

WOMAN OF FAITH*

*Narration and Music by
Bonnie Heidenreich and Linda Chapman*

*(*Author's Note: This program was written for one particular ward. As I looked to find stories of conversion within our ward, I made a list of about 20 sisters that I knew were converts. Then I proceeded to call them asking them to tell me their stories. The first four that I called were so riveting that I included them here. I never got to the other 16! This program was revised with new stories for a Stake YW meeting and again for a family reunion. I believe that there are amazing stories of conversion to the Gospel of Jesus Christ everywhere! If you wish to present this program in a ward or a stake or a family, please feel free to substitute your own stories. As the sisters read or tell of their own experiences, you will feel of their courage and the power of the spirit to change lives.)*

NARRATOR: (Piano plays "Woman of Faith," measures 5 to 22.) Latter-Day-Saint history is filled with stories of women who came to Zion. From every corner of the world they came; from every station in life and from very different circumstances. Yet, there were similarities in the lives of these women, a pattern which began with a preparation of the heart, a yearning for things eternal, and then an amazing joy which grew as the message of the missionaries unfolded.

It struck a long silent chordstring which echoed into the recesses of their distant past. It was right. It was true. And the required sacrifices were offered willingly, for the reward was well worth the effort. These were women of faith, and women of courage, who, with their families, formed a pioneer tradition which endures to this day. To these steadfast seekers of righteousness, we give honor for the legacy of faith which they bequeathed to us and for the heritage of hope they plant in our hearts. For they created not only our physical past, but our spiritual past as well. Listen to the stories of these pioneer women of faith.

ANN CANNON: I am Ann Quayle Cannon. My mortal life began in 1798, but my spiritual life began in the year 1839 with the surprising arrival from Canada of my husband's brother-in-law, John Taylor, whom we had never met. He spoke only a few words of greeting, yet something deep inside of me whispered, "This is a man of God."

And indeed he was. As the reason for his mission to England unfolded, I found myself becoming converted to his new religion with its powerful message. The more I listened and the more I read; the more I knew that God had indeed visited man again. I thought my heart would nearly burst with the joy which filled it. I was baptized with my husband, George, followed shortly by our older children. Soon the spirit of gathering began to build within us. George and I agreed that we would begin immediately to prepare for the journey which would unite us with the Saints of Zion.

But there were other forces at work. Our families were adamantly opposed, and begged us to reconsider at every opportunity. George's employer encouraged us to stay and offered a financial bonus if we would do so. At first I was pregnant and too sick to travel. Then we had a small infant who could not withstand the journey. When the child was old enough, I was pregnant again. Time was passing and we were not making any headway.

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In my desperation, I did something which only a desperate individual can understand. I secretly took a small portion of the money George allowed me for household expenses, and deposited it in an account. The total is now considerable, almost enough for the entire journey. My health is not very good and one day an impression came strongly to me that I would not live another year to make the voyage. It has become a consuming desire to unite my family with the Saints in Zion THIS season. It is for the children that I must go. I am ready to meet my God. But my children. What would become of them? My husband, in his grief, would find it hard to leave the comforting arms of his family and dear friends here in England. I fear that broken-hearted, he would indefinitely postpone the journey to America. For the sake of the children he might stay. But don't you see? For the sake of the children we must leave! Should I die on the voyage, all would be well, for they would arrive and be safely numbered among the Saints. Yes, I am firm in my resolve. And my husband? He will manage. He is strong.

GEORGE CANNON: My journal entry near Liverpool, dated September 18, 1842: "We are now launched on the bosom of the mighty deep, and sea-sickness has made the passengers for the most part very ill. My dear Ann is dreadfully affected with this nauseous sickness, perhaps more so on account of her pregnancy....

Wednesday, the 28th of September. Not a morsel of food or drink will remain on her stomach--the moment she lifts her head she is sick almost to death. Yet I have never heard one complaint from her on her own account, but regret at not being able to assist me in the care of the children....

Saturday, the 8th of October. My poor Ann still continues very sick and is getting weaker every day....She talks of her death as a sleep and tells me not to lament her, that if she lives to reach the Mississippi she must be buried on land, if not, the great deep must receive her poor body that is shrunk to a mere skeleton....

Friday, the 28th of October. I will not attempt to describe the night in particular which I have passed while watching by the side of one of the best wives that ever man was blest with....to see the grim tyrant approaching slowly but steadily to its victim. This morning she fell asleep without a sigh. Heavenly Father, keep me from repining! for I long to be at rest with my dear wife. And were it not for our helpless children's sake I should like to repose under the peaceful blue waters with her who shared my every joy and sorrow. O God, how mysterious are Thy ways! Teach me resignation to Thy will...."

SCRIPTURE: "Peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine affliction shall be but a small moment. And then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high." (D&C 121:7-8)

NARRATOR: The deep desire of Ann's heart was fulfilled. Her family arrived safely in Nauvoo, although her husband joined her in death only two years later. And her children? All six of them remained united with the Saints, safely crossing the plains, and reaching the mountains of Utah. Each one grew to adulthood, living a rich and full life of service in the church. They produced 140 grandchildren, and thousands of their descendants now live upon this earth. (music starts)
Ann Cannon....Pioneer....Woman of faith.

SONG: "*Woman of Faith*"

NARRATOR: Among the stories of pioneer women of faith, we find women of courage; with the determination to forge ahead in spite of opposition, fear and difficulty. The story of Matilda Pool tells of that special kind of bravery.

MATILDA POOL: My life has certainly been an odd mixture. My father was English and my mother a Scot, but I was born in Spain in 1838. My parents were both Protestant, but I was educated by nuns at a Catholic Convent. As a child, I lived freely and richly among the bounties of life, but as an adult, the roof over my head was often of grass or mud, and pangs of hunger were far too familiar. And yet, I would not trade the second half of my life for an easy existence with my family in Spain. For my greatest joy was the knowledge of the restored gospel and the testimony which flowed from it through me.

Though there were severe trials, I felt my Heavenly Father's arms around me, sustaining and lifting me. It is not a coincidence that whenever there is great struggle, there is also great blessing.

When I was four years old, my mother was in England for an extended visit with family and came in contact with the church. My father was working as an engineer in the minefields of Spain, and when he returned for my mother, he found she had been baptized. He was not opposed to this action, but neither was he interested in joining the church. For the next ten years, mother remained an active member, and although she did not push religion on her children, we attended meetings with her and read from the Book of Mormon. My own testimony began to blossom, and I knew that I wanted to be baptized. My father agreed, and even seemed interested in coming to Utah to work in the iron mines for Brigham Young. But before any concrete plans could be made, he was called to return to Spain for a few months.

I can't really explain the course of events which occurred at this point. The desire to gather to Zion was strong among the members in England, and my own testimony burned within me. Ships were being loaded and leaving on a continuing basis. There was also a young man who caught my fancy in more than a casual way. And then the opportunity was opened for me to join his sailing ship with another family. My mother felt certain that with his daughter in America, her good husband would quickly make plans to follow with the rest of the family. And how could he not then join the church while living among the Saints?

So, at the tender age of 15, I kissed Mother goodbye and sailed from the harbor, certain that I would see my family within the year. But it was not to be. At the end of that year, my shoes were worn from a thousand-mile walk, my fashionable clothes were ragged and my skin tanned and weathered. My sweetheart lay on the plains in a shallow grave due to the ravages of Cholera. And my family? In a rage over losing his daughter, my father cut off all church contact from my mother, moved back to Spain and took my memory out of his home and his heart. All alone in Salt Lake City, frightened, homesick and penniless, I married a new husband as his second wife and left immediately to colonize the wilderness of southern Utah. Life has been hard. But I will leave it knowing that I have done all I could in God's eternal plan. He knows my heart, and I am not afraid to meet Him. My ten children have given me the true bounties of life.

SCRIPTURE: "...ye cannot bear all things now; nevertheless, be of good cheer, for I will lead you along. The kingdom is yours and the blessings thereof are yours, and the riches of eternity are yours....and the things of this earth shall be added unto (you), even an hundred fold, yea, more." (D&C 78:18-19)

MARY ANN RICHARDSON: 1858 found me, Mary Ann Richardson, and my husband traveling with a wagon train bound for Oregon. We looked to set up a religious community there. But as luck...or perhaps destiny, would have it, our wagon broke down just outside of the Salt Lake Valley, where the infamous Mormons were living. The breakdown was major and it was determined that no materials would be available to fix it until spring. We were forced to spend the winter there alone. We didn't know whether we feared the Mormons or the Indians more, so we tried to position our wagon close enough to the Mormons to ask their protection from the Indians and close enough to the Indians to be safe from the Mormons. It wasn't long before some of our Mormon neighbors came knocking at the door. They brought fresh bread and an invitation to join them on Sunday for church and dinner. We dared not refuse for fear of reprisal, so Sunday found us among the Mormons. We were surprised at their kindness, but moreso at the spirit which we felt at that first meeting. Before the winter snows melted that year, we joined our lives with these people through the waters of baptism. My heart knew that God had directed us to find Him here. My husband and I and the two children born to us thereafter along with their families, served Him until the end of our days, numbered among the Saints.

KERSTIN RASMUSSEN: I am Kerstin Rasmusson and would like to tell you the story of my conversion. In 1900, I was married and living in Sweden with my husband and three children. One day there was a track meet at the neighborhood park. The mothers had collected nic-nacs and white elephants to pass out as prizes. My son won 2nd place in a race, and the prize which he received was an unusual pink pamphlet entitled "*The Plan of Salvation*". I read it with a curiosity which soon turned to amazement, for it contained truths which I had never seen in print. I was a great student of the Bible, and though I was a member of the state church, I knew that it was not the true Church of Christ because of differences with the Bible. I needed to find the church which taught the truths of the pink pamphlet. But the mother who contributed the prize could not remember where she got it. I read the pamphlet over and over again, until I had memorized most of it. Then I prayed fervently that God would send more light to my heart, and more information on the unknown church.

Two years passed, but nothing. Then one day, a renter of ours moved out of his room, and we put up a sign to advertise the vacancy. The elderly man who answered our ad said he was a missionary and we let him move in. That night he invited us to his room to get acquainted. He told us that he belonged to the "Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints." I had never heard of such a church, but when he explained that they were sometimes called Mormons, my heart sank. The Mormons had an ugly reputation in our town, and I determined to ask him to leave our home early the next morning. But as I went to excuse myself, he offered me some literature to read about his church. I started to tell him no thank you, when I saw in his hand the same pink pamphlet which had been my spiritual guide for two years. I started to cry. God had finally heard and answered my pleadings and sent me His church. But why couldn't it be something else other than the hated and ridiculed Mormons? However, almost immediately peace and assurance filled my heart, and the courage for what I needed to do flooded my soul. Oh, yes. I would answer His call and go wherever He led me.

SCRIPTURE: "...for I will go before your face. I will be on your right hand and on your left, and my Spirit shall be in your hearts, and mine angels round about you; to bear you up." (D&C 84:88)

NARRATOR: Matilda, Mary Ann, and Kirsten heard the call and braved an unknown wilderness, linking their posterity forever with the Church of Jesus Christ. But not all women of faith have passed on to the next life. There are many living on the earth today who are pioneering at this very moment. Women of faith everywhere seek for truth and find the source of all that is good in life--the gospel of Jesus Christ. Once they taste of its infinite goodness, nothing else will ever satisfy them. They answer the call, dedicate their lives and press forward with courage and faith. And the yearning for association with the Saints, draws them to Zion, whether it be in Nauvoo, Salt Lake City or Tucson, Arizona. Listen to a few of these modern-day women of faith as they tell their own stories.

BERNICE HEIDENREICH: I am Bernice Heidenreich. The gospel found me in the 1950's in the state of New York. My husband was a minister in the Congregational Church where he had been happily serving for 25 years. Our youngest son, Fred, was a teenager and still living at home. A trip to California and a stop at Temple Square in Salt Lake City put us in touch with the missionaries who began to visit us as soon as we arrived home. As the months passed, we studied with various Elders and read the Book of Mormon. One day, after attending an LDS meeting, my son came to us and announced that he had a testimony. I, too, felt the stirrings of the spirit in my own heart. While my husband received several deeply spiritual impressions, he was also struggling with the daily pressures of being a Pastor and didn't know which direction to turn. I encouraged him to leave the ministry until he could find out the truth about Mormonism. And so, acting on pure faith, we gave up the only source of income we had ever known, and the house that went with it. We packed our few remaining material possessions and left New York, bound for a new life. On our way, an automobile accident deprived us of our car and our cash, but we finally arrived in Salt Lake City. We were baptized a few days later in the Tabernacle. Many years have passed, and I now have thirty-four descendants who are active in the church. My life is rich and full. I am indeed blessed by God.

SCRIPTURE: "Wherefore, dispute not because you see not, for you receive no witness until after the trial of your faith." (Ether 12:6)

NARRATOR: Bernice Heidenreich crossed the plains in a car instead of a covered wagon, but she is still a pioneer, for she blazed a spiritual trail for her descendants.

MARY BROWN: My name is Mary Brown. My first contact with the church came when I was 18 years old living with my parents, two younger brothers and a sister in Beltsville, Maryland. As a family, we were searching for the right church. We made a study of many different faiths, including Catholicism, Judaism and even Islam. One day my mother said, "If there is a true church, there is surely one person who knows for certain where it is, and that is Heavenly Father. So...let's all pray about it and see if God will tell us where to find it." The next evening as we sat around the dinner table, she asked us if we had prayed to find God's church. We each answered that we had indeed prayed. No sooner had we given our report than the telephone rang. Mother answered it in the other room. She returned shortly and announced, "We're all going to be Mormons."

We were surprised because we didn't even know what a Mormon was. But the missionaries had called at that very moment to ask if we wanted to learn about their church. Mom knew it was an answer to our prayers. At the agreed upon time for our first discussion, we

were waiting along with 20 other friends and relatives we had invited to learn about the true church. Eventually, everyone in that room was baptized.

We always thought that the missionaries were just tracting on the telephone, and felt inspired to call our home. It wasn't until many years later while talking to one of our elders that he told us, "Oh, it wasn't just random. We got a phone call from a man who didn't identify himself. He only said that he was in Salt Lake City, and that we were to call some people right away because they wanted to learn about the church. He gave us your name and phone number and hung up. We always thought you had personally requested us to come." Well....we had. And I guess the message got through.

KAREN OLIVER: I am Karen Oliver. As a young teenager, I read the Bible on my own, and thought deeply of spiritual things. Yet, I felt there was something missing in the religion which I was offered. My desires to know God became intense, and one day while at work, I penned a prayer, putting my thoughts in written form:

"My Dear Heavenly father, I write these words only for you in heaven to see, not for those on earth. My father, I am weak and foolish. One part of me desires the earthly needs and wants, but another is grasping so desperately for you and your guidance and understanding. Strengthen me God for I so badly need your strength, guide me, oh please guide me, for I am weak and losing my way and need your guidance. I beg thee for thy understanding and thy love. In the name of Jesus Christ I pray. AMEN."

God heard my prayer and would soon answer my fervent pleas. Shortly after I wrote this prayer, I came west to attend school and enrolled at the U of A. I was filling out a punch card, which instructed me to list my religion, when I saw some girls who lived in my hall. Out of the blue, I asked them what religion they were. They told me that they were Mormons, and I then asked, "Can I come to church with you?" Of course, they were eager, and that church meeting led to the discussions. As I studied and read, the principles seemed so right. It was what I already believed in. It was as if I had found the religion of my heart, and I decided to be baptized. I was so excited! I wrote my parents to tell them of my decision. My mother strenuously objected and told me that if I joined the Mormon church, they would not love me anymore. I wrote back that if their love depended on my religion, I would be better off without it. Shortly thereafter, I got a call from my mother and she said to go ahead and be baptized. Our association is pleasant now, although I am still the only member in my family.

After I was baptized and received the Holy Ghost, the world became a different place. It was as if my eyes had been opened, the veil pulled aside, and I could see with greater light. Words are inadequate to express my feelings of love for my Heavenly Father. My will is turned to Him. My life is His to do with as He sees fit. I feel peace and joy! SCRIPTURE: "Be faithful and diligent in keeping the commandments of God, and I will encircle thee in the arms of my love." (D&C 6:20)

ANNAMARIA CANNON: I am AnnaMaria Cannon. My story began when I was 18 years old, and I left my home on a farm in Southern Illinois to live with family friends in Denver. My parents were in financial distress and I needed a job to earn money if I wanted to attend college. The Lord's timing was perfect as I could never have been introduced to the church living at home. My parents were strict Catholics. In Denver, I worked during the week and on the weekends would go to discoteques, dancing and partying with the friend's daughter, who was about my age. I didn't drink and I hated it.

Back at work on Monday, one of the secretaries there would talk with me about **her**

weekends. She always seemed to have so much fun and so many exciting things to do. One Monday she told me she had gone tubing. "How do you find all these fun things to do?" I asked. "Oh, I go with our church group", she replied. "Why don't you come and go with us? There'll be no drinking there." What? No drinking at a youth activity? Amazing. "And no one smokes there either." No smoking? I was astonished! "And," she added to make it really enticing, "you won't hear any profanity there either." No profanity!! You mean there are actually people that exist in the world like that? I couldn't believe it! So, she invited me to the stake center for their next activity. I thought we were going there to eat steaks. "What a weird restaurant", I thought as we drove up. "There are no neon signs or anything."

I remember going down a long hall and then into the kitchen where there was a girl stirring a pot which I later learned was taffy. I was enthralled with this girl. She was absolutely the happiest person I'd ever seen in my life. She was bubbling about something she said was a mission call that she'd just received. She seemed to radiate joy. She also had some obvious physical abnormalities, and as I looked at her, I felt myself wondering, "How can she be so happy in her condition?" Actually, all of the people there were happy, **and** clean cut. It was totally amazing!

Back at work on Monday, my secretary friend, Holly, started asking me the weirdest questions, like "Where do you think we lived before we were born?" and "Why are we here on earth." I had never thought about it before and told her I didn't know. "Well," she said, "I have some friends that could teach you the answers if you want." I ended up taking the discussions.

They went very well, and so the Elders asked me to pray to know if the church was true. I prayed. A lot. And I read. A lot. But nothing seemed to come for me—no answers. Then something happened which permanently changed my life forever. I arrived at one particular discussion in a dark mood, and nothing the Elders were saying seemed to sink in. At one point, I looked at them as they talked to me and thought, "They are fools. How could anyone ever believe such nonsense?" I didn't know that they'd been fasting for me, but the spirit must have taken over at that point. One Elder stopped talking, and for a long moment he just looked at me. Then he bore the most powerful testimony I have ever heard. I was stunned. When he finished, he asked if we could pray.

Suddenly, in the middle of that prayer, the spirit descended and filled my heart. It began to burn within me, and my mind opened to a glorious vision. The nature of this experience is sacred to me, and I don't share it often, but I can say that it was as if liquid knowledge was poured inside of me, and I knew, **really knew**, that what these missionaries were teaching me was true; that God loved me and that this was **His** church. I would never be the same again, for God gave me a testimony which I could not deny it; not then or ever. As the prayer ended, I jumped up and told the Elders that I wanted to be baptized now, right now. The bathtub would do just fine. They smiled and told me they would make arrangements for my baptism at the church.

My experience was powerful. But it had to be so, for there were great difficulties ahead and I would need unwavering courage to get through them. The family I was living with asked that I not be baptized under their roof because of my family. My family? I had not told them about the discussions, and I could hardly wait to share everything with them. But their reaction was not what I expected. My mother was very upset. I don't know how she came up with the money, but she took the next plane out of Illinois to Denver to stop the baptism. I told her I was determined, but she begged. "Please come back home and study Catholicism. You have to give it an equal chance."

I came back to Illinois. But when I began attending college, I again found the church. This time I was baptized. It was glorious, but eventually my funds ran out. I had to move home

again, and I had to tell my parents what I had done. They were furious, and immediately cut off all contact with the church. No meetings, no phone calls, no visits, no home teachers, nothing. It was the darkest period of my entire life. There was fighting and contention constantly. I had been so close to my mother before, and I marveled how something that could bring so much joy, could also bring sadness.

My parents tried to rid me of this new religion, but what they didn't know was that they could take the church out of my life, but they could not take it out of my heart. I was so filled with testimony that sometimes I would go to an abandoned barn and climb to the top level. There I would stand by the little window overlooking our farm, and bear my testimony to the woods and the birds and the sky. I held my own private testimony meetings and they were filled with the spirit. I hid my scriptures there and would tell my mother I was going to take a walk. Instead, I would find a corner in the barn and read. I was so sustained by the Holy Ghost that I had a spiritual experience every day during that time. I found out that God does not leave you alone, no matter where you are.

Less than a year later, my family left the United States to work overseas. Some friends of theirs needed a nanny, so they made arrangements for me to live with them while they were gone. I was excited. I would be back in the west where the church was. But another problem soon became apparent. While the friends weren't opposed to my attending church, they didn't want anything to take away from the time that I was to work. I was up at 6 AM and wasn't allowed to go to bed until 10 PM, literally working the whole time. They didn't want any church members calling on me, for it would take me away from my work and they certainly didn't want me spending time at the church. I remember hanging laundry outside on the line to dry and seeing the steeple of the LDS church in the distance. It was only a mile from our home. I yearned to be inside. Yet my testimony seemed to grow even more by not being able to have it. I would get up at 5 AM to read and study the scriptures before my day began. Then I would stay up an hour after 10 PM to do the same.

Finally, after six weeks in that home, they decided to allow me to attend one meeting each Sunday. It was wonderful! One Sunday while I was in Sacrament Meeting, I leaned forward to take the hymn book from its holder, and a vision opened in my mind. It was of me, in a beautiful white dress, standing by a man who was also dressed in white. I could see every detail about him--his hands, his medium build, his brown hair--but his face was a blank, without features. I knew in my heart that this was my husband and that we were standing together preparing to be married in the temple of God. Later on, I seriously dated a tall, blond, Norwegian. But, partly because of this experience, I knew he wasn't the one I should marry.

After four months of living with this family, I finally saved enough money to begin attending BYU. I thought I had died and gone to heaven. At long last, for the first time in my life, the full program and fellowship of the church was freely available to me. How I savored every meeting. My last semester there, I became engaged to Dave Cannon. His face fit perfectly into my picture in white.

My story has a Cinderella ending, for we were married in the temple for time and all eternity. We now have four beautiful children. Though life sometimes has its struggles, I have the gospel and I have my family. What more could I ever want?

NARRATOR: AnnaMaria Cannon, pioneer, is married to a great-great grandson of Ann Cannon. Their names are similar. Their courage, the same. But is her story really ended? Or has it just begun?

SCRIPTURE: "Wherefore, be not weary in well-doing, for ye are laying the foundation of a great work. And out of small things proceedeth that which is great. Behold, the Lord requireth the heart and a willing mind; and the willing and obedient shall eat the good of the land of Zion..." (D&C 64:33-34)

NARRATOR: Look around. Everywhere, seated among you, there are women of faith who have crossed their personal plains and found their Zion. Come with them to drink deeply at the well of the gospel. Come to serve in the Kingdom. Come to join with the Saints and partake in the feasts of the spirit. Reach out as daughters of God and women of faith. Come, and drink of the water of eternal life.

SONG: "*Come, Drink of the Water*"