

SAILING SAFELY HOME



Every day the fishermen of Visakhapatnam, India, sail out to sea. Most days the waves are gentle, the ocean is kind, and the boats return laden with fish. Occasionally, however, the waters turn rough. Skies darken, menacing waves rise, and the fishermen rejoice just to return safely to their harbor.

Every day the Latter-day Saint youth of Visakhapatnam set out into the world. Most days life treats them well. They gain knowledge, make friends, and return home filled with the joy of life. Occasionally, however, the world turns rough. Discouragement pounds like waves, temptation towers tall, and doubt darkens the spiritual sky. On those days they rejoice as they return safely to their havens of peace, harbors they call home.

By Richard M. Romney

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Though the seas of life may be rough at times, Latter-day Saint teens in Visakhapatnam, India, know that the harbor of home is a haven of peace.

Pictures on the Wall

Two of those Latter-day Saint teens, Naga Bushan Ratnam and Pavani Kotala Ratnam, live with their parents in a small apartment far from town but near the steel mill where their father works. You can tell by the pictures in the apartment what the priorities are. Family photos fill a bookshelf near the front door, and in the sleeping area, pictures of the Savior, the temple, and the First Presidency adorn the walls.

“When I wake up, those pictures are the first things I see,” Pavani says. “When I go to sleep at night, they are the last things I see.”

Pavani believes we all can create havens of peace in our homes. “That’s why I keep things clean,” she says. “That’s one way to make it comfortable for the Spirit to be here.” And at school, “I always have *For the Strength of Youth* in my book bag, so whenever I take up a book, I keep seeing it.”

Naga finds that conversations with his sister bring him peace. “Of course we talk to our parents and seek their counsel on many things,” he says. “Our father is the district president, so we talk with him all the time both officially and unofficially. And we love to talk with our mother. But there’s something special about being able





Church and family provide safe harbors for the Ratnam family (previous page) and for (clockwise from top left) Sujith, Sandeep, and Hepsiba Batha; Pavani and Naga Ratnam; the Butty family; and other youth from Visakhapatnam, which has three branches.

travel—all four of them—40 kilometers (25 miles) each way on a single motorbike just to get to their meetings. They talk about prayers of faith for Pavani when she was sick on the day Dad was baptized, about the priesthood blessing Dad gave to seriously ill Naga during school exams, and about the way Dad always counsels with Mom, with them, and in prayer with Heavenly Father when making major decisions.

“I have seen positive changes as our family has grown in the gospel,” Pavani says. “My parents’ example and my brother’s example have guided me as the youngest of the family. I know that Jesus Christ has helped me through every part of my life. I have people around me who help me and love me, and I have the Savior’s love. That love is more important to me than anything else.”

Such love was evident when the family traveled to the Hong Kong China Temple to be sealed. On earth, Naga says, the temple is the safest harbor of all: “It is a place of

holiness. Just thinking about it brings holiness into our home.” And that makes the Ratnams’ apartment a joyous place to be.

Scripture Safety

Hepsiba, Sandeep, and Sujith Batha, who live with their parents in downtown Visak (as locals call the city), say the scriptures are an anchor in their harbor of peace. “By reading the scriptures, we invite the Spirit to guide us in the correct path, to take good decisions in our lives,” Hepsiba says. “We also invite the Spirit into our home when we have family home evening and family prayer.”

In fact, Sandeep says, his mother reminds them “to pray every day while going out and coming in. When she says, ‘Please be thankful,’ that makes me want to be thankful for everything.”

to share with my sister.” When Naga gets upset, Pavani calms him down. Naga is somewhat reserved, so Pavani helps him to be more outgoing.

“But most of all, we strengthen each other in keeping the standards,” Naga says. For example, Pavani will ask Naga for advice about modest clothing. “If he doesn’t think it’s up to Church standards, I won’t wear it,” she says. And they often talk about giving service, both in the Church and in the community. Such discussion is partially responsible for Naga’s dream to someday be a cardiologist (heart doctor). “I want my career to be another way of giving service,” he says.

The Ratnam teens explain that having the priesthood in their home also adds to their family’s well-being. They reminisce about how their father led the rest of them into the Church eight years ago, even when they had to

Sujith says that in addition to their home, another place of peace is in branch meetings, where members learn the gospel together and where everyone is welcome to worship, and in activities where youth with the same standards can strengthen and reassure one another. “The Lord tells us that we are the light of the world,” Sujith says (see Matthew 5:14). “As we gather together, we keep that light burning bright and feel more comfortable sharing it.”

Happily Home

It was that kind of sharing that brought the gospel to the Butty family. Sisters Sandhya and Sudha Butty and their mother and father can hardly stop smiling—they are so eager to tell about how they were introduced to the Church.

“We joined the Church as a family,” Sandhya explains. “We had been looking for the right church for a long time.

We knew we needed to be baptized. Then one day our father saw two elders. Their name tags said, ‘The Church of Jesus Christ,’ and he knew he had to speak with them.”

Discussions began in earnest. “We learned that, to do the will of the Father, Jesus Christ suffered for us, accomplished the Atonement, and made it possible for us to return to Heavenly Father by following Him,” Sudha says. With that testimony solidly in place, joining the Church seemed like sailing home through friendly seas, and the Buttys have rejoiced in their decision ever since.

Every day the fishing boats sail out from Visakhapatnam. Every day the youth of the Visakhapatnam First, Second, and Gajuwaka Branches set out into the world. All of them can return safely to a familiar harbor. But in the case of the Latter-day Saints, it is a harbor that’s not only safe for now but also secure for eternity. **NE**

SAILING ON THE FRIEND SHIP

Pavani Kotala Ratnam has learned a lot about friendship by living the principles of the gospel. “When we joined the Church, I was made fun of in my class at school because I would never cheat. I never told lies. If I was asked to do anything good, I would do it for sure. And I always talked to everyone politely. I had good friends at church, but my school ‘friends’ didn’t like my standards. They told me I was crazy and laughed about me in front of others.

“I talked with my dad and my mom about what kind of friends I should have,” she continues. “Talking to them was one of the best decisions I ever made. They helped me to feel good about myself, to choose friends who built me up, and to try to be friendly with everyone.

“Soon I was talking with everyone—the big guy, the better student—I talked to everybody. I tried to set a good example. In the beginning I didn’t find any friends who encouraged me, and I had a hard time. But my teachers encouraged me. There were times when they asked, ‘What makes you different?’

“Other students kept saying, ‘Why do you behave like that?’ and ‘Why do you talk to that guy when he is not of your social class?’”

But eventually those waves of opposition stopped pounding. “I knew I was different in a good way and that I should be myself and do what is right. I had that determination,” she says.

Today Pavani is known by the other students as a friendly young woman who is a positive influence in her school.

