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THE LIFE AND INFLUENCE
OF A SPECIAL ONE
Sabra Peterson*

My dear, dear brothers and sisters, many of you were here the day that Brett was confirmed a member of the Church after his baptism and heard him make a lot of racket during the sacrament meeting because he wanted to bear his testimony. He had so many things he wanted to share, and he loved you so much because you gave him so much love. So I felt that I must share a little of him with you today and tell you a few of his experiences here in life.

Several hours after Brett was born the nurse cheerfully handed each of my three roommates her baby and started toward the door. "I get mine this time," I said. She stepped closer to my bed and said, "Oh, no, Mrs. Peterson, you won't get your baby." "Why not?" I asked, feeling my face grow pink and warm. "Well, we can't take babies out of isolation," was her reply. I had worked in hospitals quite a bit during my high school years, and I knew a lot of reasons for babies being in isolation and none of them were good, so I asked, "What is he doing in there?" and she said, "Hasn't anyone talked to you?" I said, "No," and she hurriedly left the room.

I lay quietly, reliving the delivery. This was the first of our seven children that Elwood had been able to witness with me. He had wanted to every time, but we could never obtain permission. Everything had seemed to go well, except when Brett was born one corner of his mouth was pulled down, which seemed a little bit strange. We were a bit concerned, but the doctor told us everything was all right, and he had gone.

Brett had a beautiful little body with broad shoulders and clear skin, and as much or more hair than any of our babies had had, which wasn't anything to brag about. He weighed nine pounds even. We had called home and told our seven children that Elwood had been able to witness with us. He had wanted to every time, but we could never obtain permission. Everything had seemed to go well, except when Brett was born one corner of his mouth was pulled down, which seemed a little bit strange. We were a bit concerned, but the doctor told us everything was all right, and he had gone.

Brett had a beautiful little body with broad shoulders and clear skin, and as much or more hair than any of our babies had had, which wasn't anything to brag about. He weighed nine pounds even. We had called home and told our children and mother that we had a little football player and that everything was fine.

I had time to think things through forward and back again several times before the pediatrician entered the room, drawing the curtain around my bed somewhat in an attempt at some privacy. He was a friend and I could see that his task was difficult for him, as well as for me. I became sort of hung up on the first words and couldn't seem to grasp it all, or maybe I didn't want to. He said there had been damage to the part of the brain that handles motor control resulting in cerebral palsy. I felt embarrassed that I knew so little about such things. I wasn't even smart enough to ask intelligent questions. The doctor was gentle and kind; he offered to come back again and talk when Elwood could be there also.

Elwood arrived soon and, as usual, was my strength in time of weakness. He said everything would be fine.

Hadn't it always been? We both had a great deal of faith, and I immediately felt better.

A kind friend that Elwood had worked with in a bishopric came to the hospital and they obtained permission to scrub, put on gowns and masks, and go in to put their hands through the holes in the isolette and give Brett a blessing.

Then so many of you dear people came fasting and praying to our home. I shall always have a picture in my mind of our many, many dear friends kneeling in our living room and on into the other area. I remember the great spirit and faith that was there and how Brother Andrus had wanted to say in his prayer that Brett would be well. Later, after everyone had gone, he told us that the words just wouldn't come but that he had been assured of how aware Heavenly Father was of Brett and that Brett had come to fulfill a special mission.

Brett was kept in the hospital for three weeks because of the many problems, and they were trying to work out his medication. He couldn't suck so he had to be tube fed, and I had to be taught how to tube feed him. Finally we were able to bring him home.

The children were excited. They already loved him. They had been praying and fasting for his health and happiness and could hardly wait for a turn to hold him. This was a rather unique experience, for what little bit of strength Brett had was in his back and at first he was very rigid and didn't enjoy being held. It was sort of disappointing to us, but we just kept holding and hugging him and whispering to him, and this changed very soon. We learned in our family that love conquers all.

The doctors had sent him home armed with paper robes and masks and warnings that he was weak and extra-susceptible to every germ. We began with great caution—every member of the family decked out like they were on their way to surgery. However, this soon went by the way. I awoke one morning to find the crib empty, and Elwood was still in bed. I jumped straight up and ran down the hall to find five-year-old Thayne and two-year-old Jenae and Brett watching cartoons on the family-room floor. That was a wonderful breakthrough for Brett. The children wanted him to experience everything along with them, and what a great blessing this was to all of us. They explained everything to him, and although he never moved for a long time, rarely cried, couldn't hold anything or sit or speak, his beautiful, big, blue eyes told us he knew what was going on.

When Elwood gave him a name and a blessing, we again fasted and prayed. We knew that if it were the Lord's will he could be healed, but Elwood said it was like there was a wall there. The blessing was so beautiful but again it spoke of a special mission and that he was to

*Talk given by Sister Peterson at the funeral of her eight-year-old son, Brett W. Peterson, April 19, 1978.
learn and to teach love, understanding, and patience—so many things that we are so grateful to him for.

Soon after we brought him home, El Rey wanted to learn how to tube feed him. This was such a great help to me. He was also the first one to take a turn bathing Brett each morning and caring for him with such love.

When Brett was about five months old, it was suggested that we take him to a speech and hearing specialist. He didn’t react at all to the hearing test, but I knew he could hear, and I told the specialist so. At home we would clap our hands and bang lids behind his back, and he never flinched, but if one of the other children started to cry, he would cry also. Before they were through in the sound booth my ears were ringing, but Brett didn’t bat an eyelash. (They even watched for this kind of movement.) When I talked to the speech specialist about it, he said this was possible, and told me to bring him back in a few more months. I did, and at that time, they said he could hear somewhat. I knew that he could hear well and that he could react also. This has proven to be so.

One day Thayne came in from first grade, and I heard him say, “Hey, Brett, guess what? I stole a base today.” There was a long pause, and then I heard him say, “No, that doesn’t mean I took something that wasn’t mine. You see, when you play ball you have these four square things called bases and when you hit the ball...” and he went on and on and on. This became a daily occurrence that I enjoyed so much—hearing the children explain everything in great detail to him—things that he wasn’t able to experience by himself. How we began to thank Heavenly Father for the magic this little child was weaving in our lives.

The doctors had sent me home with medication for Brett because they thought he was having seizures. With a child like this you pray an awful lot and hope for a lot of inspiration, and I soon felt strongly that he didn’t need the medication. I felt it was holding him back, but I was frightened. Still, he was lethargic anyway and so gradually I eased him off the medicine. That was seven years ago, and he never had a seizure, so, I guess it was all right.

As much as we loved and expressed love to our baby, still he didn’t have any way, as yet, to let us know how much he was comprehending. Many people thought he comprehended nothing at all. Then one day I came home from Relief Society and Elwood met me with exciting news. He had been in the yard with Brett in his arms. Someone needed help with their car, so he handed Brett to Brother Pletsch to hold for a minute. Brett looked up at Brother Pletsch and began to scream. When Elwood took him back he was happy again. Such a funny little thing. So many funny little things brought such great joy. This was our first sure sign that he knew what was going on.

Brett’s respiratory tract was weak, and he had a great deal of trouble. He made a lot of noise most of the time just breathing. Because of this he had bronchial pneumonia very often. It was a constant fight. I couldn’t guess how many times he had this, but we only had to hospitalize him about three times, which we felt was an excellent record. The first time our doctor was out of town and the doctor who met us at Emergency, upon examining Brett and seeing his many problems, said, “I guess you just want some routine help, no heroics.” I thought my kind, gentle husband was going to hit him, and then I thought if he didn’t, I would. But instead we told him how dear this boy was to us and for him to do everything for him that he would do for his own son. Once he understood how we felt, he couldn’t have done a better job.

The hospital, however wonderful, was a hard place for Brett. There were so many quirks, and it seems we never told everything to everyone. Dr. Smith was so kind to try to always let us handle Brett’s problems at home unless it was absolutely impossible. One visit I left Brett at the hospital, after getting him to sleep, and went home to care for the family for a few minutes. I returned just a short time later, and the nurse met me at the door of Brett’s room and said, “Oh, Mrs. Peterson, I feel so terrible. I thought that Brett couldn’t move. I rolled the head and the foot of his bed up to get him in the right position and left the room...” She didn’t need to finish. I knew that as soon as Brett saw that hump in the bed he would want to know what was on the other side and by now he was getting very good at pushing himself on his back. He would pull his knees up and push with his feet and, sure enough, he’d gone over the hump and through and onto the floor, hitting his eye on the way down on something on the bed. The nurse looked like she was ready for the intensive care unit and Brett looked very proud and perfectly all right in spite of the lump near his eye.

Another trip to the hospital left him without his two front teeth. Some of the children have asked why Brett was without those teeth for so long, because they were lost so early. They were giving him something with a syringe and he thought it was a real fun trick to not give the syringe back, so they didn’t get it until the two teeth were missing.

He also had great problems with different food combinations, and this was another reason it was best for him to always be home. He could eat certain things but certain things together would turn him into a blue Brett. You’ve heard him and have been very patient with him after the sacrament, but he insisted on taking the sacrament and so we would go ahead even though it was a little difficult for him.

I must tell you that Brett almost never needed to be disciplined. He never had temper tantrums or in any way was anything but sweet and dear, except for this one thing. If I would leave him for more than a day it was like he had to show me that he didn’t approve of that at all, and he would really give me the cold shoulder for a little while when I returned home. I came home after having been in the hospital with my broken leg. I was home while Brett was still in school, and I was back in the corner where he couldn’t see me as they pushed his chair through the door. I said, “Well, look who’s home!” thinking I would surprise him and that he would be all thrilled. He looked fast at me, and I could see the happy look, and then he turned his head away like he was going
to punish me for a little while. The children put him down and out of his chair, and I said, “Brett, you know I couldn’t help it that I broke my leg,” and explained to him how badly he was making me feel. In a few minutes he pushed himself across the floor to where I was and put his hand up in mine.

Brett’s hands were always very weak. He was 13 months old before he could get his fingers into his mouth. Most children are born with their fingers in their mouths, practically. We did all sorts of therapy to try to strengthen them and stimulate the brain and all the things that are done to help these dear children, but it was slow. One day while he was still this way, (he was about two and Thayne was about seven), I was working in another part of the house when I heard Thayne exclaim, “Good boy, Brett, you pulled my hair right out.” I hurried into the living room to see Brett with a fist full of Thayne’s hair and Thayne cheering him on. How thankful I was, again, for the sweet exchange that was constant between Brett and his brothers and sisters.

I guess Brett was three when the children told us he wanted a sled with sides. I was a little worried, but he got a sled with sides for Christmas. When he went sledding I’m sure he felt snug and secure, for whoever caught him at the bottom of the hill was met with a big smile.

That same year we vacationed in California and Brett rode horses sitting in front of the older children, and he loved it. He learned to float in the swimming pool with his head in a small tube. El Rey figured that out for him. He’s loved swimming ever since, and the wonderful school he attended took them every Thursday. He always looked forward to Thursdays. He was always at the peak of his alertness in these new situations. Two summers in a row we spent two or three weeks in Mesa, Arizona, and the children almost lived in the swimming pool. Brett was in the pool with them about every day. He loved it when Vaughn would put his hand over his nose and mouth and put him under the water and bring him up again. One day as I watched from the edge, they pulled Brett by his feet through the water while his head rested on an air mattress. All of a sudden his head slipped off the air mattress, and he went down to the bottom. I was about to jump in in my clothes when they brought him up laughing with his eyes wide open. Another great experience, he thought.

Another day, Jenae came in from Primary (she was about six). She came running through the house saying, “Mother, where are you? Mother, where are you?” and I said, “Down here in your room.” She came in and said, “Mother, you would never guess what I saw at Primary today,” and I said, “Well, what did you see?” She said, “They showed me a picture of a boy in a wheelchair passing the sacrament with his friend pushing him,” and then she ran over to Brett. It was like a light was turned on inside of Jenae as she explained to him how someday he could do this. And then she came back to me and said, “I wish we had a whole room full of crippled children. I could just hug and kiss all of them.” It was a beautiful experience to see this beautiful spirit working in such a small child. Again I thanked my Heavenly Father for this experience of Jenae’s which had helped her to understand and have empathy and to make such a little event so wonderful in her life.

Elwood would take Brett out to work in the yard, sometimes to watch, sometimes to play, and sometimes to help. Last summer, the day they planted the garden, Brett sat right in the dirt leaning on his dad, and with Elwood’s hand holding his, he helped dig the holes and plant the seeds and pat the dirt. It was slow, but oh how he loved it. He hated to come back in the house. Intently he watched everything that was brought in from the garden.

Another warm, summer day Elwood had him on the platform of our steep hill in the backyard watching as he put railroad-tie steps down the hill to the lot below. Suddenly, without warning, Brett’s limp body was rolling end over end down the hill, through the dirt, shrubs, weeds, etc. Thayne was right behind him crying all the way, and Elwood was right behind Thayne. Brett landed down beneath the apricot tree. I nearly cried as they carried him into the house. He looked just terrible with dirt in his eyes and mouth and all scratched, but the look of triumph on Brett’s face had a calming influence on all of us. He seemed to say, “Boy, did you see me go, Dad. Wasn’t that something!” And Elwood, seeing Brett’s big smile said, “He’s just fine everybody. Boy, you should have seen Brett get down that hill.” That was a little bit too much encouragement—he took the basement steps on next. After a few lumps, Thayne taught him how to go down feet first, slowly wriggling his body just right. He became very good at getting down the stairs without getting hurt.

The way Brett communicated without words was sometimes taken for granted by us at home, but it was really brought front and center when I asked his school teacher, Eva Shelley, “Have you noticed how much harder Brett’s been trying to talk and how many more words he is trying to form?” She looked at me so funny for a minute and said, “You know, I forget Brett can’t talk, he communicates so well.” That’s how it was at home, but what a thrill it was for me to know that’s how it was between them, also. When he was hungry or thirsty we could hear him smacking rooms away. If someone helped themselves to ice cream without offering him some, we found out very fast. That was one of his favorites. Often this silent communication and the deep understanding the children had for him shocked me.

I remember his seventh birthday. I was trying to think what would be just right for Brett and what he would really enjoy. It was always kind of hard, it seemed, to come up with just the right thing for him. Then Klyss and Valynn came home with a wristwatch. I think it was Cookie Monster, or something, but oh, how he loved that watch. It was something he could have on every day. Another time Klyss brought him “Frye” boots, the littlest pair I had ever seen, and he’s hardly had them off a day since. His feet grew so slowly. Last Christmas they got him a wrist radio. I didn’t know there was a wrist radio. We strapped it on his wrist, and he even turned it on and off by himself once. I don’t know if he rubbed it on the floor, or how he figured it out, but it was another
gift that he greatly enjoyed.

I knew that B.Y.U. had a wonderful program for handicapped children. I talked to their Principal, Glen Thomas. He told me that because of the facility they were in with all the stairs, it would be impossible for Brett to attend. We wanted so much for Brett to be able to go to school. This was the summer he was five. We knew that the D.B.A. had a great deal going on in his little mind and that he needed to go to school. One day over at the Rock Canyon School I talked with a friend who told me of the little training center school that I didn't know anything about that her boy attended. I'll always be grateful to the Larsens for this. I thought, well, her boy can talk and walk and there were many things that he could do that Brett couldn't do, but Elwood and I went to investigate. How thrilled we were when they told us they would accept him, and they would pick him up on the bus at 8:00 in the morning.

The first morning the bus came, tears of thanksgiving and joy filled my eyes as Tell Muhlestein came in our front door with a big smile saying, “Do we have a Brett here?” That is what he said every morning. I asked him how he could take him, as he couldn't sit up alone, but he was undaunted. He said, “Do you have a blanket?” I said, “Sure,” and he said, “Well, we'll just put him there on the floor right behind me and I'll watch him. I can reach back and pat him once in a while so he'll feel all right. I followed him out onto the bus, fearful that at any moment he would say, “No, that just won't work,” but I came to find out that with Tell something would always work. When Brett became more brave and wriggly and decided to interact with the other children on the bus, the other children would yell to the bus driver and say, “He's doing it again, Mr. Muhlestein,” as he tried to wriggle his way down the aisle. Tell said, “Have you got an old buggy top? That would work just fine.” So, we got a buggy top and put pillows in it to prop him up. He went to school a whole year in the buggy top. Tell would have one of the older boys help him carry Brett out to the bus. Then there was a wheelchair that they fastened a little carseat in. Always, something worked out.

Then, there came the summer of Education Week in Arizona, and we saw this beautiful wheelchair--the only one we had seen that would handle Brett. He couldn't sit in a regular one. I thought this is really an answer to prayer. Then the man came in and told us the price, and I thought, “Oh, my word!” It was just under a thousand dollars. I felt really discouraged as we left, yet we took all the brochures and information. I knew that somehow we would have to have that chair for Brett.

Upon our return home, the school called and said the B.Y.U. lab school buildings had been sold. The school would be moving to a new facility, and they thought that was where Brett should be this year. They were going to have a new bus with a hydraulic lift for wheelchairs. It was just almost too much to believe.

About two months later, the morning of Brett's birthday, August 21, the phone rang. It was dear Sister Babcock. She wanted to know if we would be home for awhile and could she come over. She had been so kind to Brett. She had brought him two little shirts on his last birthday. So, I was a little suspecting, but totally unprepared for what happened. She came in and presented a large, beautiful home-made card to Brett. One of the Darais girls had made it—I think Andrea. It portrayed a boy in a wheelchair on a beautiful green lawn under a big apple tree. Inside and outside there were many, many signatures of neighbors and friends, and it was bulging with many hundreds of dollars. There were ones, fives and a few checks. We were absolutely overwhelmed. She said this is for a wheelchair for Brett.

We started looking for the wonderful chair. No one in Provo had heard of such a chair. They didn't believe there was such a chair, but we knew there was, and we finally did find one and order it. It was sent for Christmas, and just in time because Brett was getting too heavy for me to carry everywhere, and he was more interested in going everywhere. The children had pulled him around in the wagon and an old buggy for a long time, but the view was never too good. They had had to stop and carry him to smell the roses, to pick some flowers and to play with a dog, but now he could see everything as they went along.

Valynn and Greg had gone together for three years and how Brett loved Greg, as we all did, but the day we told Brett that Greg and Valynn would be going to be married, he was so happy and nodding. His eyes were sparkling as they told him all about it and how they wanted him to be at the reception. He thought that was wonderful, and then I said, “And then Valynn will move away from our home, and she and Greg will have a home.” Brett began to shake his head no, he had a better idea. He wanted Greg to move into our home. It seemed pretty good to me, too, but he came to accept her leaving and loved to go to their home and visit them there.

Another day, as Thayne and Brett were playing together, I heard Thayne say, “You know, Brett Boy, some day we're all going to die and go back and live with Heavenly Father, and when we do I'm going to run you a race, and you know what—I'll bet you win.” There was a big smile on Brett's face and a prayer of thanksgiving again in my heart for the blessing of this choice spirit in our home who just naturally, without even trying, brought out the best in everyone.

As parents, you know we all pray for love, understanding and unselfishness and all those wonderful things to be in our lives and in our home, in our hearts and in our children's hearts. Brett seemed to just work miracles for us in all of these areas. As a family, we count him a very great blessing, for even as we lifted him, he lifted us higher. As we held his hand, he somehow drew us to him and further from the cares of this life to a more eternal perspective.

My great desire and prayer have been that we might keep him at least as long as the other children remained at home, but this was not our Heavenly Father's plan, and His plan is our first desire. These past two days I have felt a beautiful peace and that a giant spirit whom I was privileged to care for was somehow watching over me. Always, I am overwhelmed by the goodness of our Father in Heaven that He would trust us with Brett for this very short time.
I awoke in the night thinking that breaking my leg was like easing an addict off something he thought he couldn't live without. As I had been forced to give up many aspects of Brett's care to others, I had learned that I could do that, that others could take over where I left off. Also I became at least a little prepared, which at first seemed impossible to accept, for not being with him when he went. I now see this as great kindness, for I never could have let him go--at least not very gracefully. I have learned through Brett to trust my Heavenly Father. His ways are not our ways, but they are always for our welfare. As a family we pray that we might live worthy of the love and trust that have been given us from both our Father in Heaven and from our Brett, and I say these things in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The following additional comments by family members regarding Brett and their relationship with him are selected excerpts from a book by Sister Peterson personally published this year entitled, God's Plan for Brett.

Brett would soon be eight years old, the age of accountability, when children should be baptized and when each of our other children were baptized. Our kind Bishop said, "With Brett it doesn't matter. He could be baptized or not. He is perfect. He has never said or done anything wrong." But Brett cried at this statement. He wanted very much to be baptized. He had been to Jenae's baptism. He had learned all about this commandment at home, Sunday School, Sacrament Meeting and Primary and he very much wanted to be baptized. He was there. Brett was propped in an upholstered chair in front of the fireplace. As the Bishop asked him questions, he would nod his head or smile. Everyone was keyed in on Brett and sometimes one of the children would say, "He says this, or he means that." But Brett cried at this statement. He had been taught long ago that the inaudible prayers in his heart were heard by his Heavenly Father.

I remember it well. The Bishop came to our home and we were all there. Brett was propped in an upholstered chair in front of the fireplace. As the Bishop asked him questions, he would nod his head or smile. Everyone was keyed in on Brett and sometimes one of the children would say, "He says this, or he means that." It was like always. Everyone wanted Brett to succeed. The interview went well and it was decided that Brett would be baptized on the following Stake Baptism day and that his big brother Vaughn would baptize him.

It was a glorious day. Brett looked like the angel he was in the little white one-piece suit. The whole family was there.

I have never seen anyone come out of the baptismal waters as thrilled as Brett was. He had a big grin on his face and his eyes were wide open.

The following day in Sacrament Meeting, Brett was confirmed a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

As is the custom, testimonies were then borne by various members of our ward. The young Priesthood boys carried microphones with cords to those who stood desiring to do so. Brett was always good in Church but today he yelled loudly each time the microphone came near him and reached out for it. Finally, Mother took the microphone and stood. She said, in essence, that Brett wanted to bear his testimony and say how happy he was to be baptized a member of the Church. He wants to thank all of you for being so good and kind to him. Now Brett smiled, relaxed and was happy. How difficult it was to feel such joy and gratitude and find no voice to express it.

There had been some quiet talk now and then at our house about the possibility of our taking an Indian child on the Placement Program. The talk had quieted more since Mother had broken her leg and the prognosis was six months in a full leg cast. She had felt that we should take one, as we had been so very blessed all of our lives in every way and should share our love and blessings. Dad was hesitant at this point because of his great concern for Mother and his desire to make things as easy as possible at this time and not add more burden.

And so it was that we were having Home Evening and Dad started asking each family member how they felt about it. However, he didn't ask Brett. As he asked one of the other children, "Do you think we should take an Indian Child?" Brett's little, seldom used voice was heard by all as he answered, "I do." His vote carried a lot of weight. The Fall of 1978, Niki Pedro joined our family.

Sabra Peterson: Mother

Love, patience and understanding—these were the three major components of Brett's life's mission he was told in a Father's Blessing when he was an infant. He was not only to learn them himself, but also to teach them to others. His life was a living manifestation of all three.

Brett had a natural affinity for people and they for him. He was especially drawn to those who needed him such as the handicapped, the underdog or the rejected person. If anyone who was a little different from others entered his presence he was instantly aware of them and he reached out to them physically or emotionally, and they couldn't resist his advances and reached back.

As a counselor by profession, I work with many varied kinds of people with a myriad of problems. Often when I had difficulty communicating to a client about interpersonal relationship skills I would use Brett as a living example and not only would he win their hearts but he would teach them, through his role model, the skill I had in vain tried to explain.

Brett did not like conflict or dissension and he would either turn away or shake his head vigorously, "NO," if any of it went on in his presence. He would close his eyes and turn away if there was violence or bickering in a movie or on the television.

He was very affectionate and loved to be held and snuggled, touched or stroked. His soft, big blue eyes were full of loving expression and told a great deal of his inner feelings. I am deeply honored to be chosen of God to be his Father. I feel humble and touched to be given this great one of God as my son. I pray to be worthy of this great compliment.

Elwood Rey Peterson: Father
(and a committed AMCAP member)
Brett and I had some really great times together. I'm so glad I was able to spend time with Brett, he really taught me a lot. He brought such a special spirit into our home.

I love him very much and I look forward to the day when I can be with him.

Janae Peterson: Sister, Age 10*

There was a lot more to learn concerning this little brother than how to put on special masks in order to be around him; before he was through, Brett would teach nearly everyone he came in contact with the true meaning of love. His whole being communicated such a special spirit and such a great love that even strangers were attracted, all wanting to know more about him. Many of those contacts evolved into subsequent visits, and friendships.

Brett was a friend to everyone. He was a perfect model of unconditional love. It didn't matter to Brett if a person was rich or poor, handsome or homely, old or young, he loved them all.

Brett was always so happy and despite the many problems that he personally struggled with, he was always concerned with the welfare of those around him. It seemed that no matter how badly I thought life was treating me or how rotten of a mood I was in, Brett was always there with his contagious, twisted smile. You know the song that says, "Just one look, that's all it took, yeah, just one look!" Well, that's how Brett was--just one look from him and all your worries suddenly seemed very small and insignificant.

I still remember Brett's reaction when someone near him would be crying or upset about something. A feeling of caring, love and sympathy would radiate so strongly from Brett that when the distressed person would meet Brett's sympathetic stare and see the intense expression on his face, suddenly any prior feelings of discontent or anger would vanish. What magic gifts Brett had been endowed with!

Vaughn Leslie Peterson: Brother, Age 18*

A special time in my life was the Summer that Klyss and I took turns taking Brett to American Fork Training School for therapy. I learned a great deal about the special spirit of all handicapped children. Of course, none ever seemed nearly so exceptional as Brett was to me. It wasn't long at all before I wasn't sorry for the way that Brett was. I realized that it was the way the Lord wanted him to be and we were blessed enough to be the family to help with his special mission.

My life would have been only half full without Brett. His influence changed my every attitude on life and I am indeed grateful for that change.

Valynn Peterson Baum: Sister, Age 21*

It was New Year's Day 1974, when Valynn introduced me to her little brother Brett. There he lay, a twisted little boy of four; a crooked mouth, limp limbs, and an expressionless gaze encompassed him. Valynn said he had cerebral palsy and was unable to do the things that other children his age do, but was very alert and able to communicate.

How sad--this family burdened with a retarded child to care for. Why didn't they put him in a care center? He had to inhibit them, but worst of all was that they loved him so much they gave him credit for things he wasn't capable of. Could they really believe that he could communicate? What fools! I had tremendous pity for them.

That was my first impression of Brett. I was seventeen years old and had never been around a handicapped person. It was a new and growing experience for me. It is a hard adjustment for a person to make when he has to deal with something completely out of his frame of reference. But as I was around Brett, I discovered that I was the fool, not them.

The little boy that I once considered grotesque was indeed an intelligent person--probably more so than I. The gaze I mistook as expressionless was nothing more than an aloof face--no different than that of a perfectly normal, but shy, four year old. As I began to really know Brett, I discovered that the only thing strange about him was the tiny body he tried so hard to control, but simply couldn't.

Sometimes it takes a shock, something out of the ordinary to really affect a change in the way a person thinks. I thank the Lord that I had a chance to meet Brett. He gave me an understanding of something that I never before had encountered.

Gregory Carl Baum: Brother-in-law

Brett had more influence in my life than anyone I have ever known. He always emulated those Christ-like qualities that I thought no one could obtain in this mortal life. We knew Brett was special from the first day he came into our home.

My earliest recollections of Brett began from the time my Mother gave birth to him in the Utah Valley Hospital. I knew that my Dad would be home filled with excitement and beaming with pride over his new son. However, this time when my Dad came home he called us all together and in a very loving, gentle way explained to us how Brett was even more special than we had imagined. Cerebral palsy was a big word for us kids and went right over our heads. Yet, as my Father talked on he explained that it was a compliment from our Heavenly Father that He would entrust such a special spirit into our care, and how lucky our family was. I've always appreciated and admired my Dad for the special way he handled this unique situation, and from that moment on we all did love Brett with more love than we'd ever known.

Brett still is so close to our family, and in moments of despair I can always feel his love and comfort--as if he had his arms wrapped around me. I love Brett with all my heart and I know that if I live worthily I can be with him again--reunited for Eternity. I know of no greater feeling of joy.

Brett continues to influence my life every day, although he only spent eight short years with us. We have an Eternity to look forward to.

Klyss Peterson Smith: Sister, Age 22

*Ages given are ages at the time of Brett's death.

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