

BASKETS AND BOTTLES

By Chieko N. Okazaki



ABOUT SISTER OKAZAKI

Chieko Nishimura Okazaki (1926–2011)

grew up in Hawaii, USA, in a Buddhist family of Japanese ancestry. She joined the Church when she was 15.

By then, Sister Okazaki had come to acknowledge the complexity of her ethnic and cultural status. Worried about how others would perceive them after the Japanese military bombed Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, Sister Okazaki and her mother gathered and burned every Japanese memento they owned. But then she looked in the mirror and thought, “I have never set foot in Japan. I am not Japanese in my heart. But I cannot run away from myself. My eyes, my skin, and my hair are Japanese.”¹

Sister Okazaki confronted racism throughout her life. She began teaching soon after World War II when anti-Japanese sentiment still ran high in the United States. Three mothers refused to allow their children to be in her class. But Sister Okazaki soon won them over.²

Sister Okazaki was the first woman to serve on all three of the women’s auxiliary boards: first Young Women, then Primary, then Relief Society.³

This message is an excerpt of her April 1996 general conference talk on unity and diversity (punctuation and capitalization standardized).

This new series highlights the lives of devoted women and their messages, excerpted from the book *At the Pulpit: 185 Years of Discourses by Latter-day Saint Women* (2017). Selected chapters are available at churchhistorianspress.org/at-the-pulpit.

God has given us many gifts, much diversity, and many differences, but the essential thing is what we know about each other—that we are all His children.

Our challenge as members of the Church is for all of us to learn from each other, that we may all love each other and grow together.

The doctrines of the gospel are indispensable. They are essential, but the packaging is optional. Let me share a simple example to show the difference between the doctrines of the Church and the cultural packaging. Here is a bottle of Utah peaches, prepared by a Utah homemaker to feed her family during a snowy season. Hawaiian homemakers don’t bottle fruit. They pick enough fruit for a few days and store it in baskets like this for their families. This basket contains a mango, bananas, a pineapple, and a papaya . . . picked by a Polynesian homemaker to feed her family in a climate where fruit ripens all year round.

The basket and the bottle are different containers, but the content

is the same: fruit for a family. Is the bottle right and the basket wrong? No, they are both right. They are containers appropriate to the culture and the needs of the people. And they are both appropriate for the content they carry, which is the fruit.

Now, what is the fruit? Paul tells us: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, [and] temperance” [Galatians 5:22–23]. In the sisterhood of Relief Society, in the brotherhood of priesthood quorums, in the reverent coming together to partake of the sacrament, the fruit of the Spirit unites us in love, joy, and peace whether the Relief Society is in Taipei or Tonga, whether the priesthood quorum is in Montana or Mexico, and whether the sacrament meeting is in Fiji or the Philippines.

. . . When I was called to the Relief Society General Presidency, President [Gordon B.] Hinckley counseled me: “You bring a peculiar quality to this presidency. You will be recognized as one who represents those beyond

the borders of the United States and Canada. . . . They will see in you a representation of their oneness with the Church.” He gave me a blessing that my tongue might be loosed as I spoke to the people.⁴

. . . [When I spoke in other lands,] I could feel the Spirit carrying my words to their hearts, and I could feel “the fruit of the Spirit” bringing back to me

their love, their joy, and their faith. I could feel the Spirit making us one.

Brothers and sisters, whether your fruits are peaches or papaya, and whether you bring them in bottles or in baskets, we thank you for offering them in love. Father in Heaven, may we be one and may we be thine,⁵ I pray in the sacred name of our Savior, Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Chieko N. Okazaki, *Lighten Up!* (1993), 7.
2. See Okazaki, *Lighten Up!*, 48–50; Gregory A. Prince, “‘There Is Always a Struggle’: An Interview with Chieko N. Okazaki,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 45, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 114–115.
3. “Obituary: Okazaki, Chieko,” *Deseret News*, Aug. 7, 2011.
4. See Prince, “‘There Is Always a Struggle,’” 121. Gordon B. Hinckley was First Counselor in the First Presidency when Sister Okazaki was called in 1990.
5. See Doctrine and Covenants 38:27.

