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INTRODUCTION

Kent has been asking me for some time to record some special experiences that I shared with Mother and Dad. Until now I have felt very reluctant to do so, but I know that it is important that these things be recorded, and I have therefore decided to do it now, while I can still remember most of the details clearly. These experiences are not intended to be shared with everyone. They are not only very personal, but to an extent, are actually a part of me, who I am, what I believe, and what I value. I wish I could put on paper the "feelings" I've experienced, but I can't. Nor can I fully express the spiritual insights I have received. These experiences are very precious to me, because some of the lessons they teach were purchased at great cost to mother and dad. Please keep this in mind as you read the following pages, because unless you are in tuned with the proper spirit, you will not really understand what I am trying to convey.

DAD'S SENILITY

Dad began having some noticeable memory problems in about 1966, when he was 63 years old. They were infrequent at first but became progressively worse. Kent was on his mission in Germany and at times dad would "forget" to send his checks. Dad began also to regress back to his days on the ranch and would leave the house to go look after cattle that had been gone for over 40 years. He also began hiding money and other things around the house for safe keeping. (He put my tax return check in a comic book where it was safe for nearly 10 years).

We sought medical help for dad, but there was really nothing anyone could do. We took him to a Dr. Reichman at the University Hospital in Salt Lake City, who was supposed to be one of the top doctors in the nation on the brain and the aging process. He did a number of tests, but told us there was really nothing to be done. He told me personally that dad's brain was simply deteriorating and that once a brain cell had died, there was no way to regenerate it. He said that there was no way to know how long it would take before dad's mind was gone completely. Dad might reach a plateau and stabilize for a period, but then would decline again, and there would be no coming back. Once the mind was gone, it was gone.

We took dad home and mom took care of him as best she could. He tried taking vitamin E, which seemed to help for a while, but the direction of his mental stability was slowly and inevitably downhill.

I was in school at USU when mother called and told me I had better come home because dad was in the hospital. I went to the old Cooley Memorial Hospital in Brigham City and

entered dad's room alone. He was lying on a bed, his eyes were wide open and he was looking straight ahead with a glassy stare. He did not recognize me, and made no response when I tried to talk to him. He couldn't walk, talk, sit up, or do much of anything.

I have always had this thing about looking into someone's eyes. To me, eyes are a window that lets you look into where the real person resides. It's like looking into their very being and if you are close with someone, and if they will let you in, you can communicate on a much higher plane than mere words can express. For me, there is also a spiritual element involved here that I can't explain, but that somehow lets you mingle your very souls and share deep understandings.

I remember looking into dad's glassy eyes and seeing absolutely nothing. I wondered, "Where is my father?" His body was still very much alive before me, but where was that caring, quick witted and loving being that was my real father?

While I was anguishing over this, someone then came in to give dad a blessing. I think it was Bishop Vern Peterson, but I don't remember for sure. They gave him the blessing and it appeared to have no affect what so ever. I left the hospital very depressed. Dr Reichman's words kept ringing in my ears, that there was no way back. I felt I had lost my father, and I didn't even know where he was.

I think for the first time since my mission, I began questioning in my mind, whether or not there really was a spirit inside us, or was it all simply physical. Did the intelligent part of a person simply die with the physical? It weighed very heavy on me.

That night I poured out my feelings to my Father in Heaven, and demanded an answer! Where was my father? I arose from my knees without feeling I had gotten any response.

Early the next morning, I went alone to the hospital. When I walked into dad's room, I found him sitting on the edge of the bed. He was perfectly normal. He could talk and walk and sit and converse just as he always could. My father was back! I was overjoyed, but somehow sensed that it was not to last for long, but for the moment I didn't care. We sat on the bed and talked for a long time.

Dad told me that it was very hard for "him" to make "his mind" do what "he" wanted it to do. He wanted me to understand that he was still there inside a body that didn't work right and that he still loved me. He told me that he struggled to make his mind work, just as you would have to struggle to make an injured arm or paralyzed leg function properly. When I left that day, I felt I had received a direct answer to my prayer of the night before. Dad, as far as I was concerned, had literally returned from the dead to give that answer to me personally. I knew then that regardless of the condition of his body, that the thinking, feeling part of him that I loved as my father was still there inside, struggling with a physical brain that refused to respond the way he wanted it to. I also knew that he loved me and that I loved him even more than ever before.

From this high point, dad's condition gradually deteriorated again until it became necessary to put him in a nursing home. This happened following an incident where he actually attacked mother. Dad loved mom deeply and the thought of him attacking her was just inconceivable. He had reached the point where he could not care for himself, and mother, because of her heart attack and failing health, could not care for him either. We all knew we had to do something.

At first, we arranged to place him in a nursing home in Salt Lake City, near where Gwen lived, and mother was going to stay with Gwen. But when they took dad to the home, my little 5 foot 4 inch father flattened a large nursing home attendant with one blow. The nursing home decided they didn't want him there, and it was obvious that he didn't want to be there either. I couldn't help but think how frustrating it must be for him inside that body, not being able to do what he wanted, and to watch his mind make his body do things, that he didn't want to do.

His first years in the nursing home were very frustrating for him, and he often showed anger at being there. On one occasion, he went so far as to actually break an old woman's arm (it was the mayor's mother). The nursing home controlled his anger by tranquilizing him with pills. I didn't like having him drugged, but there was no alternative. Mother could not care for him alone, and no one else in the family was in a position to give him the full time care he needed either.

We tried to arrange to have someone live in our home in Brigham City with them, but it didn't work out. A nursing home was the only alternative. Never the less, I felt like I knew what was going on inside dad, and it bothered me a great deal that I couldn't do more to help him. I still have guilt feelings, that I didn't move back home to help Mom and Dad more, but at the time, I felt that if I were ever going to get married, that I needed to be living in Ogden.

I don't think any of the family members, me included, thought that our parents would be in the nursing home for so long. We thought that dad would pass on and that maybe somehow mother could go home again. But I think mostly we just went on with our lives and didn't know what else to do.

We would visit them when we could work it in, which was never as often as it should have been. Mother never complained and was always so happy to see you when you came. She never wanted anything, except that she didn't want you to leave. Dad would respond to the attention of a visit, but didn't usually seem to really know you. I always wondered how much he knew inside, and what he would have said if his mind would have let him.

I often wondered why dad had to go through all this, and why would the Lord allow it to happen? Dad was a real Christian who truly helped people, not just talked about it. I remember when he sold the oil business and all the uncollected accounts that he had not only not collected, but had never really intended to collect. There were always widows and certain others who got their fuel tanks filled, even though he knew they could never pay

the bill. When questioned about the wisdom of this, dad would simply say, "Well you can't just let them be cold."

It just didn't seem fair to me that after the life he had lived, that he had to spend the end of it imprisoned in a body with a mind that didn't work. In frustration, I somewhat angrily expressed these feelings to the Lord in prayer. The thought immediately came to me that Dad's days of trial were over. There was no more good or bad for him and no more learning. The lessons to be learned now were for the rest of the family, and that he was willing to experience whatever was necessary if there was a chance it would help one of us.

I'm not sure just what the lessons are that we were (or are) supposed to learn from dad's experience, but I feel very strongly that there are eternal consequences involved. I also know that for any of us, dad would gladly undergo any hardship, and that mother would do the same. Although he never told me this, I have a strong impression that this was all made known to dad at some point, and that he and mother agreed to undergo this trial in hopes of helping one of us. My greatest fear is that their sacrificing may have been in vain.

I will probably never really understand the impact mom and dad's last few years have had on my own life, let alone the lives of the rest of the family. The choice is there for each of us, and I feel that whether or not mother and dad's experience in the nursing home will be a source of strength, or a needless sacrifice, still remains to be seen.

I LOVE YOU

The last few years of dad's life, he became more tranquil and seemed to better accept his situation, and he required less medication. Mother had a lot to do with this, as she cared for him incessantly. She also didn't like having him doped up all the time, so she would have him spit out the pills after the nurses had gone. She then hid them on a ledge behind her bed. She showed them to Kent one day (there were hundreds), and wanted him to take them home. He told her to flush them down the toilet. She thought this was a wonderful idea, and that was the last we saw of the pills.

As the frustration and anger left dad however, so did his ability to communicate. He slowly lost the ability to speak until he became totally non-verbal, with one exception. He could still say a word perfect prayer over the food. Nothing else, just the food, and then that ability left him also. For the last two or three years of his life, he could not verbalize or communicate at all, but made only unintelligible sounds. He would respond to love and attention, but did not seem to really recognize anyone.

After mother died, it became harder and harder to take the time to drive to Brigham to visit him. He really didn't know who I was, or at least it didn't appear that he did. I often thought back to the morning I had shared with him in the hospital room, and wondered what was going on inside. But with no recognition or response from dad, even that experience began to seem like a long time ago. I began to let trivial, unimportant things fill my life and

interfere with my visits, which became less and less frequent. The rest of the family and I began to rely more and more on Kent and Mary to "take care of dad."

As dad's birthday approached in 1981, Kent invited me to come up. He said they were planning to take dad home for his birthday and have cake and ice cream, which dad still enjoyed. I told him I would come, thinking to myself it had been some time since I had seen dad, and I needed to visit him. But it rained very hard that day and as the time approached to leave for Brigham City, the rain became worse and worse. I debated whether I should go or not, and talked myself out of it several times, but I just had a feeling that I needed to go no matter what, so I did.

As I turned off the freeway to Brigham City, the rain was a real torrent. It was past the time Kent was to have picked up dad, but something told me to stop at the nursing home anyway.

As I walked in the door, there was dad sitting in his wheelchair in the middle of the hallway. I spoke to him and he looked up at me questioningly, like a small boy being spoken to by a friendly stranger. As I spoke to him, a nurse stopped by and told me that Kent had called to tell them he was not coming because of the storm.

The lights were dim, but I could see dad's face clearly as we sat there together all alone. I looked into his eyes and saw nothing. He seemed happy at the attention I was paying to him and babbled contentedly, but didn't seem to really know who I was. It made me very sad seeing him there all alone in the dim hallway on his birthday. I wanted very much to talk to him and tell him how much I loved him and how much I missed him.

I have never been very good at expressing my feelings and it occurred to me, that I had never really told dad that I loved him. I had used the words lots of times, but I had never "really" told him.

I tried to talk to him, but it was totally one sided, and I finally forced myself to accept the fact that it had been years since he had been able to talk and it was never going to happen again. I don't think I have ever felt so alone. I wanted to just get out of there and leave everything behind.

I slipped my arm around dad's shoulder, gave him a little hug and then started for the door with a lump in my throat. As I did so, dad took my hand and turned me back towards him. I looked into his eyes and they were crystal clear. He looked up at me and said very clearly, "I love you."

Our eyes met and once again our souls mingled for one last time. I knew in that instant that he understood me perfectly. I told him I loved him too and put my arms around his neck, closed my eyes and held him very tightly.

When I released my embrace and looked into his eyes, he was gone again and I knew that he would not return. I kissed his forehead and slowly walked away.

Outside I sat in the car for a long time, with the rain beating on the windshield and the tears running down my cheeks. I was filled with a mixture of joy and sadness. Sadness because I somehow knew that would be the last time I would ever see my father, but joy because I knew he was still there inside and that I had been able to express my love to him. He had again returned from the dead to let me know that he still loved me and I knew in my soul that I would never really be alone again.

I returned home and had intended to visit dad again on Father's Day, which was the following week. Early on Sunday morning (Father's Day 1981), Kent called and told me that dad had passed away peacefully during the night. I told Kent that I wanted to go to church and that I would come to Brigham later that afternoon, but I didn't tell him why.

I was serving in the Bishopric of my ward at the time, but until that day I don't think that dad knew it. I guess I never really felt like I had ever done anything in my life that he could really be proud of me for. I wanted him to see me on the stand because I knew it would make him proud. I felt a great warmth and peace through out that meeting. I knew dad was free at last from the prison of a body and mind that refused to cooperate with him.

When we laid dad's body in the grave, I felt no sadness for that act. I grieve over being separated from him, but I know within my soul that the loving, witty, caring being that was my father lives on, and that he still loves me. I also know that one day we will meet again.

I use to sit with dad sometimes and feel that there were things within him that he wanted very much to tell me, but couldn't. I sometimes get those same feelings today, that there are things he would like to tell me from across the veil, but can't. I sometimes sense that he is very near, and feelings come over me that I can't put into words, but that something within me seems to understand perfectly, and I know that he loves me.

Mother's Heart Attack

In January of 1969, Mother had a severe heart attack. I was in Logan and had to drive over to the old Cooley Memorial Hospital. When I got there, dad, Glen and some others were waiting. It was the old hospital and was very cramped for space. Most of the time, I sat on a bench which faced the nurse's station. Mother was in a room on my left, about 20 feet away, and I watched the nurses and doctors rush in and out of her room with worried looks on their faces. In front of me was the screen of the heart monitor they had on her, and I could watch it clearly. Her heart beat was very irregular and the plot went all over the screen, often far exceeding its parameters.

I was very worried about Mother as were the others there. Someone (again I think it was Bishop Peterson) then came and asked about giving mother a blessing. I remember sitting and watching the heart monitor during the blessing. It was extremely erratic until they finished the blessing, and then it went almost immediately to a normal, rhythmic pattern.

When I was allowed to see mother, she told me that her mother had come to her while she was having the heart attack and told her that, "you can come with me now and it will be very easy or you can wait, but it will be very hard."

Mother said she had wanted to go with grandmother, but then she had thought about dad, and told grandmother, "No, I can't go. Who would take care of dad?"

Mother stayed another eleven years taking care of dad, most of them in the Brigham City nursing home. Dad had to be there, but mother "chose" to be there so she could take care of him.

Finally, after much suffering, her body would no longer permit her to care for dad, and she went home to grandma on 24 April 1980. It had been a very hard eleven years.

A LETTER FROM DAD

At one point while I was on my mission in Germany, I was having some personal problems. I struggled with them for some time on my own, but it became apparent to me that I was losing the battle. Finally, I knelt down in prayer and begged my Father in Heaven to help me. I was still on my knees and had just opened my eyes, when I heard the doorbell ring. It was the mailman with a letter from dad.

My companion was downstairs and brought the letter up to me. I opened it up and was amazed at what I read. The letter said, "Dear Jim, I feel impressed to write to you at this time about ...". He then went on to discuss my problem. It was exactly what I needed to hear, and it gave me the strength I required to overcome the problem. I still have the letter and refer to it whenever I have doubts about whether I am getting answers to my prayers.

There were several remarkable things about dad's letter beyond the actual content. The first is that although mother wrote to me faithfully every week during the entire course of my two and a half year mission, dad never wrote more than once every three months or so, and I had received his last letter only a few days before.

Also, all of dad's letters, except this one, always started the same way. He would say, "Well, the sun is just coming over the mountains and it looks like it's going to be another beautiful day." He would then give me a "weather report" and ramble on until he had filled the page.

He always wrote his letters at his desk early in the morning before going to work. The desk faced an east window, and I could just see him sitting there (after having been pestered by mother for weeks to write), watching the sun come up over the mountain and trying to think of something to say. This letter was truly an exception.

The second remarkable thing about the letter was the timing. The German mail system is a remarkable thing in and of itself, and you could set your watch by the time the mailman delivered the mail. On this particular morning he was two hours early, and for some reason rang the bell and gave the letter to my companion, rather than just putting it in the box, as he usually did. It was the only time he was ever early, and the only time he ever rang the bell.

The last thing is that it took three days for mail from home to reach Germany. This meant that dad had received his inspiration to write, three days before I uttered my prayer. Our Father in Heaven certainly does know our needs and answers our prayers in remarkable ways.

MOTHER'S LOST CHILD

Mother related the following story to me on several different occasions. Each time it was following a discussion about the gospel. She usually did not go into a lot of detail, and I could tell that the experience was very special to her. I also got the feeling that there was a lot more to the story that she didn't tell.

Mother told me that after she and dad got married (23 June 1926), they lived in a little house on a ranch in the Park Valley area. It was miles from the nearest neighbors, and of course they had no telephone. She was several months pregnant when it became necessary for dad to leave to go look for some cattle, and he planned to be gone for at least three days. This would leave mother completely alone, but since the baby was not due for some time, she was not concerned.

Mother kissed dad good-bye and watched as he rode away. Just as he was going out of sight, she began to have a miscarriage. She tried to call to him, but he was too far away. Mother was outside the house and found herself on the ground, in great pain, bleeding profusely, and unable to stand.

She somehow crawled back inside the house, and lay on the floor unable to get into bed. She said she knew if she didn't get some help quickly, she would bleed to death, but there was no one around for miles and dad wouldn't be back for days.

The only thing she could do was to pray. With the simple, trusting faith which always seemed to be a part of her, she asked that the Lord send someone to help her.

She said a man then appeared at the door and came into the room. He told her to be calm and that everything would be all right because help was on the way. He then helped her into bed and stopped the bleeding by "touching me". She didn't describe him, but said simple he was not of this world.

The man then left, and a short while later a neighbor lady who lived several miles away arrived.

Mother explained that the only road to their place ran passed the neighbor's home and anyone leaving would have had to have passed her on the way.

Mother asked her neighbor if she had seen the man who had helped her, and if he had sent her. The neighbor told mother that she had not seen anyone for days. She said to mother, "I just had a strong impression that you needed help, and that I had better come over, so here I am."

The neighbor stayed with mother until dad came home. Dad then took her to a doctor. After examining her, the doctor told her she must never try to have children again because the birth canal was too small. If she became pregnant again, it would kill her.

Mom responded by praying and asking the Lord for his help. After several more miscarriages, she subsequently gave birth to seven children. I often marvel at her great faith, and at the courage it must have taken to become pregnant again under those circumstances. Each of us owe our mother a far greater debt than I think any of us can ever imagine.

In speaking of the incident, mother once implied that she knew who the heavenly visitor was who had helped her. I didn't fully understand what she was telling me, but "my" interpretation was that she believed the "man" was actually the "spirit" that was to have entered the body of the child she had lost. Mother also implied that he had subsequently appeared to her on one or two other occasions.

Kent told me that after mother related this same experience to him, that he also felt that mother believed the man who had helped her was the spirit of her unborn child. Mother, then asked Kent, "do you think he ever came again?" Kent understood this to mean, "Are one of my four sons the man?" He said that the way she looked at him, has always made him feel that what she wanted to know was, "Are you really my first son?"

As I previously stated, mother did not talk openly of this experience, and it was apparent to me that it was very personal and very important to her. I recently asked dad's sister, Verna Carter, if she was aware of the incident. She said, "Yes, mother had a very special experience", but Verna could not remember many of the details. The one thing I am sure of, is that mother did receive some very special assistance and that I would love to know - the rest of the story. I suppose that one day, I will.

MOTHER'S RULES

Mother loved to play cards, and she also loved to win. Not poker or bridge or anything that involved any money or great strategy. She just liked to play and have a good time,

and her favorite game was rummy. The only problem was, she couldn't always remember the rules, or if she could, she didn't always agree with them. This was never a problem for Mom however, because if she couldn't remember the rules, or if they countered whatever it was she wanted to do at the moment, she had a simple solution. She just made up new rules as she went along.

You had to know my little mother to really understand her unique philosophy about winning. She literally loved everybody and everything and would never intentionally have hurt anyone in the world. In fact, she never wanted anyone to feel bad about anything. Mom was a 100% win/win person long before the term was ever invented. She wanted everyone to win, but that also included her. Although she wanted everyone to win, she also didn't want to lose herself. This caused a bit of a problem with card games because they are not usually a win/win proposition. There is usually a winner and one or more losers. However, when playing cards with mother it was usually understood that she was going to win, and we all knew that we were going to have to play by "mother's rules." The term "mother's rules" became an inside family joke.

Mother's Age

Mother was born on September 5, 1902. Dad was born on June 2, 1903. That made Mom nearly a year older than Dad, but she would never admit it. I guess in her day, you weren't supposed to be older than your husband. In typical "mother's rules" fashion, she simply changed her birth date to 1903. That's the way it shows on all her personal and genealogical records. And she always told everyone that dad was older than she was.

While Mom was in the nursing home, my sister Gwen discovered the truth when doing some genealogy research and mentioned to mother that her birth date was wrong.

"Mind your own business!" was mother's curt reply.

Anyway, that's the way the records remained until mother's death. She probably has still not forgiven us for changing it.

Evil

Mother also chose to always look on the positive side of things. Somehow for her, evil just didn't exist. She knew that there were bad people, and bad things that happened, but they just didn't seem real for her, and she always saw only good in people. Evil just kind of got put on the back burner and she always stressed light, warmth and happiness.

I remember once my sister Joyce was telling her about one of their neighbors who had been robbed. She told mother that the guy had been drinking at a restaurant and got sick, so he went out in the back alley where two guys rolled him.

"Does that help," asked mother?

"No, not really," replied Joyce with a smile.

