

Standing Strong

By Michelle Lehnardt
(Based on a true story)

"Dare to do right! Dare to be true!"

(Children's Songbook, 158).

Thunk. Erik heard the lacrosse ball land in his teammate Cody's stick. He instantly turned and raced to the other team's goal. Catching Cody's eye, he raised his stick, caught the ball from Cody, and sent it sailing into the goal.

"Score!" Erik's team began cheering before the goalie even saw the ball in his goal. They had won, 5-2!

His teammates high-fived and shouted congratulations. Erik couldn't stop grinning. When he'd moved to his new school, Erik had worried he wouldn't make friends. But his lacrosse teammates had been nice to him from the start, helping him find his classes and saving him a seat at lunch.

After the game, Cody invited everyone over to his house for pizza. Still in their sweaty jerseys and grass-stained pants, the boys gathered in Cody's basement, going over the game and their best plays. The smell of pepperoni pizza filled the air, and Erik grabbed a large slice and a soda.

After a while, things quieted down, and Erik noticed a group of boys on the couch gathered around Cody's phone. "What're you looking at?" Erik asked.

Cody smiled as he pushed his phone in Erik's face. "You'll love this. Look."

Erik flinched, then turned away. It was the kind of photo he knew he shouldn't look at. *This is pornography*, Erik thought. "I don't want to see it."

"Then how about this one, or this one, or this one?"

Cody said, as he scrolled through more pictures.

"I don't want to see any of them." Erik backed away.

The rest of the boys joined in with Cody. "C'mon, there aren't any adults around. Your parents will never know."

"Don't be a baby. Everybody looks at this stuff."

"Aren't you even a little curious?"

Erik was curious. But he'd been taught that looking at pictures of people without clothes on was wrong. If he was



curious, he needed to talk to his parents about it.

"Can't we do something else?" he pleaded.

The boys agreed to turn on a movie, and Erik moved to the back of the room, trying to become invisible.

Just a few minutes into the movie, Erik felt uncomfortable when more bad images filled the screen. He slowly stood up, mumbling, "I think I'll go home now."

None of the other boys seemed to notice as Erik walked up the stairs and slipped out the front door.

Squinting into the afternoon sun, Erik began walking home. He felt tired, sweaty, and lonely, but he also felt peaceful. He felt good about his decision. And when he told his parents about the afternoon, they hugged him and told him they were proud of him.

At school on Monday, Erik thought the boys would have forgotten about the weekend. But when he walked to his usual seat at the lunch table, Cody teased, "Was the movie too scary? Did you have to go home to your mama?"

"You might want to sit somewhere

else," another boy said. "What we're talking about is too mature for you."

As the days and weeks went on, the boys kept teasing Erik. They still passed the ball to him and complimented him on good plays. But they didn't invite him to post-game parties.

After the last game of the season, Cody caught up with Erik. "You could come to the party, but you'd probably have to call your mommy. See ya."

Once again, Erik rode home with his dad. "I thought things would be different by now. I thought the boys would respect me. I thought they might even change what they watch because of my example. Aren't we supposed to be blessed for doing what's right?"

Dad nodded. He was silent for a minute, then said, "We are always blessed when we follow Christ, but sometimes we aren't blessed in the way we expect. You know Mom and I pay tithing every month, but I still lost my job last year and we had trouble paying our bills.



WHAT CAN YOU DO?

We were blessed, but not with money. You chose the right, and while that doesn't mean you'll be blessed with friends, you *will* be worthy to pass the sacrament when you turn 12 next year. And you'll be worthy to go to the temple."

Erik nodded. "I know you're right. But I'm still really lonely at school."

"You'll make good friends, but it might take some time," Dad said. "And remember, every good person stands alone at times. Christ stood alone. You can turn to Him when you need help."

Erik bit his lip and stared out the window.

"Do you know why we're careful about what we read, watch, and listen to?" Dad asked.

"Because we want to have the Holy Ghost with us?"

"Exactly," Dad said. "Pornography offends the Holy Ghost. Trust me, you want the Holy Ghost as your friend. He will help you with everything you do. You also have your mom and me and your siblings. We love you. We will always want to spend time with you."

Dad reached over and ruffled Erik's hair. "It's not the team party," Dad said, "but we could stop and get ice cream to share with the family when we get home."

Erik smiled back at Dad. "That sounds better than the team party." ♦

The author lives in Utah, USA.

Erik's teammates showed him pornography, or bad pictures of people with little or no clothes on. Here are some things to do if you see pornography. Talk about these steps as a family.

- 1.** Call it what it is. Say "that's pornography" or "that's immodest" or "that's a bad picture."
- 2.** Turn it off or turn away.
- 3.** Tell a parent or trusted adult what you saw and how you felt. You might feel ashamed or embarrassed, but speaking up will help you let go of those feelings.
- 4.** Do something positive and happy. Play outside, sing a Primary song, or do an act of service.
- 5.** Pray to Heavenly Father for help focusing on good things. Remember that He loves you, no matter what.

Heavenly Father wants you to be happy you have a body. Looking at pornography disrespects the bodies of others and can keep you from appreciating your own body. It drives away the Holy Ghost, which we need with us so we can see ourselves and others as Heavenly Father wants us to. We can be safer and happier when we make good media decisions.



Find a great video and family home evening lessons on this topic at lds.org/go/CyberStrong.