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Dear Family,

Whew! What a month! In fact, just thinking about all I've been through leaves me too tired to write about it. Actually, it makes me think about all the things I have not done that need doing. We tried to schedule activities for the Relief Society and Ward early in the month of December so that we'd all be left with plenty of time for family as the 25th approached. There are just so many things in life that you just can't schedule--like births, and illnesses and death. Our dear, former Bishop, Charles Bradford died on the 11th of December after about a three month battle with cancer. He has been handicapped most of his life with a hereditary form of MS that he and all of his brothers have been afflicted with. He dragged himself around for many, many years with the aid of braces, but following a serious car accident about three or four years ago in which he lost a good part of his stomach, he has been wheel-chair bound. The children in the ward all adored him as he would let them honk his horn and ride around on his lap on his motorized wheels. Just ten days before he died his oncologist thought he may have licked the cancer. No trace of the tumor was seen following his second round of chemo. But he was considerably weakened by the chemotherapy and was having difficulty with his heart, blood pressure and breathing. Nonetheless, they let him go home to be with his kids and wife for Thanksgiving. Within a week he was back in the hospital, the tumor had returned in vigorous form, and he had a terrific battle on his hands. What a fighter. We will all miss his cheerful optimism, and his positive outlook on life in the face of great trials. It's so nice to be able to go to a funeral, hear glowing things said, and feel that they all fell short of a great individual's life and accomplishments.

A number of small miracles and probably some great ones known only to the family occurred in the past several weeks. One night I was cruising down Route Seven on my way to do a little Christmas shopping. I had spent several nights with Mary at the hospital while Barry held down the homefront. Mary's sister-in-laws had arrived from Utah and a nephew planned to spend the night with her. Seeing a break in my schedule I headed out for the malls. I noticed a number of new shops on the left side of the road. One of them was a Virginia Honey Baked Ham Company. On sudden impulse I pulled over, went in and bought half a ham, ready-sliced and baked to perfection. The next afternoon I got a call from the Bishop, who was at the hospital. There were about ten of Mary's relatives at the hospital. It was late in the afternoon, no one dared to leave as Bishop Bradford was in such grave condition and was not expected to live more than hours. The hospital cafeteria had closed for the day to accomodate some decorating and ten people were very hungry and unwilling to leave the hospital. I had two loaves of delicious Deli bread, twenty four juice box drinks in the basement fridge, Ellen (the Bishop's wife) brought over a box of Hostess cupcakes, chocolate kisses, and trail mix, and with some carrot and celery sticks and that lovely honey baked ham we had some lovely sack lunches ready in a snap. It's funny how much something as simple as a few lunches will mean a lot to someone in a stressful situation. They could not stop thanking us for those sack lunches. It must have been mentioned twenty times or more. I was so glad for that ham in my fridge and the bone made delicious potato

soup for the Relief Society Small Group Dinner which we had in our home several days later.

Bishop Bradford was on a respirator and so was unable to talk. He was considerably weakened by the MS and had a terrible time even lifting his arms. Nonetheless, I was touched to learn that the last thing he wrote for his family was my name. I had been in several days earlier to see him. Mary had gone home to try to get some rest. It was a quiet Sunday evening in intensive care and nobody was there except me and Chick. He seemed comatose to me, but I held his hand and sang Christmas carols softly to him. He loved music more than just about anything. More than once he had called me after performing in Church to thank me for singing. He always made you feel that you had done the most wonderful thing, no matter what kind of a job you did. I brought a small bag of goodies with me for Mary--oranges, apples, chocolate, cookies, and the like. After about forty five minutes, President VanOrman and his wife Margot arrived to visit Chick. His eyes flickered briefly open when he heard their voices. I mentioned the bag on the counter I left for Mary and bid him good-bye. I didn't think any of it really registered, and I left him with the VanOrmans. With his family all around him the next day, and fading rapidly, he struggled to write my name to let Mary know that it was I who had brought the bag of goodies for her. I'm sure he probably heard me singing, also and it makes me glad to think I may have helped him get through some extremely painful hours. They were afraid to give him any painkillers as his blood pressure was so low. While it would have alleviated his pain, it would also have ended his life several days earlier. As it happened, he held on until his eldest son arrived from California and then, some four hours later, on his 64th birthday he died.

I'm afraid this may be the first of many funerals in our Ward. There must be a dozen over-eighty individuals, some with very poor health in our Ward. When the Ward had its 40th anniversary several years ago my friend Jill wanted to know why we put on such a big production at 40 instead of waiting for 50. The answer was that so many of the founders of the Ward would be long dead before 50 years rolled around for the Arlington Ward. When I was called as Relief Society President the only thing I was given in the way of training for the first six weeks of my Presidency was the booklet "Dressing the Dead." I guess this funeral didn't really break me in. Pulling off funeral luncheons must be a piece of cake when compared with having to dress a body for burial.

There have also been Ward Christmas parties, and Ward Service Projects, and Ward Christmas Luncheons, and Homemaking Meetings, and parties, and special needs of special families to keep us busy and mindful of the real spirit of Christmas. Last Sunday our Bishop got a call from an individual, no longer a member of the Church, who had just learned that her 11 year old son had hanged himself. She has not seen her six children for many many years due to some tragic and terrible incidents. Now here, just before Christmas, when she had just begun to get her life in order she gets the tragic news of her son's death. Barry and I stopped in to see her at the Bishop's request. She poured out her tragic story and asked for a blessing. Barry and the Bishop returned later in the evening and Barry was very touched by the Bishop's inspired blessing to this distraught Mother, unable to hold her children or even know if the others were all right and cared for by loving individuals. What protection adherence to Gospel principles provides for our every-day lives. How blessed I feel! How much I owe to my parents for providing a

safe, loving, righteous home for me to grow and learn and develop in. How grateful I am for a husband who speaks to me with love and respect, who never raises voice or hand to me, who adores his children, provides well for them, and nurtures the Gospel in our home. These are great blessings. Though our circumstances may change from moment to moment in our lives, a fine heritage can never be taken away. I am glad for the good people in my life and in my past. I feel a great responsibility to see that my children have as loving and good an upbringing as I did.

Well, Christmas is just days away. My shopping is almost all done. That's a miracle of its own kind. I didn't get any cards out yet--not even one. So, while this comes late, you are all in our thoughts and hearts. We miss you at Christmas time. I always think of Grandma and Grandpa Langford's silver dollar tree at this time of year. Remember those birds on their tree that chirruped when the fluid in the bulb bubbled to the beak. Someday, that box of Christmas decorations is going to be found. If the great buildings of the ages are going to be restored in the Millenium, surely the wonders of my Christmasses past are going to be restored also. We hope that 1992 is full of good health, good will and good luck for all of you. Merry Christmas, and God Bless!

*Virginia & Barry*