

The Platte River, Nebraska, 1863

“Whoa, there!” Mary pulled back on the reins, and the oxen slowed. “Everyone all right?” She looked at her three youngest siblings, who rode on the oxen’s backs. They nodded.

The Platte River lay before them, wide and muddy. “What now?” her younger brother, Jackson, asked. He was only nine, but he was helping Mary drive the oxen. Father lay in the back of the wagon, still sick from his stroke.

“We don’t need to cross the river,” said Mary. “But we can follow it.” There was no road to Zion, but the river should guide them as they headed west. “Giddyap!”

Mary didn’t know that Mormon pioneers traveled on the other side of the Platte River and went a different way. By not crossing the river, they were entering Indian Territory. They would not see another wagon train for the rest of the journey.

They traveled on. Weeks later, Mary saw a cloud of dust approaching. “Steady,” she whispered to the oxen and herself. “Steady.”

The dust cleared to show a small group of Indians riding on horses. One of the riders moved toward the back of the wagon, where Father was lying.

The rider’s eyes were kind. “He is sick?” he asked, pointing to Father.

“Yes,” Mary whispered. The man called out something in his own language, and the men rode off as quickly as they had come.

Mary looked at the sun in the sky. “We’ll stop here,” she told Jackson. She lifted Sarah and the twins down.

“Mary, come look!” Jackson said. The man with the kind eyes was riding toward them, something heavy in his hands.

“Wild duck,” he said. “And rabbit. For you.” Mary could only stare, speechless, as he dropped the game into her arms. With another nod, he rode off into the twilight.

“Food!” Mary exclaimed. “Meat!” The man’s gift was truly a miracle.

More miracles happened on their journey. A buffalo herd came near them but then parted around the wagon, going on either side of it. A dust storm carried one of the twins into a river, but Mary was able to save her.

But the journey was still difficult. Every day the wagon looked more worn, and the oxen looked more tired. The ground was steep and rocky. The mountains were hard to cross. But Mary and her family kept plodding forward.

They were just coming down from a tall summit when Mary saw a man driving toward them in a wagon.

“Maybe he can tell us the way to Lehi, Utah!” she said to Jackson. They had an uncle who lived there.

“You’re in Echo Canyon, not far from the Salt Lake Valley,” the man said when she asked where they were. “But where is the rest of your party?”

The whole story came out, and the man listened with amazement. “You’ve traveled over 1,000 miles (1,609 km) all by yourselves?” He shook his head with admiration. “You are one brave girl. Let me tell you the way to Lehi. You’re nearly there.”

“Nearly there,” Mary whispered to herself as the man drew a rough map in the dirt. Nearly to Zion. “I think we might make it, after all.”

Mary and her family made it to Lehi, Utah. She later married and had a large family of her own. Her example of faith and courage has blessed many people. ■

The author lives in Texas, USA.

