



# Standing on My Own

BY LINDSAY CANO

*I'd always lived Church standards, but why?*

I was born into a Latter-day Saint family and grew up following the Church standards as outlined in the pamphlet *For the Strength of Youth*. I didn't drink, smoke, or swear; I dressed modestly, and I tried to keep the Sabbath day holy. This made me something of an oddity in my small New England town.

Though I did have a few friends who had similar standards, I had many more friends who did not. In my high school I was frequently teased about my standards and the fact that I was a Mormon. I was also the only person in my high school who could boast of living on a dairy farm, which didn't add to my popularity. I was known as "the good Mormon farm girl," wholesome to the core.

### A Test on My Own

When I was 16 I had the opportunity to go to Ecuador for the summer as an exchange student. I looked forward to this opportunity to live in an exotic location, but some of my excitement was reserved for meeting new people who wouldn't know I was a Mormon. I decided that it wasn't necessary for the people of Ecuador to know that I was LDS. I could still live the standards—but quietly and unobtrusively.

In Ecuador I attended an orientation with other exchange students from all over the United States. I quickly made friends, some that I would see almost every day that summer because we were staying with host families in the same city. Others I saw throughout the summer at parties and field trips. It felt wonderfully liberating to meet people who didn't know my family's entire history. They didn't know I was a farm girl or that I was Miss Squeaky-clean. For the first time in my life I felt popular and accepted.

After orientation I met my host family. The very first thing we did, before I even unpacked, was to walk to a liquor store. My host sisters informed me that they were giving a big party that night in honor of my arrival, and they wanted me to pick out the booze. They were surprised to learn that I didn't drink and pressured me about it. I finally had to admit that I was Mormon.

My stay in Ecuador marked the beginning of the most intense test of living Church standards I had ever faced. I was frequently pressured to drink alcohol. I met several handsome, fun young men who were anxious to get to know me a little too well. The other exchange students



quickly learned that I was a Mormon, and they had quite a bit to say about it, much of it negative. One girl, who was known for her partying, teased me frequently about my moral standards. She suggested that I thought I was better than others because of these standards.

Though I never seriously considered abandoning my standards, I did begin to question why I was making these choices. I felt like it wasn't good enough anymore to say, "Because of my religion, I don't do such-and-such" or "That's how I was raised."

I knew I needed a testimony of my standards if I was going to continue to uphold them. I wanted a stronger testimony of the restored Church.

#### **A Testimony of My Own**

I started reading the Book of Mormon on my own for the first time, and I finished it in 13 days. The Spirit testified to me that the powerful testimonies of those ancient prophets were true. I was filled with joy and gratitude that I had the privilege of being a member of Christ's Church.

This precipitated a complete change in my attitude toward Church standards. My newfound testimony of the Book of Mormon gave power and substance to my beliefs. I felt proud of my standards, and it became easier to live them.

Nothing had really changed as far as how I lived, but my feelings were different. Nothing about me had outwardly changed, and yet I was a new person. I even noticed that my new friends responded to this change in me, perhaps without realizing it. They seemed to have greater respect for me.

One day I was alone with the girl who had been making fun of me in front of the other exchange students. She confided that she wished she had been raised to have the

same standards I had. She said she wished she had never had a drink and had never been unchaste. She was not the only one to tell me that.

When I was a senior in high school, a good friend who had gone on to college was visiting at Christmas break. She told me that she wished she had been taught my standards as a child because it would have been

much easier to keep from getting into trouble.

She told me to hold on to my standards no matter what because they would keep me safe.

A couple of years later when I was in college a girl I had known in Ecuador came to visit. She told me she wished she had been raised a Mormon because then she might have avoided the burdensome sins she'd committed. I felt very sad for my classmates, and on both occasions I cried with them over the pain they'd suffered.

They'd had to learn the hard way that "while you are free to choose for yourself, you are not free to choose the consequences of your actions" (*For the Strength of Youth* [2001], 4.)

At first it surprised me a little to think that other teens were envious of my standards. Hadn't so many of them made fun of me in high school? Didn't teens want fewer restrictions instead of more? However, it soon began to make sense. My standards did keep me safe, and everyone wants to feel safe. Living the standards as outlined in *For the Strength of Youth* had spared me a great deal of pain. Also, more importantly, because I was exercising faith by living those standards and reading the Book of Mormon, I was worthy of the companionship of the Holy Ghost. It was through the Holy Ghost that I was able to obtain one of my most valued possessions: my testimony of the Book of Mormon and the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. **NE**

