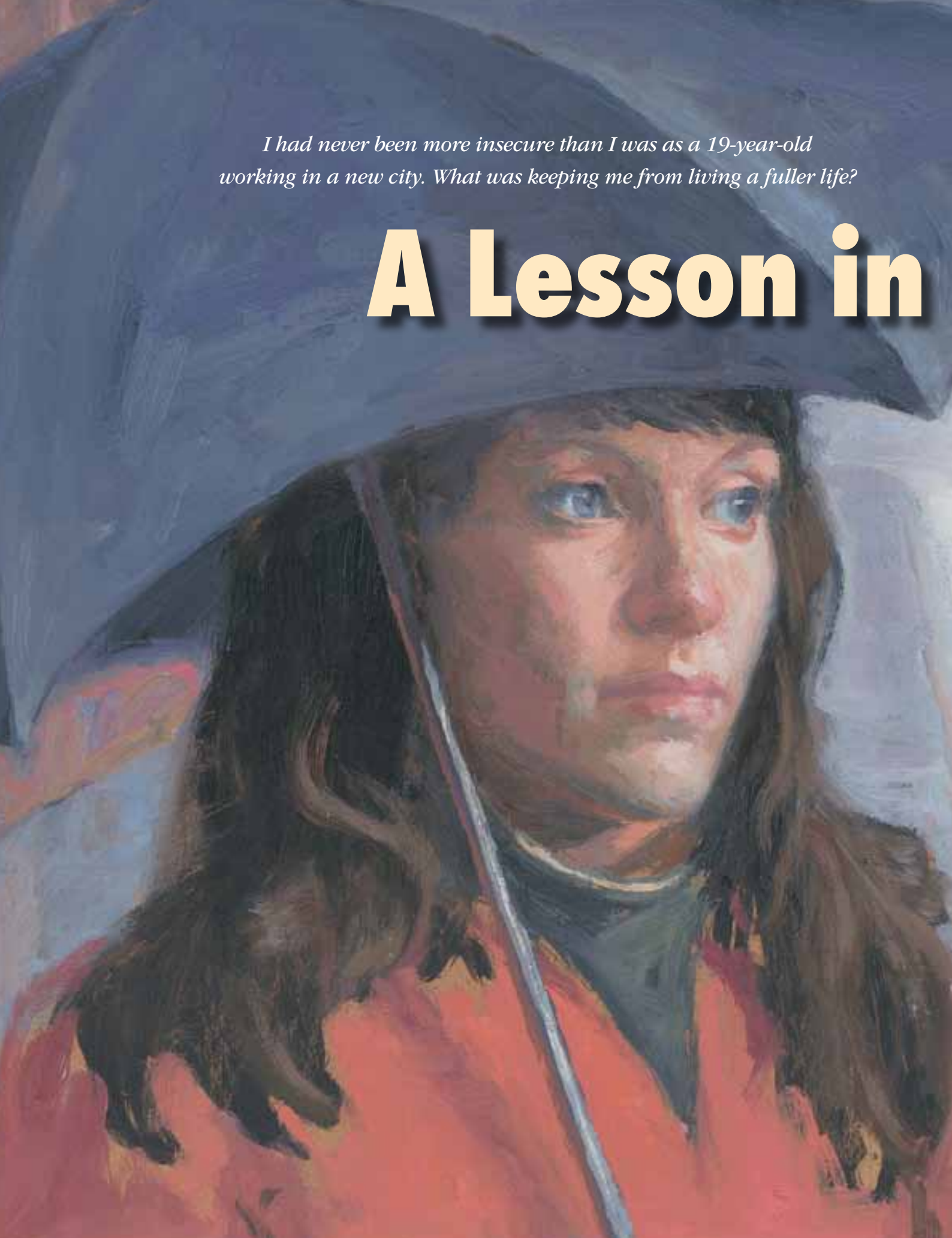


*I had never been more insecure than I was as a 19-year-old
working in a new city. What was keeping me from living a fuller life?*

A Lesson in



Atlanta

BY SAMANTHA D. HANSEN

When I graduated from high school, I wasn't really sure what I wanted to do with my life. College didn't particularly appeal to me, but I wasn't sure what kind of work I wanted to do either. I *did* know that I felt ready to be out on my own, and I ended up attending school far from my hometown in Texas but in a place near many members of my extended family.

The two semesters I spent there were OK, but I wasn't sure I would return the next fall. That summer, I returned home to Dallas, where I worked in a temporary position to earn money for school. At the end of the summer, I was offered a full-time, year long position with the company, but it would require a transfer to Atlanta, Georgia.

I considered the offer. I liked the fact that I would have a chance to earn more money for school, and maybe a year in a completely new place would help me to determine what career path I wanted to take. After fasting and praying about the decision, I accepted the job. At age 19 I set out for this new adventure.

My initial living arrangements turned out to be much different than I had expected. I had rented a room in the home of a woman who was several decades older than I was. Our age difference didn't bother me, but our differences in personality and standards did. I started to look for a new home, but in the meantime I tried just to be grateful to have a place to live and tried to make the most of my situation.

My job was fine, but friends were hard to come by at work. I knew that church could offer an opportunity to meet people who shared my standards—and possibly new roommates—but the thought of introducing myself to others

terrified me. I found a young adult ward to attend, but when Sundays came around, I arrived late and left early so that I wouldn't have to talk to anyone. I wanted so much to meet people and make friends, but the effort required was simply too overwhelming.

This church-attendance routine continued for about three months. Then one Sunday, I said to myself, "Sam, this has got to stop." I tried to get to the bottom of whatever was keeping me from fully participating in my ward, and I realized it was fear. I was afraid to be alone, afraid to meet new people, afraid to extend myself—just simply afraid.

One Sunday when I particularly needed confidence, I looked up *fear* in the Topical Guide in the back of my scriptures and turned to one of the verses that was listed, Doctrine and Covenants 68:6: "Wherefore, be of good cheer, and do not fear, for I the Lord am with you, and will stand by you; and ye shall bear record of me, even Jesus Christ, that I am the Son of the living God, that I was, that I am, and that I am to come."

It was a simple but powerful—and very personal—message. I felt the Spirit confirm that not only did the Lord want me *to not be afraid*, but He also wanted me to *be happy*. Those were two distinct, separate things—things He wanted *me* to do. And I could do them because He would be with me.

That verse changed my outlook. The next week, I went to church on time. I still felt a little bit nervous, but not enough to keep me from attending the full duration of my meetings. After all, the Lord wanted me to be happy. Even if I didn't yet feel confident in myself, I did feel confidence in Him and in His promises.



I got to know my bishop, who was instrumental in helping me better understand the gospel and gain a stronger sense of self-worth and direction in my life. I will always be grateful for the time, love, and direction he gave me as a member of the ward.

I started attending institute too. It was there that I got to know young adults from my area. Over the next several weeks, people began to look familiar to me, and several recognized me as well. One week I was invited to a party. I thought about declining, but I decided to be brave and go. I had a good time, and I also met several people who later became good friends.

In the weeks that followed, I continued to meet other people and to gain confidence. I even found another LDS young woman who was looking for a roommate, and we rented an apartment together—a huge improvement over my previous living arrangements. During that period and with encouragement from my bishop, I received my patriarchal blessing; it infused my life with direction and passion I had not previously experienced. I started a part-time position in a floral shop, which I loved. That led to a decision to study horticulture at Brigham Young University–Idaho, and today I continue to work in—and love—this field.

In the end, my time in Atlanta was a time of happiness and not of fear, thanks to specific, loving direction from my Heavenly Father.

That experience was many years ago. It taught me that I can be happy and unafraid *now*, that I need not wait until some magical event or circumstance happens to

me. I have known people who are unhappy and claim that once they finish school or change jobs or get married or move into a new ward, they'll find peace, and their lives will officially begin. But my experience in Georgia—and Doctrine and Covenants 68:6—showed me that this isn't the case. Rather, we can choose *now* to be of good cheer and not fear.

That lesson has been a vital one as I have faced personal challenges that are common in mortality. No matter my circumstances, I can choose to be of good cheer, to be unafraid. After all, the Lord has promised that He will be with us. ■



BE OF GOOD CHEER

“Good cheer is a state of mind or mood that promotes happiness or joy. . . . With God’s help, good cheer permits us to rise above the depressing present or difficult circumstances. It is a process of positive reassurance and reinforcement. It is sunshine when clouds block the light.”

Elder Marvin J. Ashton of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (1915–94), “Be of Good Cheer,” *Ensign*, May 1986, 66.