

BY REBECCA TODD ARCHIBALD
(Based on an incident that occurred in 1863)

Mary Wilkenson awoke to the sound of rain pattering against the tent. It had rained on and off for days, and she longed for sunlight to break through the gray cloud cover. Perhaps today the company would finally be assembled.

Mary and her eight brothers and sisters had traveled with their parents across the sea from Bradford, England. At times it had seemed that the angry black sea would engulf the ship, but they had made it to the eastern shore of America and then continued on to Winter Quarters.

Mary couldn't wait to get going again. The thought of living among the Saints in Salt Lake filled her with excitement. But waiting for Captain Henry Miller's company to be made up was taking its toll on Mary's family. Their makeshift tent did little to protect them from the cold.

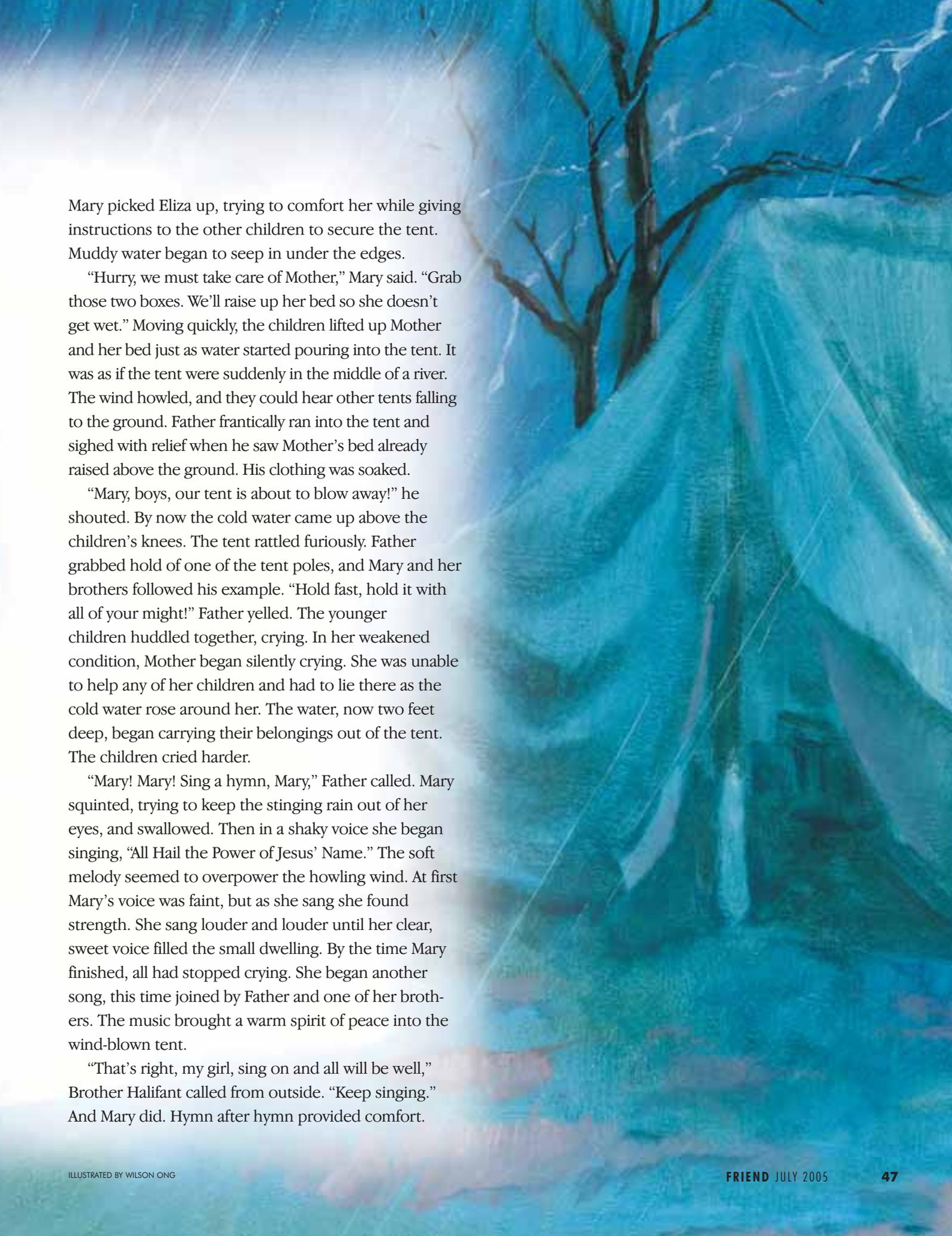
Mother had taken ill a few days ago. She lay wrapped up in the few blankets that neighbors could spare. Mary stood up and folded up the little blanket that made her bed, threw her shawl over her head, and went outside to find what little food she could for breakfast. Her arms and legs dragged in exhaustion.

A cold wind whipped through the camp, forcing Mary to cling tightly to her shawl. Just then, thunder exploded in the sky. Wincing at the sound, she looked up to see large black clouds directly overhead. And then the rain started pouring. The wind blew the rain so hard that it felt like pebbles hitting her bare hands and face. She ran back to the tent, taking refuge inside.

"What's happening, Mary?" four-year-old Eliza asked. The thunder sounded again, exploding like a cannon, and the tent shook in the fierce wind. Eliza started to cry.

A Song Amid a STORM





Mary picked Eliza up, trying to comfort her while giving instructions to the other children to secure the tent. Muddy water began to seep in under the edges.

“Hurry, we must take care of Mother,” Mary said. “Grab those two boxes. We’ll raise up her bed so she doesn’t get wet.” Moving quickly, the children lifted up Mother and her bed just as water started pouring into the tent. It was as if the tent were suddenly in the middle of a river. The wind howled, and they could hear other tents falling to the ground. Father frantically ran into the tent and sighed with relief when he saw Mother’s bed already raised above the ground. His clothing was soaked.

“Mary, boys, our tent is about to blow away!” he shouted. By now the cold water came up above the children’s knees. The tent rattled furiously. Father grabbed hold of one of the tent poles, and Mary and her brothers followed his example. “Hold fast, hold it with all of your might!” Father yelled. The younger children huddled together, crying. In her weakened condition, Mother began silently crying. She was unable to help any of her children and had to lie there as the cold water rose around her. The water, now two feet deep, began carrying their belongings out of the tent. The children cried harder.

“Mary! Mary! Sing a hymn, Mary,” Father called. Mary squinted, trying to keep the stinging rain out of her eyes, and swallowed. Then in a shaky voice she began singing, “All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name.” The soft melody seemed to overpower the howling wind. At first Mary’s voice was faint, but as she sang she found strength. She sang louder and louder until her clear, sweet voice filled the small dwelling. By the time Mary finished, all had stopped crying. She began another song, this time joined by Father and one of her brothers. The music brought a warm spirit of peace into the wind-blown tent.

“That’s right, my girl, sing on and all will be well,” Brother Halifant called from outside. “Keep singing.” And Mary did. Hymn after hymn provided comfort.



Soon even Eliza sang along enthusiastically, the music making her forget her fear. At last the walls of the tent quit shaking and the wind retreated. Mary exhaled in relief. She let go of the pole, her fingers aching from holding it so tightly. After tending to Mother, she tried to dump the water from the few belongings the current of rainwater had left behind.

“Everyone, come! We’re gathering for prayer,” a loud voice called through the camp. Mary took Eliza’s hand and walked with the family to where the Saints were gathering. Every other tent except the Wilkenson’s and one other had been blown down. The water had carried away trunks and boxes and lodged them in the brown mud. Mary tried to walk so that her legs would not touch her icy wet clothing, and little Eliza shivered in her wet nightgown.

They all bowed their heads in prayer, pleading for strength and comfort. Then Brother McAlister spoke. “Brothers and

sisters, the storm is over. We made it through, and the Lord has heard our prayers.” Brother McAlister surveyed the crowd. Everyone was wet, and many had mud smeared across their clothing and faces. “I promise that the Lord will protect everyone from taking cold. No one will get sick because of the storm.”

Mary wiped the tears from her eyes with her numb hands. She knew the Lord would protect her and her family—she had felt His love as she sang.

As the days passed, no one caught a cold. Those who were already sick, including Mother, did not get any worse. Within a few days, the Wilkenson’s were packing up to start moving across the plains. As Mary helped load the wagon, she softly hummed the song

that had brought peace to their tent a few days before, finding strength for the journey ahead. ●

Rebecca Todd Archibald is a member of the Valparaiso Ward, Menlo Park California Stake.



“Singing our beautiful, worshipful hymns is food for our souls.”

President James E. Faust, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, “Spiritual Healing,” Ensign, May 1992, 8.