

Alfred Gantner, “Knocking at the Door,” in *Finding God at BYU*, ed. S. Kent Brown, Kaye T. Hanson, and James R. Kearl (Provo, UT: The Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2001), 270–88.

... the Lord knoweth all things from the beginning; wherefore, he prepareth a way to accomplish all his works among the children of men; for behold, he hath all power unto the fulfilling of all his words. And thus it is (1 Ne. 9:6).

The White Picket Fence

Kevin and Lita Little Giddins

Kevin Jones Giddins grew up in New Jersey and has performed as a leading dancer throughout the United States. He has been involved in television commercials, film, theater dance, and music since graduating with a B.F.A. in dance from Ohio University. He received an M.A. from BYU in choreography. He is currently working for Franklin Covey as a consultant/trainer and teaches dance at the MBS Training Center in Southfield, Michigan, where the Giddins family currently lives. Lita Little Giddins was born in Chicago, Illinois, and raised in Southern California. She has been involved in the recording, commercial, film, and musical theater industries. She is a graduate of BYU, with a B.A. in socio-cultural anthropology and an M.A. in clinical social work. Recently she has been working with Michael McLean on his musical production, THE ARK, and she continues to seek opportunities to use her social work and artistic skills. Both are converts to the LDS Church. Both were recruited to BYU, in part, to perform with the Young Ambassadors, where they met. They are the parents of three children.

Kevin:

We all have different images of BYU. To the outsider looking in, BYU may be just another place to attend school; but to me BYU is much more. BYU helped me capture some of my goals and made my dreams come true, along with dreams that I had never imagined. To some, the following account may seem corny—a fabricated story complete with a house and white picket fence. For me, a white picket fence represents the “good life”—a house in the country, family, space for the dog to roam, etc. For my family in the East, however, a white picket fence represented something completely different. My parents feared that if I came to BYU, I would marry a “white picket fence.” My aunt told me that we in the black culture have every shade of the rainbow. “Why would you marry white? Who are you going to find at BYU?” While I did find someone to marry at BYU, I also found both myself and God. Neil Simon said something to the effect that “in order to know who you are, you must know who you were.” For one to know how I found myself, God, and my wife at BYU, one needs to know who I was.

On 17 December 1961, I was born to a boy of seventeen years and a girl of sixteen—Jacqueline Giddins. My birth mother wanted me to have both a father and a mother but realized that she wasn’t in a position to care for me in the way that she would like. She decided to put me in foster care with a private New York agency. Thus, although I was born in New York as Kevin James Giddins, I was reared in the suburbs of New Jersey by two wonderful parents, Edmond and Elizabeth Jones, and was raised as Kevin Giddins Jones. It was only when BYU required that I provide a birth certificate as proof of citizenship that I found “Giddins” had been misspelled.

There are eleven children in the Edmond and Elizabeth Jones’ family. I am number six. I grew up loving my family, school, life, and God, although I didn’t know him as my Heavenly Father at the time. My parents saw to it that all of us were conditioned to attend Sunday school and church regularly. My mother was Baptist and my father was Catholic in his early years. However, my father swore that he would never raise his children in the Catholic church. The memory of nuns disciplining him was too vivid. Conveniently, there was a Baptist church within a few blocks of our home, so almost by default my family attended it. My parents, however, influenced us not to believe in the Baptist church but wanted us to understand that it was the teachings of Christ that we were to follow. Family life in the Jones home was very close, and, because of our family’s size, life seemed like a party. After each family gathering, the coffee table would be pushed to the side and the music and dancing would begin.

I attended Ohio University. I was there for two weeks before I discovered that I was actually at the wrong place. I had intended to enroll at Ohio State University but didn’t really understand the difference between the two institutions and ended up in Athens and not Columbus. It was at an OU football game when I first realized this. I was cheering for the team by yelling “Go, Buckeyes!” when someone turned to me and asked, “Buckeyes? These aren’t the Buckeyes, these are the Bobcats.” I felt my heart drop. I left the stadium in a daze, returned to my dorm room, and called my mother, who responded, “The wrong school? Your father drove eight hours, dropped you off, and you have been there for two weeks. You might as well stay. An education is an education.” And so I stayed. The mistake was, in the end, an important event for me because I came to realize that something or someone else was directing my life.

It was at Ohio University that I fell away from the principles that meant so much to my parents. A moral drift started when I was in high school, and I found myself falling farther and farther to the point where I was not able to distinguish right from wrong, good from evil, or eternal from temporal. But it was also at OU that I began to search for a better life. One night, while taking a walk, pondering and praying for strength to overcome my weaknesses, a feeling came over me. Even though I feared that it might be too late, I still had a desire to do what was right and to listen. I didn't know how to do that. Satan knew me and always tempted me by using the most clever tactics: my friends, my art, and my weaknesses.

I graduated with a degree in fine arts and communications and began working professionally in the entertainment industry. I opened the door as fame and fortune were knocking. With temporal success came more temptation and peer pressure to the point where I felt like I was dying from within. I wasn't living the life I was brought up to live. I knew I needed to change, but I didn't know how. I fell continually, always promising to do better: "Tomorrow I'll be better." "I won't do that again." "I promise. I promise." "Okay, this time it is for real." "Okay, to show I am serious, I'll fast." After two hours: "Okay, maybe not a complete fast; I'll only have water." After four hours: "I'll only have one meal." I simply didn't have the discipline nor the spirit needed to get my life back in order. I fell again and again.

Frustration, guilt, fear, and anger became part of my daily life. No one would have guessed that the happy-go-lucky successful college graduate was fighting within himself and terribly unhappy. I hated my habits and my life and, even worse, I couldn't control them. No one knew, except God.

I was working at Opryland when I met a couple on vacation from Utah. I was warned that they were Mormons, but they seemed okay to me. One of them was a director of the Young Ambassadors and he invited me to go to BYU the next fall to perform with a touring group and also to teach dance. Although Utah was never in my life's plans, at the time it seemed to me that it might have some things to offer. Opportunities that led me away from Utah were popping up every day. In addition, my parents shared with me their warnings and informed me of their fears. They told me of an incident involving two black men who were killed in a park in Salt Lake City. They expressed concerns about white supremacists and told me of their fears concerning Mormons. They missed me and wanted me to come home rather than moving farther away. My mentors and friends also told me that I was making a big mistake. Financially, it was a mistake to move to Utah since it meant less income, and I didn't know anyone there. Utah also meant "Mormons" and no coffee. The only voice of encouragement was my pastor. He told me that he was certain that I was a good Christian and would not be converted to Mormonism. (He was, however, a BYU football fan.)

In my confusion, I prayed one of my longest prayers. I asked the Lord to help me make the right choice, to provide light. As I worried over the decision, the light came to me frequently: the Mormons called often to see how I was doing. But I was really confused. I began to fear a ringing phone because it might be Mormon friends calling yet again. I wanted to tell them that I didn't want to move to Utah. But after they had planned for my arrival and my other options had fallen through because of my lingering over this decision, I really didn't have a choice.

I was both nervous and excited about the move west. I would have to sign an agreement to live the standards of their university: socks must be worn with shoes, and shorts were not to be worn at all. Conservative clothing, no smoking or drinking, no sex. This was definitely not the normal college experience. (It made me wonder what Mormons did for fun on the weekend.) Going to BYU was going to be very, very different for me, yet I knew I needed this difference. I saw BYU as a kind of military school and recognized that I needed the discipline and a new way of living. Getting religiously involved with the Mormons was out of the question, but I would take their money and a scholarship.

Going to Utah was a major decision in my life. I followed what I now know to be the Holy Ghost. I take, however, no credit for being in tune with the Spirit—I could not identify what had led me to Utah until after I found God there. My Father in Heaven brought me to Utah just as he brought me to the foster home of the Joneses and just as he brought me to OU rather than OSU. Some might say that it was chance, but I know that God was involved. As difficult as I was, he showed me that my ways were not his ways. So, not knowing the reason at the time, I found myself in Utah.

I was in Utah only two days before I felt that something was different about BYU. At first I thought the entire male population was very strange. I had never seen so many macho men with cheesy smiles, shaking hands, changing diapers, carrying babies, crying at movies, and walking around on Sunday mornings with what appeared to be little briefcases. This was clearly a very different place. Yet I was received with open arms. I was amazed at the special something that the young people on campus seemed to have. Their generosity seemed too good to be true. My roommates were respectful of my beliefs and trusted me. I waited for them to misplace or lose something of value and then suspect me of stealing it. I waited for them to ask me to play basketball, as if it were a game that all blacks played. But they didn't. I was not expecting them to say, "My brother, we love you." But they did. I was overwhelmed to know

that my fears and stereotypes were misguided.

Soon after arriving I decided to attend a Mormon service. I went expecting to find a quiet, non-responding congregation listening to their pastor. To my surprise, this Mormon church service was longer and louder than the Baptist church services I was used to. It wasn't the brothers and sisters shouting "amen" that made it louder, however. It was crying babies. And their cries were echoing around classrooms. This was a very odd paradigm shift: sitting one day in a biology class with students taking notes and the next day in the same room in a sacrament meeting with mothers and fathers standing at the back rocking babies. Neither the content of the meeting nor the parents quieting babies made a lasting impression. The wonderful examples of families, of fathers caring for their children and changing diapers, did. I had always planned on having a family and I would think to myself, "If only I can make it without wasting my talent and life, one day I want a nice family and home with white picket fences and all." I actually imagined those dreams coming true that first day at church.

I discovered, however, that there were some people in church, at BYU, and in Utah who had problems. One returned missionary informed me that he hated "this happy valley" (referring to beautiful Utah Valley). If he only had the taste of that "valley of the world" that I had experienced, I thought to myself, he would think twice about such a superficial judgment.

Within the first two months, I was stopped several times by the police while driving around Provo. The first stop was for what the officer said was a "routine check." The second stop was because I had a light out. The third time because I made a "California stop" at a red light, which was valid. However, the fourth and fifth times. . . . Each time I was actually impressed with the officer's disposition, even though I was being stopped for questionable reasons. The police were always polite and gracious, always smiling and courteous. I received no citations, but I expected better.

There were a few other negative experiences. Elsewhere, I would have been told, "We are not hiring at this time." But in Utah, even when they were hiring, the door was closed. If I had been respected as an individual, I would not have been led on and on (with a smile). I applied for jobs waiting tables, but when I walked through the door, it was clear that the managers had no intention of hiring me. I had a bachelor's degree and many years experience in the East as a waiter and restaurant host. One manager told me, "You are the best applicant that has ever applied. The next opening that we have is yours." But when no call ever came, there were reasons to believe that he had no intention of hiring an African-American waiter.

But even though there were negatives in this adventure to the West, there were too many positives to let me be pushed away. Even though there were imperfect people, I knew that BYU was something very special. It was still a gem hidden away in the mountains of Utah. And even though I found some ignorant and backward people in Utah, they were more than balanced by wonderful, kind, and thoughtful people.

I came to campus not knowing exactly what I was getting myself into. I met roommates who seemed a little too friendly, met teachers who seemed to be too interested in me, and walked across a campus without the litter usually found on college campuses. The air seemed cleaner and skies at BYU seemed bluer. When you take a homeboy born in New York and raised in New Jersey and plopped him on the BYU campus, it's an almost out-of-body experience. And, of course, there were all of those white faces.

I was involved with the Young Ambassadors as one of twenty or so clean-cut BYU students who sang, danced, and more importantly, carried a spirit into their performances. Most of the men were returned missionaries and most of the women were marrying those returned missionaries or, if not, going on missions themselves.

Early morning I would wake and find my roommates praying or reading scriptures. At my first Young Ambassadors rehearsal, I was astounded when someone said, "Let's start with a prayer." This was refreshing to me: starting every day or meeting or rehearsal with prayer. They actually referred to the start of a rehearsal as a "devotional." Everyone would sing a song, have a prayer, read out of a book called "Mormon," and share a spiritual thought. Then we would begin the rehearsal. Going through this kind of experience every day, I didn't have a chance! Before I knew it, I was beginning to change.

The Young Ambassadors would give firesides with music and short talks or thoughts. All members of the group participated, whether Mormon or not. They often asked me to speak, and I did. I felt like a new person at those firesides. I felt like I was becoming like those people, maybe even becoming Mormon, or at least a practicing Christian. I didn't know what it was, but I did know that what was happening was changing me. I was still Kevin Giddins, but the attitudes, beliefs, and convictions of those BYU students impressed me. Those students knew who they were and knew where they were going. Doing so brought power, and I felt that power.

The faculty at BYU were off the "unbelievable scale." I was often invited to dinner at their homes. I can count on one hand the number of dinner invitations I received at Ohio University, and none were from faculty members. By contrast, in addition to my intellectual and academic development, the BYU faculty were concerned with my emotional

and physical well being. Being in their homes and seeing their families made me homesick. But it wasn't for my family in New Jersey. I was missing something that these people had.

It didn't take long. Within the first month of my arrival in Utah, I knew that I wanted to join The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I knew that the Church had something special, and I wanted to be part of it. However, I wanted to become a member as part of a "Christian experience." This term is used in the Baptist church when a person changes membership from one Christian church to another. I had already been baptized and, since it was clear that my new friends were Christians, I simply wanted to shift my Christian affiliation. My Utah friends told me that there was more to it than that. Little did I know that the process of becoming a member meant meeting the missionaries!

My friends had to convince me that the only way I could join their church was to talk to these nineteen-year-old boys. This I could not understand. My idea of missionaries was the older women of my Baptist church spreading good will to the needy. I envisioned missionaries helping the hungry people of a distant country. When my friends informed me that the missionaries would teach me about the Church, I was further confused. I had already taught a lesson in an Aaronic Priesthood class and was participating actively in a ward. (One Sunday, the teacher of the priests had handed me the lesson manual and asked me to teach for him the next Sunday because he wasn't going to be there—apparently, he thought that I was a member.) I knew about the Church and I knew all about being a Christian. I had been attending a particular ward regularly and the ward members treated me as if I were already a member. I thought, "Why confuse the issue by learning about something that will come in time?"

In the end, I gave in and agreed to meet with two missionaries. My friends informed me that these missionaries would teach me about the gospel and the Church's beliefs. When I met them, I thought of them as merely teenagers in suits and ties, and the only reason I was willing to listen to them was because I respected my friends. I did it to be nice, as a favor to them. The discussions didn't get off to a particularly good start. I was a bit insulted when the missionaries proceeded to show me pictures of Jesus as they recited, "This is Jesus Christ." I interrupted them and said, "Wait a minute, you guys. I hope you don't mind me speaking boldly, but I already know who Jesus Christ is. He is my Savior. He died for my sins. I too went to Sunday School as long as I can remember. Tell me something I don't know." They smiled and said, "Great!" Then they added, "Jesus died for your sins." These fellows obviously didn't get it. Each time I would ask a deep question or a question about differences in our beliefs, they would respond, "Good question! We'll get to that in the third discussion on the Restoration." After repeatedly hearing, "Good question, we'll get to that later," I began to feel a little frustrated.

This whole ordeal started to confuse me. I just wanted to formally join the local LDS congregation, but I found myself getting into something quite different. I started asking a lot of questions. Even though these meetings with the missionaries seemed very odd to me, I couldn't resist the fun-loving time we spent together. After our fourth discussion, the elders asked me if I would set a goal. Essentially, they said, "We plan with all of our investigators a future date to work toward being baptized." I told them I was already baptized. They responded that my pastor wasn't called of God. This irritated me a good deal since I had, and will always have, fond and loving memories of the Baptist church and my pastor. After long—very long—nights debating with the elders and my friends about this Mormon concern for authority, I finally understood that my pastor was a good man who is doing a good service in calling others to repentance, but that he had not been ordained by an authorized priesthood holder. I also began to realize that Mormons believed in all the teachings that I knew and cherished from my Baptist influence. This gospel that they were sharing with me did not take anything away but, instead, added to my understanding.

The Lord literally prepared and preserved my life to receive this gospel. I know today it was the memory of love at home, knowledge of God from my Baptist upbringing, and the clean-cut, all-American activities and organizations that I was part of in school, that helped me to realize what I wanted in my life. When I saw the love of family the first time I attended church at BYU, something hit me. When I attended LDS services, something hit me. When I saw young people on the BYU campus and interacted with them, something special hit me. I was stunned when I went out one Friday night with friends in Provo. There was no drinking, no smoking, and no fighting. The joy of dancing without the strong influence of Satan was wonderful. And finally, during the time I was meeting with the missionaries, I was overwhelmed by the Spirit at a fireside given by one of the Young Ambassadors' directors, Janille Christensen. Her talk centered on her life, family, and testimony. She talked about how she had been led by the Spirit. I knew then what I had to do to be successful in my career and life: Repent, be baptized in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, be led by the Spirit . . . and call home and tell Mom and Dad what they needed to do. Who would have thought that the Young Ambassadors, this singing/dancing group (to some), was actually a conduit that focused my life on what mattered most to me. Like the prophet Joseph Smith said, "I knew it, and I knew that God knew" that I knew it, "And I could not deny it" (JS-H 1:25). When the missionaries told me about the pre-earth life, I knew that puzzle pieces were coming together: I came to understand that I was a child of God and that life has a specific

purpose.

At BYU I met many people, students and faculty, who lived their beliefs twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Hence I couldn't get away from this feeling of what I needed to do. I was living in and around the Spirit in Utah, at BYU, and in LDS homes. The Young Ambassadors were a great fellowshiping influence. But Satan put three obstacles in my way. The first was ignorance: "Now don't be offended, Kevin, but does black people's hair get wet?" "You're a good dancer who has been blessed with wonderful muscles that white people just don't have." "I've never dated a black man. My parents would have a cow if I did. But, I think it would be fun. And I would show them that we're all the same." I was able to put these kinds of comments aside because I was focused on what mattered most. I didn't allow myself to get distracted by matters that had little, if any, bearing on my eternal goals.

The second and largest stumbling block was the issue of priesthood authority. My Baptist pastor was not like many other preachers. He attempted to teach from the scriptures. And in good faith, he taught his congregation the best way he knew, with humility and a Christ-like attitude. I now realize that those qualities alone don't authorize a man to be God's agent without his permission. However, my young missionaries erred when they told me preachers in other churches were only out to get gain and didn't have the authority of God to preach. My pastor was such a good man. Later, after humbling myself, I realized that he did have the light of Christ, but that he needed more. The LDS Church has truth—the complete truth—and even though to this day I believe my Baptist pastor had a vision to preach the gospel, his calling wasn't complete. With regard to priesthood authority, I came to understand that I can't second-guess God, "For my thoughts, are not your thoughts neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord" (Isa.55:8).

Peter in a vision was commanded to take the gospel to the Gentiles. Until then, the gospel was not being taught to the Gentiles. Just as Peter received revelation about the priesthood, so too did a modern-day prophet in 1978. Why did Jesus not go to the Gentiles? Why this or why that? "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding" (Prov. 3:5).

I found that it wasn't important to understand why the blacks couldn't hold the priesthood for a time, or why the Jews were once the only "chosen people" and the Gentiles weren't permitted to learn about the gospel or have the priesthood. Yes, it was important to look at history in order to learn and appreciate the blessings from God. I knew about the attitudes in the 1800s and beforehand that put people in chains. I also knew something about LDS Church history, and I was aware of misinformed and ignorant statements by our pioneers. Even so, I came to understand that there is a time and season for all things. Maybe the reality is that the white members of the Church weren't righteous enough or ready before 1978. But for me, it became most important to know simply that "All worthy male members of the church have been extended the priesthood" (Official Declaration 2, Doctrine and Covenants), and that, "Ye are all children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male or female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:26–29). My Father in Heaven showed me, through the Spirit, that the natural man can't begin to understand the things that the Spirit of God knows. The second obstacle was removed.

The last obstacle was family tradition and the feeling of leaving a wonderful, loving church. What would I say to a family who loved me, supported me spiritually and financially, and shaped me into who I am today? How could I talk with them? Disappoint them? But I was reassured to know that I was not becoming a member of just another denomination. I was accepting the *religion* of my *faith*. The step that I was contemplating was to a new way of life, not merely a religion on Sunday. I had wandered and, in many ways, lost my way. But in the end, I had come to a place of promise. I knew and felt that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was truly the right way to go. My mother always told me, "Kevin, there is one thing that the world can't take away from you—what you think, feel, and know." I knew that the Church and its teachings were true, the Holy Ghost had testified of that. The fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, and peace (see Gal. 5:22) and I had felt it. The Holy Ghost had confirmed it: "One Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph. 4:5). I came to the same conclusion as Nephi: I had been born of goodly parents. They were not members of the LDS Church. Still, they taught me in all of the Christian learning of their fathers. I knew from their teachings that I had to go and do as the Lord commanded, for I knew that the Lord would not give any commandment to me unless he had prepared a way for my family to accept, and come to embrace my decision to join his Church. I can remember that evening when, after reading 1 Nephi, I closed my scriptures, got on my knees, and prayed to my Father in Heaven, thanking him for the knowledge and power to follow his principles. I knew I would be honoring my parents and my family by doing what was right even though they had no clue that my decision to attend BYU would lead to the fulfillment of my dreams: inner peace and the knowledge that Jesus Christ has established his gospel and the Father has established a pattern that I can follow in leading my eternal family forward. Today my brothers and sisters introduce me as "Kevin, our Mormon brother with a beautiful wife, perfect kids, and a wonderful life." I add, "complete with a white

picket fence.”

But this dream of a white picket fence is intricately intertwined with a blessing given to Lita Little and a promise to me, as I was about to leave on a mission, that I would meet my wife within the next two years. Lita’s part she must tell.

Lita:

I found God long before I got to BYU. But he brought me to BYU so that I might meet Kevin, a man whom he had prepared and brought to BYU as well. The story: When I met Shawn Dennis and his sister, Kim, in a choir class at Rialto Junior High, it was the beginning of my beginnings. I was fifteen years old and had accumulated quite the collection of spiritual seeking experiences from various churches. Due to the friendships that slowly developed between the Dennis family and myself, I unknowingly began to involve myself in yet another experience which would prove to be my most prized collection of them all.

I couldn’t help but be curious about their way of life, their attitudes and behaviors, and, in particular, their ideals and beliefs. To be completely honest, I thought my newly found friends were a bit “out there,” but their zealous convictions seemed to work for them. Whatever the case, I grew to value any time that I could spend with them. They were so accepting and fun! And when they prayed, and asked for God’s blessings to be with me, I felt that he was really listening.

My curiosity got the best of me and I began to ask questions. Lots of questions. Well, before I knew it, I was having dinner with the Dennises and a couple of tall, nicely dressed guys named Elder Gross and Elder Jones. They talked with me about many truths that sounded familiar and made perfect sense. But when they told me about the boy “prophet,” Joseph Smith, and that there was a living “prophet” on the earth at that time, President Spencer W. Kimball, time seemed to stand still. As Elder Jones held up their pictures side by side, I knew that I was looking at men of God.

Throughout the course of my visits with the Dennis family and the Mormon missionaries, I gained a personal witness of the value and worth of what I was learning. The spirit of God testified to me of the complete truth of their words and that I had a responsibility to obey in the face of whatever difficulties or opposing forces life would hand to me. That meant I needed to get baptized. My mother, however, did not agree. So, I waited. For three and a half years I waited, and the Dennis family stuck by me. They rallied around me with unwavering support, remarkable sensitivity, and Christlike love. I will never be able to express in this lifetime my feelings about this family who helped place eternity in my view.

When I became eighteen, my desire to be obedient was stronger than ever and I was baptized on 7 October 1979 by Dad Dennis. That was a wonderful, long-promised day! Shortly thereafter, I received a patriarchal blessing promising me a life of being “led by the spirit,” if I kept the commandments. All events and experiences mentioned by Kevin were miles from what I dreamed of doing with my life. You see, unlike my wonderful husband, my dreams leaned more toward the “worldly” side. My focus was to secure a stable career in the entertainment field, all with very righteous intentions, of course. BYU did not fit into the temporal scheme of things in obtaining that worthwhile goal.

This is not to say that BYU didn’t try. Shortly after my high school graduation. Rex Pugmire, the son-in-law of a good friend in my stake, was recruiting for BYU. He was a wonderful guy and an excellent recruiter, but I just wasn’t interested. Instead, I had to follow an intense, undeniable power directing me to take a different role. I didn’t know why I felt so compelled to attend Citrus College. What I did know was that I needed to become a member of Ben Bollinger’s touring group, the Citrus Singers. My Father in Heaven would, sooner or later, reveal the rest.

With this group I began an intense tutorial of singing, dancing, acting, and constant prayer, and it was from that junior college that I received my associate’s degree in fine arts. What a tremendous mentor and instrument Ben Bollinger was in the hands of the Lord. I treasure him and my experience with his group deeply. I felt completely prepared to graduate and to move on to bigger and better things. Believe it or not, I seriously had come to think that my mission in life was to become “the black Marie Osmond.”

I was wrong. That mission was made more clear to me when I was set apart as a full-time missionary in the Missionary Training Center. A fine brother set me apart and gave me a blessing. At the conclusion of that blessing I received some shocking counsel. This brother concluded by stating the following: “Now, Sister Little, your Father in Heaven wants you to know that your husband is being prepared for you. You must be careful not to be hasty with your choices. You must be sure that your future husband is the one that Heavenly Father has prepared for you.” (I wish I could remember the name of that fine brother. I’m usually so good with names. I must have gone into a state of denial.) There I was, twenty-five years old, willing to set aside a promising career in the entertainment world (I had an agent and everything), and a wonderful single life that I had come to enjoy because I wanted to be obedient. Then I was flat out told that my *husband* was being prepared for me! Whose dream was this anyway? Unknowingly, Kevin was traveling

across country toward BYU to join the Young Ambassadors and begin his preparatory adventures in “Mormon” country.

After the conclusion of my mission to Leeds, England, Rex Pugmire approached me again about attending BYU. It was the end of winter, 1988. It was ten years after my high school graduation, and five years after having graduated from junior college. The very idea of going to a big university unnerved me for a couple of reasons. First, while I was a good student throughout the course of my educational experiences up to that point, five years is a long time to be away from school. And second, members of my family didn’t go to college. I couldn’t set my sights on anyone in my family who had embarked upon the college experience or had completed that experience successfully. I suppose it’s human nature to fear those things you don’t know a whole lot about. A case in point was my mother’s attitude about my joining the Church. She knew very little about the Mormon Church, and what little she knew or had heard was not all correct. So, in essence, she was as petrified for me joining the Church as I was for myself at the prospect of returning to school. But I knew that if I did all I could do to keep the commandments of God, I would be “led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which I should do” (1 Ne. 4:6). In the summer of that same year I became a student at BYU.

Life at BYU was more fun than I ever could have imagined! In addition to taking classes, I felt that it was my responsibility to get involved in all the extracurricular activities of the community—church, young single adults, seeing the sights. Did I mention dating? Well, that too. I found dating to be a fascinating phenomenon! I enjoyed going out with interesting, fun people. My undergraduate degree was in socio-cultural anthropology. Different people were my thing. I believed they enhanced my educational experience. That meant that some—to be honest, many—of those people were of various shapes, sizes, and colors. I just love finding out all about people. I didn’t think much of my dating interests until I was in a marriage preparation class that I was counseled to take.

Let me set the scene: A young male student raises his hand and asks, “What’s the attitude of guys who date interracially?” The professor responded by saying, “It’s a form of dating down.” (The answer was based, presumably, on a view that guys like to have the upper hand.) On cue the entire class turned and looked at me, the only person of color in the entire class, sitting in a corner seat. I got an education that day! What really stuck with me was the idea that even if people didn’t feel that interracial dating was a form of “dating down,” the fact that there were people who thought that people could think that was a problem. And if that was the case, then how could Zion spread forth and the kingdom of God ever come to be established? I turned to my Father in Heaven for comfort and reassurance. I found it.

Shortly thereafter, I found myself being led (or maybe being compelled again) to become a BYU Young Ambassador. The purpose of joining the Citrus Singers had been revealed. They helped to prepare me. I had developed skills that allowed me to walk through an open door without fear. As a returned missionary, I was intrigued and excited about the missionary opportunities this group encountered. The most recent was the conversion, baptism, and missionary farewell of some black guy named Kevin. Every single person I met would say, “You have to meet him!” Of course, my attitude was “Whatever . . .” But meet we did. And the rest is history. No, the rest is eternity.

Why the Young Ambassadors? They helped me to get back to the basics. I worked hard to prepare myself spiritually to be a worthy tool in the hands of the Lord as we toured to many parts of the world. My soul got refocused. I didn’t need a secure career in the entertainment field. I needed a secure relationship with my God. And did I need to be another Marie Osmond? The answer is obvious. I did not. He will use me to fulfill my mission for him if I obey his words.

I needed to find Kevin. I did. He proposed on stage at the conclusion of *The Wiz*, entering in a puff of smoke with escorts carrying pillows with gifts: one with a queen’s crown. He asked me, “Lita, will you be my queen and come with me to the celestial kingdom?” A second one with the Tin Man’s heart; “This is my heart, I give it to you.” A third with roses. And the fourth, with the ring. Some would look at our relationship and assume (at BYU), black girl-black guy, they must go together—a match. However, I accepted, not because he wanted to marry me because I was black, nor I him because he was black, but because he loved me and I loved him.

But I then needed to gain a better understanding and a deeper appreciation about his dream of a “white picket fence.” I view it differently now—like a spiritual metaphor. It represents the peace and rest and joy hoped for in dwelling eternally as a family in the glorious presence of the Lord. Jesus has promised that in his Father’s house are many mansions (some with white picket fences presumably), and that he is preparing a place for us (John 14:2–3). I don’t know what color the fence will be, or what size, or any of the specifics. But I do know that Kevin and I have a hope of securing a place that the Lord has prepared with our family.

Whose dream is it anyway? It’s certainly not mine. It’s not even Kevin’s dream really. The dream belongs to our God to fulfill his work and his glory. His will be done. Jesus Christ has made all our dreams a humbling possibility. I cannot begin to express my feelings regarding the incomprehensible worth he has placed upon the souls of all humankind (my soul too) through his completion of the Atonement. Why did he do that? So that we all might be lifted

up. The word "all" is one of my most favorite throughout the many passages of scriptures. "All shall see the salvation of the Lord" (Mosiah 16:1)." All shall rise from the dead and stand before God" (Alma 11:41). The Creator died for "all men, that all men might become subject unto him" (2 Ne. 9:5). "The Lord esteemeth all flesh in one" (1 Ne. 17:35). There is nothing "down" about any of us.

How did I find God at BYU? By finding his power within me. Lorenzo Snow made a statement that speaks to the very depths of my soul. He said, "It is the privilege of Latter-day Saints . . . to have the supernatural power of God, and in faith, day by day to secure from the circumstances which may surround us that which will be beneficial and advance us in the principles of holiness and sanctification, that we may as far as possible be like our Father." I ache for that privilege because there is nothing "down" about me. I am a child of God, and he really does love and value me deeply. And I am loved by a pure-hearted, extraordinary son of God who asked me to be his queen that I might go with him to the celestial kingdom. He gets what this is all about. My daily plea is to do all I can do so that this power might increase—allowing me to rise to the highest stature of divine womanhood in God's Church and kingdom, picket fences and all. May he continue to lead me and guide me by the power of the Spirit to do his will.