

A Feeling of Family

On a beautiful June morning, all seven of my children and I began the first leg of a two-part journey.¹ It was the start of their summer vacation, and we were traveling to Utah where we planned to pick up the rest of our family. Then we were to continue on to Newport Beach, California for some relaxation and fun.

Late in the afternoon of that day we ran into some rain, which soon turned into hail. I had just been through a spring storm in Carlinville, Illinois where we lived, and it made me more aware of the damage hail could do. I quickly started looking for a place to park so that I could protect my family and my van. Fortunately there was a small slice of space left under an overpass nearby; several other cars had already parked there. Soon after stopping, I heard a loud siren. I unrolled my window and calling out over the boisterous wind, I asked the driver in the next car what the siren meant. He yelled back that it was a tornado warning from a town nearby.

I immediately instructed all the children to get under the blankets that were in the car; but before everyone was safely covered, the side windows were shattered by flying debris. My youngest child, Karen, who was about 18 months old at the time, was seated next to a window, so I frantically told my son, Clark, to pull both of them under a blanket. Before he was able to get completely covered though, he felt the effects of the flying glass and received some minor cuts. Two of the other children, Jocelyn and

¹ See original publication: Gail H. Johnsen, "A Feeling of Family," *The Church News*, 1990.

Zane, were under a blanket near the front, and I dived under it too.

I truly thought that we were all going to die. It was a very eerie sensation thinking that it may be my last few minutes on earth. Then I was told through the Spirit to do something that I had learned while I was attending the temple one day, and I believe it changed the course of the events and saved our lives. From that moment on I knew we would be safe. Unfortunately others nearby didn't fare as well. A semi-truck had flipped over on its side nearby, and damaged cars littered both lanes of the freeway. After the tornado passed by, some help arrived. A thoughtful truck driver stopped and gave us a warm blue blanket that he kept for possible emergencies. A policeman checked on us and asked if we were all okay.

Most of the windows in our van were broken, but thankfully not the front windshield, so we were legally allowed to drive. We found a hotel a few miles away but learned that there were no rooms available. We also discovered that the power, lights, and bathrooms weren't working either. However, the management allowed us and many other people to sleep in the lobby. It was a long night because we didn't have a flashlight, and so we couldn't see anything at all. I don't know if the boys slept, but Karen was not comfortable, and she fussed and squirmed and I didn't get any sleep at all that night.

When we were ready to leave the next morning, we found that someone had wrapped the windows of our vehicle with Saran Wrap to keep the rain out. With plastic wrap flying from the sides of the car, and the children looking quite forlorn all draped from head to toe with blankets to keep warm, we drove into Denver.

I found a business where I could make a phone call, and I discovered that the woman who worked there was a

member of the church. When I told her about our situation, she called her Relief Society President. Together they found a body shop that would vacuum out the glass and replace all the windows on my van. Then the Relief Society President took us to her home.

This generous and caring woman helped us get cleaned up and we stayed at her house for several hours while the work was being done to our van. She fed our family and provided comfortable beds so that we were able to rest that afternoon. Even though we were complete strangers to this sister we were treated like family. As brothers and sisters in the gospel and as children of our Heavenly Father, our actions can create a strong feeling of family for members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It is a unique and incredible advantage to be part of this amazing congregation of followers of the Savior.

