

Episode 7

Why I Believe

SARAH LEAVITT

[BEGIN MUSIC: WHY I BELIEVE INTRODUCTION]

MALE VOICE: We believe in God the Eternal Father...

MALE VOICE: We believe in the Bible to be the word of God...

FEMALE VOICE: We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous...

MALE VOICE: We believe that through the atonement of Christ all mankind may be saved...

MALE VOICE: We also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God.

FEMALE VOICE: We may say that we follow the admonition of Paul: we believe all things, we hope all things, we have endured many things....

NARRATOR: The Mormon Channel now presents Why I Believe.

[END MUSIC]

RICK STARR: Welcome to Why I Believe, on the Mormon Channel. On this show we talk with members about experiences in their lives that have led to the mighty change of heart spoken of in the scriptures. And today we're very pleased to have with us Sarah Leavitt from Calgary, Canada, who's actually the mother of the producer of this show. But you have a very interesting conversion story. Welcome to the show, first of all.

SARAH LEAVITT: Thank you. Thank you.

RICK STARR: I'd love to hear about your upbringing. Where were you raised?

SARAH LEAVITT: I grew up in the state of Oklahoma. Was born in Claremore, Oklahoma. That's where my parents were from generationally, had been there. We did move to the southern part of the state. My dad was a dentist, and we lived down there for 9, 10 years, and we were right on the border of the Texas line. It was close to it, very close to it. We lived in a little place called Comanche, Oklahoma. But then we moved back into Claremore area, and that's where I ended up going to high school and...

RICK STARR: Okay, so even though you live in Calgary right now, you are officially a U.S. citizen.

SARAH LEAVITT: Yes.

RICK STARR: And raised in Oklahoma. That's great. Well, we'll get to the Canada part of the story a little bit later, but talk a little bit about your upbringing, and specifically when you were introduced to the Church. And what was your upbringing religiously as well.

SARAH LEAVITT: Well, I grew up – my mother was an Episcopalian. And I remember going to church as a little girl. I was so excited. To this day I cannot hear “Onward Christian Soldiers” without being reminded of my time in that Episcopal church. Because to go from somehow – I mean this is a very young memory, a little girl's memory, but they had this big cross that was on some tall staff of some sort, and if you were chosen to carry that staff, you got to usher people into the Sunday School class from the chapel, from the chapel into the Sunday School. And I wanted to do that in the worst way. And they always did that to “Onward Christian Soldiers.” And they would play that. And I got to do that one time, and I just thought I was the biggest thing that ever happened. I just thought I was so important, because I got to carry that cross into that Sunday School, into that meeting. That was, that was pretty important.

But we moved from, from Claremore. My dad was a dentist, had just finished his dental training, and we moved to a little place called Comanche, Oklahoma, which was 4 hours south of Claremore. And so they didn't have an Episcopal church, but the nearest thing to it was the Methodist church. And it was – I was always taught that it was – and I don't know if it's true or not anymore, but I was always taught that it was kind of a sister branch of the Episcopal church. They weren't as – didn't have all the rituals that were there—

RICK STARR: Of the Episcopalians?

SARAH LEAVITT: Yeah. But they did have something that was very interesting, and they referred to it as the Apostles' Creed. And we recited this every meeting, every sacrament service, what you would call. And when I did hear – I remember in the Joseph Smith story it talked about he being part of that Methodist group at that time, and he talked about the creeds, so I understood what he, what he had been through and what he was experiencing.

RICK STARR: Do you remember that creed now, or do you remember what it said, or what it was about?

SARAH LEAVITT: I could probably pick up some of it, it talked about the Apostles' Creed, and it was just – if somebody could get me started on it I bet I could probably – it's kind of like a, you know, like the Young Women's theme, you could – you could pick it up, you know. But it talked about Christ and who he was, and Mary, being the mother of Mary and – but I'd have to – like I say it's a little girl's memory. But we recited that all the time. Anybody could look it up, I suppose. I should have probably done that. I hadn't thought of it in years.

RICK STARR: Oh, that's okay. Now was your father a religious man?

SARAH LEAVITT: No. No.

RICK STARR: So you went to church in the Methodist church with your mother.

SARAH LEAVITT: My mother and father both went, but they just felt like that was something that I needed – you know, that as a family we needed to do. I went to Sunday School with my friend; they only attended a sacrament service, is all, they never went to Sunday School or anything. And that’s where, you know, I was really proud that I had achieved that 3 month perfect attendance pin, and I was really proud of that. So – but they – because that was, you know – we would go on the weekends, we would probably drive back to their hometown where both their parents were in Claremore on certain – well certainly holidays and, you know, special occasions. Summertime we were always – I never stayed in Comanche, I was in Claremore the whole summer months. But church wasn’t anything that we really – it was a holiday thing.

RICK STARR: So sort of a, kind of a tradition.

SARAH LEAVITT: Yeah, we went at Easter and we went – I mean when we lived in Comanche we went all the time. We were there – when we were in town on a Sunday, we went to church.

RICK STARR: And then, so you moved back to Claremore.

SARAH LEAVITT: We did. We did. After my grandfather passed away, we then moved back so that mother could be – mother and dad could be closer to her, to her mother, so that they could help with looking after things and being there with her and being a support to her.

RICK STARR: And is that where you were introduced to the LDS Church?

SARAH LEAVITT: No. No. I graduated from high school in 1972. And we had always said that, you know, because my parents, their alma mater was Arkansas University, of course it flows through the family, and that’s where I was always going to go to school. There was no questions, that was it. And it was while I was in the University of Arkansas that I stumbled across the Church, so to speak.

The way that happened was, I really can't tell my story without telling another story. In the dormitory that we were in, that I was in, an all-girls dormitory, in Futrall Hall – don't know where that came from either. It's been many years. So we were in Futrall Hall, and on that floor a variety of girls, a variety of different backgrounds. And this one girl had been there for several days by the time I got there, and she'd been there for orientation. And bubbly, vivacious, little cute blonde from California. And she was so lonely. She was so glad to see people that she just became everybody's friend immediately. And Lorraine was in love with Mike---

RICK STARR: Lorraine was the name of the girl from California.

SARAH LEAVITT: Yeah. And she told us she was going marry Mike. But her parents said before she was even going to be engaged to Mike she had to experience a year away from home at university. And her parents, her father had also gone to Arkansas University, so another family tradition, so she came, and she said, “That’s fine.” She was all okay with that.

And Lorraine decided that she wanted to do everything like Mike. She wanted to have this oneness, this utopia she had envisioned in her mind of what this was going be, and she wanted to be just like Mike.

And Mike had told her that he was a Mormon. And so she wanted to find out about the Mormon Church. And consequently, I was the only one on the floor that had a car. And the only reason I had a car that semester, my parents were not going let me take a car, but the only reason I had a car was because one of the options that I took – and I don't know why you even had to take one, I guess – but the option I had to take was bowling. And so I took a bowling class, and because of that bowling class I had to have a car to get to and from and—

RICK STARR: The bowling lanes.

SARAH LEAVITT: Yeah. That was the only way I was ever going have a car there was, it was that bowling class that did that for me. And because I had a car, I drove her all over town looking for a – looking for a church that had “Mormon” written on it. And not a one of them did. We couldn't find it.

RICK STARR: And they still don't.

SARAH LEAVITT: No. No. We had no idea it had an official name. We just – she says, “Well, drive us around and try to find this Mormon Church.” I said, “Okay.” And I knew Fayetteville pretty good, but I couldn't find it. We could not find that Mormon Church. But she had it on good authority that there was a Mormon Church there. And so I said, “Well, you got to do something else, you know, you got to find something else, Lorraine.” And she said, “No, I know there's one here. I'll find it, I'll find somebody who knows something.” And even to this day, we don't know how she found the missionaries' phone number. All she knew – she could phone the operators and ask for the Mormon missionary phone number, but I don't think those operators would know anymore than she did.

RICK STARR: Yeah, not back then.

SARAH LEAVITT: No. You know, nobody knew that the Church had an official name. They were just Mormons. And so, and I thought they were just, you know, I thought that was just TV stuff, I didn't know they really still existed. So but she had it, and we don't know how she got the phone number, but she got the phone number of the Mormon missionaries.

Now in the meantime of her looking for this phone number and doing all of this and phoning them, the missionaries at the time had a real strong premonition. They just knew that there was somebody on campus that they needed to teach, and they didn't know who. But of course being on a university campus, they could not proselyte through the campus at all. That hasn't changed. And so the two missionaries, Elder Clark and Elder Lunt, decided to have a fast. Because they knew there was someone there. They didn't – they just knew they needed to get on the campus somehow. And so they had – they resorted to, as all missionaries, fasting and prayer.

Now when Lorraine finally got their phone number and she phoned them, they had just – as best I've been told, they had just closed their fast. And at that final amen did Lorraine call, and she says, “I really want to know all about your church, can you come over to the dorm and teach me?”

RICK STARR: That's a missionary's dream isn't it, to have that happen.

SARAH LEAVITT: And they were shocked. They didn't know what to do, other than go over. And so they did. And so they went over, and at that time of course rules were as they were, they weren't as protective rules as they are now. And so Lorraine brought the two missionaries up to the dormitory, up to her room, and she heard the first discussion, which was, at that time was about Joseph Smith. And she was so excited, and set another, set another date. She was so excited, and after hearing that, even that first discussion, she said, "Okay, that's it, I want in." And the missionaries, still being in shock, said, "Well, we're not ready, we can't do that yet." And she says, "Well, I'm ready." They said, "Well, we've got, you know, 6 more discussions, you got to hang in there." So she said, "Okay."

Well now, the next one that she had set up, she was so influential that the next time they came they must have thought they were Wilford Woodruff, because there must have been, there must have been 10 or 12 girls in that dormitory ready to hear the gospel.

RICK STARR: Oh, my goodness.

SARAH LEAVITT: And they just weren't ready for her, period. They weren't ready for her influence either and what she could do. Now, I was one of those, I was one of those 10 or 12 or however many – the room was full of these people that were waiting to hear this wonderful, wonderful message that she had explained to them, "This is great, you all have to come hear." And so she had them all come and listen. So we listened.

Now that was, that was in September. She was baptized in October, you know, as soon as she could get through all of those. And I was the only one that hung in. The others after the next appointment and the next appointment, they all kind of weeded out, you know. The others said, "Oh, no, not for me, not for me." Now I was more polite, I guess, which that, it too surprises me that I didn't tell her just to go away or that I wasn't going to be a part of that.

RICK STARR: Did you have some interest, and what was your initial impression of the discussions they were teaching you?

SARAH LEAVITT: I thought it was great information. And I thought, Oh, okay, that's cool, that's okay. But I had decided to kind of church hop at the time. And of course like Utah, the South has a church on every corner. They're just not all the same. So I decided I was church hopping. And I didn't really know what I was looking for, I just knew that my mother had told me that a good way to meet people or good people would be to be involved in a church group. Now she wasn't specific as to which one, ever, she didn't, you know, she didn't care particularly at that time. But, so I remembered that. So I was kind of church hopping it.

But it wasn't until late November, probably the last Saturday in November, but I would ask Lorraine little questions here and there. And Lorraine, of course we were all there for her baptism too. Lorraine was way ahead of her time for scrapbooking. She made a little invitation for everyone, for us to come watch and be a part of her baptism, come be, you know – for the remission of my sins. And she would put those – and she made these beautiful little invitations and passed them out to everybody and wanted them to be there.

And we were all there, we all went to her, to her baptism and said, “Okay, if that’s what you want to do, that’s great.” So she was ahead of her time.

RICK STARR: So how did you feel attending her baptism? What were your impressions?

SARAH LEAVITT: Nothing in particular. I mean it wasn’t – I wasn’t going, Oh boy, I want this for me. I just thought that, I’m really happy that she found what she was looking for, that she found whatever, and that now she and Mike could somehow be happy.

RICK STARR: That she could marry him and—

SARAH LEAVITT: Yeah, that she could be happy.

RICK STARR: For those of you who are just joining us, this is Why I Believe on the Mormon Channel. And today we’re very pleased to have with us Sarah Leavitt, who’s a resident of Calgary, Canada, but was raised in Oklahoma. And Sarah’s been sharing the story with us about how she was introduced to the gospel through a friend in Arkansas, at the University of Arkansas.

And so your friend Lorraine joined the Church in October. And you were still there participating, listening to the discussions. What happened next with you?

SARAH LEAVITT: I mean the discussions kind of ended, when she was baptized the discussions ended. And so I wasn’t a part of anything any more, other than I would ask her a few questions here and there – what about this, what about that, and she’d answer the question and that would be it. She’d gotten to the point where she was kind of afraid to say anything more cause she didn’t want to chase me away.

So I just kind of did my own thing for a while. And then finally she invited me to go with a group of youth spelunking, you know, there’s caving all around there. And so I said, “Sure, I’d go, and that will be alright and that’ll be fun,” and we did that. And the missionaries were involved, and they were there too. And it was no particular deal, other than that night, I just told her, I said, “You know, I think I’m going go to church with you tomorrow, is that okay?” And she said, “Yeah, sure, that’d be fine.” And she said, “But I’ve got to explain to you what it is.” It was the first Sunday of the month, first Sunday in December. And she told me what it was, that it was – people would stand up and bear their testimonies and tell why they believed. And I said, “Well, okay, that’s okay, but is it still okay if I go?” And she goes, “Oh yes, yes, please come.”

And so she and I went to that meeting. And that’s when things started to happen. I guess I had been prepared enough by that time that the Lord had something to work with, that I had some information that He could work with something there, there were some ideas and thoughts and – that had been happening.

RICK STARR: The door was a little bit open by that point. And so you heard testimonies, right there in the Mormon Church.

SARAH LEAVITT: I did.

RICK STARR: What were you – what happened next?

SARAH LEAVITT: I was so impressed with the people, that they, they knew who the President of the Church was. It was Harold B. Lee. And many, every one of them stood and: I know that he's the President of the Church, I know that – I didn't hear 'prophet' as much as I heard 'president', cause I didn't understand prophet. But I heard president. I thought it was like knowing the president of like IBM or something, you know. And I thought, Wow, I don't know the president of the Methodist Church. Huh. These people are serious, they really mean business here. You know, they are involved in their church, they really know who leads them. I had no idea that everybody knew that, or that it was commonplace, you know. So that whole day was just one big event.

So now during that meeting, I do not recall it, Lorraine does not recall ever saying – she stood and bore her testimony. And at that time she stood and said, "Oh yeah, and Sarah is going be the next member, she's going be the next baptized member here." And there was some... [Laughing]

RICK STARR: What did you think? That had to be a shock.

SARAH LEAVITT: I didn't hear it.

RICK STARR: Oh.

SARAH LEAVITT: I didn't hear it. I didn't hear her say that. But there's others around her heard her say it, and thought, what is she doing? Oh, that's going chase her away so fast, you know, have you lost your head, or maybe, you know.

RICK STARR: She was just being an enthusiastic new member missionary.

SARAH LEAVITT: Right.

RICK STARR: That's great.

SARAH LEAVITT: But she has no recollection of saying it. In fact she says, "I would never have said that. I wouldn't do that." But after the meeting there were several people that came up to me and said, "So when are you going be baptized?" And I thought, "Well you're really bold!" And so I thought, "What's wrong with you? I just came to church here, I didn't say I was going do anything." So there were about three, and I said, "Well, I don't know that." And they could see I was probably a bit miffed at that question they were asking me. But they had every right to ask it because of—

RICK STARR: What was said?

SARAH LEAVITT: Yeah, what was said. But I was – "No". You know. So as the day continued, and I kind of pushed all of those questions away. And as the day progressed, then the couple missionaries, Elder and Sister Hodges, they had invited all of us to their place for dinner.

Now by this time, what had happened with Lorraine was that once Lorraine was baptized, there was another girl that was there, another student, but she really needed, she needed support, you know, and she felt awful being the only university student in that ward or in that branch. And I'm sure it was very hard for her. But when Lorraine was baptized, she had a friend, and so her activity level just really shot up.

And the two girls had gotten some information that there was an inactive priesthood holder on campus. And so those two girls decided they were going out, they were going to be this fella's saving grace. And so they went and found Rob. And Rob had a roommate. His name was Chip, they called him. And so these two girls, well of course Lorraine was so cute; it was hard to refuse her. So the two fellas, Larry or Chip, started taking the discussions, and Rob soon found that the church was a pretty good thing to be a part of, and he was totally reactivated, and his roommate started taking discussions. So now that made four, four university students at the University of Arkansas.

So that was – there was great power in that. And so the Hodges on this particular Sunday invited all of the university students – the four, and also invited myself to their home for dinner. Of course along with that came the missionaries as well. Those missionaries – there were two at that time that were there. So we had this association with them all day long. And we went and had dinner with them.

And at that time Sister Hodges got me aside by myself and asked me, “Well, when are you going to be baptized?” I thought, Well I just don't know why people keep asking me that, what is going on? But I think I needed that nudge. And the Lord knew that that's what I needed, was that little push. Because I – by then I was going, are you kidding me, how would I tell my mother? What in the world would I tell my mother? You know, I – no.

So we just moved along with the day, and she goes – she apologized. She says, “I'm sorry, I misunderstood.” And I said, “Yeah, who told you that?” “You know, she didn't say particularly, but she just said – she was just apologizing and said, “Let's just move on.” “Okay.”

So that evening, of course these thoughts now were planted. What if? What if I joined the Church, what would happen? My mother and dad...

RICK STARR: That was probably the biggest thing on your mind. What would they think?

SARAH LEAVITT: Yeah, it really was. Yeah. It was. It was a huge concern as to what would I tell them. Because we were all, you know, we were very close and it didn't take much to figure out that if I changed that pattern of our lifestyle that would be at jeopardy, that closeness would be at jeopardy. And so never really voiced that or said that, it didn't need to, I just knew that that's what would happen. But those were the thoughts that were going all day long.

RICK STARR: This Sunday sounded like a real turning point for you.

SARAH LEAVITT: Huge.

RICK STARR: This one Fast Sunday, where you went with Lorraine.

SARAH LEAVITT: Yeah. I also just felt some great sympathy for another part of that training – that thought, was one of the missionaries that was there, Elder Lunt, was such a nice, nice fellow. He was terribly shy and, and he just – he bore his testimony, and it was so humble and so sweet, and he expressed how he felt like he had failed because he...

RICK STARR: As a missionary?

SARAH LEAVITT: As a missionary, because he hadn't baptized anybody, had barely taught anyone, because his companions would do all the teaching because he was just so shy. And he just felt, he felt like he hadn't done anything of value. And at that time, it's interesting how the Spirit then worked and said, "You could help him."

RICK STARR: To you.

SARAH LEAVITT: Yeah, said that to me. And just said, "You could help him." Like how? You know, and you have this little conversation going.

RICK STARR: It's funny that not only all the members of the ward, or the branch were asking you when you were going to be baptized, now you've got the Spirit asking you when you're going to be baptized.

SARAH LEAVITT: That's true. And just saying, you know, "You could help, you could help, you can be a part of that."

And I think by the end of the meeting I was going, "You know, I'd like to help him." I had no idea what was – I really – but that was the process. And I think everybody has their own process of what they go through and how they get that testimony. But that was, that was particularly my process at that time, was that I had to be nudged and I had to hear.

And the final capstone on that whole evening was that the missionaries said, "Let's do a fireside tonight." I didn't know what that was for sure. I couldn't even begin to tell you what the subject was that night. But we went and watched one of those little, you know, those little films.

RICK STARR: The little filmstrips?

SARAH LEAVITT: The filmstrips that they had, you know, the beep and, you know. And, and I don't know what it was on, it could have even been on something like family home evening or – I don't know. I think the missionaries just knew that they needed to keep us together that night. Because they had me and they had Larry Chipman.

RICK STARR: Both investigators.

SARAH LEAVITT: Both investigators. And so – and I'm not sure, I mean they'd already started teaching Larry. So I think it was probably more for him than it was for me. I was a shot in the dark for them. But probably more for him than anyone else. And so they, they kept us together all night. And so, but I just couldn't help but all that time through that film clip, whatever it was, I argued with myself and with the Spirit all, all that time: Yes I can, no you can't, yes I—yes you can, no I can't, yes you can. And it was just constant through that whole time: what am I going to tell them, how am I going to do that?

RICK STARR: Again, your parents being very concerned.

SARAH LEAVITT: Yes, very much so. My parents, my sister, my family in general. I mean you know, how was I going break that mold, how was I going be different? And I just thought, they're going kill me. They're...

RICK STARR: Well obviously they didn't.

SARAH LEAVITT: No they didn't.

RICK STARR: Thank goodness. Let's go on to that part of the story. For any of you who are just joining us, this is Why I Believe on the Mormon Channel. My name is Rick Starr. And today we have Sarah Leavitt with us, who is a resident of Calgary, Canada.

And she's talking to us about the story of, of how she was converted to the gospel, and a specific day that was really a turning point for you, a Fast Sunday where you had a chance to go to church with another new member friend of yours from college. And then you had the opportunity to go to a member's house for dinner, and then spend the evening at a fireside with the missionaries who were also there at dinner.

And interesting, this, this fight that was going on within your head, the Spirit talking to you and trying to open your heart a little bit more, and all the concerns you had, all the worldly concerns of family and all of that. What happened next?

SARAH LEAVITT: How the evening ended was, the missionaries were leaving, we were all leaving this place of where we were – joined one another. And Lorraine and I were going back to our dorm. And the missionaries were right behind us as we were – went down the elevator. We were separating, we were going to our car, they were going to theirs.

And just then one of the missionaries, Elder Green, he came to me and he said, "Oh by the way, Sarah." I said, "What?" And he looked at me and he said, "Don't worry, everything will be okay." And I looked at him, and he says, "Just don't worry about anything, everything will be okay, it'll all work out."

And I thought, he couldn't possibly know what turmoil I was going through and what my questions were. And it was - how is this going work, you know, how is it possibly going work out?

RICK STARR: Did that set your mind at ease at all, having him say that to you?

SARAH LEAVITT: Absolutely. Absolutely. And it – I just thought, he couldn't possibly know that. So if he couldn't possibly know that, who does? And so because Lorraine and I were on the same floor, she went to her room, I went to mine with my roommate there. And I just thought, I just can't stay here, I've got to be by myself.

And in the dormitories, they had these huge big windows down at the end of the hallways. But they had like a 3 foot ledge on them, they were really sunk in. And you could just sit there in those windowsills and look out or whatever. And so it was night, it was dark, and I went into that and sat in that windowsill and I just cried. Because it was so, it was just all so overwhelming, what I had learned in the discussions, what I knew already was kind of pouring in, what I had felt that day was pouring in. Can I get

baptized? You know, all those questions were coming in great – it just seems like magnitudes of one after the other just coming at me.

RICK STARR: Did you at that point, Sarah, kind of feel like you knew what the decision needed to be, but that you just had to work out the details, the concerns you had?

SARAH LEAVITT: I think so. But what happened after that, here I was, you know, just sobbing in this hallway. And Lorraine decided she was going come down and see what was going on, what I was doing. She just felt like she needed to come see me. And of course she heard all this sobbing at the end of the hallway in the windowsill. And she came in and I said, “Lorraine, I just don't know what to do.” And she, that’s when she looked at me and she said, “Yes, you do, you know exactly what you need to do. Let’s go do it right now and let’s go phone them,” meaning the missionaries. I said, “Okay, we'll take one step at a time. I'll deal with the missionaries now and then I'll deal with my parents in a day or two.” So that was on that Sunday night. Phoned the missionaries, told them I was ready to hear the discussions, you know.

RICK STARR: And you’d heard what, a few discussions up to now?

SARAH LEAVITT: I’d heard probably all of them. But I hadn't really – I’d soaked in some. So they said, you know, the next day, Monday, they had a lot of appointments or things they – they could see me on Tuesday. I said, “Okay.”

So on the Tuesday we met, and they said, “Tell me what you know, and then we'll fill in the gaps from there.” And I pretty much – of the seven discussions they had, I could give them all the facts and whatever we had in the first four. And then so Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, they gave me discussions one, two and three – or the last three that I didn't have, whether it was five, six and seven. And that was on the Tuesday, and on Friday I was baptized.

RICK STARR: That’s amazing. They put you on the quick study course there.

SARAH LEAVITT: Yeah, we were on a fast track. We were fast track to baptism.

BOTH: [Laughing]

RICK STARR: Talk about your parents and when did they come into the picture of knowing about this?

SARAH LEAVITT: Well I had to – within those three days I had to call them and ask for permission. I was 18, although at that time you had to be 21.

RICK STARR: I see.

SARAH LEAVITT: And so I had to call and ask permission to do that. And they were very good about it. They said, “Sure.” They thought it was going be like a passing fancy, and they said, “Sure, go ahead.” You know, whatever you want to do, whatever makes you happy, go ahead and do that. And it was only through the years as the years progressed that they realized how serious it was, that this was for keeps and this was not going go away, did they kind of dig their heels in a little bit. And so it was only through the next few years that they – but everybody – it did change a relationship, it did change. We had to learn

how to communicate again with one another, because I didn't believe the way they did. And they felt like I was kind of saying, your lifestyle – what you gave me was no good. What you gave me was no good. So you know, I felt kind of like that I was better than they were or –

RICK STARR: That was their perception.

SARAH LEAVITT: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So it did strain that relationship. Not to the point – they didn't disown me or didn't do anything like that. But 'til they died it was strained. It was never, it was never the same, never.

RICK STARR: What effects did this have on your siblings?

SARAH LEAVITT: I had one sister, and that probably was even worse, between she and I. It was just never, it was just never the same, never the same. But it didn't matter, it just didn't matter. The night I was baptized, Larry was also baptized, so there were two convert baptisms that night. It was a very wonderful, wonderful evening.

RICK STARR: And that was in December 1972.

SARAH LEAVITT: December the 8th, 1972.

RICK STARR: So you've just had an anniversary of sorts, just this month, this being December of 2009.

SARAH LEAVITT: Yes, yes. Well, certainly had more of an anniversary than that even. That night there was another set of missionaries that were transferred into the area. They opened up a new area within that branch that was in another town, a neighboring town. So these two new missionaries were in there and they were transferred in. And one of the missionaries had been there before and they loved him dearly. They thought he was a wonderful, wonderful missionary and they were excited to have him back. And it was Elder Leavitt. And...

RICK STARR: Elder Leavitt being your future husband?

SARAH LEAVITT: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

RICK STARR: From Canada.

SARAH LEAVITT: From Canada, yeah. And yeah, his first name was Elder when I met him.

RICK STARR: And it had to remain that way for a while, I would suppose.

SARAH LEAVITT: Yeah, he had – yeah, he did, he had another eight months. But I went home for a month after that. Right after I was baptized I went home back to Oklahoma, and that was my school break at that time and it was a full month. And then I was back in Arkansas by the 10, 11, 12th, something like that, of January. And then I transferred out to the Y after that. Then we...

RICK STARR: Now what did that – what did your parents think of that? Because University of Arkansas was the tradition. That had to be...

SARAH LEAVITT: I broke tradition in every way imaginable, every way imaginable. I mean every time we turned around – but you know, when you're 19 – 18, 19, you know, you don't really – you're so insensitive. I was. I didn't – you know, I thought, oh well, you know, that's the way it is, that's what's happening for me now.

RICK STARR: Well but the impressive thing to me as I listen to your story, Sarah, is that you weren't insensitive to the Spirit. You heard what the Spirit had to say to you. And even though that affected some relationships—

SARAH LEAVITT: Yeah, it did.

RICK STARR: Think about the relationships that it's caused over the years for you. I'd like to hear a little bit about that.

Let me just mention that you're listening to Why I Believe. I'm Rick Starr, and we're on the Mormon Channel. And today we have Sarah Leavitt with us from Canada, but raised in the U.S., in Oklahoma. Went to the University of Arkansas, and that's where you learned about the gospel. And very interesting story about that one single day especially that was a real turning point for you.

SARAH LEAVITT: Right.

RICK STARR: Sarah, talk about your life since then. Of course you met your future husband, he was a missionary who you just met at the time there after your conversion, but talk about what's happened in your life with you personally and with your family. Of course the name of this show is Why I Believe, so we, ultimately we do want to hear your testimony. But talk about that.

SARAH LEAVITT: Well, let me back up a little bit on this story somewhat and let you understand the impact of what's happened at this time, not only for myself, but for Lorraine and Larry and Rob and Diane, the 5 of us. We were such a unit together. But everybody else always wants to know – and this is how I've used this story so many times through the years with – especially working with a lot of youth. Everybody wants to know, did Lorraine and Mike get married?

RICK STARR: In fact that was on my mind too. I was going to ask you that.

SARAH LEAVITT: Did they, did they make it, did they do that?

RICK STARR: Don't keep us in suspense.

SARAH LEAVITT: Well the answer is no, they did not. Because Lorraine, after she joined the Church, soon – I mean as soon as she joined the Church, she realized that Mike was totally inactive, and talked to him and realized that he had no desire to change that aspect of his life. And so she said, "Goodbye, I've got a different life now."

RICK STARR: So she's remained active. You keep in touch with Lorraine?

SARAH LEAVITT: Yes I do. Yeah. She lives in Las Vegas right now, she and her husband live in Las Vegas. And she's just the same, just as vivacious and, and bubbly and influential as she can be.

But it changed everybody; it changed all of our lives. So because of an inactive young man, it has spilled over. Just because he was willing to say, "I'm a Mormon," there were three convert baptisms, two reactivations. Both Rob and Larry both served fulltime missions. Lorraine has a son that's serving a mission right now. My husband and I have had five sons serve full time missions.

RICK STARR: Wow.

SARAH LEAVITT: There were four temple marriages from that. All because he said, "I'm a Mormon." So you know, my thought always is, if that can happen, if the Lord can work through Mike, an inactive young man, what can He do through you and I? What can He do with our testimonies that are alive and full and not tempered, you know. What, can He do with ours? How does He work with those missionaries now, and what does He say to them? So...

RICK STARR: It's amazing how that seed was planted, and how we all have that same ability. Maybe we're – sometimes we're concerned about what, what should we say, or we're afraid we're going offend somebody.

SARAH LEAVITT: Right.

RICK STARR: But like you just mentioned, an inactive young man just by mentioning that he was a Mormon had that kind of an effect, even to the point of you sending five sons on missions, and how that has – really the domino effect of that, how that's affected people's lives.

SARAH LEAVITT: It has. It has been – my husband had still – my future husband at that time – still had, I think, eight months left in his mission. But when I transferred out to the Y, he had a friend that had just returned home from a mission, and so he had contacted him and said, "Don't let her get in with the wrong crowd, you know, this is one of our convert baptisms, we don't want to lose her. We don't want to lose anyone, you know, we don't want to lose someone. And certainly don't want to lose someone at the Y."

RICK STARR: Right. That's true.

SARAH LEAVITT: And then his companion knew some girls that lived there, and he set that up so that I could live with those girls for a few days 'til I found my own apartment. And so I just wrote and said, thank you, and he wrote back and said, well anytime, and I wrote back and said it sure was nice, and he wrote back and said he'd do it for anyone and—

RICK STARR: So the writing continued, it sounds like.

SARAH LEAVITT: It continued.

RICK STARR: How did you finally meet up with Elder Leavitt, your future husband? Did you go to Canada? Did he come to BYU?

SARAH LEAVITT: I went to Canada. He went home. He was home by August, and had invited me to come up, through all of our letters. And he had invited everyone – invited me to come up to his home and see his home, and we'd become very close friends through those letters.

But I did go home for the summer. And my dad was a dentist, and Brian's companion, Elder Boucher had a – he'd had a wisdom tooth problem, and he was coming in, into town, into Tulsa for a zone conference or something like that. And he had this wisdom tooth that was killing him. They didn't make them take them out like they do now, they learned, they removed a thousand of those out in the field, and you figure you want to get rid of them before. But my dad did that for him, and no charge, just did it for him.

RICK STARR: Oh that's great.

SARAH LEAVITT: And just knew the kid needed help and so he just did it. Knew he didn't have any money, knew that he was, you know. And dad really didn't have any – you know, they were just boys, they were just young boys out there being on missions, and knew they needed some help, and so he did that. So I did see Brian on occasion. But when he was finish, he invited me up and I came up, and I never went home. I never went back.

RICK STARR: And you still are in Calgary and—

SARAH LEAVITT: We're in Calgary. This was in Cardston, he grew up in Cardston. But we've always lived in Alberta all of our married life. It's been interesting raising the children and having that – always wanted to give them what I never had. I always felt like I was behind. And I would suspect that as you talk to a lot of converts, they will tell you they feel that way. They always feel behind, like they always need to catch up. Because we didn't – you know, I didn't have the Primary, I didn't have Seminary, I didn't have Young Men/Young Women's or I didn't have anybody whispering in my ear all the time, You need to think of others, or be kind or be nice or, you know, have a goal, let's set a goal. I never had any of that. I didn't know any of that stuff.

One of my very first callings was to teach little – it was in the Sunday School, the Junior Sunday School. That dates anybody that knows what that is. [Laughing]

RICK STARR: Which is now the Primary.

SARAH LEAVITT: Yeah. And I was in the Junior Sunday School. And I would come home, I would be so excited. The one thing I remember was talking about Noah and Noah's ark and, and the rainbow. And I was so excited about that information. And I told Brian, "Do you know that that has a promise, that means something, those rainbows?" "Ah yeah, Sarah, everybody knows that." "Shoot." So I learned a lot in the Primary.

RICK STARR: Wonderful world of discovery. And I bet through your own children as well, as you grew in the gospel.

SARAH LEAVITT: It was, all those first few years was total discovery, learning more. I couldn't read enough, I couldn't – and then they had me teaching these little ones, which was an absolute blessing, because then I got to learn as they learned. Because I really didn't know anything. I didn't know – I couldn't have told you one church or Bible story. I

didn't know anything. Although I did have my 3 month pin, I didn't know anything. Didn't mean I paid attention in there, it just – so.

RICK STARR: Well Sarah, as we wrap up here today, thank you so much for your story, sharing your story of your conversion. And what a wonderful treat that has been.

SARAH LEAVITT: Thank you.

RICK STARR: Can we end today by you sharing your testimony? We'd love to hear that.

SARAH LEAVITT: Yes. My testimony is not much different than it was that first Sunday. Because I know and understand the power of the Holy Ghost. I understand the reality of the Holy Ghost, and how he works, and how he speaks, how he speaks to me. I understand. I've had many, many sweet reminders from my Heavenly Father that He loves me, and that He is real, and that He cares about me, and cares about my family.

I know no more, no better today than I did the first day I heard about the Prophet Joseph, but I know deeper. I understand deeper. I have had many experiences that have told me that Joseph was a prophet of God, and that we have a living prophet today.

I remember the first time while I was at the Y, my roommates drug me to what was the Tuesday – I've forgotten what they call them, those—

RICK STARR: The Tuesday morning devotionals?

SARAH LEAVITT: Devotional, yes, yes, those Tuesday morning devotionals. And it just so happened that President Lee was going be there. And he walked in, and my first experience with watching him walk in, it was just, it was overwhelming. That same Spirit would scream at me saying, “He is a prophet, he’s a prophet, he’s a prophet, he’s a prophet.” And that was exciting. That was great, great knowledge,

My testimony is very simple. Just that Thomas Monson is a prophet of God, Joseph Smith was a prophet of God and restored this great gospel plan. That plan of salvation has been restored on this earth. And that was the great awakening for me, that the plan of salvation is real. And that is my testimony. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

RICK STARR: Thank you. Sarah Leavitt, thank you for being with us today.

SARAH LEAVITT: Thank you.

RICK STARR: Appreciate your testimony and your conversion story. It’s wonderful to hear.

SARAH LEAVITT: Thank you.

RICK STARR: You've been listening to Why I Believe on the Mormon Channel. For information on this program and other programs on the Mormon Channel, please visit radio.lds.org. Have a wonderful day.

[BEGIN MUSIC]

NARRATOR: You've been listening to Why I Believe, on the Mormon Channel.

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