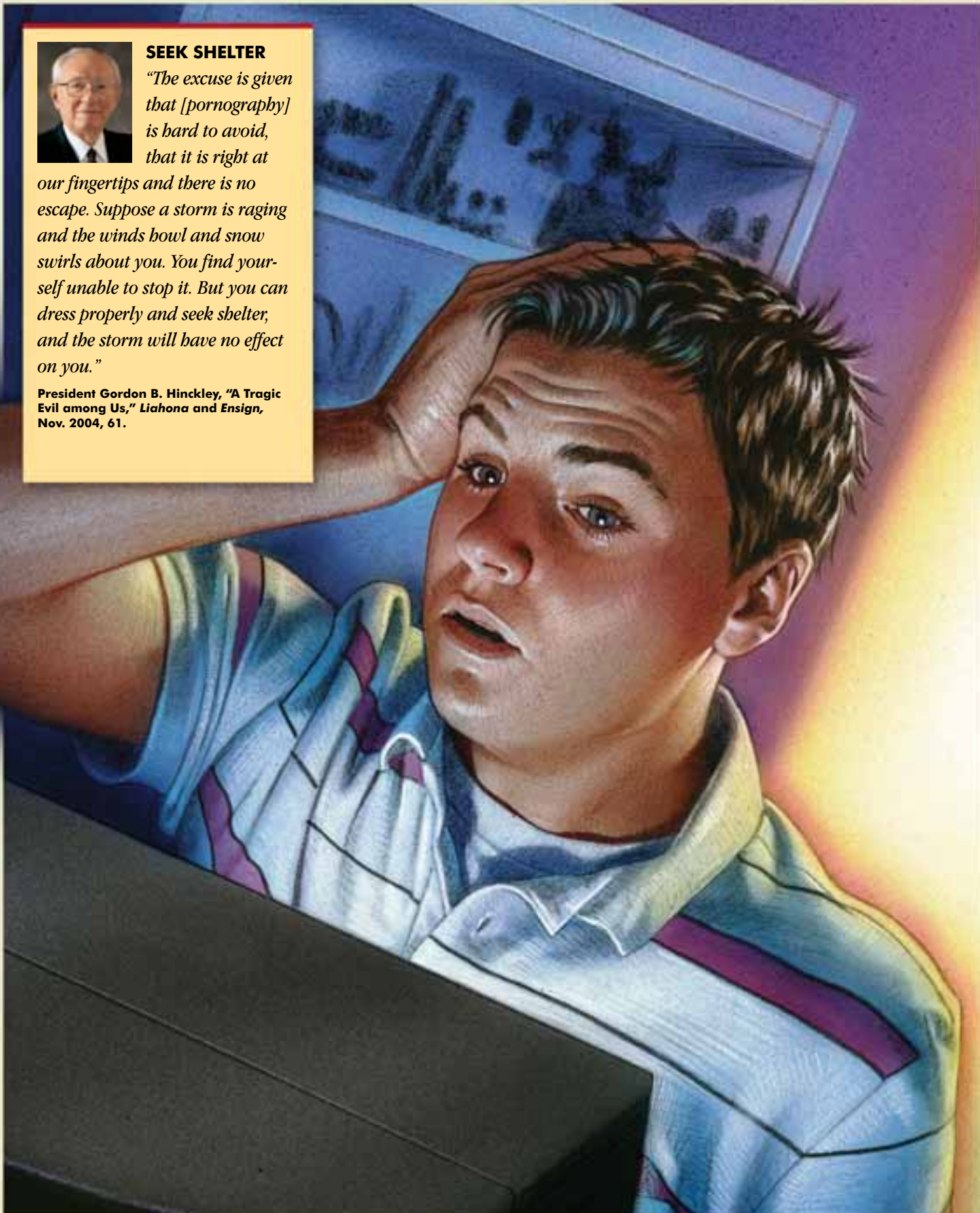




SEEK SHELTER

"The excuse is given that [pornography] is hard to avoid, that it is right at our fingertips and there is no escape. Suppose a storm is raging and the winds howl and snow swirls about you. You find yourself unable to stop it. But you can dress properly and seek shelter, and the storm will have no effect on you."

President Gordon B. Hinckley, "A Tragic Evil among Us," *Liahona and Ensign*, Nov. 2004, 61.



My Battle with Pornography

NAME WITHHELD

I was just 10 years old the first time I encountered pornography. I was at an older friend's house, and we were watching television. He turned to his computer and said he had something to show me. When I asked what it was, he said, "Hot pictures of girls." I told him it was against my religion to look at those kinds of things, but he said, "Yeah, right. Everyone looks at this stuff—it's natural." I refused to look at it and left.

Two years later I was at my friend's house again. The difference this time was that I let curiosity and temptation get the better of me, and I agreed to look at what he had to show me. It was the biggest mistake of my life. I wish on a daily basis that I had not gone down the path I did.

I continued to look at pornography on my home computer. It was in a private place, but if anyone walked in on me, I said it was a pop-up or made some other excuse. For the next year I silenced the guilt I felt and didn't even try to stop looking at pornography. I convinced myself that it was natural and ignored any counsel from the Church that told me otherwise. I didn't realize it at first, but I had become addicted to pornography.

The way I looked at girls started to change, and I was ashamed of the thoughts I had.

At a youth conference my stake president spoke to us about how looking at pornography makes young men unworthy to exercise the priesthood. His talk convinced me that I needed to stop. At first I thought I could do it on my own. I didn't want to tell the bishop because I didn't want him to judge me for what I was doing. Instead, I just resolved not to look at it anymore. Unfortunately, my resolves never lasted long. I promised myself every time was the last time, but the addiction was so ingrained in me that I would find myself looking at it again and again.

Many other sins came as a result of this one. I continued to go to church but didn't pay attention. I let Satan gain power over my life and lost the influence of the Spirit. I lied about scripture reading in seminary. I lied about Boy Scout records. I even cheated in school. I became everything I had been taught not to be.

Five years passed while I tried to overcome my addiction with prayer and self-control. But I couldn't beat the addiction by myself.

No matter how hard I tried to break free from my addiction, I kept losing the battle. I finally learned I couldn't do it on my own.



PREVENTION

The best defense against pornography is to avoid it. The following tips will prevent you from taking the first step toward addiction and all of its problems:

- Many people who struggle with pornography were introduced to it by a friend. If anyone offers to show you pornography, leave immediately. Choose carefully the people you spend time with.
- Have the courage to turn off any media that displays or talks about immorality, regardless of the rating.
- Place televisions and computers in busy areas of the house. Do not use the computer when you are home alone.
- Make sure that any computer you use to access the Internet has a filter that will block pornographic Web sites. Protect yourself against the storm of pornography (see the quote by President Hinckley on page 34).
- Never open e-mail from someone you don't know. If you accidentally encounter pornography on the Web, immediately turn off the computer and tell an adult.
- Listen to the promptings of the Holy Ghost. He will warn you when you are in a dangerous situation.



RECOVERY

If you are caught in the snare of pornography, you must repent *and* overcome the addiction. Work through your repentance with the help of your bishop or branch president. LDS Family Services gives the following suggestions for recovering from an addiction:

- *Stop rationalizing.* You must stop justifying your addictive behavior.

- *Disrupt the addictive cycle.* Prevent the following cycle of addiction from repeating itself:

Phase 1: Preoccupation—dwelling on mental images that are sexually stimulating.

Phase 2: Ritualization—engaging in routines that lead to the use of pornography.

Phase 3: Viewing or using pornography.

Phase 4: Despair.

You can overcome the temptation to look at pornography by breaking the cycle at any of the four points. Here are ways to stop one phase from leading to the next:

1. *Control your thoughts and desires.* Use faith, fasting, prayer, and scripture study to overcome impure thoughts. Replace unworthy thoughts as soon as they enter your mind by listening to inspirational music, reciting memorized scriptures, or thinking about wholesome things.

2. *Change your routines.* Do something different, like going for a walk, reading the scriptures, talking to a friend, or practicing a sport or musical instrument.

3. *Eliminate the opportunity.* Stop yourself from looking at pornography by preventing access to it.

4. *Pray for hope to replace your despair.* Do not allow setbacks to discourage you. Through repentance and forgiveness, you can feel hope instead of despair. Overcoming addiction is a process that takes time. Those who succeed are persistent.

- *Seek professional assistance.* Serious addictions may require professional counseling. In some areas, your bishop or branch president can refer you to the nearest LDS Family Services office, which has an addiction recovery program. Visit www.ldsfamilyservices.org for more information. The Church pamphlet *Let Virtue Garnish Thy Thoughts* (item no. 00460) also has helpful information on overcoming pornography.



AVOID THE TRAP

“Pornography brings a vicious wake of immorality, broken homes, and broken

lives. Pornography will sap spiritual strength to endure. Pornography is much like quicksand. You can become so easily trapped and overcome as soon as you step into it that you do not realize the severe danger. Most likely you will need assistance to get out of the quicksand of pornography. But how much better it is never to step into it.”

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Press On,” *Liahona* and *Ensign*, Nov. 2004, 103.

I finally admitted to my parents that I had a problem with pornography. I told them, “I need help. I can’t do this alone.” Even though it was hard on them, they understood and tried to help me. My parents encouraged me to meet with the bishop.

I knew my parents were right, but I was afraid to talk to my bishop. I considered him a friend, and I didn’t want him to know about all the sins I had kept hidden. When I finally gathered the courage to meet with him, I was surprised by how understanding he was. I didn’t feel like he was judging me at all; he just wanted to help.

As soon as I confessed fully to the bishop and started to repent, my life immediately got better. I understood that to repent fully of my addiction to pornography, I needed to repent of *all* my sins. I turned in all of my seminary awards and Scouting merit badges, admitting that I hadn’t earned them. I also confessed to my schoolteachers that I had cheated.

With the bishop’s help, I realized how important it is to confess both to the bishop and to the Lord (see D&C 58:43). Before, I was trying to fight this addiction all by myself, but now I have my parents, my bishop, and most important, the Lord on my side. These are strong defenses against temptation.

We got a parental lock on the computer, and I began to put pictures of the temple or the prophet nearby to keep my mind on sacred things. I discovered that daily

scripture study was one of the most helpful ways to build my spiritual defenses. When I was looking at pornography, I don’t think I even knew where my scriptures were. But now I know I need to read my scriptures every day in order to resist temptation.

I’ve also had to be more careful about what I watch and listen to. Many television shows and movies talk about immorality as if it were natural. I’ve realized it *is* natural to the natural man, an enemy to God (see Mosiah 3:19). Only through the Atonement of Jesus Christ have I been able to put off the natural man and be forgiven of my sins. I know that if anyone can understand the regret I have suffered for my sins, it is the Savior, who suffered all things.

I have now forsaken my addiction to pornography. I have come to understand that through the Atonement, there is eternal hope. Although I will have to be constantly on my guard, with the help of the Spirit in my life, I will win the war. I know the devil will still try to tempt me, but he will never prevail when I have the Savior on my side.

I learned the hard way that it takes only one time to spark the beginning of a long addiction that will bring nothing but misery. I let idle curiosity lead me to sin and despair, but I am motivated to stay away from this plague for the rest of my life. I look forward to serving a mission, marrying in the temple, and eventually living with Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ again. ■



LEFT, FROM TOP: PHOTOGRAPHS BY JED CLARK, WELDEN C. ANDERSEN, JOHN LUKE, AND TAMARA PATIETA