



7-31-2003

With Real Intent: A Continuing Influence

Carole Mikita York

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms>

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

York, Carole Mikita (2003) "With Real Intent: A Continuing Influence," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*: Vol. 12 : No. 2 , Article 12.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol12/iss2/12>

This Department is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.



NEAL A. MAXWELL INSTITUTE
FOR RELIGIOUS SCHOLARSHIP

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY • PROVO, UTAH

Title With Real Intent: A Continuing Influence

Author(s) Carole Mikita York

Reference *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12/2 (2003): 96-99.

ISSN 1065-9366 (print), 2168-3158 (online)

Abstract Carole Mikita York shares the story of the conversion of her mother first and then the rest of her family. As a young child, Carole gained a testimony that the Book of Mormon was true even before she read it.



WITH REAL INTENT

A Continuing Influence

Carole Mikita York

As I stood looking at the sun gleaming on the Mississippi River, and then turned to watch the group gathered along its bank, I could not help but wonder how I got there. I was standing among the descendants of Joseph and Hyrum Smith. These members of two faiths—the Community of Christ and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—were all singing the hymn “The Spirit of God.” The service took place on June 27, 2002, in memory of Joseph and Hyrum’s martyrdom 158 years earlier. Now, after all that time, these two groups were coming together in friendship. I felt like the proverbial mouse in the corner. I looked up wondering, “Father in Heaven, how did that little nine-year-old girl from Steubenville, Ohio, get here?”

I had traveled with my friend and colleague Alan Neves to cover an important news story for our television station. We were in Nauvoo, Illinois, for the dedication of the rebuilt temple. But this historic event for the Church of Jesus Christ led me to recollect when I first heard of

the restored gospel and to recall the two young men who delivered that message. My reflections quickly brought me to the Book of Mormon, whose spiritual power first touched me as a child and whose influence has remained palpably sweet in the renewing of old, treasured relationships in recent months.

It was 1960. By then my parents were prominent members of the Steubenville community. My father was a successful orthopedic surgeon and my mother a leader of numerous civic organizations. Three of their four parents were poor immigrants from eastern Europe, but now my parents and their four children—I am the oldest—were living the American Dream. Not all was perfect, however. My brother Steve, the third child, had been born with a neuromuscular disease, a form of muscular dystrophy. The uncertain prognosis caused my parents to worry about his future and their ability to help him. My father told my mother she was lacking in faith. She was insulted by that, reminding him that she prayed continually. He said her demeanor belied that faith. They had both been raised in the orthodox faith—he a member of the Russian Orthodox Church, she of the Orthodox Serbian Church—and, when they

married, had affiliated with an Episcopal church so that their children could sing in its wonderful choirs. We were a churchgoing family. We prayed, read the Bible, talked about the weekly sermon. But my mother was still seeking something more. She would later say, “And then *they* knocked on my door.”

My mother wrote, “As with every conversion story, I believe there are incidents or experiences that lead us to accept the Gospel. Some may take years. How many stories have you heard or read where the missionaries have been told that they were an answer to a prayer? How often have we heard that the convert was the last house on the block being tracked by the missionaries? Ours was the last house of the last block on a dead-end street. I was the only one who talked to the missionaries. I’ve heard missionaries say that if they meet people for whom everything seems to be going well that they are content with their church. They are not teachable. One must be prodded either intellectually or emotionally by adversity or trial to lead him to seek the true church. And so it was with me.”

And me too, I should say. They taught my mother and I listened. They were two young men

from out west: Wayne Lewis from Arizona and Clarence Johnson from New Mexico. How fascinating! And they had come all the way to Ohio. Everything they said either made sense or seemed to be something I had heard before. I was a child of faith. I believed that God was my Father in Heaven, but he was also my dearest Friend. I told him everything. To this day, I thank him for listening to those childish ramblings. I believed Jesus Christ is his Son and our Savior and was sure about angels. In fact, I thought that when we left church after Sunday services, they came down from heaven and took the collection plate right off the altar so they could use the money to build the kingdom.

My mother wished to be baptized immediately. She recognized this answer to her prayers and, even more important, knew that the elders had brought the Spirit with their testimonies. My father was not happy about her choice but said he respected her and would support her in this. That turned out to be the least of her problems. Her parents, brothers, and friends all thought she was making a huge mistake. They were angry. She rose above it. I really did not understand at the time how difficult it was for her.

Through the years, my admiration for her courage has grown immensely. In the Steubenville Branch there were perhaps 25 Latter-day Saints from surrounding communities who met at a Grange hall that the missionaries had to clean before sacrament services. Some were from farming families, others were steel mill workers, and there was my mother, dressed in her fur coat and designer clothes but feeling,

for the first time, she told me, as though she belonged because here was the Truth. She continued attending the Episcopal Church with my father for many years and occasionally going to meetings at the Latter-day Saint branch. Her visiting teachers came to our home and kept her in touch with activities and information from Salt Lake City. It was well over a decade later, when all of us children went to college, that my mother regularly attended all LDS meetings.

It was a short time after her baptism on November 30, 1960, that I asked her what she was reading. It was the Book of Mormon, and she explained that it was holy scripture just like the Bible but that it held a wonderful promise. “After you read it,” she said, “you can ask the Lord whether it is true, and he will answer your prayer.” I believed that. I was sure we had had many conversations to this point—I was already nine! One day I took the book, looked carefully at it, and sighed. It was long and complicated. My lack of patience was evident even then. But I was not totally discouraged. After all, the Lord was my Friend. Surely I could ask. So that night as I knelt in prayer, I asked for an answer about the Book of Mormon, promising that I would read it when I was older. The Lord heard my prayer, and every one since, but that one changed my life. He answered; it is undeniable. I remember it as if it were yesterday.

I thank the Lord for trusting a child with information so profound. But we know that young age matters less than the condition of our spirits. I, like my mother,

wanted to be baptized. So too my little brothers, and we spoke on behalf of our baby sister, who was only two. But my father said that if we wanted to join this church we should wait until we were adults. Those were surely words heard through time because missionaries found us at our colleges and universities—all four of us—in different years, at different schools, in different states.

It was 1973, 13 years after my mother’s baptism, that missionaries knocked on my apartment door. I said something like, “Oh, hi Elders. I guess it’s time I got baptized.” Elders Angelsey and Wright were shocked; they had been tracting all morning, simply trying to get someone to open the door. They quickly insisted that I “take the discussions,” and before long I became a Latter-day Saint. My mother attended my baptismal service. We both cried because this was the fulfillment of a promised blessing.

My mother had written of her own baptism: “At the time, I remember wanting this just for me—I needed it, I desired it. It had not entered my mind that my family should embark on this venture of undertaking a new religion. It was enough for me to handle my own thoughts and accompanying problems. Then as I was confirmed, the only thing that I remember is that I was blessed that I would bring my family into the church. I nearly shook my head, ‘Oh no. That will never happen.’”

Little did she know that this was only the beginning. In 1976, three years after my baptism, my brother Steve, as Duke University’s first full-time wheelchair student, had a summer

internship with a congressman in Washington, D.C. My parents hired a returned missionary as Steve's assistant. Reed Whitlock lifted, carried, and drove my brother around town and also converted him to the gospel.

The following year, my brother Bill, a student at the University of Cincinnati, was baptized. He and Pattie White were married in a beautiful Catholic cathedral in downtown Cincinnati with a Catholic priest and Mormon bishop standing side by side. In 1978 Pattie became a Latter-day Saint.

Less than a year later, my sister, Judith, was baptized at Indiana University. Pairs of missionaries tried faithfully to get her to commit to the idea, but it was a fellow artist who caused a light to go on for her. Judith is a dancer and her friend, Raymond Smith, a musician. He once told her, "None of this would be worth it without the gospel of Jesus Christ." He explained how he prayed before each concert, thanking our Father in Heaven for the gift of his talent and dedicating his performance to him. In 1980 her future husband, Richard Krzyminski, was baptized in the Huron River when he and Judith were graduate students at the University of Michigan.

In 1983 there was but one member left of the immediate family who had not been baptized. My father had continued to support my mother, who by now, I think, had held every calling possible for a woman in a branch. She had asked him for money to buy new sacrament cloths, for a new refrigerator for the church, for money to pay her tithing, and even for

help in smuggling copies of the Book of Mormon into the former Yugoslavia for her relatives. Upon hearing the last item, I laughed, thinking, "This man is going to be arrested for a church he doesn't even belong to!" Finally, he turned to my mother with the surprising news. That Christmas we children traveled home to participate in the ceremony. Bill baptized Dad, Steve confirmed him a member, Judith and I delivered the talks. It was amazing!

Our friend Wayne Lewis, who had baptized mother 23 years earlier, wrote: "Armed with little else but Priesthood and the knowledge that all men and women share a common heritage . . . that we are literal brothers and sisters born and reared in courts of glory by Heavenly Parents, two young missionaries found themselves assigned to Steubenville, Ohio. Their objective: to share the good news; . . . unsure but hopeful, these two traveled from home to home, eager to share a specific message . . . the Heavens are not sealed . . . the Lord is the same yesterday, today and forever. He has spoken today in the same manner He spoke yesterday . . . through a prophet . . . the Lord has called a prophet! Who would listen? . . . One street after the other . . . is it anyone living on Braybarton Blvd.? A warm, smiling face looks searchingly over the shoulder of her housekeeper and says . . . 'I want to hear your message.' The rest of our scenario is history . . . 23 years . . . 5 souls . . . and 1 more . . . and now the last act is written and there is rejoicing both in Heaven and on earth."

Amazing, but not finished. My mother gave us all one year to be sealed as a family. And we

did! In December 1984, the six of us gathered in the Salt Lake Temple for a beautiful ceremony. We wondered at the time why Mother had pushed so hard for this to happen as soon as possible, but we soon realized. Not long after our family was sealed, she became ill. Doctors could not diagnose her condition for quite a while, but the news was devastating. Mother had a brain tumor, a large one. There was one more miracle in store for our family. She received a blessing, a special prayer in the Salt Lake Temple, and the tumor disappeared . . . for a time. We had her for another year, during which time each of us children visited to thank her for all she had done for us, especially leading us into the gospel. People of many faiths attended her memorial service in September 1987, in a church building that finally had a chapel. Her children delivered the memorial service. We told our extended family, friends, and neighbors about our mother's courageous choice to become a Latter-day Saint. We talked of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ and the Book of Mormon. Through his tears, Dad told us, "You did your mother proud today, kids." Once again, she is leading the way, this time on the other side.

School and work had taken Steve and me to Salt Lake City. My job at KSL-TV News as the religion reporter has allowed me to travel the world, seeing firsthand the growth of the church. I have followed the prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley, from the palace of the king and queen of Spain to temples that dot the land. My experiences are

nothing short of life changing. Each one, to me, is a miracle.

I am often asked to speak to church and community groups about my experiences. Last year when I addressed the students at LDS Business College in Salt Lake City, I told them there are no coincidences in life, that the Lord knows the desires of their hearts, that he can and does open doors. Not long after that I received a letter from someone I had longed to find after 43 years—Clarence Johnson. Now a stake president in Maryland, he is the other missionary who taught my mother the gospel. He wrote that he had read on the church Web site the talk I had given to the students, and was I that little girl from Steubenville, Ohio? Enclosed with the letter was a photograph of him with my mother on the day of her baptism, a photo I did not know existed!

He wrote: “Although I never told her so, your mother was a powerful example to me and I have thought about her on many occasions. I find it impossible to put into mere words what an inspiration she was to me as a young missionary. She was so determined to do what she believed to be right despite the opposition and difficulty she experienced. I knew that being a member of the Church was going to be difficult for her, but she appeared to be willing to pay the price no matter how great the cost. In my mind she is one of the great pioneer women of the Church who demonstrated enormous faith in the restored gospel.”

April 2003 and the story continues. At my home one evening, my family, Steve, and I hosted our two missionaries and their spouses. They had not seen each other in more than 40 years.

What a reunion we had! I finally had the opportunity to thank them for planting the seeds I needed to help me through life. Those seeds, nourished powerfully yet graciously by an answer to my prayer about the Book of Mormon when I was nine, have grown as I have grown.

I remember President Hinckley advising church members about being missionaries. He said to tell friends and neighbors to bring what faith they have and “we’ll add to it.” That’s what happened to our family. I shall be eternally grateful to each missionary who heeded the call, who had the courage to knock on our doors, and who brought the priesthood, a heartfelt testimony and, most important, the Spirit. Where would we be without them? ■■