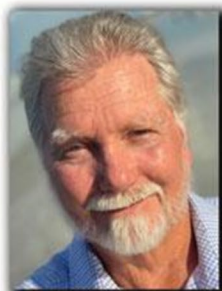


**A Little Bit Crazy &
a Whole Lot of Fun...
AI Toronto**



Yep, that's me on the front cover, diving off a 40-foot cliff under Rainbow Bridge at Lake Powell. I was 40 years old and in the middle of the most turbulent and challenging decade of my life.

The photo captions my life perfectly – diving head-first into unknown waters. It was a tad dangerous...a little bit crazy...and a whole lot of fun. My friend, Oren Durtschi, took this photograph, capturing the elongated shadow on the rocks. It's my all-time favorite.

This book is for my posterity, so I don't hold back or sugarcoat anything. I lay bare both my achievements and my failures. I present a lifetime of things to do and not to do. I often use myself as a negative example, but I did a lot of things right too. My greatest hope is that my kids and grandkids will use this history to avoid some of the pitfalls of life and follow a sure path to happiness.

I guarantee, some of the stories will put a smile on your face.

A Little Bit Crazy &
a Whole Lot of Fun...
Al Toronto

The Autobiography of
Allen Sharp Toronto
Born June 2, 1945

© 2021
Allen S. Toronto

Organization

This autobiography is largely chronological, but I made a few exceptions. I want to relay my history uninterrupted by too many side stories. It reads better that way. But there are a few important things I call out in detail that are not in chronological order.

First, I love smart girls. I had two amazingly intelligent and loyal companions – Jane for 18 years and Suzy for 34 years at this writing. I admit right up front, I'm the luckiest guy in the world. Thus, I write much about my wonderful wives throughout the book.

Second, I have five children. I have included separate chapters for Carrie, Amy, Cindy, Will and Chase. Plus, I threw in chapter about Gus, because he was such an unusual dog and a subject of universal scorn. My kids insisted I include some Gus stories.

I also call out five miracles that occurred around the time of Jane's death. This was the most stressful and formative time of my life. The lessons are profound, and they deserve their own chapter.

Finally, I include an appendix of church talks I have given over the years. They pretty much define my foundation in life.

Because of this structure, some of the stories are repeated in the children's chapters and in church talks which wrap them into gospel doctrine. This tome is made for skipping around.

Note about Jane

Jane's sister, EC Shaeffer, edited and compiled a complete biography of Jane's life titled, [*Jane Weaver Toronto – 1940-1987*](#). EC had it printed and bound for family.

What an incredible act of selfless love! All of my children have a copy. That book contains a complete history of our marriage and children – including letters and comments from me. It contains detailed information about Jane’s cancer and death. I am not replicating that information. I only reference significant experiences we had along the way from my perspective. If you want the complete story, you need to read Jane’s biography as well.

Disclaimer

Any historical account is, at best, 80% true – largely the perception of the writer with multiple exaggerations and errors. And, my long-term memory stinks. I’m giving myself the benefit of the doubt, realistically claiming this account to be 80% true.

With that, let me tell you about my life.

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Chapter 1

Birth and Czechoslovakia

What a day! June 2, 1945. I came kicking and screaming into this world at LDS Hospital in Salt Lake City. Martha Sharp and Wallace Felt Toronto were the proud parents of their fifth child and second son. They named me Allen Sharp Toronto.

I understand the Sharp and the Toronto. But I never knew why they named me Allen. I always hoped it was after my Uncle Al, one of the coolest guys in the world. But, alas, he spelled his name Alan, like most every other Big Al in the universe.

So Allen it is – a name they liked and one that has served me well for nearly 80 years at the time of this writing. My friends just call me Al.

They say I was independent from the start – not wanting to comply with anything or anybody. Can't remember, but it makes sense. I'm still that way with a healthy dose of cynicism. I fight these impulses every day. My mother got so frustrated she used to say it would serve me right to have a child just like me. Luckily, that curse never came to pass. My like-minded sister Carol (12 children) and I talked about this often. We were too street smart and suspicious for our kids to get the edge on us.

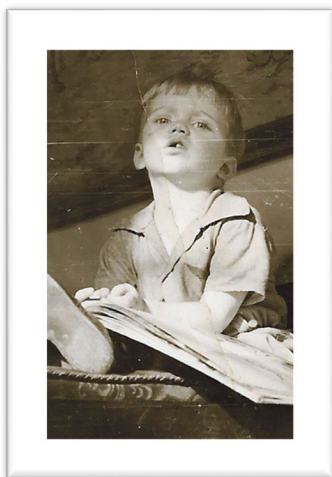
My Father

Shortly after I was born, Dad was called by the Prophet of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints to return to Czechoslovakia to provide Church assistance to war-torn civilians. He was still mission president. This was his second stint in that role. He was there for about five years before World War II and fled the Nazis with his missionaries, escaping moments before the war started. Home for four years and my birth, off he went at the call of

the Prophet on his second tour. The family followed a year later. Mom, bless her heart, had to drag five children all the way from Salt Lake City to Europe by herself – just one of her many heroic deeds.

Except as a newborn, I never had contact with Dad for the first year of my life. When we did meet in Czechoslovakia, that happy occasion turned into a cry fest. I wanted nothing to do with him according to my mother. It was tough on my parents. We made up fast, however. But since that time, I always seemed to be at odds with my father. I believe it was because I never bonded with him in that first year. Don't get me wrong, I had some great times with Dad over the years – just not connected. As children, my brothers Bob and Dave were very tight with Dad – and very obedient. Sad to say, I broke that mold.

Prague



I spent four years in Prague, growing up in the mission home. Sister Krece, our live-in maid, was my nanny. They say I spoke great Czech as a kid, though I can't remember a single word now. I'm sure the language is packed away in the far recesses of my brain, but I haven't found it.

I have a few faint memories of those early years at the mission home in Prague, boosted by what I've heard from family.

- At the entry of the mission home was a fountain with a large statue of a frog in it, water spewing out of its mouth. I remember playing in that fountain during hot summer days – mostly sitting on the frog. It was a cool and fun place to be.

- The music room inside the home was round and contained a magnificent grand piano. My sister, Marion, played it constantly. My favorite thing was to sit under the piano with our German shepherd, Butch, as she played. Those heavenly vibrations, along with the texture of the dog, filled my senses. To this day, both classical piano music and dogs bring me to tears.
- I used to crawl out the kitchen window into a cherry tree that nearly came into the house. That started my lifelong love of cherries – still my favorite fruit. It drove Sister Krece crazy to see me in that tree, and there was nothing she could do about it. I stayed until I was finished. That experience served to create the title of my mother’s autobiography, “A Cherry Tree Behind the Iron Curtain.” I got an honorary mention in her introduction. Jane, my first wife, was the editor.
- My most vivid memory was when the children were left alone in the mission home, the oldest left to baby sit the youngest. The great room was surrounded by a second story balcony all the way around. My brother, Bob, was about 13 years old. He would gather all the cushions from the furniture and pile them on the floor. The kids would then take turns jumping from the balcony onto the cushions below. A little dangerous, but great fun. I watched in amazement.



1950. I'm the mouth-breather up front.
Left to right are Judy, Carol, Bob, Marion and Dave.

The family returned to Salt Lake City in 1950. Dad and all missionaries were expelled by the new communist government. No room for religion in that atheist regime. That's a topic for another book.

1

Chapter 2

Childhood in Salt Lake City

I had an idyllic, worry free childhood. Growing up in the suburbs of Salt Lake City, I had a great group of friends, a loving family, strong church ties and little responsibility. However, I was somewhat of a rebel and got into my share of trouble. My father was a prankster as a child, and I took that as permission to do the same.

Some of his pranks were legendary. Like experimenting with electricity: He ran a bare wire along the perch of his neighbor's chicken roost and attached it to a battery just to startle them. Waiting until they were all on the perch, he flipped the switch and killed them all. Oops. Or the time he put vinegar in one of the cups on the sacrament tray to watch the reaction. For me, it was open season for such pranks.

I attended grade school for seven years at Roslyn Heights Elementary, about one block from our home on 20th East. Kindergarten and first grade were a little rough as I adjusted from my Czech environment to that of Salt Lake City. From elementary school, I went straight to Highland High School as a seventh grader. It was a brand new school, so they seeded it with junior high students for a few years. I graduated from Highland in 1963.

Like every kid, I wanted to be big, strong and athletic. No such luck. I was skinny, small and slow. However, I tried. I tried out for little league baseball. Didn't make the cut. I played little league football – mostly watched from the bench. But I was on the team and learned the game. I was OK at basketball and enjoyed playing church ball my whole life. But I was not good enough for the school team. I became an avid skier, taking after my brother, Bob, whom I idolized. Many Saturdays in winter I would carry my gear one block to 21st South and put out my thumb to the traffic. Without fail, the second or third car driving by was on the

way to Alta or Brighton for the day. I got a free ride up and down the canyon without a problem. Hitch hiking was perfectly safe in Salt Lake City in the early sixties. In summer, I hitch-hiked to work every day. Makes me long for the good-old-days.

Little Brother Dave



Not being a tough kid was a little rough on my self-esteem. The problem was, I took out those frustrations on my little brother, Dave. He was four years younger than I.

One of my greatest regrets in life is that I was so mean to my innocent younger brother. It didn't help that I was a little devil, usually in trouble, and he was perfect. I was particularly resentful when he tattled on me – a

daily occurrence. So, the sibling rivalry was in full swing – mostly on my part. I used to walk by and smack him on the head for no reason at all. I was a flat-out jerk until my teens.

I did not truly embrace Dave as my brother until I came home from basic training in the army in 1963. I have apologized to him many times as an adult – almost every time I see him. And, true to his perfect nature, he has forgiven me. This is a part of life I wish I could do over.

Mom

My memories of Mom are mostly good. She was always there, getting us up, fed and out, making school lunches every day, and getting us to church every Sunday. She scolded me regularly about being mean to Dave and running off to play before dishes were done.

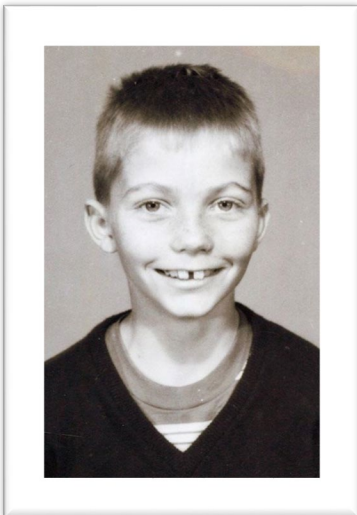
And, oh, her Sunday meals! Mom was a fabulous cook. Almost every Sunday we'd come home from church to the smell of roast beef, potatoes, gravy, and pies. Her leg of lamb was to die for. And whenever Grandpa Sharp went hunting, we dined on duck. Her specialty was pumpkin chiffon pie -- still my favorite treat.

Second Mom

I had some great friends growing up. My first and best friend was Dan Clark, who lived one block away on Preston Street. We met at the age of five and are still friends today. I spent a lot of time at his house. His mother Veda, bless her heart, is largely responsible for teaching me manners. Dan and his parents were very good to me.

Little Thief

I had other friends in the neighborhood who were not so good and helped me get into trouble. One summer, around the age of ten, I hung out with Conway Freiner. He and I started stealing packages of gum containing collectible cards from Dan's Drug Store. This was the era of trading baseball and airplane cards. A great collection was highly valued by all.



After a month of pilfering packs of gum and cards, I had a sizeable airplane card collection. We spent hours admiring it. Then I made the mistake of revealing our source to an older neighbor boy who ratted us out. Dad was onto me.

I'll never forget the encounter.

Dad came down our unfinished basement where I had my collection of cards laid out on the bed. He admired them and asked me where I'd gotten them.

I said, "Oh, I found some and I traded a whole bunch with friends. Everybody's doing it."

He gave me every chance to come clean. I held onto my story. Then he said, "I know you've been stealing them from Dan's Drug."

Woah! My little world collapsed. I cried, I stuttered, and said I was sorry. Dad scolded me – told me I should have known better and that I had shamed the family name. "Torontos do not steal...period!" Anyway, the jig was up, and I was at his mercy.

Dad asked, "How much money do you have saved up?"

I showed him a metal Band-Aid can that was full of mostly pennies. The total came to a couple of dollars. He told me to bring my can as we headed off by foot to Dan's Drug Store. It was a long three blocks.

We went into the store and asked for Dan Gardener, the owner. Standing across from the counter, Dad told Mr. Gardener that I had something to tell him. He made me confess that I had been stealing candy from Dan's Drug for more than a month. I meekly put my little can of change on the counter and offered it to the owner. That's a tough spot for an eight-year-old. Dan accepted the change, and Dad gave him a ten-dollar bill to cover the difference.

After that trauma, Dad took me next door to Valora's, an old fashion ice cream parlor, and bought me an ice cream cone. It was early evening. We sat on a bench out on the sidewalk and had a long, healing discussion over our ice cream. He hugged and kissed me, and told me he loved me. This was one of the sweetest experiences of my life – a mini-atonement, if you will. It was the end of my shoplifting career.

This experience led to my affinity for this scripture: D&C 121:41-44.

41. No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned;
42. By kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile—
43. Reproving betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost; and then showing forth afterwards an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reprov'd, lest he esteem thee to be his enemy;
44. That he may know that thy faithfulness is stronger than the cords of death.

Indeed, I knew I was loved. And I learned how to be a father.

I wish I could say this was the end of my conflicts with Dad, but I continued to be a little hellion for the next few years.

I was baptized at the age of eight by my father in the Salt Lake Tabernacle on Temple Square. There were a couple of baptismal fonts in the lower level of the west end of the building. That's where most people in Salt Lake were baptized in 1953.

Afterward, Dad sat me down on a bench on Temple Square and pointed out the features of the temple. As a boy, I gazed up at the ominous dark edifice in total awe. I had never focused on it before. The granite castle reached to the sky against a background of azure blue. Three towers on each end represented the presidencies of the Church. On the highest spire stood a gleaming gold statue of a man in flowing robes, blowing a horn. Dad explained that was the Angel Moroni, ushering in the restoration of the Church. He pointed out some of the symbols carved into the granite stones – the all-seeing eye of God, the handshake of brotherhood, the sun, moon and stars, representing the three degrees of glory. He told me it took forty years to build the temple and that his grandfather was one of the workers. I love this memory of my father – in the shadow of the Salt Lake Temple.

Little did I know then what role that building would play in my life – most of it good, some of it not so good.

Chapter 3

High School

I entered Highland High School at age 12 – junior high for most kids. I spent six years there until graduation in June of 1963.

I was smart, but lazy. I hated school and loved to goof off. Go figure! So my academic development was slow. I did the bare minimum to get by. Of course, my parents knew I was an A student, getting solid Cs, so they bugged me incessantly about it.

It didn't help that one of my best friends was Bill Parker, a true genius who never forgot anything. It embarrasses me that I passed up so many opportunities for growth as a teen. A couple of my teachers labeled me least likely to succeed. One of them, Mr. Collette, almost fainted twenty years later when he learned that I earned a Ph.D. and was a college professor at BYU.

My mission turned me around. Once I got serious and focused on a career path, I earned top grades and pushed through a three-year graduate program in two years. It had never been done before at Northwestern University.

I'm no dummy, though I felt that way for years in high school.

Death of a Friend

I had a traumatic experience at age 13 that shaped my attitude.

Four of us were at a neighbor's house playing basketball in the driveway. The basket was attached to a separate garage next to Mike Hall's house. During play, the ball got wedged between the rim of the basket and the backboard. We couldn't knock it out with rocks, so Mike got a ladder

out of his garage to climb up and free the ball. As he was swatting at the ball, Mike lost his balance and fell off the ladder.

I'll never forget that dull cracking sound as his head hit the concrete drive. Mike stood up, shook his head a few times, and walked into the house where his mother was working. He passed out right in front of her.

We were shocked when the ambulance arrived and pronounced him dead. The three of us stood there in shock. One minute we were playing ball, the next minute he was gone. I couldn't stop the flow of tears at his funeral. That could have been any of us.

This was my first experience with death. Very profound. It helped prepare me for the death of my father, a couple of friends in Viet Nam, and my first wife, Jane.

Driving

Dad taught me how to drive at the age of 13. To Mom's chagrin, he'd let me drive on country roads when we went on family trips – mostly Highway 89 to Southern Utah. There were no freeways then, so we drove on two-lane roads. The only close calls were when we'd pass a large truck on a narrow bridge with just inches to spare. Dad would reach over and steady the wheel. But I was hooked on driving, and good at it. I wanted to drive Dad's teal 1958 Oldsmobile 88 all the time.

When I was 14, I took Dad's car key to the local hardware store and made my own copy. He was out of town.

During that summer, after midnight, my friends and I would quietly push Dad's car out of the garage and into the street. With me at the wheel, we'd cruise all over Salt Lake in the middle of the night. On our return, we'd siphon gas out of cars in the neighborhood to top up the tank and then

push the car back into the garage. Somehow, I didn't think that was stealing. And, of course, I didn't consider the liability of an accident. I would have killed one of my kids, as a father, had they done this.

One night, as we were sneaking the car back into the garage, all the lights came on. There stood Dad with a scowl on his face. We had been doing figure eights in a gravel parking lot on 23rd East. A neighbor called the police with the license plate number. Dad said, "Imagine my surprise when a large policeman knocked on my door in the middle of the night and asked if I knew where my car was."

Ooh, I was in trouble. I got the lecture of my life, was grounded for a month and gave up my key. I'm surprised Dad ever let me drive again. One thing about Dad, he was quick to forgive.

Mom

I had some tense interactions with Mom too. Most of them centered around the fact that I did not want to do any work around the house. She assigned me chores that I frequently ignored, hoping they would go away.

I was, truly, a pain, as illustrated by the following story:

When I was 15, Mom had foot surgery. She suffered from bone spurs and other growths that had to be removed inside her foot. The doctor virtually split her foot in half lengthwise to clean out the unwanted tissue and carefully sewed it back together. She had dozens of sutures holding her foot together.

A couple of weeks after surgery, I was laying on the living room floor and Mom had asked me to take out the garbage. I pretty much ignored her, as usual.

She asked me again, a few times. Each time I said, “yeah, yeah, yeah, I’ll get to it.”

Her frustration was building. She finally yelled at me to get it done immediately. I rolled over and said “yeah, yeah, yeah.”

In total anger, she forgot about her foot, walked over and kicked me with it.

The sutures didn’t hold. Her foot spit, blood soaked her bandage, and she slumped to the floor sobbing in pain. She had to go to the hospital for repair.

I’ve never felt so bad, or so guilty, or so sorry. I hurt my Mom – bad. Try living with that! It was one of the worse days of my life – and it was my own fault. That day had a lasting impact on my life. I never put her off again.

But Mom got even.

Later that summer I was painting the trim of our house. I was at the very top of the extension ladder, stretching to paint the peak, about 25 feet up. I had one hand on the roof with the paint can dangling from my elbow. The foot of the ladder was on the edge of the driveway.

Mom drove in the driveway and accidentally (I think) hit the ladder.

The ladder went out from under me. I dropped the brush and was hanging onto the peak of the house with both hands, the paint can slid to my shoulder sideways and spilled all over my clothes. I was dangling there, a dripping, screaming mess. Someone finally put the ladder back so I could get my footing.

Mom felt so bad. It was her turn to feel guilty for almost killing me.

We talked about it that night and both agreed that my splitting her foot and her almost killing me was a wash. We were even-stein. It really helped us both, and our relationship improved significantly.

High School Friends

My main three friends in High School were Dan Clark, Mike Morgan and Bill Parker. In our Junior and Senior years, we were the four musketeers -- always sleeping out in each other's yards and causing trouble. At the age of 16, we all bought Vespa motor scooters, which gave us new freedom and a whole new range of activities. We rode all over Salt Lake Valley and up and down every canyon. We had a couple of accidents, but nothing serious. I've been hooked on motorbikes ever since.

I found my first love, Nola Nielson, in my senior year. We met in the Highland High Acapella Choir. There was no keeping us apart. After our first date, I never went out with another girl until after my mission. Nola was cute, shapely and smart, everything I ever wanted in a woman. And she loved me, my friends and my family. She was a great companion for a couple of years.

It turned out that all my friends were in choir and loved to sing. Mike Morgan played guitar and taught me how to play. I became obsessed with it and played day and night. This was the day of the Kingston Trio, Bud and Travis, and Peter, Paul and Mary -- all pre-Beatles groups. So Dan, Mike, Bill and I formed our own quartet with me on guitar. We came up with a dozen popular songs and actually performed for money a few times. We were pretty good. Nola was our groupie and tagged along everywhere we sang.

Embarrassed in the Tabernacle

The Highland Acapella was one of the best high school groups in the state. Our director, Mr. Christensen, was terrific – fun and energetic.

We were invited to sing for a municipal event in the Salt Lake Tabernacle. It was quite an honor to sing in that historic and acoustically perfect structure. The building was full of leaders and dignitaries – standing room only.

One of our numbers was a patriotic piece, “Shouting the Battle Cry of Freedom.” The song advanced from pianissimo to a total blowout crescendo. The last verse of the song was as loud as we could sing it. It started after a brief interlude by the piano. I sang tenor, and stood right in the middle of the choir. The piano was playing toward our stirring conclusion.

Mr. Christensen raised his hands to bring us in, and I came in a measure too early – super loud – all by myself – in the Tabernacle – in front of thousands of people.

The rest of the choir burst into uncontrollable laughter – couldn’t sing. The accompanist played the interlude again while we settled down. We could hardly finish. I’ve ever been so embarrassed.

This happened mid-school year. For the rest of the semester, Mr. Christensen would raise his hands to start a song during practice. He’d look at me and say, “Al, you ready?” It was a great source of fun and camaraderie. High school choir was one of the best experiences of my life.

First Guitar

I made my first guitar in wood shop my senior year at Highland. Our teacher required a major project for a grade. While others made chairs, tables and boxes, I made a guitar. The teacher discouraged me because it was a very difficult task for a novice. He said he'd help me if I committed to the time and effort to finish it. So, I did, and it was beautiful. It was awarded the best woodshop project of the year. The guitar was pure mahogany – heavy and tinny sounding – but it played well. I played that guitar for our quartet and took it to the army. I loved that thing. I gave it to my brother, Dave, when I went on my mission. Don't know what happened to it.

Graduation

My father handed out the high school diplomas at our graduation ceremony. He was a member of the school board. True to his fun-loving nature, he held back my diploma on stage, in front of the entire student body, insisting that I kiss him on the cheek. The graduating class of 500 students erupted in cheers and jeers when I did so. I walked off the stage red faced. He did the same thing to my girlfriend, Nola, who was actually flattered by it.

Chapter 4

Army

I joined the Army Reserve my senior year of high school, along with many of my classmates. It was a life-changing event. The story below became part of one of my favorite talks on the importance of hymns in the church. The [full talk](#) is in the Appendix.

Like Nephi of old, I was born of goodly parents. Sad to say, I was not a goodly son. Out of six children, I was the rebel – independent and stubborn. I was at constant odds with my authoritarian Father – especially as a teen-ager. We truly had an adversarial relationship. Don't get me wrong, I was never in serious trouble – just cynical and mischievous – always pushing the limits. For the most part, I grudgingly went along with family and Church. But unlike my goody-two-shoes siblings, I was not converted. I took the Church totally for granted.

For 17 years I endured endless Church meetings. It was torture for this skeptic. Week-after-week we heard the same talks and sang the same songs. Living in the heart of Salt Lake City, it seemed like we talked about pioneers and sang “Come, Come Ye Saints” all the time. Come, Come Ye Saints over-and-over again. I grew to hate that song.

At the age of 17, I'd had enough. Against all expectations and training, I decided NOT to serve a mission – the first Toronto to bail out in three generations. I just wanted to get away from home.

One day an Army Reserve recruiter came to our school to talk to the seniors. Boy, the army sounded exciting – this was before Viet Nam. Fifteen of us joined the army that day. The recruiter guaranteed if we signed at the same time, we'd all go through Basic Training

together -- and it would be one-big party. As a group, we'd rule-the-roost in Basic, and no one would mess with us. Made sense, so we signed up.

The problem was, I was a minor. My Dad had to sign the application – and I knew he'd resist. So, I decided to bluff my way into getting him to sign.

I planned-out the whole scenario. It was late at night. Dad was at the dining room table, working on his taxes. Mom was sitting next to him, reading. Everything was perfect.

I couldn't wait to see the look on their faces. I knew my announcement would break their hearts. They'd cry and beg me to reconsider. Where had they gone wrong? They'd do anything to keep me home and serve a mission like my brother. But I, the proud, independent son would stand firm -- and I would be free!

I walked in, slapped the application on the table and said, "Dad, I've joined the army. You have to sign this."

Mom's head jerked up. The fun was about to begin.

Without a word, Dad read the application and signed the bottom line. He handed it back and said, "Son... this is EXACTLY what you need."

Mom broke into hysterical laughter – couldn't stop. Dad went back to his taxes with a smile on his face.

I stood there with my mouth open, wondering what I'd just gotten myself into. And Mom giggled on.

Two months later, 15 of us were on an airplane to Fort Ord, California. Oh, we were high, laughing and joking the whole way. What an adventure we were going to have!

But when we registered, all 14 of my friends went to the same platoon, and I got split off into a different platoon – that was mostly Puerto Rican. Worst of all, I was separated from my best friend, Dan Clark.

This had to be a mistake! What about the recruiter's guarantee!!?

After a week of begging my superiors for help, they discovered it was a paperwork error. The clerk simply mixed up two names -- "Toronto" and "Torino." Since we were already one full-week into our training, they would not switch us back.

So, my counterpart, poor Torino, was stuck in the all-white-spoiled-rich-kid platoon, while I was stuck with a gang of street-smart Puerto Ricans from New York City. Both Torino and I were in for a rough time.

I've never been so disappointed, or so angry, or so afraid. All my expectations were dashed. I found myself in what seemed like a living hell – at least to this inexperienced 18-year-old. Most of the men came from dire poverty and were hostile toward this spoiled-rich-kid.

Out of necessity, I hung out with the handful of English-speaking non-Puerto Ricans. All they ever talked about was drinking and sex in the most vulgar terms. I was no stranger to bad language, but nothing like this. The drill sergeants were no better – bad-mouthed and mean.

Basic Training was grueling – up at 4:30, work all day to the point of exhaustion, and then to bed – all in the most punitive environment you can imagine. I hated every second of it. My stomach was constantly in a knot.

After four weeks, they finally gave us a Sunday off. They announced that LDS services were being held on post, but who cared? I was so bitter and depressed, I didn't want to go.

Then they gave us the next Sunday off. Again, I blew-off any thought of going to Church – I joined the army to get away from it. Instead, I went to the PX alone.

On the way back, I passed a single building with a little cross on top. It was the Post Chapel. The sign outside listed all the denominations. LDS services started at 10 o'clock. It was 10:05. I decided to drop in.

I walked into an empty foyer. The congregation was in the chapel, behind a curtained, glass wall. The meeting had already started. And guess what I heard?

“Tis better far for us to strive our useless cares from us to drive. Do this and joy, your hearts will swell. All is well. All is well.”

My chest started to heave. This hate-filled, beat-up soldier sat down, alone in the foyer, and cried like a baby. I couldn't stop. I sobbed and sobbed. The knot in my stomach was released. I was home.

Nothing has ever been more clear to me. Did I want what the world offered, or what my family and church offered? At once, I knew the Church was true, my father was right, and I was a world-class idiot – what an arrogant fool!

Like Alma the Older, my father had been praying for his rebel son. God reached down and, with a simple paperwork error, separated me from my friends and threw me into the military meat-grinder. After being compelled to be humble, He put me right in front of a spiritual freight train -- Come, Come Ye Saints. My father's prophetic words still echo in my ears: "Son, this is exactly what you need." It was divine intervention brothers and sisters – the most significant miracle of my life.

In the remaining weeks of Basic Training, I gave away two Books of Mormon – one to a wonderful Puerto Rican who became a life-long friend. I started to study and pray. When I got home, I fell upon my father's neck and kissed him and begged his forgiveness. You should have seen his face! One year later, I was on my mission.

Proverbs 22:6: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it." I'm a living example. The most interesting thing is that the hymn I hated as a child was the very instrument that brought me to my senses. Come, Come Ye Saints converted me. After more than 50 years, I still can't sing that song without crying.

I was in Basic Training for two months and got into great physical shape. I gained 20 pounds of pure muscle and learned how to kill the enemy. We were one of the last groups to use the M-1 Garand rifle – a full size .308 caliber gun used in WW2. Subsequent groups trained with the much superior M-16s that were used in Viet Nam. So we trained for WW2 type fighting, shooting targets up to 300 yards away and practicing hand-to-hand combat with bayonets. It was gruesome. I was pretty good at it.

I got a two week leave after basic training and then went to Fort Sill, Oklahoma for four months to train in the artillery – specifically learning how to blow up the enemy with 105 Howitzer cannons.

They assigned me to be a truck driver, so I became an expert at backing up the Howitzer behind a deuce-and-a-half army truck. The trouble was, that's all I did. Drivers had to stay with their trucks all day. So I'd get the cannon into position early, park the truck, put a stick on the fender for camouflage, and sit there all day. I read a lot, played my guitar, and ate junk out of a little cooler. I drew a little calendar inside the plastic lining of my hat and marked off quarter days. I hated it.



The food was awful at Ft. Sill, so I lost much of my new-found weight from basic training. The weather was miserable (hot and humid). The base was near Lawton, Oklahoma, a small military town, teeming with prostitutes. It opened my eyes to every sexual depravation in the book.

I've never been so bored or homesick. The saving grace was that Nola wrote me every day. What a sweetie. I was sooooo glad to get out of there.

The army was great preparation for my mission. And I became an expert at backing up a trailer – a skill that has served me well my whole life. It was time well spent.

As a side note, I was at Fort Sill on November 22, 1963 when John F. Kennedy was assassinated. I'll never forget the panic and desperation in the air. Fort Sill is 200 miles north of Dallas. The whole base went on military alert for a couple of days until the threat was over. It was tense.

Chapter 5

University of Utah

I returned from active-duty end of December, 1963, just in time to enroll for winter quarter at the U of U. I got in two quarters before my mission. I had several memorable experiences there.

Fake Teacher

The first began in high school the year before.

Mike Morgan and I had “the math class from hell” our senior year. Our instructor, Miss Lynn, was truly awful. She was barely old enough to be teaching, and she confused the entire class with her methods. But she was aggressive and smart.

She got mad at Mike one day for mouthing off and walked over to him with a book in the air, ready to hit him. He stood up with his own book in the air, ready to hit back. It was a hilarious stand-off.

This kind of stuff happened every day -- total chaos. Lucky for us, she was naïve. Her class was our home room, and she accepted all of our phony notes from parents, excusing us from school. Thus, we cut class and went skiing once per week all winter that year. It was great. Class was useless. We learned nothing.

As a result, Mike enrolled in advanced algebra his first quarter at the U of U. And guess who was in that class with him? Miss Lynn, our home room teacher from the year before.

Yep, she had falsified her degree and teaching certificate to get a job at Highland High. She was just reading the text book at night and trying to teach us the next day – totally bogus. Gotta hand it to her for guts. After she was fired, she enrolled in college that year for the first time and became

our freshman classmate. We immediately became friends. We hung out at the cafeteria and played ping pong and chess with her the rest of the year. What a great turn of events!

Smoking Dogs

My Dad was senior executive for the American Cancer Society in Utah. While I was going to school, he got me a part-time job at the University of Utah Cancer Research Lab, which was right next to campus. They were doing groundbreaking research into the causes of cancer, especially lung cancer.

My primary job was to wash beakers and kill rats. The rats were exposed to different levels of toxins and their livers analyzed for retention. I'd cut their throats, take out their livers, pulverize them and smear the remains on a strip used by the instruments to detect levels of contamination. It was a gruesome job.

My secondary job was a blast. The lab was right next to the kennels, which housed the experimental dogs. They taught about 50 dogs at a time how to smoke and then controlled the number of cigarettes they inhaled every day. They were killed after about a year and their lungs examined for signs of cancer. This research led to the warning labels found on all packs of cigarettes.

Teaching a new dog how to smoke was the only difficult part. To start, they would cut a hole in the dog's neck, called a stoma, and install a cigarette holder into the trachea. Then they would force the dog to smoke. The caretaker would put a lighted cigarette into the dog's stoma, then briefly squeeze his snout with his hands so he couldn't breathe through his mouth or nose. The dog naturally sucked in smoke from the cigarette in his neck.

At first, the dogs would cough and hack and throw up. They hated it.

But after a few days, they started to like it and would smoke on their own. Once they were addicted, they lived for it. They would rather smoke than eat.

I helped the caretaker hand out the lighted cigarettes. I followed behind him with the cigarette machine that lit up about 10 cigarettes at a time.

When the dogs heard the caretaker coming down the hall with cigarettes, they couldn't wait. They wagged their tails furiously and pressed their necks up against the chain link fence, waiting for their treat. They held perfectly still until the cigarette was inserted into the stoma.

Once the dogs got their cigarettes, they would stand perfectly still in the kennel and suck as hard as they could. In about 30 seconds, they inhaled the entire cigarette in a single breath. Once it was spent, it seemed like they exhaled forever, filling their space with smoke as they barked furiously and emptied their lungs. They always wanted more.

I grew to love those dogs, and I felt sorry for them. But they were being used for a good cause. They would have been euthanized by the Humane Society anyway. At least in the lab they lived longer, enjoyed their cigarettes and died happy.

Naked Life Saving Class

Spring Quarter, 1964, I enrolled in an advanced lifesaving course offered by the university. I had my lifesaving merit badge from scouts, so I knew the basics. I wanted to certify as a lifeguard for summer work.

The class was interesting. The football players from the university team were off season and needed a physical education class to fill their schedules. They all enrolled in this lifesaving class. The class consisted of me and the entire football team. I weighed in at a solid 130 pounds. They all came in between 200 and 300 pounds. Quite a scenario.

To make things funnier, in 1964, all male swimming classes at the U were nude -- no bathing suits allowed. Just imagine me, pink and scrawny, standing there naked with 20 knuckle-dragging jocks. I can't believe I went through with it.

This lifesaving class was the hardest physical thing I've ever done. I got paired up with the right tackle, a barrel chested 250 pound guy. I could barely get my hand around his chest while carrying him across the pool. His weight and size almost drowned me every time saved him. But I toughed it out, slowly dragging him and gasping for air. When he saved me, it was like pulling a rubber ducky.

I became very friendly with Zack, my lifesaving partner. We joked and poked at each other all the time.

One day we were practicing getting out of a choke hold from behind in the open water. The technique is simple. You first go under water to encourage the panicky victim to let go, then you put one hand on his wrist, another on his elbow, and lift it over your head, coming up behind him for the save. Easy peasy.

Zack went first. He treaded water in front of me so I could get a choke hold from behind.

I jumped on him and held on for all I was worth, cinching up my arms with all the strength I had – something we were not supposed to do. I was just playing around. He casually went under water and released my grip according to the book.

Then it was my turn, duh!

Zack clamped his single giant arm over my head and smashed it against his chest like a vice. I went under water, but no release. I put my hands on his wrist and elbow, but couldn't budge them. I was stuck. I began to panic, as I was under water. My ear was against Zack's chest. The harder I tried to release, the harder he gripped my head.

Suddenly, the water pressure against his chest ruptured my ear drum. The blinding pain sent me into a spasm. Zack sensed something was wrong and pulled me from the pool and laid me on the deck. I was totally disoriented and in pain, blood running out of my ear.

I don't know who was hurt more, me or Zack. It broke his heart to know that he'd hurt his partner. Oh, he was distraught. "I'm so sorry little buddy!" he said over and over. I had to drop the class. It took a long time for my ear drum to heal. Zack and I remained friends.

Note to my posterity: Don't ever do this!

Chapter 6

Mission

I received my mission call to Chile in July of 1964. Opening and reading the call from David O. McKay was quite a thrill. I couldn't believe it...South America... Spanish. My girlfriend, Nola, burst into tears. She didn't want me to go.

I had visions of teaching Indians in grass shacks like my brother, Bob, did in Samoa. Boy was I ignorant! Chile was as metropolitan as any country in Europe – about 20 years behind the US in development at the time. It was a wonderful place to serve, except for the anti-American sentiment among the growing socialist party in the mid-60s.

In those days, missionaries were set apart by Apostles or Assistants to the Apostles. So dad took me to the Church Offices to be set apart by Delbert L. Stapley, one of the Twelve Apostles. In 1964, Church Headquarters were in a three story building between the Hotel Utah and the Lion House on South Temple. It was wide open with no security – quite a change from today's towering and foreboding fortress. We just walked in and went down the first floor until we found the right office. After a short visit, Elder Stapley and my father laid hands on my head and set me apart to serve. Can't remember specifics, but it was all good.

David O. McKay

As we were leaving Elder Stapley's office, Dad said, "Let's go see if President McKay is here." Wow. The Prophet himself. We went to the third floor at the front of the building where we found the expansive office of David. O. McKay.

Dad poked his head in the door, and I heard a booming and excited voice, “WALLY!” Dad replied, “DAVID!” I was stunned. I had never been inside Dad’s church circle before.

It turned out these two were very close friends. watched them embrace.

Dad introduced me. “David, this is my son Allen. He has just been set apart to serve a mission in Chile.”

President McKay, six-foot-four with pure white hair, held out his giant farmer’s hand and shook mine vigorously. I felt the vibes and knew he was a prophet – a very significant experience for me. He said, “Come in for a few minutes, and let me tell you about Chile.”

We spent about 20 minutes with President McKay while he talked about the church in South America. When we left, he gave me a brief embrace. This is one of the primary experiences that serve as the foundation of my testimony. At that moment, I knew the church had to be true.

Mission Home

I checked into the mission home in Salt Lake City on September 3, 1964. The building was on the corner of North Temple and Main Street where the new Conference Center now stands. I spent a full week there, soaking up instructions from the general authorities. We had a different apostle for two hours every day. It was way fun.

My favorite was Mark E. Peterson – one of the most dogmatic and aggressive Apostles. He talked to us for two hours and then opened the session up for questions. After ten minutes or so, a missionary in the middle stood and asked, “How many wives did Jesus have?” Elder Peterson was quiet for about ten seconds, then replied, “Elder... SIT DOWN! Next question.” It was hilarious.

The Temple

The most significant thing during that week was receiving my endowments in the Salt Lake Temple. In those days, Elders did not go to the temple with their families the first time. They went with the group of Missionaries at the Mission Home – just part of the routine. It simply wasn't as special then as it is now. And it almost ruined me.

It was Thursday morning. Our leader came into the hall and announced that we were going across the street to the temple to receive our endowments. "Don't forget your new under garments." So all 90 of us grabbed our package of one-piece garments and marched across North Temple. I thought, "Like sheep to the slaughter."

The temple was beautiful, strange and scary. I had no clue and no preparation. There was no temple prep class in those days, and nobody ever talked about it. I went in cold and barely worthy. Thus, it was not a good experience.

As a teen, I had chided other churches for worshipping their symbols – the cross, the Virgin Mary, Saints, rosary beads, etc. I was proud of the fact that we had no such icons.

The temple flipped that concept on its head. Everything from the door to the oxen to the veil to the garment is symbolic. It turns out there is nothing in the temple that is not symbolic. I now understand that we don't worship these things, they are for our instruction and commitment to covenants. But as a green, unprepared 19-year-old with an attitude, I was stunned. I was especially put off by the all-encompassing oaths and vows of secrecy in the ceremony. I really should have excused myself, but I stuck it out. I was too afraid of the consequences.

This first experience tainted my attitude toward the temple for the next 20 years. It took a while to put those feelings behind me.

Don't get me wrong, I love the temple. I have been an Ordinance Worker in the Orlando Temple for 15 years at this writing. It's always the highlight of my week. I love it now that I understand it. Because of my first experience, I have gone overboard on preparing my children and young men under my care as Bishop for the temple. Except for the most sacred covenants, they all knew what to expect when they went through the first time.

After my temple experience, I did a rare thing: I consulted with my father. I only remember going to him twice for advice – once after my mission when Jane abruptly ended our first engagement, and once after my first temple experience. I poured out my feelings to Dad. I could see the disappointment in his face. He apologized for not preparing me, and assured me that it was all good. He frankly told me I was not ready and to buck up – the perfect response.

Language Training Mission

I arrived at the Language Training Mission (LTM) on BYU campus the second week of September. It was located in the old women's dorm building. It opened its doors on September 1st, one week before I got there. All missionaries before that time served two-and-one-half year missions. The Church gave them six months to learn the language.

I was among the first two-year missionaries called (actually two years plus three months in the LTM). We were the guinea pigs for the new program, so it was somewhat disorganized.

I roomed with three other missionaries assigned to Chile – Elder Westover from Yuma, Arizona was my companion. The other two were Elders Clark and Hartung – good guys all. We were supposed to be at the LTM for three months, but they ran out of room and sent us to Chile after just two months. We were thrilled to get out of there early.

At the LTM we thought we had a pretty good grasp on Spanish. We memorized the first three missionary discussions with a good degree of fluency. We understood each other and our instructors. But when we got to Chile, we were totally lost -- couldn't understand a thing. It took a couple of months before we started participating in real conversations. It was very frustrating.

Valparaiso

My first assignment was to Valparaiso on the coast of Chile – a spectacular city with the climate of San Diego. “Valpo,” as we called it, was right next to Vina Del Mar, the jewel of Chile.

My first companion was Elder Scott, a slim, tall piano player. He was a little on the lazy side. They gave him a greenie to see if he would rise to the occasion and work more. No such luck. I spent my first day in the mission field, a Saturday, on the beach. Elder Scott had a fine tan in progress. I got burnt to a crisp.

That night, we went to the favorite missionary restaurant for a “Sanwich Mormón.” The owner had been hosting Mormon missionaries for years and made a special sandwich just for them. It was a thin slice of steak, cheese and a fried egg on crusty bread. Delicious! This restaurant was also the favorite place in town to trade our dollars into escudos on the black market. This, of course, was illegal, but everybody did it, even the Mission Home.

The black market exchange was three times the official exchange rate. Inflation in Chile was over 100% per year, and the locals eagerly bought stable money in exchange for their depreciating script. We lived like kings on \$70 per month – ate out a lot, went to the movies and had a maid to cook and clean for us. I was able to live well on \$50 per month. I saved the other \$20 for a rainy day.

I'll never forget my first missionary discussion on my second day. Elder Scott tracted out a new investigator family. I memorized the first three missionary discussions in Spanish at the LTM. I was ready.

Elder Scott said in Spanish, "Elder Toronto will now lead the discussion about our church."

My heart was pounding. This was the real deal – in a strange land, at night, with real investigators. I started. "Nosotros somos de La Iglesia de Jesu Christo de Los Santos de los Ultimos Dias. A qual iglesia pertenece Ud?"

The father took off, talking ninety miles per hour in Spanish that totally lost me. I looked at Scott in desperation, who smiled and winked. He and the father spoke for a bit. When they were finished, Scott nodded at me to continue. I presented the next phase of the lesson and asked the next question. Then I just sat back and watched the fireworks, not understanding a thing until Scott nodded at me again. It was a serious wake-up call.

I struggled with the language like this for a couple of months. I was so jealous of the Elders who could speak. Then one day it came to me all at once. I understood almost everything and could carry on a decent conversation. I improved rapidly and became quite fluent in Spanish. Toward the end of my mission I translated for a couple of visiting authorities at the pulpit, including Hugh B. Brown.

Watermelon Revenge

Elder Scott was transferred after a couple of months, and I was assigned to continue working in Valpo with Elder Clark, who had been in the mission field about one year. He was a California surfer boy who was stuck on himself – arrogant, irritating and hypocritical. We worked hard for a month and had a couple of baptisms. The work was great.

But then Clark was passed over to become the new District Leader in our area and, in anger, quit working altogether. He was the senior companion and called the shots. So, for a month, he slept until noon, and then we'd go see the new Beatles movie "A Hard Day's Night." For a month! He was a hysterical Beatles fan. I was irritated to be stuck with such a big baby and waste such valuable time.

It all came to a head at the end of two months. In addition to not working, Clark cursed like an old sailor. In all fairness, I was no goody-two-shoes on that front either.

We were walking down a long staircase on the hillside when I slipped a few steps and sprained my ankle. I cut loose a few choice words. Clark stood above me as I was writhing in pain and arrogantly proclaimed, "Elder Toronto, we DO NOT talk like that in the mission field!"

I couldn't believe my ears. We exchanged a few barbs at that moment. I thought about that encounter all day as I limped along and got hotter and hotter under the collar.

On the way home from the movie, we bought a watermelon to eat in our apartment. Our beds were in a small room, about one foot apart. We sat across from each other on the beds, our backs to the wall, wolfing down watermelon. We couldn't have been more than six feet apart. I was still seething over our encounter that day. So, I ate my half of the watermelon and saved all the watermelon seeds in my cheeks.

When we finished, I said, "Hey Clark!" He looked up, and I sprayed him from head to toe with a couple of hundred watermelon seeds.

He came at me like a mad dog, swinging and scratching for all he was worth. I staved off the attack the best I could. I had a bloody nose and he had a bruised eye. The whole thing was over in ten seconds. Then we sat back,

considered what just happened, and started to laugh. We laughed and laughed until we cried. The two elders that roomed next door rushed in to see what the noise was all about. The room was a bloody, seedy mess.

Word of the watermelon seed fight spread like wildfire. The next day I was transferred to Santiago, the district of Republica.

Fleas

Before I leave Valparaiso, I need to tell you about the fleas in Chile. They were, truly, truly awful. I'd never seen a flea in Salt Lake City – didn't even know what they looked like. But in Chile, the ripe young North Americans were flea bait for the first few months of their missions.

Fleas were everywhere. They'd jump on you walking down the street. They were on everybody and everything – especially in our beds. They'd get under our shirts and in our pants and suck our blood. They were merciless.

When you'd catch one, they were hard to kill. The killing technique was handed down from Elder to Elder. Fleas have small hard bodies with six long legs that help them jump up to a foot at a time. When you caught one, you had to roll it between your fingers about ten times, wrapping their legs around their bodies so they couldn't jump. You can't smash them with your fingers. Their exoskeleton is too hard. You have to put them between your thumb nails and pop them, which usually sprayed a small amount of blood on your fingertips. I took a great amount of pleasure killing them.

I reacted badly to flea bites. Each one would puff up and come to a white head like a pimple. They itched like crazy and leaked all over. After a month, I must have had two hundred flea bites, all in different phases of development.

The ones on my genitals and butt were the worst – can't scratch them in public.

The low point of my mission and one of my most vivid memories is sitting on the toilet at our apartment with diarrhea, throwing up into a garbage can with hundreds of flea bites on my body. If there were any way to get home except swim six thousand miles, I would have done it. I've never been so miserable. Luckily, you get used to flea bites after a couple of months and your body becomes immune to their poison. After that, they don't bother you. In fact, because of this flea episode on my mission, I have had very mild reactions to all kinds of bug bites since. It was good for my immune system.

I went to Santiago and was assigned with Elder Christian – a great missionary. We had a wonderful time with some great baptisms.

Sister Janie Weaver

After two months in Republica, I was reassigned to work with Elder Walker, the mission's Traveling Elder. He was one of the Assistants to the President, working under the mission "Second Counselor." Our job was to travel all over the southern part of the mission and give instruction and encouragement to the missionaries.

That's when I met Jane.

It was a cold, rainy Sunday morning in Talcahuano, Chile. Elder Walker and I showed up at a Sacrament meeting. It was held in a small, rented hall. There were about 20 members and four missionaries in the room. We came in a few minutes late and sat on the back row.

The congregation was singing the opening hymn. I noticed one of the sister missionaries from behind as she played the organ: dark hair, wearing a thick coat. She had the cutest

pair of legs I had ever seen, pumping the pedals of that mechanical organ for all they were worth. I was mesmerized.

But when I met Sister Weaver after the meeting, I forgot all about the legs. She was five years older than I, bossy and a know-it-all. I found out later that she thought I was stuck on myself. So it was far from love at first sight – except for the legs, of course. It would be six months before met again.

And what an amazing six-month period – the greatest growth experience of my life.

Branch President

After two months with Elder Walker, President Beecroft called me to his office. I had been in Chile for eight months, and I was pretty confident in my abilities. I had the language under control (I thought), had over twenty baptisms to my credit, and was comfortable on the street. He assigned me to be the missionary branch president in the city of Temuco. It had been open just three months, had a dozen new members, and was in desperate need of an aggressive new leader. I would be the second branch president. Temuco was about a thousand miles south of Santiago in the rain forest. No kidding. Temuco received more than 250 inches of rain per year. It was gray and rainy most of the time.

I enthusiastically accepted the assignment. Who wouldn't? I was paired up with the existing branch president for two weeks to get oriented. He was largely responsible for the existing membership -- one beautiful family of six, a middle-age couple and two ex-prostitutes. But he was totally burned out. He had quit working. He slept til noon every day and spent the rest of his time visiting the existing members and going to movies. At least I had some great food and got to know everyone.

Though they were very nice, the conversion of the two middle-age hookers puzzled me. A month before, the missionaries tracted into their brothel by mistake – just clueless, young Americanos. The residents enthusiastically invited them in. Not knowing where they were, they set up their flannel board in the parlor and gave the first missionary discussion. I'll bet those ladies had a good laugh.

Two of these ladies continued with the lessons and converted. I was nervous about the whole thing. The elders met them on a Sunday, taught them one lesson per day, and baptized them on Saturday. Did these sisters really understand what they were committing to? Did they understand the law of chastity? Or were they just chasing after the rich Americans? (That was a big problem for the whole mission.) As the new branch president, I discovered these girls were quite confused. They left the church after a month or so – didn't like the law of tithing.

But they hurt the work in Temuco. The church rented a large house in town for a meeting place. The Elders lived in that same building, using the great room for Sunday meetings. Think about it. Everybody in town knew what these women did. Every Sunday morning they would go to the missionaries' house and stay for three hours. HmMMM.

The local newspaper picked up on this and published an article full of fun, prurient speculation. It was a public relations nightmare. Dealing with these girls was just the beginning of my challenges in Temuco.

My companion, Elder Roundy, was a greenie from Idaho. He was a large, totally innocent 19-year-old right off the farm. He didn't understand a word of Spanish. He was, truly, in la-la land.

Brother Padilla

The Padilla family was the strongest unit in the branch with four wonderful children. The mother was an angel. As the new branch president, I extended a call to Brother Padilla – a very aggressive and proud man. I asked him to be president of the Sunday School. He accepted the call with gusto – all excited to take over.

This is where I learned that my Spanish was not so great. The mis-communication was epic. Brother Padilla thought I'd turned the entire church over to him, and he tried to take over with a vengeance. He stood at the pulpit the next Sunday and announced that he was the new boss and that everyone had to chip in a few bucks for his keep. I was stunned.

Of course, I immediately took him into my office to straighten him out. We ended up having a fiery argument. He accused me of lying to him and making him look like a fool. I tried to apologize and make it right to no avail. He stormed out of the building.

Things got worse between me and Brother Padilla over the next few days. I tried and tried to make up with him, mostly because of his wonderful wife and children. They were precious.

The problem came to a head one night around his dinner table. Elder Roundy and I decided to visit the Padilla home and resolve the problem once and for all. We sat at one end of the dinner table inside an alcove with no exit – didn't think a thing about it. Brother Padilla sat at the other end.

We finished dinner and started our discussion. I tried, again, to apologize and smooth things over. Padilla got more angry as we spoke. He accused us of all kinds of falsehoods, including having sex with the ex-hookers.

The meeting turned into a yelling match. Some harsh things were said. He told us he was going to follow us around town as we worked. He said he would go into every home we entered and tell them what rotten liars and sinners we were. I was beside myself.

Roundy was big-eyed and scared. He knew there was a fight brewing. Then I said something I regret. I told Padilla if he followed us around and spread his lies, his life would become a living hell. He would lose his job. He would be roundly rejected by his friends. He would become ill.

All of a sudden, Brother Padilla jumped up and grabbed a butcher knife off the kitchen counter. His eyes were on fire and full of hate. I'd never seen evil spirits before, but this was the real deal. Scared the hell out of me. We were cornered.

Elder Roundy was on his feet. He was six-foot-two, two-hundred pounds of rompin' stompin' bull rider. We always carried a flannel board to help us teach. They were wrapped around two one-inch thick dowel rods about 18 inches long inside a fabric case. Roundy was holding that wrapped-up flannel board in the air like a baseball bat – a stripling warrior ready to take out the devil. It was an incredibly tense standoff, especially for a couple of teen-age gringos playing church in southern Chile. We were way out of our league. My mind was racing.

All of a sudden I raised my hand to the square and said, “Brother Padilla, in the name of Jesus Christ, I command you to put down that knife and be still.” He blinked for a few seconds, dropped the knife and slumped into his chair sobbing. I about wet my pants. Padilla was inconsolable, and his wife asked us to leave. What a night!

On the way home Elder Roundy said, “Gaw-aw-aw-lly, I had no idea missions were going to be like this.” Indeed.

Brother Padilla followed through on his threat. For three weeks, he followed us around at a safe distance and killed every contact we made. I have never been so frustrated. The work was at a standstill.

The sad part is, my predictions also came true. Padilla lost his job. His home was robbed. His friends abandoned him. And he got sick. I felt responsible. As branch president, I helped Sister Padilla as much as I could. We agreed not to tell her husband.

Then one typical rainy night in Temuco someone was pounding on our door around 2:00 am. It was Sister Padilla. Pablo tried to kill himself by ingesting rat poison. This poor sister didn't know what to do or where to turn. Holy smoke, would this nightmare never end?

We jumped in a cab and raced to her house. Brother Padilla was on his bed, convulsing and foaming at the mouth. Roundy and I carried him out to the waiting cab and raced to the local hospital. The emergency crew took one look at him in back of the cab and told us to get lost. They would not treat him. I couldn't believe it.

But I had an alternative. Elder Roundy had his appendix removed about a month earlier by a local veterinarian. Yes, an animal doctor (story to follow). He was the only private practitioner in town. So we delivered Brother Padilla to the vet in the middle of the night. He pumped Brother Padilla's stomach and gave him an antidote – probably saved his life. I paid Dr. Ramirez \$100 US dollars out of my own pocket. I saved it trading dollars on the black market.

Brother Padilla recovered. He was a changed man. He came back to church. I was his best friend, and we embraced every time we met. He got his job back. We started baptizing again. Things were going well.

To close on the Padilla story, a month later I was transferred to Santiago. President Beecroft brought down my replacement in the mission car and stayed for church services. I introduced him to everyone in the congregation. He pulled me to the side and asked, “Who is that brother standing by the door?” I said, “Brother Padilla.” You could have knocked me over with a feather when he replied, “That brother is full of evil spirits. Have you had any problems with him?” I told the President the story. He was a little miffed that I hadn’t consulted with him all along. He warned the new branch president to be very careful.

And sure enough, Brother Padilla pulled the exact same routine on the new branch president. He was excommunicated from the church a few months later. As sad as this is, I was relieved to learn that the problem was not just me.

The Appendix

Now let me tell you about Elder Roundy’s appendix – one of the greatest experiences of my life.

I was Elder Roundy’s first companion and trainer. He was a big, strong rodeo rider right off the farm in Southern Idaho. He really struggled with the language and the lessons. But he was a humble servant of God. Put me to shame in spiritual things. He became a very successful missionary. I love the guy.

Roundy loved the TV series “Gomer Pyle” starring Jim Nabors. This was a military sitcom from the 1960s. Pyle was an innocent recruit with a southern accent who always did the right thing and made his superiors look stupid. His signature expression was “golly.” But he said it with a southern drawl and drug out the vowel for several syllables. It sounded like gaw-aw-aw-lly. Very funny and Roundy did the perfect imitation. He said it all the time.

A few weeks after we were assigned together, Temuco was hit by a torrential storm. The roads and phone lines to Santiago were completely washed out. No travel or communication was possible. We were isolated. It was unbelievably windy and rainy.

In the middle of this storm, Roundy got sick. He had a fever and was throwing up with a terrible pain in his abdomen. It got so bad, I called a cab and took him to the local emergency room around 2:00 am. Chile had socialized medicine at the time. All doctors worked for the government.

The emergency room staff would not even look at Elder Roundy. The main issue was that he was an American, which they did not treat. I looked at them in amazement and screamed, “What am I supposed to do? My companion needs a doctor!”

They told me there was a veterinarian in town that treated humans in emergencies. They gave me his name and address. When I told Roundy, he exclaimed with wide, fearful eyes, “gaw-aw-aw-ly! A veterinarian?” He’d seen a lot of them on the farm. We had no choice.

So we raced to Dr. Ramirez’ residence. It was about 2:30am, blowing and raining like crazy. I banged on the dark front door as loud as I could. The dogs in his kennel set up a howl. It took a few bangs before he opened the door in his bathrobe. He invited us right in to get us out of the rain. He took one look at Roundy, who was delirious, and ushered him onto a plinth in his examination room. He pushed on his abdomen a little, looked at me and said, “It’s his appendix. It needs to come out – now. And you need to help. I have no assistant until tomorrow.” I explained this to Roundy, and got a fearful, “gaw-aw-aw-lly!” But he was in so much pain, he didn’t care.

So Dr. Ramirez prepped Elder Roundy for surgery and handed me some scrubs, rubber gloves and a mask. He told me I had to administer the ether during the operation to keep Roundy unconscious. He said, “Don’t worry. I’ll tell you what to do.”

Roundy had panic in his eyes as I put the gas mask over his nose and mouth and opened the valve on top of the gas tank. As he faded away, his body started to flop on the table. Dr. Ramirez yelled, “Mas gas! Mas gas!” So I opened up the valve and let it flow. Roundy fell into a deep sleep. I held the mask on during the entire operation.

Dr. Ramirez made about a two-inch incision on Roundy’s abdomen. The cut flared open with fat and blood spilling out. I just about lost it -- got faint and nauseated. I’d never seen anything like it. Ramirez yelled, “Don’t faint! I need you.” I held it together. The major gore was over.

Dr. Ramirez cut through the muscle and fascia linings of the stomach until Roundy’s intestine popped out of the hole – a gray, balloon-like structure. Ramirez jammed the intestine back into the hole with his finger and started fishing around the inside of the abdomen for the appendix. The intestine kept popping out and he kept jamming and fishing. Finally, he hooked it. He pulled the appendix out of the hole. Attached to the intestine, it was red, pussy and flaccid. Ramirez looked at me and said, “Your companion is lucky to be alive. His appendix has ruptured.”

The panic was over. Ramirez leisurely cut the appendix off and sewed up the different layers of tissue, explaining each one to me. We chatted about a lot of things. He told me I should go into medicine. What a night!

Elder Roundy was so full of infection, Dr. Ramirez kept him at his house on an IV and antibiotics for five days. He was really sick.

Now remember, there was no communication or travel for a couple of weeks. My companion was in the vet's recovery room, and I was all alone. So for five days, I worked by myself. It was the spookiest time of my mission. You get to rely on your partner for companionship and safety. Elder Roundy recovered rapidly. President Beecroft didn't even take him back to Santiago for further evaluation. The vet did a stellar job. His sorry assistant did okay too.

Dr. Mario Jesus Gonzales

We were tracting one day, when we came across the home of Dr. Mario Jesus Gonzales. His name was on the mailbox. A distinguished, gray-haired gentleman answered the door – about 60-years old. Dr. Gonzales took one look at us, and said, “You're the Mormons, aren't you?” I assured him that we were. Then he said, “Let me tell you who I am. I'm President of The Evangelist Minister's College of Chile. I'm the top-ranked Protestant in the whole country. All men who wish to become ministers have to attend my college for two years before they're licensed to preach. As a Doctor of Theology, I teach many of the classes. In fact, I'm teaching a new course this semester on non-Protestant religions. How would you like to speak to my class for an hour and present your case for Mormonism?”

I was stunned. Here was an aggressive Bible scholar, anxious to test my metal in front of 50 future ministers. I was sure his plan was to tear this amateur apart to show his young charges how smart he was.

But here was a chance for me, one of the Lord's weak and simple instruments, to proclaim the truth to 50 spiritually driven students. I figured if I could just touch one heart with my testimony, it would be worth it. So, in spite of the risks, I said “yes.”

The day finally came. Elder Roundy, and I showed up at the College. The great professor escorted us to a lecture hall. There was a low stage up front with a pulpit in the middle. In that room were 50 wooden desk-chairs. In each chair sat an eager young man, studying for the ministry.

Dr. Gonzales introduced us.

“These are Mormon missionaries from the United States. This is Mr. Toronto and this is Mr. Roundy. Today, Mr. Toronto is going to tell us about one of the greatest charlatans in religious history – Joseph Smith. The Mormon Church is the fastest-growing cult in the world. We need to learn as much as we can about it, so we can protect our parishioners from such false doctrine. Take careful notes so I can answer all your questions later. Mr. Toronto, you have one hour.”

How would you like to follow that? I stood up at the pulpit red-faced. Fifty smug faces were staring up at me like I was some kind of demon. They were waiting for my horns to pop out. I was sure we’d made a huge mistake in coming.

I started to speak. “The label ‘Mormon’ is a nickname. The official name of our Church is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.”

Dr. Gonzales jumped out of his chair and yelled, “Take notes class!” He talked for a minute about the name of the Church and sat down.

This totally caught me off-guard. I turned around to my audience, again red-faced, and continued. “The word ‘Mormon’ comes from our *Book of Mormon* which is the history of an ancient civilization that lived on the American continent for a thousand years.”

Dr. Gonzales jumped up again. “Take notes class!” He ranted on-and-on for a minute about the Book of Mormon and sat down.

I couldn’t believe it. He wouldn’t let me say more than one sentence. I decided to give it one more shot. “We believe Jesus Christ visited the American continent after his resurrection.”

Gonzales came out of his chair in a rage. “Take notes class!”

I whirled around, pointed my finger at him and said, “Hey! Will you please stop interrupting me? You can tear us apart all you want after we leave. But if you interrupt me one more time, we’ll leave immediately. You said I had one hour, and I want it – all to myself.”

You could have heard a pin drop. The great professor had been reprovved in front of his students. I doubt that had ever happened before. But, hey, I was 20, a foreigner, and didn’t know any better. Besides, at that point, I had nothing to lose.

All of a sudden, Dr. Gonzales started to laugh, breaking the tension. And all the nervous students laughed along with him. Finally he said, “You’re right. I apologize. You have one hour.”

I turned around to face my audience yet again. My heart was just pounding. But I was encouraged by the look on the student’s faces. In place of scorn, I saw new respect. It dawned on me then that now they would listen to every word I said.

I started my presentation. It went something like this:

“I came here to tell you about Joseph Smith and how he restored the true Church of Jesus Christ. But after listening to Dr. Gonzales, I’ve changed my mind. Instead, I’m going to tell you about our “Plan of Salvation.” This Plan answers life’s most basic questions. At some time in our lives, all of us have pondered these four things:

First, “Who am I?”

Second, “Where did I come from?”

Third, “Why am I here on earth?”

Fourth, “Where am I going after I die?”

Do you know the answers to these questions? (I looked over the blank stares of the students.) The Mormon Church does.”

I then went on to give this group of 50 budding ministers the fourth missionary discussion on the Plan of Salvation.

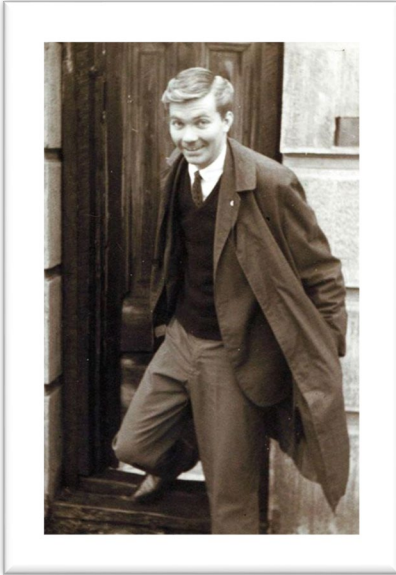
The great professor sat in his chair during my lesson purple with rage because many of his students were nodding their heads in approval and taking notes. What I said just made a whole lot of sense. But he honored his commitment and didn’t interrupt me again. I ended with the strongest testimony I could muster.

After I sat down, Dr. Gonzales stepped to the pulpit and said, “It appears that Mormons worship their own God and by their own doctrine have an answer for everything. That’s why all other religions despise them. It’s too bad they don’t stick to the Bible and interpret it correctly.”

We left the College on friendly but cool terms. I’ve always felt that I touched someone in that audience that day. The Spirit was so strong. It’s too bad I’ll never know – at least in this life.

Between Brother Padilla, Dr. Gonzales and Roundy's appendix in Temuco, I had my trial by fire. I came out the back end of that six month period with maturity and a great grasp of Spanish. The rest of my mission was a breeze.

Rebel District Leader



My first companion at the LTM, Elder Bruce Westover, was Second Counselor to President Beecroft when they moved me to Santiago. He and the President devised a plan to deal with the top twelve problem missionaries who were on the verge of being sent home early – lazy, no testimonies, girl problems, theft, word of wisdom issues, you name it. They would pair them up with some of the best

missionaries and put them all into one huge district in the heart of Santiago – the district of Nuñoa. That way, they could keep an eye on them and try to save them. They called me to be District Leader of this misfit group. The three of us sat down and assigned specific companions to each problem missionary. It was great. I had the best and the worst missionaries paired up in my district. Elder Westover volunteered to leave the office and be companion to one particularly troubled Elder. He hated being in the office. So my best missionary friend was in my district. One of the best sister missionaries I acquired was Janie Weaver – my future wife. She was paired up with a do-nothing sister. What a fateful decision!

As a new District Leader, I was charged with healing troubled missionaries. My first job was to create unity in the group, yet half of them had major attitude problems. I made a deal with President Beecroft. I wanted to work hard and play hard. It was summer in Chile, and Santiago is about 80 miles from the Pacific Coast. My plan was to rent a bus every Monday (Diversion Day or D-day as we called it) and challenge another district in Santiago to a football game on the beach. Can you think of anything more fun? He agreed, so we did that about six weeks in a row. The President joined us about half the time, bringing food out in the mission car.

That's how I fell in love with Jane – drinking home-made root beer, playing guitar and singing love songs on the beach in Chile. Of course, she didn't know it. She was five years older than I and smart as a whip. I could have been one of her students when she taught at Granger High School the year before. I figured there was no hope and forced it out of my mind. This is one of the most warm and fuzzy memories of my life.

The football-on-the-beach plan worked. Only three of the twelve problem elders were sent home early, and we became the top baptizing district in the mission for three months in a row. We developed a tremendous rapport and several missionaries were converted to the work.

I went through a couple of companions. My first had girl problems – couldn't leave them alone. Being a young American male in Chile made you a huge chick magnet. The girls were all over you all the time. My companion snuck out on me a couple of times to talk to some girls in an apartment complex across the street. I caught him making out with one of them the second time, and he was gone.

Atheist Companion

I had better luck with my second companion – Elder Eckman. He came to Chile with a bad attitude and had been constantly assigned to zone leaders for 12 months to try and straighten him out. He resented it. And here he was being re-assigned to another district leader – me.

Eckman was supposed to meet up with me on a Tuesday, riding the bus by himself. He didn't arrive until Wednesday – a full day late. He was expecting a fire and brimstone lecture. I met him at the bus stop, introduced myself, and didn't say a word.

Our first night together, I said, "Let's pray and go to bed." He replied, "I don't pray. I don't believe in God." I looked at him in amazement and yelled, "What the hell are you doing on a mission!?" He said he was just there so satisfy his parents. What a weasel. So, I knelt by my bed and prayed alone. He stayed on the top bunk.

About 30 minutes after the lights were out, he asked, "Elder, are you awake?" I said, "yes." He replied, "Don't you want to know where was all day yesterday?" I said, "Nope." I turned over and went to sleep with a smile on my face. Drove him nuts. He told me the next day that he'd stayed with an American family he'd befriended in his previous town.

So, I had an atheist for a companion. I just did my own thing. I prayed alone, gave missionary discussions alone, spoke at church alone, conducted all of my district meetings alone. Eckman wouldn't speak Spanish. He didn't know any of the missionary discussions. He would not get up on time. He would not study or pray. I didn't push him or lecture him. He was amazed. But he really got into the fun stuff we were doing. He loved our beach/football Mondays and started fitting in with the group. At least he tagged along while I did missionary work.

We found, taught and baptized a couple of great converts, and he started speaking to them. Elder Eckman really came out of his shell.

One night as I knelt by my bed to pray alone, Eckman asked, "Elder Toronto, can I join you tonight?"

I was shocked. I said, "Sure, please do."

He continued, "You mind if I say the prayer?"

So we knelt there together while Eckman poured out his heart to God for the first time on his mission. It was the most stunning conversion I've ever seen. And he was my comp!

From then on, Elder Eckman was a new man. The Spanish came pouring out of him. He learned the missionary discussions. I let him teach every lesson thereafter. Three months later they reassigned him to a new area as senior companion. This is the most successful conversion I had on my mission.

Confounding the Wise

Then I took on a greenie, Elder Bigler from Southern Utah -- a great kid with an excellent grasp of Spanish. We had an intense experience together that rocked us.

We'd been going door-to-door most of the day, and it was approaching 9:00 at night, the time when we normally quit. We'd had a miserable day. Our appointments had all fallen through. No one would let us in. And several people threw us off their property in anger. We only had 10 minutes to go, so we decided to quit. On the way out of the neighborhood, we noticed a family coming home to a house we had found vacant earlier in the day. I said, "Let's go talk to those people." He said, "I want to quit." I pushed back. "Elder, these are the times when you find your best investigators. Let's go."

We approached the man of the house. To our great surprise, he invited us in. The man was about 30 years old with a beautiful wife and two small children. I told him that we were missionaries from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, and that we had a message for him from a living prophet of God. He blinked his eyes and stared at me. Without waiting for a response, I asked him when we could come back to present our first discussion. He thought for a few seconds and said, "Can you do it right now? It sounds interesting, and I'm not home very often." So we stayed out late and present the first missionary discussion to Mr. and Mrs. Sanchez.

Without a doubt, this was the most perfect missionary discussion I ever had. Mr. and Mrs. Sanchez were golden contacts. Humble. Looking for the truth. And excited about everything we said. I related the story of Joseph Smith's first vision. They got tears in their eyes and said they believed it. I told them about modern-day apostles and prophets and how they formed the foundation of the Church. They said it made sense.

I challenged them to baptism once they had received confirmation that the church was true. They said "yes" and we set a baptismal date for four weeks. At the end of the discussion, Mr. Sanchez offered the sweetest and most simple prayer I have ever heard -- thanking the Lord for sending us to his door. The spirit was wonderful. We found a family searching for the truth, and the Holy Ghost filled that little house until we thought it would burst. That's what missionaries live for.

As we were getting up to leave, there was an angry knock on the door. It was Mr. Sanchez' father, a large, distinguished man of about 50. And, boy, did he have a scowl on his face. A neighbor called him and told him the Mormons were in his son's house. He went on the attack immediately and started yelling at us.

Mr. Sanchez quizzed his son about what we had said. He really made me mad, and I started to argue with him. The spirit of contention entered that home, and the spirit of the Lord left. It was ugly.

The father was a professor at the local university and was very well read. He declared that he was an atheist and believed that all religion was simply a means of controlling people's minds and getting their money. He said Jesus Christ was a historical figure, just like Muhammad and Buddha, but surely not divine. And Joseph Smith was a charlatan, a power-hungry maniac who stole men's wives and made himself rich. He declared that anybody who believed such nonsense as the Joseph Smith story was just plain stupid.

We all stood around and listened to his tirade. The junior Sanchez bowed his head in shame. I couldn't compete with this aggressive, educated man. He was too fast and too good. He was winning the battle. He had just devastated the finest missionary moment I ever had.

There was nothing to do but leave. We were too angry to even shake hands. The great professor was still railing against us as we approached the door.

Just before we left, I turned to the father and said, "Please, let me say one last thing before we leave."

He stopped and gave me the chance.

Choking back tears, I said, "Mr. Sanchez, I may be young, and I may not be as smart as you, but I do know a few things. I know that there is a God and I know that Jesus Christ is the Savior of this world. I know that what you say about Joseph Smith is wrong. And I know that your son agrees with me. They felt the spirit too -- until you came. Good night, sir!"

Sanchez stood there for a second. He opened his mouth to continue his attack, but no words came out. He was dumfounded and couldn't speak. You could have knocked me over with a feather. Bigler about wet his pants. We rode the bus home in stunned silence, contemplating what just happened.

This scripture from Alma took on new meaning: "And by very small means the Lord doth confound the wise and bringeth about the salvation of many souls."

Brother Miño

During this same time, Jane and I were growing closer and closer. The attraction was incredible. We were singing together in a trio that performed at all the branch functions. We were both involved in regional choirs for district events. We were together on all outings and diversion days. I was her District Leader, so I interviewed her and her companion weekly. They confided in me about the work. I baptized more of her converts than my own. She was an amazing missionary.

The most significant conversion involved the Miño family. Jane and her companion, Sister Peterson, knocked on their door at random. Brother Miño was a Methodist minister with a wife and two children. He built his church with his own hands and had been its pastor for more than 20 years. He had a faithful congregation of about 300 members. He invited the Sisters right in.

Brother Miño was a very serious, but difficult, investigator. In two months, he read all the Standard Works,, *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder* and *Jesus the Christ*. He had a voracious appetite for any information. He read all of the anti-Mormon literature he could find as well. He knew the Bible by heart and asked a flood of questions the Sisters could not answer.

The Sisters asked me to join them in their discussions after three weeks. They were way in over their heads.

I assigned my companion to work with another pair of elders and joined the sisters for about four sessions with Brother Miño. Each visit lasted about four hours and were all virtually the same. One of us started with prayer. We talked for hours, unsuccessfully trying to answer his questions. Then he would say a closing prayer. They were painful – literally. We would get on our knees, and he would pray for at least 20 minutes. That’s a long time on your knees. We joked that after ten minutes, we were all silently praying that he would stop. But on and on he would pray. These sessions were the most grueling religious discussions I’ve ever had. He was so far ahead of us, all we really had were our testimonies. We couldn’t teach him anything. After two months, we decided he was hopeless – an eternal investigator that was wasting our time. So, we wrote him off as a prospect and stopped the discussions.

A few weeks later, Jane and Sister Peterson stopped by just to say hello. Brother Miño greeted them at the door with a broad smile and told them he and his family wanted to be baptized as soon as possible. In shock, they asked him what changed his mind. He said that one night he was praying about the church. He raised his head from his bedside and looked at the stack of books the sisters had given him on his end table. They were glowing in the dark, a sure sign to him that the Church was true. I baptized the entire Miño family the following Saturday.

The next day, Brother Miño went to his own church, told them what had happened and bore testimony of the restored gospel. He handed his congregation to his assistant and walked way never to return. He sacrificed 20 plus years of hard work for the restored gospel. Six months later, he was Branch President in Nuñoa. What a powerhouse!

Earthquake

It was about that time that a major earthquake hit Santiago – seven points on the Richter Scale about two hundred miles north. A mountain town of 6,000 people was completely buried close to the epicenter. The authorities didn't even try to recover anyone or anything. Boom! It was gone. The earthquake hit on a Sunday morning. We were attending a Regional Conference at the Nuñoa chapel. The building was jammed with about 500 members. The Mission President was presiding. His family was sitting on the stand. I was outside the chapel, serving as an usher.

First I heard the rumble coming down the street. I looked and saw the road moving like an ocean wave – up and down as if I were on a boat. Then it hit our chapel with a vengeance. Chileans experience minor earthquakes every day and live in terror of the “big one.” So they are on edge all the time. This earthquake put the fear of God into them. Members were screaming out of the doors and jumping out of windows in a panic. It was total chaos. I decided to go into the chapel to see if I could help. What I saw floored me. As the building was shaking, almost the entire congregation was on its knees between the pews. Their heads were bowed, and they were crossing themselves as if they were still Catholic. In their fear, they reverted back to their most basic childhood instinct regarding prayer and God. Can't blame them under the circumstances. President Beecroft saw this, immediately stood his family by the pulpit and started singing “The Spirit of God Like a Fire is Burning.” – in the middle of the earthquake! I couldn't believe my eyes and ears. At once, those on their knees looked up, remembered who and where they were, sat down and calmly joined in singing the song until the earthquake passed. Carl Beecroft was one cool dude. I'm sure he prevented many from being trampled. From that moment forward, he always joked about how his Gringo Spanish (truly awful) brought on the earthquake of 1966.

There was a lot of damage in Santiago. One of the elders' apartments cracked in half but didn't collapse. All of us had furniture down and stuff all over the floor. It was quite an experience. No missionaries were hurt.

Then Jane went home -- six months before my release date. I was heartbroken and in love. I kissed her goodbye at the airport. We wrote often -- at least once per week -- sick, gooey love letters that embarrass me to this day. But boy, were we ready for each other when I got home.

Bottom line is that I had a challenging and exciting mission that shaped the rest of my life. A special thanks to my Dad, who paid for it, and Jane, who became my wife.

Chapter 7

Courtship and School

My family and Nola met me at the Salt Lake City airport upon my return from Chile. Nola looked magnificent and flew into my arms. Jane stayed away to avoid a scene. It was a great reunion. Nola dated a lot while I was gone but waited to see what I was like. That same night, I told her I was in love with Jane, and that we needed to part ways. It was difficult, but I couldn't wait to see Jane. She lived in a house she inherited from her mother in Granger (now West Valley). We had a fantastic reunion.

Round One

Jane and I dated heavily for the next six months. She was teaching English at Granger High School. I enrolled in school at the University of Utah. And we talked about marriage. I finally found the courage to propose. In June, 1967, I gave her a diamond ring in a sealing room in the Salt Lake Temple. She reluctantly accepted. Though she didn't say so at the time, she was not sure I was "The One." But she went along with the game. Jane had another suitor who was waiting in the background. I knew of him, but did not know she was in contact with him and still in love with him. I was insanely jealous when I found out – almost lost Jane over it.

The problem was, Jane was seeking a spectacular revelation from God about whom to marry. She was hoping an angel would appear at the foot of her bed or in a dream and declare, "HE_IS_THE_ONE!" Sadly, that's not the way it works. We all operate on faith, but that didn't keep Jane from trying.

Anyway, we were confused about marriage. Though we were still engaged, things were not moving along well. Doubts and arguments ensued. It was the summer of 1967. She was in summer school at BYU, and I was working for

the Salt Lake City Board of Education (maintenance). We had to make a decision, so we decided to fast and pray for two days and seek an answer from the Lord. This was the most important decision of our lives.

After two days of fasting and prayer, I excitedly picked Jane up in Provo on a beautiful summer day. We drove up South Fork in Provo Canyon and found an isolated spot along the creek. Very romantic. I had my answer – a resounding “YES!” I was totally pumped.

I informed Jane of my revelation. She broke into tears and said “no.” She slowly took off her engagement ring and handed it back to me. I’ve never been so deflated. I was so sure. My balloon was popped. This was the end of the road. Such rejection was hard. We drove home in strained silence. I dropped her off, thinking I would never see her again. This was one of the worst days of my life.

So, I got the answer “yes” – she got the answer “no.” I’m still trying to figure out who was right. We eventually got married, but the timing was wrong. Long term I got it. Short term she got it. I have to give the win to Jane.

Round Two

Jane ran off to San Diego in August, 1967 to teach high school Spanish and get away from me. I stayed in Salt Lake City to continue my studies at the University of Utah. I dated furiously to try to fill the hole in my heart. I got to know some really nice girls, but nothing stuck. Jane and I did not communicate.

Six months later, my family and I were just finishing up one of Mom’s delicious roast beef dinners after Church when the phone rang. Dad picked it up. As soon as he said, “Well hello Janie,” my heart leapt to my throat and started pounding. I jumped to my feet, begging for the phone.

Dad, being the greatest tease of all time, made the most of the situation. He intentionally talked to Jane about absolutely nothing for a couple of minutes while I danced around, trying to grab the phone. He finally relented and handed it to me.

It was Jane! Wow! After six months. I was on fire.

Jane told me she'd been thinking about our relationship after dating many guys in San Diego. No one measured up. If I still loved her, she would like to have me back.

A note about my father:

I'm lying on the living room floor, phone glued to my ear, involved in the most important phone call of my life. Nothing else exists. My heart is racing. I'm flushed with excitement. The family is watching.

All of a sudden, Dad shows up with a bag of ice from the freezer in his hand and a wry smile on his face. He stands over me and tries to put the bag of ice on my head. "Son, I'm just trying to help. You need to cool down."

He went on and on like this for a minute. I can't imagine what Jane heard on the other end of the phone as I was trying to shoo him away in loud whispers. That was Dad. He thought it was hilarious.

Anyway, within one hour of that call, I was in my green 1967 VW bug racing down I-15 to see Jane in San Diego. And what a reunion we had – one of the best days of my life.

Our second engagement was pure magic and so much better than the first. Jane had her revelation. Other guys were out of the picture. All jealousy and doubts were gone.

Jane visited Salt Lake City in March 1968 for General Conference. I proposed to her, again, in the Celestial Room of the Salt Lake Temple. I actually gave her the same diamond ring from our first engagement. I had sold it back to the jeweler (Fred Newsom, our neighbor). I went to him to buy another ring, and he pulled out the old one, saying, "I thought you'd be back for this." Another minor miracle in the Al and Janie saga.

Jane moved back to Salt Lake City, moved into her mother's house and got another teaching job. We spent most of our time together and planned our marriage. We set the date for June 28, 1968.

Choosing a Profession

I was taking general education classes at the University of Utah, wondering which field to study. I was drawn to dentistry, like several of my mission companions, and was taking some pre-med courses. I soon decided that working in people's mouths all day was yuck and looked elsewhere.

I was enrolled in a general speech course. One day during class a dynamic professor, Reed Miller, showed up for a demonstration with several children in tow. His specialty was teaching deaf children to speak (not sign) so they could function in regular society. As you can imagine, the biggest challenge for the deaf is dealing with verbal language. It's a devastating handicap. He was teaching these kids to read lips and speak with some great success. He put on an astounding demonstration. I was absolutely captivated and made an appointment to see him.

The next day I made a fateful visit to the Speech and Hearing Department at the U of U. The professors there were all young, fun and full of energy. The first thing we did was eat lunch and play ping-pong. They recruited me hard.

I decided then and there to pursue a Ph.D. in speech pathology and teach at the university level. I finally had a direction and purpose in life. It made a lot of difference too. From that point on, I got straight As in college.

My Favorite Pigeon

Yes... a bird. I named him "Little Joe." Believe it or not, this silly pigeon taught me a lot about life and learning.

While at the University of Utah, I took a graduate course in behavioral psychology. There were twelve students in the class.

The entire course took place in a lab. Our grade was contingent on one thing -- taking a wild pigeon that had been captured from the town square and changing its behavior.

The goal was to put the bird in a glass cage, have him peck at a red disk on the wall which would drop a food pellet into a tray, have him turn a full circle and repeat the move. Simple, huh? It was a phenomenal challenge.

The most important factor in changing behavior is motivation, so before we began, we had to get the birds very hungry. They had to be hungry enough to peck around wildly in search of food. So, we put them on a strict diet for a couple of weeks till they got down to 80% of their original weight. That was the humane threshold to not harm the birds.

The first task on the first day of class was to weigh the birds. The cages were about one-foot cubes mounted on the wall. No one had ever touched a pigeon before. Both the students and the birds were terrified.

The teacher demonstrated: slowly open the cage door, reach in and put both hands around the bird, pinning his wings to his body, pull the squirming little guy out and drop him in a box on the scale across the room, weigh him, take him out of the box the same way and return him to his cage. Easy peasy! But expect to get pecked a little.

The exercise was hilarious. No one could hang onto their bird. Within five minutes, there were twelve pigeons desperately flying around the room, trying to escape. It was like the Three Stooges running into each other in a panic. It took a couple of hours to re-capture and weigh all the pigeons.

The teacher required us to come in three days a week to train our birds – we had six weeks to pull it off.

I was determined to succeed beyond expectations. I hated the task of transferring the squirming bird from one cage to the other. Everybody did it the same way – including the teacher. Half the time they'd lose the bird and have to traumatize him by catching him all over again. So, I developed a plan. Once Little Joe hit his weight threshold, I came in five days a week to train – not the required three.

I started by opening the door of Little Joe's cage and putting a few grains of food inside the back of the cage. Of course, being super hungry, he eagerly snarfed them down. I gradually moved the kernels of food to the outer edge of the cage – about one inch at a time. He could have easily escaped, but he was too focused on the food. I repeated that for a few days. At that point, Little Joe knew I wasn't going to hurt him.

The next step was to get him eating out of the palm of my hand while he stood at the edge of the cage. That was a huge step. Think about the fear and trust involved. It took a few days to make that happen. But once he did it, he'd run to the edge and wait for my hand.

Then the big step. I held the food in my palm too far for him to reach from his cage and put the finger of my other hand next to the edge so he could stand on it. It took a couple of days, but soon I was walking around the room with a pigeon on my finger, eating out of the palm of my hand. I couldn't believe it.

The rest was easy. I'd won Little Joe's trust, and he knew I was going to feed him every day.

Then came the final exam. Twelve grad students and the teacher stood in the room, watching the spectacle. One by one, the students struggled to get their squirming birds out of their cages and into the test box. All but two failed to even come close to the goal. They got their birds to peck at the disk, but not turn a circle. Since my name starts with the letter "T," I was second to last.

When it was my turn, I opened Little Joe's cage and held my horizontal finger next to the edge. He immediately jumped onto my finger. You should have seen the look on the other's faces.

I calmly walked Little Joe across the room, without restraint, and took the lid off the test box with my left hand. He jumped off my finger into the box. He immediately pecked at the red disk, ate the pellet, did a 360 and repeated it again. At that point, I put my finger low in the test box and Little Joe hopped on. I calmly walked back to the cage, held Joe about two feet away, and gave him a little push. He flew right back into his cage and stood there on the edge.

The students' and the teacher's jaws were on the floor. This had never happened before.

I loved that bird.

I went back to the lab to visit Little Joe the day after class. I asked the teacher if I could keep him as a pet, but State law requires that all experimental animals be terminated. It broke my heart.

Father's Death

My father died on January 10, 1968. He had a fight with colon cancer for several years, and it finally caught up with him. I was 22. My brother, David, was 18.

Three of us took turns taking care of Dad at the family home on 20th East. We brought a hospital bed into the living room to make caring for him easier. Mom was an emotional wreck.

Dad's robust body was no more than a skeleton. His once jet-black hair was pure white. Dad was out of it on high doses of morphine. He said weird things and counted out loud all the time. "One, two, three, fourrrrrr." Still don't know what it meant. It spooked us all out.

In the wee hours of January 10, Mom woke me up and said, "Al, Daddy is going. I can't stay in there. Will you sit with him?"

So, I got up and sat with Dad until he took his last dying breath and passed away. It was the first death I saw up close and personal. It just amazes me how life comes and goes. I ended up making all the funeral arrangements with the bishop.

The funeral got to me too. I didn't cry at through the entire death and planning ordeal. I kept my cool. My brothers and I plus our brothers in law were pall bearers for Dad's casket. The service was held at the Parley's stake center in the gym. The chapel was too small.

We walked into the basketball court with casket in hand. As we entered, more than a thousand people stood up in silent and reverent respect for Wally. That got to me, and my eyes started to water. As we carried the casket to the front of the podium, I passed my high school girlfriend, Nola, standing there with tears running down her face. What a sweet girl! She and everyone there adored my father.

Chapter 8

Marriage



Jane and I were married on June 28, 1968 in the Salt Lake Temple. The marriage was performed by Hugh B. Brown in sealing room 3. Elder Brown was a powerful apostle and one of Dad's best friends. And I knew him. I translated for Elder Brown for a speech he gave in Chile during my mission. He gave dad his last blessing on Christmas Eve before his death and spoke at the funeral. As a favor to Wally and the family, he consented to marry us.

I've never seen another sealing like ours. After Elder Brown gave Jane and I some marriage advice, he stood at the altar as Jane and I kneeled across from one another.

He paused and said, "Allen, I want you to know that Wally is in this room, witnessing this ceremony. (Mom gasped... we all looked around, trying to see him.)"

He continued, “Jane, I want you to know that both of your parents are also in this room.”

Then he said, “I also want you to know that the spirits of your future children are here.”

Jane kicked herself the rest of her life for not asking “how many?”

Then he sealed us for time and all eternity. My greatest fear was that Jane would say “no” during the ceremony. But she said “yes.” Whew! I’ve yet to see a more interesting or spiritual sealing.

We had our wedding reception that same night in the outdoor gardens of the Stratford Ward on Highland Drive. Then we took off to spend our wedding night in Park City. We were exhausted. From there we had the trip of a lifetime at Teton National Park and Yellowstone. It’s a story worth telling.

Honeymoon

At the wedding reception, Marty Shaeffer shook my hand – it had a \$100 bill in it. He said, “Al, you can only have this if you promise to spend it on your honeymoon.” We got several hundred dollars at the wedding, but I kept Marty’s money separate. Then we headed off to the Tetons. We were driving Jane’s Mustang. Jane had always talked about canoeing and camping with her family as a child, so we started looking for a canoe. We found one for sale in Jackson Hole. We spent \$100 even on the canoe, paddles and a rack to carry it. We had a blast.

When we arrived in the Tetons, we spent a couple of days in the big old Teton Lodge with all the big log beams. Very cool. Then we started looking for adventures with our canoe. The map looked like we could paddle across one of the lakes, take it down a stream which led to another lake which circled back to our original location.

It turned out there was no connection from one lake to the other, so I ended up pulling that canoe along the ground for a half mile through the forest. People thought we were crazy. That was one of Jane's favorite memories – me dragging the canoe along the ground. We finally reached the lake and canoed back to our starting point. This was the third day of our honeymoon. We were both so sunburned we couldn't touch each other for a couple of days.

Then we went to Yellowstone to fish. We were about a half mile off shore in our canoe when a storm blew up. Many people have drown in those sudden storms, and we were in a canoe with no life vests. The waves quickly got up to 2 and 3 feet high. We were scared. I had run a couple of rivers in canoes as a boy scout and knew how to steer. It saved us. Jane was in the front, and I yelled at her to put her paddle on the floor and just hang on. I paddled backwards on the appropriate side to keep us perpendicular to the waves while the wind blew us along. It was a bumpy, wet ride. The goal was not to capsize. We were in true danger. The wind finally blew us into shore about a half mile from where our car was parked. My arms were throbbing. I decided to hike up to the car.

I left Jane with the canoe and started walking. It was dark and windy with zero traffic. All of a sudden, I looked back and there was a bear following me, about 100 feet away. I walked a little faster and the bear picked up the pace. When I slowed down, he slowed down. So after almost drowning, I was now on this lonely road in the dark with a bear following me. It was spooky and tense. I'm sure the bear was just curious. With a sigh of relief, I finally reached the car and went back to rescue Jane. What a honeymoon! The greatest time anybody could ever have.

After our honeymoon, I resumed my studies at the University of Utah and Jane taught 8th grade at Clayton Junior High School in Salt Lake City.

Chapter 9

Children and Graduate School

The first big event of this period was the birth of our first child – Carolynn. October 22, 1969. How cool that she was born on October 22, the same day as her mother!

I was in the birth room and watched the whole thing. Same with all my biological kids. Jane was in labor almost 24 hours as dilation was slow. Plus Carrie's head was in the wrong position. The doctor had a heck of a time getting her out. But out she came, pink, wet and screaming her little head off. That should have been a hint of things to come. We were proud parents.

We took this precious little baby home, and we were miserable. Jane tried to breast feed, but her milk did not flow well. She was exhausted and weak from the prolonged birth. And Carrie did not tolerate formula very well. She cried...and cried...and cried. Poor thing had Colic. We spent many nights walking the floor with her. I even took her for midnight rides in the car to get her to sleep. The hum and movement of the car soothed her. I spent much of my time at school sleeping in class. The ordeal wore us out. This went on for about six months. Carrie was such a challenging infant I swore I never wanted another baby. I should have had more patience. She turned into a wonderful, bright and loving child. What a blessing! And, of course, we had three more.

Graduate School

I graduated from the U of U in 1968 and stayed on for a Master's Degree in speech pathology. In 1969 I started looking for the right graduate school for a Ph.D. I had great grades, test scores, and recommendations, so I had my choice of schools.

At that time, there was lots of grant money from the government for speech pathologists that included paid tuition and a small living stipend. I was accepted to several programs, but decided on Northwestern University. They had an unparalleled reputation in my field, especially in neurological disorders which was my primary focus. I got all expenses paid thanks to Uncle Sam.

We moved to Chicago in 1970 to start my doctorate studies – me, Jane and Carrie. We rented the third story apartment of a brownstone on Howard Street. These were long, skinny brick apartments, very close to each other, with three units stacked on top of each other. Ours had a one car garage with a washer and dryer in the basement. It was a bit gloomy. It only became a challenge when Jane slipped on the steps going to the laundry room and boke her ankle (again). She broke that same ankle at least five times during our marriage. Anyway, she had a heck of a time getting up and down three stories of stairs with a cast on while carrying a baby.

My stipend from my grant money was not enough to live on, so Jane got a job. She translated English documents to Spanish for an insurance company. The pay was okay, and it kept us afloat. We found a sitter for Carrie in our Ward – a wonderful sister.

I dove into school with all my heart. I was determined to get my Ph.D. as soon as possible. My program and grant was scheduled for three years. I studied the requirements and decided it was possible to finish in two years. I just needed to double up a few classes and start my dissertation early. My advisors said it couldn't be done. Well, I did it – the first one in the school's history. But my grant required me to stay on the third year as a teaching assistant in the program even though I had my degree. At least they were calling me Dr. Toronto.

My studies took me in a new direction. I went to Northwestern to specialize in neurological speech disorders – specifically aphasia. But as a student, I had to take courses in vocal disorders, stuttering, language development, anatomy, phonetics and so on. It was great. All of those classes were held in clinics or hospitals in Chicago with real patients and real problems. And it turned out that half the population spoke only Spanish. There were huge neighborhoods downtown Chicago that were all Mexican or Puerto Rican. It was like being back in the mission field. And it turned out that I was usually the only professional in these various clinics that spoke Spanish. So, I was called upon again and again to interview and translate for the staff. Even the physicians called me for help once in a while. I saw a little bit of everything.

As I worked with the Spanish speaking people, it became painfully obvious that all the speech and language test and metrics in my field were only in English. Speech Pathology was a relatively new discipline so there was nothing in Spanish. I had no tests or norms to work with. As much as I loved neurology, there was a gaping hole in my field that I was uniquely qualified to fill. As a result, I gave up neurology and focused on developing tests for Spanish speaking children. I figured that would have the greatest impact.

Establishing norms for Spanish speech patterns (syntax) in children between the ages of 3 and 5 turned into my Doctoral dissertation. I called it “A Developmental Spanish Language Analysis Procedure.” It was modeled after the pioneering work of my mentor at Northwestern, Dr. Laura Lee, one of my favorite people of all time. This was one of three tests I published in Spanish.

During this time, Jane was working and taking care of Carrie. She decided she wanted to go to graduate school at Northwestern and get a degree in Special Education. The Special Ed and Speech Path departments were in the same

building. I talked to the administrators, and they had several grants available that would pay Jane's tuition and give her a living stipend for a Master's Degree. If so, she could go to school and not have to work. We were pretty excited about it. So Jane applied for the grant.

Sadly, Jane goofed off during her undergrad program at BYU and had a few bad grades. This took her GPA below the other applicants for the grant. Northwestern awarded it to someone else. We were really sad about that. This rejection was tough on Jane because she knew she had what it took.

But miracles do happen. Three months later and one week before class was to begin in 1972, I got a call from the head of the Special Education department. He informed me that one of their grant recipients dropped out of the program at the last minute and that Jane could have it if she were still interested. The angels sang...the lights went on...and Jane was back in the education business.

Jane went to grad school with unparalleled gusto. She aced every class and was top in all of her clinical assignments. She quickly became the department favorite. And the post graduate recommendations from her professors were off the charts. The department head wrote that Jane was among the top five students they ever had in the school's history. "From zero to hero" I used to say.

Second Child

During this busy time, Jane got pregnant again. Wow. Number two. So we moved from our apartment to a small house in Skokie, which is just west of Evanston. It was so much better than our brownstone. It had a nice little yard and garage and was next door to a totally nosy and loud Jewish lady who looked out for us and became our close friend. By the way, Skokie is 90% Jewish. We never felt safer or more out of place.

Amy was born June 12, 1973 at the Evanston Hospital. The pregnancy was fairly easy and the delivery was a breeze. I fully expected another screamer. But Amy was totally different. The doctor pulled her out of the womb and swatted her behind. She whimpered for a second and then just looked around the room with what we have fondly come to know as Amy's "mega-look." It's a furrowed brow and a stare that melts ice – makes everyone in the room feel like an idiot. I was the first victim.

But Amy was the dream baby. She slept through the night the first night. I couldn't believe it. She breastfed perfectly and was happy and content. I decided babies weren't so bad after all.

Chapter 10

Texas

In my post-doctoral year at Northwestern, I was walking down the hall where all the professors had their offices. Dr. Cantor leaned back in his chair, phone in hand, and poked his head out the door. He yelled, “Anybody want a job in Texas!!?” Being involved in Spanish language development, I said, “Sure.” He handed me the phone. I found myself talking to Empress Zedler, chairman of the Special Education Department at Southwest Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas. She offered me the job on the phone, sight unseen. She desperately wanted somebody from Northwestern – especially a Laura Lee protégé. Empress flew me down to Texas, and I took the job.

San Marcos sits in the hill country of central Texas, half way between Austin and San Antonio. It was a cute little town along a river with lots of history. The university had about 25,000 students. I went there as an Assistant Professor. I was teaching undergraduate and graduate classes in Speech Pathology – exactly what I wanted to do.

The first couple of years were busy as I had to plan all of my lectures. But I was good. The faculty and students liked me, and I was a breath of fresh air to a stiff and stogey department. In addition, Empress arranged for me to supplement my income with a weekly consulting job in Del Rio, Texas. It’s a border town between San Antonio and El Paso. I drove 200 miles to Del Rio every Friday to do therapy and teach at the school there district. Loved it.

My first teaching job paid \$28,000 per year. That was the going rate in 1973. I made another \$5,000 or so consulting and doing private therapy. Plus Empress got Jane a part-time teaching job at Texas Lutheran College in Seguin, Texas – about 30 miles away. We weren’t rich, but we were comfortable.

Jane and I bought our first house in San Marcos. It was a brand new three bedroom rambler on a half-acre just outside of town. We paid \$34,000. This is where I started learning how to build houses. One of my friends at church, Virgil Sayer, was a one-man contractor. He did his own plumbing, electrical, carpentry, masonry and so on. He'd build one house, sell it, and build another. Wonderful friends and family. He was my first counselor when I was Branch President. He took my place when I left and became the first Bishop of the San Marcos Ward.

Virgil showed me how to frame walls and lay brick and stone. I converted our garage into a large family room, complete with a hearth and stone fireplace. I went outside from there and built a nice car port with brick pillars and an A-frame composition shingle roof. I learned many useful skill that have helped me throughout my life. At this writing, I'm still building and remodeling.

I also picked up an interest in auto mechanics. I had an old Dodge pickup truck and a 1971 MGB. I took a couple of local auto repair classes and worked extensively on them both. I've never stopped dinking with cars.

We had a great life in Texas. Great job. Great wife. Active in church. Lots of friends. Jane took the kids to the municipal swimming pool daily in the summer. Sure, we had a few problems with weather and health, but nothing serious.

Cindy was born August 6th, 1975 in Austin. We had a little trouble bringing her into this world. Jane kept going into false labor. We'd madly drive 30 miles to the hospital in Austin only to have her contractions stop. Then they'd send us home. We did that at least four times. Jane was frustrated and overdue, so the doctors decided to induce labor. Cindy was a beautiful baby – probably our most perfect. And she is gorgeous to this day.

Canoeing the San Marcos River

Several times during our time in San Marcos, Jane's sister, EC Shaeffer and her family would visit from Clovis, New Mexico. She and her husband, Marty, had four children. Our favorite activity was to run the San Marcos river in canoes. The San Marcos river originates at Aquarina Springs, right in the middle of town. The massive central Texas aquifer just comes to the surface in a huge spring and flows all the way to the gulf of Mexico. We'd put in at Aquarina Springs and float ten miles or so to a little park where Jane and EC would have dinner waiting for us. It is one of the favorite family experiences of my life.

Uncle Sick

During our time in San Marcos, Jane and I made a visit to Juarez, Mexico, just across the border from El Paso. We left the kids with EC in Clovis.

Jane and I loved Mexico. It gave us a chance to practice our Spanish and shop at all the junky souvenir shops. We had lots of Mexican stuff.

We booked two nights in a hotel downtown Juarez. The first day we were there, we had lunch at a little taco stand on the street. We had eaten like this many times without a problem. I had two chicken tacos. Bad luck. I got food poisoning – bad. Jane was OK.

I have never been so sick. I had severe diarrhea and vomiting. I was up every ten minutes all night long, sitting on the toilet and throwing up in a garbage can. I lost about 10 pounds in 12 hours. I wretched so hard, I burst a blood vessel in the white part of my eye – looked like a zombie.

In the morning, we finally got a doctor to come to my room. He injected a syringe of Dramamine into my right arm. Didn't help. But he did manage to sever the motor

nerve to my right deltoid muscle – the one that helps you pull your pants up. It took nine months to heal while I did the hooch-around with one hand to get my pants on.

Anyway, we were desperate. Skinny, pasty gray and severely dehydrated, I was still throwing up. I was dying. I finally told Jane, “Go get me a couple of quarts of Coke. I hear caffeine settles an upset stomach, and I need liquid.” So in spite of my nausea, I forced myself to chug Coca Cola as fast as I could, which I would immediately throw up. It was difficult, but the vomiting slowed down. After a couple of hours, the nausea subsided. What a relief!

By then it was late afternoon. We were afraid I might die, and getting a dead body out of Mexico was nearly impossible. So weak, gray, skinny and bloodshot, we made a run for the border. Jane drove. Going through the border checkpoint was awful. We couldn’t convince the agent that I was not a drugged-out junkie. They searched our car from bumper to bumper and finally let us go.

We drove straight to EC’s house, and I collapsed for a few days. Dan Shaeffer was Carrie’s age – three or four years old. He took one look at me, heard the story and promptly called me “Uncle Sick.” Ha-ha! The name stuck.

Gold

In 1976 I read a book by Howard Ruff that changed my life and my finances. It was titled “How to Prosper in the Coming Bad Years.” Ruff made a great case for buying gold and silver as a hedge against inflation and hard times. He correctly called the high inflation of the late 70s.

Being a natural rebel, I was totally sold on the concept. But we really didn’t have any savings to risk. So, I talked to our local bank and struck an unusual deal.

I borrowed \$11,000 to buy 100 Krugerrands (each containing 1 ounce of gold) and let the bank hold the gold as collateral for the loan. I had enough income to pay off the loan over time.

I bought the coins for \$107 each, just three dollars from the low price of \$104 – dumb luck. Two years later, when we moved to Utah, gold was over \$300 per ounce. I paid off the loan with equity from our house and walked out of the bank with 100 Krugerrands worth over \$30,000. In 1978, that was a lot of money. It was funny, the banker thought I was a genius and was asking for my advice.

During those two years, I got to know the coin business. A couple of local dealers taught me the ropes. I started buying and selling numismatic coins, mostly rare silver dollars. I bought enough to build an inventory of coins I used to seed my coin shop.

This was a major turning point in my life – an epiphany. I learned that business and investing were a lot more lucrative, interesting and fun than working for wages. And I had the knowledge to make it work. I really liked having money for a change.

The San Marcos Branch

From the beginning, we were totally active in our little branch. Meetings were held in a modular, movable office building the church bought from the San Antonio World's Fair. It was an independent branch with about 80 in attendance every week. It operated exactly like a full-blown ward. Both Jane and I held every conceivable position over our five years there.

In 1976, President Gordon Wright called me to be branch president. He ordained me a High Priest, since I was performing the same duties as a bishop.

I had two memorable experiences in San Marcos that I incorporated into my talks over the years. I present them below as excerpts from my speeches.

Lose the Beard

The year was 1975, and I was 30-years old. America had just gone through the hippie era. This was a time of rebellion when young people wore long hair, beards, beads, and peace signs. The youth of that day were spaced out on LSD. They practiced free love and sang Kumbaya. America went through a permissive phase when almost any peaceful behavior was tolerated. Indeed, America was changed forever.

I was a young, brash college professor at Southwest Texas State University in San Marcos Texas. I had a beautiful wife, three little girls, and a great job. And I was very active in our branch of about 150 members. In fact, I was Elder's Quorum President.

And I had a full, bushy, bright red beard. Though my hair was brown, my beard was red with a slight silver streak over the chin. I wore that beard for five years, and I loved it.

There was only one problem. Beards were not acceptable grooming standards in the Church. In fact, the brethren were against any facial hair. Because of the times, they viewed beards as an outward sign of a rebellious attitude. Besides, it made members look like hippies.

But I knew better. Heck, I had a Ph.D.! I wasn't a hippie. I was enlightened and wise at the ripe-old-age of 30. Besides, Christ had a beard and so did most of the early prophets of the Church. So I knew there was nothing innately evil about beards. Even though the general authorities admonished members to follow the

modern prophets when it came to grooming, I couldn't see anything wrong with a beard. Besides, I had a baby face. I needed my beard to make me look older and more distinguished to my students at the University.

But above all, my red beard was really, really, really cool.

I had a discussion about my beard with the Stake President when he called me to be Elder's Quorum President. It was about a year earlier. He said he thought it would be a good idea if I shaved it off for the sake of my calling. He said it would be a good example for the youth in the branch. I gave him all the reasons I thought I should keep it, (the same reasons I just gave you), and then I said, "President, are you going to deny me this calling just because I have a beard?" He seemed a little embarrassed and finally said "no." Then he called me anyway. He could see I wasn't about to shave. But most of all, he was really desperate for an Elder's Quorum President.

Then in the fall of 1975, the Church called a Solemn Assembly in Texas. All priesthood leaders from ten stakes were to gather in Houston to get first-hand instructions from the Prophet himself. And several of the apostles would also be there. This six-hour meeting was an incredible opportunity to personally meet President Spencer W. Kimball.

I was the only Priesthood leader from my Branch who could go, and I was there with bells on. I arrived early to get a good seat. I went into the Stake Center in Houston and sat down with several hundred other priesthood leaders -- Stake Presidencies, Mission Presidencies, Bishoprics, and Quorum Presidencies from all over Texas.

In this sea of clean-shaven faces, there I sat with my bushy, red beard. But hey...I was enlightened. I was above it all. I just ignored all the stares, just like I always did when I went to the temple.

The meeting passed quickly and was incredibly inspirational. The Prophet, himself, spoke to us for over an hour. He was the concluding speaker. At the end of the meeting, he announced that he wanted to shake everyone's hand. What a thrill! We all lined up and one-by-one took our place in front of President Kimball for a ten-second, personal meeting.

I got more excited the closer I got to the prophet. I wanted to tell him who I was and what I was doing. I wanted to tell him I loved and sustained him with all my heart. I'd been singing "We Thank Thee Oh God for a Prophet" since I was in Primary, and I meant it. I wanted to bond with the man as we electrified each other in a spiritual embrace.

My turn finally came. I proudly stood in front of the Prophet, offered my hand and said, "President Kimball, I'm Al Toronto, Elder's Quorum President of the San Marcos Branch."

He was only five-and-a-half feet tall. He had salt and pepper gray hair and a raspy voice that had been damaged by an operation for cancer.

He gripped my hand for a second, looked up into my eyes, and said, "Brother Toronto, lose the beard." Then he reached over to shake the next brother's hand. The two guys behind me laughed so hard, I thought they were going to wet their pants.

That was it – my wonderful meeting with the Prophet. My balloon was popped. I went to this meeting rebellious and proud, and because of it, one of the

highlights of my life turned into a personal rebuke from the Prophet himself. I left the meeting embarrassed and humiliated.

I thought about nothing else during my four-hour drive back to San Marcos. I was in an emotional struggle between rage and humility. When I arrived home, I went straight to the bathroom and looked in the mirror. I had a long, hard Personal Priesthood Interview with myself. I really liked my beard, and I wanted to keep it. I had resisted all pressures from Church leaders to shave for five years. But the words of the Living Prophet were ringing in my ears. “Brother Toronto, lose the beard.” I finally boiled it all down to one ridiculously simple question: Was it more important to be cool or obey a Living Prophet of God?

So I shaved my beautiful beard and joined the ranks of all the other bald faces in the Church. How boring! Six months later, I was Branch President. (end)

A Miracle of Sacrifice

I was a young branch president of a struggling independent branch in San Marcos, Texas. We needed a new chapel badly. In those days, members had to raise 70% of the total funds locally to build a church building. We needed about a half million dollars in the bank to qualify. I looked at this number and the capacity of my members, and I got sick to my stomach. As a college professor, I had the highest income in the branch -- and it was barely enough to live on.

My figures said, at best, an additional 5% donation from all tithe-payers in the branch would get us about one-tenth the money we needed over five years – way too little, way too late. Something had to be done about our building, however, and I felt inspired to start that impossible quest.

This was no small thing. In those days, church financing was very different than today – and way more demanding. My faithful members were already donating 10% in tithing, an additional 2% to the ward budget, and an additional 2% to the stake building fund. With my additional 5% for a new chapel, I'd be asking my congregation for 19% of their income – and that didn't include fast offerings.

With fear and trepidation, I called each couple in the branch for a special interview. When they came in, I explained the situation. I laid out the numbers and the impossibility of the task, and told them this is what the Lord wanted us to do. They all choked. Many cried. They were barely making ends meet as it was. Fourteen percent was a huge sacrifice already – but nineteen percent?

One-by-one I saw the spirit touch these people. I saw their love for Jesus Christ and the gospel overwhelm them. With few exceptions, these poor saints committed 19% of their incomes to building the Kingdom of God in San Marcos. They gave up cars, and furniture, and vacations in order to pay. We did this for a couple of years until I left the area.

What do you think the spirit was like in our branch? We were all sacrificing beyond reason for a common goal. We stood and sang “The Spirit of God Like a Fire is Burning” with new meaning and fervor. We had lots of baptisms and new families started moving into the area. We were on fire with excitement that only the Gospel, commitment and sacrifice can bring.

Within three years of starting our impossible quest, the Church drastically changed its building policy. It lowered the local financing percentage for new buildings to 10%. There was enough money in our fund

to break ground for the new chapel. Three years later, one year after we moved to Utah, San Marcos started construction.

One of the highlights of my life was flying back to San Marcos, where I was honored to turn the first shovel of dirt for the ground-breaking ceremony.

Chapter 11

Return to Utah

On one of our trips to Utah, we visited the BYU campus and stumbled across the Special Education office. It included the Speech and Hearing Department. On the bulletin board, were applications for a new faculty position. We loved Texas and did not want to move. Just for grins, I filled out the application. I didn't talk to anybody, just handed it to the secretary.

What a surprise when I received a call from the head of the Department six month later. They wanted to fly me up for an interview. They were looking for a language development specialist and loved the fact that I trained at Northwestern.

So, I interviewed at BYU. I really didn't want the job, so I made a bunch of ridiculous demands. I wanted a promotion from Assistant Professor to Associate Professor, I wanted a 20% raise, and I wanted Fridays off to pursue research and private therapy. They agreed to it all, as long as I kept my salary a secret. I would be making more than the head of the department. I was stunned – and a little disappointed that BYU had secrets. Turns out that all their salaries are top secret, founded on the threat of dismissal. It's a universal problem in education. You have to pay new, younger talent more than the established teachers to attract good people.

I accepted the new position at BYU, and we moved to Utah in July of 1978.

The move itself was quite a challenge. Jane was in the last trimester of a difficult pregnancy (her fourth). We had three precious little girls and a house full of stuff – including two cars. I hired a moving van for the household goods. I flew Jane to Utah by herself, which required a doctor's note because of her condition.

I drove one car towing another all the way to Utah with three squirmy and excited little girls. Carrie was nine, Amy was five, and Cindy was three. It was the “are-we-there-yet?” and “how much longer?” marathon of a lifetime. That’s when I came up with the universal answer to all questions regarding travel time, “About an hour.” The kids hated it.

Jane and I found a house we liked in Manila, on a hillside just outside of Springville, Utah. We put down earnest money and moved in before we closed. After about a month, we discovered cracks widening in the foundation – the house was slipping off the hill. To fix it would cost as much as building a new house, so we backed out of our contract and lost our earnest money. We found another house down the road in Highland, Utah on Manor Drive. It was at the mouth of American Fork Canyon. It was a nice little rambler with a big yard. We really liked it there. It was at the end of a cul-de-sac where the kids constantly rode their bikes in the street. We had swings and a trampoline in the back yard. It was very rural and open.

Jane was pregnant and big as a house toward the end of September. She went into hard labor on September 24, 1978, and I rushed her to Utah Valley Hospital in Provo. We barely made it in time. The staff quickly took Jane into the maternity ward. She was fully dilated. The doctor showed up just in time to deliver our fourth child. The doctor had no time to administer drugs or anesthesia. The birth was all natural and Jane felt fantastic – best one yet. We took our new baby home in a couple of hours. What a great experience.

We were so excited. We finally had a son! We were hoping for a boy, but didn’t know. These were the old days when most births were a surprise. And Willie was perfect. Healthy and strong.

BYU

Teaching at BYU was great. I loved my fellow professors and the students. I pretty much taught all courses except stuttering and neurology. Those were the specialties of my colleagues who had been there a long time. There was no summer semester, so I had lots of time off.

But I did not like the politics of working there. I figured the “Lord’s University,” as they called it, would be above the petty politics and unrighteous dominion I experienced at Southwest Texas State. Not so. The administration constantly crammed the “Lord’s University” line down our throats to get us to obey their dictates and justify low salaries. It was, truly, shameful – especially for the life-long professors nearing retirement who should have been making a lot more money. They were trapped in low-paying, high-prestige jobs, and the church took advantage of them.

The dean of our department was a mini-tyrant. He got on everyone’s case about giving too many good grades, even in small graduate classes where everyone earned an A. He required us to attend all devotionals. He assigned us to unrelated doctoral committees where we didn’t have a clue about the field. He pressured me into giving a football star a passing grade, just so he could play in the Holiday Bowl. And he pressured the faculty to fail students if their hair was too long, or if they had facial hair, or if they violated the university dress code. My rebellious roots really bristled at that. Needless to say, I was disappointed in the church administration. I started to burn out on university life.

In the meantime, using windfall profits from my first gold purchase, I was buying and selling gold and silver on the side. I had lots of spare time with Fridays and summers off. And business was good. The price of precious metals was soaring. From 1978 to 1980, gold rose to \$850 per ounce

and silver to \$51 per ounce. I took out some ads in the local newspaper. I received calls almost every day. I developed relationships and wholesale accounts with major precious metals dealers in the country. I would buy something, call them immediately and lock in a price and a profit. Then I would simply mail it to them. I had a local customer who owned a private bank in Springville. He let me use all the cash I needed for short-term purchases – no interest or fees. I always paid him back in a few days. He trusted me, and I gave him exceptional prices on gold and silver. It was a dream setup.

I was making a lot more money on the side than I was teaching. Jane and I bought anything we wanted – new cars, a grand piano, a brand-new open-bow ski boat, a jet ski, and, most significantly, a one-eighth share in a houseboat at Lake Powell. That houseboat turned out to be the best investment I ever made for the family. We spent several weeks a year on the houseboat at Lake Powell with all the toys. All of my children have wonderful memories from those trips.

Gold on Steroids

During the gold frenzy in 1979, I received a call in response to my classified ad to buy gold and silver. The voice on the other end asked if I could buy 100 one-ounce gold bars with cash. That came to about \$40,000. I said yes. My profit would be close to \$2,000. We arranged to meet at a bank. Two gentlemen showed up with the gold. I bought it, sold it immediately and had my money back in two days. What a deal! The same thing happened the next week... and the next... and the next. It just kept coming. My other purchases paled in comparison.

After four weeks, my new-found customers wanted to talk. That's when I got to know Ken and Barry. They came to my house in Highland.

This was another game-changer.

Ken asked me what percentage I was making in the gold business. I told him about 10% per month. He said, “How would you like to make 4% per week with none of the work and none of the risk? That’s 16% per month. Compounded, you can double your money in five months.” My jaw dropped. I didn’t like the inherent risk of the gold business, and, of course, I had dollar signs in my eyes.

He explained his business. Their partner, Cliff, grew up in Alaska among the gold miners. Miners are understandably paranoid and shoot-on-sight when someone comes around their mines. Earning their trust is nearly impossible, but Cliff had it. He’d go around to the different mines and buy their gold nuggets for cash at 75 cents on the dollar. They were thrilled. Then he’d fly the gold to Provo, refine it into pure one-ounce bars and sell it to a dealer like me. He’d make about 15% on each trip, which he was doing twice per week. That’s 30% per week. He couldn’t keep up with the demand and needed more money. He was willing to pay 4% per week to get the cash.

I went to Salt Lake City to meet Cliff and immediately liked him – a straight shooter. I knew the deal was real because I had handled his gold on the back end four or five times.

I scraped together \$100,000 and put it in the system. I let that money double in the next five months. At that time, I took my original \$100K out to cover my initial investment, and let the \$100K windfall ride for the next year or so. The money was fabulous.

The deal was so good, I started getting friends and family into the investment. I made sure everybody knew it was risky and only put in what they could afford to lose. The company paid like clockwork and everyone was happy.

Independent Clearing House

But like all too-good-to-be-true stories, this one was fleeting and had a swift end. Cliff ended up with too much borrowed money for the gold he was buying in Alaska. He should have just returned the money he didn't need and kept his tight little operation going. But no. He was bitten by the gold bug. He started looking for additional sources of gold.

He ostensibly found some gold miners in Mexico who agreed to his terms. They would meet in Los Angeles and make the first sale for \$800,000 cash. He put the cash in a brief case and flew to L.A. The miners met him at the airport, drove him to the desert, shot him five times, and left him for dead. Of course, they took the money.

Miraculously, Cliff lived. He was hospitalized for months. Being honorable, he vowed to revive the business and repay the lost money. And people who trusted him, like me, went along. It was better than bankruptcy. I had recovered my money multiple times anyway. As a side note, authorities eventually found the Mexican culprits and recovered two thirds of the stolen money.

The problem was, the original gold source dried up, and such high return deals are impossible to find. Cliff needed a new golden goose. So, he partnered up with a guy named Dick Cardall, who was an expert in securities – a fraudulent expert, but really smart.

They created a concept based on factoring payables for large businesses, created a sales pitch, and moved ahead raising more money at the 16% per month return. They were sure they could make the concept work with enough money. They called it Independent Clearing House (ICH).

But the concept didn't work, and the system turned into a \$30 million Ponzi scheme. That's where there are no profits from a legitimate business (like gold from Alaska) and interest is paid to investors solely with new money coming in. Eventually, the scheme runs out of new money and the system collapses. The FBI raided the ICH offices and shut the operation down.

Dick, Ken and Barry all served time for this fraud. And I was a witness to it all. In fact, I was the number one witness for the prosecution at their trial. My testimony actually ended up helping the defendants. I explain how it was all resolved in Chapter 15, entitled "Miracles."

Chapter 12

Midway



In 1980, Jane and I discovered Midway, a quaint little Swiss farming community in the mountains just 30 miles east of Provo. We absolutely loved it. With our new-found money, we bought a three-acre building lot on Stringtown Road and built Jane's dream house. We hired David Weaver, Jane's nephew, who was in the log-home business as the general contractor. Jane spent weeks designing her perfect house with passive solar heat. Her sister, EC, created the blue prints. It was a magnificent log structure with huge structural beams, a towering rock fireplace and an attached greenhouse on the south side. In the greenhouse was a full-size hot tub surrounded by glass. Our majestic grand piano graced the living room. We built and paid for the whole thing in six months. It cost \$300,000 in 1980.

Paying cash for this house is one of the smartest things I ever did. Almost all investors with ICH were making so much money on paper that they never took any of it out.

They left it all in to collect compound interest. They eventually lost it all. Not me. I took my profits out every week and put them into the house. Financially, this saved me.

We were totally involved in the community and church in Midway – and we loved it. We were immediately sucked into the Midway 2nd ward. The first week we were there, the entire ward counsel showed up unannounced at our house on a Wednesday night. They brought food and ice cream for a blowout welcoming party.

Lyle Gertsch was bishop. He immediately called me to be Young Men's President and Jane to be Primary Chorister. It was fabulous. When Steve Brown became the next bishop, I was called to be Second Counselor in the bishopric. I served there until we left Midway.

Our houseboat at Lake Powell and our Suburban became the ward's go-to equipment. We virtually donated them to church activities. We used up our share of the houseboat for Elder's quorum outings, scout camps, and young women's activities. And we still had weeks left for family and business. Oh, we had some great times! The camping, water skiing, jet skiing, cliff-jumping, hiking and canoeing were unsurpassed. I loved every minute of it. To this day, all of my children relish their memories of Lake Powell. We were very happy.

Leaving BYU

Between ICH, the coin business and building our dream house, I had a lot of competing interests with my job at BYU. I resigned in the fall of 1982. I recommended one of my best friends, Lawrence Hilton, from my Northwestern doctoral program to replace me. He got the job

I hated to leave my friends at BYU, but my heart was just not in teaching. And I despised the suffocating administration at the “Lord’s University.” The windfall money I was making provided us with freedom and experiences I never could have had on a professor’s salary.

Being a Professor at BYU is very prestigious. It’s every Mormon Ph.D.’s dream job. People thought I was crazy to give it up. When I told Jane I was quitting, she only asked me one question: “Are you sure about this?” I said, “yes.” Bless her heart, she never said another word about it in spite of the troubles ahead.

Ten Acre Purchase

Once we settled into our Midway home, the new wore off after a year. Plus, the location was not ideal. Jane and I got the bug to build another house. She loved nothing more than making house plans.

We found our dream location about two miles south on Stringtown Road – ten acres with ten water shares overlooking Deer Creek reservoir. Oh, it was gorgeous! A gentleman farmer, Dale Benton, needed the money. We bought it for \$100,000 -- \$10,000 down and \$9,000 per year (annual payment). Benton financed it for us.

That land and water gradually increased in value while we owned it until 1990. It was worth millions after the 2002 Winter Olympics. Jane and I would occasionally spread out a blanket and eat our lunch on that land while dreaming of the new house.

This land was a smart buy. It played a pivotal role in our family’s security and my future.

I was into anything to make money after 1983. I bought and sold gold, silver, guns, diamonds, houses and cars. And I got involved in bartering – trading stuff with no money.

Bartering was a big deal in the 1980s. It was fun, and I had some really cool stuff. At one point, I owned a semi-truck trailer filled with pinball machines. I bought the old BYU Women's gymnasium in downtown Provo and 10 acres of land just outside Logan, Utah. Along the way, I bought and restored a turquoise 1956 T-bird. It was my baby. I had fun with that car.

Oren Durtschi

Among my many bartering deals, I ended up with a truckload of machined logs used for building log homes. I had them delivered to my newly-acquired ten-acre farm in Midway.

I used the logs to build a free-standing, four-car garage on the property. The building was 25 feet deep and 50 feet long with a trussed roof tall enough for a walk-in attic. I poured the slab and built the whole thing myself. I intended to attach the garage to the house Jane was designing.

I was installing the roof on the structure. I had about a third of the shake shingles attached when a stranger walked across the field and introduced himself. His name was Oren Durtschi. He was about my age and lived in a house within eyesight of my land. He immediately asked, "Would you like some help?" I said, "sure." Oren took off his coat, rolled up his sleeves, and worked with me for the next two days until the roof was finished.

Oren and I became best friends. We are still very close after 40 years. Oren was a bachelor and had no interest in marriage. He lived alone. He was an elementary school teacher in Heber City. He lived just down the road on 80 acres his grandfather homesteaded. And he was the kindest, most gentle man I'd ever met.

I invited Oren to our home for Sunday dinner. We rapidly fell in love with him and he us. He became part of the family. Over the next 8 years, he joined us on nearly all of our ski trips, Lake Powell outings and hikes. We always included Oren in our plans. Jane and I even included him in our trips to Mexico.

I especially liked Oren in Mexico. Jane was a meticulous and slow shopper. She would spend all day looking at every little thing and inspecting the seams of the dresses she wanted to buy. Drove me nuts. Oren changed all that. We agreed that he would go shopping with Jane as my surrogate. So, I ended up napping on the beach while Oren followed Jane around town carrying her packages. He loved it. Jane loved it. I loved it. What a blessing!

Oren loved Jane. He had little use for women, but he loved Jane. No one grieved more during her sickness and death. He was a wonderful support during the hard times we went through.

And, bless his heart, Oren took to Suzy as well. He wasn't sure about her at first, along with everyone else, because we got married in such a frenzy. She was so different than Jane. Heck, Suzy and I weren't even sure about each other! But in his kind, generous way, Oren accepted her. The relationship took a huge leap forward when Suzy introduced Oren to Chase, her 4-year-old son, as "Uncle Oren." "Uncle" and "Aunt" are terms of endearment in Hawaii, where Suzy grew up, so it was natural for her. My kids' heads all turned up at hearing the term, and Oren smiled from ear-to-ear. He has been "Uncle Oren" ever since.

Chapter 13

Troubles

Among all the wonderful things that happened in 1983, several stressful financial issues were coming to a head at the same time. I'll list them here to make my point and explain them in detail later.

1. ICH went belly up. That income stream disappeared, and I was being sued by the court-appointed Trustee for over a half-million dollars – which I didn't have.
2. Unpaid income taxes were hanging over my head to the tune of \$200,000. I hadn't paid any taxes for two years. The IRS was not involved yet, but it was just a matter of time.
3. We were living in an expensive house we couldn't afford. I was selling stuff right and left to keep it going. We were eventually going to have to sell it.

Jane and I were sitting on the back deck of our new house that summer, enjoying a drink at sunset. We were musing about the financial problems listed above and planning our next trip to Mazatlán – our favorite Mexican resort town. We weren't that broke – yet. Everything else was going great. I optimistically quipped, “Isn't it great that all of our problems can be solved with money?”

Cancer

A month later, Jane and I were in Mazatlán. We were making love in our hotel room on a beautiful afternoon when I felt a lump in her breast. I immediately brought it to her attention. Panic set in. We flew home early and set up a biopsy as soon as possible. The tumor was malignant. What an incredible wake-up call. Our priorities changed in an instant. My foolish statement about money still haunts me.

One of the most poignant moments I had with Jane was standing in the foyer of our beautiful home in Midway after that fateful call from Dr. Robinson, where he informed us the tumor was definitely cancer. She fell into my arms and sobbed and sobbed and sobbed. She knew she was going to die, just like her mother. There was no consoling her.

The next four years were a blur of doctors, hospitals, clinics, surgeries, blessings, remissions, recurrences, false hopes, pain and sorrow. All the details are spelled out in Jane's biography, [*Jane Weaver Toronto – 1940-1987*](#), compiled and written by EC Shaeffer. I won't recount them here except to give my perspective on a few experiences.

The initial mastectomy and breast reconstruction went fairly well, though Jane was never satisfied with her breast implant. They were too big and uncomfortable. Dr. Robinson removed the right breast and all of the tissue and lymph nodes from the armpit, then Dr. Pledger installed the implant. The biopsy indicated that only one lymph node was positive – out of about 12. Conventional wisdom indicated that if less than three lymph nodes were affected, no additional treatment was necessary. They thought they got it all. We were relieved.

We went back to living our lives for about 12 months. I had opened a small coin shop in Orem by the University Mall, took on a partner, and was working the gold, silver and gun business. It was paying the bills, so I couldn't complain. Jane and I vacationed in Hawaii, and we had some wonderful family and church trips to Lake Powell.

Then out of nowhere, Jane started getting some serious fatigue and digestive problems. We went to the top oncology clinic in Salt Lake City. They couldn't find cancer cells in the common locations, so they did a bone marrow biopsy. Though very rare, the cancer had metastasized to the bone marrow.

The chances were very high that the malignancy had been in the bone marrow from the beginning. It became obvious that we should have proceeded with chemotherapy immediately after surgery. Oh well.

Then Jane got mad.

She read everything ever published about cancer and alternative treatments. She was determined to live. She found that the most common factor in all cancer survivors was belief -- knowing that they would beat the disease.

Jane tried so hard to believe. And rightly so. She had many priesthood blessings from me and others that she would fully recover and live to old age. Her greatest desire was to live long enough to see Willie leave on his mission. That would give her 12 more years. That's all she asked for.

Midway Fasting and Prayer

Word got out that Jane had terminal cancer. Actually, Bishop Gertsch announced it from the pulpit in church. She was so mad at him. The children didn't know. The entire ward decided to have a special fast for her. The other wards in town heard about it, and the fast day turned into a Midway community event. They would fast one full day and meet at the Midway Town Hall for a special prayer by Joe Probst – the oldest and most revered patriarch in town.

At the appointed time, the town hall was packed. There must have been 500 people there. The bishop made a few comments, then Patriarch Probst gave the most wonderful prayer and public blessing Jane could ask for. It was sweet and powerful. He prayed for her total recovery. The universal support of the entire town touched us deeply. There was new hope in the air.

Second Opinion

About that same time, we decided to fly to Houston and consult with the number one breast cancer specialist in the world – Dr. Blumenschein at the M.D Anderson Clinic. We wanted a second opinion. This turned into the absolute low point of our cancer experience.

Blumenschein was brutal. He took Jane's history and looked at her medical records. We were in an examination room. He pulled out the plinth which was covered with clean paper. With his magic marker, he drew a graph on it. The Y axis (vertical) went from 0 to 100 -- the percent of women who survived metastatic breast cancer. The X axis (horizontal) was time – from zero to three years. Then he drew a straight line from the upper left corner of the graph to the lower right corner. He told us that the chance of surviving metastatic breast cancer was less than 2% after three years – nearly zero. He said the only chance Jane had to live was to come to Houston for a month, go into a special sterile hospital room, and let his specialists inject powerful chemicals into her bloodstream that would kill every rapid growing cell in her body. All her hair and fingernails would fall out. They would basically poison her to the point of death and revive her. Her chance of recovery would still be 2%. Listening to Blumenschein was like watching a horror movie. Our hopes were shattered.

We flew home in silence. When we landed in Salt Lake, we went straight to the temple. We prayed and prayed for guidance. We called my best childhood friend, Bill Parker, M.D. for advice. We decided the Houston cure was worse than the disease. We would take our chances with other treatments closer to home.

San Diego

Jane researched and considered every alternative cancer treatment available. There were dozens of miracle cures offered at off-shore facilities. They all touted examples of full recovery. We decided most of them were scams that were preying on dying and desperate people. However, there was one clinic in San Diego run by an MD that specialized in building up a patient's immune system to naturally fight the cancer. It was experimental, so it was not covered by our health insurance. But it hadn't been rejected by the AMA like all the others, and it wasn't weird. We decided to give it a try. Cost was about \$30,000.

We went to the immunology clinic in San Diego. The female director who owned the facility was very knowledgeable and professional. She used strict diet and customized injections that were extracted from a patient's own body fluids to build up the immune system. It all made sense. The diet eliminated all known carcinogens – no chicken, no beef, no shellfish, no processed foods. The only meat allowed was lamb and wild game. Jane also had to ingest massive amounts of raw carrot juice and other green vegetables. The diet was virtually impossible to follow. But Jane tried.

My most vivid memory of our visit to that clinic was the immune system test they performed as part of their diagnostics. They used a mild poison patch about the size of a quarter with shallow sharp points on one side. They pressed the patch into Jane's shoulder to break the skin and then immediately pressed the same patch into my shoulder. I was the control. My shoulder and arm immediately turned red hot and swelled up, and a big red welt formed around the intrusion point. My immune system was attacking that poison like crazy. Jane had no reaction whatsoever. Same poison. Same patch. Same time. It dawned on me how incredibly vulnerable she was. It was a wake-up call for both of us.

We came home and Jane strictly followed the treatment plan for a few months. It was hard. The diet was awful and Jane's skin turned orange from all the carrot juice. A friend of mine gave us a hind-quarter of moose for meat. Shari Davis was a nurse who lived across the street and lovingly administered Jane's daily injections. Everyone was very supportive.

After a few months, the San Diego clinic informed us the treatment was not working. They advised Jane to stay home and get chemotherapy from her oncologist. He could buy her some time. It was her only option. This was, truly, the beginning of the end.

Chemotherapy and Radiation

The cancer metastasized from breast to bone marrow to bone to cerebrospinal fluid. Every step involved additional doctors and more treatments. Jane ended up going through whole-brain radiation twice. The headaches and loss of hair were traumatic. Again, it's all spelled out in her biography.

One of our tender moments occurred when Jane lost her hair. She knew the time would come, but dreaded the thought. The kids were in bed, and I was sitting in the family room watching the news. Out of nowhere, Jane appeared in front of me with tears streaming down her face. She was holding bunches of hair in each hand and strands of thin hair were clinging to her head. It's one of the saddest things I've ever seen. I held her for a while. Then she sat on the floor between my legs while I cut the remaining hair from her scalp. She never did regrow her hair.

But all was not terrible. We still went to Lake Powell several times. Jane wore a bandana on her head. She even climbed Hole-in-the-Rock. And, of course, Oren tagged along. He was our resident photographer.

I also decided to take the whole family on a week-long Caribbean cruise. We had to do it while Jane was in remission. We had some great times. Jane enjoyed the tours on the islands. She wanted to see and do it all.

I basically took the last year of Jane's life off to care for her. My partner, Dave Tischner, ran the coin shop in Orem. He was great. Every month I'd visit the shop and take \$5,000 cash out of the safe. Dave never hesitated to give me what I asked for. What a blessing.

But I still had financial issues. The house payment was killing me, and major medical obligations loomed over me. But I had some help along the way. EC and Marty gave us \$10,000, which really smoothed things over. At my lowest point, my best friend, Oren helped me out. It's a story worth telling. Below is an excerpt from a talk I wrote:

Charity

After a long day of testing at Utah Valley Hospital, the doctor delivered the bad news. The cancer had metastasized into Jane's spinal fluid and was attacking her brain and nervous system. Even with aggressive and expensive radiation, she had no more than a few months to live.

Jane's health was not my only problem. Business was bad. I did not have a job. My savings were completely tapped-out, yet I still had a family of six to feed and monstrous medical bills to pay -- and this new treatment would double them. I was desperately trying to keep the house out of foreclosure, at least until Jane died. In her condition, I wouldn't dream of moving Jane out of her dream house. I was too proud to ask for help. All my life I had been a giver, not a taker. What was I going to do?

I was second counselor in the bishopric at the time, and the very same evening of that bad-news-day was scheduled for a youth activity – a roller-skating party in Provo. I was in charge. I didn't want to go. However, I had the only Suburban that could carry 15 kids, so I left Jane home and off we went to the skating rink.

Our executive secretary went with me -- my good friend, Oren. Oren was a 50-year-old bachelor who taught elementary school in the valley. He lived in a very humble home that he built himself at the far end of town. He stopped by our building site one day and offered to help me shingle the roof. I took him upon it, and we became close friends. This gentle bachelor loved my Jane as much as any man alive.

Anyway, despite my problems, Oren and I took a group of screaming teenagers to Provo that night for a youth activity.

Needless to say, I was no fun at the roller-skating rink. I found a seat far away from the crowd and sat down to brood and consider my options. I was jolted out of my daydream by Oren.

“What’s wrong, Al? It’s not like you to avoid the fun.”

The tears I'd been holding back all day flowed from my eyes as I told Oren the bad news about Jane and my finances. I, truly, did not know what to do.

The next day, I woke up early and went to get the paper. Under the front door was an envelope containing fifty \$100 bills -- \$5,000 cash. The note inside said, “Don't worry about paying this back – Oren.” I wept again. I didn't think Oren had \$50 to his name – let alone \$5,000. That money allowed me to meet my financial obligations and get on my feet.

Luckily, I was able to pay Oren back within a couple of months, though he gave me a hard time about it. A few months after Jane died, I found out that Oren had used most of his emergency savings to give me the money. He virtually gave me every spare dollar he had. What an incredibly humbling experience. And what a gift! Because of Oren's generosity, Jane was able to die in her dream house.

Moroni 46-47: "Charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever; and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him."

I think Oren is safe.

Surrounded by Angels

Oren was not the only angel in my life. The most significant was EC Shaeffer, Jane's sister. She and Jane were very close, and EC devoted a good part of her life to Jane's care during the last year of her life. She acted as full-time caretaker in our home much of the time. I knew the kids were in good hands, and I was able to focus on Jane and finances. EC was with me when Jane died. I was burdened with a boat load of emotional, legal and financial problems all at the same time. The pressure was enormous. But I held it together with a little help from my friends. Chief among them was EC.

Judy Price, Jane's best friend from Texas, was also a big help. She flew up several times to help care for Jane. And she flew in for the funeral.

And, of course, the members of our ward were terrific. They looked out for me and the kids whenever they could.

Do-Not-Marry List

About three months before Jane passed, she and I got into the hot tub. It was one of our favorite things to do. Of course, we talked about life and death – mostly life as she would never admit she was going to die. It was the foundation of her survival mindset. But in a rare moment, she told me she thought she might die. It took me back a little, since the subject was verboten.

Jane said she thought I should re-marry. She didn't want me to be alone the rest of my life, and the kids would need a mother. She asked me to wait about one year. Then she listed five eligible women in our circle of friends that she did NOT want me to marry. She made me promise. I was stunned. Some of those girls were terrific. But I agreed to the list. Then she planned her funeral – prayers, music, speakers – the whole program. Her greatest desire was for the Ralph Woodward Chorale to sing. I can proudly say I fulfilled my end of the bargain.

Last Doctor's Visit

EC and I took Jane to her last visit with Dr. Brown during the first week of December, 1986. He was monitoring her progress. She was going downhill fast. He finally delivered the bad news. "There's nothing more we can do." He instructed us to give her all the morphine she needed and let her go. He told us she had no more than one week to live.

He also asked if we had teenage daughters at home. I said, "Yes – we have three." He recommended we leave Jane in the hospital to die. The death of a mother is most traumatic to teenage girls. I said "no." I insisted Jane die in her dream home surrounded by those that love her most. I owed her that. In retrospect, that was a mistake. She was so out of it at the end, she didn't know who or where she was anyway. And taking her home just prolonged her life.

I made some mistakes in Jane's care and death at the end, and it left emotional scars on all the kids. I'm sorry. I've wrestled with that guilt ever since.

I talked to Carrie about this the last year of her life. She finally said, "Dad, knock it off!!! Stop beating yourself up over that. You did the best you could." It was as if Jane came back from the grave and slapped me upside the head. Bless her heart.

The Last 60 Days

When I got home from our final visit with Dr. Brown, I met with all the kids in Carrie's bedroom. We sat in a circle on her king size bed. I informed them that Jane had about one week to live. We all had a good cry and talked about what we could each do to help. I tried to prepare them for her death. And EC, bless her heart, was there to help them cope.

But Jane didn't die that week. She lived for two more months – the most difficult time of our lives. I moved a hospital bed into our master bedroom to assist with her care. Every night I prayed that she would pass, but woke in the morning to find her cursing and pulling at her tubes.

Jane was miserable – in pain, drugged up, cranky and hallucinating. Poor thing. It scared the children. Amy has the best record. She made entries in her diary several times a day. Jane asked for weird things, like wanting us to take her to her flying lessons. When we didn't comply, she got angry. She swore and called us names (especially me). She was not responsible, but that didn't make it any easier.

EC stayed as long as she could but finally had to go home to take care of her own family. She was back and forth for those two months. Luckily, she was with us at the end.

Christmas was a challenge. Since it would be Jane's last, I went overboard to make it nice. Three feet of snow blanketed the ground, and the white stuff was still falling. We had a 12-foot Christmas tree which we cut out of the forest ourselves, all decorated in front of our 20 foot tall rock fireplace. We had a warm fire burning in the wood stove. It was cozy as could be.

EC had gone home. Carrie, at the age of 16, stepped in as the mom. She and I stayed up late Christmas eve and set out gifts for the children. Carrie was so mature and helpful. When we were finished, she sat on my lap for the longest time and cuddled by the fire. It was beautiful.

Christmas morning we got up early to check out what Santa brought and open gifts. We first marched through the house singing "We Wish You a Merry Christmas" like we always did. Then we settled in the living room around the tree.

Jane could not get out of bed on her own, so I went up and gently carried her downstairs. I sat her on the couch so she could watch the fun. The kids excitedly opened their gifts. We all cheered as each one was opened. Except Jane. She was not participating at all. She was obsessed with her robe and her tubes. And she was irritated that we were making so much noise.

There was no making her happy. All she did was faunch around and complain. It was such a buzz-kill, I finally carried her back upstairs, put her in bed with the rails up and rejoined the children.

Oh, she was mad. Every few minutes, she would scream an obscenity that echoed through the house. We all quietly accepted the fact that mom was not herself.

Last Blessing

Below is an excerpt from a letter I wrote for Kyle Probst's 50th wedding anniversary

As one of God's most righteous daughters and true believers, Jane was a blessing seeker. She knew she could be healed if she could just get the right blessing. The higher up, the better. And she deserved it. No one who knew Jane would deny that.

As her husband, I was in an awkward position. Sure, I had the Priesthood, but I was way short of perfect. I gave Jane dozens of wishful-thinking blessings to be healed and live, all the while not totally believing it. I was conflicted about giving blessings of personal desire rather than by the spirit.

But think about it. How do you tell your eternal companion, whom you love more than life itself, that she's going to die? That's the last thing she wants or needs to hear – especially when she is trying so desperately to have a positive attitude and live. I just didn't have the courage to say it.

Jane got blessings everywhere: bishops, stake presidents, her brother, Gary, my brother, Bob, Grant Bangerter (a general authority), and others. And most of them, including Elder Bangerter, blessed her to be healed and live to see her grandchildren. Those were good days. Jane even got Wayne Probst to ask President Benson to give her a blessing when he was in Midway for a Stake Conference. Wayne was sure the Prophet would do it. Why not go to the top? President Benson told Wayne, "You've got the Priesthood, you bless her." Jane was not happy about that, but there's a wonderful lesson there.

Kyle Probst was our stake patriarch – a wonderful, spiritual giant and a personal friend. He stopped by our home to visit in December – about a month before Jane died. It was one of those twenty-below winter nights when it was hard to breathe outside. Toward the end of our visit, Jane, with pleading and desperation in her eyes, asked Kyle to give her a blessing. Here was the Patriarch, the man most in tune with the Spirit in our stake, at her disposal -- a humble and willing servant. The timing was perfect.

Kyle gave Jane a very nice blessing of comfort – no promise for healing.

After the blessing, Kyle asked to speak with me alone on the front porch. The cold took our breath away as we stepped outside and shut the door. Tears welled up in his eyes and he said, “Al, Jane is going to die. I just didn’t have the heart to tell her.” I told him I knew it too. This was one of the most tender moments of my life. We bonded hard.

After Kyle left, and I got Jane settled down for the night, I went into my office alone and shut the door. I spent some time staring at the ceiling in the dark. Then it came to me. “Maybe I’m not so bad after all.”

Death

It was January 25, 1987 – Super Bowl Sunday. Jane had been in a coma for a few days, just staring at the ceiling with a constant heart rate between 120 and 150. She was barely alive. Oren came over and we watched the Super Bowl up in Jane’s bedroom. Oren went home after the game. I knew the end was near and I asked everyone to leave. I wanted to be alone with Jane when she passed. I sat with one hand in hers and the other hand on her heart. Her heart rate gradually slowed to zero, she let out a little gasp, and she was gone.

I'd been praying for this moment for weeks. Now that it was here, I didn't want it. Relief and sorrow swept over me. I was hoping for some kind of spiritual manifestation since Jane was passing through the veil. But nothing. I felt empty.

I met EC in the hallway and told her Jane was gone. We had a little cry and then gathered up the kids to tell them. Amy was especially emotional. She had been making hourly entries in her diary all day. I took the kids into Jane's room and had family prayer. She was covered by a sheet. The older kids wanted to see the body. It was ghastly – pasty gray, deformed, bald, eyes half open and cold. That was one of my mistakes. I shouldn't have let them see her.

The mortuary was there within an hour. They took Jane's body, and it was over. Bishop Steve Brown came over to console us.

The Mortuary

I kept the kids out of school the next day -- Monday. We went to the mortuary in Heber City to pick out a casket and plan the funeral. The mortician was perfect – serious, reverent and didn't move his arms when he walked. We were sitting in a row of folding chairs in front of a curtain. He was facing us in a single chair. When we finished our business, he said, "Would you like to see your mother?" We all gasped a little, remembering the night before. "She's right behind you."

The mortician pulled back the curtain. Jane was lying in a temporary casket, dressed in her temple robes. And she was beautiful. Her eyes and mouth were closed, her makeup and hair were perfect. Carl Probst, a hairdresser in our ward, had come down earlier to set her wig. She looked like an angel. The contrast from the day before was startling. We hung out by Jane for over an hour. The kids did not want to leave. They kept looking at her and touching her face. It was a significant healing experience.

The Funeral

Jane's funeral is reported on and transcribed in great detail in her biography, written by EC, so I'm not going to reproduce all those details here. I just want to make a few comments from my perspective. I'm also going to expand on some of the stories I provided for that book in a separate section. Some truly miraculous things happened around that time.

The funeral was held in the old Midway chapel. We had a viewing in the recreation hall before the meeting. In good-old Utah Mormon fashion, Jane's casket was directly under the basketball hoop. I always thought that was a little irreverent.

Anyway, people filtered through the hall to pay their respects. All the Torontos, Weavers, and Shaeffers were there. My brother, Bob, was long-hugging all the relatives he'd never met – startled some of them. He was very emotional about Jane's death.

Just before the meeting, we shooed all visitors out except family and closed the door. I asked my brother, Bob, to offer the family prayer right before we closed the casket. His prayer was interesting.

Before he started, he announced that he didn't want to miss anything or say anything wrong, so he had written the prayer. Then he took out the prayer and read it.

It was different. It made me uneasy, because it was not a typical humble prayer. He was lecturing God. In essence, he said, "Lord, you have taken this mother from her children before her time. Therefore, you owe them." Then he proceeded to bless the children with things that God owed them -- things like health and safety and relationships and peace of mind.

It's one of the strangest prayers I ever heard. He later told Amy that he read the prayer in order to avoid saying how he really felt. He was "pissed."

I felt uneasy about Bob's prayer for a long time. But I changed my mind over time. Every single thing he blessed those kids with came to pass. What do I know? You gotta love Bob. And the fact is, of all the funerals I have ever attended, his is the only prayer I remember.

The burial was at the Midway Cemetery. I purchased two plots there from the city -- \$30 each with lifetime care for residents. Best deal I've ever made. I should have bought three. From the chapel, the family proceeded to the cemetery. The hole was prepared and the pall bearers sat Jane's casket on the straps over the grave.

This was January – temperature in the mid-20s. There was about two feet of snow on the ground. The city had removed the snow from the immediate area. Huge snowflakes were gently falling to the ground. It was absolutely beautiful. Kyle Probst gave the dedicatory prayer graveside. Then all the kids put their flowers on the casket.

My sad little family was huddled together at the edge of the grave, burying their wife and mother. I was pretty emotional. I didn't even notice the others standing around.

I looked up to the sky and let the snowflakes stick to my face. It felt so good.

I was unemployed. I was in debt. I had to move out of our house immediately. I had the ICH trustee suing me for a half-million dollars. I looked to the sky and asked God, "What am I supposed to do now?"

A voice came to my mind – as strong a revelation as I’ve ever had. “Have family prayer. Have family home evening. Stay active in Church. A lot of people have had life worse than you. Take care of your family, and I’ll take care of you.”

Little did I know that on the other side of the mountain, the Lord was already preparing another woman to be my second wife.

After the grave-side ceremony, we went to our home for dinner. As usual, the Relief Society provided the food. Things perked up significantly when we all decided to stop moping around and go skiing the next day. That bothered a few people, who thought it was irreverent, but it was the right thing to do. We all cut loose our emotions and had a fun-filled day at Park City. I can’t think of a more healing activity. All day long on the slopes I thought, “This is what Jane would want.”

Chapter 14

Post Burial Blues

After Jane's burial, I had an experience with Amy that is particularly poignant and instructive.

I was walking by the downstairs bathroom a few days after the funeral, and I heard whimpering behind the closed door. I opened it to find Amy, sitting on the bathroom counter, all curled up in the fetal position, crying her eyes out.

I gently hugged her. "What's wrong, Honey?"

She cried, "I killed her. It's all my fault." She fell into my arms. I rocked her back and forth, assuring her it was not true. There was no consoling her.

After a while, I finally got the story. It had to do with fasting.

As Mormons, we fast for everything – especially problems like cancer. And we fasted a lot for Jane. We had family fasts and ward fasts and community fasts, all to heal Jane. And then in December, when we found out she was not going to live, we fasted for her to die.

Try explaining that to a child!

Before Dr. Brown sent Jane home to die, we were fasting as a family for her to live. Amy got so hungry during the night, she snuck into the kitchen and ate an Oreo cookie. In her mind, she betrayed her mother. She was too weak, so her mother died.

I don't think I've ever been so grief stricken – or angry. Here was my innocent little girl, blaming herself for her mother's death over one damned Oreo cookie.

It absolutely broke my heart, and I wondered what I could have done differently.

Obviously, children don't understand the nuances of faith and healing. It's a miracle when things work out, and everyone has the faith of a little child. But sometimes people die in spite of the faith of those involved. Like Jane. That's a hard pill to swallow, and it challenges our faith. It certainly challenged mine. And it tore little Amy to shreds.

My advice: Children should not be forced to make adult decisions. Don't involve them in life and death fasts. It places way too much responsibility on small shoulders.

Once the newness of the funeral wore off, we settled into a new routine. I was able to extend our stay at the house (more on this later.) I received \$250,000 from a life insurance policy I had on Jane. This saved me financially. I was able to pay off all of our debts with enough left over to build another house.

Carrie tried her best to carry on as the mother figure. She did a great job. I gave her a car and money and permission to leave Wasatch High at any time for emergencies. The kids went back to school. We had a lot of family activities and home evenings. And the activities at Church and concern from the members were terrific. I remained second counselor in the bishopric.

After about a month, we were grinding out a home evening on a winter night and everybody was down. I perked up and said, "Hey, let's go to Hawaii for a week!" The kids all cheered. So, we packed up and went to Hawaii – four days in Oahu and three in Kawaii. We had a great time. That held us over for vacations until we went to Lake Powell the following summer.

I was depressed. The excitement of Jane's death and funeral were behind me, and I felt terribly empty and alone. The kids were great, but they were no substitute for a wife. And I had no interest whatsoever in other women, even though some well-intentioned sisters in the ward made their move. Some friends brought their single daughters over meet me. It was hilarious. Henry Kohler introduced me to his worn-out, hard-core tattooed daughter with purple hair. No, thanks.

I had a hard time finding a good reason to get out of bed in the mornings. I found a few projects around the house, and I was looking for another house in the valley to rent. I was really down and out. I bought a brand-new truck to cheer myself up – a 1986 Ram-50. The cheer lasted one day.

New House

After a couple of months, I woke up and told myself to snap out of it. My self-pity wasn't serving anyone. This was the beginning of April. My primary task was to find alternate housing for me and the kids, so I decided to build a log house on the ten acres Jane and I purchased. I had enough money if I did the work myself. I had five months to make it livable.

I drew a house plan by hand on graph paper and got a building permit. I couldn't believe the county gave me one. The house was 24' wide and 50' long with a full, walk-out basement. That gave me 2,400 square feet to work with. I subbed out the excavation and concrete work and Brent Hill dug the trenches for my septic tank and drain field with his backhoe. Grant Olson helped me with plumbing and electrical. I hired John Weaver, who was just off his mission, to help me. He basically moved into our house for five months. John and I put in 12-hour days, six days a week until we finished. Oh, we had fun together. It was exactly what I needed. I forgot my troubles and built something. The creative process was exhilarating.

Working so hard, I lost 40 pounds. I was slim, tan and in the best shape of my life. More important, I was excited about life again.

The only problem with building a house was it took me away from the kids during the day. They were pretty much on their own. We slipped in a lot of church activities, water skiing and Lake Powell trips, but I should have been more attentive in their time of mourning. They needed a mom.

“Yahoo, Forty Two!”

John and I were working on the roof of the new house on my birthday, June 2, 1987. We were unloading sheeting off my flatbed trailer onto the roof. When we finished, I jumped about six feet down from the roof to the empty trailer and screamed, “Yahoo, Forty Two!” That became my new mantra and the family battle cry on our trips to Lake Powell. The kids and I have been saying it ever since – especially as they each turn 42.

Chapter 15

Miracles

I had five challenges in the 1980s that were miraculously resolved:

- The trustee of the ICH bankruptcy was suing me for half-million dollars.
- The FBI wanted to convict me as part of the ICH Ponzi scheme.
- Two years of unpaid income taxes were looming over me.
- Jane's dream house was killing me financially.
- I wanted a wife and a mother for my children after Jane passed.

I get tired just looking at the list. I tackle each issue in order below.

ICH Bankruptcy

ICH took in about \$30 million before it was shut down. The company spent much of that money chasing high-risk/high-return deals all over the world. About \$5 million of that money was paid to agents, like me, as commissions to keep the scheme going. I received about half a million from the company over a two-year period.

Since ICH was ruled a fraud, the trustee of the bankruptcy tried to recover those commissions under the theory that the money was stolen and should be returned to those who lost it. Makes perfect sense. Thus, Bill Fowler, the attorney assigned as the trustee, was suing 109 agents for all their commissions. He also sued about 5,000 investors who received any interest payments.

If I knew that recovered money would be returned to the victims of the crime, I would have sold everything and given it to Fowler. But he made a fatal admission early in the proceedings. Fowler stated in open court that none of the money he recovered would ever reach the victims of the

crime. All the money would go to pay his attorney fees and court costs. He was recovering money solely for himself. So, there were two crimes – the original fraud by ICH and the legalized robbery by the lawyers and the government on the back end. Many investors lost all they had and still had to pay Fowler. The system stinks.

I used the commissions I received to pay for our house in Midway. When ICH went bankrupt, I mortgaged the house for \$250,000. I used half of that money to pay back my mother and siblings who had money in ICH under my name. I had personally guaranteed they would get all their money back. I used the rest of the money to take care of Jane and cover living expenses.

Bill Fowler was the consummate bottom-feeding lawyer -- small, feisty and mean. And he was relentless. The law was on his side, and he knew it. None of us had a chance. Of course, we didn't know that, so we fought back. I hired my own bankruptcy attorney to answer his written complaints and represent me in court.

Man, did I get an education.

Fowler was suing all 109 agents as a group, so we had huge hearings in front of the bankruptcy judge as each defendant made his case. The gallery was always packed with agents and attorneys, trying to pick up pointers for their own defense. I attended many of these hearings.

I made a keen observation.

Every single attorney for the defendants who argued against Fowler went down in flames. They never made a dent in his attack, and the judge was brutal in his rulings. The only defendants that got any consideration from the judge had no attorneys. They argued their own cases. They call this pro se. The judge was very kind to them. So, I fired my attorney and went it alone.

By the way, conventional wisdom says a pro se attorney has a fool for a client.

I eventually lost and had a judgment against me for the full amount. But even though I lost the war, I won two battles along the way. They were glorious, because I made a fool out of the great Bill Fowler in open court. I love these stories.

A few days before my own hearing, I dismissed my attorney and prepared my own arguments. I was ready for bear. At the hearing, I was at the defendant's table. Fowler was at the plaintiff's table about three feet away. We appeared before the Honorable Judge Allen.

The judge asked who I was and if I was prepared. So far so good. Fowler immediately jumped up and asked the judge for a point of order. Then he went on a rant. This is the gist of what he said:

“Your Honor, Mr. Toronto is here appearing pro se. He has a perfectly capable attorney who has responded to all the motions in this matter, yet his attorney is not here. Mr. Toronto has not filed the proper notices to release his lawyer, so he is appearing illegally. He is wasting the court's time and should be dismissed forthwith.”

Fowler was huffing and puffing in his finest courtroom voice.

The judge turned to me and asked, “Mr. Toronto?” I simply said, “Your Honor, I did file the paperwork. I believe Mr. Fowler is holding it in his hand.”

Fowler looked in his folder, and his face turned beet red. You could almost see steam coming out of his ears. The papers were there. Oh, he was embarrassed.

Judge Allen tore Fowler a new rear end. As an experienced lawyer, he made a sophomoric mistake. The judge excoriated him for a couple of minutes and ended with, “Mr. Fowler, you are the one wasting the court’s time.” About twenty observers applauded.

It was sweet. But after the arguments, I lost. My only option was to appeal the lower court’s decision to the supreme court.

After a few months, I had an appointment for my appeal before the Honorable Judge Winder of the Utah supreme court. This was in November of 1987. I was married to Suzy at the time, so a lot had happened along the way.

I had a whiz-bang defense all memorized. I was going to rip the system apart with my appeal. The system was not fair, and I was going to do my best to challenge it.

Again, Fowler was sitting at the opposing table in the courtroom, and the gallery was filled with agents and attorneys in the same boat.

I argued that the system was rigged. I presented direct quotes from Fowler that none of the money would ever reach the victims of the crime. I talked about the double nature of the crime and that the courts were complicit in hurting the little guy.

Then I ended with this mic-drop declaration:

“Your honor, if this system were fair, and the money returned to the victims, I’d be first in line to pay my share. But I’ll be damned if I’ll roll over just so this asshole can line his pockets!”

(As my father would say, “Excuse the French.”)

The gallery erupted in cheers. Fowler jumped up and yelled, "Objection!" The judge was chuckling.

When things settled down, Judge Winder admonished me for my language. Then he said, "Mr. Toronto, I agree with everything you said. The system is not fair and it allows men like Mr. Fowler to take advantage of it. But our opinions don't matter. I have to follow the law, and the law says you must pay. The only way to change it is to pass new legislation in congress."

I lost. But I succeeded in making Fowler look like a snake. It was worth it. I've never been so disgusted with another human being.

Fowler's goal was to get the money or inflict bankruptcy, so I filed for bankruptcy. Normally, people declaring bankruptcy have a long list of debts that need to be discharged. Not me. The legal process for ICH drug on for six years. I settled all my debts early on, and those payments were beyond the statute of limitations. Fowler couldn't touch them. I was out of debt and had no real assets. I listed a single half-million-dollar judgement on my filing. We had a hearing in front of Judge Allen again, and poof! The judgement was dismissed. Not a penny to Fowler. The system worked for me after all.

The FBI

I should have handled the FBI differently. I caused myself a lot of unnecessary grief by siding with ICH. But Ken and Barry were my friends, and I trusted them. The only bad guy was Dick Cardall, the brains behind the scheme. My rebellious nature worked against me.

It all started at a wedding breakfast for my niece, Julianne Miller. We had a nice meal after the marriage at the historic Lion House in Salt Lake City. Jane and I were sitting at a table with Loren Brooks, my common brother-in-law. I'd

never met him before. He asked me what I did for a living. I told him I was a professor at BYU. He perked right up and asked if I knew Russell Bishop, another professor at the Y. I said, “Sure, Russ and I are good friends.” We were more than friends. Russ was my primary sub-agent working for ICH. Loren handed me his card and asked me to call him as soon as I could. He was the senior FBI investigator for white-collar crime in Utah.

I called Loren the next day. He told me Russell was an agent with ICH, a company they were investigating for fraud. I played dumb. He told me all about Dick Cardall and the Ponzi scheme. He said they were on the verge of raiding the office and shutting it down. He had no idea I was an insider.

All of a sudden, I was sitting on a hot piece of information.

The next day, I went to the ICH office and reported what I had learned. Dick put me on speaker phone with their attorney. Of course, the phone was tapped. I looked guilty as sin and made a fool out of Brooks. I can't blame him for being angry.

As stupid as this was, I got stupider.

The very next day, Loren Brooks and his partner appeared at our house in Highland unannounced. They came to interrogate and intimidate. Jane was there and joined me for the 10-minute interview. They wanted me to spill my guts and give them all the records I had. I refused. Loren said I could either talk to them now or talk to the grand jury later. I told him I'd take my chances with the grand jury.

Here's my favorite part:

The four of us were sitting in the living room. Toward the end of our discussion, the second agent put his ankle up on his knee, exposing the gun he had strapped to his leg.

He asked, “How can you possibly be a professor at BYU, the Lord’s University, and be mixed up in a criminal enterprise like ICH?”

Jane, who had been quietly observing, came out of her chair like a momma bear. “Are you impugning my husband’s integrity!!!? How dare you!!!?”

You should have seen their eyes. They were like little boys, caught with their pants down. Jane demanded they leave and escorted them to the front door. As they were stepping off the porch, she yelled, “And take that stupid gun off your leg!”

I never loved her more.

A week later, I got the subpoena to appear before the grand jury. I hired the best criminal attorney in Salt Lake City, Rod Snow. After hearing my complete story, he told me I had two choices. I could take the fifth and say nothing, or I could tell everything I knew. There was no middle ground. He could see I was innocent and recommended I tell them everything. I spent an entire day spilling my guts to the grand jury.

Then the FBI investigation went into high gear. The agents were mad at me for jerking them around, and they were determined to prove I lied to the grand jury. That meant jail time. They looked into every transaction I made and talked to everyone I did business with. And they spread lies about me, trying to dig up dirt.

I received a call from EC in New Mexico. “Do you know what they’re saying about you down here?” They were telling people I had a criminal record, and that I had a sordid history of securities fraud. I called my attorney, and he got them to stop. I found out what they did is perfectly legal. They can lie. I can’t. Go figure.

After a month, Rod Snow called me. He said the U.S attorney and the FBI wanted to meet. So Rod and I met at the federal building with the US District Attorney and Loren Brooks.

The DA said, “We think you lied to the grand jury.”

I said, “OK, let’s hear it.”

He pulled out about ten contracts for investments into ICH that I had written. He handed them to me one at a time and asked if they were mine. I said, “Yes.” He asked me to look at the dates. They were all between August 16 and August 25.

He said, “You told the grand jury you stopped taking money for ICH on August 15th. These were all written after that date.” He was holding my grand jury transcript in his hand.

I said, “May I see that transcript?” He handed it to me.

I looked at the highlighted part and said, “It says here I stopped taking money ‘around’ August 15th. What part of the word ‘around’ don’t you understand?”

Rod Snow was smiling ear-to-ear.

The DA went on to tell me what other investors said I claimed in my sales pitch. I denied it all. They were obviously lying again – trying to fluster a confession out of me. That was all they had.

I exploded. “I can’t believe you called me in for this fishing expedition. You have spread unbelievable lies about me and spent thousands of dollars trying to catch me in a lie. I came clean with you in the grand jury. If this ever happens again, I’ll take the fifth and you can go to hell!”

Walking away from the meeting, Rod gave me an A-plus for my performance. But he said, “You probably shouldn’t have made that little speech at the end.”

The DA indicted the top 12 people in the organization. I was number 13. Another miracle. The DA used me as his first witness at their trial. But I didn’t help him much. He asked me to give the company sales pitch to the jury. When I finished, they were all nodding their heads in approval. The judge said, “Mr. Toronto, you have almost convinced me to invest.” The defendants were ecstatic. The DA was fuming.

The trial lasted six months. Only three were convicted. Dick Cardall died in prison. Ken and Barry each served two years.

Geeze! What an experience.

The IRS

Ken and Barry were way into tax avoidance and deemed themselves to be experts on offshore trusts – all originating in the Cayman Islands. All you had to do was sign some trust documents and open a local bank account in the name of the trust. The money in that account was tax free if you followed a few rules. Woohoo!

The boys were very persuasive, and the appeal was huge. Imagine, no more taxes. Many of their followers, including me, paid \$5000 each for these offshore trusts. I bought two.

So from 1980 to 1982 I made tons of money and filed no income tax returns. But it gets more complicated. I was also into barter. I was trading diamonds for land, pinball machines for houses, and bartering script for food, trips and boats. It was a wild, wild time. And I took no precautions to keep records, because I thought I was immune from taxes.

All that weighed on my mind. I knew deep inside it wasn't right and felt like the hammer was about to fall. My wishful thinking finally caved into reality, so I started looking for advice.

The greatest guru of the tax protest movement was a female attorney in Missoula, Montana. She won more cases against the IRS than everyone else put together. I made an appointment to see her. Jane and I loaded up the diesel Rabbit with our ski stuff and headed north. We stopped at Targhee on the way home for a little getaway.

Our meeting with the attorney was disappointing. She listened to my story and looked over my trust documents. She said, "Go home and pay your taxes. You have no chance of winning a court case against the IRS."

Then I called Marty Shaeffer, whose best friend, Jim Hart, was a tax attorney. I went to meet them in Clovis. Jim looked over my trusts and said they were not worth the paper they were written on. He told me to go home and file amended returns for the years I missed.

With that double advice, I hired the best tax attorney in Salt Lake City. My records were largely non-existent, so I just told him about the money and barter over the past two years. He took lots of notes. He said my records were such a mess, they would develop a theory for an amended tax return and try to sell it to the IRS. The chance of a full audit was 100%. He felt like my tax bill would be around \$200,000. Of course, I didn't have that kind of money. I submitted \$40,000 with my amended returns and waited for the audit.

About two years later, I got the dreaded call from the IRS. I made an appointment for the audit at the attorney's office. The lawyers would manage the auditor and explain the theory. It was scheduled on a Wednesday at 9am.

I showed up at the appointed time on pins and needles. The auditor was late. We waited half an hour – then an hour. No agent. At 10am, my attorney called the IRS. He came back shaking his head. My auditor showed up at IRS headquarters at 8am and handed in her resignation – just walked out the door. They had no one else to fill in. My attorney was disappointed. He had been grooming her on the phone for his theory, and he thought he had her convinced. Now she was gone, and we had to start all over again. He said all we could do was wait for another call.

Two more years went by. I was in the middle of the Jane cancer saga and in desperate financial condition. I got a call from the IRS. Holy smoke, what else could go wrong?

The agent introduced himself as Walter Chang – friendly as could be. He wanted to meet and go over my taxes. I said, “Let me get hold of my attorney to arrange an audit. He said, “Don’t worry about that. You don’t need an attorney. In fact, I think you have a refund coming. I’ll be in Orem tomorrow to visit my mother. Let’s just meet at your coin shop at noon. Do you have a room with a table I can use for a couple of hours?” I was totally confused and afraid. After stammering a bit, I said, “Okay, see you tomorrow.”

Walter showed up right on time. He was an older Asian-American – slight build. He was carrying a cardboard box which contained my records. I had an overwhelming feeling of doom, but he was cheerful as could be. I showed him to my office. He said, “I just need a couple of hours to go over some of these documents. I will have some questions about them. Then I’ll get busy processing your refund.”

I closed the door and left him in the office. I stood there scratching my head. This had to be a setup. I was sure the SWAT team was going to swoop in and haul me away any second.

Waiting for Walter was the longest two hours of my life. He finally opened the door and invited me in. He asked me a few questions about several deductions and recalculated some numbers on his machine. Then he said, “You’re getting all your money back plus interest. The total comes to \$43,522.”

I’m in total shock.

He continued, “Plus, I’m writing you a letter that prohibits the IRS from ever auditing these returns again.”

Blink...blink...blink. This has to be a dream.

But he wasn’t finished. “I’m giving you another letter for the Utah State tax commission. If you can get this to them by tomorrow noon, they’ll refund all your state income tax – about ten thousand dollars.”

At this point, I’m ready to pass out. Talk about hitting the jackpot. I woke up broke and ended the day with \$50K in my pocket. I was, truly, dumbfounded.

I couldn’t stand the suspense. I said, “Walter, you have totally destroyed all the pre-conceived notions I had about the IRS. Did you see the \$125,000 deduction I took for payments to my family without a single document?” He said, “Yes. I accepted that.” I continued, “Did you look at all the barter transactions I made without documentation?” He said, “Yes. Those were pretty much a wash.”

I finally asked, “Why are you doing this?”

He explained.

“First, every month for the entire two-year period, you reported more income than I could account for on paper. That looks good. In fact, you reported one \$20,000 cash payment twice.”

“Second, your tithing payments have been very consistent over the past 20 years. They lined up perfectly with what you claimed on these returns. I don’t think you cheated.”

“Third, and most important, you broke those stupid offshore trusts and paid your taxes. I’m the senior fraud investigator in this region. I can smell a skunk a mile away. Twelve of you at ICH created those trusts. You are the only one to come clean. The rest are still clinging to those phony documents. I am personally going to throw every one of those bastards in jail.”

Wow. My head was swimming. As he walked out the front door, Walter shook my hand and said, “I know your wife is dying. Hope this helps.”

I stood there in tears for the longest time, mulling it over. The first agent quit the very day my audit was scheduled. Then a white knight shows up in my greatest hour of need to forgive my sins and return the money. That’s a lot to chew on. Don’t tell me it’s not a miracle.

The House

Jane and I loved Midway. In 1980, we bought a three-acre lot on Stringtown Road and built a spectacular log home on it. I was making lots of money, so we paid cash for construction over a six-month period – about \$300,000. We loved everything about it.

In 1981, ICH went bankrupt, and the money stopped rolling in. I went to Utah Valley Bank in Orem and took out a \$250,000 mortgage on the house. I needed the money to fulfill obligations I had with my family. Payments were \$2,500 per month. That was a lot of money in the early eighties. Most house payments were around \$500.

I faithfully made house payments for four years. I worked hard and sold assets to make ends meet. But those payments became more and more difficult, especially when Jane got sick. We decided to sell the house and find a more affordable place. In 1985 I listed the house for \$300,000. But the market was weak, and no one was interested. I lowered the price to \$250,000 just to break even. Still no lookers.

I finally reached a point where I could not continue making payments. I visited the bank and met with the manager. I handed him a check for \$2,500 and told him that was my last payment. I simply couldn't afford to continue. I said I would be happy to sign the house over to the bank or let them foreclose if that were more advantageous.

The manager was astounded. He said nobody ever comes to them ahead of time with such an offer. Most people simply stop paying and drag out the foreclosure process until they are evicted. Under those conditions, I could have stayed in the house for a year or two.

He asked if I tried to sell the house. I told him about my dismal efforts. He said, "Let me try to sell it. I'll lend you an additional \$20,000. We'll apply that money as advanced payments on the original loan for eight months. If it doesn't sell, we'll buy the house for the amount of the loan." I was thrilled – eight more months in the house for free. Nice guy.

The real estate market was bad. The house didn't sell. After eight months, the manager stopped by with the paperwork. With the stroke of a pen, I gave the house to the bank and wiped out a \$270,000 debt. It felt so good. The weight of the world was off my shoulders.

But the story gets better. The manager asked me to stay in the house until it sold. He knew I would maintain it. He asked for \$500 per month rent. What an incredible blessing!

Over the next six months, we showed the house a few times, but nobody bought it. I found a couple of houses to rent, just in case we had to move.

Jane was getting worse.

It was mid-November, 1986 – two months before Jane died. Two gentlemen in fancy suits knocked on our door. I invited them in. They informed me that they were the new owners of Utah Valley Bank. They were cancelling my rental agreement and wanted me out of the house immediately.

I told them no. I needed a few more months. They were obnoxiously insistent and threatened eviction.

I said, “Look. My wife is dying of cancer. I have four children under the age of 15. Good luck evicting me from this house in the middle of winter. I will gladly move out after my wife passes. But Jane WILL die in her dream house.”

They sat there red faced and frustrated. They reluctantly agreed. They placed a huge new For Sale sign in front of the house.

Jane’s funeral was on January 29th, 1987. We had just finished a wonderful dinner at the church. The whole family was at the house visiting and planning. It was late afternoon.

The doorbell rang. A very nice man was inquiring about the house. He was from California and just happened to see the For Sale sign as he drove by.

I invited him in. As soon as he entered the foyer, he saw the people gathered in the living room and kitchen. I explained that I had just buried my wife at the Midway cemetery, and this was a family gathering. He was mortified and apologized profusely. He said he would come back in a few weeks when he returned to Utah.

As he turned to leave, I grabbed his arm. I looked him straight in the eye and said, "Sir...there is nothing more important to me right now than showing you this house." I'm certain he saw the desperation in my eyes. He reluctantly agreed, so I gave him the tour. He immediately bought the house from the bank for \$180,000. What a steal!

But the miracle continues. It was February, and the new owner was not going to occupy the house until September – eight months later. He didn't want to leave the house vacant, and he knew I'd take care of it. He asked me to stay in the house. All he wanted was \$150 per month to cover property taxes.

This fine man literally handed me time to grieve and build another house.

I'm shaking my head in disbelief as I recount this story. I'm convinced that an unseen hand kept people from buying our home for two years just so Jane could die in her dream house. Then on THE DAY OF THE FUNERAL, my hero appears out of nowhere, buys the house and hands me almost a year's free rent.

It had to be because of Jane. She deserved it.

Suzy

While I was grieving over Jane and building my new house in Midway, Susan Camille Cyrocki Ivie was on the other side of the mountain in her own boiling caldron. She was a very successful hair stylist at the age of 29. She owned her own salon in Orem and was Donny Osmond's personal hair stylist. She even did hair for the movie, Footloose, starring Kevin Bacon.

Suzy and her husband adopted an infant son, Chase, four years earlier. Suzy's marriage was falling apart. She kicked her husband out of her house in Highland and was waiting the requisite 90 days for the divorce to finalize.

In July and August of 1987, I was lean and mean after working so hard on the house. I was feeling my oats and frisky. You know, "Yahoo, forty-two." And the kids needed a mother figure in their lives. So, I went on a few dates.

Friends were setting me up right and left. I couldn't believe how sad and desperate these women were. I was very disappointed. Jane had been a such a dynamic package of intelligence, drive and integrity, it wasn't even close.

Claire Provost was in my ward. At a salmon cookout, he told me about Suzy Ivie – his wife's hair stylist. He gave me the same old story about how great she was, so I gave her a call.

Here's where it gets interesting.

Suzy was in her home, getting her four-year-old son ready for bed. Chase was missing his daddy, who had been expelled from the house. He was a good father. They were kneeling at Chase's bedside for evening prayers.

Chase innocently prayed that Heavenly Father would send them a new daddy. Just then, the phone rang. It was me. No kidding!

I asked Suzy if she'd like to go to dinner. She told me her divorce was not final until the end of July and that she would not date until that time. I can still hear her voice. "Then I would love to spend an evening with you."

I thought Suzy had just blown me off, so I didn't bother calling back.

A month later, Claire pinned me to the wall at church in a near panic. "You need to call Suzy now. She's dating a lot, and she won't last long. She's perfect."

So, I called and set up our first date – August 22, 1987. Truth be told, Suzy broke another date that night to go out with me. The Provosts had been talking me up.

We went to Market Street Grille in Salt Lake City. I thought that was cool, but it turns out that almost all of Suzy's other first dates were at Market Street Grille. It was the yuppy place to go. She was kind enough not to tell me.

For some reason, Cindy, who just turned 12, smelled love in the air. Though she'd never met Suzy, she was so excited about my date. I came out of my bedroom, all dressed up, and she said, "Noooo. You are NOT wearing that shirt!" I thought it was pretty cool. But she nixed it hard. It turned out I had nothing cool to wear. I just didn't know it. I was a seedy professor who dressed like an old man. That was about to change.

I picked Suzy up at her house in my mini pickup truck. At least it was new and clean. Turned out I was competing with younger men who drove Corvettes, BMWs and Mercedes. There was no way to make that truck look good.

Suzy answered the door. She was drop-dead gorgeous – short blonde hair, tall, shapely and dressed to kill. I was awe-struck. She was so far beyond the other women I had dated.

She asked me in and introduced me to Chase, her four-year-old. He was sitting on the floor by the coffee table. On it were at least one-hundred toy airplanes, all lined up in neat little rows. I said, “Hey, son. How you doing?” Suzy was shocked that I called him son.

We got in my crappy little pickup and headed to Salt Lake. One of the first things we talked about was age. I was 42, she was 29. I asked her, “Aren’t I a little old for you?” She replied, “It doesn’t bother me, does it bother you?” I was quick to answer, “Not at all.”

The whole night we spent sharing each other’s lives. She told me about Reese, Chase and her divorce. I told her about Jane, the kids, cancer and grief. I even cried a little. It was quite a catharsis and a long, long way from the regular first-date small talk. We really clicked.

I got home fairly late. Cindy was anxiously waiting for me at the door. “Did you kiss her?” I said, “no.” She cried, “Nooooo. You have to kiss her! She won’t marry you if you don’t kiss her.” It was the cutest thing I’ve ever seen. Maybe she was right. I was playing it cool.

I was new to dating and didn’t know about proper protocol. I didn’t want to appear too anxious, so I waited a full week to call Suzy. Turns out, I should have called the next day to say what a great time I had. She thought I had blown her off.

I called a week later and asked Suzy to come to the house for dinner and meet the kids. I picked her up at home in Highland and drove to Midway. I whipped up some cheese quesadillas for a quick bite, and we all went to Deer Creek

to water ski. We had a great time. Suzy was wonderful with the children. She fell in love with them immediately. Cindy was obnoxiously clingy, and Suzy was all over it.

I didn't know it at the time, but Suzy had a complete hysterectomy at age 22, so she couldn't bear children. The doctor told her she would never have children. She was determined to prove him wrong, so she adopted Chase. Now here in front of her were four broken and needy kids – the opportunity to step in and fulfill her dream of a large family.

I kissed her that night, and the courtship was full on. After another date or two, I asked Suzy to join the kids and I on our trip to Lake Powell the following week. Oren would be tagging along. She agreed.

Lake Powell cemented our relationship. We were madly in love. We decided to get married, but we were scared to death. We had only known each other three weeks, so we did what we could to reduce the uncertainties.

We had lots of mutual acquaintances, so we talked to them all. It was amazing how many times our paths crossed without meeting. Suzy had a bevy of hair clients from BYU who knew me. They gave positive reports, which helped her relax a little.

We fasted and prayed and went to the Jordan temple, seeking confirmation. We got an amazing and strong positive answer.

Without consulting Suzy, I called her father, John Cyrocki in Florida. Suzy talked about how over-protective he was throughout her divorce, so I expected some resistance to my proposal. I was sure he would say “no” or, at least, ask me to wait. It was a sweet conversation. Suzy had already told him about me and the family.

After a little small talk, I told John I was going to ask Suzy to marry me. He did not object – blew me away. He figured since I was a widower with children and in the bishopric, I must be OK. More confirmation.

Suzy was astounded that I took the initiative to call her dad. And she was more amazed that he did not object.

I talked to each of the children individually about marrying Suzy. I tried to warm them up to the idea. Carrie and Amy were not so sure. Cindy jumped up and down and squealed in excitement. Will didn't care. I didn't expect the children to readily approve. It's confusing and risky to bring another woman into the family circle, especially so fast. But it wasn't their decision to make. I knew it was right for all of us. I needed a wife, and they needed a mother. I was going to proceed, regardless of how they felt. I was confident things would work out.

As smitten as we were with each other, we didn't just jump willy-nilly into the fire like most people thought. There was a great deal of research, logic and prayer behind our decision.

Suzy was determined not to repeat the mistakes of her first marriage. She knew where she'd gone wrong, and she knew that most women marry the same kind of guy over and over again. So she made a list of ten requirements that a man must meet before she would go out with him. Her list included church activity, education, stable employment, no divorce and so on. I met all her requirements but one. I was not employed and was on the verge of bankruptcy. But I had an education, assets, and motivation, which put her at ease.

I was impressed that Suzy had such a list and was sticking to it. It showed that she valued herself and acted on principle. Very attractive. It also meant she was dating some pretty good guys.

Suzy was the only woman I dated who was not desperate. She owned her home and had a very successful business. She was making a wonderful life for herself and her son without a man. She was fully prepared to go it alone and never marry, if it came to that. Such independence was also attractive.

Plus she was active and passionate about the Church. That was high on my list.

Last of all, Suzy was dating some young, handsome, sophisticated rich guys. She could have had any one of them, but she chose me – an older, frumpy widower in a pickup truck who didn't know how to dress or date. And I had four kids. I still don't get it. But it showed she was acting solely on principle...not greed... not security... not social status. Her motives were pure.

Bottom line: Suzy was smart, independent, principled, righteous and beautiful. And she loved me. In my mind, I had no choice. She was the answer to my prayer on that cold winter day at the Midway cemetery when Lord whispered, "Take care of your family, and I'll take care of you."

She was the one.

Chapter 16

A New Companion

We wanted to get sealed in the temple, but there were complications. Suzy was sealed to her first husband, Reece, and that had to be cancelled. We didn't understand the rules, so we met with Wayne Probst, our stake president. He laid out the process for us. We couldn't be sealed for at least another year. Wayne advised us to get married civilly first and sealed after Suzy's cancellation to Reece was approved by the First Presidency.

It was Sunday night, September 20. Suzy and I were discussing the best date for our civil marriage. We talked about Christmas, then we talked about Thanksgiving, then we talked about Halloween. I finally said, "How about tomorrow?" Without hesitation, Suzy said, "I have to work tomorrow, but I can do it Tuesday?" That was September 22, exactly one month from our first date.

In a mad rush, I called Wayne Probst and asked him to perform the civil marriage at my house in Midway. I invited EC, Steve and Jean Brown, Brent and Audrey Hill and Oren to the ceremony. Of course, the children were there.

I was a little nervous about inviting EC, Jane's sister – because the marriage was so rushed. But she was kind and gracious, as usual, and made Suzy feel accepted and loved. That was very significant for Suzy, and she's never forgotten it.

You gotta love EC.

As a cute side note, when EC got home to Clovis, her husband, Marty, asked her if she was jealous, since Jane was her sister. She answered, "No. But you will be." Suzy was stunningly beautiful inside and out.

So we were married September 22, 1987 in front of our grand piano in the log home I'd built. A few close friends and family were there. Wayne performed a quick ceremony and boom! It was done. My head was swimming.

We took off immediately for our cabin in the woods. Brent Hill let us use his place at Strawberry Lake for our wedding night. It was incredibly nice and very romantic.

When we arrived, Suzy went upstairs to unpack while I stayed on the main floor to start a roaring fire in the fireplace. I had to split some logs in the garage for kindling. As I was pushing the axe head into one of the logs, it split wide open and my hand went flying into the crack. It peeled my index finger to the bone – about a two-inch gaping wound that was spewing blood. It was bad. In blinding pain, I ran to the kitchen and grabbed a hand towel.

Suzy had no idea what was going on. She heard me calling, and ran to the landing at the top of the stairs. I was kneeling on the floor, head to the ground with a bloody towel wrapped around my finger, trying not to throw up.

How's that for romantic?

Suzy drove me 20 miles down Daniel's Canyon to the Heber Valley Hospital emergency room in her wedding dress. My finger took seven stitches. The doctor on call thought the circumstance was hilarious. We didn't get back to Brent's cabin until 2am. What a way to start our life together!

We spent our honeymoon at Cozumel, off the coast of Mexico in the gulf. We had a great little bungalow at the El Presidente Resort. What a fantastic week! Then we flew to Florida to meet Suzy's parents.

By the way, Suzy and I were sealed exactly one year after our civil marriage on September 22, 1988. Marvin J. Ashton performed the ceremony at the Salt Lake Temple. He assured us that the sealing was right and condoned by all parties on both sides of the veil.

Reality

When we got home, reality set in. We had merged two broken families with five damaged children. Suzy sold her house and moved into my house in Midway. We didn't want to disrupt the children's lives any more than we had to.

Suzy has always been, and will always be, the "Fix-it Fairy." She fixes everybody and everything all the time -- and she had a monstrous task ahead of her. She tried hard to be the mother to my children, and I tried to fill the role as Chase's father. None of it was easy.

Suzy started by remaking us all with new hair styles and new clothes. I've got to admit, she really spiffed us up. I liked my new look.



Suzy made sure the kids got to all their activities on time. Most significantly, Suzy made sure we had a wonderful hot family meal every day at 5:30pm. It was a religion for her. Nobody was ever excused or late for dinner. The children loved it. That stability was our anchor for the next 15 years. Such a steady hand is incredibly important.

Carrie, bless her heart, immediately accepted Suzy in her new role – called her “mom” from the start. She was so glad not to carry that burden anymore. She could finally be the kid.

Amy resented Suzy and was mad at me for marrying her. Cindy was gaw-gaw in love with her. And Will was just OK with it.

Willie as not thrilled about Chase, however. At one swoop, Will was not the youngest fair-haired child anymore. That’s a hard pill to swallow for an eight-year old. The boys did not get along, but the girls loved Chase and bonded with him immediately.

Chase had some trouble adjusting to his new life – especially to me, the new dad. His little world had been turned upside down. At the beginning, he didn’t understand why his real dad was gone, and why he couldn’t go back to his old house. And who was this big new jerk, telling him what to do all the time? Think about all that in the context of an innocent four-year-old’s mind. He was an emotional wreck, full of resentment and rebellion. Bless her heart, Amy took Chase under her wing. That helped a lot.

It didn’t help that by divorce decree, Chase spent every-other weekend with Reece, who reinforced all those conflicts. He’d come home from those visits, and we’d start all over again. Poor little guy was a ping-pong ball.

Chase ended up going full neg with me. It didn't matter what I said or what I asked for, the answer was always "no." This was really frustrating, especially when I was getting him ready for church or feeding him. It was a straight up power struggle.

Suzy in Midway

Moving Suzy into Jane's hometown was a mistake. As you can imagine, everybody was judging her. It was patently unfair and a true test of her character. Jane was five years older than I was, and Suzy was twelve years younger – a 17 year difference. The joke was that I turned my 40 in for a 20. She threatened all the women in town and all the men were jealous. One sister was so rattled, she made her husband promise he would never remarry if she passed away. We had a big impact on that community.

In retrospect, we should have moved somewhere else. It's a miracle our marriage survived.

Suzy tried so hard to fit in. She taught gospel doctrine at church, baked goodies for all the activities, participated in the local plays, and joined the book club. She even got her famous Mormon friends to come to Midway and conduct special firesides for the stake. Only a couple of women in my circle of friends accepted her. Living in Jane's shadow was very difficult.

Plus, she had to deal with the children. Carrie had multiple piano competitions, went to college and joined the Army. Amy was severely depressed. Cindy was going through some difficult teen years. Willie and Chase had their issues. I cover the details in my chapters on each child.

The fact is, Suzy bit off more than she could chew. That's her nature. But that's when her character shows through. She has an overly developed sense of responsibility, and she rose the occasion time and time again.



Not only that, in the middle of all this turmoil, we took on a Navajo foster child. Brenda escaped from a difficult life on the Navajo reservation at the age of 12. She ran to the missionaries for help. The church placed her with the Gertsch family in Midway. All was good until the Gertsch daughters graduated from high school and left home.

Suzy found Brenda in tears at church one day. They were sending her back to the reservation unless she could find another suitable family with teen-age daughters. Suzy snapped her right up.

Brenda was a wonderful addition to the family. She lived with us for two years in Midway and one year in Hayden Lake. She added some serious cultural diversity to our home. She calls us Mom and Dad to this day. Suzy is still rescuing Brenda by phone 30 years later.

For her service, the Navajo Nation bestowed their highest honor on Suzy. She was formally adopted into the tribe. Brenda was astounded. It's a big deal and rarely happens. Suzy can go to the Reservation at any time, and they are obligated to help her as though she were a native son. Not me – just her.

We call that Plan B. She's been ready to head to the reservation a few times.

Chapter 17

Professional Development

Shortly after Jane died, I left Alpine Coins. My partner, Dave Tischner had been giving me money as an absentee owner for a year, and it was time to move on. I had no idea what he'd been doing with the business. Since I had taken so much money without effort, I just gave it to him. All I wanted was the computer and the dog.

Distancing myself from Alpine Coins was one of the smartest things I ever did. That business was in serious trouble with the law, and it did not involve me.

During the first year of our marriage, I was busy finishing the house. We took money from the sale of Suzy's house and doubled the size of my original log home. We turned my rinky-dink cabin into a spectacular custom home. It was pretty cool. I hired Wayne Mitchell to do the heavy construction, and I did the finish work.

I was still involved in the gold and silver business. I had many customers who would only deal with me. That business inspires loyalty.

I was in Provo, selling some silver bars to Liberty Mint, a silver mint owned by Howard Ruff. His son, Larry, was president. Larry handed me the money for the bars and asked, "Do you want a job?" I was looking to increase my income and said, "sure."

Larry wanted me to build a nationwide dealer network for their products. The mint manufactured one-ounce silver rounds for bulk investments and beautiful mint-state collectors coins of all sizes. I was excited to try as I had dealer contacts all over the country. So, I went to work for Larry.

But Liberty Mint had a problem. They virtually had no cash and no silver to fund such a business. All they had were the equipment and skills to produce the coins. That's not enough.

In the dealer world, when you buy or sell bullion, both the metal and the cashier's check are expected to cross in the mail the next day. Time is of the essence. Any lag or delay is the kiss of death.

Larry was new to the trade. He thought he could take an order for the coins, get the money from the dealer up front, buy the necessary silver with their money, make the product, and then mail it out. The quickest turn-around time was two-weeks. There was no way that would work, and I told him so. There were too many other mints offering immediate delivery at the same price.

Larry gave me a desk in an office and told me to try until he found some money. I shared the office with Dave VanEtten, the mint's graphic artist. That, alone, was worth it. We became life-long friends.

One day, Larry handed us a two-page marketing letter for the "Presidential Proof Set." The set displayed the busts of famous US presidents on twelve spectacular two-ounce silver coins. They were mounted in a royal blue felt display case. The letter was over the signature of Howard Ruff and was to be mailed to 75,000 subscribers of "The Ruff Times."

Larry said, "Would you read this and tell me what you think? I'm passing it around the office."

I quickly read it and said, "This stinks."

Dave's head snapped up – eyes wide open. He was sitting right next to me. Larry's face turned red. I quickly realized he was the author.

He shot back, “Think you can do better?”

I said, “In my sleep.”

I went home that night and wrote a new marketing letter over Howard Ruff’s signature. I knew his style because I had been a life-long subscriber to his newsletter.

I showed up the next day with my version. Howard loved it. He immediately mailed it to all his subscribers.

A week later, I got a call from Howard. He congratulated me on a job well done. This letter sold \$80,000 in presidential sets in three days. Liberty Mint had not had a winning campaign for 18 months.

I immediately got promoted to head copywriter for Liberty Mint. I wrote all their campaigns for the next two years and continued working for Howard for two more years.

This was a game changer. All of a sudden, I was making money as a writer. The need in the financial and investment industry was huge. I left the gold and silver business behind.

Chapter 18

Hayden Lake

After four years in Midway, Suzy and I decided it was time to move. The kids were stale and Suzy was burned out. We wanted a fresh start where nobody knew us. Plus, I was pretty much a freelance writer. I could work anywhere.

We started looking for fun places to live. We were open to anything.

One day, Suzy showed me a postcard she received from Carolyn Rasmus, one of her most loyal clients. It was a beautiful scene of a mountain lake, surrounded by pine trees. A sea plane was taking off into a bright blue sky. The handwritten note on the back said, “This is the place.”

Carolyn knew we were looking. She went to Coeur d’Alene, Idaho as part of the Education Days faculty for BYU. This was a photo from the Coeur d’Alene Resort.

I took one look at the postcard and said, “That’s it. Let’s go.” That card struck us both to the core.

We drove to Coeur d’Alene to check it out. We fell in love with the area and contacted a realtor. We came home and immediately put our house on the market. As soon as it sold, we ran up to Idaho to find another house. The new owner allowed us to stay in the Midway home until he was ready to take possession. We rented it back from him for six months.

We wanted lake-front property in Idaho, but we only had \$250,000. We found a little 1950s house for sale on Hayden Lake – about 10 miles north of Lake Coeur d’Alene. It was on two building lots with 150 linear feet frontage and a lumbering old dock. The owner, Charlie Allen, was tired of paying property taxes on it.

The house started as a two-bedroom cabin. The entire inside was lined with cedar tongue and groove siding – even the ceilings. The cabin was added upon and added upon again. It ended up with four bedrooms and two baths. The sole source of heat on the main floor was a wood-burning stove.

The house was a mess. The counter tops were peeling off, the cedar cabinets were falling off their hinges, the bathrooms were moldy. There was grass growing on the roof because of sediment left over from the Mount Saint Helen's eruption.

We bought the house for \$210,000 – pretty much the cost of the land. It required a complete renovation.

We moved in stages. I enclosed my 20 foot flatbed trailer with plywood and pulled it with our Suburban. It was pretty shabby, but it worked. We drove it from Midway to Coeur d'Alene several times.

Suzu stayed in Midway with the children to finish the school year and clear out the house. They made two trips to Idaho. I stayed in Hayden Lake for the next six months to make the house inhabitable.

I hired Grant Olson from Midway to help me in Idaho. He was the crustiest old construction dude you can imagine – highly skilled and 70 years old. He agreed to work cheap. Best deal I ever made. He brought his wife, his tools and his RV to the property. I stayed in the house.

Grant and I tore that house apart. It needed everything. We added a master suite to the main floor. We re-wired and re-plumbed much of the house. We stripped the bathroom to bare wood and modernized it. I replaced the entire main floor with Saltillo tile. We put a new metal roof on the house.

The boat dock needed help as well. I replaced all the decking and built a side-by-side six and ten-foot diving platform on the dock. We worked twelve hours a day, six days a week.

This was one of the most enjoyable and satisfying times of my life. Remodeling an old cabin on a lake in North Idaho with a friend was exciting. I loved every minute of it.

We loved Hayden Lake right from the start. When Suzy and I first bought the house, we drove by the LDS church to see where it was. There were cars in the parking lot, so we stopped in to see what was going on. The Dalton Gardens Ward was having a dinner party. We walked in, introduced ourselves and told them we just bought a house near the church. They went wild. We've never been greeted with so much warmth and enthusiasm. We ate at the same table as Glen and Lynda Westover and instantly became lifelong friends.

In our final move, we drove three rigs to Idaho. I drove the Suburban, towing our 20-foot trailer, Amy drove the pickup, towing our boat, and Suzy drove her RX7. Every square inch was packed.

We spent our first night on the road at a Motel 6 in Pocatello. Unfortunately, our Suburban was burglarized in the parking lot overnight, and all of my gold coins were stolen. This loss of ten years of savings was a one of the most traumatic events of my life. I tell the entire story in Chapter 26 ([page 223](#)) and again in one of my Church talks entitled [“Hold on Thy Way”](#) (page 270).

That gold was part of our foundation. It was gone. Instead of having financial depth, we found ourselves living on the edge. This forced us to be very careful with money. Suzy was a budgeting genius and continued to feed us well on sale items and food storage. She made the girls dresses and shopped at Goodwill. It forced me to work harder and find

a better job. In retrospect, this tragedy turned into a blessing. We found financial success in Idaho, because we had to hustle.

Moving to Idaho was the best thing we ever did for our family. Suzy and I and the children all flourished in our new environment.

Everybody loved living on the lake with our boat, jet ski, canoe and windsurfer. We got sucked into the Church bigtime. The kids had immediate friends. There was a group of teenage boys in our ward that went nuts over Cindy and Amy. They hung out at the house almost every day. The missionaries visited us a lot. We became the “mission parents.” Suzy set a dinner table for 12 every night, and we fed them all.

We hit the ground running.

I was called as Young Men’s President. Suzy, at the age of 33, was called as Stake Relief Society President. Cindy ran for student body president of Coeur d’Alene High School and won. This newcomer knocked off the most popular boy at school for the office. Oh, we were proud of her.

Though the house was unfinished, we moved in – and it worked. Suzy and I slept on a mattress on the floor while I added a master bedroom downstairs. The kids shared bedrooms while I put up walls and fixed up the second story. Except for the new tile in the kitchen, the floors in the whole house were bare plywood. The old stinky carpet was the first thing to go, and we didn’t have enough money to replace it.

One day, Suzy had enough. She took off her wedding ring, a near-perfect one-karat diamond solitaire and asked, “How much can you get for this?”

I said, “\$5,000.” I bought the diamond for that amount from a jeweler friend of mine in Provo. He sold it to me at cost and said he would buy it back anytime.

Suzy said, “Sell it and get me some carpet.”

I sold the diamond and carpeted the house. You gotta love Suzy and her priorities. It helped that we replaced that one-karat diamond with a two-karat cubic zirconium. Cost \$50, and it looked much nicer. We’ve been zirc fans ever since.

Elephant Turds

When it turned cold that winter, we heated the whole house with a single wood burning stove in the living room – a pot of boiling water on top. It was cozy as could be. We kept that thing red hot all winter. Feeding it was a lot of work, so I gave that job to the boys.

We were using natural firewood as fuel and had a couple of cords stacked in the garage. The wood was dirty and buggy, and it messed up the area around the stove. It was impossible to keep the house clean.

Then I discovered Presto Logs – large manufactured pellets that were 16 inches long and six inches thick. They were compressed sawdust. A four-foot pallet produced a lot more heat than a full cord of wood for the same price. They burned evenly so you could time feeding. A single log lasted all night, and they were clean. We loved them.

Chase was eight years old by then. Along with Willie, we were unloading my truck and stacking Presto Logs in the garage.

Chase asked, “Dad, how do they make these things?”

Without flinching, I said, “It’s easy, son. They feed sawdust to elephants, These are elephant turds.”

He blinked a couple of times before he got the joke, but oh, it was funny. We all laughed and laughed.

So, “elephant turd” became a permanent part of the Toronto vernacular. We never called them logs again. Every day, Suzy or I would ask one of the boys to throw another elephant turd on the fire. The boys would let me know when the elephant turd supply was low, and we’d run to the store for another load of elephant turds. That went on for five years until we installed central heat. We still laugh about it.

Another Foster Child (sort of)

The Taylor family had eight children. One of the middle children was Chase’s age and kind of lost. He was pigeon toed and wore thick glasses. He and Chase became best friends, and he hung out at our house most of the time.

We took Devon in as one of our own. He slept with us, ate with us and went on day trips with us. We bossed him around and gave him chores, just like he belonged. He was our most obedient child.

Chase and Devon were inseparable. They spent every summer day on my full-size windsurfing board. It was a Norman Rockwell scene. They both stood erect on the board with canoe paddles and went all over Hayden Lake with amazing speed. Now realize, the lake was three miles wide and seven miles long. Oh, they had fun.

Devon has been part of our family ever since. He joins us for motorcycle trips and reunions. The whole family treats him like a brother and he was Chases Best Man at his wedding. And he’s far from goofy. He grew up to be the most handsome, intelligent, well-built athlete we’ve ever known. He’s still the first one of the kids to call Suzy and wish her Happy Mother’s Day.

Chapter 19

Employment

I continued to write marketing pieces for Liberty Mint until they closed shop in 1992. Then Howard Ruff hired me to write marketing copy for his new venture – a multi-level marketing organization based in San Francisco. He paid me \$5,000 per month. Plus, he flew me to San Francisco and put me up in a hotel every three weeks to work with his son, Larry. I enjoyed the travel and the work. The salary paid the bills. We were comfortable.

Howard's new venture failed in 1994, and I found myself unemployed. I did some freelance copywriting, but the money was sporadic. I started looking for a job.

Agency One

One day, I found a two-line ad in the local help-wanted section of the newspaper: "Marketing Director. Start \$20,000 per year." I was curious and called the number.

That's when I met Tony Paquin, a young entrepreneur who created and sold automation software for independent insurance agencies. He had just started up a company called "Agency One." He and his brother desperately needed a marketing copywriter but had no money.

Their sales proposition was strong. They were selling a complete agency automation system for one-tenth the cost of the major establishment systems. Their package cost \$2,000. Competitive systems were \$20,000 to \$40,000. Until they came along, smaller agencies simply couldn't afford to automate, and they couldn't compete with the big boys. Agency One filled a huge hole.

The business had five employees in a little cramped office downtown Coeur d'Alene. They were selling \$20,000 in new software per month and were stuck at that level. All of their sales came from telemarketing.

I showed Tony my resume and some sample marketing pieces. I told him I was worth \$100,000 per year. He said, "I can't afford you. I can only spare \$20,000."

I made Tony an offer. "Your revenue is stuck at \$20,000 per month. I'll write two marketing letters for you at no cost. Pay me 10% of any monthly revenue over \$20,000. You risk nothing if it fails, and I pay for myself if it works."

Tony jumped at the offer. It was a good deal for both of us.

These marketing letters worked like gangbusters. The first month sales doubled to \$40,000. I got a \$2,000 commission. Then they doubled again to \$80,000. I got \$6,000. Then sales soared to \$120,000. I got \$10,000.

Tony called me into the office. He said he could not continue paying me 10% of his monthly revenue. He offered me a salary of \$70,000 per year and 10% ownership in the company to stay on as VP of Marketing.

As a growing company, Agency One needed an in-house graphic artist. I called my old friend, Dave VanEtten in Utah and offered him the job. Tony loved him. Dave moved to Idaho, and we worked together for the next six years. We did some great marketing together.

In my first two years with the company, Agency One grew from 5 to 100 employees, and revenue approached ten million per year. Then we sold the company. Both Dave and I stayed on as the marketing department for the new company for about three more years.

Steve Weir

In 1995, I was busy as VP of Marketing at Agency One. We had about 50 employees and were growing like crazy.

One day I received a long-distance phone call from Poland – it was John Cyrocki, who was serving there as mission president. One of his best and beloved missionaries, Elder Weir, was coming home. He confided in his exit interview that he didn't want to return home to Arizona as there wasn't much there for him.

Gramps asked me if there was any way I could give Steve a job in Idaho. I talked to him on the phone. After a short conversation, I hired him – told him a job would be waiting for him as soon as he got to Idaho. I even bought him a plane ticket from Arizona.

Steve showed up a week later, carrying a small gym bag. It contained all his possessions. I showed him around the office and introduced him to my partners. I told him to return home, re-unite with his family, have his homecoming at church and come back. I would buy him another plane ticket. He took out his return ticket to Phoenix and tore it up. He said, "I'm here to stay. I want to start right now."

I've never seen anybody so broke or so motivated. We put Steve up in our guesthouse on the lake and fed him. Suzy bought him some new clothes. I loaned him \$2000 to buy an old Subaru. Steve worked hard and increased his income. He gave me nearly every cent of his paycheck for three months until his car was paid off. It's rare to find someone so thrifty.

We fell in love with Steve, and so did everyone else.

Amy called home from Cedar City, Utah where she was going to school. I jokingly told her, “Amy, I think I’ve found your husband.” No one is more skeptical than Amy, and she shrugged it off. But when she came home from school, sparks flew and she married Steve.

We are so pleased that he became our son-in-law.

Chapter 20

Church in Idaho

I started out as Young Men's President in the Dalton Garden's Ward. They called me the first week we lived in Hayden Lake.

I had a fantastic group of boys. Their favorite thing was to hang out at the Torontos and water ski. They helped me rebuild my dock and re-roof my house. Oh, we had a great time. And, of course, I taught them in quorum meeting every week.

After a couple of years, the ward split. We found ourselves in the newly formed Hayden Lake Second Ward. Roger Roth was bishop, I was first counselor, and Dennis Griffiths was second counselor. We built that ward from the ground up. We had great chemistry, and the ward hummed along.

Then I got called by our new Stake President, Ron McIntire, to be on the Stake High Council. He assigned me as High Counselor to the Kellogg Ward.

This was one of my favorite church experiences.

Kellogg was a depressed little town smack in the middle of mining country. It was a boom town for a hundred years until the Bunker Hill mine went broke and shut down. This threw thirty thousand men out of work. Anyone with skills or money moved out. Only the poor and depressed stayed on to grub out a living.

The ward reflected that sad story. They had a full-size chapel from the boom days, but the members were scarce and scattered. They only had five Melchizedek Priesthood holders and tons of destitute members. The bishop was largely on his own. There was lots of dissention in the ward. The stake president considered shutting it down.

I showed up in Kellogg and went to work. I've never felt so needed. I drove up there early every Sunday to attend bishopric meeting and help with church. Because they were so shorthanded, I was constantly giving a talk, teaching a class, or running the nursery. I even served as the ward pianist. I can play 10 hymns by heart. We sang them over and over. I went visiting with the bishop almost every week after church. Bishop Keller called me his "third counselor."

You love whom you serve, and I loved those humble people. And they took to me.

The highlight of the year was the Kellogg Ward party at the Toronto's home on Hayden Lake. Everybody showed up and swamped our house and dock. They came early and stayed late. And, of course, they left our house in shambles.

When I was released, the Kellogg ward threw a huge going-away party for me. The Relief Society presented me with a going-away quilt. It was sweet.

Bishop

After five years on the High Council, President McIntire called me as bishop of the Hayden Lake Second Ward. I was surprised, but honored to serve. The calling is usually for five years. I only served two, because we moved to Florida.

I had many, many sweet experiences with my members, but it was also a wild ride as I tried to do things right.

As bishop, I took the handbook seriously. It says a bishop should only do what he, alone, can do and delegate the rest. Most bishops try to do everything and end up killing themselves.

I called my Melchizedek priesthood leaders together and told them that if members' problems did not involve "sin or sustenance," they were to handle it. I fully empowered them to act in my stead. Anybody who came to me for marriage counseling or personal issues were referred to their quorum president. All I handled personally were confessions, financial assistance, the youth and widows. I'd been in bishoprics for 12 years, and no bishop ever limited himself like this. It was great, and the ward ran smooth as silk. My quorum presidents loved their callings.

In a bishop's training session, Boyd K. Packer stated, "Bishops, if you don't have at least five families mad at you all the time, you're probably not doing your job right." According to that metric, I was a good bishop. Bishops are gatekeepers, and their job is largely to say "no." Members are like children and keep pushing the limits for what they want. It's a tough job.

President McIntire assigned me to be the "transient bishop" in the stake, which meant I took care of members' needs who were just passing through the area. He gave me strict instructions on how to handle them. He warned me that that assignment would take up all my time and money if I were not careful. I followed his directions exactly. I was not popular with the transient bums that came through town almost every day, hitting the church up for handouts.

There are thousands of people traveling the US, sponging off compassionate bishops who feel sorry for them. And they talk to each other. At first, I received daily calls from traveling conmen. If I couldn't verify that they were actually members and talk to their previous bishops, I rejected them. Once in a while, I'd give a traveler \$20 out of my own pocket for gas, but I would not dip into the Lord's consecrated fast offerings except for deserving members.

After three months, the calls from transients completely stopped – never got another call in two years. Word got out in the traveling network that there were no free handouts in the Hayden Lake Stake, so the bums all went on to the next stake. President McIntire gave me a huge attaboy.

During the last six months of my service, Suzy and I were absent about every third Sunday while we attended art shows. They were our sole source of income. But I was in town during the week and kept up with all the activities and interviews. Once Chase was on his mission, we decided to move to Florida to take care of Suzy's parents. I asked to be released. It was a sweet farewell.

Chapter 21

Art Shows



I left the Paquins in 1999 and found myself unemployed again. I did some freelance copywriting, but it was not supporting our life-style.

Suzy decided to try to sell her art at art shows. She sold some of her fine art, but it was a lot of work for a little money.

Then Suzy did an art show in downtown Coeur d'Alene and included a small stack of 8x10 matted prints featuring her wacky faceless, barefoot characters. Cards like "She Who is My Daughter" and "She Who is My Best Friend." Each matted print included a short poem about those relationships.

Suzy sold about 100 prints in two hours. I rushed home to make more, and those sold out as well. My mind raced at the prospect that we had a hot concept that people wanted to buy.

We seized on that success. Suzy created 24 designs and stories that we made into 8X10 art prints – the image on front, the story on back. We called the line “Wild Wacky Women.” We invested in several hundred prints and displays for an art booth. We set up our first booth at a large, indoor arts and crafts show in Tri-Cities, Washington. We sold the prints for \$15 each or two for \$25. It was a wild success, and we were in business. We signed up for about two art shows per month. We even went to Florida to test the art show market there. The money was great.

After a few successful shows, I decided to sell Suzy’s prints to gift shops. I visited gift shops in every city we passed through and opened up wholesale accounts. We subsequently changed the name of the line to Wonderful Wacky Women and business started to boom.

We turned our guesthouse into a warehouse. I exhibited at the Seattle Gift show and picked up 50 new accounts in one weekend. The Van Group, a gift manufacturer, discovered us at that show and became our first license. We were rocking it in Idaho.

Over the next 20 years, we turned Suzy’s art into a multimillion-dollar business within the gift industry. While Suzy headed up creative and production, I took the lead in financing, marketing and licensing. Our licenses ranged from fabrics, giftware, dinnerware, drink wear, coloring books, calendars, greeting cards, to more than 31 books. We ended up with distribution in 8 countries.

Our granddaughter, Ashley Burrup, sent a picture home from her mission to Moscow, Russia, holding a Suzy Toronto memo pad she found in a gift shop there. Pretty cool.

Of my four careers, I liked selling paintings with Suzy best.

Chapter 22

Florida

Having grown up in Hawaii, Suzy did not like the weather in North Idaho. It was rainy and cold nine months out of the year. Summers were glorious, but short-lived. Plus, our house was on the north side of a mountain that rarely received full sun. We were constantly cleaning and treating it for mold. It was making Suzy sick. So, we moved to Florida to get some sun. It was the right thing to do.

Suzy's parents and sister lived in Orlando, so that's where we headed. As soon as we decided to move, Gramps went on a mission to find us the perfect building lot. We wanted to build a new house.

John found the perfect spot in Tangerine, Florida. It is about 30 miles north of Orlando adjacent to Mount Dora. The setting was fairly rural. The lot was 2.5 acres of heavily wooded land. We paid \$80,000.

We lived in an apartment in Maitland while our house was under construction. Chase came home from his mission about that time. We kept the art business running out of the spare bedroom. We hired our neighbor to assemble prints, and Laren Lowder came to work for us full time.

We experienced our first hurricane in Maitland – Hurricane Charley. The eye blew right over us instead of hitting the usual coastal areas. The damage was widespread, and Chase and I spent a couple of weeks on church work crews to clear the streets. We had no power for two weeks – no lights, no air conditioning, no TV, no gas stations, nothing. It was a challenge and a wake-up call to prepare for the next one.

The next hurricane came a year later as we were moving into our new house in Tangerine. We took possession of the house and tried to buy insurance for it. The insurance

company laughed at us as the hurricane was imminent. They would not take on such a risk until the hurricane passed.

So, we waited out the hurricane in our uninsured home, with all kinds of limbs and debris pounding our windows and shaking the house. Huge Laurel Oak trees surrounded the house and would have crushed it if they fell. We were sure something would break. Luckily the house was built to hurricane specs and was unscathed. We were lucky.

We left for an art show in New Mexico the very next day. We had to maneuver through thousands of fallen trees on the roads to get to a major highway.

We got our baptism by fire with hurricanes our first year. It prepared us for many more to come. It's a way of life in Florida.

Motorcycles

While in Florida, I took a trip to Utah to ride motorcycles with my sons and sons-in-law to Southern Utah. Burley Glasscock came along. I rented a Harley in Salt Lake. We took Highway 12 in Southern Utah across the mountain pass that drops into Escalante. Then we rode around Zion's Canyon and Saint George for a few days. We had a blast.

Biking was so much fun I returned to Florida and bought a brand-new 2003 Honda Goldwing – bright yellow. I talked Suzy's brother-in-law, Mike Garrett, into getting one as well. He joined us on most of our trips.

I was thrilled with my new bike. I put 50,000 miles on it over the next 15 years. We took at least one big trip together every year. It became a tradition. We had some wonderful male bonding times together. I rode my Goldwing cross country from Salt Lake to Florida a couple of times.



The granddaddy of all trips was from Salt Lake City to Fairbanks, Alaska and back. We took 30 days to travel 7,000 miles. I was joined by Mike Garrett and Burley Glasscock. It was, truly, the trip of a lifetime.

I loved my Goldwing and cherish every moment I spent with my companions. I sold the bike in 2019. It got too big for me to handle. I'm still thinking about a smaller bike.

Church in Florida

We attended the Apopka Ward for the first couple of years in Florida. It was a very friendly, fun place to go. I received my favorite calling of all time in Apopka.

Below is an excerpt about Apopka from a talk I gave on church music:

When we moved to the Apopka Ward about three years ago, I had recently been released as Bishop in North Idaho. Bishop Blackwelder called me in. He asked if I

had any experience with music. I said yes. He apologized that he did not have a more substantial calling for an ex-bishop, but they were desperate for a ward chorister. Though I had never held that exact calling, I accepted. Sister Bobbyn Lowder was our organist, and we had a great time. Every Sunday, I made a total fool out of myself, conducting the congregation like they were the Tabernacle choir – flailing both arms – holding each stanza long and loud – and cutting them off at the end. To everyone’s utter amazement, especially mine, the congregation started to sing like they were the Tabernacle Choir. I’ve never had more fun. At times, I got so caught up in the music, I thought I’d fly right off the stand. Several times, both the congregation and I ended a hymn in tears. Ward Chorister is now my favorite calling. Thank you, Bishop Blackwelder -- no apologies necessary.

While in Apopka, our stake split, and we were included in the new Leesburg Stake. Doug Carter was the new Stake President. He called me to be on his High Council. I was over temple work and family history. I gave many speeches all over the stake in that assignment. I was also assigned as high counselor to the Minneola Ward and then the Clermont Ward. I made many great friends there.

Then President Carter split two wards into three and formed the new Eustis Ward. I was called to be first counselor to Bishop Mike Saunders. Jose Luge, a Puerto Rican, was second counselor. We became best of friends, and it gave me a chance to speak a little Spanish.

In 2005, Suzy and I were called to be ordinance workers in the Orlando Temple. We served there one night per week for the next 13 years. Most of that time, I served as Assistant Coordinator and Trainer. We loved our time at the temple.

New Smyrna Beach

We built our home in Tangerine in 2003. A year later, Granny and Gramps sold their house in Longwood and put that money into an addition to our home. It almost doubled the size of the house. We lived in a sophisticated duplex. We were together for the next ten years or so and got along famously.

In 2015, we started getting moldy spots on our bamboo wood flooring. Couldn't figure it out, but it kept getting worse. We finally discovered that the shower pan in our master bathroom was broken, and water was seeping through cracks in the slab. Thus, mold was popping up under the wood floor all over the house. And, as we learned in Idaho, Suzy is allergic to mold.

The mold remediation experts told us the entire floor had to be replaced and the master shower completely rebuilt. The process took six weeks.

Our insurance company approved the project to the tune of \$100,000. Since we had to vacate the house, they provided alternate housing. The agent told me our allowance was \$5,000. Sounded about right. We could find a comparable house for \$5,000 per month. The agent stopped me in mid-sentence. He said, "Not per month. You get \$5,000 per week." He said we could use that money for housing anywhere in the world.

I told Suzy, and she was on the phone immediately booking our favorite resort in Maui for a month. And sure enough, it cost twenty grand. The insurance company pre-paid for it all.

So we spent a full month at the Ka'anapali Ali'i Resort in Hawaii. It was one of the best times of our lives.

We were casually floating in the ocean one day off Ka'anapali Beach, and Suzy said, "Life is too short, Al. I want to live on the beach." We decided right there that we would sell our house in Tangerine and move to a condo on the water in New Smyrna Beach. We had been looking at condos there for a few years anyway. We were burned out on maintaining our big house on three acres.

Within a year, Granny and Gramps moved into a retirement home to simplify their lives. That's all we needed. We listed the house and sold it within three months.

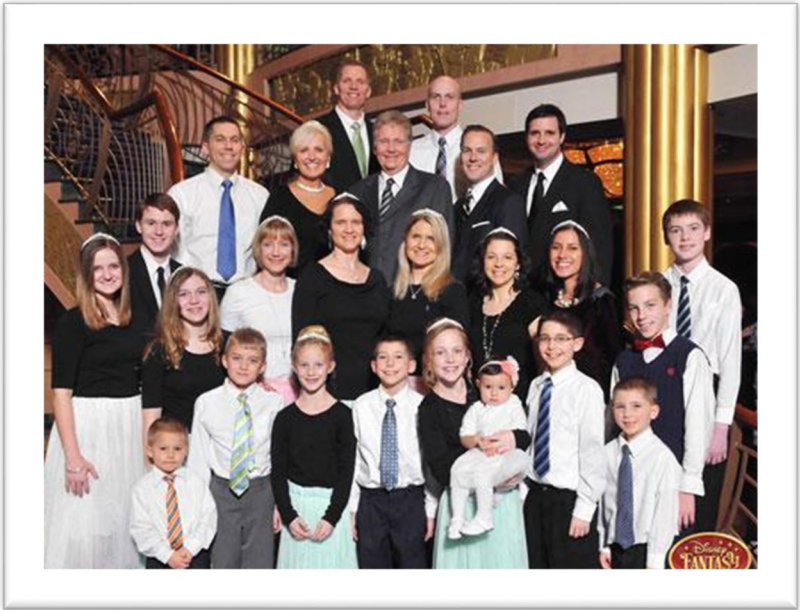
In the meantime, we found the perfect condo on the beach at the Moontide Condominium. It wasn't even for sale. We just looked at it to see what corner units looked like. Suzy walked into the living room with its vast view of the ocean and broke into tears. This was definitely our spot. But like I said, it wasn't for sale. Suzy then asked the owner, "What's your I don't want to sell it price?" We immediately bought it. We were so blessed to get the best unit at the facility.

So in 2016, we moved to a condo on the beach.

But we had a problem. We needed space for Suzy's business, and I wanted a garage for my tools. The condo was not big enough.

Across the street from the condo is a small development of town homes – two houses attached by a common wall. One of them became available, and we bought it. We converted the living space into Suzy's art studio, and I got the garage for my man cave. It's perfect. And it's just 100 yards from our condo. We walk back and forth all the time.

Disney Cruise



In 2014, Suzy and I decided to foot the bill for a family Caribbean Cruise on a Disney ship. It took Suzy a year of planning. And, as advertised, it was pure magic. All in all, it cost \$40,000 – the best money we've ever spent.

All the families came with all their children. There were 26 in our party. Ben Weir was oldest at 16, and Christina Toronto was youngest at 16 months. Wendy's parent tagged along to help babysit the toddler.

Suzy made all the kids promise that they would participate in everything, from Pirate Night to Princes and Princess night, to nightly entertainment. Everyone had to wear their *invisible mouse ears* the whole time. She made special decals for each family's door.

Every afternoon, Suzy would do all the girls' hair for dinner, turning them into princesses. It was quite a scene in and out of our state room. And every night we all met together in the dining room, dressed up for a fabulous meal. The food was the best we've ever had on a cruise.

The cruise was perfect. The ship was filled with young families – thousands of kids running around. Our grandkids were the perfect ages -- naturally pairing up and disappearing for hours on end. You don't have to worry about safety on a Disney ship. Every time we'd run into one of our kids, they'd be carrying a soft ice cream cone. They were self-serve 24/7.

The ship had a waterslide that circled the top of the boat – the Aqua-Duck. The kids rode that thing non-stop all day. And, of course, they drug me up there about twenty times per day. It was a big deal to go with grandpa. It was pretty fun, and I hammed it up.

At the final night of entertainment, the master of ceremonies acknowledged the Toronto Family by name as the largest group on the ship. We stood and everybody cheered.

This Disney cruise was, by far, the best family activity of our lives.

Chapter 23

Carrie



Jane and I timed the birth of each of our children. We picked a month for each and went for it. We chose October for Carrie – we figured the last two months of pregnancy were the toughest and should be done in the fall. Who knew she would be born on October 22 -- Jane's birthday?! That was an unexpected bonus.

Carrie's birth was the hardest for Jane – over 18 hours in labor at LDS Hospital. It was grueling. I was there every step of the way – watching the whole thing. When Carrie's little body came out of the birth canal, I thought I'd burst with excitement. Birthing a baby is the closest we come to being like God – a creator – and it had a huge effect on me. All of a sudden, I was a father – responsible for another human being for the rest of my life. Wow!

Jane and I discussed names and settled on Carolyn. I went to the hospital office to register her name, and not knowing the proper spelling, ended it with a double “n.” It simply looked better that way to me – a combination of Carol and Lynn. Anyway, the mis-spelling of Carolynn’s first name was my bad.

We took Carrie home to Granger, to a house Jane’s mother built. She inherited the house in her mother’s will. That’s where we learned how difficult life with a newborn can be. Jane couldn’t breast feed with her first baby, so we fed Carrie formula that didn’t agree with her. She developed colic for the first six months, and it was awful. She cried a lot, especially at night, so we took turns getting up to rock her back to sleep. Some nights were so bad I took her for midnight rides in the car around the block to calm her down. That helped. But we were tired. I had a hard time staying awake in my classes at the University of Utah. I took some comfort in studies that showed that colicky babies were smarter than average. I think we scored on that count.

But she was cute! Wow. We hit the jackpot. We were so proud of our first child. Jane fixed her up and dressed her in the cutest ways. Some of my favorite memories of Carrie are of her sitting in her high chair with food all over her head and face. One day she ended up with a full bowl of spaghetti on her head. I remember pouring a glass of chocolate milk on her head in Texas when she begged and begged for it and then refused to drink it. Those were great times.

From Granger we moved to Chicago where I earned my Doctorate and Jane earned her Master’s degree from Northwestern University. That’s where Carrie learned to speak and walk and went through her “terrible two’s.” I loved every minute of it.

Carrie was early to speak and late to walk. She began speaking at 9 months and walking at 18 months. We were truly worried about her late walking. I have a couple of favorite memories.

The Peg

Carrie would walk anywhere as long as she was holding onto my finger. But if I let go, she would fall down. I knew she could walk, but was too afraid to try. So, one day I took a peg from her hammer and peg set and took her for a walk. Instead of my finger, I had her hold onto the peg. Once we were walking along and she was distracted, I let go of the peg and she continued walking by herself, holding the peg in the air for about 30 feet – pretty much her first solo steps. It was hilarious! She finally looked up, realized I was not there and plopped down and cried. Oh, she was mad at me -- betrayed by her own father. It took me a while to earn her trust again. From then on, Carrie would still walk holding my finger, but by golly she wanted to feel the flesh. No more pegs! She didn't fall for that again. Like I said, smart.

The Brue

Another favorite is when Carrie fell down and got a nasty bruise on her cheek about the size of a quarter. She was almost 3 years old. Everybody made a fuss about the obvious bruise on a little girl's face.

One night in Skokie, I told Carrie a bedtime story and helped her with her prayers. Right before I turned off the lights I said, "Let me see your bruise." She abruptly scolded me. "Daddy, I only have one brue." I laughed and laughed. I quizzed her about that to discover that you have one shoe and two shoes, so it makes perfect sense that you have one brue and two bruise.

San Marcos

When Carrie was four, we moved to San Marcos, Texas. I was an assistant professor at Southwest Texas State University. We bought a brand-new house on the outskirts of town. Oh, we had a good time there. And we got a German Shepherd -- named him Max. What a great dog! I trained Max to “sit/stay” impeccably. He would not move upon my command, and Carrie loved to wash him. He hated it. Every few days Carrie would get out the hose and give Max a shampoo in the back yard. He would sit/stay with his ears back and a pleading look in his eyes while she hosed him down and soaped him up, especially his face, and ears. It’s the cutest thing I ever saw. Poor Max.

One day, when Carrie was six, I picked her up from Primary. They were in the middle of their “Pennies by the Inch” drive for Primary Children’s Hospital. Every year, the children would scour their houses for pennies and beg their parents for more. The goal was to match your inch-height and donate them to the hospital.

At Primary that day, the kids made small three-inch canvass bags to hold their pennies, each with a draw-string about three-feet long. They could sling it over their shoulders and keep the pennies safe. Carrie had about 40 pennies in her bag.

I was driving the car, and she was in the seat behind me, twirling that bag of pennies over her head. It would wrap around her wrist and stop with a bang – then she’d let it go and do it again. That swinging bag touched my hair a couple of times, so I asked her to stop. She kept doing it, so I asked her again. She was having way too much fun, so she kept at it.

All of a sudden, my head caught that draw-string from behind. The bag picked up centrifugal force as it spun around my head one time and hit me right in the eye.

That bag of pennies almost knocked me out. In pain and still driving, I reflexively reached back and tried to swat her screaming, “You don’t hit people!”

Not one of my best moments, but it was funny. And, yes, I had a black eye for a week. Jane busted a gut laughing.

Jane took Carrie and Amy to the San Marcos community pool to swim every summer. I still remember how cute they were, jumping off the edge of the pool all day long. It was early training for the cliffs at Lake Powell.

Utah

Then we moved to Utah. Jane was very pregnant with Willie at the time and couldn’t handle the long drive. So I flew her up. Then I drove our loaded station wagon, towing another car to Utah with just the three girls. Of course, we stopped and stayed with EC for a day. It was quite an adventure without Mom. At the age of 9, Carrie was already my number one helper.

I remember Carrie biking and swinging and trampolining at our house on Manor Drive. That’s where we bought Jane’s grand piano – crammed it into that small living room. We paid \$7000 in 1978. That’s where Carrie seriously started to play. And that’s where I bought my first boat and my share of the Lake Powell houseboat.

Highland was where I hit the jackpot financially. I quit BYU and went into the precious metals business – made a lot of money fast. It was incredible. That’s how we got the money to build Jane’s dream house in Midway. I paid for the whole thing in six months. It was pretty exciting. I would do it all over again. I was very pleased the Jane was able to die in her dream house.

What an incredible decade of fun, growth and grief we had in Midway. Carrie grew up, learned to drive and helped me take care of Jane. Midway was a wonderful place to raise kids. The Church was strong, the schools were good, and the community small and friendly. And that's where Carrie really learned to ski and waterski.

I remember waking up every morning about six to Carrie playing scales on the piano to warm up, then moving into a lively rendition of a Chopin composition we lovingly called "beedy beedy." I get goosebumps just thinking about it. And I loved all the piano recitals and competitions we went to. Uncle Dave came to them all – bless his heart. What a great brother!

Then there were the cars. My favorite story is when I was teaching Carrie to drive and she hit the gas instead of the brakes in our driveway, plowing my favorite pickup truck into the back of our brand-new Suburban – which then hit the log wall of the garage. It shook the whole house. Jane ran out the door screaming, "What the hell!!? Carrie broke into tears. I won some points by hugging her and telling her it was OK. What's a couple of cars anyway?

Carrie's first car was an old blue Mustang I bought from Uncle Oren. She totaled it a month later in a minor accident. She was devastated. It was around Christmas time, so I bought Carrie a newer mustang that was in great condition. I kept it secret while Marv Carter, our neighbor, gave it a shiny new paint job.

On Christmas morning, I had her car in the garage with a big bow on it. I wrapped the key in a teeny box that was embedded in about ten perfectly wrapped larger boxes. The first box was huge. She finally opened the key-box with a little love-note and ran to the garage squealing. What fun!

Lake Powell was my favorite family vacation -- the houseboat, the jet ski and early morning runs on the glass with the "A" team. Carrie was my main sidekick. Geeze I loved those trips. Sleeping under the stars and jumping off cliffs and hiking "Hole-in-the-Rock." Those were the most fun days of my life.

One of my favorite memories is when Carrie beat the pants off of John Malonas at Gin on the houseboat. I've never seen him so mad. He prided himself on being the great card shark, and she whomped him. I was so proud.

After Jane passed away, Carrie was incredible. She jumped right into the mom role and took care of the house and the kids. I can't thank her enough for that. I was a mess, dealing with my own depression, and Carrie pretty much took over. I'll never forget the night Carrie sat on my lap and told me she was going to postpone going to school to help me raise the children. Broke my heart.

Carrie held down the fort while I built a new house. I can't believe I let her take on all the responsibility. She had to grow up before her time. In retrospect, I would do things differently.

Suzy

Then I married Suzy. It sure made all the kids nervous. Except Cindy. She was totally gaga over the new mom. But Carrie was terrific. She had every right to be negative about it, but she accepted Suzy right up front as the new mom. Heaven knows she was ready to be a kid again. Carrie's positive attitude toward Suzy was incredibly significant to us. Suzy talks about it a lot.

Suzy stepped right into her new role. It was the hardest thing she's ever done. We helped Carrie get through high school and her piano competitions. We helped her get into college.

I still remember Carrie telling us how she hated the music program at BYU after one semester. Suzy and I suggested she try nursing. That was a big turning point in her life.

One of my favorite memories is helping Carrie buy a new car. We spent a whole day together looking at every little red car in Provo, and settled on a Ford Escort. Years later, Carrie and Trent totaled that car with over 200,000 miles on it.

Then Carrie joined the army to pay for nursing school. I'll never forget our experience at the recruiting office at Fort Douglas. They said they had no nursing slots for Carrie, and they tried to talk her into becoming an occupational therapist. We threatened to walk, and they miraculously found a spot in their nursing program. Carrie blew the test away, and they didn't want to lose her.

When Carrie was in her nursing program, the U.S. went to war in Kuwait – Operation Desert Storm. Her unit was activated, and she called us in a panic. She didn't want to go to war. Suzy and I drove to Denver to watch her graduate and give her a father's blessing. That was a real treat for me. She ended up graduating from her military class as "Honor Grad", equivalent to valedictorian. With that came the option of choosing her first assignment. She chose to back-fill at Hill Air Force Base and was spared going to war.

Then Carrie got her temple endowment and went on her mission to the Philippines. I felt Jane's presence more at that endowment session than at any other time. She was determined that her girls carry on the Weaver tradition and serve missions. She would have been so pleased.

Hayden Lake

About that time, we moved to Hayden Lake. Suzy never felt comfortable in Midway, so we sold out and moved. It's the best decision we ever made. Everyone got a fresh start in a wonderful place. I truly loved the decade we lived in Idaho. That's the home Carrie returned to after her mission. That's where she brought Trent to meet her family before she married him. And that's where she brought Ashley to stay with us for a week when she was an infant. Those were some of the highlights of our lives. What a beautiful, smiley little baby Ashley was! And she has been a delight to this day – as have Jenna and Tyler.

Then Carrie moved on to develop her own life with Trent. Suzy and I count our blessings often, and chief among them is that Carrie found Trent. Getting married started the main chapter in her life. We loved being part of it. The children, the houses, the music, the piano – yes, and even the cancer.

Cancer – Again

One of the greatest shocks of my life occurred when Carrie called us and told us she had breast cancer. Mine was her most difficult call, because she knew it would upset me so. It was a gut punch. Déjà vu all over again. All my memories and emotions from Jane's death filled my soul as I wept. At that moment, I knew Carrie was going to die young, just like her mother, and leave a husband and three kids behind. It was a hard pill to swallow and way too familiar. Suzy took it hard, too.

We were hoping against hope that this time would be different. Carrie discovered the tumors early. They were small, and no further treatment after her mastectomy was recommended. Plus, treatments had significantly improved after 30 years. Everything looked to be in her favor.

But Carrie was cursed with the BRCA 2 gene. Turns out there's little you can do if the cancer is genetic. Chemo doesn't help. Diet doesn't matter. Surgery doesn't work. She went on for four years before she passed away at the age of 50.

I had some sweet experiences with Carrie during those years. I actually took her to a couple of chemotherapy sessions and sat with her. I had to put on a happy face, but I pulled it off. Our conversations and memories were wonderful. They were good bonding moments.

I will always cherish the last moments I had with Carrie. We were in Salt Lake, and Carrie needed some additional tubes inserted into her abdomen to relieve her bloating. Her doctors said she still had weeks to live. Trent was swamped, so Suzy and I volunteered to take her to the hospital for surgery.

Carrie was very sick, so we gently wheeled her to the surgical center. We got her into surgery and waited. After an hour or so, we met up with her in her hospital room. She was fairly alert. We helped get her settled in and then started to leave for the airport. We planned to come back five days later after an art show.

As we were standing at the elevator to leave, Suzy said, "We're never going to see Carrie alive again. You need to go back and say goodbye." I returned, kissed her and told her I loved her. That was on a Wednesday. Carrie struggled at the hospital for a few days, until the doctors released her. Ashley left her mission early to say goodbye to her mother and was flying home from Russia. Carrie passed away the very next morning, surrounded by Trent, Jenna and Tyler. Ashley didn't make it home in time. We were at the art show when Trent texted us about Carrie's death. We were inconsolable. The whole thing still breaks my heart.

Carrie's funeral was the best I've ever seen. I choked up giving the family prayer, but the service itself was fantastic. Trent stole the show as the concluding speaker. I couldn't believe he was up to it. Then Jenna and Ashley warmed all hearts by playing a rousing version of Chopsticks on the piano. Tyler played Bumble Boogey. It was just what Carrie had wanted.

At Carrie's request, Suzy wrote her obituary. It's a true work of art. Trent quoted from it throughout his talk. Even though I didn't write it, I want to include it here in its entirety. It's an awesome tribute to Carrie.

Obituary for Carolynn Toronto Burrup
by Suzy Toronto

Our *Carrie* was the most “*crazy brave and wicked strong*” woman I have ever known. She was fearless, boundless, passionate and limitless in every way.

With that thought in mind, I'd like to share with you the life sketch of Carolynn Toronto Burrup.

When Carolynn was born on October 22, 1969, in Salt Lake City, she was the first-born child of Allen and Jane Toronto. Their precious, blonde-haired baby with incredibly big blue eyes captured their hearts right from the start. She was everything they ever hoped their daughter would be. Their sweet little girl, so tiny and petite, grew and matured through each stage of life with a temperament that would prove to be gentle, kind and loving. Everyone who would come to know her would forever consider her the most non-judgmental, forgiving and compassionate person they had ever known. Her love of music was simply an extension of her angelic qualities and persona.

As soft and demure as Carolynn appeared on the outside, those closest to her always knew it was all

smoke and mirrors. For underneath her slight and delicate exterior was a hurricane swirling in a teacup.

Her gutsy, fearless attitude was evident from an early age. She was always the first to jump off the cliffs at Lake Powell or take swan dives off the top of the house boat. When everyone woke up at sunrise to waterski the chilly, glassy waters at our home on Hayden Lake, Carolynn never hesitated to be the first one to slide into the water. Personifying the family motto of “Cold and pain don’t matter, as long as you’re having fun,” she’d slip on “The Woodie,” her favorite water ski, and ride back and forth, getting more air with each jump across the wake. I can still hear her shouting “Woohoo!” over the roar of the outboard motor. Her silhouette was perfectly exquisite as she skied with the sunrise behind her. It was pure beauty to watch.

It was equally fun to watch her snow ski as she’d cut and carve out the mountain at Park City. I can still remember the first time I skied with her. At the bottom of the hill, she asked me if I wanted to ski down a black diamond run, covered in moguls. I reluctantly agreed and waited at the top of the hill a couple of chairs on the lift ahead of her. As I was looking down regretting my choice, and just as I’d landed on a good excuse to chicken out, I saw this itty-bitty wisp of a girl fly past me in a poof of powder, once again hollering “Woohoo!” It was Carrie. And she was in perfect form as she danced through the snow-covered bumps.

Whether she was jumping out of airplanes, parasailing high over Mexico, hiking and rappelling through the narrows in Zion National Park, skiing at sunrise in icy waters or flying down a snowy mountain slope, her passion and zest for life had no boundaries... and she really was absolutely fearless.

Her love for music was also evident from an early age. Nurtured by her mother, Carolynn was especially passionate about the piano. She never had to be reminded that it was time to practice. She was our built-in alarm clock, for every morning she'd be up at 6 AM sitting at her mother's cherished grand piano. Carolynn's little fingers would fly over the keys as she banged out the scales. She'd effortlessly float into Chopin's "Fantasy Impromptu" while her little brother, Chase, laid on the floor under the piano... his favorite place to be whenever she was playing. Her music was nothing short of magnificent. It was no surprise to anyone when she won the coveted Sterling Scholar Award in Music which came with a full-ride scholarship to BYU.

For Carolynn, her musical performances were a shot of euphoria. Never afraid to walk out on the stage, whether she was singing with the Mormon Youth Choir as a young woman or with her beloved friends from "We Also Sing," she was in her element. Whether her fingers were playing the organ at church or the grand piano in the tabernacle on Temple Square, her passion for music was one of the great loves of her life.

However, with that full-ride scholarship in one hand and two semesters at BYU under her belt, Carolynn announced to our family that although music would always be her passion, it was not what she wanted to do as a career. Boldly proclaiming that *she* was the architect of her destiny, she told us that not only was she going to be a nurse, but she was going to join the military and serve her country doing it. There was no talking her out of it. She'd made up her mind. Six months later Carolynn graduated from her training as Honor Grad... the equivalent of valedictorian with her platoon's highest scores in marksmanship. A couple of years later in Officer Training School she again graduated number one in her class. She finished her

service to our country as a captain in the USAF Reserves.

Sandwiched in between her military service, Carolynn served a mission for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints to the Philippines, Davao City Mission. She put her nursing skills to use at a local health clinic there as well as proselyting. She later served at a Vietnamese refugee camp where the locals were mesmerized by her fair, pink complexion. Not being able to pronounce her last name, Toronto, they nicknamed her the Vietnamese word for “Rosebud,” because her coloring reminded them of a soft pink rose.

After her mission, she found her real passion... that which would trump her love of music and all her zany adventures. She found the love of her life. His name was Trent. I can still remember when she brought him home for the first time to meet the family. I didn’t have to ask if she was going to marry him. I could see it in her eyes. He was the one she wanted to join for the rest of eternity. She had decided. In hindsight, I don’t know if Trent had decided to marry her or not but that was irrelevant. Carolynn had made up her mind. A few months later they were married in the Bountiful Temple.

The past 25 years have blessed them with three amazing children. Ashley Jane, who just returned from the Russia Moscow Mission. Jenna Rae, who will be graduating from high school this spring. And 13-year-old Tyler Jay, who, like his two sisters, shares his mother’s passion for music. For Carolynn, motherhood was not a spectator sport. She was “all in.” She was devoted to her children and cherished her role in their lives.

From all that I’ve told you, I’m sure you’re thinking Carolynn was blessed with a charmed life. And if life

really is what we make it, then yes, she did create a wonderful, charmed life for herself. But there is another story I haven't yet told.

When she was 13, her mother was diagnosed with breast cancer... the same genetic mutation that would eventually claim her life. Even though Carolynn was barely a teen, she stepped into the role of helping her father, mother and siblings to an extent that many adults would find overwhelming. She never complained about the added workload she took on. Instead, she compassionately asked for more. After her mother passed away, and midway through her senior year of high school, Carolynn's true colors continued to shine. She announced to her father that she was going to forgo college and stay home to help him raise her three siblings. The offer broke his heart. Fortunately, it wasn't necessary, but the fact that she made it and had every intention of fulfilling it is a testament to and foreshadowing of the woman she would become.

Carolynn lived her life exactly the way she wanted. She lived her life by design and not by default. Not once did she let cancer define who she was. She was a daughter of God, and a disciple of Christ, who faithfully multiplied all of her God-given talents. She was a loving wife and passionate partner and devoted mother. She was a caring daughter and sister, a compassionate and empathic healer, and a fierce and loyal warrior.

With wings of courage and strength unsurpassed, she really was the most *crazy brave and wicked strong woman* I have ever known.

Chapter 24

Amy



I braced myself for another difficult infant when Amy was born on July 12, 1973. Carrie was such a pain – six months of colic and no sleep. But Amy was a complete and pleasant surprise. Delivery was short at the Evanston Hospital. When she came out of the womb, Amy whimpered once and then looked around with her famous mega-look. I wish we had a video.

We took Amy home the next day, and she slept through the night. Jane and I were absolutely stunned. It helped that Jane was able to breast feed from the beginning.

I fell in love with this new baby. I'd hold and rock her for hours with my daddy goo-goo talk and singing "Oh, Do

You Remember.” We put grandma’s rocking chair to good use.

Of course, Carrie was all about the new baby. She even gave up her “Suzy Doll” for a while to help. It was precious.

San Marcos

Shortly after Amy was born, we moved to San Marcos, Texas. Oh, she was cute as a toddler. She both entertained and worried us at the same time. She was, truly, a terrible-two.

I finished remodeling the garage into a living room, and was painting my back-corner office. I had installed brand new paneling and an exit door. I got called to the phone and left my tools and paint open on the floor.

Enter my two-year-old, Amy.

She first dipped every one of my tools in the full can of paint. Then she tipped the gallon over, which flooded the floor with the goopy stuff. Then she put both hands in the paint and smeared it all over my new walls. Then she sat in the middle of the spill and painted herself – head to toe.

I walked in and found a blob of paint with two eyes looking up at me. Jane stripped Amy down on the spot and whisked her away to the tub – threw the clothes away. It took me a couple of days to clean up the mess. Geeze!

Then Amy took to eating pill bugs – those little potato bugs that roll into a ball when you pick them up. She would patiently wait at our sliding glass door that went from the kitchen to the back patio. When a pill bug got in, bam! She’d pick it up and put it in her mouth. We would find her at the door, mouth dripping with bug guts. That’s when I decided Amy wasn’t mine. She must have come from an alien race.

And for some reason, Amy liked poking stuff up her nose. Drove us crazy. We'd order French fries at McDonalds, and up her nose they'd go. Pencils and anything long and skinny were fair game. We could not figure it out.

One day, Amy had a serious runny nose, but just on one side. Upon examination, we discovered she had shoved a peanut up her nose. It was lodged up there about a half inch. With Jane holding her down, I tried to dig it out with a crochet hook, but she was way too squirmy and the peanut had swollen. I was sure it was ready to sprout. We took Amy to the doctor, who sedated her and dug the peanut out in pieces. The crochet hook never had a chance.

The good news? That was the end of the everything-up-the-nose phase of Amy's life. Smart girl.

And, oh, Amy loved our cats and dogs – especially the cats. I remember Amy and Carrie watching in awe as our female cat delivered her babies. Of course, Amy had all kinds of questions we couldn't answer, like, "How did they get in there?" She pushed those kittens all over the neighborhood in her little stroller -- cute as could be.

Jane took Amy and Carrie to the San Marcos community pool often. They spent all day jumping of the edge of the pool. Those were some wonderful, care-free days.

Utah

When the three girls and I made our pilgrimage from Texas to Utah in our station wagon, towing another car, Amy was the queen of "Are we there yet?" and "How much longer?" She was five. By the end of the trip, I was ready to strangle her.

The first day we moved into our new home in Manila, Amy fell while riding her bike at the neighbor's house and broke her arm. Everything went on hold while Jane ran her to the emergency room. Our fine neighbor, who owned all the J.B. Restaurants in the world, paid for it all.

We did not buy the Manila house because of a faulty foundation, so we bought another house in Highland. It was in a little cul-de-sac where the kids played and rode their bikes all day long. The location was fairly rural, and our adjacent neighbor had a horse. Amy loved picking fresh, long grass along the fence and letting that horse eat out of her hand. The swings and trampoline were always going.

Amy and I got into a little spat one day in Highland – can't remember why. She was about seven years old. I swatted her one time, hard enough to leave a red hand print on her butt. I was immediately sorry. Amy was mad at me for the longest time. In order to heal our relationship, I took her camping. We spent a day in the mountains together, had a long night by the campfire and slept on a mattress in the back of my pickup. Showing forth an increase in love works.

Rex

Amy loved the new Midway house. Just inside the entry, was a short hallway to the living room -- the perfect spot for the 36-inch aquarium I inherited from Alpine Coins.

In that aquarium was a colorful six-inch-long piranha – yep, the infamous Amazon predator with the ugly under-jaw and sharp teeth. His name was Rex, and he only ate live fish. We'd throw in a goldfish every few days to feed him.

I owned Rex since he was two-inches long. He was an attraction at the coin shop for a couple of years. He brought in lots of business. I put a gold coin in the bottom of the tank and told customers they could have it if they dared

reach in and pick it up. Of course, Rex was menacing and aggressive and looked like the devil himself, so no one ever took us up on it. We had to keep a lid on the tank to stop him from jumping out.

If you think that sounds a little macho, we also had a rottweiler in the shop as a guard dog. Gus was vigilant, smart and mean. He saved us from robbery several times over the years. So, yes, we had a manly man business. It was actually good marketing. People felt safe in our shop.

Amy's second-grade class didn't believe she had a Piranha, so one day she used Rex for show-and-tell. The teacher brought about 20 kids to our house to watch Rex eat a live goldfish. I withheld food for a few days to make sure he was good and hungry. All the kids gathered around the aquarium on their knees, mesmerized by the spectacle. I dropped a goldfish in the tank. It swam around for about a minute. Then, like lightning, Rex hit that thing and bit it in half. All the girls squealed and the boys yelled "coooooo!" Then Rex finished off the floating remains in one gulp. It was quite a show, and Amy was queen for the day.

I eventually gave Rex away because he outgrew our tank. Then we added all kinds of tropical fish for show. It was a nice feature in the house, and the kids loved it.

When Amy was about 11-years-old, I taught her how to mow the lawn with our riding mower. It was old and noisy, but it worked. I paid her \$5, and she thought she'd hit the jackpot. She rode that mower all over the place going 3 miles per hour.

Lake Powell

Like all the kids, Amy loved Lake Powell. She was a good little water skier and loved riding the jet ski. And, of course, cliff jumping was always a thrill.

One of Amy's favorite memories was the time we took Jonny Crowell with us to Lake Powell. He was Amy's age and they were good friends.

One of my standard activities at Lake Powell was to get up at 6am and waterski on the glass before the water got rough. I lived for it, and I was always the first to ski. The air was usually cool and the water cold, so not everybody was enthusiastic about it. The wusses always stayed in bed. We called the early birds who wanted to ski the "A Team."

We invited Johnny to join the A Team on an early run. The boat was full of huddled bodies. Several people skied, and then it was Johnny's turn. He pulled his towel around him, looked at the cold water and said, "I need some inspiration."

I immediately broke into the intro to the theme song from Rocky. "Da-da, da-da-da, da-DA, da-da-da." Up a third. "Da-da, da-da-da, da-DA, da-da-da." When I got to the chorus, the entire boat was singing and dancing at the top of their lungs. "da-da-DAAAA... da-da-DAAAA...da-da-DAAAA, da-da-DAAAA. Johnny jumped in. It was absolutely hilarious – just one of the many good times at Lake Powell.

Jane

Amy had a very difficult time with Jane's sickness and death. She was 13 when Jane passed away. The oncologist warned me that the death of a mother was hardest on teenage daughters. I think Amy had the worst experience.

Amy is also a writer. She has personal journals that document her feelings and perceptions during that time. They are, truly, moving. I wish I had been more aware of her emotional trauma. I could have helped. That's another do-over on my list.

One experience I had with Amy is particularly poignant and instructive.

A few days after Jane's funeral, I was walking by the downstairs bathroom. I heard whimpering behind the closed door. I opened it to find Amy, sitting on the bathroom counter, curled up in the fetal position, crying her eyes out.

I gently hugged her. "What's wrong, Honey?"

She cried, "I killed her. It's all my fault." She fell into my arms. I rocked her back and forth, assuring her it was not true. There was no consoling her.

After a while, I finally got the story. It had to do with fasting.

As Mormons, we fast for everything – especially problems like cancer. And we fasted a lot for Jane. We had family fasts and ward fasts and community fasts, all to heal Jane. And then in December, when we found out she was not going to live, we fasted for her to die.

Try explaining that to a child!

Before Dr. Brown sent Jane home to die, we were fasting as a family for her to live. Amy got so hungry during the night, she snuck into the kitchen and ate an Oreo cookie. In her mind, she betrayed her mother. She was too weak, so her mother died.

I don't think I've ever been so grief stricken -- or angry. Here was my innocent little girl, blaming herself for her mother's death over one damned Oreo cookie!

It absolutely broke my heart, and I wondered what I could have done differently.

Obviously, children don't understand the nuances of faith and healing. It's a miracle when things work out, and everyone has the faith of a little child. But sometimes people die in spite of the faith of those involved. Like Jane. That's a hard pill to swallow, and it challenges our faith. It certainly challenged mine. And it tore little Amy to shreds.

My advice: Children should not be forced to make adult decisions. Don't involve them in life and death fasts. It places way too much responsibility on small shoulders.

The Brat

I bought a run-down Subaru Brat and fixed it up. I replaced the motor and rebuilt the front end. It came with a standard transmission.

A Brat is a four-wheel-drive, mini-pickup truck with two seats in the bed, facing backward. The kids loved riding back there. In today's world, they'd throw you in jail for child endangerment.

The Brat was my training vehicle. I used it to teach Amy, Cindy and Will how to drive a stick-shift. They all had some hair-raising experiences in that truck. Amy drove it the most – usually to Wasatch High School.

Before Amy got her driver's license, I was teaching her how to drive a stick-shift in Midway. She was doing okay, but still jerking a little on takeoff and grinding the gears. We pulled up to a stop sign on an uphill road. With gravity against you, it's twice as hard to make a smooth start. Just then, a cop car pulled up right behind us. She couldn't roll back.

Amy panicked. Frankly, I was a little worried. After some coaxing, Amy tried to go through the stop sign and jerked to a dead stop. She started the car and tried again. No luck. The cop was right behind us. Finally, she made a jerky start

and got the momentum she needed to shift into second gear. She was sure she was in trouble. The policeman passed us with a smile and a wave. We were both relieved.

Suzy

Amy had a hard time adjusting to Suzy as the new mother. And the fact is, Suzy was not her mother. The other kids did okay, but Amy resented it. Think about it. All at once there's a stranger in the house telling you what to do.

With my blessing, Suzy stepped into the role of running the home. This included being "the mom." She never tried to replace Jane, and continuously reminded the kids that Jane was still their real mom. She explained that the title "mom" was a job description. She ran the house.

Suzy and I tried to present a united front to the children. Of course, it didn't always work. It's hard to put two broken families together. Amy had the roughest time adapting to it.

Amy and Chase got along famously. This was a blessing, because I did not. Amy could get Chase to do things the rest of us couldn't, so we leaned on her.

That first winter, Chase was in kindergarten and Amy was a junior at Wasatch High. Amy wasn't driving yet, so she took the bus to school. It was the same bus Chase took to the elementary school.

Our driveway was about a quarter-mile long – quite a trek to the bus stop. It was especially challenging when the snow berms were three-feet tall and the driveway was icy.

Most days, Chase did not want to go to school. He'd start early, saying, "I not, I not, and I just not!" Amy had such patience with him. She'd coax him along, get him dressed and actually carry him on her back all the way to the bus

stop in the snow. He clung on like a monkey, all the while repeating, “I not, I not, and I just not!” It’s the most tender scene I’ve ever seen. Bless her heart, Amy saved us. She and Chase have been buddies ever since.

Amy also had a soft spot for old people. She volunteered at a local nursing home and showed incredible patience with the sweet little old ladies. She’d chat with them, listen to their stories and polish their finger nails. She’d come home with the funniest stories about her “old peeps.”

Amy helped us move to Hayden Lake, then she took off for college. She received the coveted Sterling Scholar Scholarship in art and chose to use it at Southern Utah University in Cedar City. She earned a double bachelor’s degree in biology and art.

After graduation, she moved home and married Steve Weir, a return missionary who served under Suzy’s Dad in the Warsaw Poland Mission.

Amy is very gifted at art, especially photo realism. This skill served her well in Hayden Lake and was the foundation of her first career.

I was involved in the silver business as a marketing copywriter for Sunshine Mint – basically the same thing I was doing for Liberty Mint. The mint was located just a few miles from our home.

I got Amy a job at the Sunshine Mint as a coin sculptor. They taught her how to make a plaster blank, about 16 inches wide an inch thick, and carve out a design in reverse into the plaster. She sculpted negative molds for the creation of coin dies made of steel. It is meticulous work and a valuable skill in the coin business.

Amy was really good. She sculpted for Sunshine Mint for a year and then broke out on her own as a freelance sculptor.

We called her new venture “Die Hard.” She accepted work from mints all over the country. She did this full time while Steve was in school and made a pretty good living. I was proud of my Amy.

Amy bore our first grandchild – Ben. It was quite amusing, because right up to the time of birth, we all thought the baby was a girl. Amy even had a name picked out – Emma. Somehow, Benjamin popped out! It was a welcome surprise and introduced Suzy and I to a new phase of our lives -- grandparenthood. At this writing we have sixteen grandkids.

Amy has two children – Ben and Mike. They all currently live in Bentonville, Arkansas.

Chapter 25

Cindy



Cindy was born August 6th, 1975 in Austin, Texas.

We had a little trouble bringing her into this world. Jane kept going into false labor. We'd madly drive 30 miles to the hospital in Austin only to have her contractions stop. Then they'd send us home. We did that at least four times. Jane was frustrated and overdue, so the doctors decided to induce labor.

At the time, I was a practicing hypnotherapist. I was helping people lose weight, deal with memory issues and other health disorders. In my own field, hypnosis was a very useful tool for stutterers. I even had MDs referring patients to me. I was good at it.

Jane previously had bad reactions to the spinal blocks and drugs associated with delivery, so we decided to deliver using only hypnosis. Such pain reduction is easy, and I did it successfully several times.

The trouble is, it's nearly impossible to hypnotize your wife. She knows you too well. A hypnotist has to establish a position of authority over his subject. You have to put on a superior, believable spook act to get someone into a trance. Jane tried, but just didn't buy it. I'd get into my trance routine with her, and she'd break out laughing. That was tough on the old guru. But we had pretty good successes in relaxation and preparing her for the delivery, so we gave it a try at the hospital.

Jane's contractions got harder and harder as she dilated to about 6 centimeters. I was doing my best to relax her and induce a mild trance for pain. Finally, she sat straight up and screamed at the doctor, "Give me a shot!!!" The great hypnotherapist went down in flames. It was hilarious. So, they administered a spinal block and delivered our third precious child.

Cindy was a beautiful baby – probably our most perfect. And she is gorgeous to this day. Oh, she was good -- easy to feed and easy to care for. We were thrilled to have a third beautiful daughter.

Cindy was a ray of sunshine – always smiling and happy – always lighting up every room she entered. And it never stopped. At this writing, she is still brightening my life.

Can I Snuggle?

From the start, Cindy loved to snuggle. She would sit on my lap or lay down by my side and just melt into me. It made us both feel secure.

For years and years, Cindy would wake up in the middle of the night, afraid of the dark. She would come into our bedroom and nudge me – never Jane, just me – out of a dead sleep. She whispered, “Daddy...Daddy...Daddy... can I snuggle?” With one eye open, I’d open the covers and she’d slip in by my side. It always felt so good – at least until she heated up. Her goal was to stay with me as long as possible, so she didn’t budge – not even a little. It was a personal victory when she’d make it through the night. She did not want to go back to her own bed. Usually, the heat would wake me up, and I’d send her back. Oh, those were sweet times.

By the way, I think that’s when the kids started calling me “The Old Softie.” I pretty much gave all the kids whatever they wanted if it were within reason.

Cindy’s fear of the dark drove me nuts. I’m a life-long, compulsive light-turner-offer -- a “gotta-save-a-penny-a-day” kinda guy. I still walk around turning stuff off. So, when I went to bed at night, all the lights would be off. When I woke up during the night, all the lights would be back on. Cindy! She’d get up after I was asleep and light the house up. She still likes to sleep with the lights on.

When Jane got cancer, Cindy was only seven-years-old. Willie was four. During some of their most formative years, their mother was sick. And you just can’t hide the grief and blessings and doctor visits of a terminal illness from them. It’s a hard pill to swallow – especially as a child.

What really surprised me was Cindy’s enthusiasm for me to marry Suzy. I can only surmise that at the age of 12, she was starving for a mother figure in her life. She didn’t care about any of the other women that came around – just Suzy.

For some reason, Cindy smelled love in the air when I took Suzy on our first date. Though they hadn't met, she was so excited. I came out of my bedroom, all dressed up, and she exclaimed, "Noooo. You are NOT wearing that shirt!" I thought it was pretty cool. But she nixed it hard. It turned out I had nothing cool to wear. I just didn't know it. I was a seedy professor who dressed like an old man. That was about to change.

I got home from my date fairly late. Cindy was anxiously waiting for me at the door. "Did you kiss her?" I said, "no." She cried, "Nooooo. You have to kiss her! She won't marry you if you don't kiss her." It was the cutest thing I've ever seen. Maybe she was right. I was playing it cool.

Cindy glommed onto Suzy from the start. I told Cindy about our marriage plans on our first trip to Lake Powell. She jumped up and down and squealed in delight and then hugged us both. I wish all the kids had been so enthused, but Cindy was enough.

"Totally O" (the letter O, pronounced "Oh!")

After Jane's death, I had two opposing forces in the family. Cindy was perky and happy – Amy was depressed. Each child was coping with the loss of their mother in their own way.

After Suzy and I were married, we took several family trips to Lake Powell. On one of these trips, Cindy was unusually excited and happy. She put on quite a show. Amy didn't like it and became more and more aggravated at Cindy's antics as the days went by.

One day on the houseboat, Amy had enough of Cindy and exploded, "Cindy, stop it! Do you have to be so happy all the time? You are being totally obnoxious. From now on, I'm going to call you "Totally 'O.'"

We all laughed hysterically, and Cindy squealed in delight. Instead of being insulted by the new moniker, she adopted it as her motto. The rest of the trip, she'd jump off a cliff or the houseboat and yell, "Totally OOOO!" She's called herself "Totally O" ever since.

In 2020, 33 years later, Cindy moved into a condo in Lehi. She was 45 years old. Ironically, the number of her building is the letter O. When giving her address, she tells everyone in the family, "You know, like "Totally O." The name still works.

The Brat

When Cindy turned 15, she was working as a waitress at Burgermeister – a restaurant in Midway owned by Gene Probst. Like I did with all the kids, I was teaching her how to drive the Brat. She was doing pretty well with that clutch, so I let her drive from the house to the restaurant. There was lots of traffic on the narrow road, so she had to wait to turn left into the parking lot. When a break in traffic finally came, she jerked the clutch so hard that the Brat stalled sideways in the middle of the road, blocking traffic both ways. Cars backed up and started honking. Totally flustered, Cindy was pumping the clutch, pushing the gear shift and trying to start the car. In her frustration she kept repeating, "Oh, shit...Oh shit...Oh shit." She finally looked at me and turned crimson red. We didn't use that kind of language in the house. She was so embarrassed. It's one of my cherished memories of Cin. We still laugh about it.

Hayden Lake

We moved to Hayden Lake when Cindy was a Junior in High School. Being cute and bubbly, it didn't take long for the boys from our ward to come around. Tom Pearson was her favorite. He was a wild and crazy guy and loads of fun.

Tom was the ring-leader of my Priest quorum and student body president of the high school. I was his young men's president. Great kid.

Tom wanted desperately to date Cindy, but she was only 15. We had a family rule that our kids couldn't date individually until they were 16. So, Tom and Cindy simply re-defined the word "date." I confronted them one day because they were together so much. They said, "Oh we're not dating – you know, dressing up, going out to dinner and the movies and stuff. We just spend all our time together." Yeah, right! Try as we might, Suzy and I could not keep them apart.

When Cindy turned 16, Tom threw a blow-out birthday party for her. His dad was a mechanic and had an old full-size Cadillac with the top cut off. They called it "The Beast." It was featured in all the local parades.

Tom conspired with Suzy to get Cindy ready for the date. He asked Suzy to go to Goodwill and pick out the gaudiest, ugly dress she could find for Cindy. It was supposed to be funny, but Suzy, with her amazing taste and tailoring abilities, bought a dress and jazzed it up to fit perfectly. Cindy looked fantastic in the getup.

At the allotted time that night, Tom showed up in The Beast. It was decorated with streamers and "Happy Birthday" and "Sweet Sixteen" written all over it. A few friends were in the car. They sat Cindy on the trunk, her legs on the rear seat, and drove her up and down the main drag of Coeur d'Alene with "Sweet Sixteen" blasting away on the speakers. Everyone clapped and cheered and Cindy gave them all the royal wave. Instead of teasing and trying to embarrass her, he owned it! They ended up back at the fancy 5-star Coeur d'Alene resort for hot fudge sundaes and a huge party. It was loads of fun.

Student Body President

Cindy was so bubbly and happy at the high-school, she was instantly popular and soon everybody knew who she was.

Tom Pearson talked Cindy into running for student body president for the next year after his reign. This was no small thing, because she was running against James Murphy, the most popular kid of the Junior class. Everybody thought he was a shoe-in.

With Suzy's guidance, Cindy came up with a winning campaign strategy. It involved good advertising and winning over the freshman and sophomore classes, which comprised the largest number of students. As a newcomer, there was no way she could win over the existing Junior and Senior classes – but that was only half the school.

At the beginning of the campaign, Cindy, Suzy and I went to the school early and papered the entire school with “Cindy for President” banners. No matter where you looked, there was a sign for Cindy. Then Cindy spent several days personally passing out chewing gum in the freshman and sophomore hallways, asking for their votes. She pretty much ignored the older kids.

I helped Cindy write and memorize an upbeat and meaningful speech for the election assembly in front of the whole school. Cindy sparkled throughout the speech and at the same time offered perfect delivery. She absolutely blew it away as the other kids bumbled around and goofed off during their speaking time.

Bottom line: Cindy won in a landslide. The Junior and Seniors were not happy. This newcomer stole the election with a slick and focused campaign.

Oh, we were proud of our girl!

Once Cindy started her senior year as student body president, she pulled off an amazing feat. Suzy dedicated a chapter to it in her book *The Sacred Sisterhood of Wonderful Wacky Women*. It's so well-written, I have just copied and pasted it below:

She Who Stands for Something

by Suzy Toronto

It's always admirable when someone has the courage to stand in the face of adversity. When that person is a 17-year-old teenage girl, it's downright impressive. Such is the case of Cindy Toronto.

Cindy was Student Body President of the largest high school in the state of Idaho. She was a bit overwhelmed by the challenge, but that didn't slow her down. She had an agenda, and she was determined to see it through.

For as long as any of the faculty could remember, the Pledge of Allegiance had not been recited at the school by the student body. No one quite knew when it had been deleted from the morning announcements. But Cindy, whose blood runs red, white and blue, decided it was time to put it back in. All she wanted to do was start each morning's announcements with the Pledge of Allegiance.

With absolutely no support from her peers and only skeptical smirks from the faculty, she got approval from the principal. The very next morning, with her heart racing in her chest, she threw her shoulders back, held her head high and walked into the office. Adjusting the microphone of the PA system, she took a deep breath and asked everyone in the school to stand where they were and join her in the Pledge of Allegiance. With the office staff looking on, Cindy firmly laid her right hand on her heart and recited the pledge.

No one joined her...no teachers, no students, not even her vice president. Everyone knew it was a dead deal, never to happen again.

The next morning there were more than a few raised eyebrows when she once again went through the pledge...all by herself. Weeks turned into months. Eventually the chatter of morning rush began to hush and although no one would join her in her recitation, eventually the students and faculty courteously quit talking during the pledge. After a few months, a few students started to stand and look up towards the speaker and listen. One by one, they started to lay their hands across their hearts in silent respect. By the beginning of the next semester, it was obvious to the faculty that Cindy was not going to give up. They began to join her, and by years end, the pledge was once again an everyday patriotic ritual at the school.

The local press heard about the lone effort and transformation, and they wanted to interview Cindy. Articles were written... photos were taken... suddenly she was a local heroine. But Cindy didn't revel in the glory. Her goal was to re-instill a basic patriotic love, allegiance, and respect of our country. And that's exactly what she did. It wasn't easy. Standing up for what's right seldom is.

This past July (2004), almost 12 years since Cindy made her courageous stand, I watched her gently hand her young daughter an American flag to wave at the 4th of July parade. As she lovingly explained to the child how important it was to never let the flag touch the ground and to wave it when the veteran soldiers walked by, she touched my heart as well. In that moment I knew Cindy was teaching her little girl how to be a woman who stands for something too. (end)

After high school, Cindy lived and worked in Provo for a year and met Grant Glasscock. They were married July 8, 1995. They have three children that brighten our lives – Jimmy, Suzee and Eva.

Preemptive Surgery

Cindy's mother, grandmother and older sister all died at a young age of breast cancer. As a third-generation survivor, her chances of contracting the disease was already very high. Thus, Cindy underwent testing for the BRCA2 genetic marker for breast cancer. She tested positive, which made her probability of contracting breast cancer and/or ovarian cancer soar to 87%.

This was unacceptable. Encouraged and supported by Suzy, she decided to undergo a prophylactic double mastectomy and hysterectomy to give her a better chance at life. She was 45 years old.

As of this writing, she is healthy and strong, and we are so pleased.

Having lost my first wife and my oldest daughter to breast cancer, I encourage all of my posterity to get the BRCA2 test early and take measures against this terrible disease.

Chapter 26

Will



William Duncan Toronto was born September 24, 1978.

We had just moved into our new house in Highland, and I was starting my new job at BYU. Jane was pregnant and big as a house. She went into hard labor on September 24, and I rushed her to Utah Valley Hospital in Provo. We barely made it in time. The staff quickly took Jane into the maternity ward. She was fully dilated. The doctor showed up just in time to deliver our fourth child. There was no time for drugs or anesthesia. The birth was all natural and Jane felt fantastic – best one yet. We took our baby home in a couple of hours. What a great experience!

We were so excited. We finally had a son! We were hoping for a boy, but didn't know. These were the old days when most births were a surprise. And Willie was perfect -- healthy and strong.

We chose the name William because it was different. There was no William in any of our genealogy, and we loved the name Will – not Bill. He was so darned cute, we all called him Willie. Of course, his middle name, Duncan, is a Weaver legacy name.

Willie and I were the men of the family. We quickly established the tradition of having regular “dude days.” I taught him how to ride a bike. I’d take him out to look at cars. We went skiing and camping. We went to BYU basketball games. I taught him how to shoot. And I taught him how to drive a car and a boat at a very early age – probably too early.

One of my talents is making boys feel like men. It’s not hard. You identify a meaningful, manly task – something that challenges their intellect and competence. Then you show them what to do and how to do it and leave them alone. If they crash and burn, you praise them for trying, pick up the pieces and learn. If they succeed, you reward them with freedom and more responsibility. I’ve done that with both my boys, and they are independent, responsible men. I am very proud of them. As a young men’s president four times and bishop twice, I’ve done the same thing with hundreds of young men in the church.

With that in mind, let me tell you about a couple of growth moments with Will.

The BB Gun

When Willie turned eight, I bought him a BB gun. Every eight-year-old should have one. It teaches great responsibility with little risk. And there’s nothing more manly than a gun.

I taught Willie how to load it, pump it and shoot it. And I gave him all the safety protocols. Oh, he felt manly that day.

One day, Cindy was swinging on the swing set as high as she could go. Willie took aim with his BB gun and shot her in the butt – a pretty tricky shot. Cindy put up a howl and tattled to Jane. Willie got the lecture of his life and lost his privileges for a couple of weeks. Cindy and Will still talk about it.

We moved to the new house in 1987, which was isolated on ten acres. There was lots of stuff to shoot at, particularly gophers and birds. But they are not easy to hit.

One day, Will wounded a robin with his BB gun. He asked me what he should do with the struggling bird. It couldn't fly. After examination, I explained the rules of hunting and termination. It was cruel to let the bird, or any animal, suffer until she died – it might take days. This applies to sick and wounded pets as well. Since he was the shooter, it was up to him to end the bird's life as soon as possible to relieve the pain. I made him carry the bird over by the wood pile and shoot it again at close range. Then he buried the bird. What a great lesson for an impressionable young man.

Benton's Truck

I drove up to the house one day to find the County Sheriff in my driveway. It was curious, because the police had never been at my house before. He introduced himself and asked if I had a boy about ten years old. I said, "yes." He said, "I think your son may have vandalized your neighbor's truck. Mr. Benton saw a couple of kids playing out that way and called us to report some damage. I thought this was a good place to start."

Dale Benton was my immediate neighbor from whom I bought the land. About half way up our quarter-mile driveway, Dale parked an old truck away from his house. He only used it twice a year during hay season. The kids walked by it every day on their way to school.

The Sheriff and I walked down there to assess the damage. Every single piece of glass and plastic on the outside of that truck was broken. The windshield was smashed with a large rock in the front seat. The headlights and tail lights were busted out. The side windows and mirrors were shattered. There were rocks and bricks all around the truck. And, most telling, there were little dirty handprints all over the hood.

It was pretty obvious that the culprits were Willie and his friend, Cory Smith. I couldn't see Willie doing this on his own, but Cory was a little hellion – always in trouble. We had him over to the house quite a bit and knew his parents. I told the Sheriff I'd take care of it.

I immediately went to Willie's school and checked him out mid-day. I didn't tell him why. We drove right to Benton's house and sat on a couple of bales of hay in front of the truck. I said, "Tell me about this truck, son."

Willie burst into tears and confessed all. He and Cory thought the truck was abandoned, which was feasible. It looked like a Junker. So, they picked up rocks and bricks and had a great time shattering everything that would break. What fun for a couple of nine-year old boys! We had a nice chat about private property and vandalism.

By this time, school was out, so we drove to Cory's house to confront him. His mother was embarrassed and cooperative, and Cory was contrite.

I decided to take this lesson all the way. I took both boys to the Wasatch County Detention Center and made them confess to the Sheriff. The Sheriff was perfect – uniformed and dead serious. He lectured Willie and Cory on vandalism and the seriousness of their crime.

Then he gave them a personal tour of the police station, showing them the jail cells. It impressed the heck out of these nine-year-old boys. It certainly cured Will. I'm not so sure about Cory.

I settled with Benton – \$300 cash to replace all the glass and plastic. He was very understanding.

I had the boys work that money off the rest of the summer by doing chores around the house. Cory dropped out of the program almost immediately, but I held Willie's feet to the fire. I had him moving firewood and bricks around, cleaning the garage and working in the yard. He was very diligent and obedient. In fact, he never disobeyed me the rest of his life. That experience left quite an impression on him.

The Brat

Will was quite mature and responsible for his age. Plus, we lived out in the country. I started teaching him to drive at age 11. I taught all my kids to drive early, so they were fairly experienced when I cut them loose with their own cars. I took that responsibility seriously.

Cascade Springs Road is an isolated dirt road with very little traffic. It ran right in front of our property in Midway. We were in the Brat. I was in the passenger seat and Willie was driving up and down Cascade Springs Road – no traffic at all. He was doing very well.

Wouldn't you know it, a police car came out of nowhere and pulled us over when he saw this pre-pubescent kid in the driver's seat. He could have hauled us both to jail. Of course, it was a farming community on an isolated road with very little risk, so he let us go with a verbal warning. But it shook us up a little. Willie turned into a fantastic driver.

That same year, we moved from Midway to Hayden Lake. I had an experience with Willie during that move that deeply affected me and endeared him to me. I wrote the following story for a talk I gave on adversity:

Hold on Thy Way

About Twenty years ago, our family was on the road, moving from Utah to North Idaho. I was towing a huge, overloaded, home-made trailer behind our beat-up Suburban – couldn't safely drive over 40 miles an hour. My 11-year-old son was riding shotgun. My daughters were towing a small boat with a pickup truck, loaded to the hilt. My wife and youngest son were in our third car. We had quite the lumbering caravan.

For the previous 10 years, I'd been heavily involved in the precious metals business. Thus, the bulk of my financial security was in gold coins. Those coins were in a box, locked in the console of the Suburban. I'd find safe storage for them once we reached Coeur d'Alene.

It was getting dark, and we were too tired to drive, so we pulled off to a motel in Pocatello. I parked the cars right in front of the motel room, locked them up and went in. I wasn't worried about the gold. I'd moved it like this several times. It was buried under a ton of stuff, and our ratty-old-rig was not a likely target for thieves.

When we got up in the morning, I immediately noticed that the driver's window of the Suburban was shattered. My heart sank, and I ran to the car in a panic to check it out. Stuff was scattered all over the place. The gold coins were gone.

I can't even begin to describe the adrenaline rush and sick emotions that overwhelmed me at that moment. It was all I could do to keep from throwing up. My life savings were gone – 10 years of hard work down the drain. And it was my own stupid fault!

I called the police. It took them a couple of hours to dust the car for finger prints and make a report. They poignantly assured me there was no hope for recovery. I was toast.

Throughout this entire ordeal, my children quietly observed my ranting and raving and dealing with the police – no one dared say anything. It was NOT pretty. In my emotional trauma, I'd forgotten they were there.

There was nothing left to do but continue the trip. So, we hit the road again with our motley caravan. I was behind the wheel, trying to recover my senses. My 11-year-old son, Willie, was in the passenger seat again -- quiet as a mouse.

I was totally absorbed within myself – wallowing in grief and self-pity – thinking of all the things I should have done differently. I was really beating up on myself.

After about 30-minutes of this thick silence and brooding, Willie finally spoke up,

"Dad, maybe Heavenly Father made this happen to you."

I snapped right out of my daydream. "What did you say?"

He repeated, "Maybe Heavenly Father made this happen."

I was NOT in the mood for this. But I'd been ignoring Willie way to long, so I said, "What do you mean, son?"

He continued, "Maybe this is a little test, and Heavenly Father wants to see if you pass it."

My immediate thought was – what could this little kid possibly understand? But then I thought more about what he said, and asked, "Willie, what do you think Heavenly Father would want me to do right now?"

His face brightened. He said, "He'd want you to go – PHUU (both hands shoulder high, palms up), CLAP (he then clapped his hands together), POINT (he pointed straight ahead with one hand).

I laughed, and I laughed, and I laughed until tears came to my eyes. Then I laughed some more. My pent-up emotions just poured out. I pulled off the side of the road to give Willie the monstrous hug he deserved. And the healing process began.

My young, innocent son saved me – FROM MYSELF!

He saw through all of the worldly implications of my problem and assessed the long-term reality of the situation. With his childlike faith, he came up with a simple expression for one of the most profound concepts in the Gospel – accepting loss and adversity, dusting yourself off, and continuing down the right path -- in other words, enduring to the end. Willie's little antic (phuu, clap, point) has become a symbol of faith and hope to me. I use it all the time.

Hayden Lake

Willie spent his teenage years on Hayden Lake. What a cool place to grow up! We had a ski boat, a jet ski, a canoe and a windsurfer. I taught Will how to safely drive the boat and pull a skier, so he and his gang were on the lake all the time.

We had season ski passes to Silver Mountain. Once in a while, I'd pull Willie out of school in the middle of the week, and the two of us would have a dude day on the slopes.

And, of course, Will had his share of chores and helped me finish up the renovations to the house. We heated the house with a single wood-burning stove for the first five years, and Willie was constantly on call. He pretty much kept the fire burning day and night.

The first summer there on the lake, renovations were running smoothly at the house but Will, then 12-years old and just laying around, watching TV. I said, "Why don't you go find a job?" He replied, "OK, see you later." He took off on his bicycle.

Will came back about 30 minutes later and announced, "I got a job." I was stunned. I didn't expect him to find anything – especially at age 12.

There was a dock builder with a shop and lumber yard about two miles from our house. Willie walked in there and asked to see the boss. He said, "I'm looking for a job. You got anything around here I could do?" The owner said he could use someone to sweep out the shop several times per week. Then he asked Willie, "How much pay do you want?" Will thought for a moment and said, "How about two bucks an hour?" The owner smiled and said, "How about three?" Willie worked there the rest of the summer.

Two years later, at the age of 14, Tony Paquin hired Will and his friend, Russell Isaacson, to work for their new online medical website. They were populating a new search engine for the medical community. Will's job was to find related sites and copy and paste their URLs into the new system. It turned out that these young kids were way more productive at this than the old folks. And they were good on the phone with customers helping them with set up and tech support. Our customers freaked out when they learned these kids were only 14. Both Will and Russ were able to sock away some serious money toward their missions.

Will was fully engaged in church and scouting. He and I started home teaching together when he turned 14. As a senior companion, I always made my junior companions give all the home teaching lessons. It's wonderful training for a mission. Everybody loved him.

Will earned his Eagle about right before his 16th birthday. He refinished the wood seats on the bleachers at our local ball diamond for his Eagle Project. We replaced some of the boards and painted the rest up like new. It was a great service to the community.

First Car

I helped Willie buy a black, four-door Subaru sedan soon after he got his driver's license. He drove it to school every day and ran endless errands for his mother. The summer after he graduated, he and three of his friends drove it to Southern Utah for a dude trip – four 18 year old-year-old boys on their own. Look out! They did all kinds of off-road four-wheeling around Moab and Arches National Park. They had a blast and put that poor car to the test. It came back in one piece. You gotta love a Subaru. We sold that car before Will's mission.

As an amusing side note, at about that time, Suzy tried to get Will to grow his hair out. She loves long hair on men, especially neat, clean pony tails that slick all the way from front to back. And, of course, I don't. I think men should look like men. It's one of our ongoing battles. Suzy has been after me to grow a beard and pony tail for 34 years.

One day in my presence, she said, "Willie, I'll give you a hundred dollars if you grow a pony tail." I quickly retorted, "I'll give you a hundred dollars if you don't." Suzy is still mad at me.

Willie graduated from high school and almost immediately went on his mission. He was thrilled to be called to serve in Uruguay, South America.

Suzy and I accompanied Will to the Mission Training Center in Provo when he reported for duty. It was a great experience for me. Back then, they allowed parents to accompany their missionaries through the welcoming ceremony. There must have been 200 missionaries checking in that day, so there were about 500 people in the hall. Several dignitaries addressed the crowd. All the hymns were loud and satisfying – brought tears to my eyes. We left Willie in good hands.

After we dropped Will off for his mission in Provo, I drove up to Midway alone to give Jane a graveside report. Her number-one wish when she had cancer was to live long enough to see Willie on his mission. That's all she wanted – just ten more years. She spoke to me about it often and begged for it in her prayers until the very end.

I stood over Jane's headstone at the Midway Cemetery. I said, "Janie, Willie is finally on his mission. Leave me alone!" I knew that would make her laugh. The fact that it was such a big deal to her haunted me. It was very satisfying to check that off our to-do list. What sweet closure!

Will had a very successful mission and made us proud. He came home on fire with the Gospel and speaking Spanish like a pro. Those things have served him well over the years.

Will went to Ricks College for a year and then transferred to BYU. The summer after his mission, he took a job in California selling security systems door-to-door. He made enough money that summer to carry him through a couple of years at BYU without having to work. He graduated from BYU and went to law school. At this writing, he has been in the Air Force as a JAG officer for fifteen years.

While in California, Will met his wife, JoAnn Black. They currently have six boys within an 18 year span – Ethan, Aaron, Ryan, Dallin, Logan, and Grayson.

Chapter 27

Chase “The Woog”



I have always said that the biggest and most unexpected bonus that came from marrying Suzy was Chase. He was the youngest child in our family and just a fun kid. We teased him early on by calling him a “Goodie Little Woogie.” That was eventually shortened to just “The Woog.” The name lives to this day. Even letters that came home from his mission 15 years later would be signed, “Elder Woog.”

I am thrilled that The Woog became my son.

It wasn't easy.

Chase was born November 10, 1982 in Salt Lake City. He was five weeks pre-mature and had respiratory problems. His birth parents immediately put him up for adoption. After two weeks in a foster home, he was formally adopted by Reece and Suzy Ivie.

Reece and Suzy loved and cared for their sick little baby. It was touch and go as to whether he would live for a couple of months. They spent many days monitoring his health and helping him breathe. Chase flourished under their care.

I met Chase when he was four years old. I was picking Suzy up for our first date at her house in Highland. Suzy invited me in and introduced us. Chase was kneeling on the living room floor by the coffee table. He had at least a hundred toy airplanes on the table, all lined up in neat little rows. It was cute as could be. I said, “Hey, son. How you doing?” He ignored me. We really had very little to do with each other until Suzy and I got married and moved into my Midway home.

Chase had some trouble adjusting to his new life – especially to me, the new dad. His little world had been turned upside down. At the beginning, he didn’t understand why his real dad was gone, and why he couldn’t go back to his old house. And who was this big new jerk, telling him what to do all the time!?! Think about all that in the context of an innocent four-year-old’s mind. He was an emotional wreck, full of resentment and rebellion. Amy, bless her heart, had a special bond with Chase and took him under her wing. That helped a lot.

It didn’t help that, by divorce decree, Chase spent every-other weekend with Reece, who reinforced all those conflicts. He’d come home from those visits, and we’d start all over again. Poor little guy was a ping-pong ball.

Potatoes Up the Nose

Chase ended up going full on negative with me. He objected to everything I asked him to do – didn't matter what it was.

“Want a cookie? No!”

“Let's go outside and play. No!”

“Let me help you with your shoes. No!”

It was a matter of principle. He would not yield a single point to me. As our disagreements heated up, his objections always ended the same way. He would scream at the top of his lungs, “I not, I not, and I just not!” Then he'd run into the bathroom, slam the door and talk to himself. It was really quite funny. All this from a five-year-old, leaving a totally frustrated 42-year-old in his wake.

This constant contention was destroying the spirit in our home. Something had to be done. It all came to a head one night at the family dinner table.

Chase came home from school one day very hungry and asked his mom to make mashed potatoes for dinner. They were his favorite. Suzy went around the table before the prayer, serving them up plate-by-plate. She served up a mountain of steaming potatoes in front of Chase, but he begged for more. She told him he could have more when he finished those, but he made a fuss, so Suzy piled them even higher. It wasn't worth the fight.

However, after we started eating, Chase took just enough bites to kill his hunger pangs and then refused to eat anymore. His plate was still full of potatoes. I knew he was hungry and was not eating just to spite me. This had become a nightly ritual. I tried everything I knew to get him to eat his dinner.

After a few polite requests and multiple rejections, I said, “Chase, just eat your mashed potatoes, I know you like them – you asked for extra.”

“No.”

Long-suffering is running out. My blood is starting to boil. The power struggle is on in front of the whole family. I’m trying to be patient, so we go back-and-forth a few more times. Same results.

So, I stand up at the table thinking, “Oh boy! It’s reprove with sharpness time.” I walk over to Chase, pick up his spoon, load it with mashed potatoes from his plate, and say, “Eat this!”

“No.”

I lose my cool. “Chase, if you don’t eat these potatoes right now, I’m going to shove them up your nose.”

He looked at me with squinty Clint Eastwood eyes, weighing the threat. I was staring back at him with mine. The theme song from the movie “The Good, Bad, and the Ugly” played in my mind – ooh, ooh, ooh, ooh-ooh-ooh. This was a show-down. I was secretly hoping he would say “no” so I could follow through with my threat.

Then I hear music to my ears when he screamed, “I not, I not, and I juss not!”

He started to get off his chair to run into the bathroom and slam the door. But I grabbed his head under one arm, and scraped that spoon up his nose, filling his nostrils with mashed potatoes.

He blew those potatoes all over the table and started to cry. The rest of the family sat there in stunned silence, not believing what they just saw. I don't know how Suzy kept from killing me. It's a testament to her character.

I calmly loaded another spoonful of potatoes. Chase wiped his nose with his arm, took the spoon out of my hand and ate his whole dinner without another word.

That night, I went to Chase's bedroom after he was in bed. The Doctrine and Covenants teaches that after we reprove with sharpness, we need to follow with an increase of love.

I picked him up and gently hugged and cuddled him as much as he'd let me. He was mad. I told him I loved him and tried to explain why I did what I did. He, truly, esteemed me to be his enemy, and I wanted to fix that. It took years.

When I was finished and got up to leave, he said, "Dad, what food do you hate the most?" Without hesitation, I said, "spaghetti." He said, "When you're an old man, and you can't feed yourself, I'm going shove spaghetti up YOUR nose."

I laughed and laughed and said OK. Fair is fair. So, I fully expect to die with spaghetti up my nose.

I got some serious mileage out of this event. It changed our relationship. Things were a lot smoother after that. Chase started doing what I said. All the other children in the family did what I said. My children told all their friends about the potatoes, and even the youth of the ward did what I said. It was a source of conversation in the whole community – some thought I was a hero, others said I was a brute. It was great!

The Broken Leg

A few months later, winter set in and I decided to teach Chase how to ski.

I taught my other kids to ski when they were five years old, and we were planning some family outings. I didn't have the right size skis for Chase, so I borrowed a set from a friend.

Chase and I went to ski the bunny hill at Park West. It was a nice long and gentle slope – perfect for learning. Chase was okay getting the skis on and riding the chair lift. I supported him as we skied off the lift.

I started teaching him how to snow plow, so he could control his speed. I was skiing backwards while holding his tips together as we slowly descended for a few yards. That got old in a hurry, and he wasn't catching on. He was watching the other skiers and wanted to go straight. The ski hill was in a bowl shape – higher on the sides and low toward the center. It looked like I could start him on one high side and let him traverse to the other where he would automatically stop. That might give him a feel for the skis. So, I set him up for a short traverse at the top of the run and told him to shove off. I stood in the middle to catch him if he lost control.

Chase shoved off all right. He skied right in front of me and turned straight down the hill. I jumped to grab him, but he was just out of reach as he swished by. He froze in place and picked up speed. I yelled at him to sit down in the snow, but there was no stopping him. He was probably doing 30 miles an hour when he tumbled head over heels to a dead stop. He was crying pretty hard when I skied up next to him to check it out. His skis did not release. They had been sitting in a basement for a few years and the safety bindings had frozen in place. I should have lubricated them.

Chase's leg at his shin was bent and mushy – it was completely broken. I didn't wait for the ski patrol. It would take too long and Chase was going into shock. I took his skis off and left them on the hill.

I picked Chase up in my arms and skied to the patrol shack at the bottom of the hill. The ski patrol told me where the orthopedic clinic was. I kicked off my skis and carried Chase to the car. I raced to the clinic as fast as I could. He was in terrible pain.

They took Chase right in at the clinic. He was hysterical and in shock. The doctor gave him a shot to calm him down and reduce the pain.

Actually, the shot was the worst part for Chase. He was terrified of the needle and screamed bloody murder. The shot didn't calm him down much. He was still crying and carrying on to the point that they couldn't touch him. I finally said, "Chase, stop. Look at me! Look at me!" He stopped for a second. I said, "You have to stop crying so the doctor can fix your leg. If you don't, Dr. Big Needle is going to give you another shot."

Dr. Big Needle was the magic word. The last thing Chase wanted was another injection. The meds were obviously kicking in and Chase calmed right down. They set his leg and put on a full cast, right up to his crotch. The break was pretty bad.

I took Suzy's baby to the ski hill and brought him back in a full leg cast. She was waiting for us in the driveway. I was surprised she was not more upset with me.

This broken leg changed my relationship with Chase. When we left to go skiing, I was still the enemy. But during this painful trauma, I was his only friend. Mom wasn't there, and I saved him. I showed him compassion and love. This experience bonded us for a lifetime.

The Giant Peanut

That next summer about 7am on a Saturday, Chase came running into our bedroom all excited.

“Mom...Mom...Mom.” He was pushing on her shoulder.

“Mom...Mom.” Suzy cracked one eye open.

“There’s a giant peanut, and he wants to land in our yard!”

Barely awake, she replied, “What?”

“A giant peanut. He wants to land in our yard.”

Suzy: “What are you talking about?”

“You’ve got to come right now. There’s a giant peanut up in the air. He wants to land in our yard.”

Suzy put on her robe and went outside.

Sure enough, the hot-air balloon for Planter’s Peanuts, in the shape of a peanut with top-hat and all, was hovering about 30 feet in the air above our house. They were out for an early balloon ride in the cool Midway air. The pilot asked Suzy for permission to land in our 10-acre field.

So, the entire family got up and watched the Planter’s Peanut land. Pretty soon their truck arrived to take it away.

What a great experience for a little boy, obsessed with airplanes and flying!

Lake Powell

Over the next few years, we went to Lake Powell at least a dozen times. Chase loved it. He was swimming and jumping off cliffs with all the kids. In fact, he was fearless. We'd get to the top of a scary jump, and he'd be the first one off – no hesitation whatsoever. It made the rest of us look like wimps.

I started Chase waterskiing early. When Chase was still five, wearing his own life jacket, he would hold onto my life jacket from behind while I waterskied. He'd hang on forever until I dropped.

One day, we were out for our early run. There were no other boats around. I said, "Hey, Chase, jump in here and take a ride on my back." He had his pajama bottoms on, not his bathing suit, and he did not want to get them wet. I said, "That's easy. Just take off your pajamas and go naked." He did not like that suggestion at all. I said, "Tell you what. I'll take my suit off too so we'll both be naked." I couldn't believe he took me up on it. That day, Chase and I waterskied around Iceberg Canyon butt-naked with nothing but life jackets on. It was absolutely hilarious.

One of my favorite memories is Chase and Willie, paddling all over Iceberg Canyon in our canoe with our German Shephard, Tucker, sitting in the middle. It's a scene worthy of a Norman Rockwell painting. Tucker would not let them leave without him. When they tried, he would swim out to the middle of the lake until they took pity on him and lifted him in the canoe. Chase loved that dog.

Adoption

For six years in a row, I wrote Reece a letter, begging him to allow me to formally adopt his son. I offered to relieve him of the burden of child support and still allow Chase to visit him as much as Reece wanted.

My terms were much more liberal than the divorce decree. Reece was terrific with Chase, and there was no reason to withhold visitation.

Finally, Reece relented and signed the adoption papers. It was official. Chase was mine, and he had my name. That was a good day.

Bike Face

The term, “Bike Face” is one of many Torontoisms that have stood the test of time. It started with Chase in Hayden Lake when he was ten. Chase wanted a particular model Schwinn bike. He had his heart set on it. So, at the beginning of the summer, we went down and bought the bike.

I’ve never seen Chase so excited about anything – and he’s had a lot to be excited about over the years. When we got the bike home, he couldn’t get the smile off his face. We lovingly called that permanently glued-on smile “The Bike Face.” It’s a definite look that Chase gets when he is pleased with something. We apply the term to anyone with a genuine smile on their face.

The Storm

Chase was not thrilled about learning how to drive. That puzzled me because all the other kids were all hot for it and couldn’t wait. So, I had to push him along when it came to driving.

By that time, the Brat was long gone. The only car I had with a manual transmission was my Dodge pickup truck. It happened to be wintertime, and I had a snowplow attached to the front end. I used it to clear our driveway, which was long and steep. The plow made the truck a little clunky to drive with all that extra weight on the front end.

Nevertheless, I took Chase out in the snow and taught him how to drive. He hated it, but he did pretty well. To really break him in, I took the snowplow off the truck and we drove it to Seattle and back – about 500 miles. We drove out there to watch the Jazz play the Sonics. This really got his confidence up.

Once Chase got his license, we started looking for his first car. The other kids accepted any car I bought them. Chase was more opinionated. He wanted a cool car. I actually found a great car with low miles – a Chrysler LeBaron. When I told Chase about it, he had a cow. He would absolutely not drive such an old-man car. Even today, he can't believe I even suggested it and gives me a hard time. I crossed that car off my list.

We finally found a cute, little Geo Storm. It was bright yellow and very sporty – drove like a dream. Chase was thrilled with the manual transmission, and the price was right. You should have seen the Bike Face when I bought it.

The Bike Face disappeared the first day when the timing belt broke, and Chase was stuck in the middle of town. I towed him home with the truck and we spent a couple of days replacing the timing belt. We learned all about the engine in that car.

But the Storm was a little plain. Chase wanted to mount a shark-fin spoiler on the trunk. He found the shape he wanted on the trunk of a Hyundai Tiberon (Tiberon means shark in Spanish). Each end was in the shape of a shark fin with a wing in between.

There was no spoiler we could buy for that car, so we decided to make one using the Tiberon as a model. This is the most fun building project I ever undertook.

We sculpted the spoiler out of high-density compression board. We glued up big blocks of wood on each end with a single board connecting them for the wing. Then we drew the shape of a shark fin on the blocks and rough cut them with a chain saw. We took rasps and sanders and shaped that wood into the coolest shark-fin spoiler ever. It was, truly, a work of art. Once the spoiler was fitted to the trunk, we sealed it and finished it with matching high-gloss automotive paint.

Neither of us could believe how flawless and cool it was – looked like it was right off the showroom floor.

Most important, Chase was vindicated at the high school.

He made the mistake of telling his friends that we were making a spoiler for his car out of wood with a chain saw. You've got to admit, that sounds stupid. So, Chase suffered through six weeks of ribbing about his home-made spoiler. They were expecting a couple of orange crates glued on the trunk with a board in between.

When Chase showed up at the school with his shiny, showroom quality spoiler, all the kids ran over to the parking lot to check it out. He was the hero that day with his sophisticated work of art.

Australia

When Chase was a Senior in high school, Dave Weaver, my nephew who lived in Australia called. He invited me to come to Australia to join him and his brothers for a blowout going away party. After 20 years of working there, he was coming back to the States.

Since Chase was graduating from high school, I asked him if he wanted to go. This would be his senior trip – the dude trip of a lifetime. And it was just that.

The Weaver boys (Jane's nephews) are manly men. They work with their hands. They hunt. They ride motorcycles. They scuba dive. They ski. They are some of my favorite people.

Chase and I flew to Sidney and joined the manly men for two weeks down under. It was fabulous. We drove a full day into the outback with our guns. The kangaroos out there are out of control and breed like rats. They are everywhere. You can't drive a car at night because they jump in front of your car and wreck it. The government and farmers hate them and encourage people to kill as many as possible. They are not the cute little pets Americans think they are. So, we spent a day and a night shooting Kangaroos.

Then we drove back to Sidney, rented scuba gear, and went diving with the sharks on the Great Barrier Reef. We actually only saw a few sharks, but the diving was terrific.

Then we went dirt biking in the mountains. Then we put paddle tires on the dirt bikes and rode on the sand dunes by the ocean. It was very remote and the dunes and the beach were endless.

Chase's favorite thing to eat in Australia was the "Works-burger." It was a monster hamburger with every conceivable condiment on it. It came with cheese, onion, tomato, lettuce, a fried egg, a slice of pineapple, a slice of beet, bacon, pastrami, the works. The final sandwich was about six inches tall.

We, truly, had the trip of a lifetime.

Brother Buffalo

Chase and I started home teaching together when he turned 14. We were together until he left on his mission at 19.

One of our assignments was the Buffalo family. They were an older couple with four grown boys. Sister Buffalo was very active and served as Relief Society President for a few years. Brother Buffalo wanted nothing to do with the Church. He had been seriously offended thirty years earlier and rejected all religion. But he allowed us to visit the home because of his wife.

I made Chase give all the lessons during our visits. It's wonderful training for a young man.

Our first visit was interesting. I told Chase he had to give a little lesson, and he panicked. It scared him to death. So, we practiced. All he had to do was tell the story of the First Vision and bear testimony of Joseph Smith. We went over it several times on the way to the Buffalos.

We visited with Brother and Sister Buffalo for a few minutes. She was sweet as could be and he was grumpy, but we carried on. Finally, I said, "My son, Chase, has prepared the lesson for our visit." Chase mumbled through his story of the First Vision. If you didn't already know the story, you never would have known what he was talking about. His presentation was halting and soft. He ended with, "I know Joseph Smith was a true prophet of God."

We were all so focused on Chase, we didn't notice Brother Buffalo. When we looked up, he had tears in his eyes. He said, "Chase, I know it too."

That shocked us all – especially Sister Buffalo. It had been years since he said anything good about the Church. Somehow, Chase's innocent struggle and spirit touched this gruff old man.

We visited the Buffalos every month for four years. Chase always gave the lesson. We'd visit for a few minutes and Brother Buffalo would say, "Well, Chase. What you got for me today?"

After four years, Sister Buffalo passed away. I was bishop and visited with the family to plan her funeral. Chase went with me. I told Brother Buffalo he could have anything he wanted at his wife's funeral – prayers, music, talks, whatever. He looked at me with tearful eyes and said, "I don't care what you do. If my boys want anything, they can do as they please." He paused, and continued, "Actually, I do want one thing. I want Chase to be the concluding speaker." You should have seen the look on Chase's face. It was priceless.

At the age of 18, Chase was the concluding speaker at Sister Buffalo's funeral. He did a fantastic job, and Brother Buffalo cried through the whole thing. Brother Buffalo loved that boy from the start. Chase was able to touch his spirit like no other.

Mission

Chase was called to serve in the Albuquerque, New Mexico mission. This was fun for me, because I was both his father and his bishop. I interviewed him, processed the paperwork and conducted his missionary farewell. Before each interview, I would say, "Son, I'm taking off my father hat and putting on my bishop hat." He acknowledged the change and acted accordingly.

While Chase was on his mission, we moved to Florida. When he returned, we lived in an apartment in Maitland. I had his car waiting for him, so it felt like home.

Chase got his basic computer certifications after his mission. He went to work for Grant Glasscock in Salt Lake City and earned a four-year bachelor's degree in networking and security at UVU.

Chase returned to Florida for a couple of years to work, where he met Wendy Castillo. They were married in the Orlando Temple and had a wonderful reception at our home in Tangerine. They moved to Utah for seven years to build their careers and then back to Florida. They have two beautiful children – Christina and Gabe.

Chapter 28

Gus

Gus was my guard dog for Alpine Coins – a rottweiler. He was the most loyal and aggressive dog I have ever seen. He lived for one thing, and one thing only – to protect me and my stuff. Oh, he was mean.

And everybody hated him.

But the kids still talk about him at family gatherings, and they all want me to tell my Gus stories. So here we go.

I needed some security at my coin shop in Orem. We had safes and alarms and cameras, but I wanted a guard dog. I found an ad in the newspaper by a breeder in Lehi who specialized in breeding and training guard dogs – specifically rottweilers. I went to see him and bought what he said was the most aggressive pup of his new litter.

I learned all about rottweilers. They are one of the oldest working breeds in the world. Their early ancestors were Roman war dogs, weighing between 200 and 300 pounds. The Roman armies would send in packs of dogs to kill everything in sight and terrorize their enemies. They eventually became German sheep dogs. They are widely known as the most vigilant, loyal and fierce dogs in the world. They have a bite that can crush a cue ball – a little less than a pit bull. Their only down side is that they are big and slow. Most males weigh around 120 pounds. But they are still the best watch dogs money can buy.

I brought Gus home at eight weeks old. I would return him to the breeder in six months for guard dog training. The breeder told me not to let him spend time with anyone or anything but me until his training began. The dog had to bond only with me, believing that I was his mother and the only person on earth.

The breeder also said to discipline Gus harshly once in a while. It was okay to spank, but I had to pair it with yelling or barking. The dog had to be afraid of my voice. He said once Gus was full grown, there was nothing I could do to physically hurt or intimidate him. He said you can punch an adult rot full force in the face with your fist, and it won't phase him. All you've got is your voice.

When the breeder returned Gus to me a year later, fully trained, he said, "I've been breeding and training rots for 30 years and I've never been afraid of one. I'm afraid of Gus. He is smaller and faster than most rottweilers, and he is smarter than any dog I've ever trained. Be careful."

With that, I had Gus in my coin shop full time. He was perfectly obedient. He'd down-stay for hours. He wouldn't eat anything unless I said, "OK." When there was a noise or a threat, he looked at me, waiting for a command. He was absolutely fearless. He attacked a garbage truck driving by in the parking lot. He'd jump into campfires and try to put them out. He attacked fireworks and burned his mouth. Didn't care. Nothing intimidated him – except me. When I'd yell at him, he'd roll over and pee in the air.

Then an unfortunate thing happened. Just after I got him acclimated to the coin shop, I let him out to pee without a leash. There was a field across from the shop with a few trees. He'd just run over there and do his business until I whistled. Then he'd run right back in. He never wandered.

But this day, there was a pit bull tied to one of the trees – no owner in sight. I didn't see the dog until it was too late. Remember, Gus had virtually no experience with dogs.

He was curious and went right over to sniff the pit bull. That pit turned on Gus with a vengeance. He locked his jaws onto his shoulder below the neck and started to rip.

Gus' natural abilities came into play. He grabbed that pit by the throat and was flinging him back and forth, smashing him to the ground.

The owner of the pit and I ran out of our shops at the same time. He was next door. I was able to pull Gus off, but the pit wouldn't release. The owner pulled on the pit's chain while putting his foot on his head until the poor dog passed out -- just choked him unconscious. Gus' shoulder was bleeding badly. The pit's throat was torn open. The pit's owner and I agreed to take care of our own messes and let it go. It was intense.

The next day, the owner of the pit came into my coin shop. He said, "Wasn't that a great dog fight yesterday?" I looked at him like he was crazy. He told me he was a professional dog fighter. He raised and fought pit bulls.

The fighter said he'd never seen ferocity like he saw in Gus. He offered me \$5,000 for my dog (I had \$2,000 invested in him). He told me the top fighting dog in the world was a small rottweiler like Gus -- killed hundreds of dogs. He thought Gus had that kind of potential. I told him to get out of my shop. But it gave me a new perspective on Gus.

This dog fight ruined Gus around other dogs. The adrenaline rush and taste of blood made him frantic to dominate and fight all males. And he just wanted to mate with all the females. I constantly had to discipline him around other dogs. As long as I was with him, he was ok, but I worried when I lost track of him.

Gus saved our store from robbery several times. He watched everything like a hawk.

I had a customer reach over the top of our counter when we weren't looking to take a coin off the shelf. Bam! Gus bit him, and the would-be thief ran out of the store.

Another guy went behind the counter and reached into our safe. Bam! Gus bit him too.

I caught a guy, trying to steal a gun from behind our display. I stood him against the wall and gave Gus the command, “Watch!” He was trained to hold someone in position and only bite if the subject moved. I explained that to the guy, and he froze in place. Gus was two feet away, growling and salivating, just hoping the subject would move so he could attack. The cops were there in about 10 minutes. This guy was so glad to see them.

Speaking of cops, one morning two uniformed officers came into Alpine Coins and gave us a box of a dozen donuts. They were laughing and congratulated us on our dog.

The night before, the credit union right next door sent in a burglar alarm. One of the officers who responded to the call was a rookie – been on the job one week. The officers approached the front door from both sides, guns drawn, pointing up in the air. As the rookie passed our front door with his back pressed against the glass, Gus hit it from the other side with his incredibly ferocious bark and growl. The rookie fired his gun straight up into the soffit under the roof. They took me out and showed me the bullet hole. That rookie was taking the ribbing of his life.

Gus lived a very useful life at the coin shop for four years and paid for himself several times over. When I left Alpine Coins, I only wanted two things – the computer and the dog. My partner gladly complied. Gus was too much for Dave to handle.

Rottweilers look mean, but they have a reputation for being wonderful, gentle family pets. Just ask anyone who has one. I loved that dog and gave it a try.

Jane wasn't happy about it, but she let me try. Gus responded to her commands well. The problem was, he kept nipping at the kids when they touched my stuff.

For example, I was cleaning the boat in the driveway one day, and Willie and Gus were in the boat. I brought out a can of soda, opened it, drank a little and set it on the cover of the engine compartment. I always shared my drinks with the kids. Willie picked up the can while I was out of the boat, and Gus bit him – not hard – just left a little tooth mark on his arm. After all, it was my can. He did what he was trained to do.

Willie said, “Dad, Gus bit me!” He was looking at the mark, but not crying. It wasn't that bad. I scolded Gus and took him out of the boat.

I tried to leave it at that, but Willie went inside and told Jane. She ran outside and exploded. Then Willie started to cry. That tooth mark got Gus sentenced to his kennel until Jane died.

My Favorite Gus Story

Before Jane passed away, Oren and I took all the kids on an overnight hike to the top of Mount Timpanogos – about an eight-mile trek. We took food and sleeping bags to the very top and slept in a metal shack right on the summit.

We took Gus. He was a powerful dog, so I bought him a doggie back pack. He carried all of our food and drinks to the very top -- including milk for breakfast. And on the way down the next day, he carried all the kid's rock collections. That back pack weighed a ton, but it didn't slow Gus down at all.

We reached the summit and spread our sleeping bags out on the floor of the shack. It had no door. With six of us, we were jammed in there wall-to-wall. There was no room for Gus.

I put Gus on a “down-stay” command just outside the shack. But he wanted to be inside next to me, and he wasn’t as obedient as he used to be. He kept sneaking into the shack, one-inch at a time so it wouldn’t wake me up.

Cindy, at the age of ten, turned into my watch-dog watch-dog. Gus would get about half way into the shack, and she would excitedly whisper, “Daddy... Daddy... Daddy. Gus is coming in! Get him out...get him out!” I’d put him outside on another “down-stay,” and the cycle started all over again. We didn’t get much sleep. Both Gus and Cindy were a pain.

The next morning, we hiked down to the top of the legendary glacier. The glacier is huge. It sits in a massive bowl that is steep at the top and gradually levels out at the bottom. Everyone’s favorite activity is to jump off the top of the glacier and ride it to the bottom, going about 20 miles an hour on their rear ends. There are perfect ruts in the glacier that keep you stable. It’s very, very fun when the conditions are right.

The conditions were perfect. The glacier dropped straight down about ten feet before you hit the snow, so it was a little scary taking off. But after that initial fall, it was smooth sailing for about two hundred yards.

We were standing at the top of the glacier, contemplating the jump, when a middle-age couple showed up out of nowhere. They had a dog – the most beautiful pure-bred female husky I have ever seen. Oh, she was gorgeous – clean and groomed like you see at the dog show. The owners were so proud.

Gus was standing by me when he saw the husky. His adrenaline and focus nearly knocked me over as he went on high alert. I barked at him to stay. He was shaking and huffing and puffing in place like I’d never seen before.

Now remember, Gus only had two reactions to other dogs – kill'em or screw'em. And here in front of him was the most beautiful and sexy female on earth. It was all I could do to keep him in place while the husky pranced around. Oh, he wanted her.

The owner of the husky came over and talked to me. The dog's name was Sofie, and he didn't want my devil dog messing with her. He was worried, because Gus was not leashed. I assured him I had Gus under verbal control.

Then he asked me, "How are you going to get your dog down the glacier?"

I said, "There's only one way. I'm going to throw him off the edge."

He said, "That's terrible and mean. Your dog will never trust you again. I'm going to talk Sofie into jumping off."

I said, "Good luck."

I grabbed Gus by the nape of his neck and drug him to the edge. He resisted with all he had – all fours dug in – and I threw him over.

Gus twisted and turned in the air until he hit the snow. Then he did a couple of head-to-tail spins until he got his feet on the ground. He flew down that glacier about two hundred yards before he stopped. He immediately jumped up, wagging his tail, waiting for me to follow. He forgot all about Sophie.

Then we all jumped off and slid down the glacier. Gus was all over me when I shooshed by, and we had a good little wrestle in the snow.

At the bottom, we all looked up at the top, and Carrie said, “I want to do it again.” I analyzed the bowl. It looked like we could climb back up on the rocks on the side of the glacier, so we all hiked back up to the top. Of course, Gus came with us. I left his backpack at the bottom.

About a half hour later, we came back to the top of the ridge. The nice man was still there, trying to talk Sophie into jumping. He did not see us about 30 feet behind them. The man stood up and yelled, “You stupid bitch!” He picked up his dog and threw her off the edge.

The gentle dog expert lost his cool. Oh, it was funny.

Gus saw it all, and there was no stopping him. Like lightning, he ran past the owners, and sailed off the ridge on his own after his new girlfriend.

It reminded me of my favorite scene from the movie “The Man From Snowy River.” The wild horses ran off a steep mountain, leaving the timid cowboys who were chasing them at the ridge on their regular horses. Here comes Luke on his mountain horse. He rides full speed right between them, sails off the edge and holds on for dear life as his horse negotiates the steep terrain. Thrilling!

That was Gus.

The man panicked and jumped off the edge after his dog. I panicked and jumped off the edge after the man.

The dogs got to the bottom first. Gus was on Sophie so fast it made my head spin. She was on her back, yelping like crazy.

A few seconds later the man and I arrived on the scene. He ran over to pull Gus off, and I screamed, “No! Don’t touch him. He’ll hurt you. Let me do it.”

He wisely backed off and let me handle it. It's a good thing Gus was afraid of my voice, because he was motivated.

Sofie wasn't hurt or violated. The man and I shook hands and parted ways. His wife was miffed that her precious little girl got roughed up by my devil dog.

After Suzy and I got married, I decided to get rid of Gus. He was a liability, and I had to keep him caged up all the time.

I tried to give him to the Salt Lake City Police Department. They have a K-9 division and are always looking for good dogs. I took him to their headquarters for evaluation. He met all their criteria but one. He would not pursue a target past 30 feet. He was too protective of his handler. There was no re-training him after a lifetime as a defensive guard dog.

I finally gave Gus to a family in Midway with all the warnings. True to form, he bit them all, but they didn't care. Without me in his life, his loyalty defused, and he became a wonderful house dog. Gus died about three years later of throat cancer.

Appendix

Church Talks

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All is Well, All is Well

High Council Talk – Al Toronto

Like Nephi of old, I was born of goodly parents. Sad to say, I was not a goodly son. Out of six children, I was the rebel – independent and stubborn. I was at constant odds with my authoritarian Father – especially as a teen-ager. We truly had an adversarial relationship. Don't get me wrong, I was never in serious trouble – just cynical and mischievous – always pushing the limits. For the most part, I grudgingly went along with family and Church. But unlike my goody-two-shoes siblings, I was not converted. I took the Church totally for granted.

For 17 years I endured endless Church meetings. It was torture for this skeptic. Week-after-week we heard the same talks and sang the same songs. Living in the heart of Salt Lake City, it seemed like we talked about pioneers and sang “Come, Come Ye Saints” all the time. Come, Come Ye Saints over-and-over again. I grew to hate that song.

At the age of 17, I'd had enough. Against all expectations and training, I decided NOT to serve a mission – the first Toronto to bail out in three generations. I just wanted to get away from home. My folks were fit to be tied.

One day an Army Reserve recruiter came to our school to talk to the seniors. Boy, the army sounded exciting – this was before Viet Nam. Fifteen of us joined the army that day. The recruiter guaranteed if we signed at the same time, we'd all go through Basic Training together -- and it would be one-big party. As a group, we'd rule-the-roost in Basic, and no one would mess with us. Made sense, so we signed up.

The problem was, I was a minor. My Dad had to sign the application – and I knew he'd resist. So I decided to bluff my way into getting him to sign. I planned-out the whole scenario.

It was late at night. Dad was at the dining room table, working on his taxes. Mom was sitting next to him, reading. Everything was perfect. I couldn't wait to see the look on their faces. I knew my announcement would break their hearts. They'd cry and beg me to reconsider. Where had they gone wrong? They'd do anything to keep me home and serve a mission like my brother. But I, the proud, independent son would stand firm – and I would be free!

I walked in, slapped the application on the table and said, "Dad, I've joined the army. You have to sign this." Mom's head jerked up. The fun was about to begin.

Without a word, Dad read the paper and signed the bottom line. He handed it back and said, "Son... this is EXACTLY what you need." Mom broke into hysterical laughter – couldn't stop. Dad went back to his taxes. I stood there with my mouth open, wondering what I'd just gotten myself into. And Mom giggled on.

Two months later, 15 of us were on an airplane to Fort Ord, California. Oh we were high, laughing and joking the whole way. What an adventure we were going to have!

But when we registered, all 14 of my friends went to the same platoon, and I got split off into a different platoon -- that was mostly Puerto Rican. This had to be a mistake! What about the recruiter's guarantee!?! After a week of begging my superiors for help, they discovered it was a paperwork error. The clerk simply mixed up two names – "Toronto" and "Torino." Since we were already one full-week into our training, they would not switch us back. So my counterpart, poor Torino, was stuck in the all-white-spoiled-rich-kid platoon, while I was stuck with a gang of street-smart Puerto Ricans from New York City. Both Torino and I were in for a rough time.

I've never been so disappointed, or so angry, or so afraid. All my expectations were dashed. I found myself in what seemed like a living hell – at least to this inexperienced 18-year-old.

Most of the men came from dire poverty and were hostile toward this spoiled-rich-kid. Out of necessity, I hung out with the handful of English-speaking non-Puerto Ricans. All they ever talked about was drinking and sex in the most vulgar terms. I was no stranger to bad language, but nothing like this. The drill sergeants were no better – bad-mouthed and mean.

Basic Training was grueling – up at 4:30, work all day to the point of exhaustion, and then to bed – all in the most punitive environment you can imagine. I hated every second of it. My stomach was constantly in a knot.

After four weeks, they finally gave us a Sunday off. They announced that LDS services were being held on post, but who cared? I was so bitter and depressed, I didn't want to go.

Then they gave us the next Sunday off. Again, I blew-off any thought of going to Church – I joined the army to get away from it. Instead, I went to the PX alone.

On the way back, I passed a single building with a little cross on top. It was the Post Chapel. The sign outside listed all the denominations. LDS services started at 10 o'clock. It was 10:05. I decided to drop in.

I walked into an empty foyer. The congregation was in the chapel, behind a curtained, glass wall. The meeting had already started. And guess what I heard?

“Tis better far for us to strive our useless cares from us to drive. Do this and joy, your hearts will swell. All is well. All is well.”

My chest started to heave. This hate-filled, beat-up soldier sat down, alone in the foyer, and cried like a baby. I couldn't stop. I sobbed and sobbed. The knot in my stomach was released. I was home.

Nothing has ever been more clear to me. Did I want what the world offered, or what my family and church offered? At once, I knew the Church was true, my father was right, and I was a world-class idiot – what an arrogant fool!

Like Alma the Older, my father had been praying for his rebel son. God reached down and, with a simple paperwork error, separated me from my friends and threw me into the military meat-grinder. After being compelled to be humble, He put me right in front of a spiritual freight train – Come, Come Ye Saints.

My father's prophetic words still echo in my ears: “Son, this is exactly what you need.” It was divine intervention – the most significant miracle of my life.

In the remaining weeks of Basic Training, I gave away three Books of Mormon – one to a wonderful Puerto Rican who became a life-long friend. I started to study and pray. When I got home, I fell upon my father's neck and kissed him and begged his forgiveness. You should have seen his face! Six months later, I was on my mission.

Proverbs 22:6: “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” I'm a living example. The most interesting thing is that the hymn I hated as a child was the very instrument that brought me to my senses. Come, Come Ye Saints converted me. After more than 40 years, I still can't sing that song without crying.

Let me tell you another story about the power of Church music. My good friend, Mike Richardson, was born in Orem Utah to inactive Mormon parents. Good neighbors picked Mike up and took him to Primary for five years. He was never baptized. At the age of 10, he stopped going to church. Over the next 20 years, he turned to drugs, gambling and crime. He was a bad man. In 1984, Mike was the most wanted criminal in Utah Valley. But Mike was smart and had lots of money. He was able to stay one step ahead of the law. However, he was hooked on his own drugs and was spiraling out of control. The police were closing in on his operation. It was just a matter of time until he landed in prison.

One day Mike woke-up in a drug-induced stupor. Depressed, addicted, and afraid, he decided to kill himself. And why not? He loved absolutely no one, and no one loved him. In fact, he was universally hated and feared. He sat down at the kitchen table and put a gun to his head. As he began squeezing the trigger, his life flashed before his eyes. He saw himself sitting in Primary, and he remembered this song: “Jesus wants me for a sunbeam, to shine for him each day.” Mike put down the gun, looked up at the ceiling, and exclaimed, “Jesus wants me!” That song, learned so many years ago, saved his life.

Mike went straight to the authorities and turned himself in. He received full immunity by turning against his partners in crime. He checked himself into rehab. He took the missionary discussions and was baptized. He married a Mormon widow with three children and took her to the temple. He became the happiest man I ever knew. Last I heard, he was serving in a bishopric in Provo.

Primary workers, please listen. If you ever think the work you’re doing is not important, think about Mike. I’m sure there’s a wonderful, elderly Primary chorister in Orem who has no idea she had a hand in saving someone’s life.

What effect might your lesson or song have on all the little “Mikeys” in your class today? In my opinion, you’re doing the most important work in the Church. I know one ex-criminal who would agree.

One more short story. It was Christmas Eve, 1967. My father only had a few days to live. At the age of 60, he’d lost a long, painful battle with cancer. We moved a hospital bed into our living room to make caring for him easier. Dad’s once robust body was no more than a skeleton. His once jet-black hair was pure white. He’d been in-and-out of a coma for a couple of days. He was barely breathing.

All the children were there. We gathered around Dad’s death-bed with Hymnbooks started singing Christmas carols. Dad slept through the whole thing until we started singing “Silent Night.” All of a sudden, his eyes popped open, he looked at each of us, and though too weak to sing, he mouthed the words as we sang, “Round yon virgin mother and child, holy infant so tender and mild.” Then he slipped back into his stupor. That song brought my father back from the almost-dead to say good-by to his family.

Brothers and Sisters, there’s tremendous power in the hymns of the Church. They invite the Spirit into our meetings. They serve as tools of conversion. They teach gospel doctrine.

The First Presidency says this in the preface of the hymn book: “Some of the greatest sermons are preached by the singing of hymns.” This is interesting wording – listen to it again. “Some of the greatest sermons are preached by the singing of hymns.” Then they continue, “Hymns move us to repentance and good works, build testimony and faith, comfort the weary, console the mourning, and inspire us to endure to the end.” (Hymns, ix) The stories I’ve told here today punctuate this statement. And I’m sure nearly everyone here could add a story or two of their own.

I love Church music – particularly hymns of the atonement and the restoration. Singing them is my favorite part of every meeting. I sing long and loud. I'm always disappointed when we don't sing all the verses. It's like stopping in the middle of a scripture.

When we moved to the Apopka Ward about three years ago, I had recently been released as Bishop in North Idaho. Bishop Blackwelder called me in. He asked if I had any experience with music. I said yes. He apologized that he did not have a more substantial calling for an ex-bishop, but they were desperate for a ward chorister. Though I had never held that exact calling, I accepted. Sister Bobbyn Lowder was our organist, and we had a great time. Every Sunday, I made a total fool out of myself, conducting the congregation like they were the Tabernacle choir – flailing both arms – holding each stanza long and loud – and cutting them off at the end. To everyone's utter amazement, especially mine, the congregation started to sing like they were the Tabernacle Choir. I've never had more fun. At times, I got so caught up in the music, I thought I'd fly right off the stand. Several times, both the congregation and I ended a hymn in tears. Ward Chorister is now my favorite calling. Thank you, Bishop Blackwelder -- no apologies necessary.

J. Reuben Clark said, "We get nearer to the Lord through music than perhaps through any other thing except prayer." (Conference Report, Oct. 1936, 111)

The Lord, Himself, takes music one step further by saying, "...the song of the righteous IS a prayer unto me, and it shall be answered with a blessing upon their heads." (D&C 25:12)

Music IS worship. It's a huge part of our culture. That's why hymns, choirs, and prelude music are such integral parts of all of our meetings.

That's why we should come early and listen to the prelude music. That's why we should join the ward choir. That's why we should sing our hearts out during congregational hymns. I always feel sorry for those who don't participate. They're really missing out. Particularly Young Men who think they're too cool to sing. They obviously don't know what cool really is.

And not being able to carry a tune is no excuse. Nothing tickles me more than off-key singers in church. They get it. "The song of the righteous is a prayer unto our Father in Heaven." Sounding good is not required.

In preparation for this talk, I read the hymnbook – cover-to-cover. I marked it up like I do my scriptures. It's one of the most inspiring things I've ever done. As a result, I want to try something different today. I'm going to bear you my testimony in verse, quoting selected lines from some of my favorite hymns. I'm calling this exercise "hymn-speak." By the way, this meets all the requirements of a pure testimony, testifying of God, Jesus Christ, and the restoration. If you want to have some fun, try creating your testimony using words from the hymns. It's a little disjointed, but I like it.

Here's my final testimony to you in "hymn-speak:"

I am a child of God, and he has sent me here. Has given me an earthly home with parents kind and dear.

I know that my Redeemer lives. What comfort this sweet sentence gives. He lives. He lives who once was dead. He lives, my ever living head.

Praise to the man who communed with Jehovah. Jesus anointed that prophet and seer. Blessed to open the last dispensation, kings shall extol him and nations revere.

Hail to the prophet ascended to heaven, traitors and tyrants now fight him in vain. Mingling with gods he can plan for his brethren. Death cannot conquer the hero again.

Hark, all ye nations, hear heaven's voice, thru every land that all may rejoice. Angels of glory shout the refrain, truth is restored again.

We thank Thee, oh God, for a prophet to guide us in these latter days. We thank Thee for sending the Gospel to lighten our minds with its rays.

And should we die before our journey's through, happy day, all is well. We then are free from toil and sorrow, too; with the just we shall dwell.

But if our lives are spared again to see the Saints their rest obtain, oh, how we'll make this chorus swell — all is well, all is well.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Flesh of His Flesh – Bone of His Bone

Al Toronto – High Council

I want to begin today by telling you about one of the most intense encounters I ever had with another religion. It happened on my mission about 50 years ago.

I was a missionary branch president in Temuco -- a medium-size town in Southern Chile. It was a brand new area and only two of us were assigned to the whole city. We were tracting one day, when we came across the home of Dr. Mario Jesus Gonzales. His name was on the mailbox. A distinguished, gray-haired gentleman answered the door – about 60-years old. Dr. Gonzales took one look at us, and said, “You’re the Mormons, aren’t you?” I assured him that we were. Then he said, “Let me tell you who I am. I’m President of The Evangelist Minister’s College of Chile. I’m the top-ranked Protestant in the whole country. All men who wish to become ministers have to attend my college for two years before they’re licensed to preach. As a Doctor of Theology, I teach many of the classes. In fact, I’m teaching a new course this semester on non-Protestant religions. How would you like to speak to my class for an hour and present your case for Mormonism?”

I was stunned. My companion, Elder Roundy, had been in Chile just two weeks – fresh off the farm in Idaho and clueless. He’d be no help. I’d been in the mission field about one year and was barely getting a grasp of Spanish myself. Here was an aggressive Bible scholar, anxious to test my metal in front of 50 future ministers. I was sure his plan was to tear this amateur apart to show his young charges how smart he was. But here was a chance for me, one of the Lord’s weak and simple instruments, to proclaim the truth to 50 spiritually driven students. I figured if I could just touch one heart with my testimony, it would be worth it. So, in spite of the risks, I said “yes.”

The day finally came. Elder Roundy, and I showed up at the College. The great professor escorted us to a lecture hall. There was a low stage up front with a pulpit in the middle. In that room were 50 wooden desk-chairs. In each chair sat an eager young man, studying for the ministry.

Dr. Gonzales introduced us. “These are Mormon missionaries from the United States. This is Mr. Toronto and this is Mr. Roundy. Today, Mr. Toronto is going to tell us about one of the greatest charlatans in religious history – Joseph Smith. The Mormon Church is the fastest-growing cult in the world. We need to learn as much as we can about it, so we can protect our parishioners from such false doctrine. Take careful notes so I can answer all your questions later. Mr. Toronto, you have one hour.”

How would you like to follow that? I stood up at the pulpit red-faced. Fifty smug faces were staring up at me like I was some kind of demon. They were waiting for my horns to pop out. I was sure we’d made a huge mistake in coming.

I started to speak. “The label ‘Mormon’ is a nickname. The official name of our Church is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.”

Dr. Gonzales jumped out of his chair and yelled, “Take notes class!” He talked for a minute about the name of the Church and sat down.

This totally caught me off-guard. I turned around to my audience, again red-faced. “The word ‘Mormon’ comes from our *Book of Mormon* which is the history of an ancient civilization that lived on the American continent for a thousand years.” Dr. Gonzales jumped up again. “Take notes class!” He ranted on-and-on for a minute about the Book of Mormon and sat down.

I couldn't believe it. He wouldn't let me say more than one sentence. I decided to give it one more shot. "We believe Jesus Christ visited the American continent after his resurrection."

Gonzales came out of his chair in a rage. "Take notes class!"

I whirled around, pointed my finger at him and said, "Hey! Will you please stop interrupting me? You can tear us apart all you want after we leave. But if you interrupt me one more time, we'll leave immediately. You said I had one hour, and I want it – all to myself."

You could have heard a pin drop. The great professor had been reprovved in front of his students. I doubt that had ever happened before. But, hey, I was 20, a foreigner, and didn't know any better. Besides, at that point, I had nothing to lose.

All of a sudden, Dr. Gonzales started to laugh, breaking the tension, and all the nervous students laughed along with him. Finally he said, "You're right. I apologize. You have one hour."

I turned around to face my audience yet again. My heart was just pounding. But I was encouraged by the look on the student's faces. In place of scorn, I saw new respect. It dawned on me then that now they would listen to every word I said.

I started my presentation. It went something like this:

I came here to tell you about Joseph Smith and how he restored the true Church of Jesus Christ. But after listening to Dr. Gonzales, I've changed my mind. Instead, I'm going to tell you about our "Plan of Salvation." This Plan answers life's most basic questions. At some time in our lives, all of us have pondered these four things:

First, “Who am I?”

Second, “Where did I come from?”

Third, “Why am I here on earth?”

Fourth, “Where am I going after I die?”

Do you know the answers to these questions? (I looked over the blank stares of the students.) The Mormon Church does. I then went on to give this group of 50 budding ministers the fourth missionary discussion on the Plan of Salvation.

I want to depart from my story about Dr. Gonzales for a while and talk about the first of these four questions – “Who am I.” This is THE most important question. And the answer totally depends on how we define God. This knowledge is critical. It’s the most elementary and essential doctrine of the Church. Without knowing who God is and who we are, the rest of the Plan makes little sense. With this knowledge, our destiny is crystal clear – even a child can understand it. It’s amazing to me that the true nature of God has been so lost to the world.

Here’s what Mormons understand that other religions don’t: God is a man – not a burning bush – not a mystical force – not mother nature. He’s an exalted human being who, through perfect obedience to all the laws of the universe, has gathered all knowledge and all power unto himself. And he used to be like us. Listen to this statement by Joseph Smith:

“God Himself was once as we are now and is an exalted man who sits enthroned in yonder heavens. This is the great secret. If the veil were rent today...you would see Him as a man in form – like yourselves – in all the person, image, and very form as a man... It is the first principle of the gospel to know for a certainty the character of God – to know that we may converse with Him as one man converses with another...” *Joseph Smith Jr., TS August 15, 1844, Delivered April 1844.*

This is a serious statement – and it has high credibility with me. It comes from the first prophet of the latter days. Joseph Smith is one of only a handful of men to actually talk with God the Father face-to-face. He had absolute, first-hand knowledge. The nature of God was the very first principle revealed to the boy Joseph in the First Vision.

In his own words:

“I saw two personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name, and said, pointing to the other, “This is my beloved Son – hear Him.””

What a momentous and supernal occasion! This most essential and basic truth was revealed to the earth once more.

Now this exalted human being, who is God, is reproducing. He has a family. He’s creating children of his own that he hopes will grow up to be like He is. Every person born on this earth, including everyone in this room, is a literal child of God and has the seeds within to become like his or her father.

Here’s what Brigham Young had to say on the subject:

“Man is the offspring of God. We are as much the children of this great Being as we are the children of our mortal progenitors. We are flesh of His flesh, bone of His bone, and the same fluid that circulates in our bodies, called blood, once circulated in His... As the seeds of grains, vegetables and fruits produce their own kind, so man is in the image of God.” *Brigham Young, JD 9:283, February 23, 1862*

These plain and simple doctrines blow the religious world away. Many of our fellow Christians mock us for these beliefs. To them, the idea that God is an exalted man, and

especially that we can follow in his footsteps, is heresy. It's too much for them to bear. It's too simple... too concrete... too logical.

Today's religious philosophers paint God to be some mystical, inhuman power, without body, parts or passions, that man can't possibly comprehend. I don't have time to go into this today, but if you want to have some fun, get on the Internet and search for "nature of God." You won't believe the mass of confusion. And where do they get it?

The Bible is absolutely clear that man is made in the "express image of God." (Heb 1:3) Christ Himself taught, "He who hath seen me, hath seen the Father?" (John 14:9) They obviously don't interpret these Biblical passages literally. They bend the plain and simple truth to suit their needs.

Now I want to take our relationship to God one step further. How well do you suppose we knew God personally in the pre-existence? There were billions of us. And there's a veil over our minds now, so we can't remember.

I love this quote, again, from Brigham Young:

"If any of us could now see the God we are striving to serve – if we could see Elohim, our Father who dwells in the heavens, we should learn that we are as well acquainted with Him as we are with our earthly father. He would be just as familiar to us in the expression of his countenance, and we should be ready to embrace him and fall upon His neck and kiss Him if we had the privilege. Yet in this life, unless the vision of the Spirit is opened to us, we know nothing about God... No other single item will so astound you after this life, when your eyes are opened to eternity, as to think that you were so stupid in the body." *Brigham Young, JD 8:30, March 25, 1860*

Brigham Young tells it like it is. He confirms that God is not only our creator, but our very close personal friend whom we loved and honored, just like we do our earthly fathers.

What a beautiful concept! And what a nice thing to think about when we pray!

Do these teachings from our prophets answer the question “Who am I?” They certainly do. We are literal children of a living, loving, exalted man – even God the Father – with the potential of becoming Gods ourselves.

Now let’s get back to Dr. Gonzales and his 50 students. Though I didn’t use these quotes from Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, I taught these concepts to the group, using their Bible. The great professor sat in his chair purple with rage because many of his students were nodding their heads in approval. What I said just makes a whole lot of sense. But he honored his commitment and didn’t interrupt me again. I ended with the strongest testimony I could muster.

After I sat down, Dr. Gonzales stepped to the pulpit and said, “It appears that Mormons worship their own God and by their own doctrine have an answer for everything. That’s why all other religions despise them. It’s too bad they don’t stick to the Bible and interpret it correctly.”

We left the College on friendly but cool terms. I’ve always felt that I touched someone in that audience that day. The Spirit was so strong. It’s too bad I’ll never know – at least in this life.

But what Dr. Gonzales said has stuck with me over the years. Other religions do despise us. I’ve experienced such rejection time and time again. And, of course, he was just wrong about God.

We don't worship our own – we worship the one and only TRUE God. In fact, that's the very definition of eternal life. From the 17th chapter of John, verse 3:

For “this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”

And, yes, we do have the answers to all of life's questions. We enjoy the fullness of the gospel, replete with living prophets, modern scriptures, the restored priesthood, and all the covenants necessary for salvation and exaltation. No other religion even comes close to our level of enlightenment. And it all hinges a single, critical piece of information – our knowledge of who God is and who we are.

Brothers and Sisters, let's be grateful we're members of this Restored Church. Let's be thankful for modern prophets who've taught us the true nature of God. Let's remember that our Father in Heaven is a tangible person, and that someday we'll recognize Him... and “fall upon His neck and kiss him...” and sit down and talk with Him “as one man converses with another.” Let's use this knowledge now to increase our faith and be more obedient children – for that is the only way we will ever realize our potential, which is, to become like our Father.

That we may do so is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen

Hold On Thy Way

Al Toronto – High Council

About Twenty years ago, our family was on the road, moving from Utah to North Idaho. I was towing a huge, overloaded, home-made trailer behind our beat-up Suburban – couldn't safely drive over 40 miles an hour. My 11-year-old son was riding shotgun. My daughters were towing a small boat with a pickup truck, loaded to the hilt. My wife and youngest son were in our third car. We had quite the lumbering caravan.

For the previous 10 years, I'd been heavily involved in the precious metals business. Thus, the bulk of my life savings was in gold coins. Those coins were in a box, locked in the console of the Suburban. I'd find safe storage for them once we reached Coeur d'Alene.

It was getting dark, and we were too tired to drive, so we pulled off to a motel in Pocatello. I parked the cars right in front of the motel room, locked them up and went in. I wasn't worried about the gold. I'd moved it like this several times. It was buried under a ton of stuff, and our ratty-old-rig was not a likely target for thieves.

When we got up in the morning, I immediately noticed that one of the windows of the Suburban was broken out. My heart sank, and I ran to the car in a panic to check it out. Stuff was scattered all over the place. The gold coins were gone. I can't even begin to describe the adrenaline rush and sick emotions that overwhelmed me at that moment. It was all I could do to keep from throwing up. My life savings were gone – 10 years of hard work down the drain. And it was my own stupid fault!!

I called the police. It took them a couple of hours to dust the car for finger prints and make a report. They poignantly assured me there was no hope for recovery. I was toast.

Throughout this entire ordeal, my children quietly observed my ranting and raving and dealing with the police – no one dared say anything. It was NOT pretty. In my emotional trauma, I'd forgotten they were there.

There was nothing left to do but continue the trip. So, we hit the road again with our motley caravan. I was behind the wheel, trying to recover my senses. My 11-year-old son, Willie, was in the passenger seat again, quiet as a mouse. I was totally absorbed within myself – wallowing in grief and self-pity – thinking of all the things I should have done differently. I was really beating up on myself.

After about 30-minutes of this thick silence and brooding, Willie finally spoke up.

"Dad, maybe Heavenly Father made this happen to you."

I snapped right out of my daydream. "What did you say?"

He repeated, "Maybe Heavenly Father made this happen."

I was NOT in the mood for this. But I'd been ignoring Willie way to long, so I said, "What do you mean, son?"

He continued, "Maybe this is a little test, and Heavenly Father wants to see if you pass it."

My immediate thought was -- what could this little kid possibly understand? But then I thought more about what he said, and asked, "Willie, what do you think Heavenly Father would want me to do right now?"

His face brightened. He said, "He'd want you to go – PHUU (both hands shoulder high, palms up), CLAP (he then clapped his hands together), POINT (he pointed straight ahead with one hand).

I laughed, and I laughed, and I laughed until tears came to my eyes. Then I laughed some more. I pulled off to the side of the road to give Willie the monstrous hug he deserved. And the healing process began.

My young, innocent son saved me – FROM MYSELF! He saw through all of the worldly implications of my problem and assessed the long-term reality of the situation. With his childlike faith, he came up with a simple expression for one of the most profound concepts in the Gospel – accepting loss and adversity, dusting yourself off, and continuing down the right path – in other words, enduring to the end. Willie’s little antic (phuu, clap, point) has become a symbol of faith and hope to me. I use it all the time.

There are hundreds of examples of this principle in the scriptures. In fact, most of our history, both modern and ancient, carries the same theme – overcoming adversity by faith.

The most immediate example, since it involves gold, is Nephi and his brothers in Jerusalem as they were trying to obtain the plates of brass from Laban. As you recall, Laman went in first and just asked Laban for the plates. He was chased out of Laban's house by the sword. So the boys decided to return and try to buy the plates from Laban. From the third Chapter of First Nephi (22-25 edited):

And it came to pass that we went down to the land of our inheritance, and we did gather together our gold, and our silver, and our precious things ...and we went up again unto the house of Laban... and desired him that he would give unto us the records which were engraven upon the plates of brass, for which we would give unto him our gold, and our silver, and all our precious things. ...When Laban saw our property... that it was exceedingly great, he did lust after it, insomuch that he thrust us out, and sent his servants to slay us, that he might obtain our property.

And I thought I had problems in Pocatello!

Anyway, they barely escaped with their lives. Laman and Lemuel were so angry, they beat Nephi and Sam almost to death until an angel of the Lord stopped them. You've got to admit, they'd all had a really bad day. At that point, as Nephi's brothers are having a major pity party and brooding over their losses, little brother pipes up, just like Willie did with me, "Hey, let's go back to Jerusalem again." I'm sure they snapped right out of their daydreams and asked, "What did you say?" Nephi continued:

Let us be faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord, for behold he is mightier than all the earth, then why not mightier than Laban and his fifty – yea or even than his tens of thousands.

I have this vision of Nephi – a large teen-ager – all bruised and beaten-up – jumping up in front of his older, hateful brothers around the camp fire and going,

"Laban shmaban" PHUU – CLAP – POINT!

No wonder they hated him. But what an example of faith in the face of adversity!

And, of course, we all know what happened. This teen-ager single-handedly killed Laban, obtained the plates, and saved an entire nation from dwindling in unbelief. And that was just the beginning of his heroics. Does enduring to the end pay off? You bet it does.

My favorite lesson in adversity, however, comes from the prophet Joseph Smith while he was in Liberty Jail in 1839. Prior to his arrest, he was tarred and feathered and hounded by mobs.

Then they put him in jail for six months. Considering the shortness of the Prophet's life and the harsh conditions of the prison, this must have seemed like an eternity.

His life was constantly threatened by hostile guards. He and his companions were nearly starved to death. They were even poisoned a few times. And they almost froze to death in their unheated cell.

The Prophet finally reached the end of his rope. After months of physical and mental abuse, he inquired of the Lord as to why he must suffer so. Why wasn't the Lord breaking down the walls of the prison like he did for Paul and the Sons of Mosiah? He was the Lord's chosen prophet. His people needed him desperately. What was going on?

Joseph Smith received the revelation found in section 122 of the Doctrine and Covenants. The Lord is speaking directly to him. It contains one of the most powerful lessons ever taught to man. Verse 7 is particularly graphic and poetic:

“And if thou shouldst be cast into the pit, or into the hands of murderers, and the sentence of death passed upon thee; if thou be cast into the deep; if the billowing surge conspire against thee; if fierce winds become thine enemy; if the heavens gather blackness, and all the elements combine to hedge up the way; and above all, if the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good.”

What an incredible statement in this life-and-death scenario! Joseph had been tarred, feathered, starved, poisoned and frozen – any one of which should have killed him. “All these things shall give thee experience and shall be for thy good.” Or like Willie said, “Maybe this is like a little test, and Heavenly Father wants to see if you pass it.”

This concept is nearly impossible to comprehend when we're in the middle of a crisis. Nobody wants trouble and pain. We do everything we can to avoid it, and we pray for relief. But just like Joseph, sometimes that's all we get – trouble and pain. It's what we signed up for in the Pre-existence. And here, the Lord tells us that it's all good. Our problems are yucky but necessary medicine that we have to endure in order to become like Him.

Then in verse 8, the Lord puts it all into perspective with the greatest stop-being-such-a-big-baby scripture of all time: “The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than He?” Wow! How would you like to be hit with that?

Then the Lord gives Joseph Smith the “Willie Toronto special” in verse 9: “Therefore, hold on thy way... and God shall be with you forever and ever.”

Again, “Hold on thy way (PHUU) and God shall be with you (CLAP) forever and ever (POINT).”

I don't know about you, but these scriptures sure help me put my current set of problems into perspective – an eternal perspective. They make me want to endure to the end, no-matter what, just like Nephi and Joseph Smith. I hope they do the same for you.

I started my talk with a lesson from my 11-year-old son. Now I'd like to continue with another lesson from Willie – 20 years later. It's a current event that further illustrates my topic and should make us feel better about the Gospel of Jesus Christ and life here at home.

Will is now 30 years old. He's an Eagle Scout, a returned missionary, a husband and father with a beautiful wife and three boys under the age of five.

But for the last six months of 2008, Will was not home with his wife and children. He was in Iraq, serving as an attorney with the Air Force JAG.

Captain Toronto was assigned to the highest security prison in Baghdad – Camp Cropper. He was responsible for initial processing of suspected terrorists as they were rounded up by the Marines. He interrogated them and reviewed all the evidence. Then he made recommendations to either let them go, send them to prison, or turn them over to Iraqi authorities for execution. It was a serious job with life-and-death often on the line.

I'm going to read three entries from Will's blog. It's a running diary of his experiences in Baghdad. These snapshots of military life in a war-zone have inspired me beyond words. I reflect on them again and again. Maybe it's because he's my son. I hope they inspire you as well. Here's a first-hand report from a Mormon soldier in Iraq:

23 June 2008: I walked to church at adjacent Camp Striker today, carrying my scriptures and loaded weapon. I couldn't help but think of Johnny Cash singing "The Wanderer" by U2 - particularly the line: "I went walking, with a bible and a gun . "

There are normally five in attendance, but there were six there today because the Stake rep came. I choked up singing the hymns – the spirit was so strong. Sacrament consisted of six pieces of bread. There is a spiritual intensity and purity that comes from half a dozen guys holding sacrament meeting a war-zone! I can't wait to go back.

06 July 2008: I prepared, blessed and passed the Sacrament today. It was awesome! Seven little cups and one piece of bread. I broke it into big pieces that satisfy too.

As I said both prayers, kneeling in my uniform in a chapel at Camp Striker, it just boggled my mind that such a wonderful renewal was taking place in Baghdad, Iraq.

Being fast Sunday, we just went around the room and all seven of us bore our testimonies.

The best testimony was that of the newly promoted Army 1st Lieutenant (Lt). This Lt is a platoon leader and leads his men on raids in Southern Baghdad. His testimony was truly unique. He said that he didn't think the infantry was really for him because he doesn't like the things he has to do. He gave an example of a raid where they burst into a home, found the target, put him on the ground, flex-cuffed him, put a bag over his head and tagged him. Then it dawned on him that this man's wife and toddler son were sitting right there, staring at their husband and father in such a state with his face against the wall and rifles pointed at him. He thought of his own toddler son and realized he didn't really like what he was doing.

He also recounted a time where he had to threaten to bulldoze a suspect's house if he didn't tell them where his weapons cache was located. "Would I really have done it?" - he asked as he continued. "I don't know." He just didn't like having to say it. Listening to this super-sharp, young Mormon platoon leader unburden his mind was heavy. He paused for a moment, massaged his neck with his hand and shook his head, unable to sort it all out. Then he tearfully summed up his point: "I'm just glad the atonement of Jesus Christ will straighten it all out."

19 August 2008: As funerals go, the military does them right. Short, to the point, and quite moving. There was a memorial service today for a young female soldier who committed suicide. I didn't know her well, though I saw her around.

She was in some minor pain from an accident and in trouble with command. Depressed and baking her brains out in this scorching war-zone, she couldn't take it anymore.

The building was packed, about 150 soldiers – and in the front was the wooden stand they use for funerals. It held up her M16, pointed straight down – her helmet was sitting on top. A pair of her boots was at the bottom near the rifle's muzzle. Her dog-tags hung off the pistol grip. On either side were flags. The U.S. flag on the right, her unit's on the left. On an easel, next to the American flag, was a large army photo of her.

At the service, comments were very concise – no crying by the speakers. Words of encouragement and of looking forward were spoken. We prayed together for the family back home. Her father is a senior enlisted man in the Air Force. I can only imagine that her parents feel a little betrayed.

After a moment of silence, a loud and mean voice rose from behind us, calling roll: "SERGEANT SMITH." "Here." "SPECIALIST ANDERSON." "Here first sergeant." "PRIVATE SIMMONS." "Here Sir." "PRIVATE JONES . . .", "PRIVATE CAROL JONES...!" "PRIVATE CAROL M. JONES." No answer.

We then heard the command just outside the door, "Ready, FIRE." At the sound of the first shot, the woman in front of me winced. There were three shots in a row. Then to the sound of "Amazing Grace" on the bagpipes, we all exited one by one, passing the stand with her boots, M16, dog-tags and helmet, bordered by the flags, each of us giving the sharpest salute we could. Some of the salutes were very slow, the ones from friends were very shaky. Some would tear off one of their velcro patches after saluting and put it up next to her boots.

As I walked away from her stand, I couldn't help thinking, "What a waste! Why couldn't she just hang in there one-day-at-a-time, like we all do?" (end blog report)

Brothers and Sisters, I know times are hard for a lot of people right now. Many have poor health. Some have lost their jobs and are wondering how to feed their families. Almost everybody I know is worried about their job – including me. Others are losing their homes. I know several people who are watching in horror as their retirement funds vanish in a collapsing market.

Now is a good time to re-visit the doctrine of enduring to the end.

"Enduring to the end" is the fifth and final principle of the Gospel. The first four are faith, repentance, baptism and the Gift of the Holy Ghost. We begin by becoming Saints, washed clean through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, and receiving His spirit. Then we are required to continue living the commandments to the very end, no-matter what. That's the real test. Hanging in there through both the good and the bad times is what defines a true disciple of Christ.

Nephi gives us some insights as to what it means to endure to the end. 2nd Nephi 31:20

"Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life."

There's some interesting wording here. Nephi uses the phrase "press forward" twice in the same verse, emphasizing the need for constant progress.

Then he adds two qualifiers: “with a steadfastness in Christ” and “feasting upon the word of Christ.” How do you suppose we “press forward” like this?

The answer is simple: First, we read our scriptures and go to Church – to all three meetings if we’re serious about feasting upon the word of Christ. Second, we magnify our callings both at home and in the Church, demonstrating our love of God and of all men. And third, every week we re-commit to keep the commandments by partaking of the sacrament. These three steps involve knowledge, service, and covenants. That’s how we press forward in Christ and endure. That’s how we become sustained in our trials. As a case-in-point, just think about how going to church and partaking of the sacrament are sustaining our soldiers in Iraq. They’ll do the same for us.

And such endurance leads to a “perfect brightness of hope.” This means knowing that everything rests squarely on the atonement of Jesus Christ – not only our sins, but all of our problems. Elder Quentin L. Cook addressed today’s hard times in his talk at General Conference.

As an apostle and one of today’s prophets, seers and revelators, he said this: “I testify that the atonement of Jesus Christ covers all trials and hardships that any of us will ever encounter in this life.” He didn’t say some trials. He didn’t say most hardships. He said ALL – which includes yours and mine. This statement from a living prophet gives me hope – “a perfect brightness of hope” if you will – hope that Christ is in charge and that everything will be OK, if I will just press forward in Him and endure.

To conclude my comments, I’m going to take key statements from some of the stories I’ve told and merge them into a single, flowing message. As I recite these, think about how they apply to you – to the obstacles in your life that are hindering your personal progress – to those figurative Labans in your life that need slaying today.

Think about your own, personal Liberty Jail in which you now suffer. Consider your personal conflicts and losses. When I first put this together, I was astounded at how powerful it was. It really comes alive, knowing the context in which each of these statements was made:

- From a teen-age Nephi, facing impossible odds all by himself: “Let us be faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord, for behold, He is mightier than all the earth, then why not mightier than Laban and his fifty – yea or even than his tens of thousands.”
- From the Lord to Joseph Smith, who had been tarred, feathered, starved, poisoned and frozen: “All these things shall give thee experience and shall be for thy good. The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than He?”
- From a young, Mormon Lt. at war, struggling with the brutality of his assignment: “I’m just glad the atonement of Jesus Christ will straighten it all out.”
- From Elder Cook, a living prophet: “I testify that the atonement of Jesus Christ covers all trials and hardships that any of us will ever encounter in this life.”
- And finally, from the Savior Himself: “Hold on thy way... and God shall be with you forever and ever.”

One last time: “Hold on thy way (PHUU)... and God shall be with you (CLAP) forever and ever.”(POINT).

That we may face our adversities with faith and endure to the end is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Joseph Smith

Hayden 2nd Ward – August 12, 2001

Bishop Al Toronto

On June 27, 1844, Joseph Smith and his brother, Hyrum were shot to death by an angry mob at Carthage Jail. John Taylor, an apostle at the time, was with them. If you'll recall, Brother Taylor was the companion who sang "A Poor Wayfaring Man of Grief" for the Prophet and whose life was spared when a bullet struck his pocket watch. He became the third president of the Church.

After the martyrdom, John Taylor wrote a stirring tribute to the prophet that became part of our canonized scripture. It's found in Section 135 of the Doctrine & Covenants. That tribute begins with these words:

"Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer of the Lord, has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world than any other man that ever lived in it."

What an incredibly bold statement! It thrills believers inside the Church. It outrages critics outside the Church. But revering our first modern prophet is the life-blood of the Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ. It's what makes a Mormon a Mormon. A belief in the veracity of Joseph Smith is vital part of every Latter-Day Saint testimony. And it's one of the major decisive issues in religious circles around the world.

Bruce R. McConkie said this: "The issue in the meridian of time was: Did Christ rise from the dead? If so, he was the Son of God, and the religion of the ancient saints had saving power. The issue today is: Was Joseph Smith called of God? If so, the religion of the Latter-Day Saints has saving power."

There are no two ways about it – belief in Joseph Smith separates those for or against the Kingdom of God on Earth today. You’re either in or you’re out.

Elder McConkie also said this about the mission of the Prophet Joseph:

“So great was Joseph Smith’s assigned mission, with reference to the ‘restitution of all things,’ that holy prophets spoke of him, by name, thousands of years before his mortal birth. And there are as many prophecies foretelling the work he started as there are about any other single subject, even more than the host of prophecies about Jesus Christ and his redemptive sacrifice.” (Mormon Doctrine, page 396, edited by Al)

These statements suggest that the restoration of the Gospel in this dispensation is the second most important event in the history of the world. The first, of course, is the resurrection and atonement Jesus Christ. We’re lucky to live at this point in time when we benefit from the full light of both events. No one in history has had more knowledge than we have. I feel fortunate to be so closely associated with Joseph Smith. He’s our prophet for our time.

What saving events can we attribute to Joseph Smith?
Here’s a very brief summary of what he did:

First, he had an earth-shattering vision in the spring of 1820. As Andrew has just told us, at the tender age of 14, he visited face-to-face with God the Father and Jesus Christ. Of that moment, a phrase from one of our favorite hymns always gives me goosebumps: “The veil o’r the earth is beginning to burst.” The outpouring of spiritual and temporal knowledge since that time has flooded the world.

For instance, from that First Vision, we discovered a doctrine that had been lost to the world for 1500 years. It's the most elementary doctrine of the Gospel:

God is a glorified man — a human being — with a body of flesh and bones.

From later prophetic teachings, we learn that God is literally our father. And as his children, we have the seeds of godhood in us. Our eternal destiny is to grow up to become like him. The whole purpose of life and the Gospel of Jesus Christ is to bring this about. Other churches remain in the dark about the nature of God and still don't believe this basic truth. In fact, many of them hate is for believing it. Joseph Smith's teachings opened our eyes as to who God is, who we are, and what our destiny is. And it started with the First Vision.

Moroni visited the boy Joseph Smith. This resurrected angel delivered the record of the Nephite nation to the young prophet. Joseph then translated and published the Book of Mormon — a “Second Testament of Jesus Christ.” Joseph said it was the “most correct book on earth,” and that a person can get closer to God by reading it than any other book. What a fantastic contribution to the salvation of men! It has been the means of bringing more than 11 million people to the true Gospel of Christ.

I like the Book of Mormon because it's concrete. It is tangible evidence that the church is true. We can hold it in our hands and read it. We can embrace it, or we can throw it away. It's always there regardless of our faith. It stands as a constant witness that Jesus is the Christ and that Joseph Smith was, truly, called of God.

It amazes me that anyone can read this book and not believe in Joseph Smith. I have several anti-Mormon friends who have read it with a critical eye and reject it.

I have several friends who believe it's the Word of God, but who refuse to join the Church. They love the LDS people and the doctrine – but it's too weird for them. They won't take on the social stigma of being a Latter-Day Saint. But the fact remains – if you're honest in heart, the Spirit of truth overwhelms you as you read the book.

But there's more to the credibility of this book than just the reading. If you understand the history and circumstances surrounding the translation of the plates, the Book of Mormon becomes even more of a miracle.

Here's what you would have to do to produce this sacred record like Joseph Smith did:

- You must be 23 years of age.
- You can't be a college graduate. In fact, you can only have three years of formal education.
- Whatever you write must be on the basis of what you know. No research is allowed.
- You must write a book with 239 chapters, 54 of them about war, 21 about history, 55 about prophecy, 71 about doctrine, 17 about missionaries, and 21 about the mission of Christ.
- You must write a history of an ancient country, such as Tibet, covering a period of more than 1,000 years.
- You must include in your writings the history of two distinct and separate nations, along with histories of different contemporary nations or groups of people.
- You must weave into your history the religion of Jesus Christ.

- You must dictate the whole text to a stenographer without making corrections. After pauses for sleep and food, you must never ask to have the last paragraph or sentence read back to you. You just start where you left off.
- You must finish this record of 522 pages, each containing 150 words, in 80 days.
- When you have finished, you must not make any substantive changes in the text. The first draft must stand forever.
- You must add 180 proper nouns to the English language. William Shakespeare, the greatest English author of all time, added only 30.
- You must announce that your “smooth narrative” is not fiction, but true.
- You must publish it to every nation, kindred, tongue and people, declaring it to be the Word of God.
- And finally, you must include in the record itself this promise: “And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true. And if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, He will manifest the truth of it unto you by the power of the Holy Ghost.”

The Holy Ghost aside, the raw, physical circumstances and facts that brought forth the Book of Mormon are miraculous. There is no question that it is God’s creation, brought to the world through his earthly seer.

That this book is a fraud is unthinkable. Thousands of scholars for more than 150 years have tried to discredit the Book of Mormon -- without success. Some of them have been converted in the process.

But there's more to the restoration than the Book of Mormon:

- After Joseph started translating the Book of Mormon, other heavenly messengers visited him. They restored keys and Priesthood power that were lost due to the great apostasy.
- John the Baptist appeared to Joseph and restored the Aaronic Priesthood. After that date, baptism was effectively on earth again. It's the most basic covenant we make with God.
- Peter, James, and John, Christ's original apostles, visited Joseph. They laid their hands on his head and restored the Melchizedek Priesthood. This gave him the authority to organize the Church and take the Gospel to all the world.
- Elijah appeared to Joseph Smith in the Kirtland Temple and conferred upon him sealing power and the keys of temple work. Moses and Elias visited him as well. He received all the keys for the fullness of the Gospel to prepare the earth for the Second Coming of Christ. Joseph thus had all the keys of all the prophets from the beginning of time.
- Joseph Smith received thousands of direct revelations, many of which are found in the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price.

- He reorganized God’s literal kingdom on earth — The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter—Day Saints — the same organization that Christ established in the old world during his life.
- And through that Church, Joseph Smith gathered thousands of Saints from around the globe and founded a great city. Nauvoo was the largest city in Illinois in its day – even bigger than Chicago.

Joseph Smith did all these things under very adverse conditions and severe persecution. It’s a miracle that the early Church survived. Members inside the Church betrayed him by the dozens. Outsiders were constantly trying to kill him. He was poisoned, tarred and feathered, and imprisoned many times. Often he stood alone against a violent and wicked world with just his sure knowledge of God to protect him. He ultimately sealed his testimony with his blood. At the age of 39, he was killed by a mob at Carthage Jail.

Now here’s my question for the day: How do you feel about the Prophet Joseph Smith? Knowing that he was a true prophet of God lies at the heart of every Latter—Day—Saint’s testimony. It’s absolutely critical to believe in him before you believe in any other facet of the Restored Church.

In my mind, a testimony of this Church is like a series of four or five concentric circles, one within the other. The inner circles are more important than the outer circles. The very inside circle is the heart of a testimony. It consists of three critical elements. In order of importance, they are, first, that God lives; second, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and Redeemer of the world; and third, that Joseph Smith was a true Prophet of God. Now remember, we don’t worship Joseph Smith, even though he’s in the inner circle. He was just a man. But we revere him as the most significant prophet in history.

It's Joseph Smith that sets us apart from the rest of the Christian world. All good Christians believe in God and Christ. Their beliefs, though incomplete, are founded on the Bible. But it's belief in Joseph Smith that makes a Mormon.

All restored truth, other than God, Christ, and Joseph Smith fall into subordinate circles of my testimony paradigm. The Book of Mormon rests on Joseph Smith's veracity. That we have a living prophet today is rooted in him. Missionary work and temple work are a direct result of his life. All Priesthood power came through Joseph Smith. The fact that we belong the one and only true Church of Jesus Christ on the face of the earth is totally dependent on him. These elements of a testimony, though extremely important, fall into the second circle. Anyone who says they believe in the Restored Church but can't buy the Joseph Smith story is either a fraud or he or she just doesn't get it.

My testimony of Joseph Smith is strong. The Holy Ghost has testified to me many times that he was a true prophet of God. This knowledge is part of my foundation in life. No one can change it. No one can take it away. I'd give my life to defend it. It will be a joyful day when I meet Joseph on the other side, embrace him, and thank him for what he did.

If you have any doubts about Joseph Smith, I exhort you to learn more about him. Read his personal history in the Pearl of Great Price. Study the Book of Mormon. You'll never survive in this Church without a knowledge of his stature as a true prophet. The Lord wants to reveal that to you. All it takes is study and prayer. That's how Joseph Smith gained his knowledge. That's how I got mine. That's the way you can get yours. The promise of personal revelation for those who will but ask is found throughout the scriptures. And it's verified by millions of Latter—Day witnesses.

One thing I really enjoy about Joseph Smith is that he is our prophet for our time – not some distant icon only found in ancient scripture. Volumes have been written about him in contemporary literature – both bad and good. When Joseph was an obscure boy of 17, Moroni told him that his name would be spoken of for good and evil among all nations and among all people. That prophecy has certainly come true. We know about Joseph Smith’s personal life and his personality. We know about his strengths and his weaknesses. We know what his proponents say and what his opponents claim. This allows us to get a close look at the man and feel his spirit. Again, he’s our prophet.

I think it’s appropriate to punctuate my talk with a close look at the courage and character of this great seer. I want to recite one of the most moving readings about Joseph Smith in modern literature. I don’t know why, but this particular story brings me very close to the man. I’m sure you’ve all heard it before, but it’s worth repeating.

During the most bitter persecution of the Saints, the Prophet was imprisoned in the town of Richmond, Missouri. He and several of the brethren had been placed in chains and paraded before the townspeople. Severely abused, hungry, and cold, Joseph and his companions were lying on the stone floor of a jail cell.

Parley P. Pratt was with them and wrote this:

“We had lain as if in sleep till the hour of midnight had passed. Our ears and hearts had been pained, while we listened for hours to the obscene jests, the horrid oaths, and the filthy language of our guards. They recounted to each other their deeds of rape, murder, and robbery, which they had committed among the Mormons while at Far West. They boasted of defiling by force wives, daughters, and virgins – and of shooting or dashing out the brains of men, women and children. I listened until I became so disgusted and filled with the spirit of indignant justice that I could

hardly refrain from rising upon my feet and rebuking the guards. I said nothing to Joseph or anyone else, although I lay next to him and knew he was awake. On a sudden, he arose to his feet, and spoke with the voice of thunder, or as a roaring lion. As nearly as I can recollect, he uttered the following words:

‘Silence, ye fiends of the infernal pit. In the name of Jesus Christ I rebuke you, and command you to be still. I will not live another minute and hear such language. Cease such talk, or you and I die this instant.’

He ceased to speak. He stood erect in terrible majesty. Chained, and without weapon. Calm, unruffled, and dignified as an angel he looked upon the quailing guards. They lowered their weapons to the ground. Their knees smote together. Shrinking into a corner or crouching at his feet, they begged his pardon. They remained quiet until a change of guard.”

Then Parley P. Pratt concludes with this:

“I have seen the ministers of justice clothed in magisterial robes in the courts of England. I have seen criminals arraigned before them while life was suspended on a breath. I have witnessed a congress in solemn session to give laws to nations. I have tried to conceive of kings, of royal courts, of thrones and crowns; and of emperors assembled to decide the fate of kingdoms. But true dignity and majesty have I seen but once, as it stood in chains at midnight in a dungeon, in an obscure village in Missouri.”

I’d like to conclude my remarks by finishing verse 3 of Section 135 of the Doctrine and Covenants. It’s a wonderful, stirring summary of what I have said today. Again, from John Taylor:

“Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer of the Lord, has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world than any other man that ever lived in it. In the short space of twenty years:

- He has brought forth the Book of Mormon, which he translated by the gift and power of God, and has been the means of publishing it on two continents;
- He has sent the fullness of the everlasting gospel, which it contained, to the four quarters of the earth;
- He has brought forth the revelations and commandments which compose this book of Doctrine and Covenants, and many other wise documents and instructions for the benefit of the children of men;
- He has gathered many thousands of the Latter-day Saints, founded a great city, and left a fame and name that cannot be slain.
- He lived great, and he died great in the eyes of God and his people; and like most of the Lord’s anointed in ancient times, has sealed his mission and his works with his own blood. (D&C 135:3)

Brothers and Sisters, I’ve read the Book of Mormon many times. I’ve read the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price. I’ve read the contemporary literature about Joseph Smith – both good and bad. I’ve visited Church historical sites. I’ve never been more moved than when standing on the very spot outside Carthage jail where the prophet died. I couldn’t hold back the tears.

Joseph Smith was a true prophet of God. I know that with all my heart. The Holy Ghost has born that witness to me thousands of times -- and it’s burning within me right now.

That we may all recognize Joseph’s stature as a true prophet and place that knowledge at the heart of our testimonies is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Lose the Beard

Al Toronto

The year was 1975. I was 30-years old. America had just gone through the hippie era. This was a time of rebellion when young people wore long hair, beards, beads, and peace signs. The youth of that day were spaced out on LSD. They practiced free love and sang Kumbaya. America went through a permissive phase when almost any peaceful behavior was tolerated. Indeed, America changed forever.

I was a young, brash college professor at Southwest Texas State University, located in San Marcos, Texas. I had a beautiful wife, three little girls, and a great job. And I was very active in our Branch of about 100 members. In fact, I was Elder's Quorum President.

And I had a full, bushy, bright red beard. Though my hair was brown, my beard was red with a slight silver streak over the chin. It was really cool. I wore that beard for five years, and I absolutely loved it.

There was only one problem. Beards were not acceptable grooming standards in the Church. In fact, the brethren were against ALL facial hair. Because of the times, they viewed beards as an outward expression of a rebellious attitude. Besides, it made members look like hippies, with all the implications of debauchery that entailed.

But I knew better. Heck, I had a Ph.D.! I wasn't a hippie. I was enlightened and wise at the ripe-old-age of 30. Besides, Christ had a beard. And so did most of the early prophets of the Church. So I knew there was nothing innately evil about beards. And even though the general authorities admonished members to follow the example of living prophets, I saw nothing wrong with a beard.

Besides, I had a baby face. I needed a beard to make me look older and more distinguished to my students. I was all-in as a college professor of the 70s. I wore tweed sport coats with patches on the elbows and Birkenstock sandals. And I drove a Volvo.

But above all, my red beard was really, really, really cool.

I had a discussion about my beard with the Stake President when he called me to be Elder's Quorum President. It was about a year earlier. He said he thought it would be a good idea if I shaved it off for the sake of my calling. He said it would be a good example for the prospective missionaries in the Branch.

I gave him all the reasons I thought I should keep it – the same reasons I just gave you. He conceded and called me anyway. He could see I wasn't about to shave. But most of all, he was desperate for an Elder's Quorum President.

Then in the fall of 1975, the Church called a Solemn Assembly in Texas. All priesthood leaders from ten stakes were to gather in Houston to get first-hand instructions from the Prophet himself. And several of the apostles would also be there. This six-hour meeting was an incredible opportunity to personally listen to and meet President Spencer W. Kimball.

I was the only Priesthood leader from my Branch who could go, and I was there with bells on. I arrived early to get a good seat. I went into the Stake Center in Houston and sat down with several hundred other priesthood leaders – Stake Presidencies, Mission Presidencies, Bishoprics, and Quorum Presidencies from all over Texas. In this sea of clean-shaven faces, there I sat with my bushy, red beard. But hey...I was enlightened. I was above it all. I ignored all the stares, just like I always did when I went to the temple.

The meeting passed quickly and was incredibly inspirational. The Prophet, himself, was the concluding speaker and spoke to us for over an hour. Before the closing prayer, he announced that he wanted to shake everyone's hand. What a thrill! We all lined up and one-by-one took our place in front of President Kimball for a ten-second, personal meeting.

I got more excited the closer I got to the prophet. I wanted to tell him who I was and what I was doing. I wanted to tell him I loved and sustained him with all my heart. I'd been singing "We Thank Thee Oh God for a Prophet" since I was in Primary, and I meant it. I wanted to bond with the man as we electrified each other in a spiritual embrace.

My turn finally came. I proudly stood in front of the Prophet, offered my hand and said, "President Kimball, I'm Al Toronto, Elder's Quorum President of the San Marcos Branch."

He was only five-and-a-half feet tall. He had salt and pepper gray hair and a raspy voice that was damaged from cancer. He gripped my hand for a second, looked up into my eyes, and said,

"Brother Toronto, lose the beard."

Then he reached over to shake the next brother's hand. The two guys behind me laughed so hard, I thought they were going to wet their pants.

That was it – my wonderful meeting with the Prophet. My balloon was popped. I went to this meeting rebellious and proud. And because of it, one of the highlights of my life turned into a personal rebuke from the Prophet himself. I left the meeting embarrassed and humiliated. In retrospect, I don't know what else I could have expected.

I thought about nothing else during my four-hour drive back home. I was in an emotional struggle between rage and humility. When I arrived home, I went straight to the bathroom and looked in the mirror. I had a long, hard interview with myself. I really liked my beard, and I wanted to keep it. For five years, I had resisted all pressures from Church leaders to shave. But the words of the Living Prophet were freshly burning in my ears. “Brother Toronto, lose the beard.” I finally boiled it all down to one ridiculously simple question: Is it more important to be cool or obey a Living Prophet of God?

So I shaved my beautiful beard and joined the ranks of all the other bald faces in the Church. How boring! Six months later, I was Branch President.

Brethren, THERE’S a good reason to grow some hair.

Beards and long hair are tolerated more now than they were then. They’re no longer such an obvious symbol of rebellion. Thankfully, the hippie era is a distant memory. But we’re still admonished to follow the example of living prophets. Missionaries and temple workers are required to be clean shaven. It’s part of the job and the image the church wants to portray to the public.

My beard story sets the stage for the question I want you to ponder today. All issues about obedience and living the standards of the Church can be boiled down to this single question: “Is it more important to be cool, or to obey a Living Prophet of God?” I’m defining “cool” as seeking worldly approval.

This question is ridiculous for mature members of the church who have been baptized and who live under the Oath and Covenant of the Priesthood. Doctrine and Covenants 121:35 clearly states: “Many are called, but few are chosen. And why are they not chosen? Because their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world.”

In other words, most men want to be rich, powerful and cool, as opposed to being contrite and obedient. They're in this life to gain the glory of men.

My simple beard story and its conclusion illustrate two concepts that are vital to our eternal progression. First is the damning nature of pride in our lives, and second is the saving power of standards in the Church.

I want to take a few minutes to touch on each of these concepts. Each one is a full course of study by itself, but I just want to give you something to think about. They really go hand in hand. I'll start with pride and then circle back and conclude with standards.

The landmark discourse on pride comes from Ezra Taft Benson which he delivered at General Conference in 1989. No discussion on pride is complete without it. I heard it first-hand in the Tabernacle, and it has had a huge impact on my life.

President Benson said that pride affects all of us at various times in various degrees. All of us. He didn't exclude anyone, including himself. In fact the problem is so pervasive that he called it "the universal sin – the great vice," and "the stumbling block of Zion."

One statement from his talk rang in my ears when I first heard it 23 years ago, and it jumped off the page when I read it again. President Benson said, "Pride is a very misunderstood sin, and many are sinning in ignorance." Let me repeat that with a little commentary. "Pride is a very misunderstood sin (not just misunderstood, but very misunderstood), and many (not just a few, but many) are sinning in ignorance."

That's a pretty broad stroke. If it doesn't make you squirm, something's wrong. I take this to mean that understanding pride is difficult, yet critical to our salvation. And

apparently, few people get it. The last thing I want to do is sin in ignorance. So I want to shed some light on the problem.

Most of us use the word “proud” a lot. We say we’re proud when we’re pleased with someone or something we associate with – like our families, our schools, our businesses, our team, our church, or our country – especially when they succeed and make us look good. In the world, pride is generally seen as a good thing – a building block of self-esteem that sets us above mediocrity. Whether this kind of pride is good for the saints of God is debatable. I can make a case either way, depending on how we define the word.

But no matter how the world uses the term, we must understand how God uses it. And here there is absolutely no debate. In the scriptures there is no such thing as righteous pride. It’s always a sin.

Pride is the antithesis of humility, and thus ungodly. It flies in the face of a broken heart and a contrite spirit. It always sews the seeds of disobedience.

I’m sure if I asked this audience to define pride, most of you would say things like conceit, boastfulness, or arrogance. These are the most obvious elements of the sin. However, those are just a few symptoms of a much deeper disease. To understand all the faces of pride, we must get down to basics and look at the root cause.

Here’s where President Benson helps us out. He said,

“The central feature of pride is enmity – enmity toward God and enmity toward our fellowmen. Enmity means hatred toward, hostility to, or a state of opposition.”

So anytime we oppose God's law, it's an act of pride. Like a stubborn and rebellious child, we pit our will against His and place our desires above His. Again, consider my beard story. And, of course, with our free agency, we can do as we please.

The proud do not accept the authority of God giving direction to their lives. So pride is much more than haughtiness. It's violating any principle of the gospel. It takes the form of selfishness, disobedience, hard-heartedness, jealousy, quickness to take offense, refusal to forgive, and so on.

Pride also pits us against our fellowmen, causing great enmity between individuals. We are tempted daily to elevate ourselves above others, many times by diminishing them. We want to be faster, stronger, smarter, and richer than our neighbors. This earns us the praise of the world. Please don't misunderstand. There's nothing wrong with being fast, strong, smart, and rich. These things only become sins when they are used to control others and put them down.

Doctrine in Covenants 121:39 reminds us that it is the disposition of almost all men to exercise unrighteous dominion when they get a little authority. There are those words again – “almost all men.”

In the words of C.S. Lewis, “Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man. It's the comparison that makes you proud – the pleasure of being above the rest. Once the element of competition has gone, pride has gone.” (Mere Christianity, New York: Macmillan, 1952, p 109)

So let me summarize here. All pride stems from enmity. And it occurs at two levels: first is opposition to God, and second is competition with each other.

Think about this. It means that almost all conflicts in our lives are fueled by our own pride. And very few people understand this. We tend to blame everybody else for our problems.

President Benson nailed it on the head. Pride affects us all. It is very misunderstood and many are sinning in ignorance. How about you? There's something to ponder today.

Standards stand in direct opposition to pride, since they reflect the will of the Lord. They foster obedience and humility. Of course, that's the whole point of my encounter with President Kimball over my beard. Remember, for me it boiled down to a single, simple question: "Is it more important to be cool, or to obey a Living Prophet of God?"

Let's talk about that for a minute.

This is a tough question for the youth of our Church. Being cool and popular is every kid's dream. And this drive comes at a time when most teens are just beginning to find themselves and their testimonies are just beginning to develop. They are impressionable and vulnerable. This puts a lot of pressure on a weak foundation.

I remember how hard I tried to be cool and tough even though I was a skinny, small-boned Mormon kid. Darned if I wanted to be known at my school as "Mr. Nerd-Ball, Goody Two Shoes." So I made some mistakes trying to be cool, just like most kids do. And as a parent, I have raised five teen-agers and been intimately involved in their day-to-day struggles. And I have been a youth leader in the Church for almost 50 years. The common challenge for youth is the drive for conformity to the outside world. The peer pressure is incredible. It's a wonder most of our youth turn out as good as they do.

And living the standards is tough for adults too. The desire to look rich, sexy, strong, and intelligent is the foundation of pride. We live in a world where those things are valued above all else. It's a never ending battle to be "in" the world, but not "of" the world.

That's why the Lord gave us standards – standards that come from living prophets – standards that help us stay humble... and focused... and safe.

Though all of God's commandments are important, usually, when we talk about "standards," we're referring to the visible manifestations of our faith – the way we groom, dress, talk and act. These are the things that define us as Latter-Day Saints. In fact we have been called a "Peculiar People" by the world because of our ways.

General standards for adults can be found in the questions for a temple recommend. Questions like:

- Do you pay a full tithing?
- Do you live the law of chastity?
- Do you obey the Word of Wisdom?
- Are you honest in your dealings with your fellow man?
- Do you sustain the leaders of the Church?
- Do you have a firm testimony of the Gospel of Jesus Christ? And so on.

Standards for teens are much more specific, because they need to be. They can be found in this powerful little booklet published by the First Presidency. It's called "For the Strength of Youth." I know the young men and women of this ward are very familiar with it. This booklet is the Living Prophet's message to young people today. It outlines the standards. I think it's the most significant publication for youth in the Church.

And there's no doubt about it, the principles outlined in this pamphlet go against the popular trends of the world. Outside the Church, living them will not make you cool.

To give you some idea, let me read a few sentences out of this booklet. Remember, young people, this is the Prophet's personal directive to you.

Imagine standing in front of Thomas S. Monson, just like I did with President Kimball, while he shakes your hand, looks you in the eye and says this:

- “Don’t date until you’re sixteen.”
- “Dress modestly.”
- “Treat everyone with kindness and dignity.”
- “Be honest with yourself and others.”
- “Avoid all profane, vulgar, and crude language.”
- “Stay away from pornography.”
- “Don’t smoke, drink or do drugs.”
- “Don’t listen to music that is contrary to the principles of the Gospel.”

Just like me and my beard, you can ignore these instructions and rationalize your behavior. As a former teen, a father and youth leader, I’ve heard all the excuses. Here are some of my all-time favorites:

- “Oh, I’m fifteen and a half. That’s close enough to start dating. Besides, I’m more mature than my friends.”
- Or one of my kid’s favorites: “We’re not really dating – you know, dressing up and going out to dinner. We just spend a lot of time together.”
- Here’s one for the girls, one of my wife’s pet peeves since she grew up in Hawaii: “All the girls are wearing mini-skirts and bikinis. It’s no big deal.”
- How about: “That boy stinks -- and he talks funny. Everyone makes fun of him. I don’t want to be seen talking to him.”

- Or: “Everybody swears and tells dirty jokes – especially the cool guys.”
- Or: “R rated movies are no big deal. They say and show things I see at school every day.”

I could go on forever. The excuses are endless.

But with this prophetic instruction from “The Strength of Youth,” you know what’s right. And being a kid and living in the real world, you know what’s cool. So you face the same conflict I did with my beard. And you can ask yourself the same question: “Is it more important to be cool, or to obey a Living Prophet of God?”

If you truly have a testimony of the restored Gospel of Jesus Christ, like I did, the answer is so easy.

Brothers and Sisters, the Lord has given us standards to measure our conduct and to keep us humble and focused on the gospel. They form the primary defense against pride. Thus it is possible to be in the world, but not of the world. By aligning our behavior and thoughts to God’s standards, we become more like Him. We are in a better position to govern ourselves and make the right choices.

As a parting shot, I want to leave you with the question of the day one more time. “Is it more important to be cool, or to obey a Living Prophet of God?”

That we may always make the right choice is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Respect

Girl's Camp Presentation

Doe Lake, FL 6-13-08

Why are we having a lesson on respect today?

Lack of respect is one of the biggest problems we have in the world. I believe it is THE number-one problem with the youth. We didn't have this problem 50-years ago. When I was a kid, people respected their elders and authority. The problem lies squarely with the disintegration of the home. We have two generations of permissive parents who have failed to teach their children to be respectful.

This lack of respect affects all aspects of society. You're young women. You know what it's like in the schools. Thousands of teachers quit every year because they can't take the disrespect from their students. And this problem spills into our churches and communities. It's even a problem in the military.

In addition, showing respect is one of the main principles of the Gospel. We are commanded to fear God and be reverent. Think about it. When you define the character of God, you define respect – God is selfless, loving and kind. When you define the character of Satan, you define disrespect – Satan is selfish, hateful and mean.

I could lecture for hours on defining respect. In fact, I made a complete outline of the Why, What, When and Where of respect. I looked at the list and thought, YUK. This is boring. And I only have 15 minutes to talk to you. I couldn't begin to do the subject justice.

So I thought, what can I say in 15 minutes that will make a difference in your lives? Well, I'm going to try.

I've decided to give you ONE SIMPLE TOOL of respect that could make a huge difference in your lives. It's made a difference in my life, in the lives of my children, and in the lives of hundreds of young people I have taught over the years.

I want to start by telling you how this concept came about.

About 30 years ago, I was a young father in Midway, Utah. We barely moved into town, and I was called to be second counselor in the bishopric. My responsibility was the Beehives and Scouts. My oldest daughter had just turned 12. She was a brand-new Beehive and started in a new Sunday School class. After her first day in that class, she came home from Church in tears. I asked her what was wrong.

“Oh, Dad. I hate Sunday School! The teacher just reads from the book, and the kids go wild. They yell, fight, lay on the floor, slam chairs, belch and run in and out of the classroom. The teacher just reads out of that silly book – I couldn't even hear him. The teacher had to say the closing prayer because everyone else refused. I said the opening prayer, so he couldn't call on me. I never want to go back.”

I brought this up at bishopric meeting Sunday morning, and everyone rolled his eyes. It was widely known that this group was the Sunday School class from hell. It consisted of five spoiled rich kids, three wild cowboys, two mentally handicapped kids and my daughter. They were totally out of control and had burned through three teachers in six months. They were on their fourth.

Just as we were concluding our meeting, the existing teacher walked into the bishopric office, slammed his manual on the Bishop's desk and announced, “I quit!” All of a sudden, I was teaching that class that day. I asked the Bishop not to call another teacher for a while. I wanted to take a crack at it.

Knowing what I was up against, I made some plans.

Before church started, I waited at the door for one of the kids to show up early. Wade Kelson, the most popular kid in the class, showed up first. I took him off to the side and said, “Wade, I need your help in Sunday School today. As part of my lesson, I want to slap you upside the head – not hard, just a little.”

He stood there in shock. “Uh... well... uh... gee... OK.” Then I cleared it with his parents, who were all for it. His mother wanted me to hit him hard – she was one of the previous teachers.

I went early to assess the classroom. It was fairly large with a sliding divider in the middle. I split it in half, making the room as small as possible. It had an outside door with a glass window in it. I put exactly 11 chairs, the number of kids in the class, in one row, about three feet in front of the black board. The whole back of the room was empty. I waited for the students to show up

Some immediately tried to move the chairs to the back of the room. I said “no.” Some sat on the floor with their backs to the wall. I said “no.” I lost one member of the class over that issue – a girl. She refused to sit in a chair. I told her to get out. She refused to leave. I gently took her by the arm and escorted her out of the classroom. I told her not to come back until she changed her attitude.

I got them all seated in a row, close to the black board. I asked, “Do you know why I’ve arranged the chairs like this?”

They shook their heads. I said, “Because our first lesson today is on ‘the laying on of hands,’ and I need to be close enough to hit you.”

I reached out and slapped Wade on the head. My daughter squealed with glee. You should have seen their wide-eyed faces. It was priceless. I certainly had their attention.

Then I spelled out the rules of the class:

1. There's a time for goofing-off and a time to be serious. We'll have lots of fun goofing off, but Sunday School is serious time.
2. You will call me Brother Toronto – not Al. All the kids in that ward called adults by their first names—but not in this class.
3. When Brother Toronto is talking, you don't talk.
4. No getting out of your chair.
5. No going to the bathroom – I don't care if you wet your pants.
6. When Brother Toronto asks you to do something, like pray or read, there is only one answer – and you have to say the whole thing, “Yes, Brother Toronto, I'd love to.” I don't care if you don't want to do it, I don't care if you're sick, I don't care if you're tired, you will say, “Yes, Brother Toronto, I'd love to.”

At this, one of the cowboys jumped up and yelled, “No way! I won't do it! You can't make me!” I said, “Then get out! You play by my rules, or you don't come to class.” That cowboy walked out the outside door and slammed it so hard the glass window broke and shattered all over the classroom. I made him pay for it.

Now let me ask you a question: By a show of hands, how many of you would liked to have been in that class that day? The fact is, almost everyone would. Everybody loves discipline, order and respect. After three weeks, I had the most well-behaved class in the ward. All the youth wanted to come to that class.

Word of our first class, where I hit Wade and shattered a door window, spread around the community like wildfire. I had kids showing up from other wards. And that was OK – as long as they obeyed the rules and said, “Yes, Brother Toronto, I’d love to.”

This was so successful, I took the concept home and started making all of my children respond with what came to be known as “The Answer” – “Yes, father, I’d love to.” They didn’t always want to do what we asked, but we made them say it anyway out of respect -- “Yes, mother, I’d love to” or Yes, father, I’d love to.” We made them answer that way to all of their teachers at school and church. In a sea of disrespect, my kids became famous and loved for being respectful.

Actually, I have one son, Chase, who refused to say “I’d love to.” He just wouldn’t lie if he didn’t want to do something we asked. So we allowed him to say, “Yes Father, thank you for asking.” He choked that down his whole life. All my kids are grown now, and they still say it, out of respect for me and their mother.

There are some very important lessons here.

First, respect grows from fear to admiration to love. Those kids were afraid of me when we started – I was stern. I had to be to gain control. Then, as I loosened up and joked around and took them water skiing, they started to like me. After six months, they loved me – and I loved them. I’ve been closer to this group than any other in my life. They all served missions. They all got married in the temple. They are all young, struggling parents and church leaders like I was. And I still hear from them occasionally. Some of them are teaching their Sunday school classes to say, “Yes, Brother so-and-so, I’d love to.”

Second, this simple phrase can change your attitude and your life. “Yes, I’d love to” or “Yes, thanks for asking” shows tremendous respect, love and obedience. Whether you mean it or not, say it.

I challenge you to use it during the rest of Girls Camp. “Thank you, Sister Hawkins, I’d love to.” “Thank you Sister Hunter, I’d love to.” I challenge you to try it at home, and watch your parents faint. Try it at school, and watch the teacher’s face. Try it on your friends, and stun them. Try it on the boy who asks you for a date, and watch the fireworks. Suzy said it to me when I first asked her out, and look at us now. This phrase has incredible power. You will ooze respect, and you will be more Christ like.

Now take what I’ve said here today, and see how it fits into a statement to young women by Gordon B. Hinkley.

To you young women, you of the noble birthright, you the hope of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, you the mothers and the grandmothers and the great-grandmothers of the sons and daughters of Israel who are to come: Keep yourselves worthy of the blessings of God. Keep yourselves pure and virtuous and good and decent and sweet and wonderful; (Saying “Yes, I’d love to” fits in perfectly.) As a servant of the Lord, I don’t hesitate to promise you that you will be loved and respected and honored, and you will be grateful to get on your knees with tears in your eyes and thank your Father in Heaven for His watchful care over you... (from *New Era*, Nov. 1971, 35)

End.

A Sacred Moment in a Holy Place

High Council Talk -- Al Toronto

I'd like to begin today by telling you about some of the folly of my youth.

I was a wild Mormon kid -- a typical, lukewarm, Salt Lake City teenager who took everything for granted. This was in the early 60s. It didn't help that my father was a prominent Church leader. I was constantly doing things that embarrassed him. And I loved practical jokes. I'd do anything to get a laugh from my group of like-minded friends -- all LDS. It was during this rebellious time that I learned one of the most valuable lessons of my life.

I was a freshly ordained Priest in the Parley's Fourth Ward. Two of my friends and I were assigned to administer the Sacrament one Sunday. Not considering the seriousness of our duty, and knowing much better, we decided to play a little prank. What would happen if we put a piece of white sponge on one of the bread trays? It looked just like a piece of bread. Oh we thought we were clever.

So we put a piece of sponge on tray 8, blessed the bread, and sent it out with the Deacons. Barely looking over the top of the sacrament table, we watched that tray circulate through the congregation. It finally arrived at the row where Brother Newsom sat. We looked at each other in a panic -- not Old-Man Newsom! We fully expected to get caught, but not by him -- he was the meanest old codger in the Ward. And sure enough, he picked up that sponge and put it in his mouth. As soon as he tasted it, his dagger-eyes shot up at the sacrament table. We sunk a little lower and tried to stifle our nervous giggles. He took the sponge out of his mouth, looked at it, and then put it back in. For a good 10-seconds, Brother Newsom slowly over-chewed that sponge for our benefit (chew, chew, chew)... His dagger-eyes never left ours (chew, chew, chew)...

Then he swallowed it. At least it looked like he did. We couldn't believe it. We wondered if he was going to die! I knew we were in trouble.

Brother Newsom was waiting for us in the foyer after the meeting. There was no escape. We were caught red-handed, and he had the whip. He took us out the side door where no one could hear and said, "OK boys, here's the deal: I'm going to tell your parents about the sponge. And I'm going to tell the Bishop. Then, again, I might not."

There was new hope in the air – a light at the end of the tunnel. He certainly had our attention. Then he continued, "I want all three of you at my house tonight at 6 o'clock. Then I'll decide what to do. If you don't show, I'll go straight to the Bishop."

At six o'clock sharp, we were all sitting with Brother Newsom around his kitchen table. He started his lecture. "I know you're not bad boys – just a little rambunctious. But what you did today was colossally stupid." We sat there with red faces. We could hardly argue with him. "You boys obviously have no idea what the sacrament is all about or what a serious offense it is to mock God."

Mock God, I thought. We were just trying to be funny.

He continued, "Partaking of the Sacrament is one of the most sacred things any of us do in the Church – it's the heart and soul of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It allows us to renew the covenants we made at baptism for the remission of our sins – and to repent – and continuously progress.

Have you ever really pondered the sacrament prayer you read today? He opened his scriptures, turned to Moroni, Chapter 4, Verse 3 and handed me the book. "Read this slowly, Al. I want you to think about every word." Under this kind of pressure, I read the prayer with new eyes:

“O God, the Eternal Father, we ask thee in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this bread to the souls of all those who partake of it; that they may eat in remembrance of the body of thy Son, and witness unto thee, O God, the Eternal Father, that they are willing to take upon them the name of thy Son, and always remember him, and keep his commandments which he hath given them, that they may always have his Spirit to be with them.”

The whole purpose of the sacrament was right there in front of me in black and white. If I'd only considered the meaning of that prayer – not just mindlessly repeated it. My face flushed thinking about that silly sponge.

Then Brother Newsom turned to Helaman, Chapter 4. He said, “In this part of the Book of Mormon, the Nephites have just been slaughtered because of their wickedness – and many of them were members of the Church.” He handed the book to my friend. “Dan, I want you to read verse 12. It tells us why the Lord punished these people so severely.” Dan read:

12. And it was because of the pride of their hearts, because of their exceeding riches, yea, it was because of their oppression to the poor, withholding their food from the hungry, withholding their clothing from the naked, and smiting their humble brethren upon the cheek, making a mock of that which was sacred...

Dan stopped reading and choked. “Read that part again, and continue, said Brother Newsom. “...making a mock of that which was sacred, denying the spirit of prophecy... murdering, plundering, lying, stealing, and committing adultery...”

We were stunned! Mocking sacred things is serious enough that Helaman listed it along with such sins as murder, plunder, and adultery.

Brother Newsom pointed his finger at each of us. “You need to think twice before you mock God, Jesus Christ, the sacrament, or anything holy. I know what you did today was just a prank, but it’s a serious sin now that you know.” Brother Newsom was laying it on pretty thick.

Then he said, “I guess you noticed I swallowed the sponge.” “Yeah,” I said, “We were afraid it might kill you. We never dreamed anybody would actually eat it.” With a knowing smile, Brother Newsom turned to Section 27 of the Doctrine and Covenants. “Bill, I want you to read verse 2.” He handed the book to my second friend.

2. For, behold, I say unto you, that it mattereth not what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink when ye partake of the sacrament, if it so be that ye do it with an eye single to my glory — remembering unto the Father my body which was laid down for you, and my blood which was shed for the remission of your sins.

Brother Newsom looked at us and said, “Even a sponge. But that sponge was sweet, boys. It was a valid sacrament, having been blessed by you – authorized servants of the Lord. Luckily, you only hurt yourselves.” We felt the sting.

Then Brother Newsom taught us another concept I’ve never forgotten – and I’ve repeated it hundreds of times over the years. He said, “Because of the sacrament, Sacrament Meeting is the most important meeting in the Church – more important than Sunday School, Priesthood Meeting, even more important than General Conference. That’s why we’re commanded to attend Sacrament Meeting every week. It’s where we renew our covenants with the Lord on a regular basis.”

Then he summed it all up by saying this: “Administering the sacrament is the most important part of the most important meeting in the church. It’s a sacred privilege, boys. Don’t ever abuse it again.”

We were skunked – beaten-down and stomped-on by Old-Man Newsom. But oddly enough, we felt invigorated. He shook our hands, promised he’d never tell anyone about the sponge, and sent us on our way. We left his house new men – rebuked, well-instructed and very, very lucky. God bless Brother Newsom. He died about ten years ago at the age of 95.

The inspiration for my remarks today came from a talk by L. Tom Perry in General Conference. He related his experience with the sacrament and his introduction to the Aaronic Priesthood. It was wonderful – way different than mine, thank goodness.

Elder Perry founded his talk on a phrase that I’ve memorized and put in my favorite list of sayings. It’s modern scripture, -- inspired and recorded words from a living prophet of God. He said, “Partaking of the sacrament provides us with a sacred moment in a holy place.”

Think about these poetic words – “a sacred moment in a holy place.” Is that the way we think of the sacrament? If not, we’re missing the boat, and many of the blessings of the sacrament are passing us by.

What do you think about during the sacrament? Are you wrestling with kids and passing out the Cheerios? We did plenty of that. Are you dozing off after a late Saturday night? I’ve done that, too. Are you musing over your problems and trying to figure out what to do with your life? Me too. I’ve seen many youth, and even adults, doodling and passing notes during the sacrament. And some people read their lesson manuals and scriptures. It’s my guess that many members of the Church rarely consider partaking of the sacrament to be “a sacred moment in a holy place.”

The problem is, it's so routine. We do it week-after-week, year-after-year, and we take it for granted. But think about it. You're partaking of the Lord's Supper -- actually renewing your baptismal covenant -- under the direction of an authorized servant of the Lord (the bishop) in a dedicated house of prayer (the chapel). You might as well be receiving bread and wine from the Savior Himself at the Last Supper. I'm absolutely certain He sees it the same.

My favorite example is Sister Sifuentes in Santiago Chile. During the entire sacrament, her arms are folded, her eyes are closed, and tears just stream down her face. Those tears are for her Savior, who suffered excruciating pain to atone for the sins of the world. I know, because I asked her why she always cried. Such a profound spiritual experience is available to all who will just think about it -- "a sacred moment in a holy place."

Elder Perry goes on to give us further instruction: "Parents, you have the responsibility of teaching your families the importance of attending sacrament meeting weekly. It should be a regular family practice. Every family needs that time of renewing and committing to live the gospel in accordance with the teachings of the Savior. Families, properly prepared, will attend sacrament meeting with a spirit of reverence and with gratitude for the opportunity of partaking of the sacred emblems."

Easy to say -- difficult to do. Small children have short attention spans, little understanding and unbridled energy. Getting them to sit still for a minute is a challenge. Surviving Sacrament Meeting with a young family is often an exercise in pain. Many young parents dread the experience. It's still tough when the kids get older. Many teen-agers would rather do anything than sit through a Sacrament Meeting. As a young man, I remember the feeling of freedom I had when it was finally over. Sometimes I still feel that way.

I have five children, and I've heard all the excuses not to go to church: "It's boring... the speakers are bad... the music is slow... it's the same thing week-after-week... I'm too tired." And my personal favorite, "Oh no, not the High Council!" Sound familiar? The fact is, Church is NOT fun -- nor is it supposed to be.

Thus, getting fun-loving children to catch the vision that Sacrament Meeting is "a sacred moment in a holy place" is difficult. And there are no two ways to do it – it takes long-term commitment, patience, and regular attendance. Eventually, children learn. And as Elder Perry said, it's your duty to teach them. I suspect that if parents don't do it, children may never learn, and they'll probably leave the Church.

This issue is so critical I want to leave you with some additional thoughts and suggestions:

In today's world of electronic over-stimulation and professional entertainment, it's a challenge to get young people to embrace serious religion – where they actually have to read and think and make commitments. The competition not to do so is fierce.

When I was Bishop in North Idaho, the New Life Church was one mile down the road. It was a monstrous facility. In just five years, it grew from zero to more than 10,000 members. It was, by far, the most popular church in town.

I knew the founder personally – a dynamic and inspiring man. Many of the youth from our ward, including my own son, visited services there on occasion with their friends. And they usually came back with glowing reports and the same question: "Why can't we be more like them?" This church held four services every Sunday to accommodate the crowds. So, one day, after church, I went down to check it out.

Smiling, beautiful people greeted me every 20 feet. I was out of place in my suit – most people were wearing jeans, shorts and polo shirts. As I entered the auditorium and sat down, there was a professional rock band on stage, knocking out toe-tapping Christian tunes, one-after-the-other. They were awesome! The band played for about 30 minutes – and everyone clapped and hooted for more. Then the pastor invited us all to go to the back of the hall for coffee and donuts. This lasted another half-hour. Then he called us to meeting.

With food and drinks on our laps, Pastor Williams delivered one of the most stirring sermons on the Good Samaritan and loving your neighbor I've ever heard – about 30 minutes long and very polished. At the end, everyone stood and applauded the good Pastor. Then we all went home. It was great – an hour-and-a-half of thorough, uplifting entertainment. No wonder the youth liked it.

Armed with this new knowledge, I went home and prepared a fireside for my young men and young women. I called it “Ours is a Church of Service – Not Entertainment.”

Here's the short version: In the true Church of Jesus Christ, everyone's an amateur. No one gets paid. All members sacrifice their time and money for the cause. For the most part, we take turns leading and teaching each other. We're called by revelation to do jobs for which we're not qualified, and which scare us to death. All training is on-the-job, and we make lots of mistakes.

Most members struggle with speaking and teaching and singing. Yet we do it anyway – many times not very well. But that doesn't matter. The goal is personal growth and salvation. And we operate on faith. We believe that Jesus Christ Himself is at the head of our organization, and that He communicates with us through a living prophet of God. We have modern scriptures, temples, and most important, the only true Priesthood on face of the earth.

You can't find any of these things in the New Life Church – or any other church in the world.

Mormons don't go to church to be entertained. We go to church to take the sacrament, pray together, sing together, and serve each other. So yes, at times the speakers may be bad, and the music may be slow, and the teaching may be unprofessional. But be glad. These are sure signs you're in the true Church – a church of service, not entertainment.

And because of this, the Spirit of the Lord is unrestrained – comforting and sustaining the membership. In serious religion, that's what counts. Remember the last phrase of the sacrament prayer? “That they may always have His spirit to be with them.” That's the goal. Once you really understand the purpose of going to church and catch the Spirit, it becomes one of the most exciting things in your life – even though it's boring at times.

Using such reasoning, I actually convinced my youth that if Church were NOT boring by worldly standards, it would NOT be the true Church. I recommend you teach these concepts to your older children who don't like going to church. They work.

But beyond that, make sure they understand one thing:

Above all the pros and cons of lay leadership, rises a single, shining event. Week-after-week we partake of the sacrament – the most important part of the most important meeting in the Church. We make sacred covenants by receiving the Lord's Supper from authorized Priesthood holders in a dedicated house of prayer. It's “a sacred moment in a holy place.” And it can only be found in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

Of these things I testify, in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Sustaining the Weak and Simple

High Council Talk – Al Toronto

I'd like to begin today by asking you a few self-searching questions:

Have you ever had a leader in the Church you didn't like? Maybe a bishop who offended you – or one who you thought was a hypocrite? How about a Stake President you knew personally, and you thought was unworthy to hold such a high calling? Or any leader who just didn't do the job the way you thought it should be done? Have you ever NOT raised your hand during a sustaining vote for someone you didn't like? Or maybe you outright voted against him. That takes a lot of courage.

I've witnessed all these situations over the years. They are very common – and they almost always lead to criticism of church leaders. Sad to say, I've heard a great deal of leader-bashing in this Stake. It's wrong brothers and sisters, and it's something we should talk about.

About twenty years ago, I was in Salt Lake City, sitting in the Tabernacle at General Conference. They asked for a sustaining vote for Ezra Taft Benson as prophet, seer, and revelator. Everyone raised their hands in his favor – so I thought. When the officiator asked if any were opposed, a brother two rows in front of me stood up and yelled, "No! He's a false prophet!" He ranted on-and-on until security grabbed him and dragged him out of the building. I've always wondered what happened to that guy, and what his complaint was.

Dissenting votes occur now and then in the Church. What happens when a member votes against a proposed leader, anyway? The answer is simple. That person meets with the presiding authority of the meeting. If he or she can show any proof of serious transgression, the calling might be postponed or cancelled.

In every case I know of, however, the issue boiled down to a personal grudge, and the negative vote was simply dismissed.

Which brings up a very important point. Leadership in our Church is not a popularity contest. This is not a democracy where the majority rules. Our Church is a theocracy – a top-down organization with God on top. In other words, God Rules. It’s a hierarchy founded on revelation at each level.

This means leaders are called of God by prophecy and then sustained in a vote by the congregation. Boyd K. Packer said this in General Conference: “Thus, we always know who is called to lead or to teach... By this action, the Church is protected from any imposter who would take over a quorum, a ward, a stake, or the Church.”

So this sustaining vote is an informative, defensive, public declaration by the Church. It also serves as a due-diligence worthiness check for those being called. The entire Church organization, from the Prophet to ward callings, operates on such revelation and sustaining.

Brothers and Sisters, whether we like our leaders or not is irrelevant. As members of this Church, it’s our duty to sustain all leaders, unless we have specific knowledge of serious transgression on their part. Then it’s our duty to vote against them. Not raising your hand in silent protest only demonstrates a misunderstanding of Church government – and it could jeopardize your temple recommend. One of the questions for a recommend is whether or not you sustain your local leaders.

Another thing that defines our religion is that no one gets paid for serving in the Church. I would guess that Bishop _____ and President _____ each put in over a hundred hours a month in our behalf. They don’t receive a dime for their service. In fact, they still have to pay tithing like

everyone else. You'd think the Lord would give them a break. But no – they have to serve AND pay, just like we all do. They serve out of charity – the pure love of Christ. I testify that these brethren love you and me, and they love this Church.

Aren't you glad they don't get paid? It eliminates all conflicts of interest. When you go to see your bishop or stake president, you know he only has your best interest at heart. He's not after your money. What an incredibly powerful, yet safe, love-based system. There's nothing else like it in the world.

Now this theocracy, which is run by lay leaders, presents an interesting conflict.

This is the Church of Jesus Christ, and the organization he set up for it is perfect. But Christ has to staff his Church with human beings – imperfect people like you and me. The scriptures often refer to us as the “weak and simple” things of the world.

We all sin. To some extent, we're all hypocrites. We know and preach what's right, but we don't always live up to it. Yet we are still called upon to lead and teach each other. It's difficult and risky for imperfect people to tell each other how to live. When you throw in a mix of different personalities and different opinions, sometimes things really get hot – and criticism flourishes. This is one reason why humility and forgiveness are such a critical components of the Gospel. Without humility and forgiveness, this system of imperfect leadership would surely self-destruct.

So in spite of our weaknesses, those of us who are called to serve just plug along, doing the best we can. Sometimes we make mistakes. Even if a leader were perfect, he'd still have his detractors. Consider the life of Jesus Christ. It's a sad fact that doing the right thing is often unpopular.

Bishops and Stake Presidents often have to say “no.” About 15 years ago, I was in a bishopric training session with Boyd K. Packer. He told the bishops that if they didn’t have at least five ward members mad at them all the time, they probably weren’t doing their job properly. So some dissention is the normal state of affairs. This might make it difficult to sustain a leader, if we’re mad at him. And we might fall into one of Satan's favorite traps – speaking evil of the Lord’s anointed. It's normally the first step toward inactivity in the Church, and it can lead to apostasy.

This is why it’s important for us to separate our testimonies of the Gospel from the leaders of the Church. In fact, it’s absolutely critical that each of us establish an independent testimony with the Holy Ghost and no one else. The Church is true, Brothers and Sisters – with or without the Bishop, or the Stake President, or the Prophet. The truth is the truth, and nothing should be able to drag us away from it. How many people do you know who are inactive today simply because of something somebody said or something somebody did? How sad.

My favorite story along these lines comes from my family history. Let me tell you about Franklin Weaver.

Franklin was one of the early Pioneers who migrated west with Brigham Young. Shortly after they landed in the Salt Lake valley, Brigham Young was in desperate need for wagons to rescue saints stranded in the mountains. He asked Franklin to lend his wagon to the Church for the effort. The wagon was destroyed during the campaign.

Franklin went to see the Prophet for compensation. But things were bad for the Saints. The Church was heavily in debt, and all available resources were dedicated to the migration west. There were lots of people who needed money more than Franklin. Brigham Young wouldn't pay him.

Franklin reminded the Prophet that the wagon was a loan. If he had any integrity at all, he'd pay for it. He needed the wagon for his farm. Brigham Young said "no." The argument got hotter and hotter until, out of frustration, the prophet finally yelled, "Franklin, then I suppose you'll run off and apostatize!" Franklin stood there like a smoldering stick of dynamite – his face turning redder by the second. Then he exploded, "Brigham, I'll see you in hell before I apostatize!" And he stormed out of the prophet's house.

Franklin remained faithful to the Church. Year-after-year he sat in General Conference and raised his hand to sustain Brigham Young as prophet, even though the man reneged on his promise and offended him. He knew Brigham Young was the Lord's chosen vessel. He sustained the office in spite of his grudge.

How many of us have that strong of a testimony?

Another thing I love about this Church, and another thing that makes this the true Church, is that there is absolutely no social-class distinction in the ranks of leadership. A poor laborer has just as good a chance of being a bishop or stake president as a rich executive. The calling depends on personal worthiness and who the Lord wants – not social status. And these leaders are honored and sustained the same.

One of my favorite stake presidents was Charlie Ford in Heber City, Utah. He owned and operated a small farm the valley, but it didn't support him. In order to make ends meet, he took a job during the school year as a custodian at the local high school. You've never met a more soft-spoken and humble man in your life.

Before he was called to be President, he was out plowing his field one summer day. He knew apostles were coming to re-organize the Stake. And the Lord revealed to him,

right there on his tractor, that he was to be the next Stake President. He was shocked. He held no priesthood leadership position at the time. He was teaching Sunday School in his ward.

President Ford was so funny when he'd tell this story. He didn't want to be Stake President. He shut down the tractor, got off, and started pacing around it. He was arguing with the Lord. He said, "This stake is full of doctors, lawyers and college professors who are vastly more qualified to be president than I am. Any one of those brethren would love the job – give it to them!" Then he'd kick the tire. He said he was a high school drop-out who had to work in the dirt with his hands his whole life just to feed his family. And he was a janitor. "Whoopie! Who wants a janitor Stake President!?" And he'd kick the tire. He felt less qualified than anyone in the stake.

After 30-minutes of arguing with the Lord and tire-kicking, he gave up. He drove back to the house, put on his suit, and went to the Stake Center – uninvited. When he arrived, he marched right up to Thomas S. Monson, who was standing in the foyer, and without introduction or a handshake growled, "I don't want to be Stake President!" Elder Monson looked at him in total surprise. The Lord had not yet revealed to him who was to be the Stake President. He put his arm around Charlie's shoulder and said, "Come on in Brother Ford, we need to talk." And, sure enough, they called him.

What I like most about this story is how the people of Heber City treated their "janitor Stake President" at the high school. No one ever called him Charlie again. When the office paged him over the PA system, it was Ding-Ding-Ding -- "President Ford, please report to the office." All day long the students in the hallway would respectfully say, "Hey President."

The people of that community, even the children, honored and sustained their Stake President even though he was scrubbing bathrooms at the high school. And he was the most humble and respected leader Heber City ever had. Even the doctors, lawyers and college professors withered in his spiritual shadow. President Ford's calling is a burning testimony to me that this has to be the true Church of Jesus Christ. It's so opposite of how the world chooses a leader. And it adds new meaning to the scripture that the Lord uses the weak and simple things of the world to confound the wise.

Now I want to shift gears and talk about how we, as latter-day-saints, can best sustain our leaders. Raising our hands to vote is just the beginning. There are three things that, to me, make up a good sustaining member of the Church.

First, is to stop all criticism of church leaders.

I don't care what they've done or how they've done it, my leaders deserve nothing but praise. They're working on my behalf without pay for crying out loud. They're doing the best they can under very difficult circumstances.

So what if I could do a better job? So what if they forget something? And so what if they offend me? They deserve my instant forgiveness and support. I'm just glad I don't have to carry their load. And I focus on the good things they do – the free service they render out of the pure love of Christ.

Now I must admit, I'm far from perfect in this regard. I still throw a dart now and then. But it's wrong. Please join me today in making a new commitment to stop all criticism of Church leaders – especially in the home where your example, good-or-bad, could last for generations.

Second, is to accept all callings from your leaders – willingly and cheerfully.

Remember, this is a theocracy. The Lord is calling you, by prophecy, through them. Given these conditions, we should be thrilled to be found worthy of any calling. Also remember, there is no calling more important than another. The nursery leader or the Apostleship – it makes no difference to the Lord. It's your attitude and level of service that counts.

Third is to magnify your calling.

There is nothing more supportive to a bishop than to have someone doing a great job in the ward. Your area of responsibility becomes something he doesn't have to worry about. The Bishop carries tremendous weight on his shoulders as President of the Aaronic Priesthood and the common judge in Israel. Besides spending most of his time with the youth, he hears confessions, manages fast offerings, and is ultimately responsible for the welfare of every person within his ward boundary. The job is overwhelming. By just doing our small part in the ward, we sustain the bishop beyond measure.

These three sustaining principles can be reduced to three words – praise, obedience, and service. I believe that's how the Lord expects us, as Latter Day Saints, to sustain our leaders.

To conclude my comments, I'd like to leave you with one of the most visual examples of sustaining a leader found in the scriptures. It's recorded in the Book of Exodus, chapter 17.

Moses is leading the Children of Israel through the wilderness. He's just struck a rock with his staff to miraculously create a spring for his thirsty people. But it turns out they're in the land of the Amalakites, who greatly resent their presence. They declare war on Israel. So Israel goes up against the army of Amalek.

They meet in a valley, and for some reason, the Lord is requiring Moses to stand on a hill and oversee the battle. As long as Moses holds his hands in the air, Israel will prevail. If he lets his hands drop down, Amalek will prevail. The lives of his soldiers and the fate of his people rest in the strength of his arms.

But the battle goes on longer than expected, and Moses is just a man. He can't physically hold those arms up all day long. So his trusted counselors sustain him. Aaron gets under one arm and Hur gets under the other arm. Together they hold up Moses' weary arms for the duration of the battle, and the Amalakites are defeated.

What a vision!

No one else could stand there and do what Moses did. Only he was called to do it. But his friends sustained him through it all. Without them, the battle would have been lost.

Brothers and Sisters, your bishop is a wonderful, righteous man. Your stake president is a valiant servant of the Lord. Like Moses, only they have been called of God and given the keys to administer the church in this area. They're standing on a hill with their hands in the air, overlooking the battle for good and evil in our Stake. And like Moses, they can't do it alone.

Let's be like Aaron and Hur. Let's get behind them and under them and hold their arms up when they're weary – not hang on them and drag them down like so many do. Let's add to their strength – not to their burden.

I sustain Bishop _____ and President _____ with all my heart. I sustain Thomas S. Monson and the 12 apostles as prophets, seers, and revelators. These men are my heroes. They're God's chosen servants on earth today.

But I don't worship these people. They're just men – the weak and simple things of the world. Elder Packer made this perfectly clear in his conference talk. My testimony is of God, Jesus Christ, and the Restored Gospel. When one of my leaders makes a mistake or does something I don't like, it's OK. I still believe. The Holy Ghost has given me the knowledge that this is the only true church on the face of the earth. And just like Franklin Weaver, no one can take that away.

It's my prayer, Brothers and Sisters, that we will sustain our bishop and our stake president – and all the leaders of the Church. Let's remember the three ways to do it – the three actions that make us like Aaron and Hur – the three things that assure we're pushing our leader's arms up, not pulling them down. Those things, again, are praise, obedience, and service.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Train Up a Child in the Way He Should Go

Hayden Stake Priesthood Meeting

May 27, 2001

President Davis asked me to present a bishop's perspective on a talk President Hinckley delivered in General Priesthood Meeting last October. It was a powerful discourse to men about raising their children in righteousness. Embedded in that talk, was a modern-day commandment against pornography.

I feel an awesome responsibility tonight. How do you expand on an inspired message from a living prophet of God? I pondered and prayed, and I came up with an outline. I ask for your faith and prayers in delivering my perspective with the Spirit. This is a difficult subject.

I've been a bishop for eight months now. People often ask me, "How is it, being bishop?" I'm always hard-pressed to give them a good answer. I usually shrug it off and say, "It's OK so far." But I've given that question a lot of thought in preparation for this talk.

Being bishop is time consuming, but it isn't particularly hard. Of course, I'm lucky. I have two wonderful counselors and full staff of dedicated leaders and teachers. I'm able to delegate everything except matters dealing with sustenance and sin – and, of course, Young Men/Young Women. Solutions to the problems I face are fairly obvious, and the inspiration usually comes. Do I make mistakes? You bet. Do I say stupid things? All the time. I'm pleased at how forgiving most people are.

The biggest challenge is coping with the range of emotions I experience in dealing with other people's lives. Before becoming Bishop, my emotions ranged from here to here (hold hands about a foot apart.) The scope was fairly narrow. Now they range from here to here (hold hands full arm span.) The lows are much lower, and the highs are

much higher than before. Being a “Judge in Israel” puts me squarely in the middle of people’s ugliest problems, yet it makes me an integral part of their most beautiful accomplishments as well. It’s the proverbial two-edged sword. Constantly living with the lowest lows and the highest highs in a ward of 500 takes some getting used to.

Emotions are most extreme when talking to parents about their children. Consider the lows: I have several parents with children in prison. Many parents have children living in sexual sin. Several kids are plagued with homosexual attractions. Some daughters are pregnant out of wedlock. Some kids suffer from serious drug and alcohol addictions. Others are suicidal and violent. I’ve never witnessed more shuddering sorrow than a parent grieving for a wayward child. It breaks my heart.

On the other hand, parents are euphoric when their children do the right things. They’re overjoyed when a child is baptized or ordained to the priesthood – or when one of their kids earns an Eagle or Young Women’s Medallion. They’re thrilled beyond measure when their child goes on a mission or is sealed in the temple. These are rare parental paydays. They pop up occasionally in a life-long and often painful training process. When your kids do well, you do well. It just doesn’t get any better.

I’m sure it was these kinds of things that led President Hinkley to make this impassioned statement in his conference address. He said,

“In terms of your happiness, in terms of the matters that make you proud or sad, nothing – I repeat, nothing – will have so profound an effect on you as the way your children turn out. You will either rejoice and boast of their accomplishments, or you will weep, head in hands, bereft and forlorn, if they become a disappointment or an embarrassment to you.”

Then President Hinckley goes on to describe some of the evils facing today's youth – things like all-night drug parties, choking each other almost unconscious just for the thrill of it, Internet pornography, and sexual chat rooms. These are temptations that most of today's parents didn't face as teenagers.

At this point in his talk, President Hinkley took time out to make a particularly strong case against pornography – for both fathers and sons. I'm sure all of you have noticed the flood of warnings coming from the brethren on this subject lately. It's no wonder. Sexual sin is epidemic in our society today – and it's the #1 problem in the Church. Pornography takes much of the blame.

When most of the fathers in this room were young, pornography took place in the back-alley. You had to go out of your way to find it. No more. Today, it's all around us. Pornography is readily found on television, in movies, magazines, and books, and on the Internet. With the click of a mouse, it's in our homes – as hard core as you want it. In this modern era of communications, all of us have to deal it at some level – especially soft pornography. We catch glimpses of it now and then whether we like it or not. And then we have to make a conscious decision whether or not to entertain it. Excitable young men don't stand much of a chance.

I'm amazed at how many good fathers and sons struggle with pornography in my ward. Many come to me for help. They want to do the right things, and for the most part they do. They tithe, they serve, they obey – but they wrestle daily with their insane sex drive. Occasionally they can't resist that intrusive and sudden surge of passion that comes to all men. So they sneak a peek at the girls on the Internet... or they take out that hidden magazine... or they call a 900 number. It's so private, so easy, and so fast. No one will ever know.

To quote one of the brethren who confessed to me recently, “Then once I’ve stepped over that line, I figure ‘What the heck,’ I might as well keep going.” Satan has that man right where he wants him – totally self-absorbed, defeated, and masturbating in the dark. Then follows shame and the loss of self-esteem – the perfect breeding ground for more serious sin.

Now brethren, based on my experience, I suspect there are many fathers and sons in this audience tonight who are struggling with this problem. And I’m assuming I have your full attention. So I want to read some powerful words from a living prophet of God. I consider these to be the words of Christ, speaking through his appointed seer, directly to you and me.

President Hinkley said,

“I fear pornography is going on in some of your homes. It is vicious. It is lewd and filthy. It is enticing and habit-forming. It will take a young man or woman down to destruction as surely as anything in this world. It is foul sleaze that makes its exploiters wealthy, its victims impoverished.

To you young men... I plead with you not to befoul your minds with this ugly and vicious stuff. It is designed to titillate you, to absorb you into its net. It will take the beautiful out of your life. It will lead you into the dark and ugly.

[To you fathers...] If there be any man within the sound of my voice who is involved in [pornography], or who is moving in this direction, I plead with you to get it out of your life. Get away from it. Stay away from it. Otherwise it will become an obsession. It will destroy your home life. It will destroy your marriage. It will take the good and beautiful out of your family relationships and replace these with ugliness and suspicion.”

(pause, repeat) “It will destroy your home life.” “It will destroy your marriage.”

Brethren, this quote should shake every Latter-Day Saint man to the core. It’s as clear and direct as a message can possibly be. There’s no room for interpretation. The church has a problem, and the prophet has spoken. I pray that we heed his voice.

Now back to our main topic. In his talk, President Hinckley gives parents eight admonitions to help us raise righteous children. They are tremendous guidelines. I want to briefly remind you of these principles.

First is to encourage your children to develop good friends. By this, he means friends with the same values. Friends have a great influence on our teenage children – good and bad. But you can’t choose your kid’s friends. So President Hinkey suggests you open your homes to them, feed them, and befriend them. It works at my house.

Second is to teach them the importance of education. President Hinckley presents startling statistics showing that educated people make two and three times as much money as their uneducated counterparts.

Third is to teach your children self-respect. The prophet specifically railed against tattoos and pierced body parts. This is where he shook up the women by telling them they should only have one hole in each ear. I know lots of girls who are letting their extra piercings heal over because of this talk. For you young men, piercing your body is against church standards, period.

The rest of President Hinckley’s admonitions mirror the standards of the Church, so I will just mention them.

- Fourth is to teach your children to stay away from drugs.
- Fifth is to teach them to be honest.
- Sixth is to teach them to be virtuous.
- Seventh is to teach them to get married in the temple.
- And eighth is to teach them to pray.

These are wonderful guidelines from a living prophet. Remember, his goal is to help us experience the extreme joy of having righteous children and avoid the extreme sorrow of losing them. If we follow his guidelines, we should succeed.

Now I sit back and look at President Hinckley's list from my perspective as a bishop – and as a father. I see these things succeeding in some homes in my ward and failing in others – and I've tried to figure out why. I also pondered the successes and failures in my own family. I'm searching for some sage wisdom I can present here tonight that might help us all follow through on President Hinkley's list.

The dynamics of family life make this difficult. Every home is different. Every kid is different. Every relationship is different. Bad kids often come from good homes. Good kids occasionally arise from bad homes. Discipline that works with one child does not work with another. Parenting is the toughest make-it-up-as-you-go-along, fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants, just-try-to-get-through-the-next-day job in the world. And believe me, I'm not holding myself up as the ultimate expert.

But I have had some experience and success. I believe there are a few fundamental principles that usually work in raising children that are lacking in many homes today – and they are all backed by scripture. After all, God is a father. He's demonstrated his parenting methods throughout history and even given us some direct advice. I think it behooves us to emulate how God deals with his

children. So what you're going to get in the next five minutes is my opinion on raising children mingled with scripture.

The overriding principle in raising children, whether you're a god or an earthly parent, is obedience. All eight of President Hinkley's guidelines require obedience. We want our kids to do what we say – to have respect for authority – and to obey the laws of God. That's easy to say and hard to do. Children are stubborn. They're naturally selfish and rebellious. How do you get them to obey? But more importantly, how do you get them to want to obey?

There are three driving forces that cause any of us obey any rule or commandment – and God uses all three liberally. First is fear. Second is duty. Third is love. Obedience is learned from infancy in that order – fear, duty, and love. It doesn't come naturally – it's learned. Therefore, if obedience is not taught at home, it won't likely happen.

Let me briefly discuss each concept. When I speak of fear, I'm not talking about terrorizing your family or abusing your children or becoming a tyrant at home. That would be unrighteous dominion, which is a sin. That kind of parenting just drives children away.

Our kind of fear is established by being the ultimate authority at home – the consistent enforcer of the family rules. As fathers, we use as much force as we have to to maintain order. Thus, children can grow and learn in a structured environment, surrounded by kindness and love. But somebody has to be the hammer when things go wrong – and that's you.

Looking at it this way, fear is the foundation of respect. And by the same token, fearing God is one of the founding principles of our religion. The scriptures are replete with the commandment to fear God. We're supposed to work out our own salvation in fear and trembling.

Fear of God's punishment is what keeps civilized men from becoming animals. Fear of parental punishment or disapproval is what keeps kids in check at home.

But I see a great paradox in our society today. Many parents fear their children – just the opposite of how it's supposed to be. Some are terrified of their kids. They're afraid their children won't like them. They fear that strict rules might squelch their children's creativity. So they merely become caretakers without discipline. They strive only to become their children's friend, not their parent. Such permissive parenting, brethren, is a recipe for disaster.

Then there are parents who are more interested in careers than family. They give up their parenting responsibilities and allow somebody else to raise their children. That generally results in little love, little structure, little religion, and little respect. Children are left alone to make up their own rules for life – another sure recipe for disaster.

Permissive and absent parents abound in our society today. I believe that accounts for the awful decay of respect we see in our youth. Ask any school teacher or policeman what the biggest problem is with young people today. You'll get an earful about lack of respect. And lack of respect is the main problem I see in my ward as well.

Duty is our second motivator. Hopefully, obeying out of duty instead of fear takes over as we get older. If it doesn't, obedience stops. Basically, we promise to do something by making a contract or covenant, and we're duty bound to obey. Baptism is such a covenant as is the Priesthood of God. I dare say there's not a brother in this room who would not rather be home with his family right now. Do we love these meetings? No. Do we come because we're afraid we'll go to hell if we don't? I doubt it. We come because it's our duty. It's the right place to be. The Doctrine and Covenants is bursting with the word "duty." It's found hundreds of times. Here's just one of them:

“Wherefore, now let every man learn his **duty**, and to act in the office in which he is appointed, in all **diligence**.” D&C 107:99

That’s why we’re here tonight, brethren – and it’s why we do a lot of things in the church...and in our careers...and in our families. Obedience out of duty.

The trick in raising children is to move them along into obeying out of duty rather than fear. If you can’t eventually instill duty to God and duty to parent in your children, you’ll lose them. For you see, once they get older and don’t fear you, threats no longer work. I believe the biggest factor in teaching duty is example. If you have built a foundation of respect for authority in your home, and you’re a dutiful parent, you’ll probably have dutiful children. Of course, it doesn’t always work that way. But it’s a good plan.

The ultimate and best reason to obey is out of love. We want to please the people we love and make them happy, so we do what they say. When we obey God, we show our love for Him. And there’s no greater joy to a parent than to have a child willingly do the right things out of love. That is the ultimate wish of every parent.

There are a couple of great scriptures about this concept:

Christ said: “If ye love me keep my commandments.” He also said, “Love casteth out all fear.” That would be an interesting discussion, given our paradigm of fear, duty, and love tonight. And about the ultimate act of love, he said, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man give up his life for his friends.” Christ died for us and atoned for our sins. It was the greatest act of love in the history of the universe. Love for His father. Love for you and me. Love for all mankind. Obedience out of love.

Anyway, there you have some broad generalities on raising righteous children. I believe fear, duty, and love are eternal principles that will help anyone here win the obedience game at home. Do they always work? Of course not. Your children still have their free agency, and sometimes nothing seems to work. When you think about it, God has his share of failed offspring too. But at least you'll be doing the right things as a parent based on principle.

To close, I want to put these principles in perspective by reading a wonderful scripture for parents. It was actually given to Priesthood leaders on how to govern the church, but I have used it as my guiding light in being a father. When I follow it, it never fails. When I ignore it, I usually hit the wall – and I've done that many times. As you listen to these words, compare them to your own style of discipline. You've all heard them many times. They're found in D&C 121 41-43.

41. No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness, and meekness, and by love unfeigned.

42. By kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile.

43. Reproving betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost, and then showing forth afterwards an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reproved lest he esteem thee to be his enemy.

44. That he may know that thy faithfulness is stronger than the cords of death.

Brethren, it's my prayer that we may we raise a righteous generation of children by obeying the living prophet of God, in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Wallace F. Toronto

Fireside – Apopka Ward – 8-20-06

Tonight I'd like to tell you a true story about an incredible man of God — every bit as brave as Ammon in the Book of Mormon who fearlessly carried the gospel to hostile Lamanites, and every bit as obedient as young Nephi, who went and did the thing the Lord commanded him to do.

This man's name is Wallace F. Toronto -- Wally to his friends -- and my Dad.

Dad was born in 1907 and died in 1968 at the age of 60. As the oldest of the nine children, he was a born leader. He was student body president of his high school, captain of all his sports teams, and an honors graduate at the University of Utah. (I always wondered what happened to me!) He was at the forefront of every battle and always lifted those around him.

Wally had a great sense of humor, and he loved practical jokes. Actually, he was an unbearable tease. I could spend all night telling you about some of the pranks he's pulled, but it wouldn't be appropriate. To give you some insight into his personality, though, let me tell you about one of his most famous tricks.

I learned about it a few years ago from an older gentleman I met at church. When he heard that my name was Toronto, he asked me if I was Wally's boy. (I've been plagued with that question all of my life.) When I told him I was, he began to laugh and told me that Wally was his scoutmaster when he was a young man -- "the finest scout master this world has ever seen," he said.

He told me that Brother Toronto had a special initiation for new scouts who came into the troop. At the end of each scout meeting, all of the scouts would join hands in a circle for the closing prayer. When there was a new scout in the

troop, Wally would take the new kid by the hand and get him in the circle -- all ready to pray; heads bowed and eyes closed. Then he'd creak one eye open and look around the circle, making sure everyone was in place. Then he'd let go of the new boy's hand, lick his finger and stick it into a live light socket. The shock would travel through the entire circle and about knock the new kid on his backside. All of the boys would laugh hysterically except the new kid, who was fighting back the tears. But you could bet your life he was ready for the next new kid. Today, you'd probably go to jail for doing that. Those were the good-old-days.

Dad went on his first mission to Germany at the age of 19. About half way through his mission, he was sent to Prague, the capital of Czechoslovakia to learn the Czech language and to introduce the gospel to that country for the very first time. He fell in love with Czechoslovakia and its people, and he and his companions were quite successful at establishing a branch of the Church there. After his mission, he came home, got married, and went to school for four years.

When Dad was 27, his life changed drastically. He received a call from Heber J. Grant, the prophet at the time. The Church was establishing an independent mission in Czechoslovakia, and Dad was asked to return as Mission President. At the time, my mother was only 24 years old. They were the youngest mission parents ever called. Dad never was released as President of the Czech Mission until after his death – he served in that position for 32 years. However, because of World War II and the subsequent Communist takeover of Czechoslovakia, he only spent ten of those years actually living in that country. Most of the first five years of my life were spent in the mission home in Prague.

Dad started his mission in 1935, and things were fairly peaceful for the first four years – Czechoslovakia prospered, and the Church grew rapidly. But during that

same time, Adolph Hitler had risen to power in neighboring Germany and war was threatening all of Europe. Hitler wanted back what Germany had lost after the First World War – and then some. By March of 1939, he had marched into Austria and Hungary and simply taken over what he thought was rightfully his. Dad was hoping that Hitler would not invade Czechoslovakia, even though the Nazis had already taken back one-third of that country that was mostly German. But one day it happened. The Czech people woke up, and the streets of Prague were overrun with Nazi tanks and soldiers. If anyone resisted, they were shot.

The day the Nazis marched on Prague, my mother was in the hospital having a baby. She remembers the commotion in the streets and her bed shaking as the tanks rumbled by the hospital. She especially remembers the terror in the faces of the staff and patients at the hospital. They all knew what the Nazi occupation meant – arrests, interrogations, imprisonment, and executions. Can you imagine what it would be like to have a hostile foreign army take over our country? It was the end of their way of life. And, of course, it meant trouble and permanent changes for the Church as well.

After a few weeks of Nazi occupation, the entire country lived in terror. People were disappearing for no apparent reason, and the prisons were full. Everyone was forced by law to turn in all of their guns, their gold and silver, and their U.S. Dollars. Hitler needed hard currency with which to finance his war. He simply printed millions of worthless “Crowns,” the local currency, in exchange. Dad called this “legalized robbery” in one of his letters to the First Presidency. All citizens lived in fear of a knock on the door by the hated Gestapo.

On one Sunday during this period, Dad was conducting a sacrament meeting in Prague – it was a Mother’s Day program. The sacrament had been served and Dad was

standing to announce the rest of the program. As he got to the pulpit, a tall, immaculately-dressed Nazi Officer walked into the rear of the meeting house. Can you imagine? The entire congregation froze with fear. The officer slowly walked to the front of the meetinghouse, and Dad stepped to greet him, speaking in German. They had a brief, quiet conversation. Dad returned to the pulpit and announced that this young officer had something to say to the congregation. My Mother wrote his exact words in her journal. He stood at the pulpit and said,

“Brothers and Sisters, I am Brother Schrul from Kiel. We have a large naval base there, and all young men in our country must serve. I know you are startled to see an officer of the Third Reich here in your midst. I am an Elder in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and at present, I am serving as Mutual President of my branch. I have a military assignment to your beautiful city for a few months. Therefore, I would like to be accepted and worship with you, if you will allow me that privilege.

Tears flowed and heads nodded in approval. The young officer stepped down to take his seat. All the sisters threw their arms around him, and all the men pumped his hand vigorously. This young enemy soldier, representing everything that the Czechs hated and feared, was adopted into that little branch as one of their own. They loved him – and he helped them cope with the occupation. He even went on some outings with them and got them through some road-blocks. The bonds of the gospel were so much stronger than those of nationalism.

Things got progressively worse for the mission over the next few months, and proselyting became impossible. The Czech people were afraid to talk to anyone. And with each passing day, Hitler was putting together a more powerful war machine.

The prophet decided to evacuate all missionaries from the European missions – starting with those occupied by the Third Reich.

Then an unfortunate thing happened. Four of Dad's missionaries were arrested and imprisoned for trading U.S. dollars on the black market. The new Nazi law dictated that all U.S. dollars should have been turned into the State. It so happened that, against Dad's orders, one of the four missionaries exchanged some dollars with a Nazi snitch. The other three elders were simply with him when he was picked up, so they arrested all four.

One of the missionaries, Elder Moutlon, was the mission secretary, and on his key ring was a key to a strong box, which was kept at the mission home in my Dad's desk. The secret police were very interested in this key and the contents of that box. They figured it contained more dollars and important documents that they could use against the Church. And it did. In order to keep his boys out of trouble, Dad had all of the missionaries give him their dollars for safekeeping. This was against the new law, of course. He thought he could eventually get the money out of the country. In that strong box was about \$3,000 – a small fortune in those days – and cause for my father's arrest and conviction. But that money was critical to the missionaries' independence and survival.

The first thing the secret police did after arresting these missionaries, was to take Elder Moulton with his key ring to the mission home and surprise my father at the door. They didn't want to give him any time to hide anything. They informed him that four of his missionaries had been arrested for unlawful exchange, and that they were there to confiscate the contents of that strong box. When Dad told this story, he used to say, "I figured the jig was up, and I was headed for the hooscow."

But some miraculous things happened. Dad ushered the two Gestapo and Elder Moulton into his office, and the elder gave Dad his key. Dad opened his top desk drawer, took out the metal box, and set it on top of the desk. He inserted the key and lifted the lid, exposing the cash. At that same instant, Elder Moulton reached over and knocked a lamp onto the floor. It shattered into pieces and both of the officers turned around to see what the heck was going on. Dad quickly reached in the box, took out the cash, dropped it into the top drawer, and slid it shut. When the two officers turned back around, all they found was an empty strong box, just like Elder Moulton had told them they would. They looked at each other, shrugged their shoulders, and left, taking Elder Moulton back to jail. Dad said it took a couple of days for his heart to stop pounding.

But now Dad had a real problem on his hands – how to get his missionaries out of jail and out of Czechoslovakia before the war started. It seemed like an impossible task. Thousands of people had been imprisoned and many more thousands were standing in long lines to see the authorities to try to get them out. Lines went out the door and around the block in many cases, and even then, you weren't assured that you were even waiting for the right man. It was truly a nightmare.

Dad worked closely with the American Embassy, and after about six weeks of total frustration, he was finally allowed to see his missionaries. The Germans were holding them for ransom. They wanted \$10,000 each for their release. They thought all Americans and the Church were rich. In 1939, \$40,000 was a fortune – about a half-million dollars in today's currency. And at that time, neither the Church or the families could pay.

Things were getting critical. It was just a matter of days until all-out war broke out in Europe. If that happened, travel in and out of the country would be impossible, and they'd all be stuck behind enemy lines.

Dad was totally frustrated. He would stand in long lines, just to be rejected at the end of the day. Even if he got in to see the Commander, he had no money and no power to negotiate. He was really stumped.

Dad decided to fast and pray for a couple of days for an answer. On the third day he woke up and told my mother, “I have the strongest urge to go back to the consulate today, but I know that there’s a three-day wait to see the Commander. And even if I get in, he’ll just tell me to get lost until I come up with the money.!” But Dad followed the spirit and went anyway – not knowing before hand what he should do.

When he got the consulate, the line waiting to see the Chief of Police contained hundreds people. With a sigh, Dad got in at the end of the line. He’d been there for about an hour, when an officer suddenly came out of the building and started throwing people out of line in front of him – every single one. Dad’s mind really started churning as the officer approached, and by the time he got there, Dad had a great speech all ready about why he just had to see the Commander. The officer took one look at Dad, and before he could utter a word, said, “You must be the man from the American Embassy, the Commander is expecting you. You can go right in.” Dad stood there with his mouth open. He wasn’t the man from the Embassy -- but what the heck? Why not take advantage of the situation? He marched right in.

Mom wrote:

Within an hour, Dad had accomplished what he’d been trying to do for six weeks. He was sitting in front of the supreme commander – the man who could say yes-or-no to his request. After talking for a while the Commander said, “Your Church is rich. You could pay that \$40,000 with no problem at all.” Dad thought to himself, “You old rascal -- if you can bluff me, I can bluff you.” Dad explained the

missionary program to the Commander. He explained that there were more than 150 missionaries still left in Germany, and that they were each sent about \$50 per month. He said, "Figure out for yourself how much money the Church is bringing into Germany each year. If you don't release my men immediately, I'll have every American missionary ordered out of Germany within the week, and look at the amount of money you will personally be responsible for losing for the Third Reich!" This was pure smoke. Most of the missionaries had already left, and Dad had no power to carry out such an order. But it worked! The Commander figured out on paper how much he could be accountable for losing, and renegotiated for the release of the missionaries -- he settled for \$1,000 each. Dad promptly ordered a wire in from Church headquarters. The missionaries were released in a few days after six weeks of terror in a Nazi prison.

These poor elders were traumatized – though they were not abused. They were kept in separate cells; they were pale and thin having been fed a diet of mostly bread and water. During their stay, they could hear the screams and commotion of the prison. They were constantly in fear that they were next. Even today, these four elders have deep scars from that experience and refuse to talk about it. And each one repaid the Church for their ransom after they returned home.

It took Dad a few days to actually wire the money and spring his elders. In the meantime, he sent all of the missionaries, including my Mother, to Copenhagen, Denmark.

You'll never guess how he smuggled the \$3,000 cash out of Czechoslovakia. He gave it to my mom in an envelope and told her just to keep it in her coat pocket. This was incredibly dangerous. Dad said he didn't think anyone would bother a mother fleeing the country with a six-month old baby and two small children.

So my mom, bless her heart, with her three little kids and no escort, faked an illness on the train so no one would bother her, and bribed her way out of the country with \$3,000 cash in her coat pocket. At the last checkpoint, the Nazi guards searched all of her luggage, while she stood there and watched with her coat over her arm. Her adventure is an hour-long story by itself. It just boggles my mind – can there be any doubt that the Lord was with her?

After Mom arrived in Copenhagen, the war was set to begin at any minute, but Dad and his four missionaries were still in Prague. It turned out that one of the missionaries was re-arrested at the last minute and thrown back in jail. It just about did that poor kid in. He thought he was a goner. And Dad had to start the whole release process over again.

My mother was a nervous wreck. She had just been through a harrowing escape, and her husband was still in enemy territory. She was crying and fretting about it in the mission office, when all of a sudden she felt a strong arm around her shoulder. She looked up to see the smiling face of President Joseph Fielding Smith, one of Dad's closest friends and head of all European missions at the time. He told her, "Martha, I promise you one thing. The Lord will not allow this war to start until Brother Toronto and his missionaries arrive in this land of Denmark."

The next day, Dad was able to see the Gestapo who had re-arrested his missionary. It so happened that that missionary had the same name as a British spy they were looking for. It was a simple case of mistaken identity, and to Dad's great relief, they let the missionary go.

People were fleeing the country by the thousands, and transportation was virtually impossible to find. Luckily, Dad and his missionaries were able to catch a ride to the German coast on a special train sent for final evacuation of the British Embassy. Then they boarded the very last ferry

to leave Germany for Denmark. Within hours, of reaching Denmark, and even before they reached the mission home in Copenhagen, Hitler invaded Poland with his infamous “blitzkrieg.” England and France declared war on Germany, and all travel was suspended.

Mom wrote in her journal,

“When Dad called from the coast to tell us he and his four missionaries were finally in Denmark, the relief and happiness felt in the mission home and among the missionaries living there was like a dark cloud lifting to reveal the sunshine. Indeed, the war didn’t start, as President Smith was inspired to predict, until President Toronto and his elders were on Danish soil.”

Dad brought his family home to Salt Lake City after that, built a home and started building a career. Mom finally recovered from her traumatic experience, the kids were all in school, and things were relatively peaceful. They’d been home just five years when World War II ended, and Europe started piecing itself back together. I was born in June of 1945, and two months later, Dad was again called by the Prophet, then George Albert Smith. He was asked to return to Czechoslovakia to re-open the mission. This part always amazes me. Dad dropped a promising career, left his family behind to fend for itself, and raced back to the mission field without hesitation. It’s no wonder the Lord loved him.

The war had devastated Europe. When Dad arrived in Prague, the economy was in shambles and people were starving and freezing to death. He took truckloads of food and clothing with him, which had been donated by church members, and distributed them as best he could to members and non-members alike. He was responsible for saving many lives with this humanitarian aid.

Dad was alone in Czechoslovakia for almost a year, putting the mission back together. Then the family joined him there for four more years. But this was not a happy time for the Church in that country.

Though the people were relatively free after the war, the most powerful and organized political group in Czechoslovakia was the Communist Party – and they had their minds set on tyranny. When Dad got there, only a portion of government officials were Communists, but over the years, the numbers increased rapidly. One day, the Communist Party simply announced to the country that they controlled the military, the money, and all businesses. Czechoslovakia was now behind the iron curtain, and the people were, again, in bondage to a Satanic regime. Some people question whether Satan was really behind Communism. But in one of the blessings my dad received before returning to Czechoslovakia a few years later, President McKay said, “Satan himself is at the head of the Communist empire, and just as in the beginning, it is still his desire to take away the free agency of man by force.”

To enforce their wishes and to eliminate opposition, the new Communist government set up a network of internal spies. Thousands of people were paid to report everything that everyone did to government officials. It’s hard to blame them, really – for many, spying was their sole means of income. As a result, privacy was totally done away with. The Czech people, again, began to be arrested, interrogated, imprisoned, and killed.

Dad said that in many ways, the Communist government was more terrifying than the Hitler’s Third Reich. With the Nazis, at least they knew who the enemy was. Under Communist rule, you never knew who was spying on you -- it could even be your own children.

Now the Church really had a problem, because the new rulers were atheists. They wanted to eradicate all religion. But because the Mormon Church was based in the United States, and because it had done so much good after the war, they couldn't just crush it. They had to find political reasons to expel the missionaries. So they set their spies to work on the Church, looking for any excuse to kick the Mormons out. Their primary accusation was that the missionaries were secret agents for the CIA.

So the harassment and suffocation of the Church began. Dad and his missionaries were followed everywhere. Their homes and cars were under constant surveillance, and when they left, their apartments were searched. There were secret agents in all of their church meetings. They were forced to submit all of their sermons and lessons to government officials for approval before a meeting. These speeches would come back all marked up, with whole sections scratched out. Dad said it was impossible to teach the gospel, as all references to God were eliminated.

And the members suffered badly. Since they did not join the Communist Party or spy for money, they were considered by those in power to be lowest-class citizens. They got the worst jobs, the worst housing, and were granted no privileges. They were kept in poverty with no chance of improving their lives. Belonging to the Mormon Church was a bad deal.

This made Wally very angry. Weekly he'd go into the local Commissar and raise hell about the treatment of his members and missionaries. And the communists hated him. He was squeaky clean, having done such a great job with humanitarian aid after the war. But what they hated most was the fact that he wasn't afraid of them. They were used to making anyone shake in their boots with the threat of a trip to Siberia – but not him. He was not one to be pushed around, especially when he knew he was right and when was on an errand for the Lord.

I have a vision of Dad being just like Abinidi in the Book of Mormon, standing in the midst of evil men who wanted him dead, while he fearlessly raked them over the coals.

Despite Dad's efforts to save the mission, his missionaries started receiving expulsion orders. They had 24 hours to leave the country or be arrested. Authorities were simply making up lies about the activities of the elders in order to kick them out.

At that time, communications in and out of the country were totally controlled. All phones were tapped, and all incoming and outgoing mail was read by the Secret Police. Dad could not tell Church headquarters what was really going on. But he had to tell them. So he decided to take a chance and smuggle a letter out of the country with a set of elders who were being expelled. It contained the full, ugly truth. This was extremely dangerous. If this letter were intercepted by the "Commies" as he used to call them, Dad and the elder carrying it would be imprisoned. He prepared the letter and put it in a sealed envelope. He then gave the letter to one of two elders who was getting ready to board the train out of the country. But just before the elders boarded, Dad was constrained by the spirit to change the plan. He took the letter from the elder he first gave it to and handed it to his companion. He said, "Here, you are to be the one responsible for this letter." Before this train got out of Czechoslovakia, it was stopped and many of the passengers were interrogated, including the first elder Dad gave the letter to. This poor missionary was taken into a train station and searched while his baggage was torn apart by angry agents. His trembling companion, the one with the explosive letter in his coat pocket, was allowed to stay on the train unmolested. The Lord was protecting his servants through the whisperings of the Holy Ghost that day.

Dad finally lost his battle to keep the mission alive in Czechoslovakia and was expelled in 1950. He came home to run the mission from Salt Lake City for the next 18

years. And it wasn't easy. For the first few years he communicated with the members in a code that they developed before he left, so the Communists wouldn't destroy their letters. But that didn't last long, and members were disappearing at an alarming rate – especially the leadership. When Dad left Czechoslovakia, there were about 500 members there – when he returned 15 years later there were less than 100. By the time Czechoslovakia gained religious freedom, 30 years later, there were less than 50.

Life for Mormons was difficult under Communism. They had to hide their religion to survive. By law, they could not meet in groups larger than five without permission. If the Commies thought their meeting was religious, they would arrest everybody. Scriptures and all Church literature were banned, and the remaining members couldn't receive any communications from Salt Lake City.

For about 5 years local leaders ran the church as best they could through an organized system of underground home teaching. Each Sunday, a pair of elders would go out and visit member's homes unannounced. When they arrived, they would close all of the curtains in the house, have a quiet prayer, whisper a hymn so no one could hear, administer the sacrament to the family, and leave a short message. These secret meetings took about 15 minutes. The risk was high, but they did it anyway.

And members could never include their children in these meetings. Children were taken away from parents at the age of five and raised in State schools during the week. And teachers drilled one thing into these kids – to spy on their parents. So the parents couldn't trust their own children. It was way too risky. Can you imagine? Family units were virtually destroyed, and the gospel was not passed onto future generations. Satan effectively shut down the Church in Czechoslovakia for 30 years.

The Lord must have some very special blessings in store for the faithful members of the church who lived under such trying and oppressive circumstances.

The next time you want to sleep in instead of go to church, or you don't want to go home teaching, think about these poor Czechs who would have given anything for the religious freedom we have.

We get up on Sunday morning, pile into the family car, drive to church, meet openly in a beautiful chapel, sing our hymns as loud as we want, pray together where everybody can see us, openly take the sacrament, and freely discuss our religion. In addition, we have family prayer, family home evening, and activities during the week – all to make sure our children are taught the principles of truth and righteousness. And nobody tries to arrest us and throw us in jail. It's hard not to take these things for granted – even for me, and I know better. But brothers and sisters, even today all people in the world don't have our freedoms. Let's be thankful for them.

Under the direction of President McKay, Dad applied for a visa to re-enter Czechoslovakia ten times over the next 15 years without success. The Communists remembered Toronto and didn't want him back. They were convinced he was a spy.

Dad went to visit President McKay in 1964 with his tenth rejected visa and was ready to give up for another year. President McKay said, "The Czech government wants American tourists badly right now. Their economy is depressed and they need our dollars. Why don't you apply again right now and see if you can slip by." Dad thought it was useless, but the prophet insisted. Two weeks later, after 15 futile years of trying, he and my mother miraculously obtained a two-week visa to re-enter Czechoslovakia as tourists.

They returned in 1965 to find less than 100 old and depressed members of the Church who had lost all contact with church headquarters. During their two-week trip, Mom and Dad secretly visited each surviving member of the church. They could not afford to arouse suspicion by announcing their presence.

Dad said it was the same heart-breaking scene over and over again. The members would open their doors to find President and Sister Toronto standing there. They would stare for a moment, not believing their eyes. They would reach up and tenderly touch their faces to make sure they were real, and burst into uncontrollable tears. They thought their beloved mission president was gone forever – and here he stood. Hope was rekindled in that small band of saints. He did what he could for them and predicted that, given time, the Lord would allow religious freedom to return to Czechoslovakia some day.

Dad had an interesting revelation during that visit. The night before he left, he had a meeting with all surviving priesthood holders – about a dozen men. They met in secret, of course. The group leader asked Dad a profound question: “Why was the Lord allowing them, who had remained faithful to His Church, to suffer so at the hands of the Communists?” Dad was stumped, but then the Spirit touched him. He explained that the Gospel was founded on eternal laws – one of them being the Law of Witnesses. The scriptures say, “By two or more witnesses shall all things be known.” He told them that they were in the heat of the Communist conflict as witnesses, and that either in this life or the next, they would all be called on to testify against the evil men who terrorized their country. They were unwitting tools in the Lord’s hands. This satisfied them. This was 15 years before the breakdown of communism and the return of religious freedom in that country.

My parents returned home, made their report to President McKay, and according to his instructions, immediately applied for another visa. A few months later, they received one.

Mom and Dad prepared to go back again and made their usual stop to receive a blessing from President McKay the day before they left. When they were seated in his office, President McKay took one look at Mom and said, “Martha, this trip is going to be too dangerous for you. I want you to stay home and let Wally go alone this time.”

Can you imagine? How would you feel if you had been my Mom or Dad, receiving these instructions from a living prophet of God?

Then President McKay laid his hands on Dad’s head and gave him a wonderful blessing. This is where he told Dad that Satan himself was at the head of the Communist movement. President McKay made some interesting prophecies in that blessing. There are four things that Dad wrote and told me about. I was on my mission in Chile.

- First, he promised Dad that he would not be physically harmed during this mission.
- Second, he said that what Wally was going to do was so important to the Church, that he would encounter the full force of Satan’s power.
- Third, he said that Dad would be seen by the entire Czech nation.
- And last, he said that Dad would bear testimony of the truthfulness of the gospel to the highest authorities in the land.

How would you feel with that kind of weight on your shoulders?

Dad returned to Czechoslovakia for the last time in the spring of 1966. His goal was to bolster the local leadership and to see government officials about allowing the church

to assemble in that country. A few other denominations had gained official recognition, but Mormonism was still illegal.

One of the first things Dad did when he got to Czechoslovakia was to attend the annual sports fest they have in Prague's great coliseum. It is the most important event of the year to Czechs – even more important than our Super Bowl. The single government T.V station was covering it all, and the entire nation was tuned in. After one of the major events, Dad was walking out of the coliseum, when a television reporter and camera man stopped him and asked him for an interview. Out of the hundred-thousand people there, they chose Dad. To the reporter's delight, Dad was an American who spoke Czech. So they took him into the trailer and put him on live television, Of course, the reporter asked Dad how he had learned the language. He had to be careful not to offend the government, so he briefly mentioned his mission for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and went on to talk about the sports fest. But everyone saw him, and everyone heard the name of the Church. The members of the Church did not know he was coming back and were thrilled. One of President McKay's prophecies was fulfilled.

Dad made a few visits that day, when his trip was cut short. He was at one of the member's homes for the evening, when a big black sedan pulled up to the house and two secret police came to the door. They informed Dad that he was under arrest for trying to set up an illegal church in Czechoslovakia. Of course, Dad told them he was just checking on people who used to be members, but they didn't buy it. They said he had to come with them for interrogation. He told them to wait a few minutes while he went up stairs to his bedroom to gather his things.

Dad was a little shaky, not knowing what was about to happen. When he got to his bedroom, he shut the door and knelt by the bed to pray for strength. While he was on his knees, an evil force tried to overtake him. He said it was just like the description given by the prophet Joseph Smith when he was attacked in the sacred grove before the First Vision. This force pushed him onto the floor and tried to take his breath away. Dad said all he could do was pray for delivery, and remember the blessing given to him by President McKay. He wrestled with this evil spirit for a minute, and then it departed. It left Dad very weak. He knew he was on the verge of something big. And another of President McKay's prophecies was fulfilled.

Dad finally recovered his wits, and went away with the secret police to a government building in Prague. They interrogated him about his activities in their country. He told them he was not bypassing the government to set up an illegal church, but that he'd come precisely to see the minister of religion about official status for the Church. In fact, he had an appointment with that guy in a couple of days. This confused the interrogators, so they summoned all the leaders in Prague to interrogate Dad further. All of the chiefs came that night – including the minister of religion Dad had come to see.

Mom wrote:

What an opportunity! Here, in one room, were the people who could make a difference to the Church. Dad laid out the entire history of the Church in Czechoslovakia and discussed its current status. He taught them basic church doctrine. Now remember, all of these men were hard-core atheists working for a Satanic empire. Dad stood in the midst of these misled brethren, and bore fervent testimony of the existence of God and Jesus Christ. He told them of Joseph Smith and the restoration of the true church. And he told them that he was sent there specifically to talk to them by a living prophet of God.

The third prophecy by President McKay had been fulfilled.

You know how they responded? As a group, they were furious. They wanted him to leave the country. We will never know who he affected, or how, but you can bet you're life that somebody's heart was softened that day. It's interesting that Czechoslovakia was the first iron curtain country to open its doors to the Church.

By now it was 1:00 in the morning. Dad told his captors, "O.K. I'll leave. Just put me up for the night and I'll take a plane to Berlin as soon as I can get one tomorrow." They said, "No way. We want you out of here now!" His suitcases were still in the police car. So the secret police drove him to the German border and dropped him off on the edge of no-man's land – that's a strip of fenced off and cleared ground about 200 yards wide that completely surrounds the country. It is rimmed by barbed wire on both sides and is there to keep people from escaping. The entire country was a prison. Dad had to walk across no-man's land with his suitcases in hand at about 4:00 in the morning.

The German guard on the other side was surprised to see an unshaven and tired old American coming out of the darkness at that time of night. Luckily, Dad spoke German and asked if he could wait at the guard station for a ride to the next town in the morning. The guard said he could sleep on the bench. Then the guard made the mistake of asking Dad who he was and why he was in Czechoslovakia. And my Dad, bless his heart, having been up for two days straight, having physically wrestled with Satan, having been arrested and interrogated, and having just born his testimony to the highest officials in that country, stayed up the rest of the night with that German guard teaching him the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The next day, Dad reached the mission home of the closest city, flew to London to make his report to President Benson, and then came home. The fourth prophecy was fulfilled, and my Dad's mission was complete.

Now brothers and sisters, can there be any doubt here tonight that Jesus Christ guides and directs the affairs of his church through a living prophet? Can there be any doubt that worthy members of the church are protected and guided by the Holy Ghost? And can there be any doubt that the Church is true? Speaking for myself, as the son of Wally Toronto, I say no! There is no doubt. Throughout my youth, I heard these stories first-hand from my parents with tears streaming down their cheeks. I know they're true.

To finish up, let me tell you what happened to Dad. A few months before his last trip to Czechoslovakia, he got cancer and was medically scheduled to die. President Hugh B. Brown, an Apostle of the Lord, blessed him back to health for his last mission in 1966. We were hoping for a permanent cure, but the cancer finally killed him on January 10, 1968. I was 22 years old at the time and just off my mission.

But an interesting thing happened about two weeks before Dad died. In fact, it was Christmas Eve. President Brown came to our home and gave Dad a final blessing. The whole family was there, and we expected President Brown to perform another miraculous cure. But he laid his hands on Dad's gray head, that was no more than a skeleton, and without any introduction proclaimed,

“Wally, you're going to die. But death will be a welcome relief from this old, sick body. It will be just like getting out of this bed and walking into the next room to meet your Savior.”

And then he said something that just amazed me,

“You are being called into the spirit world to organize the missionary work among the Czech people who have died without a knowledge of the gospel.”

Brothers and sister, he was never released in this life, and I suspect he is still being called “President Toronto” on the other side.

At Dad’s funeral, President Brown was the concluding speaker. He talked of his close friendship with Dad and spoke of his tremendous contributions to the Church. And then he proclaimed, “In the name of the Lord, I testify that Wally Toronto has been saved in the Celestial Kingdom.” I was floored. I knew Dad and some of his imperfections. I thought, maybe there’s hope for me.

Now let me conclude. I’ve told you a long and involved story tonight about a man who faithfully served the Lord and was saved in the Celestial Kingdom. What can we learn from it to enrich and improve our own lives? There are lessons here for almost any subject – faith, obedience, courage, prophecy, prayer, fasting, service – you name it. I hope you’ve picked up on something you needed.

But the most striking lesson to me is that of Dad’s attitude. His heart was right with God. He was willing to do anything the Lord asked him to do. He had the same “can-do” attitude of Nephi, Alma, and Paul.

You might be interested in a conversation I had with Dad a month before he died. I asked him what his favorite and most fulfilling Church calling was since he’d had such an illustrious history. It wasn’t as an emissary of the Lord, facing Satanic Nazi and Communist regimes. And it wasn’t as an exiled mission president, rubbing shoulders with apostles and prophets. It was as priest-quorum advisor in the Parley’s 4th Ward.

Needless to say, I was impressed. And it taught me a great lesson. It taught me that we can all be Wally Torontos in our own sphere, and that the Lord appreciates equally all those who are willing to serve. It's all in our attitudes and in getting our hearts right with God.

It is my prayer tonight that we can learn from this great story and become faithful, obedient servants, in the Name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

What Would You Have Me Do?

Leesburg Stake Priesthood Leadership Meeting – 2-21-09
Al Toronto – High Counselor

About ten years ago, I was involved in local politics in Idaho. One of my best friends was running for Congress. At one of the Republican rallies we attended, Senator Jake Garn was the Keynote Speaker. He told a story on himself that changed my life – particularly my attitude about living in a bureaucratic world and dealing with levels of power.

Senator Garn was at a banquet in Washington. He likes lots of butter on his rolls, and he ran short. He called the waiter over to the table and asked for another pat of butter. The waiter said, “I’m sorry sir, each plate is allowed only two pats.” The Senator pressed the issue. “I really want more butter. Please bring me another pat or take one off one of the unused plates from the next table.” The waiter pressed back, “I’m sorry sir, you are allowed only two pats.”

Exasperated, the Senator turned his chair around, looked up at the waiter and said, “Young man, do you know who I am?” The waiter replied, “I’m sorry, sir, I don’t.” Senator Garn continued, “I’m the senior Senator from Utah. I have been re-elected 6 times and have been in the Senate for 25 years. I have been the Chairman of the Banking and Finance committee for 15 years. I am the only Senator ever selected to fly one of the space shuttle missions around the earth.” The waiter listened intently, nodding his head. Then he replied, “Senator, I appreciate all that. But do you know who I am?” Senator Garn was taken back. “Well, no young man, I guess I don’t.” The waiter concluded the conversation, “I’m the guy in charge of the butter.”

The term “Butter Guy” is now one of my favorite clichés. It refers to anyone in charge of anything in your life. I use it all the time.

Now here's the question for today: Do we have Butter Guys in the Church? More specifically, who's the Butter Guy in this room? How many of you are Butter Guys in your own callings? I think we should change the term "Priesthood Keys" to "Butter Guy." It's much easier to understand.

Which brings me to my topic. This is Priesthood Leadership Meeting. We come here to learn how to lead. And, as you know, one of our major themes this year is unity. Though good leadership is important to manage an organization, by definition, unity has more to do with followership than leadership. Think about it. In an established quorum, ward or stake, a weak leader, or even no leader at all, cannot kill unity if the members are strong. On the other hand, a strong leader cannot force unity if the members are weak.

Consider poor Joseph Smith, trying to unify his first set of 12 apostles. No matter how he tried to hold it together, the quorum fell apart. Unity in our voluntary lay Church depends on strong, like-minded followers. My topic today is how to be the best followers we can be, thus unifying our Quorums, our Wards, and our Stake.

Our church is a Theocracy – a top-down organization, with God on top. In other words, God rules. It's a hierarchy founded on revelation at each level. This means leaders are called of god by prophecy and then sustained in a vote by the congregation. All of us here are fully engaged in this process and know how it works.

There are two things that make this hierarchy interesting.

First, it's absolutely authoritarian. God directs the prophet. The prophet directs the apostles. The apostles direct stake presidents. Stake presidents direct bishops and Melchizedek Priesthood leaders.

Every leader in the Church, including the Prophet, answers to a higher authority. The driving principle of this authoritarian system is obedience. As we learned last year from President Carter, the Church is run by assignment – not volunteers. We are *not* supposed to question those above us. They have the authority and keys to administer the Church, and we are expected to sustain and follow them.

Second, this is a lay church. Though the system is perfect, it is run by imperfect men. Leaders are unprofessional members of the Church, like you and me that come with all the faults of the “natural man.” No one is forced to serve. No one gets paid. All training is on the job, and leaders make lots of mistakes. As you all know, this sets up an incredible caldron of unrighteous dominion and criticism. It’s a miracle the Church functions as well as it does. The glue that keeps this system together is humility. There’s no place for pride in the ranks of the Church. Without humility, this hierarchy of imperfect leadership would surely self-destruct.

So the primary principles that maintain this lay hierarchy are obedience and humility.

My favorite example of humility comes from early Church history. As you know, most of the first apostles called by Joseph Smith left the church. But not all departed immediately. Some stayed on to sabotage it. In the early going, Joseph was surrounded by traitors. I can’t imagine how difficult those first years were where everyone was a new convert. There was no established church culture and no Handbook of Instructions.

At one time, after ten of the original twelve apostles had turned against him, Joseph Smith was, understandably, suspicious of everyone. He tested Brigham Young’s loyalty by harshly accusing him of doing something he didn’t do. He dished-out quite a verbal lashing.

Under these circumstances, most of us would argue, bristle and fight to maintain our innocence. Brigham Young quietly took his licks, looked at the prophet and said, “Joseph, What would you have me do?” The embattled prophet embraced Brigham Young in tears and said, “You have passed the test.”

I’ve adopted Brigham Young’s phrase as my own – “What would you have me do?” It’s the perfect, humble thing to say in nearly every situation and in every conflict. It bailed me out a lot when I was bishop. Try it on your wife when you get home and see what happens. This phrase oozes humility. If we use it, it will add significantly to the unity of our stake.

Obedience is the other vital principle of unity. But the unifying power of obedience depends largely on why we obey.

There are three reasons we obey any commandment: fear, duty, and love.

Obedying out of fear is the weakest reason to obey. And its unifying power is temporary. Obeying out of fear stems from force or threat of punishment. Once that force is gone, obedience stops.

Obedying out of duty is a much higher and longer-lasting behavior. It begins when we voluntarily make a promise. That includes contracts and covenants. We are honor-bound to perform, and our integrity is on the line. We made serious promises when we got married. We promised to keep the commandments when we were baptized. As Priesthood holders, we are bound by the Oath and Covenant of the Priesthood. And as endowed members, we have promised to give everything we own to the Church – even our lives, if necessary.

I suspect such duty is why most of us are here on a beautiful Saturday afternoon when we could be golfing, riding motorcycles or playing with our families.

The third and highest reason to obey is love. We love someone so much we would do anything for him or her. We want to make them happy. We look for ways to make them happy. We would gladly give our lives for them. Think about your wives and children. Who in this room wouldn't take a bullet for them? Then there is the greatest example of all – Jesus Christ: “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13) In the greatest act of loving obedience in the known universe, he died that we might live. Obeying out of love is the ultimate reason to obey – stronger than obeying out of duty alone.

We all know our duty – that's why most of us are here. The key to increasing unity for this group is to change our attitudes – moving from obedience out of duty to obedience out of love. How do we do that? In short, we strengthen our testimonies and bury ourselves in service. We love what we know and whom we serve. That's a topic for another day.

I want to pull these concepts together with a story that every bishop in the Church could tell. Though simple, this experience changed my testimony.

I had a great ward in Hayden Lake, Idaho. The leadership was awesome, but we were short-handed. Nearly everyone had more than one calling. A wonderful family moved into the ward – the Heiner Family – an endowed couple, an active High Priest, and four children. We were thrilled!

Sister Heiner was a piece of work – very aggressive and opinionated. I knew we were in for a rough ride when we first visited their home as a bishopric, and she announced that she refused to give up her maiden name. She insisted that we call her Sister Mauldin-Heiner (with a hyphen).

Not just Heiner...but “Maaauuldin-Heiner.” Her mild-mannered husband just smiled. As we walked away from the visit, we all sighed in unison, “Oh geeze, another women’s libber.”

Within a week, we called her to be counselor in the Primary Presidency and a member of the Activities Committee. She immediately tried to run the whole ward. She was always in our faces about something. We avoided her whenever we could. But we tolerated her. She was very talented and magnified her callings.

We were in desperate need of a den leader. She had a boy in the den and was, literally, the only choice we had. There was no inspiration here – it was pure desperation. So with great trembling, we decided to issue her a third calling. I looked at my Second Counselor, “Brother Krueger, would you please issue that call to Sister Mauldin-Heiner?” A shy, humble man, he almost fainted, “She scares me, Bishop. Please don’t make me do it. You call her.” I looked at my first counselor, who said, “I’m not going to do it. This is a job for Superman.” They were right. This was beyond the normal call of duty, and it had to be handled by the Bishop.

It didn’t help that a couple of weeks earlier I sat next to Sister Mauldin-Heiner at a stake auxiliary training. It was Christmas time and they asked for a few favorite hymns from the congregation. I blurted out my favorite carol, but gave the wrong page number. She leaned over to me and said, “It’s a miracle our ward functions as well as it does.” Who says that to their Bishop? Especially one you barely know?

Anyway, I called her in. After a little small talk, I said, “Sister Mauldin-Heiner, I know you have two callings already, and we appreciate what you do. But we are desperate for a den leader in the Cub Scouts, and you are the only one in a position to do it. Would you accept that calling in addition to your other callings?”

I braced for impact.

She said, “Sure, Bishop, I’d love to. And I want to keep my other jobs.”

She saw the shock on my face and asked, “What!?” I said, “I expected some resistance. We’re really overloading you and you have been very aggressive with us in the past.”

Then she said something so simple and so beautiful, I’ll never forget it. “Bishop, either you believe it, or you don’t. I believe it.” Then she continued, “I love the Lord, and I love you as my Bishop. I’ll do anything you ask.”

Isn’t that music to your ears, Bishops? If it had been appropriate, I would have given her a tearful embrace, like Joseph Smith did with Brigham Young, and said, “You passed the test.” She became one of my most powerful assets.

Testimony. Humility. Loving obedience.

Those are the keys to good followership. And they are all included in Sister Mauldin-Heiner’s statement. Listen to it again. “Either you believe it, or you don’t. I believe it. I love the Lord, and I love you as my Bishop. I’ll do anything you ask.”

I suggest we follow Sister Mauldin-Heiner’s example and adopt three simple phrases as followers in the Priesthood. First, “I believe it.” Second, “I love you.” And third, “What would you have me do?”

Let’s consider these principles in a few groups known for their unity.

I've personally heard six different apostles discuss the nature of their weekly meetings in the upper room of the Salt Lake Temple. I was impressed that, in their own way, they each sustained the prophet with three messages: "I believe it." "I love you." "What would you have me do?"

I'm an ordinance worker in the Orlando Temple. I've rarely felt such unity among a group of saints. Our communications in the temple, especially toward the presidency, largely consist of, "I believe it." "I love you." "What would you have me do?"

We have a unified High Council in this Stake. There's not a single High Counselor who, in his own way, has not publicly expressed these sentiments to President Carter: "I believe it." "I love you." "What would you have me do?"

What happens when one of these three principles breaks down?

What if someone doesn't "believe it?" Or kind of believes it? Or is just going through the motions of believing it? Such a weak testimony would certainly put a crimp a person's desire to be humble and obey. Do we call people with weak testimonies to leadership positions? All the time. We have to use the talent available to us, and it's not always strong. The challenge and hope is to motivate members to grow and believe. That's what the Church is all about. Serving in a leadership position certainly provides them with the opportunity. But the fact is a weak testimony makes for a weak follower.

What if you *don't* love your leader? What if you hate him? What if you think he's a hypocrite – or that he exercises unrighteous dominion? What if he offends you? These things happen all the time. Under these circumstances, it would certainly be difficult to take orders from such a man. And it would be especially hard to say, "I love you."

But brethren, in the Church of Jesus Christ, that's exactly what we're expected to do. It takes great humility, understanding, and Christian maturity to embrace a man you don't like. Such deep character concedes love to the Lord and love to mankind in general.

You can still practice loving obedience within the hierarchy even if you don't care for one of your leaders. Mature members of the Church do it all the time.

What if you are *not* willing to serve? What if you grudgingly do your job? The phrase, "What would you have me do," is nowhere to be found. Obviously, unity will suffer. Leaders deal with situations like this constantly.

It's easy to see how vital these three principles are to unity in the Church.

Brethren, I'd like to conclude with a raving endorsement:

We have superb leadership in this Stake. I have never served with a stronger, more-committed, or harder-working Stake President than President Carter. I think everyone in this room feels the same way. He is a serious Butter Guy! And his counselors are the same. I marvel at their workload. And, in turn, they expect a lot from us.

Our Stake Presidency sets a wonderful example. They are the most obedient men I know. They provide us with outstanding, by-the-book training, so we can become more effective and more obedient leaders in our own organizations. They're following the Lord's plan for leadership as outlined by the prophets. I've never seen it done with more exactness or with more vigor.

Now it's up to us, as their followers, to unify this stake with testimony, humility, and loving obedience. Let's make sure that, in our own way and in our own words, they get this message: "I believe it." "I love you." "What would you have me do?"

That we may do so is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.