

# Rejoice!

BY JADE SWARTZBERG

*I knew the gospel was true, but I had never felt like jumping for joy until now.*

**T**he raw wind stung my legs, and I was certain that my nose—the only part of me that was exposed—would get frostbite and fall off as I waited for the bus that would take me to church. I was in Voronezh, Russia, as an English teacher, and although I had quickly fallen in love with the country and the people, the notorious Russian winter threatened to freeze my enthusiasm.

When the old bus pulled up, I paid my four rubles and squeezed myself uncomfortably into the fur-covered mass of people. As I stood there, it became utterly apparent how far from everything familiar I was.

And yet, when I finally made it to the chapel, after trudging through more snow, I felt at home just as I did in my ward back in Canada. I could not understand more than a few words of what the speakers said in sacrament meeting, but I understood the spirit they spoke with. From my first Sunday in the Voronezh Levoberezhny Branch, the members welcomed me with warm smiles when words failed because of our language barrier. And activities with the ward members warmed my spirit even more than my Russian grandmother's soup could warm my insides.

One Saturday evening in April, my fellow teachers and I attended a fireside that the branch had organized to celebrate the Prophet Joseph Smith's birthday and the restoration of the Church. Members shared messages about the Prophet's life and bore their testimonies and expressed their love for him. I would have felt the strength of their testimonies even without the help of the missionaries who sat behind us to translate.

As I listened, I reflected on how hard it must be to accept the story of a young American boy who knelt in a grove of trees so far across the world and spoke to God.



And yet these faithful members felt the power of this message and embraced it.

I had been practicing with the branch choir, and I joined with them as they sang “Faith in Every Footstep” in Russian. There in front of me as I sang was proof of this marvelous work coming forth among *all* the children of men. With tears in my eyes, I added my testimony to theirs through music in their native language.

After the meeting, Evgeni Kharin, a member of our branch presidency, came bounding towards us American teachers and exclaimed with joy in his Russian accent, “Sisters, rejoice! The Church is restored!” It was as if I had heard the news for the first time.

The Church is still very young in Russia, and these members, who did not always have access to the gospel, understood what a privilege it was to know that Heavenly Father restored the gospel to the earth through the Prophet Joseph Smith. I realized then how much I had taken that knowledge for granted. I had a testimony of the gospel, but I had not felt like jumping for joy because of it—until now.

Since then, in times of spiritual weakness I think of the love of the Russian people and the light in Evgeni’s eyes as he told me to rejoice, for the gospel truly has been restored. **NE**

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For stories of Russian teenagers’ faith in the restored gospel, read “Russian Pioneers,” *New Era*, July 1998, p. 28.

ILLUSTRATED BY DILLEN MARSH