

Good afternoon brothers and sisters. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Jessica Hyland and today I was asked to speak on my experience at trek this past week. This was my first trek and I didn't know what to expect. In the months leading up to trek, we had many stake and ward activities to prepare such as watching the movie "17 Miracles," stake square dancing, and finding an ancestor to trek for. The ancestor I found was Eliza Ann Haven. She is my great great great great grandmother and she made the trek west with her family when she was 19. In a letter to her son, she writes of her experience and says, "In the spring of 1847, we left for Winter Quarters, the general gathering place of the saints, and then started for Salt Lake City in President Brigham Young's company, a large one... I had a very pleasant time. I was young with no cares." I also had a very enjoyable time at trek and it was an eye opening experience. We often talk about the sacrifice the pioneers made to bring the church west but I personally never understood that sacrifice until I experienced a mere fraction of what they went through. Like the pioneers, we trekked in 95 degree weather in button up shirts and long skirts or pants. Unlike the pioneers, we had plenty of water and food as well as medics close by in case of emergency. Although we may have felt like we were struggling in the moment, looking back, we were lucky with our circumstances.

The first day of trek was hot and a great learning experience. Most of us had never pulled a handcart so we had to learn how to work together and help each other when one of us got tired. Later that afternoon, we arrived at our camp and set up our tents. After we set up camp, we ate dinner and square danced. In D&C 136: 28 it reads, "If thou art merry, praise the Lord with singing, with music, with dancing, and with a prayer of praise and thanksgiving." During their trek west, the pioneers walked long days and were tired but they followed the Lord's words by dancing and praising God even through their hard times. This helped me find a positive attitude throughout trek and reminded me to always listen and follow the Lord's words.

Later that night, President Esplin and his wife gave a family home evening where they shared some stories with us about Paying it Forward, which was our trek theme for this year. President Esplin shared a story about a young man who went on a mission during World War II. Since many men were soldiers during this time, this man did not have a companion for several months and taught by himself. Towards the end of his mission, he was excited to return home a few days before Christmas. However, he found out that the missionary that was supposed to replace him was sick and his stake president asked him to extend. He extended his missions 2 months, yet a few days before Christmas, the other missionary showed up. This young man was able to buy a bus ticket home and arrived around 1:00 a.m. on Christmas morning. I really liked this story because it shows that if we trust God and completely follow him, he will bless us in ways that we never thought were possible.

The second day of trek was the longest and hottest day. We started the day off with the women's pull which was an amazing experience. For those of you who don't know what that is, it is where the women alone pull while the men stand off to the side. Although this did not happen during the original pioneer trek, this relates to when the men died leaving the women to uphold the men's duties. During the women's pull, we had to work harder to get up that hill without help from the men. The point of this was to show us that we are stronger than we think and working together makes it easier to get the job done. After the women's pull, we continued to go up a steep, rocky river bed which wore everyone out. Just when we thought it was going to end, we discovered we were only half way up. Luckily, we kept working together and finally reached the top. We got back to camp around 3 p.m. and had a relaxing afternoon. Later that night, we had ward testimony meeting but first heard from a few future missionaries who shared their testimony as well as why they chose to serve a mission. I loved hearing about their unique experiences and testimonies of this gospel.

The next day was our last day and was probably the hardest day for me. We got up early, packed up camp and trekked. It was very hot and we were all exhausted from the previous days of trekking so when we were told we would be going up the "Three sister hills," we were less than excited. The first hill was long and steep. Just when we thought we had reached the top, it became evident that we still had a long ways to go. Luckily, with the help of willing men from other companies, everyone made it up that hill and the hills to come. When I first saw so many people coming back down to help, it made me feel grateful that even though these people were tired and hot just like us, they were willing to put others needs before their own and help. I know that's just what happened in the pioneer days. Even when men and women were tired and hungry, everyone still put forward a willing hand to help those who were in need.

Trek was an amazing experience and I learned a lot about hard work and enduring to the end. I'm so glad I had the opportunity to pay it forward to the pioneers and I will use what I learned about teamwork and service in my daily life to become more like the Savior. I say these things in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.