

ONLY A PHONE CALL AWAY

BY HILLARY HOLBROOK

These Alaskan teens, though far apart, use the telephone and Church activities to stay close.

Can you imagine living in an area so remote that seminary, Mutual, and Church meetings are held on the phone rather than in a building? A group of young men and young women in Alaska don't have to imagine it. The telephone is the only way they connect regularly. And to them, it's not a problem.

Three of the youth—Harrison Child, and Jaenell and Zach Manchester—live in Gustavus, Alaska. The other two teens, Matthew and Jennifer Parkin, live on Admiralty Island in a town called Angoon. Both are in the Gustavus Branch in the Juneau Alaska Stake. There are also a few Church members on other islands that make up the branch.

Although a new LDS meetinghouse is being built in Gustavus, for years the branch members there have met

in a member's home. The sacrament is prepared on a kitchen table. After it is passed, the Parkin family calls in from Angoon, and a few members on other islands call in, too. The rest of the meeting is held, like any sacrament meeting, from the pulpit. There is a pulpit, and talks are given, but a telephone sits on the pulpit so everyone can hear.

And how do the young men and women feel about it? "It works out pretty well," says 14-year-old Zach of Gustavus. His sister, Jaenell, 15, agrees. "I think it's just like regular."

The two towns that these five youth live in are more than 100 watery miles apart, which is the equivalent of running around a high school





HARRISON CHILD, 14

Harrison loves flying remote-control planes, playing sports, four-wheeling, paint balling, and hiking. When asked what it's like to communicate with other ward members on the phone, he says, "I feel really glad to join with them to learn the gospel." Harrison gains a testimony by listening to others' testimonies and following the examples set by branch leaders.

Harrison's favorite scripture is Mosiah 5:15, the Mutual theme for 2008, because "it reminds me that if I am steadfast and immovable when faced with temptation, then I am telling Heavenly Father my faith in Him is strong."

track 400 times—a little too far to travel each Sunday. But endless miles can't keep the youth from sticking together. They recently had the chance to meet each other for the first time face-to-face. The youth, along with their parents, flew to Anchorage to perform baptisms for the dead in the Anchorage Alaska Temple. They had never been to the temple before, so it was a great experience for them. "It

MATTHEW PARKIN, 14

Matthew says that it's "never hard to say no or walk away" from a bad situation because his friends at school know about his high gospel standards, which help him make right choices. When he's not in seminary or school, he loves to fish, hunt, wrestle, and snowboard. Matthew says he gains a testimony by reading his scriptures, going to church, and paying attention to the talks that are given.

His favorite scripture is Moroni 10:5. "I like that scripture because by the power of the Holy Ghost you really can know all things," Matthew says.

was fun to introduce ourselves and see who it was we've been talking to over the phone," says 14-year-old Harrison.

As they drove into the parking lot of the temple, each felt the Spirit strongly and knew that the temple was the Lord's house. "I can't believe I'm actually here," says Jaenell as she recalls her experience. "I felt a subtle, peaceful feeling of absolute contentment and happiness."

The best part of the weekend trip was performing baptisms and confirmations for the dead in the temple. "We

JENNIFER PARKIN, 16

Jennifer, a student at Angoon High School, is good at finding balance between church and school. She wakes up early in the morning for a teleconference with the youth in Gustavus for seminary. Then she's off to school for a day full of classes and sports. She excels in track-and-field and weightlifting, activities she's been participating in for three years.

Jennifer's favorite scripture is Joseph Smith—History 1:17–19 because, Jennifer says, "The story of the First Vision is very powerful. For a young man to pray to the Lord and get an answer that would change the world is totally awesome."



helped those people who couldn't help themselves," Zach says. He enjoyed looking at the names and dates of each person for whom he was baptized.

"I could feel the Spirit, and it felt very peaceful," Jennifer says.

"When we were in the waiting room, I read an article by President Monson in the *Ensign* about the bridges Christ has built," says Jaenell. "It really made me appreciate the things that the Savior has done, because we can't build

JAENELL MANCHESTER, 15

Jaenell is self-motivated. Not only is she homeschooled, but she loves participating in service projects and sharing the gospel. In one online class, she's had the opportunity to be a missionary by answering questions about the Church's beliefs in the Word of Wisdom and the Restoration. "No matter where you are, the gospel is the same," she says.

Jaenell's favorite scripture is Alma 56:46–48 because she "loves the influence the mothers had" on their sons, the 2,000 stripling warriors.

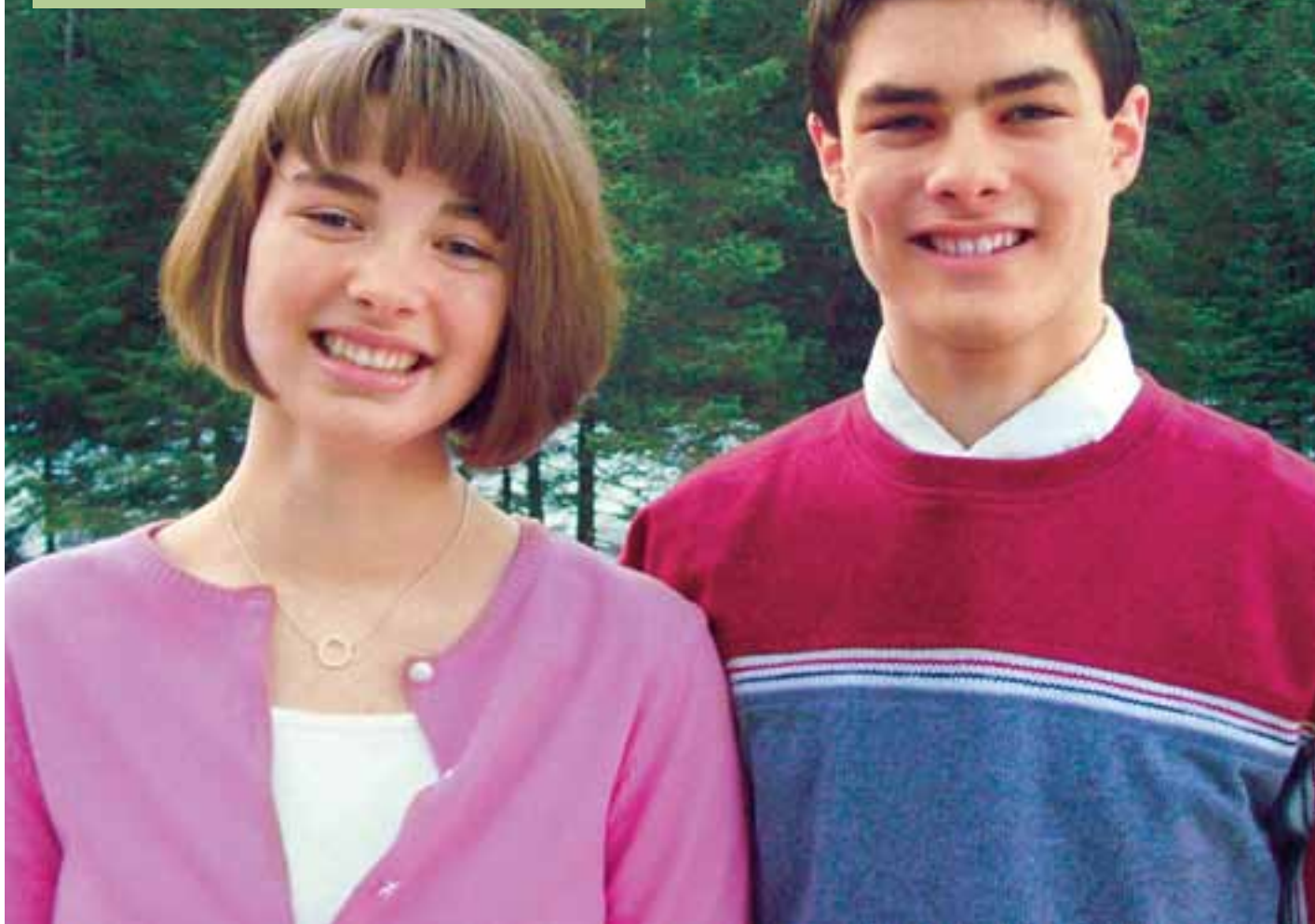
the bridges by ourselves."

The trip strengthened each person's testimony of Jesus Christ, a testimony that helps them in their everyday lives. Although they're miles apart from each other, they're only a phone call away. **NE**

ZACHERY MANCHESTER, 14

Zach says he reads an average of 20 books a month. Aside from that, he enjoys having a small seminary class because "it's more focused and not spread out between many people. I think you gain more from it." Zach, though not yet old enough to be a full-time missionary, is already having missionary experiences. When friends are curious and ask questions, Zach and Harrison explain the Book of Mormon and its history.

Zach's favorite scripture is D&C 58:27 because it tells us how to choose the right.



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