

WALKING the Lonely Road TO CHURCH

*Why was walking
eight blocks to church
so hard?*

By Sydney L. Spackman

Studying abroad had always been a dream of mine, so when the opportunity came to study Spanish in Chile, I packed up my bags and flew 12 hours to stay with a Chilean family and attend school there. Morgan,* a girl I met in Chile, was also in the same Spanish program and the only



Streets in Chile often flood because of heavy rain.

other member of the Church I knew. We instantly became good friends and made plans to attend church the following Sunday morning.

I set my alarm for 8:30 a.m. that Sunday and texted Morgan to make sure she was awake. I started getting ready for church, but even as 9:00 rolled around, I hadn't heard from Morgan. My heart slowly sank. I sat on my bed and thought, do I go alone? I felt scared. I was in a place I barely knew, I spoke minimal Spanish, I didn't know anyone who would be at church, and I would have to walk eight blocks in cold rain. To make matters even harder, my Chilean family wasn't LDS, and they were still asleep.

Once 9:30 passed, I figured I wasn't going to hear from Morgan after all. But I still felt too nervous to go by myself.

10 o'clock came—the time church started—and by now I was sitting on

my bed, having changed back into my pajama pants to keep me warm from the Chilean winter air. Not knowing what else to do—and wanting to feel the Spirit—I pulled out my laptop to watch *Mormon Messages* videos.

I was really touched by the second one I watched: “Dare to Stand Alone,” with a story from President Thomas S. Monson.

In this short clip, President Monson described his experience at Navy boot camp. On his first Sunday afternoon there, the chief petty officer directed them where to attend their churches. He sent the Catholics to one building, the Jews to another, and the Protestants to yet another. President Monson didn’t know where to go, since he was not any of those religions, so he just stood his ground feeling completely alone. “Courageous and determined, yes—but alone,” he said.



Welcome sign at the place where I attended church while in Chile.

The officer came up to him and asked, “And just what do you guys call yourselves?” It wasn’t until then that President Monson realized there were other men behind him. Almost in unison they said, “Mormons, sir!”



View of Valparaíso.

As I saw that, I realized I wasn’t being courageous enough to dare to stand alone.

I was afraid to go to church because I was by myself. As that realization sank in, I threw on my skirt and ate a speedy breakfast. I pulled on my yellow rain boots, packed my church shoes in my purse, and marched off to church just like President Monson. The whole time I walked to church, I wondered how I was brave enough to travel 5,728 miles away from my family and friends, live with a foreign family, speak a foreign language, and yet not be brave enough to walk eight blocks alone to church.

Going to church in Chile was an incredible experience. The members

Me at the Church complex that includes the mission home, institute of religion, and the chapel in Viña del Mar.



took me under their wing from the very first day, making sure I felt welcomed and loved. They were so kind and found ways to include me in their lives, including teaching me how to make Chilean dishes and inviting me to clean the church with them on a Saturday morning.



My Chilean family, who are also my friends.

I learned that through the gospel we have family everywhere. No matter where we go in this world, we’ll always have a place to go that we can call



A close-up photo of Valparaíso with its colorful houses, which are often made out of used ship metal.

home, with people who will change our lives forever. We may not speak the same language, wear the same clothes, or have the same customs, but we do have one heart to love each other. **NE**

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* Name has been changed.