



ENDURING *to* *the* BEGINNING

It took seven years, but it was worth the wait.

BY MARIA KANEVA

“Who are the teachers?” I asked my friend as we were walking down the street on a Saturday morning in February 2000. We were 14 then.

“They are my friends and are here on something like a mission,” she said. We had never talked about religion before, even though we were best friends. She told me we were going to attend English classes that her friends were teaching for free. She knew I would be interested because I was going to an English high school.

When we entered the building, my eyes riveted on the pictures on the walls. Was this a church? It didn’t look like a Bulgarian Orthodox Church, the only one I had visited before. Most people consider any other church a cult. Also, when Bulgaria was under communism until 1989, religious beliefs were condemned, and many people still look at religion as something not right.

My friend asked me whether I wanted to come to church the next day. I answered yes, more out of curiosity than piety. I knew that if she was going, there wasn’t anything wrong with it.

I started going to church regularly. I wanted to know more about its teachings. I wanted to know why those young people with the name tags had left their country to come to Bulgaria and plunged themselves into the hostile religious atmosphere here. Even though I wasn’t religious at that time, something made me keep going to Church activities.





t was a long journey to my baptism day (above), but I received strength from the scriptures, Personal Progress projects such as memorizing “The Living Christ” (opposite page), and branch members in my hometown of Sliven (opposite page).

I loved the friendly spirit of the missionaries and the warm smiles of the members.

I became friends with the young women in the branch. I was amazed by their faith and great desire to serve others. I remember when I said my first prayer at a Young Women class. I had never prayed before, and I didn’t know how powerful a prayer could be. I hadn’t felt the strong connection with our Heavenly Father that a prayer brings. I hadn’t known I was His daughter. I never quit praying after that. Every time I had to overcome a hardship, I knew I could ask my Heavenly Father for guidance. Often, those prayers would bring tears to my eyes because I could feel the assurance of the Holy Spirit that God loves me. I started trusting the Lord.

When the temptations of the teen years

came along, I already had firm faith in Jesus Christ, which gave me strength to overcome these temptations. I could see how Satan tempted my peers with worldly things and how small compromises led to bigger ones. It was hard to stand for my principles, but the connection I had with my Father in Heaven through prayer helped me stay away from temptations. I had decided to live by the principles of the plan of salvation. I knew without a doubt that one day I was going to be blessed.

Unfortunately, I couldn’t join the Church at that time. My parents strongly objected, especially my father. But I could understand him. His parents never took him to church; he was brought up when the country was under communist rule. Nevertheless, I knew the Lord had prepared a way for me to join the Church someday. I already knew that way would be very hard. But I had learned from the scriptures that tribulations can be for our good.

I went to seminary and later to institute, I attended Church activities, and I even started my own Personal Progress. I couldn’t wait to go to Young Women activities. I will never forget the hours we spent cooking, making postcards or bookmarks, decorating our classroom, or playing games, as well as the wonderful spirit of friendship between us. Each activity helped me understand my divine nature and role in life.



DETAIL FROM CHRIST AND THE RICH YOUNG RULER, BY HEINRICH HOFMANN, COURTESY OF C. HARRISON CONROY CO.

