

THE New Era

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Cover: Minnesota youth
are building firm
foundations with some
important tools. See
"Take a Stand," p. 20.

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If you don't
stand for
something,
you'll fall for
anything. See
"Take a Stand,"
p. 20.



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A GIFT FROM God



by Elder
Russell M. Nelson
of the Quorum of the
Twelve

The book's
four
major
writers were all
eyewitnesses of
the Lord, as was
its translator.

The Book of Mormon will bring you closer to the Lord and His loving power.

Not long after my call to serve as one of the Twelve Apostles, I was summoned to the office of the President of our Quorum, President Ezra Taft Benson. He expressed deep concern that members of the Church did not fully appreciate the value of the Book of Mormon. With emotion in his voice, he read to me from the 84th section of the Doctrine and Covenants:

“Your minds in times past have been darkened because of unbelief, and because you have treated lightly the things you have received—

“Which vanity and unbelief have brought the whole church under condemnation” (D&C 84:54–55).

By that time, President Benson had completely captured my attention. He then concluded his admonition:

“And they shall remain under this condemnation until they repent and remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon” (D&C 84:57).

I shall never forget that lesson. Since then, President Howard W. Hunter, President Gordon B. Hinckley, and many other leaders of the Church have continued to extol the Book of Mormon to people throughout the world.

Primary purpose

I would like to add my testimony of the divinity of this book. I have read it many times. I have also read much that has been written about it. Some authors have focused upon its stories, its people, or its vignettes of history. Others have been intrigued by its language structure or its records of weapons, geography, animal life, techniques of building, or systems of weights and measures.

Interesting as these matters may be, study of the Book of Mormon is most rewarding when one focuses on its *primary* purpose—to testify of Jesus Christ. By comparison, all other issues are incidental.

When you read the Book of Mormon, concentrate on the principal figure in the book—from its first chapter to the last—the Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God. And look for a second undergirding theme: God will keep His covenants with the remnants of the house of Israel (see 3 Ne. 16:11–12; 29:3; Morm. 5:20; 8:21; 9:37).

Its first book of Nephi—written some six centuries *before* the birth of Jesus—records that the prophet Lehi received a vision of the tree of life. His son Nephi prayed to know its meaning. In answer, he was given a remarkable vision. He beheld a virgin bearing a child in her arms. He envisioned the Redeemer of the world, His earthly ministry, and His Crucifixion. He saw 12 others who would follow the Holy One. And he foresaw the



Painting *Mormon Abridging the Plates* by Tom Lovell



When you read the Book of Mormon, concentrate on the principal figure in the book, the Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God.

ongoing opposition to the work of God and of His Apostles.

Other great prophets mentioned in the Book of Mormon—in their own way and time—testified of the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ. Among them were the brother of Jared, Zenock, Neum, and Zenos. Testimonies of Jesus Christ that *predated* His birth in Bethlehem were also recorded from King Benjamin, Abinadi, Alma the Elder, Alma the Younger, Amulek, the sons of Mosiah, Captain Moroni, the brothers Nephi and Lehi, and Samuel the Lamanite. In a seemingly endless sequence of prophetic proclamations—testimonies of “all the holy prophets” (Jacob 4:4) for “a great many thousand years before his coming” (Hel. 8:18)—the Book of Mormon makes the solemn declaration that Jesus is the Christ, our Savior and Redeemer.

Authors

Most books contained in libraries of the world were authored for contemporary readers. And they were generally written for profit, with royalties accruing from successful sales.

Not so with the Book of Mormon. It was written *anciently* for *our day*. It reveals the endless Lordship of Jesus Christ in accounts of two ancient American dispensations, preserved for the benefit of us who live in this dispensation of the fulness of times. Certainly no royalties came to its authors. In fact, they paid dearly for their privilege of participation. What motivated them? Their devotion to God! The book’s four major writers—Nephi, Jacob, Mormon, and Moroni—were all eyewitnesses of the Lord, as was its martyred translator, the Prophet Joseph Smith.

Content

Their writings centered upon the Lord, His mission, and His ministry. Jacob, for example, repeatedly referred to the Atonement and Resurrection of Christ. “Beloved brethren,” wrote Jacob, “be reconciled unto [God] through the atonement of Christ, his Only Begotten Son, and ye may obtain a resurrection, . . . and be presented as the first-fruits of Christ unto God. . . .

“And now, . . . why not speak of the atonement of Christ, and attain to a perfect knowledge of him,” and a

“knowledge of a resurrection and the world to come?” (Jacob 4:11–12).

Jacob’s advice is priceless and timeless.

The Savior declared that the Book of Mormon contains “the fulness of [His] everlasting gospel” (D&C 27:5). How did He define the *gospel*? The resurrected Lord taught, “This is the gospel which I have given unto you—that I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me” (3 Ne. 27:13).

Then He amplified that one-sentence definition: “My Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, that I might draw all men unto me” (3 Ne. 27:14).

The Book of Mormon is the most important religious text to be revealed from God to man. Joseph Smith declared the Book of Mormon to be “the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion” (*History of the Church*, 4:461). It is the only book that the Lord Himself has testified to be true (see D&C 17:6).

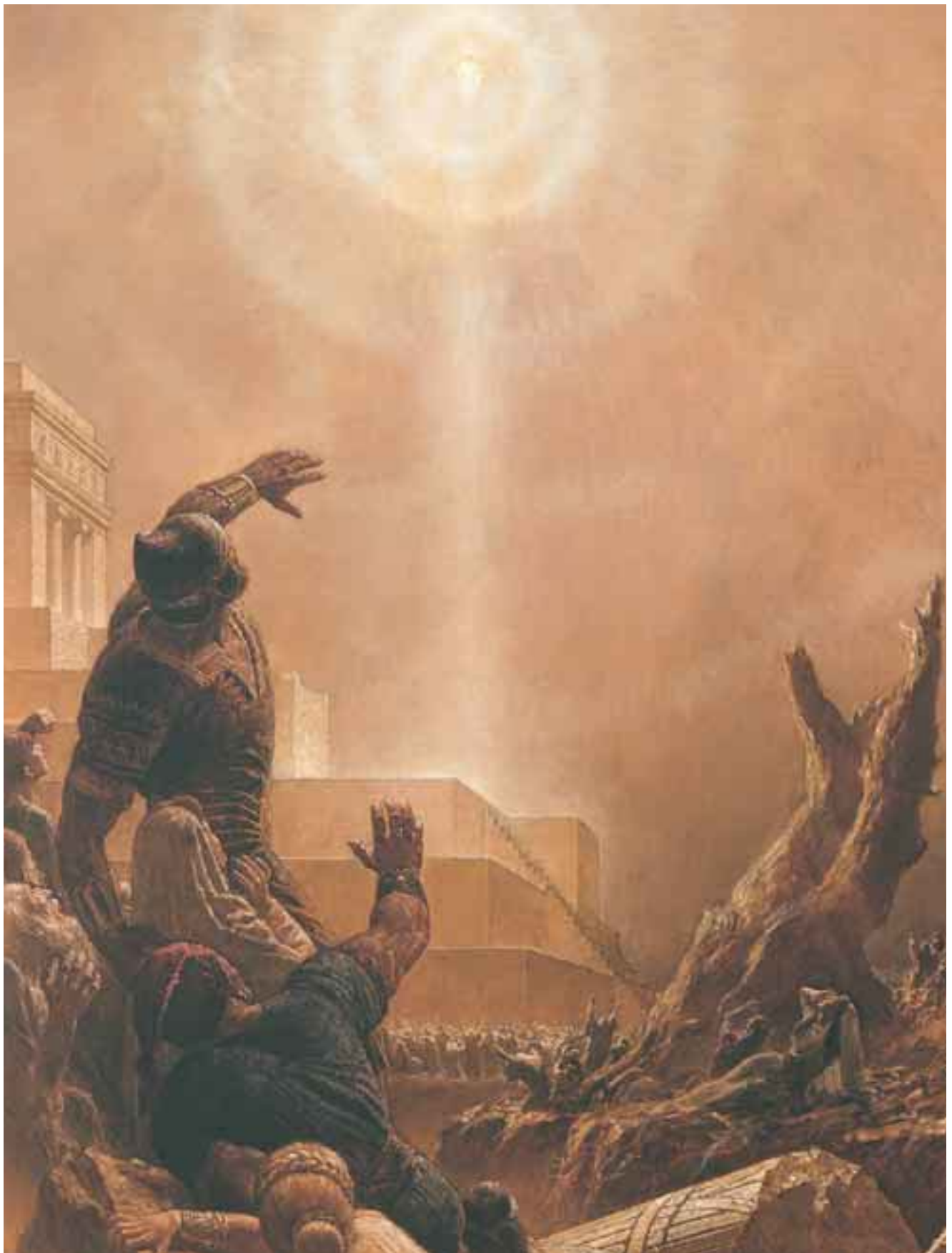
The crowning event of this sacred record is the personal ministry of the resurrected Lord to people of ancient America. He instructed the people. He taught them to pray, to repent, to be baptized, to partake of the sacrament, to know of His doctrine, to understand the importance of sacred ordinances and covenants, and to endure to the end.

The Book of Mormon is a gift from God to all humankind. He invites all “to come unto him and partake of his goodness,” and He denies “none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female” (2 Ne. 26:33).

Personal testimony and blessings

Each individual who prayerfully studies the Book of Mormon can also receive a testimony of its divinity. In addition, this book can help with personal problems in a very real way. Do you want to get rid of a bad habit? Do you want to improve relationships in your family? Do you want to increase your spiritual capacity? Read the Book of Mormon! It will bring you closer to the Lord and His loving power. The Book of Mormon is true! **NE**

Adapted from an October 1999 general conference address.



JUST HANGING

It's casual. It's fun. There's no pressure. And that makes hanging out attractive. But it also makes it easier to let your guard down. So take some tips from other LDS teens on how to stay spiritually and physically safe.

by Brad Wilcox

It's not really "dating," so does just hanging out have its own risks and rules? Absolutely.

It's not like we were on a date, Bishop," said Paul. "We were just hanging out." Fifteen-year-old Paul was trying to explain why he was having moral problems with a young lady whom he had never "dated." When the bishop spoke with the young lady, she, like Paul, failed to grasp the seriousness of what they had done because, after all, they weren't "dating."

Young Latter-day Saints know the guidelines for dating. Most can recite them by memory: don't date until age 16, date in groups, and only date those who share your same high standards. But more and more LDS teens aren't dating in the traditional sense. Sure, they may attend a few proms or other formal dances at school, but most young people today prefer to just hang out. "We just get together at someone's house," one teenager explains, "and watch videos, play games, or talk. No one asks anyone.

OUT



Word just spreads that we're getting together and everyone comes." Another said, "Sometimes we pile into cars and just drive around. It's fun."

Of course hanging out can be fun. It's casual and informal. There's no pressure, and it takes very little preparation. Most parents and Church leaders are happy to see young people gather with positive friends and stay in groups. Such activities can promote feelings of acceptance and inclusion that are necessary and good. However, the casualness and lack of accountability that accompany hanging out can sometimes open the door to problems and put young people in situations where their safety—both physical and spiritual—is in jeopardy.

As a bishop in a BYU student ward, I asked some of the young people I work with for their advice. Is it possible to hang in there with gospel standards and covenants while hanging out with friends? Here are their responses and suggestions:

Plan activities in advance. Josh Smith from San Antonio, Texas, says, "I know it takes a little effort, but it really is better if your friends know what they are going to do. Say, 'Hey, we're going to make some cookies and deliver them, or we're going to play volleyball.' Just so everyone isn't



Even if no one's in charge, there are still rules—the rules of courtesy and respect for property, for safety, for obeying parents, and for Church standards.

sitting around saying, ‘So, what are we going to do now?’” Josh is right. It’s easy to go with the flow, but if we are not careful the flow usually takes us in only one direction—down. Dustin Coffman from Lake Charles, Louisiana, says, “Everyone finds it harder to resist inappropriate videos, music, and activities when such things are thrown at us at the last minute and we haven’t thought about what we could do instead.”

Make sure an adult is around. Ryota Natsume, a young convert from Japan, says, “I can’t believe how many young people feel that it’s no problem to be at someone’s home when their parents are not there. That’s just not respectful or smart.” Jeni Judd from California says, “My friends used to think I was so weird when I would ask if their parents were going to be home while we were there, but that was my family rule. You couldn’t be at friends’ houses if their parents weren’t home. At the time I thought it was dumb, but now I realize that kids just act differently if they know an adult is around. They are just not so wild.”

Respect the property of others. Lindsay Gunnell, from Orem, Utah, says, “I always liked having friends over, but my parents hated it because things would get broken, and no one would say anything or take responsibility. My dad has a nice pool table and entertainment center in our basement, but after they got damaged he just said, ‘No one can go downstairs, period.’” Just because hanging out is casual doesn’t mean the rules of common sense and courtesy don’t apply.

Another example comes from Jason Porter from Chicago. He says, “My friends would just pig out at my house like they had never seen food before. I always felt stupid saying no, so they would just clean out the fridge and the cupboards. My mom and dad

were really good about it because they wanted me to have friends over, but they didn’t have the money to be feeding the whole neighborhood all the time.” Few parents do. Amy Lockhart, from Canada, says, “A good rule to follow when you are at someone else’s house is don’t help yourself to food unless it is offered to you.”

Use seat belts. Even young people who have good seat belt habits when driving with their own parents and families are too easily distracted when they are with friends. They pile in and out of cars without even thinking about safety. Lindsay Robinson, from Atlanta, Georgia, says, “I always made my friends buckle up when I was driving and even when I wasn’t. Sometimes they would make jokes about it and call me mom, but they got the point. I think inside they were grateful that I was being careful.” Never try to fit more in a car than the number of available seat belts. If there aren’t enough seat belts for the whole group, then make other plans.

Obey curfews. This was a point that was brought up by all the young people I talked to. They warned that when you’re just hanging out, it’s easy to let the time slip away, and before you know it you’re breaking curfews all over the



place and getting everyone in trouble. Dan Stanger from Helena, Montana, says, "Although your parents may give you a later curfew, someone else in the group may have an earlier one. That guy is going to feel stupid bringing it up or being the first to leave, so just pack up and quit the whole thing at a decent hour and then no one has to be in an awkward position."

Stay out of bedroom areas. "Another thing," Dan says, "stay out of the bedrooms. I know how it is to get talking with a girl and then wanting to get away from the crowd and the noise, but don't go to the bedrooms." Ben Dunford, from Grayson, Georgia, says, "When I came to BYU, I had to sign an honor code that said I would not only keep a curfew and not be in girls' apartments or allow girls to be in my apartment after a certain hour, but I would also never have girls in my bedroom area or be in their bedroom areas. If it's smart for BYU students to live that way, it's smart for any Latter-day Saint anywhere."

Another young woman in my ward said, "The good thing about hanging out is that you are with a big group of people. The bad thing is that no one is keeping track of who is or isn't there. You can break away from the group pretty easily before anyone misses you. That can lead to trouble. I know that firsthand. My parents would never have let me be alone with a certain boy, but they let me hang out with my friends. Well, this boy and I always made sure we were both at the same place, and then we would take off to some back room to be alone. We never did anything really bad, but I totally regret what we did and even more the deception and dishonesty we were involved in."

Immorality is immorality whenever it happens or wherever it happens. Despite what is shown in movies or sung in love songs, immorality always results in undesirable consequences. When it comes to staying clean, sometimes hanging out can be even more dangerous than dating because young people don't have their guards up. They are vulnerable to temptation and experimentation because they feel more comfortable, relaxed, and safe than they do in formal situations.



Is it possible to stick with Church standards and keep covenants while hanging out with friends? The young college students in my ward answer with an emphatic, "Yes!" But they caution that you just have to remember a few things. Planning wholesome activities in advance and making sure there is an adult around to chaperon are sure ways to set yourself up for success. Respecting the property of others and using seat belts in vehicles are excellent ways to make sure nothing spoils the fun. Following curfews and staying clear of bedrooms are ways to make sure no one has to live with regrets.

After Paul and his "girlfriend" spoke with their bishop, they realized that they could get themselves into negative and undesirable situations even when it wasn't a formal dating situation. Everyone will be happier if we worry less about what does or doesn't qualify as a "date" and more about keeping our covenants. Perhaps some of the suggestions from the young people in my ward can help others hang in as they hang out. **NE**

Follow these simple rules, endorsed by your own peers, and you can have fun and friendship with no regrets.

YOU CHOOSE



by Sister
Sharon G. Larsen
Second Counselor in the
Young Women General
Presidency

Life seems full of choices, but in the end, it all boils down to choosing one of two roads.

Life was simpler years ago in my hometown on the Canadian prairie. Our phone number was one digit—3. We had one black-and-white movie that came from Cardston every Thursday night. Mail came Monday, Wednesday, and Friday—unless it snowed hard.

There was one main road. Three miles west was our farm, and 20 miles east on that same road was the Cardston Alberta Temple. There weren't many other roads to choose or places to go.

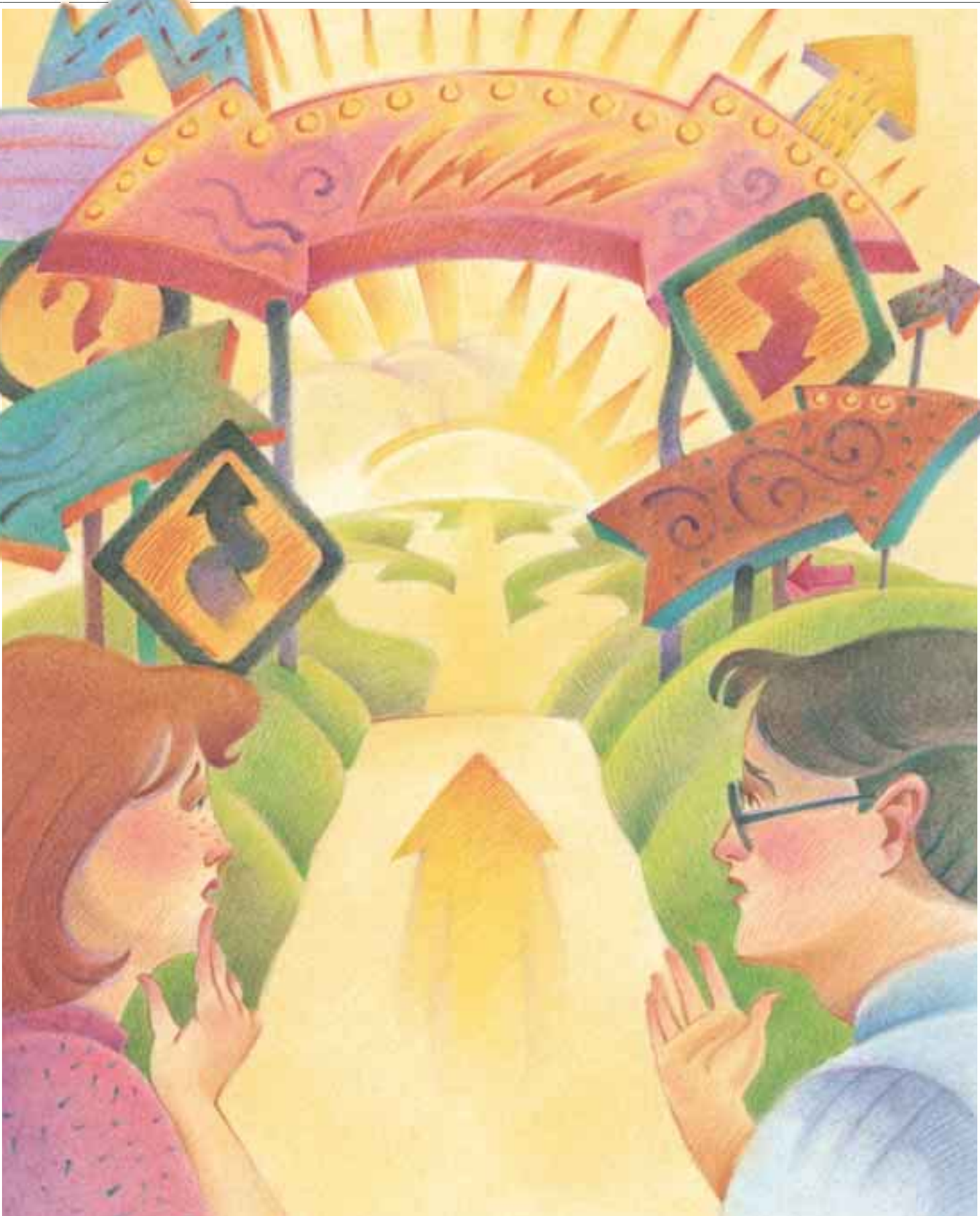
Today there are infinite telephone numbers, movies of all kinds and colors, e-mail at our fingertips 24 hours a day, and many roads that relentlessly call for our judgment. Our environment is flooded with choices. But our purpose for being here on earth has never changed. The Lord told Abraham that He sent us to earth to see if we would do

what He asked us to do. The world's two opposing forces seek our commitment. On the one hand is the reality of Satan, and on the other, the more powerful love of the Savior. It is in this exercise of acting for ourselves that we grow.

I remember asking my parents if I could do certain things. Their response never varied: "You have been taught. You know how we feel about that, but you will have to decide for yourself." Yet deciding for oneself dictates consequences, which are not always what we want. We want the freedom without consequences. And so, too often, we try to stand neutral, undecided, and uncommitted. It is in this atmosphere that we become vulnerable to Satan.

Indecision

King Ahab and his people in northern Israel tell us about neutrality and indecision. The Lord's hand was stayed because the people would not decide whom to worship—Jehovah or Baal. The Lord sent Elijah the prophet with this clear message: "How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him." The scriptures say, "The people





It's incredible. There are six billion people on this planet, and Heavenly Father cares what I watch for entertainment, what I eat and drink, how I dress, and how I earn and spend my money. He cares about my happiness.

answered him not a word" (1 Kgs. 18:21). They didn't want the responsibility of making a commitment. You remember the story: Elijah challenged them to a test to see who is God. They would each pray to their god to see which would burn up the offering on the altar. When the priests called mightily to their idol, they were left unheard and unsupported.

When Elijah petitioned his God, the fire of the Lord came down and consumed everything—the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, the dust—and it licked up the water in the trench. Following this exhibition, the people said, "The Lord, he is the God" (1 Kgs. 18:39), and then the scriptures say the priests of Baal were killed. Choices would not be a dilemma if good were rewarded as quickly and spectacularly as was Elijah or if wrongdoing meant immediate death. But it is not that simple.

Our faith and commitment are tested when the world offers tempting alternatives that can turn our faces from the Lord's kingdom. Choosing which way we face will determine our blessings or our burdens.

Finding the strength

A young man I love with all my heart said to me: "No one can tell me what to do. I am in charge of my own life." He has the mistaken idea that to be independent and free, he must oppose God's will. Where, then, will his strength come?

Brother James E. Talmage said of Jesus: He "was all that a boy should be, for His development was unretarded by the dragging weight of sin; He loved and obeyed the truth and therefore was free" (*Jesus the Christ*, 112).

Making right choices frees us and blesses us, even in choosing what may appear trivial in our lives. A friend thought the Lord was too involved in his life. He said, "I can't take all those absolutes in the Church that tell me I must do this, I can't do that." My friend did not see that those absolutes are evidence of our Father's vigilant care.

Isn't it incredible? There are six billion people on this planet, and Heavenly Father cares what I watch for entertainment, and He cares what I eat and drink. He cares how I dress and how I earn and spend my money. He cares what I do and don't do. Heavenly Father cares about my happiness.

Our Father's caring comes in so many ways, and we have only to listen and live for it.

Because our purpose here on earth has not changed, our Father steadily and regularly supplies additional gifts to make our world safe and strengthen our wise use of agency. Think about the gift of prayer—opportunities to be heard and understood. Think about the gift of the Holy Ghost, who will show us all the things that we should do (see 2 Ne. 32:5). Think about sacred covenants we have made, the scriptures, priesthood and patriarchal blessings. Think about the ultimate gift of the Atonement and its reminder in the sacrament that blankets us with love and hope and grace. These gifts help us use our agency wisely to return to our heavenly home.

Today there are many roads, but like my hometown, there is only one main road, the strait and narrow. **NE**

Adapted from an October 1999 general conference address.

TUNED IN

The weather was beautiful, and we were nearing the end of another marvelous week at girls' camp. As youth camp leaders we gathered the rest of the young women and began the transition from the light-hearted fun of the afternoon to the more reverent atmosphere we desired for that evening's program. One of the leaders suggested we sing some hymns.

We clustered together and started singing. As we sang, I noticed someone was a little out of tune. I thought someone was being silly, so I glanced sideways at those near me. But when I listened more closely, I realized who it was.

One of the youth camp leaders with us that year had Down syndrome. She had a tremendous spirit and loved each of us without reserve. And we loved her. She sang with all her heart, often being touched by many

Maybe she wasn't hitting the right notes, but her sweet spirit struck just the right chord.

by Sherilyn Farnes

of the words that most of us mouthed without really thinking about them.

I reflected on how many times Alisa had been the one to go up to one of the girls who needed a hug. I remembered how dedicated she was to the gospel. I recalled her sweet testimony at the many youth conferences we had been to. And then I realized how many times Alisa felt the Spirit when the rest of us were too busy, too silly, or too tired.

I suddenly understood that Alisa was in tune where it really mattered. She was in tune with the Spirit. As long as she stayed on the path she was on and followed the guidance of the Holy Spirit, someday she would likely raise her voice in perfect harmony with a heavenly choir to sing praises to our Lord. For now, though, the most important thing was to be in tune spiritually. **NE**



Q & A

“I’m the president of my quorum, so I’m responsible to help plan weeknight activities for my class. It seems that we end up doing the same old things most of the time. What are some things we can do to make our activities more appealing?”

NEW ERA

The fact that you are looking for ways to make your quorum activities more appealing is a sign you are trying to do your best in your calling. President Gordon B. Hinckley has stressed how important each calling is. Speaking to all the members of the Church, President Hinckley said, “Your obligation is as serious in your sphere of responsibility as is my obligation in my sphere” (*Ensign*, May 1995, 71).

Understanding the responsibility of your calling may be a bit overwhelming, but you should also be aware of the great opportunity you have to impact members of your quorum with activities you plan.

It is easier to influence people who consider you a friend. You should get to know everybody in your quorum. If you are their friend, you will know their interests and needs and you will be prepared to plan activities they will enjoy.

You don’t have to think up every activity on your own. Enlist the help of your counselors and involve quorum members. Ask them what they are interested in. If there is a member of

The key to a successful activity lies more in your attitude than in the size of the event.

Enlist the help of your counselors and involve quorum members in planning activities.

Read the New Era regularly to see what Latter-day Saints around the world are doing.

Missionary work and service to others are fun and rewarding activities.

Don’t forget to pray for help.

READERS

Assign each week of the month a topic, such as service night, career night, sports night, or fun night. Find out from the members of your quorum what they would like to do for each of the topics. Be creative and have fun.



By having everyone in your quorum participate in planning meetings, each person will have the opportunity to contribute new ideas. Sometimes when only one person does all the planning, the activities won’t always appeal to everyone. If you allow others to share their interests, you are bound to have a variety of fun activities.



**Natasha Reeves, 13
Pearland, Texas**



your quorum who is less active, involve him in planning an activity that revolves around his interests. The more you involve others in preparing and carrying out activities, the more they will enjoy the activities and want them to be successful.

The key to a successful activity lies more in your attitude than in the size of the activity. Your attitude can be contagious. No matter how well an activity is planned, if you go believing the activity won't be fun, you will probably be right.

If you want ideas for specific activities, read the *New Era* regularly to see what Latter-day Saint youth around the world are doing. There are also ideas for activities each month in the Reader's Guide at the back of the magazine. Ask your parents and advisers what activities they enjoyed most when they were your age and try a few of their ideas.

In your search for activities, don't forget the purpose of your quorum and the reason you hold the priesthood. "The priesthood is not really so much a gift as it is a commission to serve, a privilege to lift, and an opportunity to bless the lives of others" (Thomas S. Monson, *Ensign*, Nov. 1999, 50).

One of the most rewarding activities you can do as a quorum is to serve others. If you can't think of someone in your quorum who needs help, ask your bishop if anyone in the ward could use some assistance. Service projects can be a lot of fun if they are well planned.

Perhaps the best service we can give is to share the gospel. Missionary work makes for great activities. If you or one of your quorum members has a friend who might be interested in the Church, talk to the missionaries about how you can involve your quorum in sharing the gospel with that friend.

The Lord will help you in your calling if you seek help in prayer. Also remember to seek the help of your advisers, parents, and other Church leaders. **NE**

Answers are intended for help and perspective, not as pronouncements of Church doctrine.



"In the great tradition of the Church there must continue to be recreation and social and cultural enjoyment. What I am saying is that there can and should be a balance and a blending of service and recreation. . . . Every activity—even a project in which physical work is done—can be great fun. Spiritual experiences can be built into everything we do" (*Ensign*, Nov. 1975, 66–67).

— Bishop Victor L. Brown (1914–1996)

I was the president of my class, and I know how you feel. I prayed about it and asked my leaders what I should do. Try asking the people in your class what they think would be fun. The Lord and your leaders will help you decide what to do.



**Candace Whatcott, 15
Salem, Utah**

Always ask opinions of others and then follow through with their suggestions. And let people help with the responsibilities. Don't be the only one in charge. It's always important to remember others and their feelings, so make sure you listen.



**Makelle Riley, 13
Layton, Utah**

Hold a planning meeting with each quorum member present. This way you can discuss and plan the upcoming activities with everyone's input.



**Elder Shay Ludwig, 19
California Roseville Mission**

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Send us your answer to the question below, along with your name, age, and where you are from. Please include a snapshot of yourself that is 1 1/2 by 2 inches (4 by 5 cm) or larger.

**Q&A, *New Era*
50 East North Temple
Salt Lake City, Utah 84150**

QUESTION

I think I have a testimony, but sometimes I have doubts. Does that mean I really don't have a testimony? What should I do?

Please respond before October 1, 2001.

A photograph of a person's hands tied together with red string. The hands are positioned in the center of the frame, with the fingers slightly curled. A spool of red thread is placed on a wooden surface in front of the hands. The background is a warm, reddish-brown color. The text "LITTLE BY LITTLE" is overlaid on the top half of the image in a white, pixelated font.

LITTLE BY LITTLE

**THOSE “LITTLE” SINS—UNREPENTED—CAN PUT YOU IN A BIG BIND
(See 2 Nephi 26:22; 28:8.)**

TAKE A

It's not always easy to keep Church standards, but these Minneapolis youth have learned that when you stand together, it's easier to stand tall.

These kids realize it's no coincidence that the words "stand" and "standard" are related.

Small and simple things are the building blocks of the eternities. Just as large skyscrapers are the result of thousands of many smaller pieces being put together in the right order, our lives are constructed on a day-by-day, decision-by-decision basis.

The Lord reminds us: "Be not weary in well-doing, for ye are laying the foundation of a great work. And out of small things proceedeth that which is great.

"Behold, the Lord requireth the heart and a willing mind; and the willing and obedient shall eat the good of the land of Zion in these last days" (D&C 64:33–34).

The youth of the Anoka and Minneapolis stakes in Minnesota are working hard at building more righteous lives and building up the Church through their righteousness. They use the standards of the Church as their building blocks.

The youth had a recent joint youth conference titled "Standing for Something," named after the title of President Gordon B. Hinckley's book. Using *For the Strength of Youth* as a guide, the Anoka and Minneapolis youth served, participated in workshops, and bore their testimonies. They agree that

by Shanna Ghaznavi



STAND



although the standards of the Church are good and important, it's not always easy to live them. But they also agree that the more they obey those standards, the easier it is to have high standards and to form a solid foundation on which to build the rest of their lives. So the youth of these stakes decided to take a stand for some simple, but important, standards.

Stand in holy places

The recent dedication of the St. Paul Minnesota Temple has made the youth in Minnesota want to be more prepared to go there. Melissa Miller, a Laurel, went to the dedication and saw the sealing room while she was there. "Actually seeing the room was great," she says. "Having a temple in the area makes a temple marriage seem more realistic."

Trent Oelkers, a priest from the Medicine Lake Ward, took time to ponder while he waited outside the temple for his sister to receive her endowments before her mission. "When

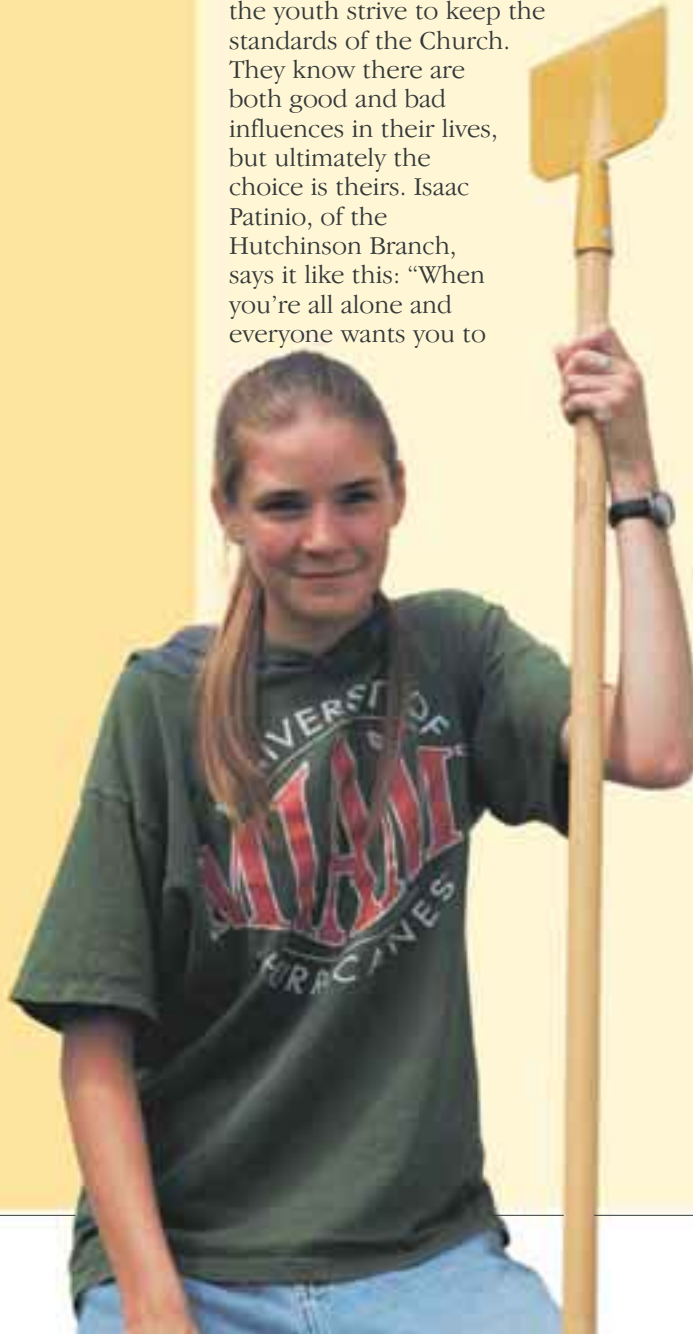
These kids know that what they choose to do now will help determine the outcome of their lives, so they choose to serve—in the temple, in the community, wherever needed.

I'm near it, I think about spiritual things more than I regularly would," he says.

Before the temple was built in Minnesota, the youth had to take an eight-hour bus ride to Chicago to perform baptisms for the dead. "The temple finishes the three-fold mission of the Church here in Minnesota," Trent says. "It probably means more missionary work in the end. A lot of people are more missionary focused now." He also agrees that getting married in the temple is on the top of the priority list for most of the youth.

Stand your ground

As part of preparing for the temple, the youth strive to keep the standards of the Church. They know there are both good and bad influences in their lives, but ultimately the choice is theirs. Isaac Patinio, of the Hutchinson Branch, says it like this: "When you're all alone and everyone wants you to



go do something inappropriate, you have a choice. Are you going to be like Joseph Smith, or are you going to say, 'Just this one time'?"

Michael Garfield, a priest in the Plymouth Ward, stood his ground last summer when his soccer team was about to go into the state tournament. His coach wanted him to return the next season, but that would mean Sunday matches. The state tournament was also on Sunday. Michael had told his coach he could not play on Sundays already, and he was about to explain to him the importance of the Sabbath day. But before he could explain, one of his nonmember teammates, whom Michael had explained the Sabbath to before, jumped in and told the coach about the importance of the Sabbath day. "My coach understood better because he heard it from someone else," Michael says. He was glad he had explained to his friend the sacredness of the Sabbath.

Michael has decided not to continue playing on the soccer team because of all the Sunday games. Keeping the Sabbath holy and having family time is more important to him, he says.

Stand at the door and knock

Other Minnesota youth are busy setting a good example, too. Maggie Albaugh, a Laurel in the Anoka stake, stepped outside her comfort zone when she taught a girl in her class to pray. Katie was one of the more popular girls in her school, and Maggie didn't know her very well. "She'd never prayed and was never into religion," Maggie says.

The sudden death of one of their friends brought them, and their whole class, closer together. Katie stopped Maggie in the halls of their school, knowing of her LDS standards, to ask her questions about life and death. "The only advice I could give her was the simple advice to pray," Maggie says. "I just felt that, as Mormon youth, prayer helps us through a lot of things and a lot of people don't have the same understanding of prayer. It is a gift that was given to us to communicate with our Heavenly Father."

So Katie prayed, and at a memorial service for their friend, she shared with her class the comfort she had received through prayer.



Above all,
they are
choosing to
stand together
and to stand their
ground.

Succor those who stand in need

Brushing up on their service skills meant the youth hauled woodchip-filled wheelbarrows, wielded paintbrushes, and picked up trash at a park near their stake center. They toted their trash bags to a nearby school to beautify it as well. Some of the youth also went to a rest home and played games with and sang to the residents.

Jane Wilson, a Laurel, really enjoyed serving in her stake. She says, "It's kind of hard to choose the right with all the bad influences around you." But you can tell when you're doing what you should because of "the joy you feel when you're doing what's right."

Stand blameless

But if they do make mistakes, the Minnesota youth know they can repent. "We need to repent if we want to get into the celestial kingdom," says Tony Maresh, a priest from the Elm Creek Ward. Tony believes in the power of repentance, but he says too



many people think they are not good enough to pray and ask forgiveness. "You are good enough," he says. You are never too unworthy to repent.

Matt Bezzant learned about repentance during a service project at a nursery school. He would let the children clean the walls of the nursery as well as they could with the tools he gave them, and then he would come along afterwards to help them make the wall clean all the way. Cleaning the walls was like repentance, he said. "You do all you can to clean the wall, and God gives you the tools for that; then He does the rest."

Stand for something

The standards in *For the Strength of Youth* are important to the Minnesota youth because if you don't stand for something, you'll fall for anything, they say, quoting President Hinckley's book. "By comparing your behavior and thoughts with your Father's standards, you are in a better position to govern yourselves and make the right choices. God's commandments (standards) are constant, unwavering, and dependable" (*For the Strength of Youth*, 6).

They are trying to use the standards to build righteous lives dedicated to God, and they are doing it piece by piece, choice by choice, living each standard that makes up the whole gospel of Jesus Christ. The Minnesota youth are "laying the foundation of a great work" by their small acts of obedience. **NE**



IN ANOTHER MAN'S SHOES

What kind of person would come to race without shoes? For that matter, what kind of person would give shoes to an unprepared stranger?

Was I prepared for the marathon? Sure, I had trained for months. But at the race site, I found I needed help just to run.

The last thing my mom asked me before I left for St. George, Utah, was, “Do you have your shoes?”

As facetiously as she had asked the question, I answered, “Yes.” Who would forget to take running shoes to a race?

Now it was 5:00 A.M., just before the start of the St. George Marathon, and I realized I hadn’t told my mom the truth.

Humility came quickly. I found myself begging. As the other runners were loading on the buses that would take them to the starting line of the 26-mile race, I was approaching strangers.

“Do you have any extra shoes?”

I got a few laughs, some sympathy, no shoes.

I started to feel nervous. I had trained for months and didn’t want to lose the opportunity to race just because I had forgotten my running shoes. But it didn’t take long to see that my chances of finding shoes were slim.

Anywhere around size nine and a half to eleven and a half, I thought, knowing I couldn’t be too picky.

One man heard my plea just as he was boarding the bus. He stepped out of line,

walked several blocks to his parked car, and retrieved an extra pair of shoes.

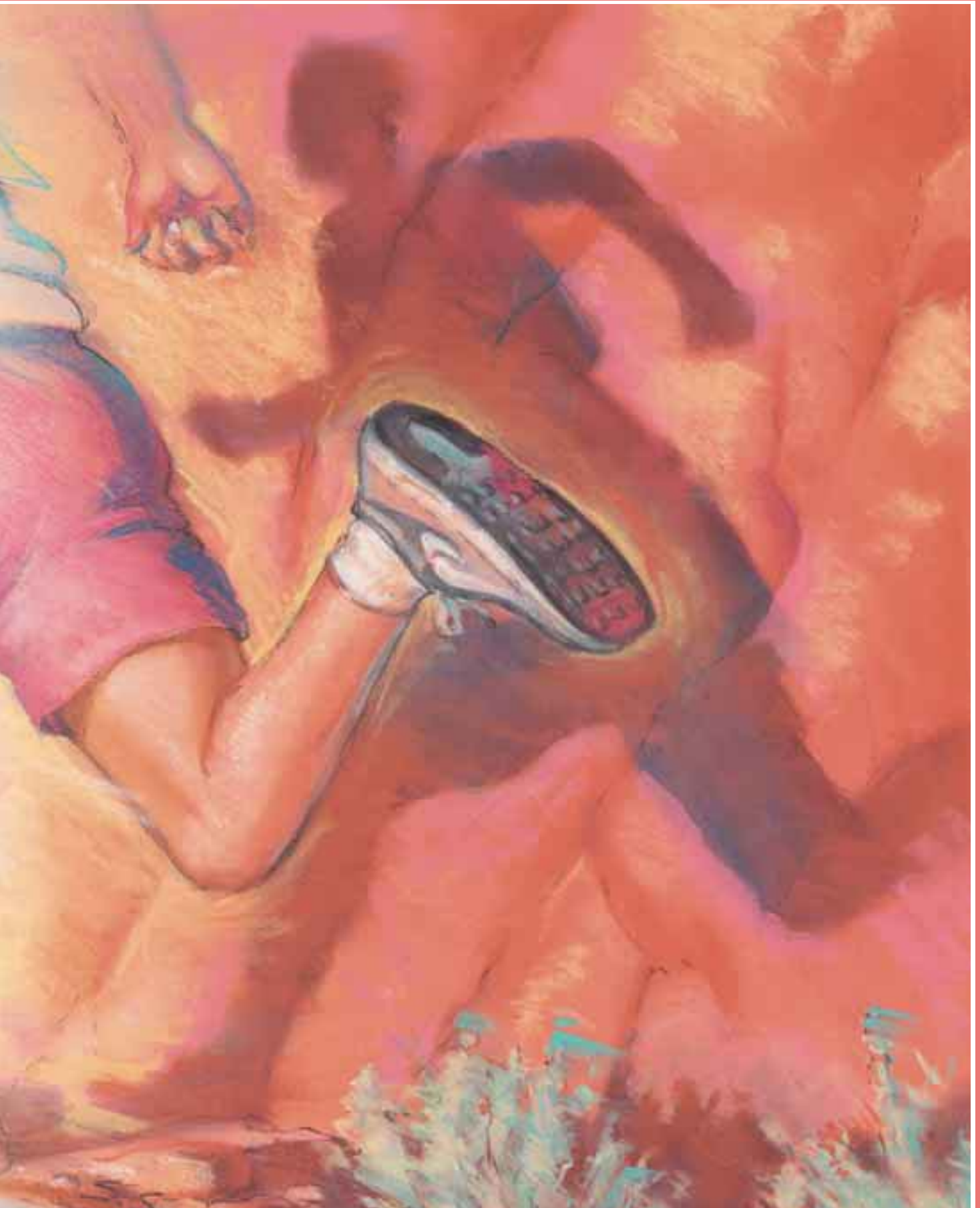
“They’re good shoes, but I don’t use them anymore,” he said as he handed them to me. “You can keep them.”

My gratitude for this man didn’t take the pain out of my feet, protected during the race by shoes that were a half size too small. And, even though I don’t remember his name or where he was from, I will always remember the gift of his extra shoes that stretched my understanding of what service can be. He taught me that service isn’t always something we organize as an activity. Service is helping people who need assistance, whether it’s planned or not.

Although I didn’t have use for them after the race, it was years before I finally got rid of the snug-fitting shoes. To me they stood as a monument to a random act of service. The man didn’t have to give me his shoes. He could have boarded the bus to the starting line and never thought about me again. But he took the time to walk to his car and bring me his extra shoes. It was as though he had made the decision years ago to take advantage of every opportunity to serve.

I’ve been told not to judge a man until I’ve walked a mile in his shoes. After 26 miles of running that Saturday morning, I suppose I can judge the size 10 man who gave me his extra pair. He was willing to go out of his way to help me, without expecting anything in return. He didn’t want money. He didn’t even want his shoes back. He just didn’t want to pass up the opportunity to serve. **NE**

by Matthew Baker



PLAYING A *Different* TUNE

Although he loves piano performance, Stephen Beus realizes that the most important performance at this time in his life won't be at a piano, but behind a badge engraved, "Elder Beus."

Every missionary has to give up something to go on a mission. Elder Beus is giving up three to six hours of practice a day.

At age five, most children are learning to tie their shoes, ride a bicycle, and recite the alphabet. Stephen Beus was learning how to play the piano.

At age nine, Stephen made his first symphony appearance with the Oregon East Symphony. At age 11, he played in his first international competition and

took fifth place. He returned to the same competition three years later and placed first.

The older Stephen got, the more piano became a major focus in his life. He won numerous state, regional, national, and international competitions. He appeared on stage with renowned conductors and famous orchestras. He performed and was interviewed on national radio. A television station from his home state of Washington produced and aired a documentary about him. He also gave benefit concerts and solo recitals. And through all of this, he was able to excel at school and keep his focus on living the gospel.

At age 18, most aspiring piano performers are practicing three to six



by Matthew Baker



Only another dedicated musician can appreciate how big a sacrifice it is to give up two years of practice, development, and performances. But Stephen says the blessings of serving a mission outweigh the sacrifice.



hours a day and learning new pieces to help them gain prominence and earn entrance into prestigious music schools. Stephen is putting all that aside to serve a mission in Finland.

Setting priorities

Although he loves piano performance, he realizes that the most important performance at this time in his life won't be at a piano, but behind a badge engraved, "Elder Beus."

"I won't be learning new repertoire, and all the other pianists will be home practicing," Stephen says. "But I think it's more important for me to go on a mission right now."

Although he will be putting a promising career on hold for two years, Stephen doesn't believe that this is different from what all missionaries do. "Every missionary has to give up something to go on a mission. Some people leave girlfriends, careers, college, sports, and other things."

Along with practicing daily, which Stephen has done for three to six hours a day except Sunday, he will also be giving up recitals and performances. "I may not be heard for two years, which is not usually ideal for pianists. I have just begun to receive invitations for recitals and performances, which is a long-awaited mark in my short career."

But Stephen believes the blessings outweigh the sacrifice. "I've been greatly blessed in my life with a wonderful family and with a testimony of the gospel. The least I can do is to share the Book of Mormon and the gospel with other people so they can experience the joy that comes with knowing and living the truth."

Sharing the Spirit

As Stephen prepares for his mission he muses about the possibilities of using his musical talent to share the gospel. "If it's effective, I'd like to do it." He says there have been numerous times he has felt the Spirit through music and hopes that he can help others have that feeling. There have been piano performances when Stephen felt his playing was like bearing his testimony.

Although his testimony isn't based on music, he says that music has helped strengthen it. "I think music is a supplement to my testimony. It's just one of the beautiful things that God has given for our enjoyment. 'Men are, that they might have joy' (2 Ne. 2:25), and I think good music is one thing that can help us have joy, because it brings the Spirit."

To be learned is good, if . . .

Stephen has been practicing the piano for 13 years. He has studied under

prestigious teachers and performed in numerous venues. He has earned respect for his talent and learned to touch audiences. But he says his learning is worth nothing if he doesn't first try to live what he believes.

He quotes 2 Nephi 9:28-29: "When they are learned they think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves, wherefore, their wisdom is foolishness and it profiteth them not. . . . But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God."

Stephen says that as much as he enjoys music, it would be selfish if he let that get in the way of his desire to serve a mission. "That scripture has had a powerful influence on me. Music is a beautiful gift from God, but if I were to let it interfere with the most essential things in my life, my music would then become foolishness."

As much as Stephen loves music, his testimony and love of missionary work is stronger. "I know that serving the Lord for two years is more important than anything else I could do, even though it is hard to leave some things behind."

Plans for the future

After he returns from his mission,

Stephen plans on restoring any piano skills he might lose during his mission. He says he will have to work extra hard to catch up with the competition. Then he would like to refine his skill even further by leaving his hometown of Othello and attending the Peabody Conservatory of Music in Maryland or Julliard in New York.

Stephen says the standards he chooses to live by aren't always accepted in the music community. He hopes that serving a mission will give him more strength to be a positive influence in that community. He also hopes that going on a mission will strengthen the confidence he needs to share the gospel when he returns.

Whatever he does, Stephen hopes that the talent he has will give him the opportunity to serve others and share the gospel. He believes that's one of the reasons he has his talent. "I think God expects me to develop my talent and try to bless other people with it."

So his love for the piano won't keep him from serving a mission. "You have to make a sacrifice to do anything worthwhile." **NE**

"I know that serving the Lord for two years is more important than anything else I could do, even though it is hard to leave some things behind."



WHAT WILL I SAY?

Bless a dying woman? I didn't know what to say, but the Lord did.

One day my missionary companion and I received a phone call from a ward mission leader. He told me there was a woman who was dying and wanted the elders to give her a blessing. I immediately felt uncomfortable but said we would do it. As I hung up the phone, I couldn't help but think, Bless someone who is dying? What kind of blessing do you give to someone who is about to die?

Before we left I knelt down and prayed. I asked Heavenly Father to help me exercise my priesthood.

We met the ward mission leader outside the house where the woman was staying. He told us they hadn't expected her to live through the previous night.

The mother led us to the room where her daughter was. She knocked on the door and said, "Honey, the elders are here to give you a blessing." As she opened the door, I caught my first glimpse of the woman.

My heart ached as I saw her lying on the bed. She was a woman in her mid-40s and completely bald due to medical treatment. She slowly opened her eyes, and I smiled as kindly as I could.

It was decided that my companion would anoint her and I would seal the anointing.

My mind raced as I tried to think of what to say, but nothing seemed right.

As I laid my hands on her head, the Spirit took over. Words flowed to my mind as I blessed her, words that did not come from me.

My companion finished, and I looked at her, so frail looking, so weak. What am I going to do? I thought. Just bless her was the reply to my silent question.

I felt a great calm come over me as I laid my hands upon her head. I called her by name, stated my authority, and paused. Then the Spirit took over. Words flowed to my mind as I blessed her. Where was all this coming from? It was amazing. Never before had I given a blessing like this.

I closed in the name of Jesus Christ, took my hands off her head, and wiped my eyes. I had started crying almost as soon as I had begun. She took my hand in hers and whispered, "Thank you."

"Thank you" was all I could say in return. Everyone in the room was crying. The mother said, "You can feel the Spirit so strongly." The woman's sister took me aside and said, "Thank you. She has been so scared. That was exactly what she needed to hear." As I left I thought about what had happened. I should have remembered that blessings don't come from men. They come from God through men. That blessing was exactly what she needed to hear because Heavenly Father knew what she needed.

The priesthood isn't a power that is used over someone, and it doesn't make a priesthood holder more special than others. But it provides a way for our Father in Heaven to help us in very special ways. Through the priesthood great blessings are brought into the lives not only of those who receive the blessings but of the priesthood holders as well. **NE**

by John Allen Whatey



Illustrated by Paul Mann

Oasis OF

They might be on a desert island, but they are definitely not lost.

A beautiful night in the desert, the sound of camp songs in the air, and the smell of . . . camels? This isn't just any camp. It's girls' camp in Bahrain, an island in the Middle East where the Church is legally recognized.

The girls are from the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, the Philippines, and South Africa, but since their families are all far from their native countries, and since they all love the gospel, they have a lot in common. Many of them are the only Latter-day Saints in their schools, and they have few opportunities to get together with other LDS youth. And those opportunities only come when the youth are willing to sacrifice. All the girls belong to the Arabian Peninsula Stake, which covers seven countries, so they traveled long distances to come to Bahrain.

"When we get together with everybody else, it makes me realize that I am not alone. There are others in the same situation," says Anne Wellington, a young woman from England.

The three days of camp were filled with activities and spiritual experiences. The girls made fast friends while they swam and toured ancient ruins. They also provided service for a school for disabled children by bringing needed supplies to the Hope Institute.

Margaret Tueller says, "We had warm feelings. It was as good to give as it was to receive."

Beth Chapman said her favorite part of girls' camp was "the way everyone had a bright and cheerful spirit."

Although living in the Middle East might sound exotic, these girls face the same challenges of Latter-day Saint youth all over the world. Emilie Shurtliff, a Mia Maid from the United States, tries to stand for

Although living in the Middle East might sound exotic, these girls face the same challenges of Latter-day Saint youth everywhere.

by Diane Shurtliff



FAITH



They come from all over the world, and they can tell you the challenges are basically the same everywhere.





But the blessings are the same everywhere, too. There is always the opportunity to learn, to serve, and to develop friendships nurtured by the things Latter-day Saints everywhere have in common—their testimonies and love of the gospel.





LIVING AS EXAMPLES

“Brothers and sisters, the Lord expects us to do something. I believe we are expected to increase our own faith, shake off any possible feelings of apathy, and by the power of the Holy Ghost reaffirm our commitment and intensify our service to the Lord. Then, when we seek to clarify someone’s understanding of the Church, our lives—well and faithfully lived—can serve as a magnifying glass through which others can examine the impact of gospel living. Under the light of our good example, the Spirit can enlarge understanding of the Church and its mission to all with whom we have contact” (*Ensign*, May 2000, 33).

—Elder
M. Russell Ballard
of the Quorum
of the Twelve

clean language and set an example. “When I am around people who swear, I feel uncomfortable and out of place. I am the only LDS member in my school, so for a long time I just ignored the language around me. After a while I asked the people closest to me not to use bad language.” She says she tried not to condemn others and to be very careful about her own language as well. “Eventually, I noticed that I didn’t hear swearing very often, and when I did, I

often received an apology without having to say a word.”

Many of these young women are the only contact with the Church some people in the Middle East will ever have. They are allowed to teach the gospel only through the way they live their lives. Liz Taylor, a Laurel, said she was questioned in science class one day during a discussion about the effects of illegal drugs. “One student blurted out that Mormons don’t even drink coffee. My teacher asked if anyone was Mormon, and I timidly raised my hand. The rest of the class was spent asking me questions—genuinely interested questions.”

Although the girls know they are growing from their experiences in the Middle East, they still get lonely sometimes. “We are like pioneers,” Anne says. “It’s hard because there are so few of us.”

The young women of this remote stake are seeking the blessings of the gospel in their lives through their personal righteousness as they learn to trust in the Lord. The young women each confirmed that reading the scriptures, praying, and participating in their branch or ward family helped them meet their everyday challenges. Despite the political restrictions they face, they are seeking to be good and to do good in their homes, their schools, and their communities. **NE**





DANCE STANDARDS

Your stake probably has youth dances a few times a year so you can get together, dance, and have fun. As Latter-day Saints we don't follow worldly standards, so we have Church guidelines for our dances that help invite the Spirit and allow everyone to have a good time. Here are some of those guidelines:

- *Youth under 14 only participate in Church dances that are on regularly scheduled Mutual nights, unless otherwise stated by the bishopric or stake presidency.
- *Dress and grooming should be modest,

- tasteful, and appropriate. Anything you might wear to Church would most likely be appropriate.
- *Lighting, dancing styles, lyrics, and music should create an atmosphere where the Spirit can be present (see *For the Strength of Youth*, 13–14).
- *Those who provide music should agree to follow Church standards when performing for Church activities.
- *Music volume should allow people standing next to each other to carry on a normal conversation.
- *Lights should be bright enough for you to see across the room. (See *Church Handbook of Instructions*, 277–79.)

100 YEARS IN JAPAN

In August 1901 Elder Heber J. Grant, along with three missionaries, arrived in Japan and dedicated the land for the preaching of the gospel on September 1 at Yokohama. The missionary work went slowly, and the mission was closed in August 1924. Fewer than 200 people were baptized into the Church in those 23 years.

However, in 1948, after World War II, the mission was reopened, and the Church in Japan has grown to more than 111,000 members since then. The Tokyo Japan Temple was dedicated in October 1980.



WRITE AWAY!

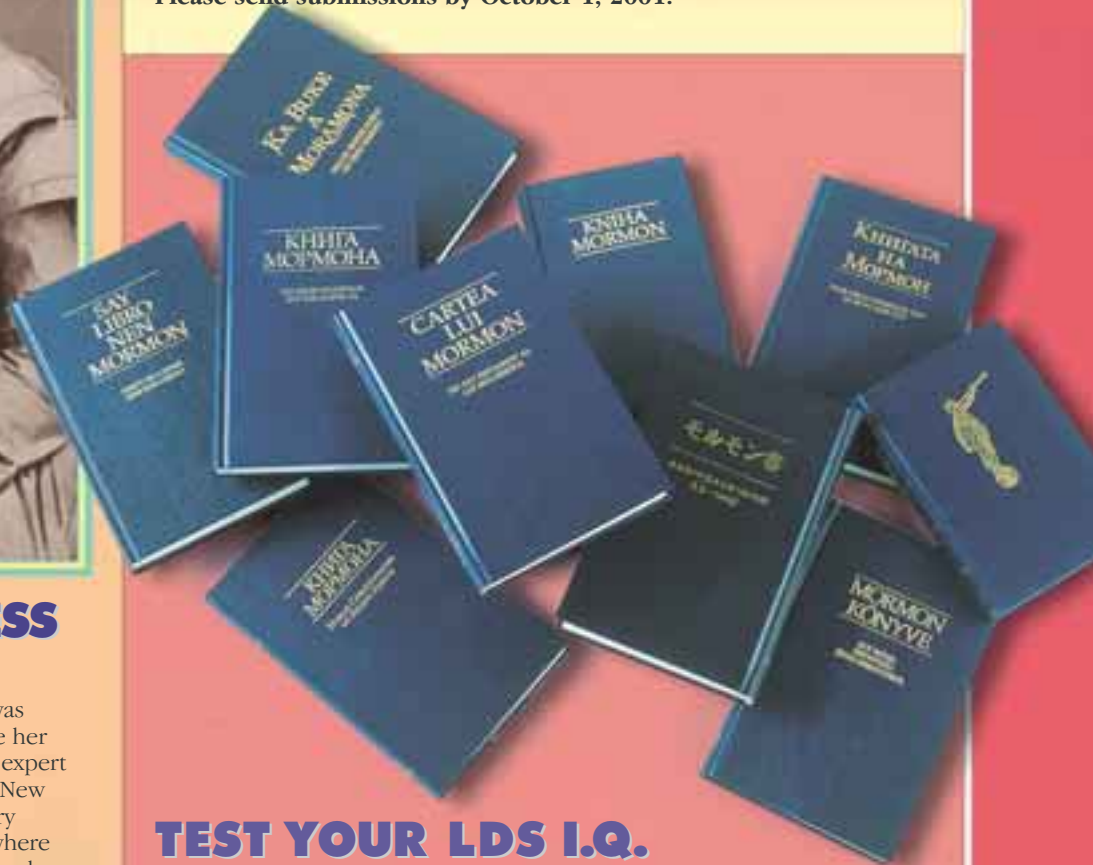
The *New Era* wants to hear about how you gained your testimony of the gospel, so we can share your story with others. Send us your true story about your testimony-building or -discovering experiences. You can send your submissions to “How I Know,” *New Era*, 50 East North Temple, Salt Lake City, Utah 84150 or to cur-editorial-newera@ldschurch.org. Please send submissions by October 1, 2001.



ZION'S POETESS

Eliza R. Snow, second general president of the Relief Society, was born on January 21, 1804. Before her conversion at the age of 31, she was an expert at needlework and a renowned poet in New England. She gave up fame in the literary circle there to join the Saints in Ohio, where she continued to write. But her theme had shifted from patriotism to uplifting the Saints and praising God. Her talent led the Saints to give Sister Eliza the title “Zion’s Poetess.” Her many trials as the Saints were driven from place to place, along with her failing health, were discouraging. Despite her trials, she managed to inspire and bless others with her songs and poems. One of her well-known hymns is “O My Father” (*Hymns*, no. 292).

Sister Eliza’s health problems also made her fear she would not be a good Relief Society president when Brigham Young called her. But President Young promised her if she would accept the calling the Lord would strengthen her, and she had faith in his words. She held that calling for 21 years, during which she also continued to write. Included in her writings is the biography of her brother, Lorenzo Snow, the fifth president of the Church. She died in Utah at the age of 83.



TEST YOUR LDS I.Q.

- 1. You can read about Eliza R. Snow in this month’s *Of All Things*, but do you know what the R in her name stands for?**
- 2. Which temple is the largest, and which is the smallest?**
- 3. Who was chosen to fill the vacancy in the original Quorum of the Twelve Apostles after Judas Iscariot’s betrayal and death?**
- 4. In how many languages is the Book of Mormon printed?**
 - a. Fewer than 25**
 - b. Between 25 and 50**
 - c. Between 50 and 100**
 - d. More than 100**

You’ll find the answers in the Reader’s Guide on page 49.

LETTER FROM

Brett

I knew I shouldn't resent him. After all, he was dead and I was alive. But sometimes it seemed that, even after all these years, he got more attention than I did. My feelings changed, though, when I turned 16 and Mom handed me the box he had left for me.

I resented this brother whose illness had cheated me of my childhood. Then, long after his death, I received his gift.

I must have stared at his picture a thousand times—sometimes in anger and jealousy, other times with curiosity and wishful wondering. There it sat in the same place, year after year, on the top shelf of the bookcase in our living room. Once again I was looking at it, studying every detail, and searching my memory for any recollection of the laughing face in the picture before me.

I lifted it from the shelf, then curled up on the couch to study it. The boy in the picture was 15 years old at the time it was taken. He had black hair like my father and soft blue eyes like my mother. He had the wide grin that definitely belonged to my grandfather and the perfect, straight family nose that we all have. He had always been big for his age, but in this picture, he was quite thin. I knew that this was taken when he first became sick and at the same time his little sister was born, his little sister who was me.

At times I nearly hated him. Because of him and his sickness, I had a neglected babyhood. There are hardly any pictures of me as a baby in our family photo albums, and my family remembers few “cute” things I did while growing up. No

one is sure when I started to walk, talk, or cut my first tooth. You see, at this time, the boy in the picture—my brother Brett—got leukemia. According to my family, he put up a huge fight for two years; but the disease eventually won, and at the age of 17, he died.

Whenever our family gets together for anything, the conversation always works its way back to memories of times with Brett, and then, of course, about his heroic struggle with his illness. But to me, he is a stranger, an envied, wondered about, sometimes resented stranger.

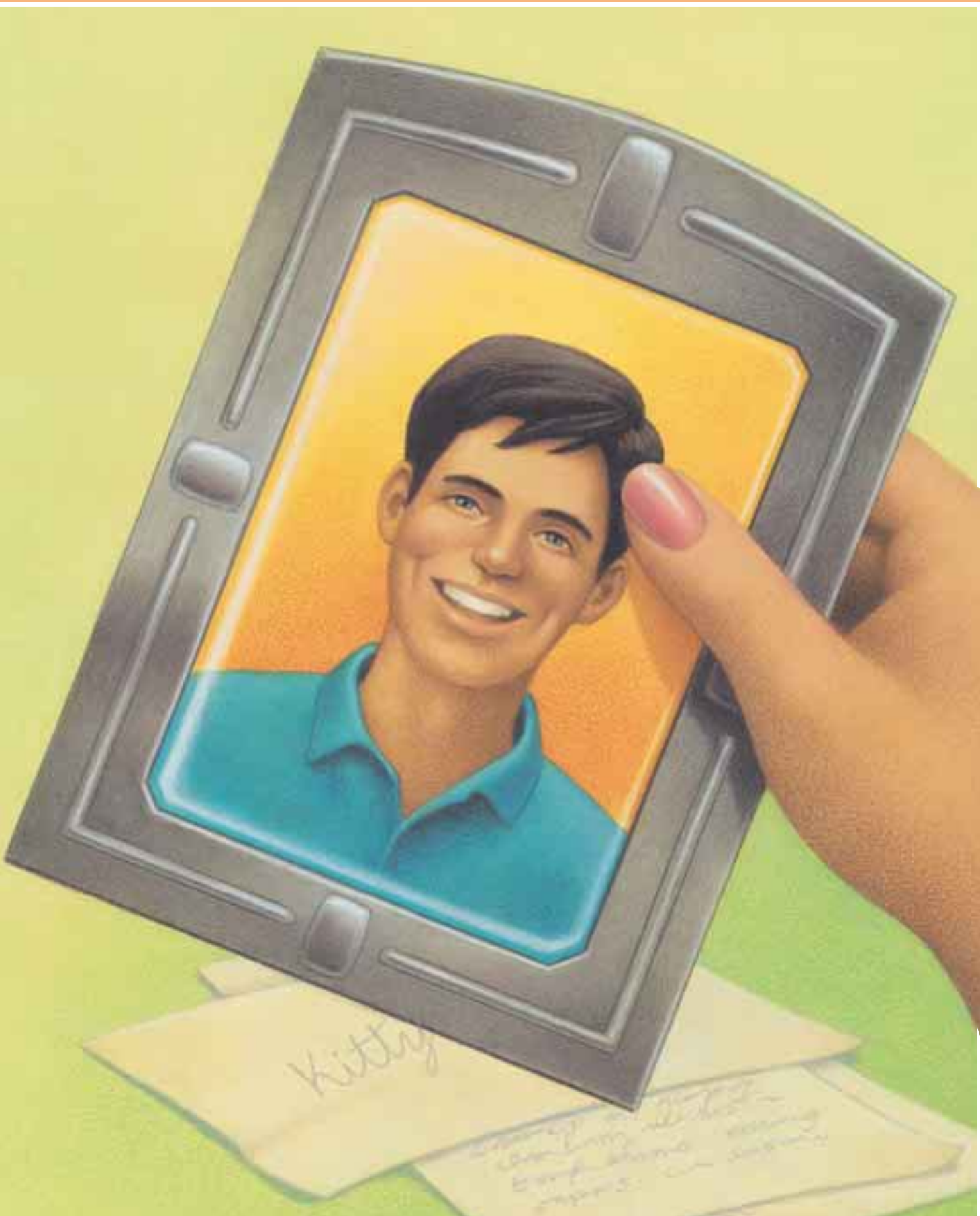
I suppose it's self-centered of me to feel I was neglected as a small child, but being the youngest, you'd think I would have received a lot of attention. Brett must have demanded everyone's time, love, and attention. I was sure I always had to take the back seat during my early childhood. My accomplishments—like pronouncing my first words—just weren't as important as Brett's accomplishments—like going into remission for a while.

Sometimes I'd feel angry and a little sad when my family would talk about times with Brett before I was born. Last weekend, when my brother and sister and their families came for Mother's Day, it didn't take long before I'd had enough of the memories I couldn't share, so I escaped to the kitchen to scrub the countertops and dishes. Mom followed me into the kitchen.

“Honey, what's wrong? Don't you want to . . .”

I turned from the sink to face her with my arms folded. “Mom, since we always

by Kay Lynn Mangum



There, where Brett's letter had told me to look, was the picture of him with a little girl on his lap. There, too, was his journal—as much about my life as about his.

talk about stuff that happened when Brett was alive, I guess no one in this family thinks we've done anything interesting since Brett died, right?"

"Honey, you know that's not true. We've had some wonderful times together since Brett died. We've had some great times. I know it's hard for you to have to listen about times that you weren't part of . . ."

Suddenly, from the other room, voices

became even louder.

"Oh, that reminds me. Remember when Brett started high school?" Chuckling and laughter followed this remark of my sister, Tara.

"He wasn't anything like the rest of you. He had to be the class clown and make everyone laugh." That was Dad. "And yet he always managed to get wonderful grades."

"And don't forget what he did for the school itself. I remember how the principal and some of his teachers would tell him what a disappointment he was because of the stunts he'd pull. And look what he did—he won the debating awards and helped the football team go to state one year and region the next." My brother Alex was only a year older than Brett. He remembers a lot of things about Brett that the rest of us never knew.

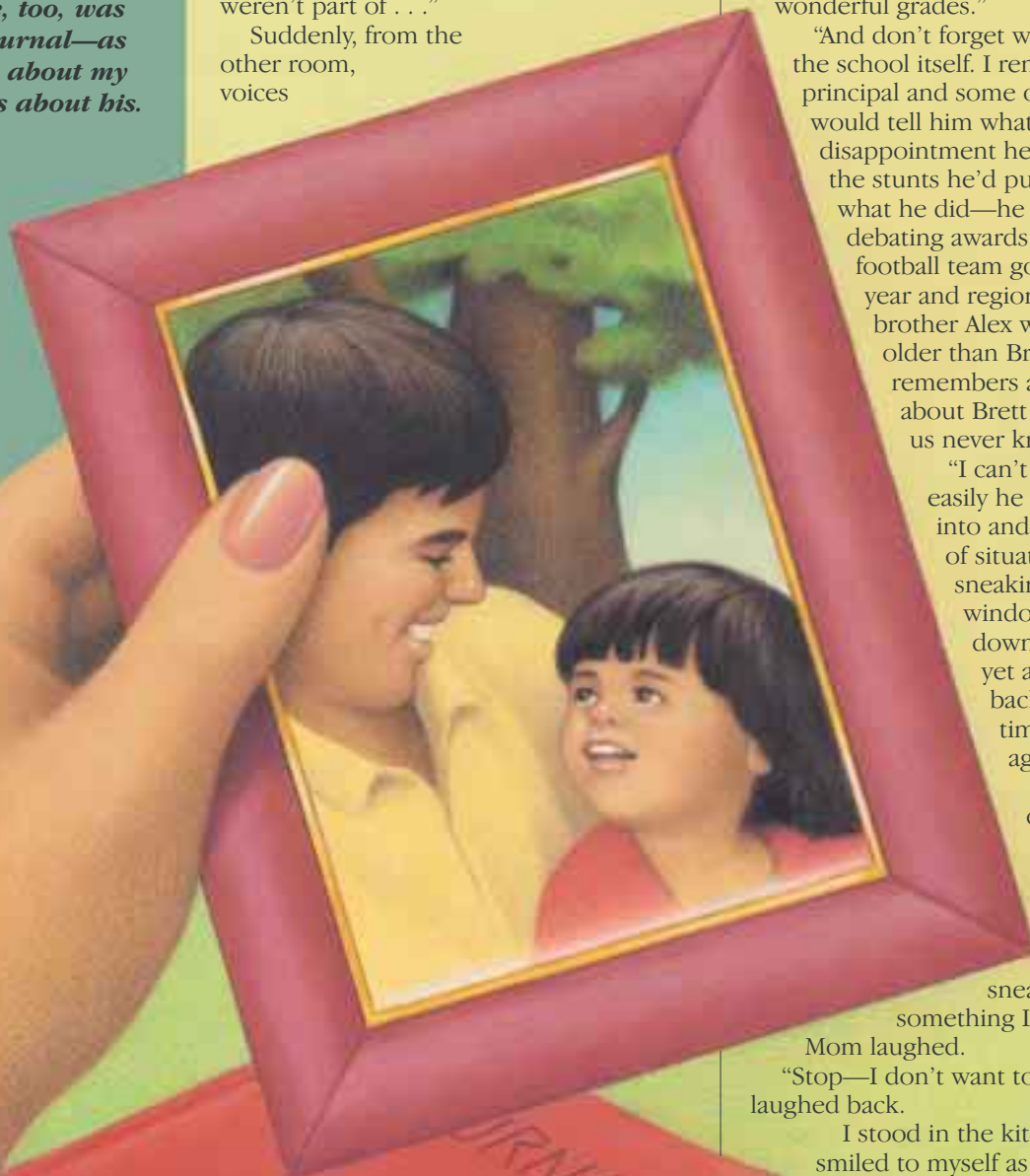
"I can't believe how easily he could weasel into and out of all kinds of situations, like sneaking out his window at night and down the tree, and yet always making it back home just in time." Tara's voice again.

The conversation had pulled Mom back into the room. "Just exactly where he would sneak off to is something I'd like to know!"

Mom laughed.

"Stop—I don't want to know!" Dad laughed back.

I stood in the kitchen listening. I smiled to myself as I thought about some of the things he'd done that I'd heard stories about. But I couldn't help the familiar, hollow feeling that grew inside of me. Sometimes I could laugh along with everyone else, but I'd always feel as if I'd missed out on something—and I hated feeling that way.



My family didn't constantly talk about Brett. In fact, I could go for days, even weeks, without even thinking about him. But then I'd go into the living room and see his picture, and I'd start wondering again.

Today I turned 16. I had a pretty good birthday. My parents gave me lots of nice things, and Alex and Tara and their families came over to help me celebrate.

This evening Mom came into my room and dropped a long, faded white envelope into my lap with only the name "Kitty" printed on it in an unfamiliar handwriting.

"What's this?" I questioned. *Kitty*. That had been an old family nickname for me when I'd been really little, but no one had called me that for years.

"Open it and find out." Mom smiled at me in a funny kind of way, then left me, closing the door quietly behind her.

I frowned at the envelope in my hands. I couldn't stop looking at the name "Kitty" suspiciously. Who would call me that? I finally ripped it open. Inside was a single sheet of lined paper filled with handwriting that matched the name "Kitty" on the envelope.

Dear Kitty,

If Mom has done what she promised she'd do, then right now, today, you must be turning 16 years old, and I'm probably not around anymore. But at this very second, as I write this letter to you, you're barely two.

Ever since you were just a little baby, you've saved your biggest smile for me. It's impossible for me to believe that you'll never remember me. You see, I'm very sick, and I know I'm not going to be here for much longer, so I won't see my beautiful baby sister grow up. I won't be there to help you along in your life. It doesn't seem fair, and as I've watched you these past two years, I feel like I'm going to be cheated out of something incredible.

Two years ago, right before you were born, I found out I have leukemia. The fact that from then on, I would never lead a "normal" life made me want to give up and die. And then Mom came home from the hospital with you. The first time I held you and looked into those blue eyes of yours, I knew that

now I had a reason to live. I couldn't give up now—you needed me. And I knew I needed you. I wanted to see you grow up and help you, be there for you, and, hopefully, be your friend. We had a great start. I've spent more time with you these past two years than practically anyone else.

I have to thank you for these past two years you've given me. I know I wouldn't have had them if it weren't for you. Now I can honestly say that they've been two of the best. I've fought hard, but I know my time is short. The doctors say it's amazing that I've lasted as long as I have, because I'm in bad shape. But don't think I'm giving up or that I'm just going to leave you now. Not a chance! You helped me through the roughest two years of my life, so I have something for you that I hope will help you as much as you've helped me. It's in the bottom of my gray strong box. Your name's on it.

*I love you,
Brett*

After retrieving the key for Brett's strong box from Mom, I found a package covered with faded wrapping paper covered with lots of once-colorful balloons. The package was addressed to "Kitty—for her 16th birthday. With love, Brett." With trembling hands, I ripped off the paper and carefully lifted the lid of the white box inside. A scarlet-colored book lay nestled in white tissue paper. Not just any book. It was a journal done by Brett, as if he were talking to me, of the last two years of his life, starting with the day I was born and ending on the day he died. He recorded everything we ever did together, including all of my babyhood milestones, along with his own milestones, as well as his feelings as he struggled with his illness. He also added in a lot of advice for me for when I was older, since he knew he wouldn't be able to tell me in person. And on every page, no matter what happened during the day, he never forgot to write, "I love you."

I was staring at a picture again today, studying it for the hundredth time.

In the picture was the image of a dark-haired boy, sitting under a tree, smiling down at a tiny little girl sitting on his lap, laughing up at him. I smiled myself just looking at it. I placed it back on its spot on my dresser, right by the

He spoke to me in his journal, telling me of my early childhood, about how much I meant to him, and about the book that had given him so much hope.

So now I held in my hands the book with the blue cover, and with pounding heart I walked into the living room to meet our visitors.

mirror. I had found it in Brett's journal on my 16th birthday, so I'd framed it and filled an empty space on my dresser with it. I opened one of the drawers and took out the journal, my special journal from Brett, and hugged it. It too had filled an empty space—an empty space in my heart.

Mother poked her head around my opened bedroom door. "Well, your visitors are here. Are you ready?"

I nodded. "I'll be right there."

I quickly returned the journal to its drawer and turned to pick up the book I'd been reading a lot lately off of my bed. My mind raced back a few months to my eventful 16th birthday.

Under the tissue paper in that white

box had been yet another book. This one had a midnight blue cover and one of the most peculiar titles I'd ever read. Brett had scrawled a message on the inside cover in his now strangely familiar handwriting:

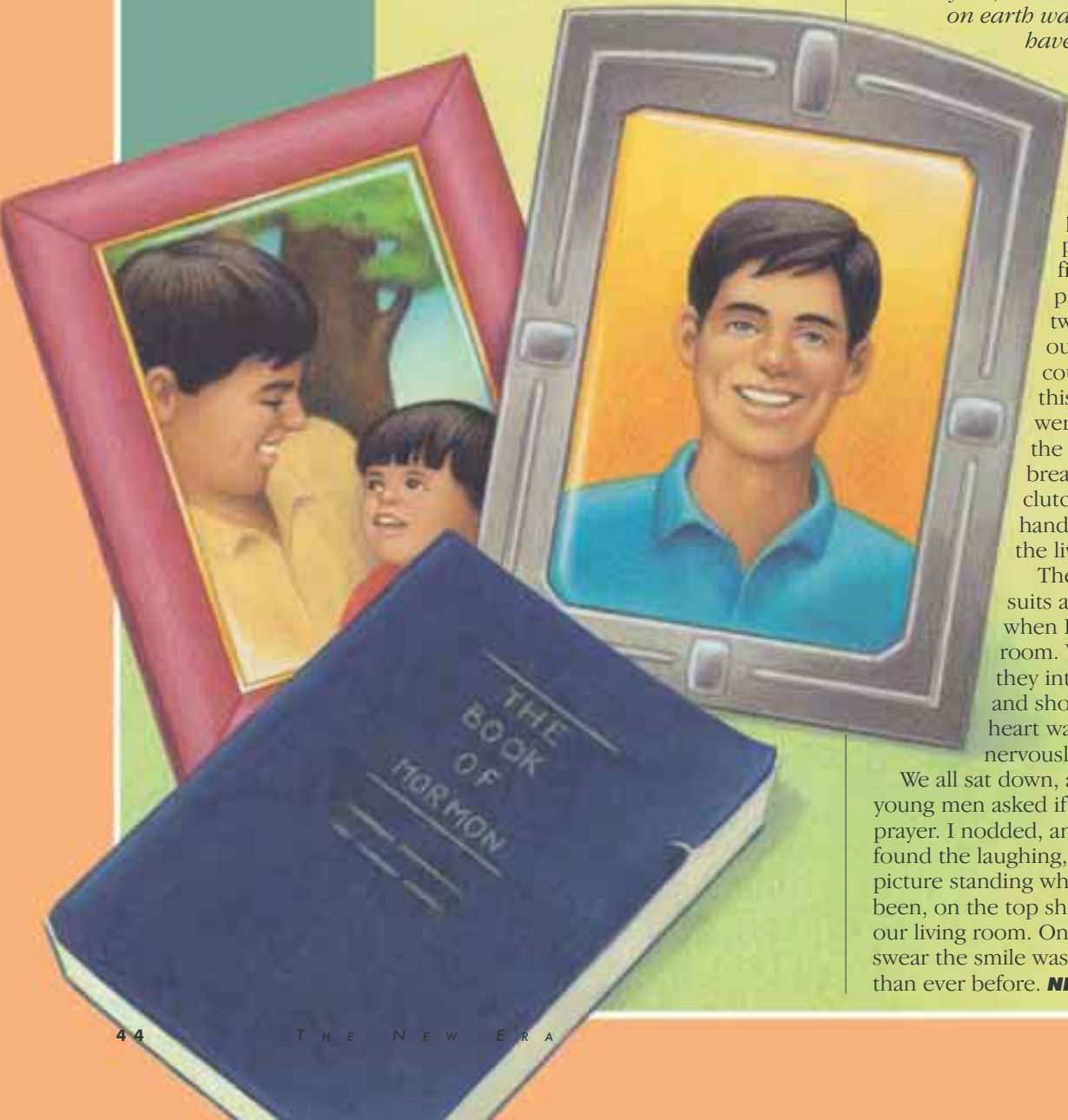
This book was given to me by two amazing guys one day at the hospital during a particularly bad stay. It brought me a lot of comfort during my darkest hours, and now I'm not so scared to die anymore. If this book brought comfort to me to face death, then surely it should give you strength to face life.

According to what these two guys teach and what is found in this book, I will see you and all my family again someday. So, although our time together on earth was short, we'll always have forever.

My heart was pounding after reading those words for about the millionth time. It had taken a lot of pleading and persuasion, but I'd finally convinced my parents to let me invite two special "visitors" to our house so that I could learn more about this book. My hands were shaking as I closed the cover, took a deep breath, and walked, clutching the book in my hands, down the hall to the living room.

The two young men in suits and ties stood up when I walked into the room. With huge smiles, they introduced themselves and shook my hand. My heart was still pounding as I nervously smiled back.

We all sat down, and then one of the young men asked if he could offer a prayer. I nodded, and as I did, my eyes found the laughing, smiling face in a picture standing where it always had been, on the top shelf of the bookcase in our living room. Only this time, I could swear the smile was bigger and happier than ever before. **NE**





Val Chadwick Bagley



Adam Koford



Ryan Stoker



HOW to Get an ANSWER



by Elder
Merrill C. Oaks
of the Seventy

Her question was important—should she marry a certain young man?—and she was worthy to receive an answer. So why hadn't she?

Need the Lord's help with an important question? Then here are some things you need to do.

Some years ago while I was serving as a bishop of a Brigham Young University ward, a young woman came to me for counsel concerning a marriage proposal. She really liked the young man but was strongly committed to not taking a step as important as marriage without receiving inspiration that it was right. She had been praying about whether to marry him and had received no answer. I assured her that the Lord would surely answer her prayers and that she should keep on praying.

The following Sunday she asked to see me again. She felt she was receiving no answer. I interviewed her and established that she was worthy. I again assured her that the Lord does hear and answer prayers and that she should continue praying.

The young man was really pressing her to make a decision. He loved her but felt she was stalling because she probably did not love him. He was approaching the time he might terminate the relationship. She was very concerned but felt she could not marry him without an answer from the Lord. I was very troubled by this. I knew the Lord answered prayers. I

knew this young woman was worthy to receive answers to her prayers. Why was she not receiving an answer?

The key came to me in a moment of clear enlightenment. I told her she was expecting the Lord to completely make the decision for her, but He would not do that. Even a decision as important as marriage requires us to exercise our own agency. In Doctrine and Covenants 9:7–9, Oliver Cowdery is told why he was not able to translate the Book of Mormon: “Behold, you have not understood; you have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me.

“But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right.

“But if it be not right you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought that shall cause you to forget the thing which is wrong.”

Like Oliver Cowdery, she had taken no thought except to keep asking the Lord. I told her she must exercise her own agency by studying it out in her mind, making a tentative decision, and then asking the Lord for a confirmation of her decision. I asked her to make two lists. On one list she was to place the things she liked about him and all the positives about marrying him. On the second list she was to outline all her doubts and

anything she did not like about him or that was a negative. After a few days she was to evaluate the lists, make a tentative decision on her own, and then go to the Lord for confirmation of her decision.

The following Sunday she asked for a recommend for her temple marriage. I asked her if she was now sure. She felt certain it was right to marry him. I questioned how she had received her answer. She explained that each day as she looked at the two lists, she was crossing things off the list of negatives and adding to the list of positives. Her words were something like, "I just began to feel good about getting married, and I knew that my prayers were being answered."

In our eagerness, it is possible to misinterpret our desires as inspiration. Dr. Carlfred Broderick, a retired professor of marriage and family counseling at the University of Southern California and a former stake president, wrote of an amusing experience which occurred as he greeted his oldest daughter returning home after attending

Brigham Young University. "Daddy, Daddy,' she cried as she ran to give me a hug, 'Guess what? *Eight* boys had it revealed to them that they were to marry me, and that's more than any other girl on our floor'" (*One Flesh One Heart*, 1986, 21).

Of course they had not all been inspired to marry her, and she had no obligation to the feelings of any of those young men unless she herself wished to accept a proposal of marriage and received a spiritual reassurance on her own.

One of the most precious gifts of earth life is agency, the right to freely make decisions. As we meet life's challenges, we need the Lord's help. The help He gives us generally will not come in a way which inhibits our agency or the growth we receive from overcoming difficulties.

His guidance most often comes as we ask Him and are working ourselves to solve our own problems. **NE**

A rmed with
her new
knowledge
of how to use her
own agency along
with her faith, she
was finally able
to get the answer
she needed.



Creative ideas for using this issue of the New Era.

Member Missionary Work

□ Read Elder Russell M. Nelson’s message, “A Gift from God,” on page 4 about the Book of Mormon. Buy an inexpensive copy of the Book of Mormon and highlight your favorite passages about the Savior. Give the book to a friend, including your written testimony in the front cover.

Personal Improvement

□ Do you have a much younger sibling or cousin you wish you were closer to? Read “Letter from Brett” on page 40 for some inspiration. Then write the individual a heartfelt letter to be read on a birthday or other special occasion.

Leadership Tip

□ At your next quorum or class presidency meeting, talk about the activities you think have worked well in the past. Then discuss some areas that need improvement, and make an action plan of how they can be improved. Read Q&A on page 16 for inspiration. Be sure to consider the talents and needs of your class or quorum members.

Young Men and Young Women Activity Ideas

□ “Just Hanging Out” on page 8 gives ideas for activities you can do with your friends without getting into trouble. Invite some of the young adults in your ward to participate on a panel of “experts” at your

next weeknight activity. Have them present their thoughts on fun things you can do with your friends. Then have a Q&A session with them using questions from the audience.

Laurel Value or Eagle Project

□ The Word of Wisdom is very important, not only because it is a commandment, but also because it helps you protect your physical health. Through an education campaign, spread the word about the dangers of smoking. Contact your local health department or community center for ideas on providing a public service.

Seminary Devotional

□ Read “How to Get an Answer” on page 46. Bring a padlock to class with numerous keys. Have someone try to open the lock selecting only one key. Point out that to be successful, the person will have to “study it out” or try several keys to find the right one. Compare it to the advice given by Elder Merrill C. Oaks on keys to making wise decisions.

Answers to quiz on page 39

1. Eliza Roxey Snow
2. The Salt Lake Temple is the largest with 253,015 square feet. The Monticello Utah Temple is the smallest with 6,700 square feet.
3. Matthias (See Acts 1:22–26.)
4. d, more than 100

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A strong feeling

I would like to thank you for printing the talk given by President Gordon B. Hinckley to the youth in November 2000 (Jan. 2001 issue). As I listened to him speak, and as I read the talk again, I felt strongly that he is a true prophet of God. I realized how important his words are for the youth today, and I'm grateful he would take the time to give us specific counsel. Thank you for your wonderful magazine. I have read it for years and continue to enjoy it now as a young adult. The stories and messages have helped me feel the Spirit more fully in my life, and it has become a valuable tool in building my testimony. I appreciate your efforts to guide and strengthen the youth.

*Jennifer Harbon
Southport, England (via e-mail)*

Making values more valuable

I'm really thankful for the Idea List about "The Do's of Dating" in the November 2000 *New Era*. I'm very glad for this article, and now I know how to make the Young Women values more valuable in my life. Let us all remember to project our values in our life and not forget to make a good date.

*Dian R. Chandra
Surabaya, Indonesia (via e-mail)*

Great missionary tool

I'm writing to express my appreciation for the great missionary tool the *New Era* can be. I tell my friends about the magazine and share it with them. It is a great way for them to learn more about the gospel. Through reading it they can see how great the youth can be. They can also read the words of the true prophets, which can help them feel the Spirit and lead them to learn more about the Church.

*Torrie Hicks
St. Thomas, Virgin Islands*

Perfect example

The story that has brought the most meaning to me is "Dutch Treat" (Apr. 1999). I feel the man was the perfect example of true

"I want you to know how thankful I am for the awesome articles and stories that are printed monthly in the New Era. I love it with all my heart."



friendship when he shared the gift he received with his best friend. It's sort of like spreading the gospel with the world. We have this wonderful gift which has brought us happiness, yet the fear of rejection scares us off. I feel if they're a true friend, they will not reject you but will thank you for the wonderful gift of the gospel that you shared.

*Drew Allen
Statesville, North Carolina*

Many things learned

I am so thankful for the *New Era*, which I read every month. I have learned many things in the *New Era*, especially about the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. I have seen many changes in my life since I was baptized. I have learned how to bear testimony and how to be honest and obedient to the commandments of God. Thank you, *New Era*.

*Davis Godson Irigo
Ubungo, Tanzania (via e-mail)*

All my heart

I want you to know how thankful I am for the awesome articles and stories that are printed monthly in the *New Era*. I love it with all my heart. Each time I read it, the messages inspire me to serve more, to work harder on my talents, to be the very best I can be, and to become closer to my Heavenly Father. I feel so grateful to have the gospel to keep me strong in this world of temptations.

*Elizabeth Getz
Billings, Montana*

*We love hearing from you. Write us at
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Salt Lake City, Utah 84150*

*Or e-mail us at
cur-editorial-newera@ldschurch.org
Submissions may be edited for length
and clarity.*



by Lana Leishman

Heartstrings

by Kirsten Christensen

I still remember the day
I first learned our connection,

Grandpa—
the day Mom told me
that you and Grandma
belong to her
like she and Dad
belong to me.

My surprise
gave way
to pleasure
as my young thoughts
grasped the logic
of the connection.

True,
my previous theory
was a good one—
that we had somehow picked you
out of all the nice, gray-haired
people in the world
and called you ours—
but how much sweeter to know
that God had somehow picked you
out of all the nice
people in the world
and called you ours
and His
and let you earn your gray hairs
by creating a connection
linking heaven and earth,
parents and children,
teaching by example,
loving unconditionally.

The years
give increasing way
to pleasure
and gratitude
as my thoughts
grasp the logic—
the eternal logic—
of the connection
that what I learned
at one loving knee
was once learned
at yours.

I'll always remember the way
I learned our connection, Grandpa—
our inseparable connection
from heart to heart.



The youth of the Anoka and Minneapolis stakes in Minnesota are working hard at building more righteous lives. They use the standards of the Church as their building blocks.

See "Take a Stand," p. 20.