

PURE RELIGION

The Boy Who Moved

Just east of the Black Sea and south of the Caucasus Mountains lies the country of Georgia, and in a city on the northern border of that country lived a small family of four. The youngest member of the family was a boy of 13 years. His name was Simon.

Simon had muscular dystrophy and was paralyzed from the waist down. Since he could not walk and could barely move his arms, his mother had to carry him from place to place. As a consequence, Simon had never been to school. In fact, he had rarely gone outside the house.

As he grew, it became harder to move him. By the time Simon was 13, he was heavier than his mother and, in fact, because of how awkward it was to move him, he had already broken his arm from a fall.

Simon's mother and father had sought help from every source they could think of. If only they had a wheelchair, then they could move Simon from room to room. He could move into the bathroom and even go outside once in awhile.

But though they asked and asked, no one had the resources to help . . . until the day a large package arrived at their door.

A wheelchair! But not any ordinary wheelchair. This was a motorized wheelchair!

The parents rejoiced. They laughed and wept, they were so grateful. But Simon was terrified. He had never seen anything like this contraption before, and he swore he would never get near it. His family begged him and moved him toward the chair, but he cried and pleaded with them to take the dreadful machine away.

After a great deal of persistent begging, they finally persuaded Simon to give it a try. He sat in the chair, touched a lever . . . and moved!

For the first time in his life, he could move by himself!

Forwards, backwards, from side to side. To the outside! It was a wonder and a miracle!

But who had sent the chair? The family had to thank them.

It came from Elder and Sister Kemp, they were told. Ray and June Kemp were from Essex, England, and had left their home and family at their own expense and were living six hours away in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia. They were serving a humanitarian mission for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The wheelchair had come from Salt Lake City, Utah. It had come as a gift from the Church.

When Elder and Sister Kemp heard that Simon and his family wanted to thank them personally, they arranged to meet them the next time they traveled to that faraway city. When they arrived, the family was prepared for them. Even though they lived in a humble home and had little money, they had filled a table with every kind of food imaginable.

"They treated us like we were royalty," Sister Kemp says. "They couldn't afford the meal, but it was the only way they had of thanking us."

The family insisted that Elder and Sister Kemp stay and eat and talk. Simon recited several long poems and delighted them by gunning the chair and zipping through the house and darting around corners. They thanked the Kemps over and over again. They didn't want them to leave.

For Elder and Sister Kemp, it was simply one of many unforgettable experiences. "It is difficult to communicate how wonderful and fulfilling it was to serve a welfare mission in Georgia," Sister Kemp says. "It was a rich, rich experience."

And for one 13-year-old boy who lives on the coast of the Black Sea, life will never be the same.

