

My Memories of Brother Israel's Family, by George Wallace Thompson I

I am thankful for the rich spiritual heritage which has been mine to enjoy, for I grew up in Zion among the saints. I was born to George F. and Samantha Thompson, December 7, 1911. If they had not been members of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, I might not have survived, for I was born with Pneumonia. My mother often told me of calling the elders to administer to me, and how I was healed. When I was seven months old, I was blessed by President Joseph Smith III and Elder W. H. Garrett.

Brother Joseph Smith III died when I was only three years of age, so I do not remember him. But I was well acquainted with his son, Israel A. Smith, and his beautiful wife Nina. Their sons, Joseph Perrine, who was called Perry, and Don Carlos, were my playmates. They lived at 1214 West Short, and we lived at 1320 West Short, in Independence, MO. So my brothers and I were close playmates of brother Israel's sons.

I was taught the gospel, and when I was nine years of age, I was baptized by Brother W. D. Bullard who lived near by. I knew many of the old time missionaries, and I remember well the visits to Apostle Joseph Luff's home. He was also a doctor, and he allowed me, with the curiosity of a growing boy, to study the many bottles and vials and their contents on the crowded shelves in his living room.

Many of the missionaries visited in our home to have my mother cut their hair. She had a barber shop on the Independence Square prior to her marriage to my father, who also was a barber when they married. Mother had quit work to become a wife and mother. Ever afterwards she looked upon her ability to cut hair as a talent to use for the Lord. She let Brother Israel A. Smith, who at the time was one of the Church's bishops, know that she would like to use her talent for the Lord, and he agreed to send the traveling seventies and elders who needed haircuts to her.

Most traveling missionaries visited Brother Israel when they arrived in Independence, for he was a friend they all loved and trusted, as well as a Saint who sympathized with their financial needs. He and mother worked together to keep the missionaries well groomed. Mother's talents saved the men and the Church much money. Those devoted preachers were on fire with the gospel, and of miracles in God's church as mother cut their hair. When I saw them coming or was at home, young as I was, I went to listen to the stories, for I had faith that their testimonies were true.

However much of my time was spent playing with my brother, John, who was nearest my age, and Don Carlos and Perry. Not far from our home was a little creek in some woods, and we four boys, along with other neighborhood boys, dammed up the creek. The water rose to about three feet deep, making a pond. We called it our swimming hole. Our poor mothers nearly worried themselves sick, for they were afraid we would drown. All we managed to do though was to have a lot of fun and get wet and muddy.

Whenever we were playing, brother Israel would come to check on us from time to time, as we were busy and not paying attention and not paying attention to what he was doing, he would walk up quietly and manage to slyly slip a chocolate drop into each boys pocket. More than once, when I was standing with my hands behind me, I felt him place a little chocolate treat in my open palm. He never was harsh with us boys, but was always gentle and kind and forever giving us little surprises.

My brother and I and Don Carlos and Perry played back and forth and in and around one another's homes. Sometimes I went to Don and Perry's home not only to play, but to listen to their mother sing. To me, she sang like an angel. I would sit out on the porch steps or the concrete steps that lead down to the sidewalks, and listen to her sing the hymns of the restoration, parts of the messiah, and other beautiful pieces. I never grew tired of hearing her sweet voice float from her open door or raised window. And, though I was but a young lad, I would often feel the thrill of the comforting spirit of the Lord as the music feel upon my eager ears.

I am thankful for the rich heritage which has been mine. That rich heritage included the teachings I received from my parents, the testimonies from the fervent missionaries, and the privilege of being close to the prophet Israel A. Smith and his family.