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were no other method of correcting the disability, and if this method were morally unobjectionable (e.g., if it did not involve the cloning of embryos), the parents of the disabled child would be *obligated* to use it. How

would you like to have to tell a child that you could have enabled her or him to have a family, as you do, but that you decided to make the contrary choice — without her or his consent? ■

BEATING A DEMON

Bobby Jindal

PHYSICAL DIMENSIONS OF SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Though she had not said anything, I knew something was wrong. Susan and I had developed an intimate friendship; indeed, our relationship mystified observers, who insisted on finding a romantic component where none existed. I called her after the University Christian Fellowship (UCF) meeting — UCF is an Inter-Varsity Christian group composed of undergraduate and graduate students. Though the interdenominational group's weekly program of songs and prayers had produced the usual emotional high among most members, Susan had left the meeting in a very sullen mood. I asked her to join a group of us who were attending a Christian a cappella concert to be held on campus that same evening.

Despite our intimacy, Susan and I had not spent much time together this past year. We had

succumbed to pressure from our friends and decided we should not be so emotionally interdependent without a deeper commitment. To be honest, my fears of a relationship and the constraints of commitment had kept us apart; our friends' objections merely provided a convenient excuse. Still, I felt comfortable asking her to come to the concert, and she accepted the invitation. Though Susan appeared composed throughout the concert, her sudden departure in the middle of a song convinced me otherwise and affirmed my earlier suspicions.

There was no doubt in my mind that I had to leave my friends and follow her outside. I was not exactly sure what I would do or say, but I knew I had to run after her. I found that she had not gone far, but was sobbing uncontrollably outside the auditorium. Since we had been very careful to avoid any form of physical contact in our friendship, I was not sure how to respond. My inaction and her sobs produced a very awkward situation. Fortunately, a female friend who followed us out was able to comfort Susan with hugs and soothing words of reassurance; her quick action was in stark contrast to my paralysis. Once Susan had regained her composure and fell silent, I knew I had to intervene. The female friend meant well, but did not know Susan well enough to provide the advice Susan was sure to seek.

Not even knowing the cause of this raucous scene, I asked Susan if she would like to talk, and volunteered to walk her home. Wanting to avoid any additional embarrassing scenes, I thought it best to remain in silence while we walked. I dared not cause

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another emotional outpouring until we were safely behind closed doors. When we finally reached the dormroom, I promptly sat Susan on a bed and placed myself in a chair located several feet across the room. This physical arrangement was hardly conducive to the love and support I was supposed to be providing, but I was too scared and unsure of myself to get any closer.

Taking a very businesslike approach, I queried Susan as to the cause of her distress. At first the words were slow to come and the few that she uttered made little sense. Gradually the words formed sentences and the sentences arranged themselves into a coherent story. A jumble of events was transformed into a logical sequence with a common theme of cause and effect. She had noticed a lump on her scalp, had visited the university health clinic, and had a biopsy performed. "Biopsy!" One thought replaced all others — "benign or malignant?" The results had indicated skin *cancer*. Cancer, in any form, is a disease with a very powerful ability to capture our attention and unleash great waves of fear within us all. The word itself, and the hopelessness it conjures up, causes us instinctively to whisper condolences; our minds automatically turn to the horrors of chemotherapy. Radiation, hair loss, and death all seemed very real. No wonder poor Susan was devastated.

I quickly collected my thoughts and returned my attention to Susan. Not only had the prognosis scared her, but she had found little or no comfort among her friends. They considered skin cancer a minor affliction, something that affects those whose vanity causes them to tan in the sun too long. The only friend who expressed concern was worried about the possibility of contagious cancerous cells. Her friends, many of them pre-meds aspiring to be compassionate and skilled physicians one day, noted that a simple operation would remove the tumor, and then simply laughed the entire matter away. She had felt foolish about her worries and joined their laughter; however, her smile merely masked her inner worries and fears. It was these repressed fears that had led to her emotional outburst earlier that night.

As I listened to Susan recount these events, I wondered how we had grown so far apart. There were now other guys in her life and many friends I had barely met. I had insisted on emotional distance

to allow us to develop independence, but that was ridiculous. Susan was my best friend and I hardly knew what was happening in her life. I soon found myself breaking my silence; until this point, I had hardly needed to prompt Susan to speak and had not even provided soothing remarks. Now, I suddenly started comforting her and validating her feelings. Of course I would be there for her. Of course I understood her fears and worries. Of course I would reach out and touch her?

The interaction of Susan's revelations and my assurances had produced another outpouring of emotion, hysteria, and tears. Against my will, I found myself reaching out and holding her hand. I promised to stand by her forever, to be the rock against which she could lean, to accompany her to the doctor's office and the operating room. I never stopped to think of the significance of my valiant pledges; I assumed any good friend would react similarly in the same situation. How could any decent person turn away a desperate woman in such need?

The tears vanished as suddenly as they appeared several times throughout the night. Susan was even stable long enough for me to buy her milk to ease the gastric pains caused by her anxiety. She was literally worrying herself sick. I realized my words of comfort were only temporary measures and were not enough to provide her with long-term support. However, I did not go far enough. Instead of directing Susan to depend on a source far more dependable and stronger than myself — i.e., our Christian faith, her own inner strength, or even a professional care provider — I continued trying to solve her problems myself.

During Susan's next wave of tears, I found myself putting my arm around her to provide both physical and emotional support. We were soon sitting on the bed next to each other, and I told her a fairy tale. Instead of tackling all of her problems at once, we took each individual concern — e.g., upcoming finals — and magically solved it. Her problems began to seem insignificant and our ability to overcome adversity soon assumed heroic proportions. We were soon laughing, and despair was definitely vanquished, at least for the night. We were both startled to find my arm around her shoulder, but she asked that I continue to hold her for just a few moments longer. I happily complied and we

embraced her problems away; along with my soothing words, the simple gesture of a hug was enough to bring peace to Susan's heart for one night.

Susan had finally found a friend willing to believe and understand her worries; she no longer had to pretend that cancer did not frighten her. She was terrified, and I understood. I was able to mix the almost contradictory states of empathy and aloofness; Susan needed me to share her fears and yet still be strong enough to comfort her. I was her partner in misery and yet also served as her knight in shining armor.

The peace and our renewed closeness were not to last long. Susan and I had consciously maintained a fairly distant friendship over the year and the night's openness was a glaring exception. Scared of her own feelings and dependence on me, Susan made it a point to avoid me the next few days and answered my queries about her well-being succinctly and coldly. Our relationship stayed in this détente mode for an entire month. During this time, Susan's doctors were preparing her for the operation. The relatively simple procedure would not involve many days in the hospital and had a very high chance of success.

Susan and I may have never confronted each other had it not been, ironically, for our pride. We continued meeting for meals and engaged in superficial conversation, focused on the weather, sports, and any other topic except for cancer and our friendship. The catalyst for our confrontation was a silly misunderstanding over a dinner. Susan did not show up at the cafeteria at our agreed upon time and made little effort to warn me of the scheduling conflict that caused her absence. This inconvenience, minor under normal circumstances, proved to be the starting point of an intense struggle of wills. We fought to prove who could be the most stubborn and arrogant; the result was a tie, with both of us losing.

Waiting for an apology, I refused to talk with Susan for a week. She decided I was being silly and refused to admit any error on her part. Somehow, we finally searched deep and found the maturity to discuss our differences. The strain of our open hostility during the week and quiet indifference during the month had beaten down both of our wills. We could hold our breath no longer.

We quickly settled the matter about the dinner and then turned our attention to the real cause of the

tension between us. For the first time in a month, one of us mentioned the night of the concert, the night I first heard of Susan's affliction. This talk was very different in character from our last serious discussion; whereas before I had provided support and comfort for a helpless Susan, this was truly a battle of wills between two strong and independent individuals. We discussed issues as varied as our true feelings for each other and Susan's upcoming operation.

Then Susan confessed that she was disturbed by recent nightmares. I accepted this as a normal reaction to a very difficult semester. One of Susan's closest friends from home, her Bible study leader there, had committed suicide shortly before Susan



found the lump. Adding insult to injury, she learned of his death through a newspaper article, since her family and friends were too scared to tell her. The operation alone would have been overwhelming for any emotionally healthy individual. Given the loss of a dear friend from home, the tension with one's best friend at school, and the pressures of a very demanding academic schedule, it is a miracle that Susan remained sane; nightmares hardly seemed a cause for alarm.

Then Susan started saying words like "visions" instead of nightmares, and I began to get worried and scared. I had always known that Susan was a charismatic Christian, but had thought little of what such labels meant. She had told me of speaking in tongues during certain prayers and even seeing visions in her dreams as a child, but I had never pushed her to talk about such things. I figured that what I did not know could not hurt me. How wrong I was!

Susan started describing various odors (which others would later ascribe to the sulphur that supposedly accompanies the devil), sounds, and appearances that both she and her roommate had witnessed. They had even called maintenance, which had found the odors but not the cause. Her roommate, neither charismatic nor Christian, had seen, heard, and smelled the same things, but had not known how to interpret the events. I was about to hear Susan's understanding of her visions and the accompanying disturbances.

A senior in UCF and a leader of my Bible study group had once asked me if I believed in angels, spirits, and other such apparitions. I had recently heard a priest confidently proclaim that the Bible's words on such phenomena were never meant to be interpreted literally; he had historical evidence that incidents involving spirits were merely metaphors for tangible events. Being a new Catholic and very eager to avoid the subject, I had accepted the priest's views without question. After I related my doubts, the senior proceeded to describe recent incidents involving mutual acquaintances — e.g., a woman who claimed demons inflicted physical scars on her arms. I remained polite, but incredulous. The issue of spirits did not affect me, and I was thus content to leave its resolution to others. I had no opinions or feelings on the subject.

But Susan was forcing me to take a stand on the entire issue of spirits and charismatic Christians. Having given the subject little thought, I was hardly

ready to present an informed opinion. Susan was my closest friend and I would have tried to believe her had she claimed Martians had kidnapped her; friends are supposed to believe in each other even when nobody else does. Despite my verbal reassurances and lack of condemnations, Susan knew me well enough to see that I was having problems accepting her visions and spirits. I was doing everything I could to convey my support and sympathy; however, I was definitely in unfamiliar territory and was overwhelmed by the strength of her convictions. I wavered between my loyalty to Susan and the apparent irrationality of her claims.

I left the room we were in for a moment, on some flimsy pretense, made the sign of the cross in desperation, and pleaded with God for divine assistance. Seconds after I re-entered the room, Susan angrily lashed out at me, telling me she never wanted to talk with me again since I did not love her, and ran out in tears. I tried following her, to no avail. I did not understand what I had done. All I could think was, "Gee, thanks God. So much for prayer." I realized that Susan had never fully presented her interpretation of the recent events in her life, and I had not had the chance to accept or reject her claims. The entire conversation remained very nebulous in my mind, and many of Susan's reactions made little sense. I had a vague sense that her anger and tears involved both my inability to care for her and also my inability to understand her recent experiences.

I was stunned, and so was hardly prepared for what was to follow the next day. While Susan's older sister flew in to provide comfort during this trying time, Susan visited the doctor for one last set of tests. UCF had organized a prayer meeting that night for Susan's upcoming operation and the intense emotional trials she had endured. I called Susan, in an attempt to make peace, but was greeted with cold indifference. As she was hanging up, I asked if she wanted my presence at the prayer meeting. She declined the offer, but suddenly changed her mind just before the line was disconnected. I, along with several other students, gathered in a classroom, despite the hectic finals schedule, to offer our prayers and support for Susan. Since she was a very active member and Bible study leader in UCF, many upperclassmen were in attendance. These students, the most active and experienced Protestant leaders on campus, came from different churches

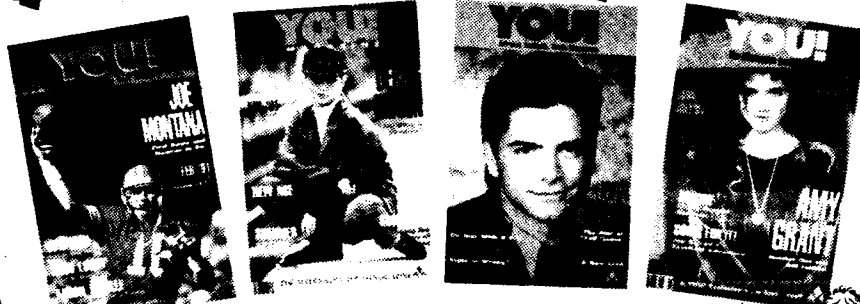
with different creeds.

The meeting started, as did any other UCF gathering, with group songs and a few prayers. We sat in a circle on the floor so we could face each other. Susan refused to acknowledge my presence when I entered. Though I was accustomed to feeling an emotional high during these meetings, I felt the initial songs were a bit dry. Given the circumstances, the group had lost much of its normal enthusiasm. Susan's sis-

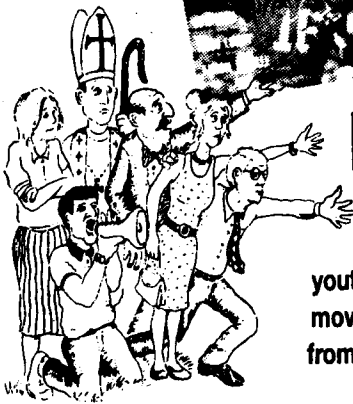
ter then asked for a period of meditative prayer; the entire group would fall silent while individuals would pray aloud "as the Spirit led them." This is a common practice in both Bible studies and group meetings within UCF. My inexperience as a new Christian and my reserved nature prevented me from speaking during these times; rather, I prayed silently.

After a period of group prayer, a student made a movement to end the meeting. Suddenly, Susan

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emitted some strange guttural sounds and fell to the floor. She started thrashing about, as if in some sort of seizure. Susan's sister must have recognized what was happening, for she ordered us to gather around and place our hands on Susan's prostrate body. I refused to budge from my position and froze in horror. I will never forget the first comprehensible sound that came from Susan; she screamed my name with such an urgency that the chill still travels down my spine whenever I recall this moment.

Confused as to the events occurring before my very eyes, I responded to the desperation and cry for help so evident in Susan's voice. I wanted to rescue my friend from these horrible people who were holding her down and ridiculing her dignity. I tentatively approached the group and placed the edge of my fingertip on her shoulder, as if afraid of becoming infected with the disease that was ravaging her body. I had yet to realize that the affliction was ravaging her soul.

In a voice I had never heard before or since, Susan accused me: "Bobby, you cannot even love Susan." Before I even noticed the sound of her voice, I thought it funny that Susan would refer to herself in the third person. Then the full impact of the words hit me. Forgetting the frantic students around me and even poor Susan lying on the floor, I thought of our conversation the day before. The real argument had been whether I was capable of loving Susan. I needed the answer to be yes, more for my sake than ours. I have always been a closed and relatively unemotional person and needed to know that my best friend felt that I at least could love her; due to some very strong remarks made two years before by my former girlfriend (hardly an objective source), I was beginning to doubt that I had the capacity for feeling.

Knowing that I was doing Susan no good, I quickly retreated to the opposite side of the room. Susan proceeded to denounce every individual in the room, often citing very private and confidential information she could not possibly have known on her own. It was information capable of hurting individuals — attacking people, as she did, by revealing their hidden feelings, fears, and worries. The night was just beginning!

The students, led by Susan's sister and Louise, a member of a charismatic church, engaged in loud and desperate prayers while holding Susan with one hand. Kneeling on the ground, my friends were chanting, "Satan, I command you to leave this

woman." Others exhorted all "demons to leave in the name of Christ." It is no exaggeration to note the tears and sweat among those assembled. Susan lashed out at the assembled students with verbal assaults.

Though I attempted to maintain a stoic attitude and an expressionless face, my inner fear must have been apparent to all present. I was the only one present who remained silent and apart from the group.

I repeated to myself that such things do not happen to normal people. I had attended a charismatic church once, out of curiosity, but had merely seen a congregation dance wildly, pray enthusiastically, and speak in a language that sounded like gibberish. I wondered how the horror unfolding before my eyes could make any sense. I desperately wanted it all to end, but could not leave.

Then the fear and doubts began. Though I have experienced the normal periods of questioning, I have never come so close to abandoning my faith as I did that night. I could not pray to God. I tried as hard as I could, but I couldn't. Out of desperation, I called upon the saints to articulate my prayers and rescue me from this living nightmare. Though I had never prayed with the saints before, I began to understand the Church's teaching of the unity within the One Body. I pleaded with the saints in heaven to offer God the prayers I was unable to formulate.

Susan's sister sent someone to call a local minister experienced in such matters. Some desperate part of my brain wondered if we should also call the campus priest. I wanted the full authority of the Church to confront this demon, or whatever was causing this horrible scene. I wanted the priest to bring the Eucharist and watch the spirits fall before the power of Christ's Real Presence. But I was scared. I wondered what would happen if the Eucharist did nothing and the priest was helpless. What if the consecrated Bread was just bread? What if the Church had no power over the cause of Susan's bizarre behavior? I was unable to pray and too frightened to test my Church's spiritual strength.

I, like many other students feeling the effects of the night, was swaying from exhaustion. I was mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually drained of everything I possessed. I was ready to give up. I rubbed my hands over my face and through my hair in an attempt to stir hidden reserves of energy. Though her eyes had been closed the entire time and I was kneeling several feet away, Susan must have

sensed my actions. Addressing me for the second and last time, Susan told me to leave because I was tired.

Whenever I concentrated long enough to begin a prayer, I felt some type of physical force distracting me. It was as if something was pushing down on my chest, making it very hard for me to breathe. Being a biology major at the time, I greeted this feeling with skepticism and rational explanations. I checked my pulse for signs of nervousness and wondered what could cause such a sensation. Shortness of breath is a common symptom that can mean very little or may signal the onslaught of a fatal stroke. Though I could find no cause for my chest pains, I was very scared of what was happening to me and Susan. I began to think that the demon would only attack me if I tried to pray or fight back; thus, I resigned myself to leaving it alone in an attempt to find peace for myself.

I gave up all attempts at prayer and admitted unconditional defeat. The effort succeeded and I felt relief immediately. There were no more mysterious forces and I was able to watch the proceedings with the security of an outsider, beyond the immediate reality of the frenzied action I was witnessing. It may have been I was trying too hard to pray and be there for Susan; however, the sense of fear and dread felt like more than mere anxiety at the time.

Maybe she sensed our weariness; whether by plan or coincidence, Susan chose the perfect opportunity to attempt an escape. She suddenly leapt up and ran for the door, despite the many hands holding her down. This burst of action served to revive the tired group of students and they soon had her restrained once again, this time half kneeling and half standing. Alice, a student leader in Campus Crusade for Christ, entered the room for the first time, brandishing a crucifix. Running out of options, UCF had turned to a rival campus Christian group for spiritual tactics. The preacher had denied our request for assistance and recommended that we not confront the demon; his suggestion was a little late. I still wonder if the good preacher was too settled to be roused from bed, or if this supposed expert doubted his own ability to confront whatever harassed Susan.

Alice's presence countered Susan's recent burst of energy, and Alice's confidence inspired us all. Surely Crusade's experienced leader would be able to rescue us and reaffirm our faith in Christ, the Bible, and everything good. Even I felt confident enough to approach God once again; Susan's lunge

for the door awakened and invigorated me. Strangely, I found myself repeating the Hail Mary until it became a chant. Being a recent convert to Catholicism, I had yet to accept the Catholic doctrines concerning Mary and considered any form of Marian devotion to be idolatry. Though I had never before prayed a Hail Mary in my life, I suddenly found myself incapable of any other form of prayer. Somehow, Mary's intercessions allowed me to find peace during that long night; I knew that I had survived the worst and that I would exit with my faith intact. It terrified me to recall how close I came to turning away from Christ out of fear.

The crucifix had a calming effect on Susan, and her sister was soon brave enough to bring a Bible to her face. At first, Susan responded to biblical passages with curses and profanities. Mixed in with her vile attacks were short and desperate pleas for help. In the same breath that she attacked Christ, the Bible's authenticity, and everyone assembled in prayer, Susan would suddenly urge us to rescue her. It appeared as if we were observing a tremendous battle between the Susan we knew and loved and some strange evil force. But the momentum had shifted and we now sensed that victory was at hand.

While Alice and Louise held Susan, her sister continued holding the Bible to her face. Almost taunting the evil spirit that had almost beaten us minutes before, the students dared Susan to read biblical passages. She choked on certain passages and could not finish the sentence "Jesus is Lord." Over and over, she repeated "Jesus is L..L..LL," often ending in profanities. In between her futile attempts, Susan pleaded with us to continue trying and often smiled between the grimaces that accompanied her readings of Scripture. Just as suddenly as she went into the trance, Susan suddenly reappeared and claimed "Jesus is Lord."

With an almost comical smile, Susan then looked up as if awakening from a deep sleep and asked, "Has something happened?" She did not remember any of the past few hours and was startled to find her friends breaking out in cheers and laughter, overwhelmed by sudden joy and relief.

My expression must have betrayed my former fears; Stacy, a freshman I hardly knew, asked about my welfare. I was startled that anyone would be offering me assistance when Susan should have been the focus of attention. I eventually left the room in a

stupor. As I was leaving in a crowd, Susan's sister, who had met me once years before, called my name and asked that I "commit my nightlife to prayer." I hardly understood what she meant and was startled that others continued to single me out for attention. I nodded and looked gently at Susan, who thanked me for coming.

Though I waited for a friend to avoid being alone during the walk home, the rest of the night proceeded without incident. My nightly prayers, despite my apprehensions, came to me easily and I no longer had any problems approaching God; indeed, I left that night with a reaffirmed faith in God's power over any force in or out of this world. If the night's events had not seemed so real, I would have thought my earlier fears silly.

Susan stayed in the house of a missionary with experience in spiritual warfare in foreign countries. Her sister thought it best she stay out of her own room. Susan's roommate, the daughter of a Hmong faith healer, had decorated the room with supposedly pagan influences. Other theories explaining the night's events soon surfaced. Susan's mother had once worshipped and offered a sacrifice at a pagan altar in the Far East for her husband's health; though he had been healed, she had been warned not to repeat such practices, but had returned to that same altar in the Far East upon hearing of Susan's illness. The UCF staffmember dismissed Susan's affliction as a psychological disorder, precipitated by the semester's stress, and advised her to seek professional help. Susan, who had experienced visions and other related phenomena as a child, thought her intense flirting with guys and straying away from God had led to this punishment.

When the operation occurred, the surgeons found no traces of cancerous cells. Susan claimed she had felt healed after the group prayer and can remember the sensation of being "purified"; she saw her physical and spiritual afflictions as being related. The physician's improbable explanation that the biopsy may have removed all the cancerous tissue is no less far-fetched.

Susan still struggles with the theological implications of her experience. Though she recalls nothing of what happened that night, the tidbits she hears from others terrify her. Can a Christian be "possessed"? What precipitated her attack and will it happen again? Susan has talked with ministers, charismatic pastors, and others. It took months before we could reestablish

our friendship and she was able to trust me. Though I do not have the answers she desperately seeks, I have provided comfort and support whenever Susan has fears or doubts. With holy water and blessed crucifixes, I have even given her physical protection from the demons that have only once reappeared, and then for a mere moment. We have resolved the tension in our relationship and I am developing the ability to selflessly care for others.

I now realize that Susan's initial outburst during the concert was a cry for help. Even more terrifying than the threat of cancer and surgery were her nightly visions. However, Susan and I retreated behind the barriers we had built between us before she had the chance to seek my help. Given my response, it may have been just as well that I had not known about the true cause of her anxiety. I had attempted to solve her problems alone and had not once mentioned the power of prayer or the necessity of relying on God. I cannot imagine the disastrous consequences if I had attempted to confront Susan's visions with my own strength.

The members and leadership of UCF have never publicly discussed what we witnessed and experienced that night, rationalizing that it may deter new Christians. Most of us were too scared to discuss it even among ourselves. Ironically, Alice, a lapsed Catholic and a practicing Evangelical, had deployed a crucifix blessed by the Pope and given to her by a friend. That night marked the beginning of her and Louise's investigation into the Church; while serving as presidents of UCF and Campus Crusade for Christ, both left their leadership roles to be confirmed into the Catholic Church. Stacy, the freshman concerned about my welfare, became a close friend and another convert to the Church. Perhaps most amazing of all, Susan, despite her vicious attacks against the Church while in her trance and despite her sister's staunch opposition, has also become an active member of the Catholic Church.

I left that classroom with a powerful belief in Mary's intercessions and with many questions about spiritual warfare; I also learned a lasting lesson in humility and the limits of human understanding. Was the purpose of that night served when so many individuals were inducted into the Church? Did I witness spiritual warfare? I do not have the answers, but I do believe in the reality of spirits, angels, and other related phenomena that I can neither touch nor see. ■