



By Jess Verzello

Every Christmas Eve, my mother reads us the Nativity account in the New Testament. Each family member dresses up and plays a character. I'm always the angel who proclaims the "good tidings of great joy" (Luke 2:10). Christmas has always been a special time to remember the Savior's birth and spend time with my family.

That's why my first Christmas as a missionary was really difficult. I'm not sure what I expected, but it definitely wasn't walking the streets in search of a place to eat and a way to call home.

I had been serving in the Dominican Republic for about five months. I loved everything about my mission. And I was so excited to video call my family and see their faces. But the light and joy of Christmas faded fast after our dinner plans fell through. Then the family who had offered to let us use their computer suddenly had to leave town. My companion and I were left with no food, no computer, and no idea what to do.

We didn't want to intrude on anyone else's Christmas, so we walked. And walked. I began to lose hope. Why was everything going wrong? I assumed that since we were missionaries, everything would work out. Weren't we sacrificing so much to be here? Shouldn't we at least have a decent Christmas?

I tried to hold on to the true meaning of Christmas. But it was getting harder. Heartbroken and humbled, we returned home only an hour before

the time to call our families. Together, we prayed that we would find a way to contact our families in time.

The thought came to my mind to go to the mission office. Maybe someone there could help us. Trusting the Spirit,

THE BEST WORST CHRISTMAS EVER!

we got on a bus heading into the city. When we arrived, the gates were locked and the office was deserted. I slumped to the cement, my back against the gate's bars, exhausted and hungry.

Just then, a man passed by us with a snack stand. Food! My companion and I quickly jumped up and bought some snacks. We asked the man about his Christmas and shared a small message about the miracle of Christ's birth and the love Heavenly Father has for us to send His Only Begotten Son.

As I bore my testimony, I could feel a weight being lifted from my heart. The stress of the day had kept me from feeling the peace of Christmas—of Christ. As I testified of the Savior, I slowly felt that peace seep back into me.

After the man left, we sat back down, feeling much happier with a little food in our stomachs and the spirit of Christmas in our hearts. About 10 minutes later, the office gates opened and the office elders drove up in their white minivan.

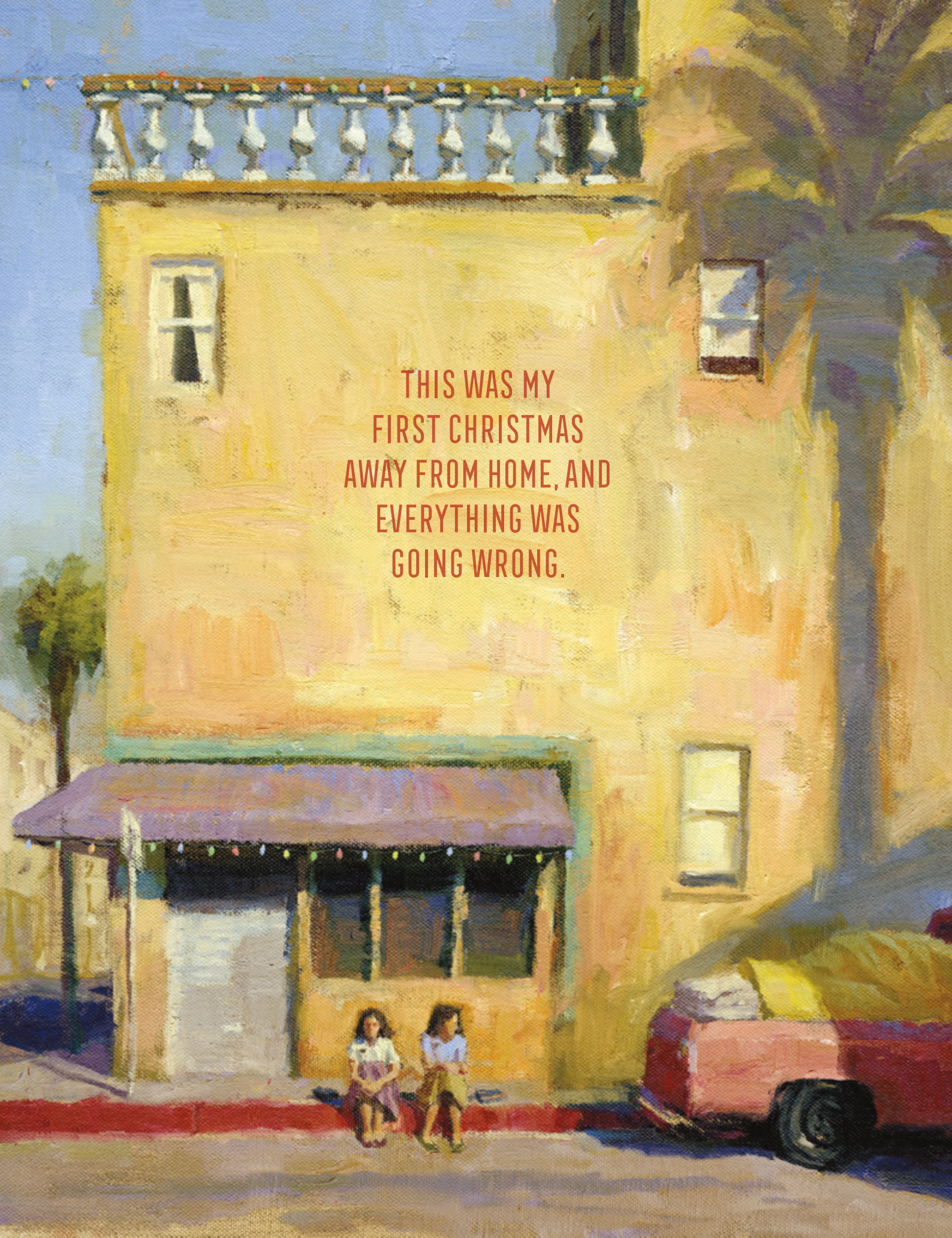
When they saw us, they knew something was wrong. We told them about our long day, and they called the mission president, who gave us permission to use the office computers to call our families!

Soon I was inside calling my family. Tears came to my eyes at the joy of seeing their faces. The awfulness of the day faded away as we talked.

Even better, the Christmas package my mom sent me was at the office, so I was able to open it with my family right there! The treats my mom sent became one of the best Christmas dinners I've ever had.

Cancelled dinner plans and hopeless street wanderings weren't what made me sad that Christmas—it was being away from my family and losing sight of the Savior. Acting on faith and sharing my testimony brought the peace of Christ back into my heart. And brought me closer to my family. None of the disappointments that day mattered when I finally got to see their smiling faces and feel their overwhelming love for me. It reminded me that our Savior made it possible for families to be together forever, and that's what truly matters. **NE**

The author lives in Utah, USA.

A painting of a yellow building with a balcony and two girls sitting on the sidewalk. The building has a balcony with a decorative railing and a string of colorful lights. There are windows on the building, and a red car is parked on the street to the right. Two girls are sitting on the sidewalk in front of the building. The painting is done in a textured, expressive style with visible brushstrokes.

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