

# THEY BROUGHT ME BACK

BY GRETCHEN FITZSIMONS STONE

*I thought going back to church would be too hard, but caring friends made all the difference.*

*I liked to go to a nearby field after school, lie in the tall grass, watch the clouds go by, and wish to be happy.*

I was baptized when I was eight and attended Primary, but when I became a teenager I fell away from Church activity. At first, I went to a few Mutual activities, but by the time I graduated from high school, I was completely inactive.

During high school, I liked to go to a nearby field after school, lie in the tall grass while watching the clouds go by, and wish to be happy. I was sad because my parents were separated. I didn't feel peace or happiness a lot of the time, and I didn't know why. I was a cheerleader, I participated in school government, and I had plenty of friends, but something was missing in my life.

Two years after high school I went on a backpacking trip with friends. Everyone went to sleep early, but I stayed up by the campfire. As I was looking up into the heavens, the thought came to my mind to say a prayer. I looked up and asked, "Heavenly Father, are you really there? And if you are, will you help me to be happy?" It felt as if a huge blanket was wrapped around my shoulders. I felt warm, as though everything would be OK.

A few weeks later, my mom and I went

for a vacation to Idaho with her sister. A couple of my cousins invited me to a youth dance at the church, and I had a great time. I danced with a young man who had received a mission call to Korea. He asked if he could write to me, and I agreed.

In his first letter, this young man shared missionary experiences with me and bore his testimony of the gospel. I don't know whether I was swept off my feet by him or the Spirit. But after all those years of inactivity, I decided to go back to church and check things out.

I roped one of my older brothers into going with me so I wouldn't have to sit alone. I don't remember the meeting at all. I just remember thinking, "Everybody must be looking at me and saying, 'Look, Gretchen is at church. I wonder why.'" I was so uncomfortable by the end of the meeting that I planned a quick escape as soon as the closing prayer ended.

That's when something happened that changed my life forever. Four girls I remembered from Primary ran up and surrounded me. They were so happy to see me at church, and I felt their sincerity. They asked if I would come back later that night to a





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## LIGHTING THE WAY FOR OTHERS

The Young Women torch symbolizes the light each person can have as she stands for truth and righteousness. As a young woman in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, you can “let your light so shine” by serving and helping others. Try some of these ideas when you share the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ:

- ♥ Reach out to others.
- ♥ Smile.
- ♥ Be kind.
- ♥ Include new people.
- ♥ Be a friend.
- ♥ Invite others to Mutual.
- ♥ Be positive.
- ♥ Never criticize another person.
- ♥ Use clean language.
- ♥ Pray to be guided to those who need your friendship.
- ♥ Do what is right.

youth fireside. I agreed and then left for home.

I talked my brother into going with me again. At the fireside, a man stood to speak and said he felt impressed not to give his prepared talk but to share his testimony and then let us do the same. All of a sudden, my whole being felt on fire. I don't know how long it took me to get up, but I stood and bore my testimony that now I knew why I had been feeling unhappy and lost. It was the gospel that was missing in my life. I knew I needed to make some changes.

Now, almost 30 years later, I am still grateful to those young women who didn't let me escape the chapel that day. I later met and married a returned missionary in the Idaho Falls Temple. We have four chil-

dren, three of whom have married in the temple. Our oldest son served a mission, and our last is now planning to go on his. I have served in the Young Women program of the Church. Each time I teach a lesson on service, I share my life-changing experience in hopes that the same will be done for others as was done for me.

I believe my simple prayer was answered on that mountaintop. Heavenly Father does hear and answer our prayers. And my prayer was answered because four girls chose the right. They put their arms around a lost soul and invited her back. There are Gretchens out there who need to be brought back. You never know whose life can and will be changed forever if you will just reach out and be a loving, caring friend. **NE**

