

The Dawning of a Testimony



*“By the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things”
(Moroni 10:5).*

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Of the Seventy

I have always been fascinated by the wild outdoors. I love the mountains. I love the ocean. I love the rivers. I love the animals. I think that God’s creations are almost beyond any description in their beauty and value.

When I was 16 years old I wanted to see more of the outdoors, so my mother gave me permission to work in Alaska for the summer. I rode an old propeller plane there and found a job working in a grocery store.

I worked with a lay minister who was quite interested in converting me to his beliefs. Day after day we discussed the scriptures, but it was hard for me to defend my faith because, frankly, I didn’t know it well enough. I struggled to explain the Joseph Smith story and the revelations he had received in a way the minister could accept.

I finally realized I needed some help. So I looked up the full-time missionaries in the area and asked them if they would teach me more about the gospel. That summer I often spent an hour or two with the missionaries before talking with the minister, who had become a very good friend.

One particular night I awoke from sleep. I felt concerned that I couldn’t teach the gospel very well, even though I was coming to know it was true.



Outside the summer sun was shining the brightest fluorescent colors on the Alaska mountain range. The clouds hovered about two-thirds of the way up the slope, making it look like the mountain was floating in the air. It was one of the most beautiful sights I have ever seen. It is hard to describe the beauty I saw and the reverence I felt for Heavenly Father's creations.

I dropped to my knees and asked Heavenly Father to hear my prayer. I sincerely wanted to know that the Book of Mormon was true, and I sincerely wanted to know if what my mother had taught me all those years was what I should believe. I wanted to know that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was the true Church of God upon this earth.

That night—although it was still daylight in the Alaskan frontier—I came to know that the Church is true. I came to know that the Book of Mormon is the word of God. I came to know the importance of eternal relationships with my mother, deceased father, and other family members.

I stood up the next morning a different person because I knew that I could bear my testimony—that these things had been revealed to me by the Holy Spirit. The minister couldn't handle that. He could debate the doctrine, but he could not argue against my witness that I knew the Church was true.

Though I remembered the names of the missionaries who taught me, I lost track of them for many years. In 1998 one of those missionaries was called to be a General Authority. Elder Stephen A. West was one of the key figures in helping me gain a complete testimony of the gospel. As General Authorities, he and I were assigned to the North America Southeast Area Presidency and were able to talk about our experiences that had happened so many years ago. I shall forever remember that Alaskan adventure I experienced as a 16-year-old boy. ●



Left: At age 16 (right) with Elder Stephen A. West and Elder David Loveless at the Anchorage Alaska Airport. Above: At work in the grocery store at age 16.

