

*“Armed with Principles That Never Change”*

Matthew O. and Lisa Richardson

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**Brother Richardson:**

It is with great pleasure that we stand before you today at this session of Women’s Conference.

**Sister Richardson:**

This may be a “pleasure” for Matt, but to be a little honest, this is nerve-wracking for me. After all, we are just ordinary people who have been asked to be part of something extraordinary. And speaking in the Marriott Center doesn’t help me much either.

**Brother Richardson:**

Actually, you should feel very comfortable here. After all, we have a home court advantage.

**Sister Richardson:**

Is this going to be a sports metaphor?

**Brother Richardson:**

No, not really. But this is a home of sorts for us. Think of all the time we’ve spent in this building.

**Sister Richardson:**

Basketball games, devotionals, forums, concerts, conferences, meetings, and then our graduation, our children’s graduation, and ...

**Brother Richardson:**

... much, much more. We have shared much together in this building. Ah, there’s no place like home!

**Sister Richardson:**

And because of this, we thought it would be appropriate to share this experience together. We have found that we are a pretty good team, and when we work in unison, we are much better together than we are alone.

**Brother Richardson:**

So here we are, standing together.

**Sister Richardson:**

Our topic today is “Armed with Principles That Never Change.”

**Brother Richardson:**

My first thought upon hearing the word “armed” is the phrase “armed and dangerous.”

**Sister Richardson:**

Somehow I don’t think that is quite what the organizers of Women’s Conference had in mind. “Armed and Dangerous with Principles That Never Change”?

**Brother Richardson:**

I’m sure that’s true. So we need to be clear by what we mean by “armed.” The adjective “armed” actually means “equipped” or “to fortify.”

**Sister Richardson:**

So what you are saying is our topic could read, “Equipped or Fortified with Principles That Never Change.”

**Brother Richardson:**

Yes. And don’t forget that fortify means to “protect” or “strengthen.”

**Sister Richardson:**

This makes sense. So what are the principles that truly equip, protect and strengthen us?

**Brother Richardson:**

Principles are typically defined as “the fundamental rules of action or conduct.” But we are not just talking about any array of principles, as good as they may be. The principles we are talking about today are, as Elder David A. Bednar explained, “doctrinally based guidelines for what we ought to do.”

**Sister Richardson:**

And doctrinal truths, according to Elder Bednar, “are never altered. They never vary. They will always be the same. You can always count on them” (“Teach Them to Understand,” Ricks College Campus Education Week Devotional, June 4, 1998).

**Brother Richardson:**

I really like that last line: “You can always count on them.” We live in a topsy-turvy world that is always changing, which makes it hard to know what you can count on.

**Sister Richardson:**

As a result, what we value has a very short shelf life. So we end up chasing the next fad, style, or trend.

**Brother Richardson:**

And it's next to impossible to keep up with the changes. For example, just yesterday I heard our son Tyler say so-and-so is the "sickest kid in the school." If I heard that expression when I was in high school, I would've sent that kid a "Get Well Soon" card.

**Sister Richardson:**

Depending on a person's age, an attractive person would be described as a real looker, a cute chick, a fox, a babe, being hot, or sick.

**Brother Richardson:**

No matter how you say it, I think actually every one of those apply to you, except for "being sick." I just can't get my head around that one—or my stomach.

**Sister Richardson:**

Thanks, Matt. And I think you're the bomb!

**Brother Richardson:**

If our happiness or our identity is determined by the styles, the fads, or whatever the world values for the moment, then we are in trouble—or we will be as soon as the tide turns. Just when you think you've figured it out, the standards change and your identity is lost. No matter how hard you try to keep up with the latest styles, the ghosts of fashion past will haunt your credibility.

**Sister Richardson:**

Isn't that the truth? Don't let your children catch a glimpse of your old school yearbooks or you will spend the rest of your life trying to convince them that your hairstyle was not an accident; that in your day shoulder pads were not just for football players; and the list goes on ...

**Brother Richardson:**

... and on, and on and on. There are times when change can be good and necessary. Those handwritten messages scrawled across my yearbook pages remind me of this important point.

**Sister Richardson:**

You mean those meaningful quips like: "Have a fun summer" or the oh-so-sincere, "Call me sometime"?

**Brother Richardson:**

Yeah. And even more to the point are those messages like this wisdom-filled note that would turn Solomon green with envy (show photo of yearbook note): "Matt, you are a

great guy. Don't ever change. I swear stay exactly the way you are."

**Sister Richardson:**

Ahh, the famous "Whatever you do, don't change" message. How original.

**Brother Richardson:**

You mean how ridiculous! I thank my lucky stars every single day that I changed. Could you imagine going through life as a seventh-grader?

**Sister Richardson:**

Or being married to one? The point here is that most things in this world change. But some things should never change, like divine principles leading to salvation.

**Brother Richardson:**

Now with this foundation, we can focus on some of the never-changing principles that truly fortify us.

**Sister Richardson:**

Maybe it would be valuable to look at what Heavenly Father has done to equip others in the past. After all, it is written that He is an unchanging God and His ways are everlasting. Perhaps we should start at the very beginning.

**Brother Richardson:**

A very good place to start.

**Sister Richardson:**

So, let's start at the very beginning with Adam and Eve. What better way to learn how we can be equipped to face what Elder Bruce C. Hafen called "the sorrow and contamination of a lone and dreary world" ("Beauty for Ashes: The Atonement of Jesus Christ," *Ensign*, April 1990).

**Brother Richardson:**

Lehi recounted the experiences of Adam and Eve because he felt doing so would be for our "profit and learning" (2 Nephi 2:14). It is here that we learn of the first principle with which God arms Adam and Eve. Lehi taught, "The Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself" (2 Nephi 2:16). The word "act" comes from the Latin *agens*, which is the same root for the terms agency and agent. Because agency is given to us by God, it is not only a divine gift but a God-given responsibility as well.

**Sister Richardson:**

The doctrine of agency is essential to the plan of salvation, and without it we would not be able to learn, progress, or grow, or follow the Savior. When God said, "Nevertheless, thou mayest choose for thyself, for it is given unto thee" (Moses 3:17), He was "arming" Adam and Eve with the power to do what they ought to do—even act for themselves.

**Brother Richardson:**

Now Satan, on the other hand, did everything in his power to “disarm” them. He sought to “beguile,” which, by the way, simply means “to mislead by trickery or flattery.” Satan’s ultimate plan was and still is to destroy the agency of man.

**Sister Richardson:**

Since Adam and Eve had the power to choose for themselves, Lucifer tried to mislead them into thinking that they—and not God—can determine which choices would be right or wrong. Satan reasons that if we have the power to determine what is right and wrong, then we can choose the consequences of our behavior as well.

**Brother Richardson:**

Those equipped with the principle of agency, however, in every dispensation, understand that our actions and consequences are inseparably connected. Paul’s straightforward message to the saints in Galatia reassured us of this never-changing principle as he taught, “God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7).

**Sister Richardson:**

Please know that Satan is still trying to disarm you—even today. Take courage in doing what is right even though it may seem to be for naught and blessings are slow in coming. I encourage you to take the Savior’s counsel given to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery as they were deciding the course of their future. Christ admonished them, “Fear not to do good, my sons, for whatsoever ye sow, that shall ye also reap; therefore, if ye sow good ye shall also reap good for your reward” (D&C 6:33). I testify that your rewards are coming.

**Brother Richardson:**

And in the meantime, rather than wondering about “when will” or “how will” or even “where are” those promised blessings, look instead to Jesus Christ “in every thought; doubt not, fear not” (D&C 6:36), and proceed in faith that He will deliver as promised. I too testify that the law of the harvest works, and you will reap what you sow.

**Sister Richardson:**

Satan undermines our ability to “act for ourselves” by focusing solely on the “choosing” and making it seem as if this is the ultimate goal of mortality. In truth, however, the object in this life is not simply to exercise our right to choose, but to choose the right. Elder Dallin H. Oaks clarified this as he explained, “In mortality, choice is a method, and not a goal” (“Weightier Matters,” BYU Devotional, Feb. 9, 1999). This helps us understand why the Church strongly advocates choosing the right when dealing with moral behaviors rather than focusing on preserving, protecting, and providing choices.

**Brother Richardson:**

Too many parents think they are fulfilling their responsibility as they leave all decisions to their children without providing any input on their part. “After all,” they say, “we don’t want to interfere because it is important for them to make the choice on their own.”

While it is true that we should and must choose for ourselves, it is also true that responsible individuals should teach, encourage, and invite others to choose the right.

**Sister Richardson:**

Satan tries to beguile us by tricking us into believing that we cannot truly act for ourselves because we lack the power to do so. There are those who join voices with the “father of all lies” in this grand deception.

**Brother Richardson:**

They proclaim that there is no such thing as free will and say we are “victims of circumstance—of the genes we’re bequeathed and the environments we encounter” (Jerry A. Coyne, “Why You Don’t Really Have Free Will,” Jan. 1, 2012, [www.usatoday.com](http://www.usatoday.com)). They say we cannot act differently because that’s the way we are. Every generation has encountered such teachings. Korihors and Nehors come and go. Their tune may change, but the lyrics are still everlastingly the same. Elder D. Todd Christofferson pointed out, “Their doctrine is that values, standards, and even truth are all relative. Thus, whatever one feels is right for him or her cannot be judged by others to be wrong or sinful” (“The Divine Gift of Repentance,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2011).

**Sister Richardson:**

But those armed with the never-changing principles see through these philosophies and are protected against the winds of clever prose and the sophistry of men. They endure challenges with hope and determination, for they know they have the power to act for themselves.

**Brother Richardson:**

Jesus Christ reminded us, “For the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves” (D&C 58:28). This power was given to all mankind before coming to Earth. It was, as Elder Oaks described it, a “God-given precondition to the purpose of mortal life.” Thus, Adam and Eve had this power “in them” to determine how they will act even before they received their mortal bodies.

**Sister Richardson:**

Sisters, you have the power to act and to choose good over evil regardless of your circumstances, race, culture, traditions, genetic makeup, dispositions, temptations, wealth, geography, poverty, or sickness. You have more power than you realize, and you can find renewed strength as you act appropriately.

**Brother Richardson:**

I realize there are some who feel that God would never ask us to do something that is contrary to our desires, our feelings, our tendencies, or our current circumstances, for after all, that would be “too hard” or asking “far too much of us.” Whenever I hear such talk, I can almost hear the voices of Laman and Lamuel as they said, “Thou hast declared unto us hard things, more than we are able to bear” (1 Nephi 16:1). Sadly, this was a reflection of the way they exercised their agency. They always seemed to recoil from anything requiring effort, and they downplayed their ability to choose the right way. I

testify that you have the capability to bear “hard things.” I know some here today are struggling with difficult relationships or inexcusable abuse in its various forms. There are those of you who have lost a loved one and ache for their company. There are those struggling with their own addictions or the addictions of others. We are aware that some of your hearts are filled with angst, with frustration and despair because of personal sin or the sins of family or friends.

**Sister Richardson:**

There are those who long for healthy, rewarding relationships, dream of being married or having children, but still remain alone. There are some whose “hands hang down” as you are trying to make ends meet or just make it through the day.

**Brother Richardson:**

While it would be difficult for any of us to fully understand and know how hard it is for others, please understand that Jesus Christ knows. He fully understands your pain, your frustration, fatigue, and even your seemingly unfulfilled righteous desires. He knows it is hard, and yet He still asks every single one of us to press onward and upward. Now how could He ask such a thing of us? He knows the power is in each of us, and to act accordingly we are armed with this principle. And we will be protected, strengthened, lifted, and made equal to this challenge.

**Sister Richardson:**

The second principle we learn from Adam and Eve is we must work to be protected and strengthened in this world. After eating of the fruit, Adam and Eve learned firsthand that God meant what He said as the consequences unfolded. One such consequence was being driven from a garden where everything was provided. Now, Eve was told that her “sorrow” would be multiplied and that “in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children.” Adam was told that “in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life” and that “by the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, until thou shalt return unto the ground” (Moses 4:22–23, 25).

**Brother Richardson:**

We must note that “sorrow,” as it was used here, does not have the same meaning that we may think. Today, sorrow is generally associated with sadness—the opposite of happiness. The Hebrew word used in this passage for sorrow, however, is also interpreted as “toil,” which means “work.”

This means that childbearing or earning a living is not a sad event but an event that would require work. Thus, living in the fallen world requires (meaning that this is not optional)—it requires all of its inhabitants to work. Now I know that there are many today who still do not see the difference between sorrow or sadness and toil. Surely you mothers of teenagers have heard this lamentation all too well. You know of the weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth that happens whenever you ask a teenager to pick up a sock or put their dishes in the sink.

**Sister Richardson:**

Some of us still long for a world that brings forth fruit, happiness, flowers, and money—without any effort or toil. We feel entitled to such blessings because, well, we showed up. Those days ended when Adam and Eve left the garden. Before leaving, however, God equipped them with the absolute knowledge that the world they were entering would require more than just showing up.

**Brother Richardson:**

I wonder what God would have thought had Adam and Eve, upon hearing the conditions of mortality, said, “No thanks, I don’t do sorrow and sweat. I think I will pass.”

**Sister Richardson:**

After all, even Heavenly Father works. He said, “Behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). That’s a lot of work! But notice that this work also brings a lot of glory. Something important happens when we realize that work is not a bad thing. Good work, no matter how difficult or arduous, brings satisfaction, contentment, and change for the good. It builds strength and character.

**Brother Richardson:**

Elder Neal A. Maxwell said, “I remind you that the gospel of work is part of ‘the fulness of the gospel.’” No wonder the Book of Mormon refers to those who oppose God as a “lazy and an idolatrous people” who “glut themselves” on the labors of others (Mosiah 9:12). They search for a path of minimal resistance, or they wait around for someone else to solve their problems. When it comes to acting for themselves, they are paralyzed. This is a problem, for as Elder Maxwell observed, “I have not seen any perspiration-free shortcuts to the celestial kingdom; there is no easy escalator to take us there” (“Put Your Shoulder to the Wheel,” *Ensign*, May 1998).

(Show broken escalator clip.)

**Sister Richardson:**

Sisters, the power to act is in us. The power to work is our heritage. We can solve our problems for we are armed with the principle of work, and it will win the day.

**Brother Richardson:**

I wonder if we are removing the blessings received by toiling from those we love by doing for them what they should and can be doing for themselves. Are we helping or hurting as we remove reasonable responsibilities, opportunities, and burdens?

**Sister Richardson:**

Do we support entitled attitudes by failing to help our children learn to work? Are we hoping to reap the rewards of spiritual blessings without paying the required price? Ask yourself, “How can I provide meaningful ways to assist God in His work?” Sisters, do we “wear the worker’s seal”? “The work to do is here for you; Put your shoulder to the wheel” (“Put Your Shoulder to the Wheel,” *Hymns*, no. 252).



**Brother Richardson:**

“For some must push and some must pull, As we go marching up the hill; So merrily on our way we go Until we reach the Valley-o” (“The Handcart Song,” *Children’s Songbook*, 220) ... Sorry, I thought we were doing a work medley.

**Sister Richardson:**

No, no, we weren’t. No, but you do have a good point. We all must work even though we have different roles, responsibilities, capabilities, time, etc. Some must push and some must pull.

**Brother Richardson:**

By the way, I was just wondering, what exactly is a “Valley-o?”

**Sister Richardson:**

Not really sure! This does push my thoughts to the pioneers. Talk about a hard-working lot. I think of one of my ancestors, Alice Greenwood, who after joining the church in England in 1842, immigrated to join the Saints in Nauvoo. Her life was not easy. She gave birth to 14 children, one on a steamboat. She endured mobbings in Nauvoo and the trials of Winter Quarters, and on the trail to the “Valley-o” her horses were stolen. I admire this hard-working woman whom I have never met. She would most likely be surprised to learn that someone—anyone—admired her. She was just doing what she thought was expected of her. She wrote in her journal that she was “trying all the time to go through the sacrifice to the best of [her] ability in [her] poor weak way.” I am particularly moved by a line recorded in her journal in response to her reflections on her experiences that reads, “I can truly say I never felt to murmur through them all for my Heavenly Father has given me strength in the midst of all this.”

**Brother Richardson:**

Never felt to murmur? Now how could that be? I believe that she, like all the Saints of similar character, was armed with the principle of work. She understood the price of mortality and happily worked toward earning and paying that price to the very best of her ability.

**Sister Richardson:**

Such is the legacy of those armed with the never-changing principle of work. They not only endure, but they endure well. When Matt and I were in the Czech Republic on an assignment, we sang, “Come, Come, Ye Saints” (*Hymns*, no. 30) at one of the meetings. This is an anthem fitting for Saints like Alice Greenwood. You can just hear them singing lines like: “Come, come, ye Saints, no toil nor labor fear,” “Though hard to you this journey may appear,” “Gird up your loins; fresh courage take,” and even “And should we die before our journey’s through.” As you know, each verse ends with a heartfelt, “All is well! All is well!”

**Brother Richardson:**

Now those not armed with the principle of everlasting work question: All is well? How

could that possibly be true? Really? Sure, these pioneers felt the press of toil, but because they were armed with the understanding that work is what we must do, they pressed forward with courage and faith. They may not have been singing “All is well! All is well!” with every step, but surely they were singing the Czech translation of this phrase, which Lisa and I learned is actually “Not so bad! Not so bad!”

**Sister Richardson:**

Not much has changed since the Garden [of Eden], Nauvoo, or Winter Quarters. Sure, we have more conveniences today than any generation past. Technology continues to change our world, but the tuition of mortality must still be paid. And those who shrink and shun the right to pay the tuition forfeit the greater blessings. In 1936, the First Presidency said, “Work is to be re-enthroned as the ruling principle in the lives of our Church membership” (Conference Report, Oct. 1936). In this light, we see that work is not merely labor but an investment. This means that real value, lasting value, can only be achieved through work.

**Brother Richardson:**

We value and love our marriage because it’s something that we work at it. We do this every day.

**Sister Richardson:**

We value and love our family because we work at it—every day.

**Brother Richardson:**

We value and love the gospel and have a testimony because we work at it. It is what we do every single day.

**Sister Richardson:**

Contrary to the world’s expectation of ease, relaxation, retirement at the age of 26, work is a principle here to stay. So roll up your sleeves, gird up your loins, and go to work so you may receive protection and strength from the Lord.

**Brother Richardson:**

The third principle that we can glean from Adam and Eve’s experience is looking to God and listening to His voice to receive that protection and strength. After talking with and being beguiled by Satan, Adam and Eve heard God’s voice and “went to hide themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden” (Moses 4:14). Now don’t you find that passage just a little odd?

**Sister Richardson:**

What do you mean?

**Brother Richardson:**

Well, I mean coming up with a plan to hide from God amongst the trees of the garden. Now I have no idea how big the garden was, but I am sure it wasn’t too big for Heavenly Father to find Adam and Eve! I can picture Adam and Eve hiding behind a tree and God

is calling after them. Were they whispering to each other, saying, “It’s working! He will never find us! He will never know!”

**Sister Richardson:**

Most likely, they were just like all of us when we act in inappropriate ways. We just don’t want to face those who trust and love us. We want to turn, run, and hide. Having discovered Adam, God asked, “Where goest thou?” And Adam said, “I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I beheld that I was naked, and I hid myself” (Moses 4:16).

**Brother Richardson:**

I just love the next line (Moses 4:17) in that scriptural passage and all that it implies. “And I, the Lord God, said unto Adam: Who told thee thou wast naked?” You see, something changed since the last time Adam and God were together. When God asked Adam, “Who told thee thou wast naked?” He may have very well been asking something like, “Who have you been talking with and listening to lately?”

**Sister Richardson:**

President Ezra Taft Benson warned, “We must not be swayed by the many voices of the world. We must listen to the voice of the Lord and then determine that we will set our feet irrevocably upon the path he has marked” (“The Law of Chastity,” *New Era*, Jan. 1988). Sisters, who are you listening to? Are you actually facing the world and listening to its voices rather than facing God and Jesus Christ and hearkening to their words? Do you feel inadequate because of what you see in the media, the latest fashion trends, or entertainment? Do the learned and wise of the world, the social elite, politicians, or even those on Facebook, Twitter or Pinterest determine how you think, act, or feel? Who told thee thou art inadequate? Who told thee thou art unhappy? Who told thee thou art not enough of this or too little of that? These voices are overrated and overwhelming.

**Brother Richardson:**

So rather than listening to voices of the fallen, “Adam and Eve ... called upon the name of the Lord, and they heard the voice of the Lord from the way toward the Garden of Eden, speaking unto them” (Moses 5:4). I love the imagery of this account. As Adam and Eve heard God’s voice, I can see them turning “toward the Garden of Eden” to face God, instead of turning away from Him and hiding as they did earlier.

**Sister Richardson:**

This reminds me of whenever we see our children in a crowd and want to get their attention. One of us usually whistles, and our children immediately begin looking around as they turn to face where the sound came from.

**Brother Richardson:**

Sisters, as we turn to face God, we are ready to receive His voice and His direction.

**Sister Richardson:**

Jesus Christ taught, “whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the

same” (D&C 1:38). Because of this we have been counseled to “give heed unto all [the prophet’s] words and commandments which he shall give unto you as he receiveth them” (D&C 21:4).

**Brother Richardson:**

When the children of Israel were bitten by venomous snakes, Moses said if they would look upon a brass snake fixed atop a pole, then they would be saved. While “many did look and live” (Alma 33:19), Nephi pointed out that “because of the simpleness of the way, or the easiness of it, there were many who perished” (1 Nephi 17:41). Can you imagine not looking to and heeding prophetic counsel when your very life was on the line?

**Sister Richardson:**

With this in mind, consider recent messages of the prophets directed especially to us, the women of the Church. For example, President Uchtdorf recently told us five things “we would be wise never to forget” (“Forget Me Not,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2011). He said be patient with yourself, know the difference between a good sacrifice and a foolish sacrifice, be happy now, remember the “why” of the gospel, and know that the Lord loves you.

**Brother Richardson:**

Sisters, have we already forgotten this simple yet profoundly important prophetic counsel? Was it so simple that it was acknowledged but not applied in our own lives? I promise that if you will heed the counsel of the prophets, seers, and revelators, no matter how simple the counsel may be, you will be directed, protected, strengthened and blessed. You see, facing the Lord and His prophets and turning away from the many voices of the world is yet another way to have an “eye single to the glory of God” (D&C 4:5). As we focus on the Lord and what He says, it is extremely difficult to hear what the world has to say.

**Sister Richardson:**

This brings us to the last principle we offer today. We must be armed with a commitment to teaching, edifying, and supporting each other. As Adam and Eve left the garden, they quickly discovered that they would need to prepare and strengthen others. As a result, Adam and Eve did make “all things known unto their sons and their daughters” (Moses 5:12).

**Brother Richardson:**

So in addition to spending time together, your family fun, scripture reading and family prayers, Family Home Evening is an excellent time for making “things known unto” your family. This is a time for sharing testimony, counseling together, learning and teaching gospel whys and hows. It is also a time for expressing love, learning to appreciate and understand one another.

**Sister Richardson:**

Teaching, edifying, and supporting families is not restricted to formal gatherings alone,

for it happens in other ways as well.

**Brother Richardson:**

I can't help but think of my own children, for example, who every morning when leaving our home have a rousing experience where my wife teaches, edifies, and supports them. Lisa stands at the door and says:

**Sister Richardson:**

Stand up straight and smile and remember who you are. You are a child of God and a Richardson. Reverence! Respect! Responsibility! Resourcefulness! Resolve! Be a light!

**Brother Richardson:**

Doesn't that just make you want to be good? This is what my children have said. As you can see, my wife blesses all of us as she teaches and lives the principles of the gospel.

**Sister Richardson:**

Such influences, reminders, and support are important even when we may think that what we do really doesn't make much of a difference.

**Brother Richardson:**

Perhaps this personal experience might illustrate this point. I remember winning an election in junior high school, and the "cool kids" invited me to a celebration at the local roller-skating rink. The prospect of being included with this new group was so exciting that I almost forgot that I had already made a commitment to attend a different celebration.

**Sister Richardson:**

Almost forgot?

**Brother Richardson:**

Well, sort of. I suppose I wanted to forget about a birthday party that I had attended every year for my entire life! This was real and high drama.

**Sister Richardson:**

Especially when you consider he was only 13 years old.

**Brother Richardson:**

Unfortunately, I was lured by the siren call of peer acceptance, and I neglected my commitment to one party for the seemingly more exciting party. When my mother asked if I needed a ride to the party, I informed her I was "good to go."

**Sister Richardson:**

You just conveniently neglected to tell her which party you were going to!

**Brother Richardson:**

True. Everything was going well at the roller-skating rink. We prepared for the “snowball,” where all the boys gathered on one side of the rink with all the girls on the opposite side. A boy and a girl would be selected to skate around the rink holding hands. The manager would then blow a whistle, and the pair would split apart and select other partners and skate together until the whistle blew. And the process was repeated until, well, it “snowballed.” The lights were dimmed, the mirrored ball started spinning, and the anticipation of actually holding a real girl’s hand was mounting. I vividly remember seeing a silhouetted figure walking onto the floor, which I thought was the manager who would set the snowball into motion. It was obvious by the way that this person was walking—with short choppy steps—that he was just as excited as we were. Much to my surprise, however, that silhouetted figure marched right past the center of the rink, full-speed ahead and in my direction. To my horror, I realized that it wasn’t the manager marching across the rink—but it was my mother! She marched up and gripped my arm and said, “Come with me, young man!”

**Sister Richardson:**

The parental words of imminent death.

**Brother Richardson:**

Oh yes. Oh yes. My mother marched me off that roller-skating rink with my arms flailing as I tried to maintain my balance. She paused only long enough for me to change into my shoes. Of course, everyone skated over to see what was the matter. Was there a death in the family?

**Sister Richardson:**

Well, not yet!

**Brother Richardson:**

I was marched out the door and into the car. I was humiliated. My only chance to be part of the “in crowd” evaporated, and this scene would surely be the talk of the school for at least the next century. The only upside to this story is that it happened long before YouTube and Facebook.

My mother didn’t say a word as she drove me straight to the birthday party. When we arrived, she handed me a gift (which she purchased herself) and said, “Go in there and be a gentleman and a man of your word.” I was so angry. I started to slam the car door, but I paused just long enough to say in a way that only a 13-year-old can say, “I will never speak to you again as long as I live.”

Well, after the party I walked home and I entered our house, finding my mother and father sitting at the kitchen table. I marched right past them, keeping my oath to never speak to them again. I hurried to my bedroom, only to collapse on my bed, and I started sobbing. My young life was over.

I remember thinking that my parents were most likely in similar torment as they were

upstairs, surely second-guessing their parenting skills and regretting the parental errors that they made that night. In my mind's eye, I could see my parents with tearstained faces and swollen eyes, consoling each another and wondering if I would ever be able to forgive them.

**Sister Richardson:**

Now, as parents, we really know what happened. They watched Matt enter the room, march past them grunting and sighing, stomp down the stairs, and then heard the bedroom door slam shut. They looked at each other for a brief moment, and then they burst into laughter.

**Brother Richardson:**

Well, I did hold true to my promise and didn't speak to my mother again.

**Sister Richardson:**

You mean until the next morning when you wanted to know what was for breakfast.

**Brother Richardson:**

You know me far too well. But here is the point. I suppose that if you interviewed me at that time in my life, I would have most likely told you how much I disliked my mother, how mean she was, and how she ruined my life. But today, right here and now, I will sing her praises and honor her angelic performance. She taught me a lesson as a 13-year-old young man about integrity that has lasted a lifetime. There is at least one trait that I hold in common with the stripling warriors: I did not doubt that my mother knew. I knew integrity was really important to her. Now this experience continues to teach me even after all these years. Now as a parent, I have thought about how hard it would have been to make a public entrance and walk across a roller-skating rink in front of all of those people, to save a son.

So sisters, don't you dare give up on teaching, edifying, and supporting your family members. Even when you think you are failing, when you strive to strengthen and support, those around you will be blessed. I know this is true. I testify this is true. And even better, I can witness that this is true.

**Sister Richardson:**

The principle of teaching, edifying, and supporting reminds me of Christ's admonition, "when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:32). This principle applies not only to families but to friends, neighbors, and ward members. Every time you teach—from the pulpit, or in Relief Society, Young Women, Primary ...

**Brother Richardson:**

... or Sunday School! Sunday School! Wherever you are or whatever you do, you can teach, edify, and support others, regardless of your circumstances and your situation.

**Sister Richardson:**

Twelve years ago our daughter Megan and I attended her very first Young Women's

general meeting in the Tabernacle. Sister Ardeth Kapp, the former Young Women's general president, just happened to be sitting right next to our daughter. Before the meeting began, she put her arm around Megan and said, "I wasn't able to have children. Would you mind if you would be my granddaughter tonight?" After the conference, Sister Kapp handed my daughter this note: "Dear Megan, As the former general Young Women president, may I welcome you to your first YW conference? It was a joy to meet you, to sit by you. Remember you are a daughter of God who loves you. Always stand for truth and righteousness. You are special. Love, Ardeth Kapp."

**Brother Richardson:**

This noble woman taught, edified, and supported my daughter, my wife, and even me as well as any grandmother ever could. Every one of you can make a difference. You are and can be women armed with principles that will never change.

**Sister Richardson:**

As I think of women armed with principles that never change, I envision this woman who has been portrayed on the program cover of this year's conference. Upon reaching the valley after an arduous journey, she raises her hand in what Marian Wardle, Minerva Teichert's granddaughter and a museum art curator, describes as a "stance of exaltation with enthusiasm." She is armed with a white handkerchief above her head, which according to Sister Wardle is in "the biblical tradition of shouting praises or hosanna."

**Brother Richardson:**

Now the word "hosanna" as we know it originated from the Hebrew meaning, "Save us, we beseech thee." It was King Benjamin that taught there is no "other way nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent" (Mosiah 3:17). It is evident that this pioneer woman, who surely besought the Lord to save her and her family along the trail, exerted her grit and the principles like we have discussed today. But now with the end in sight, the valley in sight, she continues to recognize the Lord's hand and signals heavenward, waving that white handkerchief, beseeching Jesus Christ to still "save" her.

**Sister Richardson:**

In the dedicatory prayer of the Kirtland temple, Joseph Smith prayed, "And we ask thee, Holy Father, that thy servants may go forth from this house armed with thy power, and that thy name may be upon them, and thy glory be round about them, and thine angels have charge over them" (D&C 109:22).

**Brother Richardson:**

It is God's power, His name, and His glory, not ours, that arms and fortifies us in all things. As we live His principles of truth, we unite our humble efforts with the supernal magnificence of Jesus Christ. Our only hope is to be armed in Him.

**Sister Richardson:**

To be armed, equipped, or fortified, each of us must act for ourselves—but remember, we must act as Christ acts.



**Brother Richardson:**

To be armed, equipped, or fortified, each of us must be willing to work every day to the very best of our ability.

**Sister Richardson:**

To be armed, equipped, or fortified, all of us must turn, look, and listen to God's voice and the voice of His prophets, seers, and revelators.

**Brother Richardson:**

To be armed, equipped, or fortified, we must teach, edify, and support each other.

**Sister Richardson:**

We testify that these principles have not changed and are true.

**Brother Richardson:**

We invite you to live according to these and other doctrinal principles.

**Sister Richardson:**

We promise that as you do so, you will be protected and strengthened in all you do.

**Brother Richardson:**

It is our sincere hope that you will be armed with principles that never change. In the sacred name of Him who makes all this possible, even Jesus Christ.

**Brother and Sister Richardson:**

Amen.