



In July 1943 Spencer W. Kimball, then a partner in an insurance agency in Safford, Arizona, received a phone call from President J. Reuben Clark of the First Presidency. "Spencer, this is Brother Clark," he began. "Do you have a chair handy?"

And with that ominous introduction he issued an invitation that was to permanently alter the course of Spencer Kimball's life. During his thirty-plus years as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, and twelve subsequent years as President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, he illustrated in convincing fashion what can happen when one man lengthens his stride.

The Christian philosopher C. S. Lewis once wrote that disappointment occurs "on the threshold of every human endeavor. It occurs when the boy who has been

enchanted in the nursery by *Stories from the Odyssey* buckles down to really learning Greek. . . In every department of life, it marks the transition from dreaming aspiration to laborious doing" (*The Screwtape Letters*).

If anyone exemplified that distinction, if anyone knew how to transform aspirations into reality, it was President Kimball, whose Church service was marked by laborious doing. As a result, he will be remembered for many things—his exhaustive pace, his humility and zeal for missionary work, the unprecedented growth of the Church during his administration.

But perhaps even more, he will be remembered for something quieter. For he had a gift. While it was his stewardship to represent and teach the whole of humanity, he quietly reached out and touched one after another. In a tribute to a devoted man, we offer the following glimpses of a life nobly lived.

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In March 1972, when President Kimball's heart was failing and he sensed that death was nigh, he obtained a conference with his file leaders in the Church, the First Presidency. To provide medical information as requested, he invited his cardiologist, Dr. Ernest L. Wilkinson, and me.

President Kimball breathlessly began, "I am a dying man. I can feel my life slipping. At the present rate of deterioration it is my belief that I can live only about two more months. Now I would like my doctor to present his views."

Dr. Wilkinson then reaffirmed President Kimball's feelings, concluding that recovery would be unlikely and death would ensue in the not-too-distant future. Then President Kimball called on me as a cardiac surgeon and asked, "What can surgery offer?"

"I indicated that an operation, if it were to be done, would consist of two components. First, an aortic valve replacement would be required. Second, an important

coronary artery with a blockage should be treated with a bypass graft. President Harold B. Lee then asked the crucial question, "What would be the risks with such a procedure?"

"I don't know," I replied. "In a man age seventy-seven, the risk of either of these operations is significant. But to do both on one whose heart is failing would entail risk so high that the operation cannot be recommended as a safe one."

As a weary President Kimball responded, "I am an old man and ready to die," President Lee interrupted. He rose to his feet, pounded his fist on the desk, and said with prophetic power, "Spencer, you have been called! You are not to die! You are to do everything you need to do to care for yourself and continue to live." President Kimball replied, "Then I will have the operation."

The outcome is well known. He was blessed to survive the operation which reversed the tide of his

## SPENCER W. KIMBALL

deterioration. I shall never forget the feeling I had as his heart resumed beating, leaping with power and vigor. At that very moment, the Spirit made known to me that this special patient would live to become the prophet of God on earth."

ELDER RUSSELL M. NELSON  
COUNCIL OF THE TWELVE

When I was first appointed as acting conductor of the Tabernacle Choir, there was a great deal of sorrow at the unexpected resignation of my predecessor. Shortly thereafter I received an anonymous letter that was very hurtful to me personally, and somehow President Kimball got word of it. The next time I was in his office he told me that everyone has opinions and are entitled to them; but that when an individual doesn't have the courage to sign a letter, special handling is called for. He told me *he* often received such letters, and then explained, "When I receive such a letter, I read it carefully to see if I can learn from it. Then I have a special file for it," and he pointed towards the wastebasket. "I file it there," he said, smiling, "and I also file away any hurt or anger." He helped me at a difficult time. He also taught me a great lesson about genuine concern for others.

JEROLD OTTLEY  
DIRECTOR, TABERNACLE CHOIR



In a talk I once said that when the prophet speaks, the debate is over. The following Monday morning President Kimball called me into his office. "Sister Cannon," he began, "do I recall that you recently said something to the effect that when I speak, the people must obey?" I answered, "President Kimball, what I said is that when the prophet speaks, the debate is over." His next comment took me by surprise. "I don't think the people like to hear that." I replied, "But it's true, isn't it?" He paused for a moment and answered, "Yes, it's true, but I don't think they like to hear it quite that way." What he was teaching me was that there was a gentler way of getting the point across. That's the secret of that man. He led us, he didn't force the gospel upon us. That's why we would follow him anywhere.

ELAINE CANNON  
FORMER GENERAL PRESIDENT  
YOUNG WOMEN

I became well acquainted with President Kimball when I worked with him on publication of *The Miracle of Forgiveness*. About six years ago I had an appointment with him in his office. It was a hot July day, and on the way I ran into a stream of traffic. As a result, I was nearly fifteen minutes late for my appointment with the President of the Church. You can imagine how frustrated and embarrassed I was. When I finally arrived, I began to apologize. "President Kimball, I am so sorry that I've kept you waiting. I had difficulty in traffic, and consequently now I'm all hot and bothered," using an old phrase common in England where I'm from. He immediately said, "Oh, let me get you a drink of cold water," jumped up from his desk, and hurried into the next room to get me something to drink. He was not a bit concerned that I had kept him waiting but was more worried that I was comfortable. That to me was the quintessence of humility and concern for others.

H. GEORGE BICKERSTAFF  
SENIOR EDITOR, BOOKCRAFT

My husband and I attended a conference with President and Sister Kimball, and as we entered together everyone stood and began to sing "We Thank Thee O God for a Prophet." As they did so, President Kimball leaned over to me and said, "Whenever the people sing this song, I immediately think of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young and John Taylor," and he proceeded to name every one of the prophets. "Then I just stand and sing with all my heart, honoring them."

BARBARA B. SMITH  
FORMER GENERAL PRESIDENT  
RELIEF SOCIETY

As our plane circled to land in La Paz, Bolivia, a city famous for its extremely high altitude, the stewardess warned us that we might get a headache on landing. No sooner did we land than I got a headache. When we arrived at the hotel, I went immediately to my room. I was miserable, and had terrible pains in my chest. I thought I was going to die. I could visualize my epitaph, "Died in La Paz." While lying on my bed I heard a knock on my door. I was a little put out that someone was disturbing my dying. I strode to the door and flung it open. There stood President Kimball and his personal physician. He asked how I felt. Talk about fast repentance. Here was a man twice my age, a man who'd undergone open heart surgery, and he was inquiring about *my* health. I insisted I was fine, and as I turned from the door I heard him knock on the next door and ask, "How are you feeling?" Some time later President Kimball admitted that he'd hardly slept while in La Paz. He'd had chest pains and found it difficult to breathe, and had subsequently sat up in a chair most of the night.

DELL VAN ORDEN  
EDITOR, LDS CHURCH NEWS

President Kimball was particularly remarkable in the range of his intellect, spirituality and capability. His vision of Christian values reached soaring heights, but he patiently and successfully pursued progress in realistic ways, when necessary through minute details. One of several fond memories I have of him occurred at the dedication of the BYU Law School. Following my dedication speech, he emphasized my urging that lawyers be



healers, and he committed to make the BYU Law School a leader in the effective formation of ethical lawyers dedicated to serve.

WARREN E. BURGER  
CHIEF JUSTICE OF THE UNITED STATES

I participated with President and Sister Kimball on a reenactment of the pioneer trek, and enroute our facilities were very au naturel. Everyone slept outside except for President and Sister Kimball, who slept in a small pup tent. During the middle of the night while walking through camp I tripped on a stake holding down their tent and crashed in on them. The next morning at the devotional President Kimball began his remarks by saying, "We had an interesting night last night. Brother Anderson dropped in on us."

JUDGE ALDON J. ANDERSON  
FORMER CHIEF FEDERAL JUDGE

I traveled with President Kimball to an area conference in New Zealand. We stayed with the temple president, who lived just a few hundred feet from the New Zealand Temple. On Sunday morning after we'd finished breakfast President Kimball asked if I'd mind accompanying him to the temple. Of course, I was thrilled with the invitation. The temple president walked us over, and as we neared the temple President Kimball took his wallet out of his back pocket and removed his temple recommend. At the door the temple president started to ask for the prophet's recommend and then stopped himself. "Forgive me for being so presumptuous." President Kimball responded, with a twinkle, "I was just waiting to see if you were going to follow the guidelines." The temple president then unlocked the door and let us in. The President and I went up to the second floor and approached a room where the door was closed. President Kimball turned to me and asked, "Earl, would you mind waiting for me?" Naturally, I didn't. He remained inside for about twenty minutes, and I couldn't help but feel that he was seeking inspiration for that particular area conference. When he came out, we hurried to the conference, which had already started.

When it was President Kimball's turn to speak, he

went to the podium, held up his prepared talk, and said, "I am impressed that I should set aside this talk and discuss with you another matter." Then he discoursed at length about the heritage of the Maori people, some sixteen thousand of which were in attendance. He had no notes. Afterwards I asked him if he'd ever spoken or written upon that subject before. He couldn't remember ever having done so.

J. EARL JONES  
FORMER MANAGING DIRECTOR  
CHURCH SECURITY

When our temple presidency was set apart, President Kimball spent a lot of time talking to me. I was almost self-conscious about how much time he spent with me personally. He held my hands and hugged me. Before he set me apart he looked me in the eyes and said, "You're going to run that temple." I was a little uncomfortable about that because I was only a counselor in the temple presidency. But as things turned out, I did handle many things because I could speak the native language fluently. And there was a period of several months when the temple president was very ill, and I did run the temple. President Kimball must have known. The experience was unforgettable, for an ordinary man such as myself to be treated like his peer. He made me feel he had full confidence in my ability to do something I'd never done before. I was a total stranger, yet I knew that he loved me.

YUKIYOSHI INOUE  
FORMER 1ST COUNSELOR  
TOKYO TEMPLE PRESIDENCY

We had just concluded the morning session of our stake conference. President Kimball was the visiting General Authority. I brought our children up to meet him. When he met our six-year-old son, John, he gave John a hearty handshake, and said, "John, you look like you would make a great missionary. How much money do you have in your missionary bank account?"

With an uncomfortable look on his face, John turned to me for help with a reply. John didn't have a missionary bank account. I was even more uncomfortable than John, and offered a weak excuse, explaining we would make adequate provision for financing their missions when the time came. Elder Kimball reached in his pocket and brought out a dollar which he gave to John. "John, put this in your missionary bank account, and plan to be a great missionary."

The story did not end there. The years passed and it came time for John to go on his mission. In the intervening years, Elder Kimball had become President Kimball. John's call to the Japan Fukuoka Mission was signed by President Kimball. John was invited in the letter to respond as to his willingness to accept the mission call.

John wrote his letter, but before mailing it, asked me if I would be willing to read it. His letter was addressed to President Kimball. The first paragraph indicated his willing acceptance of the call.

Then he continued, "President Kimball, you came to our stake conference when I was just a boy. You shook my hand and asked if I was going to be a missionary, and how much I had in my missionary bank account. At the time I didn't have a missionary bank account. You gave me a dollar and told me that was for my mission. My dad



Elder Kimball sings with Mark E. Petersen, Matthew Cowley, Ezra Taft Benson, and Harold B. Lee (at piano).

took me to the bank the next day to open an account. I wasn't able to answer your question then, but now I can tell you I have more than \$3,300 in my account that I have saved for my mission. And I still have the dollar you gave me. After my mission I plan to graduate from college and get married, and someday I plan to give that dollar to the first of our children to open a missionary bank account, with an explanation the dollar came to them from you through me."

As I read John's letter a tear came to my eye and a lump to my throat. Silently I thanked God for a prophet who had the wisdom and understanding to reach out and touch the lives of both a boy and his father.

BEN LEWIS

As the associate publisher of *This People* magazine I had accompanied a photographer to take pictures of Sister Kimball for an upcoming cover. It was in August of 1981.

Sister Kimball greeted us warmly, but my eyes were immediately locked on the small man behind her, his eyes blinking back the sleep from the nap I had interrupted. He wore a white, long-sleeved shirt open at the collar, black slacks and socks, but no shoes. He smiled at me in a way that was almost disarming. But I would have to wait until later to look more closely because at the moment his complete attention was focused on me. He leaned forward and took my hands in his, and for a while I was a little boy again, enveloped in the most complete love I had ever known.

He looked up at me and said, "Brother Rodriguez, you're a very handsome young man." I could feel the color rising in my cheeks as I smiled awkwardly. I was so ecstatic to be with him that I'd have smiled had he said I looked like a toad. I felt he could look into my soul and see every crevice, every mistake, every dream. And he loved me, not as a polished being, but for myself. As I held his hand like a five-year-old, President Kimball said in his gravelly voice, "Brother Rodriguez, blessed are the valiant servants of the Lord." Then he leaned up and kissed me on the cheek.

Tears began to well up in my eyes. I had never considered myself valiant, but how I wanted to be! Moments later, President Kimball repeated himself and

kissed me again. I left his home feeling like Charlton Heston in his portrayal of Moses as he left Mount Sinai.  
MICHAEL RODRIGUEZ

The first time President Kimball attended our sacrament meeting after becoming President of the Church, he quietly entered the rear of the chapel and lingered there among ward members. He was loathe to sit on the stand. It made him uncomfortable when the members would rise when he came to the stand, and he would wave for them to be seated.

It was not difficult to conduct a meeting in his presence. I pasted in my journal a little handwritten note he passed to me near the end of a testimony meeting. It said, "I shall say a word if agreeable. Would you like to wink at me just before you close the meeting?" I shall always feel the warm hug he often gave me when I was much in need of it.

LYLE M. WARD

"My home teacher is serving in this mission, and I would like to visit him." Spencer Kimball, then a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, spoke those words to my mission president in England. You can imagine my companion's surprise when he looked out the window one early winter morning in 1968 to see President and Sister Kimball stepping out of the car in front of our digs.

As we visited that morning, my mind was flooded with poignant memories of the warmth and love I had felt in the Kimball home. I remembered his greeting me and my home teaching companion at the door, him dressed in Levis and a velour. He would look at my seasoned companion and then at me, a wild and raw priest, and ask for my lesson.

Many nights when I came home late from activities I would see the light in his study burning as he worked into the night. After his heart surgery in 1972 I wanted him to perform my marriage, but was reluctant to ask because of his health. I called Sister Kimball for her advice. "Of course, he will want to do it," she said. And he did. I've never been able to understand exactly what perfection is, but it must be something like President Kimball.

PHILIP L. WARD

I had run for a political office and had been unsuccessful by a narrow margin. While it was not earthshaking to me, I was disappointed and also felt badly for those who'd worked on my campaign. About that time, a friend of mine and a member of the Quorum of Twelve passed away, and a day or so after the election I attended his funeral in the Tabernacle. At the conclusion of the service, the thousands in attendance congregated outside. I was standing back in the crowd when the members of the Quorum of the Twelve came by, two by two, and Elder Kimball was among them. How he ever spotted me I will never know, but he did. He immediately left his place in the line and gently worked his way through the crowd until he reached me. He put his arms around me, hugged me and kissed me on the cheek without saying a word, and then hurried back to his place in line. That was the kind of man President Kimball was. In an instant, he took away my disappointment and sorrow.

RICHARD C. ANDREW

DECEMBER/JANUARY