

# "Home First"

**Rex D. Pinegar**

Several weeks ago in a neighborhood not far from my home, dozens of bright, yellow balloons were seen floating from every tree branch and light post lining a winding, three-block road. It was a beautiful sight on that hazy winter day. Senses were stirred as one drove with anticipation along that friendly, colorful street. Around each bend in the road rose the yellow balloons, waving upward to the top of the hill where they warmly proclaimed: "WELCOME HOME, BRIGHAM!" I had heard of Brigham Fordham only a few months ago when I was told of this young eighteen-year-old's tragic accident that left him paralyzed. I only now discovered that this was his home and his homecoming from the hospital.

I noticed the ramp that had been built to the front of the house and thought of other changes that would have been made in his home to accommodate the changes in his life. There will be changes in Brigham's family, too, I thought. Life will be different for all the Fordhams—and difficult.

But, as the yellow balloons brightly signaled to Brigham and to all who had the opportunity to travel this street, his was a caring home where family love and strength would be found.

Our Heavenly Father has organized us into families for the purpose of helping us successfully meet the trials and challenges of life. The home also exists to bless us with the joys and privileges of family associations. Our family is our safety place, our support network, our sanctuary, and our salvation.

Our homes should be "the strong place to which children can come for the anchor they need in this day of trouble and turmoil," said President Harold B. Lee. (*His Servants Speak*, comp. R. Clayton Brough, Bountiful, Utah: Horizon, 1975, p. 154.)

In his book *The Power of the Family*, Dr. Paul Pearsall declares there is a "power of loving energy that flows within every family circle," he said, "during the joy of the best of times and particularly at times of the sorrow of the worst of times." (New York: Doubleday, 1990, p. 354.)

He states, "No matter what the form of your family, from single-parent household to the largest multi-generation family in your town, your work at keeping families together is the job of saving our world." (Ibid, p. 351.)

The Lord, through His prophets, has taught us of the divine power and influence of the home.

"There is no substitute for the home," said President Joseph F. Smith. "Its foundation is as ancient as the world, and its mission has been ordained of God from the earliest times. ...

"There can be no genuine happiness separate and apart from the home, and every effort made to sanctify and preserve its influence is uplifting to those who toil and sacrifice for its establishment. There is no happiness without service, and there is no greater service than that which converts the home into a divine institution, and which promotes and preserves family life." (*Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed., Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1939, p. 300.)

On the night of September 21, 1989, Hurricane Hugo passed with all its fury over the beautiful city of Charleston,

South Carolina. My good friend Alvie Evans lived in a low-lying area near the water, where the maximum strength of the storm was headed. He gathered his family together and moved to higher ground, to the home of his mother.

Late in the night, 150-mile-per-hour winds raged around them, uprooting trees and ripping away parts of the house. The storm became so severe they began to fear they would experience physical harm. Alvie, with his wife and children, his mother and his brothers and sister and their families, knelt together in the entrance hall of the home and prayed humbly to the Lord, asking for protection and for safety.

The next morning they viewed the devastation. Of the fifty or more large, strong oak trees that had been growing in his mother's yard, only eight remained standing. There was damage to the house, the cars, the entire city, but the family was safe. The Lord had heard their prayers and had protected them through the storm. Alvie said, "I didn't know then if we would have a house to return to, but I knew we would always have a home, because our family was intact and secure."

President David O. McKay once said, "There is nothing temporary in the home of the Latter-day Saint." (In Conference Report, June 1919, p. 77.)

He also stated: "[One] can have a beautiful house with all the decorations that modern art can give or wealth bestow. [It] can have all the outward forms that will please the eye and yet not [be] a home. ... It may be a hovel, a log hut, a tent, a wickiup, if you have the right spirit within, the true love of Christ, and love for one another—fathers and mothers for the children, children for parents, husband and wife for each other—you have the true life of the home that Latter-day Saints build and which they are striving to establish." (*Gospel Ideals*, Salt Lake City: Improvement Era, 1953, pp. 480–81.)

Today, evil forces are challenging the home as never before. If our homes are to endure, parents and children must dedicate themselves to the gospel ideals that ensure preservation of home and family.

Dr. Pearsall expresses the opinion that families aren't failing, but we are failing the family because we have not learned how to put family life first in our world.

"Our society is interfering with the family-first feature," he writes. "We are in familial bankruptcy and have fallen into the hands of receivers such as schools, businesses, recreational pursuits, and numerous institutional demands. The issue is not one of setting priorities; the issue is one of making difficult choices for the family. There can only be one number one," he stresses. "Is it your family?" He makes this emphatic statement: "I warn you that if your family does not come first, your family will not last." (Pearsall, p. 18.)

In homes where high ideals and gospel values are maintained, it is parents, not teachers, who lay the foundation of character and faith in the hearts of their children. If the training a child should receive in the home is neglected, neither the Church nor the school can compensate for the loss.

In recent instruction from the First Presidency and the Twelve, President Thomas S. Monson pointed out that "the primary responsibility for building testimonies and providing faith-building experiences in our members, including our youth, resides in the home. The Church should continue to support the determination of the family to do this." President Monson encouraged priesthood leaders to "increase their efforts to build strong, gospel-centered homes." (*Ensign*, May 1990, p. 93.)

To assist us in this vital endeavor, major changes in Church budgeting policies have been made, which Elder Boyd K. Packer said "will have the effect of returning much of the responsibility for teaching and counseling and activity to the family where it belongs. ... There will be fewer intrusions into family schedules and in the family purses.

"Church activities must be replaced by family activities."

Elder Packer closed his instruction by saying, "It is a course correction; it is an inspired move." (*Ensign*, May 1990, p. 90.)

Only when parents and children work together for the same high objective—to put home and family first—can the home be preserved as God intended.

Just a few weeks ago we had a special opportunity for a family get-together. A married daughter and her husband came with their three little boys for a short stay before their move from the East Coast of the United States to the West Coast. Another married daughter and her husband came with their four children from out of town to make it possible for the entire family to be together for a weekend.

On Sunday evening all of our family gathered in our home just to celebrate being together—"all under one roof again," exclaimed my wife. She had planned a special program for the occasion, with the appropriate theme, "Making Memories." She had a recording of one of our daughters singing a song about memories. She had obtained copies of a particular book about the subject as a special gift for each son and daughter. To make the memory of that weekend really complete, there would be a family picture taken. Every detail about the evening had been meticulously planned. It would be certain to create a happy memory for each family member. Or would it?

While the beautiful song played softly in the background, the living room filled with the noise and laughter of our growing family circle. The grandchildren couldn't sit still. They giggled and teased and played happily with one another. The grownup children enjoyed each other, too, and all talked at once, it seemed, about days gone by and about the future. They laughed with each other and laughed at the antics of their children, who by now were having tickling matches on the floor or sticking little fingers into the chocolate mint cake. It had become frustrating—and funny!

I don't know which was more frustrating or funny—the family program which ended soon after it began, with Bonnie, the would-be "memory-maker," sighing, "Oh, what's the use? No one's listening!" or the photo session, with twelve frenzied adults all trying unsuccessfully to pose eleven overactive, squirming children. Was this a family celebration? Or was it a family circus? One thing I knew, this was not the way Bonnie had intended it to be. She had wanted this time of family gathering to be meaningful and memorable.

A few days after everyone had gone and our house was again very quiet, a little book came for us. It was a picture book about families, and it was inscribed: "To my warm and loving, full-of-fun family—every one of you," with a special note added for Mom: "Here's to the wonderful chaos, the wonderful photos, the wonderful gathering place, the wonderful memories you so lovingly help to create each time we're together."

Later, this note from another daughter: "Thank you for a wonderful stay. The boys haven't been this happy in many months. It has been so nice for them to feel so loved and to have a little extra attention and spoiling. I'm

so glad we could all watch together as Clark learned to walk, and that he could start forming his special bonds with loving grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Our children couldn't be more blessed to have such a loving, supportive family network."

Another daughter wrote this:

*If you could see my house of dreams,  
No palace would it be  
But just where I feel happiest—  
You are that home to me.*

Within that "wonderful chaos" of our family all is obviously not perfect. There are problems in our family, as in many families—challenges related to serious illness, aging parents, schooling, employment, and others. However, individual burdens and concerns may be lightened by the power of a family united in mutual love and support and in prayers of faith.

Following President McKay's well-known statement "No other success can compensate for failure in the home," he went on to say: "The poorest shack in which love prevails over a united family is of greater value to God and future humanity than any other riches. In such a home God can work miracles and will work miracles." (In Conference Report, Apr. 1964, p. 5.)

On a Sunday morning a few years ago, Donald Pinnell, now president of the Amarillo Texas Stake, was attending church in his branch in Tucumcari when suddenly someone brought him the alarming news, "Brother Pinnell, your home is on fire!"

President Pinnell quickly found his two sons, ages twelve and sixteen, and headed toward his ranch. His first thoughts were of his wife who had stayed home that day recuperating from recent surgery. He had no word about her until the driver of a returning fire truck stopped along the way to tell him she was safe.

Brother and Sister Pinnell had just built their dream home, a Spanish-style house on their ranch fifty miles out in the country. It was a very nice home and a source of great pleasure to their family.

As he and his boys approached the top of the terrain, they could see in the distance the smoke coming from their burning home. Donald Pinnell said of that moment, "We could tell that our home was completely engulfed in flames; and I just stopped the car at the top of the hill for a few minutes. I said to my sons, 'Now look, you can spend all your life storing up treasures of the earth, and you can sit on a hill and watch them go up in flames, or, you can store up the right kind of treasures and take them with you through eternity.'"

The right kind of treasures are our families and those divine attributes and qualities of character that are taught and learned in gospel-centered homes.

May we make the necessary individual and family course corrections which will put the Lord and our families first and fill our homes with these eternal treasures. I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.