

Ugly Duckling or Majestic Swan? It's Up to You!



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As a young child, I remember my mother reading to me the story “The Ugly Duckling,” by Hans Christian Andersen. Maybe it was because I was shy and felt like I didn’t fit in, but the memory and the moral of that story have always remained with me.

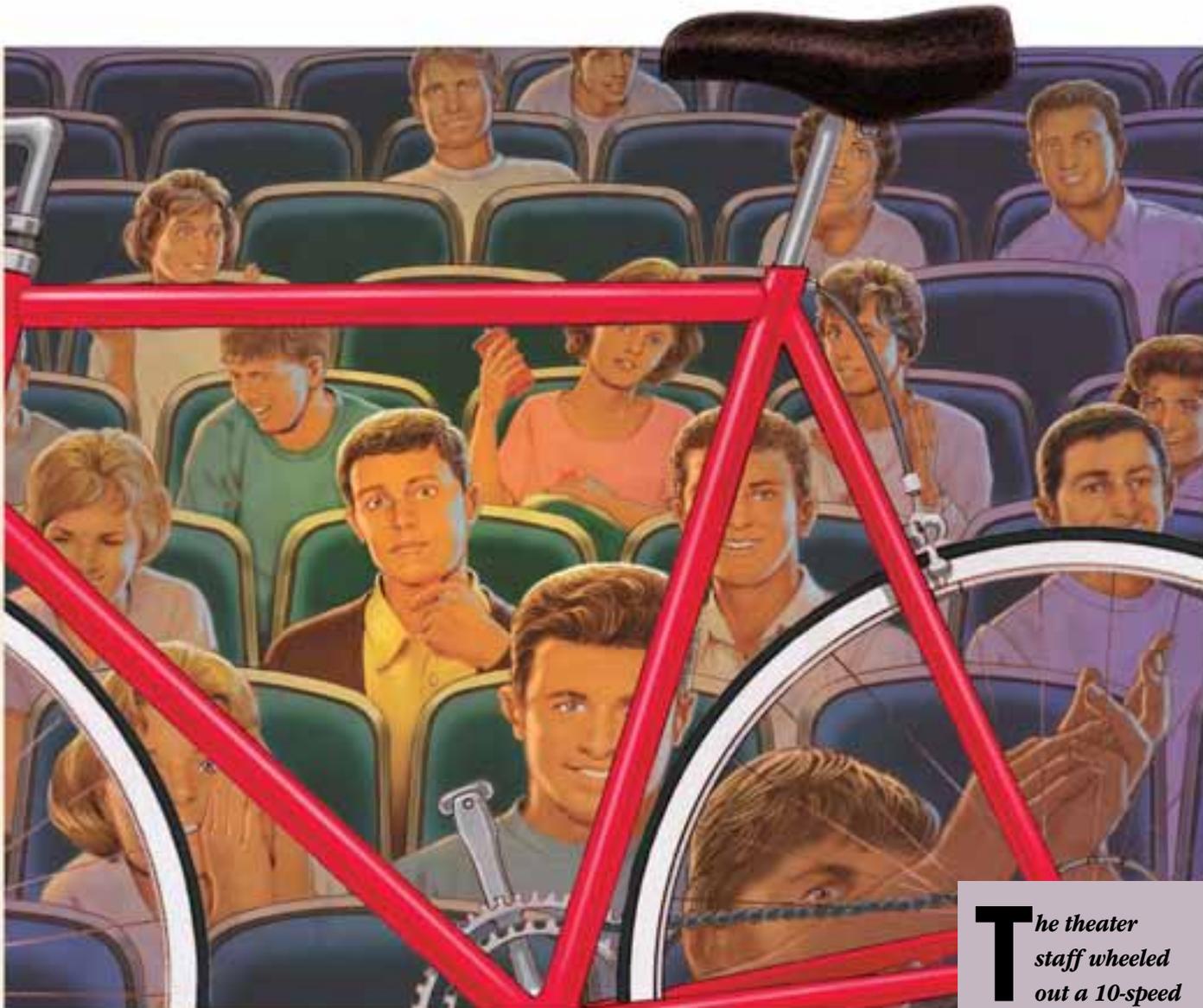
In the version that I remember, a mother duck waits patiently for her eggs to hatch into little ducklings. Before long, the fuzzy, yellow ducklings emerge to the delight of the mother duck. However, there is one slightly larger egg that still has not hatched. The mother and her ducklings wait and watch. When the egg finally cracks open, the yellow ducklings notice that this new member of the family looks different. They gather around him and declare to their mother and father, “He’s not like us. He’s ugly.” They leave him alone in the nest and swim away. The ugly duckling wanders away from the nest and tries to hide.

Every encounter he has is negative and discouraging. He would often think to himself, “Everyone hates me because I’m ugly.”

Then a miracle takes place in his life. He sees others who look and act just like he does! He becomes friends with them, and they take him to their mother and ask,

You are a chosen son or daughter of God. Choose to live up to the divine potential that lies within you.





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“Mother, Mother, we’ve found a little brother! Can he stay with us forever?” The beautiful, graceful swan mother folds her white wing around the ugly duckling and says to him in a gentle voice, “You’re not a duckling at all! You are a little swan, and someday you will be the king of the pond.”

I loved hearing this story as a child. I didn’t realize that the lessons I learned from it would help me through my difficult teenage years. I was baptized a member of the Church when I was eight, but gradually my family became less active.

In the small town in Idaho where I grew up, there was a movie theater that featured

an afternoon matinee every Saturday. I would always go with two or three of my friends. The theater would show a short movie about sports and another about current events. The main feature was usually a cowboy movie with lots of action.

One Saturday during intermission, the staff wheeled out a 10-speed bicycle. It was red, it was beautiful, and they were going to give it away to the person in the audience who had the winning ticket stub! Oh, how I wanted that bicycle!

The announcer reached into the container and pulled out a ticket. As he read the number on the ticket, I discovered that I had



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the winning ticket. Yet I didn't move or say anything. I was too shy and embarrassed. I did not have enough confidence in myself to stand and let everyone know that I had the winning ticket. He announced the winning number two more times, and each time I held the ticket down so that no one could see it. Finally, the announcer read another number. One of the friends I came to the movie with happened to have the new number. He jumped up, screamed, and ran to the stage to claim his bicycle. That bicycle could have been mine!

As I walked home alone from the movies that Saturday, I thought of the story of the ugly duckling. I was feeling a lot like that

little swan. I felt like I was wandering around in the woods trying to hide and that no one liked me. I didn't realize who I was or what I could become. By the time I arrived home, I knew something had to change. I remember thinking, "It's time to grow up. That will never happen to me again."

I began to discover that there were others around me who loved and cared about me. My ward bishopric took an interest in me, as did my stake president, who lived just down the street from me. They taught me the gospel. They bore their testimonies to me of the reality of the Savior and His precious Atonement and what it could do for me. They read to me repeatedly the story of Joseph Smith and his

vision in the Sacred Grove. From that experience I have developed the wonderful habit of reading Joseph Smith—History every week. By doing so, I know that I can have the strength to overcome anything placed before me that week.

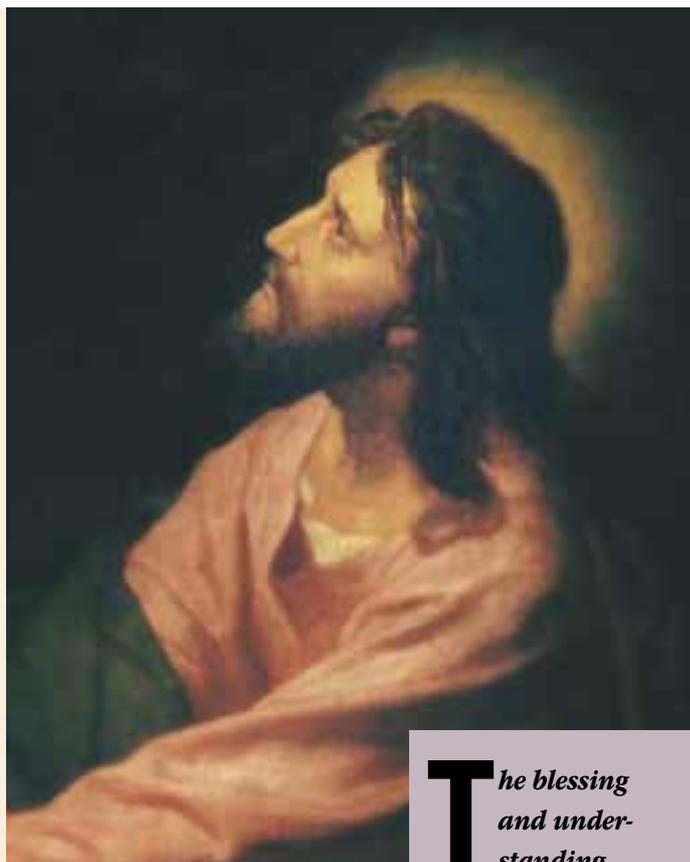
At that time in my life, when I needed someone so badly, my Heavenly Father blessed me. He knew who I was, and He sent His servants to help me discover that for myself. They wrapped their arms around me and told me by their actions that I wasn't an ugly duckling at all and that if I was worthy and kept the commandments of God, I could become "the king of the pond." The blessing and understanding of the Atonement began to give me added strength and confidence.

When I reached the age of 16, these good men encouraged me to receive a patriarchal blessing. After I received my recommend, I got on my old bike and rode several miles to the patriarch's home. He explained once again what a patriarchal blessing is and how it would bless my life. He laid his hands on my head. After that experience, my life was never the same.

I accepted a mission call to Scotland and had a wonderful experience. A few weeks after I returned home, I met my future wife at a Church meeting. We dated, and I proposed marriage. We were married in the Salt Lake Temple.

One sentence in my patriarchal blessing indicates that I would be permitted to live in mortality with an angel. At the time the patriarch gave me that blessing, I didn't know what an angel was, let alone the meaning of the phrase. As I left the temple the day my wife and I were sealed, I knew what it meant. She has been the light of my life. Thanks to her, I have been permitted to live in an environment of light. She has brought joy and happiness to our 8 children, 25 grandchildren, and 2 great-grandchildren. My children have all come to call her blessed. I give thanks to God for the blessings of the gospel and the eternal blessings of the covenants and ordinances of the holy temple.

Satan would have us believe that we are ugly ducklings with no chance of becoming like our Heavenly Father and His holy Son. I bear witness that God loves each of us in special ways. As Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004)



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of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said so often, "God's personal shaping influence is felt in the details of our lives."¹ We are His children. I have come to know that we can rise above our current environment and become "kings and queens of the pond" by following the gospel commandments.

I know something else. I know who you are and where you came from. The revelations remind us of our faithfulness in the premortal life (see Revelation 12:7–11; D&C 138:56; Abraham 3:22–23). As we tie our testimonies to that great truth, each day becomes a wonderful blessing for each of us.

Stay on the Lord's side of the line. If He can take care of a bashful, shy boy like me, He will take care of you now and in the future. You are a chosen son or daughter of God. Choose to live up to the divine potential that lies within you. ■

NOTE

1. Neal A. Maxwell, "Becoming a Disciple," *Ensign*, June 1996, 17.