

SHOCK, SORROW, & GOD'S PLAN

Through the most *devastating experience* of my life, I felt that *Heavenly Father was with me* during my entire journey.

By Paola Çajupi

It was an early morning in 2008 when my mother woke me up to go to school. I was really happy that morning, but I didn't know that it would turn into the worst day of my life or the last time I would be with her. I didn't finish all my classes that day because a friend of our family picked me up and told me that my mom had killed herself. I was only 12 years old.

I thought, "How can I live without my mother?" She was my best friend.

I cried for months. I didn't like going to school because the other children treated me differently and felt sorry for me. I had no clue what I was supposed to do; I only knew I had to be strong for everyone else.

One day, five or six months after my mom's death, I was alone in my room by the window, crying, trying to understand what I was here for. Suddenly I heard a voice in my head: "You are my daughter; I won't let you suffer." I knew it was God. But it surprised me because I didn't believe in Him anymore, especially since I felt that it was God who had taken my mother from me. Even though I didn't know what He meant, I felt safe.

Three years later I went to Rome, Italy, to visit my uncle. He kept telling me about this church he went to. One Sunday, he took me with him. I will always

remember walking toward the church's doors for the first time and feeling the love of Heavenly Father when I went in. It felt like home.

I started going to church every single Sunday and to every activity during the week. I loved being with the youth of the Church. They made me happier. They thought and believed in the same things that I did. Then, after three months, my summer holiday finished and I had to go back to Albania.

When I returned home, I told my dad about the feelings I'd had and how happy I'd felt during those three months going to Church activities. He didn't like it. He told me he wouldn't allow me to continue to go to church. So I would have to be patient for the next three years until I turned 18 years old. Then I could decide for myself and be baptized.

During this time I was blessed with so many people who would tell me about what they learned each Sunday at church. One of those people was Stephanie. She'd been living in Italy when my uncle joined the Church, but she had returned to her home in the United States. My uncle thought it would be good for us to write to each other, so I added her as a friend on Facebook.

Even though we'd never met in person, I will always be grateful to her for helping me build my faith and learn more about the gospel of Jesus Christ. She wrote to me almost every Sunday and told me everything she learned in church and then would answer my questions. She was a great friend to me.

Finally, after years of being patient, I was baptized just two days after my 18th birthday. And soon I will share with my mother the happiness I felt that day, because I will be baptized for her. I know she will be proud of the life I have chosen.

I feel blessed by Heavenly Father because He was with me during my entire journey in so many ways. I just had to wait and be patient because He had a plan for me. He's the one who gave me strength to go through all the challenges I faced. He was always there, helping me be happier. **NE**

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