

MY CHANCE

to

STAND

By Raven Austin Haymond

When I was baptized, I promised to stand as a witness of God. Now I had a big chance to do just that—in Honduras.

I remember the night my father got the call. We were all sitting around the table of our North Carolina home playing UNO, and my father came downstairs with the news. He was going to be a mission president.

When we later found out we would be moving to Tegucigalpa, Honduras, we eagerly pulled out maps and the encyclopedia. In some ways, I was terrified to move to a foreign country right before my junior year of high school. Speaking Spanish was not a problem (I was born in Peru, and my family had lived in El Salvador for seven years). But we had lived in North Carolina for only two years. I finally felt like I belonged, and then this call came. I would have to start all over again. It was thrilling but intimidating at the same time.

Mission life in Honduras was great. I attended spiritual zone meetings, helped the fantastic sister missionaries teach the gospel, and served Christmas dinner to eager young elders. However, school was not going so well. I was doing fine academically and was even on the volleyball team, but I was one of only three North Americans in my grade—not to mention the only member of the Church in my whole school.

Making friends was hard. In a school with no orchestra, no choir, and no art program, I found few outlets for my interests. On top of that, with my LDS values, I did not belong in the dance clubs, where my classmates spent their weekends drinking alcohol. I made friends, but I spent my lunch periods in the library and my weekends at home. And as wonderful as missionaries are, they are not

meant to be the best friends of the mission president's daughter. I was lonely.

In the past, I wasn't outspoken about being LDS, but people figured it out. If they asked, I would tell them. In Honduras, however, the fact that I was LDS was one of the first things people learned about me. I'd meet a new person and the conversation would go something like this:

"So, what does your dad do?"

"Well," I'd explain, "he's in charge of about 200 missionaries for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in this area."

"Oh, cool," they would reply, not really knowing what to say.

So everyone knew, and I didn't mind. Then one day my teacher told me that someone had made a comment about Mormons while I was out of the classroom. Apparently, it wasn't a very nice comment. I'm still not sure why she told me this.

My instinct told me to sulk about it or be offended, but something else in me spoke louder that day. Much to my surprise, I smiled and told her I would be happy to explain about the Church to the class. I knew they had never been taught anything about the Church by its members and that their comments were based on ignorance, not cruelty. My teacher was thrilled at my proposition and arranged an entire class period for me to talk about the Church.

I probably should have been nervous, but with the Spirit's help, I eagerly arrived that day with temple pictures in hand. The Spirit whispered that this was my chance to stand

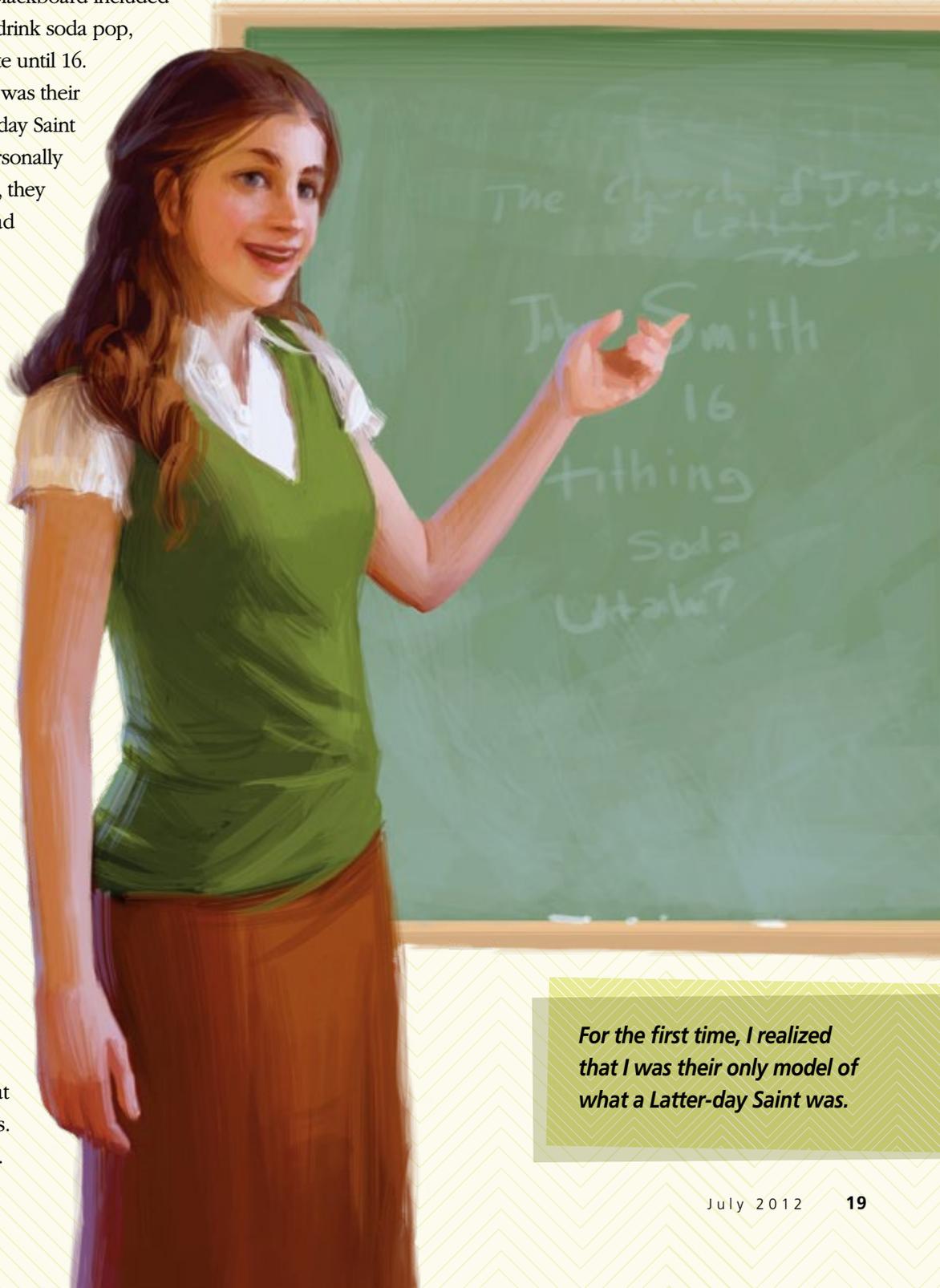


as a witness of God, just as I had promised I would every Sunday since I was baptized at 12.

We arranged the desks in a big circle, and I began. Even the school principal came to listen. I decided to start by having my classmates brainstorm what they knew about our Church. The list on the blackboard included items like John Smith, don't drink soda pop, all live in Utah, and don't date until 16. For the first time, I realized I was their only model of what a Latter-day Saint was. For instance, since I personally chose not to drink soda pop, they assumed that my decision had something to do with being LDS. I was their sole contact with the Church, so that left me with the responsibility of providing a good example for them.

As the discussion continued, we addressed polygamy, the gold plates, the First Vision, and other questions. I loved every minute of it. The Spirit gave me the words to speak, and I knew my classmates were being touched. They might not have been converted on the spot, but at least they were more educated about the Church—a seed was planted. I was filled with a spirit of conviction and testimony. No one was offended by what I had to say. In fact, I believe they respected me more after that for my beliefs and standards. It was “cool” that I was LDS.

Even as the mission president's daughter, I had the chance to be a missionary. After this experience, I could no longer be passive about my values and beliefs; I needed to be an example of the truthfulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ to everyone I met. I stood as a witness. **NE**



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