

# THE Turnaround

BY KAYLA CASPER

*After years of wandering down the wrong path, I finally found my way back.*

***It was amazing to experience sacrament meeting in Japanese, and I realized that the gospel was just as strong halfway across the world as it was at home. Many of these members didn't have the support from friends and family that I did, but they still believed.***

My falling away from the Church was gradual. It began in the fifth grade, when I met some new friends. We used bad language and got into all the wrong things. Once junior high came around, we entered into all the wrong groups, and by high school, things started to get really bad.

I became really depressed. I was wearing more and more black and kept insisting on thickly layering dark eye makeup. To me, life became something just to get through and not to enjoy. My thoughts were often suicidal, and I had no confidence. I almost completely shelled up. I never really talked to anyone, never told people what was going on. I knew I was loved, but I just didn't care.

I almost completely fell away from the Church. I say almost because I was never allowed to skip church, and my parents always expected me to take seminary during high school. But I wanted nothing more to do with the gospel or the LDS Church.

My family and loved ones saw this downward spiral, and they tried to help. I often spent time on Sundays in the bishop's office, and just as many days trying to avoid the

bishop. He showed a lot of support and interest in me, looking into the things I believed in so that he could better understand me. My parents kept trying to help, but they didn't know what to do. There were times when my dad and I were near tears trying to talk about our differences.

During my sophomore year, I hit a turning point when a foreign exchange student from Japan came to live with us. She was a softball player, and she convinced me to play that year. That experience alone did a great deal of good for me. The coach helped me raise my self-esteem, and the experience of belonging to and working on a team gave me the blessed feeling of belonging somewhere.

That summer I went to Japan to stay with the family of our foreign exchange student for five weeks. During my stay, I went four weeks without going to church. Finally, in the very last week, we stopped by the Tokyo Japan Temple to take pictures. In a strange country where the language and customs were so foreign to me, it was the most comforting feeling to finally be in a familiar place. The Spirit there was so strong.



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That Sunday we found a ward building, and I attended church. It was amazing to experience sacrament meeting and Sunday School in Japanese, but what hit me most was when I went to Young Women. Seeing those few Japanese girls rise and say the theme, I realized that the gospel was just as strong halfway across the world as it was at home. I knew that many of these members didn't have the support from friends and family that I did, but they still believed. Again, I felt at home.

Shortly after I returned to Utah, my brother Richard came home from his mission. Richard noticed my struggles and made it apparent that we would be having a lot of talks. He got me to pray with him.

But what really hit home was seminary. My dad found out I wasn't enrolled for

my junior year and was surprised. It wasn't long before I was called to meet with the seminary principal. It was very nonconfrontational; he just talked to me, conveyed friendship, and expressed concern that I wasn't enrolled. Finally I agreed to take seminary. I met my teacher, went to class, and that was it. I never skipped and rarely begrudged going.

I'm not sure when the transition took place, but I started to feel comfort. I began to pray regularly again. It was really hard at first, but I stuck with it. I read my scriptures and knew that they spoke truth. Life began to look up. I had more energy, confidence, and ambition. I felt better about the new friends I began associating with. I tried out for plays, immersed myself in my artwork, and started singing again. I tried out for my school's select choir group and made it. I was no longer the shy, introverted girl I had been for so long.

I was also called to serve on the seminary council, and that was when I knew that I would be okay. If someone had told me a year ago that I would be where I am now, I never would have believed it could happen. I'm a completely different person. And I'm grateful to my friends, family, and teachers, who gave me their love and patience. Their faith in me was the constant in my life that I could always fall back on in my darkest hours. And now I'm so grateful for the gospel. I feel it really has saved my life. If I hadn't made the turnaround when I did, who knows how far off the path I would have gone. I'm grateful I've never had to find out.

The Church is true; I know that with all of my heart and mind. Heavenly Father loves His children, and Jesus Christ is our Savior. Having the restored gospel on earth is one of our greatest blessings, and I pray that someday all of God's children will come to know the truth and feel the same gratitude and love for Him that I have in my heart. **NE**