



## **Gaining a Wider Perspective**

Life experiences shape the person we become. However, some are subjected to life experiences most of us could not comprehend. Harindranto Rasolo, native of Madagascar, has lived a life full of diverse people, cultures, and experience. From this combination, he has learned the key to expanding our world does not lie in visiting as many countries as one can in a lifetime; the key is in learning about people unlike you and taking time to listen to someone no matter their background. While travel can help diversify and widen your narrow understanding of different cultures, the only way to truly understand a country outside your own is to interact with the people in that country. Rasolo speaks many languages. Since birth, he's spoken Malagasy, an Indonesian-based language. In grade school, he (like all students in Madagascar) learned three languages: two required—French and English, and one by choice—Spanish, because of his mother's love for it. On his mission to the Netherlands in 2006, he had the opportunity to learn Dutch, bringing his total languages to five, but

that is getting ahead of the story.

In Madagascar, Rasolo met the Latter-day Saint missionaries on their preparation day. His mother talked with one missionary on the street as Rasolo played basketball with others. After taking the discussions, his mother and brother were quickly baptized, followed by his father; however, Rasolo had a harder time. He knew he wanted to be a good person and live a life of integrity, but he also wanted to be in control of himself and not force himself into a church unless he was sure it was the right one. His change of heart came gradually after the conversion of his family, but particularly in response to three specific experiences. First, as the missionaries taught him that the Lord wanted to help him in his education by giving him the Holy Ghost, he got the impression that the Lord did really care for him and know his needs. After a friend insulted his interest in the Church and invited him to instead become a member of his denomination, as they could do anything they wanted, Rasolo felt the need to know the purpose behind being religious at all. He felt an urge to understand the reasons behind the doctrines he was learning instead of merely following a religious congregation who did not practice what they preached. He recalled feeling the Spirit for the first time while listening to two sister missionaries sing in Sacrament meeting. He knew it was a special witness and could not have come from man. Although all his questions were not yet answered, that witness was his confirmation that the Church was the place he belonged, and he was baptized. His true conversion took place after being forced to leave his homeland.

Rasolo's father had been hired by the government to work as part of a panel of experts in distinct fields to develop projects to help build Madagascar's economy. When Rasolo was fourteen, Madagascar was hit with severe political unrest when both major candidates, Didier Ratsiraka and Marc Ravalomanana, claimed victory. If their political viewpoints weren't different enough, their distinct ethnic backgrounds—Ratsiraka coming from the coastal Betsimisaraka tribe and Ravalomanana from the highland Merina tribe—escalated distrust between the opposing groups and created a crisis. Thousands of people gathered in the streets to show support for their candidate. Gathering led to mobs and mobs to riots. Ravalomanana supporters burned down part of government headquarters, and took control of Toamasina, the nation's chief port city; Ratsiraka supporters cut major transport routes from Toamasina to the capital, consequently cutting off supplies to Ravalomanana's supporters. Violent demonstrations continued for seven months ending in a battle that killed twenty-five soldiers and civilians and injured many others. Although his father was not involved in politics, his government affiliation connected him with the problems and he became a target. He, along with other members of the panel knew they had to act quickly to protect their families from danger. Rasolo's father decided to move the family to Belgium, but before their new Belgium identification cards could be issued, their request for citizenship had to be approved by

the UN. They were forced to stay in a refugee camp with others from many countries who were attempting to make Belgium their new home, as they went through interviews and waited for background checks to clear before the final decision could be made on whether or not they could stay in Belgium.

No Events