Kirsten E. Benson
From "Worth Remembering" by Jacalyn S. Leavitt

As Kirsten closed her eyes, she was grateful she could finally rest comfortably. When she collapsed from sickness and exhaustion after her arrival in Utah, young Kirsten was taken to the home of her sister Mette, and her husband Jens Peter Benson. They lived beyond the Salt Lake Valley in Lehi. There she received a special prayer to help in her recovery. Mette and Jens peter would care for her until she was strong once more.

Kirsten was part of a handcart company that arrived in the fall of 1857 after a difficult three-month journey walking across the plains. The journey had been so hard that a rescue team was sent to help the struggling handcart company with the last two weeks of the trip. With their assistance, Kirsten and the others no longer needed to pull their heavy handcarts as they walked. But she was so weak from the hardship of the trail that she became sick.

Her journey had begun months earlier and thousands of miles away with her parents and grandmother. Kirsten's family had been farmers near the coast in denmark. They were taught about a new religion called the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Their decision to convert and become members of this church meant they would face many changes. Enough money was saved by twenty-two-year-old Mette, the oldest daughter, that she and her youngest sister, seven-year-old Elsie Marie could begin the five-month journey to the West. The two sisters left in the spring of 1854. Three years later in 1857, Kirsten and the rest of the family boarded a ship and traveled for five weeks across the Atlantic Ocean. They wanted to join with other members of the church in America.

Kirsten's courage was tested upon her arrival in the new country. After the boat docked, the family began an 11-day train ride to the place where the handcart company would meet. Unfortunately Kirsten became separated from her family. She was a young girl in a strange land. She knew no one and could not speak

English. Kirsten wrote about what happened when her family realized she was missing. "I was telegraphed for and found by the description of the clothing I were, and made to understand by the hands of a watch that I could go to my company by train at 6:30 that night." She was united with her family and continued to be brave for she knew she had many long miles ahead.

In Iowa, Kirsten's family joined a company of 100 handcarts. They carefully packed the cart they would pull for the next thousand miles. The leader of the group gave instructions that only 15 pounds of clothing was allowed on the cart. Even their blankets must be left behind. Kirsten wrote how difficult it was not to take the many useful items they had brought with them. She said many of their belongings "had to be left lying on the ground as we left our camping place for no one would buy them for us. This was a very great trial to me, having brought good new clothing from Denmark to leave on the ground for strangers to take."

The first three works of the journey proved to be too much of a hardship for Kirsten's parents and grandparents. So, at Omaha, Nebraska, they decided to stay behind and not travel on foot, pulling a handcart. Kirsten wrote, "I came in the conclusion that I could not leave the parents in a strange country and so made up my mind to stay with them. The Captain of the company, C. Christiansen, came to me and advised me to leave my parents and promised me if I would do so, God would bless me and them, and preserve us. This was a very sore trial to me, but I put my trust in God and the promise of His Priesthood. In July of 1857, she said goodbye to her loved ones. She wrote, "We started on the Plains. It was a day I shall never forget full of sorrow in parting from my parents."

She was assigned to a cart with an elderly couple and an ill young girl. This means most of the responsibility of pulling the cart was hers. Kiersten was a small young woman, only five feet and one inch tall, and the task was overwhelming for her.

She wrote, "About the fifth day out, I was worn out with pulling over the rough roads, up hills and through the sand and (I became) discouraged because I

did not believe I could stand the journey. But I came to the conclusion that I might as well die there as suffer longer, and I purposely stayed behind when the company was traveling and laid down in the grass expecting to die there., believing there was no one behind me and that I would not be found. Soon after this the Captain came along and found me and helped me along. He promised me that when we came to a hill or sand he would come and help me pull, and he kept his promise and helped me.

It was now July and August and very hot on the Plains and my shoes were worn out. We had to get raw hide from the dead cattle along the road and make shoes for ourselves so as to be able to pull. Crossing the creeks and rivers would make the raw hid soft and the hot sun and road would make it hard, and our feet were nearly all the time sore and bleeding.

"I, being alone and having no bedclothes, had to sleep in an old shawl in the tent, and coming through the mountains, the nights were cold and freezing, and having to get up in my turn in the night to make bread, I was often too warm on one side, and much too cold on the other.

"About two weeks journey from Salt Lake City, the relief trains came to our help, and oh how thankful I was to be allowed to walk and not have to pull the cart for I was sick and worn out with the journey. We arrived in Salt Lake City September 13th, having been five months on the way from the time we left Denmark. When I saw how poor the people were in clothing, for they were ragged, I could not help remembering the good clothing we had left behind."

Kirsten recovered from the journey as her sister cared for her, and the following year she rejoiced when her "father and mother and grandmother came into the valley safe and well."

When her sister metta, died in 1876 from complications of childbirth, Kirsten became the mother to her sister's four younger children. She lovingly nurtured

them along with her own six children. Kirsten remained in Utah and was an example of standfast courage both to her family and to others throughout her life.