

“Why I Believe”

Firesides

Held Sunday Evenings at the New Zealand
Temple Visitors’ Centre

2004 and 2005

Talks Are Arranged In Alphabetical Order

“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you. . .”
(I Peter 3:15)

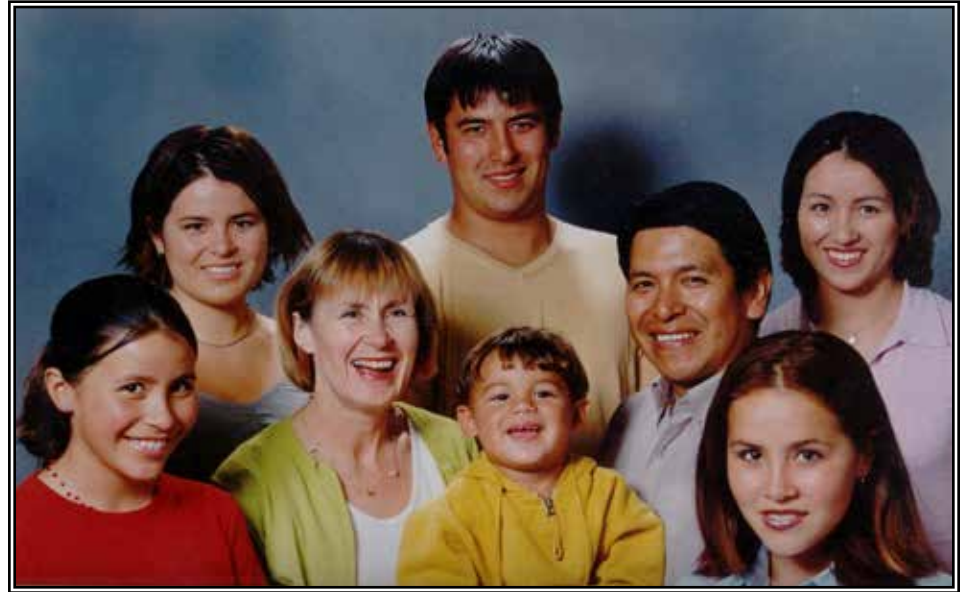
These Firesides were under the direction of Doug and Cecile Scribner
Directors of the New Zealand Visitors’ Centre - 2004 and 2005

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“Why I Believe”

Simon Acarapi

**A Convert from
La Paz, Bolivia,
South America**



Hello, my name is Simón Acarapi and I was born in La Paz, Bolivia. When I was about sixteen, I used to visit my uncle Teodoro, and his family. This uncle was a very talented man musically, and in my visits I used to listen to him playing his guitar—then he would teach me.

One evening, the missionaries were teaching him and his family the gospel, and I was deeply touched by their message. Their teachings ignited in me a desire to know more, and I was excited to learn about my Heavenly Father and

his *Plan of Salvation*, where I came from, why I was here on earth, and where I was going to go after this earthly life. My auntie and cousins were so excited with the discussions and were already making preparations for their baptisms. The date was set—in three weeks time. My uncle mentioned that he still wanted to learn more and he would not be ready for his family’s baptism. I asked him, “How long would it take you to learn in order to be ready?” He mentioned, “Two months or more,” and I decided to be baptised with him.

I completed the study and scripture reading assignments before the next meeting with the missionaries and was invited to join my uncle in baptismal preparations. However, my parents did not agree because of their strong Catholic background. Eventually that same year, I was given permission on the condition that I would *not ever change my mind*. My uncle had waited, and we were baptised at the same time.

During my high school years three friends and I organised a four piece musical band. We played Latin American folk music, becoming well known, performing in radio, television and other entertainment venues. The other band members were also introduced to the gospel—two of them also became members and we did enjoy great times together as young entertainers.



However, my belief in Jesus Christ also grew stronger on experiencing the change that comes from living the gospel and keeping Heavenly Father's commandments. Later there came an opportunity to serve a mission which I did in my native country, Bolivia. This I really

enjoyed, gaining a great deal by growing closer to my Redeemer Jesus Christ and strengthening my testimony of the scriptures. I know that Jesus Christ lives. I have seen lives completely transformed when people take on baptismal covenants and strive to live like Christ lives.

I met *Hermana* Dallas who was also serving a mission in Bolivia. A year later, I came to New Zealand, Judy Dallas', home to be married and to pursue my career. I studied here in Hamilton and have never left. Judy and I have one son, four daughters and three grand children. I have fulfilled the promise I made to my father when I was sixteen. I have not changed my mind about the Gospel of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. (October 2004)

Simon Acarapi's story of conversion was one of those chosen for the Pageant, "Legacy of Faith—Celebrating the 150-Year History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in New Zealand." (1854-2004)

“Why I Believe”

Freddy Beijerling

When Freddy was a baby, his parents joined the Church in The Netherlands. This was the only baptism that “their” missionary had. However, Freddy tells of the great rippling effect that is experienced when even just one or two in a family join the Church.



"Some years ago a missionary was labouring in one of the many difficult European missions. He served at a time when missions were for two and a half years, and many missionaries would go home without seeing anyone join the Church through their efforts. The fact that the missionaries did not learn the local language until they arrived in the field did not help them much.

Our missionary was fortunate. While still very new, he and his companion knocked on the flat of a young couple and their baby son. The young couple were mildly interested in religion and very interested in practising English, and so invited the missionaries to come in. After many months of teaching, the couple finally entered the waters of baptism, travelling to the nearest font which was in a neighbouring country.

Our missionaries left this young couple in a branch, which, on a good day, only numbered twenty. They met in a rented hall that had to be swept out each Sunday morning to remove the cigarette butts left by other hirers. Just these two baptisms in thirty months, and the chances of them remaining active were extremely low. Our missionaries may have wondered whether their labours had been worth it.



However, the family thrived, fellowshipping a number of other families into the branch, which has now grown to be the largest ward in their stake. Several of the fellowshipped families sent children on missions, and did missionary work of their own every day. The family emigrated to New Zealand to be closer to a temple and to allow their children to attend the Church high school there.

Their oldest son served a mission in Arizona, helped to baptise more than two people, and now has his own eternal family with four children, all of whom are preparing to serve. The second son served in Australia, helped to baptise more than two people, is sealed to his wife and all three of their children are



Freddy Beijerling (the oldest son) and his family now live in Temple View, New Zealand.

preparing to be missionaries. Another son served in England, helped to baptise more than two people, married in the Temple, and is helping his wife to raise three prospective missionaries. The only daughter served a mission in Belgium where she helped more than two people see the light, is married for eternity and is expecting her fourth prospective missionary. Another son served in Pennsylvania, has started an eternal family and is already raising two prospective missionaries.

Recently our family had the opportunity to renew contact with *our* missionary, letting him know of the enormous impact of his labours all those years ago. The impact of our efforts is always much greater than we will ever be aware of, whether for good or bad. Two brothers chose to fall away from the truth, and as a consequence,

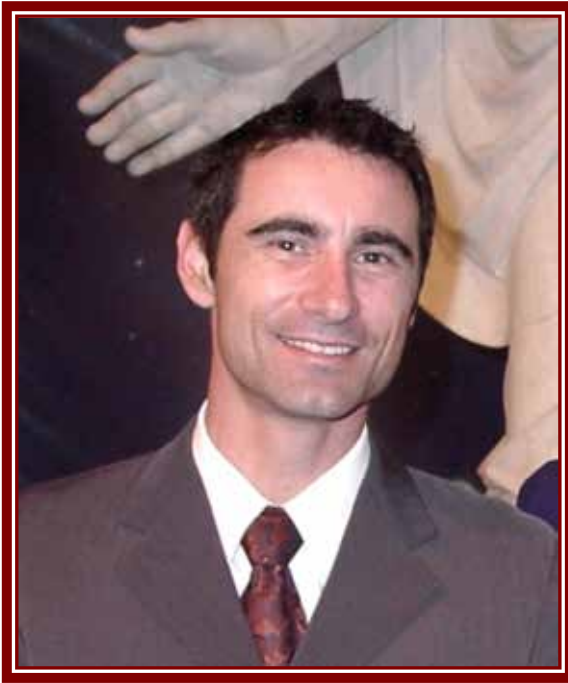
millions of their Lamanite descendents suffered. One man chose to teach the gospel and remain true despite the threat of death by fire. He had only one convert, and he did not even realise that before he died. But thousands were saved because Alma was taught by Abinadi.

As a stone cast into the water creates a relatively small initial ripple, then that ripple spreading out from the impact zone can impact over an area that is proportionally enormous. If you bring "save it be one soul unto me, how great shall be your joy with him in the kingdom of my Father!" As King Benjamin says, when we do what is right "he doth immediately bless you; and therefore he hath paid you" and yet he still promises that by the same action you are laying up "treasures in heaven." There is no better pay master.

I am eternally indebted to my Saviour for his atoning sacrifice. I am grateful for the gospel and thankful for the many people who have started a ripple effect in my life. They are a big part of the reason *why I believe.*" (January 2006)



Freddy, and two of his children, Hyrum and Kalyna, just recently shared their talents in a Readers' Theatre, telling the story of Joseph Smith. Freddy was Joseph Smith, Kalyna was Caroline Smith, and Hyrum was a newsboy. (December 2005)



“My Conversion Story”

Mark Chapman

Mark is an Australian, converted at the age of thirty-five. *Temple Lights* played an important part in his conversion.

I was born in Australia, 9 September 1969, and moved to New Zealand about six years ago. All my family live in Australia, and none are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. For the past twenty years I have had very little exposure to any religion of any denomination. Looking back, however, I can see that our Heavenly Father has been preparing me to come into the true church. I believe that if I had had the same introduction to the Mormon Church even six months earlier, I would not have become a member. Not surprisingly, His timing was perfect!

About a year and a half ago, I started work with my current employers. I knew they were members of the church, but nothing more than that. A short while later I got more involved with the company, took up a full time position and started to work closely with one of the director’s daughters—Lisa. She is an awesome member with a huge amount of knowledge. No one at work tried to press their beliefs on me, and I really wasn’t interested anyway. However, I was interested in having a harmonious working relationship with Lisa, so my first *church related questions* were to her. Since I knew absolutely nothing of the Mormon Church, I asked her to let me know if there was anything I was doing that caused offence. She laughed and said “No,” so I must have been halfway decent as a non-member!

As work progressed, I started to ask more questions of Lisa and what she believed. I got the important questions out of the way like, “Is there a missile in the temple spire?” “Do you sacrifice chickens/goats/virgins, etc?” and many other enlightening and important questions that non-members are most concerned with! Gradually my questions changed so that over the months I got a better understanding of the Mormon Religion and discovered that they are *normal* people just like *me*. Who would have thought! Still, it was more for curiosity than any desire to really investigate for myself.

It is now clear that the catalyst that engendered my desire to find the truth was Rachel Munro, who is the most amazing person I have ever met, absolutely perfect for me, and about ten weeks after we first went out, became my fiancée. It could have turned out very different however! I say she was the catalyst for two reasons: One is that on the 18th of December she invited me to the *Christmas Lights* at the Temple, and that night I discovered I had an interest in finding out for myself about the church. The other is that because of my interest in her, I had a desire to know about what she believed.

That night at the Temple I went through the Visitors' Centre. Luckily, I was wearing a *Redback Breweries Beer* t-shirt so I blended in with the Mormon crowd and drew little attention to myself! I saw on one of the walls a display about the *Purpose of Life*. It showed the tenets of the church – *Food, Clothing and Shelter, Good Health, Friends, Achieving Your Potential, Families, and Heavenly Father's Plan for our Lives*. As I looked at those tenets, I realised that they paralleled exactly the beliefs I had about life and what was important.

A few days later, I got my first invite to church. Ironically it came from the least expected source. In talking with my flatmate Ross about the experience at the *Lights* and how much I enjoyed it, I discovered that he was an inactive member of the church! We were at a pub at the time and whilst playing a poker machine, drinking beer and smoking cigarettes, he offered to take me to church the following Sunday. Maybe the Spirit made a special visit to that den of iniquity that night to start things happening!

In any case next Sunday, 21 December, Ross, Rachel and I went to the Temple View Chapel. I couldn't sleep that night. My mind kept going over and over the things that I had seen—so much so that I gave up on sleep at 3 am, got up and went to work! I couldn't stop thinking about the church. Two entries I put in my journal the next day sum up what happened at church. I wrote: *The church has really challenged my views or awakened a longing that was there as unattainable before but has manifested as a totally real and achievable result, and The commitment I have now is to discover the truth and be able to choose one way or another. The Lord works quickly and powerfully at times!*

Two days later I was again at the *Temple Lights*. Sherryn, Rachel's sister, invited me to come down and hear her husband who was one of the singers. Rachel took me down again, and we listened to the carols and talked. During our conversation, Sherryn asked me whether I would read a *Book of Mormon* if she gave it to me. I said, "Yes," and she got a book for me. On the way home Rachel said that she also had a *Book of Mormon* for me, wrapped and inscribed. As I held the two *Books of Mormon*, I recalled that earlier that day at work Lisa had given me a present of two books (I could tell through the wrapping!) but it wasn't until that moment that I realised what the present was. Behold! I had received three *Books of Mormon* on the same day from three different sources! That night I couldn't sleep again – my mind was going over and over things again. At 2.20 a.m., I stopped trying to sleep and wrote in my journal. One passage stands out. I wrote: *It feels like this is going to happen. When I think about joining the church it seems real to me.*

The next Sunday I went to the O'Neill Street Chapel, in my home ward, for the first time. Rachel came with me and introduced me to *The Missionaries!* I remember thinking at the time that they were young and very earnest men. We made an appointment to meet at Temple View for the following Friday. That day I attended Sacrament, Gospel Principles and Elders Quorum. That night I read the *Book of Mormon* and found the passage *Alma 32:27*: ". . . even if ye can no more than desire to believe. . ." I highlighted it and wrote in the margin, "*Me @ 28/12/3.*" I knew that I wanted it to be true. I offered my first ever prayer based on knowledge and desire, praying that God show me that His scriptures were true. It was a powerful experience, and I felt a wash of emotion as I asked—almost to tears. I was not convinced yet, but I read a number of passages that day and was touched by many of them.

The next day was perhaps the most important day of my life. From this day I knew without doubt that God existed and that the *Book of Mormon* was true. I was reading the Gospel Principles book I had got at church last week and was up to the chapter on Jesus Christ. As I started reading it, I was overcome by this feeling that I should read *The Gospels* and come to know Jesus better—that that was the path to my true understanding. As I got up to get my Bible to start reading, I *heard* these words clearly, *Wherefore canst thou believe that which thou knowest not?* I knew I had been directed to *The Gospels*, and I knew God was real. My very first prayer had been answered in an indisputable fashion. From this point on, as I read, I believed everything. I believed that these were real people, that what they did really happened, that the scriptures were true and that God, Jesus and the Holy Ghost existed. This was the day I was converted in truth to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. That day, too, kindled a hunger for more knowledge. My diary entry was short that day. It ended with, *Can't write much more—must study!* Not surprised at this and looking back now—it was a commandment from God!

On New Years Eve I had dinner with Rachel, discussed the church and how it felt like it was a foregone conclusion now that I would join. She was so happy when I told her of the words that I had been given, and we talked of the church a lot. I had many questions! We officially started dating that night after I got up the courage to ask her how she felt! It was my first New Years for about sixteen years without alcohol, and I can say that it was indeed excellent!

Friday, 2 January 2004, was the first discussion with Elders Jackson and Raymond. Rachel took me down to the Visitors Centre at the Temple and we sat downstairs in some comfy chairs. . . I had the next discussion on Wednesday 7 January—The Atonement. . . After the missionaries left, I offered my first prayer asking for *forgiveness*. The lesson had made me realise that I was not proud of some of the things I had done in my life, and it was a humbling experience to ask for forgiveness for those things that I had done.

I realised later that I had truly been blessed to have these two men to teach me the discussions. Their knowledge, faith, love, sincerity and the fact that they are men who live their lives according to the gospel, practising absolutely what they preach, impressed me greatly. Their example showed me it was possible to live the gospel in this world and not only that but to rejoice in the fact. As missionaries they are outstanding, as friends and role models they are superlative. I am so grateful the Lord sent me these two.

On Saturday, 10 January, Rachel and I met the elders at the temple, and we watched the *First Vision* and *The Testaments* before continuing the second discussion. *The First Vision* was awesome and the *Testaments* was even better. I really felt the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ as I watched that film. I could not believe the love this man had, and has, for us. I felt immeasurably humbled, and in the sections near the end of *the Testaments*, where Jesus' face fills the whole screen, I had to lower my head as I could not look upon Him. I wept. I knew my faith and love for Jesus had been strengthened and affirmed. . . . When the third discussion, *Heavenly Father's Plan*, was over, I knew for the first time ever the purpose for being here. This knowledge has given me a foundation for my life here on earth and shapes the things I do. In different discussions I was asked if I would keep the word of wisdom, the law of chastity, the law of tithing, if I would attend church weekly and read the scriptures regularly. I had no hesitation in agreeing to all the requests. . .

On the 31st of January 2004, I was baptised by one of the only two men in the world I would have chosen for this task—Elder Raymond. It was an awesome day. I have no family in the church and no family in the country; yet there were about thirty or so people there—new friends—and I was amazed these people who had known me but a short time, cared enough to be there. It was humbling. . . . When I came up from under the water, I felt as though I had crossed an unseen boundary, one that I still did not fully understand. However, the feeling of rightness and pure joy that flowed through me was testimony enough that I had done right. A huge smile was on my face as I looked up at the witnesses, and as I turned and embraced Elder Raymond, I was full of love and gratitude for the marvellous work he and Elder Jackson had done with me. Once dry and back in the chapel, I bore my testimony for the first time in my life. I had made a promise to myself as I investigated the church that I would never stand up in front of witnesses, indeed in front of God, and bear my testimony unless I was completely and absolutely sure that I believed what I said. That day and every other since, I have believed.

The next day, 1st of February 2004, I received the Gift of the Holy Ghost. I chose Elder Jackson to be the voice. . . . And I will never forget this moment. It filled me up to overflowing - a tangible, living, loving testimony that God lives and that Jesus is the Christ, given to me personally by the Holy Spirit. I was literally filled. I could feel the Spirit flowing within me and through me—touching each and every person there and changing my life forever. . . . I was fortunate that day to be able to bear my testimony to the ward. I remember standing at the podium, both humbled and elated, and feeling the love of the Spirit flow through me and into those that filled the chapel. My life in Christ had begun. . . . The journey to the church has been long in the making but short in the culmination. Although from my first contact to baptism it was just five weeks or so, it seemed a much greater journey than would be possible in that time. As a spiritual event, as a period of growth and development of faith and knowledge, I have never known such a short period of time to have such a huge impact in my life and my future. It has truly been the most special event in my life. (7 March 2004)

P.S. Mark married Rachel, and they are about to have their first baby together—two years after his first visit to Christmas Lights—December 2005)



“Why I Believe”

Leon and Faye Chen

Converts from China—now living in
Auckland

Leon: (“ . . . Then I attended the fourth
lesson. This lesson is about the salvation plan

for all mankind. The truth shocked me because it was exactly the same as what I imagined—what I dreamed about life. I knew on my own before they told me, “What a coincidence.”)

I grew up in a society that taught **materialism** and evolution. I’ve been taught there is no other possibility for man to come to this world. Human beings controlled the world, could change the world and could conquer nature if they really wanted to. Anything related to belief would be called idealism or superstition, no matter Buddha, Allah or God. Although I don’t really believe it, I’ve been affected by it more or less. Therefore, I only believed the things I could see, I could touch and I could feel. However, I still questioned the world a lot. We human beings have been in this world for a long time. Many scientists have developed our knowledge to a very high level we can reach. But we still do not know much about this world. We don’t know much about the ocean, which is the majority part of this planet. We don’t know much of what is beneath the ocean, not to mention the sky or the universe. The most unbelievable fact is that **we don’t even know much about our own body**. What we see, know, and understand are still so limited. Also, sometimes the things we think we know are not always like what we think. **All the laws of nature** are found by men, but they were always there—they are never ever invented by men, nor made by men. That’s why I always imagined somebody or something almighty administered and governed the universe.

The interest I had in **the secret of life** brought me the chance to meet the missionaries. But I am a little disappointed for the first lesson. The missionaries gave me the impression that they are very nice people, but much younger than I. They didn’t have much *life experience*. Most questions they asked me were about whether I believed in God, and most questions I asked, they always answered by reading scripture. If I think God existed just in a myth or in fiction, how should I believe scripture? I didn’t think I needed these people to teach me how to do good. I was sure I was not a bad person. I wanted to do good to people. Just like many people’s thinking, I thought I could perfect myself in my own way. Then the next two discussions, I just escaped.

One of the two missionaries was just about finishing his mission at that time. He invited us to a farewell fireside. Politely we went. But we are so happy we went because we were so touched by the testimony they shared, and that made us query why those wonderful people who are much wiser and more humble than us gather together to worship God. Then I attended the fourth lesson. This lesson is about the salvation plan for all mankind. The truth shocked me because it was exactly the same as what I imagined—what I dreamed about life. I knew on my own

before they told me, “What a coincidence.” It reminded me that at the first class they told me how to communicate with God in prayer. The way of prayer is very similar to what I did when I was in trouble.

After they left, I thought a lot. I was confused by the world we live in. On one hand, it runs itself so perfectly. On the other hand, it gives too many imperatives for mankind. I feel terrible when a natural disaster happens, like an earthquake or the tsunami. I don't like famine in Africa; I don't like the war in Europe and Asia. I don't like terrorism around the world nowadays. I feel lucky those bad things did not happen to me. But I don't feel safe, and I'm afraid that one day they may happen to me. I don't think it's fair that some people are born in power and in riches, and some others are born in misery. I query why some good people get too little reward and some bad people get everything. I can't figure this out. Does the spirit really exist? I query why there are no two persons the same in the world even though we have a huge population? Where are we from? Why are we here? Where will we go? What if God exists?

When I drive to the heights at night and look down in the dark, I see those lights, buildings, vehicles, highways, and bridges. We humans live in a world we built for ourselves. But if you once feel the majesty of the mountains, once experience the power of the ocean, you may realize that compared with nature, men are too tiny to be seen—too weak to survive. However, humans think they may control the universe or change the world. We are just busy with our concerns without thinking much about why this world is running so perfectly. **How meaningless** if everything just disappeared after we die! However, if the earth is just a temporary place made to test our faith (as the salvation plan teaches), made to separate good from evil, that would make a lot of sense.

Another reason why I converted is the first vision of Joseph Smith. Around the 1820's, a fourteen-year-old boy was standing at the crossing of his life. The religious confused boy wanted to seek the true church, the proper mode of worship, and the right way to live. This desire to know brought the youth to seek the Lord in earnest prayer. And two glorious heavenly beings with extreme brightness and glory appeared to young Joseph and showed unto him revelations of the true Gospel. What Joseph did was simply declare what he saw. He revealed that God is a personal being who communicates His will to man. But what he got back from those people who called themselves disciples of Jesus was not a warm welcome. He was immediately driven out from the religious world. Those people had no desire to help him out from his deviation. They even had no desire to decide whether Joseph Smith found a *treasure* or *trash*.

But when I read the gospel, I feel very happy and comfortable. It is full of mercy and justice. It is not exclusive, but *all inclusive* to every soul who will accept its principles. It's so plain, so precise, so clear and so everlasting. If there is a better world, this will be the one—the one made up of all righteous beings under the principle of justice.

As we consider the outstanding accomplishment of Joseph Smith during the fourteen years between the organization of the church and his martyrdom, and as we think about the perfect harmony of the restored Gospel with that of the primitive church established by Jesus and his apostles, and as we look through the 180 years, judging the virtue of Joseph's teaching, we can't help ask, “*Where is this man's wisdom from?*” Joseph Smith had not much learning, school education, or philosophy of religion, so he could not have accomplished all this of his own wisdom. He could not have done it or could not have done it so perfectly. But, the words are not man made but direct from God, the source of all intelligence.

Joseph Smith had his testimony. It was very simple: “*I had seen a vision; I knew it, and I knew that God knew it, and I could not deny it, neither dared I do it.*” Through mobbing, arrest, imprisonment, and persecution that led to

martyrdom, Joseph Smith, as many prophets before him, even as the Savior himself, strove his best to follow the truth. Before the night that he threw himself to the enemy, he said,

“I am going like a lamb to the slaughter, but I am calm as a summer’s morning. I have a conscience void of offense toward God and all men. If they take my life I shall die an innocent man, and it will yet be said of me, he was murdered in cold blood.”

If the coincidence of prayer and the salvation plan did not help me to make up my mind, Joseph’s story confirmed my decision to go further in searching for the truth of this gospel. If Joseph was a true prophet of God, the *Book of Mormon* must be true, and the teachings, warnings and promises in the book must be accomplished. The church set up by Joseph must be restored from God. This whole thing is most likely true! It was not acceptable for me to just stop there. I wouldn’t allow myself to miss this precious chance to know the truth of life. I already spend lots time on much useless stuff, so why can’t I put time on more valuable things. So I searched, then found.

(Moroni 10:4-5): *“When ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the holy Ghost. And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things.”*

After one year of being in the church, and after our temple marriage, our son was born. Instead of joyfulness, we experienced much sadness. My son suffered a lot after he was born and had been announced he was most possibly dead. We have nothing to do but leave him to God. We blessed him and then prayed and fasted, and expected the best result. I have a strong testimony that because of our faith in God, we’ve been given a miracle. My son overcame the difficulties and became stronger and stronger. We are quite happy with his progress now. Whenever we look back to the first couple of days of his journey, we deeply know how many blessings we have got. I am grateful for this trial because this is the way I learn—this is the way I know how important it is that we should have faith in God. This is the way I know how much the family means to me. There are many other members who experience much more. They all know who go through different trials that they are necessary for our life on earth.

When I have my son, I think of him all the time. When he is happy, I am happy. When he is sad, I am sad. I will be very joyful if he can be brought up in the right way. I want to be with him forever. I kind of understand why we were created. We are truly sons and daughters of our Father in Heaven, and He loves us more than anything else. He wants us to know the true happiness that He has. He wants that we may become like Him. He will really be happy if we can make the right way leading to Him. He will also be sad when we are in the trap of Satan. He can protect us. He can forgive us. But He can not endure it when we don’t want to recognize Him but want to follow the other one. The scripture says, *“For behold, this is my work and my glory – to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.”* (Moses 1:39). How can we make our Father happy and how can we have the eternal life? That is to make all possible efforts to enter the building behind me (the Temple) and be true to the end.



I'd like bear my testimony with you that: I believe in God, the Eternal Father, in his son, Jesus Christ and in the Holy Ghost; I believe men will be punished for their own sins and not for Adam's transgression. I believe that through the atonement of our Savior, all mankind may be saved by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel. I believe that we were truly family before we came to earth, and every one of us has proved he is worthy to come to this world. We raised our hand to sustain the salvation plan, to sustain Jesus and promise to find the right way back to the presence of our Father. I am grateful I have been given many blessings in the journey of my life. I am grateful that missionaries brought the light of truth to my family. I am grateful for this physical body that I may taste all the beautiful things created by our Lord.

I testify that if any man will do the will of God he will get the testimony in his heart and in his life that God lives, Jesus is the Christ, Joseph Smith is a true prophet of God, and the *Book of Mormon* is the most correct book in the world. I did it. Millions of Latter-day Saints did it. Everyone is able to do it. The Lord is watching us all the time and stretches out his hand in front of us. The point is whether we are willing to give ours.

At last, I'd like to say that those eternal truths in the Holy Scripture are the most precious gift to each one of us. They are the iron rod leading to the tree of life. They are the holy words of our living God. In the sacred name of our Savior, Jesus even the Christ. Amen. (*Talk given at the Visitors' Centre 29 May 2005*)



Faye: (“From the very first moment I read *The Book of Mormon*, I had a feeling in my heart that this book is true. The more I read it, the stronger the feeling is. I just can not deny it. Now I come to the answer to the question, “Why I Believe?” It is because these things are true. That’s why I believe. Such a simple answer to a simple question.”)

I’m so grateful to have this opportunity today to share some of my experiences, my thoughts and my understanding of the Gospel. About two months ago, my husband and I were having a holiday in Christchurch at a friend’s place. Suddenly, one afternoon, I got a phone call from Sister Scribner who works in this Visitors’ Center. To be frank, I was quite surprised and wondered how she can track us down there and meanwhile felt so privileged to be invited to give a talk. I happily accepted this invitation and asked her, “What’s the topic?” She said, “Why I believe.” OK—“WHY I BELIEVE.” I hang up the phone thinking, “Well, it sounds like a pretty easy topic—but wait a minute—*Is it?*”

Why Do I believe? Yes, *why?* I have to give myself an answer before I can give a talk in public. I keep asking myself this question ever after—even on the plane on our way back from Christchurch. *Why I believe?*—is it because of some spiritual experiences that happened to me or my family? I do have a strong testimony of the truthfulness of this church. It was two and a half years ago when I was having the discussions with the missionaries. I was struggling about whether go further—more because of being afraid of giving up my old life style. Then, that very night, the amazing moment happened. The Holy Ghost came to visit me and answered my prayer by showing me his supreme power—such a warm, strong, bright, beautiful and peaceful power beyond any description existing in this world. There is no thinking, no language—just soul speaking to soul. I have to say that it’s this experience that led me to baptism. But, is it the reason *why I believe?* No. It’s more like a deciding factor for me to have the resolution to start a new page of my life.

During the past two and a half years, I've heard a lot of spiritual experiences and miracles that happened to our friends or their families in our church. I was very much moved or touched by those experiences but never thought I would be a witness of a miracle too until last year. It was a miracle that happened to my baby.

My baby boy Ethan will be one year old tomorrow. He was born with a huge *hemangioma* (blood vessel tumor) on his right arm. This tumor consumed up a great deal of platelets and red cells in his blood, which caused a large area of brain bleeding. So he was put into the intensive care unit right after he was born and was connected with countless tubes and monitors. On the third day, he was found to have a serious problem of breathing. Doctors were kind of giving up. They did not think he could survive, even with the help of a breathing machine. He would face heaps of difficulties in sports, intelligence and communication because of the brain bleeding.

It was the hardest time ever in our lives. We prayed a lot and finally got the answer in our hearts that if he's meant to go, then we should let him go. We agreed to have the breathing machine taken off. We asked Bishop to give him a blessing. Leon also gave him a release blessing as a father saying, "*If he means to go, please let him go peacefully and quickly, and if he can survive, please let him grow into a normal boy and become a strong member of the missionary force, a powerful tool of the Lord. We leave him in thy hands and accept whatever result as thy will wish.*"

It's amazing that since the machine was taken off, his breathing problem was just gone. Well, he was in and out of hospital many times for this reason or that during the first eight months. Finally at the end of this January, his *hemangioma* was under control and all medications were stopped. It's still a bit early to see how the effect of the brain bleeding will be, but so far so good. He is now all perfectly normal in his reactions, very sensitive and alert to the environment, has great ability of imitation, even getting naughty. He started to say, "Mummy and Daddy" last month.

Every time when I look at him, my heart is full of gratitude. He is a living testimony of Heavenly Father's love, and of the restored priesthood's blessings. However, is it the reason *why I believe*? Well, this experience and all other miracles I've heard somehow strengthen my faith, but are they the base of my faith—the base of my belief? No.

Then, *why do I believe*? What on earth is the reason *I believe*? I keep thinking--keep searching in my memory. And I recall the very first day when I saw the missionaries, when they passed me *The Book of Mormon*, when I opened it, and when I read the first few pages—the account of Joseph Smith and the origin of *The Book of Mormon*, the statement of the three witnesses and the eight witnesses. From the very first moment I read *The Book of Mormon*, I had a feeling in my heart that this book is true. The more I read it, the stronger the feeling is. I just can not deny it. Now I come to the answer to the question, "Why I Believe?" It is because these things are true. That's *why I believe*. Such a simple answer to a simple question.

Now I realize the base of my belief is the truthfulness of the gospel, the truthfulness of scripture, the *Book of Mormon* and *Bible*. But is it enough for us? Is it the end of the story? I did have a testimony of *The Book of Mormon* way back two and a half years ago. I did know these things are true before I was baptized, but I still did not feel like this is anything to do with me, I still had trouble quitting from my old life style. Why? I guess I knew, but I knew not enough. There is much difference between *I know* and *I truly know—I believe and I really believe*.

I'd like to share a story from the teaching of President David O. McKay. There was a little blind girl, and she was sitting on her father's lap in the train. A friend sitting by said, "Let me give you a rest." And he reached over and took

the little girl on his lap. The father said to her, "Do you know who is holding you?" "No," she replied, "but you do!" Oh, the trust of that child in her father. President McKay pled that just so real should be the trust that the Latter-day Saint boys and girls should have in their Father in Heaven.

As we come through the veil to this world, we are all spiritually blind, more or less. From the little blind girl, I understand one thing that true love and real sincere belief will definitely lead to unconditional trust and faith. In the movie *Finding Faith in Christ*, Thomas, as one of the apostles, was sharing his belief and faith in Christ with his friend Jonah, but Jonah challenged him by saying "I don't believe what I cannot see. Must faith always be blind?" And Thomas answered, "I did see; but without faith, even seeing is not enough" The Prophet Alma gave us a definition as following: "*Faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things; therefore if you have faith you hope for things which are not seen, but which are true.*"

Faith is knowing that good will come, whatever happens to us. Faith is to have a firm belief about things which have not yet happened. For example, we are now safely sitting here in this room. Can you imagine that if one day we got lost in the wilderness or jungle, what would be the spiritual strength to support us to get through the hardships? I think most of us would rely on the belief that our family and friends who truly love us would definitely come to save us. These things have not happened, and may not happen in the future, but we do know that if we are in danger, our friends and family will come rescue us. This is faith.

How strong our faith is depends on how sure we are about the love and concern between our beloved ones and us. We know many people in our lives, and of course we have different degree of faith towards them. It's quite a simple and plain truth that strong affection and friendship will only be built up by positive seeking and efforts in shared experiences and daily contacts. That's why we normally have strong faith in our parents, our brothers and sisters, our husbands and wives.

Most of us know about Jesus and God, whether members or non-members, but that is quite different from *really knowing* God—just like it is one thing to be introduced to another person, but quite another thing to know him personally. Many people stop in their quest for God at this point. But that's not enough.

Faith needs to be cherished—needs to be fostered. How can we foster and keep the faith in our Father in Heaven? The answer is the same as how we foster the faith towards our beloved ones. We do it by daily contacts, by reading the scriptures, by attending sacred meetings, by serving others and by meeting the worthy, righteous leaders, missionaries and friends. Because if we don't *really know* our Lord, how can we have faith in him. It's just like the little blind girl whose faith comes from her father's love that she feels on a daily basis.

Yes, most of us have no chance to see a sign or miracle from heaven, at least not yet. But some people did, including the prophets. They did see and witness so many things that Jesus did. He cured the sick, raised the dead, taught the gospel, died for us and did live again. If all these things are written, I suppose even the world itself couldn't contain the books that should be written. But these are written--*The Book of Mormon* and the *Bible*—through which we can know and believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and we will have life through his name. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

(Talk given at the Visitors' Centre 29 May 2005)

Why I Believe

Kataraina Timu Cook

A fifth generation member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter- day Saints



Kia Ora katou katoa,

My name is Kataraina (Timu) Cook. I was born in Te Hauke, Hawkes Bay in 1949, to George and Treve (Harris) Timu. I am a fifth generation member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This means so much to me as I continually ponder on the blessings of being born into a family who had already embraced the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. Church membership in our family came down through our maternal line four generations ahead of my own entry into this world. Each woman was a tower of strength in her own right. Each lived faithful, leaving a strong influence for good on those who followed. My mother was only thirteen years old when her mother Ngawai passed away. Mother's love for Ngawai was felt by her us as she continued to share the good deeds that she saw her mother do in the community and the church. I remember her taking me into the Relief Society Room, which was at the back of an assembly hall. The chairs were covered with starched embroidered cloths that were handmade by her mother and the sister of Relief Society. Children were not allowed to go into this room. I remember my cousin and me saying, "It is too dark," and we didn't want to go in there anyway.

I loved the family community in which I was brought up in. The gospel was the heartbeat of our lives. Everything we did was centered around the church, including all the activities at the marae. Everyone who lived there were members except for most of the fathers who were weak converts or non-members. One of my uncles played an imaginary father role for me. He was the president of our branch for years and always bore a strong testimony that the Lord will bless us if we keep his commandments. He always encouraged everyone to pay tithing and shared personal experiences of how the Lord had blest him and his family and will bless us if we pay our tithes. As a child exposed to his testimony every fast and testimony bearing, I believed every thing he said without question because I felt the spirit telling me he was telling the truth.

During my years at Church College I was always aware that it was a real honor for me to be there. I knew it was a great sacrifice for my parents, particularly my mother who had many children to feed and clothe. My Dad was not an active member and found greater need to spend his weekly income on himself and friends, much to our dismay. I left school prematurely and realised it was a mistake but felt I needed to give younger brothers and sisters the opportunity to be at Church College too. I loved my time there interacting with wonderful friends and developing in my testimony and faith in the Lord.

During my first employment, down in Wellington, I was faced with social decisions that left me on my own most weekends, while hostel friends enjoyed each others company partying. One weekend, feeling isolated and lonely, I

decided that the next time they ask me to go with them I will say, "Yes." To my disappointment, I waited and waited for them to come and invite me, but they didn't. As I watched them leave together by taxi, I was so hurt and angry I threw myself onto my bed and grabbed a book and read. By the time I got to the end of the book, I had received a burning testimony that Joseph Smith was a Prophet of God. I had just finished reading *Mans' Search for Happiness*. The feeling was so strong I remember to this day thinking that I had actually been in the grove of trees with Joseph at the time he saw God the Father and Jesus Christ. When kneeling in prayer, I thanked the Lord that my friends did not come and ask me out with them as I would never have had this wonderful experience. I reflected on how much He loved me and had always been there for me and was not an imaginary father but a real father who cares about us and wants us to make right choices.



During all this time, I remained close to my mother. She was my friend, my exemplar. One day while she was out doing her visiting teaching, our home caught on fire. This led to our moving to Hamilton to live. We established ourselves in the ward, and it wasn't long after that I decided to serve a mission. I loved every day of it, and counted my blessings that the Lord loved me enough to have me as a servant. I returned home and worked in the temple. It was here I met my husband, Alipeti Cook.

Mum died just after our fourth child and first son was born. Losing her was like losing part of myself. I realised that her life had played a vital part of my own. I didn't want to have a marriage relationship like hers, but I wanted to be a dedicated member of the church just like she was. I knew the Lord would want that of me too. This is *why I believe* the church is true. I know my Heavenly Father has always loved me. He blest me with the most beautiful mother who was instrumental in bringing me up in the gospel. He blest me at the



crossroad of life with a burning testimony that Joseph Smith was a Prophet. He blest me to be worthy to serve a mission and to be prepared for temple marriage when I met my husband. He has blest us with five beautiful children and seven grandchildren. He has blest me through my studies to become a school teacher. At fifty-six years old, I begin my first class in February 2006. How could I not believe when I owe Him so much. (January 2006)

*Ngawai and Rahiri Harris,
My grandparents*

My mother, Treve Harris Timu



*My great-grandparents,
Emaraina Temaemae Paewai
And Ihaia Takerei*





Welcoming Fireside For
President and Sister Cook

**(Auckland New Zealand
Mission President -- 2005-2008)**

Carl B. Cook: Visitor's Center
August 7, 2005

I believe in Jesus Christ. I believe his words, "If ye have faith, and doubt not,...ye shall say unto this mountain, be thou removed and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done. And all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." (*Matthew 21:21, 22*)

When I was a young boy I was walking happily to the community grocery store to purchase some candy. As I walked, I flipped my coin up into the air, planning to catch it. Unfortunately, it dropped into the weeds next to a ditch bank and I was unable to find it. Remembering what my mother had taught me, I said a prayer, asking Heavenly Father to help me find my precious coin. After praying, I wondered how Heavenly Father could let me know where my coin was. I had a great idea. I went back to the house and got another coin. Returning to the precise place I had lost my other coin, I flipped it into the air and let it drop to the ground. This time I watched the coin carefully as it landed in the weeds. As I knelt down to retrieve the second coin, there was my first coin sitting right next to it! Oh that we could all have the faith of a child.

The scriptures are full of miracles which demonstrate God's powerful intervention with man.

Jonah 1:4, 15-17; 2:1, 9, 10; 3:1, 2

I believe the events recorded in the Bible happened to Jonah exactly as recorded. Jesus used the story to teach a principle in *Matthew 12:39-41*, reinforcing the truth of the story of Jonah in the whale's belly.

When our daughter Natalie was a young girl she developed a significant problem with warts. When we counted, she had twenty-eight warts covering her hands and arms. They caused her much embarrassment. After trying several remedies unsuccessfully, we finally tried a strong prescription medicine that was to be applied each night. Unfortunately, it was a very painful process, and after the application Natalie would run through the house crying and waving her arms trying to get the air to dry the medicine so it would stop burning. After one of these unpleasant episodes, we quickly gathered our family together for a short prayer before putting the children to bed. Natalie's younger brother, Cameron, was asked to say it. He offered a simple prayer with one request, that Natalie's warts would go away and she wouldn't have to have the medicine anymore. We were humbled by his simple faith. Natalie hugged him with affection. The next evening when it was time to apply the medicine, Natalie stated that she didn't need the medicine anymore, because Heavenly Father was going to bless her. She just asked that Cameron offer the evening prayer again. This challenged our

faith as parents. Should we give Natalie and Cameron an opportunity to exercise faith at the risk of the warts getting worse? We decided we must allow them to try. Within a few days the warts started to disappear, and they were gone within a very short time afterwards.

I pray that we might all increase our faith and trust in the Lord's power in our lives.

Lynette Cook: Visitors' Center August 7, 2005

I am inspired by our full time elders and sisters. Their examples of commitment and their testimonies strengthen my testimony. Our Korean missionaries serve two years of compulsory military service, and still choose to serve two years as full time missionaries. Many of our missionaries are the only members in their families. Many never receive a letter from home. Some have been disowned by their families. Many save money and support themselves on their mission. All leave familiar surroundings and people for the unknown. Many learn a new language.

WHY? They have felt the love of God in their lives. They want to share it. They have felt a portion of what prophet Lehi felt in *2 Nephi 1:15, 20*: "But behold, the Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell; I have beheld his glory, and I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love. And he hath said that inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper in the land; but inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from my presence.

Who have our missionaries come here to teach? Those who have been prepared for the message.

1. Those whose afflictions have humbled them. *Alma 32:6* Alma had gone to teach the Zoramites. He found that the people who were ready to hear his message were the poor people who had been "despised of all men because of their poverty," who had been cast out of the synagogues that they had built with their own hands by the rich. "And now when Alma heard this, he turned him about, his face immediately towards him, and he beheld with great joy; for he beheld that their afflictions had truly humbled them, and that they were in a preparation to hear the word. Therefore he did say no more to the other multitude; but he stretched forth his hand, and cried unto those whom he beheld, who were truly penitent, and said unto them: I behold that ye are lowly in heart; and if so, blessed are ye." And he proceeded to teach them the gospel.

2. Those seeking to be cleansed from sins. *3 Nephi 27:19-21* "...No unclean thing can enter into his kingdom; therefore nothing entereth into his rest save it be those who have washed their garments in my blood, because of their faith, and the repentance of all their sins, and their faithfulness unto the end. Now this is the commandment: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day."

3. Those seeking a better life, or increased light. As we accept the message the missionaries bring, we begin to develop the same level of conversion and commitment in our lives that brings about the faith that they exemplify as missionaries. I pray that each of us might do this. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.



“Why I Believe”

Job and Lesley

Cyril

(Job is a convert from India and Lesley was born in New Zealand and raised in America. They met in the Young Single Adult Program in New Zealand.)

Job: (*“I’m grateful that among the many billions of people living in India, the Lord had an eye on me, and that He was able to soften my heart so that I can join the church.”*)

It was Summer of 1991. I decided to spend two weeks at my dad’s home in Sangareddy, forty miles east of Hyderabad, India, where my mom, my brother and I lived. I was only fifteen at this time—enjoying my life as a young boy and learning new things.

Next to Dad’s home I noticed there were two visitors from Great Britain. They were on a work project setting up an engineering plant close to my dad’s office. Because of the language barrier, they used to work during night time. At about 5 p.m. everyday I noticed these two guys go for a walk. Every morning Dad and I would have breakfast together. He would leave to work, and I was alone. I noticed that my next door neighbours were playing or reading books everyday. I wanted to go and meet them, but not knowing how to get the nerve, I declined many times thinking, “I don’t know these people.”

But one day I felt a strong impression to go and meet with them. It was so strong that I felt over-powered, which I have never felt in my life like that before. I felt like Nephi in *The Book of Mormon* when he said, “*And I was lead by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which I should do.*” (1 Nephi 4:6). I slowly took the courage and knocked on their door. Mark answered the door, and I noticed that he had a beer bottle in his hand. Steve was in his room. I introduced myself that I lived next door and wondered what they were doing. Mark invited me inside his house. When I walked inside, I could see Steve studying scriptures inside his mosquito net in his room. We had a good conversation that day, and our friendship grew. Steve was a member of the Church and a returned missionary. He was twenty-seven years old with a girl friend at home. Steve never mentioned during our conversation about the Church or *The Book of Mormon*. Then after a few days, I returned to the city where Mum lives, and they returned to the UK. We exchanged our addresses.

Then one day while I was at school, there was a note on my door from the local elders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. They said that they were Steve’s friends and would like to meet me. I was excited. And then I started the missionary discussions. My dad told me not to get too involved with the church, and he did not permit me to join the church at that time. But I continued with the discussions. After six months, my mom signed the papers, authorizing me to join the church because I was a minor. I went to church every week. I used to look forward to Sundays and partaking the sacrament. My dad was against the church because he read some anti-Mormon literature, and Jacob, my older brother, was influenced by him. I was persecuted and mocked by my friends, and I didn’t know how to respond to them when they asked me questions like, “Why don’t you drink tea and coffee?”

I got baptized on 20 October 1991. No one from my family was there except me. I remember feeling for the first time in my life that I did the right thing by joining the church. Life after being a member was hard at first because I had to leave old habits and friends. Church was my new extended family. Members and couple missionaries were a source of strength to me.

Going on my mission was another challenge. I told my mom about my desire, and I told her about the church. She, in turn, was interested in learning about the church and started taking the discussions. And I had the opportunity to baptize my mom—it was a very humbling experience. Mom agreed to pay part of my mission expenses and signed my mission papers. The day before I left for my mission, I met my dad and told him, “I’m leaving on my mission, and I will not be seeing you for the next two years.” He had the shock of his life. He told me that he wasn’t happy with the decision that I made, but, it was my choice.

I was called to serve in India Bangalore Mission. As I look back at my mission, I was sent to the place I was most useful. Apart from serving a full time mission, I was called in two different areas in my mission as a branch president. Working with the members and learning from my missionary companions was overwhelming. I saw some of the most beautiful people join the church. I think about them almost everyday. They have touched my life for good.

My mission and the trials that I had to go through made me strong in the church. They caused me to find out for myself and to gain a testimony about the truthfulness of the church and the purpose of life. I have a strong testimony that the *Lord had an eye on me* from my childhood. He knew that I would join the church when I became sixteen years old and that I would serve a mission.

When I got home from my mission, my goal then was to go to the temple. The closest temple was very far. In those days, the full-time missionaries did not have the opportunity to receive their own endowments before going out into the missionfield. So my first goal after I got back home from my mission was to go to the House of the Lord. Right from my first job, I started to save some money in my bank. I remember putting aside my first savings from my first job for my temple trip. It was only US \$2.20 cents that first month. I wondered, “Will I ever be able to get to the temple in Hong Kong with my savings being so small.” Not meaning to boast, I saved everything I could from that point on. I didn't buy expensive clothes. I didn't buy anything that was not important. I saved and saved.

My desire in life was to further my education, and I wanted to get my MBA degree. I wanted to study in a country where I could stay close to the temple. When I was looking at all the options, I felt really comfortable about moving over to New Zealand. I felt that I would be taken care of by the Lord, and I made this big move. From the movement, I landed in New Zealand. I was able to stay in a comfortable place and was able to have a part-time job to financially support myself.

When I first went to Hamilton and looked up at the temple, I just broke down into tears. I said to myself, “I sacrificed so much to be able to visit the House of the Lord, but all the sacrifices were so worth it because the Lord has blessed me more than what I’m worthy of.” Everything that I have today belongs to the Lord. I’m grateful that among the many billions of people living in India, *the Lord had an eye on me*, and that he was able to soften my heart so that I can join the church. Going to the temple often now has been such a neat experience.

I really don't know what the future holds for me, but I have a strong testimony that as long as we put Heavenly Father first in our lives and do His will, he will take care of our needs. I’m a witness that Heavenly Father hears and answers our prayers. He lives and loves us more than we can ever imagine. I’m but an ordinary person. I’m grateful that out of small things, great things come to pass. I love you guys so much and thank you for everything that you do for me. (Talk at Visitors’ Centre July 2005)



Lesley: (“Most of all, I knew this young man was worthy to take me to the temple. Job and I were sealed for time and for all eternity in the Hamilton Temple of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints on 31 May 2003.”)

Luke 17 tells the *Parable of the Ten Lepers* who were cleansed by the Savior: “*And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks. . .*” I would like to tell three experiences of

why I believe, each one reminding me of what that one action—*turning back*, given in gratitude to the Savior—can do for changing lives.

1) The first story begins after World War II with my great-grandmother, Ailsa Margaret Coutts, who at that time was a war widow raising her two daughters in Whakatane. The elders knocked on her door one day and asked if they could share the Gospel. My great-grandmother made an appointment for them to come back. When the missionaries came back, no one was home. The elders at that time had a *three strikes and you’re out* policy, and came back again—this time with no one home again. They came back the third time to find no one there again. As the elders were walking down the street, one of the elders felt the prompting to *look back* at the house, and there he saw my great-grandmother and her two daughters going into the driveway. The elders taught them the Gospel and they were baptized in 1949.

2) The second story begins on an Auckland bus in the early 1970s. My dad, George O’Scanlon, and his best friend, Tony Cassidy, were one day catching a bus home from school. My dad is a huge American football fan, and when he saw two missionaries on the bus, he knew enough of the Church to know that missionaries at that time were probably American, and would probably know about American football. The two boys, about sixteen, sat down behind the elders, and my dad talked as loud as he could to catch the attention of the elders. One of them turned around and, until they got off the bus, talked with my dad and his friend about American football. Not once did they mention the Gospel. Before getting off the bus, the elder asked my dad for his details, which my dad gave them. Those missionaries forwarded the name of my father to the missionaries in the Kelston Area, and at age sixteen, and against the wishes of his father, my dad was baptized a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

3) The third story takes place in 2002, mid-September. My father’s love of American football saw myself and my three sisters grow up mainly in Utah, although I was born in Auckland. In 2002, I decided to come to New Zealand to study for a semester at Auckland University. During that time I stayed with my grandmother. I was fortunate enough to attend the YSA ward in Massey. One night I attended institute and choir practice and did not have a ride home. I saw someone go up and talk to a young man in the ward by the name of Job Cyril, whereupon he quickly turned around and came up to me and asked if I needed “*a drop*.” I had never heard it put quite like that before. I said, “Thank you,” but did not accept the ride. Instead, because of sports in the hall, that night I was able to talk with Job, learn about his life, how he was studying for his MBA, and how he joined the Church in India. I remember feeling so uplifted by that conversation, that it was with happiness that I accepted his invitation to go out when he called the next day.

Epilogue:

Every good story has a follow-up. Here is the follow up to the three stories:

1) In 2000, I was fortunate enough to meet the elder that *turned around*. He was back in New Zealand with his wife serving a mission fifty years after returning home from his first mission. It was with joy that I was able to meet Elder Lou Winter and his wife and to hear him recount the story of following the prompting to *turn around* that day and of the consequent teaching and baptism of my great-grandmother, grandmother and great-aunt. It is with joy now that I think that because of that one decision, that one followed prompting, there are now five generations of my family in the church—my great-grandmother, Ailsa Coutts, my grandmother, Rae Patterson, my mother, Shelley O'Scanlon, myself, Lesley Cyril, and our little son, Nathaniel George Cyril.

2) After my family moved to the United States, to Utah in 1988, my father was away from home on business somewhere in Utah. He got a terrible toothache—so bad that he could not wait to come home to take care of it. Instead he found a local dentist to get the problem fixed immediately. Sitting on the dentist chair he looked up into the face of the dentist and thought he looked familiar. He asked a few questions of the dentist. “Where did you serve your mission?” “New Zealand” was the answer. Do you remember riding on the bus one day and turning around and talking to a young boy about American football? “Vaguely,” came the answer. That missionary did not work with my dad, as he was not assigned to my dad’s ward. It was with tears in his eyes that my dad was able to tell this returned missionary how he had changed his life. It was with joy that I now think of how that one action of *turning around* made such a difference in my life and is a major cause of *why I believe* today.

3) Job and I did not date for very long. I was only in New Zealand for a few months, but it did not take me long to figure out what kind of a person Job was. His love for the Gospel was apparent in everything he did. His mission had been served eight years previous to our meeting, but the missionary spirit was alive and thriving in him. I first recall seeing that from the time he *turned around* and offered me a “drop.” Most of all, I knew this young man was worthy to take me to the temple. Job and I were sealed for time and for all eternity in the Hamilton Temple of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints on 31 May 2003. We now have a young son, Nathaniel.



I am grateful for these three experiences and the part they play in *why I believe* today. I know that the Church is true. I love my Saviour. I know He lives. I know the Book of Mormon is true. I know Joseph Smith saw God the Father and Jesus Christ in the grove of trees. I hope that you will come to know these things for yourself and that your faith and your testimony will be able to impact on why somebody else believes. I leave this with you in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

(Talk given at the Visitors’ Centre, July 2005)

“Why I Believe”

Jacque Dallas

Currently serving as a part-time missionary in the Visitors’ Centre



As a child I believed in prayer, although at that time my parents didn’t attend any church. I have come to love the Gospel with all my heart—it has been a great strength and guidance to me all these years.

I joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in December 1967, after attending a discussion, which Sister Hazel Stroud conducted with a group of Baptists, whom she had met, in Greymouth. Previously, I had attended a different church, but had never really felt the Spirit that is present in ours. My six children attended with me also. I had met this very talented lady who was the producer of the Greymouth Operatic Society’s annual production. She would travel from Invercargill each year to produce and direct these shows. She asked me to attend this discussion with her, which would be conducted over two Sunday evenings.

My mother had joined the Church in January 1956, but lived some distance away, so that I did know a little about it. On these two nights she took the discussions—“Where do we come from?” “Why are we here?” and “Where are we going?” I felt the spirit so strongly. I knew it was true—all that she taught—and I knew that I must join this church and be baptised. But how to get my husband’s permission? I had not had the discussions or read the *Book of Mormon*, but I felt a burning testimony inside and an unspeakable joy. And so I prayed with every fibre of my being that my husband’s heart would be softened and that he would give me permission to join.

One afternoon as I was kneeling down praying, the words came to me, telling me exactly what to do and the words I should speak. I heard the voice as clearly as someone would speak to me, standing beside me. I followed that course the next day, and my husband said, “Yes, if it means so much to you.” After he left to return to work, I rang my mother in Nelson and asked if she could please arrange my baptism as there was no chapel in Greymouth and no missionaries. There was only a nucleus of about five members.

The next day, I was due to drive to Nelson to collect my four oldest children who were at boarding schools there and to bring them home for the Christmas holidays. Accordingly, I set off to stay with my parents. I was baptised the next day at the stake chapel. Brother Ron Warwick baptised me, and Brother Ben Hippolite spoke at the service.

Later, my family and I moved to Christchurch where we lived for two years before moving to Hamilton. Three of my children served full-time missions--my twin sons, John and Michael, and Judy, my eldest daughter who served in Bolivia, South America. One other daughter, Gillian, served a mini-mission. I, myself, later served a mission in the Philippines.

I know with all my heart that Jesus is our Saviour, our Redeemer, that He lives, that He and our Heavenly Father have glorified bodies of flesh and bone and that the Holy Ghost is a personage of Spirit, that we have a living Prophet on the earth today, and that the *Book of Mormon* is true.



In Jesus Christ's name. Amen (January 2006)

Jacque Dallas has participated in many ways at the Visitors' Centre. She's an amazing missionary who possesses great sensitivity. She participated in the Pageant (2004) "Legacy of Faith," and most recently played the role of Lucy Mack Smith, mother of the Prophet Joseph Smith in the Readers' Theatre, "The Martyrdom and The Aftermath—The Family and Friends of the Prophet Joseph Smith." (December 2005)





Why I Believe

Vic and Maria

Dos Santos

Converts from South Africa

Vic:

The story of my conversion—well that’s easy. She is standing right next to me. One day my wife said she wanted to find out more about other religions. I knew she worked with an American woman, so I put two and two together and thought, “Mormon.” I pictured them in long black dresses, the men with beards and long coats. These were actually Amish.

When my wife mentioned tithing, well that made life very unpleasant, as I did not want to give any of our hard earned cash away. I became very unhappy, strange thoughts started coming into my mind as to our family breaking up. After weeks of much turmoil, I decided to find out for myself what this church was all about.

I had been raised a Catholic. My mother would drag my brother and me to church even if we didn’t feel like it. A seed was planted in me at an early age. I believed in Jesus Christ but would only attend church if there was a good reason—like a wedding or a baptism.

My first attendance to a sacrament meeting was not pleasant. I was not dressed appropriately and felt very uncomfortable. However, after a few weeks I decided I would dress in a suit and stay for the whole three hours—to observe “what they do.” The high priests took me to their quorum during priesthood and were very friendly to me. I don’t think I’ve missed a Sunday since then.

The missionaries would come about once a week for a meal, and one day I told them to bring the discussions because I was interested. I had the discussions and then decided I was ready for baptism. My eldest son, Andre, and I were baptized on the same day. I have since had the privilege of baptizing my youngest son David and also being sealed as a family in the temple.

It has taken a while to gain a testimony, but the biggest issue I had in the beginning, tithing, is now my greatest testimony, as my family has been blessed in so many ways. We have achieved goals, have been overseas to Salt Lake City and Nauvoo, have had a boat, a second home, good jobs etc.

I know I made the right decision in joining the church. It has taught me to be a better father, husband and person. I know this is the true church on this earth. Jesus Christ is our Saviour. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Maria:

I was born into a Catholic family. When I was a small child my maternal uncle and his family left the Catholic faith and became Jehovah's witnesses. Ever since then they tried to convert our family to follow their faith. My father worked many years for a man of the Jewish faith. These factors created an environment where we grew up being comfortable over discussions over "which was the right faith." My father's boss would affirm they had the correct faith. My uncle would affirm theirs was the correct faith. An evangelical church built their house of worship just behind our house. They too invited us to come and worship with them. We did attend their various services, whether Christian or Jewish. However we joined none.

We were used to Jehovah's witnesses knocking on our door. I do not recall my family ever turning them away. Even though we recognized and respected the passion they had for their beliefs, they never managed to convince us. Others slammed doors in their faces, but we just did not have the heart to be rude to them, so we invariably heard them out and offered to buy their booklets so that they would leave in peace. We did this, bearing in mind that some of our family were members of their faith. Sometimes we would enjoy a religious discussion with them.

One of my university entry subjects at school was "Biblical Studies." Perhaps because of the environment I grew up in, I was always interested in religion, and by the age of sixteen, I had read a lot about different religions. By then, I had a knowledge that all that the Catholic Church taught or did was not right. I belonged to a Christian youth group at school. This group was predominantly Baptist and Methodist faiths. They often invited me to their churches, wanting me to join them; but I found that though they were enthusiastic, they were blinded by their own opinions. This was evident in their condemnation of other Christian churches. However, I felt that I did not belong to the right church, and I did pray for God to show me which was His church. So when the missionary elders knocked on our door, they found a family that was tolerant and with some willing to be receptive. So we heard them out.

Whilst they were talking, I was reading their name tags, and I started to search my memory. I had a feeling they were Mormons, but I wasn't too sure. So in the midst of their conversation I blurted out the question, "Are you Mormons?" To which they replied, "Yes." Then I replied, "Oh yes, you're those fellows that have many wives." Of course, they quickly started to deny that they had many wives. But by then I started to think about all the stuff I had read of Mormons and cults. So while they spoke, I just waited for them to go.

I recall asking them, "Who sent you here to our door?." It couldn't have been our cousins, and recently some other group looking for Italian people had knocked on our door. So I thought they must have gotten the wrong house. I explained my question. A sheepish look crossed their faces and they replied that nobody sent them. I knew they were not answering me correctly but I let it go.

They came back again. I was on my own this time. I did not want to listen to them, so I offered to buy their books so they could go on their way. They said they had a book to give me, but they wanted no money. This confused me a bit. Something for free—where was the catch? I refused the book. They then asked if we could discuss the Saviour. Now that stopped me in my tracks, and I thought, “Why not?” The discussion on what I thought and on what they thought took over three hours. All this on the front porch! We never invited strangers in. Throughout the discussion I started to feel uncomfortable about my clothing. I was in short shorts and a strapless top. So when I could no longer tolerate feeling uncomfortable, I excused myself and changed my clothing to cover myself. I told them, “I just had to change because I was feeling cold.”

After the discussion, they asked if they could return again. I was still hesitant but realized that I had enjoyed the discussion and they got me thinking. So I replied, “Yes.” So I continued to have the discussions. Sometimes my sisters would join in, other times just me—all on the front porch. At the same time the youth group found out that I was having the discussions. The friends I had associated with at school turned on me. They demanded that I stop having the discussions with the missionaries. Tell a teenager they can’t do something! So I dug my heels in. They then told my sister they were going to ask me to leave the group. When she told me this, I replied, I’ll do them a favour—they won’t see me there anymore. Two teachers who ran this group also turned on me. They blocked me from receiving Dux award at school or from becoming a Prefect. I found this out much later on.

I started to read the Book of Mormon. It gripped me and its words burnt within me. I felt I could not put it down. I read way into the night. By the time I had finished it, I knew that it was from God. However when I heard the story of Joseph Smith, I felt wary of it because there were so many similarities to what I had gone through. I wondered if Satan was trying to trick me. But the spirit witnessed to me that what these missionaries were saying was true. Even though I was not too sure about Joseph Smith, I was willing to be baptized. I had some very sacred experiences that confirmed my feelings. My thoughts were a bit of a jumble because I looked at both sides. I wanted reason to prevent me from being misled. My father, however, would not let me get baptized, and he asked the elders not to come visit anymore. Regardless of what my mind reasoned, I felt despair that I could not get baptized. So I turned my back on all they had taught me, packed the Book of Mormon away and never had any contact again with any LDS for eighteen years.

During those eighteen years I married, had two boys, and then my husband and I decided we needed to get away from a country so full of crime. I feared my boys being placed in a situation where they could witness their parents being murdered. So we left South Africa for New Zealand. I was packing my books. I sorted them out into “discard piles,” “not so sure piles” and “yes-- I’m taking those piles.” The Book of Mormon fell on the “not so sure pile.” My sister picked the book up and said to me, “You should take this with you—it meant a lot to you once.” So I took it. In my mind I said, “Yes, one day I’m going to find out for sure if those feelings I had over this book were correct.”

When I got to New Zealand, I came across many LDS chapels. I recognized them immediately. Sometimes I would be driving and I would feel the spirit urge me to look to the right or down the street.

Invariably I would see a chapel or some missionaries on their bicycles. So I started to feel the spirit move within me, and I started to get an urge to go back, to go and worship in those chapels.

I then changed jobs. At that time I had prayed to find a job that would give me fulfillment. I started a week after an LDS girl (from Salt Lake City) also started at that same place. As soon as she told me she was from Salt Lake City, I knew—"A Mormon!" I thought to myself, "Better watch myself. Better not let her find out about my past, or she won't leave me alone." However, I did watch her very closely. Once she was reading a book on Parley P Pratt. I recognized the name, and I was consumed with much curiosity. I wanted to read it. She caught me staring at the book, but I evaded her questioning look.

I started to then have a heightened experience of everything around me. It was the Holy Ghost. Because I could not understand these feelings, I started to withdraw into myself. She then asked me one day if I was alright. We were alone, and without thought, I told her what I was feeling. She then answered me, "That is the Holy Ghost." It was not the reply I expected. Soon thereafter I opened up and told her that I had been taught by the missionaries. I expected her to then ply me with offers to come to church with her. But she didn't. A few weeks later she gave me the book called, *A Marvelous Work and Wonder*, by LeGrand Richards. As I started to read that book, everything that I had been taught eighteen years ago came back to me. It was amazing. I had not forgotten a thing, and I realized I had believed it then and still believed it now. I realized that had any of it been false, I could not have possibly retained it as such. It had been engraved into my heart.

I then read for the first time Joseph Smith's own words of the account of the first vision. I then knew without a doubt, that he was not lying. With this conviction in my heart, I decided I would go back to church. I told my husband that I no longer wanted to attend Catholic services, but that of this new church called "The Church Of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints." I was afraid of his response. I had for many years tried to convince him to go to church and to have a personal belief in God. Only recently he had started to go to church—the Catholic Church. Now I was telling him that this was not the right church. Of course, there was drama in the house. At times it felt like I would have to sacrifice all I had held dear so as to attend this church. I had been threatened with divorce, I had been threatened that I would never see my children again, yet I could not turn my back on what I knew to be true. All my life I had been looking for this true church.

So I took it slowly, I attended when I could. Many a time I got to church in a very fragile state leaving the harsh words said at home. There at the chapel, I found peace and it strengthened me. My husband then started to come with me. A year later I got baptized—before my husband. He then got baptized, as well as my two boys. Our family was sealed in the temple in Hamilton. We have had various callings. Our boys are growing up strong in the faith. I have a husband who loves me dearly. My life has changed. I have lost friends because of my choice. My father is still angry and upset about this. Yet I have gained life, a rich and full life. A life full of love, a family that loves each other, guidance from the prophet, comfort from the Saviour and a knowledge that I am a child of God. I know the meaning of joy. I will always be eternally grateful for a loving Heavenly Father who helped me every step of the way though I was not aware of it. He never forgot me.

A Testimony of “Why I Believe”

Troy Egan

*(The sister missionaries arrived at his door in answer to his prayers and asked him to read **The Book of Mormon**—conversion immediately changed his life for the better)*



Good evening brothers and sisters. I am honoured to be invited by Elder and Sister Scribner to share with you *Why I Believe* in the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is a true blessing to be standing before the Holy Temple, the House of the Lord, a place that brings such great joy to me. When I pondered the topic of *Why I Believe*, it dawned on me that there are so many reasons that it is hard not to believe. *I believe* because of the **EXPERIENCES** Heavenly Father has blessed me with. Because of these experiences, I no longer believe anything is just a coincidence .

Like my friend Mark Chapman who spoke earlier, I had an experience where, when staying with friends, with nowhere to live and looking for employment, I came across a book. The friend I was staying with would always bring a book home from the library, and I would find it. I would start reading, and I would receive a feeling as if this were just the right book for me to read at that time. This happened about three times, and my friend was getting frustrated because I was reading all his books before he could read them! Then one day, he brought an interesting book home, different from the others. “The Book of Mormon,” it read, the light catching its golden lettering. Strangely enough, I didn’t read this book straight away.

After two weeks at my friend’s home, I was making phone calls. On my knees at the time, I was frustrated as each phone call for accommodation and employment seemed to be met with dead ends. This was frustrating because it felt like everything in my life had been like that for the past three years—a series of dead ends. I was, however, blessed in that time to have a growing belief that there was a greater power than I that was benevolent and in control of all things. I called in my heart to that Being, saying, “Whatever it is that you want me to do, I will do, because what I’m trying to do now is not working.” Just as I went to replace the receiver of the phone after another failed call, there was a knock at the door and two **sister MISSIONARIES** from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were there to meet me with the most valiant smiles I had ever seen! I invited them in immediately. They shared a wonderful message, which I felt was true. They shared things that I thought I had learned by myself, only to find that they had been discovered by someone else thousands of years ago! The sisters would then always add a **TRUTH** that I didn’t know. I realized then that, instead of knowing everything, as I often thought I did, I knew only a drop in the ocean of what there is to be learned.

As we concluded our meeting, the sisters showed me a book and asked me if I had seen it before. I ran to the next room and retrieved *The Book of Mormon* from the side table, and said, “I had.” I agreed to their invitation to read it.

I believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ because of the **FELLOWSHIP** of the saints. From the first time I met those sister missionaries, I couldn't believe that anyone could be *that happy*. Since I have been a member of the Church, I have been blessed to meet many of the saints. Never have I experienced such outpourings of love from a people, something that I had not experienced in such a way before. I felt this in the open and warm handshakes whenever I enter a chapel—it just makes me want to shake everyone's hand! It is a testimony to me that this gospel is true, and a love that I can see in all your faces here tonight. It is something I like to call *instant friends*.

I believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ because of the **BLESSINGS** I have witnessed. Since I have been a member of the Church for a little under two years, eight members of my family have been baptized, including my parents.

I believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ because of the **SPIRIT of REVELATION**. I know that Heavenly Father truly loves us because of the guidance He gives to us—the comfort of His Holy Spirit that is given to us to uplift and strengthen us when we call upon Him for help. Through revelation, Heavenly Father has spoken to my heart in a way that I know only He can.

I believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ because of **CHALLENGES and TRIALS**, for I have known these oppositions to be a perfect accompaniment to the fruits of repentance and faith that we might receive. In Doctrine and Covenants, section 128, verse 24 it states,

“Behold, the great day of the Lord is at hand; and who can stand when he appeareth? For he is like a refiner’s fire, and like a fuller’s soap; and he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. Let us, therefore, as a church and a people, and as Latter-day Saints, offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness; and let us present in his holy temple, when it is finished, a book containing the records of our dead, which shall be worthy of all acceptance.”

I am grateful that the Lord has loved me enough to teach me, often repeatedly, through the challenges and trials of my life.

It is also because of the **HOLY TEMPLE** that *I believe*. Never before have I experienced such wonderful testimonies, such awesome assurance that something is good and true than hearing the saints share their feelings of the House of the Lord. Nowhere on earth have I felt such peace and serenity, such outpourings of love, than in the presence and sanctity of the temple. I know that God lives and He loves us, and that there is no place on this earth that He would sooner visit than in His house. May we all be worthy to enter therein.

Jesus is the Christ, and He lives. I know Joseph Smith to be a true Prophet of God. I know *The Book of Mormon* to be the word of God, and that man will get closer to the Lord by abiding by its precepts than by any other book. I know Gordon B. Hinckley is our living prophet on the earth this day. I share this with you, that I love you. This is my testimony, and I leave it with you in the holy name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

(Talk given at the Visitors' Centre in September 2004)

Troy has also been a participant in the Pageant performed in New Zealand in 2004 and in the Readers' Theaters performed in 2005 in the Christus Room at the Visitors' Centre.

“Why I Believe in Christ”



Iese Fesola'i

Young Single Adult Leader in the Tamaki Stake

When I think of the blessings that I've received in my life, I can't help but think about everything that has been given in order for me to be here today. The question is "Why do I believe in Christ?"

What I have learnt over the years, and most especially from serving a mission, was the understanding that comes from viewing, learning and understanding the mission of the Saviour Jesus Christ. I don't expect anything I say to be taken as doctrine, but these are personal thoughts and feelings that I've had as I have learnt of the Saviour.

In the pre-existence I picture a great scene where the children of God gathered together in a great council. My view is that I was there amongst all of you and my family and also the great prophets who would each take their turn in the great history of mankind. I picture Heavenly Father offering His plan and promise of a place where he would send his children to receive and enjoy blessings that only He knew at that time would be our greatest joys. In presenting this plan to us as his children He began by sharing all the ecstasies of life that we would enjoy – bodies, families, friends, life, happiness and the like. As he shared this part of the plan, many of us were eager to follow and be part of this seemingly wonderful plan.

But before we could step forward and be the first to accept the plan, He shared the other conditions that would be part of this life. He shared that there would also, however, be moments in our life where we would experience death, sin, sickness, hopelessness and trials (though they were for our growth) that would make us suffer. In presenting this part of the plan, many of us sat down and became quiet. Not knowing if we really wanted to be a part of this plan, we sat in silence as Heavenly Father expressed that this would be a way for us to one day return to live with him.

It's my personal feeling that some of us were still afraid and unsure if it were even possible that we could return to live with Him. In the midst of the silence and apprehension, I picture my Saviour, Jehovah, standing before the Father and offering his life to the Father like no one else could. He said, "Here am I. Send me." We watched as He shared how He would set the example for each of us and that He would do everything in his power to help God's children return to Him. He promised us that from *death*, He would bring a resurrection, sin to forgiveness, sickness to divine healing (physically and spiritually), hopelessness to hope, and from trials, an eternal blessing that we could claim if we accepted His teachings and lived by his example. I believe it was at that moment, and only then, that we stood as sons and daughters of God and "*shouted for joy*." I feel as if for the first time then we "*stood all amazed*" at the love He offered us. Of all the sons that Heavenly Father had, only He stood forward—only He had the courage and therefore, only He was worthy for the task. I believe the Atonement had already begun and was only actioned in this world to complete what had already been offered in purity there.

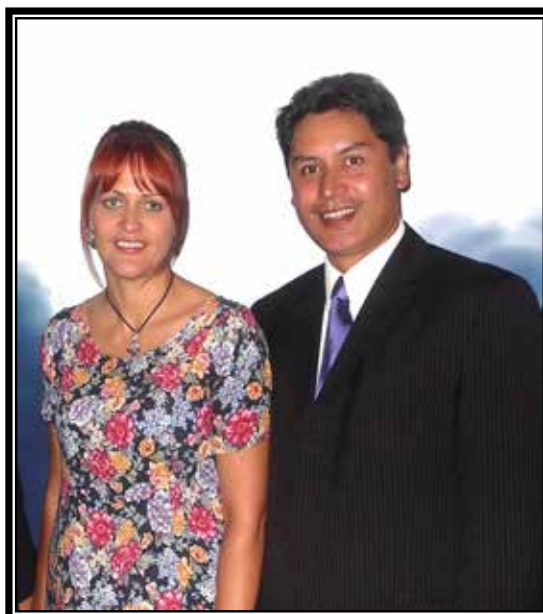
I share my testimony of the Saviour, that He is a real person. I believed in His stories for so many years and now know that they are true. I know that He has a love that is universal and though that love is universal and immense, He remembers my name and knows me intimately as he does every child of God. I know that the Lord's promises are real and that they are ours to lay hold upon if only we trust in him. I thank my Heavenly Father for offering his Only Begotten Son for someone like me. Elder Neal A. Maxwell once said, "*There was no ram in the thicket at Calvary*." Knowing what I know now, I would have gladly been my Saviour's *ram* if it meant that I could ease His burden. I love the Lord with all my heart and am so thankful to Him for my family, friends, my experiences both good and "a lighter shade of good," and for being ever present in my life and in the life of those I love. I bear testimony in the name of the King of Kings, even my King, the Saviour Jesus Christ, Amen.

(Speaker at the Visitors' Centre November 2004)

Why I Believe

Moana Parker Gilbert

Moana was born into the Church into a family of strong faith



Have you ever asked yourself why you believe in the Gospel? I have been thinking about this a lot during the past couple of weeks and it occurred to me that the answer to that question would differ depending on what stage of my life I was at. I decided that I would tell you a couple of the answers I would have given at a couple of the different stages of my life.

I am blessed to have been born a covenant child to parents who have never wavered in their knowledge of the truthfulness of the gospel. As such, I attended church from the very first month of my life. At primary age, the reason I believed in the gospel was because it was fun. My primary teachers were wonderful people called by inspired priesthood leaders to help nurture my fledgling testimony. In those days primary was held weekly on a Tuesday afternoon when we would gather together and have a lesson and an activity. We looked forward to Primary because it was the time to get together with our friends and our “cousins” who weren’t actually related but were such a part of our lives that we always thought that they were. Bonds formed then are still strong today.

I remember going to school after Primary Tuesdays and telling my schoolmates about different activities that we had had the previous evening. My school friends always said that it sounded like I had a lot of fun and they wondered why their churches didn’t have a similar thing. My friends were particularly interested to hear about the Daddy/Daughter activities and how we were able to go on a “date” with our Dads. There were quite a few of my friends who didn’t live with fathers in their homes and I told them that we had “extra” dad’s in our church who came with the girls who didn’t have their own Dad to attend with. I can remember feeling a little smug that our church had a primary programme and that even though I was only a child, I was as important to Heavenly Father as any other person in the ward. Even at that age I knew that being a member of the church set me apart from others and made me feel special.

After Primary I moved on to the Young Women’s programme. Of course I experienced all the challenges of being a teenager, just like every other person and it is at this time of your life that you want so much to not be “special”. You want to blend in like every other teenager. To be different is the equivalent of being a leper. I was the first and only member to attend my High School in my first year. The following year, my sister came to the same school and then there were two. The student body was about 1000 strong and 998 of those students did not believe as my sister and I did. Boy did I feel ODD. As members, my sister and I had

the longest uniforms of all the girls. We did not smoke or drink, we did not have boyfriends and we did not go to our school dances. Added to this we had Maori names in an extremely Australian school and we also had more brothers and sisters than practically any other student. If that wasn't enough to make us feel like misfits, we spent much of our school holidays, traveling around Australia to sing at Open Homes to help the missionary effort. I formed good friendships at High School and I still keep in touch with one of the girls that I went to High School with but it was the other girls in the Young Women's programme at church with whom I always felt the most comfortable. Even though I felt that I was different, I never felt that I missed out on anything because every couple of months, there was a church dance to attend. There were the Stake Sports activities which included Basketball, Volleyball, Swimming and Athletics. I guess being in the strongest ward in the whole stake had its advantages too. There were always the yearly YW camps to look forward to as well. I remember one in particular that I attended with my non-member cousin. On the Sunday, we had a fast and testimony meeting and the spirit was so strong that my cousin was prompted to bear her testimony. She expressed how she was not a member but told us YW how lucky we were to have the sure knowledge that our Father in Heaven loved us. She said that for the first time in her life, she realized that she was a Child of God. I spoke with her recently and even though that testimony meeting was more than 25 years ago, it is one of her clearest and most cherished memories.

It is during my teenage years that I learned how to "live in the world but not of it." I always felt luckier than many of the other students at my school. They seemed to have so much turmoil in their home lives that I just didn't have to deal with. I came to appreciate the gospel principles in action in our home and even secretly began to enjoy family prayers, even though Mum and Dad made us kneel in a circle and hold hands. They did this mainly to ensure that we weren't misbehaving during prayers.

When I became a mother and looked into the eyes of each of my newborn babies, I could not doubt that I had a Father in Heaven and that there is more to this life than our physical existence which ends with our death. Children teach us the real meaning of unconditional love. It is as a mother that I began to understand the unconditional love that the Saviour has for us and why he was willing to sacrifice his own life to ensure the eternal nature of our lives. Until I became a parent and experienced unconditional love, the atonement was something that I had always known about not related to myself personally. I was able to understand the depth of the Saviour's love for every one of us and why he would be willing to take upon himself the sins of the world. Most mothers can relate to the desire to shelter our children from the consequences of their actions. I cannot bear to think that I will be separated from my children by physical death. I have seen the remnants of the pre-existence in their unfocussed newborn eyes. I experienced the euphoria of knowing that I and their father undertook a partnership with God in the creation of their lives. I want to focus again, when on the other side of the veil, I may see eternity together with each of my children. I know that the only way I will be with my children then, is through this gospel – how then could I believe anything other than the wonderful plan of salvation which is such an important part of this gospel.

After enduring the pain of divorce, I was able, in a very small way, to understand the pain that the Saviour endured to atone for my sins. I was unwillingly suffering as the result of the actions of another person. The pain I felt was for my one person and one night as I knelt in heartfelt prayer to my Father in Heaven it came to my mind that the Saviour suffered the sins of all mankind. It certainly put my pain into perspective. It also gave me a strong testimony of the divine nature of the Saviour because I am convinced that only he who

was the Son of God could have undertaken this great and terrible task. My body ached with the unfairness and emotional anguish. I could not comfortably lie on the softest of beds because the ache went through every layer of skin to my very soul. Why would Jesus Christ agree to be the ultimate sacrifice save there is a greater purpose than that we can see with our limited vision.

During this time, I relied heavily on the Holy Ghost for comfort. I spent many hours on my knees in desperate pleading with my Father in Heaven to make it all better. One evening I knelt to pray and my prayers followed a by now familiar pattern of quickly reciting the things that I was grateful for so I could get to the important part of my prayers IE: almost demanding that he should remove this pain and suffering from me and also removing the free agency of the perpetrator of this hurt and making that person choose the right according to what I wanted. As I continued to pray in this fashion, I began to feel a tingling in my entire body. The room which had been dimly lit, began to glow brighter and a sensation of warmth and peace suffused my body. I continued to pray but my prayer had changed from one of demand, to a humble request not that all would be fixed the way I wanted, but that all would be as the Lord would have it be. I prayed not for everything to be returned to its previous order in my life, but that I would have the strength to see this challenge through to the end no matter what that might be. I prayed that my children and I would be safe and well. As I closed my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, I knew that all would be well and that events would unfold just as they should according to my faithfulness.

That doesn't mean that from that time forward, everything was better. There were still days when I pleaded and cried and hurt but it seemed that I always knew that there were happy times ahead after the challenge of that particular situation was met. I didn't know where or when but I knew that my Father in Heaven was aware of every heartache and pain that we all have and that he knew me personally. Not as another face in the crowd, but as Moana, an individual in my own right, one of his children – imperfect, but his all the same.

At this time in my life why I believe includes all these life experiences. The gospel is fun, it is where I belong, it is where I find truth and comfort. It is where all humankind can find peace and refuge from the hurts of this world. It is a great source of freedom and is the only way by which we can attain the ultimate happiness and joy in our lifetime and in the kingdom we have yet to inherit. It is where we become eternal families and live together for time and all eternity.

You could say that life and experiences have taught me different principles and aspects of the gospel. I often heard of experiences of those who had these incredible experiences and miraculous occurrences that let them know that the gospel was true. As a teenager, I wondered when I was going to experience my own “epiphany” that I could relate to others and that we would marvel over and I could say “That was when I knew the gospel was true”. I guess I expected that like Joseph Smith, I should have my own vision or miraculous visitor who would give me my testimony. Well, I never have had a vision like that of Lehi and Nephi. I have not been visited by heavenly beings that I could see as I see you. Nevertheless brothers and sisters. I DO BELIEVE in the Gospel, but more than that, I KNOW THAT THE GOSPEL IS TRUE. I don't need visions or visitors from heaven to come and tell me of its truthfulness because I realize that I have always believed and I have always known and I always will. So brothers and sisters – that is why I believe. (March 2005)

“Why I Believe”

William and Ripeka
Gudgeon

**Long-time members of the LDS
Church. William has just
finished a term as a
Member of Parliament**



William: *(It had not been a practice in my life to kneel in prayer, but for the first time in my life, I knelt down in prayer with my grandfather and listened to him pleading with the Lord to soften my father’s heart. . .)*

On this one occasion, the bells of St. Mary’s Church began to toll, and like an obedient little boy I accepted the invitation of my beautiful mother to attend on this one particular Sunday morning. This church building was erected as a memorial to the pioneer Maori Battalion soldiers who fought in the First World War and also to the soldiers of the famous 28th Maori Battalion who fought in the Second World War, which my Father was a member of.

As a twelve-year-old, I remember sitting there in this ornately carved building, listening to the minister’s preaching. Somehow, I felt that there was something missing—as to what it was, I could not identify. Approximately two to three years later, I recall my grandfather having Sunday School at his home, and the Mormon missionaries from America were in attendance. The congregation was made up of about four or five families. Up until then I had not heard of the Latter-day Saint Church or the *Mormons*, as people described them. This was all new to me.

On this occasion, I remember the elders speaking about a man named *Joseph Smith*, which to be honest, was somewhat confusing, as I expected a sermon on *God*. I suppose this was a rarity for me, as attending any church meeting happened on maybe once or twice a year. Attending another Latter-day Saint Church meeting did not happen until many months later.

I loved my grandparents, as they had taken care of me and my mother during the war years because my father was a participant during those years of turmoil. Whenever I visited with my grandparents, I could see the change in their lives, and this had to do with the influence of the Latter-day Saint Church. During this period of time, my grandparents would attend gatherings called *Hui Tau*, which were organized by the church in Hastings and other parts of the country. On their return home I would listen to my grandparents describe how beautiful the choirs sang and how much they enjoyed them. By then,

unknown to me, the construction of the New Zealand Temple and Church College was in progress. The labour missionary building programme was the means by which the work was being done, and people from all over the country were flocking to Hamilton to volunteer their services.

My mind goes back to 1957 when my father wanted me to attend Gisborne Boys High School. This school, being one hundred miles away, was not to my liking, and being a country boy, living in the city was not for me. For some reason, there appeared a very strong desire within me to attend that *Mormon College*, as I called it then. As a non-member, I shared these feelings with my grandfather. It had not been a practice in my life to kneel in prayer, but for the first time in my life, I knelt down in prayer with my grandfather and listened to him pleading with the Lord to soften my father's heart so I could have permission to travel to Hamilton.

Immediately following that prayer, contact was made by telephone with my father, and permission was granted. For me, that was an example of the power of prayer and faith, as originally, he was against my being involved. Arriving in Temple View, Hamilton, was a culture shock, as I was not accustomed to meeting or seeing people of other cultures and nations. The impressions I had were the friendliness of the people and their willingness to help. I soon adjusted to the new lifestyle with the help of many, and, on attending the church meetings, I was astounded how little children could stand before a congregation and speak without fear or hesitation. This really was an eye opener.

My desire to work for the church was strong even as a non member, and this I did before attending Church College of New Zealand as a founding student in 1958. The spirit of our Heavenly Father did guide and direct me, and finally I was taught and given the discussions by Elder McCullough and his companion. With faith and prayers, I wrote home to my mother and grandparents and asked if they would convey to my father my desire to be baptised. Permission was granted, and on my return for the semester break I was baptised on the 23rd of May 1958, by my Grandfather George Cyril Ferris and confirmed a member by Brother Rupert Wihongi. I remember this day because the Waiapu River was in flood.

Since then, Heavenly Father has guided me through my life. My mother and all my brothers and sisters accepted and were baptised members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. My father died without joining the church, but his work has been done in the New Zealand Temple. My wife Rebecca and I have four sons and a daughter. All our sons have served missions, and all who are married have had this ordinance done in the temple. At this stage we have fifteen grandchildren. During my term as a Member of Parliament in New Zealand, I have totally relied on the Lord for direction and guidance, and those blessings have been immeasurable.

To whomever may have the opportunity to read this, I bear testimony that *God the Father lives and that His Son Jesus Christ is the only Begotten Son. Joseph Smith the Prophet was instrumental in restoring the Gospel to the earth, and we have a living prophet today, President Gordon B. Hinckley.*

Arohanui and lots of love. (November 2005)

Ripeka: (*“On our return home later that day, I reported the happenings of the day to Dad, and he felt that the Lord had protected us and guided our horse at the precise moment that we needed protection.”*)

I am the eldest daughter of Grace Curry and Tapua Heperi. My great-grandparents were Hohepa Heperi and Raupia Patuone. Raupia was the grand-daughter of Eruera Maihi Patuone, one of the Ngapuhi Chiefs who signed the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840. There were twelve children in our family, and being the eldest, I helped out with all the farm work. We lived on a farm in the Waihou Valley at a little settlement called Rahiri. This land originally belonged to Eruera Patuone and was prone to flooding when we had heavy rainfalls, which lasted over three or four days.

As far as I can recall we always went to church. My mother was a convert and we belonged to the Waihou Branch. Our meetings were held in a little church house in the Waihou Valley where the Nehua and Bryers families lived. When I was very young, my younger brother and sister and I went to church with Mum and Dad on horses. A little time later, Brother Hare Bryers picked us up on his little truck—or Brother Johnny Bryers would pick up a few families on the back of a bigger truck. This truck had a canopy on the tray, and we would sit on bales of hay and all of us would sing songs as we traveled to and from church. At one time, when I was about four years old, Mum and I walked the four miles to church, and I was most unhappy because my feet were sore and I was very thirsty. It may have been challenging, but it helped to strengthen my testimony as I got older.

When I was eight, I was baptized in the swollen flooded river just below the church house. By the time I was ten, my younger sister and I went to Primary on my horse. Primary was held each Saturday morning. One incident I recall was this particular day our dad advised us to stick to the main road and not let the horse wander down to the swampy sides of the road. The horse was always obedient, but this day he didn't listen and wandered down the side, and I was very anxious. We no sooner reached the bottom when I heard a great noise above my head. I realized that a huge swarm of bees was flying above us, and had the horse not wandered off the road, we would have been caught in the middle of the swarm. On our return home later that day, I reported the happenings of the day to Dad, and he felt that the Lord had protected us and guided our horse at the precise moment that we needed protection.

Since those days, I have had other experiences that have helped me rely totally on the Lord, and his guidance has strengthened my testimony. Prayer and study has played a major part of my life. I am so thankful for my testimony of Jesus Christ, His atoning sacrifice of His life, His obedience to Heavenly Father, and His perfect example of how we should live our lives. I know Joseph Smith was instrumental in restoring the truth in these latter days—

This I say in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. (*November 2005*)

“WHY I BELIEVE”



IKE, MI-KYUNG, AND CHANG-HEE HAN

(“Pioneers” in the Gospel from Korea—they came to New Zealand in order to have more time together as a family)

IKE SANG-ICK HAN:

I have been asked to talk about *why I believe*, not why we believe, so please allow me to talk about my personal experiences. I won’t mention any gospel doctrines today, but I will share personal experiences which strengthened my testimony.

I believe because God lives and answers my prayers. With reluctance, I would like to tell you how I joined the church—because it was neither dramatic, nor spiritual, but a rather shameful and embarrassing story. It was 1970. One of my best friends was introduced into the church. He attended the church and had discussions with missionaries. At almost the end of the discussions, he was asked to be baptized, so he invited me to join the discussions and we’d be baptized together. I was not interested in the church, but he’s my best friend, so I accepted his invitation and joined a couple of discussions before baptism and was baptized with my friend. That was 1971, Jan. 23rd.

Since then, I attended the church and participated in all church activities, even though I didn’t know the doctrine and did not have a testimony. I liked the church activities and members. As I entered the university, I enrolled in the religious institute—not to learn the doctrines, but to enjoy the activities. I was recommended to be a student body president by our bishop who was an instructor. As approaching the graduation from university, I was forced to consider going on a mission, because there was a tradition in the institute that all former student body presidents went on a mission; so whenever I went to the institute, I was asked when I would go on a mission.

However, I didn't even think about serving a mission because I thought my situation could not allow me to serve the mission. I planned to get a job after graduation and to take care of my old mother.

One day I sat on the bench at the university campus. One student came to me and asked whether or not I attend the church. I said, "Yes, I do."

"Which church do you attend?" I answered, "Mormon Church."

He asked, "Why do you believe that church? Have you read the Book of Mormon?"

I had to reply with reluctance and shame, "No."

He said, "If you haven't read the Book of Mormon, how can you know your church is right?"

That made me embarrassed, and I reconsidered my faith. After sincere consideration since then, I decided to go on a mission because if I could know the truthfulness of the gospel by serving two years, I thought it would be worth it. As a missionary (in Korea) I didn't have any problems to approach and talk with others. I thought that it would be hard for them to believe the *first vision* of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon, so I planned to talk about family and Jesus Christ first and then gradually introduce them to those kinds of mysterious and miraculous events. I thought my stratagem was perfect and would easily be accepted by them. However, I failed without getting any further appointments. I lost almost all investigators. I didn't know what the problem was. So, my companion and I decided to fast and pray for a whole day. During the prayer, I heard obviously, "Teach the First Vision!" I recognized what the problem was, and I got the answer from the Lord. That became the turning point of my faith. Since then I taught the First Vision first to whomever I met. The result was incredible. I baptized eighty-nine people during my mission. I've never doubted my faith and the truthfulness of this church since then because I got the answer from the Lord personally.

That's why I believe. (November 2005)



Chang-Hee Han

(The third of four sons of
Ike Sang-Ick Han and Mi-Kyung Han)

Our family came to New Zealand about five and half years ago because my parents believed that this country has more opportunities than Korea—and some other reasons. But the main reason was that we could not have enough time together as a family because we were very busy doing what we were doing at that time.

When I was a young boy, I believed in Jesus because of my parents. I was born in the Church so I didn't have any choice but to go to church every Sunday. Because of that, I had a testimony but it wasn't mine. It was my parents' testimony.

I began to have my own faith and my own testimony when I was attending Church College of New Zealand. At Church College we begin every class with a word of prayer. We call teachers as "*brother and sister so and so*," and I was very surprised. But it was a good surprise. I felt comfort and like I was *at home*. I've felt, experienced, and learnt so many things while I was in the Wiser Dorm. Every Sunday I used to go up to the temple with other friends after church. We sang church songs together, we watched church movies. Every time I went up to the temple, I felt something warm in my heart.

I still can remember the strong feelings while we were performing the *haka* to the MTC missionaries. Every three or four weeks we had an opportunity to perform the *haka* as a dorm to the missionaries who were about to go out to missionfield. They were well-prepared missionaries and had strong testimonies. It was an awesome experience to me to hear their testimonies. I felt the spirit so strong, and at that time I'd actually made my decision that I would go on my mission and share strong testimonies just like they did. My parents want us to go on a mission because they believe that we will be completely converted after our missions. And my dad used to tell me that that's how he got fully converted to this church—through his mission.

My oldest brother Joonhee believed on his words, so he went on his mission and then served an honourable full time mission. My second older brother is currently serving his mission, and I know that it's my turn to go in the field and serve the Lord with all my heart, might, mind and strength. In the scriptures, the Lord has promised to the missionaries that He will be with them.

I know that the Lord will bless the people who have chosen to serve Him with all their might, mind, and strength, and He said that we won't be cast out if we believe Him and worship Him with our might, mind, and strength, and our whole soul.

I know this Church is true. The Book of Mormon is the word of God. God lives and loves us. (November 2005)

Mi-Kyung Han

(Convert from Korea and mother of four sons)



In 1979, I was a twenty-two year old. We had trouble because of my father's business failure. I had to stop school and all my family had to move to another area. I had no friends and had difficulty to find a job. There was no hope in the future, and I was wondering *why I'm living*. I really needed someone to listen to me and to encourage me with hope. At the time, I did not belong to any church but I wanted to attend church. However, I was confused which church I should go to. One day missionaries knocked our door. My father could not reject American missionaries who were covered with snow in a very cold winter evening. He let them in. The missionaries showed the filmstrip regarding family home evening and talked about the first vision of Joseph Smith. As you all know, Joseph Smith had read the scripture, "*If any of you lack wisdom let him ask God that gives to all men liberally and upbraideth not and it shall be given him.*" And he prayed to God which church he should go to.

I was touched by knowing that he also prayed to find out which church he should attend. However, regardless of my will, my father told them we didn't need any religion because we believe in Buddhism. Our tradition does not allow us to disobey the will of parents. I was very nervous and worried that they would leave without further discussion. I prayed in mind that if there is a God, please help me to make an appointment with them. That was my first prayer. Suddenly, one visitor came to see my father unexpectedly, so my father excused himself, and I could make an appointment with missionaries for the next discussion. At the time I did not know how to pray. During the discussions, I learned how to pray, and then I did pray according to their instruction and asked whether the Book of Mormon is true or not and if Joseph Smith was a true prophet or not. I tried to focus on prayer with all my mind and heart. One day in the very quiet moment after prayer, I felt very special feelings, and then I was baptized. Since my first prayer, I have never doubted and never been away from the church.

Long time ago, I lost the fifth child in my pregnancy. Because of huge pain and sorrow, my husband could not help me enough. I wanted to go to the temple to repent and to get comfort from the Lord. When I prayed with all my mind and heart in the Celestial Room, I heard a clear voice. It said, "*Behold, I leave these children to you. You do your responsibility faithfully.*" And I had a vision that the door of celestial room opened and four children dressed in white walked in and sat beside me to pray unto God. I could not hold the tears with overwhelming thanks and love and comfort. I do know that we are all children of God and the temple is the holy house of the Lord. Since then, I had to prepare myself to raise them in the gospel.

It's more important to me and to my husband because we are *pioneers of faith*. We rely on the Lord, more humbly because we are pioneers of faith, and we know that fruits will be produced from their (our children's) testimonies based on our faithful roots. I hope that our children could remember me and my husband as faithful pioneers like our real pioneers in the church history. I do know that this is the true church. God lives. Jesus is the Christ and Saviour... (November 2005)

“Why I Believe”—My Testimony

Daniel He

(Born in China, converted to the Gospel as a Young Adult in New Zealand)



I have been back in China for awhile. In here, I found the society is totally different from New Zealand. For me, I would rather stay in New Zealand. In here, like my friend said, there are so many temptations, and we don't have enough good activities to strengthen ourselves. I am so grateful I could have the chance to know the gospel in New Zealand, because I found the true meaning of life while I was there.

I still remember when first I met Elder Ryland and Elder Thomas. They came to my home to teach my flat-mate. At first I only thought they were trying to sell something to us, but then my friend told me they were missionaries. My friend lost his interest very quickly and tried to hide every time when missionaries came to my place. He even asked me to lie to them that he's not at home every time when they came. One time, when they came to my flat, I told them my friend might have lost his interest already, but I would like them to come in and have a short discussion. Also, the same day, the Elders gave me my first copy of the Book of Mormon.

I believe to be a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the most correct decision for me. I so enjoyed staying with other members. They were always examples for me. From the gospel, I learnt how to be a standard person, how to deal with other people, how to plan my future, and how to face this troubled world. I had learnt that in my life, there are lots of things I should do that will help me to complete the eternal goal of my life. I have understood the importance of family.

I know I am not perfect, and it seems it is impossible to be perfect. Now, I have learnt that there is an example in the world. Through Jesus Christ, I can learn how to make myself better. I want to fulfill my eternal goal—to go back to Heavenly Father's place, and to live eternally with the people I love most. When I am in trouble, I learnt to pray for help. I know God loves us, and He won't let anything hurt his children. I know I am not a lonely soul in the world because I am in a big family with lots of wonderful people. Especially, I am so grateful for the people who helped me in the past two years—they are great examples in my life. They helped me to be better.

Now, I am called to serve my mission in the Sydney North Mission. I will share my testimony of Jesus Christ to the people in Sydney. I will share the joy to them and try my best to help more people to know about the Gospel and Heavenly Father's perfect plan. This is my testimony in the name of Jesus Christ.

(written October 2005)

“Why I Believe”

Benjamin Hippolite

A long-time member of the Church, labour missionary, church leader, and a good friend to all, in and out of the Church, here in New Zealand. Ben also served as one of the labour missionaries who built the college and the Temple in the late 1950's

My name is Benjamin Hippolite. I was born in Nelson, New Zealand, and was brought up on D'Urville Island. I was baptised at the age of ten in the ocean surrounding D'Urville, and I grew up in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, attending most of the auxiliaries, including Primary, and was in the Aaronic Priesthood. While on my mission in 1954, I received the Melchizedek Priesthood. I have been asked by the Director of the New Zealand Temple Visitors' Centre to write *why I believe*. I have asked many

people if they could remember when they were converted to the Church, and nearly all of them could recite the exact date and some, even the exact time. I have to say that this has never happened to me. I really don't know when I was converted to the Church, but I have had so many experiences that it is impossible for me to deny the Gospel.

I would like to tell you three short experiences that will give you some idea as to *why I believe*. The first time I was asked to exercise my priesthood was on D'Urville Island. Some children came up to the house where I was holidaying during Christmas and said that I was required to go down and give Grandma a blessing. My grandmother had been bedridden for fifteen years with polio; and she was having a serious bout of pain. I was requested to go down and give her a blessing. My companion was a young boy by the name of Percy Tehira. Percy didn't hold the Melchizedek Priesthood, but he was a priest, and he came with me to support me because this was the first time that I was going to exercise my priesthood. As we entered the back door of the house where Grandma lived, we could hear her screaming in pain. Our first reaction was fright. We entered a bedroom at the back and offered a silent prayer and went in to anoint Grandma and give her this blessing. The very moment we said, “Amen,” she stopped screaming and fell off to sleep.

Second experience. I received a letter from my son while on his mission in Dallas, Texas. He had received a letter from his mission president informing him that he'd been fasting and praying because a new missionary was coming into the field. This new young missionary was the only one in his community who had joined the Church. He was slow of speech and slow of movement, but the mission president said that

he had a wonderful spirit. He came from the *backwards* of Kentucky where the people there still speak *thee* and *thou*. He mentioned to Elder Hippolite that this was the reason for his fasting and praying—to find this elder a good companion. My son picked him up at the bus depot, took him back to their flat, and helped him store his gear. After they had some refreshments, he told this new elder that they had an appointment that night. When they went to the appointment, the investigator invited them in. Every time Frank started to talk about the gospel, the shutters in this man’s eyes came down, and he would switch off. Frank would talk about something else, and the shutters would go up again. And the very moment that Frank would start talking about the gospel again, down would come the shutters. After about forty-five minutes of this, Frank decided it was time to finish, and in closing, he asked this brand new missionary if he wanted to say anything. The missionary replied, “I don’t know the discussions, but let me tell you about my relationship with Jesus Christ.” Frank said that as this young boy started to talk, the shutters went up, and the investigator started to lean forward. He hung on every word that young missionary was saying. My son wrote back and told me about this situation. He said that the greatest lesson he learned on his mission was to develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Third experience. Many years ago I received a letter from the First Presidency. They explained in their letter that a missionary who had been serving in the Hawaiian Islands had written to the First Presidency requesting that he be allowed to come to New Zealand before going back home. While he was on his mission, his parents had separated and divorced, and his mother had migrated to New Zealand. Also in this package was this elder’s honourable release certificate. The First Presidency also asked if we could hear his testimony, and then if we felt comfortable with it, would we give him the honourable release and present his certificate to him. We immediately answered in the affirmative.

At the appointed time, a knock came on our door. I opened the door and there stood this handsome young missionary. He reminded me of the description given to King David in the Bible. He was well-proportioned and goodly to look upon. We invited him into the office, and after he sat down, we informed him about the procedures we were going to follow. We opened with a word of prayer, and we asked questions about his mission. After we felt comfortable with all of the answers, we asked him to bear his testimony. He hesitated, and I wondered what was wrong. After a minute or two he said, “President, may I bear my testimony in the manner I have been doing in the past two years?” We granted him that permission, and he immediately began to give a sign language testimony with his hands. For two years he had been teaching the Hawaiian people on a colony where they could not hear or speak. Their only communication was through sign language. I will never remember what signs he made, but I will never forget the feeling I had as he bore his testimony.

My witness is that Jesus is the Christ. He is the Son of the living God. We do have a prophet on the face of the earth today, and when Christ took Peter, James and John up into a high mountain, which is now referred to as the Mount of Transfiguration, ancient prophets of old restored keys that they held to Peter, James and John. My testimony is that these same keys are held by the prophets today—the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. (November 2005)

“Why I Believe”

Lorine Itere

(A Young Single Adult Leader in Tamaki Stake)

In all honesty I can't tell you *why I believe* or how I came to believe, except to say that I've always felt in my heart that God exists, and that He loves us. The best way to describe this instinct is to turn to the scriptures. In Doctrine and Covenants 46:13 it says: *“To some it is given by the Holy Ghost to know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that he was crucified for the sins of the world.”* This is why I believe... because for some reason a loving Heavenly Father chose to instill this great spiritual gift in me before I was born.

I thank my Heavenly Father for goodly parents. My mother especially lived the gospel through her actions. She taught the gospel in our home. Through her diligence, she invited the spirit into our home. When my father was converted to the gospel in 1991, he explained his decision by saying that he could feel how happy were, and he wanted that in his own life. Doctrine and Covenants 46:14: *“To others it is given to believe on their words, that they also might have eternal life if they continue faithful.”*

I love the opening statement of the Young Women theme: *“We are (children) of our Heavenly Father who loves us, and we love Him.”* How grateful I am to know these truths. I feel in my heart that I am a child of a loving God. I feel His influence all around me, guiding and protecting me. And yes, I love Him.

Jesus Christ is the Only Begotten Son of God in the flesh. He came to earth to experience pain and suffering, that He might know how to succor us. I've felt Him beside me during my personal trials, helping me to endure them with faith. I know He lives.

Joseph Smith was a Prophet of God. Because of his courage in seeking for truth the whole world is blessed to have the Kingdom of God established on the earth once more. I'm grateful to have the Book of Mormon. It is the word of God, testifying of Christ and teaching us how to find happiness in this life and prepare for the next.



We are led today by a living Prophet, just as in ancient times. I've stood in the presence of Gordon B. Hinckley and felt the Spirit that encompasses him. I know He is God's Prophet on the earth today. Knowing this gives me courage to do what he counsels, because I know that he is declaring God's will, not his own.

I know that *"when God speaks and man obeys, that man will always be right."* This is my testimony... this is why I believe, in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

(Speaker at the Visitors' Centre November 2004)



Why I Believe

Mason LePou

(Mason is a police constable. He and his brother joined the Church to be part of the basketball program.

He was only twelve years old.

His mother was a member, but was inactive at the time)



The story of my conversion starts in Tauese Village in Samoa early in the 1900's. My great-grandfather was a very faithful member of the church. He was a branch president and raised his family in the church. My Nana was born in 1935, grew up in Samoa, and married a slick looking, smooth dressing Samoan boy who was not a member of the church. They both decided to move to New Zealand to raise a family. Nana did her best to raise her kids in the gospel and the local Ward did their best to help. My Papa was not keen on the church at all so things didn't last.

My father recalls being forced to join the church as a young boy, so consequently left the church when he was old enough to make his own decision. Some of the kids stayed active in the church. My father married his high school sweetheart who was not a member of the church. My mother was baptized in the church just before I was born, as the missionaries were trying to re-activate my dad through converting my mum. My mum made an effort to be an active member of the church even though my dad was not interested.

She would walk to and from church carrying my three-year-old brother and pushing me (a baby) in the pram. Unfortunately, my father never supported mum in her efforts, so things didn't last long. As a result my brother and I grew up without the gospel. Life as a non-member was quite the experience. I learnt how to drive at a young age so that I (or my older brother) could drive my drunken dad home from the pub. My parents hosted a lot of parties at our house, which involved a lot of alcohol and drugs, and my brother and I were the sober drivers and clean up crew. My parents used to fight a lot. Although my brother and I were raised in New Zealand, the *Palangi way*, when it came to discipline, it was straight Samoan! My closest uncle, who I spent a lot of time with, was convicted of dealing drugs and went to prison. My closest friends growing up are now *patched Mongrel Mob* members.

Although I didn't grow up in the church and get taught gospel principles, my parents taught me good morals and how to be a good person. They were very supportive of everything I did and went out of their way to give me and my brother the things they never had as children. *Sport* was probably the main focus of our family. We got involved in most sports, but our main focus was basketball. You could almost say that

sport was our religion. I was taught many of life's lessons through sport. I learnt good work ethics, how to be a team player, how to lead and how to follow. I was also taught that whatever you do, do it well and give it your all.

The most important thing about sport is that it brought the gospel into my life. One day, out of the blue, the LDS Missionaries came to our door looking for my Auntie who was an active member of the church and who had just moved over from Samoa. My brother happened to be home at the time and asked about the annual stake basketball tournament. The Elders told my brother that he had to be a member of the church to play in the tournament. So to make a long story short, he was taught the first discussion. At the end of the first discussion, (like all good missionaries do) my brother was asked for a referral, and he suggested *me*. To this day, I'm not sure whether he referred me because he felt the spirit or because he wanted to make sure he had another player in the stake basketball team.

My brother approached me that night and asked me, "Do you wanna be a missionary?" I think I asked him, "Are those the guys in the suits that ride bikes?" He said, "Yes." I'm pretty sure my answer was, "Sweet!" My brother then gave me the *Book of Mormon* with a reading assignment. Now I wasn't much of a reader as my attention span (like most twelve-year-olds) was non-existent. I read the account of Ammon's ministry to King Lamoni (Alma 17-19). This was probably the first time in my life that I had ever **WILLINGLY** sat down with the sole intention to read, kept my concentration the whole time and retained everything I read. I had no idea how that happened or what this meant, but I was fascinated to learn more.

The rest is pretty straight forward. As my brother and I were taught the discussions together, we kept all of our commitments and were eventually baptized. One thing I do recall is that the gospel really brought me and my brother closer together. Before then, my brother and I used to wish death on each other. The day of our baptism was the first time I ever told my brother that I loved him. Our parents never once opposed us joining the church. My dad even came with us to our first Sunday as members. I am very thankful to the Lord for softening our parents' hearts to allow us to join the church. My brother didn't last long as an active member of the church as he didn't have anyone his age to fellowship him. He didn't take too well to some of the bad examples of certain active/less active members, and worst of all, the stake basketball tournament was done away with the following year.

Initially I thought of my conversion as the usual success story of the missionaries finding me, teaching me the gospel and my getting baptized. After a little research, I found that it had taken four attempts and over fifty years of planning and preparation for me to be converted. I am thankful that no unhallowed hand can stop the work from progressing and that we had faithful missionaries that were guided by the spirit and brought into my family's lives. The circumstances of my conversion and example of *my* missionaries were the driving force behind my becoming the first and only missionary in my family. I initially went on my mission to find someone like me and my brother. I owed the Lord that much.

Of all the lessons I learnt on my mission I feel the most important one was recognizing the power of the spirit. Before I went on my mission I used to despise those less active members of the church that had been born and raised in the gospel. Like my brother, I had seen so many bad examples. I shared this with one of my missionary companions who had been born and raised in the church. His reply was, "I'm glad that it is

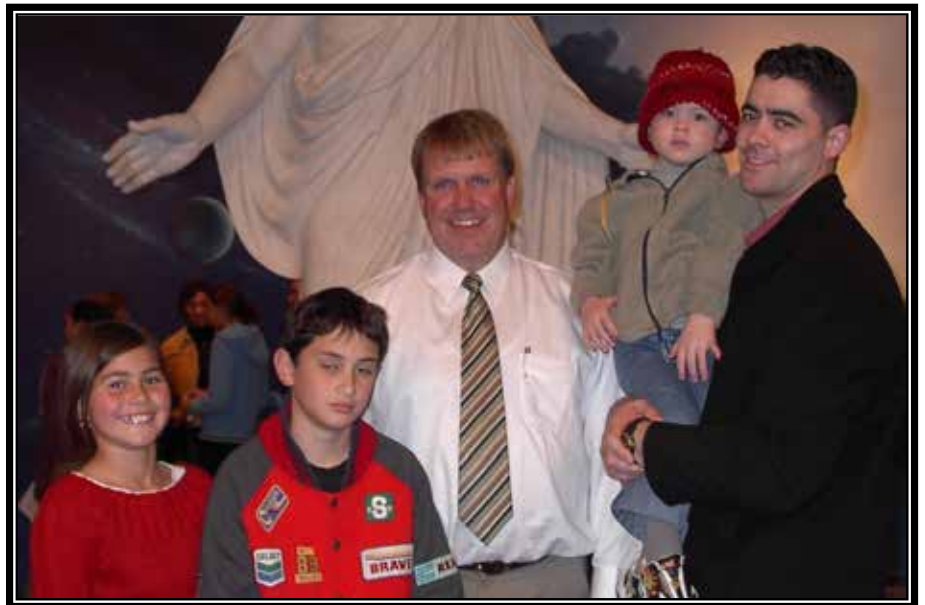
the same spirit that converts us all.” I had never thought of it that way before, and that comment changed the way I thought about those I used to despise.

It was the *Spirit* that converted me, and it was the *Spirit* that led me to the investigators (on my mission) and converted them. The *Spirit* re-converts me every time I feel it. It was the *Spirit* that brought my mother back to the church while I was on my mission and it was the *Spirit* that helped me find my eternal companion when I came home from my mission. The *Spirit* has blessed my life with the gospel, happiness, a beautiful family, a career and many other wonderful things.

With all the correct decisions I have made in my life, I could have found a hundred reasons why not to do them. The one reason I did do them was the *spirit*. I owe it all to the *Spirit*.

The spirit is why I believe. (Talk given at Visitors' Centre April 2005)

This is a picture of my son and I with Doug Passey. Doug was one of the missionaries that taught and baptized my mother. Doug was in New Zealand with an LDS youth group assisting with Habitat for Humanity. He was trying to track down my mother and got hold of my phone number. Doug gave me a call, not knowing that I was a member of the church.



He seemed very hesitant and unsure when trying to explain that

many years ago he was an LDS missionary and taught and baptized my mum. After he had given his explanation, he said he was trying to locate my mum as he had lost contact with her many years ago. I then informed him that I was an active member of the church, a returned missionary, was the Elders Quorum President in my Ward, sealed in the Temple and lived in Temple View. I also told him that my mum became less active shortly after being baptized but has now come back to church, is a Relief Society teacher in her Ward and a Temple patron.

Doug was over the moon at what I had told him. For years he had thought that his mission was not overly successful. Now he knew that his diligence and hard work had brought many people unto Christ.

That evening Doug spoke at the Visitors Centre and shared this experience with the congregation. I was blessed with the opportunity to meet with him and introduce him to one of the fruits of his labour, my three- year-old son Kainoa.

“Why I Believe”

Rachel Mailangi

**(From Tonga and a teacher at the
Missionary Training Center in New
Zealand)**



Last year, I went with a friend of mine to Tonga, to where I grew up. It was the first time to go back since I immigrated to New Zealand. My friend and I decided to go to another small island (Pangaimotu Island) for a day. It takes ten minutes to get there from the main island (Tongatapu) on a boat. We arrived at the wharf, I looked at this small boat, ten people can fit in it. I was a bit scared. On a way, I kept praying in my heart asking Heavenly Father to watch over us. It was a beautiful day! I was thinking, if there is something happening in the ocean, I don't know what to do. I had a firm belief and trusted in Heavenly Father, that He will take me there and bring me back. Even though I grew up in the main island, I had never been to any of those small islands. That was the first time to visit another island. I am grateful for my parents who taught me the gospel and to have that knowledge knowing there is a Loving Heavenly Father. I know He lives. He hears and answers my prayers.

I had the opportunity and a blessing to serve a mission. I had a testimony and knowledge of the truthfulness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but I found a confirmation of my testimony and my gospel knowledge increased when I served as a missionary in New Zealand Wellington Mission from 1995-1997. You are sitting here amongst representatives of the Lord, Jesus Christ and His Church.

There was a man who has just completed his new house, having had no knowledge of electricity—he made no provision for it when he built the house. He has been satisfied with the use of candles. An agent of the light and power company calls on him and invites him to become a customer of the company. He calls the man's attention to the fact that he is sitting in semi-darkness and informs him that a mighty change would come into his life, if after due preparation he could have a thousand candle power light in every room by pressing a button. The man whom we call the builder said, “I do not believe such a thing is possible!”

The agent replied, “Of course, if you do not believe, you will not act. But when you believe, I'll show you how to get both light and power far greater than anything you have known.” The agent continued, “My friend, you are sitting in darkness. There is a great light in the world, and it is available to you. There is power of which you have little comprehension. If you will listen to me, you will learn how to turn on the light and the power.”

This man said, “I do not believe you.” The agent said, “If you do not believe, I cannot help you.”

This man, the builder, thought what the agent had said, called the agent and said, "I have thought about this light and power you have told me of and I now believe what you say of it. I'd like to get the light, which you promised me if I would believe. I do believe and now request that you turn on the light."

But the agent advised him that there are certain pre-requisites that must be met. He advised him that he must wire the house, install fixtures and make contact with the source of power.

The builder replied, "I will not do it. It is too expensive. It involves sacrifice."

The agent advised him, "You cannot have the light or the power until you comply with the terms."

The builder asked, "Who says I must do these things?" And the reply was, "The manager of the company which owns the power house. You must conform to the rules or I cannot help you."

The builder invited the agent to call on him again and says, "I now believe what you said. Please give me the light and that power."

The agent of the power company replied, "There are certain pre-requisites before you can get that light and power."

"What must I do?" The builder asked.

The agent replied, "Change your way of living. Put something into your life that will make it possible for you to make contact with the source of divine power. When you do that, you will get the light and enjoy it's blessings."

The builder asked, "Who said so?"

The agent replied, "The one who has the light and power to give, the power of the manager of the company." At a later time the agent teaches the builder how to wire his home and prepare for the blessings of electricity. After the builder had wired his house and had all the fixtures installed, he asked the agent to turn on the light. But he was told, "Not until you sign a contract with the company agreeing to pay the light bills, to live up to the terms of the agreement to be honest in your dealings with the company. You must agree that you will not tamper with the meter or other company property. And when you have signed the contract, the light will be turned on."

The builder asked, if the manager of the company himself would sign a contract with him? The agent answered, "No, I am the agent of the company. I have the authority to bind the company by contract. It will be just as valid as if the manager of the company had signed it personally."

"What do you mean by a contract? A contract with whom?" The builder asked.

The agent replied, a contract with one who has the light and power to give. It is a contract with the manager of the company.”

builder represents non-members / investigators
agent represents representatives / missionaries
customer represents members
company represents church
manager represents Jesus Christ
contract represents Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ

Christ is the light of the world. He is the source of truth and light.

The manager is not here today but there are agents who can teach us today how to put light in our houses and to allow us to sign the contract if we accept it.

*“I believe in Christ, he is my King! with all my heart to him, I’ll sing;
I’ll raise my voice in praise and joy, In grand amens my tongue employ,
I believe in Christ, he is God’s Son, on earth to dwell his soul did come,
He healed the sick, the dead he raised, good works were his, his name he praised.”*
(Hymn 134 by Bruce R. McConkie).

I know He lives. He is the head of this Church—there is no other way or means whereby man can be saved, only in and through Christ. . . .He is the life and the light of the world. . . .He is the word of truth and righteousness. (*Alma 38:9*) I know He will come again. I extend and invitation to all,

“ . . .come unto me and ye shall partake of the fruit of the tree of life; yea, ye shall eat and drink of the bread and the waters of life freely.” (*Alma 5:34*)

The fullness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ has been restored for us this day through the Prophet Joseph Smith. The temple up the hill is for us to seal our families together for eternity. The Book of Mormon is true. It testifies of Christ. It contains the fullness of the Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ, in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Thank you.
Rachel Mailangi





Why I Believe

Siteri Mellor

Convert from Fiji

(. . . It was late at night. . . Then this saddest feeling in my heart came over me. I thought to myself, ‘If God is a kind and loving God, how can he burn my auntie, grandmother, my mother and father? How can He?’ The thought was so unbearable for me as a ten-year-old. . . . with tears in my eyes I looked up to the heavens with billions of stars and a

big yellow moon above me. I prayed in my heart, “Oh God, I can’t bear the thought of losing my family. Please don’t. Please!” . . .)

I am Siteri Mellor. I was born in Fiji into a large family of seven sisters and four brothers. My parents came from a strong religious background. My grandfathers came from a long line of Methodist ministers.

I would just like to share a few experiences in my life. My spiritual journey and search for the truth began when, as a family, we gathered every night and sang hymns and read and discussed the words of the Bible—especially the New Testament. As a small child, my mother excitedly and joyfully shared the stories of Jesus and the parables. She taught all of us children that Jesus was a son of God and was a good person and that each of us must follow Him in our lives. I had a childlike desire to be just like Jesus in my own life.

When I was six years, I used to follow my grandfather into a meeting house where he would preach early Sunday mornings. As years went by, I became very interested in the New Testament and had a strong desire to read it over and over again. I used to go and hide under the house so I could be alone—just to read the records of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. When fourteen years old, I began to have the desire to really do all that Jesus said and did. As I was growing up, I would easily forget to do those things I desired in my heart. Later on in my teen years, these desires grew deeper and stronger.

By this time I had some serious questions in my mind that I needed the answers to. I couldn’t ask my parents at that time, so one day I went to our village minister and asked him. I asked, “Is Jesus alive?” and “Are there men on this earth like Peter, James and John?” I was told that those men were of the past only and that there were no such things now. I was sad and disappointed when I was told this. I felt also that I shouldn’t be asking questions like that.

I continued to attend church every Sunday. I remember as a child I was told in church one Sunday that if I was a good girl, when I die I would go to Heaven. But if I was a bad girl, I would burn in hell with fire and brimstone. That saying used to really scare me, and the thought stayed in my mind as I was growing up.

Knowing that, I would strive with all my best, at a young age, to really always try to be a good girl. Sometimes I was able, and sometimes I failed. But I kept trying because I really desired it.

One day, when I was ten years old, a few of my family members from the village came to visit and stayed for awhile. They were the people I loved so much, and I was so happy to have them come by and visit us. This particular night all the adults decided, after dinner, that they would take all our mats, blankets and pillows outside and sleep under the moon and stars. It was late at night. I observed that all my family were asleep except me. Then this saddest feeling in my heart came over me. I thought to myself, "If God is a kind and loving God, how can he burn my auntie, grandmother, my mother and father? How can He?" The thought was so unbearable for me as a ten-year-old. My heart was so pained and broken at the thought of my loved ones perishing by fire! As I tossed and turned, sobbing quietly so that nobody could hear me, with tears in my eyes I looked up to the heavens with billions of stars and a big yellow moon above me. I prayed in my heart, "Oh God, I can't bear the thought of losing my family. Please don't. Please!" Then I fell asleep.

I remember also when I was eleven years old, I had a desire that I needed to ask God for something I needed at that time. And I planned in my mind a quiet spot in the forest to go to and pray. So I left the house, made my way up to a small hill covered with tall trees and bushes. I knelt down to pray. I had only just begun to say a few words when I heard strange noises around me. I got off my knees and ran home. I never told anyone what I did. I still don't know today what it was that I wanted and went to pray for.

At sixteen, I started attending different churches. Inside me I had a void that needed to be filled and questions that needed to be answered. Some of my main questions were, "Who am I?" "Where did I come from?" and "Where am I going after this life?"

When I was seventeen, I saw my older sister reading a blue book with a golden angel blowing a trumpet. When I saw the angel, I thought of when Jesus will come again to the earth. Also, I felt that the angel was blowing the trumpet to wake up the people of the earth from a deep sleep so they could obey God.

Five years later, I moved to New Zealand. I was visited by the elders—missionaries! I was taught the gospel and got baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I was twenty-two years old, and that's when I saw the same book that was like the one my sister was reading one day in Fiji. It was called the *Book of Mormon*. I never regretted joining the Church, and I've never looked back. I finally found the truth that I had been searching for 31 years. The void has been fulfilled--my questions all answered. I know God lives, Jesus Christ is the son of God and hears and answers sincere prayers. The church is true- The Book of Mormon is the word of God. The Prophet Joseph Smith was a true prophet who saw the Father and the Son. We have a living prophet on the earth today. Families are forever, The Gospel and the Priesthood of God has been restored. Yes there are men on the earth today who are just like Peter James and John of old. We are children of God, He desires for us to be happy in this life and the next. I acknowledge his hands in my own life. How happy I have become. All these made possible by the Atonement of my dearest friend and Savior--even Jesus Christ. This is *Why I Believe*. (December 2005)

Siteri's story was told in the Pageant performed in 2004. And we've heard her glorious soprano voice in the Visitor's Centre many times – also she has sung in the Readers' Theaters performed in 2005.

“Our testimony of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints”

Marc and Véronique

MOCELLIN

Marc and Véronique are members of the Church living in New Caledonia. Marc is originally from Grenoble, France, was called on a mission to New Caledonia, but also served part of his mission in Salt Lake City, Utah. He is a Branch President in New Caledonia.



I was born in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints thirty-nine years ago and was raised in the church. My parents taught me the gospel, and I was happy.

When I was fourteen, the *Book of Mormon* was taught in seminary. At the end of the year, my teacher said, “Marc, you read the *Book of Mormon* and you studied all this year. You are now ready to ask the Lord to know if this book is the word of God.” I did it, and the experience was so strong that I can remember that day as if it were yesterday.

Since that day, life was different for me. I knew what was the way to follow. After my study in university, I served a mission in New Calédonia. Those two years were a wonderful experience to share my testimony of the gospel with others.

After my mission, I came back to France. Two months later, I went back to New Calédonia to discover this wonderful country. In discovering this country, I also found the most wonderful person who became my wife. We were married and sealed in the Sydney Temple two months later. We now have three wonderful girls that the Lord gave us. We are happy together and we live the gospel.

We know with all our hearts that God lives. Jesus is the Christ and He is our Redeemer. We are happy to have the privilege to come to the New Zealand Temple almost every year since we were married. Last year our first daughter did baptisms and next year, the second one will do it also.



This year, Veronique’s father died after five years of illness. The cancer he had made it hard for him to live, and it was also hard for all the family. When he died, we were ready because we knew that it was not the end. It’s so wonderful for us to know that we will be together one day. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen. By Marc and Véronique MOCELLIN (January 2006)

Marc spoke in the Visitors’ Centre in January 2005 when the New Caledonian members of the Church were here to do Temple work. Here, he shared his testimony along with Harold and Alexia Gurrera, also from New Caledonia. Both are serving as Branch Presidents.



A SPECIAL VISIT FROM A PROPHET OF GOD—PRESIDENT DAVID O. MCKAY

***DEDICATION OF NEW ZEALAND TEMPLE AND
CHURCH COLLEGE OF NEW ZEALAND (1958)***

By

Emmery Vida Morris (nee Kelly)

The atmosphere was electric- we had been told that President David O. McKay had arrived at the construction site here in Temple View, and had been taken on a tour of the whole project. Elder Evans, who was Plumbers Crew Leader, had purchased an early Model T Ford and had it restored and painted, so that our beloved Prophet could see this wonderful place clearly, with nothing hindering his view. It was an open Tourer with seating for four (but could take six). It was the most beautiful day that the Waikato skies could give us, with a soft breeze.

So, off they went—President and Sister McKay in the back, Elders Biesinger and Evans in the front, driving our wonderful Prophet around in this Model T Ford. It was such a fantastic sight! There was no canopy—the car’s hood was folded back, and the Prophet’s magnificent hair was blowing gently in the wind. We all came out of the office to watch—all of us watching with tears in our eyes. We were then informed that President McKay would be coming into the office to meet with crew leaders who were part of the governing council, and Elder Biesinger, Brother Mendenhall and Brother Bird. After which, we were to stand by our doors and greet our dear Prophet as he left the building. We were excited and began asking each other what we would say if the Prophet spoke directly to us. We all responded in the same way: in awe of our beloved Prophet President McKay and his beloved wife.

And then the time came and with great excitement, we watched our Prophet walk down the hallway, stopping to greet those at each office door. There were two of us in each office. Alex Forbes was in Requisitioning/Ordering of all material, and I was to follow on with costing out everything to the appropriate category and area. We shared our feelings about the Prophet. He had been our Prophet when we were children. The time finally arrived, and we were able to stand outside our offices to greet him! We saw him come out of the other office and come towards us. My eyes were stinging.

When the Prophet got closer to our door, I was crying—the tears could not stop. I was so overwhelmed by his presence and this feeling of awe, I couldn’t speak. I tried—I even opened my mouth, but nothing came out and the tears kept flowing. Meanwhile, Alex shook my shoulder saying, “He’s coming, Em! He’s coming!” I responded with “I know, I know!” And I cried more and tried to smile as well. When he got to our door, he smiled at me, nodding his head at the same time. . .as if to say, “I understand...believe me I do. . .” (13 September 2005)

“Why I Believe”

Noel Morris

**Born into an LDS family, sportsman in his youth, and labour missionary at the time the New Zealand Temple was being built—
presently a missionary in the New Zealand Visitors’ Centre**



I am the fourth child of the family of five children of **Lehi Embley Morris and Harata Matekohuru Trotter.**

We lived in a country community where there were only two Latter-day Saint Church member families. When I was old enough to recall, we held a *Home Primary* at the Brown’s home about two miles from my father’s farm every Saturday. This was also attended by non-member children. My father was Branch President of our branch, which was called *Te Hapara*. Sunday was a long way of travelling twenty-five miles to church, which included a branch presidency meeting, Priesthood, Sunday School, auxiliaries, leadership, etc., etc.—finishing around 5 p.m. In winter, it was a long day—always arriving home in the dark and walking over the Swing Bridge that had no lights.



I was baptised on the 14th January 1945 in the Waipaoa River by my father, who also confirmed me a member of the Church.

When I entered my teenage years, I became a bit of a rebel. I stopped going to church, having a good time doing activities with the neighbours’

sons. My mother invited me to come to church. There never was any compulsion. In my four years of secondary schooling, I found myself in responsible leadership positions—Captain of First XV (rugby) and First X1 (cricket), Head Boy Prefect, Athletics Champ, and Senior Tennis Champ. My love of athletics caused me to join Gisborne Amateur Athletics Association where I was elected Captain. I competed in H.Bay Poverty Bay Championships, and won sports trophies for *All Round Sportsman and Sprinting* events.

In 1954 and 1955, I represented HBPB (H.Bay Poverty Bay) at Dunedin and Wellington respectively at New Zealand Junior National Champs, came in second in long jump and third in 880 yards team relay in Wellington. In this year there were many things happening in my life. In May, I was drafted into Compulsory Military Training for fourteen weeks. I had to attend Church of England Church Services and couldn't comprehend or believe what the minister was preaching about Jesus Christ—*He was large, filled the universe. He was so small he could dwell in your heart.* This didn't make much sense to me at all.

After I got out of camp, my sister wrote to our mother suggesting that she should send me to the LDS College on a labour mission. In the month of October 1955, I began a labour mission, witnessed the ground-breaking ceremony for the New Zealand Temple on the 21st December 1955, and worked on various crews—joinery crew, plumbing crew, farm crew and finally, transport crew. While serving my mission, I learnt about the Gospel, received the Aaronic Priesthood, and later the Melchizedek Priesthood, and gained my own testimony of Jesus Christ.

While on my mission, I had the blessing and privilege of meeting a young woman who eventually became my wife. We were engaged in April 1958, the date being right at the time the Prophet David O. McKay dedicated our beautiful Temple and Church College. We married a year later, 11 April 1959, in the New Zealand Temple. May 1959, I received my Patriarchal Blessing and found out that I came from the House of Ephraim, which brought to my realisation why I had many callings of leadership in the Church. We were blessed with a daughter and three sons—covenant children. Our three oldest children were married in the New Zealand Temple. We now have eleven grandchildren—six girls, five boys. We have both served a two-year Temple Mission as ordinance workers, plus extra time. At present, we are serving one day a week in the Temple and have the added blessing of serving in the Visitors' Centre as well, surrounded by wonderful people who are helping us to be quality missionaries in that wonderful building.



Emmery and Noel Morris (1958)

I know the Church to be true and testify that Jesus Christ is our Saviour, the Son of our Heavenly Father. Joseph Smith was a Prophet of God, and our present Prophet, Gordon B. Hinckley, is a true Prophet of God who stands at the head of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen. (November 2005)



Why I Believe

Sister Peihana Owen

Missionary in the Visitors' Centre – Labour Missionary

Why do I believe? When did it begin? Where did I start? I grew up as a fostered child from a little toddler until my early teens, when I was sent back to my mother. My mum had married again to an LDS man and this was not my first contact with the LDS Church. In the beautiful valley where I grew up, my foster grandfather would take us once in a while to the only church in the valley that met every Sunday—the LDS Church. As a child it meant nothing to me—it was just another thing to do. But now it meant going to church on a regular basis.

I am now looking back from where I am today. My step-father was the only member in the home, and he was semi-active and was seldom at home. The Gospel was not taught at home. We went to church on Sundays but nothing was reinforced or followed through. We were non-members. One day, two men arrived at our home, wearing badges, who spoke with a strange and funny accent. They introduced themselves to my mother as missionaries from the LDS Church. I can remember to this day the name of only one of them—Elder Forsythe. He was from Hawaii. He spoke with my mum. Soon he was talking to me and my younger sister and telling us that Mum had given him permission to baptize us in three days. That was so amazing.

My mum didn't speak English. She understood it hardly. She knew "yes" with the nod of her head and "no" with the shake of her head. I was not taught the gospel. I didn't know what baptism was. I hadn't seen anyone being baptized. The few times that I had gone to church did not prepare me. I was baptized. It was amazing.

Over the years I have looked back with an overwhelming love and gratitude for my mum. I have felt that she knew and understood what she was doing then—because my life has been an amazing, wonderful journey—rough sometimes, but one I would travel again. By the age of eighteen, I was married to one of Heavenly Father's choice sons. He taught me how to live the Gospel. He was patient and long-suffering with me. At the age of nineteen, we were on a labour mission. At the age of twenty, I was a mother and caused a bit of a stir by having the first baby born on the *project*. That was my one and only brief claim to fame. His name was Eddie.



The nine and one-half years that we served as labour missionaries were the most special years in my growing up in the church. I loved the people with whom I associated. I loved the senior American couples (in their sixties). They took me under their wing and taught me how to take care of my baby. I was a country bumpkin, naïve as to the ways of the world, newly married, and not long being baptized. The Lord had set me up. It is only as I'm writing this that I realize with all my heart and soul that I was taught by angels. I was taught very clearly that there was no misunderstanding—line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little. I was taught with much love and patience and faith.



I wish I could say that I was always a good pupil. I would sometimes be filled with pride and arrogance and self-righteousness. Heavenly Father loved me and would give me a gentle prod (sometimes not so gentle), which He continues to do. Somewhere along this learning journey I was led to Hannah in the Old Testament. When I read the story of Hannah, I loved her. I still love her. I wanted to be like her as a mother. I had given birth to my first-born son. I wanted to dedicate him to serve the Lord. Not in the same way that Hannah did. I don't think I could have done what she did, but that he and his siblings would know God and know who they were and serve Him all the days of their lives.

I have much joy in my children as they continue to walk with the Lord. I loved it when the Lord said to Enoch, "Walk with me." In my Patriarchal blessing it states, "Like Sarah of old you will have joy in your posterity and you will have numerous posterity." I think I have made a good start with thirty-eight mokos and eight and a half great-mokos.

My first experience I can remember being touched by the Holy Ghost was when my son was old enough to go on a mission. He had been ordained an Elder and was working to earn some money towards his mission. I was in the temple on a session one day and had some concerns on my mind about him going. Suddenly this sweet, warm feeling welled up in me and spilled over as tears, and the thought came to my mind that all was well—that there was no problem. As young parents being entrusted by the Lord with such a weighty charge, we decided that we would set apart one day of the week as a day to fast and pray to help us to teach our children the gospel. We did this all the years they were growing up. I remember my son writing to us from his mission to include some of their investigators in our fasting because he knew that we still did this.

We also wanted them to know that the church was their culture. I'm glad to say that they have no confusion as to who they are. Our service as labour missionaries was a trial of our faith in our youth. We came through. The Lord was pleased. Our children served missions. They married in the temple. Our grandchildren are serving missions. Will and I served as labour missionaries and also in the temple we helped to build. I'm serving at the Visitors' Centre with some wonderful sons and daughters of God who leave their homes and families at their own expense to help us to know who we are.

I have been blessed to witness many marvelous miracles in my life with my family. To experience many times the fulfilling of Nephi's statement in 1 Nephi 3:7—the Lord entrusted me with much of this work and all I had to offer was my willingness. And Nephi of Old was my hero. I loved Nephi. He never murmured. I wanted to be like him, to have his faith. I loved it when he said, "I was led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand what I should do." Many times I was called to great positions of responsibility, positions of leadership, and I was led by the Spirit, never saying "no." My learning is ongoing, thorough and clear. I was taught that I had made covenants with God before I left, and thus I learned that if I said, "no," I would be breaking a covenant. How could I do that? He walked with me all my life as He did with the children of Israel.

This is my legacy for my children. This is the only treasure I have that is of great worth. They must reach and take His hand that is ever outstretched toward us all the day long. It is the only way. This is why I believe. (*Visitors' Centre 2006*)





“Why I Believe”

Sok Cheon Pak And Charla Pak

(Converts from Korea)

Sok Cheon:

I am a so-called “First Generation” convert in Korea thanks to my brother-in-law who was working in the medical section at the time. He is a man of integrity and the most honest man in the world according to my own mother. I was at Primary School when I was able to get acquainted with American missionaries. Since the missionary meal roster was pretty common in Korea as a part of culture even before President Hunter urged the members to share the meals, the Elders visited my house very frequently. It was not until I went to high school when I was finally baptized in the makeshift portable bathtub. Like many schoolboys at the church, I was in the gray state rather than being either white or black. Compared to my own son’s Young Men programme or activity, the programme at the time was mainly theoretical, not exciting enough for a young man. Figuring out all the underlying concepts of church doctrines was not until I began serving the mission. It was purely humble experience to knock on hundreds of doors in the coal mine town in Korea as a greenie. Every morning and evening was like a cram study for me to memorize and understand the scriptures. Based on President Hinckley’s new guidelines for missionary eligibility, I must be one of unprepared missionaries ready to harvest the field. Half of my one year (President Kimball granted for Korean university students to serve only one year because no university allowed more than one year of absence from the study) mission was served as a Branch President in the small town. It was the most exciting and rewarding experience in terms of building the Kingdom of God on the earth.

After my mission, I studied one last year of Bachelors. Following graduation, I left Korea to US for a further study. During my graduate study, a member in Korea introduced the most beautiful girl in the whole world to me. After getting married with a short courtship in Korea, we were sealed for eternity in the Logan temple. During eight-year sojourn in America, I became a father of one son and hugely blessed with countless blessings. After completing my doctorate degree and postdoctoral fellowship programme, I was offered a teaching job at the university in Korea. Teaching and research was my main part of work for five years. During this period, I was working hard to integrate the Western Medicine technology with the Oriental Medicine philosophy. Due to a numerous publication in the peer reviewed journals, I was included in the Who’s Who with many other scientists in the world. In 2002, I was offered another teaching job form NZ and I made a full commitment to pursue my academic ambition in a different country. Without any knowledge about NZ, I think our family is blessed to be located in Hamilton with a temple nearby.

I think I owe the church a lot because I learned many valuable lessons of how to live, how to serve and how to become a good husband. I strongly believe in living in this earthly life as a probational condition. Depending on how we fabricate our each life, we can be awarded with different degree of next life. I am so thankful for the knowledge of meaningful service. I have learned to be better each day in this church. I am so grateful for the family to be happy each other. I love my family so much and feel lucky to be one of members at this great church. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Charla:

I was brought up where the love was strong within the family. My parents showed the example to us how loving for each other brings joy and happiness. I remember that one Children's Day (we set aside and celebrate this day especially for children by treating them well in Korea) our whole family, including my two sisters and a brother, went up the hill near our house. We played all day in the nature and enjoyed the food that my mother prepared for us. She was a good cook and she always remembered to cook my favourite peanut fingering cookies on occasions like this Children's Day.

I was converted to the church just before my marriage and baptized in Gwangju, South Korea. I was a typical university student who wondered about the life and tried to find a better way to live. The discussions I had with sister missionaries, one from America and the other one from Korea, was so sweet and peaceful. I felt that I found an answer for my ongoing questions of life at that time. I met my husband at the church. He came to Korea to get married with me as he was studying for his Masters degree in Logan, Utah. Within a month we got married and I went to USA to be with my husband. My marriage announcement shocked many of my friends and even more surprising for them to see me leaving Korea. It was Christmas Eve in 1987 when I arrived in Utah, and I still remember seeing my sweetheart's exciting and happy face at the airport. We were student couple who could not afford prosperous lifestyle, but we were so happy that we were together and have the gospel in our lives. We were sealed in Logan Temple and I worked as a volunteer at the international student centre on campus. At that time, I had a wonderful sister who took care of me and taught me many things like her own daughter. Her grandchildren were my wonderful English teachers for a while. I still cherish this friendship until now and always thankful for that opportunity. I am sure that we can meet them again someday and share our friendship. We had our first son Benjamin while we were living in Clemson, South Carolina. I met another kind sister who helped me get through spiritually in my difficult times then. I think she had more than eight children but she still had much love to share with others including me.



After completing my husband's academic degrees, we went back to Korea and had our second son Brian while enjoying our busy life of working in our home country. We attended a local ward in Gwangju. The sisterhood I felt in this ward was so special that I still see them whenever I visit Korea. Due to the lack of members at that time, I served for many different callings and through these services my faith grew. I remember one day visiting sisters in the ward with my wonderful visiting teaching companion who said that she would like to do this kind of church work all day and everyday because it made her so happy. I am sure she will be a great senior missionary someday when she retires from her work. Every New Year's Day, our ward had a special prayer meeting early in the morning and shared our testimonies. After that we usually shared our traditional food together and wished to have a good year.

My husband was offered a job here in Hamilton and that led our family to emigrate to New Zealand. Leaving Korea the second time was not easy thing to do for me but this was the right thing to do for our family. Currently he is teaching at the tertiary education area. Our family is settled well here now and we enjoy every minute of it. My children enjoy their schools, various activities of sports and the church. It is my joy to see them grow physically and spiritually. My first son was recently ordained priest and attends seminary every morning before he goes to school. He will become a fine young man and serve a mission in the near future. I have been so blessed with loving husband and two wonderful children. I enjoy reading scriptures and feel my life guided by Holy Spirit. I love to go to the temple and I feel my faith is growing little by little every day. I know Heavenly Father loves me and watches over us. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen. (2005 Visitor's Ctr) (Charla's story was told in the Pageant, "Faith In Every Footstep" 2004)

THE PAORA FAMILY

Our Conversion Story

From being an Alcoholic, drug smoking, partying every weekend, now we are forever an eternal family and live our daily

lives according to the Gospel from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This is our conversion story we would like to share to the world.



Early in July 2003, our son Steven went on a weekend trip to Hamilton with his Grandmother. His Grandmother was visiting Hamilton to attend the CCNZ Fiftieth reunion. Whilst in Hamilton, Steven had the opportunity to interact with his cousins and meet all his extended family. On Sunday the Watene Family was getting ready to go to church. Steven asked why everyone went to church, and his aunty kindly asked him, “If you want to know, come along with us.” Steven’s reply was, “Ok.” After that day, eleven-year old Steven felt the spirit. He very much wanted to go to church and find out more information about Jesus Christ.

When he arrived back in Wellington, Steven asked his Grandmother if he could start attending church every Sunday. She reluctantly said, “That’s fine, but you will only last two weeks and your commitment to church will lessen.” Steven remembered her words. Four months after attending church on his own, he was getting ready to be baptized. He went back to his Grandmother and said, “Commitment will lessen, aye?”

Steven was working hard towards his baptism. During this time he was thinking of his own family. His mother was a heavy alcohol drinker; his father was a drug smoker. He had three other siblings. Steven really wanted them to come to church, but he knew they wouldn’t come without Mum and Dad. Steven had a desire for his family to come to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and do all the things other families did. Mother’s Day was only a few weeks away—Steven came up with a plan. His plan was to invite his mother to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for a Mother’s Day gift. He was going to surprise her, and give his mother the Gospel for Mother’s Day.

On the eve of Mother’s Day, Hana (Steven’s Mum) decided she would go out with her friends and get drunk, smoke a bit of weed and party till she could no longer stand. Tipene, Steven’s Dad, was there as well, enjoying the company of friends, smoking weed, drinking alcohol and dancing—partying-up till early hours of the morning. Tipene and Hana decided they had had enough to drink and smoke and it was high time they went home. They arrived home at about 3:45 am. Because this was a weekend trend for Tipene and Hana, it was quite a normality to sleep off the hangover all day Sunday and basically let the kids fend for themselves till such a time when their hangovers no longer lingered in their heads. Surprisingly, Mother’s Day fell on this particular day “Sunday,” and Steven’s plan was about to take place.

Steven, all dressed for church, walked into his Mum and Dad’s bedroom, and as he had figured they were bodily hung-over. Steven’s determination to present his Mother the Gospel that day was not hopeful, but he knew he had to try. Steven gently tapped his mother; she woke up and said, “What’s the matter?”

Steven said, “Mum, I have a Mother’s Day gift for you.” She replied, “Cool—where is it?”

Steven said, “Mum, you have to drive me to it.”

Hana (Mum), not wanting to upset her son, said, “Ok, that’s fine, let me get up and we will go.”

I (Hana) really didn’t want to go because I felt sick and tired, and once more I couldn’t be bothered, but I got up. I grabbed the keys to the car and asked Steven, “Where are we going?” Steven said “Just drive, Mum, I will give you directions.” As Steven did, we drove for about thirty minutes, then we pulled up this drive. I remembered feeling nervous. I had no idea where we were—all I could see were people dressed up nicely as though they were attending a wedding or a birthday function. The car came to a complete stop, and I asked Steven where we were.

Steven said, “Just come on, Mum, this is special.” I asked him, “Ok son, where is my Mother’s Day gift?” He took me by the hand and said, “Follow me, Mum, it’s in through these doors.”

I remembered feeling out of place, my appearance was shocking, and I felt embarrassed. I knew I hadn’t combed my hair, I could see my boots were muddy and my skirt was over my knees, and my shirt had spilt beer on it. But the strange thing about it all, everyone who was dressed nicely and looked great, all shook my hand and said “hello”—they greeted me like I was the birthday girl. They didn’t care how I looked or presented myself—it was me who had the problem.

Next thing I asked my son, “Where are we, and where is my Mother’s Day gift?”

Steven said, “Follow me through these doors, Mum, and we will find a seat.” Ok, we were seated, but I still had no idea what was going on or where I was—everything was new and definitely strange to me. I asked Steven again, “Where is my Mother’s Day gift?”

Steven held my hand and said to me, “Mum, this is your Mother’s Day gift—being here—coming to church.”

I remember feeling shocked, and at that particular moment, I could feel my son’s love and the amazing strength it took for an eleven-year old boy to present the Gospel as a Mother’s Day gift. Two weeks after I received the Gospel as a Mother’s Day gift from my son Steven, he was baptized on my birthday into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Four months following Steven’s baptism, my three children and I were baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. And after fifteen years of being an inactive member, my husband found his way back to the Gospel. A year later on December 17, 2004, our family was sealed at the Hamilton, New Zealand Temple. Steven, then aged thirteen, put his hand on top of all of ours inside the sealing room while we were kneeling at the altar, and he said, “My mission is now complete—I have brought my family to the Lord’s House and now we are an Eternal Family.” He continued to say, “Dad, Mum, I have one more mission to do. I want to serve the Lord for two years and find me a wife to marry inside the Temple.”

Brothers and sisters, our eleven-year old boy showed us the way to the Gospel. He is truly amazing. My testimony of Christ is true, Heavenly Father lives and answers our prayers. We have a testimony of tithing, and I could never imagine my life without the Gospel. I love this life that I’m living now; I truly admire all my new friends who share testimonies like mine. I am so grateful to Heavenly Father for blessing us with our son. If he hadn’t made the choice on Mother’s Day to wake me up, I don’t know where I’d be today. I leave you my testimony in Jesus Christ name. Amen. (*Visitors’ Centre 2005*)

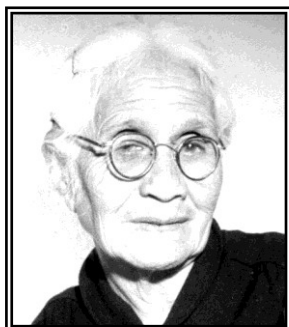


“Why I Believe”

Rangi Parker

(New Zealand Church Historian)

I was born in Wellington and grew up in a place called Porirua where almost every family in the Pah (village) were members of the Church. As a child growing up I was surrounded by women who were great examples in my life—although at the time I did not appreciate the guidance and counsel I was receiving from them because I thought that they were strict and bossy. I can see now the great wisdom that they possessed in guiding me (along with my sisters and other cousins), in teaching me good values, eg, kindness, charity, love towards others, patience, understanding and, most of all, love for my older brother Jesus Christ and for my Father in Heaven.



I was brought up by a Grandmother Oriwia Parata who made sure that my sisters and I attended our Church meetings every Sunday, We wore our very best clothes. I still remember the lovely Sunday meal that was ready for us when we arrived home from our Sunday School and Sacrament meetings. We also attended our Primary which was held after school during the week in the early days of my youth. My mother worked hard to support us and provide a home for us with our grandmother.

When I reflect on those years I can remember so well that everyone in our Pah took care of each other, and the law of consecration was practised among them, even though as a young girl I did not know what that was. I was taught to respect our elderly people and the missionaries who always seemed to be around. I remember my grandmother and mother telling us that we must always feed the missionaries and take care of them because they were the servants of the Lord.

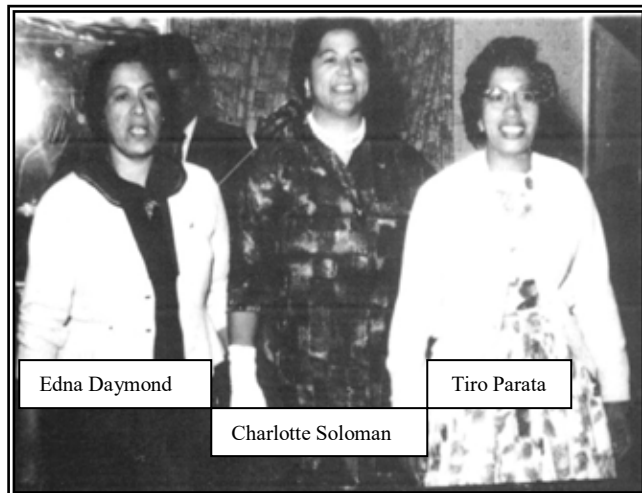




My grandmother always gave them the best she had, my mother carried on the tradition after my grandmother died. I grew up feeling very safe in our community. My cousins who were my play-mates were all members of the Church as well so it was easy in many ways for me to believe.

When I was a teenager and there were daddy/daughter parties held, my uncles would stand in as my *Daddy* for the evening. I grew up seeing the priesthood they held respected. I knew that God lived and was taught to pray from a very young age. I was taught that Heavenly Father

loved me, and if I needed His guidance, all I had to do was get on my knees and pray. I was taught about the word of wisdom, and it was made easier also for me not to partake of alcohol tobacco, tea, and coffee, because I never saw any of that in my grandmother's house.



My mother, Tiro Parata, taught me the love of music, and as a young girl, young adult and finally a mother myself, loved to hear her sing—solo, as well as with my aunties, Edna and Charlotte, in a trio. My love for music comes from her and my Uncle Puohu Katene who was my choir master. Throughout my life and over the years of rearing our children, I have tried to teach them the importance of good wholesome music in their lives, and we have had wonderful experiences together as we have travelled to entertain in many places throughout Australia where we lived for fifteen years. It has been one of the highlights of our lives.

I am so very grateful for my grandmother, mother and relatives who taught me wonderful values and helped to build my testimony of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I firmly believe that when I met my eternal companion he had many of the qualities that some of my uncles possessed, and more.

My life has been enriched, I thank the Lord each day for my blessings, my husband, six children and their spouses, and twenty-six grandchildren.

If you are a non-member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and are searching for the truth, invite the missionaries into your home and they will only be too happy to tell you all about the Saviour's message to all the world.

Mate Atua e manaaki e tiaki I nga wa katoa. Arohanui, Rangi Parker (September 2005)

Thoughts about the Prophet Joseph Smith

Graham Read

Participant in several Readers' Theatres, "The Family and Friends of the Prophet Joseph Smith." Played several different roles:

Joseph Knight, Sr., Lyman Wight, Frederick G. Williams, and Thomas C. Sharp—editor of the *Warsaw Signal* newspaper



As I sat and read through the Fifth Readers' Theatre script (*The Martyrdom*), I felt within my heart the sorrow and anguish that all the saints at the time of Joseph Smith's death must have felt. I question why it is that people of the world have continually over the years hated and murdered so many prophets for trying to save the souls of mankind. They have never harmed or threatened the lives or safety of the people, yet the people choose to kill them, and when they do, the very thing that they were trying to destroy grows stronger, not weaker, by the loss.

God's Plan is set firm and no amount of adversity will weaken its resolve. Satan may very well be able to hinder some of the progress by influencing some to sin, but the love of the Lord and His Will, will strengthen those that have the desire to accept and love as Christ did, to overcome and repent of their wrong doings and be able to carry on with the Lord's work.

May we stand firm as our Prophet Joseph Smith and stand up for truth and right as our Lord and Savior has revealed to us members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. For this is our only way of achieving our ultimate goal—Exaltation in the Highest Degree with our Lord and Savior. (*October 2005*)

“Why I Believe”

Blair and Leilani Rorani

Converts from New Zealand



Blair: *(While I was out running that afternoon after I had finished reading, I decided to stop on the side of the road and ask Heavenly Father to let me know that the Book of Mormon was the word of God. As I prayed, I felt a warm, comforting feeling—nothing dramatic, but something distinctly different than I had ever felt before. I had asked, and God had answered as promised.)*

The Saviour taught the Nephites, that “every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit ... Wherefore, by their fruits ye shall know them” (3 Ne. 14:17-18, 20). This same principle can be applied to the Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ. A person can know with certainty for him or herself that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is indeed the Kingdom of God on earth.

The prophet Alma tells me that I can conduct a spiritual “*experiment upon [his] words*” to test this truth. He gives the requirements for such an experiment as “*yea, even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye can give place for a portion of my words*” (Alma 32:27). I had such a desire and decided to conduct the experiment.

I’d like to share with you the results of my experiment and the eternal difference this has made in my life. Alma compared a seed to the *Word of God*. “*Now, if ye give place that a seed may be planted in your heart ...*” (Alma 32:28). I began attending Church College in 1996. There a friend of mine who was also studying history who had enough courage to share with me a copy of the *Book of Mormon*. She had personalised the book by highlighting important passages and writing notes to help me understand important ideas. I decided that I would read from the *Book of Mormon* for an hour or more every single day. I had begun by planting the seed and giving it a chance to grow.

If ye do not cast it out by your unbelief, ... Ye will begin to say within [yourself] – It must needs be that this is a good seed, or that the word is good, for it beginneth to enlarge my soul; yea, it beginneth to enlighten my understanding, yea, it beginneth to be delicious to me. (Alma 32:28)

As I read from the pages of the *Book of Mormon*, I didn’t always understand what I was reading, nor could I recall all the stories and their important people. But what I could not forget was the feeling I had as the

Spirit of the Lord enlarged my soul and enlightened my understanding. It felt like I was finally coming home. After reading the final chapter of Moroni, I applied his promise and prayed to know that the book was true. I prayed on a deserted country road near the house where we lived during the school holidays. While I was out running that afternoon after I had finished reading, I decided to stop on the side of the road and ask Heavenly Father to let me know that the *Book of Mormon* was the word of God. As I prayed, I felt a warm, comforting feeling—nothing dramatic, but something distinctly different than I had ever felt before. I had asked, and God had answered as promised.

“Now behold, would not this increase your faith? I say unto you, Yea;” (Alma 32:29). After learning for myself that the *Book of Mormon* was true, I asked to be baptised as soon as I returned to school after the holiday break. The bishop of our student ward told me I had to have six lessons from some full-time missionaries and then I could be baptised. I entered the waters of baptism on the 31st of August 1997. I was baptised in lane four of the Church College of New Zealand swimming pool by my best mate, Brigham.

Alma tells us that once the seed has been planted and begun to grow, we need to *“nourish it with great care, that it may get root, that it may grow up, and bring forth fruit ...” (Alma 32:37).* From that day on, I dedicated myself to loving and serving Heavenly Father and my fellowman with all my heart, might mind and strength. As I nourished the seed of truth that had been planted in my soul, by praying, studying the scriptures, attending Church and helping to build the Kingdom, it soon took root, began to grow and brought forth fruit.

Here is some of that fruit. The following year I received a patriarchal blessing and a call to serve as a full-time missionary in Western Australia. While serving a mission, I spent every moment treasuring up the words of life. I saw countless lives touched and changed because of my efforts to live and teach the Restored Gospel of the Saviour. Eight months after returning from a mission, I met my beautiful wife at the *Christmas Lights* on Christmas Eve 2001. Two weeks later we were engaged to be married and were married in the Hamilton New Zealand Temple in July 2002. We had our first child, Joseph, in December 2003 and had a baby girl on the 20th of December 2005.

And because of your diligence and your patience with the word in nourishing it, that it may take root in you, behold by and by ye shall pluck the fruit thereof, which is most precious, which is sweet above all that is sweet, and which is white above all that is white, yea, and pure above all that is pure; and ye shall feast upon this fruit even until ye are filled, that ye hunger not, neither shall ye thirst.(Alma 32:42)

My life is one richly blessed by the Gospel. These blessing are the *fruits* Alma described and are the results of my experiment to find the truth about God. My spirit has been filled by this fruit that I truly hunger not nor do I thirst. I know that God lives, that Jesus Christ really was the Son of God who lives today. I know that He and His Father appeared to Joseph and called him to restore the fullness of the Gospel. I know President Hinckley is his successor and that all the Keys of the Priesthood are only found in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I love my wife and our children. I will be eternally grateful for the witness of truth I received by reading the Book of Mormon and bear testimony that this witness is freely available to all who sincerely seek the truth. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.



Leilani: (Double gold-medalist at the 2002 Commonwealth Games)

MY ANCESTORS

It is my strong belief that my faith in Jesus Christ began before I was born. I believe it began with my ancestors: men and women of faith and conviction who looked to God and thanked Him for every blessing. They built for me a tremendous inheritance of faith, which has endured through generations of my family. I feel very grateful to know that I am a link in that chain. It makes me realise that if that link is broken then all will be lost. My goal is that I will be a “strong link in the chain” so that future generations of my family will also have the opportunity to partake in and enjoy the blessings of the Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ upon the earth.

WHO AM I?

I learnt for myself the restored gospel of Jesus Christ when the missionaries came to our home in 1984. I was ten years old when I was baptised, along with my three other siblings. I remember feeling I was doing something right and that I felt clean afterwards. But things started to go wrong and the feeling didn't last. When I was seventeen years old, I stopped going to church for eight years. During that time I concentrated all my efforts on becoming the next world squash champion. I figured that would bring me the happiness I was looking for. At first it seemed that way; I was traveling around the world, playing a sport I loved and succeeding at it; meeting lots of people and earning my own money. But as time went on, it became clear to me that despite my many successes, I still felt emptiness inside. By the year 2000, my squash was going great and my goal was within reach. I had become so carried away with success and desire for praise that I had forgotten who I was (that I was a daughter of God with a divine heritage), and I had forgotten my duty to Heavenly Father. As a result, I had made a lot of wrong choices and had lost my way. Around that time I realised that the happiness I was looking for wasn't found by living the way I was living.

THE BOOK OF MORMON

This realisation led me to open *The Book of Mormon* and start reading. After eight years of trying to hide the book, I found myself totally engrossed in its pages. As I read the scriptures, I began to see a dimension to my life that I had never seen before. I began feeling an increase of faith and a desire to do what's right and a feeling of inspiration and understanding of the Lord's love for me and His plan of happiness for His children. Within a few days, I had read half the book and, as a result, I decided to *face my past* and go back to church on Sunday. Going back to church wasn't easy. I was so nervous and scared. One, because I wasn't sure what to wear; two, because I didn't know anybody; and three, because I was afraid that people might judge me—especially after all that I knew I had done wrong. What gave me the reassurance to face my fears was that I truly felt that Heavenly Father would help me get through the day. As it turned out, I ended up having a great day. It didn't go as bad as my imagination had conjured up. The members were kind to me, and I made friends with two women in Relief Society. Most important, I felt a strong sense of being in the right place, at the right time, doing the right thing—which made me feel good.

THE PRAYER OF THE HEART

But when I got home, and on my own, the good feeling I had faded away, and in its place was a feeling of doubt about going to church the following week. Most of the doubt centered on my realisation that being a worthy disciple of Christ wasn't a one-day thing, but a seven-day-a-week commitment. It meant a drastic lifestyle change, and I wasn't sure if I was strong enough to make those changes, and more importantly, follow through with them. At that point I remember breaking down in tears. I didn't get down on my knees and pray, but I began to wish in my heart that I had

a friend I could talk to—someone who would understand my situation and not judge me; someone knowledgeable in the gospel that could answer my questions about repentance and the plan of salvation. For some reason I didn't want to talk to the bishop or the missionaries. I wanted to talk to another female—a female friend in the gospel. Little did I realise that as I was wishing for this, the two women I had met at church that day were planning to visit me. They didn't know what they were going to say—just that they felt prompted to come to my house. Not long after wishing for a friend in the gospel to talk to, a knock came at my door. To my surprise, there standing on my doorstep was Jodi Owen and Luanna Michael. At first I didn't know what to say, but I welcomed them in and before I knew it, I was asking them questions all about the gospel and what I needed to do to be a worthy disciple of Christ. We talked for hours, and by the end of our discussion, I felt inspired to continue my journey in the gospel. Most importantly, I felt I had a friend in the gospel.



TEMPLE MARRIAGE

As I attended more and more church meetings, I began to learn how remarkable a blessing it was to be a daughter of God. For the first time I learnt about *pride in womanhood* and *joy in motherhood*, and I caught the vision and purpose of my of my divine roles as a woman, wife and mother, and how essential those roles are in Heavenly Father's great plan of happiness. The more I learnt the more I found my priorities and focus change. With the help of my bishop, I set new goals that would bring me lasting happiness. The main one being that one day I would hopefully meet a worthy priesthood holder who would honor me as a woman and take me to the temple to enjoy the sealing blessings in the holy marriage covenant. Truly, there is no greater goal we can aspire to in mortal life than that of a Celestial Marriage, binding families together forever. Fifteen months later I met Blair Rorani. He was everything I had ever dreamed of and prayed for. Two weeks after we met we got engaged, and six months later, on 2 July 2002, we were sealed for time and all eternity in the new and everlasting marriage covenant.

WHY I BELIEVE

There is no doubt in my mind that the path I now travel on is indeed the one true path to happiness. I am grateful for all the experiences, challenges and friends I've had in my life that pointed me to the right path and helped me stay on it. The journey hasn't been easy. But it has been worth it. So getting back to the original question; why I believe?

- I believe because of the faith and conviction of my ancestors.
- I believe because Heavenly Father helped me remember who I was, and more importantly, who I can become.
- I believe because I gained an increase of faith and a desire to do what's right that I would not have gained in any way except by studying the scriptures.
- I believe because I know that that there is none else save God that knowest (the) thoughts and intents of the heart, (*Doctrine & Covenants 6:16*).
- I believe because a temple marriage under the plan of our Eternal Father is truly a wonderful thing—to be sealed together for eternity.

By the power of the Holy Ghost I know that God lives; I know Jesus Christ is our redeemer and Saviour; I know Joseph Smith was a true prophet of God and I know the Book of Mormon is true. This is my testimony, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

“Why I Believe”

Sister Cecile Scribner

(Missionary in New Zealand from California)



For one and half years at the Visitors Centre here in New Zealand I've been listening to testimonies from people from Fiji, Australia, New Zealand, Tonga, Samoa, South Africa, New Caledonia, Scotland, Denmark, Holland, China, Taiwan, Korea, England, Colombia, Italy, the Congo, America (including Hawaii) and India. Every story has been different—these firesides have been the most uplifting experiences I think I've ever enjoyed—week after week. My testimony of the restored Gospel of Jesus Christ has grown immensely. Every person has struggled to answer the question, “Why I Believe,” and now I'm struggling with it myself. With every testimony that's been borne, I've asked myself, “How would I explain my own feelings?” I will try.

In 1985 we were living in Scotland, and my oldest son was at Brigham Young University. He was preparing for his mission, and was asked to bear his testimony. He struggled with it, and wrote it down. That's how I knew what he said—I found this scratch piece of paper with his testimony on it. He said, “I don't know myself that the Church is true, but my father knows it's true, and he's the best and most honest man I know. If he knows it's true, then it is.”

It's okay to live on the strength of someone else for a while. I think I did that for several years. As a very little girl, I seemed to know the Church was true—the Holy Ghost bore witness to me of this many, many times. But I had not done anything for that testimony—I hadn't worked for it. I simply was born into a family where the Gospel played a part of our every day lives. We weren't a perfect family by any means, but as I search my early memories, I can remember kneeling as a family in prayer on Sunday mornings before we left for church. We never missed church. During my first six years of life, my father was the Bishop of the ward in Rock Springs, Wyoming. Then we moved to Utah in 1947, and my father had to stay in Wyoming to keep his business going, but my parents wanted the family to live closer to the heart of the Church where we could meet and marry the right people in the right place—the Temple. For the rest of my growing up years, I only saw my father on the weekends. He had his own small airplane and would leave work on Friday nights and fly to Utah. Every evening about five or six o'clock we would listen for the sound of an airplane to come through Provo Canyon. Soon we heard it and ran outside to search the skies. Sure enough, there he was! He circled our house a couple of times, tipped his wings and we would wave. Then we'd hop in the car and race down to the airport to pick him up. On Sunday afternoon after a big Sunday dinner and some relaxing time, we'd get in the car again and take my Dad back to the airport where he would fly back to Wyoming.

I remember hearing my Dad tell stories of his mission in 1921 to Australia. We enjoyed them no matter how many times we heard them. I loved Sundays. I loved my friends at Church, and I loved being with my family. After Church when we'd walk into the house, there was always this wonderful aroma of a roast and potatoes in the oven. Sitting around the table on Sunday afternoon after Church with brothers and sisters, nephews and nieces and special guests—now, there were Sundays to remember! My Dad always said beautiful prayers. They were reverent (and sometimes too long!).

My mother told stories of her life. We loved to hear them over and over again as well. The stories that I loved the most were the “miracles.” Which one was my favorite? There were so many—but to mention a few, there was the time that she was at the dedication of a small chapel in Wyoming, and Melvin J. Ballard was there to dedicate it. A glorious choir sang for the dedication. My mother asked Brother Ballard afterwards why they didn't build choir seats so the choir could be seen, and he answered, “So you heard it too. This chapel must have been built with great sacrifice because what you heard

was a heavenly choir.” Then there were the many times we heard about her three younger brothers and sisters. They were young adults in the 1930’s when tuberculosis was at epidemic proportions in the United States. First of all Alan, 24 years old, had his tonsils out, and afterwards weakened. He caught tuberculosis and never got well. He died in Illinois, but he appeared at the foot of my mother’s bed that evening (she was living in Wyoming) and simply said, “I’m going now, Lucie.” She knew he was gone. Alan’s death was hard for the whole family, but ten months later, the family was beginning to feel “life” again. The girls were in a jovial mood, trying on their mother’s hats and laughing and giggling. Winnie, 26 years old, was healing from tuberculosis, but in a moment of laughter, she started coughing and couldn’t stop. Scar tissue on her lungs broke and she died. Just the next year, it was obvious that Lora, 21 years old, was not well. She had a testimony of the Gospel and to her mother said, “You know, don’t you, that I’m not afraid to die.” She knew she would be with her beloved companions. My mother went to her mother’s home to help care for Lora, but during the evening she had a dream that her grandmother had come to “get Lora.” She joined her mother in the kitchen the next morning and told her about the dream. Neither had gone into Lora’s room yet, but her mother said, “Yes, Grandma has come to get Lora—I had the same dream.” They both knew she was gone.

These and many other stories were part of my growing up. I think they are the reason why I believe. I learned about God just by listening and believing. Like my son, I knew that my mother and father were the best people on earth—they could not be deceived, and wouldn’t lie, so those things that came to them were real. The great experiences my Dad had in the mission field, the spiritual manifestations that my mother witnessed over and over again in her life—they were real. Without much effort on my part, I knew that God lived, that death was not the end of life, that families were meant to be forever, that we needed the constant nourishment of God’s word that came through our activity in Church. I knew that someday I would marry in the temple and would continue to live this very kind of life that had brought me so much happiness in my childhood. I wanted my children to have what I had.

Now I’m sixty-four years old. My testimony of the Gospel has only strengthened as I’ve gained a personal testimony that is no longer leaning on my parents’ and other great leaders I’ve known. I’ve read the Book of Mormon many times over. I know it is the word of God as I know the Bible is. I’ve served my own mission in Australia and have my own miraculous stories to tell of conversions there. I’ve had the witness of the spirit that told me that I was marrying the right man. I’ve prayed for children who have come into our home and blessed our lives. Is there any woman who has gone through this experience who could deny that God lives, that the birth of a baby is the greatest miracle on earth? My husband and I have had trials—a child born with a defective foot, a daughter who had to have a kidney removed at five months, a son who needed heart surgery at four years of age, a son who was born deaf, but through the blessings of the priesthood was given his hearing, a child who had a partial cleft palate and who spent fifteen years learning how to talk, children born with poor vision. I’ve seen God’s protective hand in severe car accidents when, for some reason, the lives of my children were preserved—not once, but twice. Perhaps these were given to us as a “test” but as we prayed for miracles, we expected them to happen, and they did—not always in the way we asked, but miracles nevertheless.

I haven’t witnessed miracles in the same way my mother did, but I cannot deny that there is a God in Heaven who loves me and my family and who has protected and guided us over and over and over again. But with everything I have witnessed, I’m not sure my feelings are any more heartfelt than they were when I was a little girl leaning on the testimony of my parents. In actuality, I do not know how NOT to believe. I would have to deny my very existence and turn against the people who I know to be the best on earth. I thank my Father in Heaven for goodness in my life, for all those who went before me and sacrificed for the sake of the Gospel—my great, great grandparents in Wales, Scotland and England who left their families and homelands when they heard the testimonies of great missionaries like Wilford Woodruff, who taught them of Joseph Smith and the restoration of the Gospel in these latter days. These ancestors of mine had greater faith than I can even imagine—and why did they leave homeland and families to join the Saints in Nauvoo and Salt Lake City? Sometimes I feel like they personally did it for me—that I might have this great love in my heart for the Saviour Jesus Christ, for God, his Father—my own Heavenly Father, and that I might have this “forever feeling”—this strong bond that I feel with my own children and grandchildren and extended family and friends. I have been so blessed. And I leave this testimony in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen. *(by Cecile Scribner, August 2005 in New Zealand)*

“Why I Believe”



Elder Douglas M. Scribner

(written while serving a mission as Director of the New Zealand Temple Visitors' Centre 2004-2006)

About 700 years before Jesus was born, the prophet Isaiah gave us a priceless glimpse of the purpose of life. He said, “Whom shall he teach knowledge? And whom shall he make to understand doctrine? ... For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line; here a little and there a little.” (Isaiah 28:9-10) *Gaining Knowledge* about God and his Doctrine has been a driving force in my life, and I have learned that it comes by searching for it just one little bit at a time. Gaining this knowledge of each precept is a process which begins with having a desire to know. If we then make a place for this desire to grow, it becomes a belief. The belief turns into faith as we actively strive to live by it. Then finally, following a trial of our faith, it becomes knowledge. I would like to share seven precepts that form the basis of *Why I Believe*.

This search for knowledge about God began for me when I was sixteen. I remember singing in our high school choir at an Easter sunrise service in Balboa Park in San Diego, California. There was a dense fog that morning and only a few people came to hear us, but as we sang “*The Holy City*,” something touched my heart deeply, and I wanted to know more about Jesus Christ. So I became active in a Congregational Church youth group where my parents occasionally attended. I enjoyed singing and joined the church choir as well as continuing with the high school choir. Still, my quest for knowledge about God was not satisfied. Finally, in frustration, I made an appointment with the minister of the Plymouth Congregational Church. When we met in his office I said, “*I have two questions for you to answer: ‘Who is God?’ and ‘What happens to us when we die?’*” Perhaps it was because Reverend Barber had earned his way through theological seminary on a hockey scholarship, but I was very disappointed with the vagueness of his answers. So I decided to forget about it for awhile.

The next time this quest emerged was in my second year at Stanford University. Even though I was pursuing a degree in electrical engineering, the university required us to take courses in liberal arts including English composition. I was living off campus that year in a house with five other fellows, two of whom happened to be Latter-day Saints. One day I was in a basement study hall with one of my Mormon housemates and decided to write a paper about “*Who God is*.” Since I didn’t know, I made one up. I surmised that God was like a rain cloud and we all left his presence as individual raindrops to live our lives. Then at death we all got together in the rain puddle and evaporated our way back to God. I was proud of my paper so I asked my LDS friend, Robert Gwynn, to read it. After reading it, Robert said, “*That was very interesting, would you like me to tell you who God really is?*” He took me into a small, private room and told me the experience of the Prophet Joseph Smith who prayed and saw a vision of God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. Afterwards I told him that I appreciated his sincerity, but that I could never believe it. I wasn’t ready yet!

Two years later, my search began in earnest. A girl from my old church youth group had attended BYU and had been converted to the restored Gospel of Jesus Christ. She introduced me to the missionaries who taught me the lessons. When I returned to the University for my final year, I started attending the Palo Alto Ward

where the Stanford students went to church. Not only was this a chance to learn the doctrine, but I could see the example of Latter-day Saint families. Our Stake President at that time was David B. Haight, and he and his family were members of our ward. I remember two occasions of being invited to his home for dinner, even before I was baptized. Thus, the first precept of my testimony was, “*By their Fruits Ye Shall Know Them.*” The examples set by these families are still an important factor in *Why I Believe*.

After nine more months of meeting with the missionaries, reading the book, *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*, studying the scriptures, fasting, praying earnestly, and going to church, I realized the time had come when I had to make a decision. I was graduating from the university and starting a new career, so I needed to get the spiritual part of my life on a firm foundation. Finally, sitting on the library steps, unable to concentrate on anything other than the Gospel, I came to the realization that I knew the Gospel was true. I didn't yet know much about the life of the Prophet Joseph Smith, but I knew that the precepts which he taught were true. I had fasted and prayed and the Spirit bore witness that the doctrine was correct and relevant to my life.

The second precept was the simple but profound answer to my question, “*Who is God?*” In the grove of trees where The Father and the Son appeared to the young prophet, Joseph learned more about the nature of God in a few moments than men had been able to discover in the previous 1800 years. The third precept had to do with the *purpose of life*. I knew innately that God would not create mankind without a purpose and a plan in mind. Yet the word ‘*Plan*’ does not appear in the Bible. However, it does appear frequently in the Book of Mormon, as the *Plan of Salvation*, the *Plan of Happiness* or the *Plan of Redemption*.

The fourth precept has to do with the question, “*What happens to us when we die?*” Einstein's Law of Relativity explains that matter cannot be created nor destroyed, but can only change form between physical matter and energy. Thus, you strike a match and physical particles are replaced by light and heat. The same, I reasoned, must be true of the human spirit. It was not created from nothing at our birth so there must have been a pre-existence where our Spirits lived before we were born. Neither could our spirit be destroyed at the time of death so there must be a Spirit World where we go after we die. I suppose at this point I believed because of intellect, but I also felt the Spirit, so I was baptized. A year later I was serving a mission in Australia.

On my mission, my reasons for believing were changing. The basic reason, to gain knowledge about God, precept by precept, was still there. Our mission President, Bruce R. McConkie, encouraged Gospel Scholarship. However, I also came to believe in the fifth precept, which is the *power of God to change people's lives*. Teaching and testifying is wonderful, but seeing the Gospel and the Holy Spirit change lives was awesome. The words of the Apostle Paul were ringing in my ears, “*For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.*” (Roman 1:16)

My reasons for believing gained a whole new dimension through my love for the woman who became my eternal companion. Her personality, her faith, and her reason's for believing were all different from mine, but they were just as valid as mine were. Her greatest joy came from making other people happy. Her faith was built on generations of faithful saints who went before her. Slowly her reasons also became my reasons. Up until this point, I thought that I alone could determine whether or not I entered the Celestial Kingdom. Now I realized that we must go there together and, if she doesn't make it, then I don't either. The sixth

precept was *Celestial Marriage*. As we help and lift each other, Heaven has a whole new meaning. Our eight children broaden that dimension even more. Granted, we can only teach them and they must decide, but we do have to teach them.

Now in the mature years of life, there is yet another reason *Why I Believe*. The *seventh precept* is that I have come to *rely upon the Lord answering our prayers*. If we do what we are called to do, hold nothing back, and pray earnestly, the Lord will bless us in ways we never even imagined. I have come to know the Lord, and to feel his trust, by being the person through whom other people's prayers have been answered.

A short story will illustrate. We lived in Scotland for three years in the 1980's on a work assignment. Our oldest son was with us for one summer and then went off to BYU. Through our letters and occasional phone calls, we sensed that he was not being as active in church as he should have been. We were so far away that the only thing we could do for him was to pray and expect the Lord to answer. His roommate, who came from our home town, was at BYU for the wrong reasons and our son was influenced by him. At that time we had a full-time missionary couple in the Scotland mission whom we had come to know and love. Their names were Elder and Sister Butters. When I next had opportunity to make a business trip to California, I stopped in Utah to spend a weekend with our son. I asked him to take me to his ward, and I worried when he wasn't too sure where and when they met. Throughout the Sacrament meeting I prayed for a way to help my son. At the end of the meeting I said, *"Let's go meet your Bishop."* When we got to the front, the Bishop was busy, but his counselor greeted us warmly. When we met, he introduced himself as Brother Butters. I replied, *"We have an Elder and Sister Butters in our Mission in Scotland."* He said, *"They are my parents!"* With gratitude in my heart, I said, *"Brother Butters, I have a deal for you. If you will look after my son, I will look after your parents."* We both did so, and the prayers of both families were answered.

I'd like to close where I began. Not only did Isaiah promise us that we could gain knowledge about God, line upon line, but Nephi also added to that understanding. He said:

"Wo be unto him that shall say: We have received the word of God, and we need no more of the word of God, for we have enough! For behold, thus saith the Lord God: I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto counsel, for they shall learn wisdom; for unto him that receiveth I will give more; and from them that shall say, We have enough, from them shall be taken away even that which they have." (II Nephi 28: 29-30)

I believe we have a loving Father in Heaven who is pleased to grant each one of us knowledge about Eternal Truths. He blesses us with His perspective. Heavenly Father sees who we are from the eternities that preceded our birth to the eternities that will follow our death. He knows our potential and the blessings we will receive if we choose to accept the Atonement of His only Begotten Son. To Joseph Smith he said, *"... what power shall stay the heavens? ...to hinder the Almighty from pouring down knowledge from heaven upon the heads of the Latter-day Saints."* (D&C 121: 33)

This is *Why I Believe*. There is no way to prevent God from granting us knowledge to answer the two questions I originally asked, *"Who is God?"* and *"What happens to us when we die?"* In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

“Why I Believe”

Lora Scribner

While living in New Zealand with her parents, Lora was called to serve a full-time mission in the Dallas Fort Worth, Texas Mission. August 2004-February 2006



(“ . . .It was at the rock bottom of this time frame that my once miracle minded faith seemed a joke or an illusion. All that remained was a desire to believe, and once again, I started where I began a decade before—by my bed, on my knees, in desperate prayer. . .”)

The life of a latter-day saint seems to always be one of self-examination. This can be a little too internally focused at times, but for the most part, questioning our testimonies seems to leave an avenue for faith-building experiences. It’s a compilation of these experiences that seems to flood into my mind while pondering *why I believe*. So I hope this story isn’t too scattered and helps someone besides myself—but if not, at least I can count on my parents saying how much they loved it!

I have to say that my knowledge that my Father in Heaven knows me and loves me, that the Book of Mormon is true, that Joseph Smith was Christ’s mouthpiece called 200 years ago, that we have a living Prophet (Gordon B. Hinckley) and Twelve Apostles today, and that miracles and the spreading of Christ’s Gospel are fueled by faith and diligence—all have come to me through prayer. This list of gospel truths, a few of which I would like to highlight, have come to me in different times of my life.

First of all, I’ve always known my Father in Heaven answers prayers. Being probably the most forgetful and *crises-minded* child in my family, I’ve had a lifetime of desperate pleas for a lost shoe, my homework assignment, a pen, a quarter, the keys, my temple recommend, and now my homework assignment again. Though I seem to be supplied with infinite weaknesses, the Lord has repeatedly and immediately shown infinite mercy.

The first big experience I remember having with building my testimony was while I prayed to know that the Book of Mormon was true. I was some age younger than ten, and I remember staying up past my bedtime, kneeling by my bed, and hoping for some heavenly manifestation of trumpeting angels and an echoing bass voice resonating, “It’s true, it’s true, it’s true. . .” No such luck, but I do remember feeling good enough about the experience that, in the end, I was willing to risk punishment for staying up past my bedtime, to tell my parents, “I know the Book of Mormon is true.”

To hear a resonating echo isn’t too difficult, for different variations of this foundational scene has replayed itself many times in my life. Of course, I always felt great at church. It was always the highlight of my week, giving me refuge and grounding in standards established by the inspired primary and young women’s programs.

While the teenage world around me took turns going crazy with substance abuse and day-to-day deceit and cruelty, I knew that Church was good and helped me turn to my Savior for safety.

A few defining moments in those years:

EFY – Especially for Youth Program: Watching a video with Christ surrounded by little children and knowing that I wanted to be there and that I would strive to get there by living the way Christ wanted me to live.

Girls' Camp: The theme was, "If You Can't Stand It, Kneel." I had a great experience one night on a hike to see the stars. The sky was covered from horizon to horizon with clouds, and we were invited to exercise our faith and pray to see the stars. We then laid on our backs waiting for the miracle as we shared our testimonies of the Gospel. From the moment the first testimony began, sky appeared. During the major portion of the *meeting* the whole sky was clear and the stars were radiant. The moment the last testimony ended, about an hour later, the cloudy covering had quickly, thickly, reappeared over every portion of the sky. I gained a great testimony of prayer that week.

Defending Proposition 22: Being an LDS republican in a 90% liberal high school during a political proposition to allow *same-sex marriage* didn't exactly help me stick to my *stay ambiguous* four-year plan. As the school newspaper displayed the LDS position on the issue, my testimony of the reality of a modern day prophet and continuing revelation grew tremendously. I was able to testify to one of my best friends that "*gender* is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal and eternal identity and purpose," and that "marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God." Although my friend was homosexual, through a desperate prayer for mutual understanding, the Spirit of love that was between us testified that the things I was sharing were true.

After high school is always a different story. Spiritually riding on the coattails of family and friends doesn't have the sustaining power it once did, and distractions are EVERYWHERE. Simple commandments of daily reading of scriptures and praying never seem to fit in the routine. Black and white rules and lines turn grey, and soon, church attendance can become sporadic and purely social.

It was at the rock bottom of this time frame that my once miracle minded faith seemed a joke or an illusion. All that remained was a desire to believe, and once again, I started where I began a decade before—by my bed, on my knees, in desperate prayer. This time, not only for the acknowledgment of eternal truths, but to know that my Heavenly Father loved me and could forgive me for neglecting Him so long and making uninspired decisions in the meantime.

I came into that prayer disturbed and foggy and left with a peaceful clarity, knowing that when we trust in the Lord, everything is going to be OK. I also received a knowledge that *day-to-day care* of our testimonies is essential—they grow or decay. There is no standing still. As I practiced repentance, I felt a freeing power, which grew in renewed direction through constant prayer and scripture study.

One year later, I again found myself on my knees in a clothes closet in Virginia. I was fasting and praying specifically about Joseph Smith and the *Book of Mormon* so that I could be converted as Nephi was, with an ability to testify with boldness and surety. I had to know if the Priesthood power had been restored, if Christ truly was at the head of this church and if the correct authority to baptize was restored to the earth. Since all of these questions hinge on whether or not Joseph Smith was a prophet and if the Book of Mormon, which is

evidence of his divine calling, is true, I again asked if this record was correct. As I proceeded to read, I was filled with enlightenment and understanding as the *Book of Mormon* answered specific hardships I was facing. Again, I received a personal witness and communication from my Heavenly Father, and I was ready to serve a mission.

That is my testimony over and over again. The Savior's plan and restored gospel enables us. When you come with a troubled mind, reading the scriptures, going to church and praying will heal the wounded heart and fill spiritual voids with direction and peace that only Christ can give.

Now on a mission, I feel daily experiences adding tremendous depth to my knowledge and beliefs. I now cry out with all my energy of soul and voice: "Come all that are heavy laden. Come to the Savior. Give Him your sins to truly know Him, and follow him through authorized baptism and receive the Holy Ghost, that He may give you rest!"

I know it. I've seen the transformations of those around me, and my own *new* heart. Christ lives. He guides our living prophet today. The *Book of Mormon* adds its witness of the Savior to the Bible as a second testimony of Christ's reality, which answers questions to the soul.

I love this gospel, my Father in Heaven, and my Savior Jesus Christ. In his name and with His help, I strive to declare His words. Amen. (December 2005)



While living in New Zealand with her parents, Lora spoke at the Visitors' Centre on "Why I Believe." When Lora arrived in Dallas, Texas, she was met by her Mission President and his wife, President and Sister Dennis Crockett. President Crockett served his first mission as a young man in New Zealand.



A Spiritual Experience

Esther Shaw

Esther was a participant in the Pageant, Legacy of Faith, the 150 Year History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in New Zealand, presented in 2004 at the Founders Theatre

Hello! Last year I performed in a pageant that was presented to the New Zealand public about how the *Restored Gospel*, predicted by the New Zealand natives, was brought here 150 years before to our forefathers who eventually built us a temple.

Although my mother's forefathers came from New Zealand (from America) , I and my father and his forefathers were born in part of Yugoslavia. Since before I was born, Yugoslavia was Communist and didn't allow foreign religions to be taught there. But my father and mother had a quarrel and got divorced and it was a really sad time. And my mother decided to return to New Zealand and also brought my brother and me over. We came by ship, the way most people traveled then. It took us two months.

I was very scared. I thought I would never see my father again and was too frightened to find out. Living here in New Zealand since then, I found the restored gospel many years later, which told me I may certainly see my Heavenly Father again with all of my righteous ancestors and return to live with Him forever. It gave me the courage not to be afraid of speaking openly, which had been the desire of my heart. Our good words and works are recorded in heaven by the angels there no matter what happens to us.

In the pageant I played the part of an immigrant which is what I was, coming here to New Zealand when I was little. But being in this pageant taught me more about Heavenly Father's love and how well the old prophets knew us all and could see us in our day. In the pageant, it spoke from the Bible where the old Prophet Isaiah foretold that in these latter-days God would gather Israel from the four quarters of the earth and make the sea their path, because He promised great blessings and salvation to and through them who are upon the isles of the sea. I came here, just like Isaiah said, to this island in the sea using the sea as my path on an ocean liner. Two thousand seven hundred and fifty years ago, Isaiah prophesied these things even though he had never seen big ocean liners or even the big ship that Nephi built in his day.

This pageant helped me to see that even when we are afraid we are losing something in this life, God is actually bringing a great blessing to us. If only I knew when I was little that I would be learning about Jesus and my Heavenly Father by coming to New Zealand, then I wouldn't be so afraid and upset. I might have even been quite excited. Yugoslavia, to this day, has only about one small branch of the church in it, and only recently, because after Communism ended, the country went to war with itself. This pageant has helped me appreciate better the good things God has in store for all of us.

“Why I Believe”

Lisa Skea

A Convert and a Returned Missionary from Tonga. Married to Michael Skea and a young mother of two boys.



(. . .That night, I found myself on my bedroom floor with my Book of Mormon, praying for help. . . Believing is everything. And with a sincere heart, I asked Heavenly Father, “Please show me inside this Book of Mormon what I have to do. I am going to open it three times and the first verses that I spot can help me.”. . .)

I’m grateful for the program of *Why I Believe*. That gives me an opportunity to share with you my story. My name is Petulisa Skea. I grew up with goodly Christian parents, wonderful close brothers and sisters, in the beautiful island of Vava’u in Tonga. I was raised up in my father’s religion—the Tonga Hou’eiki Church. It taught me there the importance of reading *The Bible*. We memorized some of whole chapters for a big church event once a year. It was kind of like a competition for the best scripture chapter’s mastery, and I was one of the best in my age group. When I think back about it, I memorized the scriptures, but I didn’t really understand their meaning.

In part of my father’s tradition, we had to attend church meetings every Sunday—10 a.m. to 12 noon and 4 p.m. to 5 p.m.—and on Monday, Wednesday, Friday from 5 to 6 a.m. every week. He believed that if we attend all the church meetings, *the Lord will never forget or let anything bad happen to us; and we will always be safe and blessed*. I still live with what he said, and I’m grateful for all the teaching he raised me with.

My father had a bad experience, and he never let us have anything to do with the Mormon Church, and if we did, we would be disowned. In my young woman time, a loving role model lady relative, Etta Harris, invited me to a ward conference, and I loved it! It was not because I felt the Spirit, but I loved the way people dressed (with much modesty). Whether they know you or not, they just come, introduce themselves, give you hug and kiss and get to know you! That was beautiful!

The second time she invited me was stake conference. After the stake conference, the whole week I felt inside of my heart that there is something so beautiful about the Mormon Church, but still I didn’t know anything about it. Mostly, all the time I went to the Mormon Church was just to find out what is so bad in there that made my dad hate it so much.

Every Sunday my dad's church started at 10 a.m and ended at twelve noon. After church, I asked permission to stop by and visit relative friends, but I didn't go there. I walked fifty-five minutes to a Mormon ward chapel that started at one p.m. for their sacrament meeting. I only went to that one meeting before I rushed home. Otherwise, someone would find out. I kept continually going to two different churches every Sunday for six months, and then I had enough. I thought to myself, "I'm tired of hiding my feelings of loving to go to the Mormon Church." So one day, I was walking down the road, and I met a missionary. I didn't know what got into me, but believe it or not, I offered myself to the missionary to baptise me. Of course it was "Yes." I was baptised into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in December 1991, and confirmed too. And the missionaries asked me to be at church on Sunday to sustain me as a new member. But it didn't happen. At that same week, my dad *crowned* me for being friends with Mormon people and would not allow me to visit anyone unless I was with a member of my family.

Well, for a long time I never was able to go to the Mormon Church until 1994—three years after I was baptised. Etta Harris offered me a job at her grocery shop, and I began to go with her to church. For some reason, (on a small island), my dad found out that I was already baptised in the church. Well, I got a bad hiding, and he brought me home.

That night, I found myself on my bedroom floor with my *Book of Mormon*, praying for help. When I prayed, I told Heavenly Father, "I love the Mormon Church, and I don't want to disappoint my family too." While I was praying, I thought of the story of Joseph Smith and how Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ showed themselves to him when he prayed and asked for help. I knew they wouldn't show themselves to me, but with the *Book of Mormon*, they would talk to me. Believing is everything. And with a sincere heart, I asked Heavenly Father, "Please show me inside this *Book of Mormon* what I have to do. I am going to open it three times and the first verses that I spot can help me."

While I still had my eyes closed, I picked up my Book of Mormon and opened it, and the first verse I spotted was Mosiah 24:14:

And I will also ease the burdens which are put upon your shoulders, that even you cannot feel them upon your backs, even while you are in bondage, and this will I do that ye may stand as witnesses for me here after, and that ye may know of a surety that I the Lord God, do visit my people in their afflictions.

I didn't really understand the *Book of Mormon* at all, but for that verse to me, I knew God was with me right in that moment, and He promised here in this verse that He would help me to ease my burdens. I opened the *Book of Mormon* for the second time, and I found Moroni 7:17:

I beseech of you, that ye should search diligently in the light of Christ that ye may know good from evil; and if ye will lay hold upon every good thing, and condemn it not, ye certainly will be a child of Christ.

I kept reading over and over this verse, and to make more understanding to me, I came up with my own meaning: *I will use my agency to make decisions based on what I think is right. If I know everything about the Mormon Church is true (and that's the good) and forget about what my dad or family are thinking, it's*

only me who can make myself become a child of Christ. I believe I'm still searching to know all the good from evil, but in that moment I finally said to myself, "I choose to belong to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints no matter what the punishment my family will give me, and that will make me a child of God."

The last and third time I opened the *Book of Mormon* I found Alma 37:47, and all I could see was, *Look to God and live. Go unto this people and declare the word.* To me, it was just like He told me straight to go on a mission. That's the only thing that I can do to become a Mormon in my life. I got all the answers for my problems, and I felt alive. Like it says: *No problem is too small for Heavenly Father's attention nor so large that He cannot answer the prayer of faith.* I know I can pray, and you can pray with purpose when you realize who you are and what Heavenly Father wants you to become.

In 26 January 1996 - 2 August 1997, I served my mission in Nukualofa, Tonga. My family wasn't happy with me, but I told my dad, "Live or die, I'm going to be a missionary of the Mormon Church." I guess at that time, he finally realized that He couldn't do anything to stop me. And before I left to the airport, his last words were, "I rather have you return in a coffin, than you return home and not finish your mission!" I put his words in my heart, and it helped me through to complete my mission time (eighteen months). After my mission, the Lord blessed me and my family to be closer again like nothing had happened. My dad was proud of me and of all the change in me. And he let me attend all my church meetings freely without any fear.



And to all of you who have a similar story to me, don't be scared to do the right thing because the Lord will always be there to help you, like He helped me. Everything will be rewarded. In August 1999, I was blessed with a worthy priesthood holder, a returned missionary, Michael Andrew Skea, who took me to the temple to be sealed for time and all eternity. We have two sons. The first one, Dayton, was born on 22 November 2001. Heavenly Father needed him more than we did. And the second one is Aidan. He was born on 3 January 2003. He brings so much joy into our lives. And I'm proud to say that we are really happy with all the blessings that the Lord has blessed us with. And not only that, my mother Petesa was baptised into the church in June 2004.



Why I believe? It is my choice to believe. Missionaries taught me everything about the gospel. You and I are the ones to read the *Book of Mormon*. The choice is up to you and me to start to prepare and find our way to go back and stay with Heavenly Father forever. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

(Presented at the Visitors' Centre 18 April 2004)



Why I Believe Dirk Smibert

**President, New Zealand Auckland
Mission, July 2002 – July 2005**

Some time ago, I received a letter from a troubled missionary who was struggling with his testimony as a result of being confronted by a man who he described as a scholar of the Bible, who tried to prove him wrong and destroy his faith. Writing to me for some help and assurance he asked me to tell him how I gained my testimony. I have felt inclined to share the response I gave him with each of you.

Dear Elder XYZ,

When I arrived home last night I received your personal letter. Thank you for sharing with me your inner-most feelings. I felt a deep sense of empathy for you, but I do not feel any unnecessary concern as I am absolutely confident that your experience is but a catalyst for you to develop unshaken faith and a sure testimony that will be a blessing to you as a missionary and throughout your life. You've had only mild opposition to your beliefs in the past, never a test of this magnitude. I am not surprised that it should come to you now at the beginning of your mission. Let me share with you the following quote, which I think is most pertinent and timely. It is an excerpt from a letter written by President Heber C. Kimball to his son William on a mission in England. (*Millennial Star Volume 17, p.315-316*)

"Now William be of good cheer for the Lord our God is your friend, and He will sustain you. Open your mouth and it will be filled with wisdom and with truth. Trouble not yourself about others because they are more eloquent in speech than you are. These things tickle the ear, but it is the TRUTH, the plain unvarnished truth, which like a two-edged sword pierces the heart; and one man or woman brought into the fold by the truth is of Israel, while tickling the ear by sophistry is apt, very apt to bring in pests or hypocrites.

"Now you know well, that when I was called by the Prophet Joseph Smith to open the door of proclamation to England, it was the first foreign mission known in this Church. I had not, at the time, the education that you have; neither did I know and understand one-tenth part of what you did previous to your going on your mission. I was illiterate and unlearned, weak and feeble, and felt as though I was the weakest of all. Many times I thought to myself, "Why should I, so weak an instrument, be called to such an important work", while there are many who were LEARNED AND COULD SPEAK WITH ALL THE ELOQUENCE OF ARTIFICIAL EDUCATION?"

I said to myself many times, "I should have sooner thought it might have been Orson Hyde or Willard Richards," who had the education of the world. Still the Lord had appointed me to head that important mission, with all my weaknesses.

"You well know the Lord says He will take the worm of Jacob, and thrash the mountains; and take the unlearned and the illiterate to bring to naught the Wisdom and LEARNING OF THIS WORLD. When I was in England, with all my weaknesses, I relied wholly on God, that He would USE ME FOR HIS PURPOSES: SO I WAS LIKE A FIDDLE

IN THE HANDS OF GOD - Instead of my dictating the fiddler, the Lord directed the tune, and played as seemed to Him good, for HE KNEW THE WORDS REQUIRED TO CONVINCe THE TRUE ISRAELITES."

You asked me in your letter to relate how I gained my testimony. Well, I think much like you, in that I don't ever remember not knowing that Heavenly Father and Jesus live and that they love me. I've always believed that, and that the church is true. I was taught these truths as part of my upbringing, for which I am ever grateful. As a child my testimony was small and simple. It is still simple but now very strong. It grew much like the seed referred to in Chapter 32 of Alma. As I have gained life's experiences, so my knowledge and conviction has grown accordingly. The Lord said, "If ye shall do His will, ye shall know of the Doctrine..." (*John 7:17*) I have found that to be true. As I have done His will or "nourished the seed with great care that it may get root" (*Alma 32:37*) my testimony increased accordingly.

There is nothing so powerfully convincing as a witness of the Holy Ghost. The peace, warmth and assurance that the Holy Ghost brings is something I have felt regularly throughout my life. This has been a great blessing to me and motivation to do better. I remember times in my life when my testimony was challenged, especially in the mission field. The initial impact of such a challenge (even when done peaceably or supposedly with innocent intent) brought deep hurt and offence as it invariably led to some sort of criticism of that which I held sacred. I would feel the same as though someone had maligned a member of my family. There were times when my ability to articulate a defence to my belief was lacking and the whole experience would leave me feeling spiritually violated. I believe I can relate to some of the feelings that you may have had.

People can argue doctrine or points of history or interpret the gospel as they may, but one cannot discredit the feelings of the Spirit. I recall numerous experiences in my life when I have felt the Spirit testify of truth. Such times have included attending the temple, sacrament or testimony meetings. I have felt the Spirit on occasions when I have been taught at the feet of the Brethren, participating in an ordinance, or on other sacred personal occasions in my life. I'm not just talking about emotional experiences here, there is a difference between emotion and the very personal sacred spiritual experiences to which I refer. I recall times as a missionary when I recognised the presence of the Spirit as we taught the discussions. We would always try on those occasions to help the people we were teaching to identify it also.

I have also learnt that the Lord doesn't always answer me in accordance with my proposed timetable (which I usually want, here & now!!) I have also realised that when I ask for an answer that He has already given me, rather than receiving it again, I am instead reminded of His original answer or the prompting I had previously received.

A good example of this principle is found in the Doctrine and Covenants Section 6 verses 22 and 23. Here the Lord is speaking to Oliver Cowdery when he was seeking a further witness to something the Lord had already given him.

22. Verily, verily, I say unto you, if you desire a further witness, cast your mind upon the night that you cried unto me in your heart, that you might know concerning the truth of these things.

23. Did I not speak peace to your mind concerning the matter? What greater witness can ye have than from God?

My personal experience has generally been that when I pray for direction or an answer from the Lord, I don't receive visions or bolts of lightning—I usually just feel right about it - nothing fancier than that. The outcome is not always as I would expect but I have often come to know, and sometimes well after the event, that it was right.

Some years ago while I was serving on the Stake Presidency struggling to find the right person to fulfil a particular calling, I remember praying about it and receiving a distinct impression who should be called. I discussed the name in Stake Presidency and received the sustaining of the High Council and then went out to extend the call. During the preliminary chat, the person opened up and tearfully confessed a major transgression. I was able to give the necessary

counsel and get the Bishop involved to assist in the repentance process. I remember driving home and questioning how I could have got it so wrong. I distinctly felt impressed of the Lord to call this person. Then it came to me. My interviewing this person was perhaps the only way that he would be placed in a position to relieve himself of the burden he was carrying. He had resisted for some months coming forward of his own volition. The Lord prompted me to fulfil His purposes, not mine. He has the greater vision. Was I prompted? Yes I was. The Lord's agenda was different to mine, but the prompting was real.

I am aware of a wonderful young family who the missionaries are currently teaching. Last week as they were being taught the second discussion, the man stopped the missionaries and asked, "Can you feel what I'm feeling? It's a calm, warm and peaceful feeling, it's wonderful." He then added, "In all my religious experience I can only remember two other occasions that I have felt like that before. One was last Sunday at church and the other was when I was about two or three years old sitting on my mother's knee as she read to me stories from her bible."

I have found that when the truth is taught with the Spirit, it is always accompanied by feelings of peace, warmth and love. I have never felt uncomfortable or "spiritually violated" by hearing true doctrine or pure testimony.

Brigham Young said:

"I had only travelled a short time to testify to the people, before I learned this one fact, that you might prove doctrine from the Bible till doomsday, and it would merely convince a people, but it would not CONVERT them. You might read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation and prove every iota that you advance, and that alone would have not a converting influence upon the people. Nothing short of TESTIMONY BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY GHOST WOULD BRING LIGHT AND KNOWLEDGE TO THEM AND BRING THEM IN THEIR HEARTS TO REPENTANCE. Nothing short of that would ever do. You have frequently heard me say that I would rather hear an Elder, here or in the world, speak only five words accompanied by the power of God, and they would do more good than to hear long sermons without the spirit. That is true and we know it." (President Brigham Young Discourses pg.507)

If the gospel is to be preached to "every nation, kindred, tongue and people," then there must be a universal means for all to receive and accept it. If that were by means of intellect or education, there would be disparity, for there are great intellectuals but there are also many who are ignorant and uneducated. Common to us all, however, is the potential to receive a witness to our heart from the Holy Ghost.

So what about your spiritual witness. It would seem to me that you would have had similar witnesses to me when I was your age, and probably more, but you may not yet have recognised them as such. Without meaning to be presumptuous, allow me to personalise to you the words the Lord gave to Oliver Cowdery:

Elder XYZ, if you desire a further witness, cast your mind upon the night you cried to me in your heart (or cast your mind to some other meaningful experience). Did I not speak peace to your mind concerning the matter? What greater witness can you have than from God?

Heavenly Father lives, I know it. Our Saviour Jesus Christ died for all mankind. His love is unto all. He restored His gospel through the Prophet Joseph Smith. His gospel shall be preached to "every nation, kindred, tongue and people" and ultimately "every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is the Christ." Your task and mine is to "Bring souls unto Christ" that they may live in accordance to His true gospel.

I know He is mindful of you, and if you haven't already, you will recognise His personal witness to you, His chosen son.

Love, President Smibert



Why I Believe

Kerry Smibert

**(wife of Auckland New Zealand Mission President
Dirk Smibert) (2002-2005)**

When I was seven years old, two missionary sisters were tracting on our street and knocked on our door. I opened the door, but as my father was teaching drum students in our lounge room, I could not hear what they were saying. My mother invited them inside, and their conversation led our family to hear the missionary lessons. I remember clearly the feelings I had as I sat on our lounge room floor and listened to them teach that God and Jesus Christ appeared to the young man Joseph Smith. The spirit confirmed to me at that young age that what the missionaries had taught was true, and I have never doubted the reality of it.

From that time, I grew up with the blessing of living in a home where we learned together how to pray, read the scriptures, attend church, and have family home evenings. We held cottage meetings in our home where our family invited other new members to join us and answered the questions that all who embrace the gospel have. Our family came over to New Zealand to be sealed in the Temple, and I remember the feeling of kneeling together around the altar all dressed in white. What a great blessing it has been to me being a part of a *forever family*.

Attending Primary, Young Women's, Seminary, and Relief Society have been growing, learning times for me, as has serving as a missionary—twice in New Zealand. All of these experiences and opportunities have come because of my membership in this Church, and because of my testimony that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is indeed the Kingdom of God on earth and that He is our loving Father. He sent His son to provide a way for us all to return to live with Him again. The Saviour Jesus Christ atoned for each one of us, and that has become very personal to me. I know that the witness of the spirit planted in the heart of a simple seven-year-old child has grown because of the blessing of living the gospel of Jesus Christ as He has restored it to the earth in these latter days!! Living is Believing!! (*John 7:17*).

September 2005



Why I Believe

Bonnie Smibert

(teenage daughter of Mission President Dirk Smibert)

The answer to the question *Why I Believe* can best be summed up in a letter I wrote to my parents last Christmas (2004) as follows:

Mum and Dad,

As I searched for the perfect gift for the two of you this year, nothing seemed to express how I feel and just how much I love you.

One night while lying awake in bed, the thought came that the best present I could give you is a letter—a letter expressing my love and gratitude for you both. Also, especially at this special Christmas time, my testimony.

Firstly, I want to thank you with all my heart for bringing me up in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Not only for teaching through words, but being the most amazing examples of what this gospel is really about—by living it everyday. Thank you. I'm thankful for all the experiences that you give me. This last two and a half years certainly has had its challenges ... as I'm sure you realise. But I want to thank you for this opportunity. I hope that I take advantage of this experience and lesson to learn and grow from, as I know it will, and has, changed my life. I have loved watching you teach and lead these servants of the Lord. Your strength, patience, obedience... continue to amaze me. Thank you both for serving the Lord with such diligence.

I also wanted to share with you this Christmas something that I hold dear and to be the most precious gift I could give you—my testimony. I only wish I could express in words the feelings of my heart and the spirit I feel as I think of what I know to be true and am so grateful for. I feel so blessed and my heart is truly full as I think of all that I know and have.

Firstly, I know without a doubt that I have a Father in Heaven and a brother and Saviour Jesus Christ. I know that they are real and that they love me so much. I have felt their presence in my life so strongly. I'm so grateful for the part that the spirit plays in my life—that feeling of peace, comfort and continued reassurance, of my knowledge that my Heavenly Father loves me and answers and listens to my prayers. How grateful I am for prayer. That communication is such a blessing one so frequently uses, that I can't imagine life without it. I also testify of the great eternal appreciation and knowledge I have of the atoning sacrifice that the Saviour has made. Through him I am made whole, and he has made it possible for me to experience eternal happiness. It is so wonderful to think of Christ as my brother. I have such a great love and appreciation for him and his love. Oh how I wish I were (and am working hard to become) more Christ-like. What a perfect example he is.

As I continue to learn and study the scriptures, I am never filled with any doubt that what I read is true. The spirit so strongly testifies of its truth. I know that, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is true. How grateful I am that it has been restored to the earth at this time. How lucky I am. I know that it is the true church and has been restored by a true prophet, a man called of God. Joseph Smith saw what he said he saw. How grateful I am for his faith and obedience and that he restored this gospel, and with that, brought forth the Book of Mormon. I know that this book is true. I know it. Thank you for making it a part of my life

I also want to thank you for your worthiness to be sealed in the temple. I am so grateful for the closeness of our family. I have such a love for each member in it. How grateful I am that we are eternal—wouldn't want it any other way. I want you both to know just how much I love you. I have a strong testimony of this gospel and I want to thank you for rearing me in righteousness and truth. I am excited for what adventures the future will bring....I'm sure there will be many! Thank you so much for your amazing examples.

Mum, I hope to be just like you one day and to marry a man just like Dad. How excited I am to practice in my own home what you have taught by example all these years. I love you both so very much, thank you for everything.

I say these things in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Much love from your daughter,
Bonnie

Since writing this letter my testimony has become even stronger as I continue to learn and continue to recognise Christs influence in my life. (September 2005)

Why I Believe

Ngatai Smith

(Hillcrest Institute Director – Hamilton, New Zealand)



Ever since I was a young boy I was surrounded by good people who loved the Lord. I could tell by the way they looked after each other and tried to live good lives – none more so than my mother.

My father was a great provider and a gentle dad. He found great joy in his sport and the simple things in life. He was in many ways a stabilizing influence in my younger years. He was a hard worker. He never missed a church meeting, fulfilled his church callings and did his home teaching every month. So, what I saw him do I did. When he left the house for a meeting, I was right behind him. I will always be grateful to my dad for his example of duty.

My mother was my inspiration to want to “live” the gospel. She was the best teacher and made the stories and scriptures come alive. She is the reason why when so young in testimony I tried to do what was right. I didn’t always do so but I tried and her influence was always with me.

As a teenager I attended boarding school. I took with me what I learned from my parents. I began to add my own learning and experiences to my growing testimony. I graduated from High School and went on to University and my knowledge grew that God lived and that Jesus Christ was his son and my personal friend and Savior.

I met and married the most special young lady while still a student and we began our life together. The following year, we started our family and raised them in the gospel. All my early training in the church, knowledge gained and life experiences helped prepare me to be a husband and Father. We have been sealed in the Temple and are into our 34th year of eternity together. I have enjoyed every day with my sweetheart and family. We have five special children born in the covenant and have a grandson due October 1st.

Why I believe? Because I have over the years had personal experiences that have confirmed to me that God lives and that He loves me. Because I have had the warm assurance that Jesus is the Christ, my Elder brother and my Savior and that His atonement is central to carrying out Heavenly Father’s Plan for me, my family and all mankind. Because the spirit has confirmed to me personally that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints is truly His church. Because I have felt the warm assurance that the boy Joseph (Smith) did see the Father and Son in a vision, that he did translate the Book of Mormon from gold plates given to him by the Angel Moroni, that he was pivotal in setting up the Church and that he died as he lived – a true prophet of God. And because God loves us still, he continues to guide us by revelation through His living Prophets today.

With all the strength and soul I possess I encourage you to listen with an open heart then ask God yourself if what I have said and what you have heard is true.

May the Lord bless you in your sincere search for the truth.

Ngatai Smith JP, Presently Hillcrest Institute Director and Employment Coordinator – Church Education System
(August 2005)

“WHY I BELIEVE”

Hori Solomon

**(Descendent of Ihaka Tatu Whaanga of
Ngatikahungunu Tribe)**



The first vision of the prophet Joseph Smith brought about great excitement in 1820 when God the Father and Jesus Christ appeared to him. Whoever would have thought that the Lord in his wisdom and power would inspire Maori leaders during this same period of time, especially when Maori were raging war one with another. Whoever would have thought that in 1887, the Maori not only would receive the Book of Mormon but also would receive it written in their own tongue, and they would learn that it contained a record of their brothers, the Lamanites and Nephites, and that the record linked them back to ancient America and back to Israel itself. Why would the Lord in his wisdom see fit that the Maori would people the land at the end of the South Pacific? What was his reasoning, and why would messengers come from the East carrying the everlasting truths of the gospel to New Zealand?

The answer is clear in my mind as to the thinking of the Almighty. Firstly, he loves us. By blood, we are the children of Israel. He has preserved us. His intentions were not only to educate us but to *fine tune* us—to take us out of grass skirts and to clothe us—to replace the weapons of war that we held in hand so tightly and to replace them with a more peaceful, greater, powerful weapon in hand that would carry an eternal edge, that being the Book of Mormon.

The Book of Mormon was first published in 1830. A forefather of mine, Arama Toiroa of Mahia, East Coast of New Zealand, prophesied back in 1830 that messengers would arrive in this land, coming from the East, that they would travel in pairs, that they would teach the gospel in the language of the Maori, and that they would pray amongst them. Churches at this time were already established. However, the people asked Arama which church they should join. Arama urged his people to be patient and wait and remember the prophecy he had explained to them. Arama informed his people that they would recognise these messengers when they came. He further explained that, in time, one among them would go in the same direction that the messengers had come.

My ancestral line from my grandmother Isabella Henrietta Christy is where I link up to my forefather, Ihaka Tatu Whaanga, one of the last paramount chiefs of the Ngatikahungunu Tribe. On the 4th of July 1808, Ihaka Tatu Whaanga was born at Mahia Peninsula. The prophet Joseph Smith was born on the 23rd December 1805. At a young age, Ihaka's life was spared by the hand of Arama Toiroa, the Tohunga. Ihaka's father, Te Rataau, and six of his brothers, including Ihaka, had left the shores of Waikawa Island - Portland Island - in their waka on the promise of receiving a gun. In 1844, the prophet Joseph Smith was shot dead with a gun similar to that of what Te Rataau was going to receive, as he thought. Arama Toiroa could sense imminent danger ahead. He swam out to the waka and grabbed the child Ihaka off

the waka. TeRataau, along with his five sons were killed. Ihaka's life was saved, and he was raised by Arama the Tohunga.

I believe the Lord had a hand in saving Ihaka's life, as the most part of his life was spent on the warpath trying to bring and establish peace and harmony among his people and to stop the shedding of blood among Maori. In August 1872 he was presented with a *Sword of Honour* by Sam Locke on behalf of Queen Victoria of England for his service to the Crown. In his own right he was a peacemaker as he rode with the Red Coat soldiers—not as a traitor, but to stop the shedding of blood among his people, as he could sense that continued war would obliterate the Maori Race.

Ihaka's first wife's name was Ka Te Haka Rakatoa, to which a son, Hirini Te Rito Whaanga, was born in 1828. In May 1829, John the Baptist appeared to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery and confirmed upon them the Aaronic Priesthood, which held the keys of baptism by immersion. The latter part of that year, three of Christ's original apostles (Peter, James, and John) appeared to Joseph and Oliver and confirmed upon them the Melchizedek Priesthood. In 1830, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was organised by the Prophet Joseph Smith in the state of New York in America. Hirini Whaanga would have been about two years of age.

In 1846, President Brigham Young was preparing the saints to leave Nauvoo to trek to the great Salt Lake Valley to find peace, to build a temple and to seek a place of refuge for the saints. In 1884, Elder Stewart and companions arrived on the East Coast of New Zealand as part of an evangelistic tour of the area. A grandson of Arama Toiroa was at the meeting and recognised the missionaries as being those spoken of fifty years earlier by his grandfather—those that would bring the true gospel to his people. From this, many Maori were baptised into the church, including Hirini Whaanga, who was well regarded by the missionaries and who became a popular speaker at church conferences. Hirini was baptized on the 30th of November 1884.

In 1893, Hirini desired to travel to Zion and carry out temple work in Utah (America). Brothers and sisters and even grandchildren protested against it. Finally, Hirini reminded them of the words of Arama Toiroa that "one would cross the waters to the land from whence the gospel messengers came." When they were reminded of the prophecy, the people consented, and Hirini and his family departed on the ship the *Manowai* to Zion, where he laboured in the temple for the salvation of the dead. Hirini returned back to New Zealand under the direction of the First Presidency to fulfill a mission at the age of sixty-nine to seventy years old. He gathered a lot of genealogy while back in New Zealand. However his mission was shortened, as he had to return back to America in 1899. The same year of his desire in June 1893 to go to Salt Lake, was also the dedication of the Salt Lake Temple on 6th April to 18th May 1893. On 14th January 1893, Hirini was ordained a priest in the Aaronic Priesthood. On October 17th 1905, he passed away and is currently buried alongside his great wife Mere Eia (Mete) nee Smith in the Salt Lake City Cemetery.

My heart is full of love and appreciation at this time for my forefathers whom I believe the Lord moved upon to establish his gospel in this part of his vineyard. My heart weepeth and my mind is clear, my emotions swell deep within and I am filled with the comforting feelings of the Holy Ghost as I write a

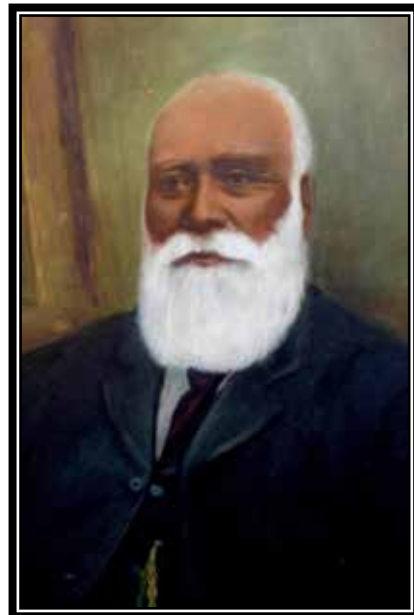
part of history in regard to my ancestors. I get the impression of total assurance that Joseph Smith and Ihaka Whaanga definitely knew each other in the pre-existence. Joseph Smith, born 23rd December 1805, and Ihaka born 4th July 1808. As good friends talk, I wonder if Joseph mentioned to Ihaka in the pre-existence words to this effect:

Ihaka, I will be going to America; I will be called to be the modern day Prophet and will be the prophet to whom is restored the gospel of Jesus Christ back to the earth. I will be responsible also for bringing forth the Book of Mormon, which contains a record of your people and the Lord's dealings with them. It will contain truth and light to those who are obedient to the commandments.

On the 23rd December 1805, Joseph Smith left the pre-existence to begin his earthly mission in America. The Prophet Joseph Smith died on June 27th 1844, in Carthage Jail, shot dead. On the 4th July 1808, Ihaka left the pre-existence to begin his earthly mission in Aotearoa—Te Mahia, New Zealand. Ihaka died in 1875 in a house fire at Maungakahia, Te Mahia. Born in 1828, Hirini left the pre-existence to begin his earthly mission. He died on 17th October 1905.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the true church of God. We are children of Heavenly Father created in his express image. Joseph Smith indeed was a prophet of God. The Book of Mormon is the word of God, which contains a history of my forefathers. I testify that this will all be revealed, when we all one day return to the presence of God. There is a living prophet on the earth today— his name is Gordon B. Hinckley. God continues to guide man today through prophets as he did anciently. I bear testimony of this in His Holy Name, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Hori Solomon (Presented at Visitors' Centre August 2004)



Hirini
and
Mere
Whaanga

Why I Believe

Ivory Tangaroa



(A fifth generation member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints here in New Zealand)

My name is Atareta Ivory Tangaroa (nee Meha). I am from a family of ten—five girls and three boys, including Mum and Dad, Stuart Rewi Tapsell Meha and Annie Dorothy White. I was born in Hastings but brought up in Dannevirke—a small Danish town in central Hawkes Bay, New Zealand. I am a fifth generation member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

My Maori tribal links are Ngati Porou, East Coast, TeArawa Rotorua, Ngati Kahungunu and Rangitane Hawkes Bay, and Tainui Waikato. My patriarchal link is the Tribe of Manasseh, the eldest son of Joseph who was sold into Egypt. I married in 1960. My husband, TeNaera Tangaroa, and I moved to live in Temple View about 1966. We have three children and ten grandchildren.

My testimony of the Gospel as a child was a *pick-a-back* one of my parents. In my younger years I would just sort of repeat the same words, like every other kid my age did! In my late teen years I gained a testimony for myself. I was blessed with very faithful parents. They were always in church activities. My mother was Relief Society President, always doing a service for others. I learnt to be of service by going with her.

My testimony grew from strength to strength through church activities, accepting positions, working with dedicated leaders, studying the scriptures in our home, and attending Seminary classes. Doug Strother was a very dynamic teacher. Elder Matthew Cowley was the Mission President of New Zealand. He would speak of lots of faith promoting experiences in our church meetings. He spent a lot of time in the home of my husband's grandparents' home in Tahoraiti Pah, Dannevirke. This home was a "Mission Home" to many missionaries who traveled from Wellington to Auckland or vice versa. Many church leaders like Apostles and Prophets also stayed here. Throughout my Primary, MIA, and adult years I was taught by great teachers. Their teachings also built my testimony.

In 1952, President David O. McKay visited New Zealand to find a place to build a temple. His wife and party traveled from Wellington and stopped to rest at my husband's grandparents' home. This was a great thrill for us all. We young ladies performed a Maori welcome for them. We served

food and drink to them, and then gathered around the Prophet and his wife for photos. We could talk of nothing else for days after!!

A few days later, I traveled to Hastings as a youth speaker at a youth conference there. Imagine everyone's surprise and delight when it was announced that the Prophet would also be attending the conference. As he walked in the hall, the spirit was electrifying! We all arose and sang *We Thank Thee O God For a Prophet*. From our seats we could just see this mass of white hair. It was a very emotional experience for us all!

But I still had to give my speech! And I was feeling very nervous as I stood to go to the mike. I glanced over at the Prophet, and he gave me a big smile, and a warm feeling of confidence came over me, and I was able to give my speech. In fact, I don't remember walking to the microphone or giving the speech!!!



With my husband, I served a mission at the New Zealand Temple Visitors' Centre for three years. My testimony went from strength to strength as we conducted tours through the Centre and talked to visitors about the Gospel. We are now currently serving a service mission in the New Zealand Auckland Mission under the direction of first, President Smibert, and now, President Cook.

Over the years, my testimony has been strengthened from many faith promoting experiences. As a temple ordinance worker the spiritual experiences have been numerous and so uplifting in my life. I love the Gospel—even more so, I love Joseph Smith and his teachings, his life, and his translation of the Book of Mormon. I love dearly my husband who is indeed a *Man of Faith* who loves the scriptures and spends hours studying them. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

(Sister Ivory Tangaroa, October 2005)

Elder and Sister Tangaroa and others who participated in the 2004 Pageant, Legacy of Faith



Why I Believe

Todd and Alesi Taylor

Todd is presently serving as a Bishop of Chartwell Ward, New Zealand. Todd is from Utah and Alesi is from Fiji—they met at BYU-Hawaii



Todd:

In the United States, there is a popular radio presenter named Paul Harvey. His hallmark routine is to refer to a story that is already commonly known amongst the radio audience and then to give some very interesting details to the story that are not commonly known. He always concludes his radio programs with the words “and now you know the rest of the story.”

Well, tonight, my wife, Alesi may have told you a little bit about how we met and why *she asked me* to marry her, but the way I tell it is much more interesting. And then “you’ll know the rest of the story.”

Alesi, our four children and I have been in New Zealand since the beginning of 2003. We moved here, so I could attend law school at the University of Waikato. I was born and raised in St. George, Utah. I graduated from high school in 1988 and served a mission in Chile from 1989 to 1991. Upon returning from my mission, I attended and graduated from a two-year university called Dixie State College and then went to BYU-Provo for a couple of semesters and then decided to finish my education at BYU-Hawaii, where I graduated with a degree in accounting.

While attending BYU-Hawaii, I got a job as a canoe-pusher at the Polynesian Cultural Center. For those who are not familiar with the Polynesian Cultural Center, it’s a Church-owned theme park that works in conjunction with and is located next to the university. Within the Center, there are seven sections that have been built up to look like and function as a traditional village from each of the major Polynesian islands, which include Samoa, New Zealand, Fiji, Hawaii, Tahiti, Marquesas and Tonga. These villages are all connected by a manmade lagoon, and it was my job to push a canoe loaded with tourists past each of the villages, while giving a brief explanation of the different cultures.

At this same time, Alesi was working in the Fijian village, where she would put on shows for tourists, explaining and demonstrating the customs, songs and dances unique to the Fijian culture. It’s important that I provide you with this context, lest you get the wrong idea when I tell you that when Alesi and I met, she was a showgirl, and I was a pusher!

Alesi was born and raised in Fiji. Her full name is Adi Alesi Waqanivalagi Sovasova Taylor, which translated means *Lady Alice Boat-of-an-Englishman Basket-Basket Seamstress*. But, we like to call her Alesi. We were married in the St. George Temple in 1994 and have managed to have four children, each one being born on a separate land mass. Our oldest daughter, Keikikalani, was born in Oklahoma (North American Continent); our second daughter, Lavenia, was born in the Hawaiian Islands; our first son, Talmage, was born in the Fijian Islands; and our youngest daughter, Lomani, was born here on the North Island of New Zealand. While this diverse trend makes for great conversation, I wouldn't recommend it to anyone, because I still want at least three or four more children, and we are running out of places to have them. If we stay in New Zealand, we may need to spend some time in the South Island!

We have had many interesting experiences living in all these places. In each place, we have been taught lessons by the Lord that have strengthened our testimonies and helped us to find greater happiness through living the gospel.

The theme for this fireside series is "Why I Believe." I want to answer that question tonight. But, I would like to preface that with two additional questions:

1. What does it mean to "believe?" Dictionary definition: Mental acceptance of and conviction in the truth, actuality, or validity of something.
2. What do I believe?
 - a. God lives and we are his children.
 - b. Jesus is the Son of God and Savior of mankind.
 - c. God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ actually appeared to Joseph Smith at the age of fourteen and called him to be the prophet and to restore the true Church of Jesus Christ to the earth.
 - d. The Book of Mormon is the true word of God.
 - e. The Church is lead today by prophets, seers and revelators.

One might ask the question, "If we are all God's children, why is there so much *diversity* amongst us?" Well, it can be shown that *diversity* is actually part of God's plan and that it forms an important part of it.

The word *diversity* comes from the Latin root word of *vertere*, which means "to turn." With the prefix *di-* (as in *di-vert*, *di-verse* or *di-versity*) the word literally means to turn aside from a course or direction. Hence, when we are enjoying a diversion (or having some fun), we are turning our minds away from that which is routine in our lives, and this allows our minds to be distracted and to relax. Or, if something is diverse, it is turned away from being the same as something else—it is thus different.

In the pre-existence, we see how diversity is really a product of our free agency.

Abraham says that "*the Lord had shown unto [him]...the intelligences that were organized before the world was*" (Abraham 3:22).

Joseph Smith taught that

"[God used his] power to institute laws to instruct the weaker intelligences, that they may be exalted with himself, so that they might have one glory upon another, and all that knowledge, power, glory, and intelligence, which is requisite in order to save them" (TPJS, p. 354).

Being free agents, the intelligences' response to these laws was diverse, and this resulted in there being some among them who were noble and great and some among them who were not so noble and great—in accordance with the degree to which they were obedient to the laws of God.

This diversity in progression among God's children in the pre-existence continued to develop and accentuate, allowing each of God's children to become a unique and individual spirit. This uniqueness brought about a diversity in opinions of what to do in response to Heavenly Father's plan, and as we know, some decided to follow Heavenly Father's plan and some decided to reject it and follow Satan. This is an example of how diversity brought about a very important adversity that we needed to face in order to continue our progression. Having decided to follow our Heavenly Father's plan, we were privileged to come to this earth, where we can continue to enjoy diversity. Much of diversity is within righteous boundaries—or spheres—or measures of creation. We have diverse geography, weather, plant and animal life, as well as diverse fellow humans that make life interesting and sometimes challenging, which again brings about adversity (or opposition) crucial to our development.

Though diversity can and should be celebrated, it can also be exaggerated. While the Church encourages individuality and the learning of one's own culture (as demonstrated by its commitment to undertakings such as the Polynesian Cultural Center), there is a line that must not be crossed—when there is a conflict between the traditions of a culture and the will of God. This is where traditions of the fathers must give way to the commandments of God. It can be a very difficult thing for people of a given culture to stay within the bounds required by their baptismal and temple covenants.

There is a unifying fact common to all human existence that brings us all within a single umbrella—that we are all children of God, the Father. There is also a unifying condition to all human existence that likewise puts us all in the same boat—that we are all in need of the Savior's atoning sacrifice in order to be cleansed of our sins and be able to return to the presence of our Heavenly Father.

If anyone asked me, "What do you think of the Kiwis?" I would have to say, "They are great."

If anyone asked me, "What do you think of the Fijians?" I would have to say, "They are great."

If anyone asked me, "What do you think of the Hawaiians?" I would have to say, "They are great."

If anyone asked me, "What do you think of the Chileans?" I would have to say, "They are great."

If anyone asked me, "What do you think of the Americans?" I would have to say, "They are great."

This commonality is a testimony to me of the light of Christ that illuminates all of God's children.

Alesi:

Good evening brothers and sisters. My husband and I are quite honored to be speaking at this fireside tonight. It's wonderful to be here and to fellowship with you all and also to be able to share with you our feelings, our experiences and our testimony of "*why we believe!*" I for one feel very grateful, and I mention *grateful* because first of all this speaking assignment gave me the chance to go back in time and reflect on how my family in Fiji joined the church. And I am also grateful that things happened and turned out the way they did—if not, I would not be standing here today.

As you all know by now, I am originally from Fiji--born and raised. I come from a family of six, two boys and four girls. When we were growing up, both my parents worked—my mother as a nurse, my father in the sugar industry. He actually "worked his way up the ladder" so to speak. He started by doing manual labor, such as loading bags of sugar onto ships and planting and cutting sugar cane. Now, because he did well in school, he was offered an office job not too long after that. From there he moved into the administration part of the sugar industry, did pretty well and was able to offer us children a reasonably good life.

Both my parents came from strong Methodist background, and that's the church we attended. Although, one Sunday I recall, my father and I attended the Catholic Church, and as we were walking out, I asked him why we had gone to the Catholic Church instead of the Methodist Church. He said something like, "all the churches are the same." Little did he know what the Lord had in store for him!

In that same year, November of 1979 (I was only five years old at that time), my family attended a carnival in Suva, the capital city of Fiji. As we were walking around, we came across this booth, a stall where they had on a puppet show. We all thought this was interesting and quite different from the rest of the stalls, so we continued to watch. My father was a little bit too curious so he walked around to the back of the stall to find out *who* was putting on this puppet show. To make a long story short, the show was put on by a bunch of American missionaries from the LDS Church. One of them, Elder Woodbury from Salt Lake City, saw my father standing there, so he came out of the stall and started talking to him. Somehow, they set an appointment for the missionaries to come to our home.

The day arrived. We were all very excited to have these American missionaries in our home. As we were visiting with the missionaries, my Father called from work and said that he was very busy and couldn't make it. Now, the missionaries were smart; they set another appointment. The day arrived, and the same thing happened, so my mother told the missionaries to go ahead and start teaching us the discussions. Every time the missionaries came to our home, my father always had an excuse not to be there.

The last discussion was given—the missionaries challenged my mother and my three older siblings to pray about the things that they'd been taught, and if they felt good about it, then the next step was to prepare for baptism. The missionaries were quite surprised when my mother told them, "We don't need to pray about it; we already know it's true." All they needed now was our father's approval. She told the missionaries to come back later that night and teach my father. Now, she was also smart. She didn't tell my father that the missionaries were coming that night.

Even though I was only five years old at that time, I can still remember quite vividly the events that took place in our home that night and the following evening. That night my father was taught all eight discussions! I recall my mother telling him in front of the missionaries that she and the older kids were going to be baptized with or without him. That must have hit a nerve because after the missionaries left our house that night, my father stayed up all night till the early hours of the morning reading the Book of Mormon. The following evening when the missionaries came, he told them that he had read the Book of Mormon and *felt something* as he read 3 Nephi about the Savior's visit to the American continent. *Not only that*, but he was also ready to be baptized with the rest of family!

The spirit was very much present in our little home that evening. We were also taken back when the missionaries started weeping and crying in front of us. And it's something we like to bring up whenever we get together. We still keep in touch with those two wonderful missionaries and they have become a part of our family. Last year when my youngest sister was called on her mission (she is currently serving in the Wellington, NZ Mission), I sent an e-mail to Elder Woodbury, who baptized my parents and brothers and sisters. I thanked him and his companion for sticking with my father and being patient with him. As a result of their persistence, our family has been blessed significantly. He wrote back and shared his thoughts about my parents—my father specifically, who, sadly, passed away in 1997. I would like to share a piece of what Elder Woodbury said in his e-mail:

Please know that my life has been greatly blessed by you and your family. In 1979 we had an incredible experience watching the Lord soften your father's heart and witness to him the truthfulness of the restored Gospel of Jesus Christ. And your mother was so in-tune, strong and patient while the spirit worked on your father. The strong bond created through that experience together, will last beyond the veil. When I pass away, one of my great joys will be to again greet your father, with his beautiful loving smile, friendly chuckle, and his firm knowledge of the Savior.

One month after my family was baptized, we moved to a smaller island in Fiji which hardly had any members of the church. Most of them had moved to the city. So my Father was called to be the Branch President. The church began to grow slowly. It was amazing to see how the gospel brought a new life to those who joined during that time. Many of those who joined the church at that time were baptized in our family swimming pool and if the pool wasn't working for some reason, baptisms would take place in a nearby river. About eight years later, a District was formed on this island. My Father was called to be the District President. It was a joyous occasion as members gathered to celebrate this milestone on this island.

Two years after that, in 1990, we moved back to the city, back to Suva. A new stake presidency was being formed. There was only one stake in Fiji at that time and my father was called to serve as the second counselor in the Stake Presidency. Four years later, he retired and moved the family to the western side of Fiji—*back to the village* as they would say in Fiji! A new stake was formed for the western side of Fiji. My father felt blessed to serve as the new Stake President. Now, I say this not to be boastful in any way. I wanted to share my fathers experience because that's where my testimony of the gospel started.

My father was happy to serve in any calling he was given, whether it was the hymn book collector, door greeter or Stake President. My parents loved the Lord and I knew that because everything we did revolved

around the church. The gospel became our life and not just a part of it. The gospel gave our lives meaning and direction and also a lot of happiness.

I leaned on my parents' testimony as a child growing up. But it came to a point where I had to find out for myself. I read the Book of Mormon and prayed to know for myself if it was true and if the church was true. And I received a very strong feeling that ***I had always known*** that it was true, and ***that the experiences*** I had growing up in the church, including the example set by my parents, had contributed to my testimony.

I mentioned in the beginning that my parents came from a Methodist background. When they became members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, their families and relatives looked down on them. I am grateful that my parents kept the faith. Now when you go to Fiji, you'll see that I've got aunts, uncles and cousins who have become members of the church. And it's so wonderful to see.

Just as my parents knew the truthfulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ and could not deny it, I too have found out for myself, and I cannot deny it. **I know that God lives. I know that Jesus is the Christ and is our Savior. This is why I believe!**

I share these things with you, with my love, and I do so in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

(September 2005)

Todd and Alesi participated this year in the Readers' Theatres held at the Visitors' Centre (April - December 2005) - "The Family and Friends of the Prophet Joseph Smith." In April, Todd played the part of the Prophet Joseph Smith, and in August, Alesi played the part of Sophronia, Joseph's sister.



Note: Sadly, Alesi passed away after a bout with cancer. She died Nov 30, 2016 at the age of 42.

Why I Believe

Noelene J. Thomson



“ . . . I remember one special conversation I had with my mother. . . She said, ‘Other churches think that they are right, but we know that ours is the true church. Someday the missionaries will come back, and you will have a chance to learn about it.’ These were not just words from her mouth to my ears. It was from her heart and spirit to mine . . .”

My deep gratitude is extended to my great, great grand parents, Soren and Bodil Ericksen, who were among the very early converts to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Denmark in the mid 1800’s, and to my mother Ruby (their great grand daughter) who was my personal introduction to the church.

Along with Soren and Bodil, their six children also entered the waters of baptism. The oldest five were already married and had begun raising their own children. Soren’s plan was for them to all emigrate to Utah. He sadly was exposed to smallpox and told his family he would get it and would die and when that happened, he wanted them to go ahead with their planned emigration. He did die of smallpox and they carried out his wishes. That is, his wife and four of their children and their families did become part of the thousands of pioneers on the trail to Utah. Two of his daughters and their spouses, however decided to come to New Zealand instead, arriving in 1872.

My great grandparents arrived in Napier and settled in Dannevirke owning a few acres of land across the road from where the Latter-day Saint (L.D.S.) chapel now stands. That road, Cole Road, used to be called Mortensen Road, which was named after them. My great grandfather missed living by the sea so later returned to Napier where most of their children stayed. Their granddaughter (my mother), along with her parents and seven sisters, were the only L.D.S. family in Napier in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s. Missionary presence among them was sparse. Most times there were no missionaries there with only the odd pair occasionally passing through.

How fortunate I am to be born to my mother. She was the only one of her siblings, first cousins and second cousins in New Zealand to remain faithful and active in the church. Our family should be one of the large, well known families in the church in this country. I am her only descendant and have never

married. My one brother did not survive the birth process. Two of my cousins have come into the church as converts after they were married and had some of their children.

It is not easy to be a pioneer, especially when you do it alone. Because my father was not yet a member of the L.D.S. church when I was young and then living in Dunedin, my parents agreed not to have me baptized when I became eight years of age, but to allow me to make up my own mind later. When I was still a child, World War II intervened, and all the American missionaries were called home, not returning to the South Island until I was sixteen years old. During those years of my late childhood and early teens in Christchurch there was no church activity. There was not one faithful priesthood holder in the Christchurch area, and my mother and one other female member, a new convert, who shifted from Dunedin to Christchurch, were the only two who would have been active members (if there had been anything to be active in).

During those years, although I knew little more than nothing about the church, I had no doubts whatsoever that it was truly the right church, and I just had to wait to be in it. I remember one special conversation I had with my mother. I was looking at an Articles of Faith card with a picture of a temple on the reverse side, which I came across at home one day, when my mother approached me. I remember well her words to me. She said, "Other churches think that they are right, but we know that ours is the true church. Someday the missionaries will come back, and you will have a chance to learn about it." These were not just words from her mouth to my ears. It was from her heart and spirit to mine, and the Holy Ghost no doubt had a hand in there too.

Since my baptism at age sixteen, I have been a busy active member with no lapses. Although my knowledge and experience of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is broader now, I was just as sure of my testimony that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was the right church when I was a youngster and not even part of it, as I am now.

My father joined the church when I was in my twenties. I didn't have to work to gain my testimony or any part of it—it was always just there. I feel sorry for the many people who have to work, study, struggle and pray to gain their assurance. (January 2006)

Noelene's story of her family's history in the church was one of those portrayed in the Pageant, "Legacy of Faith," which told of the 150 year history of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in New Zealand. (October 2004)





Why I Believe

Alethea Wade

*(17- year old convert in 2005 from Hamilton,
New Zealand)*

I have strong and humble testimony of the truthfulness of this gospel. Jesus is the Christ and has paved the way for us to return to live with our Father in Heaven. The example Christ lived is the image I strive to succeed. He holds all virtue, he is our brother in heaven, he is my best friend, my idol and the personality that lingers near me. I look forward to the day we meet again. The second coming is close, and if we adhere to the council of our prophet and leaders, we can greet Jesus Christ with a smile. In return, his arms will be outstretched—in a warm embrace

Heavenly Father is just that—Our Father in Heaven. He loves us and helps us in times of need. He is always with us, although we may not hear Him at times. He loves us all so much that he has created so many ways and chances for us to return to him. He sent his only begotten son to die for our sins. He gave us breath that we may live. He let us come to this earth to experience immortality, and to bear witness of “free agency.” He wanted it to be our choice to be with him. He loves us so much that He trusted in our free will. Every kind word imaginable doesn’t begin to describe him. He is *where I want to be*.

I have a strong testimony in the Prophet Joseph Smith. Heavenly Father chose him to do the most important thing of this time--to bring the gospel back to this world. I believe in all his revelations. He translated the most important book to date, *The Book of Mormon*—a keystone of this dispensation. He is another great example to me. All he endured throughout the establishment of this church helps me realize the importance of my membership. He was a great missionary—a character I try to live like every day. Joseph Smith was a true prophet of God.

The Book of Mormon—is the best guidance in the world. If ever in need, I pray to Heavenly Father asking to reveal the answers through the Book of Mormon. Each time I find stories from prophets of old relating to the situation I’m in. The Book of Mormon is such awesome resource. By reading it cover to cover, I gained a testimony of its truthfulness. It broadened my mind to the beauty of this gospel. It helps me walk the path of righteousness—and to always choose the right.

Gordon B. Hinckley is a true prophet of God. He is another instrument of Heavenly Father. He has also been chosen to help people return back to Heavenly Father. Have you ever realized how humble and *human* he is? He has never expected a red carpet to be rolled out for him—he never asks for the riches of this world. He only ever asks for the saints to live according to God’s will. He is a true follower of Christ, and through his counsel and guidance, I can live my life in a more spiritual light. He is a true brother in Zion.

I love this Gospel with all my heart. I can’t imagine living without it. I am so grateful for missionaries throughout the world. The work they do is so important. Through their endurance and overcoming the many obstacles thrown in front of them, many more souls come to the fold. The light of Christ is in all of us. Missionaries seek out that light. We are all in essence missionaries of Christ. Every opportunity we have to share the message of Christ should be taken. Heavenly Father calls upon us at those times to do his will. Who are we to turn him away?

Why I Believe

Tzu-Fen Wang

A Convert from Taiwan, mother of missionaries, and a participant in the Pageant, "Legacy of Faith"



I come from a non-Christian family in Taiwan. My parents are diligent people. They always emphasized education to us. When growing up, our surrounding neighbors invited me to church with them at Christmas. I did not understand the teaching, but I really enjoyed the Christmas cards. That is the reason why I liked going to church with them.

Throughout my schooling years I was a top student. From year to year at school, everything was normal; however, in my second year of senior high school, I had a few unanswered questions—*soul questions*. My soul hungered. I read some books trying to find the answer to these questions, but couldn't find any answer. Five years from that time, I was at university in Taipei. I went home for a school vacation, and I saw my younger brother with the missionaries. They were having a meeting with some members. I said "hi" to them, and the two American missionaries introduced themselves. Then they talked about what they were doing in Taiwan. They asked me if I was interested to know more. I told them I would be going back to Taipei shortly. They asked for my address, and said that the missionaries in Taipei would come to see me.

As soon as I arrived in Taipei, the missionaries arrived at my dormitory. They asked, "Are you interested in having the discussions?" I said, "Yes." So we started, and what they taught me then and later was the answer to my prayers and my questions that I had earlier. They asked me to pray to find out if the *Book of Mormon* is true. I didn't hear a voice saying, "The church is true," but I felt good in my heart. I just felt good. I was a *golden* investigator. One month later I was baptized. I felt really good. I loved to feel good.

I wanted to be obedient and keep the commandments from then on so I could always feel good. I wanted to learn a little bit at a time. I started to exercise my simple faith in Jesus Christ. I was the only member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in my school. I spent time attending the church meetings and activities, and in doing my calling. I was so excited because the gospel made me happy. I was baptized in October, and during winter vacation I enthusiastically shared the gospel with my friend. Two years later he joined the church, and we got married. After a lot of effort, we were sealed for time and all eternity in the Tokyo Temple.



I have a loving husband and three wonderful children, Jennifer, Leo and Jane. Leo is a returned missionary and Jane is now serving as a missionary in Hong Kong. We have one grandson who is two-and-a-half months old. They are my blessings. I am so grateful for so many blessings. I know that if we endure to the end, our families can be together forever.

I have a strong testimony of the fullness of the restored gospel and the true Church of Jesus Christ. I know God lives, and He answers every child's prayer. He loves his children and sent His only begotten son Jesus Christ to be sacrificed for all mankind. Through His atonement we may have the chance to return to the presence of our Heavenly Father. I know Jesus is

Christ. He lives. He is my Redeemer and Savior. He has paid my debt, and all I want to do is follow Him.



I am grateful for the prophet Joseph Smith who translated the Book of Mormon and restored the Church of Jesus Christ. I know President Gordon B. Hinckley is a living prophet guiding us in these latter days. I really love the gospel.

I leave my testimony with you in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

(November 2005)

Leo, Tzu-fen, Jane Wang

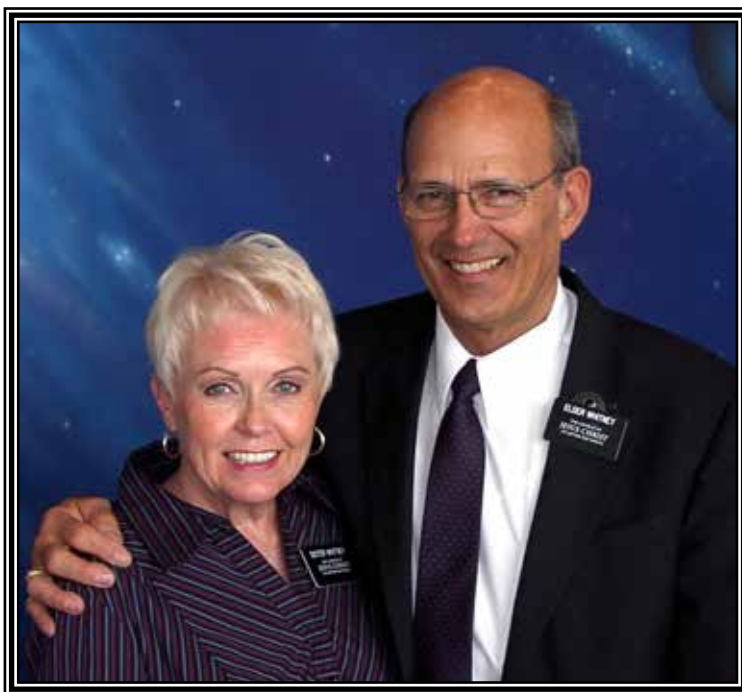
(In August 2005, Tzu-Fen participated in a Readers' Theatre at the New Zealand Temple Visitors' Centre—"The Family and Friends of the Prophet Joseph Smith in Missouri.")



“WHY I BELIEVE”

Elder Arvy L. Whitney

**Missionary with his wife, Vonda, serving
in the New Zealand Visitors’ Centre
2005-2006**



Hmmmm! Why do *I believe*? Well, for starters, I believe because something inside me since I was a young boy hungered for truth. My Mother probably is at least partly responsible, although I never witnessed her presence inside a chapel of any kind that I can remember, but she was a good woman who knew the difference between right and wrong and passed it along to me and my sisters. So, the stage was set.

In 1953, when I was nineteen, married with two children already, I took a job in a mental hospital in Talmage, California. After I took the job with the hospital, many religionists approached me and wanted me to join their church. As a youngster, I was not baptized into any faith, so I was somewhat concerned about not having that ordinance done, but “*By whom?*” was a very good question. So one could say, “I was ripe!” I lived in a flat of apartments where a Mormon family lived next door and another behind. I was invited to play ball with the church by my neighbors, and I accepted the invitation, so I became good friends with Bill Kelly the next door neighbour. I got the flu one day, and Bill asked me if I would like to have a blessing. I told him that I would.

The Stake Missionaries came and administered to me and asked me if I would like to hear the discussions. Again I said, “I would.” When they began to teach me, I felt as if I had come home after a long journey. It began to feel good—to be delicious to me—and I wanted to share what I had learned with everyone. But my wife said she was a Catholic, and she wouldn’t *buy* any of it. That was just an excuse. She knew the Church was true also, but would never get baptized. I waited and waited for her, but she never came around. In 1961, when I was stationed in Alaska, I decided to be baptized along with two of my children. My wife and I divorced in 1963.

I remarried in 1965 to a lady that was a Mormon. We ended up with *most* of the children *most* of the time. (When we married, she had two children, who I subsequently adopted). We were married in the Salt Lake Temple in 1968. In 1975, I retired from the United States Army and moved to Sandy, Utah. My wife got cancer of the breast in 1976, and she died of ovarian cancer in 1986.

A family in our ward was losing their father and husband to cancer just six months before my wife passed away. We visited him, and my wife tried to comfort him about his disease and treatment because she had been through it. In less than six months he died of lung cancer.

Well, my wife wanted me to get acquainted with his widow, Vonda! Just six months after this man died, my wife passed away. So, Vonda and I dated a couple of times. On our first date, I took her skiing. While we were in the ski lodge, we had a conversation that went something like this:

Me: “So, are you going to get married?”

Vonda: “The men like the younger girls.”

The conversation continued on the chairlift:

Vonda: “So, are you planning on getting married?”

Me: “Yes, I plan on being married in six months to a year at the most!”

Vonda: “Don’t you have to meet someone first?”

Me: “Why do you think I have you up here?”

She about fell out of the chair! Later, a ward party *The Love Boat* was coming up, and I invited her to go with me, and she accepted. We sat with Bishop Peterson and his wife Barbara. They were taking pictures of all the attending couples, and it was our turn. They wanted us to sit on a bench. I straddled the bench, and they asked her to sit next to me. Well, she didn’t want any part of that. But, reluctantly, she did. That started a short courtship that ended in marriage in April, and we have been married now for nearly twenty years.

We have served two full-time missions. Presently, we are here in New Zealand in the Visitors’ Centre, and before this, we were in Santa Rosa from 1998-2000, as office missionaries. Additionally, after returning home from Santa Rosa, we inspected apartments in the Salt Lake City South Mission for a year under President Stephens, 2000-2001. We also served as stake missionaries for two years before we went to Santa Rosa.

I believe because I received a solemn witness that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God, and that His gospel was restored by the Prophet Joseph Smith, Jr. He saw what he said he saw in the grove of trees when he was fourteen years old. Anyone who will read the Book of Mormon will know that he is a prophet. *I believe* because, as you have read in my story above, the Holy Ghost has been a guiding influence in my life. Gordon B. Hinckley is a prophet of God who guides the affairs of the church today. I so testify in His holy name, even Jesus Christ, the Saviour and Redeemer. Amen

“Why I Believe”

Hsing-hsing Wu

(Convert from Taiwan and participant in the Pageant, “Legacy of Faith” – 2004)



I am from Taiwan where they have had missionaries for fifty years. In 1971 (when I was thirteen) my uncle went to an open house where he met missionaries. He didn't have interest to meet with the missionaries so instead of writing down his information, he gave them my family's information. Not long afterwards the missionaries came to our house. When we opened the door and realized there were two tall foreigners we were a little worried. None of us knew English well enough to talk to them. But we soon realized they could speak Chinese. My Parents were not interested in the message the missionaries had but my interest was sparked so I began taking the lessons.

At that time I was only fourteen. I really enjoyed listening to the missionaries and when they had taught me all the lessons, I had great desire to be baptized. When I asked my parents for permission to join the church, they said “no.” My parents wanted me to study hard and be able to go to a good university. To them, school was the most important thing. They didn't want church to be a distraction. My mom said after I had tested for university, they would consider my being baptized. Because I wanted to be baptized, I started to work harder in school. I continued to attend church and grow in the gospel. The time finally came to test for university. I did my best, and I was accepted into a really good university (Taiwan University). Because I listened to my parents and did as they wanted, they were willing to sign the paper for me to be baptized. After being an investigator for four years, I was able to join the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

After I graduated university, I decided I wanted to serve a mission for the church. I was excited to receive my call to serve in the Taiwan Taichong Mission. I enjoyed helping my brothers and sisters of Taiwan come to know their Savior Jesus Christ. Seeing them accept the gospel and join the church through baptism was the best part of my mission. When my mission was over it was on to another “mission.”

I returned home and began teaching at a local high school. Through my dad I was able to meet, Brother Wu. At that time he wasn't a member. We became friends and he gained a desire to meet the missionaries and learn about the gospel. He had to make some changes in his life. In only three days he quit smoking. (If you ask him how he did it, he will tell you, “If you really love someone you'll do anything.”) He was later baptized a member of the church. We continued to date and two years later we

were married. In 1985 we were sealed in the Taipei Temple for time and all eternity. I know our family has been blessed because of these experiences.

We have three children who are all active and involved in the church. Our oldest, I-fan, is serving in the Wellington, New Zealand mission. Chi is attending university studying early childhood education. And Yi-Han is attending the Church College of New Zealand. Chi and Yi-Han are both preparing to serve missions. I am very thankful that from the small act of listening to and obeying my parents, my family has been blessed. (August 2005)



Right: Hsing-Hsing in Wedding Photo with husband. Below: Hsing-Hsing as a young missionary.



Why I Believe

Tania Young



Born in New Zealand and raised up in the Jewish Faith

(“. . .I saw clearly that whether I liked it or not, before my eyes, each piece of the Plan of Salvation and the Gospel, fit together like a jig saw puzzle. For years I had only certain pieces, now I was suddenly presented with many more to create an actual picture—so clear and understandable became my whole existence. . .”)

Shalom Aleichem – Brethren and Sisters,

Regardless of culture or location, each of us are given opportunities to receive our own witness of Jesus Christ throughout our lives. This evening I will unfold for you my wonderful journey toward spiritual fulfillment.

I entered this world as one of six living daughters, and also five brothers who chose to take a fast pace journey back to Heavenly Father. My birth was most traumatic, as my mother and I both struggled to hold onto this earthly existence. It is ultimately due to Heavenly Father’s intervention that we both continue to live today, and it is no wonder that I am the only member in my family.

My birth became the beginning of a spiritual journey for my parents. Although not brought up acquainted with Judaism, my parents, having become dissatisfied with the lack of answers in churches, began to implement a few religious traditions which eventually became the practice of Messianic Judaism. This became a solid blend of both the old law of Moses and new Messianic practices. My mother did find out she is Jewish and eventually met her father in Israel while discovering her Jewish roots as an adult, and my father traced his family history back to Adam. After a few years, my parents began a New Zealand Kibbutz, eventually containing twenty-eight people.

We fervently kept Shabbat (Sabbath). I recall many beautiful Friday evenings singing around the dinner table as we welcomed Shabbat. And, our beautiful table laden with an ironed Shabbat tablecloth, homemade placemats made from an Israeli calendar, a traditional roast beef meal, challah, grape juice, and the bright wooden menorah (seven branch candlestick), fully lit as a weekly reminder of our Saviour’s presence in our lives. We even met weekly in a room set aside as the temple. I was asked to be permanently in charge of temple service at the age of twelve..

Other memories include building a suka (a traditional booth with an open roof to see the stars, based on Mosaic law but incorporating the items produced by the New Zealand land). With sides made out of pungas and ferns and tea-tree, we celebrated, ate, danced and prayed in the suka for a week. Pesach (Passover) was

always a very sacred and special time as we recalled the Lord's *Last Supper* and re-enacted foot washing, breaking of the bread and drinking grapejuice. We also ate our way symbolically through the seder plate, laden with food items representing the Passover story.

We celebrated and revered these and many other festivities such as Purim, Rosh ha Shanah, Shavuot, Yom Kippur and Chanukah, plus learned Israeli dances, the Hebrew language and kept the laws of *clean and unclean*. Through these, I learned to value sacredness, how to conduct myself reverently, how to rejoice and worship, and most importantly, learned of how the Almighty used His power to save his people, both through physical miracles and the gift of His beloved Son.

Throughout this time, I developed a fundamentally strong foundation and a close relationship with both my Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ. I did not know He was preparing me for a higher law. My journey has enlightened and enriched my mind and spirit, and now I understand how the Saviour, Yeshua Ha Mesiach, (Jesus the Messiah) has truly brought new meaning and light unto the world. He desires us to be fruitful and happy through obedience.

At the age of eighteen I married a man interested in our Messianic Jewish beliefs. Our wedding was based on the coming of the Saviour, with the bride meeting the groom after the trumpet sound. We moved to the city and began a new life with the arrival of our first born son in the first year. Over time, without the support of the Kibbutz – Machenah Shalom, the actively Judaic side of me slipped away. However I had continued on my own with my son for a year or two, teaching him to reverence the Sabbath. Eventually, the lack of support from my husband caused me to neglect any form of religion. Heavenly Father sat still and deep within my heart.

After five years of a very difficult marriage where only my personal hope and faith in my Elohim kept me going, I decided to undertake my own spiritual journey without the influence of my parents or husband. I became a born again Christian, and my husband and I parted two years later after the birth of our daughter Shoshanna. I continued exploring my beliefs and knew that I hadn't found enough definitive answers yet.

I became interested in the "new age" way of thinking which for me included attending a spiritualist church, pursuing knowledge from clairvoyants, and dabbling in tarot card reading etc. In hindsight, throughout this entire period, I discovered I had the ability to discern what I did and did not agree with. Was I, in fact, measuring these beliefs and practices against what I had believed so dearly as a child? Or was the Holy Spirit letting me know what Heavenly Father's limits are? I was to find that, in the following months, my interest and new beliefs in *life beyond death* aligned very closely with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Let me back-track a little at this point. In 1997, finding myself alone as a solo mother with two children, I resolved to find my purpose in life. I had never lost my sense of there being a purpose for me somewhere, but had now come to the stage of being desperate to gain that revelation.

One day as I walked along the beach, I cried openly to the Lord and said, "Lord, please set me apart to do Your Will. Show me what it is." Two months after this, through divine guidance to get to this point, and through a period where I was making major decisions in my life, (any one of which could have lead me to a different

track), a friend invited me to spend Christmas with his family in Hamilton (a large Mormon family). Afterward, he took me up to see the temple lights (prior to sunset). As I alighted from the car at the rear of the temple, I felt illuminated and overwhelmed with a sense of God's presence coming from the building, so much as to flood my whole mind and body. I had felt his presence many times throughout my life and knew this to be what I felt at this time too. With the feeling, came a desire to release myself of my wrong ways. I heard within myself a voice to "repent." Only pride stopped me from crashing to my knees in a flood of tears.

I recall being prompted to turn around and stand on one of the small paving stones. As I did so, I looked up and found myself to be directly in front of the temple doors. I looked up and said, "but what have I to repent of? I am a free spirit to do as I like!" Wow, from that point began a war of the mind and spirit. My spirit already knew and desired this for myself. My mind struggled and directed at least a thousand questions at my friend and the missionaries before becoming converted to the truth. I saw clearly that whether I liked it or not, before my eyes, each piece of the *Plan of Salvation* and the *Gospel*, fit together like a jig saw puzzle. For years I had only certain pieces, now I was suddenly presented with many more to create an actual picture—so clear and understandable became my whole existence.

My mind could no longer battle. Even the pieces I had not yet gained an answer to would one day be answered. I finally became content and excitedly absorbed with what I was hearing. Within three weeks of the first contact with the temple, I was baptized. I had the privilege of being baptized in a small bay resembling a small piece of Israel – with palms, stone wall and the imagined picture of donkeys walking its paths. A sister shared with me later she saw the Lord himself walking beside me on the water as I walked out with the missionary. Truly the Lord did not wish to allow me to die at birth. I was to marry in the temple fifteen months later and have my two children sealed to my new husband. This was the beginning of a bright future.

I pray that those of you like myself, who have joined this truly sanctified church in the last hour, would realize, Heavenly Father has prepared you well and been there for you through confusion and despair, attended every trial and gently guided you step by step toward the truth. He has now, only to water you, as you are already truly converted with all your might, mind and strength. You must hold firm to your faith. There is no other way.

And, those of you who struggle to believe, and entertain doubt, must focus your lives on the Saviour and put everything else behind you. Listen to the Holy Spirit, He is there as your personal guide. There is no other way.

I am indeed converted to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I know this church is true by its very existence and that culture and location have no bearing on what is offered and expected of each individual. They are simply means to a higher path.

In the name of Jesus Christ – Yeshua Ha Mesiach – Ahmen. (April 2005)



“Why I Believe”

Ada Yu

(Born in Shanghai, China and Converted to the Gospel as a Young Adult in New Zealand and a missionary in New Zealand Visitors' Centre)

Dear brothers, sisters and friends,

It has been a great honour for me to be invited to give a little talk on *Why I Believe*. Everything here in this beautiful Christus room seems so familiar to me. It reminds me of the wonderful six weeks I spent here for the *Christmas Lights* last year. I introduced to the people (mainly Chinese visitors) the perfect gospel, the meaning of the Christmas, and the purpose of the gorgeous temple out there. The feeling I have right now is exactly the same I had those nights when I was serving at the Visitors' Centre. That is, I am very nervous, but besides being nervous, I am overwhelmed with the feelings of excitement, happiness and peace. In my life up till now, every time I share my testimony about Heavenly Father with others, talk about my faith in Jesus Christ with others, I always have a wonderful feeling of joy. It might be the main reason why I believe.

I was born in Shanghai, China and spent most of my youth time there. I was brought up by a faithful Christian mother. She believed in God when she was twelve. It was not very normal for people to have any religion at my mother's time, but my mother was lucky, because my aunty, my mum's elder sister, was born in Philippines and she spent a lot of time there. When she was back to China, she brought the Christianity into her family. My parents didn't have a good marriage. They were separated when I was very young, and my father got married again. I was really lucky I had a wonderful mother who was my great example. My mother has been keeping unmarried since then. The only expectation she has is to bring me up in righteousness. When I was little, she taught me many stories in the Bible, and I was fascinated by the ways my mum presented to me. I had a great feeling of excitement every time when my mother was telling me the stories, and a great feeling of peace every time when she ended up the prayer with our reciting the Lord's Prayer together. My attitude of life wasn't influenced at all by the fact that I was brought up by a single mother. On the contrary--in my little heart I had enough love of my mother and my Father in Heaven though I didn't get much love from my biological father. I did feel the love from my Lord through every time we prayed together, every time I was learning from those Bible stories. I could feel His mighty company with us through the prayers, and I could touch Him through the tenderness of my mother's embrace, and I could see Him when my mother was smiling at me.

My belief at that time was pretty much depending on the example my mother set for me, but when I think back, my own testimony was comparatively quite weak. I also believe if something happens, there must be unpredictable reasons behind it arranged by God.

I came to New Zealand in 2000 to study and live, and I don't think it is a coincidence. Heavenly Father arranged me this chance to build up my own testimony and strengthen my faith because He knows the reason why my Mom believes will never be the same reason why I believe. And the testimony my Mom has had will never become my own testimony. It has to be me myself to search for the reason.

After I came to New Zealand, I tried many ways to attend different churches. And I still remember I was taken by some friends to some churches on Sundays where they always sang the hymns loudly with somebody playing saxophone or drums, as if I was in a party or something. I didn't say it was not good, I just didn't have that feeling of peace and joy I had before with Mom. When I was very confused, on 18th of May, 2001, two missionaries went tracting and knocked on my door and introduced me the Book of Mormon and asked me to read, telling me this is another testament of Jesus Christ. With the desire to find my own testimony in my Lord, I read it, pondered upon it and most importantly I prayed about it to my Father in Heaven. The feeling I had in my bosom when reading the book and praying about it was the same as I felt when I was with my mother—excitement when I was reading it, joy when I was pondering on it and peace when I was praying about it. The feeling testifies to me that the Book is the true words of God.

I was baptized in October 2001, and went to Hamilton Temple for my own endowment in 2002, one year right after my baptism. I went to the General Conference in October 2004, and I served my mini mission last year here in the Visitors' Centre. My testimony grew stronger and stronger. I know by my own who I am, where I came from and who I am going to be in the future. I know I lived with my Father in Heaven in my pre-existence, that is why he loved me so dearly when I came into this earth and didn't have a perfect family with mother and father. He sent me out to New Zealand to render me a chance to find my own testimony about Him, and He taught me the perfect plan of Salvation and let me know that though my parents didn't have a good marriage, I can have an eternal marriage and a family of my own sealed together for time and for eternity in the Temple.

I just want to testify that Heavenly Father does live—no matter whether we know Him or not. A lot of my friends and family members on my father's side back in China don't even know His existence. No matter whether we believe Him or not, He loves us, each one of us, unconditionally. *Why I believe* is because He loves me, and my whole life up till now witnesses His great love. Before I finish my talk, I want to sing you my favourite hymn, *Our Saviour's Love*. I sing this hymn to show my gratitude to my Maori parents, Bother and Sister Tutauha. They came with me to give me encouragement and to back me up. I sing this also to show my love and gratitude to you. There is no music going with me, so I hope you are not bored.

(Singing of *Our Saviour's Love*)

I leave with you all this in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen. Ada Yu (11 September 2005)

Many more testimonies were given by members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the Visitors' Centre expressing "Why I Believe," but unfortunately, they were unable to give written copies of their testimonies and conversion stories. We thank them all for the spirit that they brought into the Visitors' Centre during the two years that we served as directors. These firesides ALWAYS brought the Spirit and all who attended were touched spiritually. We have great love for the Saints in this part of the world who have become life-long friends.

Doug and Cecile Scribner
 New Zealand Temple Visitors' Centre Directors, 2004-2006



Ed and Janice Ridges,
 5 June 2005
 Missionaries in New Zealand



David Hemi, 26 June 2005



Dr. Tiwini Hemi, 26 June 2005



Butters Family - April 2004



Bishop Benavides,
 April 18, 2004,
 (Hawaii)



Natana and Alba Horua,
 April 18, 2004



Eugene Watene, April 25, 2004
Anzac Fireside



Antonio Savini, February 6,
2005, (Italy)



Gladys Nylangaruye
February 6, 2005,
(The Congo)



Br. and Sis. Shortland,
Feb. 13, 2005



Todd Miller, February 8, 2004
Team member of the
New Zealand All Blacks



Newman Soloa'i
January 9, 2005



Ian and Paula Ardern, January
16, 2005 - Called to serve as
Fijian Mission President



The Thomson Family
September 18, 2005



Brother Strother and Bronson Strother
July 11, 2004



Brother Rayner, July 11, 2004



Br. and Sis Wihongi (Auckland) and
Sister Heperi, July 25, 2004



Sister Katie Mill, June 1, 2004
Visitors' Centre Missionary
(Colorado)



Bishop and Sister Delaibatiki and Family (Fiji), November 28, 2004



President and Sister Campbell, New Zealand Temple President and Matron, June 13, 2004



President Higgins (Stake President), March 27, 2005



Tzu-fen Wang and her son, Leo, May 1, 2005



Selvin Abraham (India) May 1, 2005



Vic Parker May 16, 2004



Br. and Sis. Paton May 15, 2005



Greg and Liz Willis May 22, 2005



Bishop Josephs and his son, Keola, May 30, 2004



Alex and Kathy Steenstra November 7 2004



Br. and Sis. Churchill (Scotland) Oct 31, 2004



Gill Ballard (costumer & photographer) Sept 5, 2004



Renata Kahuroa (musician) Sept 5, 2004

The following pages include copies of sketches that were donated (in 2004) to the New Zealand Visitors' Centre by Ray Andrus, the son of Roman Andrus, the artist who made these sketches. Roman and his wife, Irva, served a mission in New Zealand in the 1970's and he drew these sketches of people who had come to attend the temple - many of them came from outlying islands. These are now in the Matthew Cowley Pacific Church History Centre, Temple View, New Zealand (as of October 2019)



Self-Portraits of the Artist, Roman Andrus



