

# GOING TO DAD'S RESCUE

By Chantal Martin Owens

I will never forget the sacrament meeting where I first heard an excerpt from the conference talk “Man Down!” by President Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor in the First Presidency.<sup>1</sup> It completely altered my perspective.

I remember being preoccupied at the time with figuring out how I could become more Christlike and learn to let go of years of anger and bitterness through true forgiveness. This had proven to be nearly impossible as I battled ongoing and overwhelming feelings of hurt and hatred.

My own father was the source of such inner turmoil. He passed away when my brother and I were still

young, but I was old enough to have been affected by the atrocities my father committed against our family. Most of the memories I had of him were scenes where he lay unconscious from an overdose. I couldn't picture him without seeing his glassy eyes and uninterested interactions. There were also the many stints in rehab, the pornography, the constant deceit, and the time he spent my birthday in jail. Ultimately, I remembered his betrayal of our family as he was excommunicated and spent his days in sin before eventually dying from an overdose.

Everything about my childhood made me angry because I knew

**My father's poor choices left deep wounds in our family. But who was I to say he was not eligible for the Savior's atoning grace?**

Heavenly Father intended families to be loving and nurturing. I grew up believing that I had done something wrong in the premortal life that caused me to be sent to an earthly father who didn't love me, who chose drugs over his family. I had not yet come to understand the importance of two vital principles: agency and the Atonement.

## No Man Left Behind

During the 16 years since my father's passing, I have had time to grow and mature, both emotionally and spiritually. I have sought counsel and comfort from priesthood leaders, good friends, and professional counselors from time to time. There were periods when those dark feelings of bitterness would overwhelm me, and I occasionally chose to turn away from God out of anger. I had to repeatedly exercise true repentance in my own life, each time more fervently than before. Most important, I have learned to turn to the Savior and seek His healing for my aching heart. And I've been humbled as I've gained an appreciation for His love and patience.

I was particularly filled with this sense of humility and with gratitude for my Savior during that pivotal sacrament meeting. I remember with vivid detail when the second speaker stood and began reading from President Eyring's talk:

"Almost all of us have seen a battlefield portrayed in a film or read the description in a story. Over the din of explosions and the shouts of soldiers, there comes a cry, 'Man down!'

"When that cry sounds, faithful fellow soldiers will move toward the sound. Another soldier or a medic will ignore danger and move to the injured comrade. . . . Whatever the risk, someone will run low or crawl to

***Over the noise of battle, when a soldier is hurt others cry, "Man down!"***



get there in time to protect and give aid. . . . The histories of such groups are full of stories of those loyal men who were determined that no man would be left behind. . . .

“ . . . Our comrades are being wounded in the spiritual conflict around us. . . .

“ . . . You are under covenant to go to a spiritually wounded child of God. You are responsible to be brave enough and bold enough not to turn away.”<sup>2</sup>

Those words struck me to the core. My eyes welled with tears as I had a very powerful and personal realization that the Lord loved my dad; he was Heavenly Father’s son too.

### A New Heart

I began to picture my dad as one of those spiritually wounded soldiers who had fallen on the battlefield with no one to help bring him back to safety. I thought of how the Lord and His servants here on this earth had come to my rescue when I was spiritually in danger and how Christ’s Atonement had healed my broken spirit countless times. My heart began to burn with this question: Why not my own dad? Why had I believed him to be so ineligible for the limitless grace of God? Suddenly I realized that he was just as entitled to access the Lord’s healing power as I was. Who was I to say he should be left behind? I, being his own daughter, should

have been the first to cry, “Man down!” and to run to his aid.

This insight changed my life. With a new heart, I pursued a unique opportunity to give my dad the option for the relief he so desperately needed, though on the other side of the veil now. I took on the sacred task of writing to the First Presidency, requesting that my father be re-baptized by proxy and have his temple ordinances restored. Joy consumed me as I read the return letter stating that the request had been approved and that his proxy baptism had been performed by the Salt Lake Temple presidency. All his temple blessings were now restored. My heart enlarged with renewed hope as I read those words. I have never felt with more surety that God loves all His children and has provided us with a perfect plan to return to Him through the Lord Jesus Christ.

As I have exercised a deeper faith in the Lord’s plan, I have felt peace and assurance that my family will see each

other again. I have been blessed with so many experiences that have helped me come to know my dad’s heart, to understand his journey, and to recognize the distinction between who he is and the disease he suffered from. This earthly life was just one part of his eternal existence. His life continues in the spirit world, where the opportunity to repent and accept the ordinances of salvation is available to those who choose to follow such a course.

### Remembering the Good

With my new attitude I decided to make a conscious effort to stop dwelling on the bad and try to remember the good in my dad. This has been challenging at times because of my limited resources. All I had of my dad were a handful of photos, a pair of glasses, a few army medals, and the flag that covered his coffin. There were no journals and no accounts of him from people who knew him before he was ill. It was difficult trying to get to know someone who was no longer

*Looking back at my Dad’s struggles, I realized that as his daughter I should have been the first to cry, “Man down!” and run to his aid.*



here. But then the Lord gave me a miraculous opportunity to do just that.

One day at the temple I met Brother Lussier, a temple worker in the baptistry. We began chatting and I discovered he had served in the Canada Montreal Mission, just like my dad. Immediately I felt this was not a coincidence, and I told him my dad had served in the same mission. As we continued talking, we realized they had served at the same time. I explained that my father had passed away when I was 13 and that I knew nothing of his mission. I felt impressed to ask Brother Lussier if he might have any photos of my dad among his mission pictures. I knew it was unlikely and that the request might seem strange, but he happily agreed to check for me and took my contact information.

As I drove home from the temple that night I wept. I had been praying for something like this for years. I had spent months scouring mission alumni sites and Facebook pages for any clues about my dad and who might have served with him. I had just about given up. And now the prospect of meeting someone who might have known my father on his mission, who might have heard his testimony and seen the light in him—it was almost too much for my heart to contain.

Less than a week later I received an email from Brother Lussier. Although he did not serve directly with my dad,

he had reached out on my behalf and contacted multiple networks of missionaries who had served in Montreal. They gave selflessly of their time to seek out photos and stories of my dad. Within days I was put in contact with many who had served with my dad and loved him. They had many photos and even an old book inscribed by him, all of which they were willing to give me. Some even shared their thoughts and feelings about him with me by telephone. With the Lord's help, I now had invaluable treasures and tokens to remember my dad by.

In keeping with the popular motto from my dad's mission, "Je me souviens" (or "I remember"), I too will remember. I will remember the words of President Eyring and the testimony borne to my spirit. I will remember my Redeemer and His power to heal and sanctify all of God's children. I will remember the many miracles the Lord has wrought in my life to help me have a true change of heart. I will remember the love and service shown to me by so many along the way, and particularly by my dad's fellow missionaries. And now, with gratitude, I will also remember and treasure the testimony my dad once bore and the service he gave as a young missionary. I will remember the good. ■

*The author lives in Arizona, USA.*

#### NOTES

1. See Henry B. Eyring, "Man Down!" *Ensign*, May 2009, 63–66.
2. Henry B. Eyring, "Man Down!" 63, 64.



#### JUDGE NOT

"We must refrain from making final judgments on people because we lack the knowledge and the wisdom to do so. We would even apply the wrong standards. . . . The Lord's way of final judgment will be to apply His perfect knowledge of the law a person has received and to judge on the basis of that person's circumstances, motives, and actions throughout his or her entire life."

**Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "'Judge Not' and Judging," *Ensign*, Aug. 1999, 8.**