

From Coast to Coast: Our Journey to the Temple

Editors' note: This story is a reminder of what a young couple sacrificed to be sealed for time and all eternity. We hope it will inspire you to make temple marriage a priority in your own life.

By Efraín Rodríguez

In October of 1979, the day after we were married in a civil ceremony, my wife, Maria Ondina, and I left our hometown of Arequipa, Peru, near the shores of the Pacific Ocean, to travel to the São Paulo Brazil Temple, on the Atlantic coast, to be sealed. We were the first couple from Arequipa to travel by land to be sealed in the

newly dedicated temple—the first built in South America. We had planned to make the round-trip journey in 10 days, but in the end, it took us almost 30 due to a dangerous political climate. I didn't know how it would work out—all I knew was that I had made a promise to God that after my mission, I would get sealed to a worthy woman.

Arequipa to Juliaca to Puno

After a nine-hour journey by night, we arrived in Juliaca, Peru. It was Thursday, and we still needed to get stamps in our passports and exit permits so that we could leave the country. The following day was a national

Although we had little money and a perilous journey ahead, my wife and I knew that we had to be sealed in the temple.

holiday, and government offices would be closed for the rest of the weekend, so we arrived in line at the Bank of the



Nation that morning to ensure that we would have sufficient time before all offices closed at noon.

When we finally got to the counter at 11:00 a.m., the gentleman expressed concern. "Sorry," he said. "We don't process these kinds of documents here. You will have to go to our office in Puno." We were both surprised and frustrated—Puno was 45 minutes away.

Puno to La Paz to Cochabamba

After struggling to find a taxi, we made it to the office in Puno by 1:30 p.m. The doors were already closed. I knocked the iron doorknockers together as hard as I could. A very upset man opened the door and asked, "What do you want?" I said a silent, fervent prayer and looked this stranger in the eyes. "Sir," I said, "I'm a Mormon,

I'm going to get married in the temple in São Paulo, Brazil, and you can help me." His hostile attitude changed. "I'm so sorry, sir," he said, "but everything closed over an hour ago, and almost everyone has already left." I responded, "Let me in and let my God help me find what I'm seeking." He let me in.

After finding the manager, Rosa, I explained our situation. She politely responded, "Those forms are processed by three different employees, and I think everyone has left." But all three men were still there, and she enlisted them to stay late to help me.

The first man asked me for forms I didn't have. "You're supposed to have gone to the Ministry of Economy, bought six forms, and brought them here for processing," he explained. "You'll have to wait until Monday."

I froze—I couldn't believe it! Again I said a silent prayer. "Sir," I said,

"I'm Mormon, and I am going to the temple in São Paulo, Brazil, to be married. And you can help me." He no longer seemed to be in a hurry. He looked in every drawer and finally located the longed-for forms. The next clerk quickly checked them and stamped our passports.

At the next window, as I paid the exit tax in U.S. dollars, the cashier seemed to take great pleasure in saying, "I'm sorry. See this sign?" A sign on the wall read, "Dollars not accepted." Our plan was about to fail—there was nothing I could do.

"Take the payment," I heard Rosa say from behind us. The cashier accepted the money and gave me the documents. We were on our way!

Heading into downtown La Paz, Bolivia, it was getting dark when rocks began hitting our bus. Through



the windows we could see angry people in the streets, throwing rocks and putting up barriers to stop the traffic. Our bus continued moving swiftly to the center of town. That night was the start of a revolution in Bolivia.

We got off the bus and began looking for a hotel. The only one we could find was very expensive, but after repeating my explanation to a good man who worked there, he boarded us in the hotel's cleaning supply room very cheaply. He placed a mattress on the floor and gave us blankets to protect us from the cold and the sounds of gunfire that echoed outside all night.

We left early the next morning, frightened and hurried. On our way to the bus stop, we saw soldiers supported by tanks firing rifles at those protesting the revolution.

Fuel was beginning to run scarce, and instead of three bus departures a day as usual, only one was being

announced. The seats had sold out days in advance. I found the manager and said the words I had used with everyone else: "Sir, we are Mormons, and we are going to the temple to get married. And you can help us." He asked, "Where do you need to go?" "Cochabamba, sir." He opened a drawer and pulled out two tickets. I could see there were no more. "Hurry up," he said, "the bus is about to leave." Our suitcases seemed weightless, and our feet barely touched the ground—in our hands we held that day's blessing.

Cochabamba to Santa Cruz

We arrived in Cochabamba amidst more chaos from the revolution. We found a market filled with tents, where a kind fellow Peruvian let us wash up and then store our suitcases while we went to the bus terminal. Using our same plea, we made it

standby onto another bus and arrived days later in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, near the Brazilian border. For three mornings, I went to the train station to ask if there would be any departures. The answer was always no. But on the fourth day, news spread that a train would be leaving soon for Brazil.

By this point, we were running out of money. I shared my concerns with my wife, who firmly replied, "Even if we have to arrive by foot or on the back of a donkey, we're going to make it." Her reply made me happy. I wasn't unsettled about money for the rest of the trip because our confidence was placed in our faith.

As we talked, an old lady walked toward us. She stopped in front of my wife and said, "Young lady, wouldn't you like two tickets for today?" My wife practically ripped the tickets out of her hand. I paid the old woman, and she vanished among the crowd. It took us



a few seconds to realize that the Lord and His angels were still by our side.

Santa Cruz to São Paulo

When we finally arrived at the São Paulo Temple thanks to one last ride from a friend we made on the train, the temple lodging was closed. Resigned but happy, we made ourselves comfortable on a couple of benches outside the temple. There it was, just as beautiful as we had dreamed it would be, with the statue of the angel Moroni on top. It was now midnight, and we cried as we hugged, tired and wet from the falling rain. We didn't feel the dampness, the hunger, or the cold, just an indescribable sense of happiness for being so close to the house of the Lord. We had been obedient, and there was our reward.

While we were basking in that moment, someone tapped me on the

shoulder. It was one of my former mission companions, who had been sealed in the temple that day and was returning from dinner with his wife. He let us stay in their apartment that night, and the next day he was a witness to our sealing, performed by the temple president himself. How beautiful it was to see my wife in the celestial room, all dressed in white.

With a loan from my missionary friend and help from the temple president, we made the return trip in less than five days, without any delays—and with only \$20 dollars to begin a life with my wife, Maria Ondina, as my eternal companion. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.



WORTH EVERY SACRIFICE

“Those who understand the eternal blessings which come from the temple know that no sacrifice is too great, no price too heavy, no struggle too difficult in order to receive those blessings. There are never too many miles to travel, too many obstacles to overcome, or too much discomfort to endure. They understand that the saving ordinances received in the temple that permit us to someday return to our Heavenly Father in an eternal family relationship . . . are worth every sacrifice and every effort.”

President Thomas S. Monson (1927–2018), “The Holy Temple—a Beacon to the World,” *Ensign*, May 2011, 92.

