

# STANDING AS A WITNESS

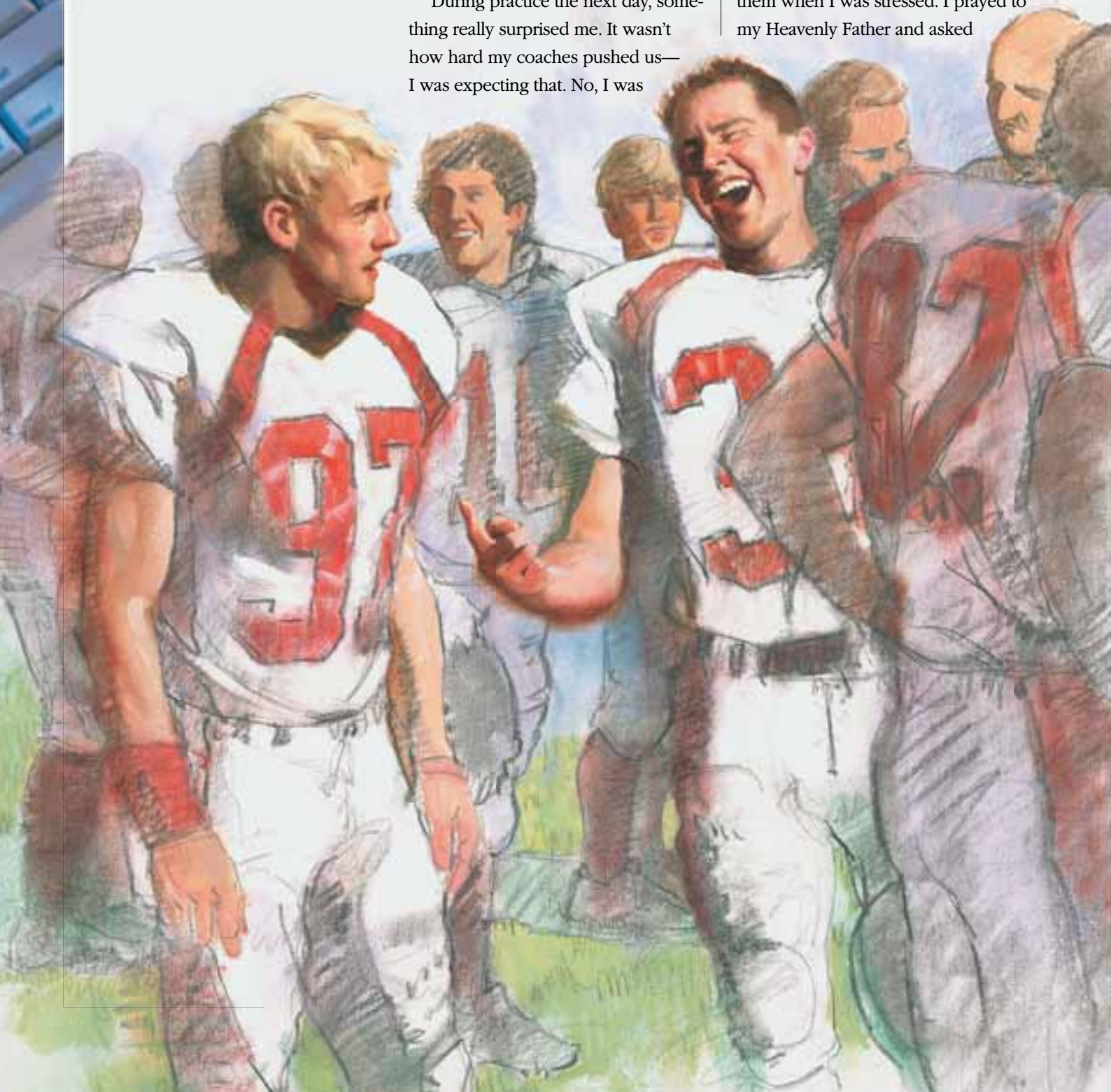
BY DON HARSH

It was the day before my football team's first practice of the season. That night I was so excited I couldn't sleep. I had saved up my money over the summer so I could pay all the fees myself. And now, at the age of 14, I was finally going to fulfill my dream.

During practice the next day, something really surprised me. It wasn't how hard my coaches pushed us—I was expecting that. No, I was

shocked at the filthy, vulgar language all the players and coaches were using. At first I tried to ignore it and not let it bother me, but after awhile it started to take its toll.

I found myself thinking those words, and even worse, repeating them when I was stressed. I prayed to my Heavenly Father and asked



Him to help me be strong. Then, I made a promise to myself and to the Lord that I wouldn't swear.

Later in the season we played a game against our biggest rivals. Right before the game started, our coach gathered us together to say a cheer. He told us the cheer that he wanted us to say, and unfortunately it required us to say a swear word. I remembered the promise that I made to myself and to Heavenly Father. I decided to say the cheer except for the swear word. I would just replace it with a more appropriate word.

When the cheer was over, the player next to me noticed what I had said and started to make fun of me. He went up to the coach and said, "Harsh is Mormon, and he's not man enough to swear. He's too churchy!"

I thought the coach would get mad at me or start to make fun of me as well, but instead he stood up for me and told my teammate, "Hey, leave Harsh alone. He has a lot of heart and can show you up on the football field any time!"

I was surprised. I thought my coach would respect me if I swore like everyone else. But actually, he respected me more because I was true to my standards.

I don't know how big of an impact my example had on my teammates and coaches, but I realized later how strong that experience made me. Now, a few years later, it is easier for me to stand up for what I believe. I also realize that when we make a decision to obey the commandments, we are not alone. The Holy Ghost will help and support us through our trials. **NE**

# LETTERS TO MISAKI

BY CYNTHIA ALLEN SMITH

**W**hen I was a new missionary serving in Kobe, Japan, I noticed an unusual box hanging in the middle of the Church bulletin board.

"What is that?" I asked my companion.

"It's a mailbox," she explained. "Our Sunday School teacher Brother Nakatani" has an eight-year-old daughter named Misaki. She was hospitalized a few months ago with cancer."

We began writing letters every week. Writing in Japanese was difficult for me. But as I wrote, I thought of what I would say to my own little sister, and somehow the words came easily.

One Sunday, Brother Nakatani pulled us aside and told us that Misaki loved our letters and wanted to meet us. He gave us the address of the hospital and told us when to be there. We stood behind a glass wall and spoke to Misaki through a telephone. She wore a little hat to cover her bald head. She looked frail but laughed and talked with us.

Not long afterward I was transferred to another area. I continued to write to Misaki. Sometimes I worried about my Japanese and wondered if the letters were difficult for her to read.

On the last month of my mission I was transferred to a ward in Misaki's stake. I ran in to the stake president and immediately asked about Misaki.

"A few months ago we almost lost her," he said. "But now she can go to

school again. Her hair is growing back, and she is doing just fine."

A few days later my companion and I went to church to help with a stake Primary activity. While we were there I saw Brother Nakatani.

"How is she?" I asked.

"She's here," he said. "Do you want to see her?"

I recognized her right away. A hat covered her head, but this time I could see dark tufts of newly grown hair underneath.

"Misaki Chan!" I called.

She looked up and smiled as I knelt beside her.

"Do you know who I am?" I asked.

She looked puzzled. I pointed to my nametag.

Misaki's face brightened, and she clapped her hands with joy. Then, she pulled out the missionary packet that all Primary children had received and asked for my autograph. At that moment, I knew that every letter I had sent to her had been worth it. Each of my letters, imperfect as they were because of grammar and spelling errors, had brought her happiness.

Whenever I hesitate and fear that my kindness to others will be misunderstood, I remember the letters to Misaki. No matter how small or imperfect, kindness is always worth it. **NE**

\* Names have been changed.



# OUTSIDE LOOKING IN

BY MARCIE JESSEE

**W**elcome to Podunk, USA,” I thought glumly as I sat on my back porch. It was a warm day for February, but I wasn’t enjoying it. I was too distracted by the sight of the cows 50 feet away.

My parents had moved, with my three sisters and me, to Jefferson City, Missouri. My eyes filled with tears as I thought of the distance that now separated me from the comfort of my friends and my old life.

Just the day before we had gone over to the high school to meet with my counselor. She smiled sympathetically and informed me that I was too late for cheerleading tryouts and that my new school didn’t even have a show choir. Those two activities meant the world to me, and the thought of not being able to do them made me want to walk the 1,000 miles back to Maryland.

“How will anyone get to know the real me?” I thought. I wouldn’t be the same person now that I wasn’t going to be on the sidelines at the games or singing with my friends in the choir.

“I am officially a nobody from nowhere,” I concluded.

I stared blankly at the scriptures on my lap, hoping for some peace from my depressing thoughts. As I flipped through the pages, my eye landed on a scripture I had highlighted: “The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7).

I realized that when Heavenly Father sees me cheering for the team or singing on the stage, that is just part of my outward appearance. Those activities don’t determine who I am. He sees the real me, His daughter, someone who is trying hard to make the right choices and be a good example for her sisters.

The next day when I started at my new school, I walked confidently through the crowded halls. I realized that the Lord knows my heart and that I’m never alone. **NE**

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