

# THE POWER OF Education

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**M**y mother grew up knowing nothing but abandonment, starvation, and poverty. She didn't receive much formal schooling, but she knew the value of education and its power to change lives. In sewing together scrap pieces of paper to make me a notebook for school, my mother made one thing clear: education could help me escape a life of poverty.

## Humble Beginnings

I was born in northern Brazil more than three months premature. Thirty years ago, there was almost no chance for a premature baby to survive in the cockroach-infested public hospital. The doctors told my mother that I would be dead within a few hours. I did not die. The Lord helped me survive.

When I was about five years old, my father left my mother, my four siblings, and me. My mother had also been abandoned by her parents when she was small, so she had no family to turn to for support. We didn't have

*My mother told me to work hard in school because it was the one thing that could overcome poverty.*

enough money to rent a house, so instead we rented a plot of dirt. We built our home of scrap wood, paper, and plastic with a roof made of dried leaves. We had no furniture other than a hammock, which two or three people would often share, and our bed, which we made from a few flattened cardboard boxes. We had no running water, no electricity. We had nothing.

Mom worked as a housekeeper and did people's laundry. I went with her to the river and helped the best I could; then we would walk for hours delivering the clothes. This time working side by side was precious for me. It is when I built a relationship with my mother.

Even though we worked hard, we never seemed to have enough money. Sometimes we would have hardly anything to eat. My mom gave us her food and sometimes went for days without any for herself. We would drink water and go to bed because it was all we could do to avoid the hunger pangs.

Do you know how to split one egg among six people? I do.

I had a small group of friends when I was young, but as we grew up, we took different paths. The girls turned to selling their bodies to make money, and the boys would steal. When they invited me to join them, I felt something inside tell me it wasn't right. I know the Lord was aware of me even then, before I was a member of the Church, and I have continued to see evidence of His hand in my life.

## Refusing to Give Up on School

My siblings and I had long been on a waiting list for public schools. When our opportunity to enroll



finally came, my mother told me good things about school. She said if I took education seriously, I would be someone someday. I will never forget her words: “I am sorry that I am not able to provide a good life for you. I am sorry that you had to learn the hard way the importance of work so early in your life, but now you will have the opportunity to get an education. Whatever happens, never give up school because it is the only thing that will take you away from this life.”

Once I was in school, we had to be inventive to come up with school supplies. I would find blank pieces of paper in garbage cans and bring them home. My mother sewed them together to make a notebook. She would buy a pencil to divide in three so my two sisters and I could each take a section to write with at school. Our other two siblings were not yet old enough to come to school with us.

*My mother sent me off to school with a homemade notebook and a third of a pencil.*

### **A New Faith**

Because my mother had suffered so much her entire life, she didn't believe there could be a God. Throughout my childhood, neither did I. But as I got a little older, I started asking questions about God. I asked myself why my family never had a chance to have a good life and why I never had toys, enough food, or new clothes. Every time I asked these questions, I felt somehow in my heart that I wasn't alone. This feeling comforted me for many years.

When I was about 13 years old, Latter-day Saint missionaries came to our home. They answered all of my questions and taught me about Jesus Christ. They told me there was a church where I could learn more about the gospel in special classes for people my age. They taught me how to pray. They told me about the Book of Mormon. When I was baptized, none of my family came.

I felt lonely, but I knew I was doing the right thing. I was introduced to a new life—a life of hope, happiness, faith, and love. My peers, I knew, were seeking solace in drugs and immorality. I found mine in a loving Heavenly Father and the gospel of His Son. After my baptism I knew that the Lord had been aware of me my entire life.

I learned a lot about the gospel. I met people who shared my beliefs. Some of the members got to know a little bit about my life when they visited me at home. They generously helped me buy clothes and shoes for



## OBTAIN TRAINING

“The Lord wants you to educate your minds and hands, whatever your chosen field. Whether it be repairing refrigerators, or the work of a skilled surgeon, you must train yourselves. . . . You will bring honor to the Church and you will be generously blessed because of that training.”

President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008), “A Prophet’s Counsel and Prayer for Youth,” *Liahona*, Apr. 2001, 34; *Ensign*, Jan. 2001, 8.

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## INSTITUTE

**N**o matter where you obtain your education, you can gather with other young adults at one of the more than 500 institutes of religion around the world. To find a location near you, contact your local priesthood leaders or visit [www.lds.org/institutes](http://www.lds.org/institutes).

church and notebooks for school. I babysat regularly for Church members and made more money than I ever had before. Because I was so young, it might have been easy for me to stray from the gospel. But with the support of Church members, I remained firm in my newfound faith.

The gospel truly changed my life. After I was baptized, I felt I had more energy to learn in school. I learned a lot and became a tutor. If I did not

know a subject, I would study until I knew it so well *I could* teach it. I used the money to help at home.

I received my patriarchal blessing and was counseled to serve a mission because the Lord reserved a special blessing in my mission that would change my life forever. I didn’t know what that meant, but I knew I would understand in time if I was obedient.

## New Opportunities

I served in the Brazil Curitiba Mission from 2000 to 2002. Through my association with a particular

companion, I was able to go to the United States to study. I knew this would indeed change my life forever. I knew my Heavenly Father was aware of me and had a specific plan for me. This opportunity to further my education was an answer to my prayers.

I knew that it would be challenging to learn a second language, but I also knew it was possible if I worked hard enough. I studied at the Brigham Young University English Language Center and spent up to 10 hours a day in the library. One of my teachers suggested we pray for the gift of tongues, so every night I prayed and asked Heavenly Father for this gift. He certainly helped me.

After I completed my studies at the English Language Center, I was accepted at several universities. I decided to attend Brigham Young University–Idaho and apply for the nursing program. I heard that it was very difficult to get into the program, especially for international students. So I studied my hardest. My friends teased me, saying I should move into the library because I spent so much time there. Even when it closed, I went home and kept studying.

When times were difficult, I remembered the words of President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008): “You need all the education you can get. Sacrifice a car; sacrifice anything that is needed to be sacrificed to qualify yourselves to do the work of the world.”<sup>1</sup> I knew those were the words of a prophet of God, and I took them seriously.

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When I was accepted to the nursing program, my heart filled with gratitude and happiness. I knew it would be hard and I would have to continue to make sacrifices, but I knew the Lord would be with me.

While in school, I met my husband, and we were married in 2007. My mother also joined the Church that year. She told me that she had never known why I was so happy, even with all the terrible things that had happened to us. But once she joined the Church, she understood. The gospel of Jesus Christ has blessed my family, and I'm happy to see my mother blessed after all the sacrifices she has made. I will always be grateful for her.

By the beginning of 2010, I was preparing for graduation—and was pregnant with our first child. Two months before I was to graduate from the nursing program, I had complications with my pregnancy, and our baby was born via cesarean section. My teachers told me I should take time off from school and graduate later. But I was so close—only two months away!

So my husband and I carefully organized our time so we could properly balance our priorities and I could complete my education. I scheduled my study time so I could give my husband and our son the attention they needed. Sometimes my husband's parents stayed with our son while I was in class. Two great classmates helped me review class materials. I felt that the Lord had sent all of these people to support me through this difficult time.

### **A Better Life**

After graduation I passed the state certification exam and started working as a nurse to help support our family while my husband completes his education. Even though I am not planning on working once my husband starts his career, if a tragedy or economic hardship requires me to work in the future, my education helps me feel prepared to do so.

Mom was right: education *does* have the capacity to change lives. It has changed mine, and it will change the lives of my children. I hope they will realize that I am successful because I followed the Lord's plan for me. He wanted me to get an education, and He helped me every step of the way. I hope my children learn how to work like I did and that they come to value education as much as I do. ■

#### **NOTE**

1. Gordon B. Hinckley, “A Prophet's Counsel and Prayer for Youth,” *Liahona*, Apr. 2001, 34; *New Era*, Jan. 2001, 8.

### **PERPETUATING EDUCATION**

**T**he Perpetual Education Fund (PEF) was established in 2001 to help members of the Church obtain the education and training they need to be self-reliant. Members of the Church who qualify for the program receive a loan to help pay for their education. They repay the loan after gaining employment. In order to qualify for a PEF loan, an applicant must do several things, including the following:

- Be a worthy, active member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Single male applicants between 19 and 26 must be returned missionaries or have an approved exemption.
- Be endorsed by priesthood leaders.
- Enroll in an institute of religion, unless married or over age 30.
- Live, work, and attend school in a PEF-approved country. PEF loans are available to members in over 40 countries.
- Commit to pay as many school costs as possible with personal money, graduate and gain better work, and fully repay the loan.

If you are interested in applying for a loan through PEF, contact your local priesthood leader. Learn more about the program by visiting [pef.lds.org](http://pef.lds.org).