# Living Histories: Selected Biographies from the Manhattan First Ward

*Dian Saderup and William Cottam*

## Introduction

Two years ago the Manhattan First Ward published a small collection of biographies chronicling the lives of nine senior ward members. Impetus for the project came when news reached Bill Cottam during his initial year as First Ward bishop that several older members had died. They were people he had not known; nobody seemed to have known them. Investigation revealed that some of these members had once been very much involved in the life of the community, but they had grown unable to negotiate the subways and buses in Manhattan to get to meetings and activities. The New York City wards have hundreds of inactive members, bishops change frequently, and few members of any ward go back more than three years. Consequently, once these elder members became homebound, they slipped from sight, gradually forgotten. It seemed that if histories of the First Ward's remaining older members could be collected, such tragedies might be avoided in the future. With their histories available in print to all, senior members could be vividly remembered and therefore more easily served by the Church membership in their remaining years.

The collection of biographies that grew out of this idea is the product of group effort by a number of Manhattan First Ward members. Several individuals interviewed and transcribed the stories of the people whose lives are profiled in the collection. Editing was kept to a minimum, leaving the styles of individual writers and the voices of their subjects—with all of their idiosyncrasies—intact. The senior members of the ward whose lives are detailed have been delighted with the recognition they've received. Indeed, as the histories focused attention

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on them, ward resolve grew to get those members coming to meetings. Drivers volunteered their cars and time and, when necessary, members hired cabs to bring the people to church. Once the ward began to know its seniors a bit better, it discovered they had something substantive to contribute to a predominately young congregation. By giving public prayers, talks, and lessons, the elder population became a key element in the personality of the ward community. The success of this endeavor led us to believe that people outside the Manhattan First Ward could benefit from and enjoy exposure to these stories, of which we have selected three for publication in DIALOGUE.

As time has passed, increasingly complex values have been highlighted by this project which began with a relatively simple goal—to recognize senior ward members. To begin with, those who have read the biographies have learned much about the stunning diversity of background and experience that exists amongst us. Our church—growing, some say, too fast for its own good—has yet to truly embrace the alien cultures it seeks to convert. Too many of us tend to transplant little pieces of Utah throughout the world rather than grafting foreign cultures into our own peculiar tradition. But as the following three representative life histories attest, some hearty "alien" vines have taken root in our sheltered garden. They bring vitality and difference to our collective experience. Recognizing them and accepting them on their own terms, honoring them by giving ear to their sometimes strange yet invariably interesting tales, invigorates and expands all our lives as members of the Church.

The Manhattan First Ward—urban and diverse—is perhaps unique among Mormon wards. It too has its strong "Utah contingent" made up of students drawn to New York by Columbia University and other westerners lured by job opportunities. Yet it also has a sizable population of artists and performers, as well as immigrants from many lands and converts from the East coast and abroad. And the elderly population—members from that foreign land called "Age"—is significant. The ward is faced directly with the challenge that the entire Church now faces at least indirectly: accommodating differences among its membership without eradicating individual cultural identities. The First Ward's book of selected biographies seems to be a real step toward that end—a quiet validation and celebration of varied lives and varied paths toward God.

These stories in and of themselves are entertaining. Further, they are significant cultural documents—authentic records of remarkable lives produced by and for ordinary people. In our Church we hear repeatedly of the importance of keeping personal histories. We Mormons are record keepers. And to what end do we keep our records if not to

transmit experience from one person to another? Too often, we think, Latter-day Saints keep records for posterity's sake without enjoying the fruits of record-keeping here and now. The Manhattan First Ward has put a twist on record-keeping—making it a community endeavor—and in so doing has demonstrated the value of recording the details of our own lives and the lives of our fellows in Christ. These biographies provide an example of one way a ward community may act to bridge difference amongst its members with understanding.

One need not be a brilliant writer or even, for that matter, particularly well educated to capture authentic experience in words. These life histories make that fact plain. We do not submit them as literary masterpieces; clearly, they are not. We submit them as honest—essentially unexpurgated—reports of the life experiences of a handful of elderly Latter-day Saints. Peggy Fletcher Stack interviewed Mary Guluzian and compiled her story. Christine Horne pieced together the tale of Walter D. C. Johnson's life, and William Cottam wrote as closely to her own account as possible Clara Orsi's life history. These narratives reveal cultural expanses perhaps unusual but by no means unique within a standard Mormon ward. And they demonstrate how a ward, working together, can bring not only tolerance but honor to members whose backgrounds are different from so many of our own.

*Mary Guluzian*

Mary Guluzian is a survivor. She has descended from a royal family. Her mother, Sara Garbissian, was born in 1906 in Zeytoun City, Turkey. At this time, the Turks were expanding their empire by invading Syria and attempting to eliminate all Christians. More than one and a half million Armenian Christians in both countries were murdered. One evening while playing in her backyard, Sara overheard two soldiers describing a massacre planned for her city the next morning. She told her parents what she had heard, but they dismissed the idea and told her not to worry. Her strong sense of foreboding persisted, however, and so at midnight she stole out of the house and was hidden by a Kurdish family. As foretold, the next morning her entire family was slaughtered. Sara was the only one remaining in the family line.

Even as a child Sara Garbissian was very beautiful, with lovely blond curls and stunning brown eyes. It is not surprising, then, that before long the Kurdish family decided that she should marry one of their sons when she grew up. Although grateful for their kindness, she felt strongly that she couldn't marry a Kurdish boy because Kurds are not Christian and she, like most Armenian Christians, was very

religious. So she was forced to flee once again. This time she met up with the French army, which was rescuing young orphans, and joined their group. They gathered forty children in total and together they built a church which they named, "Forty Kids." (The church is still standing today.)

Eventually, Sara was transported to Aleppo, Syria, where she married Garbed Garbissian and had six children, among them, Mary, the second youngest.

Mary's father, Garbed, was in the intelligence unit of the British Army in Syria. He was fluent in many languages, and thus his services were badly needed by the British during World War II. He travelled a great deal. In 1940 he was sent on his first trip to Haifa, Israel. After that he went regularly to Israel for the British. After one such trip, he disappeared. A year later, two captains reported to his wife that Garbed was sent on a mission from which he failed to return, but others said that he had a heart attack in the army camp. The family was never able to discover what happened to him.

Thus Mary's mother was faced with the difficult task of raising six children, from six months to nineteen years old, on her own. She became quite depressed and lonely. One evening she had a dream. In it she saw the face of Jesus in the sky. She called to him, "Jesus. Jesus. Look at me." And he turned and gazed upon her and blessed her. Then he was gone. When she awoke, she felt peaceful, with renewed strength to carry on. And, indeed, she proved herself capable in every way. (In 1965, she even earned an award as the "Mother's Mother of all the Middle East.") She taught her children to love God and the Christian Church; she was very religious. After all, religious persecution had killed her entire family and had caused her to run away from the Kurdish family. Thus, she believed if religious truth was worth dying for, it was a sacred treasure to pass on to one's children. And, indeed, all of the children embraced their mother's religious faith with gladness and gratitude.

It was her brother, Kevork, who became the most deeply immersed in religion. Magnifying his faith one-hundred fold, he became a priest in the Armenian Orthodox Church. He was also Mary's closest sibling, friend, and confidant. She came to recognize his extraordinary spiritual gifts, his leadership ability, his strengths and kindness. All the family was so proud of him.

Sara Garbissian also gave her children a legacy of learning. She loved having students around and opened her home and her library to any who wanted to use them. Reading and studying were very important to her and her family.

Mary was born in Aleppo in 1938, the fifth child. She had two

brothers and three sisters. After graduating from Ousommasirad Elementary School, she began to teach others. She also learned English and studied nursing at Altounian Hospital at a very young age. Every day she poured over the English dictionary, hungry to devour all its contents. She also became a singer and actress at her church. She attended Tarouhi High School where she also participated in various musical productions, including an opera.

After high school, Mary decided to pursue a career in nursing, and so she left her family to study at the American Kennedy Memorial Hospital in Tripoli, Lebanon. She graduated with honors in 1959 and then returned to Syria to work. There she taught operating room techniques to nursing students and was generally in charge of the operating room.

In 1961 the entire family moved to Beirut, Lebanon, and Mary again took charge of an operating room, this time at the American University of Beirut, where she specialized in ear, nose, and throat, gynecology, and open heart surgery. Her brother, known as "Father Kevork," also studied theology at the American University. In addition, he taught in high school and colleges and was in charge of the local Sunday school as well as all the activities at the cathedral there. Everything that he could possibly do for the Armenians of Beirut, he did. His energy was boundless. And he and Mary were inseparable.

It was during this time in Beirut that Mary first fell in love. He was an intern at the hospital, and many women admired his looks and dexterity. But he only had eyes for Mary. They became very close and even discussed marriage, but Mary's brother was against any marriage between the two, because the doctor was a Muslim. Mary eventually realized that she could never change her religious commitments for a man of a Muslim tradition, even if the love were overwhelming. Armenians are Christian and must always remain true to that faith, she felt.

Mary had known Abraham Guluzian since 1952 in Aleppo. Then he, too, moved to Beirut where he was a photographer with a photo shop next to American University where she worked. After breaking up with the doctor, Mary had decided to move to London to pursue her studies further. She had no more interest in matters of the heart. But Abraham had other ideas. After she visited his shop to get passport pictures for her trip abroad, he invited her out for coffee at a little cafe by the seashore. She didn't want to go but reluctantly agreed. There Abraham proposed marriage to Mary. Although she told him she didn't love him, they were married one month later. On their wedding night, she reiterated firmly that she didn't love him, but Abraham was very patient. He promised her that one day she would come to

love him, and she discovered within three months of their wedding day in March 1967 that she loved him mightily—more than anyone in the world, more than she ever could have imagined.

Just about one year later on 17 March 1968, Mary gave birth to their first and only child, a baby boy named Movses. They were a very happy family. While Abraham and Mary worked, Abraham's mother and sister cared for Movses. God was in his heaven and all seemed right in the Guluzian world.

Suddenly, however, war erupted in Beirut in 1970. Palestinian refugees began flooding the borders of Lebanon. The city, once known as the most beautiful of all Middle Eastern cities, indeed a showpiece of the entire region, slowly disintegrated under the burden of bombings and bloodshed. Many of its inhabitants fled to the United States, among them, the Guluzian trio. American University provided glowing recommendations of Mary's work and the U.S. secretary of state sent letters to the American consulate inviting the family to immigrate.

And so they arrived at Kennedy Airport in New York on 22 November 1970 and were greeted with warmth by Dr. Harouth Mekhdjian and his wife (a couple who were to become their best friends and most supportive advocates). They were escorted to the Mekhdjian apartment where they remained for several weeks while trying to get settled. Almost immediately, Mary was offered a position at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital in the operating room as staff registered nurse. The hospital found a furnished apartment for them in the St. Nicholas George Washington Apartments, within walking distance of her work.

Adjusting to life in a new city and new country was both exhilarating and difficult. At first Mary was stunned by the filthiness of the city streets. In Beirut the streets were well-kept, almost gleaming. Also Lebanese dogs were rather small when compared with some of the big dogs people kept in New York. It took her a while to realize that it was the dogs who were dirtying the streets, not the people. She also missed the mountains, rivers, and most of all, her many friends back in Lebanon.

Still, New York was not as bad as some had led Mary to believe. She had been told that there were no fruits, cheeses, and meats in New York, which was obviously untrue. Also, she began to make friends and feel more at home within a very short time. The boxes of their belongings soon arrived and they found an unfurnished apartment, even larger and more accommodating than the first, in the same complex that was to become their permanent home. For the first year Mary worked at the hospital while Abraham took care of their little son at home, but within a year Abraham opened a photo shop which he named, Photo Mosi. There he both worked and cared for the boy.

After one year of working at Columbia Presbyterian, Mary was promoted to head nurse in the operating room. The family continued to build a life in this new country, even though both Mary and Abraham harbored dreams of returning to Lebanon one day. Thus she felt torn when she received a letter in 1975 offering her a position in the open heart surgery room at American University of Beirut. Finally, however, after her brother, Father Kevork, convinced her that the situation in Lebanon was very bad and growing continually worse, she and Abraham decided to stay in the United States. They applied for and received American citizenship shortly thereafter.

In the late 1970s several tragedies struck. First, in 1977, Abraham had to have heart surgery. He was operated on by their friend Dr. Mekhdjian, who replaced his aortic valve. He recovered fully but was always weakened thereafter.

And in 1978, Mary's beloved brother died. He was to have been the head of all the Armenian Orthodox within a week. It seems that for twenty years there had been two camps of Armenian Christians in Beirut, and Father Kevork was responsible for bringing them together. Following the admonitions of Christ, he was a peacemaker. He wore lavender robes and united the people in common virtues. By choosing Father Kevork to lead them, they were choosing peace.

At the time of his death, he was living with another Garbissian sister, Mary Rose, near the ocean. Every morning he would swim for only five minutes or so because there was much bombing near the shore. This one morning, 15 July 1978, he was gone more than 20 minutes, and it was soon discovered that he had drowned in the Mediterranean Sea. In Beirut that day everything stopped, all the bombing, the fighting, the hostilities. The church bells rang in somber notes all day. The entire city mourned his passing. Then the news spread around the world, and Armenians in every nation cried for their loss.

Mary first heard about his death on the television news, but they had spelled his name wrong so she refused to believe it. She had talked with him on the telephone less than a week earlier. He had been planning a trip to America. A millionaire Armenian was bringing him to New York to officiate at his wedding. On the phone Father Kevork had expressed his love for his sister and sent her a kiss over the phone, a thing he had never done before. Finally, when she was forced to admit that he really was dead, she fell into a coma-like condition for seven days.

The next decade would bring many joys to help her heal after her brother's death. Mosi was growing into a lively, imaginative, hard-working teen, and Mary's talents were constantly being rewarded with raises and honors. In 1984 she was overwhelmingly selected to be a

delegate to the New York State Nursing Association. In 1986 she was chosen to represent New York at a conference in Russia on operating room education. When she returned from her sixteen-day stay, she gave two seminars at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital. Then she wrote an essay on the nursing model in *Gyn Nursing*, and it was selected for publication and was widely distributed. Because of her extensive knowledge of languages, including Armenian, French, Arabic, Turkish, and Zey Touni (an Armenian dialect spoken by her mother), she was regularly used as a translator in the hospital.

But the decade brought sorrows as well. Her older brother suffered a heart attack, was in a coma, and died three days later. Her older sister, who had moved with her husband and family to Los Angeles, was hit by a car and was severely brain-damaged so she no longer recognized her family members. In 1984, her mother died. And then, worst of all, in 1987 Mary lost her dearest friend and companion, Abraham, to a heart attack on Easter eve.

After Abraham died, Mary became severely depressed. She had always been a hard worker—indeed enlivened by work—but after her husband died, she couldn't find the energy to do anything in or out of the house. They had been the perfect family, Mary, Abraham, and Mosi; everyone in the building said so. Mary could feel no joy without her brother and husband. Nights and days were consumed with weeping.

One day some months later on her way home from work, she felt prompted to take a different path. It was as if a hand were guiding her. She passed by the George Washington Bus Terminal, near her home, and saw two Mormon elders standing by a table. On top of the table was a picture of Jesus Christ. She felt drawn to it. The elders were teaching the "Life After Death" course that she had seen advertised on television. She began to sob as she unleashed the dam of emotions and sorrow she felt for her husband and brother. The elders listened as she told the stories of the two deaths. They were reassuring about life after death. They hugged her and promised to teach her more.

When Mary returned home, she felt better than she had since her husband's death. Calm, comfort, and some relief. Still, she wasn't certain how involved she should become with these Mormons, she didn't want to betray her husband's Christian beliefs or the life mission of her priest brother. Yet she wanted to hear what the elders had to say. So they began to visit and teach her. After about four months, she found peace. She felt that life could continue for her and her son. She began to take pleasure in cooking as before. She invited the elders to dinner about once a week. They became fast friends. She felt close to her mother, who had loved to have students to fill her house. She felt close

to her brother, who had loved to teach and learn about religion. The elders became a central part of her life.

A sort of crisis came when the elders wanted Mary to join their church. She was unsure what to do. One night she had a dream. In the dream, Elder Orton (the one who had been teaching her all along) opened a door and told her to jump in the sea. When she awoke, she felt strongly that she should be baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints by Elder Orton. On 19 September 1987 Mary Guluzian became a member of the LDS Church.

In her own words, Mary Guluzian explains what her faith has given her:

> I have learned that the Book of Mormon can strengthen your faith in Christ by providing you with a greater knowledge of the purpose of life and the plan of redemption through Christ. It can help you walk in Christ's way and keep his commandments more faithfully. It can change your life. It changed mine. It relieved my pain and depression. It made my happy days happier and my impossible days possible.
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> I learned also to love the Lord with all my heart. I learned also there is life after death. This lesson has eased my life a lot and given me peace in my heart because I know that one day I will meet again my brother, Father Kevork, my dearest husband, Abraham, my mother, Sara, and all the others.

Mary Guluzian has come to understand, through a life tinged with tragedies and great love, that we can all be survivors.

*Walter David Clinton Johnson*

Walter David Clinton (D. C.) Johnson was born 23 December 1909 in Florence, South Carolina, to David and Sarah Lacy. He had four uncles who were preachers—Sarah's older brothers. He also had a brother two years younger than he named Leon and a younger sister named Pauline who died as a child.

His father, David Lacy, was a railroad man who got sick and died when Brother Johnson was very young. His mother, Sarah, died in the 1917–18 flu epidemic when she was only twenty-five and Brother Johnson was eight years old. Many people died during this epidemic, usually after only a few days of illness. Sarah got very sick and was brought home just before she died. She couldn't talk—was only able to make little noises. However, two hours before she died she talked to each of her two children. When she talked to Brother Johnson, she blessed him, saying, "D.C., I want you to be a lover (speaking of divine love). I want you to treat everybody nice and be kind. If you do, the Lord will always take care of you." Brother Johnson says that so far the Lord has.

Sarah's body was buried the day after she died. No one told her brother John that she had died, but somehow he knew because during the funeral he came running through the woods saying, "Oh my sister, oh my sister!" Uncle John was a preacher. He was six feet four and like a giant. People were scared of him. He had traveled everywhere. He was sort of like a scientist. He used to teach Brother Johnson things like how to make a little radio and explained about ideas like perpetual motion. One time there was a problem about a white woman. Some white men tried to kill Uncle John, but they got scared and dropped their knives and ran. The spirit protected him. Uncle John had problems. Some people said that someone must have put root on him—there is a lot of witchcraft in the south. Brother Johnson doesn't believe that, although he has met lots of witch doctors. But his uncle did have spells come on him. Sometimes he went out of his mind. Once Uncle John was talking to his mother (Brother Johnson's grandmother), and he pulled a gun on her. Brother Johnson got between them, and he dropped the gun and ran away. Brother Johnson says he always loved his Uncle John, but no one could help him.

Brother Johnson had another uncle named Arthur who was the only member of the family to serve in the armed forces. Brother Johnson says that his mother and his Uncle Arthur (who was in the army at the time of the funeral) must have been very close because when his mother got sick she wrote a letter to Uncle Arthur and asked him to take care of her oldest son. Brother Johnson's brother, Leon, went to live with another uncle who was a preacher and had a sugar farm. Brother Johnson doesn't know what has happened to his brother—even if he is still alive.

After Sarah died, Brother Johnson lived with his grandmother Marguerite Sare, who owned a little house on Sumpter Street in Florence. His grandfather, Henry Lacy, lived somewhere else. Brother Johnson can't say much about him because he didn't care for him, but he says his grandmother was a nice old lady. She used to tell him jokes. She came from Africa and lived in Jamestown, Virginia, till she married and moved to South Carolina with her husband. Her family name was "Amarato." As Brother Johnson learned and studied, he realized that the family name was the same name as Joseph of Aramathea in the Bible who buried Jesus in his tomb. This means that Brother Johnson is a Hebrew.

Brother Johnson never went to school, but he learned to read the Bible with his grandmother (although she couldn't read herself). He believed that he didn't need school, that the spirit would teach him anything he needed to know. Now he thinks that he was wrong and that having no education is a handicap.

After Sarah died, while Brother Johnson was living with his grandmother, his Uncle Arthur came out of the service. Brother Johnson told him that he had a dream that all the family went to heaven, but that he, Brother Johnson, went to hell and was burning. He told his Uncle Arthur that he (Arthur) would be a Pentecostal preacher. Uncle Arthur didn't believe it—he said he was an army man and was never going to be a preacher.

Uncle Arthur disciplined his nephew. Brother Johnson says that he was a pretty bad boy and liked to be out at night and walk around and imagine things. One night he took his little brother out with him. There was a seaboard train that ran up and down South Carolina. It was a small train with just two coaches. Brother Johnson used to watch it and watch how it was driven. That night, just for devilment, he took his brother out to the train and drove it. He and his brother also cut out some of the carpet on the seats that was good for shining shoes. Brother Johnson was the black sheep of the family. His uncle thought he was bad and used to beat him. One time his uncle beat him and held a gun on him. He got beat so bad he still has the scars. He was put in a dark room for weeks. They couldn't take his clothes off. His clothes were sticking to his body because of the blood.

When he was eleven, Brother Johnson ran away to Florida. He changed his name and traveled around for a long time. When he was about nineteen, somebody who knew his name told him that his uncle had moved to Albany. He had married, and when they split up he had started preaching. Brother Johnson went to Albany to see his uncle and family. His uncle started chastising him for something, and Brother Johnson reminded his uncle of what he used to do and how he had beat him. His uncle denied it and got angry. Brother Johnson says he sort of mugged his uncle, but he didn't hurt him. His grandmother hollered, "Oh my baby!" and Brother Johnson ran away. Later someone told him that his uncle said that he'd kill him if he ever came back. Brother Johnson was excommunicated from his family and has never seen any of them since. He left Albany and traveled around, later coming to New York City.

Brother Johnson says that he always believed in God, but it wasn't till he moved to New York that he came to believe in Jesus Christ. He got sick with constipation and went to Harlem Hospital. His stomach swelled. He didn't pass water and couldn't move his fingers. He couldn't eat or sleep. He just hollered and cried and wanted to die. Then he had a vision. Christ came to him in a vision and said, "Walter, you'll never do right." Brother Johnson said that if he was made better he would. The Lord said, "I'll do what you say, but you won't never do

right." The Lord told him to tell Nurse Johnson to give him a warm glass of milk with sugar and honey in it and he would be all right. Brother Johnson called for the nurse. She was surprised that this delirious man knew her name. She asked him who told him her name. Brother Johnson said that the doctor did and told her that the doctor also said he was supposed to have some warm milk with honey and sugar in it. She gave it to him, and he drank it. After that he passed water and could move his fingers. A white man said, "Walter, get up." Brother Johnson thought the man must be God. He tried to get up and he did.

Someone in the hospital found a place for him to stay and a job. He worked for a lady from Jamaica named Constine Thomason. She owned three private houses. Brother Johnson says that people from the West End used to come to Harlem and get houses and then rent rooms to make money. He worked as a superintendent in these houses. Mrs. Thomason was married to a man who would pass as white. He worked as a white man in an office downtown and then came home at night as a black man.

Brother Johnson had a dream that Mrs. Thomason would have a son named John who would be a great man. Mrs. Thomason just laughed and didn't believe him. Later she did have a son who was named John and who is today a police officer in Brooklyn. Mrs. Thomason also had a daughter. The Thomasons treated Brother Johnson well. They gave him a special table to eat at and paid him thirty dollars a month.

When the war came along, Brother Johnson went to the draft board and said he was a conscientious objector. He told them he didn't believe in killing. They told him he would have to make ammunition. So during the war he worked in ammunitions and washed dishes, but didn't fight. He and another man worked at Perth airport in New Jersey. The chemicals they had to use made his skin break out, and he had to quit the job.

Brother Johnson became a pastor in a pentecostal church. While he was a pastor, he helped people in his congregation get on welfare. His wife took care of the church, and he took care of the money. He used to get contributions for the church and paid the rent. His wife took care of the people and used to give food to the kids. Brother Johnson eventually had to give up the church because he couldn't keep up with the safety regulations.

Since that time, Brother Johnson has remained involved with many religious organizations. When he stopped being a pastor, he joined the St. Jude Methodist Church. The church was named after the Lord's brother, who is the saint of the hopeless and performs miracles.

Brother Johnson has also been a member of the Masonic Order for fifty-three years and is a life member. His great-grandfather had been the grand master of South Carolina, and Brother Johnson had always wanted to be a Mason. He is now a chaplain of the state of New York and a high priest after the order of Melchizedek. Every Monday night he leads prayers. He doesn't hold office but is a "prayin' man."

He has been involved with the Prince Hall Grand Commandery of Knights Templars of New York as a prelate. The Knights are "friends of the cross—defenders of religion." Brother Johnson has also been to the Abyssinian Baptist church where Haile Selassie attended long ago when he was in New York. Brother Johnson was involved with the Bengal society, which is a worldwide religious society—its first American branch opened in Florida.

Brother Johnson has also been involved with the Unification Church. His first contact was some information about an event sent to him by Reverend Moon. Something told him not to go to the event. Later he met girls selling magazines, which he read. He went to meetings and met lots of young people. One of these people offered to pay for him to go to an international conference of ministers in South Korea. Last March Brother Johnson attended this conference for nine days. About 250 attended. They flew through Alaska, refueling there before going on to Seoul. Brother Johnson went to this conference to find out what the Lord wanted him to do and found out that he should come right back here and study.

Brother Johnson never had a family of his own. He married a woman named Susan who had a son who was on drugs. She went a little crazy and pushed Brother Johnson down the stairs. He tried to get a divorce, but she wouldn't sign the papers. He hasn't seen her for a long time, about fifteen years, but recently someone told him she is in a home in Brooklyn. Brother Johnson would like to get married. He is tired of living alone. He had a vision that he would marry a white girl and have a son who would become a great ruler. But this didn't come true.

Brother Johnson has been a member of the Church since 16 August 1981. He had heard about the Mormon church all his life. In 1981 he was working for a woman named Connie Howder as a chauffeur. Mrs. Howder worked for the state taking care of foster children. One day as Brother Johnson was getting the car fixed, some Mormon elders started talking to him. He teased them about Brigham Young and all his wives. Brother Johnson became interested in what the elders were saying when they told him about the plan of salvation. He was interested in what had happened to his mother when she died. She was twenty-five,

and he was only eight. After she died, he heard her voice. She would call "D.C." and he would answer. When he was twenty-five, she called him. He got scared and stopped listening and didn't answer. He wasn't ready to die yet. That was the last time she called him. He still loves his mother and thinks the world of her. The elders taught him about baptism for the dead and told him he would meet his mother again. Someone could be baptized for her and he would see her in the first resurrection. Brother Johnson was very interested in these things the elders were saying. He studied with the missionaries for three months and was baptized on 6 August 1981 in Scarsdale, Westchester County.

Brother Johnson likes the church. When he lost his left eye and was in the hospital for surgery, High Priest Pace came to visit him. Brother Pace was the only one of his friends who came. His visit made him feel good. Two years ago Brother Johnson went to the Washington, D.C. temple and did baptisms for the dead. He thought they were going to drown him, they did it so many times! It wasn't easy like the first time. He says he has to do more preparation before he will go to the temple again. Brother Johnson says the church has a great history. Joseph Smith was true—what he revealed and what he said was true.

Brother Johnson says he's a born solicitor. He's never worked much but always gets what he needs when he asks. The Lord has been good to him. He says he tries to keep his commandments, but the devil is always after you. Brother Johnson says the Lord takes care of simple people and babies. The Lord has always taken care of him. Brother Johnson says that all he wants is to be blessed and to have eternal life.

*Clara Solyom Orsi*

I was born in Europe in Romania in the state of Erdei in the village of Tote. Our family records were twice lost, in the First World War and then again when Hitler took the records. When I asked my father about the village, he didn't like to remember. On 21 February 1923, I was born.

My father was Alexander Solyom. His mother, Suzana, was a very religious lady, a Presbyterian, but very arrogant, and she didn't seem to like anyone, especially my mother. After Suzana died, my father said she came to him saying she was very tormented, saying she had hurt very much Juhas Terez, my mother. Father was very excited and worried. She told him, "Do something for me." He asked the church to pray for her. I don't know what happened. My father cried very many times. He was very repentant.

Father was Presbyterian and loved my mother, who was Baptist, so he had to become Baptist (was baptized by immersion) and had to wait for a year to marry Mother. Ten children were born to Mother and Father. My brothers and sisters were Dani, Ema, Peter, Juliska, Alexandre, Americo, Jose, Ester, Matil, and myself, Clara. Two boys and two girls died in their first year. Six of us lived. Five came to Brazil. Jose was born in Brazil.

Romania took Hungary's eastern sector, where I lived. I became technically Romanian. But I speak Hungarian—was of the real Hungarian religion, the real Hungarian tradition. Our folks used to anger the Romanians by saying their living room was in Hungary, but their bathroom was now in Romania. There was tension between the two peoples. Rather than live with the Romanians, we left our land with several other families to form a colony in South America, Brazil. Traveling on the train towards Germany, I became extremely sick and nearly died. I was only seven months old when we reached Brazil.

In the colony we had no pastor, but the families wanted to form the pure religion of Hungary, a community religion. The families were of various religious persuasions, but we all came on one ship. We were brothers and sisters, and our children, if one child did something wrong, it affected us all. They wanted to make a paradise there. But when the children and grandchildren grew up, many married with Brazilians and broke up the Hungarian families. (My husband was Italian, born in Brazil.)

The Hungarian colonists had to build their own school, a perfect, beautiful school—with their own hands, their own materials. They began a morning session for the first class and afternoon sessions for the other classes. I attended the first class. Our teacher, Louis Juhas, was a wonderful man. He taught in German (this was considered then the universal language). He was honest, good, a true Hungarian. But the Brazilian people in the area discovered our school, and since they had none of their own, they invaded ours. There was no room then for us. The Brazilians took over completely in the morning, and we were given the afternoon time. But the teacher could not speak Portuguese. Someone else had to teach. I went to school just a few days. I went again later on and tried to study in Portuguese, but the teacher released me saying there was no room for me. They stole our lunches. So I stayed home and played with my brothers and sisters, and cared for the animals which we all loved. I learned to add and that was all. (My husband could reduce figures.) I never went back to school.

My father had twenty acres with some animals, and he grew vegetables. In Hungary, Grandfather was a carriage maker. He never

walked by foot. In the colony my father did the same as his father, but also cut forest wood and raised cattle. Our first house was built by Father from the forest. It is all gone now, replaced by farms, occupied by Brazilians, and the families of the colony now live in Saõ Paulo and elsewhere.

When we arrived in the colony, Mother got pregnant. She helped my brother and father with a building, carrying the bamboo they cut. She got a sliver in her hand, but because she was terrible busy (since I was small and she had a big family) so she didn't pay much attention to the sliver. She went ahead and made wash soap using soda as an ingredient. It affected her hand. She said nothing to my father. But always she hurt and hurt. But she had to wash and cook and do the dishes. So the wound never cured.

When she was very bad, she told my father. He took her to the hospital in Saõ Paulo (the Santa Casa da Mizeri Cordia). But the baby was soon to be delivered. The hand had swollen, and the swelling had moved up her arm. The doctor would not give her an injection, just ointment, because of her pregnancy. She was told to return forty days after the birth of her child. But she didn't tell my father she had to return, because she was sorry to leave my brothers. By the time she finally returned to the hospital she had blood poisoning (Telulo). She had a germ, and it was very hot in the colony.

I remember her, just twice I remember her . . . like a dream. I was crying, "I want my mother, I want my mother. Give her to me." The neighbors put me in the bed with her, and I remember nothing. She was bedridden two weeks before she died.

When Mother was in the coffin in the living room, everyone was crying. When she died, my father called my oldest sister saying, "Your mother died." But I woke up before my sister (who awoke, jumped up, and started to cry). I wanted to see my mother, but Father told me not to bother her, that she was sleeping. Then the congregation came, and I didn't understand why they all cried. No one could calm my little brother. I asked why they all cry. "She travels," they answered. I quit crying, believing that she would return to us. My father was so desperate. He never remarried. He suffered too much.

My father died accidentally when he and my middle brother, Americo, had gone to the jungle to buy wood. Father really liked the jungle and wanted to accompany my brother. My brother bought a cheap German jeep left over from the war. They took water because they were afraid to drink from the rivers of the jungle. My brother went on ahead with another partner and left father. When the water was gone and Americo was delayed, having to wait for the man who sold the wood, Father became so thirsty that he finally had to go to the

river and drink. He got a big, big fever, and when my brother found him, they hurried home—but home was very far away. The doctor said they had no medicine to care for this fever. Americo then took father in a helicopter to the hospital in Curitiba, but it was too late. The fever never broke. Yet, he lived two weeks. He had a terrible strong heart. My brother slept with him.

I had a friend, Maria Bogarsh, who gave me a lead to a child-care job, as a companion, really, to little Jimmy Boot. The work hours gave me a chance to learn to sew in a high fashion industry nearby during the day. I was there three years. The family had a beautiful house. It was in front of Dataligey College (a high school). The students sang in the afternoon at recess. I liked to listen, so I would go to the terrace of the second floor. One of the students watched me from the school grounds. He said that when he graduated, he wanted to meet the girl on the terrace. At night he would walk up and down the street in front of the house.

I was with my friend Yolanda on our way to a party. We passed this young man. My friend commented on what a nice young man walked by us. She said, "Let's walk slowly." After we passed, we looked back, and he had stopped. He came slowly toward us. We stopped in the gate of the house.

"Good evening," he said. "You saw me at the college?"

"There are many students at the college," I answered.

"I know you. You stand in the terrace."

We talked and talked, and when I went to go in, he made a date with me—not with my friend. But on the day of the date came a terrible rain, so that I thought I had lost him. But after the tempest, he came.

Rene and I dated for eight months. He was a very, very elegant man, though he didn't talk much, just when necessary. He was very respectful.

Mrs. Boot took her son Jimmy to England to study. Jimmy wrote inviting me to come with the father to England. I stayed on, however, to watch the house while Mr. Boot settled his affairs and prepared to join his family in England. I told Rene I would leave, too. He seemed desperate. "You don't go," he insisted. "I will quit college, get a job, and we will marry."

"No, you are young and Catholic, and I am Baptist. We are so different," I argued. But he insisted that it didn't matter.

I was alone in the house. He watched me. He came to visit. I made him lemonade. I was twenty-one then. I never thought of marriage. One afternoon . . . I don't know what happened to us. He was terrible respectful. It was like a dream. He took me to meet his grand-

mother. They asked him if he intended to marry "this little thing." I weighed 90 or 100 pounds then. He answered, "Yes! Yes!"

When I told him I was expecting, he was terrible happy. He said, "Don't worry." He insisted we never separate. "Even in eternity we will never leave." He swore it so, but I did not. I did not understand. His mother accepted us. She signed the contract so we could marry, as he was only nineteen. But they tried to talk him out of it. With my brother and some friends, we went to the city office and were married.

Rene was handsome, beautiful, intelligent, everything good. And he was careful with the money—very controlled with money. And we loved each other very much. But there was trouble with his family. We could not find a house to rent (because of the scarcity of building materials and apartments, due to the war) so eventually we went to live with his grandmother. She always troubled me. When the baby was born, my husband's grandfather took care of me. He was a very generous man. She (the grandmother) was no good, she was a misery, but he was a wonderful man. He took me to the hospital, was with me continually.

When our son was three years of age, we decided it was best for me to move out from the grandparents' home, until we could find a house or an apartment of our own. We could not pay big rent, and there was nothing to be had. (I could not work with a little boy.) Our lawyer advised me to go and live with my sister. We signed an agreement, since Brazilian law considered a woman's rights to her husband at an end if she spent even one night away from his home. My husband stayed to search for a house. I left. We met on weekends at the beach and stayed at the hotel and ate at the restaurant.

Rene was operated on for appendicitis (by mistake), but became very sick and so returned to the doctor. Seven specialists examined him, but the cancer developing in his abdomen went undetected. His wealthy grandfather paid for the hospital, for weeks of examinations. It wasn't until he vomited blood that they saw the cancer. It had spread. They operated, but it was too late. I cared for his wound. We took him home, but just for a few days, then back to the hospital. He died four months later. It was 1951. We had married in 1946.

My son and I returned to the grandparents' house. I had to work. Because of the contract, I got nothing from his family for support. Rene's brother married and moved in. They all tried to manage me. I was not independent, so we moved again. I went to sew for a rich family. My son and I lived with them. Then my husband's parents called us back to their home.

While at my husband's parents home, the second time, I started to read the Bible. Sometime I could not read because of my tears. I read

the Bible very firm. I read about when Jesus taught about fasting. I had nothing in my mind. I want to do what Jesus say, but I did not know how to do fasting. Now, my father fasted in very secret. Once a year he would start Thursday night and finish Sunday in the morning, three days. The Bible said we do not have to look like we suffer when we fast. I did exactly that, with no further thought. I went to work Friday and worked Saturday and thought of good things and said to God, "Show me the right."

On Monday, when I went to work, there were people teaching religion in the square. Sometimes they sang and invited me to join them singing. One afternoon I took a bus to my sister's house. The bus was empty and quiet. I feel something touch me inside, touch my feelings. I felt I had to find the truth. This moment is still with me. But when I asked somebody about the "truth," they just gave me a quick shout, "Just keep the commandments." But what commandments, and how, I wondered. I asked the Crusade Church, paid some money, and gave them my Bible. In their service they began to make a miracle. But my nature would not accept this. I didn't feel any.

One day I walked with my son back to the Baptist church, though it was far away. We began to attend every Sunday. We had many friends there. Once the priests gathered to talk about when Jesus comes again. They invited me to the conference, but it was nothing for me.

One Sunday I was holding my son's hand when I saw two elders and three sister missionaries preaching. Though far away, I felt heavy, that this is what I needed. As I got closer, I could hear them teach Jesus Christ, the restoration of the gospel, and Joseph Smith the prophet. There were many in the square screaming at them. But what I heard from the missionaries was good for me. I felt so confident. When they closed, one sister stood on the bench and prayed (in Portuguese, and not very good). She asked God to help people with good intentions find the true church. I want to get closer to talk to them, but they were busy. They did direct me to the Church and gave me Joseph Smith's book. I very like it. This is for me, this is mine. In the book was the meeting schedule.

I went to the Mormon church with my son who was ten. We sat in the back. One of the missionaries invited me to sit in the front. Later they took my son when we separate for the class. The Brazilian missionaries gave their testimony one by one. "This is the true Church." They thanked the Lord they could find it. At the end I took my son to leave. The elders ran after me. "Lady, lady. You like it?" they asked.

"Oh, yes, this is what I look for."

They came in the afternoon. Oh, I was happy. They speak so badly in Portuguese. But everything they taught I remembered like it was a dream. I accepted it so happy.

The missionaries prepared me for baptism. We were living once again with my husband's parents. Sometimes they listened to the Elders but said nothing. My son listened with me, and when the time for baptism came, he said he wanted to be baptized too. I was told to wear a white dress. I bought the white fabric and did it in one night. Still I have it to remember. But the next day in the morning the grandmother seemed long-nosed with me. When I told her how happy we were to be baptized, she threw down the pot she was drying and went out running and screaming. (But she did attend the baptism.) They did not want us there anymore, so we moved again.

Elder Murphy baptized me. I found a job in a beauty parlor. We rent one room with a Polish couple. They had come to Brazil after the Hitler war. It was a beautiful room with a wonderful view. I was there a long time with her. My son went to school. I dressed him well. I had carfare. We built a church and I cooked for the construction crew. I had such help with Heavenly Father. For six years I coordinated the Primary children. They obeyed me. I taught them with love.

I told the missionaries I wanted to go to Utah, that I have such an imagination of Utah, as paradise. They were smiling. I went to the consulate and requested a visa. Before I could go, however, a lady had to check up on me. She spoke Spanish and English. "Bring me all references," she said. I gave her my letter from little Jimmy. She said it was enough. Such a beautiful world. "Come stay with me in my grandmother's house. I'll get you the visa and the ticket." I said, "Just fine, thank you." Soon I was landing in Miami, and with a green card in my hand!

My first job was in New York. Mrs. Kenny was to pick me up at the airport. I was screaming her name, but she never came. Eventually an older taxi cab driver helped locate her address. It was 6 January 1971. I had only a sweater and $35.00. Mrs. Kenny took the $35.00 to pay the cab. She lived in Plainview, on Long Island. I found the Church. They wanted me to go to the Spanish Ward, but we did not understand each other. By September, I was on my way to Utah for general conference. I went to the temple to be sealed to my husband. But something was wrong. I had to talk to one of the First Presidents. He asked me some questions. I told him a dream I had of the Church. He gave me the authority I needed for the temple.

During that fall, I became very sick, with a white throat. I was taken to a clinic and given an injection. It was at this time that I dis-

covered that the other helper working for Mrs. Kenny spoke Hungarian. I did not speak English. We became good friends.

Mrs. Kenny had just given birth to a new baby, her fourth child. Mrs. Kenny very much liked me. I was happy there. But the Relief Society of the Church for some reason decided I should return to Brazil. I did not speak English and did not understand. The president, Mrs. Sealey, came to Mrs. Kenny and demanded my luggage and green card. Mrs. Kenny did not want me to leave and refused to give up my luggage and my green card. Several of the women of the Relief Society were with Sister Sealey and when Mrs. Kenny would not meet their demands, they went next door and called the police. Two officers came and one investigator. The investigator said, "Give it to her now." She did.

I did not return to Brazil but met some Brazilian girls in New York City. They helped me get another job, and with an independent apartment which was beautiful. The lady I cared for was ninety-one years old. She had been an opera singer. She had a boyfriend, age fifty, who would take her out to the clubs and operas. I was there about two years when my son's wife ran away, and I had to return to Brazil.

I found my son desperate and the children like skeletons, without proper clothing. I became very ill (the reaction to an injection given in New York before leaving). A Japanese physician treated me for shock, and I slept for three days, awoke, and was well again. I sold the land my father had given me, bought furniture, a Volkswagen, clothes for the children and my son. One day a message came requesting that I return to New York. Eventually I returned, but to another job. My son called again. Once again I returned to Brazil.

The next time I returned to America I went to work for Mrs. Rosenburg. It was at a good salary. They were so nice. At Christmastime they all gave me a gift of $500.00. But her daughter got cancer and was going to die. One Saturday, during the biggest snowstorm in recent New York history, I went out for the laundry and slipped on the ice, catching my heel. I broke my leg is three places. This was 1977. There was a very slow recovery. (I lived at the time where I now live. I have been fourteen years in this same apartment.)

In 1980 I went to work for Mrs. Spiers and continued there for seven years, until I retired (partially) receiving finally my Social Security. My life and work continue.

Before my husband died, I sat at the foot of his bed for the last time. "Now I feel better," he said. "When I get well, we'll cancel our separation, and go far away, across the ocean." Then he stopped. "You go. I'm going to meet you there. You want to marry me?"

"What are you talking about. We are married."

"But some place in the church," he said. I didn't answer. My son came in. He made frightened eyes. "I will visit you there."

"Where?" I asked.

"On the other side of the ocean."