’s Truth.” President Koerner suggested I collect the story “A Father’s Truth” and seemed to be rather particular about this one, as he had played a small role in its as well. The story tells of a Taoist priest who is able to overcome tradition and help his two children and himself receive baptism. The convert as well as the missionary who was planning his baptism at the time served as my only informants.

“Coming Back to Him.” “Coming Back to Him” relates the story of a young woman who is reactivated into the Church. I met my informant while recuperating from my surgery in the mission home. She had just arrived as a new missionary, and we

shared a room for two nights. At the time I had not been informed as to all the logistics of the project, but thought her story remarkable. I didn't officially collect her narrative until later when I was able to call her and type it up over the phone.

Thesis Development

Especially because of my role in first collecting these narratives and then presenting them in short story form, I am a large subjective part of this process as a whole. I also realize that my insider status as a Mormon may bring my own objectivity under scrutiny as I analyze aspects of the LDS culture. However, I feel that my role as an outsider to the Chinese culture will aid me in my analysis of this project. As Jan Walsh Hokenson states in response to M. M. Bakhtin's model of intercultural autobiography, "When one is not wholly embedded in a culture, but fluent in different languages, one can see the cultures from without" (107). Although I do not claim fluency in the Chinese culture and communication modes, I feel that my own personal experience living among the Chinese people as well as the research accomplished since my return home have instilled in me greater desire to share the insights I have gained with others. I am comfortable in writing this thesis as an American Mormon who has been deeply and indelibly touched in many ways by the Chinese people and their way of life. This thesis was almost accidental in its conception, but it has answered for me many of the ethical and cultural questions raised by one tiny Chinese woman.

The remainder of my paper will be structured around three different categories: the nature of conversion narratives in both American and Chinese cultures, the collecting

process, and some general implications of my project and analysis. The nature of conversion narratives describes the conversion narrative both by definition and also by function within both American and Chinese cultures. My analysis of the collecting process addresses the roles of both audience and tale-teller and takes an individualistic approach to the study of these roles and their function within the conversion narrative. My last section deals with the Church as a cross-cultural, world-wide entity, and how through a better understanding of communication modes, we can fully utilize conversion narratives according to their several functions.

Analyzing the Nature of Conversion Narratives

When we speak of knowing God, it must be understood with reference to the imperfect comprehension of man; for to know God as he really is, far transcends the powers of man's thoughts, much more of his perception.

John Milton, *The Christian Doctrine*

Definitional Classification

In the 167th Semiannual General Conference of the LDS Church, President Gordon B. Hinckley, the Church's 15th prophet, announced the following observations from the pulpit:

Something, my brothers and sisters, is happening in this Church, something wonderful. As we walk in the small world of our individual wards and branches

we are scarcely aware of it. And yet it is real, and it is tremendous. We are growing. We are expanding. A month from now we will reach the 10 million mark in membership. . . More of our members now live outside the U.S. than in the U.S. (67)

President Hinckley's announcement is certainly exciting to members of the Church all over the world. It is astonishing indeed to note the LDS Church rise from its humble, six-member, homogenous congregation of Upper New York State farmers and become such a large and diverse group of people, as each member hails from various backgrounds and cultural codes to form a folk group which has running through it a linking factor, or as Alan Dundes describes it in *The Study of Folklore*, a "common core of traditions," which every member of the group knows and believes (qtd. in Bauman 99). And what is that common belief? What is the core tradition which binds the members of the LDS Church together in unity? It is the deep and irrefutable belief in a young boy's simple conversion narrative.

From the first time Joseph Smith orally recounted his glorious vision of Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ to the countless times a day missionaries all over the world relate that same story, the conversion narrative seems to be an important tool in helping people from any background and culture gain a testimony of the LDS Church. Inherent in this statement is the persuasive function conversion narratives serve within and without the Latter-day Saint ethnicity, but do these narratives serve the same function for different cultures which collide within this LDS ethnic group? And perhaps an even more relevant

question follows: Is any narrated event even capable of such a goal?

In order to answer either of the two questions posed above, folklorists must first be agreed upon the definition of a conversion narrative. Regardless of its narrowness or breadth, this definition determines which personal narratives can be considered conversion narratives and which narratives must be excluded from this genre. Unfortunately, there has been little done in the field of folkloristics with concern to *defining* conversion narratives as a genre. For example, Peter Stromberg in his book *Language and Self-Transformation*, writes about his experiences gathering Evangelical conversion narratives, as he analyzes both congregational sharing and individual testimonies. Due to the specific focus of his project, Stromberg is not able to address many important questions raised by his research in relation to the development of conversion narratives as a genre in general, and their subsequent ability or inability to express personal experience. Although Eric Eliason's introductory work on LDS conversion narratives as a genre is specific to one religious group's conversion narratives, I think his essay, "Toward the Folkloristic Study of Latter-day Saint Conversion Narratives" addresses the broader question of what counts as a conversion narrative as well. Eliason, taking notes from Neal Lambert and Richard Cracroft's essay "Literary Form and Historical Understanding: Joseph Smith's First Vision," forms their observations about conversion narratives into a specific rubric, using Joseph Smith's own written narrative as a model for other conversion narratives:

Many LDS [Latter-day Saint] conversion narratives share with the Joseph Smith

Story the following sequential main motifs or building blocks:

- 1) Individual finds self in a situation that raises concern about the lack of correct religious knowledge (revival or immigration)
- 2) a long frustrating search for true religion
- 3) an epiphany that suggests the seeker is on the right track
- 4) the adversary's failed dissuasive intervention
- 5) finally, the gift of true religious knowledge and union with God. (7-8)

Eliason's rubric seems based upon the concept of "conversion" as explained in the following definition from the 1989 2nd edition Oxford English Dictionary: "To cause to turn to and embrace a (specified) religious faith, usually implying that the turning is to truth from error or ignorance. (without qualification usually = 'to convert to Christianity')" While this more narrow definition is certainly valid, if indeed all the stories I collected are to be considered conversion narratives, a much broader definition of "conversion" is required. The definition I am seeking is by no means prescriptive, as I am trying to find a definition that is broad enough to merely describe and encompass all of the narratives collected.

While several of the stories included in my collection tend to follow Eliason's pattern, there are also many notable variations. Although in the story "A Father's Truth," the birth of Mr. Wang's daughter and his simultaneous move into fatherhood did raise some religious concerns for him, the event did not spur the beginning of a long, frustrating search, but merely whetted his desire to know the truth. And while four years

passed between the time Mr. Wang heard the truth and was baptized, there was no frantic searching between the initial event of his daughter's birth and his first meeting with the missionaries fourteen years later. Rather than an epiphany (defined within this essay as revelation from God) which confirmed for him he was doing the right thing by meeting with the missionaries, Mr. Wang merely stated there came a day when he knew the gospel to be true. While Mr. Wang feels that the adversary did try to intervene, this opposition was in the form of his father's devotion to Taoism, a belief so strong Mr. Wang never even spoke of his conversion with his father. It was only after his father died that Mr. Wang considered joining the Church, but it is only his realization immediately before baptism of the decision's implications upon his life which can be seen as a specific intervention by the adversary. After setting those doubts aside, however, Mr. Wang was baptized and reaffirmed his union with God in his baptism testimonial.

Although Mr. Wang's narrative follows the above pattern and definition of "conversion" quite nicely, there are other narratives which, according to this definition, would be excluded from the genre. For example, in the story "Coming Back to Him" the woman protagonist is baptized when she is very young, falls into inactivity, and eventually not only comes back to Church, but serves a mission as well. Fang-ting's reactivation account could also be considered a conversion narrative, but only if measured by the following definition of the conversion concept: "to turn back, cause to return; sometimes, to bring back, restore." (Oxford English Dictionary). The structure of Fang-ting's narrative also differs a bit from the previously stated rubric. When relating her

narrative to me, Fang-ting began her version by telling me about the day she saw the temple in Taipei again after a very long time; however, this event did not raise in her a desire to know the truth, but rather a type of curiosity as to what had been happening in the Church all this time. Fang-ting does go through a long and frustrating time as she tries to become active again, even attending Church and trying to share her beliefs with her boyfriend, but as she revisits the chapel, she does not have a kind of epiphany which reaffirms her decision to return. Indeed, just the opposite happens: she has a terrible experience at Church and decides to stay away. Most members would be reluctant to suggest that Fang-ting's attendance at a Church meeting heightened the devil's intervention on her behalf, but as the guilt she felt at Church was too strong for her to deal with, she told me she had to leave the meeting. By the very nature of inactivity, we can tell that Satan had been influencing Fang-ting's individual desires for quite some time. Fang-ting's re-acceptance of the truth is acknowledged at the end of her story as she relates to the sister missionaries that not only does she remember how to pray, she has been praying even while not actively attending Church. Although varying in substantial ways from the standard model suggested, I think Fang-ting's story can also be classified as a conversion narrative, if our classification is based upon the above definition of conversion.

While classifying conversion narratives, we must also decide whether this category should include those personal narratives in which an individual has already been baptized a member of a specific religion, but then gains a strong testimony of a particular

doctrine or idea embraced by that religion, experiencing a conversion to that doctrine. This type of conversion is included in the following definition, again from the Oxford English Dictionary: “to cause to adopt a better opinion, belief, party,” or “to turn or change in character, nature, form, or function,” and is best exemplified in the story “The Sweetness of the Fruit.” The story’s protagonist, through his willingness to share the gospel with others, gains a testimony of the principle of missionary work. My informant said he finally found himself in a position to *explain* correct religious principles to another person, as he had been trying to give away a Book of Mormon for quite awhile with not very much success. As the informant bears his own testimony about the Book of Mormon, he experiences an epiphany of righteousness. The adversary’s intervention can be seen at the *beginning* of the story as the protagonist must quell his own fears and talk about the gospel with someone else. Finally, in this story the conversion of the entire family *validates* the fact that the member possesses true religious knowledge and is in union with God.

LDS folklore is replete with these types of conversion stories as they are often shared to strengthen members’ testimonies of certain religious beliefs or commandments, commandments often unique to the LDS religion. For example, there have been many variants told about the unfortunate family without enough money to buy food for the week but because they pay their tithing to the Church anyway, somehow there is food for them to eat that week. In general, these stories of conversions to principles are similar to those of complete religious conversion in that both must end in a physical act. Total

religious conversions usually end in a physical baptism of some sort, and while the physical results of conversion to principles often differ, they are almost always didactic, giving dramatic closure to the story and exemplifying the protagonists' relationship with God, or at least with a specific commandment. The story "A Road Prepared" deals with this idea as it tells the story of a member who, through some difficult experiences in the army, gains a testimony of scripture reading, obeying the Word of Wisdom (exclusively the commandment to abstain from drinking alcohol), and the importance of attending Church. Because the story begins with a conversation about gospel principles between a missionary and his mission president, its initial focus seems centers around the protagonist gaining a testimony of these specific gospel principles.

When I collected Kai-ming's story, he first related his conversion to the Church as a religion, and then told me the story of his conversion to certain principles of the Church he had joined. The fact that he is required to enlist in the Taiwanese army for two years sets the stage on which he must decide whether he believes the principles of the gospel or not. Kai-ming faces not one long struggle, but several frustrating experiences which all work together to confirm for him the truths of specific principles. His epiphanies come throughout the narrative: after his Book of Mormon is taken from him he is able to figure out a way to read scriptures everyday; after his life is threatened he has a scriptural epiphany that not only strengthens his own testimony but convinces the other men to spare his life; after he cannot find a chapel in which to attend Church he prays, only to realize he is kneeling beside the missing chapel. Again the adversary's greatest influence

can be seen sooner in the story than the model suggests, perhaps in the events that lead up to Kai-ming's climactic life and death experience. But even then, the adversary's influence is best exemplified in Kai-ming's personal discouragement. The only aspect of Kai-ming's story where Satan's influence can be identified as a specific force of evil is when all the men who do disobey the Word of Wisdom want to kill Kai-ming, thus creating a disturbing either/or paradigm between good and evil-- the righteous, obedient member and those people who do not obey God's commandments.

Often missionaries themselves will experience a type of conversion to the principles they are teaching. These conversions are best described by the following definition: "to turn in mind, feeling, or conduct; to bring into another state" (OED). The protagonist in the story "The Mustard Seed," is not the young girl who is baptized, but rather the missionary who tells her story. Although a testimony of his/her religion or denomination is inherent in a missionary's very nature, this story can be viewed as a conversion to principle, as the missionary's understanding of faith and ability to exercise it increases. It is the same non-member the missionary ironically hopes to convert who brings the missionary's attitude and ability "into another state."

Functional Classification

It is only by broadening the definition of "conversion" to include all of the aforementioned definitions that the personal narratives in my collection can be considered conversion narratives. Besides the model and definition Eliason suggests for cataloguing conversion narratives, we can also look at the function the narratives serve within the

LDS religion, as well as the motives behind collecting them in an effort to further define and categorize this genre. I think conversion narratives can more easily be categorized into one of the two following genres: thematic and functional. In his book *Folklore Genres*, Dan Ben-Amos' definition of the thematic approach to folklore is as follows:

Comparative folklore research concerns itself with the diffusion of themes in different traditions. "The touchstone for such a generic classification of texts is the answer to the question What is it about?" . . . Underlying such an approach to folk literature is the premise that thematic similarity implies universal generic identity. (26)

Obviously this classification becomes troublesome when the folklorist tries to examine texts from different time periods or from different cultures and fit them into a thematic mold. For example, if folklorists define a conversion narrative thematically as a narrative in which someone experiencing a reconciliation between Christianity and self leads to a life-altering outcome, they would be forcing all of the non-Christian conversion narratives into a separate genre, as well as those stories in which an individual is able to reconcile self with religion or God, but this reconciliation does not necessarily lead to action on the part of the converted. If we then define it more simplistically as a life-changing encounter with a "god-like" or supernatural force, we would be intruding into the genre of the Chinese "ghost story," or, if our interpretation of the change in an individual's life becomes extremely didactic, we intrude into the world of the cautionary tale. Although there can be, and usually are, similar themes running through different

cultures' folklore, it would seem that a thematic approach to cross-cultural folklore becomes confusing and somewhat ineffective in understanding the folklore's culture. But Ben-Amos goes on to offer us an alternative category-- that of functionality:

The functional approach . . . has focused upon the relationship between forms of verbal art and existing cultural, psychological, and social needs. . . Their [anthropologists'] distinction of genre is based not upon any intrinsic qualities of oral literary forms, but upon the perception and identification of their attributes by the people themselves. The functional approach is concerned not with what genres are, but with what the members of the society say they are. Thus, the taxonomy of verbal art has become actually a categorization of cultural experiences. (223)

As the functions of a culture's folklore are defined by "what the members of [that] society say they are," the folklore can better reflect the values of that particular society. Folklore, if defined by the individuals who use it, can then be utilized by those individuals according to the functions they have assigned it. In the following section I analyze the different ways conversion narratives function in American and Chinese cultures in order to better understand the effects and their usefulness within the two cultures.

Persuading Others. The Western idea of the conversion narrative can be seen as having four distinct functions: to persuade others, to build personal testimony, to reconfirm one's social standing within the religious ethnicity, and as a means for furthering individual definition and identity. The sharing of the Joseph Smith conversion narrative by

missionaries is a prime example of the conversion narrative as a persuasive tool. Missionaries are told that an investigator has a basic testimony of the LDS Church when they believe that Christ is their personal Savior, and that Joseph Smith saw God the Father and Jesus Christ and that he was called by them to be a prophet. If these are the fundamentals of a testimony or a belief in the LDS Church, it would appear that Smith's narrative, inasmuch as it is a representation of this divine vision, serves as a thread which binds Mormons together as a specific ethnic group, and the narrative event can be seen as a tool for persuading others to believe in the narrated event and other basic doctrines of the LDS Church. But how does Smith's narrative event, or any narrative event for that matter, persuade others to believe in the actual event, inasmuch as Olshen reminds us that "existence is entirely different from textuality, that it is too complex for textuality to capture, that it is not the task of textuality to capture it" (14)?

In answering this question, it is important for readers to realize that it is not the textual authority of the conversion narrative itself which will plant the seeds of a testimony, but rather an interaction between God, reader, and text. It is the godly manifestation of truth a reader may receive when reading an account of Joseph Smith's First Vision, and not the text or narrated event itself which is divine. And as readers come in contact with multiple versions of Joseph Smith's narrative, it is imperative that they also realize, as folklorist Sandra Stahl notes, it is the combination of both "nontraditional content--the teller's unique experience--and the traditional aspects of form, style, and function" (268) which constitute the basic elements of a personal

experience story. In their essay, Lambert and Cracroft address this combination of content and form within the various texts of Joseph Smith's First Vision experience. The authors begin by explaining how the content and form of other "conversion accounts spoken and written by his contemporaries" (94) influenced Joseph's own representation of his sacred conversion experience. Of Joseph's first written account in 1832 of his remarkable First Vision, Lambert and Cracroft write the following: "Young Joseph, then, very conscious of the importance of his account, could not resist the temptation to attempt to match his rhetoric to the event, particularly when doctors of divinity were recounting events of less importance in even higher-sounding phrases" (94). As the authors continue to follow subsequent recordings of Smith's narrative, they note substantial changes in Joseph's prose and voice and in the over-all presentation of the experience. Indeed, by the time Joseph had written the 1838 version, "the transition from plow-boy to prophet was complete" (96), Smith's constant personal development supporting Olshen's note that, "the autobiographical account . . . presents the autobiographer with 'an "I" never his own because it makes present what remains past to him'" (9).

Although as a Mormon I believe that Joseph Smith experienced a vision in which he saw God the Father and Jesus Christ, as a literary theorist I also know that language is incapable of truthfully representing any event, whether historically based or purely fictitious. This idea that the best we as journal writers or autobiographers can hope to create is ultimately a fictitious persona trying to represent the sense of us as a subject, however, can be scary for some people. In his essay, "Subject, Persona, and Self in the

Theory of Autobiography, Olshen states the following:

I for one am still committed to the idea that as subject I have a privileged position with regard to myself, a position that enables me to recreate myself in my self-made persona more fully, more intimately than anyone else can or will, a position in which my testimony may be authoritative in a way another author's can never be. (10)

While Olshen may take great comfort in this thought, he must be willing to examine the not so privileged aspects of an autobiographer's memory and introspection as suggested by G. Thomas Couser's article entitled "Authority":

Even if individuals are privileged witnesses of their internal lives, however, they cannot be counted on to give candid, uncensored views of themselves.

Unfortunately, neither of the autobiographer's two unique resources, memory and introspection, is inherently reliable or unmediated. Current views of memory suggest that it is a highly selective and subjective version of the past which undergoes constant and unconscious revision in light of subsequent events and changing self-concept. . . Since human beings are proficient unconscious rationalizers of their acts, "self-knowledge" is often illusory. (35)

How can any text Joseph Smith writes about his experience of seeing Jesus Christ and Heavenly Father in the flesh represent the complete "truth" of that event which took place, especially as his present identity tries to write about his past? How can any rhetoric he may use match the power and significance of meeting divinity? How can the

“true” essence of anything divine be captured by something as base as language? William Epstein, as quoted by Jeffrey Wallen in his essay “Between Text and Image: The Literary Portrait,” notes that most “biographies implicitly or explicitly claim that they can change life into text and then back into life again” (54). Because of the vast limitations of self-expression, this kind of linguistic fusion is simply not possible; an event cannot become a text.

Although textual as well as oral limitations exist within the world of representation, regardless of the limitations which also exist in the oral presentation of events, there are a few fundamental differences between the oral performance of an event, and the textual representation of that same event. The LDS Church favors the oral retelling of the Joseph Smith story as a conversion tool, as Eliason notes that “the Church’s missionary force may relate the Joseph Smith story and personal conversion stories upwards of a hundred thousand times a day” (6). My own missionary experiences support these findings. Like most other foreign-bound LDS missionaries, I spent the first two months of my mission in the Missionary Training Center, memorizing and practicing the standard discussions we would later teach to investigators. Joseph Smith’s narrative was not only one of the first passages we memorized, both in English and then in Chinese, but it was also the passage most practiced and delivered during our training. On discouraging days, I sometimes wondered why the Church required us to personally deliver this narrative and if it wouldn’t be just as effective to stand on the street corner and hand out pamphlets entitled “Joseph Smith’s First Vision,” in the hopes that people

would go home and have a conversion experience as they read the account. As I became a more experienced missionary, however, and constantly experienced that performing the narrative was more effective than sending it home as homework, I realized that my own testimony and conviction of the truthfulness of Joseph's experience could be felt by investigators as I orally recounted the event to them.

Folklorist Richard Bauman's research on oral performance has yielded many important observations concerning the dynamics of the oral presentation in regard to audience and performer interaction. Bauman, quoting Walter Benjamin, also supports his following observations about the oral storytelling experience: "The storyteller takes what he tells from experience – his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale" (2). But Bauman is not suggesting that the oral performance is free from such external, formalistic elements which limit textual representation as well. Indeed, Bauman's studies exist mainly to understand and make others aware of those formalistic constrictions forced upon modes of communication by different cultures and societies. Bauman's theory also addresses the sometimes unnoted power an audience may exert over an individual's performance:

From the point of view of the audience, the act of expression on the part of the performer is thus laid open to evaluation for the way it is done, for the relative skill and effectiveness of the performer's display. . . . Performance thus calls forth special attention to and heightened awareness of both the act of expression and the performer. (3)

Thus it would seem that the ability of the conversion narrative to persuade others greatly depends upon the speaker's ability to follow those "acts of expression" which are condoned or are natural to his/her audience and their respective culture. Learning what other cultures' "acts of expression" are then, would seem to insure more effective communication between speaker and audience.

Building Personal Testimony. Despite the limitations and cultural differences inherent in both written and oral presentations of actual events, Joseph Smith's narrative, whether as a written text or the oral performance of that text, is used daily by missionaries all over the world to persuade others to experience a conversion themselves. But how effective are other members' conversion narratives when used as tools of persuasion? Eliason goes on to speculate that the telling of other conversion narratives may be more useful in strengthening the tale-teller's own testimony than in persuading others to adopt a certain ideology:

While few tellings of a conversion story directly result in a convert baptism, most of the conversion narrative transcriptions I have studied, and interviews I have conducted, suggest that the telling of conversion stories almost *always* has a powerful effect on the *teller*, recalling the same emotions and spirit present at the time of the events described. Fostering the telling of conversion stories in faith-affirming contexts would aid in convert retention perhaps even to a greater degree than in proselytizing. (13)

Much as an audience can feel a missionary's own belief in Joseph's experience, so too

does the performance of a conversion narrative help the speaker recall those feelings present at the time they experienced their own conversion. Eliason's conclusions of the effectiveness and possible uses of the conversion narrative seem to support Bauman's findings regarding the power of oral narrative performance. While others may not necessarily become converted through our presentation of our conversion story, our own testimony as tale-teller is greatly strengthened, as the recitation recalls the feelings present for us at the actual event. While it may seem paradoxical that a missionary's relation of Joseph Smith's conversion experience more easily persuades others than his/her own, it is still the speaker's unique belief in Smith's narrative, almost equal to the belief they have in their own, which is felt by the investigator. Although Eliason wonders if these individual conversion narratives might be more effective for building the teller's own testimony, he is not suggesting they are useless in proselytizing work, much as the Church's training programs seem to support.

Apart from the focus upon memorizing and performing Joseph Smith's First Vision, a large part of the training of LDS missionaries is devoted to the presentation of their own conversion narrative. Inherent within this training is the belief that investigators can and will realize the truthfulness of a missionary's own conversion experience, if "effectively" presented, therefore furthering their desire to believe the missionary's presentation of other Church doctrines. As inexperienced missionaries with very minimal Chinese skills arrive on Taiwan, their senior companions will always ask them to bear their testimony or tell their own conversion story to the investigator,

inasmuch as bearing personal testimony is one of the few things missionaries learned how to do in Chinese in the MTC. Bearing personal testimony is seen as vitally important even from the beginning for missionaries to do and for investigators to hear.

Reaffirming Religious Status. As with many other Christian religions, the telling of LDS conversion narratives also serves to strengthen the teller's spiritual and social status in relation to other members of the religious group. In her book *Transformations of Power*, Margaret Brady addresses one attitude of Mormons in view of professed personal revelation:

A final aspect of Mormon worldview that is relevant here is the significance of personal revelation. A personal revelation from God is a special blessing, a significant affirmation of one's spirituality. Such experiences are encouraged within the community, for one who has experienced a personal revelation is clearly marked as a spiritual individual in the eyes of many Mormons. (465)

The most dramatic personal revelation from God may come to believers in the form of a conversion narrative, as God directly reveals to an individual whether or not to believe a specific spiritual doctrine, and is viewed as one of the most sacred of LDS experiences.

Other religions also manifest the need for this type of spiritual sharing. Stromberg, in his work with American Evangelical conversions, makes the following observations:

On this view, it is no coincidence that I encountered a remarkable high level of cooperation as I sought out believers who would be willing to tell me their conversion stories. To do so was, for these believers, not a chore, but rather a

central ritual of their faith. The conversion narrative offered an opportunity to celebrate and reaffirm the dual effect of the conversion, the strengthening of their faith and the transformation of their lives. (3)

As Stromberg's informants believe the relating of their conversion stories are "central rituals of their faith," likewise LDS believers are traditionally known for their same willingness to share their testimony with other members, viewing it not only as a duty but also an opportunity in which to reaffirm their faith in the presence of other members.

Presenting the Individual. A fourth function of the conversion narrative exists inherent in Stromberg's findings—the chance the conversion narrative provides for individual identity and definition. Stromberg's informants shared their conversions with him because it was a way for them to celebrate transformations unique only to their lifestyle, transformations which helped them stand out from others in some special way, definitions of who they were as individuals. According to Toelken,

the Anglo-American is very much concerned with personal identity, and, especially today, with 'doing his own thing' (as well as looking out for 'number one'). He is encouraged thus to be competitive, to measure his worth against other by besting them or being bested by them. He measures the length of his life very carefully. (270)

For example, about three weeks ago my roommates and I were sitting around exchanging stories and arguing over who had driven the forty-five miles from Provo to Salt Lake City in the shortest amount of time. Answers varied: forty minutes, thirty-five, and finally a mere half an hour, an

impressive feat indeed. My childhood was filled with many such story-telling competitions, usually consisting of anything from girlfriends to close scrapes with my parent's discipline, in which my six brothers would try and verbally best each other's stories. My brothers now tend to sit around at family reunions and tell old mission stories, in an attempt to out-tell the last story told. Although religion in general now seems a topical taboo in our stridently independent American culture, even the telling of conversion narratives are still viewed by those outside any religious group as an acceptable form of communication: if these narratives are not valued for their religious content, they at least serve as a representation of the speaker's ability for individual and personal experience.

Contrasting Conversion Narratives Across Cultures

The Japanese have a saying that goes something like this: "The stick that sticks out needs to be pushed down." With 125 million people inhabiting islands that together total less than the land mass of Montana in the United States, the Japanese have had to learn how to get along with each other very well. They have a strong sense of community, and sometimes Church members are perceived as unsettling that community by being "sticks that stick out." We are striving to change that perception by helping the Japanese see that Church members among them are sticks that strengthen the fiber of the whole.

LDS Asian Area President David E. Sorensen, *The Ensign of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.*

Definitional Classification

American culture most likely values the personal narrative as a mode of communication because of the vast and varied functions the narrative has served within the culture. Accordingly, it is little wonder that the numerous functions of Joseph Smith's narrative within the LDS culture make it a thread which binds members together as the Church continues to spread across the globe. As the LDS Church becomes a world-wide entity, now embracing numerous cultures and societies, it is important to examine the strictly American functions of the conversion narrative in an effort to more effectively and properly understand and utilize this communication mode within other cultures. Only by understanding how the conversion narrative is indigenously defined and functions within other cultures are we able to share our narratives with differing audiences in a way which will help them respond with understanding, and conversely desire to share their narratives with us in a way which is both comfortable and logical according to their learned communication behaviors.

Inasmuch as Chinese literature in general is didactic and only rationalized as "an educative tool to alter perceptions and behavior" (Gunn 309), it appears hard at first to define the conversion narrative by its persuasive function, and still differentiate the form from the bulk of Chinese literature. But an important distinction does exist inasmuch as Chinese writing persuades readers to follow a certain "good" which is accepted by the community as a whole, but not necessarily considered an individual belief. If we define

the concept of “conversion” specifically as a conversion to Christianity, the conversion narrative can be immediately viewed in direct opposition with other Chinese stories meant to persuade readers to follow the already standardized traditional value system. But even as we define conversion narratives in a broader sense as a change in character, or the adoption of a better opinion, the genre of conversion narratives is still unique in relation to the rest of Chinese literature as it favors an individual’s conversion to a doctrine and the direct effect of that doctrine upon the personal rather than the communal belief.

Functional Classification

Persuading Others. Inasmuch as Mormonism is still a fairly new religion in Taiwan, Chinese members have many opportunities for sharing their conversion narratives with nonmembers. While serving as a missionary in Taiwan, however, I, along with most other missionaries on the island, would often become frustrated at the reluctance of members to share their conversion narratives with nonmembers. On those rare occasions when members would surprise us and volunteer their narrative, they immediately commenced to relate some bizarre metaphor which seemed to us to have little to do with their actual experience.

I think there are couple of reasons for this reluctance and misunderstanding regarding the conversion narrative in the Chinese culture. As Chinese members watch the missionaries continually use the personal narrative form to couch their own conversion stories, they conclude that it must be the “correct” way LDS members present

their conversion narratives, and because of their reluctance to use the same modes, they either become reluctant to share at all or do so by using a communicative form they are more familiar with. Within Chinese communicative modes, allegory is usually used to express intimate, personal experience, as it not only represents the individual, but the individual is replaced by metaphor. Using extended metaphors to explain personal feelings and experiences is also a common practice in Chinese literature, as evidenced in the famous historian Ssu ma Ch'ien's historiography. In his own autobiography, the following is the only representation of his many years in prison, written in his chosen mode of communication, the metaphor: "When the fierce tiger dwells in the deep hills, all the other beasts tremble with fear. But when he is in the trap of the cage, he wags his tail and begs for food, for he has been gradually overawed and broken" (63). Ch'ien then gives another example of a man who has suffered in a like manner in prison, but without directly connecting this man's experience with his own. After sharing the second man's experience, Ch'ien ends with a question which is asked directly of the unknown man's story and only vaguely connects with his own: "What respect could people have for such a man" (64)?

The use this metaphorical language exists at least twice within my own collection. The protagonist in "The Sweetness of the Fruit" shares a Book of Mormon metaphor with the man on the bus in order to help him understand why sharing the Book of Mormon with others is important to the protagonist and members in general. The metaphor compares the doctrines of the LDS Church found within the Book of Mormon to a tree

whose fruit brings so much joy to the partaker he or she immediately wishes to share it with everyone they meet. My informant expressed to me that it just felt natural for him to couch his own feelings for the book in that that way. This metaphorical mode of communication is perhaps best exemplified in “A Father’s Story.” As Brother Wang tries to relate his feelings after learning about the gospel, he couches them in the following metaphor:

“This square,” he began, “represents my brain. And right now, my head is full of these.” He took the chalk, and drew many squiggly lines inside the box. “It’s filled with untruths, confusion, and symbols that don’t mean anything to me, to anybody. They have no purpose, they draw no picture, they only take up space so that the real things can’t come in.” He reached again and drew a tiny wooden horse, and then he turned and looked at me. “When something real comes in, something true, I cannot recognize it, and I don’t know what it is. I can’t tell it’s any different from the squiggles, because everything has just been squiggles for as long as I can remember.” (86)

Brother Wang then goes on to share another metaphor, this one a representation of the Taoist religion he has just rejected:

“It’s like having two best friends, and you’ve known them since you were small. You grew up with them, you played with them, you trusted them. And then one day, someone comes up to you and tells you that all this time, they have been lying to you. And all the things you gave them, and the things they had given

you, the secrets you told them, the experiences you shared with them, are worth nothing; they are wasted time, because it was all a lie.” (86-87)

Either unable to or uncomfortable in expressing his feelings about such a personal conversion, my informant opted to couch it in the form of a metaphor, thus explaining himself without existing as himself within the narrated text. This metaphorical representation of the self can be seen as individual expression inasmuch as it is a product of my informant’s brain, but it serves to couch his individuality behind a universal representation. Thus his narrative becomes a representation of a representation, presented primarily to the reader as his conversation with a missionary about his conversion feelings and only secondly as the feelings he experienced when learning about the truth.

While Chinese members may recognize their own conversion narratives as effective tools in persuading others to investigate the Church and may want to share these narratives, they remain uncomfortable trying to couch their experiences in those communicative modes valued by Americans but not by the Chinese. Thus the fears most Western missionaries possess when inviting Chinese members to tell their conversion stories begin to appear quite foolish, for who is to say that the native Chinese investigator would not better understand this Chinese metaphorical form of expression? Perhaps the missionary’s uncomfortable silence is so loud, he or she cannot hear the communication which is taking place between both Chinese participants. A thorough understanding of the way Chinese members choose to express their conversion narratives more effectively utilizes the conversion narrative as a proselytizing tool. As members are allowed to tell

their stories in ways which make more sense to them, they will become more willing to share and ultimately provide the Chinese nonmember with a more accurate representation of their feelings toward the Church.

Building Personal Testimony. Because of the question and answer nature of the standardized discussions, each missionary hopes and expects mutual communication and discussion during the teaching situation. Often due to the hierarchical student/teacher relationship between the missionary and the investigator as well as the standardized discussions the missionary is required to teach, the performance of the discussion is often not the place where cultural sharing is likely to happen. Instead, the discussion can be described as a situation in which the missionary listens to the investigators' experiences and then teaches their investigators the proper way to best couch their spiritual observations. Some missionaries feel they must teach their new converts the doctrines of the Church, how to express their spiritual communication with God, and how to experience communication with the divine in a standardized Western-Mormon way.

Missionaries always invite investigators to pray about the truthfulness of their message and then explain how God will reveal answers and communicate with them. The missionary discussions describe God's revelatory method as a warm, comfortable feeling or a clear, firm thought. This feeling or thought is usually referred to by the missionaries as the Holy Ghost, and it is through the inspiration of the Holy Ghost that God communicates with us: the Holy Ghost is God's given method for revealing truth to people. On subsequent meetings, the missionaries will then encourage these investigators

to share the thoughts and feelings they experienced while praying. In many instances, however, the Chinese investigator's experience did not match that warm feeling described to them by the missionary. I often overheard American missionaries admitting how sometimes they dreaded asking this question, for fear they would have to explain to yet another investigator that the weird dreams, visions or voices they *thought* they were hearing weren't really answers to prayers. The missionary would again explain that God's answer is a warm feeling or clear thought, invite the investigator to pray again, and continue to ask them the same questions on subsequent visits until the investigator was able to explain their communication with God in a way the missionary could understand and accept.

For example, I remember responding a little incredulously to my informant in the story "Small and Simple Things." One particular day while on her way to Church as she was again struggling with her decision to serve a mission amid the threat of utter rejection from her family, a passing car blew dirt into her contacts, forcing her to stop at the Seven-Eleven and clean her eyes. As I sat there listening to the tape she had recorded I became more dubious about her whole narrative in general:

She slowly pulled ahead toward the sign, and then her mind, it heard the voice:

But to go to the Seven-Eleven will take time, right? To fix the problem with your eyes, to fix any problem takes time. And patience. It's a little bit like your parents. They need time to accept your decision to serve a mission. They need time to understand why it is so important to you, to understand the blessings and

the meaning of a mission in your life as well as theirs. (73)

The voice then spoke to her two other times, continuing the metaphor and reassuring her that the future would be brighter than the past.

I don't know why I questioned such an experience happening to my informant; I guess I just never expected God to talk to someone in the bathroom of the Seven Eleven, or perhaps I thought that only long standing members of the Church who had learned how to listen to the Holy Ghost were afforded experiences such as hers. Whatever the bias, I was a little dubious of her story, and tempted to omit the experience altogether. In the end I opted to include the experience, but I explained the voice away as a "feeling more of wisdom and of knowledge flowing through her mind, giving her a sense of the other power, of inspiration" (73), my description of her experience noticeably similar to the explanation given of the Holy Ghost in the first missionary discussion. As I collected this project toward the end of my mission, certain missionary modes of communication had already become natural for me, and I began to couch my informants' experiences according to my original personality as well as the missionary modes I had learned how to use. The voice also spoke to my informant in the form of a metaphor, comparing her current contact pain with her painful decision to serve a mission.

Because missionaries usually feel more comfortable talking about God and religion, I realize that occasionally they must help nonmembers feel *comfortable* sharing their own spiritual experiences. Much like some American nonmembers' reactions, the Chinese are also hesitant when it comes to expressing spiritual feelings or talking about

religious subjects, but does teaching another person how and what they should be feeling make them more comfortable or merely serve to distort their experience for them in some way? When a teller's experiences become distorted, the telling of that narrative no longer functions to build the teller's own testimony. The telling becomes not so much a reaffirmation for them of their original experience, but serves as an opportunity for polishing their ability to relate as well as interpret that experience within those modes which have been portrayed to them as somehow more "correct" than those codes native to their own experience and culture.

Reaffirming Religious Status. Awareness of individual placement within the LDS religion may be even more important for Chinese members than for American members, inasmuch as the Chinese 'self' is only understood in relation to others around them. The Chinese define the 'self' only in relation to others, as "all social institutions and human positions are defined relationally and functionally" (Lu 44). These relations can include family, nation, social duties or class standing, and even nature, and are clearly exemplified throughout Chinese historiography, biography, and fiction.

In his book *Changing Stories in the Chinese World*, Mark Elvin notes the following about the Chinese self:

The Chinese 'self' had two aspects. In the Confucian domain one was one's parent's child. One came into the world with obligations defined by what was, ideally at least, a unique place in a network of ascendant and descendant kin. As life progressed, one acquired further obligations toward teachers, friends, and

relatives by marriage. A 'person' in this Confucian sense was defined by his or her relationships which created a field of obligation and feelings in which the self found its orientation and hence its meaning. (23)

As Elvin notes, the Chinese see the individual as a transitory entity, never reaching a state of complete "self," always becoming more itself through consecutive relationships and obligations with others. But when a Chinese person joins the Church, many of their associates view this conversion as not only a religious switch, but a severance of the ties that existed before. The fact that every relation between the convert and others is often severed at baptism is especially dangerous for the Chinese members, as it leaves them virtually nonexistent with no context in which to define themselves.

For the Chinese member, the performance of the conversion narrative does not serve to reaffirm the existence of the speaker's testimony, but rather serves to reaffirm the speakers' ability to share their testimony at all. This ability is important as it becomes a symbol of the member's complete acceptance of the foreign religion and the forms which it includes, thus also placing them within an elite "in-group" within the Chinese LDS culture. As Margaret P. Baker concludes in her dissertation *Some Functions of Mormon In-Group Language in Creating and Maintaining Ethnic Boundaries*, there is an in-group language which exists to preserve the integrity of the LDS group, and it is an individual's willingness to voluntarily follow this linguistic framework which places them within that group's boundaries. (93-94) It is crucial for new Chinese members to feel they are a part of this in-group, as they are searching for new relations with which to redefine, or simply

define themselves.

The mere fact that a Chinese person has undergone a conversion from the traditional Eastern religion to Western Christianity is evidence of their rejecting the old religious ideologies, which often means rejecting some familial duties in favor of religious ones. T.S. Eliot once stated that “culture is the incarnation of religion” (qtd. by Briggs 9), and with regard to the Chinese people, he couldn’t be more right. Natalie Isser and Lisa Schwartz, in their book *The History of Conversion and Contemporary Cults*, quote Sobel who asserts that often times a person’s conversion has “wrenching and cataclysmic’ effects (25). For the Chinese people, as there is no distinction made between being Chinese and being either Buddhist or Taoist—both categories defined as one and the same—their joining the Church not only means changing religions, but changing nationalities as well. Elvin continues his book by analyzing a Chinese American writer, Yuan Ze Nan, and his collection of essays. Elvin feels that Yuan sets up a dichotomy for his readers by presenting people, much like himself, who he refers to as not “wholly Chinese.” Yuan feels that his bicultural experience is an either/or situation for him as he is forced to “cut the umbilical cord of China with a relative degree of success . . .” (233) in order to survive in a second culture. According to Chinese identity, you either embrace the whole of China, or you embrace the foreign. For the Chinese, belonging to the in-group of the LDS culture does not require a reaffirmation that they possess a testimony, but that they feel comfortable in sharing that testimony with other members on a regular basis and using the correct Western methods. It is a reaffirmation not of their

leaving their Chinese religious ties, but of completely embracing the Mormon.

For example, there are inherent within the structure of the LDS religion, several standard oral performing events in which members are given the opportunity to bear testimony to other members. One such meeting, the Fast and Testimony Meeting, is held on the first Sunday of every month and members are invited, if they so wish, to come to the pulpit and share their testimony with the entire congregation. The Fast and Testimony Meeting functions much the same as the conversion narrative: the members have an opportunity to strengthen their own testimony by stating it out loud, and the congregation's own testimonies are also strengthened by listening to the speakers. Surprisingly, in most of the Fast and Testimony Meetings I attended in Taiwan the Chinese members were always most willing to participate, I feel for two different reasons: first, the member's level of willingness to share their testimony seemed to exist in direct correlation with their level of Mormonism; second, the Chinese member also views it as his or her duty.

The Chinese often identify themselves in relation to their various duties. Just as "duty to one's class, one's locality, one's family, and one's beloved" are strong motivations for Chinese literary heroes and heroines (Hegel 16), so they also serve as strong motivations for actual people as well. The story "Small and Simple Things" is a classic example which pits the protagonist's new duty in the Church against the wishes of her parents. In the following excerpt she explains to the Church's prophet how her desire to serve a mission is in direct correlation with the new duties she feels as a member of the

Church, even though this duty is in direct defilement of her parent's wishes:

"I want to serve a mission for the Church," she began. "It has been my biggest desire since I joined a few years ago, but my parents, they are not willing to let me go. When I asked them if I could, they said if I did, they would disown me as their daughter. President Hinckley, I love my parents very much. I don't want to hurt them, but I also want to serve a mission for the Lord. And so I promised him that I would give up all I had, but I didn't know he would ask me to sacrifice my family." (71)

This passage exemplifies my informant's fear as she realizes the relations which may be severed by the new duties of her baptism and her ultimate rejection of the Chinese. As her parent's threaten to sever the relationships by which she defines herself as an individual, my informant is faced with a choice in which she must discard the old relations for a new set of relations by which she must define herself. Her conversion not only forces her to reject the old religion she had embraced, but she is also forced into a basic redefinition of self as defined by aspects of her new life as a member of the Church. She is able to make this transition as her duty to Church untraditionally wins out over filial obedience.

The use of traditional Chinese communicative forms may be another factor contributing to the comfort Chinese members feel bearing testimony in this setting. Although the Chinese consider their willingness to bear testimony to other members in the Fast and Testimony Meeting an example of their complete Mormonism, it is notable

that they still use a more traditional Chinese form in which to bear these testimonies. This move is especially surprising considering the members' passive adherence to traditional Chinese modes of communication within other Church settings. Stromberg's studies with Evangelical congregations suggest the following about group sharing methods and their effect in form-shaping conversion narratives: "I will note that in the very large congregation I studied, there was no "witnessing" in front of the entire congregation, a practice that would tend to shape conversion stories around a particular form" (6). And as members perform this type of testimony sharing at least once a month in Church meetings, this testimony meeting serves as yet another instance in which to mold and teach the correct way to couch conversion narratives. And although many missionaries feel the need to help the Chinese people better express their own personal feelings in these public testimony meetings, for the most part the Chinese still bear testimony in Fast and Testimony Meeting using more traditional Chinese communicative forms. Instead of bearing a testimony comprised of personal feelings or experiences exemplifying gospel principles, much as was done by members in my home ward growing up, the Chinese members will usually share scriptures or Church articles which address certain gospel aspects as representations of their own experiences with these concepts. Rather than stand and show through personal experience how the principle of faith has affected themselves as individuals, they will refer the listener to another's story in which the same principle produced the same effect. In this way the Chinese are able to more comfortably share their personal testimony while avoiding a blatant representation

of the personal.

Presenting the Individual. Perhaps because of the novelty of Christian conversions in general in Taiwan, the sharing of conversion narratives functions to a much greater extent as an example of individual identification. But even though this function may be more pronounced in Chinese culture, the results of this function and its sharing differ greatly than those for Western members. While I suggested earlier that individual identification serves as a positive influence for Western Latter-day Saints as it helps them recognize their ability to be an individual, perhaps in part because of the communal society in which the Chinese have been living, this idea of personal representation is very disturbing and brings a result they would rather not deal with. The consequences or results of this sharing with nonmembers account for much of the hesitation on the members' part and explain why they couch it the way they do. Because sharing the conversion narrative functions as a tool of individual expression, the communal Chinese will, of course, be much less enthusiastic in sharing these individually marking narratives with others.

As China opened up to the Western trade and began to be influenced by Western ideas and values and social logic, in the early 1990's a growing split developed "between identification factors and self or as it has often been termed—the social self, where identity is determined by others and the personal self which indicates the way a person conceives of herself/himself." (Chen 7). Although this shift became apparent in the early part of the century, after the Chinese government once again turned to communism, the community man became more valued, the personality of the individual sacrificed for

their importance to the communal good. Hence, as Robert E. Hegel suggests in his book *Expressions of Self in Chinese Literature*, “To the Chinese, it has been the common features and not the uniqueness of an individual that draws attention” (6).

President Koerner wanted to include several stories specifically because they pointed him or certain missionaries out in particular. It is ironic that these stories would be suggested for the very same reasons the Chinese would be reluctant to share their own stories. Evidence of my Chinese informants’ hesitation and passive rebellion against the stories’ individual focus became evident throughout the project’s collection process. All the names included in the collection, whether English or Chinese, are fictitious. I made this decision about halfway through the project, as I was becoming more and more aware in our interviews of my informants’ concern that their real names would be used. After the decision was made, I would always try to remind my informants, but if I happened to forget, most informants would eventually ask me if their real names were going to be used or not. And as President Koerner became more adamant about at least using real English names as a tribute to certain missionaries, the differences between the two cultures and their views regarding individual recognition became more obvious.

For example, in Wolfram Eberhard’s introduction to the collection entitled *Folktales of China*, he chides the early Chinese folklorists for failing to include details which Eberhard considers essential in their early collections:

few, if any, of these men were trained in folklore, and it would be only too easy to criticize them. For example, they almost never gave the name of the storytellers,

often not even the places where the tales were recorded. They seldom told the stories in their original form, but edited their texts. They avoided stories that were, according to their views, immoral and corrupt. (xxxiv)

Perhaps this absence of specific place and people names is not the result, as Eberhard tends to believe, of undertraining; perhaps Chinese folklorists did not want to include these names, as they are a culture more concerned with a representation of an event than with the self. Inasmuch as folklore in particular represents a people or particular ethnic group, the Chinese informant is less likely to associate any personal identification in conjunction with this responsibility. As the Chinese society works to represent individuals, the individuals see themselves as an aspect of that society rather than an individual entity.

Although Chinese is not exactly considered an oral culture, the people seem more comfortable sharing their stories orally rather than writing them down. While collecting the projects' narratives, I began to realize there existed among my informants a subconscious differentiating between oral storytelling and written text. In his essay entitled "Oral Culture," Jack Goody makes the following observations about oral societies and the importance of the narrative event itself:

In oral societies each performance . . . reshapes the work and provides a new model for future versions, because performance is transmission . . . On the other hand, it is in principle feasible to see how an individual has constructed his or her own performances, which tend to resemble one another more closely than

versions by different performers. Individuals contribute, some being more creative than others, but their signatures rarely remain for long because of the very nature of oral transmission over time. (15)

Although Goody is speaking of the role of the oral narrative within a strictly oral society, I think his theory also works well in describing how Chinese in general feel about telling a story and recording a personal narrative. I found it surprising that most, if not all, of my informants were more inclined to share their personal feelings with me as an oral performance simply because they knew once the story was told, it would become lost and could not be traced to its informant. After I once informed them these stories would eventually be written up into a book, or explained that I was recording and typing up their answers, they seemed to become more hesitant, if not more guarded in their sharing personal feelings with me.

Literary Presentation of the Chinese "Self"

Much of these differences between the way conversion narrative functions in either culture stem from the two cultures' differing definitions of the "self." While traces of the "self" do exist within Chinese literature and oral storytelling, the Chinese definition and presentation of the "self" differs drastically from that of the Western world.

The Chinese self will be expressed, as Hegel points out, but perhaps in "less direct ways that in the West" (30), for the Chinese define the "self" only in relation to others, as "all social institutions and human positions are defined relationally and functionally" (Lu 44).

These relations can include family, nation, social duties or class standing, and even

nature, and are clearly exemplified throughout Chinese historiography, biography, and fiction. Perhaps this need for couching the individual within the filial community is best exemplified in the literary structure of the most famous Chinese historiography entitled *Shih Chi*, or *Records of the Historian*. The *Shih Chi* is important indeed, as Burton Watson notes that, “Its form became a model for most of the major historical works of later ages; its contents and style have had an incalculable influence upon the literature of China and the countries under the sway of Chinese culture” (vii). Watson begins his book by including parts of the author, Ssu ma Ch’ien’s, own autobiography, noting that the author, following custom, “begins his own personal narrative with a genealogy of his family, tracing it back, as is wont with Chinese writers, to the golden-ages of the legendary past” (42).

The introduction of each protagonist in relation to their ancestors and family line is evident in most of the accounts presented by Ch’ien, although on differing levels of stringency. The following is an introduction to one of the biographies Ch’ien collected: “Wu Tzu-hsu was a native of Ch’u; his personal name was Yun. His father was named Wu She; his elder brother, Wu Shang. One of his forebears, Wu Chu, had won renown for the frankness with which he offered advice when he was in the service of King Chuang of Ch’u and accordingly the family in later generations enjoyed fame in the state of Ch’u” (16). In order to introduce us to Wu Tzu-hsu, Ch’ien feels it imperative that we understand the protagonist as a son to Wu She, as a younger brother to Wu Shang, and as the posterity of Wu Chu. Although Yun’s personal name is given in this particular

biography, sometimes Ch'ien withholds that name entirely, and only the formal and the family name are listed. The value of filial relationships was even carried over into the Chinese disciplinary system, as castration was a more disgraceful and severe punishment than death, whether self or state inflicted.

Wu Tzu-hsu's biography provides the protagonist's relationship to those family members who had somehow ennobled themselves through the accomplishment of specific deeds. This choice of family referents indicates the importance of societal duty and status as another reference point for understanding the Chinese view of the self. As Hegel again notes, the nature of the self, as the Chinese understand it, can be defined as being "visible in, even created by, one's social function, that it is no-self and yet everything, that it is in constant flux, and that it encompasses mutually contrastive or even contradictory elements" (30). Hegel also states the following regarding the relationship between society and individual identity:

In the People's Republic today, individuals are still identified by reference to social function—by type of occupation, workplace, and political experience—in addition to the bare-bones data of personal appellation, home province, and time of birth. It is no exaggeration to say that to a considerably greater extent than in the modern West, the real Chinese individual has been, and still is, identified by reference to the greater human context of his time. (5)

As I forced my shyest informant to tell me more about himself, he repeated several times the fact that he was a restaurant owner, and offered this information before he even told

me he was married. This same man would also portray himself in relation to the missionaries and their activities with which he became involved. As I continued to ask him questions about his personal gospel desires and his own part in the baptismal accomplishment, he would inevitably end his answer as a reference either to the missionaries or to their activities. My informant for "A Father's Truth" felt the filial bond so strongly he was forced to wait for three years and his father's death before joining the Church. So defined by his father figure, my informant, a man well into his fifties, could not allow his conversion to sever the bond, but rather waited until his father's death severed the bond itself. The informant who had been a Church member for the longest period of time, the protagonist in the story "A Road Prepared," defined himself several times to me by his calling in the Church and how that exemplified his relationship with other members. His need to define himself in relation to others was still there, but the reference points had just been altered by his conversion to the Church.

Ssu ma Ch'ien's works are replete with examples of this self definition based upon social functions and status. For example, Ts'ao Mei's biography begins as follows:

Ts'ao Mei was a native of Lu. Because of his daring and strength he was taken into service by Duke Chuang of Lu [r.693-662], who had great admiration for physical might. Ts'ao Mei served as a general of Lu, engaging in battle with Ch'I, but he was three times defeated over the city of Sui and the region around it to buy peace with Ch'I, but later he once more made Ts'ao Mei a general. (45)

Ts'ao Mei is first presented to us in relation to his place of birth or residence. The

following information tells us about Ts'ao Mei, but only Ts'ao Mei the general, and his relation and service to his superiors. In Li I-chi's biography, more personal details are given about the protagonist, but only because they help the reader better understand Li I-chi's place in his community:

Li I-chi was a native of Kao-yang in Ch'en-liu. He loved to read books. His family was poor and had fallen on such hard times that they had no means of procuring food and clothing, so Li I-chi became keeper of the village gate, but the worthy and influential people of the district would not venture to employ him at anything else. Throughout the district everyone called him "the Mad Scholar."

(201)

Although it might appear that Ch'ien, through including such personal details as Li's affinity for reading, tries to make him a more personable character, the reader must not forget that the details are included only to show Li I-chi's relationship to the rest of the community. The role of social structures or functions in relation to individuals can be seen in the conversion narrative "The Search." The story's protagonist is finally able to accept the LDS Church as the missing part of her life, but only after she is able to relate her Mormonism with a particular edifice in a particular location, and as a symbol of a particular people. While the protagonist had been learning about the gospel for at least three years in Taiwan, it was not until she traveled to Utah and saw the first LDS temple erected in the Salt Lake Valley, located as the starting point of the great traditional LDS population, the spot of land which Brigham Young himself deemed, "the right place."

Within Chinese literature, the physical attributes of individuals are not stressed as much as the events which happen to them. For example, a reader can digest a complete biography without a single physical description of the protagonist, such as in the biography of Jing Ke, the failed assassin. Within the Chinese translation of the conversion narrative “The Sweetness of the Fruit,” the lack of attention to the physical dimensions of the bus as well as the old lady (or my obsession to the same) was startling:

Looking up from my reading, I watched her board, fingers tightly gripping the small silver handrail as she pulled her little bend body up the three steel-studded steps and onto the platform of the already crowded bus. She dropped her few coins in the slot, her grey bun slightly bobbing to the rhythm of their fall. The bus coughed twice, and lurched to life; she lunged and caught the nearest hanging plastic ring, and then, from seat to seat, began to weave her way along the aisle.

(29)

The Chinese translation is simply “An old woman got onto the bus.” This difference in the translation is not due to the difficulty of the English text, as the accomplished Chinese translator would have been able to translate this passage in its complete literal state, but for her, the physical details did not possess the importance that they did for me.

This is not to state that physical descriptions are nonexistent in Chinese literature. In other stories, such as the famous novel *A Dream of Red Mansions*, physical descriptions exist, but they are often written as metaphors of nature:

Gazing at her [Black Jade] attentively, he soon recognized how different she was

from other girls. Her eyebrows were knitted and yet not frowning, her sparkling eyes held both joy and sorrow, and her breath was soft but faint. In repose, he mused, she must be like a lovely flower mirrored in the water; in motion, like an easily-bent willow branch swaying in the wind. (24)

Beyond the obvious metaphors of nature, the description of Black Jade's eyes are grounded more in abstract ideas than in physical dimensions, and the mention of her breath is odd inasmuch as it cannot be seen nor does it possess tangible dimensions. This brief excerpt from the novel is just one of many examples in which the physical dimensions of heroes or heroines are portrayed as representations of nature or analyzed in comparison to something typically earthy.

Although for the Westerner, as Sidonie Smith exerts in her essay "Performativity, Autobiographical Practice, and Resistance," "autobiographical storytelling becomes one means through which people in the West believe themselves to be 'selves'"(18), the same function of autobiography does not hold true for the Chinese. Understanding the individual only in relation to the collective, they have no driving desire to represent themselves as an individual, an exception to the masses. As Couser attests in his essay,

To the Marxist, far from being an authoritative form of writing, autobiography would inevitably disguise the actual relation between the individual and society. Insofar as it *singles out* its subject, autobiography is a form of self-delusion—indeed, of self-mutilation, the amputation of the individual member from the body politic. (38)

The Chinese, much as the Marxist, would view autobiography as a separation of themselves with their "body politic," their reference points and subsequently, their identity.

This idea is also exemplified in Chen Mai Ping's essay "On the Absence of the Self." While Mai Ping's article lists several different ways modern authors are beginning to redefine the self, I found the narrative confessions of the poet Yu Hua quite revealing:

I like the kind of narrative attitude that is, in common words, to tell people stories about other people. I will make an effort to avoid another kind of narrative attitude, that is, to tell people stories about myself. Even if it a story about myself, once it enters my narration I would turn it as into a story about other people. I am looking for a narrative method which does not have a self. (84)

The whole idea of wanting, searching for a narrative method with no self would seem to baffle most Western postmodern narrative theorists. Although many seem to agree that no language can represent the self, at least there is some desire for the text to do just that, to represent in some way the persona of the autobiographer.

Addressing the Problematics of Collecting

"But why was she sent away? Why did your father divorce her?" Direct, assertive, American, I break into my mother's reflection and pull her back to the story I want to hear.

Lydia Minatoya in response to her mother's narrating Lydia's grandmother's story, *Talking with High Monks in the Snow*

Tale-teller and Audience Association

Taking a functional approach to classifying conversion narratives provides folklorists with the opportunity to study the text or story and its relation to the people telling it and those listening, thus analyzing the performance of both the informant and his or her audience. By nature of this definition, conversion narratives are often influenced by the informant or collector's own motives, needs, and values. As folklorists employ a functional approach while analyzing or classifying conversion narratives, more emphasis is placed upon the individual which leads to some interesting discoveries about both the speaker and the collector's hidden pressures and biases. Because of the vastly different definitions of the "self" and the way it should and should not be expressed according to Western and Eastern ideologies, the focus on the individual is crucial to my project in understanding why the narratives function the way they do in either group. The racial and religious differences between myself as collector and my informants are so pronounced that a separate analysis of both these roles becomes imperative to any in-depth understanding of how these narratives actually function within the different cultures. My own move from collector to tale-teller also requires a closer analysis of the conversion narrative and its relationship to those listening and to those telling.

More recently, the field of folkloristics in general has been moving toward a study of folklore as human behavior rather than cultural representation. Folklorists such as Alan Dundes have begun to conduct more psychoanalytically oriented studies, Dundes in particular embracing a Freudian approach to folklore. As folklorists focus even more

intently on the relationships between folklore and human psychology, we begin to realize folklore's potential for illuminating the performance situation in regards to both the audience and the tale-teller, the collector and his or her informant. In her essay "Who Shapes Oral Narrative," Gloria Cronin feels folklorists need to push past functionalist theory and embrace what she terms a "psychosocial approach." Cronin feels confident that such an approach will "tell us who shapes oral narrative, audience or tale-teller, how that lore is constantly transmuted through the process of "communal recreation," and how we adapt culturally as a people bound by the exigencies of time and place" (13). It is imperative for folklorists to be concerned with the individuals on both ends of the conversation in order to understand how the audience as well as the tale-teller shapes the narrative, and thus determine who the tale-teller actually is.

There are two different ways in which the collector as an audience can affect the way that the informant presents his or her narrative. Depending upon the situational aspects of a specific performance, the collector can play roles ranging from either very passive to very aggressive. In her article "Personal Experience Stories," Stahl confirms the philosophy that some collecting opportunities are more ideal than others. Usually those contexts in which a person willingly and even almost unknowingly begins the telling of a personal experience story are preferable to those situations in which the story must be formally elicited from the speaker (274). The very nature of our project required a type of unnatural solicitation on my part as I telephoned the individual informants and asked them to relate their stories. Thus my role as collector became much more

aggressive than it would have been had I caught my informants sharing their conversion narratives in a spontaneous social gathering. Once on the phone with my informants, due to their reluctance or discomfort in using the personal narrative form which I required of them, I became an interviewer as well, asking them questions whenever I felt what they had offered was insufficient.

Often times, as is exhibited in Erving Goffman's book *Forms of Talk*, the interviewer may possess more communicative power in the performance situation than the tale-teller exhibits: because the replier is completely dependent upon the asker, the interview process often places more of the narrative power with the questioner than with the answerer. Throughout his book Goffman raises the issue of conversation control and its relationship to asking questions and giving answers:

Whenever persons talk there are very likely to be questions and answers. These utterances are realized at different points in "sequence time." Notwithstanding the content of their questions, questioners are oriented to what lies just ahead, and dependent on what is to come; answerers are oriented to what has just been said, and look backward, not forward. Observe that although a question anticipates an answer, is designed to receive it, seems dependent on doing so, an answer seems even more dependent, making less sense alone than does the utterance that called it forth. Whatever answers do, they must do this with something already begun.

(3-4)

Although Goffman's findings are insightful in and of themselves, they are especially

important when analyzing the interview as a tool for collecting conversion narratives. With only one exception, all of the narratives I collected were either in the form of telephone or personal interviews. Depending upon the willingness of the informant to share their story, my role as interviewer fluctuated from passive listener to aggressive speaker. But as Goffman suggests, whether passive or active, as interviewer I was always on the offensive, thus forcing my informants into the defensive. The narrative "Small and Simple Things" was the only story shared in a non-interview format, as my informant recorded the entire story onto an audio tape and sent it to me. I listened to the tape as I translated and typed the story into the computer, never calling her up or asking her a single question. To flesh out the events of her story, I added a few descriptions, but all of the events recorded are those she chose to share with me, those she viewed as important. Instead of being forced to share certain events with me in answer to questions I asked her, she was able to share those events which she most valued and wanted to include. Although her story cannot appear just as she told it to me, it does represent the informant's own voice to a greater degree than any of the other narratives. Just as the other stories were comprised of much question and answer, the informant's narratives were replaced by questions that represented my values, thus stripping away some of my informants' agency to structure their own narrative.

An audience's expectations and learned preferences for certain narrative forms can control the tale-teller's performance in other ways as well. Much of what informants decide to share, how they decide to share it, when, and where depends upon their

audience and how well the tale-teller has incorporated the values of their audience into their own sharing, or at least understands these expectations. It wasn't until I tried to relate some of my own missionary narratives after returning home that I began to realize the influence audience expectation exerts over both the structure and the content of a tale-teller's narrative.

The first Sunday after my arrival home, I found myself standing in front of my entire ward congregation while they waited for me to deliver my "homecoming address." As much of my "farewell address" would have related my feelings at leaving for the unknown, the "homecoming address" would relate those experiences which had transformed the unknown into the known: I had forty minutes to explain my eighteen month sojourn in Taiwan. This address served another purpose as well, as the presentation of my mission narrative became a definitive standard by which the audience could decide what type of missionary I had been. Like most other missionaries, I wanted the members to think that I had been a very spiritual, obedient missionary, so I decided to begin my talk by relating the most spiritual experience I could think to share:

One day were out tracting and it was really hot. Well, we had about three hours and we didn't have anything to do. So we could either sit in the Church in the air conditioning and we could write in the area book, or we could go out and tract and we could find some people. And so me and my companion decided to go out and it was so hot and we really were not in a very good mood, and, um, we went out on the street. We started down this one street and we started tracting and we

tracted for three hours, and nobody would let us in and nobody wanted a The Book of Mormon and nobody even wanted to say more than three words to us, and we were getting really discouraged. It had been three hours and it was really super hot and my companion said, “Okay. we’re going to finish this street.” And so we walked down the street and we knocked on the door . . . she turned out to be a really nice young lady actually, and she took a The Book of Mormon and she wanted to hear the discussions and we taught her the discussions and she was baptized about a month after that . . . and I’m really glad that that day we decided to do what Heavenly Father told us to do and we followed the scripture and we did everything that was in our power, and then Heavenly Father helped us that we could find a way to teach this woman the gospel and she could feel the spirit . . .

After I finished my talk and sat down, I began to realize what I had done. Like so many other missionaries before me, I had unconsciously nested my own experience into a ready-made and oft-used narrative format—the “last door” story mold. I don’t know how many times I had heard the “last door” story, the story rewarding the most diligent missionary efforts with eventual converts, but my talk had just made it one more. I didn’t exactly lie to the congregation (although considering the social pressure felt by returning missionaries I can see that happening as well): it was the last door we tracted that day. But was it the last door we knocked on because it was actually the last door on the street or was it our last door because we decided after finally being let into one door it was time to call it a day; we’d done our job. In honest recollection, my situation was the latter of

the two. But it was this need, whether I was conscious or unconscious of it, to gain the approval of my audience which forced me to contextualize my story within a method of narration acceptable to my LDS audience.

A basic understanding of the underlying ideology of this audience in relation to missionary work itself is crucial to understanding the role of an LDS audience, composed of both missionaries or members, in shaping conversion narratives. LDS folklore is replete with examples which represent as well as reaffirm the idea that the missionary effort will continue to succeed as long as missionaries continue to be obedient to mission rules and commandments. And for most members, this success is represented in physical terms by the number of baptisms or conversions a missionary is directly or indirectly involved in. William Wilson, in his article "The Paradox of Mormon Folklore," suggests that Mormons, through the stories they tell, are not just seeking "evidence that God lives but also that his programs are inspired and that he expects us to follow them" (134). Wilson also states that Mormon folklore functions to "reinforce Church dogma and practice, to sanction approved forms of behavior, and to give people a sense of stability in an unstable world" (133). While the idea that God blesses the obedient has a stabilizing effect on the actions of a member audience, it also sets up scary paradigms and expectations which missionaries feel they must meet. For those missionaries who were able to baptize many people, the symbol of their righteousness and obedience as a missionary is easily seen by all. For those missionaries who did not acquire many baptisms, however, the converse then becomes true--they were not as righteous or as hard

working as other missionaries who baptized more. While this is a logical fallacy most members do not actually voice, it still places internal pressures on the missionaries, pressures that are evident in the portrayal of their own personal mission stories. An individual's story is often reshaped to fit both structural patterns and values which might not be inherent in the teller, but which his/her audience may require of him. Perhaps as I stood to tell about my mission, the fact that Sybil was eventually baptized was not my main point, but my story was nonetheless reshaped to more dramatically focus upon her conversion, her union with God affirming my own spirituality and relationship with divinity.

A more psychological approach to viewing the narrator as well as audience makes my text and its collection process very problematic indeed. I already briefly addressed the issue of LDS missionaries and their influence on the Chinese members' communication modes, but determining the specific extent of this influence on my informants is nearly impossible. The content as well as structure of my informant's conversion narratives developed directly, to some extent, from previous coaching and emulation of a LDS missionary's example. In literary studies, the tale-teller and the audience were traditionally classified as worlds apart in function and personality: tale-tellers were defined as those who wrote or told their own stories, and an audience was defined as anyone who listened to the teller. But recently, as folklore has begun to place more importance upon the influence of the audience on the tale-teller's ability to tell the tale rather than on the content of the tale itself, the tale collector or audience in general

has become one of the study's central concerns. And in some cases, the collector can actually become the tale-teller.

Collector and Tale-teller Fusion

I can be considered the tale-teller of my own collection for several reasons. Because I was only able to translate the stories from Chinese to English according to my own interpretation and understanding of the words I heard, my role as translator can be seen as connected to that of tale-teller. As I decided to couch these narratives in a short story format, my move from collector to author, while creatively freeing, paradoxically bound me to the traditional forms and modes of the short story genre as well. Of course there are many other aspects of myself as an individual, both biologically inherent to me as well as socially constructed, which also must be examined, but because individual aspects of my personality were also complicated by my role as a missionary, determining exactly which aspects to examine becomes considerably difficult. While serving a mission, my existing simultaneously as female, middle-class, college educated, American, life-long Latter day Saint, story collector, and missionary created the same types of identity gaps as are mentioned by Smith in her article "Performativity":

It is as if the autobiographical subject finds him/herself on multiple stages simultaneously, called to heterogeneous recitations of identity. These multiple calls never align perfectly. Rather they create spaces or gaps, ruptures, unstable boundaries, incursions, excursions, limits and their transgressions (20).

To analyze myself as author of these stories is less than problematic and becomes almost

as complicated as analyzing my Chinese informants who are both male and female, poor and rich, illiterate and learned, Chinese and Taiwanese, life-long Buddhists and Taoists, white-collar and blue-collar workers. A brief analysis of my own perceptions and consequential portrayal of Chinese culture can be conducted by examining certain sections of the stories in which I consciously added or changed my informant's own responses. Such an analysis may reveal a few of those ideologies which, while deeply embedded, are nonetheless very real and evident within my own cultural context.

In the story, "The Thawing," my informant told me that she and her brother attended the Church-organized English class often, but my placing the scripture from Peter into her mouth is an evidence of my own frustration with the Chinese nonmembers. Because of her Buddhist background, and the role in which Chinese people in general understand religion, it is not Ya-ping who would specifically recall the altar and its glowing incense and thereby place it in opposition to another religion: "It remained clear with her, the glowing, pulsing alter redly casting shadows on their words . . ." (11). As a foreign missionary from a Christian country and Latter-day Saint family who looks at idol worshiping as breaking the first great commandment of loving God with all your heart, might, mind, and strength, my personality would react to the altar as a symbol of opposition, as it would cast shadows on the girl and her future. The red, odorous incense sticks were included as objects I was not familiar with, but were not so notable for Ya-ping.

Through Ya-ping's father I also portrayed my wish for the kind of emotional

attachment children in Western cultures have with their parents, the gestures of love that are apparent from most parents in Western cultures. As a female and as a daughter so far from my own home I missed this type of affection and therefore created a Westernized version of Ya-ping's father, giving him some of the qualities of the fathers I have known, and their tenderness I missed in Taiwan:

He tried to catch the tear as he once again thanked Heavenly Father for his chance to learn about the gospel. . . Ya-ping gently nudged him with a tissue . . . "Are you okay?" she asked softly.

"I'm fine," he embarrassedly assured her; "I think I might be catching cold." (18) And again on the last page, I present them as I think fathers and daughters should be: "As they waited for her mother to enter the water, Ya-ping quietly took her father's hand. . . A small smile, a squeeze; . . . Ya-ping squeezed back" (19). My informant mentioned none of this physical affection within her story, but according to my own learned value system I felt the story needed to have a more tender feeling toward the end.

Inasmuch as "The Search" portrays the meeting of an American and a Chinese family and their reactions to each other, the story serves as a fine commentary on the differences between the American and Chinese cultures, and how they are respectively affectionate or reserved. The following excerpts from the written text were not conveyed to me by any of my informants, and because of the language barrier between the two cultures, would have been virtually impossible. There was a morning in which both families read scriptures together, and at one point in the trip Allison was asked by Sister

Jyan to bear her testimony, but I'm not sure exactly when that took place. But the following conversation between Brother Jyan and Brother Harker is completely fictional; it just did not ever happen:

“Brother Jyan, have you ever had a chance to kneel together with your family in your own home, and have a prayer with them?” Brother Harker inquired afterward.

Mr. Jyan looked up startled for a moment. It was the first time he had ever been called Brother Jyan. He kind of liked the sound of it. After a minute or two, he had thought of what to say. “Because of my job, I am gone from my family a lot, and so it's hard to be together as a family very often. But everyday, when I am out on my ship, I am always praying for them.”

Sister Jyan looked up at her husband in surprise, but before he could catch her gaze, she had glanced back down at the hymnbook still clutched tightly in both hands. *She didn't know that either*, Brother Harker silently noticed in amazement. *She doesn't know how much her husband really cares for them.*

Brother Harker then looked up at his own wife, and over at his children. A small smile crept across his face. He hoped his children knew how much their father really loved them. (40-41)

My desire to include this fictitious episode perhaps more blatantly exemplifies my own views about family prayer and Chinese self-expression in general. Inasmuch as I define family prayer as an expression of a father's love for his family, I am also conversely

implying that if a father foregoes this habit, his family will not know he loves them. According to my own cultural values, a person's verbal expression of their love for another serves as another indication of their literal love. As my own parents verbally expressed their love for each other, I began to believe that the verbal expression of one's love literally represented that love, and that all of the speaker's actions then attempted to exemplified this love, and while sometimes actions fail, if individuals don't say it, they definitely aren't doing it. This Western notion of verbal expression was also exemplified through the actions of missionaries and some American leaders one Sunday in a certain branch in the mission. I was later told a particular Church meeting wasn't adjourned until every man was made to stand and publicly express his love for his wife. While this type of activity may benefit a Western audience, these Chinese members became somewhat confused by the Americans' insistence, and a few were visibly upset by the incident. This forced confession did not produce the desired results from Chinese members and may have had an adverse effect upon their feelings in general.

Within this story, the importance of missionary work is exemplified in a slightly different way and for a slightly different reason, and serves as another example of a particular missionary folk belief and narrative. As the sister missionary's decision to complete her mission ends in baptism, her story follows the model of the "destined" missionary, one who has been called to serve in a particular mission to help a particular individual become acquainted with the Church. If Sister Wang had returned home to her father and foregone the remainder of her mission, she would not have been able to help

Sister Jyan experience Temple Square, feel the Spirit, and be baptized into the Church.

These types of "fated union" narratives are often shared throughout the mission, acting as a tool to remind struggling missionaries that there are certain things they promised to do or they are supposed to do, and warning them of the consequences of leaving their missions early: "Brother Harker, you have truly been led by the Spirit today, she started; "led, to the only Chinese speaking missionary in the state of Utah right now.

Congratulations on finding me so fast" (42). My portrayal of their meeting seems too coincidental as she is the first missionary he talks to on Temple Square: indeed, he walks straight to her. After their short conversation, made only more poignant by the knowledge of Brother Harker's own daughter serving in Taiwan, he walks away from her humming the hymn "Come, Come Ye Saints," as again, my own insertion brings greater contrast between the unique feeling in Utah and the Salt Lake Temple and anywhere else in the world.

The bulk of this narrative seems to be more focused on Utah as a special location rather than Sister Jyan finding the truth, as is evidenced in the opening scripture I chose to use, the scripture from Isaiah which talks of all people coming to the mountain of the Lord, the House of the Lord. Although there is a temple in Taiwan, it was the Salt Lake Temple at which Sister Jyan finally gained her testimony of Mormonism. Was her belief a matter of location then, or of timing? And if it was a matter of location, as this story seems to suggest, does Sister Jyan's conversion support the presumption that the Salt Lake temple is somehow more spiritual than other temples dotting the earth? If so, this

story again serves to promulgate my own imbedded attitudes of Western-America dominance in relation to the membership of the LDS Church.

In “The Mustard Seed,” the “plastic fronds,” the “deeply-carved couches,” the “water-purifier,” are details exemplifying those aspects of Taiwan most alien to my own perception. As the missionary is riding his bike to the hotel, I make reference to the hymn “How Great Thou Art;” it is not the elder’s father’s favorite hymn, it is *my* father’s favorite hymn (6). And the six members attending that first Church meeting on the island only derives its significance from a LDS audience, as there were six members at the first ever organized Church meeting Joseph Smith conducted in 1830. And the emphasis again is placed on the author’s own faith in missionary work: “Mei-ru is currently trying to help the people of her small island home meet the Church, and understand the teaching of the gospel. . . Right now, Mei-ru is also preparing her family to listen to the gospel, and preparing to serve her own mission for the Church sometime soon” (10). While all these facts are true, it is the decisions of what to include and what not to, that we are analyzing here. In order to validate my own experience as well as my missionary audience spending two years of their life on a mission, there needs to be a sense of other people reaffirming the importance of missionary work by exemplifying it in their own life.

"Duel" Audience Articulation

My dual role as missionary and collector became even more problematic as I struggled to write for both American missionaries as well as Chinese investigators.

Closer examination reveals instances in which I place religious agendas inside my informants' mouths. The following excerpt from "The Thawing" exemplifies the fact that I perhaps occasionally had other motives in mind for my informants' sharings. As Ya-ping's struggle between obedient daughter and new Church convert seemed to echo other members' similar conflicts between family and Church, I decided to utilize her story as an example for other Church members to reevaluate their own devotion to the Church:

Ya-ping never could understand how everything she said, it somehow came out bad. But she really didn't care. The next Sunday she would be there, and the next one and the next. She would not stay away from Church, it meant too much to her. It was where the Savior wanted her to be, it was where she had promised him she would be, and it was the only place her testimony grew. The more she came, the more Ya-ping learned, the more she knew the Church was true. She remembered baptism. How good it felt to be clean and new and warm, but like rebirth, she was just a child again. She needed to be fed, to be loved, to be taught the gospel of the Savior; she needed to come to Church and learn. (13).

My informant did tell me that "she would not stay away from Church, it meant too much to her," but the rest of the paragraph is perhaps the projections and reflections of a missionary's desires. As a frustrated missionary dealing with so much inactivity in Taiwan, I used my informant's thoughts to not only encourage other missionaries, but as a lead-in to prick the conscience of members and part-members, hopefully encouraging

them to attend Church more regularly.

Again, on page fourteen of the same story, I use Ya-ping's own testimony to her parents as a teaching tool for my missionary audience. While writing the section, I decided this was a convenient place to provide for new missionaries a standard model for explaining all the principles in the first discussion, and it does do just that. It serves as a model, a great teaching tool for young missionaries to see how they can synthesize this information. But again, I must question the ethics behind my motivations in persuading Ya-ping to share her story in the first place. Does Ya-ping's narrative exist merely to serve as a teaching model to missionaries, or is there not some inherent value which exists, at least to the Westerner, in any representation of the individual? Or does her story exist to teach other members the *correct* way to help their families join the Church? If so, what are the implications of her story for those stalwart members whose families do not join the Church, even after their own efforts are similar to Ya-ping's? There is no correct way to help one person convert another, yet this narrative would claim the authority to do so.

Because of the unusual focus on the missionaries' diligence and hard work in searching for one man, "When Hearts Prepare," probably more than any other narrative, expresses this idea that a missionary's personal righteousness is directly related to finding converts. This story serves to promulgate the idea that only the righteous missionaries will find people and baptize, but again inherent in that ideology is the flip side of the coin: if missionaries don't find and baptize, they are in some way, less righteous or less

faithful than those who do.

President Koerner first suggested I collect this story because of the human interest element it contained for our missionary audience. Other missionaries would certainly find the downhill chase humorous, but the incident also exemplifies the type of dedication and obedience all “good” missionaries should possess. At first I resisted the story’s inclusion inasmuch as my personal views of the project consisted of a specific focus on the Chinese members and their obstacles, not on the greatness and personal righteousness of the missionaries. But now as I consider our dual audience, I have to admit the need for dual motives as well. If the stories were written for the benefit of the missionaries as well, personal worthiness stories would perhaps strike chords deeper within some missionaries we wanted to reach. Perhaps because of the difficulty of proselytizing on Taiwan, the sharing of baptismal experiences were of great importance among the missionaries there. Often times these success stories served as a motivational impetus for less experienced or younger missionaries to work harder. President Koerner further related to me the unusual experience of one of the missionaries in this story: when one of the sister missionaries in the story first saw the future convert, she prophetically pronounced him the next leader of the Church in that area. The idea that this particular missionary not only exemplified such personal worthiness, but also that this worthiness specifically led to success quite intrigued me and I decided to include the story. When I called the sister missionary, however, she told me her prophetic comments were more like a joke than anything else, as it was a phrase they used all the time when they met

people they thought were neat or they wanted to talk to. Although this sister's confession made the story a lot less coincidental and extraordinary, I proceeded to describe her as prophetic, as that version would more effectively connect the ideas of personal worthiness and success.

“It's him!” Sister Davis excitedly yelled to her companion. “He's got it—the light of Christ in his eyes.” Sister Wheeler looked a bit confused at her companion's outburst.

“Who is it?” she asked again.

“It's him, I tell you; we just saw our next branch president drive by!”

“Well, aren't we going to go and get him then?” Sister Wheeler asked without a pause. (22)

Although this version of their narrative makes the entire missionary experience much more dramatic and helps to promulgate the connection between personal worthiness and convert baptisms, the ethical implications of this representation on my part are astounding. While it is true the more dramatic interpretation of this incident furthers the story's ability to motivate missionaries to remain worthy in order to experience success, I achieved the project's motive at such a cost, the narrative situation practically demanding the choice I made. By favoring motive over narrative, I am violating my own belief in the idea that biography must somehow be responsible for attempted presentation of the “truth” to a particular audience.

One of the most recognizable themes in the story "Coming Back to Him," is that

of a missionary's legacy. Promoting the idea that it is specific missionaries who are vital to a convert's individual success is another way of validating missionary work in general. While focusing on a missionary's individual identity may also motivate other non-native missionaries to work harder for similar validation and recognition, Chinese missionaries may not be similarly motivated. While perhaps ego boosting, this idea of a legacy can also be dangerously self-serving and tends to twist motive. There were a few instances in which I became concerned about President Koerner's own motives for pushing our project in particular. Occasionally referring to the project as "my legacy," or "your legacy," or "the mission's legacy," I became concerned that the project's ultimate motive was to provide a memoir to his years as a mission president, rather than become an effective teaching tool. His concern with one of the stories in particular also added to my fears. The first story, "A Mustard Seed," took place on a small island off the coast of Taiwan, an island which had first been opened up for missionary work by this president, later closed because of political strife, and had just been cleared for reopening. The two missionaries sent there quickly found a young woman, taught her the discussions, and then baptized her, with the president and his wife in attendance for the baptism. I didn't feel their presence as essential to her conversion storyline; consequently, their presence wasn't even mentioned in the first two drafts. Although I was happy with the end result, the president insisted that I redraft the story a third time, this time including him and some scenery changes he had suggested earlier. I finally acquiesced, submitting my own ego beneath his own. But my involvement with the project boosted my own ego as well,

as I was performing work perhaps only I was qualified to perform, and the recognition from other missionaries and members on the island which would surely follow this book was exciting. The project provided a way for me to stand out as unique, and be recognized for my individual abilities and accomplishments, much to my Westernized delight.

Acknowledging the Challenges of a Multi-cultural Church

“Frankly,” confided Funch, “since you left, Wendell hasn’t been himself.”

“And who,” said Oedipa, working herself into a rage because Funch was right, “pray, has he been, Ringo Starr?” Funch cowered. “Chubby Checker?” she pursued him toward the lobby, “the Righteous Brothers? And why tell me?”

“All of the above . . . Behind his back,” Funch was whining, “they’re calling him the Brothers N. He’s losing his identity, Edna, how else can I put it? Day by day, Wendell is less himself and more generic. He enters a staff meeting and the room is suddenly full of people, you know? He’s a walking assembly of man.”

Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*

A Conclusion-less Frustration

President Hinckley's announcement of the Mormon Church's gradual transformation into a world-wide, multi-cultural entity, while exciting to members of the

LDS religion, should also be a cause for their concern. As people of vastly different backgrounds are becoming one in a religious group that for many years was composed mostly of whites or Anglo-Americans, the difficulty remains in the acceptance and understanding of these new cultures. Toelken believes that by nature the whites or Anglo Americans are "as deeply bound by their worldview, as are any of the other groups which make up the American conglomeration, with the one rather ominous difference that they have tried to eradicate the others' views by a process known politely as acculturation" (268). Inasmuch as acculturation leads to the homogenizing of other cultures by the dominant one, the goal of any heterogeneous ethnic group should be one of enculturation, that of mutual cultural sharing, understanding, and deciding how to best coexist.

Often, as Toelken notes, there are differences in the ways that two distinct ethnic or cultural groups understand, evaluate, and perceive each other: "We have flattered ourselves too long that the Black is 'like us' except for his dialect and color, that the Indian is like us except for his childish primitiveness, that the Mexican-American is like us except for his accent" (268). It is this viewing other people as like us except for their differences which leads not only to false assumptions and acculturation of their motives, habits, and modes of communication, but of them as individuals as well. It denies us the ability to recognize their right to a unique existence while they are subsequently grounded in shared religious beliefs and doctrines.

I had just finished relating Toelken's ideas to my friend one Saturday night when he immediately responded with the following questions: "So what is it you want from

the missionaries, from me, from members in general? You want us to become Chinese? Are you suggesting that the only “good” missionaries are those who can think and act Chinese? That the only “good” members are those who can adopt another culture’s values and perspectives?” His belligerent manner startled me and he left long before our discussion of individual realities and frames of reference had fully answered his questions. During our conversation I confidently suggested the impossibility of members or missionaries becoming Chinese, but by refusing to even recognize the different modes of representation between the two cultures, members and missionaries are either implying these differences don’t exist, or perhaps even more frightening, allowing that they do exist but are no longer relevant or valuable because of the members’ belief in their ability to successfully reach a Chinese perspective from their own Western reality.

Although my answers had sounded self-confident, my friend had posed these questions at a bad time. Three days prior to our discussion, one of President Koerner’s assistants in Taiwan informed me that the project Sister Wang and I labored over had literally disappeared. Not only was the book never published in Chinese, but copies for the English speaking missionaries were never distributed either. I was not terribly surprised at the announcement, but somewhat disappointed and became very angry as I began to question the value of the project itself and, subsequently, the value of my thesis. But as I continually reflect on the original questions this project raised for me in my mind and the answers I tried to reach in my thesis, I cannot ignore the effects that the simplest awareness of my project’s implications could have upon the LDS Church as a whole.

If I felt comfortable in labeling this section a conclusion, many of my experiences in Taiwan and the analysis of these experiences would have been for naught. Therefore I do not pretend to conclude anything in these final pages, but rather state some realistic implications of my project and its analysis. After coming to a better understanding of the inability of text to represent event and that textual authority is not inherent within the text, my focus has slightly changed from wondering if I as an American could write a *reliable* account of a Chinese personal conversion experience, to an examination of when and how my American values surfaced throughout the different stories. While the narratives themselves may be less *explicit* representations of my own learned methods of communication, the stories converted from them and written by myself inherently are my own creation. Although the Chinese people may not value the art of personal expression much as a Westerner might, they are still capable of sharing personal experiences although the willingness to share and methods which are deeply embedded into their psyche may differ. In specific regard to the conversion narrative in general, the functions of sharing the conversion narrative may appear similar, but the methods and results of this sharing in some ways differ drastically between Western and Eastern cultures.

After so stating, I can just hear my friend screeching “So what? Who cares?” into my ear. I believe a more sensitive understanding of how and why Chinese people express their testimonies and personal narratives will enable missionaries to utilize the conversion narrative to its utmost function within the Chinese culture. If allowed the freedom of individual expression, the Chinese members’ sharing of their conversion narratives can

better build their own testimonies, can enable them and missionaries to more successfully share the gospel with others, may reaffirm for them their individual membership and covenants rather than their status as a member of a group, and it will help them better express themselves as individuals within a non-threatening, traditional Chinese format. I do not believe my friend must be Chinese or Mormon in order to meaningfully communicate with a Chinese Mormon, but I hope that he would at least possess a desire for more effective communication. I realize that if I were to return and begin this project again, I would still be an American collecting and writing Chinese narratives, but I would not be the same American that I was before. It is the awareness of the differences between myself and the Chinese members which can illuminate my preconceived expectations: I cannot expect the Chinese Mormons to become American Mormons anymore than I can expect to become a Chinese Mormon. For me this type of understanding has come as I experienced a performance situation in which cultures were not swallowed up by one another, but where they crossed, where an analysis of different communication modes was made possibly through a situation where two cultures collided in the act of self-expression.

By analyzing those communication situations in which different cultural modes clash, the folklorist can begin to discover both the informant and audience's "psychosocial" ideologies, fears, and stresses which their respective performances of differing language modes may mask. Analysis of the performance situation and consequent written texts of this conversion narrative project have, for me, heightened my

awareness of hidden cultural ideologies and fears, both within the Chinese culture as well as within my own American culture. This awareness of each culture's and individual's psychological intuitions has allowed me to come to a better understanding of myself, the Chinese self, and ourselves together in context.

Global Church, Individual Focus

The question of group boundary constructions and deconstructions within the Mormon religion and its role upon the individual is a timely one. As President Hinckley recognizes the Church's rapid global growth, he is becoming increasingly concerned with the individual member. In a talk entitled "This Work is Concerned with People" given in the Church's 1995 Annual General Conference, Hinckley makes the following assertions:

We are becoming a great global society. But our interest and concern must always be with the individual. Every member of this Church is an individual man or woman, boy or girl. Our great responsibility is to see that each is "remembered and nourished by the good word of God" (Moroni 6:4), that each has opportunity for growth and expression and training in the work and ways of the Lord . . . This, I submit, is the inspired genius of this the Lord's work . . . Jesus was the true shepherd who reached out to those in distress, one at a time, bestowing an individual blessing upon them. (52-53)

Hinckley's renewed attention to the individual is necessary as the Church constantly welcomes different cultures comprised of distinct individuals. If these cultures can continue to exist together under the umbrella of Mormonism, a more thorough

understanding or at the very least a desire to understand the different values, fears, and challenges of each culture is imperative. One of the most effective ways to begin this understanding comes through analyzing those performance situations in which two cultures collide.

As I sat listening to my roommates' linguistic competition while they boasted their fastest trips from Provo to Salt Lake, I tried to image how silly our conversation would have sounded to someone who valued the experience of driving to Salt Lake more than they valued a quick, timely trip. As Bauman further notes, this basic realization of different cultural values can be accomplished as the folklorist attempts to

discover the social organization of communication, the patterns, functions, and social meanings of communicative forms and practices. . . The central concern of the field is to discover the patterns, functions, and meanings of those communicative resources in the conduct and interpretation of social life, for the people among whom they are current, for whom they are available as equipment for living. (xv)

As communication is socially constituted, we can better understand cultures based upon their own modes of sharing and communication by analyzing these modes and the social values inherent within them. I believe Bauman is correct in his assessment, and that once we discover how a culture's communicative resources operate within their culture, we are better able to use their methods for more efficient communication. There exists a great need to study conversion narratives, not only to develop a more efficient proselytizing

tool, but to better understand and treat those of other cultures who already exist within the boundaries of the LDS culture.

After speaker and listener through different linguistic performance situations become aware of each other's inherent cultural differences, both need to make the other as comfortable in expressing these cultural differences as they do in expressing their LDS sameness. This requires that both groups view the other's method of communication as valuable as their own, that one is not better than the other, but both are valuable. Only by understanding how culture's different modes of communication, such as the conversion narrative, is indigenously defined and functions within other cultures are we able to share our narratives with their audience in a way which will help them not only respond with understanding, but conversely desire to share their narratives with us in a way which is both comfortable and logical to them.

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Cross-cultural Conversion Narratives: An American Missionary in Taichung,
Taiwan

Amy Nelson

Department of English

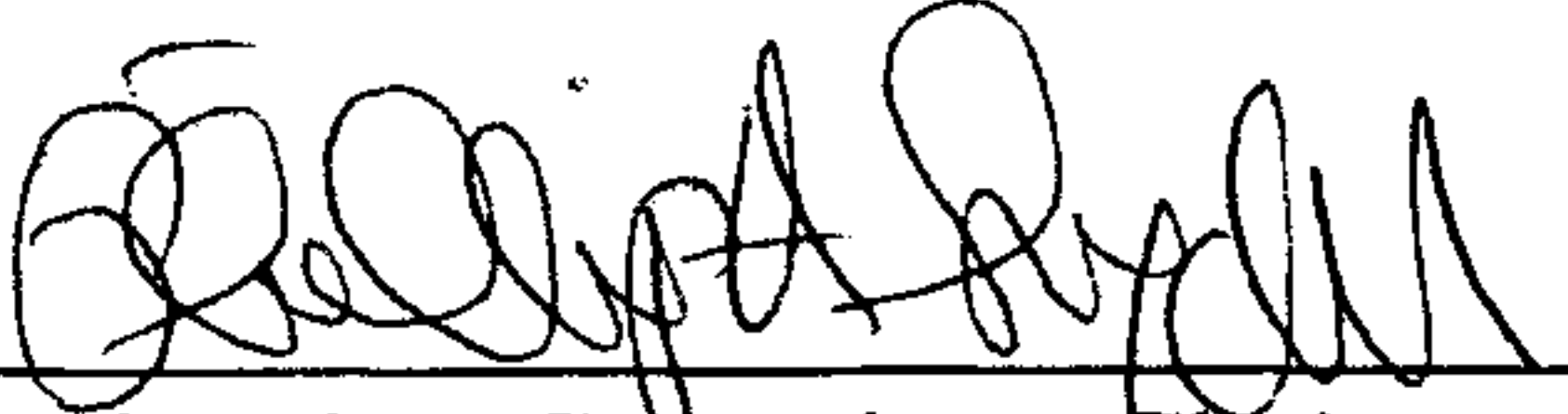
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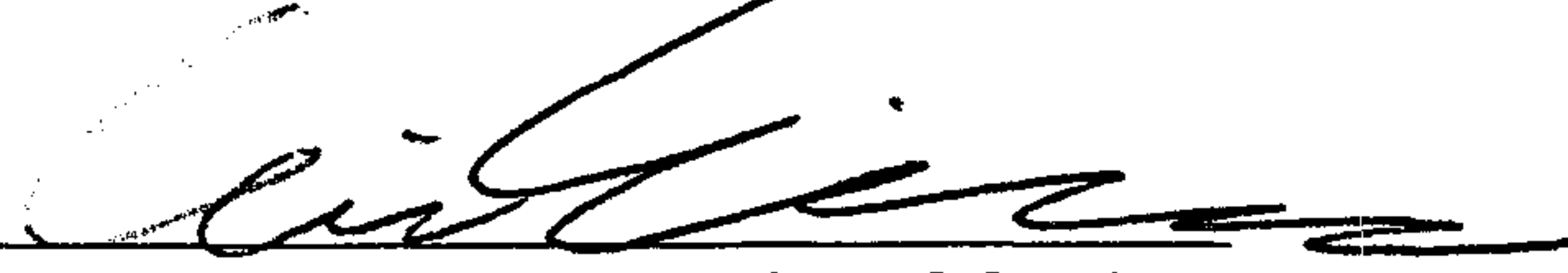
ABSTRACT


This thesis analyzes a collection of conversion narratives which I gathered and then composed into stories during my LDS mission to Taichung, Taiwan. The first section of the thesis relates my own personal narrative, providing explanatory information concerning LDS missions in general, how this project in particular came to bear while I was serving my mission, and a brief synopsis and summary of the individual narratives included within the work. The narrative collection itself is included in an appendix at the end.


I analyze these narratives by first descriptively outlining the genre of the conversion narrative according to definition and function and then focusing on the different ways the narrative functions for American Mormons and Chinese Mormons. I then delve into an analysis of the Chinese idea of "self" using examples from Chinese historiography and literature. I conclude by explaining how an awareness of the different cultural communicative modes between cultures is essential in preaching the gospel and retaining those members who are already part of a continually expanding and diverse religion.

COMMITTEE APPROVAL:


Phillip Snyder, Committee Chair


Eric A. Eliason, Committee Member


Jill Terry Rudy, Committee Member

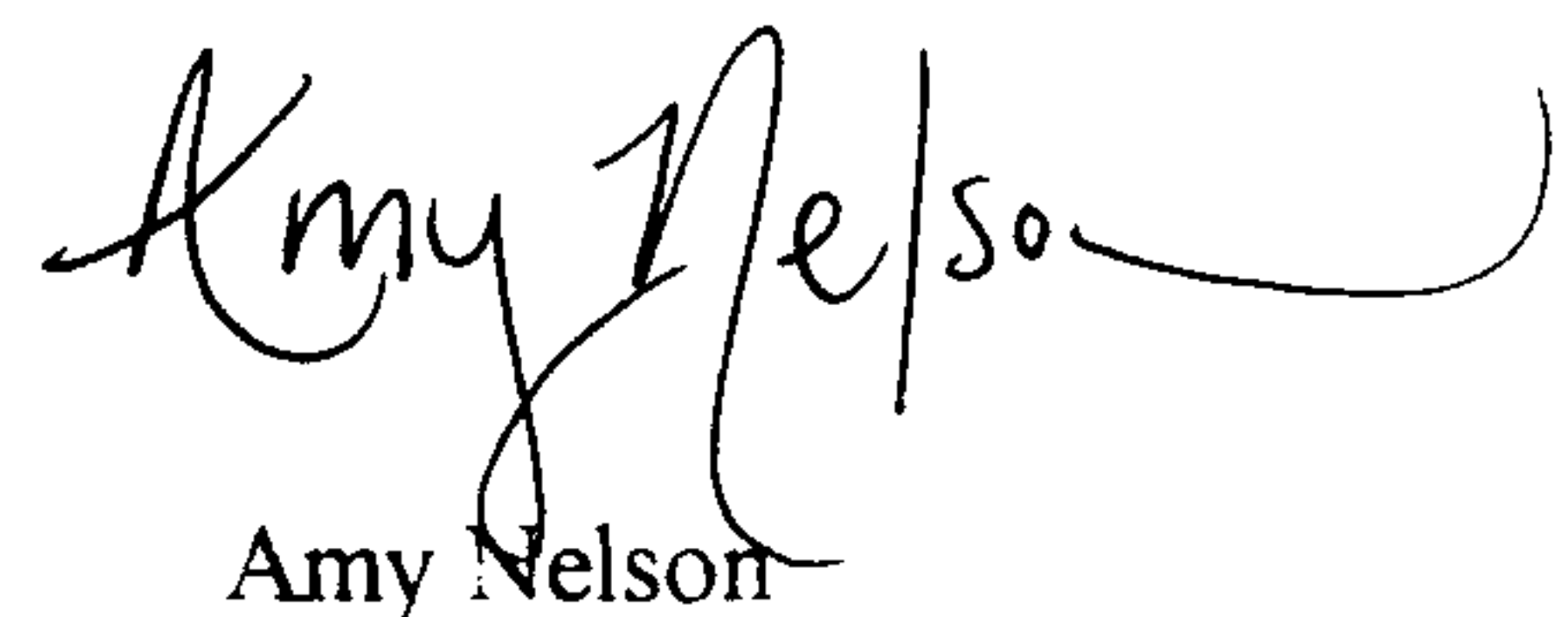

Richard Y. Duerden, Graduate Coordinator

TOPICAL INDEX

TITLES	TOPICS
<p>A Mustard Seed <i>A Peng-Hu member's faith to be baptized.</i></p>	Overcoming Boundaries, Faith, Baptism, Missionary Work, Church Attendance
<p>The Thawing <i>A young woman is baptized and later helps her whole family join the church.</i></p>	Overcoming Parental Opposition to the Church, Patience, Diligence, Sharing the Gospel with Family, Church Attendance, Personal Example, The Book of Mormon
<p>When Hearts Prepare <i>Two missionaries' efforts to find a man prepared to hear the gospel.</i></p>	Overcoming Obstacles, Power of the Holy Ghost, Missionary Work, Prayer, Desire, The Love of God
<p>The Sweetness of the Fruit <i>A member gives away a Book of Mormon on the bus.</i></p>	Overcoming Fears of Sharing the Gospel, Sharing the Book of Mormon, Kind Deeds, Patience
<p>The Search <i>A mother's search for truth takes her and her family to the Salt Lake Temple.</i></p>	Overcoming Doubts about the Gospel, Spirit of the Temple, Patience, Love, Diligence, Personal Example, Testimony
<p>A Road Prepared <i>A young man learns how he can follow God's commandments while serving in the army.</i></p>	Overcoming Influences of the Army, Courage, Obeying the Commandments, The Word of Wisdom, Reading the Book of Mormon, Church Attendance, Prayer, Faith
<p>The Heart, and a Willing Mind <i>A member helps a suicidal friend accept the gospel, who later shares it with another friend.</i></p>	Overcoming Depression and Death, Sharing the Gospel, The Purpose of Life, Hope, Personal Conversion, Desire
<p>Small and Simple Things <i>A young woman's desire to serve a mission finds fulfillment in the Prophet's promise.</i></p>	Overcoming Parental Opposition to Serving a Mission, Doing Your Own Part, Prayer, Patience, Faith, Desire, The Prophet's Guidance
<p>A Father's Truth <i>A Daoist priest finds truth and happiness through the gospel of Jesus Christ.</i></p>	Overcoming Traditions, The Importance of Finding Truth, Personal Conversion, Desire, Faith, Hope
<p>Coming Back to Him <i>A young inactive member finds her way back to the gospel.</i></p>	Overcoming Inactivity, Church Attendance, Personal Conversion, The Spirit of the Temple, The Sacrament,

The stories contained in this book were taken from extensive interviews, both in person and by phone, between the writer and usually several of the persons mentioned within the story. These interviews were very thorough in nature, and the important events and basic storylines of each story were written according to the content of these interviews. The writer was very careful to follow the storylines with exactness, and included all the details she was given. But there were also many details which were not disclosed to her, and she had little means of obtaining. Much of the dialogue between characters, some of their thought processes, and many of the descriptive and environmental details therefore, were left to the writer's own discretion and creativity.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amy Nelson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail that extends to the right.

Amy Nelson

A MUSTARD SEED

20 . . . for verily I say unto you, if ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.

Matthew 17:20

"This place is a dump!" I ran my hand across the kitchen table, blackening my fingers with the dirt, and, turning my palm toward the door, gave my companion a look. He shrugged and dropped the books, dust from the bamboo bench rising up and settling on the pages of my missionary guide. He stood and stared a minute, then remembered the suitcases outside the doorway.

"It's just dirty," I heard him mumble over his shoulder. He entered the house again, this time with two gigantic suitcases in one hand, his shoulder bag and briefcase hanging from the other side. "Where do you want me to sleep?" he asked quietly, as his eyes too began to survey the almost vacant room.

"Well, I'd fight you for the waterbed, but seeing how neither of us even has a bed yet, you can have the floor over there, okay?" With a small, half-hearted smile, he tried to ignore my pessimism.

"I'm sorry it's not like the hotel," was all he said, and then turned and busied himself with his luggage.

I slowly sat down next to the pile of books, sighing as the old bench rocked a little, adjusted to my weight, and tried to remain aright. It had been a hard week. I thought back to my initial excitement as I first learned I would have the chance to open up this remote island area, away from the rest of the mission, secretly envied by the other missionaries. But as I sat here in our "new" house, surrounded by nothing, that excitement had now waned, replaced with the realization that everyday was going to be a long, hard day of knocking doors and talking to everyone, in an effort to find those ready to hear. I absently reached for the books next to me, picked up the first one on the stack, and, turning to the title page, stopped and read aloud: "*A Study of the Articles of Faith* by James E. Talmage, Being a Consideration of the Principal Doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints." I felt a little foolish reading outloud to no one, but a phrase had caught my eye--I read again: ". . . A Consideration of the Principal Doctrines of the Church." I stopped, and let the words

reverberate in my mind. Principal doctrines of the church--faith was a principal doctrine of the church.

Of course I already knew that; the first principle of the gospel is faith, the foundation of a testimony, the seed of understanding. So I began to wonder why it was, since I supposedly knew all about faith, here I sat tired and selfish, with little faith the Lord would help us find those people who were earnestly seeking the happiness and peace brought only through the gospel of Christ; those "only kept from truth because they know not where to find it" (Doctrine and Covenants 123:12). But it was hard, faith was; the intangible is slippery. How can the Lord expect us to understand the unseen, I thought, or even harder, go and use it, live it? After all, there was a big difference between the two; it was just as the girl in the hotel had said.

She held the keys to our room, so we saw her every night that first week. She worked at the little desk behind the plastic palm frond from four in the afternoon until late into the evening. It was Tuesday afternoon as we first arrived on the small island. Since we had no home, we were happy with this, one of the bigger hotels in town. It was nice, with a big fish tank and small lounge, and also mostly deserted since the winter months had hit the tourist island. That first night there, she was friendly, helpful; genuine, concerned. Her name was Mei-ru. She worked two jobs on the island-- at another hotel in the mornings; and she lived with her family, her mom, dad, and two younger brothers, not very far down the road. Although we were already late coming home that night, we stayed and talked awhile, and then grabbed our key and headed to the room.

"I think she's great; I really do," my companion said for the third time since we had started up the flight of stairs. "We definitely need to teach her the discussions," he finished as we reached our room. I pulled the key from my pocket, metal scraped metal, and the door swung open.

"Okay, Elder Wang. Let's see if we can't fit her into our busy schedule," I sarcastically suggested. That managed to make him smile.

Thursday afternoon found us seated on the lightly padded, deeply carved couches of the hotel lobby, all exchanging stares of curiosity. Mei-ru sat across from us, smiling at our jokes and giving us these little funny looks, almost as if she couldn't quite remember where she was. She was nervous, so we talked for a while, and then, after thanking her for the chance, began to teach the first discussion. I cleared my throat to start, but before I spoke, my heart first voiced the simple, familiar prayer.

Dear Heavenly Father, I pleaded, Please help this woman to understand my Chinese. Help us to communicate in a way that she can understand what we are saying, and we can understand what she is feeling. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen. And then we started the discussion.

First she told us not to worry; she believed in God, and she wasn't scared of church. We couldn't help but smile, as she then continued to catalogue for us the different Christian churches she had already attended or had heard a lot about. She described their chapels to us: very clean; wooden benches in some, stained glass art in others. Always a pulpit, always a cross, and some even had hardbound hymnals and an occasional drinking fountain. My mind wandered to our own modest but beautiful chapel in Taichung, and I suddenly wished that we were there in that Sunday School room, to look up and see the pictured Christ, as he lovingly washed the disciples' feet clean. A gentle gurgle of the fish tank brought me back to the hotel, and to her words. After a while she ran out of descriptions, and when we asked her how she felt, she smiled.

"Church is good," she started; "it feels good to talk of Christ." Then she searched a minute, to find the right emotion. "But in my heart, at least, there is always something missing, something not quite right perhaps, a bit out of place; it's like learning a lot, but at the same time, still not knowing . . . the truth."

So we began to talk of Heavenly Father and his plan of happiness for us, about prophets and how they help us find the truth, and know how to live this plan. We told her of Joseph Smith, the young boy who knelt in the woods to pray; of his great desire to find and know the truth, of his great faith to kneel and ask which church was God's, and of his courage to tell others the things he saw that day. I pulled the blue and gold-bound Book of Mormon from my bag, placed it gently on the tea-stained table top, and tried to tell her what it meant to me. We started with Lehi and Nephi, of their struggle to the Americas, of other prophets and their testimonies, and of the Savior, his visit to these people. He healed their painful sores, salved their burning souls, and took their children in His arms. Oh, how I loved him, and wanted Mei-ru to know that he could do the same for her. Then we were at the end. We asked her to pray about the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon, about Joseph Smith, about the message we had shared.

Mei-ru looked at my companion, thoughtful for a minute, and then slowly replied, "It takes a lot of faith to find and live the truth, doesn't it? But I think I'm willing to try my own. I'll read, I'll pray, and I will find my answer."

I once again said a silent, thankful prayer, pleading that she too might find the truth, our discussion ending the same way it had begun. I stood to stretch my legs, and wandered to the water purifier.

"By the way," I heard my companion say, "since you said you're not scared, we also have church every Sunday. Why don't you come this Sunday and see what it's like?"

She stood up also, nodding her consent as she walked behind the desk, but then her head quickly bobbed back up over the top. "Hang on a minute. I don't think I've even seen your chapel before. Where did you say it was again?"

I looked up from my water and over at Elder Wang, I too, a little curious as to where our chapel was. He gave me a little quirky smile, and then, turning back to her, added, "Can we get back to you on that?"

Church, it turned out, was only minutes from the hotel. After discovering a few members on the island, we called one up and invited him and ourselves over for church services at his home. So that next Sunday morning, after a fifteen-minute walk from the hotel, we found ourselves and Mei-ru, a little cold and windblown, on the doorstep of Brother Fan's abode.

His house was short and small, but clean, I imagined scrubbed special for this, our first sacrament together. I pushed the buzzer and looked over the roof and into his backyard. I could see the banana trees, heavy and pregnant with fruit; the orange trees a bit more bare. I had to smile a little at the struggling avocado tree that seemed to be growing its way straight up out of the house and into the open air. The chirp had died away, and, at the sound of the latch, the little red door swung inward to give us our first look at Brother Fan and his little chapel. As always, I stooped a little as we entered the doorway, my eyes adjusting to the light. "I just thought we could have it in the big room here," he said, pointing to our left. Still a little apprehensive, I took a long look around the room. He had brought out what appeared to be all the chairs he owned, each one precisely placed to form a perfect arc. From the back bedroom came the small nightstand table on which we could bless the sacrament; there were even some paper and a pen up front, for the speakers to jot their last-minute thoughts. It only took a second to see it all, but I gazed longer anyway. Turning to Mr. Fan, I couldn't think of anything to say; it was beautiful.

And then the meeting started. Except for no piano, it was perfect. I didn't even miss the pulpit when I stood to give my talk. The sacrament was blessed and passed; we renewed ourselves to live a better life. Then my companion stood and gave his talk. He told us of our Heavenly Father's plan, and the great blessing it was for us to come to this earth. And as he spoke, the room filled with peace, and warmth. I cast a small glance at Mei-ru, and I could see she felt it too. That Sunday morning as we few sat there side by side, the Spirit testified to the truth of my companion's every word. It burned in our hearts; it filled the Fan's home, just as it filled every other beautiful, aesthetic chapel of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. And then it was time to end it.

As we thumbed our way through the two small hymnals and sang the closing song, I silently thanked my Heavenly Father that we could know, even in the Fan's

small home, that this gospel was true, and that Christ's true church had once again been established on the face of the earth, for the salvation of all men who would come unto it. The song over, I stood to say the closing prayer; through misty eyes, I quickly counted the bowed heads, the folded arms--there were exactly six of us.

Mei-ru just couldn't get enough. After church she invited us back to the hotel to teach her another discussion. So a few hours later there we were again, sitting on the couches in the hotel lobby, listening to the fish tank and the computer lady's voice welcoming people to the hotel, and thanking those that left. It was here Mei-ru would learn about the Savior's love for her; his death so we can live again, and his atonement so we can return to our home. We taught her the first principles and ordinances of the gospel: faith, repentance, baptism, and the Gift of the Holy Ghost. Then we talked about commandments, and about the Savior's own baptism, an example of his humility and willingness to obey all the commandments of the Father. And then I asked her to follow him and do the same.

"Mei-ru," I began, "are you willing to follow the Savior's perfect example and be baptized in his name?" As I voiced the words of the invitation, my mind quickly reflected again on what it was I, as I spoke for the Savior, was asking her and others before her to do. I was asking her to change her life--to follow him, to do as he had done, to live as he had lived. I was asking her to have faith that Christ's atonement really provided a way for her to repent. I was asking her to repent, to be washed clean from all that would keep her from God; I was asking her to join Heavenly Father's only true church on the face of the earth, and live its only truths. But then I realized that, unlike the others, I was asking Mei-ru to join a church that she had never even seen before. To her, the church was Brother Fan's living room, the smell of pineapple and fruit, the mismatched footstools, the nightstand from the back bedroom. The church was six people who sang beautiful hymns badly, who listened to good talks given in my weak Chinese; six people who had the faith to look for truth and then to live it, six souls who wanted to communicate with God. *What kind of faith is this? I wondered. The faith to move a mountain, to calm an angry sea?*

She broke my thoughts; "I will--I want to follow Him." We were silent for a second, and then she smiled, I smiled, my companion smiled. All three of us sat smiling; somehow it was enough just to feel the happiness. But even happy moments must be broken, as a man by the palm frond intently looked our way, and cleared his throat for service. Mei-ru looked at us wistfully, her eyes shone; "I have to go. Thank you for coming today," and then she was already behind her desk. After a few seconds we also stood, gathered our bags and, signaling our goodbyes, walked out the doubled glass doors and into the greying afternoon, the computer lady barely audible over Mei-ru's own "Thank you for coming" still ringing in our ears.

I closed Talmage's *Articles of Faith* and looked up. My companion had wandered back into the living room, bored with the contents of his suitcases. "I was just thinking about Mei-ru," I said with a smile.

"She sure has taught us a lot, huh?" His remark didn't surprise me, and I quickly nodded in agreement; we'd just come to expect that from Mei-ru. From that first week we had met her until now, she had outworked, outthought, and outstudied us. No matter how badly we wanted her to learn and progress, she wanted it more. No matter how well we did our part, she did hers better. She had the faith to try, the desire to know if these things were true, and the strength to kneel down and find out. And so I sat there in our dirty house, and remembered her words; it does take a lot of faith to find the truth and live it. It takes a lot of faith to pray, to ponder words of scripture, to make commitments. It takes a lot of faith to be baptized, to make covenants for blessings not yet realized. I began to remember, for the first time in a few days, how hard the road was which she appeared to make so easy.

And yet, she had the faith to do it. I figured that if Mei-ru could do it, I could too. Besides, there was still much she needed to learn before she was baptized. I looked up from the old bench at my companion, who must have read my mind.

"Well, where do you want to start?" he asked me.

"Let's start with my luggage, I quietly replied.

For the third morning that week, I pulled the wad of rain clothes from my bike basket, and shook out the dead leaves and dirty water that had slept there the night before.

"How come every night I leave my raingear and helmet in this basket and pray with great faith they won't get rained on, yet every morning I come out here and they're soaked." As if seeking for an answer, I glanced upward at the angry, charcoaled sky, and tried to drink in some of the wet; it mostly just ran down my skyward face.

I stepped into the plastic pants, pulling the drawstrings a little tighter for protection, and swung my leg over the dripping bike seat. *The third day this week*, I thought to myself. *This storm's got to stop soon; after all, the Lord did promise Noah.* As we pedaled along the canal and muddy rice fields, from the inside of my rain-streaked visor I looked out across the little island, almost to the sea. It was like a little world, its own little globe, its own little life. I began to wonder how many other small islands like this God had created, and then how many other oceans, how many other worlds. *My God, how great thou really art*, I thought. It was my father's favorite hymn. We passed the little electronics store and climbed the corner to the hotel. We parked our bikes on the sidewalk, shouldered our bags, and walked in to visit Mei-ru.

She was not good. "Just look outside! Just look at it! Never mind, just look at you two. If it keeps raining like this, there's no way they will come. On Sunday it'll just be me and Elder Harris and a couple of lonely squid out there in the water." She looked down at the nearly blank hotel register, and dejectedly fingered her pen for a while.

"It's not that I'm trying to complain," she started again; "I just really wanted my friends to be able to come and see my baptism." She stopped short and corrected herself. "I mean, I really wanted my friends to come and understand my baptism. I want them to understand about the Church, about the gospel. I want to give them a chance to be happy, like I'm happy."

My companion and I looked at each other. At the moment, it was hard to see the joy of the gospel beaming from her countenance, but we couldn't think of anything consoling to tell her. Fortunately, we didn't get the chance to speak.

"And that's not even the worst," she began again. "I'm scared that it will just be too cold for me to be baptized in the rain, and I don't think I can bear to wait any longer." She stood up on her tiptoes in an effort to see past us and out the glass doors behind, as if by sheer willpower she could command the storm to cease. I also turned to watch the rain as it ran streaming down the doors; I knew if anybody could command the elements, it was Mei-ru.

My companion spoke first. "Mei-ru, if you really feel that strongly about it, maybe you should start praying that the rain will stop by Sunday." It was all I could do to refrain from reminding him of my recent prayerful attempts at controlling the weather. But I also knew that he was right. It seemed that whenever Mei-ru really wanted something bad enough, she ended up with it. And as we were always telling her, where there is faith, there is a way.

But as usual, Mei-ru didn't need advice from either one of us. I could tell by the way she was standing, all squared up and serious, that she was determining something in her mind. And then it was decided. "I am going to fast and pray today. I want so much to be baptized tomorrow, and I want my friends to be there to see it. I know God wants that too." Her smile broadened and she got that determined look in her eyes.

"Elders," she informed us, "you just wait; Sunday will be a great day to be baptized."

The rain began to stop at nine o'clock, and by ten o'clock they had all arrived: the mission president and his wife, just flown in from the mainland to witness the event; the members, now comfortable in our small apartment chapel, sat and talked about the storm. Mei-ru was the last to step inside the door, her eyes lighting as she saw the people gathered there. We could still hear the howling of the wind and see the

trembling foliage, but the rain was no longer falling. I walked over to the door, to where she was.

She smiled back at me. "I knew it. I knew the rain would stop." That was all she said; it was all she needed to say. Then it was time to start the meeting.

Just what kind of person was this? I began to wonder as we took our seats; I'd never seen someone who could fast their friends to church, and pray away a storm. Soon after the sacrament meeting ended, and after all her friends had found the house, we began her baptismal program. The wind still swirled outside the door; but the rain, it didn't fall.

"I hope this isn't going to be as cold as it looks." From the backseat of the Fan's car, we could still see the wind as it whipped the landscape and blew the tardy rain in small rivers down the windowpane. We waited a minute for her friends to arrive, and then stepped from the car, gasping as the wind blew the white from our clothes. I merely looked at her and felt colder, pulling my heavy overcoat tighter around my body. We left the others standing there, and walked along the road a ways. The stairs were a mess of slippery moss; we carefully descended to the naked beach. It was low tide now, the sea was calming from its day of floods, and we could see the ocean's secrets. It was here we also left the President, but she glanced back at him again. His smile gave her courage, and then we walked toward the sea.

The water ever neared us, and we finally stepped into its cold. We continued walking out a way, our clothes becoming heavy with the wet. The wind sloshed water rough and cold; she looked at me for reassurance. Finally we were deep enough. We both stood there shivering a little as the prayer was said, and then I dropped her back into the ocean. She rose back up and stood there, the water running down her cheeks, mixing with her smile. And then it wasn't nearly quite as cold. We had been warmed; it was that peace. I turned from her and we both began a journey: I started walking back to shore; Mei-ru, she started walking back to heaven.

"I want to go to Taichung too then." Surprised at the response, I looked up from my *Gospel Essentials* manual, across the small table at Mei-ru, and saw that she was serious. The three of us sat in our little chapel-house, discussing the blessings we receive when we receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. Two weeks since her baptism, and Mei-ru was more curious than ever about the Church. *But still*, I thought to myself, *she wants to come to next week's Missionary Zone Training Meeting?* I felt a little apprehensive about her attending, not knowing if there was a rule on inviting members to these kinds of meetings or not; the normal members usually didn't ask to come. Not knowing whether to feel sorry I had invited her, or feel happy she wanted to come, I quickly tried to undo what had already been done.

"Mei-ru," I started, "I was mostly just kidding when I suggested you come to our training meeting next week. You probably wouldn't like it at all; it's just a bunch of missionaries having a meeting about a bunch of missionary things. We mostly just talk about how to do missionary work and the purpose of why we are here on missions. You might not understand what we are talking about, and then you'll get bored and want to come home. I'm telling you, you really don't want to come."

She barely let me finish my sentence. "I don't care what you say--I want to go anyway," she answered back. "Besides, I've never even seen a chapel before. I want to go and see what one looks like."

My companion looked up from his manual long enough to give me a small smile and defeated shrug. I knew he was right; there was no use trying to talk Mei-ru out of anything if she really wanted to do it. I continued to stare at her for awhile, hoping to make her change her mind, but it was with little faith; I could already see where she'd be next Tuesday at ten. I hid the beginnings of a smile as I reached for the phone and began to dial the office; after all, she'd have to have some fried rice on Tuesday too.

We pulled up outside the gate of the Taichung chapel at 10:45. "Well, at least we didn't miss the closing prayer," I muttered as I grabbed the vinyl door handle and stepped out of the car. My companion's bad haircut bobbed up next, and we both started for the building. Mei-ru's soft gasp made us stop, turn, and return in silence to her side. We stood there on the sidewalk with her for a while, remembering to give her a look.

"Well, what do you think?" I asked as we once again headed for the door. "Is your church house all you thought it would be?"

"Oh, I knew it would be perfect," she quickly informed me. "After all, I already knew this was the Lord's chapel, and so whatever it turned out to be today, that was good enough for me." Her answer sort of surprised me. For some reason I'd never really thought of it quite that way. We quietly walked up the steps, through the doorway, and entered the beautiful building.

For a while we traveled in silence--me, my eyes taking in blue-crystal, white-clouded ocean, and the tiny speck of dust that would soon become our island; Mei-ru, her hands absently bending the already beaten blue card, as she sat memorizing Articles of Faith. I turned my gaze from the window and looked over at the blue card in her hands; the word faith once again catching my eye. What was the name of that book? I was trying to remember--*A Study of the Articles of Faith*, Being a Consideration of the Principal Doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I looked from the card up at Mei-ru, suddenly realizing how far we'd both come in the last two

months. She unexpectedly glanced at me, caught me taking her in and smiled; then she quickly turned thoughtful.

"Thank you," was all she said. "I learned a lot in Taichung."

Startled at the mood, I carefully voiced her name, and, quietly inquired, "What did you learn today?" A little embarrassed at the question, she looked down in silence at the card in her hands. Oh, how I vowed to remember this plane ride, this woman, this faith!

"I think I learned how to be humble," she managed, and then nothing more was said between us. After a moment passed I slowly turned from her, and again looked out the misted airplane window, the island still just a small speck above sea. *The size of a mustard seed*, I thought to myself, *the faith to walk water*. I noticed in the distance the island growing bigger and bigger and bigger.

Mei-ru is currently trying to help the people of her small island home meet the Church, and understand the teachings of the gospel. Through her example, many people have come to realize that church is more than just a building; it can be any place where the truth of the gospel is taught, and where the Spirit of the Lord bears witness of those truths. Right now, Mei-ru is also preparing her family to listen to the gospel, and preparing to serve her own mission for the Church sometime soon.

THE THAWING

*1 Thomas, My Son, blessed are you because of your faith in my work.
2 Behold, you have had many afflictions because of your family;
nevertheless, I will bless you and your family, yea, your little ones; and the day
cometh that they will believe and know the truth and be one with you in my church.*

Doctrine & Covenants 31:1-2

It was getting warmer. Ya-ping rubbed her arms and stamped her wearing shoes, her toes and fingers slightly tingled in response. The dregs of Taiwan winter still remained, the dampening cold as always, eager to intrude a coat and kiss the skin. She jerked the wheel from right to left impatiently, and the old bike whined its disapproval of the cold. But even he, her beaten, weathered bike could not deny it--it was getting warmer.

And then her brother's face was in the doorway; a quick tug, jar the top right hinge a bit, a sound of metal echoed as the rusted red door jangled into place. He seemed so slow this morning, as if today were just as good as any other day. Absently, she watched him rub the dewy seat cover dry, and remembered another day like this one, a colder day, when in anticipation they had traveled this same road. At first it was to study English, her brother's friend had said. But in the silent chapel down the road, they found much more than grammar. It reminded her of Peter's words: "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee" (Acts 3:6). Soon after, she would learn what Peter had to give, as every week the missionaries met them there and taught them, her brother in one room and she in the other, learning the purpose of their lives, of the Father's plan, and of the Savior's pain. *I am a child of God, and He has sent me here.* She never tired of saying it. Then came thoughts of another father, and their family living room. They stood together and told him of baptism, of commandments. It remained clear with her, the glowing, pulsing alter redly casting shadows on their words, their father's tired, gutty sigh--his symbol of defeat. But oh, if only his desire to know the truth could truly equal theirs. He too could know that they had reached all the knowledge he had ever sought.

A quick glance at her brother, and Ya-ping's eyes filled with emotion. Oh, what a road they two had traveled together! What a trail of purpose lay ahead! And today, today a perfect day for travel. Her brother must have read her thoughts and

would not let her linger long; with one quick step, shove, straddle, he was gone. A few more miles, and he was already there.

The sacrament meeting ended; their baptism, it had come. Her brother stood beside her, tall and calm against the unknown, as pictures were snapped and people welcomed. And then, she was looking up into his eyes. He was here, her father, staring at them from a little distance off. Ya-ping clearly remembered inviting him, but somehow had misunderstood his silence for a no. It didn't matter now, as he took his place beside her. The picture snapped, verifying to her, to all, that he had really come.

"Be still. Your mother doesn't know," he whispered in her ear, and then, from him, the rest was silence.

They walked inside and up the stairs together. He held her hand, and her little brother walked beside them, running his arms across the walls, pretending to paint pictures on its white. Her older brother proudly walked behind, leading from the back. They opened with a hymn, a prayer, and then they heard the talks. She tried to listen, but mostly she just watched her father, who sat behind them in silence. *Why had he come? she wondered, and would he ever come again?* Her heart ached with desire to see him every week beside her, close enough to hold his hand, to whisper funny secrets near his ear. But this was not the time for her to think those thoughts. Right now it was her own start she must think about. *First I need to learn, then I can help him do the same.* As the music died away and they all rose and followed to the font, she vowed it would be done.

The mirrors turned foggy from the heated water, but everyone just crowded closer to the font. A couple scooted closer to the cinder block wall, allowing her father a better look down in. To finally end their argument, her brother had decided to go first. She watched him as the prayer was said, and after, as the water rushed all over him, a swift and cleansing current. And then she felt herself step down into its wet. It warmed her toes, her feet, and legs, up to her waist. The prayer, and then she dropped beneath the air, the water swirling hair and clothing caught beneath its fray. She arose and looked at father. Her hope for him was shining in her eyes. But he no longer glanced her way, a little discomfited. She wiped her eyes and started from the font; it just might take awhile, she gently reminded herself.

She had been right. It was at least another year before she sat at church next to her mother and looked down the row into her father's eyes. They had finally come to church because they wondered why she did, both wanting to understand, to know what she was learning. As she sat beside her parents, she marveled at the miracle. At first it hadn't been this way. Her mind thought back to angry kitchen scenes, the forbidden Book of Mormon, accusing words and anxious confrontations.

“And you, gone every day each week; can't we even have some help from you on Sunday? You would leave your mother here to watch these things herself, do all that she must do, and still on Sunday too? How can you love that church more than your family?”

He stared at the blue book in distaste. “I don't want to catch you reading it, not now, not tomorrow, not ever.” Even from the first he could tell it was not like the other books.

“I didn't bring it up, you did. How can it all be mine, or just the church's fault?”

Ya-ping never could understand how everything she said, it somehow came out bad. But she really didn't care. The next Sunday she would be there, and the next one and the next. She would not stay away from church, it meant too much to her. It was where the Savior wanted her to be, it was where she had promised him she would be, and it was the only place where her testimony grew.

The more she came, the more Ya-ping learned, the more she knew the Church was true. She remembered baptism. How good it felt to be clean and new and warm, but like rebirth, she was just a child again. She needed to be fed, to be loved, to be taught the gospel of the Savior; she needed to come to church and learn. How she wished her parents understood. But she knew that wishes weren't enough. So she tried her best to *show* them how she felt inside: each day help a little more, be a little kinder, do a little better. And slowly after that when Sundays came around, they didn't seem as big a burden as before.

It was her father who first noticed change in her. He didn't know it came from the little blue and gold book he had forbidden her to read. He didn't know it came from Sunday trips to church, the time she spent there learning of the Savior and how to follow him. And he didn't know it came from Ya-ping's heart, the growing, burning testimony of the truth that she was gaining. They just didn't know, so here they sat in church, listening to things that she'd been taught. And then they began to wonder.

"You want me to pray? About a book?" He sat in his chair, resting the opened book on his upturned belly, a little blue roof atop a big round mountain. "Why?"

Well, when he put it that way, it sounded a little funny to Elder Jackson too. He started to say these very words, but Ya-ping's father wasn't finished yet.

"You see, I like reading about religions. I like to read books that teach of God, no matter what they teach him to be." Ya-ping looked up at her father and remembered, even as a small child, the Buddhist bibles he would buy for them to read and study. It was true; he did like to study books. Her father continued. "Books that can help people to be happier, help their lives improve. But to pray about a book . . ."

He trailed off as he looked across the table at his wife. Quieter than he had been, she looked down at the table and said nothing.

Elder Jackson broke the silence that had followed. "But Mr. Leo, this book is not just a book, like other books you simply read to gain more information. This book is God's word, written by prophets so we can know what it is God wants us to do." He then turned to her beside him. "Ya-ping, why is the Book of Mormon so important to you? Why did you pray to find out if it's true?"

Ya-ping slowly picked up the book from the table. She rubbed her finger along its textured cover; its heavy weight lay familiar in her hand. She looked up at her father and her mother, and her heart, it painfully expanded with desire. She yearned to put in their hearts the knowledge she had gained, the feelings she had felt. But of course that wasn't how it worked; just as she had done, they too must search it for themselves. Ya-ping felt grateful in her heart for the testimony she had found, and for this chance she had to bear it.

"The Book of Mormon contains the word of God. As the elders taught us today, our Heavenly Father has prepared a way for us to return and live with him again. But the way is not a free one; there are some things we have to do. We need to follow the commandments our Father in Heaven has given us. These commandments will make us happy in our lives now, and will help us return and live with him again. Our Father reveals these commandments to prophets, who then write them down in books called *scriptures*. But how can we know that the things these prophets have written are truly from God and will help us return to His presence? This is the Lord's test for us; he expects us to do our part. He wants us to pray about these writings, to find out for ourselves if they are true. I love my Heavenly Father so much because he gave us a plan and taught us how to live it. I love the Book of Mormon because I know it is true. This knowledge has given my life peace, because I *know* that if I follow the teachings of this book, I *will* return to my Heavenly Father's presence and live with him again."

Ya-ping quietly set the book back on the table and waited for the Elders to continue, but in her heart, she said a silent prayer: *Heavenly Father please, give my parents the desire to know these things are true. Give them the desire to ask, and the faith to accept the answer.* And then, the most important part: *Thy will be done*, she quickly added at the end.

Elder Frank rode slower these days, it seemed; he was thinking about Ya-ping and her family. He'd met them only a few times since his arrival here, but from the other elders he had learned all about these two long years--how Ya-ping and her brother had been baptized first, and how through their example and their willingness to change, her parents then agreed to come to church and learn about its teachings. They

had felt the Spirit as they sat inside the chapel, learning that their family could be together forever; death, it would not separate them. Then they had learned about their Heavenly Father and his son Jesus Christ. But baptism had frightened the mother, and after that, she refused to meet. So it became just him, and he wouldn't pray and he talked about Buddhism all the time. And then her mother had become so sick. Elder Frank remembered that day as he stood by her hospital bed, the room dimmed, her husband silent, unwilling to speak with them, to communicate. He remembered the power, the priesthood power he held to bless others, to heal their bodies, to strengthen their souls. She was released shortly after, too weak and tired to meet with them, her husband still too hardened to listen.

Reflecting on his own brief time with them, Elder Frank could see where he had led them wrong. Her father's Book of Mormon didn't sit unread, but how could he ever know the truth about the stories there inside it? How was he to know, if he refused to pray? How could you get an answer if you never asked the question?

Their last discussion came to mind. Mr. Leo hadn't understood the Word of Wisdom, why we live it, and why he had to try. So later that night when he said that he was too busy for them now, Elder Frank was hurt, but not surprised. It pained him to sit and watch a man and his faith, dwindle. Ya-ping's father needed to see how important this book was to someone else. He needed someone to show him how much they cared he really knew the truth. Mr. Leo just needed someone's love.

Ya-ping waited outside the chapel for what seemed like an eternity. She was cold; no, she was past cold. *I wonder what they call that, "past cold"; I think it's dead.* Jerked alive by the sound of Elder Frank's brakes, she mentally reminded herself to remind him to get them fixed. Even before the elders could dismount she began to talk, the words coming out in frustrated sentences, in shortened, frightened syllables.

"He's lying to you." She started in the middle of her thoughts. Elder Frank shook his head and tried to catch up with her.

"Who is?"

"My father, he lied to you tonight. He didn't have anything to do, except avoid a meeting with you two. I saw him sitting at home, and I began to have this feeling. I had a feeling to come to the church and find you both, and take you to our house. You've just got to do something. You've got to call him. You *have* to go and see him. I think he really needs your help tonight." Ya-ping, fearing she might cry, turned and sniffled loudly. There, that was a lot better.

Elder Frank, usually very uncomfortable about spying on investigators, tried quick to think of something else to calm her down.

"But hey, the church phone is broken," he remembered almost brightly. "I'm sorry, Ya-ping, I don't think we're going to be able to call him up tonight. We'll try again tomorrow, okay?"

But she had already grabbed her bag and was running through the massive black iron gate that stood in front of the small white chapel. "Next door," she yelled back breathless; "next door's got a phone." She didn't even wait to see if they would follow after. Elder Frank just stood and watched her leave, bounced his front tire up and down against the cold, concreted parking lot, and wondered what to do. A moment later he pushed off, his bike heading in the direction of her flailing arms and coattails.

The voice on the line startled Elder Frank. "Hello? Mr. Leo! Well, I had no idea you were home," Elder Frank began. "We were just thinking about you, and wanted to give you a call. How are you doing, anyway?"

"How did you know to call me here?" Mr. Leo began. "How did you know I'd be home?" Elder Frank tried to suppress his urge to laugh as Ya-ping, frightened of the voice, darted away. "Oh, I guess you could say we just had a feeling."

Silence from the other end, and after a time, "Really? A feeling?" More doubting silence and then, "Elder Frank, how long has it been since you last saw my daughter?" Mr. Leo sounded husky, heavy, heartened.

Elder Frank, not quite sure how to answer the unexpected question, began to grope for words. But as his eyes took a quick scan of the room--the small stools, the steamy Shrimp fried rice, the busied mothers and their children--he felt a small grin sneak across his face. "Quite honestly, Mr. Leo, it's been a little while . . ."

"You're doing what? You're getting baptized?" Ya-ping's mother stood next to the kitchen sink. Steam rose from the freshly stewed clams and began to fog her glasses. She took them off, almost breaking them as she slammed her fist upon the tabletop.

"You want to get baptized? Whatever for?" She said it again, as if the first time hadn't been loud enough for them to hear. "What are you even talking about? We went to church to find out what our kids were doing there, not to be baptized members of it! How can you be this stupid, to let them trick you into their beliefs?" She looked as though she wanted to cry, but was entirely too angry to do so.

His look was not one of surprise, just sadness that he knew her all too well. Mr. Leo reached into his pocket, searching for the yellowed handkerchief, and slowly wiped the beaded droplets from his worried brow. He had dreaded facing her for days, but now he sat in front of her, and firmly shook his head.

"I'm sorry you don't understand, but I feel that this is right for me to do; I have prayed about it, and God has told me yes, this is the right decision." After his few minutes of insistent explanation, she only grew more angry.

"And I had told you no! You're not going to get baptized because I'm not going to let you. The day that you get baptized is the day I'm going over to that church and I'm going to . . ." Failure to think of a proper punishment for them all stopped her in midthreat. ". . . I'm just going to hit everyone of them for what they are doing to this family."

Ya-ping tried hard not to smile, the picture her mother painted slowly forming in her mind. She wondered when her mother would see, just what the church was doing to their family.

His had been a great baptismal service. For the most part, Ya-ping sat remembering her own, the ecstasy and excitement of the day. Her father smiled and tried to talk to everybody, usually all at the same time. And he had definitely been washed clean, his little belly making it all the way under on only the third try that day. He arose to bear his testimony, Ya-ping still familiar with the feeling. It had been she, not too long before. She closed her eyes and remembered the miracle of this, her father's day.

He stood before them now, his hair still damp, his white shirt clean. He cleared his throat a few nervous times, and, unfolding the paper before him, tightly clutched its cringing edges. Then he found the words to speak.

"The first time, you know, I came because I wanted to see what it was my daughter and my son were studying here. But I was mostly bored at church. I thought that maybe I was watching the wrong thing, so I decided just to watch my daughter and my son, not at church, but as they lived their lives. I watched them as they changed, as they began to do things a little different than before, caring about things they never cared about before. They helped us more, were kinder to us. Although I didn't know it at the time, they were just trying to become more like their Savior, more like Jesus Christ. It was because of their example that I was willing to meet with the missionaries and learn even more about the church. But shortly after, I realized that it took more than my daughter's example for me to find the truth. I myself had to really want to know; I had to want to find it.

But at the time, I didn't really want to know. I didn't want to pray about the things the elders taught me. I liked to come and listen to gospel things because I thought that the Church was good, that it could help my life. But praying for answers, making commitments, that was scary. I did read the Book of Mormon, though, everyday. It fascinated me. I would open up its covers, and find answers to my problems. Nephi, he was just like me, his struggles just like mine. I would read his

stories over and over again, finding new meaning every time I looked. And that's when I discovered that there was something special about the book. And then after I prayed about it, I knew I had been right. It was a special book; it was the word of God."

He waited until he was sure he wouldn't cry, then went on. "I thank my children for leading me to this happiness, and for their patience and good example. I thank the Lord for giving us this gospel, giving us the Book of Mormon, so we can know how to return to His presence. This is my testimony; I know this church is true."

Yes, thank you, Lord, for helping him here, Ya-ping's own heart repeated in gratitude.

Mr. Leo felt his heart burning at her words. Sister Chen finished her testimony and sat down, her two small boys immediately running to her, mobbing the bottoms of her skirt. It has been a good testimony meeting, he thought to himself. He turned his head slightly to the left, looking at his daughter sitting peacefully by his side. And then, that moment, he began to understand. He understood why Ya-ping had done what she had done, why she had continued going to the church for all that time. It was because she wanted to progress; she wanted to learn more about the gospel and how to return to her Heavenly Father. Her example had brought him to the Church, but now it was up to him to make of himself what he wanted to become. His mind recalled the elders' sharing:

"If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself" (John 7:17). They were right, he knew that now; a testimony came in the doing of it. A testimony of prayer came from praying, a testimony of God's word came from reading it, and a testimony of the gospel came from living it and learning all about it.

He tried to catch the tear as he once again thanked Heavenly Father for his chance to learn about the gospel. He was willing to have a testimony; he was willing to live the doctrine of the gospel, because he wanted to live with his Father again; he wanted to return home.

Ya-ping gently nudged him with a tissue. He quickly took it, blew his nose, and wiped his eyes a little drier.

"Are you okay?" she asked softly.

"I'm fine," he embarrassedly assured her, "I think I might be catching cold."

Mrs. Leo leaned back in bed, trying to explain herself a little better. "I don't mean that you've turned into another person or anything; I just mean you seem a little different lately. Maybe a little happier or something. Do you know, I can't even remember when our last argument was. What is it that's so different about us?"

He sat on the edge of their bed, rubbing his calloused feet back and forth between his warming hands. Smiling at her and shrugging his shoulders in innocence, he was secretly happy that she had even noticed. Since the day he had realized the Church was true, he had also wanted her to understand the gospel, and how it would help their family have the chance to live together again, even after death. He thought it strange that he followed in their footsteps once again, as he looked to Ya-ping's example to know how to share the gospel with his wife. He had learned that words were not enough at first, so he had tried to use the gospel, to show her what it meant to him. And she had seen the change; now her heart also began to wonder.

In answer to her question, without a word he reached over to the Book of Mormon by his bed and lifted it from the table. He held it out to her, a silent gesture of his change. She took it in her hands, and, after looking back at him a little skeptically, opened it slowly and began to read: "I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents . . ."

She was beautiful that day, her white dress flowing gently all around, her hair cut short and curvy. Like a little mother angel, my mother angel, Ya-ping was thinking to herself. Ya-ping and her father crowded closer to the font, while her younger brother knelt beside them on the floor, his lanky body still too tall for the shorter kids to see above. Her older brother stood just far enough away that he could watch, yet not appear too anxious, too old to be too touched.

As they waited for her mother to enter the water, Ya-ping quietly took her father's hand. "Dad, you know all those times you asked me for a tissue during church? I knew you really didn't have a cold." A small smile, a squeeze; he mouthed the words, "I know." Ya-ping squeezed back. She knew she had been right; it was definitely getting warmer.

Ya-ping is now serving a mission for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Her father is president of a local branch, where her mother also serves as Relief Society president, and her older brother currently serves the youth. Her younger brother was also baptized a short time after his mother, and is now serving his country in the Taiwan army. Two years after they were baptized, Ya-ping's whole family were able to go to the Taipei temple, and there be sealed together for time and for all eternity.

WHEN HEARTS PREPARE

16. . . .the Lord did pour out his Spirit on all the face of the land to prepare the minds of the children of men, or to prepare their hearts to receive the word which should be taught among them at the time of his coming--

Alma 16:16

"Just one more game," the two missionaries pleaded from the court. "It'll only take ten minutes."

Yu-fang glanced up from retying his shoelace and looked around. Except for the five of them, the court still appeared deserted. A few mosquitoes buzzed around the net, and a couple of white mice played something in the taller grass around the edge. Yu-fang couldn't understand it. Usually this park was alive, but when he had come this morning to take his usual walk, they were the only ones here. And so the four tall foreigners had invited him to play basketball. But that was a good hour ago, and now Yu-fang had to get to work.

He shook his head and smiled his disappointment. The shorter American just shrugged his shoulders, turned around and began to shoot baskets. The other three waved good-bye, and then they all started a new game, this time without him. Yu-fang stood and stretched as body as big as it would go. It had been a fun morning with them, he reflected as he started for his scooter. He didn't know why, but he was really glad they'd met. They were in some way different from anyone else he'd ever known-- something different about their spirit, the way they carried themselves, something in their smiles. All the way to work, Yu-fang kept wondering who they were.

Elder Lyons stood to start the district meeting, the president's last words to him running through his head: "I've asked you to serve in this area specifically to help more men here join the church, to find more men who are prepared to hear the gospel, receive the priesthood, and lead this area to greater things. I need your district to concentrate, work hard, and find those men whom the Lord has prepared to lead his saints here. If there are no leaders, there is no way the Church here can progress."

Elder Lyons looked across the table at each of the other members of his district, realizing how important and individual they all really were. The reality of his responsibility suddenly became much clearer to him, and he began to wonder how he

would do it, how he would lead them all. He cleared his throat and thought of what to say.

"We are lucky to have such a chance to be here together," he began. "I want you to know that I know that each of us has been called here for a special reason. There are people here that only we can help, people who are waiting for us to find them and share the gospel with them, people who are prepared to accept their Savior, Jesus Christ, and join his only true church. This area is wonderful, but it lacks men, worthy males who can use their priesthood to lead this branch of the Lord's church. And so that is our responsibility here. We need to find those people who can lead this area, help them progress, and become even stronger than they are now."

Elder Lyons paused, and again looked around at the missionaries gathered in the room, not really sure how to continue. "So the first thing that I think we should do is kneel down in prayer, and ask the Lord to help us do this work, help us find those men who are prepared to accept the gospel of Jesus Christ, and lead this church in righteousness." Elder Lyons walked around to the other side of the table, knelt down, and waited for the others to do the same.

The ribbon of hill seemed to stretch on and up forever, its surface shining black in the late morning sun. It beat down hot and fierce, as if trying to melt the concrete from the mountainside. Sister Davis rode in silence alongside her companion, Sister Wheeler, all conversation wilted by the stifling summer heat. They drove their bikes in crazy patterns from shade spot to shade spot, in an effort to escape the sweaty sun.

The car approached from the top of the hill, and as it neared them, Sister Davis curiously peeked inside the window, anything to take her mind from the outstretched hill before them. The man driving looked up at her, smiled big, and waved a little. It had only been a second, but she continued to stare at him even after he passed; she knew what she had seen.

"It's him!" Sister Davis excitedly yelled to her companion. "He's got it--the light of Christ in his eyes." Sister Wheeler looked a bit confused at her companion's outburst.

"Who is it?" she asked again.

"It's him, I tell you; we just saw our next branch president drive by!"

"Well, aren't we going to go and get him then?" Sister Wheeler asked without a pause. Not particularly fond of looking like a fool, Sister Davis struggled with herself for a moment. *Well*, she began to reason, *we can either chase after him like wild, undignified lunatics just escaped from the crazy house, or we can do nothing and hope that someday someone else finds him and shares the gospel with him.* Put that way, it made her decision a lot easier.

"Let's go get him, Sister Wheeler," she yelled back at her companion. She whipped her bike around, and, her pride and gear-hashed skirt blowing in the wind, started down the hill, pedaling for all she was worth.

Yu-fang was late, but he wasn't really worried; it would only take a second to dump the garbage, and then make it back to his restaurant in time to start the rice for tonight's customers. As his car came up over the hill, he immediately spotted them, the two bicycles making their way up the long, mountainous road. As he approached them, he noticed they were both young women, their large helmets bobbing up and down in rhythm with the bumpy road.

He looked out his window at the one nearest his car. She must have been at least twenty, but not much older. Her black helmet hung crooked from atop her windblown hair, and they both looked a little hot and tired in the late morning sun as they pedaled past him up the hill. He didn't know whether to laugh at them or call for medical help. He decided to smile big and wave a little as he passed them. After that, he turned and watched the road stretch out in front of him, never looking back; he didn't see then turn and tear back down the hill after his retreating car.

Just their luck, his car was the kind that went much faster than the average bicycle could, and so before long, they made no progress at all. As he only became smaller and smaller in the distance, Sister Davis realized she either needed to pray for strength, or pull over soon for a vital organ transplant. Since she wasn't real big on needles to begin with, Sister Davis began to pray.

"Heavenly Father, I love the man that is in that car way, way, way up there," Sister Davis began, "and I hope he has been having a good day so far, but we really need to catch him so we can share the gospel with him. I know the chances may be slim, but I am praying with all my faith that in about another thirty seconds, a torrential island storm will start, causing lightning to descend and strike a gash in his tire, a gash large enough to allow us to catch up to him, but not one large enough to cause him or his car any serious harm" (after all, she knew prayer had to be specific). With that she finished her prayer, stuck out her hand, and waited for the rain to fall.

In the distance, the small, black garbage bin loomed bigger and bigger in her eyes, and to her joy, so did his short red car he had parked right next to it. *Hallelujah, he stopped to dump some garbage*, Sister Davis thought to herself. Although the lightning would have been more dramatic, this would just have to do. She started to laugh in delight. "We've got him," she yelled as she turned around and saw Sister Wheeler, smiling big and laughing hard right back at her.

By the time he realized he'd been followed, the garbage had already been dumped. Yu-fang brushed his hands off on his pants, and stepped back in the car. As his hands reached down searching for his keys, his eyes spotted them in his rearview mirror--the two young women on bikes he had just passed a few minutes earlier that

morning, their big, black-beetle helmets giving them away. They rode low on their dated bicycles, hands tightly gripping both blackened handlebars which stuck out high up in the air. They rode as if possessed, backs bent low, postures streamlined. The hair sticking out behind their varnished helmet tops danced in a flip-flop motion behind them, right to left, then left to right, while the wind slowly hiked their skirts up, revealing sagging knee-high lines and bony, whitened knees. They abruptly came to a stop beside his car. As he realized it was him they'd been chasing, Yu-fang couldn't help but start a smile.

Sister Davis screeched to a stop not three inches from his car window, and Sister Wheeler rolled her bike in front of his front fender. Sister Davis, sure that they had his full and complete attention by now, knocked on his window, motioning for him to roll it down.

At first he just cast his puzzled stare back and forth between the two sister missionaries, the one blocking his car from any forward motion, the other smiling back at him from the other side of the windowpane. He unrolled his window and asked them what they wanted.

"How do you get into town from this road here?" Sister Davis asked him, trying to look as casual as she could, while wiping sweat and dirt from her reddened face.

Well, you were headed into town before you turned around and rode down the hill after me," he told them. The smile on his face grew a little wider.

"Thanks," she replied. "Where exactly do *you* live?" Not really a person to share a lot about himself, Yu-fang couldn't resist; the feeling he had was just too good. Before realizing it, he had told them not only where he lived, but all about his family and his children, his interests and his work. He stopped talking and looked at both of them again. *What is it about these two people*, he wondered to himself again, *that makes me feel the way I feel?*

Sister Davis had gone on. "Do you know that we're missionaries from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?" He shook his head no, so she resumed.

"We missionaries have a special kind of work to do. We go out everyday and introduce our church to other people, and invite them to learn more about it. We want to give you this little blue sheet that better explains what we share with other people. We have six standard discussions about our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ and about why we came here to earth. Do you feel you have interest to hear about these things?"

Strangely surprised, Yu-fang realized he did want to learn more about their church. He thought for a moment, then replied: "You know, my brother is a member of another church, and I've been to his church several times before, but I don't think I liked it very much." He stopped talking, but the feeling persisted: *You know you want*

to learn about their church, so just tell them you will. "I think I would be very interested in what you have to teach" he finally managed.

It sounded like a yes to Sister Davis. Yu-fang took the small white card from her hand, and proceeded to write his name and number on the front of it. Sister Davis thanked him and nodded to her companion. She wheeled her bike away from his car and into the road, and with a final wave, they started back up the hill.

Yu-fang watched the other sister as she walked her bike away from the front of his car. He turned the key, and with a big black cough, the car came to life. Shifting it into gear he began to pull away, his heart still feeling the feeling; somehow Yu-fang knew he would soon become a member of this church.

"I hate to tell you this, companion, but I think the sisters in our district are getting scarier and scarier.

"Why do you say that, Elder Soldiers?"

"Well, look for yourself. They're coming up the hill right now."

The two elders stopped and parked their bikes, and watched the sisters pedal toward them. Elder Lyons waited until they dragged themselves to a stop next to him, and he could get a closer look. Sister Davis first unstrapped her helmet. Her hair fell from its resting place, matting to her sweat-streaked face. Her dress hung damply to her, as she wiped the sweat that ran in beady drops along her nose. His companion had been right, he quickly decided to himself; they did look pretty bad. Sister Davis first found breath to speak.

"Hey, we just met the most awesome man dumping garbage on the road," she blurted out in one short breath. "And here's his number. We told him you would call him later today."

"We think he's the next branch president," her companion chimed in with a smile.

Elder Lyons smiled at the two sisters' enthusiasm a little skeptically, took the referral card from Sister Wheeler's outstretched hand, and read the address written on the front. It was in Elder Yancey's area. "I hope this referral isn't as weird as the last one you two gave him," he mumbled to himself. "Now exactly why was this man dumping garbage on the road?" he asked them again.

"He didn't dump it *on* the road, he dumped it *beside* the road. You see, we wanted him to get a flat tire, but then he dumped his garbage, so it worked out a lot better."

"What?" Elder Lyons tried again.

"See, we were riding our bikes up the hill, and he passed us in his car on the way down, but when he passed he smiled and waved, and I just thought that he had the

light of Christ in his eyes, you know, the feeling that helps you know someone is prepared, and they want to hear the gospel. Well then I decided to go and chase him down--"

"Excuse me, but I do believe that it was my idea to chase him down," her companion interrupted her with a laugh.

"Well, I was thinking about turning around anyway," Sister Davis replied. "But for some reason, his car went a little faster than my companion's bike." She turned and smiled at Sister Wheeler's indignation. "So I prayed that his tire would get struck by lightning so we could catch up to him. For some strange reason though, the lightning never came, but then we ended up not needing it because he happened to pull over to a big black trash bin someone had put out in the middle of this road to nowhere, I'm not really sure why. Well, it doesn't really matter why that trash bin is there, because he stopped at it anyway, and that's how we caught up with him."

Sister Davis was really getting into it now. "So by the time we reached his car, he had already dumped his garbage and was getting ready to pull away. But my companion rips up and plants her bike right in front of his car, and he's not going anywhere. So I lean over, take a quick peek at my sweaty American-with-a-long-nose-and-moppy-hair-reflection, and knock on his window. At first he looks kind of nervous, but then, figuring we are too ugly to be that dangerous, he rolls down his window, and I ask him for directions. Of course we didn't need them or anything," Sister Davis felt the need to clarify, "but that was the easiest way to start a conversation with him; after all, we didn't want him to think we were weird. After that, we started talking about his family, and about our work here as missionaries. He was really nice, and so he agreed to hear the discussions. That is of course, after we invite you to teach them to him," she finished, nodding her head at the referral slip he held in his hands.

Sister Wheeler looked down at her watch impatiently. "Well, we really have to go now, sorry." They walked their bikes past the elders a little ways, turned and waved good-bye, then continued up the hill, their helmets bobbing up and down into the distance. Elder Lyons took out his pen, and turning the referral card over, quickly wrote in big capital letters: OUR NEXT BRANCH PRESIDENT: CALL HIM. He thought that might spark Elder Yancey's interest.

Elder Lyons thought he recognized the street. A quick glance around confirmed it; it was the same street he had tracted out one day about three weeks ago. He still remembered that afternoon. It had been very hot, and halfway down the street they had wanted to give up and go home. But they had stuck it out, and contacted every business on both sides of the little narrow street. How was it, then, he began to wonder to himself, that they could not have met this man? How had Yu-fang been

overlooked? Elder Lyons' eyes began to search, and quickly he found the little restaurant's red and blue sign leaning out into the street. They quickly crossed the street and stood outside, peering in. And then he remembered this store. The day that he had walked this street, Yu-fang had been asleep inside. Not wanting to interrupt his nap, Elder Lyons had simply passed him by. Now, once again outside his store, Elder Lyons said a quiet grateful prayer within his heart, that Yu-fang had been given another chance to hear about the gospel, the gospel that would bring so much happiness into his life. This time he didn't even hesitate as he pushed aside the door and walked right in.

"So Elder Yancey won't be coming back." Yu-fang looked up at Elder Lyons, a confused look crossed his face.

"Well, I thought at first that you lived in Elder Yancey's area, and so he would be teaching you all of the discussions," Elder Lyons tried to explain, "but it turns out that me and my companion will be visiting you from now on." He could see from his face that Yu-fang needed a little reassurance. "You are really going to miss him aren't you?" Elder Lyons tried to console him. "How was your first discussion with Elder Yancey anyway?"

"He taught me so much," Yu-fang began, his eyes lighting up excitedly. "I had no idea that we were children of God, and that he wants us to return home and live with him. I had heard a lot about Jesus Christ before, but I never knew why he was important. I didn't even realize that he had done so much for me. And I didn't know about the Book of Mormon, and that it tells us *how* we can return and live with our Father in Heaven." Elder Lyons couldn't believe how excited Yu-fang appeared to be; he was practically glowing.

"But I think my favorite part was when Elder Yancey explained to me what that feeling was I felt when I first saw the sisters that day they chased me down the road. I can't believe there is a feeling like that, a power that God has given us to help us know what is his truth, and what is not."

"How did you like reading the Book of Mormon?" It was Elder Soldiers.

"Well, the first night I couldn't read it," Yu-fang began. "My eyes are really bad, and I haven't had any glasses for a long, long time. But then the next day I went and bought some, because I somehow knew that this book was important for me to read. And I was right," he finished with a smile.

Yu-fang reached over and grabbed the book from under the table at his side. Then he looked up at the two elders. "Who wants to give the opening prayer?" he asked.

Yu-fang found himself dressed in white, waiting for his baptism to begin. They stood in the classroom of the small chapel; Yu-fang looked around nervously. His hands were sweaty, and he felt a little cold. It wasn't that he didn't want to be baptized; he had wanted it since the first day the elders had invited him. Yu-fang thought back to that invitation only one mere month before, and began to realize how much about this church he really didn't know. He did not know all about the church's history or everything about its teachings; he had not even read all of the Book of Mormon yet. He didn't know so many things, and yet he could not deny the feelings he had. He had felt the feelings of the Holy Ghost, testifying to his heart that it was true. He remembered back to that day as a young man, the day he played basketball with the missionaries in the park, and then much later, the day the sisters had chased him down to share with him the message God wanted all to hear. He remembered the feelings he had had when Elder Lyons was in his home--the love, the warmth, the comfort, the peace. They called it the Holy Ghost, telling his heart that the gospel they were preaching to him was true; he preferred to simply call it joy.

The time of his baptism arrived, and their short prayer meeting came to an end. Those gathered in the room all knelt on the tiled floor and offered up a prayer in his behalf. They prayed that Yu-fang would feel peace, that he would know all he needed to know to be baptized there that day. Yu-fang knelt and was listening to the prayer, when suddenly he felt someone's touch. It was as if strong arms of warmth had been wrapped around him, touching his shoulders and giving to him of their life and of their power. They held him close and tight, and he was engulfed by their peace and love. Yu-fang opened his eyes and glanced around the room, but as he looked across the others bowed heads and closed eyes, he knew it wasn't them. And then Yu-fang knew where the touch had come from. It had come from his Father, his Father in Heaven. Knowing of Yu-fang's nervousness, he had come to comfort him. Yu-fang once again realized that he did have a Heavenly Father that loved him endlessly, and that knew him intimately. His father knew exactly where he was, what Yu-fang was feeling like, and wanted to try to make him feel a little better. It was just like the missionaries who had been led to find him. His Father had known where he was, and had sent those sisters to his side.

Yu-fang said amen as the prayer ended, then looked up to the ceiling, skyward. "Thanks for coming to my baptism," he softly whispered to listening ears.

Yu-fang is a very active member in his small branch of the church. He is currently waiting to receive the Aaronic Priesthood, and is also excited for his chance to go to the temple and begin to help others receive the important ordinances of the gospel, the ordinances necessary for their salvation. Yu-fang is eager to learn all he can about the church, and he continues to diligently study the gospel daily. He knows what a blessing it is to have been found and taught the true gospel of Jesus Christ.

THE SWEETNESS OF THE FRUIT

27. *Verily I say, men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness.*

28. *For the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves. And inasmuch as men do good they shall in nowise lose their reward.*

Doctrine & Covenants 58:27-28

Looking up from my reading, I watched her board, fingers tightly gripping the small silver handrail as she pulled her little bent body up the three steel-studded steps and onto the platform of the already crowded bus. She dropped her few coins in the slot, her grey bun slightly bobbing to the rhythm of their fall. The bus coughed twice, and lurched to life; she lunged and caught the nearest hanging plastic ring, and then, from seat to seat, began to weave her way along the aisle. As she approached I closed my book and stood, reached for my bag, and began to exit from the window seat. I bumped my seatmate as I crossed his legs; his paper crinkling as I passed. After certain she was sitting comfortably, I adjusted my own weight in preparation for the long stand ahead of me.

"I'm sorry," I mentioned to the man seated by her side. "I hope I didn't interrupt your reading."

"That's okay, it's not today's newspaper anyway," he said with a polite smile. "What were *you* just reading?" he curiously asked, his finger pointed to the black book in my hands, the one I now held closed and close against my chest.

"It's my church's book. We call it scripture." I sounded a little stupid to myself, but that's what the bishop had said to do. "*Remember how much happiness the gospel has brought to your life. Don't be ashamed of it; bravely share it with others, so they can become happy too.*"

"I've never heard of scripture. What is that?"

Not knowing what to say, I just shared with him the part I had been reading. "Scriptures are the love of God," I began. "I was just reading about a man named Lehi. One night God gave him a vision. Lehi dreamed he was in a wilderness, and he saw a long iron rod running to a tree with beautiful and delicious fruit on it. A big river also ran along the rod, and there were mists of darkness everywhere. Those people who held onto the rod didn't get lost and made it to the tree where they could eat the good fruit and be happy."

I then motioned to the book I held. "These scriptures are like the iron rod. The teachings they contain can lead us to much happiness," I explained. "But in Lehi's vision, there were also some people who didn't follow the rod; they got lost, and never made it to the tree. Across the river there stood a big building full of rich, proud people who looked down at the people eating the fruit and mocked them, so soon some of these people left the tree and got lost too."

I nodded my head toward the lady sitting by his side. She was already asleep. "It's kind of like when you do nice things for people, and other people make fun of you for being nice. I never let them bother me though; I just remember how happy it makes the other person feel, and not about how important I will look to other people."

After a quiet minute or two, the man turned his thoughtful stare from the lady and looked back up at the book I held next to my chest.

"Do you have another one of those scripture books you could give me?" he asked, a little embarrassed by his own forwardness. I reached and pulled the second copy from my bag. The bishop also said to always carry two, one for you to read, and one to give the friend you haven't met just yet. First I shared with him my testimony written in the front, then opened to the pictures and told him what the book was all about. After giving him the book, we still talked for quite awhile. He told me of his family and their home; I told him of my baptism in Taipei just the month before.

And then I had to go. I stepped down from the bus, and turned and watched it drive away; through the dusty windows I saw him open up the book and start to read.

The phone scared me, I was so tired. I rolled over and looked up at the dullish glow of the clock; it was a long time after ten o'clock. I scrunched myself up against the headboard and rubbed my eyes, trying hard to become coherent.

"Hello?"

"I'm sorry, I was just wondering if there was somebody at this number who gave away a Book of Mormon on a bus about four years ago."

I was sleepy, but it sounded like something I had done one time.

"I think you want to talk to me," I quietly replied.

"That day on the bus you never told me your name or address," the man began, "but I always remembered you were baptized in Taipei, and what you look like, so I eventually found you anyway--I had to. I wanted to thank you for being brave and introducing me to the gospel. Last week my whole family--my wife, my two children, and I--were all baptized members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Thank you for sharing the Book of Mormon with me. You gave our family a chance to have the happiness of the gospel now in our lives, and a chance to live together as a family for eternity. We thank you, my brother; thank you."

I could barely sleep at all that night; the scripture, it kept running through my head:

"And as I partook of the fruit thereof it filled my soul with exceedingly great joy; wherefore, I began to be desirous that my family should partake of it also; for I knew that it was desirable above all other fruit" (1 Nephi 8: 12).

And then I realized it was just as Lehi said. Those who heeded not the mockers found great joy in sharing the gospel with others. I always knew that Lehi was right, but I never really knew the sweetness of the fruit--until the day that I was brave enough to share some on my own.

THE SEARCH

2. *And it shall come to pass in the last days, when the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it.*

3. *And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.*

2 Nephi 12:2-3

"And I'm telling you I don't want a Book of Mormon!" She looked back at them with determined, angry eyes. Elder Steward cast a long sideways glance at his companion; it was his cue for help.

"I don't know," his companion whispered back through smiling teeth. "In all the copies of the Book of Mormon I've ever tried to give away, I've never come to blows before. Maybe you had just better leave her alone. After all, contention is of the devil."

Not comforted by his companion's words of wisdom, Elder Steward still felt a little confused, and very much uncomfortable. Although he had been on island for a little over five months now, there was nothing in those five months that could have prepared him to meet Sister Jyan. He just couldn't quite figure her out. It wasn't that she was physically intimidating, the top of her head barely clearing his chest, but sometimes she just seemed to tower over them. She was smart, quick, and feisty--not only telling you how it was, but how she thought it ought to be. She was fired from inside, and he could see it occasionally when he looked into her eyes. Elder Steward had to admit it: he'd never in his whole life met anyone quite like Sister Jyan. He defeatedly put the book back down in his lap and started another approach. But she wasn't finished yet.

"I don't want it because I'll probably just throw it away someday soon, and then I would feel bad," she began again. "So if you don't give it to me, I won't have to throw it away."

Well at least she's honest, Elder Steward thought to himself.

"When I want one, I'll call you and ask for it," she concluded, folding her arms and leaning back in her chair for added emphasis. Thinking that was the end of their

conversation, the two elders both sat back in their chairs, thanked her for her time, and gathered their things to leave.

Sister Jyan saw that they were going, and sat up a little straighter in her chair. "What about my kids? Aren't you going to give them a book?"

Startled at the request, Elder Steward glanced up from his briefcase in surprise. "But I thought you just said you didn't want . . ."

She sat there, staring at him in innocent silence, waiting for him to finish the sentence he had started. *I hope I figure these people out soon*, he thought as he reached into his bag, pulled out three copies of the book, and began again.

"Now this man, his name is Lehi . . ."

"Well, I'm sorry you're confused, but I really don't know how else to describe her. She is a nice lady and everything--just not your typical, quiet Chinese housewife. Watch your left around this corner."

Elder Jensen rode alongside his new companion down the shallow road; in the distance, the day's remaining light slowly collected into darkness. It was hot. He reached behind and found his handkerchief, and then sat back upon his bike seat--one hand to steer the bike, one hand to wipe the sweat. He tried again.

"You see, Sister Jyan first met the missionaries about three years ago, and has met every other pair of missionaries since. The members all know her too; she's been to church before, and she used to come to English class all the time."

"So why hasn't she joined the Church yet?" Elder Daw carefully asked.

"I don't know why. I know she thinks the Church is good, and that it can help her kids out alot. Her kids really like it when we come over to read the Book of Mormon and talk about the Church. In the beginning, the whole family used to hear the discussions. But after a while the husband got busy with his work, and then she kind of lost interest in reading and studying about the gospel. . . ." Elder Jensen trailed off thoughtfully.

"So why does she keep wanting the missionaries to come?"

"Well, I think after that, it was mostly because of her kids. She knows the gospel and the Church are good; she knows they can help her children learn good things. So now she invites us over to talk to her kids, read the Book of Mormon with them, and make goals that will help them progress."

"What about her?" Elder Daw turned and looked at his companion. "Does she still read the Book of Mormon?"

Elder Jensen began to smile. "I'll let you ask her yourself. She's right here on the right." They pulled up to the entrance of the house, the big iron door hung open. Elder Jensen parked his bike, and began to call her name.

"Hello? Sister Jyan, are you here?"

She appeared in the doorway momentarily. "Oh, it's you." She squinted in the darkness. "Who is he? Your new companion?"

"Yeah, he's from America too, from Utah," Elder Jensen began, but as he looked up from his handlebars, Sister Jyan had already disappeared inside the house. They started to follow her in.

"Your outside door's open. Do you want me to close it?" Elder Jensen yelled into the house.

She came hurrying back out. "No, leave it open right now. Jya-rong's not home from playing ball yet," and then barely audible, Elder Daw heard, "and I want Heavenly Father's love to come in." Surprised at the remark, he asked her to repeat it.

"Repeat what?" She looked at him blankly. He turned to Elder Jensen, who just silently shook his head no, and began taking off his shoes.

They entered the house together, and while she busied herself in the kitchen, Elder Daw looked around in curiosity. The floor's pale green tile was shiny in the yellow light. It looked just mopped. He peeked around the corner and saw the three bedrooms on the side, and the smallish kitchen in the back. In a moment, she emerged, following a large tray of several sweating water glasses. She set the water on the table in front of them, and then she called the kids. The boy came running from the back bedroom; the little girl looked up from her homework in the chair. They both had copies of the Book of Mormon in hand; the little boy opened up his shiny red pencil case, carefully analyzed the contents, and then chose his favorite pen. They were ready to start.

Elder Daw was asked to introduce himself. He did so, only to find her staring intently at him.

"Your Chinese isn't very good yet," she bluntly observed, then turning to Elder Jensen asked, "What are we going to learn about tonight?"

Elder Jensen, casting one glance at his angered companion, decided it was time for the opening prayer. After the prayer, he gathered his strength and tried to start a Sister Jyan discussion. But she had her own plans for this discussion. Before Elder Jensen even had a chance to start, she had already spoken.

"So which part of the Book of Mormon are we going to read together tonight?"

"Well," Elder Jensen began, a little wary of Sister Jyan's new-found enthusiasm, "I thought that tonight we could get together and discuss the parts that you have read since last time we met."

"But I thought," she responded, "that we could talk about a new part together."

"We can do that too," Elder Jensen reassured her with a smile, "but first we want to read the part we asked you to read last time we came." He was testing her. "Where, exactly, did you get too?"

Not willing to admit she hadn't read, she responded, "You should know where it's at; after all, you're the one who assigned me to read it."

She was getting good at this game, Elder Jensen had to admit with a little smile. But even his amusement couldn't hide his concern for his friend. *She hasn't read again*, he thought to himself dejectedly. *What are we doing wrong? How can I ever help this lady understand the importance of this book?*

Elder Daw, looking over at his companion, decided it was time to interrupt. "Sister Jyan," he began, "how do you feel about the Book of Mormon?"

She seemed to relax a little at his question; it was a familiar one. "It's a good book. I am glad my two sons, Jya-rong and Pei-hong, are reading it, and I like to talk with you about it when you come."

Well, she knew the answer to that one, he told himself. Elder Daw continued. "Sister Jyan, how do you think reading the Book of Mormon everyday will help your life right now?"

She thought for a minute. "Well, I know that it will help me live better, help me be better to my husband, and it can help me teach my children better. I know that when I read, I can learn a lot about becoming more like the Savior."

Elder Daw cleared his throat to agree. "Sister Jyan, thank you for sharing your feelings with us. I also know that the Book of Mormon will help us to become better people, and that by reading it everyday, we can become closer to our Heavenly Father. So I want to ask you Sister Jyan, are you willing to start reading from the Book of Mormon everyday?"

She looked right through him. "Elder Daw," she calmly replied, "I don't have to answer that question."

He almost fell out of his chair. "Excuse me?" he finally managed.

"I said, I don't have to answer that question," she returned again.

Not your typical Chinese housewife, Elder Daw thought to himself. He had, however, recovered enough to continue.

"Sister Jyan, we need to know if you are willing to read so we can keep coming and visiting you," he began again. "If you don't read, you can't know if the book is true, you can't progress, and you can't know if the church is true."

Sister Jyan leaned forward, listening to every word he said, and nodded her head in agreement. Pleased by her reaction, Elder Daw also leaned forward, gave her his best stern look ever, and prepared to ask her one more time. "Sister Jyan, are you willing to start reading the Book of Mormon everyday?"

She looked back at him just as sternly; "Elder Daw, I'm just not going to answer that question."

Elder Daw's arm reached forward, picked up his water glass, and took a big long sip. *It's going to be a long, hot summer*, he decided.

"But I never said you could do that. What do you do, just go around doing things without even asking me what I think or what I want?"

English class was already over, but through the din of the student's casual chatter, Elder Daw still thought she was being a bit too loud. He couldn't understand why she was so upset over the whole thing in the first place. "But the sisters here are wonderful," he started, "and--"

"But I don't want the sisters to come over to my house," she interrupted in frustration. "I don't know them. Why can't you elders just keep coming over?"

"We talked about it and decided that since your husband is never home, it would be better if the sisters come and visit you and your children." The decision had already been made, a decision Elder Daw had felt good about. *I really think the sisters can help her out--if she'll let them anyway.*

He looked back at her, and saw that her eyes had begun to water. "Well, I don't think it's fair," she quietly told him again. "Besides that, you elders never gave me a fair chance. You never even asked me to be baptized."

Elder Daw felt awkward when women began to cry, so he did the only thing he could think to do--he got mad.

"We did too ask you," he accused her, with a start. "You always said you didn't like to talk about it, you didn't want to be pressured into it." Elder Daw began to feel frustrated and angry and upset all at the same time, and then, he suddenly felt himself grow bold.

"Sister Jyan, do you or do you not want to be together with your family forever?" She looked up at him, eyes big with surprise, and then simply nodded her head.

"Well, if you want to, you know that you need to be baptized right?"

"I know," was all she said. "I know."

And then he just had to ask the question one last time. "Sister Jyan, do you or do you not know that this church is God's only true church upon the face of the whole earth?"

This time it was the smallest voice. "Yes, it is" she answered, "I know." She looked down, and again she whispered, "I know."

"Then I think you also know what you need to do," Elder Daw softly said.

Sister Harker put her helmet on. She took one last look at Sister's Jyan's house, then turned and straddled her bike. *I can't believe I'm leaving this place tomorrow*, she thought to herself.

"I had no idea I'd be so sad to see you leave," Sister Jyan said with a small frown. She stood in the doorway of the house, her hands resting firmly on her hips. A few strands of black hair freely blew across her face, the rest held captive in the back. "You know, at first I didn't even like you missionary sisters."

"I can't believe I'm leaving either," Sister Harker said. It had only been two months ago that she had first met this lady, and now it was already time to say good-bye.

"Don't forget me," Sister Jyan made her promise.

"You can't forget your promise either then," she playfully reminded her. "Next time I see you, it'll be at your baptism, right?"

Sister Jyan smiled. It had become an old joke between them. "Okay, she replied with a laugh. "I promise. The next time you see me, I'll be in white."

Sister Harker smiled back and began to ride away. "You promised!" she yelled back over her shoulder as she waved good-bye.

"Well, I don't know what to do either. We've already bought the plane tickets," Sister Jyan said in exasperation. She looked up at her husband in frustration. They had been having this same conversation for about two hours now, and it was starting to get on her nerves. Their trip to America was only two weeks away, and suddenly they had no one to stay with.

Mister Jyan looked just as tired as she was, but he valiantly started from the beginning one more time. "Well, we can't just go to America and expect to stay with people we don't even know," he logically reminded her again.

"And I can't go to America and stay with that uncle of yours in California for two hours, let alone two weeks," she replied back.

He looked down at his hands for a while in silence. Sister Jyan waited for his decision. "Maybe we just shouldn't go then," he finally suggested, the disappointment evident in his voice.

She looked up at him sharply, the frustration evident in her voice. "Not go? How can we just not go? After all this time of waiting and planning, and now you just don't want to go? What about Utah, the temple, the missionaries we wanted to go and visit?"

Hearing her voice begin to catch, he looked up in surprise. As he watched her eyes fill up with tears at his suggestion, it was only then that Brother Jyan began to understand his wife. She didn't want to go to America to look around, to see the sights, to be amused. She went to better understand herself, the gospel, to find some

answers to her many questions, to learn those things about the church that somehow here had turned up missing; she went to find the truth. But now? It seemed impossible. How could they go now? He stood up from the table and quietly left the room. Her questions would just have to wait for another time, another day, another chance.

Sister Jyan looked up long enough to watch him leave. She wished she could give up. It would be so much easier to follow his lead. But she could not deny the something inside of her, that something that kept pushing her, pushing her to America, to Utah. *There has got to be a way*, she tiredly thought to herself. *There has got to be a way to the temple.*

She slowly closed her eyes and gently bowed her head. Then she began to pray.

"Companion, you get this phone call; I got the last one."

Sister Harker sat up from her scripture reading and peeked out of her little blanket cave. As she rolled over in an effort to untangle herself, her Book of Mormon slid off the bed and fell on the floor in a mess of pages. "It's still cold here," she informed her companion, as her feet and legs hit the outside air of their apartment. She reached it by the seventh ring.

"Good morning! Yes, I'm Sister Harker," she replied. Then she was silent for a while. "I didn't even know they were planning to go to America," she finally said. "Did she say why they were going? So they can see the temple in Utah? And so they can see if returned missionaries keep on living the gospel?" She had to laugh outloud at that one. "Sounds like Sister Jyan is the same as I remember her. You tell her that my family wants them to come and stay for as long as they need a place to stay. They only live a few minutes outside of Salt Lake. My family would love to take the Jyans to Temple Square and to the other cool church stuff there." She paused and listened for a minute more, but had already decided what to do.

"You tell Sister Jyan that I'll have my family meet them in the Salt Lake City airport as soon as their plane lands in Utah." After a few more minutes, she hung up the phone, but stood thinking for a little while longer. She couldn't believe it. The Jyan family were going to America; they were going to see the temple; they were going to her home.

Mr. Jyan peeked his head out of the exit tunnel and looked around the airport. They were the last passengers to deplane. Except for the occasional suitcase following its hurried owner, the immediate unloading area was deserted. His eyes watched their flight number and time flash on and off the electronic screen above the reception desk to the right. There was no mistake; they were on time. An older man stood at the

edge of the boarding area, holding a red rose and a small ladies' purse. He caught Mr. Jyan's attention and smiled at him encouragingly. Mr. Jyan could only manage a small, nervous smile back; where was Sister Harker's family?

"Hey, we're over here!" He looked toward the sound of the voice, and only then noticed the herd of people motioning for his attention. He counted the four young girls and their parents. *It's gotta be Sister Harker's family*, he thought to himself. He briefly disappeared, and then a moment later came walking back down the aisle, followed by a tiny Asian woman, a rather handsome young man, and then the smallest child, donning her Davy Crockett headgear. The Harkers crowded too close around the kids; Mei-li had to adjust her coonskin cap.

"So what do you want to go and see first?" Brother Harker asked them slowly. There is basketball, or plays, or the mountains . . ."

He trailed off in anticipation, hoping they could understand his words. They all looked a little confused at first, but then Sister Jyan suddenly caught on. She grabbed her husband by the arm and excitedly turned back to Brother Harker. She made a steeple with her hands.

"You want to see the church?" he asked with a smile.

Sister Jyan didn't understand what he had said, but somehow she just knew it wasn't right. She tried again, this time making the steeple a little bigger, her face trying to convey the picture in her mind.

Her father still confused, Emily spoke up quietly at first. "Dad? I think they want to see the temple."

Sister Jyan turned to the youngest daughter, nodded her head excitedly, and smiled with relief. She didn't quite understand what Emily had said either, but she really didn't need to. It was in the way she had said the word "temple"; the way she had mentioned the holy house of God.

"She wants me to bear my testimony? Right now?" Allison sat straight up in her rocking chair. She looked over at the translator, just to make sure she had heard it right. "So she can see for herself if I've still got one?" Allison tried hard not to laugh at the request; she managed to keep it to a big smile. "Well, can't you just tell her I've still got one? Do you think she can just trust me on this?"

It was pretty early, even for the Harker's early morning scripture study class. They had come struggling down the stairs at the usual time this morning, only to find the Jyans lined up in a row waiting for them to start--hymnbooks in lap, hair combed, eyes rubbed, and showers taken. The opening hymn was a mixture of unintelligible English and Chinese, and then they began with family prayer.

"Brother Jyan, have you ever had a chance to kneel together with your family in your own home, and have a prayer with them?" Brother Harker afterward inquired.

Mr. Jyan looked up startled for a moment. It was the first time he had ever been called Brother Jyan. He kind of liked the sound of it. After a minute or two, he had thought of what to say. "Because of my job, I am gone from my family alot, and so it's hard to be together as a family very often. But everyday, when I am out on my ship, I am always praying for them."

Sister Jyan looked up at her husband in surprise, but before he could catch her gaze, she had glanced back down at the hymnbook still clutched tightly in both hands. *She didn't know that either*, Brother Harker silently noticed in amazement. *She doesn't know how much her husband really cares for them*. Brother Harker then looked up at his own wife, and over at his children. A small smile crept across his face. He hoped his children knew how much their father really loved them.

They sat in the living room in their usual arrangement, the rocking chairs all pulled close together in a circle. The chairs had grown fat with the added comforters; they squeezed out of the wooden railings on either side. As Sister Jyan read through her copy of the book, she began to realize things she never had before. *Why had she never heard it quite like this before?* she wondered in her mind. *Why had the book never spoken to her like this? Why had she never yearned to read and study these precious words, the words of God?* For some reason she thought of the missionaries, and became homesick for that spirit they brought into her home every Wednesday night and every Saturday morning. So she had turned to Allison, to reconfirm for her those words she had read, the feelings she had felt.

"I know that this church is the only true church on the face of the whole earth," she began. "I know that Joseph Smith is a prophet of God. I know that with God's help, he translated the Book of Mormon, a book that helps us know how to return to live with Heavenly Father again. I know Jesus Christ loves us, and he wants us to be happy." As she bore her testimony once again, Allison thought back to her mission in South America, the times she bore this same testimony to her brothers and sisters there, to other children of God. It was funny how it didn't feel any different right now, right here in her own living room.

Sister Ting pulled the collared coat up tighter around her throat; Utah was definitely colder than Taiwan. She stamped the snow from her favorite brown boots and thought about her home in Kaohsiung. It is warm in Kaohsiung now, she remembered, and the gentle breeze a welcome from the heat. A gust of wind came blasting through the square again, chilling any solitary passerby, and reminding her that this winter was not like all the others. It was her first winter away from home, the first winter of her mission, the first winter without her father. When she had first come to Utah to start her mission, he had been sick with the cancer. She remembered how she had wanted to return home and take care of him. Many days she struggled to decide,

and after that, struggled with her decision. Mother had died when she was just a child; he had no one. And then when he died, it was she who had no one. But she stayed although he worsened, his death become a distant story. Her life was here on Temple Square, her mission for the Lord.

"Excuse me, miss," She turned to face the tall, kind man, her thoughts again in Utah. "I am Brother Harker, and these are my friends who are staying with me and my family for a few days. They wanted to come and see the temple grounds, but they only speak a little English. I called the center a few days ago, and was told there are missionaries serving here who can speak Chinese and take them on a tour."

"So you are Sister Harker's dad," she began with a smile. I'm glad I finally got the chance to meet you. I first met your daughter when we started our missions in the Missionary Training Center. We always thought it was funny she was going to my home, and I was coming here to hers. And as for a Chinese speaking tour guide. . ." She had to laugh a little at the irony of his request. "Brother Harker, you have truly been led by the Spirit today," she started; "led, to the only Chinese speaking missionary in the state of Utah right now. Congratulations on finding me so fast. Don't worry about anything; I'll take good care of them."

Mr. Harker had to smile back at the beautiful Chinese sister, and his heart felt a touch of homesickness for his own daughter, miles away in a different land, a different culture, sharing the same gospel and the same happiness of Heavenly Father's plan. He again thanked her for her service, then stood and watched them walk away. The words of a familiar hymn somehow came to mind: "Come, come ye saints, no toil or labor fear; but with joy, wend your way." He began to hum to himself as he turned and took one more look at the temple. It stood tall against the cold. *Holiness to the Lord*, he thought, *the temple of the Most High; the mountain of the Lord*.

The temple grounds were cold, but Sister Jyan would not remember. They began the tour at the tabernacle, its golden dome now touched with white; inside, the polished wood and vaulted ceiling, a feeling of expansion. Then the Assembly Hall, its granite blocks; the seagull statue, tall beside the pooling water fountain. And then the temple was before them. It stood a granite edifice, a place of refuge, a place of peace. It stood to challenge all of nature--the bitter cold, the aching snows and blasting winds of winter, the very mountains from which it had been cut. She stood there for a while, trying to understand the feelings of her heart. The temple, a place where families can be sealed forever, a place where marriage is begun on earth, and never after ended, a place where God's own Spirit dwells. *So this is what they've been trying to tell me for the last three years. And all this time I never knew.* She thought about the many missionaries she had ever known--their love, their struggles, their desire for her family to receive these precious gifts only the gospel could provide. Why did I not know

what it was? Why could I not see it? Sister Ting looked up at the temple's rising spires, and something deep inside began to hurt; her heart, it came to understand.

She wiped the tears from her eyes and took her husband's hand. They turned from the temple and continued walking among the sculptured trees and dormant flowers, now sleeping in the winter snow. What will it take for them to rise again? she wondered. The sunlight breaking through the gray? The breath of heaven on their petals? The power of God, of life; the power of rebirth.

Sister Ting walked quietly by Sister Jyan's side. She, too, had felt the power of the temple that day, the power of God, the power of rebirth. She thought about the gospel, the joy it had brought to her own life, and she thought about the joy it could bring to this small family. She turned and looked at Sister Jyan, and then she knew she had to ask, to invite her to the truth, to invite her to the waters of baptism. Sister Ting reached over and gently tapped her on the shoulder.

The heavy oak door closed without a sound, all noise muffled by the thick green carpet of the center's study room. Brother Harker looked in confused amazement around the room at the Jyans, still not sure he understood what this day had brought. After leaving them that morning, he had gone to work for a few hours, and returned to Temple Square, only to find that Sister Jyan had agreed to be baptized a member of the Church. Sister Ting had looked as happy and confused about everything then as he did now. He turned to her, and once again asked her to explain.

"We were just walking around and looking at everything," she related to him, "and then after that, I suddenly felt the Spirit prompting me to ask her to be baptized. So I did."

Brother Harker could barely control his excitement. "I'm surprised, but I am happy to hear she wants to be baptized a member of the Church," he managed after a minute. "So after they get back to Taiwan, exactly when is she planning on being baptized?"

Sister Ting gave him a funny kind of smile. "Brother Harker," she informed him, "Sister Jyan said she isn't going to be baptized in Taiwan, she is going to be baptized now. Right now. In Utah. And now I don't know what to tell her."

"Right here? Right now?" Brother Harker stood stunned for a moment; he didn't know what to say. So he did the only thing he could think to do. He gently dropped to his knees and invited them to pray.

They knelt together in a small circle; Sister Jyan began the prayer. She prayed for strength, for wisdom, for illumination. She finished, and Brother Harker began to stand, only to be asked to kneel again. "I would like to pray for my wife too now, if I could." Brother Jyan was soft, firm. And then Pei-hong also wanted to talk to God. "Please Heavenly Father, help my mother know if she should be baptized now."

Brother Harker strained to understand their words, but instead, it was enough to simply feel the feeling; it was warm, it was forever, it was truth. He waited for Pei-hong to finish, then slowly opened his eyes. Brother Jyan still knelt, holding his wife in his arms. As she tried to brush away the tears, Pei-hong reached up and gently took his mother's hand. Brother Harker began to weep.

It was snowing by the time Pei-hong spotted the outside of the house. The car pulled to a stop in the driveway, the black rubber marring the freshly embroidered blanket. They quickly piled from the car and looked around in wonder. The snow had started, once again, to cover the graying walk that had been shoveled clean that very morning. The flowerbed had turned to hardened sticks of wood. Stems shot up bravely from the frozen soil, lightly dusted by the newborn snow. Sister Jyan stood on the lawn and let the clean white snow gently cover her outstretched body. It was refreshing, exhilarating, purifying; it was rebirth. The feeling suddenly swelled within her; she began to dance around in it, the frozen grass sounding crunchy beneath her feet, her laughter echoing down the street.

"Brother Harker, we've really got to talk." In his frenzied state of mind, Elder Carter invited himself into the living room, where he hurriedly threw his snowy scarf over the banister and began unbuttoning his heavy coat. Brother Harker tried to be helpful by closing the door behind them and offering his companion a seat; he was sure he'd never seen an elder as distraught as the one sitting in his living room chair. "So what can I help you with this early on a Saturday morning, Elder Carter?" he asked patiently, settling into his own chair. Knowing Elder Carter, this could take awhile.

"Well, last night I didn't sleep at all. I couldn't stop thinking about the Jyans, and about Sister Jyan's baptism on Sunday. And then this morning I finally figured out what was bothering me all night. Now I know this is going to sound funny, but I'm just sure that if I don't ask Mr. Jyan to be baptized with his wife, the Spirit is never going to let me sleep again. What do you think? Should I invite him to be baptized? Or am I just crazy?"

Of course Brother Harker wasn't going to honestly answer the last question, but he was becoming more and more confused by the minute. He was still a little hazy about the events of the past few days anyway. Everything was happening so fast. After all, it was just a week ago that the Jyans had come to America on vacation, and now tomorrow, according to Elder Carter, not one but both of them were supposed to be baptized members of the Church. Brother Harker watched Elder Carter's pantlegs drip melted snow on their new green carpet, while he thought of what to say. Finally he stood up, walked over to the banister, and picked up the faded scarf. He turned and handed it to Elder Carter. "Elder, you go and do exactly what the Spirit tells you to

do. If Brother Jyan is supposed to be baptized tonight, I guess you had better go and ask him."

They all sat waiting for the Jyans. Elder Carter looked down into the font. He could see his reflection in it--lucent, clear, and warm. The water seemed to spread forever. "Like life," he thought to himself. He looked up as she came into the room. Her hair had been pulled back into a ponytail, and its weight swung with her walk. She sat down on the first row of orange padded chairs, crossed her ankles, and swung her feet back and forth. And then Brother Jyan came in next; his bare feet felt funny as they stepped across the carpet. Mei-li held tight to his left hand, as Pei-hong importantly carried his father's white tie. Without a word, Brother Jyan sat down next to his wife. Someone had miscounted. The extra chair beside them seemed reserved in some way for their other son, Jya-rong, who had only the night before, called and told his parents to follow their hearts and be baptized. *They both look a little nervous, especially Brother Jyan*, Elder Carter thought to himself, and then he remembered why.

He had almost waited too long to ask him. Sister Jyan's baptismal interview had ended, his companion bearing testimony to the truthfulness of the church, and to the righteousness of the decision she had made, and then Elder Carter realized he could wait no longer. He turned to Mr. Jyan and asked him to be baptized with his wife that very night.

The bishop sat back in his chair and stared at the missionaries in the startled silence that followed. He looked as though Elder Carter had just invited him to be baptized. "Elders," he began, "I really don't think that--"

But Mr. Jyan interrupted him. "Bishop Dodge, I had an amazing day in America yesterday, in which I discovered that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is God's true church here on earth. I don't think I ever really knew before, but yesterday I left Temple Square with the knowledge that the temple is the house of God, and that this is indeed his church, and has been restored by Joseph Smith in these, the latter-days." His tears began to fall as he remembered the feelings of warmth, of love, of knowing. "But I know something else as well," he continued. "I also know that I am not worthy enough to join this, the true church of Jesus Christ. I don't feel that I am good enough to receive all the blessings it will bring to me and to my family."

It was Elder Carter's turn to interrupt: "Mr. Jyan, I also know that the Church is true, and the thing I like the best about the gospel is that it gives us a chance to change, a chance to become better people, more like the Savior and our Heavenly Father. None of us are worthy to return to our Heavenly Father's presence. This is why we all need the Savior and his atonement. Through his sacrifice for us, he has given us a chance to repent of all our sins, to change our habits and our life, to become

more clean, more worthy to live with him again. But in order to be worthy to live with him again, we also have to do our part, obey the commandments he has given us, and show him we are willing to emulate his perfect life." Elder Carter stopped and looked at the translator, and then back at Mr. Jyan. "So Mr. Jyan, I want to ask you again. Are you willing to follow the Savior's perfect example, and be baptized into his church?"

Mr. Jyan looked at the two elders for a minute. "Aren't there some discussions that all you missionaries teach?"

And so that very afternoon, they taught him all six discussions, sharing with him Heavenly Father's plan and the Savior's atonement and resurrection, and about the temple, and how families can live together again, even after death. Mr. Jyan remembered some of it, and quickly learned the rest, as the Spirit again testified to him of the truthfulness of the gospel, that the Savior lives, and that our Father in Heaven loves him. And then they said the closing prayer, thanking Heavenly Father for the blessings of the truth, the blessings of the gospel, and for helping Mr. Jyan find out where they are.

"And now here they sit," thought Elder Carter, "in this beautiful chapel of the Lord, waiting to be baptized members of the Church, and start their new life together in Christ." The service started, and as Elder Carter sat through the ensuing talks, he offered his own small prayer of gratitude for the chance he had to know about the gospel. And then suddenly, it was time; they entered the baptismal font. He watched Mr. Jyan step down into the water, then look up again at his wife. Elder Carter smiled and thought of the miracle of rebirth: "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live" (John 11:25). He humbly bowed his head and waited for the prayer.

"It's 8:15 already?" Sister Lai looked down at her watch in despair. "Companion, they'll be here in forty-five minutes! Just look at this place; it's still a mess. I think we're failing this apartment inspection," she mumbled to herself. She was interrupted by the chirp of the door.

"Oh no, they're early; just great!" she yelled at the back bedroom. She snapped the pink rubber gloves from her hands, and started for the door. She pulled it open, and Sister Jyan stared back at her.

"You're back," Sister Lai yelled, and then broke out laughing. Sister Jyan joined her. "Was it fun? Did you see the temple? How were the Harkers?" Sister Lai asked it all in one breath. Her companion, hearing their voices, came running out from the bedroom.

"Do you two missionaries notice anything different about me?" Sister Jyan stood in the doorway, her hands on her hips, and ignored all of the sister's questions.

The question caught them off guard. Sister Lai just smiled at first, but then saw Sister Jyan was serious.

"Well, I can't tell right off. Your hair isn't any shorter is it? Your clothes are new--did you buy those in America?" Sister Lai began to guess.

Sister Jyan couldn't wait another minute. "I'm baptized," she blurted out, and then started laughing again.

Sister Lai stood there stupidly, not really comprehending what she had just been told. Sister Jyan stopped laughing long enough to manage: "Oh, and by the way, when can I get my own Book of Mormon?"

"You got baptized?"

Wow. Three letters in one day. And she never got mail. I must have better luck up north, Sister Harker thought to herself. She stood at the kitchen table and opened up the first; it was in Chinese. She put it in the "mail needed to be translated by a member" pile. The next one was from an old friend back home. She quickly scanned a brief outline of the last two months at Utah State, and tossed it on the table; the third one was from her father. She opened it a bit too eagerly, and the pictures slid out of the envelope and onto the floor. Of course that was just the way it had been going that day. She sat down on the hardwood and scooped them up into her lap. The first few were family ski trip photos. The snow looked incredible; the pure crusted mountains majestic, the whiteness, a brilliant shade of clean. It touched her heart, the white. She continued through the pictures; and then she suddenly stopped. She stared at the photo for a long, long time, and then began to cry. For there Sister Jyan was, they were, in white; just as she had promised.

The Jyan family returned to their home in Taiwan as members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Brother Jyan is currently preparing to receive the Aaronic Priesthood, and hopes to someday soon baptize his own children members of the church. Then they plan to go to Taipei, and this time enter the holy house of the Lord, and be sealed together as an eternal family. Their story bears testimony that our Heavenly Father is aware of all of us, and continues patiently to help all his children come unto his gospel, and learn how to return and live with him again.

A ROAD PREPARED

7. *"I will go and do the things which the Lord has commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them."*

1 Nephi 3:7

"... And he's a wonderful investigator, President. He loves to study and read the Book of Mormon, and when he prays, he really talks to God. He is willing to obey all the commandments, and has done all that the Lord has asked him to do. But he is also going into the army in less than forty five days. Once he does, there is no way he'll be able to attend church every Sunday, no way to observe the law of the Sabbath, no way to partake of the sacrament and continually renew his baptismal covenants with the Lord."

Elder Hanks paused, as the frustration again began to well. *It was just so stupid*, he thought to himself. *Why can't this just be a little easier for them all?* How many times on his mission had he seen people sacrifice their jobs, their way of life, their friends and even family, because they knew that the gospel was true? Because they all knelt down and asked God, and found out themselves that it was real, it was right, it was true? They wanted to return to Heavenly Father's presence and live with him again; they were willing to follow his plan. But why so many challenges? Why the searing sacrifice? Why was the price so high?

"Well, tell me what kind of man he is," the president began slowly. "How did he meet the missionaries? How long has he been investigating the Church? Has he knelt and asked his Heavenly Father if Joseph Smith is a prophet? If the Book of Mormon is really the word of God? How strong do you think he can be?"

Elder Hanks was silent for a long time as he thought about Kai-ming, his friend. Where to begin? How to tell his story? He took a deep, long breath, and tried.

"Well President, I guess I should start back at the time he was selling carpets at a night market. That's where he first met the elders. When he was a kid, his father used to run some kind of business with Americans, but it turns out they were cheats, so Kai-ming wasn't ever too happy when these American missionaries came around and wanted to talk. In fact, he was downright rude. But for some reason, these missionaries just never gave up, and finally, on their fourth trip there, they managed to

give him a Book of Mormon. Soon after that, though, both missionaries moved, and he lost any contact with the church.

One day about six months later, two sister missionaries came to town to attend a meeting held there, and happened to walk by his booth that night. He caught sight of their nametags, and showed them his unread Book of Mormon. They invited him to meet with the local elders, and he agreed. But after only their first meeting, he decided he had no interest, and refused to meet with them again. Shortly after that, those missionaries were also transferred from his town.

His next contact with the Church came another six months later, in the form of a telephone call from a newly arrived missionary who spoke pretty bad Chinese. At the time, Kai-ming was unwilling to meet with them, but agreed to attend a church activity scheduled later that week. There he was touched by the Spirit he felt, and finally decided to investigate the church. But as he began to listen to the discussions, he had a hard time believing all the elders told him. At that time he was living a life full of troubling habits and saddening influences. He just couldn't believe that Heavenly Father really loved him, or would forgive him for the mistakes he had made. His relationship with his family was rough too; there was no love, and he had no desire to live with them again after death. So the missionaries just continued the best they could, because they knew that Kai-ming desired to find the truth and live it.

Over the next six months, Kai-ming heard almost one hundred different gospel discussions, some days with the missionaries for as many as eight hours. During this time of intense study, scripture reading and prayer, he thought a lot about baptism, about making promises with God, but he also could not forget his obligation to his country, for the army would soon become his life. How could he keep his baptismal commitments in an environment such as that one? To him there seemed no way, and so there was no baptism. It wasn't until a few months later, after the death of his best friend, that Kai-ming began to know that the gospel was true, it was all true, and how important it really was to him. It became clear to him after that; he wasn't just learning about good ideas, or having neat discussions, or talking about religious philosophies. He was learning about the purpose of life, why he came to earth, and what he needed to do right now, to be able to return and live with his creator, God, the Father of his soul. Kai-ming now longs to covenant with God, to progress in his relationship with him, and receive the even greater blessings God has in store."

Elder Hanks stopped in reflection. "President," he began, " I know Kai-ming's heart. He wants to live the gospel, and he wants to follow the commandments of God. But President, I am also scared for him. I don't know how he will make it to church in the army, and I fear it will be too hard for him there to keep the covenants he has already made with God. I just don't know what to tell him."

It only took him a second to respond. "Elder Hanks, if this man is not worthy to be baptized, I don't know who is. I promise you, if we can help him make this covenant, he'll find a way to church."

They crowded in the bunkhouse to the smell of sticky sweat, and listened to the man read rules. His voice droned on: "No lights on after 10:30. No leaving base unless permitted. No outside materials of any sort to be found in desks or sleeping areas."

Kai-ming's shirt hung damp and limp from the heat; he was very hot. The man continued.

"This includes any books, magazines, or any other reading materials not issued by the army." Startled, Kai-ming instinctively looked down at his bag of things, and his mind thought of the two copies of the Book of Mormon that lay inside. He had known before this day they would be taken from him, but at the time had brushed the thought aside. Now it had become reality. Check-in day was the day after tomorrow; he had to think of something before then. Distracted from his thoughts, he glanced up as the soldier near the window shifted weight and coughed aloud, and then he saw the tree. Framed a little awkward by the slightly cracking window, it stood alone, two hundred feet from where they were. It was old and ugly, its leprous bark peeled crazily from the trunk, leaving gaping holes and dangling branches. From the inside of the bunkhouse Kai-ming stared at the wretched looking thing; it just might be the perfect place.

Kai-ming ran the final lap, stopped to grab his bag, and then stole quickly from the playing field. A hundred yards, and then he reached the aging tree. He dropped the extra weight upon the ground, and reached for the soft, braided strings of the graying duffel bag. Untying the loosened knot, he reached into the deep, his fingers groping for the book. He carefully brought it from the darkened bag and into brilliant day. He looked up at the tree, and chose the bigger rotting hole, just big enough to fit. With backward glances at the track, he pushed his hand into the tree. It came back mostly clean, a trace of sticky syrup clinging gently to one finger. *It was good enough*, he decided; *it would have to be*. He pushed his hands inside the belly of the tree, arms careful of the chipping, splintered edges, and placed the book inside. And then he stood and stared. He had been right; the aged tree would serve him good. He turned his head; the playing field had grown a little louder now. He hoisted his bag upon his shoulder and ran toward the track.

Two days later orientation was over, and registration had begun. Kai-ming found himself standing in line behind his new jumping partner, the man's burly frame obscuring everything up front. He glanced behind to see where he had been, as he

watched the line still snaking from the building to the distant playing field. He gently massaged his right biceps, still tender from the shots, and looked around the room. The walls of the military office, he imagined once white, were now gray and rainspoiled from the many wet, hot Taiwan seasons they had seen. The walls were dressed by only a few simple pictures of the island, and a small Taiwan flag that lay flattened in a frame. The fans roared dull behind their backs, blowing hair and paperwork, but offering little relief from the heat. Then it was Kai-ming's turn to report.

"Name."

"Shu, Kai-ming," he answered.

The man did not look up. He pointed to the large plastic containers piled high against the wall. "Put any of the personal things you brought with you in a container over there." His pen scribbled out a few more words, and then he reached into the sprawling laundry bag on his left and found the shirt and pants. He thrust the clothing at him, and nodded toward the row of curtains on the right. "Go behind there and put these on; come back out and we'll check you again. Hurry; we got people waiting."

Kai-ming stood behind the curtain and began to undress himself. His shirt and pants fell in familiar heaps upon the floor. His new used clothes were rough with wash, like wearing someone else's life. He bent and scooped his own clothes from the floor, and pulled the Book of Mormon from the over-sized pocket of his pants. He already knew the rule, but he thought at least he'd try. Gathering up the rest of his things, he stepped awkward from the curtain, the musty closet giving way to the lighted room. Guessing his destination, Kai-ming walked toward the line of tables to his rear. He already felt a little different; he felt a little smaller.

The table in front of him was chipped and peeling; the top sagged slightly under the weight of his few possessions. The sergeant rummaged through the objects laid before him, poking here and lifting there, stopping when he saw the book. He looked at Kai-ming curiously for a moment, then picked it up, and began flipping through the pages. It bored him quickly; he threw it careless on the pile.

"You can't take any of these with you," he mumbled out of the side of his cigarette. He swept them all off the table and back into the plastic container. His whistle brought another soldier from behind the faded curtains. He snatched the plastic from the sergeant, and began to walk away. Kai-ming stood mute and watched him go; his stomach began to hurt. He gently leaned forward and looked out the window toward the weathered bunkhouse. From where he stood, he almost saw the tree trunk's secret hole, the branches swaying in the breeze. He closed his eyes and began to feel a little better.

Exhausted, Kai-ming sunk down upon the wooden bunk; this day had finally ended. He thought about kneeling to pray, but then quickly changed his mind; he'd had enough curious glances for one day. So he turned his eyes toward the moonlight and tried to talk with God. But his mind just wouldn't focus. He doubted, he worried. Then he realized why he couldn't pray; it had only been one day, yet his faith had not remained untouched. One swift moment, his Book of Mormon gone. What would tomorrow bring? What else could they take from him? How was he to read the words of God? How was he to pray? How could he uphold his standards here? Could he really be that strong? And how was he to get to church, to partake of the sacrament? To renew his promises with God?

Kai-ming lay staring at the slivered slabs of wood directly over his head. *Maybe that elder was right*, he began to think to himself, *maybe I shouldn't have been baptized before coming here*. He couldn't catch the tear in time. It rolled down his cheek and wet his pillowcase. *Heavenly Father, I can't do this alone!* He lay pleading for a time, his mind trying to recall the comfort from the scripture. How did it go again?

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you, Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27).

He couldn't remember it exactly right, but after a minute it made him feel better anyway. His heart, it started to relax; he could begin his prayer.

"Dear Heavenly Father, please give me peace. . ."

"Ten minutes to clean up!" The sergeant yelled from the door of the bunkhouse. Kai-ming grabbed his toothbrush and soap from the edge of the little metal shelf. He ran to the back of the bunkhouse, where he heard the water already running. *I'll just have to be a little faster next time*, he thought to himself. The room quickly filled with other soldiers, and he fought them for the sink. He rinsed the toothbrush clean and blotted his face dry on the edge of a rough green towel. He looked at his watch. *Five minutes, that should be enough*. He quietly stole to the back of the bunkhouse; a soft click later, he was already out the door. The tree stood old and gnarled in the darkened morning light, silent with his secret. In his careless hurry, his arm brushed the chippered bark, but it only bled a little. More careful now, he brought his Book of Mormon from the darkened cave and brushed the binding clean. He held it tender for a moment, then pulling back the cover, revealed the scarred and scabbing pages of the record. He pulled the razor blade from deep within his pocket, and placed it on the face of the upturned page. And then his eyes, they rested on verse three:

"And thus we see that the commandments of God must be fulfilled. And if it so be that the children of men keep the commandments of God he doth nourish them, and

strengthen them, and provide means whereby they can accomplish the thing which he has commanded them; wherefore, he did provide means for us while we did sojourn in the wilderness" (1 Nephi 17:3).

He hesitated a moment, the blade shined sharp upon the page, and a pang of guilt ran through his heart. He quickly swallowed it down as he had done before; there was just no other way. He started at the page numbers and cut his way down the columns, then turned and cut them in half again; the pages came away clean and supple. Chapter seventeen removed, he once again closed the cover of the book. He reached up and placed the verses in the left breast pocket of his shirt, buttoned it closed, then once again placed the book inside the tree, wiped clean his hands, and all was as it was before. The whistle startled him, and he jumped up off his knees. He briefly leaned his head against the tree, and tried to pray away the guilt. After all, there was no other way.

The pink-clad tables seemed to stretch forever. A little cooler than the outside air, the room was almost bearable. They sat on the second table from the outer doors, and from where he sat, his eyes could see the entire feast. The hall was a little brighter than usual, as the smell of the gas lamps wafted back from the front of the canopied table. Their bitter aroma only heightened his growing appetite; how long ago was lunch? His thoughts of food were broken as a thousand chairlegs scraped the concrete floor and the sea of soldiers swelled; the officers were entering the room.

They came in from the right-winged door. First the battalion commander, and then the majors, followed by the lieutenants, and the other company commanders. The first, as they entered, took their places in the front, behind the slightly heightened, canopied table. The latter entered to join their own group of soldiers seated at the smaller tables. They stood at attention until the officers had all been seated in their chairs. And then the food began to come.

All the doors along the other end of the hall flung open in unison, accompanied by the sound of the food trays' squeaking wheels and cheap sheet metal, groaning with the weight. The food was exquisite: great silver platters of steaming fresh seafood, shrimp still pinking; large draughts of thinning white carrot soup; mounds of softened noodles, fried golden yellow and shining in their oil; and bowls and bowls of fried or sticky rice, the giant mushrooms adding texture to the whiting, softened grain. As the beer and drinks arrived, he quickly grabbed the little juice and set it by his plate. He bowed a little and blessed his food, and then began to eat.

By the time the toast arrived, Kai-ming already had a plan. As the other men all raised their beer and drank, Kai-ming, trying not to draw attention to his actions, gently threw the beer out on the ground, cleaned his glass, and quickly reached and

filled it with his juice. Despite his quickness and attempted stealth, his actions had not gone unseen. The table had grown silent now, and although conscious of their stares, Kai-ming raised his glass again in toast, and then he drunk it dry.

For what seemed like a long, long, time, the commander simply stared. And then he reached across the rounded table, and grabbed the shot glass from Kai-ming's hand. In his angry indignation, it was all the commander could do to control his shaking hands, as he once again filled Kai-ming's glass with beer. The glass held high, he poured for all to see, the transparent glass quickly yellowing from the beer. Finished, his arm reached back across the table, and then harshly shoved the glass into Kai-ming's hands; the yellow liquid spilling over, down his fingers, and dripping on his pants. Satisfied that this time he would be obeyed, the commander again bid the soldiers toast, but none would drink their beer; they all watched as Kai-ming once again threw his on the ground.

After that, theirs was an uncomfortable, quiet table. Everyone seemed to sigh relief when the fruit plates finally arrived, signaling the end of the traditional feast. And suddenly it was the battalion commander at his side, filling soldiers' glasses for the final toast. He looked down at Kai-ming and reached to take his glass. Kai-ming firmly placed his hand atop the cup's open mouth and waited for the beer to pass. As the commander drew back in surprise, Kai-ming quickly filled it with the grape juice, and raised it to the toast. The battalion commander stared strong at him a minute, and then, without a word, his hand came smashing down upon the table, startling the room from full activity into a hushing silence. Then he quickly turned, walked down the room, and out the swinging doors. Kai-ming softly set the grape juice down and pushed aside his plate of fruit. He didn't feel like eating any more of it.

Kai-ming could smell the cigarette smoke before he even opened the door. His parachute pack hung heavy on his back, and he looked for a place to drop the extra weight. It fell by his bed, buckles on buckles, with a loud metal clang. His roommates looked up from their chips just long enough to show their disapproval. It had been a long day for everyone, but they seemed to stare especially long tonight; more than a few looked especially drunk. Ignoring the fact, Kai-ming reached for his toothbrush and paste.

"Hey, no, you've really got to come gamble tonight." It was his big friend again. "Six airplane jumps in one day, you've got to be tensed up something fierce."

Kai-ming, as was his nightly ritual, again declined politely. The big man just shrugged, and spit onto the floor.

"He'll probably want to after tonight," one of the others mumbled under his breath. As Kai-ming raised his eyes to the voice, all the men, heads now thrust deep in their cards, became intently engrossed in the game. In the strained silence that

followed the remark, Kai-ming felt it wasn't right--something wasn't right. But it was late, and his body ached for sleep. Without another glance their way, he headed for the sink.

The whispers woke him first. Sensing something wrong, he lay in the darkness of the room, his eyes closed but his body awake. He could hear them talking about something, but he was still too far away. And then rough hands began to pull him from his bed. He tried to open his eyes, but the small light from the window hurt his head. He tried again to see, and this time the light distilled upon their forms, but he could barely make them out: Pei-ru, Wan-cheng, and a few others were there beside them. He knew them all, they were his friends, his roommates; and Rai-shin, his jumping partner. But his tired brain just would not understand what they were doing by his bedside in the middle of the dark.

"Get walking." It sounded like Wan-cheng. He felt himself being shoved toward the back door. Their boots clumped hard on concrete floor; he remembered he had none.

"Here, tie him up with this." It was too dark, he couldn't make it out.

"I don't think we need to tie him up." He heard the familiar click of the rifle, as cartridge shell and chamber met together. *Why are they doing this?* It was too hard for him to understand. *They will kill you, they will*, his mind began to scream in panic, but as the cold, blunt ended steel roughly prod him from the room, he realized he had little choice. They stepped outside into the sleeping night.

The outside air, though smothering, helped to wake him up. Kai-ming became conscious of their route, as the tree passed to his left, the rotting hole an even deeper shade of dark. After three hundred yards or so they stopped, and made him duck behind a fence. His heart raced faster now, his mind screaming in denial, as Kai-ming looked around him. It was a place he didn't recognize, a place he'd never been. Then the rifle never left his ribs, as the other five drew sleeping swords from their buckled beds. The bladed silver glimmered in the night; Kai-ming was strangely curious how they would do it in the end.

Wan-cheng spoke again. He seemed to be in charge. "The commanding officer doesn't like it when you throw the beer he gives you on the ground. That is weird, and it insults him. But the battalion officer hates it even worse. He doesn't like people to be different, to not socialize and gamble with the others, to not drink beer and relieve themselves with women on release days. So we've been asked to help him solve this dissension in our ranks. Next week he has planned a special dinner just for you, at which time you will start your new life of being normal and doing what the rest of us all do. So tonight we'll tell you all the rules, to make sure you know exactly what to do. If you promise to drink the beer at next week's party, you're invited. But if you

still refuse to drink, we will kill you right now, and bury your body behind this fence. Trust me nobody will ever find it, and you'll sadly turn up missing."

Wan-cheng paused a moment, giving Kai-ming a chance to think. Then he began again, this time his voice a little different. It almost pled with Kai-ming as if to help him change his mind. "But we don't really want to do that. So please don't be a fool. How important can it really be to you? Kai-ming I'm asking you; is it really worth your life to not drink beer with us?" Wan-cheng's questions stopped, his voice died down to nothing. They all stood in an awkward circle, pointing weapons and staring silently at Kai-ming in the dark. And then Wan-cheng finally broke the silence, his voice had hardened once again. "It's all your choice Kai-ming, but don't be stupid; we already brought the shovel."

Kai-ming felt his stomach falling down. He felt far away, as if watching the play from a distance. They all looked mean, and he looked small and scared. It was unreal, this scene. Time, it dragged and had no meaning, for his fear encompassed all. And then suddenly, he remembered the scripture. It flashed into his mind: right side of the page, middle of the bottom column, the words a burning memory in his mind.

"Let him trust in me and he shall not be confounded; and a hair of his head shall not fall to the ground unnoticed" (Doctrine and Covenants 84:116).

As Kai-ming remembered the Savior's promises to him, he began to take great strength. This promise true, then why should he be scared? Another force began to fill him with an overwhelming comfort and with peace, a power greater than his own began to grow. Kai-ming's heart prayed for courage; his mind already knew what he must do.

"It is you who have the choice." Kai-ming's voice came from somewhere deep, and sounded loud in his own ears. "You can still choose to kill me or to not, but my choice has already been made. I will not drink your beer. I have promised God I would not do this thing. I have promised to obey this commandment, and I will not lie to God. And God has promised me that I need not fear your weapons, your knives, your guns. He has said that whosoever loseth his life for my sake shall find it. So you see, it doesn't matter if you kill me now, I have put my trust in God, knowing I shall even live again."

Peace was filling his body now. He looked at them in triumph, nothing wavered in his stare. But neither did it turn their angry stares away. They still waited, waiting for the moment they should kill, waiting for the moment of his death. Until Wan-cheng dropped his sword upon the ground.

"Put them down," he ordered. The men did not respond. "All of you, put your swords away!" Again there was no response. Wan-cheng cast his angry stare upon them all. "Are you so blind you cannot see this man is braver than us all? Did you not feel the power of his words? Do you not fear that if you kill this righteous man, God

will bring His punishment upon your heads?" His face was livid in the moonlight. "I tell you one last time, put them down, or this man's blood will never cease to haunt you." The swords began to waver in the night.

"Two months ago you tried to kill me, and now you want to come to church?" It was afternoon; the sun beat fierce upon the playing field. Wan-cheng had to laugh at Kai-ming's question--it did sound kind of strange.

"Let's just say that I've changed a lot these past few months." Kai-ming knew that it was true. He remembered how Wan-cheng had inquired of him later, humbly asking where his words that night had come from. Then he remembered the days that followed his friend's inquiry, the many moments they would spend together talking of the gospel, and of the happiness it brought to those who followed it. And now he wanted Kai-ming to take him there, to church.

"I'd love to take you there," Kai-ming answered his friend excitedly. "How good is your sense of direction?" he then asked Wan-cheng with a smile.

"He said the church isn't at this address anymore," they yelled at him from across the steaming street. Kai-ming looked down at the slip of paper in his hand. He was sure it was the right address; how could the church have just disappeared? He shrugged his shoulders in defeat, and motioned his friends back to his side. They waited for a few cars and the big bus, and then they ran across the street. They looked at him expectantly; Pei-ru slapped a mosquito from his arm.

"It's okay." Kai-ming managed a small, worried smile. "We can walk around for a few minutes and try to find the real address." But he remained standing on the sidewalk for a few moments more, the sun beating down upon his head, and tried to think of what to do. In an attempt to orient the unknown, Kai-ming took a quick look around. The noodle shop stood on the corner by the light; on his right were two motor scooter shops, and a hair-cutting place directly across the street. Kai-ming decided, and, turning toward the stoplight, began walking brusquely up the street.

They traveled on this way a while, scanning streets for chapels or rented spaces of some kind, occasionally stopping to ask a curious passerby. But in the end, it was all just restless wandering. The morning grew later; his friends grew tired. They came upon a small and shaded park, and found a place to sit. Kai-ming wiped his face, then tried to shove the dampened rag back in the pocket of his pants. It hung out like a tired, limpid fan. Then Wan-cheng cleared his throat and spoke.

"I think I'm going back to base now." The other two agreed. "Sorry Kai-ming, but I don't think we're going to find it this way, just wandering around. Besides, it's getting late, so even if we stumble on it, the meeting will already be over. Maybe next

time." His friends, following Wan-cheng's lead, all stood in unison to leave. Then amidst goodbyes and handshakes, they backed slowly from the park.

Kai-ming understood. He was hot and sweaty too, and there was little reason to believe that they could find it now. He stood alone and watched them go, the yellow taxi becoming a small, black bug in the distance. *Maybe it's just as well*, he thought. Two older men sat staring at him from across the children's sandpit. He stared back until they looked away, the heat again running slowly down his face. He turned from the park and began to walk away; he needed a place to pray.

Out of view from the road, the narrow alley simply opened up before him. On either side, the giant buildings towered high above it, casting needed shadows over heated, dirty pavement. It formed a small oasis, a spot of cool for the wearied traveler. Kai-ming stopped, and took a closer look inside. Some peels and plastic garbage lay where they had been thrown, and the drainage water ran in crazy rivulets along the bumpy roadside. Except for a few skinny, drifter cats, the alleyway was deserted.

After walking in a little way, Kai-ming chose a spot, and knelt down on the blackened pavement. He looked around once more, making certain it would only be the two of them. Then he humbly bowed his head, and began to talk with God.

"Dear Father in Heaven. You know that I am in the army, and don't get a chance to come to church very often. I know there is a church nearby. I really need to find it, because it will be a long time before I get to go to church again. Please help me find it. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen."

Kai-ming opened his eyes. He remained kneeling in the street, as the Spirit once again bestowed its peace. He knew there was a way; there always had been, and he knew there always would be. As he arose, he glanced up at the building on his right and felt himself grow cold. The sign, it stuck out from the window, jutting out into the little alley, as if it wanted to shake hands. "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints" it casually read, as if posted on every other building on the street. Kai-ming closed his eyes again and began to laugh. He pictured Nephi, the weight of the brass plates straining even his strong arms, as he gently placed them beside his father on the ground, doing all that had been asked of him to do. Kai-ming, too, had done all that his Father asked, for the Lord had made a way. He opened his eyes and quickly started for the door; it was time to take the sacrament again.

Kai-ming has since been married in the temple. He has a lovely wife and two precious children, who were also brought to him in the form of a small miracle. Four of the men who attacked him that night so long ago were later baptized members of the church. Through his example and courage, they came to realize that the gospel isn't something you just learn about, it is something that you live. Kai-ming knows that if we are willing to obey the commandments of the Lord, He will always prepare a way for us to do so.

THE HEART, AND A WILLING MIND

16. *Wherefore, whoso believeth in God might with surety hope for a better world, yea, even a place at the right hand of God, which hope cometh of faith, maketh an anchor to the souls of men, which would make them sure and steadfast, always abounding in good works, being led to glorify God.*

Ether 12:4

This time Meng-jya actually waited for the other end to ring before slamming the receiver into the cradle of the phone. *Man, but this was hard.* She sat for a long minute, staring at the phone, nervously biting her lip and rubbing the palms of her hands along the rough seams of her blue jeans. *Why am I so scared to make this call? It's just like calling up an old friend,* she tried to tell herself, *except it's almost eleven o'clock at night, and you haven't said one word to Mr. Leo for more than three years now.*

Meng-jya tried hard to push these excuses from her mind and trust the feelings of her heart, the warm and gentle spirit that she felt. It was the same spirit she had felt earlier that night, when meeting with the sister missionaries to learn about sharing the gospel with others.

Of course Meng-jya wanted very much to share the gospel with her friends, but she also had to admit she didn't know how to do it, what methods she could use, or even where to start. But Meng-jya did believe the sisters' words that night--you have to start with prayer.

And to Meng-jya, this start made a lot of sense. Since God was the one who commanded her to share the gospel with her neighbor, then Meng-jya knew she was entitled to his help. It reminded her of Nephi, as the Lord continually helped him obey the commandments given him. "And thus we see that the commandments of God must be fulfilled. And if it so be that the children of men keep the commandments of God he doth nourish them, and strengthen them, and provide means whereby they can

accomplish the thing which he has commanded them” (1 Nephi 17:3). Meng-jya knew that God would help her, if she was only willing to ask.

And so they had asked. The sisters said a prayer to close their meeting with Meng-jya. They asked Heavenly Father to help her know who was prepared to hear the gospel, who Meng-jya could help to receive the blessings of the Lord. In her estimation it had been a pretty effective prayer; as Meng-jya waved good-bye to the sisters from her scooter, she had already thought of her friend; by the time she reached her house, his name wouldn't leave her head.

The little black clock ticked out 11:02. *Come on, Meng-jya; if you don't do it now, it's going to be too late to call him. But could it really be Mr. Leo?* Meng-jya still questioned in amazement. It seemed almost impossible to her that the short, shy friend she had made at work all those many years ago was right now prepared and waiting to hear the gospel--she barely even remembered who he was. But the feeling was just too strong; for some strange reason, she needed to call him--now. She sighed and reached again across the nightstand, but instead of immediately picking up the phone, her arm reached for the picture's golden frame, and she drew it near her body. As her fingers traced the figure in white she thought about that day, the day of her baptism, and the feelings came to her again.

It had been stagnant, wet-hot Taiwan summer, but it felt like springness and a breeze. The feeling of closeness with God, of oneness with life; it felt of purpose, and of love. She looked at the other figure in the picture, her friend Pei-mei, and remembered another day, that day at work. Meng-jya still remembered Pei-mei had eaten something nasty that morning; she found her friend lying down on one of the kindergarten's little wooden fold-a-beds, and that's where they began to talk. It was there Pei-mei first introduced her to the Church, told her about the great eternal purpose of her life, that she had a Father in Heaven who loved her very much, and that families, especially mothers, do not ever really die.

As she thought about her own introduction to the gospel, Meng-jya wondered if Pei-mei was as nervous then to talk about church things as she herself was right now. She smiled, then almost laughed as she pictured Pei-mei at home hanging up the receiver over and over and over again, too scared to make a phone call. *Not Sister Chen*, she thought, *not Pei-mei, who isn't scared of anyone or anything. It's a good*

thing she's like that and didn't wait to talk to me about the Church; Meng-jya began to remember: *Pei-mei was almost too late anyway.*

Her mother had died that April. Although things for Meng-jya had always been frightening with her dad, she figured that was when he really began to hit her. Her mother's death was quick, like a surprise, which some people considered a blessing. But Meng-jya didn't like to talk to people who said hurtful things like her mother's dying was a blessing. Sure, her mom had that one sickness a long time ago, but nobody talked about it much because it wasn't either pleasant or nice, and besides, *you don't die from that, and mother got better, so why must you keep reminding me my mother is not immortal?*

Meng-jya didn't remember much, but she did remember that nobody did anything right. The table mother lay on in the hospital was too cold; nobody would ever lie down on a table that cold. And no one should be in that much pain when there are lots and lots of people all standing around in the same room as them. And of course it wasn't fair that she had died and now Meng-jya had no one. Of course that part wasn't fair. Neither was the part that said you only got to say one goodbye to someone, and then you never saw them again; never held their hand, or painted with them, or combed their hair for them, or looked at the moon with them, or *was* someone to them. No, nobody had done anything right, and her mother had died.

So, what are you going to do about it? She heard her father's unfeeling voice, even though she tried hard not too. It was a good question, though. *I will probably do nothing about it since I didn't do anything to get shoved here in the first place.* And then Peng-shou said he didn't want to love her anymore or do things with her, and he left too. But that goodbye was too soon after the other one, so it really didn't count, that one. If it hurts too much it doesn't count--that was her new rule. It helped her to forget father, but Meng-jya couldn't forget her mother that way. So she vowed she wouldn't forget her. Even though things like people can be taken from you, there are still some things that only you control.

At that time, Meng-jya lived by herself in the student housing because it was cheap, and on the fifth floor because it was available. It was a little dirty, but that didn't bother her. Before her mother died she wasn't there a lot to notice, and then after that, she never really noticed much about any of the places she went. But she did remember her favorite game. You had to play it outside on the clothes-drying porch by the big opening across from the bedroom door. Meng-jya knew exactly the best place to stand and drop the glasses, and watch them shatter on the ground. She thought it weird they all fell different: the pretty teacups she got at fifth grade school

party fell soft, like raining flowers; the mismatched tumblers and drinking goblets she found when she first moved in fell clumsy, like great clods. She played the game every night until one night she ran out of glasses. After that she just stood there, watching the ground far below, and wondering things. *I wonder what girls whose mothers just died fall like?*

Some nights as she stood there staring down, the breeze would blow her old blue shirt, her favorite one before the stain, and it would brush her cheek. Hanging from the line above her head, he always wanted to dance, but it only made her mad. *Just look at you! I've scrubbed and scrubbed and you're still not clean! Besides, I'm too tired to dance anyway;* Meng-jya began to cry; she curled up on the porch and closed her eyes.

The next day at work, the children painted silently; the canvas stood stark cold. Just matter and space, and then there were red and yellow and blue. Then the colors became things, and the things all got together and made meaning. *That's all pictures really are,* Meng-jya thought to herself and she watched the children paint; *patterns of color that somebody thinks are valuable. It's like having nothing at all and then a hand, a brush, and it's suddenly worth something to someone; art is born.* The time had run out, and the children picked up their bags, put on their shoes and left. Meng-jya didn't even try to clean the room; She eventually found Pei-mei on the fold-a-bed, and sat down next to her.

"I didn't come here to talk to you," Meng-jya said after a long time. "I just came to sit here and forget how stupid this life is, and how much I don't want to be here anymore." Then, barely audible, the words "I just wish she was here again."

There was more long silence, and then a prayer. *Please help me know what to say to her,* Pei-mei pleaded; *Heavenly Father, I need to help my friend.*

"It's too bad that you feel that way," she began. "You say you hate being here, and yet you don't even know why you're here. You don't even know what a blessing it is to come to earth, to get a body, to live! You have the chance everyday to know what flowers look like, to know what chocolate tastes like, to know what painting feels like. You have the chance to learn and progress, to get better and smarter at lots of different things, to learn how to be a happier person, but only if you choose to do it!"

Pei-mei went on, a little softer now. "But you cannot be forced to learn, you cannot be forced to study these things. You have to decide that you want them. You have got to want to know the answers so bad that you are willing to do whatever it takes to find them. I know that life is a gift, a blessing, a chance to study and become a better person. I also know that if you are willing to follow God's plan for us here, you will see your mother again and you can live with her forever. But I can't take the

knowledge that I have gained and give it to you; I can't make you know. I can only help you know where to find it for yourself."

Meng-jya remembered Pei-mei's words had given her that small desire to know, and so it was that she eventually met the Church. She remembered learning from the missionaries: *I am a child of God, the Savior loves me, I can be with my mother again someday.* She remembered going to church with Pei-mei, and shortly after, being baptized a member of it. And the sadness still came sometimes, and pain and trials; without them there is no birth. But now there was also hope, the hope that someday she could return home to her Heavenly Father, and the happiness living the gospel brought to her life here on earth. It was just like the painting: first there is nothing, then a hand, a brush, and art is born. Her friend had helped Meng-jya realize her own colors were of worth. *I am here and I'm alive, and I want to be.* There was no greater gift to be given. And now she too felt the Spirit pushing her on, to help another know of these eternal truths, and the joy of life. Meng-jya leaned over and put the picture down. *Thank you, Pei-mei.* She reached for the phone one last time.

Meng-jya rode behind the sisters, the two small bike reflectors flashing in and out of sight in the darkness. *I hope they know when to turn right,* she worried to herself. Mr. Leo's house was getting close, and she was getting kind of nervous. *Just how did I end up here?* she wondered for the hundredth time that night. *I don't know how to be a missionary! I've only been a member of the Church for a month now, not like Pei-mei who joined the Church a long time ago, and knows all about sharing the gospel with people. Besides that, what if he freaks out when he sees my friends are really missionaries?* When she asked Mr. Leo if she could bring two friends with her to come and visit him, she hadn't quite mentioned the fact that they were missionaries. But as they had talked that night about his life the past three years, and then his recent car accident, Meng-jya just knew it was time for him to meet the sisters; she knew that he had been prepared of God.

But now, as they pulled into the Leo's driveway, she wasn't so sure again. *I just need to trust the feeling;* she was tired of hearing herself say these words. *I need to trust that the Lord is leading us on.* She kickstanded her motor scooter while the sisters, in one smooth move, grabbed the helmets from off their heads and flung them into bike baskets on the front. She shook her head and had to smile at them. *Well, it can't turn out all bad,* she figured; *after all, we come bearing gifts.* She handed the sisters the cake, and, with the roses in one hand, she reached up and pushed the doorbell, hard.

At first, nobody knew quite what to say. Mr. Leo met them at the door. He was just like she remembered him, except now he looked like a dad. She wasn't sure what that look was, perhaps an extra wrinkle around his eyes, or the way he answered

the door; taller, more protective in the doorway. It made Meng-jya wonder what the last few years had brought to him. His wife came down the stairs carrying the baby in her arms. He was a mini Mr. Leo, the jet black hair stuck straight out to the side; and even as he slept, his little lips kept moving in and out. They asked his wife to stay and talk; she moved his crutches and sat down beside him on the couch. His foot still looked pretty painful, and Meng-jya felt bad that he was hurting. He told them the whole story, or at least the parts he could remember--the light, the car, then his scooter and the noise. And then he broke off suddenly. He hesitated, then looked up at Meng-jya and the sisters.

"I'm sorry," he started. "I usually don't think about this kind of stuff much, but lately, maybe because of what has happened, I feel there's so much of life I really don't understand. I have to say I've never understood why God would give us pain, why trials happen to people; bring them sorrow and grief. Like this, for example." He raised his foot off the ground for emphasis. "Why did this have to happen to me? I have a job and a family to take care of. I just don't understand sometimes. Why does life always have to hurt?"

And then it became so clear to her; the promptings, the telephone call, the visit. Meng-jya looked at Mr. Leo, now understanding why the Lord had led her once again to her old friend.

"Mr. Leo," she began softly, "I know what it's like to hurt. After my mother died, all I did was hurt. I didn't think it was fair she died, I didn't think it was fair that my father never cried, and I couldn't stop. It hurt to feel, it hurt to breathe, it hurt to live. So I decided not to. I tried not living for awhile, but every morning I would wake up and I was still here. So I began to wonder why any of us even came here to this nasty, hurtful place; all I wanted to do was leave." Meng-jya looked over at the sisters for support, and then back to her friend; she wanted to do this right.

"But since I learned about the gospel," she continued, "I now know that we have a Heavenly Father who loves us very much; he gave us a chance to come here to earth and learn all the things we possibly can. But the most important thing he wants us to learn is how to become the kind of person he knows we can become. I now know why we're here, and it's not for pain, and it's not to hurt, but it is to grow, and it is to progress. It's just that sometimes we need the trials to become a better person. I know that this life is a gift, a blessing, a chance to study and become a better person, but I can't take my knowledge and give it to you; I can only help you know where to find it for yourself."

Her eyes were wet as she repeated Pei-mei's words. The missionaries looked at Mr. Leo. "We too know that the things we share are true. We know that by following Heavenly Father's plan, we can find true happiness now, and have the chance to live

with our families again, even after death. Mr. Leo, are you willing to let us come back to your home, and share our message about these things with you and your family?"

Mr. Leo looked down at his ankle, then over at his wife, his son--his family. He looked back up at the sisters and simply nodded his head. "We would like that very much," he said, and then he smiled over at Meng-jya: "I can see that I'll be learning a lot."

Meng-jya thoughtfully replaced the phone, and sat down on the edge of her bed. Three months later, she still thought it strange; those first promptings which led her to call Mr. Leo on the phone, the details of their talk, the spirit that was there. Who was to know about his accident? That this had prepared him to know of the gospel? Who was to know his desire to learn of the truth, the purpose of life, the meaning of Heavenly Father's plan? Still, it had been a slow, hard road. In the beginning they walked together, Meng-jya attending every discussion, excited to help him progress. And then his wife also felt of the truth, and wanted to better understand. But then came that night job, and Meng-jya couldn't go anymore. And then came their pressures--his work, his injury, her family, the child. But they knew that they needed these truths. So they were taught, then taught again, always reading, always praying, always learning. And now he would be baptized. The sisters tried to hide their excitement on the phone, but Meng-jya had guessed their secret, for she knew her friend had done his part. Mr. Leo was getting baptized, his wife soon to follow; his son, he joked, a quick eight years later. He had found the truth, and seen the way the gospel would change his life now, and through eternity.

Meng-jya sat for a long time, pondering on the beauty the gospel brought to the lives of others, to his life, to hers. The worth of a soul is great in the sight of God. Meng-jya knew that now; she had experienced it--twice. She knelt down by the side of her bed and offered up a prayer of thanks.

Today Meng-jya is a very active member of the Church, and a great example to all who know her. She is preparing her mother's name for the temple, and plans to go and be baptized in her behalf. She also hopes to serve a full-time mission for the Church soon, for she has learned firsthand what sweet joy comes from sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with others.

SMALL AND SIMPLE THINGS

6. *Now ye may suppose that this is foolishness in me; but behold I say unto you, that by small and simple things are great things brought to pass; and small means in many instances doth confound the wise.*

7. *And the Lord God doth work by means to bring about his great and eternal purposes; and by very small means the Lord doth confound the wise and bringeth about the salvation of many souls.*

Alma 37: 6-7

"Well, you're sure here early."

Mei-en let the hotel's big glass-brass door slam softly shut behind her. She smiled at Hong-ru's teasing, and began to remove the light jacket she had tied around her waist. "You're usually not even on time, and look at you tonight. You wouldn't be trying to make me look bad now, would you?" In mock exasperation, Mei-en threw the jacket at her friend; she caught it in her open hands.

"I don't know why I came to work tonight so early either," she replied, thoughtfully staring at her watch. "I just--" she started. "I don't know why, but I just didn't feel like doing anything else; I guess I was bored and couldn't sleep, so I had to get away." But it wasn't exactly that either, Mei-en mused to herself as she took her place behind the hotel lobby's large deep-stained oak reception desk she now called home. It wasn't long until she found herself pacing up and down the gallant entrance of the VIP suite. She just couldn't sit still; it was in the air all around her--a feeling of urgency, of expectation, like waiting for someone to come so you can start, waiting for that person to give you something you've needed for a long, long time. Although restless, Mei-en secretly hoped the night would bring no new lodgers seeking rooms; she needed some time to think. She needed some time to figure out how she was going to go on a mission.

It was to serve a mission that she desired most. Every day she thought about it, and every night she prayed about it. Ever since she had returned to Taiwan, it consumed her thoughts, sometimes twenty-four hours a day. Her desire to serve the Lord had been born in America, where she had been a stake missionary for over a year and a half. In vain, she had hoped the return home would lessen the intensity, but the desire had merely grown instead. Maybe it had been a mistake, but her desire drove

her to it; she told her parents she wanted to serve a mission for the Church. It was natural--she could understand it better now--that they could not comprehend her desire, or why she would have these kind of feelings. But she still could not believe her mother's words.

"You serve a mission, you are not our daughter. If you come to visit, you will not be welcomed to our home. If you call, we will not recognize your voice. If you go on this mission, you will have chosen your own life, and we will not have a part in it. It will be a life of your own choosing, not ours."

Nothing could quench those feelings of anguish that had begun to well within her heart--except perhaps her desire to serve the Lord.

And so she had come to Taipei. It wasn't really to find work, as she had told her parents; it was to apply for a mission. Of course Mei-en knew she could not just sit back and expect her parents' change. So she prayed, every night, telling the Lord she was willing to give him all. "Heavenly Father, I am willing to give you everything I have, or would have had, or would like to have. I sacrifice it all if I may be allowed to serve thee." At the time, Mei-en had no idea how much he would really ask of her to sacrifice.

She had gotten herself to Taipei, but what to do now? She prayed and prayed, always asking God to change her parents' hearts. But then she remembered God wouldn't take away their agency, so she prayed that she might accept their choices. And then the phone call from the missionary back home, who helped her know what to do in Taipei. Her friend said that now was a time to be spent on her knees, not asking God why, but how. It was a time to be spent in preparation, preparing herself to be a clean vessel of the Lord, preparing her family to accept her desire, her decision.

And so she tried to do these things. She wrote many letters to her parents, trying to explain, hoping they would understand. She began to read the scriptures, and to try to understand the holy words of God. But it had been six long months of preparation now, and still no sign of change. And then one day Mei-en heard the news: he was coming to Taiwan. The prophet was coming to her home.

She prayed to Heavenly Father; "Please give me a chance to talk to the prophet. I feel I need his help to solve my problem. Can I have it?" And after her prayer, the answer came, running through her body and giving her the warmth that she needed to recognize it; she knew the chance would come to tell him of her problem. But today he had already come, come and gone without a word. She had been there with him this very morning, listening with others to his counsel, but in the end, he had left, and her chance had not happened as she thought it would.

Why, then, why the feeling? In her disappointment, Mei-en looked up at the lobby's chandelier, as if she spoke to God. *Why did I think I'd talk with him, and he would help me find a way?* Her questions becoming repetitive, she again returned

behind her desk, to straighten and restraighten the few objects there in frustration. It was then that the two of them stepped through the giant doors and into the hotel's lobby.

He was even kinder than she remembered him. She didn't really know what a prophet was supposed to be like, so he naturally exceeded her every expectation. He looked like the patient, funny dad, the dad that could love you no matter how many times you spilled your milk, or put your feet up on the brand-new couch. They entered the lobby and approached her desk; they were looking for their key. She stood and smiled nervously at first, and then she found the courage to speak to him. After all, the answer to her prayer stood not five feet in front of her.

"President Hinkley"--his name sounded funny off her lips. "I'm a member of the Church, and I was at your speech today. Thank you for your talk; it helped me out a lot."

He looked at her kindly, and his face broke into smile. "My, I didn't know the church was recruiting such beautiful new members," he joked with her. "It looks like the elders' eyes are getting better and better all the time."

She blushed and looked down, embarrassed at the compliment. She still couldn't believe that it all was really happening. He stood real before her, and as she returned his glance, she felt the Spirit prompting her to reach out to him and share her burden. She felt awkward, selfish, but at the same time, he was there before her as if wanting to help, wanting to make life better.

"President Hinkley, I was wondering if I could ask you a question." She watched his face, not knowing whether to wait for an answer. "I want to serve a mission for the Church," she began. "It has been my biggest desire since I joined a few years ago, but my parents, they are not willing to let me go. When I asked them if I could, they said if I did, they would disown me as their daughter. President Hinkley, I love my parents very much. I don't want to hurt them, but I also want to serve a mission for the Lord. And so I promised him that I would give up all I had, but I didn't know he would ask me to sacrifice my family." Although her eyes went heavy, she would not let the tears fall; she would not cry in front of him.

The prophet looked at her for a minute before he spoke. "Dear child, I don't think the Lord wants you to sacrifice your family. I know that you will serve a mission for the Church, and that you will be a great help to many of your brothers and sisters. Just remember that as long as you do your part to prepare yourself for service to the Lord, and prepare your family to accept your decision, the Lord will soften their hearts, and one day, they will rejoice in the blessings your serving a mission has brought to their lives. You must have faith, even when it looks as if things can in no way turn out right. I bless you that you will have the faith it takes to help your family change, and accept your decision to serve a mission."

And that was all he said to her. Key in hand, they turned and headed for the room, but then he paused and looked back one more time. "We'll be waiting for your application," he said to her, smiling.

Some of them had found their way into the trash can, while a few others lay uncrinkling on the floor where they'd been tossed. Mei-en watched in fascination as the ink traces slowly hardened into meaning on the sheet of paper before her. This was the letter's final copy, she had decided; this one would have to do. She had started this letter to her parents too many times already--first staring at the blank, white nothing of paper, later reading words that only sounded offensive in her ears. She cast her glance again upon the page; if she made it perfect, she knew she could make them understand.

"Being here in Taipei, I have decided to serve a mission for my church. It will only be a year and a half, and as soon as I return home, I will find work again, so I can continue to help the family out. I hope that this decision doesn't upset you, and that you will try to understand my reasons for wanting to serve. My parents, I love you more than anything, and I hope that you can be proud of me and love me too." It made her sad to think of their response, but she would have to try her faith; she signed her name in big black ink across the bottom.

The phone rang three times before she got out the bathroom door. Water dripping from her hands, she ran across the dining room, her slippers thudding up and down against her feet. She plopped herself upon the couch; it sighed and sunk a little, and then she grabbed the phone. It was her mom.

Mei-en had never heard her quite this angry before.

"... and then we get a letter that doesn't ask us, it tells us, that you are going on a mission. After that one, why did you bother to write the other letters? They all lay here unopened until I threw them away last night. Did you think they could somehow make it up to us? That your pleading and your pretty words could somehow change our minds? Enough of this mission nonsense; you are coming home, and you are coming home right now."

Her heart would break, she was sure of it. After the first letter was sent, not a day had gone by she hadn't written her family, expressing her love to them and her desire to serve a mission. And the letters, they had all been thrown away without so much as a glance. But she would not go home, she could not. She had promised, and she had been promised. This was her part--the faith before the sign.

Mei-en took a deep breath. "Mom, I want to come home--but not right now. I will stay in Taipei and prepare to serve my mission. And then, before I leave to serve, I want to come home and visit my family, and tell you all good-bye.

Her mother's rage was deafening. "You have just told us all good-bye right now. Do not bother coming home to visit; the door will be bolted and there will be no one here who will unlock it for you."

Mei-en gently replaced the receiver, and for a long time did nothing but stare at the peeling wall.

She was almost late for church. She drove her scooter along the roadside, the wind blowing her hair in all directions. From behind her came the truck's dust; too slow to close her eyes, her contacts began to sting. The tears flowed freely down her face and began to mat her windblown hair. Pulling the motor scooter over to the side of the road, she stopped and quickly grabbed the contacts from her eyes. The dirt was everywhere; they needed to be cleaned, and her eyes hurt to remember the sensation. She spotted a Seven-Eleven up around the next corner, its familiar green and orange just visible in the distance. It was Sunday, but there just was no other way. She slowly pulled ahead toward the sign, and then her mind, it heard the voice.

But to go to the Seven-Eleven will take time, right? To fix the problem with your eyes, to fix any problem takes time. And patience. It's a little bit like your parents. They need time to accept your decision to serve a mission. They need time to understand why it is so important to you, to understand the blessings and the meaning of a mission in your life as well as theirs.

It was not as though Mei-en didn't understand these things, but she was somehow overcome with the newness of the thought. It was a feeling more of wisdom and of knowledge flowing through her mind, giving her a sense of other power, of inspiration. But she could not ponder long. Holding the dirty contacts in one fist, she steered the scooter into the parking lot, and quickly stepped inside the door. After all, washing them clean was going to take some time.

She stood in front of the water-stained mirror, watching her hands as clear, comfortable saline solution bathed her dirty contacts and ran in small, crooked rivers down her fingers. Cleaning them as best she could, she reached up and placed one in her eye. It burned at the contact's touch, the pain of a newly intruding object, even after all the times she'd worn them. In her hurry, she clumsily removed the contact and let the tears wash her eyes clean again.

Your eyes, their pain, it's like your parent's pain. They do not understand your reasons, your desire, because they do not understand the Church, the things that you have learned here. Perhaps at first you cannot understand their rejection; the first time your eyes didn't want the contacts either. But you still need them, and so you try again.

The fourth time when they fit, her eyes were comforted, the solution soothed the tensing nerves. It was as if at once her eyes had forgotten all the pain and welcomed new sensations of both comfort and rightness.

Your mission will be full of experiences like these, times when you have troubles or trials, and you feel as though you can't go on. But the feeling ends, doesn't it? It will be the same for you. The feeling will end, and you will be happy and comfortable, because you will know that the things you are doing are right. Your family can change and accept your mission, as your eyes have accepted the contacts that will help them to see more clearly. You, too, can help your family to see more clearly, but first you have to go through the pain of helping them know your choices will eventually bring them joy. You need to do your part.

Mei-en closed her eyes, relieved at the comfort of the contacts. She promised to remember just how good they really felt.

She stood at the pay phone behind the lady in a flowered dress, again wondering if she really wanted to do this. It had been her idea, this one last trip home before her mission, but now she had forgotten why it was she'd come. The whole bus ride home, she wondered what it was she was going home to: she had told them she was coming but they never said she could. Mei-en wasn't sure if she could face the bolted door, the screaming voices from inside, while her brother stood beside her parents and learned to hate her too. The denial in her father's voice, her mother's tears. She glanced back at the buses, the ones that could take her back to Taipei, and began to wonder--.

But then it was her turn to use the phone. She stepped inside the opening, hands shaking as she tried to deposit the coins. A few slipped from her fingers and fell to the ground. She gathered the scattered coins, and tried to call again. The phone rang and rang and rang; she began to hope no one was home.

Suddenly she heard her mother's voice; it startled her, bringing with it memories of her childhood. It was the voice that sang to her when she was small, that told her not to cry, especially when it hurt. It was the voice that laughed when she did, that told her dinner was ready to eat. She pictured her mother now, her hands brushing against her face as she held the receiver tightly to her ear, the same hands that had also brushed Mei-en's face, the time when she was sick, and no one else could touch her. Her heart felt pain as she thought of what her decision had brought. Maybe she'd been wrong. The sacrifice, reality now, seemed much greater to her than it ever had before. But she also remembered his words, his blessing. The prophet had blessed her with the faith to do her part. And this was her part. She could not turn and board the bus for Taipei. The Lord wanted her in this phone booth. Mei-en sighed a little, and gently answered back.

"Hello, mom? It's me Mei-en. My bus was late, and I just got here." She stood and waited for her mother's unknown response.

"Mei-en? Is that you? Really? We haven't heard from you in so long. Your father is right here. He's been waiting since eleven-thirty to come and pick you up. I'll give the phone to him, and you can tell him where you are. We've been worried because your bus came so late. I made you stir-fry because I know you love it, but it's cold by now. Oh, here's your father."

She talked to him only briefly, hung up the phone, and stepped away from the booth. Still thinking of her mother's voice, she found the bench and sat down, running her hands up and down its iron railings. It was the voice again, the one she remembered from a long time ago. And now her father was coming here to pick her up, to take her home to an unbolted family, a family that still cared for her, a family of which she was still a part. Mei-en was so happy she began to laugh outloud.

"What day are you leaving on your mission?" Her mother stood in the doorway of her bedroom and asked the question, her tiny figure leaning against the oaken door frame. She stood there for a moment, wiping her hands on her apron front, then sat down on the bed's pink coverlet.

The question surprised Mei-en. Although she knew one day soon it would have to be discussed, so little had been said about her leaving, her mission, that she was taken aback by her mother's mentioning it. She didn't know quite how to respond; she hadn't thought this answer through yet.

"Next week, next Tuesday," she replied, and then looked back up for her mother's reaction.

"Don't go. Please don't go." Her mother's voice was barely louder than a whisper, her eyes pleading. Mei-en felt torn apart, this last week at home a reminder of how much she really loved her mother, her parents, her family. She wanted her to understand, and tried again to explain, but her mother cut her short.

"Mei-en, you need to think about these things," her mother began to tell her. "You need to think about how this mission will affect your family. Please don't go. You don't know what you are doing to us. You can go anywhere else you want to, do anything else that you would like to do. But please, don't make us go through all this hurt."

But mother, she screamed inside, I do know how this mission will affect our family; we will receive even greater blessings from the Lord because I choose to serve it.

Mei-en looked at her mother and sadly shook her head. "Mother, I know it is right for me to serve a mission for my church; I know it is what the Lord wants me to be doing, and I know he will bless our family because I want to serve him."

Her mother stood and left the room. That was all she would say about Mei-en's leaving. Mei-en lay back down on her bed, and clutched her pillow tightly to her. She wished their good-bye could have been a little different; she wished that maybe once, her mother would have had to dry her eyes.

They sat in silence in the car, watching the buses arrive and pull away, bringing people home, and taking others far away. She sat across from her father, staring out the windshield as the big buses came and left, their engines sounding dirty in the morning air. It was he who broke the silence first.

"Do you have any money?" he simply asked. He wasn't angry, really, just distant.

As Mei-en looked back at him, she choked down the impulses of her heart to tell him of her need; her wallet--it was gone. She had looked for it everywhere yesterday, under the bed and all around the house, but she couldn't find it anywhere. So she had sat on her bed for a while and thought about what to do. Even now, she wasn't exactly sure what she would do, but she did know what she wouldn't do; she wouldn't ask for money. Not with the way things were now--not now, not tomorrow, maybe not ever.

"I've got enough," she lied. They sat again in silence for a while, until he reached into his pocket and brought it forth. He pushed the money at her. "Here. We wanted to give you this. If you don't need it now, you can probably use it later.

She reached out and took the money, the pink wrinkled bills still warm from the pocket of his pants. It made her want to cry, but she was interrupted by a loud screech and hiss; the bus had pulled into the station. She slammed the car door shut and he handed her the black bag's handles. And then she couldn't think of anything to say. She walked toward the bus, turning to look back only once, but the car had already pulled away. She hugged her bag a little tighter, and, reaching down into her pocket, she scrunched the wad of money from her father. It was his love for her, his care of her, his acceptance of her. To Mei-en, it was almost as good as holding his hand.

"Heavenly Father, please help me make this phone call home," her prayer ever since the day she had found her wallet. It had only been a week since the day her father left her standing at the bus stop. Two days later, her wallet was returned. Now she only needed to uncanceled all her cards and phone her parents yet again. She looked up from her knees and glanced around the apartment; everything had happened much too fast. The trip to Taipei was over, and her mission had begun. She knew what they would say; her mother, she would call her home again. It was inevitable. Mei-en finally stood and walked into the other room, the tile cold against unslipped feet.

She sat down and began the call; the receiver in one hand, she waited through the rings, and then it was her mother's voice.

"Please come home; please, Mei-en, please," her mother begged and begged. Mei-en, through her frustrated tears, could do nothing but refuse. Finally, she heard the crying on the other end, as her mother's voice dwindled into softened sobs. Mei-en wanted to hang up. She said good-bye, and did. Then she too began to cry. Her first week had been hard enough without the heartache of this phone call, she remembered as she tried to stop the tears. Is a mission really worth all this pain? Will what I do make that much difference? Can it really be worth the sacrifice? Mei-en then remembered the prophet's promise to her: "It will help your family. That's one thing it will do; it will help your family grow."

"My mission will help my family," she quietly said again, as if trying to convince herself of the words. She had been promised her mission would help her family, but if she didn't serve one, how could it possibly help them? If she wasn't here, willing to progress, how could she expect their progression? She thought of the blessings she had already received. You receive the blessings promised you if you are willing to do your part. It was just as the scripture counseled her, "Deny not the power of God; for he worketh by power, according to the faith of the children of men, the same today and tomorrow, and forever" (Moroni 10:7). Mei-en could not deny the power of God she felt as the blessings had been pronounced upon her head, but those blessings were based on her own faith, her own efforts to obtain them. She sat up in her chair and wiped away the tears. She needed to start serving her mission and stop thinking about her family. She needed to do the work first; only then would the blessings begin to come. *Faith precedes the miracle*, she reminded herself, *let it precede this one*.

"I'm really sorry, sis, but she just keeps saying that she won't talk to you." Her brother's voice sounded a bit discouraged, and it touched her to hear him care. It was time to end her precious phone call now, and her mother still didn't want to speak to her. Mei-en only sighed a little, struggling to be as happy as she could.

"That's okay," she told him. "I can't expect her to accept everything right at once; I guess these things just take some time. It sure was fun talking to you, though. Thanks for all your advice." She hoped the distance would mask the disappointment in her voice.

There was only static on the other end, and then her brother's voice. "Wait, she's right here. Hang on a second." More static, as she tried to make out their voices. Her heart began to panic. She had wanted to talk to her, but now, what should she say? There was no more time to think.

"Mei-en, it's me, Mom." Her voice sounded more beautiful than ever. Mei-en started to think about the way they had separated, and why, the hurt still fresh in her mind, but so, too, the joy. She hoped her mother could remember some of the joy.

"Mom, things at home, how are they?" Mei-en asked hesitantly, not wanting her mother to call her home again.

Her mother was silent for what seemed like a long, long time. "Things are much, much better," her mother finally said with a sigh. "The family is doing fine. Our trials are becoming smaller, our blessings much, much greater. We don't know why our life is somehow better, more fulfilling, happier. Somehow, it just is."

That was all her mother said to her, but it was enough. Mei-en hung up the phone and thought back upon the prophet's words. Her family would be blessed and she would bless the lives of many others as she served a mission for her Savior. Because she was serving others, her own were being blessed. It was true now, and she knew it. All the promises, the feelings, the blessings--they came only after faith, but they did come. "Doubt not, but be believing, and begin as in times of old, and come unto the Lord with all your heart, and work out your own salvation with fear and trembling before him" (Mormon 9:27). Mei-en finally understood; she had become believing.

Mei-en is currently serving her long-awaited mission for the Lord. Although they don't completely understand her decision to serve, her family continue to allow her to do so, receiving the blessings the Lord pours out upon all the families of those who serve him. Mei-en knows that the Lord works by our faith, and that as she continues to concentrate on her mission, and serve the Lord with her whole heart, mind, might, and strength, he will bless and protect her beloved family; and one day, they will be brought to understand the great desires of her heart. Such are the promises given to all the faithful missionaries of the Lord.

A FATHER'S TRUTH

12. *"For there are many yet on the earth among all sects, parties, and denominations . . . who are only kept from the truth because they know not where to find it."*

13. *"Therefore, that we should waste and wear out our lives in bringing to light all the hidden things of darkness, wherein we know them; and they are truly manifest from heaven"*

Doctrine and Covenants 123:12-13

We parked our bikes outside the tiny Daoist shop, its little eaves lined with the red and gold of worship. We stood and peered into his store, curious of the golden-edged papers and incense sticks, whose various shapes and meanings we knew nothing about. It was all so new to us, this culture. My companion, who had only been on island for a few brief months, was fascinated by the roadside display. He reached out and fingered a few leaves of the paper, leaving his own unique markings on the ruffled stack. I stood back behind him, a little unsure of myself. I knew we were at the right place, but I just wasn't sure how this was going to go. Of course I had already heard a lot about this man from the members of the ward; he'd been coming to the church for about four years now, and his two children had just recently been baptized, but this was the first time that I would actually meet Mr. Chen, the Daoist priest. Nodding at my companion to proceed, I followed him into the little shop.

He sat behind a lengthened desk, writing large Chinese characters on some parchment. The ink-stained pen went from left to right, and from up to down, little black marks becoming strokes, the strokes becoming sounds, the sounds, becoming meanings. He had noticed us when we first came in, but only now acknowledged. He raised his pen, and looked us in the eyes. He smiled.

"Good afternoon. You must be Mr. Chen," I smartly deduced.

"Yes, and you must be Elder Gallup." He stood and politely grasped my hand with both of his, and, bowing slightly, shook it. Noticing my companion's curious stares, Mr. Chen invited us to look around a bit. "It's okay, you can touch it if you want," Mr. Chen assured me as I approached the giant redwood altar. I looked at the different painted gods, their images fierce, kind, abstract, naive. We looked and touched awhile, then turned to where he sat.

"Your shop is great," I finished up. He
"How did you get started doing this kind of work?"

"My grandfather was a priest." He moved
the back wall, and, laying his work aside, came
one of the first priests to settle in this part of the
he was only very young. Because of his extensive
was able to help many people learn about the gods
worship. He eventually became a legend. People
places, just to hear him speak, or to ordain a
was wise."

Mr. Chen stopped for a moment to collect
story he liked to tell. "Then after he died, my father
course, as son of the legendary priest, he too was
every tenet, every teaching of the Daoist way of
because of his father's name, in part because of
His three wives were also loyal to the work, and
to live it, and how to understand it. While growing
father, as I did not move away but always lived
to my father's work and his important priestly
could sense the importance of his position; I was
religion. But I had other interests than my father's.
high school I drove a taxi for awhile, and then
smiled at the memory. "That was the first time
always getting these telegraphs from America.
But it was not until much later that I would have
Because one day, not long after this, my father
suspected my desires might lie elsewhere, he found
the best child for the job. He told me I was to

This time he paused much longer. He
then began the final generation of his story.

"I remember I was only forty, but I felt
oldest daughter was born, I was barely thirty
young myself. From the time of her birth, I began
experience in life, and none at all when it came
in my arms at night, I began to wonder why it
here, and the best way I could help her be happy.
know any of the answers. I didn't know what
help her obtain happiness, when I didn't have the
time? I began to list the things that I had to do

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which was most important. What was the best thing that I could give my children--my daughter, and later my son? Of course to him I would give my grandfather's Daoism, but I wasn't sure how that could help him obtain the happiness I hoped he would obtain. So I decided that I would search, and try to find the thing that would make them the most happy, and when I found it, I would try my best to see that my children received it.

It was at this time that I began working with my father. He taught me all he knew about the religion of the Daoists, those things I hadn't picked up as a child. And he taught me how to be a priest, to use my knowledge to help others choose their gods and give them life. My father took great pride in introducing me to those he knew. I made many new friends in his old circles. I am the third generation of our family's Daoist heritage, my grandfather's legacy, begun almost one hundred years ago. I am the third, and my son was to be the fourth."

"One hundred years; three generations," my companion slowly repeated outloud. "And now there is no more."

Mr. Chen looked up at us and shook his head emphatically. "No, there will never be a fourth generation; my son will never be. Because one day when I was in the park, two young men came up to me and invited me to a church activity," he simply replied. "I still can clearly see that day. I had brought the children to the park to do their homework. We all sat on the bench and did the math together. The two young missionaries came up to us, and before long we were talking about their church and their missionary work. They said that they were volunteers and didn't receive any money for their work; in fact, to pay for their two years here, they used up money they had saved. When I asked them why, one of them replied that they didn't come to Taiwan for their own benefit, but to benefit the people here, to benefit my people.

I was touched that they would sacrifice so much to come so far away, to share something that seemed so important to them. I was intrigued, and so that next Monday night, I went to the activity at their chapel. I felt so good when I was there that I went the next week, the next week, and the next week. I loved to watch the members--their happiness, their love for others, their joy when they talked about this thing they called the gospel of Jesus Christ. I found myself wanting to become happy like they were happy, so I began to come to the church and meet with the missionaries. I learned much from them; they introduced me to the truth, to real happiness, the kind I sought to give unto my children, and to the plan of God. I studied and I read, the Book of Mormon from front to back, and tried to memorize the things that were inside. As I continued to meet with the missionaries, I also became intrigued by their courteousness and their good habits, their love for other people. I always asked them, 'Why are you the way you are,' as I thought of how I wanted my children to become like them."

He stopped for a moment, and looked out into the street. The afternoon was quickly waning; the traffic had begun to start. He offered us some fruit, and we declined. Then he continued on.

"But then one day I woke up and remembered who I was, that it was impossible for me to continue on this way, to be studying this gospel, and have the feelings for it I was having. Then came the day that I realized I knew that it was true, and so after that I couldn't come back anymore. If my father were to know, then he would die. Besides, I am a Daoist priest, I thought to myself. I cannot love my gods and love the Savior too. But I also knew that my children didn't have to suffer because of my life and who I was. They were young, and I decided that more than anything, I wanted my children to have the happiness that I knew the gospel could bring to them. I knew the Church was true, and because it was from God, it would give to them the greatest happiness. And then, for the first time, I think, I finally realized what being a parent was all about; Heavenly Father wanted me to prepare my children to accept the true gospel of the Savior, Jesus Christ."

I stopped him for a moment, genuinely curious about his way. So exactly how did you do that?" I asked. "How do you prepare your children, prepare anyone, to accept the gospel of Jesus Christ?"

He smiled at me, and I began to see the amusement in my question. Me, a mighty missionary, asking Mr. Chen, a Daoist priest, how to help others accept the gospel message. He began it simply, he said.

"I realized that the missionaries were the way they were because they had been taught the gospel from when they were small children. But of course I couldn't just open up the Book of Mormon and start to sermon my children. So I tried hard to remember some of the most important commandments inside the book, and then everyday, I taught them some of these commandments. 'We need to be nice to all of God's children because they are our brothers and sisters. We need to learn to love people, and forgive everyone, even if they hurt us 70 x 7 times.' I taught them not to drink, to gamble, to waste their lives in meaningless things. And I knew, as I taught them day by day, that they were building a testimony of their own, so later, when they learned about the commandments, they would find them a joy to live. They would already know what blessings came from obedience to God, and then they wouldn't balk, but would go forward in God's righteousness.

I continued to prepare them in this way. For a year and a half I taught my daughter and strengthened her until I knew that she was ready. She then was taught the gospel, and was shortly baptized. My son soon followed in her footsteps, and has just been baptized too. My children have found the truth, and they have found happiness in living it." He paused for a moment, and I could sense that something wasn't right.

"And you." I asked it slowly. "Have you found the truth, and found happiness in living it?"

He was silent for a moment. "Did you know that I always thought I would be the first one baptized into the Church? And now, I will be the last?" He smiled a little at the bitter irony. "I have come to realize that I am not like them, my children who can have the great blessings of the truth in their own lives. I am like my father, and my father's father, who now believe in things that someone told us to believe. As I watched my son be baptized, I thought my heart would break. It was supposed to be me; it always was, but now I know there is no way. I need my work, I need my father. It is too late for me to leave and join the truth."

I felt his sorrow as he turned his head to hide the tears, and I pleaded for his sake. "Heavenly Father, what will he do? What can he do? Please help him find his faith." There was really nothing else to do.

They sat in the lobby and waited for their ride, his mind still on the meeting of that morning. It had been a long way for the mission president and his wife to come, but because they had worshiped here this day, their long trip had been forgotten in the members' joy. But he was still a little glad that it was time to go; he longed to be back home.

"President Williams?" He turned and saw the man walk in the chapel doors. He came in as though he wanted to find no one, but needed to find someone. He sat down beside them on the wearing vinyl couches.

"I am Mr. Chen," he began the introduction. "I met you in the meeting earlier today." President Williams' simple smile confirmed that he remembered. "I am sorry to interrupt you both. I don't know why I came back to the church, I guess I just needed to talk to someone. It's just that . . ." He had started something he was unable to finish, but then began again.

"President, I just know this church is true. I know that it is the gospel of Jesus Christ, and I know that he came to earth to save all mankind, to give us a chance to return to our Heavenly Father's presence again. Oh, how I want to become a member of this church, to learn more about its teachings, to learn the truth of why we're here and what we need to do. I want to love the Savior and show him that I do. I want to follow him, but I can't. I can't leave the road I'm on, and walk on his. There are too many obstacles between us, the roads too far apart. I am old, and have to have a job. But how can I do my job, and say I love the Savior too? I cannot. I do not believe in what I do; I have found the truth, but it has not made me free. I cannot leave my life--I must live it.

President Williams leaned back on the sofa and thought. "Mister Chen, I can feel of your desire to join this church, and I can also feel your pain. So what can you

do? Now you need to look at your desire. But desire is sometimes not enough." He quickly corrected himself. "But desire is *never* enough. To live the truth takes courage. It takes sacrifice, it takes faith. The Lord did not mean for this to be an easy road. He tests us so that he can see what we will do. He tests us so that we can grow. He gives us our own seeds, and then stands back to see what kind of garden we will make of them. And why must we have faith? We need faith to believe in him, to be strong when we feel weak, to trust him enough to give our lives to him. I know the Lord wants you to be baptized into his church. He is waiting to give you the blessings of eternity. But first you must show him you believe that he is waiting for you, that he is mindful of you now, that he will continue to protect you."

The President turned to him again. "I know that if your faith is sufficient, if you are willing to help it grow, the Lord will prepare a way that you can follow his commandments, and your family will not suffer. You can be baptized, and the Lord will give you greater blessings than those you have already seen."

A smile of encouragement, and then they had left the chapel to start their long trip home. Mister Chen watched them leave the chapel. They turned back once and waved, and then the car began to pull away. Mr. Chen sat on the sofa for a long time afterward, thinking about his faith.

I stood and stretched my legs. The meeting finally over, the young girls began to giggle, and mothers, restless children clutching at their skirts, began to talk and tried hard to be heard above the din of small boys playing at the door. The men stood silent and observed; some yawned, others hurried off to begin their first of many Sunday meetings. I asked myself what we would do when we had finished lunch. *Go tracting again*, I answered back. I unzipped my floppy business case and replaced the tiny hymnbook in its tiny cardboard cover. It was then my shoulder felt the gentle tap, and I turned to face the branch president.

"Elder Gallup, I have an experience I'd like to share with you. You know Chen Rai-shin don't you?"

"Of course I know him." The president looked a little excited; I asked if all was right.

"Oh, everything is great. He's fine. This last Wednesday night, he just showed up at my house, after which we talked for a good couple of hours. Elder Gallup, this man's greatest desire in life is to receive baptism and become a member of the true Church of Jesus Christ. He has known the Church for a little over four years now, and has spent the last two years preparing his children to become members of it. But it is with bitter sweetness that he sees the blessings of the gospel flow into their lives, as he must choke down his own desire, knowing there is no way for him to receive of the same. But as he sat in my living room on Wednesday night and we cried together, I

think he found an answer; I think he found a way; I think he found his faith. He is willing to try the Lord, use his faith in all the Savior promised him, knowing that the Lord will give him all he needs to overcome the greatest obstacles he faces, and with his children, enjoy the blessings of the truth. So he is ready to hear the gospel; he wants you to come to his house this week and start teaching him the truth."

I could only nod my heart's consent. I had never felt so unworthy to teach a man the truth.

"You know, I'm getting baptized tomorrow."

We both sat in the older rented apartment that served as our area's small chapel. I looked at Rai-shin from across the wooden table, and even though we were in serious conversation, I had to smile at the man. I loved the way he always made me feel so good about everything. I loved his simple faith, his humility, his strong desire to learn. He had taught me much, these last months of our togetherness. And as I had sat in his home every night for the last week and learned with him the gospel, I marveled at his faith and his desire to know the truth; I marveled at how much I had been taught.

"I know, Rai-shin."

"I'm scared. His voice tightened a little. "There will be repercussions," he simply prophesied.

I looked down in my sadness, wishing that I could help. "We knew there would be," I softly replied. "What is it that scares you the most?"

His voice--it came from somewhere deep, low, and heavy. "Oh, I don't know. I'm scared of a lot of things. I know that when they all find out I've joined the Church, my Daoist friends, my customers, they won't come to me anymore, and my business will die. I need my job to support my family. I know I need to have faith, but I also need to work, at least a few more years. And then after they stop coming to me, they will never stop attacking me. They will tell me I am a liar and a hypocrite, and they will curse me, and I will have no one to protect me from their hate." He stopped. I could see real fear in his eyes, as the scene played out before us. It was tomorrow's tomorrow, and they were here, gathered in his living room. He stood in front of them, and they began the hurt.

My heart was wrenched. Why must he suffer so? I looked across the table at this man, my friend, and thought how strange it was. He, a Daoist priest for almost as long as I had lived, and me, a young Mormon missionary from a very different place. And yet the gospel had somehow made up for our differences; this night we sat together in his home as brothers, and as I knew of the pain that could follow his decision on the morrow, I asked him one more time.

"Rai-shin, why are you getting baptized, then?" I didn't ask to doubt the testimony that burned within his heart. I knew that he had asked of God, who had given to him liberally. But at such a cost? The room was silent, and I felt him searching in himself. He looked for a long time as we sat there, and then finally he had found it.

"I am getting baptized . . .," he began, and then began again. "I am getting baptized because I know that only in this church is the full truth of God to be found upon the face of all the earth. I know that this church contains the truth, the eternal laws of God, the precepts by which he created the universe, and the reasons why we came to earth to live. I know that Joseph Smith is a prophet of God, that he restored to us these truths that God before had taken from the earth. I love the truth," he began again. "I love the truth because it took me so long to find it. I love it because I am learning how to recognize it, and I love it because it brings me and my family happiness. When you can know what is true and what is not; when you can know what things are of God, and what are not, that is real happiness."

He looked up at me, but through his smile, I could still see pain behind his eyes. "But for some of us, truth is not so easy to be found, is it?" he asked me innocently.

He stood and walked to the blackboard. He drew only four long straight lines, and with them made a square. I sat in silent curiosity.

"This square, he began, represents my brain. And right now, my head is full of these." He took the chalk, and drew many squiggly lines inside the box. "It's filled with untruths, confusion, and symbols that don't mean anything to me, to anybody. They have no purpose, they draw no picture, they only take up space so that the real things can't come in." He reached again and drew a tiny wooden horse, and then he turned and looked at me.

"When something real comes in, something true, I cannot recognize it, and I don't know what it is. I can't tell it's any different from the squiggles, because everything has just been squiggles for as long as I remember." Lost in thought, he stopped and stood still for a moment. "But since I found the gospel, I am trying everyday to slowly take the squiggles from my mind, so there is room for truth, room for more real things. So now when I see something real, like this horse, I still don't really know that it's a horse, but at least I know it's not a squiggle. When I first found the truth, I didn't know what it was, or even that I had found it, but I could tell that it was different from all the other things that were floating in my mind. Truth brings hope," he ended, "but it also brought me pain."

At first I didn't understand his meaning, so he began to explain. "It's like having two best friends. . ." He put his pen down, walked toward the burnished table, and sat down in the wooden chair across from me. "It's like having two best friends, and you've known them since you were small. You grew up with them, you played

with them, you trusted them. And then one day, someone comes up to you and tells you that all this time, they have been lying to you. And all the things you gave them, and the things they had given you, the secrets you told them, the experiences you shared with them, are worth nothing; they are wasted time, because it was all a lie. And so then you look at yourself; by now you are old. Your time is wasted, it is up. All you worked for, believed in--it was all wrong. So what are you going to do?" His thought unfinished, he ended the sentence anyway. I slowly answered for him.

"So you are going to start over again," I replied softly. You take the truth you've found and you begin your life anew. You kneel down and thank your Heavenly Father for giving us Jesus Christ, who gives us a chance to start over again, to be made clean, to be born again; to start a new life, because before we didn't know the old life wasn't right, it wasn't his way, it wasn't true. Because the Savior paid the price for our sins and died for us, we have a chance to change and to become better. He is hoping we can find the truth, and then we can use His sacrifice to start again and live our lives according to that truth."

Rai-shin began to smile again. "Will tomorrow never come?" he asked me like an excited child.

"It's not much longer now," I quickly reminded him, and silently promised myself.

His four-year quest had finally ended. His baptism over, he stood before them; they listened to hear him speak. He stood tall and simply for a moment as he cast his eyes upon his friends; and then bowing his head low, he gently placed it in his hands, and he began to cry. Some moments later he raised his eyes again, and, smiling through his emotions, spoke.

"My friends, I have waited for this moment for so long. You are indeed my friends, because you know me, and you love me. I hope for your forgiveness my friends. I hope that God forgives me for the work I do. I must work because I love my family, not because I love those gods. I love my children very much; that is why I sought the gospel. I started out just wanting my children to be happy. I saw the Church and what it gave to people. I saw the happiness it brought into people's lives as they learned they have a Heavenly Father who loves them, unconditionally. So that's what I decided to give my children, and as they learned why they came to earth, their life truly did develop more happiness and meaning and purpose. They know why they are here and what they are to do, and that if they do what is required, they have an eternity of happiness to look forward to; we have an eternity in which we can be together again. Death cannot separate us now, because I now too have found the truth, and am happy because of the blessings it has given me. I need only look at my children . . ." He paused for a moment and smiled down at them. "To know they have

the truth," he continued, is my greatest joy. I love Jesus Christ, and I know that He is my Savior. Thank you for helping me know."

I sneaked a look at Rai-shin's children as they sang the closing song. "And the great God has had mercy on us, and made these things known unto us that we might not perish . . . because he loveth our souls as well as he loveth our children" (Alma 24:14). I hoped my children's father would be a lot like theirs.

Rai-shin's search for the truth ended when he found the gospel, but it hasn't ended his desire to study and progress. He is constantly studying the scriptures and reading books about the Church, in an effort to learn all he can about the Savior, and about the restored gospel. He and his two children are strong, active members in their little branch. His current work situation may be uncertain, but his faith is firm and strong; he knows the Lord watches over those who put His work and glory first, and trust Him with their lives.

COMING BACK TO HIM

14. *Yea, verily I say unto you, if ye will come unto me ye shall have eternal life. Behold, mine arm of mercy is extended towards you, and whosoever will come, him will I receive; and blessed are those who come unto me.*

3 Nephi 9:14

"Wait a second. Stop!"

"I can't stop here. We're in the middle of the road!"

"I'm serious! Stop! Pull over a second. Not here, across the street--over there by that building." She grabbed his arm and helped steer them over to the side of the road.

"Fang-ting, you're going to get us both killed! What are you doing?"

But she was already ignoring him. She rolled down the window and took a good long look. It was beautiful. Standing tall on the corner, its whiteness sparkled in the afternoon light, its spires going up and up and up. *To heaven*, she softly whispered, as her gaze followed them up into the sky.

He tugged her arm again. "Fang-ting, what *are* you doing?" He pulled her head back in the car. "You're starting to make me nervous."

"Would you just look at this temple!" she said excitedly. "Oh, and look! There's a chapel next door too. No there!" She motioned with her arm. "Over there, on the left."

Finally spotting the blue roof of the chapel, he only nodded impatiently. "Well, so . . ." he trailed off.

"So . . ., I'm a member of this church," she slowly finished for him. He started to laugh, and then saw that she was serious.

"I didn't know you believed Jesus," he started to say, but was interrupted as a flow of people began pouring out of the blue-roofed chapel. "Church must just be over," Fang-ting guessed outloud. She spotted a young woman in a black and white skirt, and before she knew it, had already opened her mouth. "Hey, miss, excuse me," she yelled from the car window, "but are you a member here?"

The woman gave them a curious look, then started towards the car. "Yes," she said upon reaching the window, "I'm a member here. Do you know our church? Where do you live?"

"I live here in Taipei," Fang-ting replied, and then, motioning with her hand, "I live up over that way. I'm a member too," she continued, and then looking at him, quickly added, "but I haven't been for a really long time. I was just wondering what time the meeting starts."

"It starts at nine o'clock, and you're always welcome to attend." They continued to talk for a few minutes, and then the woman had an idea.

"I know. Here." She reached deep into the bag slung over one shoulder. "How about I give you my phone number and you can call me. I'll be happy to come and pick you up and bring you here or do whatever you need."

Fang-ting stuck the card in her wallet. "Thanks," she yelled as they began to pull away. "I'll think about it." The woman waved good-bye.

Except for his occasional humming, they drove for a while in silence, Fang-ting going in and out of thought about the temple and her new friend. *After all, I did promise her I'd think about it.* Fang-ting smiled to herself. The funny thing was, she always thought about it. Almost everyday since the day she was baptized, Fang-ting had thought about the church, the gospel. *Baptism.* It seemed so long ago, almost like it had happened to a different person. Fang-ting leaned back, closed her eyes, and tried to remember it all.

She was fifteen, and it was fun. At first there were four of them; her older sister, her, and two of their friends. So it really wasn't all her fault they always laughed and talked when they were supposed to be learning about the gospel. Soon after their friends left, and it was just her and her sister, but then they still didn't know, and the elders thought they were wasting their time, and had had enough, and wanted to give up on them--but for some reason never did. And then one day they made Elder Peterson cry, and after that, it wasn't ever quite the same. She still remembered his tears, his words:

"I don't know if you care, but I have to tell you that I know this church is true. I know that Joseph Smith saw Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, and that he was called to be their prophet, to lead us here on earth, and to restore the true church of Jesus Christ. I know that the Book of Mormon is true and that Heavenly Father wants us to read it so we can understand how to return and live with him again. I know that Heavenly Father gave us commandments because he loves us, and he knows what things will make us most happy, and what things will make us most sad. And so I know that living the teachings of the gospel will bring us the greatest happiness, because we have a Heavenly Father who loves us enough to help us through this life."

And then it became clear to them: they saw the value of the gospel, they learned about it, they prayed about it. And their Heavenly Father had heard their prayers. As she knelt to pray, she felt warmth and peace. She didn't doubt, she didn't

guess; the truth burned inside her heart. The Holy Ghost spoke to her spirit; it wrapped itself around her, covered her. It was safe, and she felt loved.

So they wanted to be baptized, to follow the Savior and be like him, and they knew that this was the only way to become clean, to start a new life, to become able to return and live with Heavenly Father. But they were fifteen, seventeen. *Of course we can't ask mother; what is to be done?* They gave *themselves* permission, they signed their mother's name. Because they knew the church was true, and, just as the Elder said, the gospel would bring their lives joy.

But then they thought he was wrong; being baptized didn't bring joy into their lives at first, it brought them pain. How was Mother not to know? And after she knew, they fought about everything. She forbade them from going to church, but they went anyway, because that's where Heavenly Father was. And then one day when Fang-ting thought she had misplaced her Book of Mormon, she found it in the garbage can. She cried a little, then hid it really good. Her mother became an angry person, and after a little while Fang-ting became angry too, because this wasn't the way it was supposed to be. God wasn't being fair at all. The missionaries told her she needed to try to have a better attitude, to get along with her mother, and then she went home and tried to do the right thing, but everything ended up badly. One Sunday she didn't go to church, and then her mother turned into the mother she was before Fang-ting joined the Church. That was much nicer, so then she started not to go, started not to know people, and started not to care. Then high school was over, and there was a job in Taipei. She took it to get out of the house, she took it for new friends, she took it to get away from herself.

The car braked abruptly for the light, and Fang-ting remembered where she was. She cleared her throat and tried to think of what to say to him, her mind still on the temple, on the church. *It looks like I followed myself to Taipei*, she mumbled with a sigh.

The telephone rang. It was his voice on the other line. "Hello, Fang-ting? It's me. Don't worry, I don't want to fight, I just want to talk to you."

He sounded as though the last year had already been forgotten, erased from his memory by the long moments apart. It had almost been a year now since they last kissed, a year since she really loved him. Not long after the day she saw the temple, they decided to take it easy, have some space, look around a bit. Since that time the distance had deepened, not abated. She asked him why he was calling.

"I just wanted to see how you are. I've been thinking about you lately, and also been wondering something. Do you remember that one day when we were driving the car, and you made us pull over and look at your church? Well, I was just wondering if you ever went to it, as you said you wanted to."

Fang-ting tiredly closed her eyes, leaned back on the legs of her chair, and tried to figure out what was wrong with this man. "Now why exactly did you call me up again?" she began, "and why are you asking me all these questions about my church? You hate my church, remember?" She remembered the weeks that followed that day, how he teased and made fun--of it, of her.

She held the receiver in silence for a minute. He seemed to be collecting his thoughts. "I know, he began, but I've just been thinking about things lately, and realized that I'm not very happy with the way my life has been going. I don't know exactly what it is I'm looking for, I just know that something is missing." He paused, and tried again. "I'm just not very happy right now; are you?"

It was an annoying question. "Of course I'm happy; why wouldn't I be? I've got a good job, a nice apartment, friends. My life right now is full, I am enjoying myself. I feel lucky that I have so many good things all around me, so many fun things I like to do, people that I love. It's a good life."

She meant it, too. He sat quiet for a minute, and then began again. "Then, Fang-ting, I really want to know, why did you join that church in the first place? Your life was happy before you met the church, wasn't it? So why did you want to learn about it? Why did you want to join it? Why did you get baptized a member of it?"

His questions were hard; there was nothing she could say. *Why did you get baptized?* That wasn't a fair question, or had she just forgotten the answer? Her thoughts turned homeward, and she once again remembered her baptism. She remembered the elder who cried, who said that he knew his church was true. She remembered the questions; she had herself knelt and asked her Heavenly Father herself if the Church was true, if the Book of Mormon was his word, if he wanted her to be baptized. And then she remembered the answers: the feelings of warmth, of being wrapped in too many blankets, of wearing too many clothes. Through her prayers, she found out that the elders' words were true, it was all true; living the gospel and obeying the commandments would bring her life much more happiness, because Heavenly Father did know what things would make his children happy, and what things would make them sad.

As Fang-ting thought about his questions, she realized she was already happy. She hadn't lied to him. It was a good life full of work and friends and interests, and fun things to do. But she couldn't lie to herself either. She knew inside her heart-- somehow she had always known--that living the gospel was the best way to live her life, because she knew the Church was true; it was all true. She knew that following the commandments of Heavenly Father would save her from some pain, would lead her to more happiness, more peace, more purpose in life, more sense of direction. What was it the elders had said? We must follow the commandments in order to return to live with Heavenly Father. That had always been her goal; and what about now?

His voice jarred her thoughts back to the phone. "Fang-ting, I get the feeling you're not listening to me." She tried to focus on his words, but he had already gone on without her. "All I'm saying," he continued, "is that I'd like to visit your church with you sometime. I want to go and see if maybe I can learn some things that would make my life happier. I want to see what it's like, and see if it can help me change some things that are making me sad. So I'm asking you to come with me, and help me understand what it is all about. Do you still have that woman's number?"

Fang-ting could see no way out of this one. Besides, he was still her friend, and she wanted him to be happy too. "I think I can find it somewhere." She hesitated, then voiced his name.

"What?" he answered.

Fang-ting hesitated again, then didn't know what to say. "Nothing. I'll call you back later. Good-bye." She hung up the phone and began to cry.

Two days later she finally reached for her wallet and pulled the once white namecard from its zippered pouch. The sides were now grey with fingerprints, and the number almost illegible from wear. She gently rubbed the card along the inside of her palm, the fraying edges as soft as tissue paper. Why didn't I ever throw this thing away? she wondered to herself. At first, she almost did. Every time she emptied her wallet to clean, the urge had been there. But for some reason, she just never could. And so the card became a trusted friend. She looked for it whenever she opened her wallet, and then later, sometimes when she was depressed or worried or when she just wanted to think about things, she would pull it from the wallet and read: Chen, Ming-ju, (02) 365-4855, ext. 14, and then she scribbled blue across the bottom--*Call me if you want to*. And so the namecard remained with her a year, but she had never been able to call. Until now. She took a deep breath, picked up the receiver and began to dial.

Had she waited only a few seconds more, she would have seen them coming. Ming-ju stood in the doorway of the chapel, anxiously watching the road, and greeting the few latecomers that came straggling in. She looked at her watch again: 9:06. *She said they'd be here at nine*. Nervously walking in and out of the big glass doors, she waited a few more restless minutes, and then slowly turned and walked back inside the church. Music suddenly sounded from the large room on her left. They've started the opening song, she thought in dismay. Ming-ju glanced once more through the open doors and out into the street. Then she turned and softly walked inside the chapel.

They sat in the back because they were late. *That's okay*, Fang-ting thought. *I wanted a chance to look around anyway*. She glanced up as the chorister ended the opening song, and then the prayer was given. After the prayer, she raised her head and began to look around. The small children, already tiring, were lying on the floor or

sitting quietly looking at picture books. Some held crumbling cookies in their hands, others, bottles of milk. Some of the older children seemed intent on exploring the pages of their parent's copies of the Book of Mormon. A few old men dozed in the row behind them, while a nervous looking mother up in front tried to still her crying child.

It was all as she remembered it. Fang-ting looked over at the young people occupying three or four benches on the left-hand side; some sat with scriptures open, others constantly fidgeted to find a more comfortable piece of wood, and still others, heads bent low, were recovering from a long night of study. *That was me last time*, she seemed to remember. *I sat there, I was young; that was me.* And her sister? *Yes, she would have been there too.* It was her sister who liked to sing, whose hands held the hymnbook and mimicked the chorister's dance. What was that song they had loved? She thought a moment for the words: "Though deep'ning trials thron'g your way, Press on, press on, ye Saints of God! Though tribulations rage abroad, Christ says, 'In me ye shall have peace.' Christ says, 'In me ye shall have peace.'" Unable to remember all the words, she had to smile at herself. That was all right; she had never got it right before either.

It grew reverent as the sacrament was passed. She felt the hush fall, as the room remembered the Savior, repented of their mistakes, and covenanted to think better, to do better, to be better people. She had forgotten the taste of the bread, but she still remembered the feelings. They came again to her now; oh, how she wanted to do better too. She longed for a rebirth, for a chance to once again be made clean. Her life was good, but it could be better! She could be cleaner, she could do better, she could be more like the Savior. Suddenly longing for comfort, Fang-ting reached for the hymnbook in front of her. She randomly turned the page and found the hymn she loved. "Fill our hearts with sweet forgiving; Teach us tolerance and love."

"Fill us with forgiving"--the words sounded loud in her head. *Oh Heavenly Father*, she pleaded, *please fill me with thy forgiveness.* She looked down at the small child in front of her, returning his curious stare. He was so young and she was so old. A feeling of panic began to rise within her heart. *But I have forgotten everything! I have forgotten this life, these feelings! I have forgotten the commandments. I cannot start to live them now. Not now, not after such a long, long time.* Fang-ting could not stop the tears from falling, as she plead with God to take away the pain. *You cannot ask this of me! There are too many obstacles, too many commandments I am no longer able to live.* She bowed her head and tried to think of something else. She had been wrong: church wasn't quite the same as she remembered it.

The window turned from rice fields to high-rises, to mountains and to greens. She sat back on the trainseat and watched the transformation; she was on her way

home. She had left her job. There just wasn't anything else to do. And she had left him, and the Taipei chapel, and now she was going home. She thought back on the last four months, to the first time she had gone to church with him. He had liked it; church made him feel good, he said, and so he met the missionaries and started to learn. But his heart wasn't really in it, and so after a little while, he didn't want to come back anymore. He just sort of went away. *The gospel will change your life, she thought, whether you want to change or not. You learn about the Savior, and realize how much you need to change.* She remembered her first introduction to the Word of Wisdom, the law of chastity, the law of the tithe and of the fast. She began to understand why the elders had invited her to pray about each commandment and ask God if it was true. *You must find your own testimony, she thought, in order to live these commandments from God. You must know that they are his, and they will bring you peace.* Did she know this now? She remembered she had once. Fang-ting felt the train lurching to a platform; she still had three hours left. She was glad--she needed some time to think.

It was two long years later before they finally found her, and Fang-ting let them visit. When they arrived, Fang-ting was looking out the window of her office, rooftops and skyscrapers brilliant in the afternoon light. The sound of the buzzer startled her reverie, and she knew it must be them. She waited at her desk for a few moments, pushing the paperclip back and forth across the marbled top. Then she walked around the desk, and, a little hesitant, opened the outside door. They stood there in the doorway smiling at her. "May we come in?" they both asked in unison, then laughed at each other's mistake.

"So you're the missionaries." Fang-ting stopped for a minute and read their names. "Yes, do come in. Go ahead and sit down," she offered. "I'll go and get some water."

She still didn't know if this was a good idea, letting them come over, but she knew she needed someone. Fang-ting leaned her head against the water tank, in an attempt to calm her fear. *It's okay, she reassured herself. You don't have to go back to church unless you want to, until you want to.* After a minute, feeling better, she brought the cups back in, placed them on the table, and then they began to talk. They asked her questions about her life, the past few years in Taipei, and what it felt like to be home. Then after talking for a while, they both became a little serious, and the taller one reached into the bag beside her chair.

"Fang-ting, we are excited you let us come here and get to know you," she began. "We were also hoping we could read some scriptures from the Book of Mormon with you today." She pulled a copy from her bag and set it on the table. Fang-ting picked it up, and turned it over in her hands. *It's just like the day Mother*

threw you in the garbage can and I found you later, she thought; what is so special about this book?

The other sister continued: "We would also like to say a prayer with you today before we start. Fang-ting, are you willing to offer an opening prayer for us?" *Heavenly Father, help me so I can pray outloud for them,* Fang-ting silently prayed, and then nodded her consent. The sister leaned over, pulled a flipchart from her bag, opened up to a page called "The Steps of Prayer," and set it on the table in front of Fang-ting. "Don't worry if you have forgotten some of the steps," the sister smiled and explained. "They're all right here on this page. Just take your time and remember, prayer is just like talking to a friend." Then it was her turn, and the sisters looked up at her in anticipation.

Fang-ting sat still for a second, then reached over, quietly closed the flipchart, and handed it back to the sisters. "Thank you, but it's okay," she began, looking down at her folded hands. "I still remember how to pray. All these years I never went to church, but I've been praying everyday. Just how do you think you two finally found me here, anyway?" she said with a smile, looking up.

After Fang-ting found her own way back into activity, she helped her brother become baptized a member of the Church. She recently revisited the temple on the corner, this time to enter its holy doors and receive her own endowment. She is currently serving a mission for the Church, in part to thank her Heavenly Father for continually watching over her, and to help others realize that there is no mistake, no problem, no trial, that the Savior cannot help us overcome. There is always a way back to the gospel!

信心

那是個星期二的下午，何王兩位長老甫登這小島，他們來到這家飯店，櫃台小組叫美如，很友善，只是他們尚不習慣跟孩子說太多話，因此也沒有多聊。不過她常幫他們轉接電話，慢慢地就比較熟了。

到那裏的第二天晚上，他們和她聊了一下才拿鑰匙回房間。在電梯裏，何長老說：「我覺得她不錯。」

「對，我們可以跟她傳教。」王長老回答。

「好啊，我們可以試試看。」

下一次再見到她時，他們介紹了課程並邀請她來聽

「好啊！」她說。

星期四下午他們在飯店大廳內開始了第一課。美如告訴他們她以前去個教會，但是它們看起來假假的。當他們問到她的祈禱時，她說在高中時因為老師是基督徒，教他們祈禱，所以試過一次，卻沒甚麼感覺，長老們邀請她作祈禱，讀摩門經。

「好啊！」她回答。

星期五下午長老們問美如祈禱及研讀過得如何，只見她讀了摩門經中所有指定的部分和研讀指南，更令人驚訝的是她把讀過的地方都劃了重點。美如作了祈禱，而且有很好的感覺。於是傳教士們決定要邀請她來參加星期天的聚會，在一位教友家舉行。

「好啊！」她說。

第一次的聚會，包括傳教士只有八個大人，兩個小孩。

星期天下午，長老們與美如上了第二課。他們談到耶穌基督，祂的犧牲和贖罪，以及福音首要原則及教儀。

「美如，妳願意效法耶穌基督的榜樣，經由一位聖職持有人接受洗禮嗎？」何長老問。

「好啊！」

接下來的日子中，他們每星期見面三次，在傳教士的公寓兼教堂。眼看著她吸收所有他們教給她的事情，接受每項承諾及挑戰，努力研讀和祈禱，甚至主動向朋友提起教會，她令他們感到驚奇。美如連真正的教堂都沒有過！在這小島上，奇跡不斷在發生。

要洗禮的那個禮拜，雨下了不停，美如開始擔心到了星期天時她的朋友會因下雨而不來參加洗禮會，或更糟的，洗禮會因此而取消。所以，她決定要作禁食祈禱，祈求雨能夠停下來。

星期天早上十點時仍然是大雨如注。但在領受聖餐後雨勢突然減弱了。漸漸地雨停了。長老們很訝異，卻看見美如一副胸有成竹的模樣，似乎是說她早就知道了。居然有人可以禁食到驅走暴風雨，這是什麼樣的信心啊！

洗禮會開始了，海邊冷得要命。美如的朋友來看她，他們說她瘋了，會生病，非i是她不管。她和何長老離開其他人，沿著海灘走下去，走進海中，到了夠深的地方，何長老說禱告詞並為美如執行了洗禮。當時的他們，覺得溫暖且平安。美如，她開始走向天國。

洗禮後兩個禮拜，美如每星期仍與傳教士見面三次，他們也開始一起研讀福音原則。她對教會中的一切都很好奇，當她知道長老們要去台中開會時，她決定了，她也要去，去看看真正教堂長什麼樣子。

下個星期二的早上十點四十五分，他們在台中在教堂大門口停車。踏出車外時，美如驚愕了一會。

「所以，妳覺得怎麼樣？教堂跟妳想像的一樣嗎？」何長老問。

「哦！我早知道它會很完美，畢竟，這是主的教堂，所以不管今天它是什麼樣子，都是很美的。」她馬上回答。

回程時，美如向長老們道謝。

「我在台中學到很多。」

「妳學到了什麼？」何長老問。

「我想我學習到如何謙卑。」

美如目前很努力地幫助小島上的人認識教會並了解福音的教導。經由她的榜樣，很多人開始明白教會不只是一棟建築而它，可以是真理被教導及聖職作見證的任何地方。她也正準備家人聽福音並且在不久的將來為主傳教。

退冰

亞萍依稀還記得她和哥哥要洗禮的時候。那時他們都未滿十八歲，需要父親簽同意書。父親不太高興，告訴他們他會讓他們自己選擇，且會尊重他們的選擇，但是他不贊成。

他們洗禮的那天，父親來了。他非常注重小孩子的教育及生活，是非常有學問的人，自她懂事起，就見他研究佛教及其書籍。他也非常有主見，想看看自己的孩子在做什麼。

亞萍洗禮後，起初，生活沒有多大的改變，但是漸漸地，父親發現她常在看摩門經，有些不太高興。有一天就問，妳為什麼要看摩門經？花那麼多時間，不如用這時間去讀英文或數學，當下亞萍直接的反應就是與父親分享見証，「這本書是真實的，它是我人生中最重要的一本書！」她為此做過祈禱，她知道。

父親發怒了，不准她再讀摩門經，所以亞萍總在他睡著時爬起來看。禮拜天時，父母也想盡辦法不讓她去教會，叫她洗車，拖地，掃地，洗碗，準備早餐等。亞萍的生活似乎被限制住了，沒有辦法參與教會的活動。她把自己的情況告訴教友，告訴他們自己的父母反對，教友們也鼓勵她為父母祈禱。於是她開始為他們祈禱，她向天父祈求，幫助她的家庭成為永恆的家庭，幫助他們認識福音。

在同一個時刻，亞萍的父母也到處跟親戚朋友說，小孩被洗腦了，結果，所有的親戚朋友也開始反對她和哥哥。

過了三、四個月，亞萍的母親生病，需要住院開刀，她很害怕。當時亞萍有種感覺，可以請長老來為母親做聖職祝福。她問媽媽時，她竟然答應了。所以長老去醫院為母親做聖職祝福，開完刀後，母親就出院了。

出院之後，長老邀請亞萍的母親去教堂見面，因為長老給她祝福，她不好意思拒絕，所以答應了。見面那天，她硬拉著父親坐陪，他很不情願地跟去。教堂裡，長老姐妹都在，父親坐下來第一句話便是：「我不會受洗的

，我只是陪我太太來，順便了解一下小孩在做什麼。」他們看了「永遠在一起的錄影帶，很感動，那時，亞萍的父親答應聽課程。

開始上課，長老們覺得她母親較可能接受，所以課程較由姐妹來上。一兩月後，母親因身體不好，沒有繼續。於是長老接下去為她父親上課。上課上了一年多，期間也是斷斷續續，有時候父親不想和長老們見面，找一些理由搪塞，亞萍都會去告密，然後長老就會打電話來，「哦！劉先生，你在家啊！」

後來，是因為讀摩門經的關係吧！父親決定要洗禮。對於這，母親非常生氣，甚至要去揍人。在洗禮的前一天晚上，父親為母親祈禱，希望她能接受他的決定。

洗禮後，亞萍的父親分享了他的見證：

「第一次我來是因為我想看看我的兒子女兒在這裡學些什麼，但大部分時間我都覺得很無聊。我想，我可能看錯地方了，所以我決定要看看我兒子女兒的生活，而不是他們的教會。我看到他們改變，他們開始用比較不一樣的方式去處理事情，去關心一些以前從來不會在乎的事。他們比較會幫忙，對我們也比較好。當時我並不知道他們只是嘗試變得更像他們的救主耶穌基督。因為他們的榜樣，我才願意和傳教士見面，學習更多關於教會的事。可是過沒多久我就發現女兒的榜樣不足以我找到真理，我自己必須真的想知道，真的想找到。

但是在那個時候，我不是很想知道，我不想為長老教的事情祈禱。我很喜歡來聽福音的事情，因為我想教會很好，可以幫助我的生活，但是為得到答案祈禱或作承諾，那很可怕。不過，我還是每天看摩門經。它令我驚奇。我會翻開摩門經，然後找到我問題的答案。尼腓就跟我一樣，他的奮鬥和掙扎就像我的一樣。我會把他的故事重覆看好幾遍，每一次都會發現新的意思。那時，我開始發覺這本書有點特別，在我為它作祈禱後，我知道自己是對的，它是一本特別的書，它是神的話。

我感謝我的小孩帶領我走向這快樂，以及他們的耐心和好榜樣，我感謝主賜給我們這福音，賜給我們摩門經，所以我們可以知道如何回去祂的身邊。這是我的見證，我知道這個教會是真實的。」

半年過去了，亞萍的母親覺得她先生改變了，脾氣變好了，跟他吵，他也只是笑笑，不以爲意。她問他是什麼使他變這麼好。他說是因爲閱讀摩門經的緣故。

漸漸地，亞萍的母親開始去教會，不久之後，也受洗成爲教友。

亞萍目前正在爲耶穌基督末世聖徒教會傳教。她的父親是一位分會會長，母親爲婦女會會長。她的哥哥在男女青年中服務，弟弟也在母親洗禮後不久受洗，目前在當兵。在他們洗禮兩年後，他們全家在台北聖殿印証爲永恆的家庭。

當人心準備好時

在這小小的分會當中，傳教士們有個共同的目標。他們要努力集中於尋找及教導更多的弟兄，他們要找到已經準備好接受福音，接受聖職，帶領這地區進步的弟兄。唯有如此，這個地區的教友才會愈來愈穩定和堅強。

有一天，戴姐妹和魏姐妹騎車經過一部車子，戴姐妹向窗口望了一下，車裡的人居然向她微笑且招手。

「就是他！」戴姐妹興奮地向同伴喊著。「他眼睛有基督的光！」

「誰？」魏姐妹問？

「我告訴妳，就是他！我們剛剛看到我們下一任的分會會長開過去！」

「那，我們要不要去追他？」魏姐妹問。

「魏姐妹，我們去找他吧！」

然後兩人快速轉頭去追，但是他的車子開得比她們的腳踏車快多了，眼見他愈開愈遠，戴姐妹開始祈禱：

「天父，我很愛那個很前面的車子裡的男人，我們真的需要趕上他，所以我們可以跟他分享福音，我知道機會不大，但我用我的信心祈求您內電可以擊中他的輪胎，讓我們有足夠時間趕上他，但是不要嚴重到讓他或車子受傷。」她想，祈禱必須要很詳細才可以。

結果，她在心中大喊哈利路亞，原來他居然在前面停下來倒垃圾！她和魏姐妹衝過去，魏姐妹擋在他的車子前面，戴姐妹則停在他右座窗戶旁。她敲敲窗子。

「請問，到鎮上要怎麼去？」

「妳們沒調頭以前的方向就是了。」他笑著說。

「謝謝，你住在哪裡？」

他告訴了她們自己住的地方，但是因為談起來感覺蠻好的，他談到了他的家庭、小孩、興趣和工作。

「我們是耶穌基督末世聖徒教會的傳教士，我們的工作很特別，我們每天出去跟別人介紹我們的教會並且邀請他們來更加的認識，我們可以給你這張藍色傳單，它介紹更多我們和別人分享的信息。我們有六個標準的課程關於天父和耶穌基督和我們來到世上的目的，你覺得對這些事情有興趣嗎？戴姐妹問道。

他的哥哥是別的教會的教友，他也去過哥哥的教會幾次，但是他不怎麼喜歡。不過他還是接受了她們的邀請。 姐妹們於是請他寫回條，氣急敗壞地再騎去教堂把回條給長老們，並且告訴他們整個事情的經過。

長老們開始和宇斌見面，並且與他上課。到他家時他們發現三個禮拜前曾在那條街上做生意接觸，當時宇斌在睡午覺，所以他們沒吵醒他。這次，又是一次聽福音的機會。

宇斌對他所學到的事情非常興奮，他也非常高興能知道他第一次遇見姐妹們時，心中有的好感是聖靈給他的提醒，幫助他知道什麼是真的。剛開始他眼睛不好，無法讀摩門經，但後來他馬上去配了一付，因為他知道讀摩門經很重要。後來長老們邀請他接受洗禮，從那天起，他就期待那一刻的來臨。

洗禮的日子終於到了，他很緊張，因為自己還有很多事情不知道，教會的歷史或教導等，甚至他連摩門經都沒讀完。祈禱會結束時，一起為宇斌祈禱，他的眼睛本來是閉著，但他突然張開眼睛，因為他感覺到溫暖的雙臂環繞著他，給他力量 and 平安，他環攬四周，知道了那是天父。

宇斌目前是那小分會中活躍的教友，等著接受亞倫聖職，並且很高興自己很快能去聖殿為別人接受重要的教儀。他有很大的渴望去學習更多關於教會的事，並且繼續每天研讀福音。他知道被找到及被教導耶穌基督的福音是一項偉大的祝福。

那果子的甜美

在他洗禮後的一個月，有一天，佑成正在公車上讀摩門經。公車靠站時，有個老婦人走上車來，佑成站起來讓位，不小心碰了一位乘客，也因此打開了兩人的話匣子。那位先生對佑成在看的經文頗為好奇，問了很多問題，於是佑成與他分享他所讀到的部分，以及自己如何將經文應用在生活中。他一直記得主教叫他要勇敢與別人分享福音帶給他的快樂。

談話之餘，佑成的新朋友問他有沒有另一本摩門經，說巧不巧，主教也告訴他要隨身帶兩本摩門經，一本自己看，一本可以給朋友。所以佑成把袋子裡的摩門經拿出來送給了那位先生，前面還有他寫好的見証。他們聊了一下那位先生的家庭和佑成的洗禮，佑成的站就到了，於是他們道了再見。

四年後的一天晚上，佑成接到一通電話，一位先生問是否有人曾於四年前在公車上送摩門經給一位乘客，佑成說他曾做過那樣的事。那位先生開始向他道謝，並告訴佑成他和他的家庭在上個禮拜接受洗禮，因為當初佑成勇敢的向他介紹福音，如今，他的整個家庭都有機會嘗到福音帶來的快樂並能夠永遠在一起。

「當我吃那果子的時候，我的心靈充滿了極大的快樂，因此，我極希望我家裡的人也能吃到這果子；因為我知道這果子比其他一切的果子更好吃。」（尼腓一書第八章第十二節），就如李海所說的，那些不理會嘲笑者的人們，從和別人分享中得到快樂。在與人分享的同時佑成也真正嚐到了那果子的甜美。

搜尋

江家庭已經是三年的慕道友了，這些日子當中，傳教士來來去去，而他們卻沒有明顯的進步。慢慢地，聽課的人從整個家庭變成最後只剩江姐妹。長老們思考之後，決定把她交由姐妹來負責。

江姐妹說，那一陣子，傳教士一直到她家去，要她洗禮。有一天，她突然有種感覺，有個聲音告訴她，她不會在台灣受洗，她會在美國受洗。這個經驗使江姐妹開始積極的準備，她存錢，她學英文，一心想要去猶他州看聖殿，並且感受一下那兒的靈性。

不料，出發前在行程上出了一點狀況，以致於他們無法按照原先計劃的去猶他州，去聖殿，或與一個摩門家庭生活一兩天，學習他們的榜樣。這樣的結果自然讓每個人大失所望，但是，通常當天父關了一扇門時，祂會打開另一道窗。前一陣子才搬家到別地方傳教的何姐妹與她的家庭聯絡，他們非常願意接待江家庭，並且帶他們四處看看，而且還有其他的傳教士們，他們的家庭也很樂意招待江家庭。於是，帶著何姐妹和一些返鄉傳教士的電話地址，他們上路了。

初到加州，他們的親戚帶他們玩這玩那的，日子也頗充實愉快。不過江姐妹仍然想去猶他州看看。江弟兄還是挺擔心的，不確定到了猶他州會發生什麼事，萬一被放鴿子怎麼辦？就乾脆打電話回台灣問大兒子的意見。他說：「去啊！帶鹽湖城的水和鹽回來給我。」江姐妹決定要去了，雖然江弟兄仍在遲疑。她告訴他，你不去我就一個人去，我不怕。最後，還是去吧！出發前，他們夫妻和隨行的小兒子及女兒做了一個祈禱。

到了鹽湖機場，江家庭還沒來得及把精心製作的布條拿出來，何姐妹的父母和小妹就上前問他們是不是江家庭。到何家時已經是下午了，吃過午餐後，有一位何家庭的朋友，二十五年前曾經在台灣傳教，到他們家與江家庭聊天認識一下，舒緩氣氛。所有的行程似乎早就安排好了。第二天，何弟兄帶江家庭去逛聖殿廣場，把他們交給當時在聖殿廣場傳教的吳姐妹後，

就去忙一下自己的事情，並幫江家庭聯絡一位在台灣認識的返鄉傳教士林長老。

在吳姐妹的帶領下，他們來到了家譜中心，在看電腦的時候，江姐妹突然告訴江弟兄她要受洗，「妳確定嗎？」她非常的確定。所以，江弟兄告訴吳姐妹再告訴何弟兄，大家都覺得蠻驚訝的。吳姐妹覺得有些過於突然，建議她回台灣再洗禮。沒想到江姐妹執意要馬上在美國洗禮，不然，回台灣的話，她還需要再考慮一陣子。最後吳姐妹邀請江姐妹作祈禱。一行人走到後面沒人的地方，跪下來由江姐妹作祈禱。她回憶當時的感覺，只覺得心裡熱熱的，整個人及頭都熱烘烘的，祈禱完就一直掉眼淚，好像水龍頭一樣。江弟兄還問她怎麼了，她告訴他，她覺得很高興。那是高興的眼淚。

決定要在美國洗禮後，他們與主教見面，何弟兄也找傳教士來做洗禮面談，由一位剛從台灣返鄉的傳教士翻譯。面談後，傳教士覺得江姐妹已準備好了，問江弟兄，他倒是嚇一跳，覺得自己完全沒準備。畢竟，上過第一課後，就因工作忙碌而無法繼續。傳教士告訴他，如果請一位朋友翻譯，他們可以幫他上課，江弟兄同意了。於是，花了一個早上的時間，傳教士們為江弟兄上完六個課程，並且在結束時邀請他和江姐妹一起洗禮。江弟兄很緊張，不知道自己準備好了沒，隔天早上夫妻倆又一次的面談，之後就由何弟兄去張羅洗禮會的事情了。

當天晚上，許多人聽說有對中國夫婦要洗禮，聞風而來，洗禮會擠滿了人，只見江姐妹十分開心，而江弟兄卻是萬分緊張。最後，洗禮由何弟兄執行，證實由林長老執行，在場的有何姐妹，林長老的家人，及其他正在傳教的傳教士的家人，還有一些剛返鄉的傳教士，擔任獻唱和翻譯的工作，整個過程充滿了靈性及快樂。江家庭的猶他之行，到此有個圓滿的結局。

江家庭回到台灣後，不斷努力地按照自己在美國所看到的榜樣，召開家人家庭晚會，看經文及做家庭祈禱。有一天江姐妹在洗碗時，她的小兒子跑來跟她說自己有一天會受洗，將來還會去傳教。「你又沒錢，又沒準備，又不去教會，怎麼受洗？怎麼去傳教？你以後不是還要讀軍校嗎？」他說他會用讀軍校的那段時間來存傳教的錢。雖然沒有再多說什麼，江姐妹卻是

感動地一邊洗碗，一邊掉淚。而前陣子，江弟兄也收到一件特別的禮物，是他在洗禮時向傳教士借的領帶。在洗禮後，家庭的改變及大家的關心，都幫助他不斷地努力學習，下次有機會他們還要再去。

準備好一條道路

凱明第一次遇見傳教士是在夜市擺地攤賣地毯的時候。當他還小時，他父親跟美國人做過生意，但是那些美國人都是騙子，所以當傳教士試著跟他聊天時，他的態度很差。奇怪的是，那些傳教士怎麼就是不肯放棄，最後，他們在第四次造訪時，終於想辦法讓他收下了摩門經，可是過沒多久，兩個傳教士都搬家了，他也就與教會失去了聯絡。

六個月後的某一天，兩位姐妹到鎮上去開會，恰巧在晚上經過他的攤子。凱明看到她們的名牌，就把他的摩門經拿出來給她們看。姐妹們邀請他和當地的長老見面，他同意了。但是見了一次面後，他沒什麼興趣，所以拒絕再見他們，不久之後，那些傳教士也搬走了。他第三次接觸教會是在半年後，有個新來中文還不太好的長老打電話給他。當時凱明不願與他們見面，但答應會參加那禮拜舉辦的一個教會活動。在活動中，他被聖靈感動，決定好好學習關於教會的事。剛開始他無法相信長老告訴他的，當時他的生活有很多不好的習慣和悲傷的經驗，他沒有辦法相信天父真的愛他，或者天父會原諒他曾犯下的錯；他和家人的關係不好，也沒有渴望在死後再和他們住在一起。傳教士只能盡力做他們的部分，因為他們知道凱明的確有很大的渴望來認識真理。

之後六個月，凱明幾乎上了一百次的課程，有時候甚至是一天八到十個小時，這段期間中，他努力研讀和祈禱，也想過接受洗禮，與神立約，但是他也想自己的義務，他就快去當兵了，在當兵的時候他要怎麼守住對神的承諾？好像不可能，所以他沒有洗禮。

直到幾個月後，他的朋友過世了，凱明突然了解福音是真實的，而且福音對他來說是多麼的重要，不是在學習一些好的觀念和想法而已，而是學習生活的目的，來到世界上的原因，以及他現在需要做些什麼以回到天父身邊。他有極大的渴望要與神立約，增進他們之間的關係。

傳教士很清楚凱明的心意，他們知道他想過福音生活，想遵守神的誠命，但是也很擔心在他當兵後沒法去聚會，沒辦法遵守他所立下的約

定。與傳道部會長談過後，他們知道，如果他們可以幫助他立下這聖約，他一定會找到方法去參加聚會。

在軍中的規定是不可閱讀任何非軍方發行或出版的書籍報章雜誌。第一天，凱明帶了兩本摩門經，把其中一本藏在樹洞裡，另一本在檢查時被沒收了。事情發生後他不斷地想，第一天就這樣，明天呢？他要怎樣保持自己的標準呢？他要怎樣去教會領受聖餐？他躺在床上流淚，不知道自己如何可以渡過這些日子，然後，他想到一段經文：「我留下平安給你們，我將我的平安賜給你們。我所賜的，不像世人所賜的。你們心裡不要憂愁，也不要膽怯。」（約翰福音十四章二十七節）一陣子之後他心裡覺得比較輕鬆，於是他向天父祈禱。

礙於時間和場合，凱明利用盥洗的一些剩餘時間，大約五分鐘左右，跑到樹那裡把尼腓一書第十七章給割了下來，放在口袋裡，方便閱讀。這樣做讓他很有罪惡感，但是，沒有其他的方法了。

吃飯時，大家都在喝啤酒，凱明把他杯子裡的酒倒在地上，擦乾杯子，把果汁限侷去喝。大家都瞪著他做這件事。班長倒酒給他，他也倒掉了，後來連長跑到他旁邊幫每個人倒酒，凱明用手蓋住杯子，不要他倒酒，連長瞪著他用力拍了桌子一下，走出了大門。

後來，和他同一期的士兵在漫長的一天結束後，聚在一起賭博，他們找凱明一起賭，被他婉拒了。

半夜，凱明醒來聽到有人低聲說話，突然，他被拽下床，他努力睜開眼睛，發現是他的室友、朋友，培如、萬成，及他的跳傘夥伴來興。他不懂那麼晚了他們要做什麼。萬成叫他站起來走，凱明覺得自己被推向後門，走到外面。有人要把他綁起來，另一個覺得沒有必要，凱明聽到來福槍子彈上膛的聲音，他心裡開始害怕，知道他們要殺他。一旦走到外面，他頭腦醒了一大半，發現他們把他帶到一個荒涼的地方，然後，把槍指住他的肋骨，另外五個人則拔出刀子。

萬成好像是帶頭的，他告訴他，班長對凱明把他倒的酒洒在地上很不高興，尤其是連長，他很討厭有人和大家不一樣。不社交、不賭博、不喝酒，放假時不跟女孩子出去。所以他們被吩咐來解決這件事。萬成告訴他下個禮拜連長為凱明特別準備了一道晚餐，那個時候他必須是個「正常人」，做其他人做的事。如果他拒絕的話，他們現在就會把他殺了，埋在籬笆後面，沒有人會發現，他會「自動失蹤」，萬成說那是他的選擇。

凱明看著這些兇神惡煞，感到渺小而恐懼，好像一切都不是真實的，突然間腦子裡閃過那段經文，在右邊那頁，下面的中間：「他應當信靠我，則他不會受挫折；並且他的一根頭髮不會落在地上而不被注意。」（教約八十四章一一六節）他知道這應許是真實的，他不應該害怕，同時，他心中充滿了平安和安慰，並知道自己該怎麼做了。他開口說話：「要選擇的是你們，你們仍然可以選擇要不要殺我，但我已選擇好了，我不會喝你們的啤酒。我已經向神承諾我不會這樣做，我承諾要遵守這項誡命，我不會對神撒謊。神答應給我什麼？我為何不怕你們的武器、刀子和槍？祂說過凡為祂的緣故喪失生命的必得著生命。所以，你們現在殺不殺我不重要，重要的是我信賴神，我知道我會再次活著。」凱明全身上下都感到平安。最後萬成丟下刀子，並且叫每個人丟下武器，剛開始沒什麼反應，但是萬成生氣的告訴每個人，凱明比他們都勇敢，他的話語是那麼有力量，而且如果他們殺了這個正義的人，神會將懲罰降在他們頭上，他的血永遠不會停止煩擾他們，後來每個人都放下了武器。

兩個月後，萬成告訴凱明他想去教會。這兩月中萬成改變了很多，他們談到很多關於福音的事情以及福音所帶來的快樂。凱明非常快樂，不過他的方向感不太好，找不到教堂，最後，其他的人先坐計程車回營地，凱明找了個地方跪下來祈禱，希望天父幫助他，因為這次不聚會，下次就不知道是什麼時候了。當他站起來時，發現教會招牌就在右手邊的大樓外，於是他向教會走去，是再次領受聖餐的時候了。

凱明後來在聖殿裡結婚。他有個美麗的太太和兩個奇跡般獲得的寶貝小孩。許久以前攻擊他的人中，有四個人在後來加入教會。經由他的榜樣和勇氣，他們了解到福音不光是用學的，而是用活的。凱明知道，只要我們願意服從神的誠命，祂一定會為我們準備一條道路。

靈魂的價值

那年的四月，夢嘉的母親去世了，事情發生得太快，令人有點措手不及。每件事都變得不太對勁，她開始不在乎，想忘記生活多麼愚蠢，她也對生活感到厭倦。

一天，工作結束後她去找佩玫，坐在她旁邊。「我不是來找妳聊天的，只是想靜靜坐著，忘記生活中的一切。真的不想再待在世界上。真希望我媽還在。」

沈默了一會，佩玫說她很遺憾夢嘉會有那種感覺，很討厭在這世上卻不知為何在世上，甚至不明白能夠來到世界上生活是多麼大的祝福。「妳有機會知道花看起來像什麼，知道巧克力嘗起來像什麼，知道畫畫的感覺是什麼樣子。妳有機會學習和進步，在許多不同的事上變得更好，更聰明，學習如何變得更快樂，但是這些都需要靠妳自己的選擇。妳不能被強迫學習，必須是妳想去學習和進步。妳想要答案要想到願意做一切事情去找到。我知道生命是一個禮物，一項祝福，一個學習變成更好的人的機會。我也知道如果妳願意遵從神為我們準備的計劃，妳會再次見到妳母親並且能夠永遠與她住在一起。但是我不能把我所知道的給妳，我只能幫助妳知道。」

佩玫的話帶給她了解的渴望，所以夢嘉開始與傳教士見面，去教會，不久後她便受洗成為教友。生活中有時還是會傷心難過，會有痛苦和考驗，不過，現在也充滿希望，也充滿福音所帶來的快樂。

前一陣子，傳教士姐妹與夢嘉談到教友傳教士的計劃，才剛談完，騎車回家的路上，她的腦海中就浮現了三年前工作同事的名字。真的是李先生嗎？應該不太可能吧！他準備好聽福音了嗎？夢嘉受到聖靈的溫暖，決定信任這種感覺。

不過，打電話給三年多沒聯絡的朋友談福音不是件簡單的事。但當她想到佩玫那時的勇氣及加入教會帶給她的改變，還是硬著頭皮撥了電話。

電話中，李先生告訴她過去三年來所發生的事和前陣子才發生的車禍，當時，夢嘉覺得他準備好了。她問他可否帶兩個朋友去看他，李先生答應了。

幾天後，夢嘉和傳教士姐妹到了李家門口。她有點緊張，想到自己只是一個多月的新教友，而且萬一他看到她的朋友是傳教士時大驚小怪怎麼辦？她豁出去了，決定信賴主會帶領她們。

剛開始都不知該說什麼好，慢慢地，他告訴她們整個故事。他說，通常他不會想那類事情，但是最近有許多事情發生，生活中突然有許多他不了解的部分，為什麼有痛苦？為什麼有考驗？為什麼車禍要發生在他身上？他還有工作和家庭要照顧。

剎那間，夢嘉明白為什麼主會帶領她的老友在這裡了。「李先生，我知道受傷害的感覺。我母親過世後，我所做的就是悲慟。我覺得她過世很不公平，父親沒有流眼淚也不公平。我停不下來，感覺很痛苦，呼吸很痛苦，活著也很痛苦。所以我決定不管了，但是每天早上我還是會醒來，還是在這裡。我常想為什麼我們會來到這噁心痛苦的地方。

但自從我學習福音以來，我知道我們有個愛我們的天父，祂給我們機會來到世上學習我能夠學習的事。最重要的是，如何成爲一個祂知道我們可以成爲的人。我知道我們在這裡是爲了成長和進步，只是有時我們需要考驗來幫助我們成長。我知道生活是個禮物，是項祝福和機會。但是我不能把我的知識給你，只能幫助你知道去哪裡尋找。」當她重覆佩玫的話時，眼眶都濕了。姐妹當時就向他們家庭提出了邀請，他們答應了。

三個月過後，夢嘉還是覺得很奇妙，聖靈提醒她打電話，他們談話的細節，當時所感受到的聖靈，這一切的一切都被安排地很微妙。有誰會知道他出了意外？誰知道這件事會準備他聽福音？誰知道他渴望學習？這段路仍然是艱辛漫長。開始時夢嘉參與每個課程，而且他太太也感受到聖靈，想更深入的了解。但是後來夢嘉晚上要工作，無法再陪他們上課。然後他們開始有了各方面的壓力。但是他們仍然努力學習和做自己的部分。

如今，李先生要洗禮了。他的太太很快會跟進。夢嘉現在知道了，她再一次體驗到福音帶來的快樂。

現在夢嘉在教會中很活躍，也是非常好的榜樣。目前她正準備把母親的名字放在聖殿裡，計劃替她接受洗禮。她也準備在不久之後去做全部時間的傳教士，與別人分享耶穌基督的福音所能帶來的喜悅。

信心產生奇跡

一九九六年對美恩來說，充滿了考驗與挑戰，也充滿了奮鬥與希望，讓她自己來告訴你吧！

「受洗後不久，我就去美國讀書。求學期間，我努力做教會事工，不管功課再忙，神的事情總是放第一位。神真的給我很大的祝福，讓我在短短一年半內讀完了大學。當時我就想，我一定要去傳教，來回報神所給我的祝福。所以回來台灣後，我和父母提到自己想去傳教。沒想到，我父母的反應很激烈，我媽甚至說：「如果妳去傳教，我會去燒掉妳的教堂。」

經過了這次的抗爭，我心裡非常的難過，所以下了個決定要去台北，從台北申請傳教。到了台北，還沒進我妹妹的公寓，就聽到電話聲，我跑去接，一拿起來，剛好是南部家鄉那兒的傳教士姐妹打來找我的，我們談了談，那通電話給了我很大的鼓勵，姐妹告訴我要繼續努力和父母溝通，並且要找工作存錢準備傳教。於是我開始在飯店裡作貴賓招待。工作期間，我每個月三分之二的薪水會寄回家，加上繳交十足的什一奉獻，所剩幾乎無多。但是我仍堅信遵守神的誠命是最重要的。雖說要準備傳教，數個月過去，父母的態度似乎沒有改變，傳教的事一直像個石頭般壓在心頭。

直到有一天，我聽到先知要來台灣，我心想，先知這次的來訪一定能夠幫助我知道該怎麼做。我不斷地祈禱，希望天父能藉著這個機會給我些啓示。我的感覺是能與先知握手並講一兩句話。大會的當天，我剛好被選作招待。但是當時人太多，雖身為接待，卻絲毫沒有任何的機會接近先知。我有些氣餒，不知道該怎麼辦。怎麼會這樣呢？這不是我的回答啊！

第二天早上，不知為何我破天荒的早十分鐘上班，通常是會遲到的。同事也覺得很奇怪。只見五分鐘後，辛格萊會長一行人從飯店門口走進來，我當場愣住了，但也真的好感動，天父祂回答了我的祈禱。我和辛格萊戈登會長談我想去傳教，他對我說：「去傳教，神會祝福妳的。」自那一刻起，我就痛下決心要寄出申請書了。

於是我開始作各項準備。申請表寄出去的那天起，我每一天寫一封信回家，日子一天天的過去，父母卻愈來愈生氣，打電話到台北來罵我，說我寄回去的信他們都沒有看。不論如何，我仍然努力祈禱，看經文，和參與教會的各項事工，我立了一個目標，要在傳教前把四部標準經典看過一遍。將近半年的時間，我沒有看過電視，每天回家都看經文，教會雜誌及聽教會音樂，並且常常與傳教士分開工作。以便在靈性上充實自己。

召喚書終於寄來了，可是，為什麼還是有那麼多的困難？我那麼努力準備自己，深信只要準備好了神一定會用我。我準備好了，為什麼家人還是那麼反對？我真的不明白。後來有一千晚上我騎車回家，突然間，眼睛好痛，隱型眼鏡不知出了什麼問題，我趕快找了一家便利商

。剎那間，我了解了，就像隱型眼鏡需要經過不斷的清洗才變得乾淨不傷眼，我對家人造成的傷害，也是要靠耐心來慢慢地治癒，一次又一次地…

正式報到的前一個禮拜，我覺得必須回家一趟，打電L話回去是我媽接的，她很生氣，說：「妳不用回來了，回來也沒用，沒人會幫妳開門！」我不管，把行李運到傳道部，就坐車回家。到了車站，我又打了一次電話，奇跡似的，我媽沒再罵我，只是告訴我，爸爸會來接。結果他們倆一起來了，我坐在後面，一句話也不敢吭。到家，大家都刻意避開傳教的h話題，只是偶爾媽媽會問：「妳可不可以不要去傳教？」日子漸漸逼近，最後她會問：「妳什麼時候要去傳教？」

離開的那天，爸爸送我去車站，我們談了很多，分手前他突然問：「妳身上有冇冇錢坐車？」老實說，當時錢包不見了，我身上只有一千塊錢，也不知道能撐多久。但我還是告訴他：「有啊！有啊！」爸爸拿出三千元說：「這三千元妳留著用。」使我感動地一直掉眼淚。

美恩報到之後，正式開始傳教生活。到目前為止她家庭的態度已經有了L轉變，她對神的見證幫助了許多人更認識耶穌基督，她對每個靈魂所付出的愛也打動了他們的心。美恩知道，這個機會是神給她的，只要盡心盡能盡意盡力地為神和她的同胞服務，她的家庭會蒙受神的祝福。

一位父親的真心話

「我的祖父是個道士，他是最先來這裡定居的道士之一。在他還很年輕時，他就很有名了，又因為他非常細心鑽研道教，使他能夠幫助許多人學習有關神明和崇拜的方式，最後他成爲一個傳奇。大家會從很遠的地方來專門聽他講道或作法祭神。他過世之後，我父親繼續追隨他的腳步。當然，生爲傳奇道士的兒子，他按照道教的方式過他的生活。也有很多人到他那裡去，有些是因爲他父親的名聲，有些則是他自己打的天下。他的三個太太也很虔誠的幫助他的工作，並教導他們十五個小孩怎麼過那種生活及如何了解。

在成長過程中，我變得和父親很接近，我一直住在離他的工作和道士義務的附近。每天看他工作使我感覺到他的地位很重要。我開始沈浸在道教的文化中。但是我除了父親的工作外，還有別的興趣。

畢業後，我開了一陣子的計程車，然後在一家電報公司上班。那是我第一次聽到教會，因爲我們常常會收到從美國發來給「摩門」傳教士的電報。但是很久以後我才有機會真正認識教會。因爲有一天我父親打電話叫到我工作那裡去，雖然他懷疑我的興趣可能在別的地方，但他覺得我是最有經驗的小孩來接這份工作。他告訴我，我要做這份工作，所以，就那樣結束了。

我記得自己那時四十歲。大女兒出生時，我才快三十歲，不過也是個年輕人。從她出生開始，我慢慢了解到自己沒有什麼生活經驗，對於教養小孩更是一無所知。晚上抱她睡覺時，我開始想她爲什麼會來，她來這裡做什麼，還有我能幫助她快樂和擁有一個好人生的方法。但是我沒有任何答案。我不知道自己在做什麼。我自己大部分的時間沒什麼快樂，怎麼幫助她？我開始列出我可以給孩子的東西，想想那一項是最重要的。我可以給孩子們什麼？以後有了兒子我自然會把祖父的道教給他，但是我不確定那可以幫助他獲得我要他獲得的快樂。所以我決定我要尋找，找到會幫助他們快樂的事情。而且當我找到時，我會用盡一切所能讓他們得到。

那時我開始和父親一起工作，他教我所有他知道關於道教的事情，那些小時候我沒學到的事。他也教我怎麼當一個道士，用我的知識去幫助別人選他們的神並給予他們生命。我父親驕傲的將他所知道的都介紹了給我，而我，也在他的朋友圈中走動。是我們家族道教傳統的第三代，我祖父的神話幾乎在一百年前就始了。我是第三代，我的兒子會是第四代。

但不會有第四代了，我兒子永遠不會做第四代。因為有一天我帶孩子們去公園做功課，兩位年輕的傳教士走上前來聊天。我們談到他們的教會和傳道工作。他們說他們自願的，且不收取任何費用。事實上，他們用他們存的錢來付傳教兩年的費用。我問他們為什麼，其中一位回答他們不是為自己的利益來的，而為了這裡的人的好處。我真的很感動他們願意犧牲那麼多，到這麼遠的地方來分享對他們似乎是很重要的事。我變得有興趣去了解。

之後的星期一晚上，我去他們的教堂參加活動。在那裡我有很好的感覺，所以我後來就一直去。我喜歡看到那些教友，他們的快樂，他們對別人的愛，和他們談所謂的「耶穌」基督的福音的喜悅。我發現自己想變得像他們一樣快樂，所以開始到教會與傳教士見面。我在他們身上學到很多，他們把真理，真正的快樂介紹給我，那種我為我小孩尋求的快樂，及神的計劃。我從頭到尾讀完摩門經，並試著把一些裡面的話背起來。我也慢慢發現傳教士們很有禮貌，習慣很好，對別人也有很多的愛。我常問他們，「你們為什麼會這樣」，因為我希望自己的孩子也能像他們一樣。

但是有一天我醒了，我記得自己是誰了，不可能再繼續學習福音和有那種感覺。然後有一天我明白自己知道那是真實的，所以我不能再回來。如果我父親知道，他會氣死。而且我是個道士。我不可能愛我的神明如愛救主。但是我也知道我的孩子不需要承擔我的生活所帶給他們的痛苦，他們還年輕。我下定決心要他們擁有福音所能給他們的快樂。

所以，我開始計劃要怎麼做。我了解傳教士之所以會那麼好是因為他們從小就被教導福音。所以我試著記得摩門經中所教導的一些最重要的誡命，每天教他們一點。比如說，要好好對待每個人，試著去愛人，去原諒

別人。不要喝酒、賭博，浪費生命在一些無意義的事情上。我知道以後他們學習福音時，他們會順利的接受。

我一直努力的準備他們。我教了女兒一年半直到確定她準備好為止。然後她開始上福音課程，不久後便洗禮了。我兒子也最近才洗禮。我的孩子們都找到了真理和其中帶來的快樂。陳先生在蓋長老去拜訪他時告訴他這個故事。「你呢？」蓋長老問。一陣沈默後他說：「你知道嗎？我一直以為我會是最先洗禮的人，但是我了解到自己和孩子不一樣，我看到兒子洗禮時，心都要碎了，但是我知道不可能的。我需要我的工作和我的父親。」沒有人知道該怎麼辦。

可是，事情並沒結束，陳先生想加入教會的極大渴望使他向傳道部會長傾訴，向分會會長傾訴。經過一連串的掙扎，他找到了他的方向，他找到了他的信心，他願意運用他對主的信心來學習真理。之後，他決定要接受洗禮。陳先生知道他將面對許多的挑戰和壓力，他知道他的生意會完蛋，他知道有許多人會罵他，詛咒他，他也知道沒有人可以保護他，但是在另一方面，他也知道自己會重頭開始。

四年來的追尋總算告一段落了，陳弟兄在洗禮後，仍有極大的渴望學習和進步，非常努力研讀經文和教會書籍，藉此學習更多關於救主和祂的福音。他和兩個孩子是分會中活躍而堅強的教友。目前他工作的情況仍究不太確定，但是他的心非常穩固且堅定。他知道主看顧著把祂的事工和榮耀放在第一位並信賴祂的人。

來祂跟前

芳華接觸傳教士是在她十五歲的時候，對於當時的她，學習福音似乎是一件很好玩的事情。她和姐姐及兩個朋友一起上課，所以常常在上課的時候講話和大笑，很快地，她們的朋友便失去興趣，只剩她們姐妹倆聽課。可是不管長老怎樣努力，她們還是一知半解。

有一天，她們把一位長老給弄哭了。「我不知道妳們在不在乎，但是我必須告訴妳們，我知道這教會是真實的，我知道斯密約瑟看到天父和耶穌基督，並且被召喚為他們的先知，在這地面上帶領我們，重新建立耶穌基督真實的教會，我知道摩門經是真實的，天父要我們研讀它。我知道天父給我們誠命是因為祂愛我們，祂知道什麼事情會使我們快樂，什麼會使我們悲傷。我知道依照福音的教導生活會帶給我們快樂。」

聖靈打動了她們的心，她們開始為福音祈禱，而天父也確實的以平安和溫暖回答了她們。所以，芳華和姐姐想接受洗禮，但是她們一個十五歲，一個十七歲，需要母親的許可，她們知道母親一定不會答應的，所以就自己簽了名，因為她們真的想要受洗。

可是洗禮後的生活對芳華來說並不快樂，反而很痛苦。因為媽媽發現她們加入教會，她們每天都吵架。不顧母親的反對和禁止，她們還是去教會。有一天，芳華以為她的摩門經放錯了地方，後來卻在垃圾筒裡找到。從此以後她把它藏得好好的。

芳華的母親愈來愈容易生氣，傳教士教她要試著用比較好的態度，可是每次事情到頭來都是一團糟。有一個禮拜天，芳華沒去聚會，媽媽的態度突然一百八十度大轉變，所以，她開始不想去聚會，不去後就愈來愈陌生，愈來愈不在乎。高中畢業後，她離開家到台北工作。

有一天，她和男友開車經過金華街，芳華看到聖殿和教堂，所有記憶都慢慢地回來了。她向教堂中走出來的一位姐妹問了聚會的時間，那位姐妹也留下了她的電話，表示隨時願意幫忙。不過，芳華一直沒與她聯絡，男朋友也漸漸疏遠了。

一陣子之後，她的男友打電話給她，問了許多教會的問題。芳華覺得不耐煩，他不是討厭教會嗎？為什麼突然想去了，還問她加入教會的原因，她想了想自己的生活，的確非常的充實，但她無法騙自己，她一直知道按照福音生活是最好的生活方式。所以她答應幫他。

芳華與那位姐妹聯絡，卻因遲到而沒碰頭。他們坐在後面，芳華靜靜地觀察四周，聚會和她所記得的一樣，沒什麼不同。但是後來她突然覺得恐慌，她已經忘了所有的事，已經忘了這種生活，有太多阻礙使她無法像以前一樣遵守誠命了。

她的男友起初覺得教會不錯，開始聽課程，但是他的心不是真的在那上面。不久之後，他就不想再繼續了，四個月後，芳華離開了台北，回到家裡。兩年後，她再次邀請傳教士拜訪，這次，她下定了決心慢慢回復活躍。

在芳華自己找到路回教會後，她幫助她弟弟接受洗禮成爲教會的教友。目前她正在傳教，爲了表達對天父的感謝，並且幫助別人明瞭沒有任何過錯、問題或考驗是救主無法幫助我們克服的。總是有路可以回來！