



Brian Kershnik and *She Will Find What Is Lost*, April 3, 2014, the day it was installed in the Conference Center in Salt Lake City. All photos courtesy Cris Baird.

She Will Find What Is Lost

Brian Kershnik's Artistic Response to the Problem of Human Suffering

Cris Baird

“I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken.” (Ezek. 34:16)

In March 2014, my wife, Janae, and I purchased Brian Kershnik's masterpiece *She Will Find What Is Lost* and immediately loaned it to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for display in the Church's Conference Center in downtown Salt Lake City, Utah.¹ In this essay, I tell the story of how we came to own the painting, what it means to us, and why I believe the painting has a spiritually important and universally applicable message.

It is rare for a painting to enter the collective artistic consciousness of the Latter-day Saint people with such speed and force as *She Will Find What Is Lost* has. In six short years, the painting has become iconic. I've lost track of how many social media posts, blog posts, and online reviews I've read where people who have seen the painting share their love and appreciation for it. There are simply too many to count. I have seen dozens of photographs of people standing in front of the painting at the Conference Center, and I've read stories of people gifting prints of the painting as a message of hope or as an expression of gratitude.² It

1. Janae and I owned the painting from March 2014 through January 1, 2018. The Church now owns the painting via a partial gift/partial sale.

2. For example, see “Conference Weekend: Personal Experiences from Members, Visitors,” *Church News*, updated April 11, 2017, <https://www.thechurchnews.com/archive/2017-04-11/conference-weekend-personal-experiences-from-members-visitors-45692>; “Finding What Was Lost,” May 13, 2014, *Leaves with*

has even inspired Latter-day Saint author Terryl Givens to discuss his thoughts about the painting in a public setting on at least two occasions.³

What is it about this painting that makes it so unique? Why does this image seem to resonate on a profoundly personal level with so many people? What explains its power?

She Will Find What Is Lost is a contemporary figurative painting completed in 2013 in Brian Kershnik's characteristic method, which has been described as a "primitive-realist style."⁴ The painting depicts a woman in profile. Her head is bowed, as if she is lost in thought. There is a multitude of angels above her, some of whom are gently touching her head, neck, and shoulder. Their touch is ambiguous. She may be unaware of their presence, but she may also be quietly responding to their presence. The angels are all depicted wearing white clothes, and the background is a muted and indistinct blue-green color. The original painting is impressively large—eleven feet tall and eight feet wide—which means that the woman who is featured in the image is life-size. Because reproductions in various sizes are widely available, most viewers have seen only a reproduction, not the original painting. As of the date of this essay, the original painting has been on display at the Conference Center for over five years.⁵

Janae and I have heard several interpretations of what the painting may mean. Many people see the helpful influence of their ancestors as they engage in family history research.⁶ Some see the process of divine

Tree; You with Me (blog), <http://somethingsgotogether.blogspot.com/2014/05/finding-what-was-lost.html>.

3. Terryl Givens, "Forging the Mormon Identity," Center for Latter-day Saint Arts, July 19, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ol4kE3eNUV0>; "MI Conversations #5—Brian Kershnik with Terryl Givens, 'Surprising Angels,'" Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, <https://mi.byu.edu/mic-kershnik/>.

4. Noel A. Carmack, "Mormons and American Popular Art," in *Mormons and Popular Culture: The Global Influence of an American Phenomenon*, vol. 2, ed. J. Michael Hunter (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Praeger, 2013), 99.

5. It is axiomatic to say that original art is best experienced in person. The reason the painting now hangs in the Conference Center is to allow more people to see it than if it were hung in our home.

6. The explanatory placard placed next to the painting when it was originally installed said, in part: "In this painting, angels descend from heaven to comfort a woman and assist her. No matter what has been lost in our lives—a loved one, the name of an ancestor during genealogical research, our health—we are not left alone, for the veil is thin and spirit world is close to us."

inspiration.⁷ The image appeared on the cover of the February 2017 *Ensign* magazine to illustrate an article about how Church members can overcome heartbreak in marriage.⁸ I have previously argued that the image is a unique artistic depiction of Latter-day Saint theology regarding the sociality that exists between the heavenly and earthly realms.⁹

Even so, the artist is reluctant to tell people exactly what the painting was intended to mean. In a blog entry published on his website, Kershnik explained:

The circumstances that drove me into this piece are, as usual, particular and personal and not necessarily needed to have a personal reaction and use for this piece yourself. I have often said that my paintings are a kind of mythological autobiography whether the subjects are men, women, animals, buildings, etc. It was not, for example, intended as a painting about being a woman, but rather a human. Humans have gender and for fairly specific, but not exclusive, reasons, I chose to paint a woman. I do believe that in art, very often that which is most personal taps into currents that are most general. In this way great art of the distant past can continue to inform and illuminate very current issues. Finding these “big subjects” involves a kind of dumb luck and often has little or nothing to do with an artist’s conscious intention.

The painting *She Will Find What Is Lost* has been used to underline and illustrate a good number of private and public experiences as well as political or social agenda. This has led to a notion of my endorsing certain views. Of course, I agree with some of these views, some of these views I am ignorant of, and others I actually disagree with. Most of the stories I hear are completely consistent with the hopes I retain for the usefulness of this picture which is an extremely and intensely personal sort of usefulness. I cannot pretend to be able to dictate how people are to feel about my work or the narratives that they will bring to it. That is in fact anathema to my understanding of how art works and should work. If I may ask it of you, I ask that you respect that my intention for this piece was to speak to the most intensely private and intimate kind of supernatural interference, influence, and assistance, whatever your particular experience. I don’t have to agree with you to

7. Claudine Bigelow, “Creativity” (speech, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, August 4, 2015), https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/claudine-bigelow_creativity/.

8. “Heartbreak and Hope: When a Spouse Uses Pornography,” *Ensign* 47 (February 2017): 34–39.

9. Micah Christensen, “Cris Baird on His Collection of Contemporary LDS Art,” August 29, 2017, in *Zion Art Podcast*, <https://www.zionartsociety.org/podcast/2017/8/29/cris-baird-on-his-collection-of-contemporary-lds-art>.

believe that whatever your gender, circumstance, or issue, many unseen forces are interested in you, love you, and work to influence matters for your profound benefit. Most of what we all do is resist it, misinterpret it, or mess it up, but my experience indicates that these unseen efforts persist impossibly. I thank God for that.¹⁰

Personally, I think Brian's decision to allow viewers to reach their own conclusions about the meaning of the painting is wise because it allows viewers to bring their own experiences to the painting and engage with it on their own terms.

Janae and I have visited the Conference Center to see *She Will Find What Is Lost* many times since the painting was first hung there in April 2014. We have affectionately referred to these trips as an exercise of our "visitation rights" with respect to the painting because when the painting didn't come home, it felt like a part of our family had been separated from us. When we tell the Conference Center hosts who we are and our relationship to the painting, they inevitably share some of the experiences they have had when showing *She Will Find What Is Lost* to other Conference Center visitors. This particular stop on the Conference Center tour is a highlight for many visitors.

Janae and I recall one experience in particular. In October 2014, after the painting had been in the Conference Center for about six months, we stopped by for a visit. While we were having a quiet moment enjoying the painting, a small tour group came through. Janae and I looked at each other and smiled as the group lingered for a while. After a few minutes, we introduced ourselves to them and asked what they thought about the painting. The visitors were not members of the Church. They told us they were in town for only a few days, and they were visiting the building as tourists. They began to ask questions about the painting, how we came to own it, and how it came to be on display in the Conference Center. Janae answered their questions and briefly shared our experience with the painting up to that point.

As we told the story to the visitors, we both felt that we should tell it to a wider audience and in more detail. This is our story.



10. Brian Kershnik, "A General Note about *She Will Find What Is Lost*," *Brian's Blog*, June 28, 2014, <https://www.kershnik.com/w-o-r-d-s/2017/7/7/a-general-note-about-she-will-find-what-is-lost>.

Seven months earlier, in March 2014, Janae and I were visiting Salt Lake City, and we stopped by the downtown Deseret Book flagship store. We had been collecting art by Latter-day Saint artists for several years at that point, and we loved to see the original art on display there. The limited-edition print of *She Will Find What Is Lost* was prominently positioned, and I recognized it as an image I had seen somewhere before. Struck by the beauty of the image, I called Janae over to take a look. As soon as she looked at the print, her eyes widened, and with a look of surprise on her face, she turned to me and said, “This is it—this is what I saw!”



In the summer of 1982, when Janae was only twelve years old, she was inadvertently exposed to toxic industrial solvents that had been illegally dumped near a residential area in Phoenix, Arizona. She discovered, after the fact, that those chemicals had shocked her immune system, causing her bone marrow to stop producing enough blood cells to fight infection and carry oxygen throughout her body. A year later, Janae began to experience light-headedness and was taken to see a doctor. Her doctor discovered that her blood cell counts were dangerously low and diagnosed her with a rare medical condition called aplastic anemia. The only effective treatment was a bone marrow transplant, which was a very complicated and dangerous medical procedure made even more complicated and dangerous by the fact that Janae was a young teenager and the only suitable bone marrow donor was her youngest sister, who was only nine months old at the time. Janae and her sister were rushed to Los Angeles, where she underwent the procedure at the pediatric oncology center at UCLA Medical Center. She was hospitalized for two months, and the treatment required many units of donated blood. But thanks to the skill of the many doctors and nurses who cared for her and a few miracles along the way, she survived both the illness and the radiation and chemotherapy treatment. After several years of carefully living with a compromised immune system, she was given a clean bill of health.



In November 2013, Thomas B. Griffith, a federal appellate court judge and former general counsel of BYU, stayed in our home in Arlington, Texas, for a few days. Tom and his wife, Susan, were in town so that Tom could speak at several different engagements in the local area. We were very fortunate to be able to spend some down time with the Griffiths, and we quickly discovered that we shared a deep admiration for the artwork

of several Latter-day Saint artists, including Brian Kershnik. In fact, Tom told us that he had visited Brian in his studio several months earlier when Brian was working on, but had not yet completed, *She Will Find What Is Lost*. Tom was so enchanted by the image that was still unfolding in Brian's studio that he asked for permission to take a photograph of the work in progress. Brian granted that permission. Later, when Tom was visiting us, he showed us that image on his smartphone. We enjoyed seeing the image, but it was difficult to appreciate the full glory of the painting on such a small screen, and the painting was still incomplete when Tom took the photo. I didn't think anything more of the painting until a few months later, when I noticed that reproductions of the painting were being offered for sale by Deseret Book. I assumed, wrongly, that if prints of the painting were available for purchase, the original painting must have already been purchased, and I wondered who the lucky buyer of the original painting might have been. I was disappointed that I had not been able to see the original painting before it had been purchased and presumably removed from public view.



Full-body radiation treatments can have long-term effects for girls and women. Women are born with all of the eggs they will ever produce, and radiation treatment can potentially damage the eggs. If those eggs do get damaged, the effects are not reversible. As a result, some women who have undergone radiation treatments are not able to give birth to healthy children. Before we were married, Janae and I visited a genetic specialist who informed us that if Janae were to become pregnant, it was possible, though not certain, that her eggs had been so damaged that a developing fetus would likely not be born alive. We were in love and were married knowing that we might not ever have children, yet we still hoped that it would be possible.

About six months later, Janae received an ominous letter from the American Red Cross. They notified her that one of the people who had donated blood products used in her bone marrow transplant in 1983 had been diagnosed with HIV III, a blood-borne disease for which there was no test in 1983. The Red Cross could not determine if the donor had the condition when the blood products were donated in 1983 or if the person contracted the disease later. And while HIV III is not the strain of HIV that develops into AIDS, it was still a serious medical condition. The letter from the Red Cross advised Janae to have her blood tested immediately. Though, thankfully, the test came back

negative for HIV III, the joy of that good news was short-lived. About a year into our marriage, Janae's first pregnancy spontaneously miscarried after only a few weeks. We spent the next eighteen months wondering if Janae would be able to give birth to healthy children and mentally and spiritually preparing ourselves for the possibility that she would not be able to do so. Our prayers were full of gratitude when, in November of 1991, after thirty-two hours of labor, Janae gave birth to our first child, a beautiful—and completely healthy—eight-pound baby girl.



Shortly after Janae gave birth to our fourth child in 2001, we began to wonder if her childbearing years were over. Janae has a small frame, her children had all been between seven and nine pounds at birth, and her last pregnancy was more difficult than the earlier ones. After a period of intense prayer, Janae told me she felt strongly that one more child was meant to join our family. I agreed. In August 2004, a nine-pound, fifteen-ounce healthy baby boy joined the family, but this pregnancy was to be Janae's last. Janae's internal organs had been somewhat damaged during her earlier pregnancies, and while delivering her fifth child, the earlier injuries were aggravated. Full pelvic reconstruction surgery was necessary. The lengthy surgical procedure required several pints of blood, so medical professionals drew and stored Janae's own blood in the months leading up to the surgery so they would have it on hand when needed. Janae woke up from the surgery with good news. The surgery was a success! There was, however, also some bad news. A routine blood test performed prior to the surgery revealed traces of hepatitis C in Janae's blood. Her doctors explained that hepatitis C did not have a name or testing protocol in 1983, so one of her earlier blood donors must have been infected. The disease had lain dormant in her body for over twenty years until it was finally detected in connection with her pelvic surgery. Further testing revealed that the disease had been detected before significant liver damage had occurred. Nevertheless, her blood was infected with a disease that could, over time, lead to liver cancer or liver failure. Janae had an important choice to make. She could either wait to see if the disease worsened over time, and risk liver damage in the process, or begin treatment soon in an effort to avoid permanent liver damage and live a longer, healthier life.

The most effective treatment at the time required that she take medication that was known to have the devastating side effect of inducing suicidal ideation. The side effects of the treatment were much worse than the symptoms of the illness itself, but because Janae was relatively young,

her doctors were concerned that her liver might be damaged at a later point in her life when she would not be able to tolerate the treatment at all. She delayed the treatment for several months as she diligently researched the side effects of both the treatment and the antidepressant medications she would be required to take. She began treatment for hepatitis C in 2006, with a willingness to trade what she thought would be serious but manageable side effects for a short time in exchange for a longer, healthier life. As it turned out, the effects of the treatment were much worse than either of us could have ever imagined. In fact, they were even worse than I knew at the time. I knew that Janae was struggling through a dark and difficult time during her treatment, but she did not tell me exactly how dark and difficult it was until a few years later.



While Janae was undergoing treatment for hepatitis C, she was serving as a counselor in the ward Relief Society presidency. I was a lawyer, working hard to realize my career ambitions at a large real estate company, and I was also serving as a counselor in our ward bishopric. We had five children who were fourteen or younger, including three very active boys who were six, four, and two. The stress and workload that fell on Janae's shoulders was simply overwhelming. I knew that she was in a constant state of exhaustion, but I did not fully understand that the treatment was slowly killing not only the disease that was coursing through Janae's bloodstream but also the hope and the faith that had illuminated her life up to that point in time.

A few years after her successful recovery, she admitted to me that she had regularly prayed that her suffering might end. When I wasn't home to help her, she sometimes crawled on her hands and knees from one room in the house to another because the physical pain of her treatment was so excruciating. And if that wasn't bad enough, she felt that the medication she was taking had been blocking the influence of the Holy Ghost in her life. She was numb. She was full of despair. She felt impressions suggesting that she was not good enough, that she was a burden to her family, and that she was not worthy of having her good health restored. The messages that she heard in her own mind would taunt her by saying that if she was really courageous, she would end her own life. As a tragic consequence of her suffering, she lost her faith in God. When she prayed at night, she would occasionally attempt to test him by saying: "God, if you're real, you won't make me wake up in the morning." When she woke up, her despair was only amplified as she faced another

day of pain. It was another sign, at least in her tortured mind, that Heavenly Father did not exist, and if he did, he didn't care enough about her to take away her pain—or let her die.



And then one day in 2006, about six months into her eleven-month treatment, something happened. Janae's prayer was answered in an unexpected way. She told me how, in the midst of her pleading with Heavenly Father for some indication that he was aware of her loneliness, her mind recalled a scripture from 2 Chronicles. In this verse, the Assyrians are attacking the people of Judah, and Hezekiah counsels his captains to "be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him: With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles" (2 Chr. 32:7–8; see also 2 Kgs. 6). As she contemplated the verse that had sprung unexpectedly to her memory, a thought occurred to her: there were more with her than were against her. And she perceived a chain of spirit beings stretching out above her who she understood to be family members. These were people she had known who had already died and people who had not yet been born but who were interested in her welfare. She could sense that they were aware of her loneliness—they knew her and cared about her. They loved her. She understood from them that it was not time for her to die and that she had much to live for, including a young family who also loved her. Her mortal experience was not over and should not end. She still had more life to live on earth.

Janae later told me of another experience she had about a month later as she was praying again. This time, she had been praying for several minutes to know if God understood how hard it was for her to carry on. Her suffering was so great, she didn't think she could bear it alone. She prayed to know if God really knew what she was going through, and if he knew how hard it was for her. And then the answer came. She heard a calm voice say to her simply: "I do. I know this is hard. And I'm sorry."

She said that experience has been as a single droplet of cool water falling onto her parched spirit. The memory of the brief answer to her prayer began to revive her spiritually and emotionally. Both experiences combined to give her hope that she just might have Heavenly Parents who loved her and that there were others who were interested in her well-being. Her suffering did not end that day, but instead of constantly being filled with doubt and self-loathing, she occasionally allowed

herself to want to believe that she mattered and that she might actually survive long enough to be healed. That desire was just enough to help her get through the remaining dark hours and days of her treatment.



When Janae said, “This is it—this is what I saw!” on the day we entered the Deseret Book store in 2014, she recognized that this painting portrayed what she had felt: a chain of spirits who loved her stretched out above her. She was overwhelmed as she stood in front of the image and recalled how her prayer had been answered in 2006. I also felt the image speak to me powerfully. I was prepared to purchase a print of the image, but then we learned from Linda Howard, the employee in charge of the fine art department there, that the original painting was still for sale at an art gallery in Park City, Utah.

Because I had received an unexpected financial windfall, Janae and I had been thinking of adding a significant artwork to our collection. Could this be the piece for us? The news that the painting was available for sale astonished me. We immediately started to investigate and soon discovered just how large the painting is. We guessed that its size was why it had not sold, but we believed we could fit it in our home since we have high ceilings. We went to the Meyer Gallery in Park City and met with Susan Meyer, who told us that the painting had been on display for a few months, but when it had not sold, Brian Kershisnik took it back to his studio so that some of his other pieces could be displayed.

Janae and I spent the rest of the day talking about the painting. We talked about our reactions to it. We talked about her illness and her recovery. We talked about how the painting felt significant to us. We talked about the unique financial circumstances that would allow us to buy a once-in-a-lifetime painting for our collection. And we both prayerfully considered making the purchase. We felt good about moving forward, but it was late in the evening when we reached this decision. I barely slept that night. I called Susan the next day and told her the happy news. We placed the check in a mailbox as we drove out of town and returned to Texas.

When we got home, we realized that for the painting to fit in our house, we would have to remodel and move some things around. We knew this would take several months. We contacted Brian and explained our predicament. Brian told us that before we had purchased the painting, he had contacted a few owners of large buildings to see if they might be willing to display it until it sold. He was still waiting for one of those



Brian Kershnik, Cris Baird, and Janae Baird at Brian's studio in March 2014.

people to get back to him. A few days later, Brian revealed to us that he had been consulting with Laura Hurtado, the global art acquisition curator for the Church, and, if we were willing, the painting could be hung for a time in the Church's Conference Center.

This news was simply stunning. Brian was telling me that the painting I had just purchased could be displayed at the Conference Center—the gathering place for Latter-day Saints who come from all over the world to participate in general conference. As I mentally processed what he had told me, it occurred to me that the April general conference was just a few days away. I asked him when he could actually hang the painting if I agreed to make the loan. In my mind, the painting would be at the Conference Center for about a year, so hanging it immediately would mean that people attending the next three general conferences could see the painting before it came home to Texas.

The following day, Brian received permission to hang the painting in the Conference Center on Thursday, two days before the start of general conference, assuming I agreed to make the loan. We quickly worked



Clockwise from left: Faith Heard, Brian Kershisnik, David Ericson, and Steve Vistaunet, placing the canvas on a frame before hanging *She Will Find What Is Lost* in the Conference Center in Salt Lake City.

through the paperwork, and I arranged to fly to Salt Lake City so I could be present when Brian hung the painting. We were joined by some of Brian's friends and my two daughters. A reporter and a photographer from the *Salt Lake Tribune* joined us too.¹¹ The process of hanging the painting took a few hours, and I felt the suspense building as Brian rolled out the painting face down and then stretched the canvas and tacked it to the stretcher bars. This was my first time seeing the painting in person. Because the painting was so large, Brian asked if I would help. Holding this majestic painting in my hands and helping to lift it onto the wall of the Conference Center was one of the highlights of my life. I felt tears of joy as I stood back to experience the beauty and power of the original painting for the first time. It was a moment I will never forget.

11. Peggy Fletcher Stack, "Angelic Painting Reminds Mormon Mom She Is Not Alone," *Salt Lake Tribune*, April 5, 2014, <https://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=57772059&ctype=cmsid>.



Steve Vistaunet holding the left corner, Cris Baird holding the middle, Brian Kershisnik holding the right corner, and David Ericson holding the back as they hang *She Will Find What Is Lost* in the Conference Center.



Janae's physical recovery from the hepatitis C treatment was long and difficult. Her body had been weakened, and she had lost most of her hair. Her energy was low. But rebuilding her spiritual life took even longer than her physical recovery. Shortly before Janae started her treatment, a friend of ours who had left the Church began to send her information that was critical of the Church and its leaders. The simple faith of her childhood had been devastated by mind-altering medication and grueling medical treatment, and whatever foundation she had left was under attack by mean-spirited and inaccurate criticisms. One of Janae's strongest memories from that period was of her visit with the stake president in connection with the renewal of her temple recommend. She told me that when the stake president asked if she believed in God, she answered honestly: "For the first time in my life, I'm not really sure." Being fully aware of what Janae had gone through to that point in her life, the stake president's inspired follow-up question was simply, "Do you want to believe in God?" Janae replied with a tearful "Yes." That desire was enough for her to begin reconstructing a new spiritual foundation.

Within a year or so, as the effects of the medication wore off, she told me that she felt her ability to feel the Spirit grow. But she wasn't yet sure how to rebuild her faith in God. She wanted to return to the simple faith of her childhood, but her recent life experiences seemed to be preventing that. She remembers another experience very fondly. Elder J. Devn Cornish of the Seventy visited our stake to speak at a stake conference, and in a brief conversation with Janae afterward, he listened as she asked how she might regain the faith of her childhood. With kindness, he encouraged her to look forward rather than backward and to see her difficult experiences and questions as tools that could help her expand her perspective. She would no longer see the world from a child's perspective because she was no longer a child. But armed with these new experiences, she could have a wonderful new perspective that was built on a stronger and more mature faith. His wisdom opened the door to another approach. Rather than dwell on the disappointments of the past, she would try to look forward with faith. She would try to find ways to harness her experiences for the benefit of others.

Another experience that helped her strengthen her newly budding faith was accepting a call to teach Relief Society lessons on the life and teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith. She told me how as she studied in preparation to teach her lessons and as she learned more about Joseph Smith's life

and ministry, her appreciation for the divinity of his calling grew. While the emails from our friend may have opened her eyes to new information about Joseph Smith, the man, Janae realized that the negative conclusions that her friend had reached about Joseph Smith, the prophet, were flawed and incomplete. Janae knew that Joseph Smith, the man, was not perfect. Yet Heavenly Father was able to use Joseph Smith, the prophet, to accomplish his work. She related to me that she came to see that the Lord works through imperfect people, like her. And that dawning realization became a source of comfort. It gave her the courage she needed to continue to look for the answers to her questions, “in all patience and faith” (D&C 21:5).



In the summer of 2013, Janae was asked to lead our stake’s effort to host a series of Christmas concerts. She reached out to several schools and community organizations and made countless arrangements to welcome the community into the stake center as we celebrated the season of Jesus Christ’s birth. She dedicated ten to fifteen hours a week to this effort for five months. When the weekend of the performances finally arrived, a huge ice storm shut down the entire Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex. Schools, businesses, and churches were closed because roads and bridges were covered in two to three inches of solid ice. The stake Christmas concert series was canceled. A few weeks later, she was invited to visit with the stake presidency to discuss, she believed, how to improve planning for next year’s concerts. Much to Janae’s surprise, as the meeting was coming to a close, the stake president extended a new calling to her. Would she be willing to serve as the stake director of public affairs? She had never heard of the calling before, and she felt unprepared to reply. She asked for some time to consider the request.

When Janae came home and we began discussing the responsibilities of the calling, she was initially reluctant to accept it. She had no formal training, had not finished her college degree, and continued to feel overwhelmed at times with four children at home and a husband who was serving as the bishop at the time. But as our conversations continued, she realized that she had emerged from her physical and spiritual journey with a newfound faith built on a testimony of the atonement of Jesus Christ and that she had an entirely new perspective on what the Lord expected of her. He did not want perfection from her—he wanted the benefit of her life experiences. Janae decided to accept the calling.



The growth that Janae experienced during many dark months of health challenges allowed her to empathize with people who were going through similar experiences, and she found joy in lifting and supporting them. In her new calling, she became a bridge builder—someone who bridged the gap between our stake and various community service and governmental organizations. For many nonmembers, she became the face of the Church. For many members, she became the face of the community. She worked hard to establish the JustServe initiative in the stake and to teach members and nonmembers alike how to more effectively work together to strengthen the community. Janae told me how over time she realized that the questions that previously motivated her religious curiosity were now focused less on historical claims (because she had received satisfactory answers to those questions) and more focused on goodness claims. How could living the gospel of Jesus Christ improve her own life and the life of her family? How could loving her neighbor strengthen the Church and the community? She was able to see, with more clarity than ever before, how the gospel of Jesus Christ could help her accomplish those objectives. Perhaps more importantly, she could see how the experiences to that point in her life had laid a strong foundation for her new personal ministry of service to the community and the Church. Just as the title of the painting had suggested, Janae had finally found what she had lost.



Returning to the questions I posed at the beginning of this essay: What is it about *She Will Find What Is Lost* that makes this painting so unique? Why does this image resonate on a profoundly personal level with so many people? What explains the power of this painting? I believe that the first hint at the answer to those questions is found in Brian's observation: "That which is most personal taps into currents that are most general."¹² To that observation, I would add these rhetorical questions: What could be more personal than the suffering a person experiences? And who has not experienced suffering? Thus, human suffering has the dual qualities of being both universal and unique. We have all experienced it.

The problem of human suffering has been around from the moment Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden. And humans have been searching for answers to the problem of suffering for just as

12. Kershishnik, "General Note."

long. Many ask, “If God loves his children, why does he allow them to suffer?” One of the best answers to that question came via revelation to the Prophet Joseph Smith when he was experiencing his own suffering in Liberty Jail:

If thou art called to pass through tribulation; if thou art in perils among false brethren; if thou art in perils among robbers; if thou art in perils by land or by sea; If thou art accused with all manner of false accusations; if thine enemies fall upon thee; if they tear thee from the society of thy father and mother and brethren and sisters; and if with a drawn sword thine enemies tear thee from the bosom of thy wife, and of thine offspring, and thine elder son, although but six years of age, shall cling to thy garments, and shall say, My father, my father, why can't you stay with us? O, my father, what are the men going to do with you? and if then he shall be thrust from thee by the sword, and thou be dragged to prison, and thine enemies prowl around thee like wolves for the blood of the lamb; And if thou shouldst be cast into the pit, or into the hands of murderers, and the sentence of death passed upon thee; if thou be cast into the deep; if the billowing surge conspire against thee; if fierce winds become thine enemy; if the heavens gather blackness, and all the elements combine to hedge up the way; and above all, if the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, my son, that *all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good.* The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he? Therefore, hold on thy way, and the priesthood shall remain with thee; for their bounds are set, they cannot pass. Thy days are known, and thy years shall not be numbered less; therefore, fear not *what man can do, for God shall be with you forever and ever.* (D&C 122:5–9, emphasis added)

These verses found in modern-day scripture contain the most succinct answer to the problem of human suffering I have been able to find. Suffering is a necessary part of our human condition. It is how we experience growth. That growth can and should be harnessed for good. Both for our good and for the good of those within our sphere of influence. But we don't need to fear suffering because God will be with us, even in our suffering.

And that is the power of *She Will Find What Is Lost*. The image speaks to our souls because it speaks to our suffering. It answers in the affirmative the question of whether or not God is aware of our concerns and if he is willing to do anything about them. And it expands the answer to include the love of additional ministering angels, perhaps our own ancestors, who also love us enough to visit us in our trials. It illustrates God's ability to reach through the veil that separates the mortal from the

immortal, his desire to assure us that our suffering has meaning, and his promise that he will not forsake us. We are never truly alone.¹³



We bought *She Will Find What Is Lost* because it allowed us to follow the first rule of collecting art: buy what you love. We loved that the painting was beautiful. We loved that it spoke so eloquently to Janae's experience. We loved that it answered one of life's most important questions in a way that was consistent with our faith. But we quickly discovered that this very special painting has a power that is completely independent of our nominal ownership of it. The story of *She Will Find What Is Lost* is not just our story. Our story is just one of many stories, and I'm confident there are many more stories that are waiting to be told about this painting.

The April 2014 general conference was held just two days after the painting was hung in the Conference Center. I stayed in Salt Lake City that weekend to attend general conference, and after the first session concluded, I stopped by to see the painting for a few minutes. I enjoyed watching as conference-goers walked past the painting. Most people were in a hurry to leave, but several lingered and looked. After a few minutes, I noticed someone taking a photo of a family member in front of the painting. A few minutes after that, I saw another young woman crouching down in front of the painting, turning to one side so that from the perspective of the camera, she was eclipsing the woman in the painting. I realized what she was doing right away. The resulting photograph would appear to show that the angels from the painting were reaching down to touch her. Several others followed suit and took similar photos, with each one appearing to receive a blessing from the angels hovering over them. I was pleased to see the power of the message in the painting being manifest on the first day it was viewable by conference goers.



Janae and I both went to Salt Lake City a few days before the October 2014 general conference began. It was on that trip that we met and talked to the tourists I mentioned earlier in this essay. Janae answered their questions and shared a short version of her experiences as they related to the painting. It was obvious to us that they understood the

13. On God being with us, see Joshua 1:9; and John 14:18–19.

message and felt the power of the painting even though they were not members of the Church and had never seen the image before. Before we said our goodbyes, they asked if they could take some photos with Janae in front the painting. Janae gladly obliged, and our new friends continued on their way. We left the Conference Center a few minutes later, and then went to the Church History Museum for a brief visit. As we were leaving Temple Square for the day, we crossed over South Temple Street. To our great surprise, we saw the family we had met in the Conference Center earlier in the day. They were in the checkout line at the Deseret Book store, waiting to buy a print of *She Will Find What Is Lost*. We were touched that they, even though they were not members of the Church, found sufficient meaning in the painting to want to take a print of it home with them. We wish we could have shared with them the full story as we have shared it here. But we are thrilled that because of this painting, they, like many others, will now be reminded every day that God will never forsake us.

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