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Kimberly Jo Smith's Journey Discovering Joseph, Emma and Herself

Dec 22, 2014 *Living Descendants of Joseph Smith Visit His Birthplace*



Joseph Smith's descendants visit his birthplace after joining the church Christ restored through him.

In the stillness of the budding spring of Sharon, Vermont, [Kimberly Jo Smith](#) stood in the quiet forest for the first time, looking down on the remaining moss-covered foundation stones of the home where her great-great grandfather was born. Standing at [Joseph Smith's birthplace](#) last May, she completed the circle of her family's story.

After Joseph's death his children all chose paths outside of the Church, leaving their children and grandchildren in various places and various faiths. In Kimberly's generation some of them started to come back. When Kimberly was twelve years old she first learned of Joseph and Emma, beginning a twenty-four year journey into the Church that Joseph restored.

Kimberly now travels the country speaking and singing to share her story. A fireside event for the Montpelier, VT [Stake](#) finally brought her to the beginning. The place where Joseph first stepped on the scene of mortality, setting a new course for their family's story and for the world.

When visiting places from her ancestors' lives, Kimberly feels a special connection with them. Of her experience in Sharon, Vermont she said,

When I walk where my ancestors walked, I can feel them beside me, I can feel experiences that they've had... When I walked those grounds, especially where Lucy Mack grew up, it was very, very tender. It's almost like you walk through their lives with them.

On my own visit to Sharon, I imagined Lucy in that simple log home holding her two day old son on Christmas day. Certainly her thoughts were on Mary holding her own tiny son in a small stable in Bethlehem. I imagine she pondered what was in Mary's heart and wondered how she felt to be the mother of the Savior.

Lucy's life paralleled Mary's more than she imagined that cold December day. Her son was called by Mary's Son to restore His Church, and she too watched her son [die at the hands of an angry mob](#) for teaching God's word, while only in his thirties.

I suspect December 23, in the midst of the Christmas season, was always a special, contemplative day for Lucy.

Like her third great grandmother, Kimberly also celebrates Joseph's birthday in quiet contemplation. As a gift, she hands over the threads of bitterness and hatred which ran through the Smith family for generations, threads which she spent years untangling. And each year she has a personal talk with Joseph, reflecting on his life and thanking him for things he taught and did.

Kimberly Jo Smith Discovers Joseph and Emma



Kimberly saw these portraits in her Grandmother's cabin sending her on a journey for the truth.

Like Joseph, Kimberly's life took a course she never could have imagined as a child. But the Lord had a plan, and He set things in motion when she was twelve years old on a visit to her grandmother's cabin in Ava, Missouri.

The old log cabin, nestled in the hills of 30 acres of lush Ozark mountain land, had hardwood floors, a cast iron claw foot bathtub, and a collection of salt and pepper shakers from around the world. But the details went unnoticed on this occasion.

Upon arriving at the cabin, Kimberly entered through the wooden door and turned left into the sitting room. She rested on the couch and leaned her head on the soft cushions. Then

she looked up. Against the flowered wallpaper she saw two portraits which she never noticed before. That moment changed the course of her life.

She says,

“It is hard to describe the feeling I had at that moment except to say that for a brief period it seemed as if time stood still... I felt as if there was no one else on earth except me and those two portraits.

My attention was first drawn to the man in the portrait which hung on the left; the familiarity was deep and instant... eyes that seemed to hold stories in their backdrop hues of gray and piercing blue; knowledge in a face so fair, a history that spoke volumes which reached out and embraced me in unknown depths.

I felt a longing to get close to this man. I was drawn to know who he was, when and where he lived, and why his portrait was in Grandma’s house. What did it have to do with me? ...

Tears began to stream down my face as I looked to the portrait beside the man and searched the face of a lovely woman. She seemed to convey a noble bearing, with raven black hair, eyes large and round, their color a beautiful dark brown. Again feelings of admiration and sadness rose in me, so much so that I could not bear to look any longer and went to find my Grandmother.”

Her grandmother told her that the portraits were of Kimberly’s great-great grandparents, Joseph and Emma Smith and that Joseph established the ‘true’ church, by which she meant the [Church of Christ Temple Lot](#). Kimberly did not understand what that meant; she only knew that an intense love for these people filled her, along with a compelling desire to find out everything she could about them.

Surrounded by Her Father’s Family



Kimberly’s family moved into her Grandmother’s cabin after she discovered Joseph and Emma there.

Kimberly’s family moved into that log cabin not long after their visit, which put her in the middle of her Smith family. One day, Kimberly brought her clothes in from the line and as she lifted a shirt she saw a copperhead snake coiled underneath. This sneaky creature crawled into the laundry unnoticed and Kimberly carried him inside.

That snake perfectly symbolizes the bitterness which crept into the Smith family and which they carried through the generations. These were the feelings and beliefs to which

Kimberly was exposed at this period of her life as the ideas of her father's family and the teachings of The Church of Christ Temple Lot surrounded her.

Kimberly's religious experience up to that point consisted of simple Southern gospel teaching from her mother: the need for unconditional Christ-like love and for following the Holy Ghost, no matter what. But the teachings from her father's family had a different feel, filled with bitterness which Kimberly said "didn't feel natural," a brewing animosity for the LDS Church.

These bitter teachings sounded through the generations instilling a sense of hatred and a rigid perception of the LDS Church:

- Brigham Young organized the murder of Joseph, Hyrum and Samuel Smith.
- He wanted to take control of the Church.
- A corrupt band of Brighamites followed him to the West, and
- If any of the Smiths ever went to Utah they would be killed.

Understandably, these barbaric Mormons terrified Kimberly.

And yet, something about those teachings didn't feel right. When Kimberly sought answers about Joseph and Emma from her father and his family, they spoke of him respectfully but as a fallen prophet, often with crisp tones denoting negativity.

Kimberly yearned to find the peace and love she felt when she saw their portraits, and so she stopped asking and kept her desires silently kindling in her heart.

Searching For Her Ancestors



Kimberly searched for anything about her ancestors, including things written about them and by them.

As Kimberly began having children of her own, her desire to know her ancestors and understand her true heritage became unquenchable. She needed to know the truth about Joseph and Emma as well as those who came before. A rich heritage was waiting to be discovered and Kimberly determined to find it.

As a teenager she came across a book in her father's office called [Joseph Smith and His Progenitors written by Lucy Mack Smith](#). She flipped through a few pages of Lucy's early life before being shooed out of the office by her father. Being caught up in teenage life, she forgot about it for several years.

As she began seriously searching for her ancestors as an adult, Kimberly asked her father for the book. It was gone, likely lost in one of their many moves. Not knowing what else to do, Kimberly headed to the small Douglas County Library.

The library had many books filled with names of early American immigrants, but the only names Kimberly knew were Joseph and Emma's. She needed somewhere to research and find the names and stories of earlier ancestors.

Kimberly knew the young, blonde librarian from her teenage years spent in that library. She was a withdrawn woman, but she had the answers Kimberly needed. Unfortunately (or perhaps fortunately) they were not the answers she wanted. Among suggested places for genealogical research, the librarian mentioned the [family history center](#) which was part of an LDS church– a *Mormon* church!

In Kimberly's words, the librarian might as well have pierced her with a knife. The Mormons were bent on killing her! She would not turn herself over to them. But the Spirit reasoned with her. It was more important to get the information no matter where it came from. And so ultimately she decided to go, hoping to get what she wanted without telling them she was a Smith.

At the Family History Center



Kimberly finally found others with the same love for Joseph and Emma at the family history center.

Kimberly arrived at the family history center, determined to find the names of her ancestors quietly and without being noticed. She told the sister missionary who greeted her that she did not need any help, and sat down at a computer. Within five minutes she realized that she did, in fact, need help. Rather than admitting her confusion, Kimberly prepared to make a stealthy exit.

Just as she stood to flee, the sister missionary's husband sat next to her and offered his assistance. He asked for the furthest name she knew so he could show her how to take the name through the program.

Kimberly froze. Her father taught that the most important rule in dealing with Mormons is to never tell them who you are. But she wanted this information! After silently deliberating, Kimberly decided to take a chance. Smith was a common enough name, after all.

But then the missionary wanted the given name. "Maybe he won't notice," she thought as she said "Joseph." He gave no response and Kimberly thought she fooled him. "Birthdate?" he asked. Easy. "December 23, 1805." And then he stopped. His eyes lit up and he asked,

Would that be the Prophet Joseph?

The man called his wife over to introduce her to Joseph Smith's great-great granddaughter. The sister responded, "That must be so special!" And for the first time in fifteen years Kimberly felt the same deep love for Joseph and Emma that poured through her as a twelve year old girl in her grandmother's sitting room.

The [missionary couple](#) excitedly asked Kimberly questions about Joseph and Emma and the Smith family, but she had no answers. She felt lost, like she didn't know herself. And so her desire to find her heritage became stronger. She resolved to learn where she came from, and thus who she was.

Setting Out To See Her Ancestors' Lives in Nauvoo



Kimberly began to visit the places her ancestors lived including the Homestead house in Nauvoo.

Kimberly felt this discovery could only happen in the places of her ancestors' experiences. So she set out for Nauvoo. As she took in sites, sounds and feelings of her ancestors' lives, Kimberly wondered why her family never spoke of this place. She felt that a marvelous secret had been hidden from her all of her life. She writes,

Upon entering the Homestead everything took root in my heart. As my eyes adjusted to the dimness, I looked up and breathed in sharply. It was one of those moments that people identify with déjà vu. I felt as if I had been there before.

I struggled with the emotions coursing through me, realizing it was more. It was as if I was having a memory that was not my own. As I breathed, thoughts and feelings about Joseph and Emma filled my heart. Tears fell down my face and I lagged behind the others so that I might absorb as much as possible.

Kimberly couldn't get enough of Nauvoo. For several years she made an annual trek from Ava to Nauvoo, gathering information and insight into her forebears' lives. With each trip she fell more in love with Nauvoo and more in love with Joseph and Emma.

The Osmonds Move to Missouri



The Osmonds embraced Kimberly and gave her a safe place to learn the truth about the Mormons.

During that time [the Osmonds](#) moved their family theater to Branson, Missouri, a town just 50 miles from Ava. Kimberly passed the theater's neon sign proclaiming the latest shows each time she took her young children to [Silver Dollar City](#) theme park. She even stopped once to peek inside.

Like every girl of her generation, Kimberly grew up with the certainty that she would marry Donny Osmond. She spent hours beside her bunk bed learning to harmonize with "One Bad Apple" and "Puppy Love" as her sister's parakeet perched itself on the needle of the record player.

For six years she dreamed of attending a show, but she never did. Then one day she got a phone call at her small engine business, telling her that she won the Bids for Bargains radio show. When she went to the radio station to pick up her prize, she opened the envelope to find tickets for the Osmonds' Christmas show.

Dressed for the season in jeans and a sweater, Kimberly entered the theater that “felt like home” marvelously decorated as as a Christmas from yesteryear. She settled into her plush navy blue seat in the middle of the theater and enjoyed an incredible production of music and ice skating.

Then Merrill took the stage alone. As he sang the first notes of “How Great Thou Art” the same overwhelming feeling returned to Kimberly as when she saw the portraits of Joseph and Emma for the first time. The Spirit moved her to get to know this man, speaking very specific instructions into her heart: introduce yourself to Merrill and tell him your relationship to Joseph Smith.

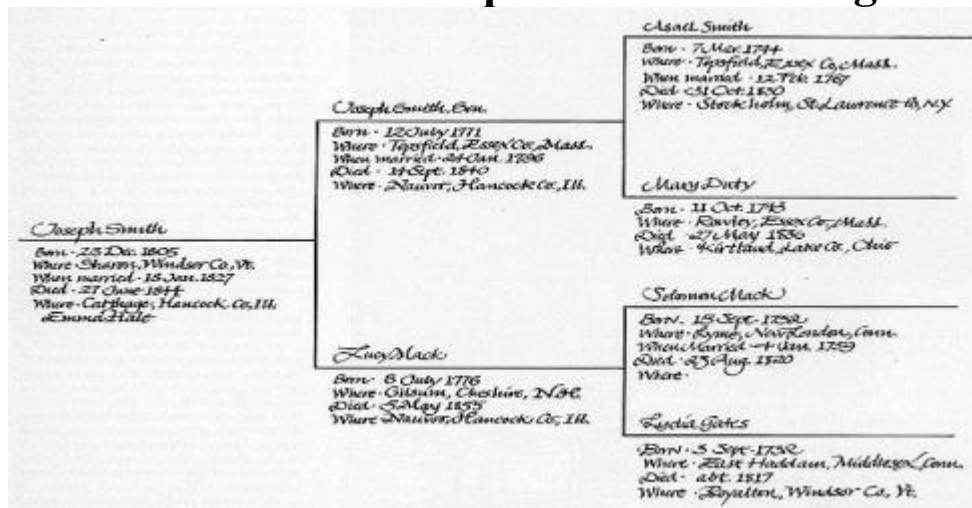
The teachings of her mother ran through Kimberly’s mind and she resolved to follow the Spirit. So, being a very practical woman, she went to the gift shop during intermission and bought a postcard for all of the brothers to sign.

Unbeknownst to Kimberly, Merrill Osmond had a dream prior to the show. Joseph Smith appeared to him in a large room. A curtain hid a section of the room. Joseph walked to the curtain and pulled it back, revealing a sea of miserable faces. He then pleaded with Merrill,

This is my posterity; please help them.

The Osmonds came out after the show, as usual, and greeted their guests like family. But the conversation with Kimberly went beyond the normal greeting. She told Merrill, “I’ve seen your website and read your statement of beliefs and your love for Joseph Smith. I just wanted to let you know that he is my great-great grandfather.”

The Conversion of Joseph Smith’s Great-great Granddaughter



As Kimberly learned of her ancestors and the gospel, the Smith's story came back into the Church.

Rushing to catch a plane to Utah for the holidays, Merrill said, “Oh, I need to talk to you!” and wrote Kimberly’s name and number on the back of a receipt.

The holidays came and went. Weeks went by and Kimberly didn’t hear anything from Merrill. That might have been the end of the story, but her mother taught her,

When the Spirit works on you it is your responsibility to follow and to find out why because the Spirit is trying to lead you somewhere.

And so she took responsibility and she called the Osmonds’ manager at their Branson theater.

Merrill lost the receipt, so Kimberly’s phone call thrilled him. And her instant connection with the Osmond family thrilled her. She finally found a safe place to ask questions and sort out her feelings about the Mormons.

Within a few months, discussions with the Osmonds turned into discussions with the sister [missionaries](#). After the third discussion she knew she had to be [baptized](#).

A Unique Mission



Like Joseph, Kimberly is a disturber and annoyer of Satan’s kingdom.

Upon reflection of his own life, Joseph Smith said,

It seems as though the adversary was aware, at a very early period of my life, that I was destined to prove [a disturber and an annoyer of his kingdom](#); else why should the powers of darkness combine against me?

Kimberly's story echoes this statement.

- She is one of few direct descendants of Joseph and Emma to join The Church.
- She works tirelessly, and with great success, to [bring unity and love to the Smith family](#) and all families.
- She and her son travel the country teaching and [singing about Joseph and Emma](#), and the importance of forgiveness and the power of the Atonement.

She performs a special work in God's kingdom and the adversary seems to be aware, and set on hindering, this unique mission.

In fact, Kimberly's mission nearly ended before it began. Her mother had high risk pregnancies and nearly died giving birth to Kimberly's older sister. Doctors counseled her to not have any more children. When she became pregnant with Kimberly, they pleaded with her to abort.

Despite the fervency of her doctors' urging, she could not imagine harming an unborn child and chose to risk her own life instead. Thus Kimberly entered mortality.

Satan Tried to Stop Her From Embracing the Gospel



With faith greater than her fears and doubts, Kimberly was baptized by Merrill Osmond in 1998.

After Kimberly committed to be baptized, Satan bombarded her with fears and doubts.

- What about everything her family taught her to believe about the Mormons?
- How would they react?
- She still couldn't accept Brigham Young.
- Her father told her that joining any other church was denying the Holy Ghost, an unpardonable sin.

And yet, it was in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that she discovered a fullness of the Holy Ghost.

Through all of these competing thoughts and emotions Kimberly's faith conquered her doubts, and she was baptized and confirmed by Merrill Osmond on the morning of June 7, 1998.

Kimberly describes Satan's failed attempts to derail her faith in these words,

“Even though those emotions were swirling within me there was the trust I had toward the guidance of the Holy Ghost. Knowing that the Spirit never lies to us has always given me the confidence to move forward in any situation, even though I may be afraid, because the Holy Ghost knows all, and we know very little...

I remember there being a shift when I started to go down into the water. That was my leap of faith right there, that very moment of going down into the water. As I came back up I felt the fear and doubt pulled from me and it was replaced by a confirming witness that I had done what was right.

I wish I had a picture of after the baptism, for I am sure I looked much different, for the fear and doubts were washed away and it was like seeing the sun through a window I had just cleaned thirty-six years of dirt off of.

No matter what lay ahead after that moment I knew I had the strength to get through it and I was not as afraid because I knew I was where I belonged.”

Satan Tried to Stop Her From Untangling the Smith Family



Descendants of Joseph and Emma come together for family reunions. (Image from JosephSmithJr.org)

After “meeting” Joseph and Emma through their portraits and getting to know them through study and travel, Kimberly felt that they gave her a charge to untangle the threads of bitterness and hatred that had become as much a part of her family as the musical talent and jolliness that are inherent in the Smith line. Kimberly said of this journey,

“It gave me a good idea of the tools the adversary uses to destroy a family, but also the far reaching effects of the atonement to pull a family back together. We need to forgive the past and the present because we can’t carry that baggage and do what we need to do.”

As she dug up the roots of anger and enmity, she replanted unity and love. Kimberly shared her convictions with [her son and daughter](#). Her son Bryan was baptized in 1999 and her daughter Leah in 2000. She invited her mother to travel to firesides with her and her children, and after six years of doing so, she too was baptized 2006.

Her mother’s membership in the Church brings the missionaries into their home frequently. Kimberly says of her father, “He is not ready to join the Church, but the hate has been removed and replaced with a sense of love for the members of the Church and missionaries. That’s what we have to turn around; the Lord takes care of the rest.”

Kimberly also sows seeds of goodwill and understanding among her extended family. She served as an ambassador in the [Joseph Smith Jr. and Emma Hale Smith Historical Society](#) and works to bring cousins together at family reunions.

These reunions are held at historic sites for the Smith family, such as Kirtland, Palmyra, Independence and Nauvoo. Just as Kimberly discovered herself in the places of her ancestors, the family gathers where they can see their history, ask questions, and find out who they are.

As they do so, the bitterness between those in different churches dissipates and now as they sit on blankets together they are just a family having a family picnic and getting to know each other with love.

But this mission of unity was impossible while Kimberly held a deep seated hatred of her own, the hatred she harbored since childhood for Brigham Young.

Forgiving Brigham Young



Kimberly knelt at Brigham’s grave, apologizing and forgiving.

Kimberly's first week in [Relief Society](#), a woman handed her a manual with Brigham Young's picture on the front. So she slipped from the room and walked out of the church building, throwing the manual in the trash on her way out.

Satan used this animosity to undermine Kimberly's ability to fully embrace the gospel and to fulfill her mission of unity and love. And so the Lord sent a special missionary to help Kimberly let go.

Two days before a trip to Utah to attend the temple for the first time, Kimberly gave this missionary and his companion a ride home from a zone conference. The missionary asked Kimberly if she planned to learn about Brigham Young while she was in Utah.

She says, "I felt a surge of bitterness race through me. Tightening my grip on the steering wheel, I replied that I would not have time . . . The atmosphere within the car grew very quiet and there was a shift of emotion."

The Elder was quiet for a long time and Kimberly knew the Spirit was working in him and that she must listen. He first bore his testimony of the Savior and the Spirit filled the car. Then he bore his testimony of Joseph Smith and Kimberly relaxed. Finally, he bore his testimony of Brigham Young. He concluded just as they approached a stoplight.

Kimberly remembers,

"When I hit the brakes something washed over me and all of the hatred I had ever felt toward Brigham Young was taken from me. It was so sudden it took my breath away. I believed in and had witnessed the healing power of the pure love of Christ, but this was the first time I ever experienced it myself. I told the Elder there was an empty space where all of the hatred had been and that I would learn all I could about Brigham Young."

True to her promise, Kimberly toured Temple Square and then she walked the block up the hill to Brigham Young's grave. In that lovely park, tucked back between apartment buildings with a view of the Salt Lake Temple, Kimberly knelt at Brigham's grave.

She poured out her tears and her heart as she apologized for generations of hatred. And she forgave him too because things were said and done on both sides that caused hurt.

During her time with Brigham, Kimberly knew that all had been made right on the other side of the veil and there was no need to carry hurt feelings any longer on this side. And then, with a heart made light, she went forward to help her family find the same forgiveness and healing.

Sharing the Message



Kimberly shares her story at nearly 100 events each year.

The message is not reserved for the Smith family alone. Kimberly shares her story freely, teaching her discovery of Joseph and Emma along with the importance of following the Holy Ghost, the healing and unity that comes through the Atonement, and the need to forgive and let go.

Kimberly published her story last year in her book, [Rising Hills and Sinking Valleys](#), and she presents and sings with her son at firesides, concerts, family home evenings, and family reunions across the country. In fact, it was at one of her family home evening events that I first met Kimberly.

Her story of discovering her great-great grandparents intrigued me and I felt as though I truly discovered them right along with her. I always loved and admired Emma, but as I listened to Kimberly speak and sing that night, I finally understood her too.

As I watched images of Emma's joys and hardships on the screen while listening to Kimberly sing the words, "[How many tears did she cry as the willow tree swayed?](#)" my feelings for Emma went so much deeper than the outward reverence and admiration I always felt. Kimberly shared with me a sacred glimpse at the heart of a truly elect lady and gave me the gift of understanding.

She then shared some of her own sacred moments. We were gathered in an apartment social room, just half a block from Brigham Young's grave and as we traveled there together in our minds, we all realized the need to let go of some things in our lives and truly embrace the Atonement.

Seasoned members of the church filled the room that night, many of whom had two, three, or four decades more life experience than Kimberly, but her message and her music touched, instructed and inspired each one.

Satan Tried to Stop Her From Sharing Her Story



Kimberly and her son speak and sing across the country, sharing the Smith's musical talent.

The gifts of speaking and music are traits that have carried through the Smith family from the time of Joseph's great speeches and Emma's compilation of hymns. Kimberly clearly received these gifts to share this message in this way, and so Satan tried to silence her.

As a child, Kimberly loved performing with her father at Bluegrass parties, but when she was nine years old a neighbor severely abused her. This event shattered Kimberly's confidence and self esteem. She withdrew to her bedroom and she stopped singing.

Kimberly thought she was ugly and stupid, and she swore she would never perform or speak publicly again. Even through high school she chose to fail assignments rather than

doing oral reports. Her sense of self worth was so shattered, she could not even look people in the eyes.

Looking back on the experience Kimberly says,

The adversary knows what our mission is in life. Look at where he tries to shut us down. The two things I excel at to help people.

But the Lord's efforts to heal us are always more powerful than the adversary's efforts to break us.

God Had a Plan



Kimberly spent hours listening to the Osmond's album, The Plan, glimpsing the plan of salvation.

During that dark time, Kimberly spent a lot of time listening to music in her bedroom. When she was about eleven years old, the Osmonds released their album, The Plan. For the first time, Kimberly heard messages of the plan of salvation. She felt an enlightening and comforting presence, returning a glimmer of her destroyed self esteem. And that was enough for the Spirit to work with.

Nearly thirty years later, Kimberly's cousin [Gracia Jones](#) (the first direct descendant of Joseph and Emma to stay in the Church) asked Kimberly to bear her testimony at a fireside she presented in Ephraim, Utah. Kimberly still held many of the lingering feelings that caused her nine year old self to feel, and wish to be, invisible, but Kimberly knew the Spirit was impressing her to say yes.

In fact, as Kimberly stood to bear her testimony that night in an Ephraim, Utah chapel, she felt that she would someday do the same thing Gracia did. She shook off the feeling, thinking that she had nothing to offer. And she certainly didn't have the confidence to offer it. But the Lord is persistent in helping us achieve the mission he has designed for us.

One year later when Kimberly was visiting Utah again, a friend asked Kimberly to share her story at another fireside. After that Kimberly says,

“I knew from that point I would be speaking on a regular basis and I had an understanding that it all had very little to do with me, but everything in the world to do with the Lord and healing hearts through His love.”

And that is exactly what she does, nearly one hundred times a year.

Now She is Anxious to Bless the World



Kimberly's life of integrity teaches us the kind of people Joseph and Emma were.

Joseph Smith once said,

“A man filled with the love of God, is not content with blessing his family alone, but ranges through the whole world, [anxious to bless the whole human race](#). This has been your [the Twelve in England] feeling, and caused you to forego the pleasures of home, that you might be a blessing to others, who are candidates for [eternal life], but strangers to truth; and for so doing, I pray that heaven's choicest blessings may rest upon you.”

This sentiment encapsulates why Kimberly gives her life to travel the country, anxious to bless the whole human race. Satan tries to derail her journey at every turn, but Kimberly consistently and faithfully follows the Holy Ghost. Beyond her bloodline and her research, her very life teaches us the kind of people Joseph and Emma were.

I imagine as she has her birthday talk with Joseph, he also thanks her for the life of integrity she is living, dedicated to healing his family and teaching the truth. She does not just honor him on this day; her life is a tribute to the truth for which he lived and died.