



ARE YOU LDS?

By Caitlin Anderson

Often it's the small, subtle things that help define who and what we are.

Blending in isn't always easy when you're one of only a handful of Latter-day Saint kids in a high school of 2,000, but I managed somehow. I grew up mostly quiet, content to go with the flow and see where life took me rather than firmly planting my feet on any convictions. At 17 I knew I was nearing the precipice of big life changes, but I didn't know how to commit to any direction. People often smiled knowingly at me, kindly telling me that I had it made and had the world at my fingertips. But I wasn't so sure. I wasn't sure of anything, because I still wasn't sure who I was.

No one from the outside looking in would have known how little confidence I had in myself. I did a good job of hiding it. Though I was quiet and hardly popular, I still played on two sports teams, participated in several clubs, and sat securely at the top of my class academically. I enjoyed Church activities and seminary. I seldom realized how truly at peace I felt during those early mornings before school, poring over my scriptures before the chaos of the world set in. But the chaos always came. Though I smiled and laughed in the school hallways, none of

those things seemed to really matter—I wasn't happy. It's hard to be truly happy when the very essence of your being is a mystery to you. I knew I was a child of God, but so was everyone else. Did I really matter in the big picture? Was I willing to put the gospel principles I'd always been taught at the center of my life and face whatever questions or mockery might arise? Who was I, really? Instead of having enough faith in myself to find the answers, I chose to almost fade away.

Just before my junior year ended, a small thing happened that would change all that. I decided to throw an after-school job into the mix of my already busy schedule, and I was very nervous about it. Working retail, I had to approach strangers and ask how I might help them, which was a daunting task for someone as shy as I was. With practice, however, I eventually came out of my shell and no longer felt butterflies each time I approached a customer. One evening just before closing I found myself helping

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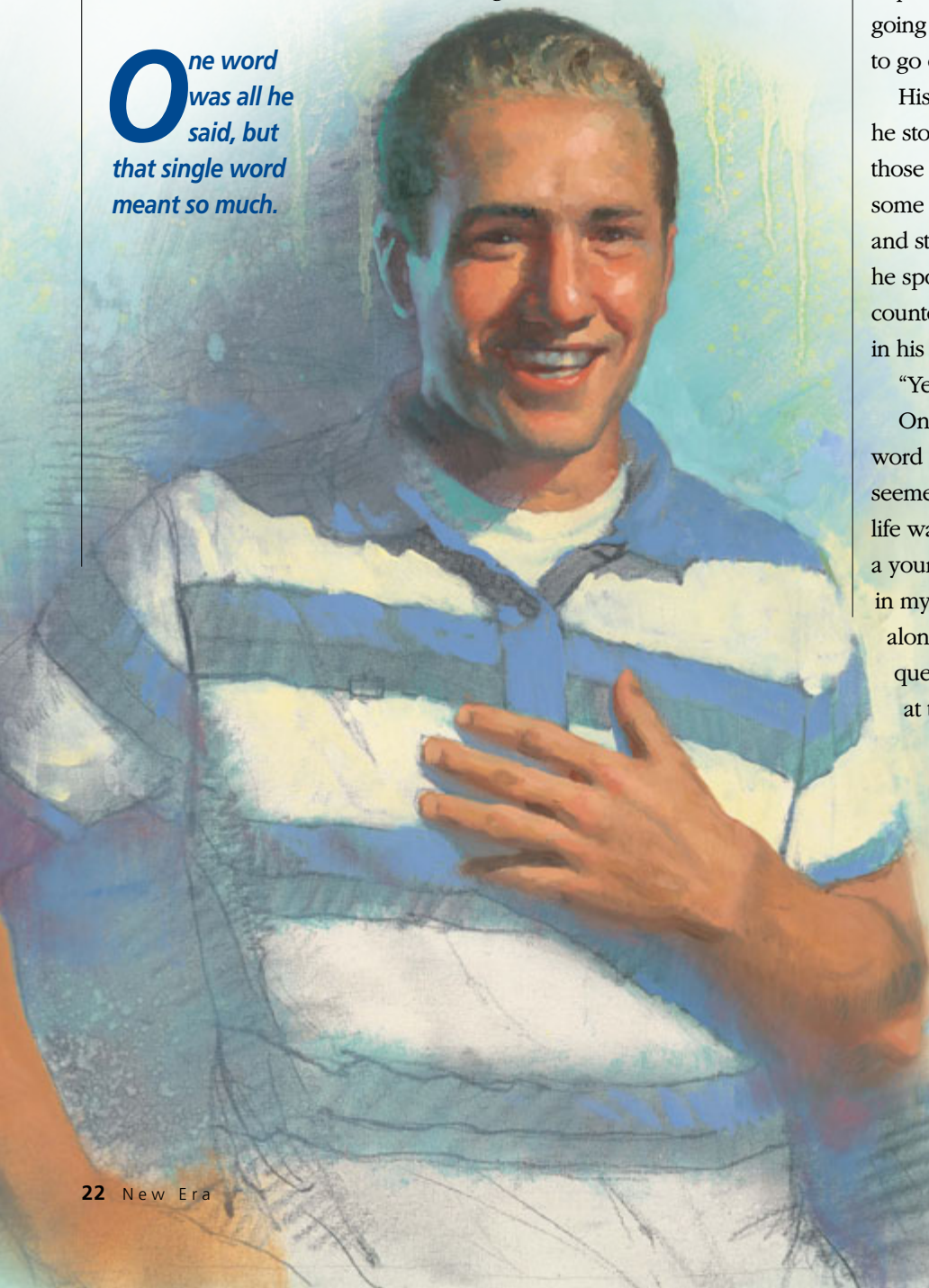


a young man who had recently had his hair buzzed off. My town was home to a couple of military bases, and it was not uncommon to see young men with freshly-shaven heads.

After we found the item the young man was looking for, we walked to the counter so he could pay for it. As he opened his wallet, I noticed on his finger a shiny silver ring with a familiar design. I smiled at the sight of it, thrilled as always to discover another member of the Church in a place where we were so few.

“Are you LDS?” I asked, gesturing toward the CTR ring.

One word was all he said, but that single word meant so much.



The young man froze, almost flinched, and his eyes then snapped up quickly to mine as though to analyze the meaning behind my words. After a moment I remembered that the young LDS marines often had it rough trying to find their place in a new town and lifestyle. I had heard stories of new LDS recruits and how hard it was to stand strong when surrounded by things a Latter-day Saint would find demoralizing. Drinking, profanity, and immorality were common, and more than one recruit suffered his share of scorn and ridicule for choosing not to participate. Did this young man think I was going to mock him or that he was going to have to go on the defensive?

His hands shook almost imperceptibly, and he stood silent. It was obvious that during those few prolonged seconds, he was making some kind of decision. At last he lifted his head and straightened to his full height, and when he spoke, a resounding conviction flooded his countenance while an undeniable light shone in his eyes.

“Yes.”

One word was all he said, but that single word meant so much. In that moment, he seemed to know who he was and what his life was all about. The example of a stranger, a young man I had never seen before, stays in my mind to this day. Whenever I feel lost, alone, or uncertain, I pose to myself the same question I so casually asked that young man at the check-out counter: Are You LDS?

Yes.

I am a child of god. I am a disciple of Jesus Christ. I am a Latter-day Saint. I serve the Lord, and I am neither frightened nor ashamed. I know who I am, without a doubt. This was a small moment that changed my life. There are moments like this in everyone's life—moments that help define you and put everything into focus. Some are monumental and easy to recognize, but many more are small, subtle, and unexpected. **NE**