

A LETTER FROM MY

It couldn't have arrived at a better time.

BY COURTNEY HATCH

It had always been my dream to live in Germany, and at age 16 I left home for a year to be an exchange student abroad. Although my host family would not be Latter-day Saints, I didn't think it would have a big effect on me and how I lived. It ended up being a little different than I had imagined.

My host family did not support my going to church on Sundays, and because I had to rely on other Church members for rides, I was only able to go to Church a few times during the first months that I was in Germany. I thought I could handle it, but with no seminary, no family home evenings, no home teachers, no family scripture study, and no family prayer, I felt myself slipping, and temptations became stronger.

I went to Berlin for a week to stay with some friends during the fall holidays. The week was packed full of fun and excitement, but I was sometimes with people who were smoking, drinking, and doing drugs. I never participated, but by the end of the week I had become accustomed to it all. I didn't realize it at the time, but during that week I didn't pray or read my scriptures. Instead, I let worldly things distract me, and I felt like there simply was not enough time for prayer and scripture study.

When I returned home there was a note from my host family informing me that they would be out of town for a few hours. I felt exhausted, confused, and alone. For the first time in my life no one understood how I felt, and there was no one I could talk to who could relate to how I was feeling. After such an amazing week in Berlin, how was it that I felt so unhappy?

When I went into my room, I noticed a letter from my dad had arrived earlier that day. I tore open the letter and began to cry as I read the message that he must have been

inspired to write. He wrote about the Church, the value of living the standards, and that he had full confidence that I was making good decisions on my own. How could he have known what I was facing? The message was brief, but it was the perfect thing for me to read. The letter concluded with: "Interesting how 16-year-olds can legally drink in Germany. . . . Just remember that freedom to do something means freedom not to do it as well."

Dad's letter reminded me that just because something is "legal" doesn't mean that it isn't still wrong. It brings far more happiness to live the standards of the Church than to live the standards of the world.

After I read the letter, I realized my father knew me better than I thought he did. I was quickly reminded of another letter I had from my Heavenly Father. He had also written me a very personal letter in the form of my patriarchal blessing. It was, once again, exactly what I needed. My patriarchal blessing became more personal and special to me in that moment when I realized how it really was a "letter from my Father" as well.

Heavenly Father knows and understands our needs, and I am so grateful I had that letter to read, to remind me of who I am, and who my Father is. We are children of God, and although worldly things can be distracting at times, they don't bring true happiness. The week I spent in Berlin was fun, but I still felt alone, and that fun was only temporary. When I read my patriarchal blessing, I felt a joy and a closeness to God that was far better than the short-lived pleasures of the world.

I know that God lives, that He knows us personally, and that He truly wants us to be happy because He loves us more than we can imagine. He is our Father. **NE**

FATHER

