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Choosing war or peace from a gospel point of view

During the few weeks before the fighting began in the Gulf, I had a lot of feelings about the war. As a girl, I don't expect ever to have to fight in the war -- but I might have to support people I love when they are called to fight. My first fears in the face of war, then, were for myself and for my brothers and friends. I have an older brother, twenty years old, who is currently serving a mission for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in Haiti. Before he left on his mission, he sang with four other boys, all friends of mine, in a quintet. I used to spend as much time as I could listening to them sing. They sang a lot of songs about people leaving -- songs with words like, "Walk down that lonesome road all by yourself", and "When we meet again, later on in life, will you remember me?" These songs had great meaning for me since all of these five friends of mine were planning to serve missions in the next few years, and I knew that I would have to say goodbye to each of them. Now, thinking about war, these words took on added meaning for me.

I also have a younger brother, Robert, who is sixteen. He and my older brother, Tracy, could both be drafted to serve in the war if it continues for any amount of time. My brother Robert was born on my birthday when I was three years old and I've always felt close to him. My brother Robert also sings. I could not bear to think that I might not hear the voices of my brothers and friends blending and harmonizing any more.

As I thought about the possibility of war, I was also concerned with political questions, such as whether or not we are choosing to buy oil with blood -- or whether Saddam Hussein really would become another Hitler without intervention. I had certain doubts that a war could ever be short and clean. But my strongest feelings were for my loved ones who might be called to fight and possibly be injured or die. My feelings about this were so strong that to escape them I avoided thinking about or talking about the war.

On the day after the fighting began in the gulf, I walked into the lobby of the Wilkinson Center during my lunch hour. I immediately was presented with two factions demanding my attention. One was a peace rally and the other a booth carrying a sign that said "SUPPORT OUR TROOPS."

As I stood and wondered which side I was on, the words, "Stand in holy places and be not moved" came into my mind. At the same time a strong feeling of peace and calm came over my whole body. Time stood still and I was not afraid or worried any more.

From that moment, I have known that no matter what happens, I will be able to endure the war. I will be able to support my brothers if they are called to fight. I will know that while our country is at war, my brothers and I might not be able to choose our fates from day to day, but we can choose what happens to us after this life. We can choose to return to God when this life is over. I know that if I am separated from my brothers and friends now, I can still see them again. I know these things not just as words but as a feeling. I would describe that feeling as a feeling of trust in God.

Finally, as I stood in that lobby, I knew that I did not have to decide between rallying for peace or rallying for our troops. I had already decided. I knew that I could pray for peace, yet support a government that had decided to fight. And I knew that no matter what happened, I would be safe and my brothers would be safe, because whether at home writing letters or out on the battlefield, the person who follows God stands in a holy place.

Genealogist personalizes Christmas with

By SANDY STUART
Staff Writer

BERNARDS TWP. — Sherlene Bartholomew won't have several generations of family members gathered around her tree on Christmas morning but she will have the next best thing: Several generations of kin decorating her tree.

Bartholomew, an enthusiastic genealogist who lives on North Maple Avenue, has festooned an evergreen with old photographs of her ancestors to create what she has dubbed her "family tree."

The personalized Christmas tree, which also uses lace doilies and ribbons to create an old-fashioned look, traces Bartholomew's maternal ancestors back to the early days of the camera.

Hanging atop the highest branches is a photo of Fielding Langford, her great-great-great grandfather, born in Kentucky in 1804. Successively lower on the tree are following generations of Langfords. On the back of each photo is a brief biography.

"There are interesting stories behind each photograph," noted Bartholomew, who is a part-time volunteer in the Family History Center of the Morris County Library. "It really brings the photos to life when you know something about the people in them."

For example, there's Fielding Langford. "He had a distillery and I guess he had to taste every batch," said Bartholomew. "He became an alcoholic and his wife eventually left him." Langford's alcoholism, she said, might have been a factor influencing other family members to convert to Mormonism, which forbids its adherents to drink liquor or other addicting substances.

Another colorful addition to the tree is James Harvey Langford, born in 1861 to the Mormon faith, who is shown in one photo wearing prison stripes. "He was jailed for polygamy," Bartholomew explained. "He had married two sisters, and refused to give one of his families up when the law changed (prohibiting polygamy)."

After being released from jail, she said, James Harvey Langford moved to Mexico with his wives and eventually expanded his family to 22 children.

According to Bartholomew, her "family tree" illustrates one of the pitfalls of genealogy — finding out that your forebears were flawed.

"Look at it this way. If you go back just six generations, you have 510 direct ancestors," she said. "When you get 510 relatives, you may find alcoholics, you may find thieves, you may even find a murderer or two."

Although the majority of family genealogies won't trace back to Mayflower bluebloods, Bartholomew said



(Photo by Ray Jones)

Special Ornaments

Sherlene Bartholomew of Basking Ridge shows off some of the photo ornaments adorning her family Christmas tree this year.

she doesn't believe there is any reason for anyone to be ashamed of their heritage.

"Most of the people who came to this country were destitute people. That's why they came here," Bartholomew pointed out. "They may have been very poor, or they may have been persecuted. But I feel we owe what we are today to them, and they deserve to be on our tree."

Of course, the genealogical game works both ways. "You also might find you're related to famous people — maybe people who fought in the Revolutionary War or maybe even a president," she said.

While residing in White Plains, N.Y., several years ago, Bartholomew discovered she was related to Solomon Tracy, a Revolutionary War soldier who fought at the Battle of White Plains. She said she "got chills" when she realized she was living only a short distance from the battleground where

Tracy risked his life to create a new country.

"I figured he was probably hiding somewhere in the woods 200 years ago and here I am nonchalantly going to the grocery store and taking all my wealth and freedom for granted," she said.

She also learned recently that she is directly related to Jonathan Fairbank, born in England in 1595, who settled in Dedham, Mass. "He must have been among the wealthier ancestors, because he brought bricks and window glass with him from England," Bartholomew said.

After one of his sons and a grandson were massacred by Indians, Jonathan Fairbank had a secret passageway built into his house, Bartholomew said. The house is now the oldest still standing in Dedham and is an historic landmark.

Bartholomew became interested in genealogy about 10 ago, after agreeing to help her mother, Ida-Rose Langford Hall, with some research. She said her mother had been an avid genealogist for many years and had even written a book on family history.

"When I was growing up I thought she was crazy," Bartholomew said. "I wondered what she could possibly see in all those dusty old records."

But when she successfully ferreted out a tricky piece of information for her mother, Bartholomew felt an instant sense of connection with her ancestors.

"Once I found that date, I was hooked," said Bartholomew, a Utah native who moved to Basking Ridge with her family two years ago. "My husband had to try to keep me out of the library."

Bartholomew now has volumes of genealogy books and charts, plus computerized files of her family history. Every bit of new information carefully logged into the computer, using a special genealogy software program developed by the Mormon church.

Although her ancestry has been more extensively researched than most, Bartholomew said there's practically no such thing as completing a family tree — unless you can trace your lineage back to Adam. Because the number of ancestors doubles each time a researcher goes back another generation, she said, there are always new mysteries to be solved.

"It's like a puzzle — you have to have a little bit of detective in you to solve it."

As gung ho as she is about researching her own family history, Bartholomew is almost as enthusiastic about helping other people find their roots. Twice a month at the Morris County library branch on James Street in Morristown, she helps novice genealogists get a start on their family trees.

"It's really not as hard as it sounds," she emphasized. Thanks to the computer and the Mormon church, which houses the world's largest collection of genealogical information at its Family History Library in Salt Lake City, there is plenty of easily accessible information for almost anyone who can supply a few names, dates and locations.

Much of that information is available in Morristown, Bartholomew said. The local Family History Center has a file drawer full of microfiche International Genealogical Index (IGI) cards supplied by the church.

The IGI cards provide an alphabetized listing of surnames, according to state and county of birth. Included in the listings are the date of birth, christening, names of parents (if available), date of marriage if applicable and name of spouse.

"A lot of people think that since that information is collected by the Mormons, you have to have Mormons in your family to find anything in the library," Bartholomew said.

But that's not the case, she said. Because the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints is relatively new, having been founded in 1830, the tie between Mormons and non-Mormons of European ancestry is very strong.

To the surprise of many people, Bartholomew added, the Mormon church also keeps extensive genealogical records.