



UNDERSTANDING *Ellie's Challenge*

Instead of praying for medical answers for my daughter, I started praying for help in dealing with the situation.

BY TIA HAYWARD

On November 7, 1994, our healthy, dark-haired little Ellie Jane was born. My husband, Steve, had just graduated from college and begun his career, and we had purchased our first home. I considered myself a very blessed person and thought I knew genuine happiness and joy. However, not having been through any serious trials, I had never truly felt the need to rely on the Lord and seek His help and guidance. That was about to change.

Five weeks later, on a cold December morning when

I had just finished feeding Ellie, her little body began to shake in a very odd way, and afterwards she cried. Hoping it was just a cold chill, I tried not to be overly concerned. During the day, however, her body shook again. I telephoned my husband and told him I was worried. That evening we found ourselves at Primary Children's Medical Center, where Ellie underwent numerous tests. We were told that our baby had had a seizure, but the doctors did not know why. All of her tests came back normal. We returned to our home unaware of our future.



THE WORKS OF GOD MADE MANIFEST

“The challenge of having handicapped people is not new. Many have questioned why some have such limitations.

It was so in the time of Jesus:

“ ‘And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth.

“ ‘And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?

“ ‘Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.’ (John 9:1–3.)”

President James E. Faust (1920–2007), Second Counselor in the First Presidency, “The Works of God,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1984, 54.

The medications our daughter took the first year of her life did not control her seizures completely, but Ellie continued to develop normally. She had a beautiful smile, and her big brown eyes would light up when we would talk to her. Her older brother, Zac, loved to play peekaboo with her.

On Ellie’s first birthday we had a wonderful party with balloons, ice cream, and cake. We took a great picture of Ellie with her hand in her ice cream and making a funny face. It was the last time we were able to take a picture of her smiling and looking at the camera. Within two weeks, our beautiful daughter began to lose her mental and physical abilities. Her seizures became more frequent and more severe.

An electroencephalogram (EEG) test on her brain revealed that she had developed hypsarrhythmia, an irregular brain wave pattern. She was diagnosed as having infantile spasms—a hard-to-control seizure disorder that leads to severe retardation. We were devastated. My husband and I were so heartbroken that at times it was too painful to even look at our daughter. She no longer smiled, called out to me, or even moved or made sounds. We grieved over the loss of our child. Zac wondered why his little sister wouldn’t laugh at him anymore. The light in her eyes was gone.

Tearful days turned into months, and months turned into years. We searched every possible avenue for an answer. We traveled to four different states for tests. We sought help from many doctors in various fields of practice. We put her small body through daily shots and strong medication, but nothing helped her. We tried to accept the fact that her daily seizures would never go away, but we so desperately wanted Ellie to be “normal” again.

I quit praying for answers because I felt I wasn’t getting any. I disliked reading stories about miraculous healings

because I felt my daughter was being cheated. My husband suggested that I might be praying for the wrong thing. Instead of praying for medical answers for Ellie, maybe I needed to start praying for help in dealing with the situation. I tried to follow his advice. His words brought me comfort, but I still felt that I wasn’t doing enough for Ellie.

Four years later, my husband and I attended ward temple night. Ellie was

again on my mind, and I was praying for comfort and medical answers. It was a very busy night, and we waited in the chapel a little longer than usual. As I was gazing around to see which neighbors or friends were joining us for a temple session, a gentleman caught my attention. At the time, I saw only the back of his head, but his dark, curly hair stood out. I noticed that he did not have a left arm. “How amazing that he is here with the limitations that he has,” I thought. A few minutes later, I realized that his other arm was mechanical.

A powerful feeling came over me at that moment. This man probably had a tremendous amount of faith, but no matter how many prayers he uttered, no matter how many priesthood blessings he received, no matter what doctor he went to, his arms would never grow back. Either this was the way he was born, or something had happened that caused him to lose his arms. But his arms were gone and not coming back. It was then that I received a very personal revelation.

My daughter, Ellie, was as she was for a reason. No matter how often I prayed or how much faith I exerted, she would still have her disability. Yet the Lord loved her. The Lord loved me. I reflected on the past four and a half years and realized the Lord *had* answered my prayers by bringing me comfort and peace.

I am so grateful to the wonderful stranger in the temple for the peace his example of faithfulness helped bring into my life. I don’t know his name, but through him my prayers were answered. ■