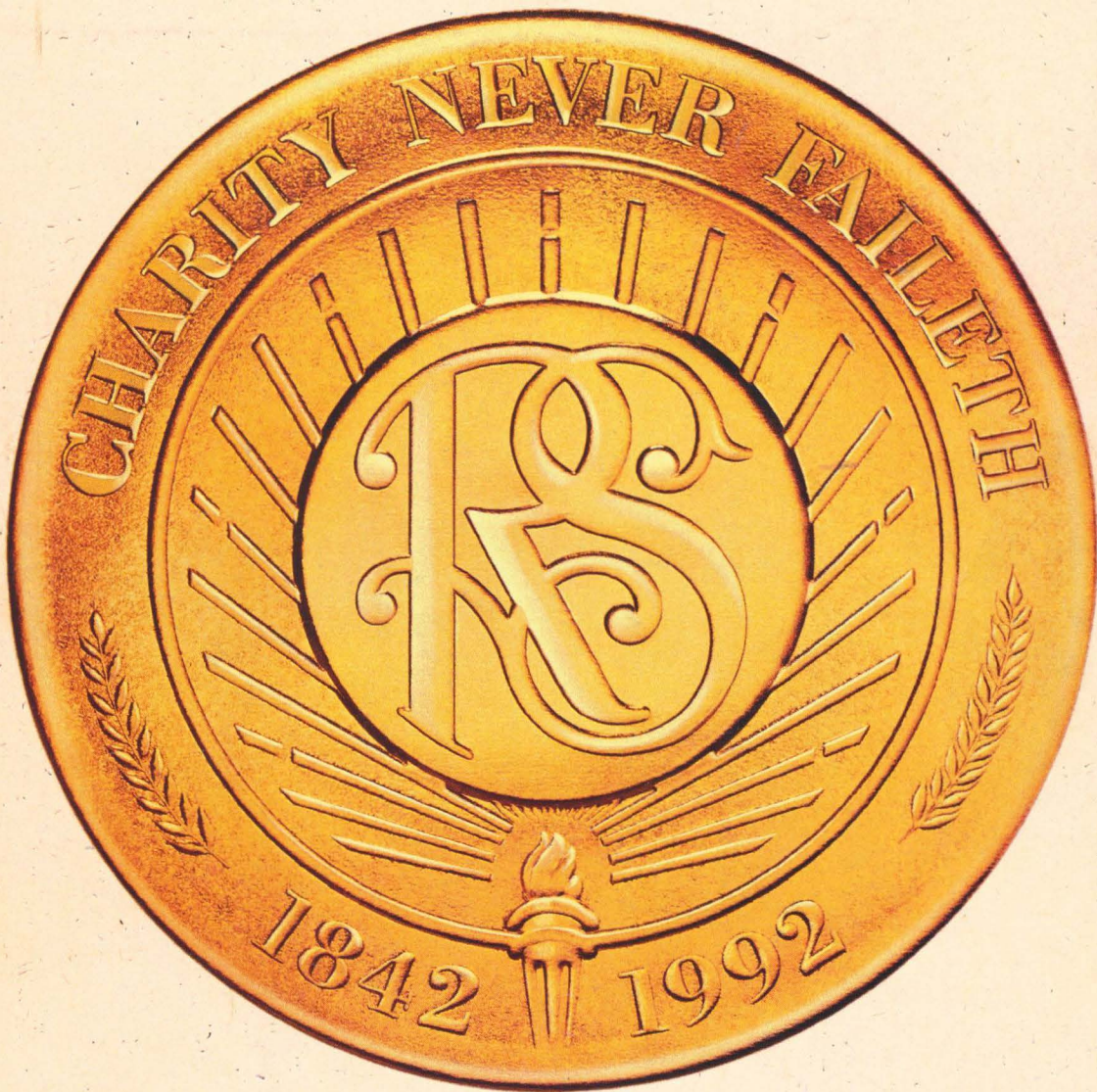


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ENSIGN



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Blessed, Honored

PIONEERS

Latter-day Saint women worldwide continue the pioneer legacy of lifting burdens and doing things they have never done before.

By Mary Ellen Edmunds

On Sunday, 24 July 1977, 130 years after the first Mormon pioneers entered the Salt Lake Valley, I gave a talk in sacrament meeting about pioneers. It was a hard talk to prepare and give—not because I didn't feel deeply about the topic, but because I gave it in a language I had only recently learned to speak: Indonesian. I was a member of the Solo Branch in central Java, and the branch president had asked me to share something about the pioneers.

As I gave my talk, it struck me that the members of that small congregation were pioneers themselves—the first few members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in a green and ancient land.

Some of the sisters came up after I spoke and thanked me for helping them understand something of how the Utah pioneers had suffered and how much faith they had. I found myself thinking of all I had learned from these great Indonesian Saints about faith and suffering. Their pioneering efforts seemed as significant to me as the stories of the pioneer trek to the American West. The words of a hymn celebrating the early pioneers came to my mind, and I thought how appropriately they applied to these Javanese sisters:



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It was my mother's example that first taught me how modern women can be pioneers in charity through service to the sick and needy.





*They, the builders of the nation,
Blazing trails along the way;
Stepping-stones for generations
Were their deeds of ev'ry day.
Building new and firm foundations,
Pushing on the wild frontier,
Forging onward, ever onward,
Blessed, honored Pioneer!*

*Service ever was their watch-cry;
Love became their guiding star;
Courage, their unfailing beacon,
Radiating near and far.*

*Ev'ry day some burden lifted,
Ev'ry day some heart to cheer,
Ev'ry day some hope the brighter,
Blessed, honored Pioneer!*

*As an ensign to the nation,
They unfurled the flag of truth,
Pillar, guide, and inspiration
To the hosts of waiting youth.
Honor, praise, and veneration
To the founders we revere!
List our song of adoration,
Blessed, honored Pioneer!
(Hymns, 1985, no. 36.)*

Gradually, through experiences like this in Indonesia, I began to realize that pioneering goes on all around me. It did not begin in the 1800s, and it did not end when all the wagon trains and handcart companies reached their destinations. A pioneer is someone—anyone—who goes first. That happens in the 1990s as well as in the 1770s or the 1880s. It happens in every village and barrio, in every city and suburb where someone has the courage to lead out in righteousness. Blazing trails along the way, they mark the path for others to follow. I have met some of these pioneers, and my life has been enriched because of them.

When I think of blessed, honored pioneers, I see faces. Specifically, I see the faces of women who have helped me understand why “Charity Never Faileth” was chosen as the motto for the Relief Society. These sisters have indeed had service as their watch-cry and love as their guiding star. Certainly every day some burden was lifted, some heart was cheered, some hope made brighter.

The first face I think of is that of my mother. I remember going with her to visit the sick, feed the hungry, and comfort the weary. She never pulled a handcart and was never the first to enter a valley, yet she was a pioneer. Sometimes we went to a home where someone was dying, and my mother would bathe and feed her. Sometimes we went to a nearby Indian village to deliver clothing and food or teach home medical skills.

I think, too, of Barbara Taylor, whom I met in 1962

the day I entered Hong Kong as a new missionary. Sister Taylor was the wife of President Robert Sherman Taylor, president of the Southern Far East Mission. The day after I arrived she took me visiting teaching. With a couple of sister missionaries who could speak Cantonese, we took a bus to the harbor, then a ferry to a place called Aberdeen.

Among the homes we visited were some dug out of the side of a hill. We reached these homes by hiking up hand-dug stairs, scattering chickens and children as we climbed. As we visited with one sister—a beautiful young Chinese mother—I saw and felt things I'd not felt before. I looked at the refugee families on the side of that hill and realized they were children of God who had kept their first estate and who deserved all the help I could give them in keeping their second estate—in making sense of life on earth with all the challenges they faced. All around me were hosts of waiting youth, speaking a language I could not understand—yet communicating with me through smiles and feelings, eager to learn and grow and help.

I felt that same eagerness in 1977 while attending our branch Relief Society in Indonesia. One Sunday, the Relief Society president held up a picture of Belle Spafford (a magnificent pioneer, as all the general presidents have been) and explained that this was a picture of the general president of the Relief Society. She then turned to me and said, “Is that right, Sister?”

I said, “Another president has been chosen.”

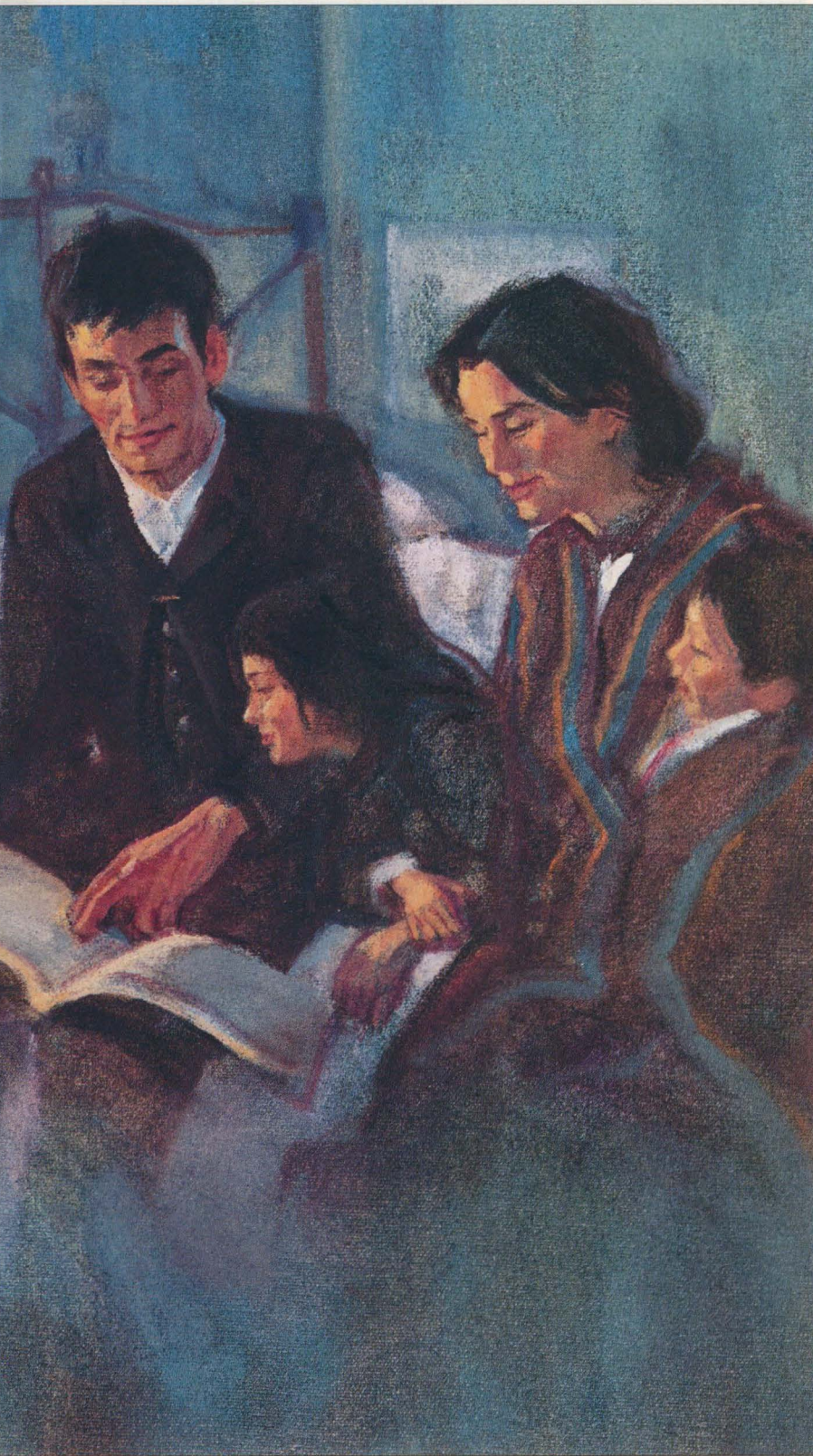
All the sisters were suddenly excited. I happened to have a copy of my May 1976 *ENSIGN* with me, and I turned to page 118. “This is Barbara B. Smith,” I said, showing them her picture. “She’s the new president of the Relief Society”—new to them, though quite some time had gone by since Sister Smith had been called.

Each sister took the magazine in turn and looked intently at the picture, exclaiming, “Oh, she’s beautiful!” They asked me, “Have you ever seen her?”

“Yes,” I answered. They were amazed and impressed, and I was deeply touched. They expressed the hope that some day they might be able to meet her.

Maxine Grimm stands out in my mind as an honored pioneer. I met her in the Philippines in 1964 when there was only one branch of the Church and fewer than one hundred members. With her husband, Peter Grimm (we called him “Grimm-pa”), this remarkable woman helped unfurl the flag of truth in that beautiful island nation.

Sister Grimm had been a Red Cross volunteer during World War II and had remained in the Philippines after the war to help the new members there. I clearly remember her arriving at our small place at 7-D Kamias Road to help us begin the first Relief Society in Quezon City. She would always bring copies of the *Relief Society Magazine* for the sisters to borrow, as well as her portable pump organ so we could sing the hymns together—all six of us.



These Bolivian pioneers held family home evening on the bed, the warmest spot in their home. But it was their spirit that warmed me.

Many beautiful faces among those first few Latter-day Saints in the Philippines will be etched in my memory forever. One of many that could represent them all is the face of Salud Dizon Jimenez, the first convert to be baptized in Quezon City. She later became the Relief Society president when a branch was organized in that huge city near the Philippine capital of Manila. Sister Jimenez and many like her would often travel for hours on jeepneys and buses to Taft Avenue in Pasay, where we held all our Church meetings. Others followed in the footsteps of those great pioneers, and today the Philippines is blessed by more than two hundred thousand members in more than forty stakes. A temple graces the city of Manila.

I see in my mind another pioneer woman who was chosen to help the families in a Monclova, Mexico, branch make their homes learning centers. I met her on a Sunday in September 1975. Adelita happily showed me the things she had done in her own home to motivate her children to study, then told of things she was doing to help the other sisters in the branch teach their children better study habits. Adelita herself was illiterate, yet she placed great value on education. Humble and gracious, she desired only to serve.

Adelita told me how she and other sighted sisters had tried to develop empathy for a blind sister in the ward by doing some of their most routine tasks (making tortillas and cleaning the house) blindfolded. She couldn't keep back the tears as she expressed how that had made her feel. I couldn't keep back the tears as I saw the compassion she had for the blind sister and the efforts she was making to help that sister learn to cope with her blindness.

I think of the Saints in the little village of Bermejillo, Mexico, where I went with some health missionaries in 1975. As we walked along a dusty road with the branch president and his wife, we were taught how to pick out the homes of Church members. Their fences and homes were painted, and vegetable and flower gardens accented their neat and tidy yards. As we passed several homes, the branch president's wife told us, "These people

are not active right now, so you can't tell they're Latter-day Saints. But soon they'll be back with us, and on your next visit you can pick them out, too."

Eventually the members in this branch built their own chapel and became the subjects of an inspiring film-strip made by the Church.

The beautiful face of Sister Pai on the Altiplano in Bolivia fills my memory with a warm glow. I visited her and her family in January 1975. They had been members of the Church for only three months, but in that time they had learned that President Spencer W. Kimball had encouraged members to have gardens. I was thrilled to see their two small vegetable gardens and a flower garden. Each night they covered their three gardens with plastic sheets to protect their treasures from freezing.

I shall never forget their family home evening, held in the warmest spot in the home—on their bed. Of that experience I wrote in my journal: "The rain and the cold, the walk and the mud were all well worth it. I would have walked one hundred miles to visit with this family and have the privilege of feeling their spirit and their enthusiasm in being members of the Church and learning principles which help them to be healthier and happier." Blessed, honored pioneers.

I think of the woman I met in the Dominican Republic right after Christmas in 1983. Some missionaries and I were sitting in her San Francisco home as she told us of the dramatic changes Church membership had brought into her life. I was impressed with her courage in blazing trails through habits and traditions she felt needed to be changed. My faith was strengthened as this great pioneer soul spoke of her deepest feelings about Jesus Christ and her joy in discovering the gospel.

I cried as I had to leave. We had been together for only a short while, yet I felt as if I had known her forever. As my companions and I walked down the street, I kept looking back to wave. She was still waving back as we turned a corner and lost sight of her radiant face.

Many of the pioneer faces in my mind are the faces of friends in Nigeria,



After every meeting, the Indonesian sisters would prayerfully consider who needed a visit. Then they would take the rice they had saved that week to share with those who had less than they did.

West Africa. When I first arrived there in January 1984, I met Cecilia and learned of her creative pioneering in what seemed to me the overwhelming task of day-to-day living. I said, "You are my teacher."

She responded, "I will be your teacher."

I told her that I didn't know if I could learn very fast, because she had so much to teach me. She smiled gently and said, "I will teach slowly."

And she did. I lived as Cecilia's neighbor for several months, and I will be grateful all my life for the things she helped me learn. I am a better pioneer because of this great soul and others in our neighborhood who allowed me to follow in their footsteps for a little while.

One of the most important lessons I learned in Africa was to examine my priorities and values. In one of our Relief Society lessons there, the manual recommended that children should be helped to keep their drawers clean and neat. One of the sisters asked, "What is a drawer?"

So many great Latter-day Saints, honored pioneers, will be exalted without ever having seen a drawer, owned a new dress, used a time planner, or gazed into a mirror. They will rejoice in the celestial kingdom having never walked through Temple Square or visited Relief Society headquarters in Salt Lake City.

It still amuses me that my companion Ann and I were sent to teach Cecilia and others about self-reliance. While I hope we were able to share some information about health and sanitation that made a difference for them, I know that I personally learned the greatest lessons. Most of those lessons I learned from them had to do with self-reliance. I'm convinced that Cecilia and her sisters can handle any emergency. Forging onward, ever onward, they are indeed blessed, honored pioneers.

I first met Sally Pilobello in the Philippines in 1972 when I was sent there as a health missionary. I learned that she and her husband had lost their first baby when the baby was five months old. Sally had other children, but she now was pregnant with another and asked me, "What can I do to have a healthy Mormon baby?" I thought of her courage and faith as she responded to truth and adopted some new habits and traditions. Soon people in the neighborhood were sharing the news: "Mormon baby is coming!"

On 20 January 1973, Sarah Pilobello was born—a healthy, beautiful "Mormon baby." Her mother's pioneer spirit had enabled her to do things she had not done before—to add more truth to what she already knew. Sally used to smile at me and say, "Sister, you can never teach an old dog new tricks." Then she'd pause and add: "But Sister, I am not a dog!"

In 1984 I received a letter from eleven-year-old Sarah—"Little Melon" to her family and friends: "I'm sorry that I have not written for a long time because every time I'm going to start my letter my playmates are insisting me to play with them. Now I firmly

decided to write to you. We are glad that Mommy is doing what the family preparedness program of the welfare missionaries taught them. We now purify our water and have a balance diet that is why we grow faster than the other children. The Temple is now being made and I hope I'll see you there. I love you. Little Melon."

I also received a letter from her mother, my dear friend Sally: "I want to express my gratitude for the things I have learned which are making such a difference in my family. I realize now that some of the things my mother taught me—things her mother taught her—were not correct. But the truths I'm learning will now be taught to *my* children, and to *their* children, and to the generations to come. We will not be damned any longer by ignorance. 'Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free!' As they say, it is never too late to learn and change. God must love us dearly to allow us to have so much truth."

When I first arrived in Indonesia in 1976 I met a group of pioneers in central Java who helped me understand much, much more about the meaning of words such as *relief*, *compassion*, and *service*. These Relief Society sisters, led by their president, Ibu Subowo, were giant souls in small bodies. Every morning before they began their cooking, each sister would hold back a spoonful of rice. They kept the rice in plastic bags that they brought to Relief Society each week. After the meeting, they would gather and prayerfully consider who needed a visit. All would then go together to visit those in need, taking the bags of rice with them to share with those who had less than they did.

Consecration. The Lord's storehouse. A society of interdependent Saints. I learned much about sacrifice, wondering what my equivalent of a spoonful of rice would be.

I've thought a lot about Enos's comment toward the end of his short narrative in the Book of Mormon. He felt sure that he would someday meet the Lord and "see his face with pleasure." (Enos 1:27.) There are many faces on this earth that I hope someday to see with pleasure again. Among them are those of the women who have taught me much about pioneering—about having service as a watchword and love as a guiding star.

We're *all* pioneers. Across the years, and across the miles, we blaze our trails through our personal wild frontiers. In a wide variety of circumstances, we cross our plains, sing our songs, bury our dead, deal with our personal sorrows, bear one another's burdens, visit, comfort, and show compassion. Blessed, honored pioneers! □

Mary Ellen Edmunds, associate director of training at the Missionary Training Center in Provo, Utah, serves on the Relief Society General Board. Sister Edmunds is a member of the Mapleton Ninth Ward, Mapleton Utah Stake.