

AS CHRIST COMFORTS US

It was our first Christmas on the North Island of New Zealand—a beautiful and fascinating land. Yet despite the sunshine and the kindness of the Church members, I felt deep pangs of loneliness for my parents and siblings. We had moved from the United States earlier that year, and I felt homesick.

In our new area my husband and I became friends with the Wilsons, a young Irish family of another Christian faith who had also recently arrived in New Zealand. Noleen Wilson was my co-worker, and we soon became good friends, sharing experiences of immigrating and of our love for our new home. As our friendship grew, I became aware that their family was also struggling with

loneliness as well as feelings of being overwhelmed. They had three young children and a fourth on the way.

One evening when I was feeling particularly lonely and sorry for myself, I had the impression that the best way to overcome my loneliness was to serve another—specifically the Wilsons. My husband and I decided that night to begin celebrating the 12 days of Christmas with the Wilsons by anonymously leaving messages and small gifts on their doorstep. Each night my loneliness was replaced with excitement and anticipation as we sneaked up to their home, left our message and gift, knocked on their door, and then ran away with big grins on our faces.


Each day at work Noleen would tell me about the mysterious “Christmas elves” who had visited the night before. She would relay stories of her children anticipating the arrival of their visitors, who were making the family’s Christmas a happy one. On several evenings the ward youth joined us in our fun.

On the final night, Christmas Eve, the Wilsons left a message and cookies on their doorstep, asking that they be able to meet their elves. When we arrived with the youth to sing carols as our final gift, the children were ecstatic and our friends embraced us with hugs and tears of gratitude. The loneliness in my heart was replaced with love and joy, and the bond of friendship between our families was strengthened.

Later we received an e-mail from a man in the Wilsons’ church who said he was so touched by what we had done for the family that he asked about our Church and the acts of service we provide for others. The congregation had never heard of the 12 days of Christmas and now associates this tradition with Latter-day Saints.

I will never forget that first Christmas in New Zealand, where I learned an unexpected way to forget myself, go to work, and “comfort those that stand in need of comfort” (Mosiah 18:9)—just as Jesus Christ comforts us in our times of need and loneliness. ■

Angela Fallentine, New Zealand



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MY CHRISTMAS CARD FROM OBREGÓN

While I was serving my mission in Mexico, my companion and I met a man from Obregón, a city in northwestern Mexico near the Gulf of California. He was interested in our message about the Restoration of the gospel, but he had only 10 minutes to talk because he had to catch a train. We taught him all we could in that short time and gave him a copy of the Book of Mormon and all of the tracts we had. At the time, our mission had no missionaries in Obregón.

Several months later I received a Christmas card from someone in Obregón. I looked at the card and wondered who could have sent it. Then I realized it had been sent by the man we had talked to for 10 minutes. I hung up the card in our apartment with the rest of the Christmas cards the other elders and I had received.

After Christmas I was about to throw the card away when I felt an impression to keep it. The impression was not an audible voice but a feeling in my heart. Instead of throwing the card away, I put it in my suitcase.

A few months later as I was reading the monthly letter from the mission home, I noticed an announcement that missionary work would be opened in Obregón. Once again I thought, "What does that city have to do with me?" Then I again remembered the man we



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had met from there. I dug through my suitcase and found the Christmas card. I wrote on the card, "These elders are friends of mine, and I am sending them to teach you more about the gospel." Then I sent the card to the elders assigned to serve in Obregón and told them to take it with them and visit the man.

Soon I received a letter from the elders in Obregón. It read: "Dear Elder Ramos, the work here has been so difficult that the mission president was planning to pull us out until we

received your card. We went to see this brother, and he was so excited about our message that he took us to meet all of his family and friends. Because of this brother, we have started a branch."

Years have passed, and now three stakes have been organized in Obregón. I am humbled to know that because I had listened to the promptings of the Spirit, I was blessed to play a small part in helping my brothers and sisters in Obregón receive the gospel of Jesus Christ. ■

Robert Ramos, Oregon, USA

WE HAD NOTHING TO EAT

I woke up early the day before Christmas worried because we didn't have any food for our Christmas dinner that night; nor did we have any money to buy food. I was then living with my sister Edicta in Maracaibo, Venezuela.

When I got out of bed, I knelt down and began to pray. I pleaded with my Heavenly Father to remember us. I asked Him to grant us at least some food for that very special day, *la Noche Buena* (Christmas Eve).

As I prayed, I was filled with peace. I seemed to hear a soft voice saying to me, "Everything is going to be fine. Don't worry." When I had finished my prayer, I knew that something good would happen that day.

After waking up my sister, I went to sweep the front porch. The neighbor across the street saw me and came over to give me 1,000 bolívares that she owed me for a Christmas tablecloth and decorations I had embroidered for her. I was surprised because I hadn't remembered that she owed me money.

I ran to my sister's room and showed her the money I had received. Surprised, she asked me where I had gotten it. "With God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26), I responded.

A few minutes later we heard someone outside calling for my sister. When we realized it was the same neighbor, we went out to talk to her. She then paid my sister 1,000 bolívares she owed her for some sewing. My sister and I were very happy

because now we could buy breakfast, lunch, *and* dinner.

After we had returned from grocery shopping, we found a friend waiting for us. He asked if he could spend *la Noche Buena* with us because he didn't want to spend Christmas Eve alone. We explained that we would be having just a small dinner at home but that he was welcome to join us. He contributed 2,000 bolívares to help with the cost of dinner. We could hardly believe how much God was blessing us.

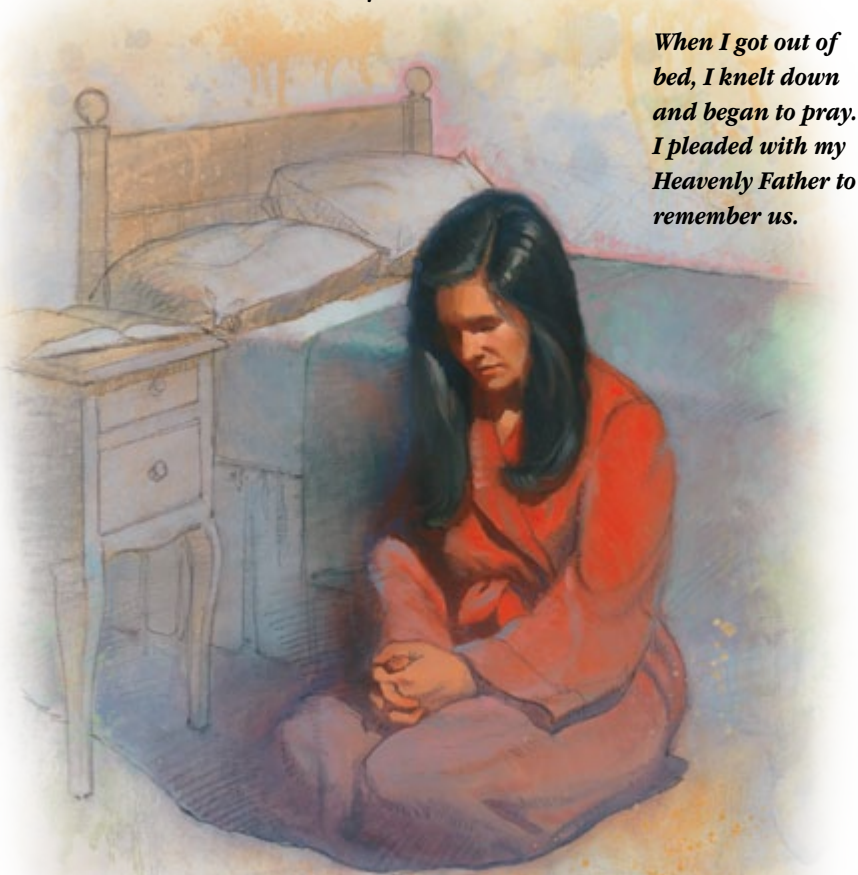
Later my niece called to tell us that she would be arriving that night and would be bringing 33 pounds (15 kg) of marinated meat. And at noon my

nephew arrived with his wife and their children. They asked if they could return that evening with some food and celebrate Christmas Eve with us.

"We're not going to have a grand dinner," we answered, "but we will have enough for everyone."

That evening Edicta and I made baked chicken, potato salad, a lemon dessert, and *majarete*, a traditional coconut pudding dessert, which we enjoyed with all of our guests. But first we gave thanks to Heavenly Father for the great blessings He had given us. That day we were reminded that if we have faith and doubt not, He will bless us when we ask for His help. ■

Estilita Chacin Hart, Utah, USA



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LINDA'S LAST CHRISTMAS

During my sophomore year at Brigham Young University, our ward bishopric signed the ward up for a Sub-for-Santa program, through which we would provide Christmas presents for a family in need.

Our ward name, however, kept disappearing from the list of volunteers. As Christmas neared, we still had no family to help. Then one of the bishop's counselors told us of a family that might be able to use our help instead. When we learned about this family, we all felt certain that we should focus on them.

Linda (name has been changed), who had several sons ages 9 to 15, had fought a grueling battle with breast cancer. During the stress of that illness, her husband had left her. She had just moved from another state to take a job in Provo, Utah, but the job fell through, and she was left with no income.

When we met Linda, we immediately took her into our hearts. We were blessed to see her the way the Savior did—as a great and noble spirit who had overcome many difficult challenges. She was never a *project* to us; rather, she was an eternal friend. Every member of the ward contributed something to help her and her boys. We were all young college students and poor in



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our own right, but we gladly gave because we loved her.

Linda came to our ward Christmas party, during which several ward members went to her apartment and filled her cupboards and refrigerator with food. They decorated a Christmas tree and surrounded it with presents for the whole family. They also left her four new car tires and paid her rent for several months. I'm not sure how our meager contributions managed to accomplish all that, but I knew that Heavenly Father had used our sacrifices to bless her.

A year later I was in another student ward, but I returned at Christmastime to visit my previous bishopric. I learned that Linda's husband had returned to the family and that their finances had stabilized. But then her cancer had returned and claimed her life. I realized that we had helped give Linda her last Christmas.

In feeling "the pure love of Christ" (Moroni 7:47) so strongly through that experience, I learned that real charity is a priceless spiritual gift that propels us to act in the Savior's place. ■

J. Audrey Hammer, Utah, USA