

STICKING *My* NECK OUT

By Whitney Wilcox

I decided to follow my dad's advice and get out of my shell.

“**N**o!” I shouted, staring at my father in disbelief. My dad had just announced that he had been called as a mission president and we would be moving to the South American country of Chile for three years. The world felt as if it were falling in around me. Hot tears ran down my cheeks. *Three years. Chile. Moving.* The thoughts swirled in my head until I felt dizzy.

I looked at my younger brother, David, who had previously been grinning broadly, as he promptly burst into tears upon seeing my display. I felt guilty to be putting on such a show, but I couldn't help it. Three years away from everything I loved.

Suddenly another thought entered my mind: *Russell!* Russell, my 18-year-old brother whom I absolutely idolized, had just graduated from high school and would not be coming with us. “I won't go!” I told myself. “I'll stay here and live with my friends.” But even as I thought it, I knew that it wouldn't work.

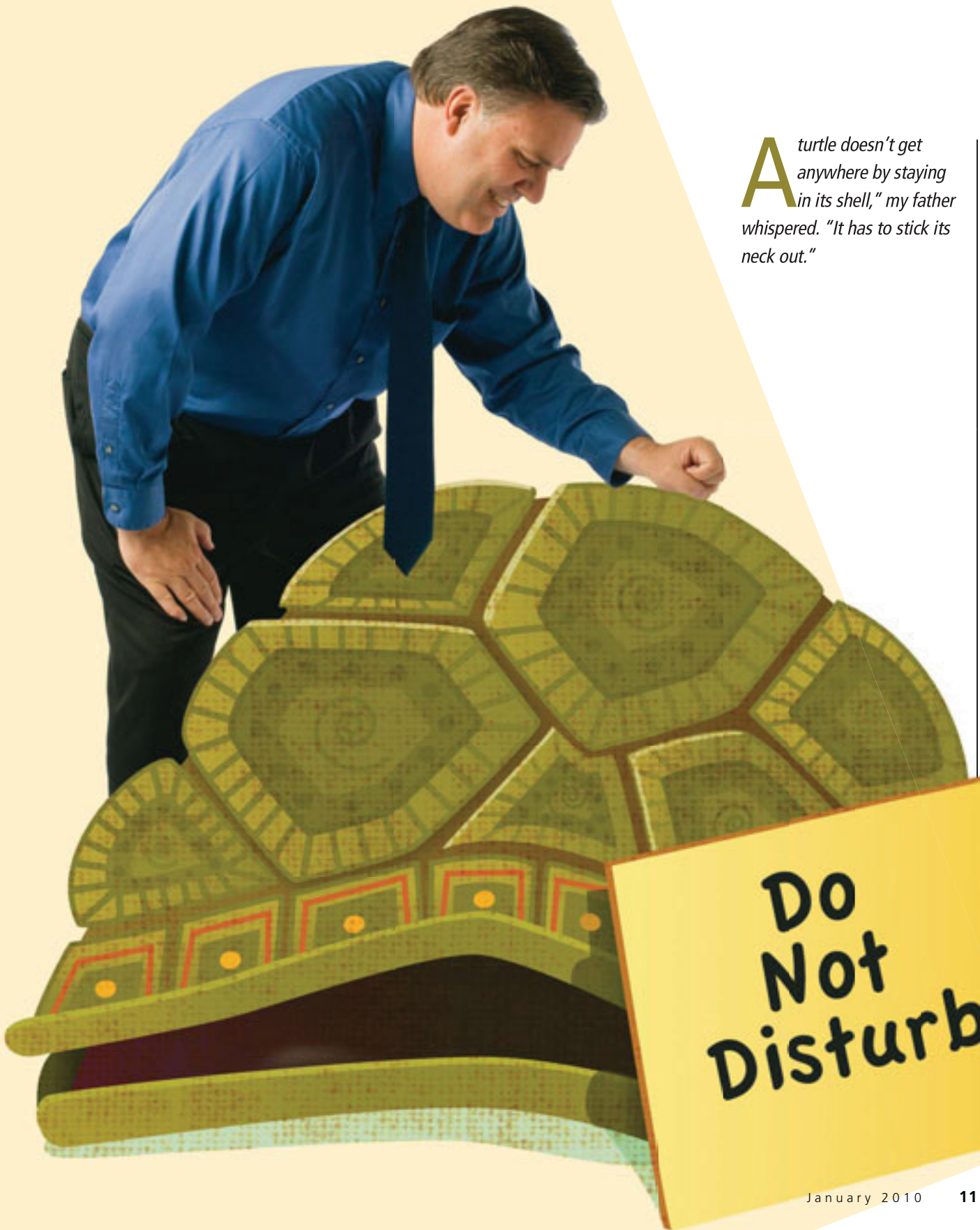
I was still upset when we drove to the airport four months later. On the plane, the flight attendant frequently handed me warm towels to dab away my tears. My dad put his arm around me and leaned in close to my ear.

“A turtle doesn't get anywhere by staying in its shell,” he whispered. “It has to stick its neck out.” At the time I didn't realize how much wisdom was in those words or how many wonderful experiences awaited me.

We reached Chile, and I began sticking my neck out by meeting new people, making new friends, and attending a new school. I stuck my neck out as I learned Spanish, shared my beliefs with others, and learned about another culture by being a part of it. The adjustments weren't easy, but each experience helped me improve. I slowly began to adapt and form a deep love for a country that I initially had wanted nothing to do with.

Before I knew it, three years had passed, and it was time for our family to leave. I remember sitting on the back porch of our home in Santiago, watching the sun casting the beautiful orange glow so typical of a Chilean sunset. “It's incredible,” I thought. I had fought so hard against coming, and now I didn't want to leave. I couldn't imagine leaving the people with their friendly greetings and kisses on the cheek. I couldn't imagine leaving the majestic snow-capped mountains and beautiful Pacific Ocean. I even loved the crazy buses that zipped through the streets of Santiago, the noisy street vendors, and the stray dogs.

“Okay, Whitney,” my dad called from inside the house. “It's time to go.”



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**Do
Not
Disturb!**



learned that a turtle doesn't get anywhere by staying in its shell. It has to stick its neck out.

I got up and looked around for the last time. “Goodbye Chile,” I murmured quietly. “I’ll miss you.”

While I was excited to see my friends again, and I couldn’t wait to hug Russell, who had returned from his own mission a few days earlier, my heart felt like it was breaking. Living in Chile had changed me so much. My views, opinions, personality, dreams and hopes had all been shaped by my experience there. I didn’t fully realize how much I loved it and how wonderful and unique my time there had been. Many people shy away from experiences that seem scary or overwhelming at first. We’d rather stay in our comfort zones than try something new—whether it’s moving, serving a mission, trying out for a play or team, or giving a talk in church. Yet it is these experiences that give us joy and mold us into the people we want to be. These experiences are not always easy, but they’re worth it.

As our plane touched down 10 hours later, my dad came and put his arm around me. “So, what did you learn?” he asked.

I smiled at him. “I learned that a turtle doesn’t get anywhere by staying in its shell. It has to stick its neck out.” **w**