

# Elder Quentin L. Cook

## *A Willing Heart and Mind*

BY ELDER JEFFREY R. HOLLAND  
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

**I**t was fire drill day at a Logan, Utah, elementary school, and fire drill captain Joe Cook, a stalwart sixth-grade student leader, was determined to post a good time. He was pleased when, at the ringing of the alarm, students began to evacuate the building rapidly. “This will be record-setting time,” young Joe thought. “We’re going to go down in history.” Then just as fame seemed within his grasp, Joe heard the announcement: “Someone is still in the building. The building *is not* clear.”

As record-breaking time ebbed away, Joe Cook finally saw one lone first-grader emerge from the building. It was his little brother, Quentin! Joe had been denied his rightful place in Cache Valley history by his own flesh and blood!

Fuming, Joe barked, “What on earth were you doing?”

Quentin held up a pair of large, worn boots and said, “Joe, you know that [and he mentioned a friend’s name] sometimes has to wear hand-me-down shoes that are too big for him.



When the fire drill rang, he took off running and ran right out of these. He didn’t want to ruin the drill, so he left them and ran outside barefoot. I went back to get his boots for him because I didn’t want his feet to be cold in the snow.”

Such a tender story reveals how committed Elder Quentin La Mar Cook has been from his youth onward to matters of the heart and to the principles taught by the Savior. “I have known Quentin all my life,” says childhood friend and future missionary companion



Lee Burke, “and he has never done anything that would dishonor himself, his family, or his Church.” That the Lord knew the destiny of this young man was obvious to his beloved mother, Bernice, when her patriarchal blessing revealed that her sons “would bring

honor” to the family and “be mighty in forwarding the work of the Lord.” So those sons have done, and so Elder Quentin L. Cook will continue to do in his call as an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ.





**Right: With Elder Jeffrey R. Holland and Elder Marion D. Hanks, their former mission president and former member of the Seventy. Opposite page, from top: Eight-year-old Quentin Cook (at left with his family) and at ages 19 and 3.**

### Learning from Others

Born on September 8, 1940, in Logan, Utah, to J. Vernon and Bernice Kimball Cook, Quentin learned from his father at a young age the importance of setting goals and working toward them.

“My father had three rules,” Elder Cook says. “First, we had to have worthwhile goals. Second, we could change our goals at any time. But third, *whatever* goal we chose, we had to work diligently toward it.”

His frequent talks with his father taught him to observe

those around him and apply the best in them to himself. “People have so much to offer us if we are willing to learn from them,” Elder Cook says. “That is why it is important to surround yourself with good people.”

Growing up in Logan, he had that opportunity. For example, he recalls listening intently as Elder L. Tom Perry, now of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, then a young man recently returned from World War II, spoke in sacrament meeting about his experiences. That inspiring moment remains one of his earliest and strongest childhood memories.

As a young man, Elder Cook loved sports, helping his high school teams win statewide recognition in basketball and football. His interests also included debate and politics. As a 16-year-old, he was one of two young men elected to represent the state at a national event. There he had the opportunity to meet current and future U.S. presidents Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, Richard M. Nixon, and Gerald R. Ford. Seeing them at work in the law-making process impressed him deeply and helped influence his decision to study law.

Before his mission Elder Cook attended Utah State University, where he was elected to a student-body office with his friend W. Rolfe Kerr, who would later be called to the First Quorum of the Seventy and now serves as Commissioner of the Church Educational System.

From 1960 to 1962 Elder Cook served in the British Mission, the same mission to which I would be called.

We were profoundly affected by our mission president, Elder Marion D.

Hanks, then of the First Council of the Seventy. To all of his missionaries, he emphasized discipleship and determination. He taught us to love the Savior, to cherish the Book of Mormon, to be true to the Church and the gospel for the rest of our lives.





Now, more than 45 years later, it is a rare occasion to have two former missionary companions serving together in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

The list of good men and women from whom he had the opportunity to learn goes on, but Elder Cook points out that many of them didn't hold lofty positions at the time. They were just good people.

"We can learn from doctrine, and we can learn from good examples," Elder Cook says. "But when you find people who have put those two together, whose lives are consistent with what they have learned in the gospel of Jesus Christ, that is a wonderful combination. And these people don't have to be General Authorities or have some high occupation. All walks of life produce that kind of people."

### The Influence of Family

Though Elder Cook has been blessed to find good associations throughout his life, those with the greatest influence have been members of his own family.

He is grateful for a loving, involved father and a mother who "loved the Savior. They did everything they could to raise us the right way." He appreciates the love and support of his brother, Joe, and sister, Susan.

One of the pivotal experiences of his life happened when he was 15 years old. His brother, Joe, wanted to serve a mission, but his father—a good man who had lost interest in Church activity—felt Joe should instead attend medical school. Joe and Quentin respected their father highly, so they sequestered themselves to consider his counsel.

They talked well into the night, balancing



the pros and cons of each option. The bottom line, they decided, was this: If the Church is just another good institution, Joe could help people better by going to medical school. However, if the Savior truly lived, if Joseph Smith truly was a prophet, if the Church he organized under God's direction truly is the Church of Jesus

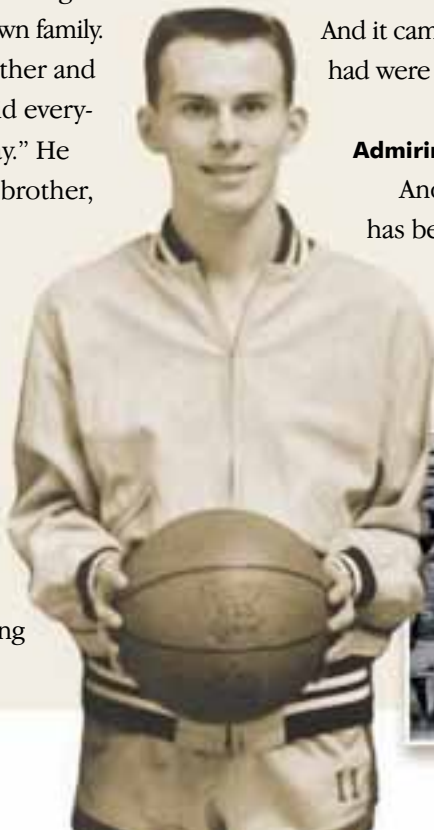
Christ, if the Book of Mormon is true, then Joe's obligation was clear. The next morning Joe approached his father with that reasoning and bore his testimony. He left for his mission soon after, with his father's support and his mother's joyful blessing.

That conversation profoundly affected young Quentin. He had always had a testimony of the Savior. However, Joseph Smith, the Church, the Book of Mormon—these were another matter to a 15-year-old. He believed, but he had yet to receive a spiritual witness that confirmed their certain reality.

After he and Joe parted that night, Quentin went to his room, knelt in prayer, and asked for the same witness his brother had, a witness he desired with all his heart. And it came in a way so powerful that any doubts he had were swept away forever.

### Admiring Mary

Another of the great influences in his life has been his wife, Mary. "It would be hard to find anybody in the whole world who is as good and righteous and bright as she is," her husband says. "She has a wonderful sense of humor."





The Cooks' daughter, Kathryn Cook Knight, reinforces that assessment. "Dad was a perfect father," she says. "I adore everything about him. But my mother is a saint."



Sister Cook is very gifted musically, having taught music and filling her home with music. In fact, Elder Cook first became acquainted with Mary at a seventh-grade talent assembly. He remembers, "This little towheaded girl gets up and sings 'On the Sunny Side of the Street.' Even in junior high school she had a remarkably mature, deep voice. I was absolutely amazed. And that song could have been the theme for the rest of her life. She has a wonderfully bright, sunny disposition."

During their schooling, the two had numerous opportunities to work together. In junior high he was elected student-body president, and she was elected student-body vice president. They were in debate together. And as senior-class president in high school, he worked with her as a student-body officer.

"We were friends long before we were anything else," Elder Cook recalls. "I admired her before I fell in love with her, and marrying her was the best decision I have ever made."

Elder and Sister Cook were married in the Logan Utah Temple on November 30, 1962.

#### **Loving People from All Walks of Life**

After he graduated from Utah State University in 1963 with a degree in political science, Quentin and Mary moved to California, where he earned his Juris Doctor degree from Stanford University in 1966. Elder Cook then joined the San Francisco Bay Area law firm of Carr, McClellan, Ingersoll, Thompson and Horn.

It was there that he decided that "what I believed and who I was had to be visible." In his work in business law and health care, Elder Cook associated with well-educated and affluent people. The Cooks' son Larry remembers being touched that his father was so deeply respected among his business and civic associates. "I attended the retirement dinners honoring Dad when he left his law firm and later when he stepped down from the leadership of a health-care system," Larry recalls. "I was in awe that colleague after colleague, none of whom were members of the Church, spoke—often with tears—about what Dad meant to them, how he had mentored and nurtured them, how he had selflessly fostered their careers without any sense that it was taking time or energy away from his own."

**Elder and Sister Cook raised their family (left and below) in California, where he worked in business law and health care. Above: With Sutter Health business associate Van Johnson. Opposite page: In high school Elder Cook was elected to Boys Nation, where he helped place a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. He also starred on his school's basketball and football teams.**



At the same time, his Church service led to treasured associations with members whose cultural backgrounds were diverse and whose economic status stretched between broad extremes. Through both professional and Church experience, he developed the ability to understand and relate to people from all walks of life, and his love grew for all people.

He was called to serve as a bishop, then as a counselor in the stake presidency (to his beloved older brother, Joe!), and later as stake president. During that time he worked with not only English-speaking wards but congregations that spoke Spanish, Tongan, Samoan, Tagalog, Mandarin, and Cantonese.

Some of the members had little education and less money. But they had much to give. He remembers fondly “one of the great men I knew” who delivered bread for a living and was called into a bishopric. The man had seen ward leaders taking briefcases to their meetings, and so he decided to take one too. But since he had nothing to put in it yet, he filled it with sourdough bread to share. This humble man’s willingness to serve was surpassed only by love for others.

“Specific occupations or levels of education aren’t what I’m talking about when I say learn from good people,” Elder Cook says. “You can find good people everywhere and learn from them all.”

### **Being Prepared at Home**

Raising their three children in the San Francisco area with his wife, Elder Cook was careful to develop a close relationship with each of his children in

spite of the demands of work and Church callings.

“It is important,” he says, “particularly for those who have leadership positions in the Church, that they have a relationship with their children where the children

can see the virtues they have been applied in an entirely different setting than church—whether it’s working in the yard or playing sports or doing something together outdoors.”

Remembering an example of love demonstrated, not simply taught, the Cooks’ second son, Joe, recalls that his father was uneasy about Joe’s driving back to San Francisco after finishing his first-semester exams at Brigham Young University. It would be late December, the roads might be snow-bound, and he would be tired. At the end of the semester Joe answered a knock on the door of his dormitory to

see his father standing there, having flown up from the Bay Area to be his son’s driving companion for the trip home. Joe says that was not only a powerful manifestation of his dad’s love for him but the talk time they had on the trip home—filled with discussions of various gospel principles and repeated testimonies of the Savior—became one of the truly formative

moments in young Joe’s vision of what he wanted by way of testimony and for his own future fatherhood.

As his father had done, Elder Cook taught his children to set goals and evaluate how their actions and activities affected reaching those goals. The Cooks also set goals as a family that were focused first on the gospel. Elder Cook believes that if a family observes appropriate



religious practices, such as family prayer, family scripture study, and regular family home evenings, children can be raised righteously anywhere.

The key, Elder Cook says, is private, individual religious observance. "Walking by my children's doors and seeing them studying the scriptures or on their knees praying was the single most important thing to me as a father," he says.

But individual religious observance is more likely to develop "when your family religious observance makes it clear to your children that all other life goals, such as occupation and education, are secondary to having a testimony of the Savior and living righteously."

### Preparing to Serve

During three decades in California, Elder Cook moved from one responsible position to another, both in his career and in the Church. He moved from associate to partner to managing partner in his law firm and then was hired as president and CEO of California Healthcare System, which subsequently merged with Sutter Health, where he became vice chairman.

During that time he served as a regional representative and Area Authority before being called as a member of the Second Quorum of the Seventy in 1996. He was called to the First Quorum in 1998.

As a General Authority, Elder Cook served in the Philippines/Micronesia Area Presidency and as President of the Pacific Islands and the North America Northwest Areas of the Church. His love for the faithful Saints around the world continued to grow.

As Executive Director of the Church's Missionary Department, he played an important



role in developing the new missionary guide, *Preach My Gospel*. But Elder Cook takes no credit for it. "The hand of the Lord was in it right from day one," he says. "Every single member of the First Presidency and the Twelve made incredible contributions."

### Ready and Willing

Elder Cook is well prepared to serve in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. His willingness to learn from others and his lifetime of selfless service enable him to offer the Lord his heart and willing mind.

"I have revered, sustained, and honored all of those who have been Apostles," he says. "Their influence on me has been profound. I don't know what my contribution will be, but I do know that Jesus Christ is the Savior, that God is our Father in Heaven, that Joseph Smith is the prophet of this dispensation, and that we have a prophet today. That knowledge is the center of my life."

We can be certain that knowledge will continue as the center of Elder Quentin L. Cook's apostolic ministry. ■

For more information about Elder Cook, see [www.quentinlcook.lds.org](http://www.quentinlcook.lds.org).

**Of his wife, Mary, Elder Cook says, "Marrying her was the best decision I have ever made." Below: After the October 2007 general conference session when he was sustained to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Opposite page: Elder and Sister Cook's children and grandchildren.**

