

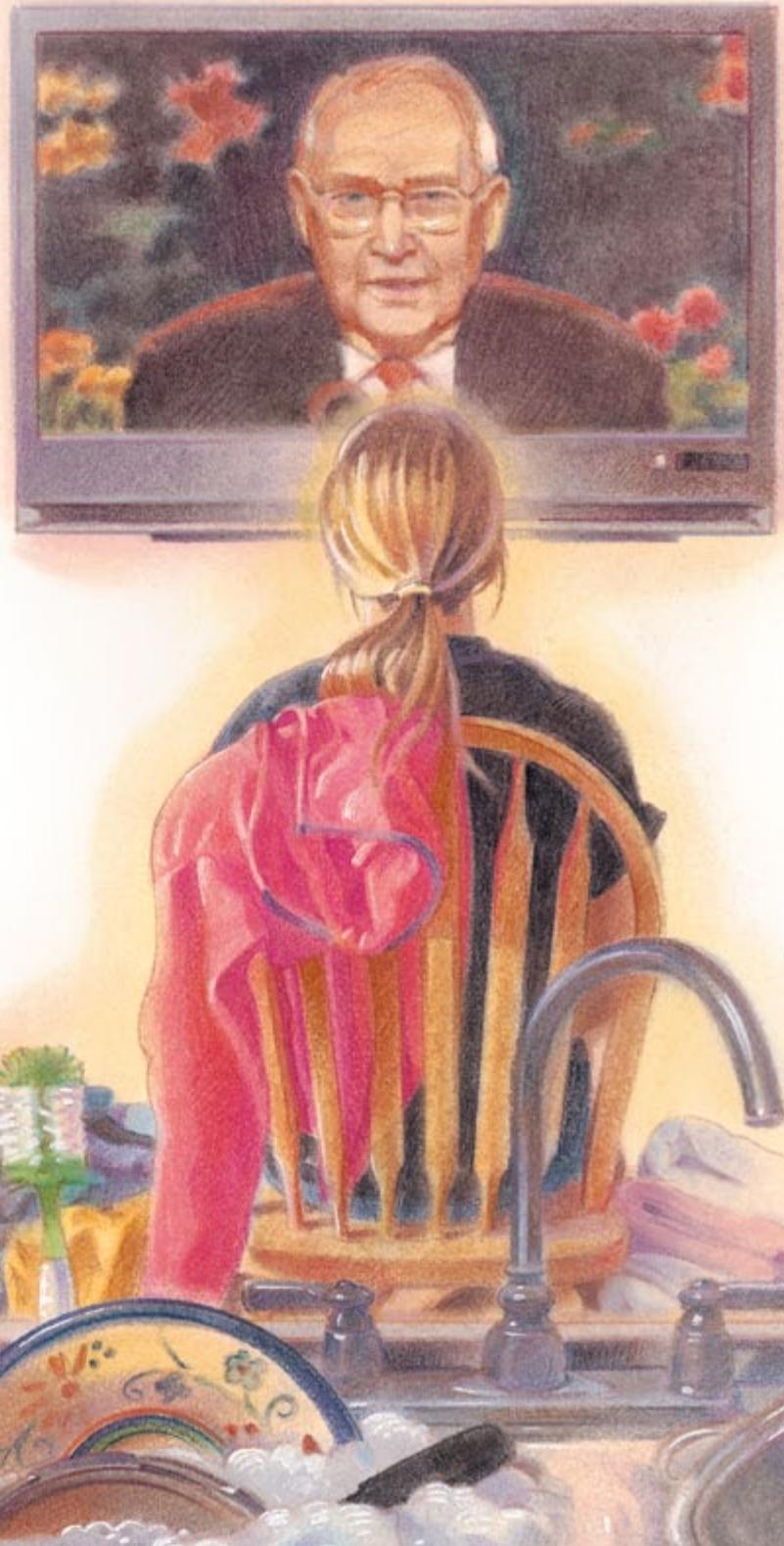
A GENERAL CONFERENCE JUST FOR ME

What I was facing was terrifying, but Heavenly Father was aware of me that first weekend in October.

By Ann Singleton

I grew up in a home where general conferences were as much anticipated as a holiday. I remember as a young girl being given a Sunday School assignment to match the pictures of the General Authorities with their television appearances as they spoke during conference. As I grew older, I learned to recognize those Brethren not just by physical appearances but also by their voices and the messages they gave. As a university freshman, I was thrilled when our institute of religion choir was invited to sing at a session of conference in the Tabernacle. In short, by age 20 I already had a special feeling about those first weekends of April and October each year.

But I was yet to learn how significantly personal general conference could be. Our stake received tickets for the general Relief Society meeting in September 2008 at the Conference Center. I was excited to mingle with the sisters in our stake, anticipated the inspiring music and talks, and was especially humbled to think that we would hear a message from President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency. I hung on every word, vigorously took notes, and committed to put into practice what we were charged to do. I felt this was a wonderful prelude to the general sessions to follow the next weekend.



Then my world shattered. While at work the following Thursday, I received a telephone call from my doctor informing me that the tests I had had the previous week indicated cancer.

The next days were a blur of doubts, fear, anxiety, sadness, despair, and agony. So many emotions churned inside me that sleep did not come and my tears flowed constantly. I had never felt so afraid.

When Saturday morning came, I intended to listen to conference while doing other tasks. Staying busy, I hoped, would help focus my mind away from my trial. But I found myself putting down the laundry and letting the dishes sit in the sink as I was drawn to the television. My heart almost skipped a beat as Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles began the first session with this statement: "We can't predict all the struggles and storms in life, not even the ones just around the next corner, but as persons of faith and hope, we know beyond the shadow of any doubt that the gospel of Jesus Christ is true and the best is yet to come."¹

Surely, I thought, the next topic would be on moral cleanliness or the Sabbath day. But each succeeding message was also one of hope in times of trial!

Sunday was a peaceful day as our family united in prayer and fasting on my behalf. I continued to hear words of hope just as I had the previous day, with a powerful concluding message in the afternoon from Elder Quentin L. Cook of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: "I testify that the Atonement of Jesus Christ covers all of the trials and hardships that any of us will encounter in this life," he said. "At times when we may feel to say, 'Hope you know, I had a hard time,' we can be assured that He is there and we are safe in His loving arms."²

Perhaps it was the fasting or the prayers or simply my humble emotional state, but from beginning to end, I felt this was my own personal general conference with an audience of one.

The following days, weeks, and months brought many challenges as I faced tests, surgeries, chemotherapy, and radiation treatments. I wish I could say that I never felt despair during those 12 months. I did. But during those times, I also felt sustained by the prayers and fasting of ward and family members, priesthood blessings given by my father, and the faith of my mother. I read the Book of Mormon completely during the first few months of treatments, knowing that comfort can come through the word of God.

But on the darkest days, I always went to my well-worn copy of the November 2008 *Ensign* and reread those words that came from a loving Father through inspired servants and directly to my fearful heart. I was amazed at a phrase I hadn't remembered President Thomas S. Monson saying in his opening address: "Our Heavenly Father is mindful of each one of us and our needs. May we be filled with His Spirit as we partake of the proceedings of this, the 178th Semiannual General Conference."³

I had gained a testimony of that truth. Heavenly Father was mindful of me that weekend in October. He knew of my need of hope in His love and hope in His plan for me. He spoke and I listened. ■

Note: Sister Singleton finished her cancer treatment in June 2009, and the cancer has not returned.

NOTES

1. L. Tom Perry, "Let Him Do It with Simplicity," *Liahona* and *Ensign*, Nov. 2008, 7.
2. Quentin L. Cook, "Hope Ya Know, We Had a Hard Time," *Liahona* and *Ensign*, Nov. 2008, 105.
3. Thomas S. Monson, "Welcome to Conference," *Liahona* and *Ensign*, Nov. 2008, 6.