

SAFE IN MY WARD FAMILY

By Caroline Kingsley

One of my fondest childhood memories is the clicking of my mother's high heels on the hardwood kitchen floor as she prepared our family for church. She was heavily involved in our ward and served for years as Relief Society president. I never dreamed anything would change.

When I was around 12 and she and I lived alone, she left the Church for reasons I didn't understand. Although my mom—my role model—had decided to take a different path, I knew the gospel was true, and I continued to attend church. Even though she disagreed with my decision, Mom did drive me to and from church every week.

It was often emotionally difficult to attend church, especially sacrament meeting where, sitting alone near the back, I had a clear view of all the mothers, fathers, and children sitting together. Many times I sat with a friend's family. I'll always be grateful for my "Mormon family" and others in my ward who took extra care to include me during this difficult time.

My home teachers, for example, were faithful even though it was only me they came to teach and I lived farther away than most ward members. I looked forward to the opportunity to discuss the gospel and to feel the strength of the priesthood and the Spirit in my home.

Many ward members were people I had known all my life. With their familiar faces,



When I began attending church alone at age 12, I found that Heavenly Father had blessed me with a ready-made safety net.

welcoming smiles, and friendly conversation, they became my ward mothers, fathers, brothers, and sisters. Feeling a sense of belonging and love eased the heartache of attending church without my family.

I know I am not alone in experiencing this circumstance. Many youth attend church without one or both parents. But through example, friendship, and callings, we all can reach out to these sons and daughters of Heavenly Father and help them feel welcome, teach them gospel principles, and encourage them to be an active part of meetings and activities.

"Heavenly Father planned for us to be born into a family—the most basic, most hallowed, and most powerful group on earth," said Virginia H. Pearce, former counselor in the Young Women general presidency. "And it is within the family that some of the most important learning we'll ever gain takes place. In addition to that family group, the Lord also provided the ward or branch family. . . . Wards are not designed to replace the family unit, but to support the family and its righteous teachings. A ward is another place where there is enough commitment and energy to form a sort of 'safety net' family for each of us when our families cannot or do not provide all of the teaching and growing experiences we need to return to Heavenly Father. We need to expand our appreciation of the power of the ward family and renew our commitment to participate positively in that community of Saints."¹

How grateful I am for those who became my safety net, instilling in me a desire to do the same for others. ■

NOTE

1. Virginia H. Pearce, "The Rewards of a Ward," *New Era*, Mar. 1995, 41.