

Maria's

~~Mettle Medal~~

Thy friends do stand by thee, and they shall hail thee again with warm hearts and friendly hands (D&C 121:9).



BY CINDY AND
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(Based on a true story)

I'm nine years old and in the third grade. I love gymnastics, and last January I had worked hard preparing for a gymnastics exhibition. But as I sat and shivered through the evening, I realized that I was too sick to perform any of my routines.

Then things just got worse. When I got over the flu, I came down with a disease that made my joints swell up so much I couldn't walk. Big purple bruises covered my legs. I couldn't do any gymnastics. I couldn't even go to school. Every day Mom went to my school and collected all the work I missed from my teacher. I sat at home all

day and worked on it. Sometimes writing made blood vessels in my hands burst into new bruises. I really tried hard not to complain. Mom tried to cheer me up by telling me I was getting good at sewing and reading and other "sitting still" kinds of things. I'm not the "sitting still" type, though, and week after week of not moving around was really tough.

What's "mettle"?



It means being able to deal with difficult stuff in your life.

My 14-year-old sister, Jeanne, has a New Era poster in her room of a baby chick trying to crack out of an egg. The words say, "Adversity can make you strong." I wasn't sure what adversity meant, but I was sure that I was having plenty of it. I felt just like that little chick that couldn't crack out of the egg.



It took six weeks for me to get better. Finally I could go back to school and gymnastics. Although I had kept up with my schoolwork, I was out of shape and far behind everybody else in gymnastics.

I knew the first gymnastics competition of the season was in May, and I knew I would have to work really hard to get ready. I did work really hard and

was able to compete.

The next big competition was the state meet. My best friend, Natalie, and I did really well at all of our qualifying meets over the summer. We did so well, in fact, that we both qualified in all areas (vault, floor exercise, bars, and beam) to go to the state meet. We were so happy we were practically walking on air!



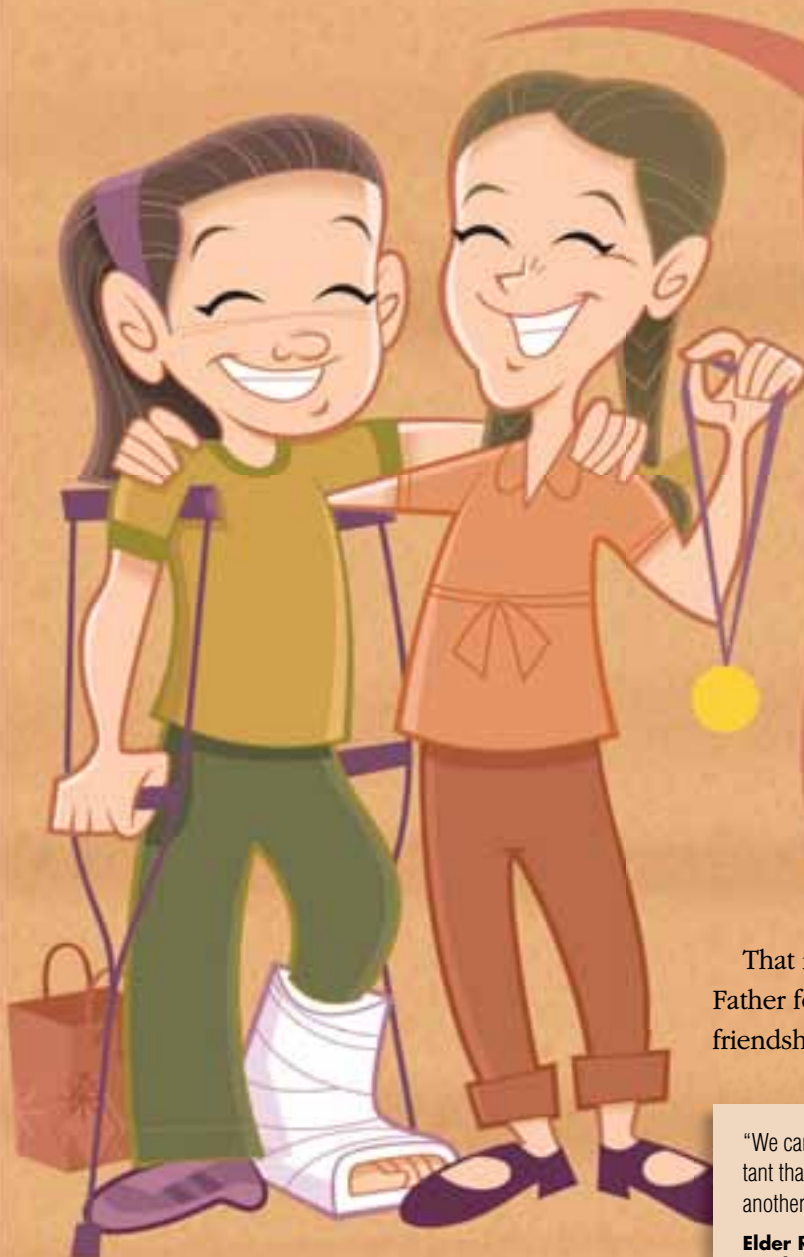
Then the unthinkable happened. Two weeks before the state meet I broke my ankle. When the doctor told me I wouldn't be able to compete, I burst into tears. I had worked so hard to make it to state. I felt sorry for myself, and I was miserable. Why did everything always happen to me? I felt like I had a big, sad hole right in the middle of me.

On the day of the state meet, Natalie and her mom came to pick up Jeanne. I knew Natalie was really sad that I couldn't go, so I tried my best to hold back the tears as I waved good-bye. After they left, I sat on the couch and cried.

When Jeanne got home from the meet, she told me that Natalie had done well and had won two medals. I was happy for her, but I still felt that big, sad hole in my heart.

The next day there was a knock at the door. I grabbed my crutches and hobbled over to answer it. It was Natalie. She was carrying a present for me in a small gift bag.

I opened the bag and pulled something heavy out of the tissue paper. It was one of Natalie's state medals that she had worked so hard for! On the back was engraved, "To my best friend, Maria." She said she knew I would have won it if I had been there.



The big, sad hole inside me melted, and I gave Natalie a giant hug. Suddenly the state meet didn't seem so important. Being friends with Natalie was what was important, and I knew I couldn't ever have a better friend!

That night when I went to bed, I thanked Heavenly Father for Natalie and for teaching me that love and friendship are more important than winning. ●

"We cannot endure to the end alone. It is important that we help by lifting and strengthening one another."⁵

Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

