

By Marjorie A. Havens

(Based on a true story)

Every man should esteem his neighbor as himself (Mosiah 27:4).

Oh, Mommy, do they have to come tomorrow?" I asked in a pleading voice.

"Of course they do. I've asked them to come early so they can stay all day, not just for Christmas dinner."

"Why can't we ever be by ourselves? Then we could have leftovers the next day," I said. I didn't like guests much, and especially not the Lindsays. They had five children, and these kids were the most ragged bunch in the whole school. My friends all said they were "different."

"Christmas is for sharing, Karen," my mother said. She was making pies for Christmas dinner and the spicy smell of apples and cinnamon filled the house.

"We won't have enough food with the way the Lindsays eat. They're always starving," I grumbled, grabbing an apple while my mother put a pie in the oven.

"Now, Karen. You know we have enough for everyone, and Christmas is about giving. Now why don't you go join your brother and Matthew to get the tree today."

"Matthew? You mean Matthew Lindsay came over to get our Christmas tree too?" I was mad. My brother Jim and I always did

that together. It was *our* tradition.

"Yes, Karen. Now hurry along," she said. "And I want you to be nice to Matthew," she added.

I put on my boots and my old coat and mittens and went out to find my brother. I didn't even want to add Matthew's name in my thoughts. It just wasn't fair. Jim would be talking to *him* the whole time. They were both 12, and they wouldn't even ask me about which tree to pick.

I saw them over by the barn getting the ax to chop down the tree.

"Hurry up, Karen, or we'll have to go without you," Jim shouted to me. He would never have said that if Matthew weren't coming. He would have needed my help. I felt even madder.

Matthew smiled at me as I walked up to them. I just looked the other way.

The boys talked together all the way to the woods. I could have joined in, but that would have meant giving up my sulking, so I didn't.

"Hey, Matt, how about that one?" Jim pointed at a beautiful tree. It was in the middle of a swampy area, but it was so cold that the water had frozen and we were able to get to it.

"What do you think, Karen?" Matthew asked me. I wished he hadn't asked. I

didn't want to feel anything but angry right now.

"It looks OK," I said grudgingly. It really was pretty, and I had to smile when I looked at it.

Matthew smiled too, and I began to feel better. Maybe things weren't so bad after all.

Jim and Matthew took turns chopping while I stood and watched. The tree started to fall in my direction. I jumped to the side to get away, and my feet broke through the ice! It wasn't that deep, but the cold water went over the tops of my boots. It was awful, and it made my teeth chatter. I didn't say anything because I didn't want Jim to wish he hadn't brought me. But Matthew saw, and he helped me dump the icy water out of my boots.

By the time we were pulling the tree home over the snow, the sun had dropped low over the hills. It was so cold that my feet were stinging and I could hardly keep from crying.

When we were halfway home, I fell in the snow because my feet were numb and I couldn't keep up. I was so cold and miserable that tears began slipping down my cheeks.

"What's the matter now, Karen? Come on, we need to hurry home before it gets too dark," Jim said as he pulled me to my feet. But I couldn't walk another step.

"Here, I'll carry her if you'll drag the tree and carry the ax," Matthew said. "The tree is heavier, and you're bigger than I am."

Matthew handed the ax to Jim and pulled me up on his back. I suddenly realized that Matthew's hands were bare. They must be as cold as my feet, but he was willing to carry me. I slipped off my mittens and handed them to Matthew. Then I tucked my hands in the long sleeves of my coat. He couldn't turn around to look at me since I was on his back. I was glad because I didn't want to see his kind face after I had been so mean to him.

Maybe my friends were wrong about the Lindsays. Maybe I should tell them so. ♦

I wanted Christmas to be just us.



Warming Up to the Lindsays