

## Jesus Was There

*Marilyn Bushman-Carlton*

on the wall behind the choir chairs,  
and the ladies  
brushing the warm chapel air  
with round cardboard fans were there,

and the men losing hair  
and holding hymn books up  
with rough sun-burned hands were there,

along with my father and his counselors,  
and the stake president  
in his special chair beside the pulpit.

And I, a white-stockinged child, was there  
trying to keep my Sunday feet still,  
especially during the prayers  
as they hung there mid-air.

The grown-ups kept their backs  
straight to the benches  
or choir's semi-circle  
of pale cushioned chairs.

I knew why the ladies' legs barely bent.  
It was perfectly clear  
for I'd watched my mother  
dressing herself for the Sabbath.

From the girdle  
under her best pressed dress,  
rubbery garters dangled,  
and pinched into place  
reinforced tops of nylon stockings  
she'd carefully unrolled so neither would tear,

one of the pair at a time,  
from inside out with fingers and thumb,  
beginning with toes,  
moving over the knees  
with habitual reverence.  
I tried not to stare.

And I knew about the men  
with the knots at their necks,

and knew that for Jesus  
even my father would wear thin manly bands  
which circled, like elders at a blessing,  
the white-root flesh of his calves.

He'd slide the fasteners,  
copper tithing coins, snugly along  
with the tops of his argyles  
into their slots  
which held them up and perfectly square  
like a sanctified prayer.

Garters those days  
could keep any sort from slouching,  
even in warm Sabbath air.