

“There Is Always a Struggle”: An Interview with Chieko N. Okazaki

Note: Gregory A. Prince, a member of Dialogue’s board of editors, conducted this interview with Chieko N. Okazaki on November 15, 2005, in her home in Salt Lake City. In addition to her career as an elementary school teacher and principal, she was the first non-Caucasian to serve on any LDS general board (Young Women’s Mutual Improvement Association, 1962–71) and is the first woman to serve on the general level of all three LDS women’s auxiliaries. After serving on the Primary General Board, 1988–90, she went directly from that calling to first counselor in the Relief Society presidency (March 31, 1990–April 5, 1997). She died on August 1, 2011, in Salt Lake City of congestive heart failure.

Chieko Okazaki: In my meetings with the young women or with the Relief Society women, I’m often really surprised that they do not feel that they can function as women in the Church—not all of them, of course, but many of those who come to me and talk to me. I just keep wondering, “How did they get to that point of feeling like they were not worth anything in the Church?”

Greg Prince: Did you feel that way when you were younger?

Chieko Okazaki: No, not at all! I guess it was because I was raised by my parents, who were really raised by their grandparents, saying that I had a contribution to make in this world. My dad and my mom—we were sort of on the far side of the track, as far as financial things were concerned. My dad was a plantation worker. I know he only made about \$200 a month. At that time, in the Japanese way of life, the oldest son always had to give his money to the parents, and then his parents would give him an allowance for his family. So I just knew, from my earliest childhood, that this was

how things would be as long as my grandparents were there. Even as a child, I noticed that.

But my parents told me, “You are not going to have this life. You are going to the university and you are going to become somebody, and you are going to have another way of life, and not this plantation way of life.” Even as a child I used to think, “How are they going to do that? It costs to go to a university.” One time I asked my mother, “How can I do that?” She said, “You don’t need to worry about that. You need to worry about getting there. You be the best student that you can, and do the best you can in school.” I said, “Okay, I’ll do the best I can, and I’ll study hard, and I’ll do the work that I’ve been given.”

I went both to the Japanese school and to the English school, and did my best. I was popular in school. When it was time for me to go to the university, I don’t know how my mother and father had the money for my tuition, but they did. But I did work for my own personal needs. I worked at Sears, I worked at the Swedish Consulate, and at whatever jobs I could get. And I went to school at the same time. And I did make it.

Then, I discovered—and I write this in one of my stories about “You have to walk in my *zori*,” which means “You have to walk in my slippers,” to understand what my life was like. A few years ago, I thanked my mom for having given me that education and helping me to get to school. She said, “It was a family effort, you know.” I said, “What was the family effort?” “Your two brothers and Dad and I made slippers.” They sold those slippers for fifty cents a pair, and yet on the market they would probably be \$2.50 or \$3.00. She said, “We saved the money from those slippers, and that was your tuition.” I just cried.

Greg Prince: You’d known nothing about this?

Chieko Okazaki: I didn’t know anything. She didn’t say anything to me. But I remember going back at Christmas and helping them do this. My two brothers would scrape the leaves and take the thorns off, then dry the leaf and roll it. My dad would cut it into the size of the slippers and weave it, and my mother would sew the leaf on the pad. It was hard work. I cried when she told me. My father had died many years earlier, but I also thanked my brothers, and they teased, “Oh, you don’t know how many cuts we had on

our hands from the thorns.” We all laughed, but I said, “Well, that’s a sacrifice you made for me, and I’m very, very grateful for that.”

But anyway, what I see in this world today is that we forget who we are and where we came from. . . . When I first came to Utah in 1950, I noticed that most people didn’t know that there was more than the white race. I came as an exchange teacher. My husband did his graduate work while I was doing this. People didn’t know how to take me—not my education status, but more who *I* was. I looked different. They wondered whether I could possibly be like them and whether I could teach their children, being Japanese.

There were three parents who said they didn’t want their children to be taught by me. But I had a very, very great principal. She was way ahead of her time, in relation to acceptance of different peoples and acceptance of their traditions and ideas. So she accepted me, just like that (snapping fingers), when she saw me. She was so grateful that I was placed in her school. She said to these reluctant parents, “That will be fine,” and she transferred those students to another second-grade class.

I thought many of the parents would feel the same way—not knowing my skills and my qualifications. I used to sew during those days, and I made a fuchsia dress. I had very black hair, and the fuchsia really looked dramatic with my hair, and then I topped it off by putting a flower in my hair. All three of us second-grade teachers opened the door to the schoolyard that first day, and I saw many parents standing there with their children. I knew how unusual that was. Of course, parents bring their children to kindergarten and often for a few days in first grade, but for second-graders to have parents come—that was really a message. I was pretty sure that they came to see who I was.

The other two teachers said, “Why don’t you call your children first?” I said, “That will be fine.” I just said, “I’m very happy to be here in this wonderful school and to be a part of this society here and to work with your children. I’ll start calling the names of the children, and you come up and form a line and I’ll take you to the classroom.” So I said, “James Backman.” He came running up. I said, “Goll, you just had a haircut, didn’t you?” I put my hand on his hair. He said, “Yes, I did.” I said, “Well, you look really great.”

He said, "I want you to know that my dad is the president of the Salt Lake Board of Education." I said, "Oh, that's nice to know."

I called the name of the next child: "Beth Benson." She came up, I said, "Beth, you have beautiful hair. I love your braids." (I found something positive to comment about with each child.) Beth said, "My daddy is an apostle in the Church." I said, "Oh, yes, that's nice to know."

And so it went. Each child's parents were heads of this and heads of that. I thought, "What a class I'm going to have! Thirty-five children of very important parents."

So I took my class in; and within a few days, those three women went to the principal and asked if their children could be returned to my class. The principal looked at them and said, "Well, you know, opportunity just knocks once. I've already changed them to another class. I've had three other children take the places of your children." The principal then came running down and told me what had happened. She was really a great advocate and friend.

I'm telling that story to illustrate that Utah really was something of a closed society in many ways. It was difficult for many of the Saints here to really get to know others and to accept people who were not of their race. Of course, one of the best things that happened was the missionary program. When the missionaries were sent out into the different parts of the world, they began loving the people they worked with. This broadened their scope of understanding about what all human beings have in common. They began to understand the concept of "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold" (3 Ne. 15:21). But Ed and I just accepted that, where the older generation was concerned, there would still be some prejudice and some feeling of "you're not as good as I am."

I remember that one of the really hurtful things that I heard soon after we moved here was: "If you were not born under the covenant, you can never enter the kingdom of Heaven." I'd sit in church, listening to that, and I'd think, "How do you account for the people who are converts to the Church? How in the world can I be in this church?"

My principal used to be on the Sunday School General Board.

She came in one day and said, “Chieko, do you realize that I fought for you yesterday?”

I said, “You did?”

“Yes. In my class, they talked about people who are not born under the covenant—that they will not be able to enter the kingdom of Heaven.”

I said, “You’ve heard that, too?”

“Yes, and I fought for you. I said, ‘Do you mean to tell me that Chieko, who is a convert, will not be eligible for the kingdom of heaven?’ And the teacher said, ‘That’s right. That’s the doctrine.’”

Anyway, we don’t hear things like that anymore, and it definitely *isn’t* the doctrine. But that’s what we’ve progressed from. That’s why I think people of my generation—white members of the Church—always have a little bit of a problem with racial prejudice. They don’t talk about it, and it certainly has mellowed; but I’m sure if they had to make a choice in relation to their child or grandchildren marrying into another race, they’d have hard feelings about it and might try to stop it.

I remember when I was a student at the University of Hawaii during World War II, one of the apostles of the Church at our stake conference spoke. I was a member of the Japanese Branch, and of course we all went, although I have to say it was hard for us to go to the tabernacle, because everybody else was white people. We felt that we were intruding somehow. Many servicemen were present, and this apostle said very bluntly, “I want all of you soldiers to know that you are not to get into the situation where you would like to be married to any of these people. And you women, you are not to get to the point of integrating yourself to the point where you think you are going to be married to one of these men. Each of these men has a person waiting for him in one of the wards in the city they come from.”

I remember how surprised I was. It was a completely new topic to me, and maybe it was a problem for some of the older young adults there. I’d never dated in high school, because I was focusing on my education. In fact, I didn’t date in college until I was a sophomore. So to me, that wasn’t a problem. But I thought, “Why is it that the Church doesn’t look upon us, who are of a different race, as worthy to marry a white Mormon man? If we are daughters and sons of God, I don’t think the Lord would look at

us and say, ‘You’re different, so there are things you can’t do.’” I realized that I was still learning about the gospel, but that was a contradiction that I tucked into the back of my mind.

I had to think more about the contradictions when Ed and I moved to Utah. (Ed was Japanese, like me.) One of our friends was marrying a white person, and they could not get married in the temple because the state had what was called a “Mongoloid law.” They had to go to Canada to get married in the Cardston Temple. That was in 1951. I remember thinking about that scripture when the Lord said, “Other sheep I have which are not of this fold,” and I could understand that, where ethnicity was concerned, I really was not of *this* fold.

So Ed and I really could have left the Church here in Utah. What I understood as the gospel message didn’t match what we encountered so often with the people. There was a big gap in so many ways. Again, my mother’s wisdom helped. She said, “Know that you know the truth”—she wasn’t a Mormon. She was a Buddhist until she died—“and others haven’t learned it yet. So just hold fast and let the rest go.” So that’s what we did. We just held on and tried to look at the doctrines of the gospel rather than how people behaved sometimes, and believed that our Father in Heaven and Jesus Christ would not look at us as any different from white members.

For a long time, we weren’t asked to serve in any Church callings. But I’m glad to say that when our wards got to know us and realized that we could contribute, we were asked to serve.

My husband got his degree in social work at the University of Utah. He worked for the American Red Cross for a while, and then with the Veterans Administration as a psychiatric social worker. Then he became the first director of aging for the whole state of Utah.

Then he was offered an excellent position with the government in Denver. That’s when we moved to Colorado. We found a different climate, a lot more openness. We had neighbors of all religions, including Jews. So there we were, Mormons, and we just were part of it. But even the Mormons had a lot more openness about them. I noticed that right away. We felt free to associate with one another and talk openly about things that we couldn’t bring up in Utah. I remember in Utah that a few times Ed and I tried to

express our feelings about some of the things we noticed, and we got a pretty stiff response, like: “Whoa! Are you trying to change our attitude?” So we quickly learned never to discuss the questions we had about the gospel and how we were treated. But in Denver as I listened to other people and the way they talked about things, I thought, “Well, in this society, I probably could.”

Greg Prince: Did you?

Chieko Okazaki: Yes, I did. People always used to ask me, whenever I gave a talk, “How is it that you are able to do that?” I said, “Well, it is the truth, isn’t it?” “But how did you get away with doing that?” I said, “I’m not getting away with anything. I’m just saying what I think.”

I’ve had a wonderful life, being in Hawaii and being raised by my parents, and then coming here and having all these opportunities. My patriarchal blessing had one section that I did not really understand at the time I received it. Would you like me to read that?

Greg Prince: Sure. I’d love it.

Chieko Okazaki: It’s kind of interesting. I thought maybe it was answered when I was on the general board of the Young Women. No. Then, when we went to Japan. No. When I became a member of the Primary board. No. This blessing was given to me by Eldred G. Smith, who was the Church patriarch:

Thou shalt also receive the greater blessings promised, of knowledge, wisdom and understanding, and the Lord shall be mindful of thee, as he has been in the past, that thine understanding shall be quickened, that thou shalt recognize truth, that thine understanding and knowledge of the principles of the Gospel and the plan of life and salvation shall continually be increased unto thee. Through thy efforts to impart thereof to others, the Lord shall bless thee with increased abilities and opportunities in teaching, and thine influence and power for good, especially of thy kin and thine associates, shall essentially be increased. And through thy righteous living and thy teachings, they as well as others shall heed thy teachings and counsel, and bless thee for thy interest in their behalf. And the Lord shall be mindful of thee and thy efforts therein, and shall assist thee with success. Thou shalt be an influence and power for good, especially among thine associates. Thou shalt not lack for friends and associates, especially among those of thy sex, for they shall come unto thee seeking counsel and advice, and in thy efforts in teaching unto them

of the principles of the gospel and the plan of life and salvation, they shall bless thee for thy interest in their behalf. The Lord has blessed thee with special gifts and talents and abilities. As thou shalt continue to use them in assisting others and further promoting the work of the Lord on the earth, the Lord shall reward thee richly, giving unto thee additional talents and abilities and means sufficient to be successful therein, for his providing care shall be ever with thee. And thy household shall not be in need for the necessities of life, and many blessings shall be added unto thee in the time of their need. Thy testimony of the divinity of the gospel shall continue to grow with thee, and give unto thee courage and strength to follow thy righteous convictions, through which thou shalt be assisted to withstand the trials and temptations of life, with joy and rejoicing in thy heart.

Greg Prince: When was it given?

Chieko Okazaki: It was given on December 2, 1952.

Greg Prince: When did it dawn on you that it contained a remarkable promise?

Chieko Okazaki: Well, I read and read it over and over. Because we were Japanese, people would ask, “Who are you?” We’d go to church, and they would wonder whether I could even speak English. Florence Jacobsen, who was the general president of the Young Women’s Mutual Improvement Association, called me to be on her board. I was the first non-Caucasian to ever be called as a general officer in the Church, on any general board.

Greg Prince: Any general board?

Chieko Okazaki: Any general board. Even among the Seventies, there was not anyone who came from another race.

Greg Prince: Was there resentment?

Chieko Okazaki: No. In fact, once I asked Florence, “How did you get my name past President McKay?” (He was president of the Church then.) She said, “Oh, he was fine, as far as that was concerned.” Later, he called Ed as president to open the second mission in Japan when the mission was divided.

I was interviewed by Elder Ezra Taft Benson for the YWMIA board. He knew who I was, because I was his child’s teacher. He said to me, “Chieko, I want you to know that you are a pioneer.” I thought, “Pioneer? In what sense am I a pioneer?”—because it had certainly been impressed upon us that we weren’t pioneers like

those who had crossed the plains. Then I realized that I was the first one who had been called to any of these general boards or any part of the Church hierarchy.

So when I got this blessing and read it, I thought, "Where am I going to have these kind of blessings, where the women will come to me and seek advice?" So this blessing was in my mind in all of my callings. And women did come to me. But at that time, I wasn't able to speak like I spoke when I was in the general presidency.

Greg Prince: Were they coming to you even before you went on the general board?

Chieko Okazaki: Not as much. I served on the stake level in Denver; our first callings in Utah were on the ward level. But I was not open. I was still studying the environment and the people. I could tell that there were certain things you could not say and many things to be careful about, so I was. So I didn't speak as I did when I was in the general presidency. By that time, I had matured and had grown. But as I read my patriarchal blessing, I thought, "When is this going to happen?"

It was interesting when I was on Florence's board and used to go to conferences. In one of the conferences in the East, I heard that one of the women said, "I came here to see if she could speak English." They had never been with people of another race in a Church setting. Here I was, representing the YWMA program, speaking to them and teaching them in their classes, and she was curious to know whether I could speak English. So she came.

All those kinds of experiences made me wonder more than ever, "Elder Smith, why did you say these things?" But I realized, when I got called to the presidency of the Relief Society, that this was the time of fulfilling that blessing.

I also have to read to you from my setting-apart blessing when I was called into the Relief Society general presidency.

Greg Prince: President Benson was Church president then, wasn't he?

Chieko Okazaki: Yes, but he couldn't function very well, so President Gordon B. Hinckley was basically in charge. Also present were President Monson and Elder Russell M. Nelson, who was the apostle with oversight for the auxiliaries. President Hinckley spoke to us for about an hour or so about our responsibilities and

what came to his mind. And then he said, “We will now set you apart in your positions. Sister Elaine Jack, you will be set apart by President Monson. And Sister Okazaki, I will set you apart. And Elder Nelson will set you apart, Sister Aileen Clyde.” I thought, “This is not Church protocol.” President Hinckley should have set Sister Jack apart. I think everyone noticed. Even my husband thought that. After we left, he said, “That was really strange. President Hinckley was in charge, and he should have set apart Sister Jack.”

But nevertheless, this is what the blessing was. You know how verbally skilled President Hinckley is. Words just flow out of his mouth. But I noticed he stopped very often, like he was receiving some kind of guidance. He wasn’t as fluent as he usually was.

Greg Prince: Was he doing that throughout the blessing?

Chieko Okazaki: Yes. It was like he was waiting for something to come to him. As he went on, the words seemed to come more easily. (reading)

Sister Chieko Okazaki,

We, your brethren, holding the holy Melchizedek Priesthood, acting in the authority of that priesthood and in the name of Jesus Christ, lay our hands upon your head and set you apart as First Counselor to Sister Jack in the general presidency of the Relief Society of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and give unto you every right and responsibility appertaining therein.

We charge you to be true and faithful to the great and sacred trust which is placed in you as you serve in the presidency of this vast organization of members of the Church who have faith in their hearts and testimony concerning this great latter-day work. We compliment you on the call which has come to you. We bless you for your faithful service in the past, in many capacities.

We feel to say unto you that 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, and as it were, an outreach across the world to members of the Church in many, many lands. They will see you as a representative of their oneness with the Church.

We bless you that you may be free in speaking, that your tongue may be loosed as you speak to the people. We bless you that you may be wise in counsel, that you may be inspired in what you say. We urge you to speak to these issues which come before this presidency and in your board meetings, that you may freely express your

thoughts. But remember then, when a decision is made by your president, that becomes your decision, as it becomes the decision of the entire presidency and the board.

We bless you with health and strength and vitality, according to your needs. We bless you with great happiness in this assignment. We bless you with faith and testimony and the spirit of prayer, that you may implore your Father in Heaven for that light and understanding and knowledge and the strength which you will need while you serve in this capacity.

We bless you with the watch care of the Lord as you travel over land and sea in pursuit of your responsibilities under assignment of the presidency.

We bless you that you may be a strength to Sister Jack, a great strength to her, and to Sister Clyde and to the board and to the work, and that you may speak with inspired wisdom to the people as the occasion may require.

Now, dear Sister Okazaki, you have many friends who love you in various lands. We bless you that your friends may be multiplied and that you may have cause to rejoice and thank the Lord for his great favor upon you.

We bless you in your home that there may continue to be peace and harmony and respect, with you and your husband standing as examples before the people of what family life should be. We bless you and your posterity, and we commend you to our Father in Heaven as his honored and chosen servant, and invoke upon you every needed gift and grace and blessing and you go forward with this assignment, and do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Greg Prince: That's quite a blessing.

Chieko Okazaki: It is! I just listened to that, and I thought, "My gosh!" When people ask, "How is it that you are able to speak the way you do?", I say, "I was given a blessing, that I would speak my mind." It was really interesting, because all of our talks had to go through the First Presidency, and nothing was changed. Nothing in my talks was changed.

Greg Prince: These were talks in general conference, or other venues as well?

Chieko Okazaki: General conference. But still, I was very open in general conference, too. These are the women and men who said to me, "I heard you in general conference," and that's why they were asking how I could speak the way I could.

When we were called, Aileen and I, it dawned on us that we two were very different women. I give Elaine a great deal of credit, because she could have chosen her friends. We were not her friends, at all. We didn't know each other. We got to know each other when we became a presidency.

Greg Prince: So how was it that Elaine chose you?

Chieko Okazaki: I asked her, and she said that she just took all the names of the people on the boards, and she prayed about it, and then she looked at each name. Every time she came to my name, her finger would stop. She said she did that several times, and she always stopped on my name. So she said it must be that I would be one of her counselors. I think she did the same thing with Aileen. I think she took names of people from the community and did that.

Greg Prince: Did she know you?

Chieko Okazaki: No, we didn't know each other. I knew who she was, but we never had any opportunities to speak to each other or be in social groups. So when we were set apart was the first time we met. We shook hands and got to introduce ourselves to each other. She was praying really hard, and the Lord was with her. But some people probably wondered what she was doing calling me. In fact, I got a letter—I should mention that I had only two negative letters from women all the time I was in the presidency—I got a letter from a woman in Texas. She said, "Dear Sister Okazaki, I don't know how you got to be first counselor to the general president of the Relief Society. You have worked, you have only two children." She was very angry about the fact that I had been a working woman. I wrote back to her and said, "Dear Sister So-and-so, I thank you for taking the time to write to me. But I must tell you that I didn't apply for this job." I didn't get a response back.

Greg Prince: What was the other letter?

Chieko Okazaki: I got the other letter after my first book, *Lighten Up*, came out. This sister wrote: "I'm going to throw your book away. I told my husband I was going to throw it away and he said, 'Don't throw it away. I'll keep it.' It's because you never mention anything about the stay-at-home woman." I don't know if I men-

tioned anything about women who worked, either. I wrote back to her and I said, "Don't throw it away. Send it back to me and I'll send you a check for it." I did get an answer back. She wrote and said, "Well, I thought about it, and I looked at it again, and I decided to keep it." Those were the two negative letters I got. All the others were, "Please help me," or "I loved what you said," or "You made me feel so good in your talk."

Greg Prince: What was the feedback that you would get from women? Were you reaching women who hadn't been reached before by anybody?

Chieko Okazaki: You just cannot believe the response, especially after I gave the talk in Oregon on sexual abuse and then taped it and Deseret Book sold thousands of copies. Even today, every time I speak, at least two women will come up afterward and, no matter what I was talking about in their meeting, they'll say, "Thank you so much for that tape." And I know exactly what they mean. They'll say things like: "You put me over the hump. I've gone to the psychotherapist for a long, long time, and look at me today. I feel fine. Thank you for that tape."

Greg Prince: Had anybody talked about it in that venue before?

Chieko Okazaki: No. This was so interesting. Sometimes I tell the Lord, "Why do you put me in such a situation?" Every time I'm invited to speak at a women's conference, I talk to the stake Relief Society president and ask, "What are your needs? Tell me your sisters' needs. What would you like me to talk about." This time, the Relief Society president said, "Sexual abuse." I said, "Say that again?" "Sexual abuse." I said, "Is there anything else?" She had another topic, and I asked, "Which of these would you like me to talk about?" She said, "I hate to say this, but I wish you could speak about sexual abuse." I was thinking, "You must be kidding," but I said I would and then I prayed and prayed. I had worked with some people who had this problem in their past to deal with, but I certainly wasn't an expert. And when I got there, that place was just packed!

Greg Prince: Did they know, in advance, that was what you were going to speak on?

Chieko Okazaki: No, they didn't. No one knew except the stake Re-

lief Society president and the stake president and the Regional Representative. I didn't want to go over their heads. But just in case, I also prepared another talk.

Greg Prince: So they all signed off on it in advance?

Chieko Okazaki: Yes. I read that talk over the phone to the stake president, and he said, "Great." I called the Regional Representative and I read it to him, and he said, "That's great."

I saw some men in the audience, and I thought they would be bishops. The other board member I went with was having a great time, making people laugh, doing a light-hearted, encouraging talk. I whispered to the stake Relief Society president, "I don't think I can speak after that." She said, "You're going to." I looked at the stake president, and he said, "Yes." So I thought, "Well, here I go."

I started, and I gave a little bit of humor in the beginning. Then I got into it. There was silence. You could hear a pin drop. And then you could hear sniffles, people crying. There was a woman in the front row who just burst into tears and cried through the rest of the talk. All through the audience there were tears coming down. I thought, "Oh, what have I done?" But I went right on.

After the meeting—it was 8:30 when we were through—until 10:00 there was a line of people who wanted to talk to me. At the end was a man. I thought, "Oh, don't tell me I'm going to talk to a man about being sexually abused." I knew it happened to boys as well, but I just wasn't prepared for it. He said, "I'm a bishop." He thanked me for being brave enough to give this talk. He said, "I have worked with ninety women. It got to the point where I could not say no to these women for therapy. The stake president and the Regional Representative stopped me from using Church funds, so I used my own money so these women could get therapy." Ninety! When inactive women heard that he was helping abuse victims, they had hope and wanted to talk to him. It's awful, when you think about it.

Greg Prince: All the women who were in line to talk to you, what was the message they were giving you?

Chieko Okazaki: They were saying, "Thank you so much for opening this up. Thank you so much that I don't need to hide by my-

self, and worry and be concerned about me being the person who was wrong and that I did something really bad.” They just recognized that somebody finally had opened this topic up and that now the Church would know that it’s a problem that it’s okay to talk about and that they were okay. Each one said something like, “Thank you so much for talking about this in public to everybody, so that we don’t have to hide.”

Now today, when I go to different places, they will tell me, “Thank you so much for that tape. You helped me.” I was speaking in the Midwest at one conference, and a sister came up afterwards and told me, “I’ve been going to a therapist for fifteen years. I could not get to first base, even with all the therapy. Somebody gave me your tape. I listened to it, and all of a sudden I was released, and I became a different person. So I went back to my therapist and she said to me, ‘You look different. What has happened to you?’ ‘You don’t know about me and my church, but there is a woman that works with the women of the Church, and she gave a talk on healing from sexual abuse. I listened to that, and I believed her. It was just what I needed.’ She said, ‘I want to listen to that tape.’ ‘I’ll bring it to you.’” She did, and the therapist listened to it, and said, “Where can we get more of these tapes?” She said every one of the therapists got one.

Greg Prince: Did you speak again on that subject in other places?

Chieko Okazaki: Yes. I spoke at BYU. They taped that talk and broadcast it from time to time. I’ve heard from several of my friends and several of these women at the conferences, “I heard you on the BYU channel. I’m a victim of sexual abuse, too. It was so good to hear you speak.” Every time, I think of what President Hinckley said in the blessing. Nobody had talked about it before in an open forum. Nobody would. People were just astonished that I would do it.

Greg Prince: Do you have any sense about whether sexual abuse in the Church is a greater problem today than it was a generation or two ago? Or has it always been there and it’s just coming out in the open now?

Chieko Okazaki: It’s always been there. I think it’s been a problem for a long, long time. It’s just that people have not been honest about it, and they were afraid. But people never wanted to talk

about it, because it usually happened in the family. It was hard to point out to the priesthood leaders that “it’s my brother” or “it’s my father” or “it’s my uncle.”

Greg Prince: Or “it’s my husband.”

Chieko Okazaki: Yes, that’s right. And the women always got the message that they were supposed to back up the men in the family. It was hard for them to say anything about it. So that has been a problem. But now I think that there is a great deal more relief on the part of the women who have had this problem. When I read my blessing from President Hinckley, I think, “Is this what you mean, that I can talk about things like that?” I don’t think too many women would be able to do that. I knew that I could be told that I shouldn’t do that from now on, but nobody said anything.

Greg Prince: No negative feedback?

Chieko Okazaki: No. But I noticed that the Brethren began speaking about abuse. Of course, society as a whole was much more open about it, too.

Greg Prince: So part of the secret of your success is that you’ve been willing to tackle hard topics that nobody else has. Any other secrets?

Chieko Okazaki: I don’t know if it’s a secret, but I’m very honest when I talk to the women, especially about the gospel. For example, I was in another state where I had a speaking assignment, and there was a luncheon before. I was seated next to a mother and daughter. The daughter was inactive, but she’d come to this luncheon with her mother, who had told me how worried she was about her daughter and the choices she was making. I knew we didn’t have much time, so I didn’t beat around the bush. I said, “You know, you are blessed that you have been born in the Church. What a blessing it is that your mother is still very staunch in doing the things that she knows that she ought to do. But she is not making you do the same things, because she respects your agency. But that means you have to make a choice. Your choice is whether to leave the Church or to be in the Church. So, I’m just going to tell you that you should really study the gospel, get back into the scriptures and read them, and then God will tell you what your choice should be.” Then I said, “You know, I have to make a

lot of choices in life, too; but I'm glad it isn't whether I should leave the Church or not. That's a choice I made when I joined the Church."

But when I was having this conversation with the daughter, I couldn't help thinking that I'd had moments when I thought, "Why should I belong to this Church when I'm not accepted? But it must be for a reason that I'm here." I gradually learned that part of that reason was so people would learn how to accept people who are not of their color."

Greg Prince: But let's dig down into that question a little more. At its base, what is the real answer? Why did you stay when you could have left?

Chieko Okazaki: I stayed because it was God and Jesus Christ that I wanted to follow and be like, not individual human beings.

Greg Prince: And you saw them within this church?

Chieko Okazaki: I did.

Greg Prince: Isn't that what it comes down to?

Chieko Okazaki: It does. But you know what? I brought Buddhism with me. Buddhism teaches love for everybody. The Buddhist values are not limited just to the people in the Buddhist faith. They include the whole wide world. When you talk to the Dalai Lama, you can feel a love that he has for all humankind. He doesn't preach, "You must belong to my church." He preaches, "You must become better people because of what I am telling you." Christians, Muslims, Buddhists go to listen to him, and they become better Christians, better Muslims, and better Buddhists because of the values and morals that he teaches. He makes you think, "I can become a better Christian because of what I heard." He is a messenger or a disciple of God, in a different way.

I came to the Church having all these values. The Church didn't teach me that.

Greg Prince: And you didn't have to discard any of them.

Chieko Okazaki: I didn't. I brought them with me, and I live them, and I'm grateful that I have them. I can easily relate to Jesus Christ and God, because they have it.

Greg Prince: I think we're losing a lot of our youth. I have a seven-

teen-year-old daughter who is a high school senior. I think she is representative of teenagers in the Church. They have so many competing voices that if you don't make it relevant to them, you're going to lose them.

Chieko Okazaki: Exactly.

Greg Prince: It's the young men and the young women. I watch so many of these kids drift away, and to me it's our fault. It's not theirs. We're the ones who are there to lead them, and we haven't done the job of making the gospel interesting and relevant.

Chieko Okazaki: It's a teaching problem partly. When I was on the Young Women's general board, we would go out with the General Authorities to stake conferences and have auxiliary conferences where we taught the teachers and officers. We taught the Young Women leaders while the General Authorities worked with the priesthood leaders. We taught the women of the Church how to teach. We still do that, but the sad thing is the people who lead don't know how.

Greg Prince: Your generation, my generation, and earlier generations all looked upon religion as a duty, that there was to be discomfort as part of it. And we accepted that. In some cases, it was a hair shirt that we wore, and that was just part of the deal. Not with the generations now! They are not willing to do that.

Chieko Okazaki: That's right.

Greg Prince: I don't think that we have realized how different they are in their view of religion from where we were.

Chieko Okazaki: A few years ago, I was asked to speak at a high school commencement. When the students heard that the Relief Society person was coming, they thought, "Oh, do we have to listen to a Relief Society lady? My gosh!"

When I walked in, all of them had their Walkman units with them because there was a Utah Jazz game that night. The parents came in with their Walkmans, too. I thought, "I'm going to have a really fun audience!" Then I thought, "I know about kids." In our little village, we boys and girls always played together, so I was just as good at marbles or yo-yo tricks as the boys. So I thought, "I'm going to tell these kids a thing or two."

I had brought my yo-yo, and I started out my speech by saying,

“You know, all you young people here are graduating and going into the world. Sometimes people look at you and think that the only things you’re good for is to just walk the dog.” And I went across the stage, “walking the dog” with my yo-yo. Or “rocking the cradle,” and I would do that with my yo-yo. “But do you know what I think? You’ve got to go ‘around the world,’ and you have to use your ‘silver bullets’ making choices and doing the things that you know best to do, and fighting evil and whatever is happening in your life. That’s what you ought to be doing instead of letting people think that you can only walk the dog.” And those kids clapped. They clapped and clapped. I didn’t see any more Walkman earbuds. They listened, and five times when I was talking, they burst out clapping; and at the end, they stood up—parents and all—and gave me a standing ovation. So when I walked out with them I said, “Who won the game?” They said, “Oh, I don’t know. We didn’t listen.”

Greg Prince: And it wasn’t the message. They had heard the message before. It was how you delivered it!

Chieko Okazaki: That’s right. So sometimes I see these kids and they say, “Hey, are you still playing with your yo-yo?” And I say, “Yes, once in a while I get it out.” But they remember that.

Sometimes I take my ukulele for the children. I say, “You all know how to sing ‘Jesus Wants Me for a Sunbeam,’” and I’d play it. I’d say, “That was really great. What other things do you want to sing?” And I’d play them. That got them in the mood. Then I’d say, “You know, we sang about Jesus. He was a really great man, wasn’t he?” We’d just go on from there. You just have to be generational, in relation to who they are.

I was different at conferences, because I brought things. I would teach using objects, and people remember the objects. I was asked to speak to a group of literary writers in the Church, the Association for Mormon Letters. I said, “I’m not a writer, I’m a teacher.” This woman who was organizing it said, “That’s okay. We want you to do it.” There were some people who said they didn’t want me, because I wasn’t a writer, compared to what they were. So I was invited, but I was on notice that I wasn’t what all of them wanted. So I showed up with several of the objects I’d used in my conference talks.

I told them, “I want to ask you what you remember about some talks I have given.” So I took the oar and I said, “What do you remember about this?” And they remembered. I took the hat, the peach, the basket of fruit, my cat’s cradle, everything that I had, and they all remembered the object of the lesson. I said, “Can you understand why I am a teacher and not a writer?” They said that was the best meeting they had ever had.

Greg Prince: So how do we stop the hemorrhage? We have lost so many people. To me there is a double tragedy. It’s not just that they leave our church; it’s that usually they don’t leave it to go to another one. They just abandon religion in general.

Chieko Okazaki: I heard President Hinckley talk about the importance of retention, and he was really worried. I think we need to teach new members what is going to be happening in their lives. I got these four books that they wrote a long time ago, about the family and priesthood, and I said, “You know the ward missionaries could take the place of the missionaries, and once a week go through the little manual about the family and teach them what it says about prayer.” When I joined the Church, I thought that prayer was just blessing the food and listening to the prayers in church. Then I learned, by osmosis, that I pray to God, personal prayer. I gradually learned, by osmosis, that there are many different kinds of prayers. My husband learned that he could bless his children, so when school started, he did that. And whenever they went on trips, he did that. But it was a gradual thing. Here, in the book, it tells you all the different kinds of prayers. So they can practice this among themselves, so the man would know what to do, and the sons and the daughters and the mother could watch. And they can ask their dad, “I’m not feeling so good. Could you give me a blessing?”

When we talk about retention, it’s not about being in the Church; it’s about retaining the things of the Church that we need to have to become a part of this kingdom!

Greg Prince: And then, you want to be in it.

Chieko Okazaki: Exactly! Because we know what it is like. But now, we just talk about tithing and giving of yourself by giving your time and all that, but we don’t talk about praying, and different types of things that happen in the Church that would make you

become the kind of person that you would like to become one day. These books tell you why the priesthood is important, and they give the men and the boys—and the women—an understanding, so we don't think that the priesthood is just something for the men and the women don't get anything. No, it analyzes these things, so that they understand that they have a part in the priesthood. And sustaining the priesthood means that we, the women, have that job! It's a job that we give our parents and also our children. We sustain them by what?

Anyway, I went through this entire thing. The retention comes when they have an understanding of who they are and why they're here, and why God has brought this Church back to us. And therefore, you are part of this organization. But nobody teaches this. And so, when the child has a talk to give, these ward missionaries can say, "Let me help you with a talk." And then the father and the mother learn how to give a talk in church and they also learn how to help their children.

And then we need to help new members understand what their role is in class. Let's take a Relief Society lesson. The ward missionaries can teach them by asking, "What does the lesson say? What comes to your mind? You must raise your hand and say, 'I do not understand this. What does it mean?' That's part of your obligation as a member. You cannot just blindly say, 'I don't know what it means, but that's what they say.' So you repeat it, but you don't know what it means, how it applies to you, and what it does for you in your life." They can teach the new member what it means to be called to a position, what you do, who you go to. And always the message is, "If you need help, we are here to help you."

All of this could be part of the retention program. And then when you can tell that they're ready, they'll say, "We feel comfortable. I think we can go and do things on our own. Thank you very much. But we will call on you when we need help." You are always there to help them. And you keep retaining them. Retaining means what? It means that you are holding onto them. You are part of their life, and they are part of your life.

I was a little different. I knew God and I knew Christ immediately. And I knew the Church. Therefore, I retained myself in the Church. There are many who need more help to be retained. I

made these suggestions, but I haven't seen anything come out of it. Somebody told me I should have gone to President Hinckley.

When we went on our mission, I said that the missionary discussions were wrong. It was wrong to start with Joseph Smith in Japan.

Greg Prince: We can't do one-size-fits-all.

Chieko Okazaki: No, we can't. I said, "We've got to start with lesson four, talking about God! They believe in a God, but you cannot tell them about this young kid who restored a church." We need to start where they are, with the God they learn about in Shintoism and Buddhism and the shrines they have in their homes and temples.

Greg Prince: Did you change it in your mission?

Chieko Okazaki: Yes. We just said, "You talk about God. You cannot go there and start out talking about Joseph Smith." And another thing, too. I said, "You must tell them, 'You are a blessed nation.' Why? The creation myth of Japan is that these islands were created by a goddess named Amaterasu Omikami. She threw three spears into the ocean and created the northern part, the central part, and the southern part. The imperial family of Japan is descended from this goddess and her husband, according to this legend.

Greg Prince: Did the missionaries do it?

Chieko Okazaki: Yes. Japan had lost the war and the emperor had officially renounced claims of divinity. That was hard for a proud people. When we held our zone conferences, we told the missionaries to always to be aware that the Japanese people think differently from Americans. They are very family oriented, they have pride in their families, and they are proud of their nation. I said, "They have pride in their God. If you can change that to pride in our God and Jesus Christ, you have a convert."

Greg Prince: But then the next mission president came—

Chieko Okazaki: —and it changed. But this is why I feel I am really blessed in many different ways. I feel grateful that I did find this Church. I started attending LDS meetings when I was eleven. I've been in the church for sixty-four years. It's just like being born in the Church. It's part of me.

I think that we still have to struggle with many things. There are so many things I can't do anything about. One of those things is teaching children and youth, so that they will be thinking about how a concept applies to them—not just memorizing stuff.

I remember giving a talk to the youth on divine destiny. They sat there and just looked at me like it was the first time they had heard anything like that. I think we just need to talk to them about reality.

When girls ask me some questions about some pretty tough topics, sometimes I say, "You know, that's an interesting question! Tell me more about it." And they do. I say, "Oh, so you find yourself in that dilemma? How would you change that? What would you like to see happening?" As you ask them, they become a lot more honest, and they just say it. If I said, "You shouldn't be thinking like that," that would be the end of the conversation.

Greg Prince: They know when you speak to them honestly and want them to answer honestly. They can spot it immediately.

Chieko Okazaki: But how do you get these women to learn how to do that? That's the question.

Greg Prince: You're supposed to give me the answer!

Chieko Okazaki: I know, but I'm not called into those kinds of positions. I was the education counselor, so I worked with one of the men on the curriculum committee. We wanted to change the manual so that it brought up modern-day problems that women have to face and focus on how to implement some of the gospel doctrines and principles in dealing with the problem.

I had written a general outline, and the Relief Society presidency approved it. So I talked about it to a man on the Curriculum Committee. He went to his boss, and the boss said, "We don't need a new manual for the Relief Society." "Why don't we need a new manual?" "We already are writing a manual for them."

So he came back and told me that a new manual was already being prepared. I asked what it was, and he said, "Well, it's the manual on Harold B. Lee." It was the first one in that series of teachings of the Church presidents. I asked, "Why are they writing a manual for us on Harold B. Lee?" He didn't know.

I told the presidency, so we went and asked the Curriculum Committee, "What is this all about?" They said, "Well, we're al-

ready almost finished with the first book.” We said, “You’re almost finished with the first book, and you didn’t tell us that you were doing this? Why is this the first time we have heard about it? Chieko has been writing an outline in relation to what women need.” So I asked, “Who is writing this manual?” It turned out to be five men, and the Melchizedek Priesthood quorums and Relief Society would have the same lessons.

I asked, “Why aren’t the women included in this?” Then they sort of got the point and called three women to the committee. I had one of our board members assigned to be the liaison with these three women. They got to the point where they could go through the manual and write questions in relation to the manual. And for the second one, they were part of it. But that’s how it was. I just thought, “Where are we, anyway, in this entire thing?” It was such a shock! I said, “How did this come about?” “Well, President Hinckley thought that many of the people who live outside the United States don’t have the privilege of having any doctrinal books in their homes. He thinks we should have a manual where we have the prophets speak about their doctrines, so they would at least have a doctrinal book in their home.” That’s a good idea. “He decided maybe this would be a good thing to have for the priesthood and the Relief Society.” “Well, why wasn’t it discussed with us, too?”

We asked one time if we could be on the building committee and the temple committee, because sometimes we think, “Why did they build it this way?”—because it doesn’t work very well for the women’s needs. And we wanted to be on the temple committee, because there are many things that affect women in the temple. But we were never allowed to be a part of those committees. I think we could help a great deal, but you have to have leaders in the Church who are willing to make that possible.

Greg Prince: Do you see that as perhaps coming from beneath? That as you have new generations of women who are the wives of bishops and stake presidents, and who are ward and stake Relief Society and Young Women leaders, that they are going to grasp the reins a little bit stronger than their predecessors?

Chieko Okazaki: I have to say that, in my sixty-four years in the Church, I sometimes see a little bit of a change that the women

themselves prompt, but most of the time, I haven't seen women who would make that change possible. Wherever I go, I think that they already know their place. Maybe they'd be able to be more open if there were open-minded bishops or stake presidents who would listen to some of the feelings and the ideas of the women. But when women get the message that their job is to be supportive and just agree with the decisions of the bishop, they become clams.

Greg Prince: Should the Relief Society president sit in on bishopric meetings?

Chieko Okazaki: It would be a great idea. They are in the council meetings, but in many council meetings the person who is in charge is the only one who is talking. I'm on several community boards, and sometimes I'm the only woman there or one of two or three women. I'm on the YWCA advisory board; I'm on the advisory board for the University of Utah Graduate School of Social Work; and I'm on the Belle Spafford Chair board. If I got the message that I was supposed to just sit there and listen to the men, I'd quit that board. I'd say, "What am I here for?" I speak up a lot in all of these board meetings.

In contrast, in 1995 when "The Family: A Proclamation to the World" was written, the Relief Society presidency was asked to come to a meeting. We did, and they read this proclamation. It was all finished. The only question was whether they should present it at the priesthood meeting or at the Relief Society meeting. It didn't matter to me where it was presented. What I wanted to know was, "How come we weren't consulted?"

Greg Prince: You didn't even know it was in the works?

Chieko Okazaki: No. They just asked us which meeting to present it in, and we said, "Whatever President Hinckley decides is fine with us." He decided to do it at the Relief Society meeting. The apostle who was our liaison said, "Isn't it wonderful that he made the choice to present it at the Relief Society meeting?" Well, that was fine, but as I read it I thought that we could have made a few changes in it.

Sometimes I think they get so busy that they forget that we are there. It's different from the time when Belle Spafford was president of the Relief Society. She was her own boss, as I read her life.

And so was Florence Jacobsen. There's a great deal of difference now.

Greg Prince: Don't forget LaVern Parmley.

Chieko Okazaki: Yes. "The Big Three," I call them. Boy, they were staunch and strong women!

Greg Prince: And it didn't bother David O. McKay one bit.

Chieko Okazaki: No! It did not. Sister Spafford was on international and national women's committees. Mormon women were out there! But gradually, things were taken away from Belle Spafford. I remember when the U.N. sponsored a women's international meeting in Beijing. Elaine asked if we could attend, and we were denied. We couldn't go.

Greg Prince: Do you see change coming?

Chieko Okazaki: There's change in society. Women are now presidents of companies and presidents of countries—

Greg Prince: But it's still in transition.

Chieko Okazaki: Oh, yes, it's in transition. I guess it's a cultural thing. You know, when we went on our mission, the members would see Ed and me working together, and I would conduct the programs and assignments that I had, and the brethren were taken aback when they saw that. But in the three years we were there, we saw a lot of change about how husbands and wives worked together. Many Japanese women told me how much they appreciated the example that Ed and I were to them.

Greg Prince: And not because you were pushing an agenda, but because that's what you *were*.

Chieko Okazaki: That's exactly right. And, you know, we need to talk about this to the young women.

Greg Prince: And let them know that it's okay for them to speak in an honest voice.

Chieko Okazaki: It seems to me like Christ loved the women. I think he really included them in many areas where Jewish society excluded them. He didn't mind breaking those rules.

Greg Prince: So where do we need to go to get women in the Church where He wants them to be?

Chieko Okazaki: I think women should continue really immersing themselves in the scriptures and praying so that they know what Christ really thinks. We say that we are not perfect yet, but we can become more perfect every time we go to church. Something I'd like to see is better integration between sacrament meeting and the classes. I've commented to several bishops that sacrament meetings are where we hear about the doctrines and principles, and see how Christ has tied it into our lives. It's where everybody listens to the same thing. If speakers were assigned to talk about specific principles, then in the classes, then in the Sunday School, and maybe in the Relief Society and priesthood meetings, that's where the application and the practicum should be.

I'm a teacher. If we just teach doctrine, doctrine, doctrine, and never teach application, how will we learn? If I read the Sunday School lesson and the Relief Society lesson and then the teacher just goes through the manual again, why should I bother to read it? Why can't we talk instead about how to apply it? I think we could have great discussions. Somebody will say, "I've used this principle as I worked with my son or daughter or husband by doing this." "And what success did you have?" "Well, this is what happened." And someone else will say, "Oh! I'm going to try that." "What else can we do to become more perfect in that principle or that doctrine?" And so you say to the sisters or to the Sunday School class, "Try this principle for the whole week, and then come back and tell us in class for five minutes what happened, whether you have improved, and what you need to do to be more perfect." So the next week, you discuss it again, and the other sisters suggest, "Well, have you tried this?"

Now your question, in relation to women, I think that women feel that they need to know every law and every principle of the gospel, and have to live it, so that they can be more perfect. They're hard on themselves because they're not already perfect. Whenever I speak, I try to share this principle with them: "I'm not perfect, but I try to live the principle as best I can. When I see that I can improve, I try to do that."

In one of my books is the talk I gave about the principle of *kigatsuku*. *Ki* means "within your soul." When you get to the point where you can see things and do them without being told, that means it's part of your soul, and you will be doing fine. When my

mom used to teach me, she would say, “Oh, I’m looking for a *kigatsuku* girl.” I’d see her sweeping the floor, so I’d run and get the dustpan. I was just a little girl then. She would say, “Oh, that was a *kigatsuku* girl.” She would be washing clothes and she would say, “I’m looking for a *kigatsuku* girl.” I’d look to see: “Oh, I need to rinse the clothes and hang them.” We had to put our wood in the Japanese bath, and she would say, “I’m looking for a *kigatsuku* girl,” and I’d look to see if she had enough wood. If she didn’t, I’d go and get the wood.

But it got to the point where she didn’t need to tell me anymore. I’d see things and I’d do it on my own. Being *kigatsuku* was part of my soul. I still have that within me. I see something, and I think it needs to be done, and I just go and do it. It becomes part of me, and this is how she taught me. She never lectured me and said, “This is the principle and you must do this.” Instead, she taught me by doing it herself. So when I’m walking through the airport and I see trash, I have a hard time just leaving it there. I pick it up and throw it away. One guy behind me said, “Why are you doing that? They have people for that.” I said, “It makes the place look nicer. Besides that, these men can do something else besides going and picking up trash.” He looked at me like, “Are you crazy?” Well, that certainly explained why there was trash around.

My mother taught me another principle: *on*. It meant that you felt gratitude and recognized your obligation to someone who had helped you. She said, “Don’t ever forget that you have *on* for people who have given you your life, the way you think, lessons in relation to how to become a better person—anything in your life that you didn’t get on your own, that you got from somebody.” I always think, “Christ, I have to thank you. Every night I have an *on* for you, because you have taught me.” The Japanese say that you have *on gaishi*—you have to return help to the person that first helped you. My sixth-grade teacher really helped me in developing my love for teaching. I watched her, and the way she taught and the way she related to us made me realize that that was what I was going to become.

I talked about her influence on me and it was a talk that was published in one of my books. Her nephew happened to be a member of the Church and sent her the book. When I was in Ha-

waii on an assignment, she came to listen to me speak. I told her, “I’m returning *on* to you, because you are the one who gave me the start in my life by showing me that I wanted to become a teacher like you.” She cried, and she said, “You are the only person who has ever told me these things.”

When I first came to Utah, I expressed my *on* to the elder who baptized me. And when I found the sister who taught me, I went to visit her in Arizona and told her, “I have to give you my *on gaishi*.”

My greatest *on* in life is to my mother. She turned ninety-eight this year. [Note: Hatsuko N. Nishimura died at age 100.] She never lectured me, but she never stopped teaching me. I remember once when I was just a little girl and did something wrong. She took me by the hand and we walked into the bedroom and sat on the floor in front of the mirror, so that I could see both her and me. She told me that life is hard and that we learn by experience. She said, “I’m going to tell you some of the experiences I have had, ever since I was a little girl.” Her life had been very hard. I just cried the whole time she talked to me. I had always loved her, but that love developed new depths as she talked. I realized then that all of us have to go through struggles to become the kind of person that we want to be.

She had a brilliant mind. Her mother died when she was in the sixth grade, and she left school to take care of the younger children in the family. But she studied on her own. She could read papers and books in Japanese, which I can’t do. Once she said to me, “I’m getting to the point where the books are so hard to read that I need a dictionary.” So I sent her a dictionary. She taught me, “No matter what you do, there is always a struggle. But when you pass that struggle, you have reached a new level of perfection in your life.”

I look at my work in the Church the same way. I’m going to struggle. I have struggled. Christ struggled. When He died, He was struggling the most. Yet He is going to come in His perfection when He comes back the second time, and we can, too.