

MY EXPERIENCES WITH FAMILY HISTORY (1/31/04)

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INTRODUCTION

Approximately 35 years ago, I awakened from a sound sleep to see the spirit of a beautiful young woman, who was unknown to me, standing at the foot of my bed. I sat straight up in bed so I was face to face with her. She was dressed in clothing of the style worn in the early 1900's. Her image was imprinted on my mind and she soon disappeared without saying a word. Thus was the beginning of a lifetime journey for me.

Before I get into the heart of what I want to say about my experiences in seeking after my Kindred dead so their Temple work might be done, I need to provide some background information to help set the stage.

My talk today is centered on our great responsibility for redeeming our kindred dead. As we review the scriptures related to Family History we soon learn that this is a very important work.

In Chapter 4 of Malachi (*Malachi 4:5-6*) we first learn about turning the hearts of the children to the fathers often referred to as the Spirit of Elijah. This message was also repeated to the Nephites by the Savior in Chapter 25 of 3 Nephi (*3 Nephi 25:5-6*). When Moroni first appeared to Joseph Smith, part of the instruction he gave to Joseph included quotes from Malachi regarding Elijah and turning the hearts of the children to the fathers (*Joseph Smith 1:36-39*).

In the 110th Section of the Doctrine and Covenants (D&C 110:13-16) we learn more about Elijah's mission. *"After this vision had closed, another great and glorious ^avision burst upon us; for ^bElijah the prophet, who was taken to heaven without tasting death, stood before us, and said: Behold, the time has fully come, which was spoken of by the mouth of Malachi—testifying that he [Elijah] should be sent, before the great and dreadful day of the Lord come— To ^aturn the ^bhearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers, lest the whole earth be smitten with a curse—... "*

From the time of Elijah's visit a desire to know something of their ancestors has come into the hearts of the people all over the world. Many people who are not members of the Church use the Church's Family History Libraries and Internet site, 'Family Search' to assist them in finding their ancestors.

In part of the 128th Section of the Doctrine and Covenants (D&C 128:15-18) we read, *"And now, my dearly beloved brethren and sisters, let me assure you that these are principles in relation to the dead and the living that cannot be lightly passed over, as pertaining to our salvation. For their ^asalvation is necessary and essential to our salvation, as Paul says concerning the fathers—that they without us cannot be made perfect—neither can we without our dead be made ^bperfect" "the earth will be smitten with a ^bcurse unless there is a welding ^clink of some kind or other between the fathers and the ^dchildren, upon some subject or other—and behold what is that subject?*

It is the ^abaptism for the dead. For we without them cannot be made perfect; neither can they without us be made perfect.....”

The world asks how can it be that someone can be baptized for one who is dead. If we truly believe in the vicarious work of Christ in doing something for us that we could not do for ourselves, then we must also believe that we can do vicarious Temple work for someone who is dead.

In Section 137 of Doctrine and Covenants (*D&C 137:4-8*) we read about Joseph Smith’s Vision of Celestial Kingdom: “...*Thus came the ^avoice of the Lord unto me, saying: All who have died ^bwithout a knowledge of this gospel, who would have received it if they had been permitted to tarry, shall be ^cheirs of the celestial kingdom of God; Also all that shall die henceforth without a knowledge of it, who ^awould have received it with all their hearts, shall be heirs of that kingdom; For I, the Lord, will ^ajudge all men according to their ^bworks, according to the ^cdesire of their hearts. And I also beheld that all ^achildren who die before they arrive at the ^byears of accountability are ^csaved in the celestial kingdom of heaven.”*

Section 138 of the D&C contains a vision given to President Joseph F. Smith in 1918. In this Section, President Smith ponders upon the writings of Peter and our Lord’s visit to the spirit world. He sees the righteous dead assembled in paradise and Christ’s ministry among them. He learns how the preaching of the gospel was organized among the spirits and he sees the righteous dead of this day continuing their labors in the world of spirits. As part of this Section (*D&C 138:57*) we read, “*I beheld that the faithful ^aelders of this dispensation, when they depart from mortal life, continue their labors in the ^bpreaching of the ^cgospel of repentance and redemption, through the sacrifice of the Only Begotten Son of God, among those who are in darkness and under the bondage of sin in the great world of the ^dspirits of the dead.....”*

We rejoice in the marvelous work being accomplished in the Temples. Where baptisms and ordinances are performed by the authority of the living God in behalf of those who have passed on and if accepted by them will lead them to life eternal and to salvation, although they may have died without any knowledge of the Gospel.

PERSONAL HISTORY

I was born and raised in Star Valley as a non member. My Grandparents, John and Ida Anderson, were some of the earlier settlers in Grover and my mother was born and raised a member of the Church. My Father came to Star Valley from eastern Wyoming during the depression and there met my Mother. His Parents, members of the Lutheran Church, came to Nebraska from Sweden in the 1890’s where my Father and his twin sister were born. After my mother and father were married, my father was offended by some members of the Church and did not want his Children joining the Church. I had one sister and one brother. I joined the Church here in Evanston about a year after Barbara and I were married. We went to the Temple about 10 months later for our endowments and had our infant daughter sealed to us. Barbara and I began the process of trying to find the information for our 4 Generations and we were easily successful except on my

Father's side. We could only get back a couple of Generations on the Peterson line. My Brother and Sister joined the Church after I did and my Father joined years later when he was 78 after being loved into the Gospel by a Stake President and Bishop.

My Mother's brother Arthur Anderson was killed in an automobile accident in 1940. Sometime before he was killed my deceased Great Grandfather Andrew McCombs appeared to my Grandmother Anderson and told her that one of her sons would be taken and that he would be involved in the great missionary work in the Spirit World teaching the Gospel to those who had not received it here on earth. This is the missionary effort talked about in Joseph F Smith's vision contained in Section 138 of the D&C.

Barbara and I with our first two children moved to Salt Lake in 1963 and it was here that I received my Patriarchal Blessing in April 1968. Part of this blessing reads as follows: *"Now I bestow upon you another blessing, Brother Peterson. As you have been called out of the world to God, so must you also prepare to assist your forefathers in the redeeming work, that you may enter the holy Temples of the Lord frequently and cause that the names of your forefathers on both mother's and father's sides - and assist your wife in her progenitors - and cause these names to be found. As you are being blessed today, there are many, by the hundreds, who now live in the spirit world who have accepted the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who live as it were in prison since this vicarious work has not been performed. And I bless you today with the power and spirit of Elijah, that you shall so use your time wisely not only for the living but for the dead and trace their lines as far as the time and records permits, and see that they are sealed and receive their endowments in the holy Temples, and your life and mission shall be a glorious one."*

It was not long after this time that I saw the personage at the foot of my bed. I realized in my heart her purpose for visiting me was because she wanted her work done in the Temple although she did not speak. The big question in my mind was how can we do her work if we do not know who she is. I visited with my parents to see if they had any ideas. I had two aunts on my father's side had who both died shortly after giving birth. When we visited with my parents in Star Valley, I saw pictures of these two aunts and knew it was neither of them I had seen. I went through all of the old pictures they had and drew a blank. Sometime later we were again visiting with my parents, and they had received a small stack of pictures from one of my cousins, a non-member, who lived in Western Idaho. As I looked through the pictures, there was a picture of the young woman that I had seen at the foot of my bed. I asked my Father, *"Who is this? She is the one I saw."* Without hesitating, my Father said she was a second cousin of his who lived in a different county in Nebraska from where he grew up. He said he was just a boy when she was shot and killed by a rejected suitor. He said she lived in Jefferson County and he knew that her last name started with "S" and said it sounded something like Swenson, but he knew that was not it. I still did not have sufficient information to have her Temple Work done.

Along about this time a second cousin of mine, who I had never met or seen who loved in New Mexico was corresponding with any relative she could find to enlist their help in putting together the Genealogy of our common ancestors and relatives. She was a retired

school teacher and she and her husband were obviously touched by the spirit of Elijah. They were not members of the Church but utilized the Church software PAF to help organize the information they received. They also utilized the Church's Family History Library in the area where lived. We provided information to them on our side of the Family Tree. I visited with my second cousin on the phone and asked her if she had come onto any information about a young woman who had been killed in the early 1900's. I told her what my Father had told me and so she checked with other relatives. No one had any information that could help me at this point. She and her husband went to Sweden twice and they also hired a professional genealogist to help find information from the records in Sweden. They had the genealogist also look for information on the Peterson line as a favor to me. He found some information that helped us find additional Kindred dead. They provided us with the information they had obtained.

I went to the Family History Library in Salt Lake looking for additional information that might help me find the identity of the young woman. I was not successful. In 1988 Barbara and I with our two youngest daughters went to New Mexico where we met for the first time my second cousin and her husband. We visited about family history and they showed us what they had done. I visited with them about my search and asked if by chance they had obtained information from other relatives that had lived in Jefferson County whose name started with "S" with a young woman who would have died about 1910 or so. We looked through a number of records and found a Simonsson family who had lived there who had a daughter who died in 1908 at the age of 20. Her name was Hilda and she was my father's second cousin. He would have been 12 when she died. No cause of death was shown on the records but the name and phone number of the individual submitting the records to Lorraine was given. Her name was Lola and she was Hilda Simonsson's niece. When we returned to Evanston, the first thing I did was call Lola. Her husband had recently died and she was only going to be at this particular phone number for a few hours that day. She was then moving to the City and I would have missed her entirely. I asked her about Hilda and she verified that Hilda was shot and killed by a rejected suitor and told me the same story my Father had. I wrote to the State of Nebraska and received Hilda's death certificate that also stated that she was murdered. We now had all of the information we needed to do Hilda's work and on August 1988, my wife Barbara went to the Ogden Temple and did Hilda's Temple work. Five months later we sealed her to her parents.

Hilda's visit and the diligent inspired work of my second cousin and her husband and Lola opened up the opportunity for a large number of Kindred dead to have their work done in the Temple. In addition to what we received from them, I did some searching at the Family History Library in Salt Lake with some considerable success. One night I was going through various Swedish Parish records on microfilm reels looking for more family members. As I was going through one of the reels at a fairly rapid rate, I all of a sudden stopped at a particular record, not by my choice but by some unseen helper. I found the record of a baby girl named Christina who had died in her first year. She was my great aunt, my grandfather Peterson's sister. She was someone I had no idea existed. The professional genealogist in Sweden had completely missed her, as would I, if not for some unseen help. I also found the records of some other ancestors that night by the

same means, an unknown and unseen helper.

In December 1991 we performed the Baptisms for a very large group of our Kindred Dead on my Father's side in the Jordan River Temple and then early the following year, the initiatory work, the endowments, and the sealings were performed in the Temple. The Temple workers involved with the initiatory work for the deceased women told my sister that it was one of the most spiritual experiences they had in that area and it was obvious that these women, whose work was being done, were ready and waiting for this great Temple blessing.

It is a testimony of how the Lord works through his children outside of the Church which should be an inspiration for each of us in the Church to earnestly continue searching for our Kindred dead. How far do we go with kindred dead? In my experience, it goes at least as far as second or third cousins.

HILDA

Last December, I finally located the name and phone number of the only newspaper in Jefferson County, Nebraska and I called them to see if I could get a copy of a news report and obituary for 1908. They were able to find it in their archives and they sent it to me. The following is part of the news article dated Friday, September 18, 1908:

"Murder and Suicide.

James Greenwell shot and killed Miss Hilda Simonsson Wednesday evening at the home of Cecil Bosley at Helvey and then killed himself.

Some time ago, the two were engaged to be married, but the young lady broke the engagement. Wednesday was the day agreed upon for the wedding, before the engagement was broken. Miss Simonsson was helping Mrs Bosley and was getting supper, no one being in the house at the time. Greenwell evidently came into the room where she was and shot her before she could turn around, the bullet entering the back of her head and killing her instantly. He then turned the revolver upon himself and put a bullet thru his temple and dropt dead beside her.

Mr Bosley and his wife were near the house when they heard the shot and they rushed in to find the two dead bodies on the floor, everything indicating that both died without a struggle.

Miss Simonsson was about 20 years old, daughter of John Simonsson, who lives a mile and a half north of Helvey. She was a very highly respected young lady, with numerous friends who are shocked at her unfortunate death.

Greenwell has no relatives here. He came to Fairbury about two or three years ago and worked in Jud Clark's barber shop for awhile Then he moved to Helvey where he conducted a barber shop and a little store in connection. He was between 25 and 30 years of age. The young lady's folks say the engagement was terminated because she discovered that he was not the kind of a man she thot he was.

Greenwell had made threats that he would do someone harm because of his trouble with the girl and had annoyed her for some time."

WHAT CAN WE DO

I have in my hand a copy of the foldout document entitled “*How do I start my Family History.*” You can obtain a copy of this document from your ward family history consultant. If you don’t know who yours is, ask a member of your Bishopric. You can also ask your Ward Family History Consultant for assistance as you begin your process or if you have questions that they can help you answer. Also, feel free to call me if I can be of any help to you.

The Evanston Area Family History Library is located in the other Stake Building on Morse Lee Street. Last year we conducted a series of lessons at the Library as a cooperative effort between the two stakes for anyone interested in any phase of Family History work. One series included the use of the Church’s software called PAF or Personal Ancestral File, another covered the use of the internet for Family History work, and a third covered submitting names for Temple Work using Temple Ready. If there is enough interest, we are willing to do a similar program this year. There are a lot of tools and sources available to help you find your Kindred Dead that their Temple Work might be done.

A new era of family history work has arrived. As President Gordon B. Hinckley recently noted, *“The Lord has inspired skilled men and women in developing new technologies which we can use to our great advantage in moving forward this sacred work. Previously, efforts have focused on gathering names and dates and organizing that information. Now, computer products are available that can actually guide you to find your kindred.”*

SUMMARY

1. The Spirit of Elijah does touch individuals who are not members of the LDS Church. They can be inspired to do family history work although they may not understand its full significance.
2. Family History requires time and effort. When we get up against a brick wall and we feel we can go no further, there often appears an opening in the wall that we can crawl through to find something of value in this great work. The journey is worth it.
3. Many of your kindred dead may already be ready and waiting for their Temple work to be done here on earth so they can advance in the Spirit World.
4. It is a labor of love when we find our departed ancestors and complete their Temple work. It brings great satisfaction and joy on both sides of the veil.
5. Be prayerful as you seek your kindred dead and you will receive inspiration as you advance the work.
6. Our kindred dead were real people that did much so we could be where we are and what we are. They have real stories that we need to gather and share with our families. Children love to hear about their ancestors and what they did. When we finally meet our kindred dead on the other side of the veil, we will know something about them.
7. The salvation of the dead is one of the main reasons for the restoration of the everlasting Gospel. When we meet our kin on the other side, it can be a joyful reunion or it can be filled with regret for what we could have, should have done for them when we had the chance. The choice is ours.

CLOSURE

I would like to thank my wife Barbara with all of her help and support over the years in this great work. She helped me maintain focus on what the real objective was for what we were doing. I love and appreciate her very much. She is my Eternal companion and my soul mate.