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Michelle stands up for her standards all the time, both at her school, where the dress code is already strict, and in her family, which she helped to return to church. The Ramnauths live near Port of Spain (center photo), where coconut trees grow right outside their door.



Certain STANDARDS



Think your school is strict? Compare notes with Michelle Ramnauth of Trinidad, who is known for keeping all the rules—both at school and at home.

The sign at the entrance to Manzanilla High School near Sangre Grande, Trinidad, is clear. “No” it says in big red letters, and it itemizes what is forbidden by the dress code: Absolutely no short pants, skirts, or tops; and absolutely no thin straps, halter backs, strapless vests, or bare backs.

Some students balk at the restrictions, but for 17-year-old Michelle Ramnauth they’re no problem at all. “There’s nothing in the school dress code that isn’t already clear in *For the Strength of Youth*,” she says. And many people at the school know what *For the Strength of Youth* is, thanks to Michelle.

Sharing Strength

She explains: “After lunch every day we have 20 minutes for silent reading, and we can read any book we would like. So I would bring *For the Strength of Youth* and read it. One day I left it sitting out and some of the more mischievous boys took it.” But then they actually read it. “And that turned out to be good because they used to curse a lot, but now when they are around me they respect my standards and don’t do that anymore.”

In fact, word spread through the school that Michelle followed the “rules” in her church book, and that meant she had high standards. “If the way I conduct myself in school agrees with *For the Strength of Youth*, that’s exactly how I want it to be,” she says. “Some people think that means I’m too proud to talk to them, but that’s not it. When they’re telling dirty stories or using bad language,

I just don’t want to be around that influence. They’re being disrespectful, I would say. But I have two or three genuine friends who are now trying to change their ways because they respect me and appreciate me for who I am. So I would call them my *true* friends, and I’m happy if I can be a good example for them.”

Sister Solidarity

There is someone else at school counting on Michelle to do what’s right. Her younger sister, Melissa, 15, also attends Manzanilla High, and she has seen what her big sister’s example can do.

“It helps me to have a sister who stands up for what she believes,” Melissa says. “It makes it easier for me to do what’s right.” They see each other during the day and talk about how they’re getting along, and that helps both of them to stay strong.

“For example,” Michelle recalls, “one day some other girls were making fun of Melissa, saying unkind things about our nationality.” At lunch they talked it over, and Michelle was able to reassure Melissa, reminding her that she is a daughter of God with divine nature and of infinite worth. “That helped me feel better,” Melissa says. “It helped me remember who I am.”

In addition, they know there are two more sisters, Marissa, 9, and Marsha, 3, already looking up to them and watching what they do. “As sisters, we all have the responsibility to help each other,” Michelle says.

Standing Strong

Michelle has always tried to be a good influence in her family. The Ramnauths used to live in Guyana, a small

THE GREATEST EDUCATION

“You have a mighty spirit and so do I. The greatest education and the greatest thrust in our lives ought to be to build upon the things of the Spirit.”

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Go for It!” *New Era*, Mar. 2004, 8.

Melissa and Michelle (top right) are known for keeping the standards in For the Strength of Youth.

country on the mainland of South America directly below Trinidad. In Guyana, their father David made his living driving a truck, but the family was struggling financially. He found he could make more money if he went to work in the interior jungles.

“I know he was just trying to provide for us,” Michelle says, “But we grew apart because the most we would see him was like two days in a month.” Eventually her mother, Pamela, got discouraged. “She eased up on going to church, and that really discouraged me,” Michelle says. “For a few Sundays, since I didn’t have my parents’ support, I didn’t go to church.”

Then rather than giving up, Michelle went into action. “I would press [iron] my clothes each Saturday and then get up early on Sunday and go to church by myself. I did that for a few months. It was kind of hard each Sunday because people would ask, ‘Where are your mom and dad?’ I felt a part of me was missing when I went to church by myself.”

So she turned to heaven for help. “I prayed and then cried myself to sleep at night, but I always asked Heavenly Father to help us find a way. I fasted a lot of Sundays by myself, and one or two times my mother fasted with me.”

Spiritual Solutions

Eventually, help did come. First, Michelle persuaded her mother to come to church again. Then a missionary couple, Elder and Sister Dunn, took an interest in her family. “They said they were going to fast for us and asked if I would join them,” Brother Ramnauth recalls. “I told them that ever since I became a member of the Church, I had never fasted. But I said I would.”

Michelle and her mother joined in that fast, too. The result was positive. “I found the strength to say that the

work situation I was in wasn’t good for my family and to realize that not going to church on Sunday was also bad,” Brother Ramnauth says. “So I started going back to church, and we started having family home evening.” He also was able to find a contract closer to home that allowed him to transport materials with the same truck.

“Our family became very active in the Church again,” Michelle says. “I would say it was an answer to prayer and that fast-ing helped, too.” It was only a few months later that the family moved to Trinidad, and in their new country they are still sticking to their standards. Michelle, Melissa, and their mother and father all have callings. Brother Ramnauth is serving in the branch presidency. “I see him sitting in front of the congregation, and I say, ‘Hey, that’s my dad,’ and I’m so proud of him,” Michelle says.

“Living the gospel has created a positive atmosphere in our home,” Michelle says. “You know when you have gospel principles and precepts behind everything you do, your standards aren’t just some rules you have to live while you’re in the classroom. Standards are rules for life, to be followed all the time.”

In fact, you could say that Michelle and her family have certain standards because their standards are *certain*. And that’s a lesson that’s valuable in school and also in the school of life. **NE**

