



# LETTING GO OF My Fear

*I felt that my testimony was private, but when I finally shared it, I realized it had the power to help others.*

I was baptized on my 40th birthday after eight years of resisting the attempts of my husband, his home teachers, and so many sets of missionaries that I lost count—all trying to get me to read the Book of Mormon. On July 4, 1991, I finally began to read it and found that I could hardly put it down to eat or sleep until I finished. Now when I hear the hymn “I Stand All Amazed,”<sup>1</sup> I feel as if it were written just for me, and I truly do stand all amazed when I think of what I have now as a member of the Church compared to what I had before.

Converting to the Church after years of being agnostic gave me an entirely different outlook on the world and my place in it. I embraced this new way of life and even newer way of thinking, but I struggled to let go of some of my old inhibitions. I was terrified at the thought of saying a public prayer or testimony and was adamant that I would never do so.

I had stayed firm in my resolve for three years when my bishop asked to talk with me. He suggested that it would be a growth experience for me to share the testimony he knew I had in a fast and testimony meeting. I told him I could not do it yet. He gently told me he hoped I would be able to do so soon.

I felt that my testimony was private and personal, so when I told my husband about my response to the bishop’s suggestion, I expected him to agree with me. To my surprise, Terry encouraged me to search the scriptures about proclaiming the gospel, to pray about what I read, and to try to bear a brief testimony the next Sunday.

I couldn’t believe what he was asking me to do! Then

I got an idea. I would simply go to the pulpit on Sunday, recite the same words the children say, and be done with it.

Sunday came and I was ready, but I sat there in the meeting waiting for the courage to stand up. My palms were wet, my mouth was dry, and I couldn’t move. Finally the meeting was only a few minutes from ending, and I began praying for the strength to go up.

I took a deep breath. And then I decided I just couldn’t do it yet. Maybe I would next month. I began to calm down, but suddenly I felt such an urge to get up that I nearly leaped out of my seat. I literally bounded up the aisle, quickly said one last silent prayer, and started as planned.

“I want to bear my testimony. I know this Church is true. I love my . . .”

I went blank. I stood there in silence for what seemed like forever, and then I started quietly: “I just want you all to know how much this Church means to me. Before I had the gospel, I had no one to turn to during the hard times. I got frustrated and became an angry young woman.”

I felt as if I would pass out, but my mouth kept moving: “I do not think many of you would have liked me back then. In fact, you probably would have feared me.”

I was in shock at the words coming out of my mouth, but I helplessly continued. I told the congregation about an experience in my life when I had been so angry at another driver for a small offense he committed against me that I became outraged and verbally threatened him! I actually felt satisfied when I saw him lock his doors because I knew he was afraid of me.

At this point in my testimony I was stifling my sobs and trying to stop talking, but I continued on. “I felt trapped, and I was angry at the world, all the while wondering, ‘Why me?’ This gospel has taught me that there is a reason we go through our trials, and more important, I know that I am not alone and that I am a daughter of God. I am now a different woman, and I have found the peace I always wanted.”

Sobbing nearly uncontrollably, I quickly finished. As I sat down, I wondered why I had blurted that out. I was embarrassed, feeling I had exposed too much of myself. I hadn’t even thought of that driving incident for 15 years. But when the meeting ended, many ward members expressed love for me and gratitude for my remarks.

My husband and I moved away shortly after that, but we moved back into the ward less than a year later. Our first Sunday back was wonderful; I had forgotten how much I loved those people. At the end of sacrament meeting, a sister came up to me and gave me a bear hug. She told me she and her daughter had cut off all communication with each other many years ago, and she said, “Your testimony made me realize that if you had once been so angry and yet became the woman you are now, then maybe my daughter was no longer the angry person I saw so long ago.”

She continued with tears swelling in her eyes. “I called my daughter, and she wasn’t angry anymore. I cannot tell you how grateful I am for your testimony that day.”

I hugged her and told her I was glad my humiliation did someone some good. She responded, “No! You have no idea what your testimony did for me and for my daughter and her children—my

grandchildren I did not even know. I am certain that Heavenly Father had a hand in this. You really needed to say those things to wake me up!”

She then told me that shortly after their reunion her daughter had been diagnosed with a fast-growing, incurable cancer, and she had recently passed away. This woman was grateful for the time she was able to spend with her daughter and the role she could now play in the lives of her grandchildren.

I cried with gratitude that the Spirit had not given up on me as I sat in the congregation, trying to gather the courage to stand up. As this sister shared her experience with me, I learned how important it is that we as members bear our testimonies when we are prompted.

I never thought Heavenly Father would call on “a soul so rebellious and proud as mine”<sup>2</sup> to share my testimony and in turn help another.

My husband and I moved again after I learned this great lesson, and we were called to be stake missionaries in our new stake. I knew that accepting this calling would require a lot from me and would take me far outside my comfort zone. I was scared, but I was determined to turn over a new leaf. I said prayers when asked, and I even promised myself I would bear testimony as often as I could muster the will.

Being a missionary was not always easy, but because a lot of people we approached reminded me of the woman I had been, I was determined to share with them the peace I had found in the gospel—a gift I will be forever grateful for. ■

*Gilda Hughes Christensen passed away while this article was being prepared for publication.*

#### NOTES

1. *Hymns*, no. 193.
2. “I Stand All Amazed,” *Hymns*, no. 193.

