

BY RACHEL R. STEPHENSON

I learned that thanks to the Atonement, nothing is beyond my reach.



Like many people I meet, my new friends at camp were not sure what to make of me at first. I was born with a genetic condition called achondroplasia (commonly known as dwarfism), and I stand only four feet, four inches (1.3 meters) tall with unusually short arms and legs.

Once people get to know me, they find that I am just a regular girl and my height seems to make no more difference than my hair color. Soon my new friends and I were doing everything together.

One day at camp we all had the chance to take on the confidence course, a high ropes challenge. For this activity, each participant was strapped into a climber's harness and had to climb halfway up a steep, notched telephone pole and then up a climbing wall featuring handholds placed randomly across its face. The whole time an instructor watched and waited on a platform high above the climber holding a safety rope attached to the climber's harness.

For most participants, the course's height and degree of difficulty made for an imposing obstacle. Still, most of my friends were determined to meet the challenge. In spite of my physical shortcomings, I try to do all I can to match the abilities of average-sized people, and so I decided to attempt the climb.

Before I knew it, I was suited up with climbing helmet and harness, standing at the base of the notched pole. As I began to climb, I heard encouragement from

A FEW EXTRA INCHES



my friends below and from my instructor above. I soon discovered that no matter how hard I tried, my reach was insufficient for the spacing of the notches, which were designed for people with “normal wingspans.”

The instructor at the top watched as I struggled and, when he saw that I had stretched just as far as I was able, he pulled up on the rope a few extra inches allowing me to reach the next handhold. He then relaxed his tension, allowing me to do all of the work that I could.

After much effort I would try for the next handhold. Again I was just inches short of reaching. But because of a caring person at the top who wanted me to succeed, I was again lifted those few extra inches needed to reach the next level. It continued this way, with few exceptions, until I was at last at the top.

The instructor congratulated me, and I felt such appreciation, not only for the help he gave me but also for the fact that he let me do all that I could for myself. It was our success, not his or mine alone.

A few weeks after the camp, my family was asked to speak in sacrament meeting on the grace of God. As I studied for the talk, my mind went back to my experience on the confidence course. I was able to recognize how often in my life the Lord has acted much like that instructor, encouraging me to succeed, letting me do all I can do in the struggles of life before giving me just the amount of boost required for the task at hand.

The Apostle Paul tells us that all of us have shortcomings and that none of us have the reach needed to ascend back to our Father. “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). I am grateful for Jesus Christ’s Atonement, which is the means by which we can all ascend if we continue to put forth our best efforts. I know that He cares for me and will gently lift me while allowing me the freedom to grow. After all, “it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do” (2 Nephi 25:23). **NE**

