

By Mariana M. Lara

I was living with my mom in a little town in Mexico where everyone knows each other. I knew right from wrong, but I was confused and the only active young woman in the whole town.

I wanted to fit in, so I did one thing that made sense back then: have a boyfriend. This was only one of the first mistakes I started to make. I started giving in to peer pressure and believing I was old enough to think for myself, which meant becoming an inactive young woman who lived in darkness.

I lived in darkness for a year, with every passing day becoming darker. My poor decisions led to arguments

with my family, and I realized I couldn't keep living with them. But it wasn't until the death of a close Latter-day Saint friend that I realized something was missing. Unfortunately, I blamed God and the gospel. I stopped believing that blessings came from being obedient. I knew that if I didn't decide to start living the gospel, I would continue ignoring my connection with the Church and keep living in a worldly manner.

I was sitting on my bed in a dark room, crying and feeling sorry for myself when

I realized that I was afraid—afraid of being there alone with no one to talk to, afraid of not being able to fix all the wrongs I had done, afraid that no one was going to forgive me, especially God.

Eventually, I moved to Minnesota, USA, with my grandparents, who are not members of the Church. My stepdad flew with me, and my first Sunday there, we went to church, but only for



**FRIENDS**  
Who **SHARED**  
Their **LIGHT** with Me

sacrament meeting. By the end of the meeting I had already decided to leave the Church, but to my surprise, just when we were going to the car, we saw the bishop running to catch up to us. He asked us a few questions and invited us to come back next Sunday—and we did.

The next Sunday, just as sacrament meeting was ending, before I could stand up, I was surrounded by the young women from the ward—young women who would help me change my life.



I suddenly entered a completely different world: a world with a bishop and a Young Women president who cared for me and, most of all, young women who tried to live the gospel daily, who strived to live high standards and stand for the right. They shined so much that they could brighten the path before me.

That's when I realized what I had to do: "Let [my] light so shine before men, that they may see [my] good works, and glorify [my] Father which is in heaven" (see Matthew 5:16). And so I started by going to church and Mutual every week,

reading the Book of Mormon and praying every day, dressing modestly, using better language, going to the temple, and preparing myself to get my patriarchal blessing.

I had completely changed, but I didn't realize it until Young Women camp, when I felt the Holy Ghost and discovered that I had a testimony—a testimony that would remind me that God loves me, that He has a plan for me, and that He doesn't want me to be alone. A testimony so bright and strong that it changed me. A testimony to share and light not only my path but others'. A testimony that is not afraid to shine in the dark. ■

*The author lives in Baja California, Mexico.*



*I was feeling afraid  
and alone. Then  
I moved to  
another country  
and went to  
church for the  
first time  
in a long time.*