

BEFORE OUR Journey's Through



By Richard M. Romney
Church Magazines

I never have to worry about where to find my 92-year-old father, Paul Romney, on a Sunday afternoon. He's in his ward in Salt Lake City, Utah, tidying up the chapel. It takes him a little over an hour.

He leans on his walker as he goes up the aisle. Then he leans on the benches as he moves from row to row, picking up stray papers, arranging hymnbooks, and gathering cereal or breadcrumbs that have fallen on the carpet. It is a task he has been doing every Sunday, with few exceptions, since he was ordained a deacon in 1934.

Preparing for Worship

"I do it to show that I love the Lord," he says. "Having a clean chapel helps us to worship Him."

As a deacon, Paul Romney learned that his duties included caring for the temporal needs of the ward. "I figured one way to do that was to tidy up after meetings," he says. "So I just started doing it, and I've been doing it ever since." It has never been an official assignment or calling, although occasionally he has come on Saturdays to

Paul Romney demonstrates his love for the Lord by tidying up the chapel.

For those who endure well, faith deepens with the passage of time.

help others assigned to clean the meetinghouse. Sometimes his children have helped him. Years ago when he was in the bishopric, he encouraged the deacons to join in.

But most of the time he simply waits until the last meeting of the day is finished. Then, without fanfare, he contributes his small part to maintaining a house of order. And he does it faithfully, every Sunday.

My father's example has shown me that no matter our circumstances, we can always find a way to serve. It has taught me about reverence and preparing to worship. And it has helped me to see that there is much we all can learn from those who are ahead of us on their journey through this life.

Changing Roles

I have learned similar lessons from my neighbors down the street. Larry Morgan, 97, and his wife, Elizabeth, 94, have successfully filled various roles in their lives together: husband and wife, father and mother, senior missionary companions in Holland. When Larry was 72, he was called as

a counselor in the bishopric. At that time there were 79 widows in our neighborhood, and by assignment from the bishop, Larry and Elizabeth visited every one of them.

For more than 40 years, on fast Sundays, Larry and Elizabeth's children, and now their grandchildren and great-grandchildren, have gathered in the evening to end their fast. "We wanted our family to enjoy being together, and everyone likes to eat," he says. "We had lots of wheat in storage, so we'd grind our own flour and make waffles. Then we'd eat until everyone was filled." That simple, shared meal has fostered enduring feelings of family togetherness.

Today, children and grandchildren do the cooking. Elizabeth has dementia but knows the family is near. To each person present, she repeats over and over again, "I love you."

When the meal is finished and everyone is gone, she enjoys listening to Larry read scriptures and Church magazine articles out loud and finds reassurance in just knowing he is there.

About two years ago, Larry fell and damaged his spine. As a result, he can no longer walk. "I don't waste time asking, 'Why



Larry and Elizabeth Morgan show continual commitment to each other.



me?” he says. “I received a priesthood blessing. I was told I will walk again, even though it will not be in this life. Because of the Atonement and the Resurrection, I know that it will happen. I’ve learned that our Father in Heaven is in charge. When we accept His will, then we can count on His help.”

Growing Perspective

I met Merle Christensen for the first time in an assisted living center in Brigham City, Utah. The grandmother of a friend of our

family, she was about to celebrate her 101st birthday. In her room, Merle sat surrounded by souvenir books and photographs. Two photos she shared particularly impressed me.

The first, taken many years ago, was of a group of seminary students, including Merle’s daughters. “They’re on the front row with their teacher, Boyd K. Packer,” Merle says. “He looks really young, but he was a good teacher.” Today he’s the President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

When Merle was young, she was stricken with polio. “It wasn’t easy to deal with that as a teenage girl,” she says. “My faith had to grow to keep up. But the Lord helped me then, and He is helping me now.” Those who suffered polio in their youth often struggle with post-polio syndrome as they advance in years, dealing with symptoms like muscle weakness and overall fatigue. Such is the case for Merle.

When she feels tired, she remembers the scripture in Alma 7:11–12 that tells how the Savior “will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people . . . that he may know . . . how to succor his people according to their infirmities.” Then, she says, “you trust that the Lord knows what you’re going through. Take it day by day, pray, go to church, and be kind to others. It’s the little things that help you to get through.”

The second photo Merle showed me is in a scrapbook—a picture of three of her five daughters. All of her children were girls, and three were born as



AN INHERITANCE OF HOPE

“Wherever you are on the path to inherit the gift of eternal

life, you have the opportunity to show many people the way to greater happiness. When you choose whether to make or keep a covenant with God, you choose whether you will leave an inheritance of hope to those who might follow your example.”

President Henry B. Eyring, *First Counselor in the First Presidency*, “A Priceless Heritage of Hope,” *Ensign*, May 2014, 22.

Merle Christensen rejoices in the knowledge that she will be able to see loved ones again.

triplets in 1936, the first triplets born in Brigham City. “Having triplets was rare back then,” Merle says. Medicine wasn’t as advanced, and two of the girls were born with heart problems. Sharon died in 1958 and Diane in 1972. Janice, who had no heart condition, passed away from cancer in 1992.

“I love all of my children, their husbands, my grandchildren, and great-grandchildren,” Merle says. But she misses her husband, DeVere, who’s been gone for 26 years, and she misses her triplets, who would be turning 79 this April.

Again she reads in Alma: “And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people” (Alma 7:12).

“I know that the Savior overcame death,” Merle says. “Because of that, I know that I will see my husband and my triplets and all of my family again.” That conviction, she says, grows stronger every day.

Sister Christensen passed away in September 2014, after this article was written.

Walking Together

Alph and Lucette Passeraub of Lausanne, Switzerland, love to go walking together. One of their favorite strolls is along the shore of Lake Geneva, where the Alps tower over the inland sea. A couple of years ago on such a walk, the Passeraubs spent the evening reminiscing.



Lucette and Alph Passeraub reminisce about their life together in the Church.

“Even as an adolescent, I was searching for the truth,” Alph, 78, said. “I always said to myself, If God exists, He must have a living prophet on the earth. I was preoccupied with that thought all the time.”

As Alph began his post-high school studies, a friend encouraged him to attend a free English class taught by LDS missionaries. After one of the classes, the missionaries invited him to church.

“The first time I attended, the Sunday School lesson was about the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost as three distinct beings,” Alph recalled. “The teacher said we know much about God thanks to the teachings of a modern-day prophet, Joseph Smith, and that there are living prophets today. I was amazed. They were talking about what had been in my heart for so long.” He soon joined the Church, “and every day since then, I rejoice that there are prophets on the earth.”

Lucette, 80, grew up as a child of World War II. “I had to go to work at 14 and never got to complete my

education,” she says. “But I found that the Church gave me opportunities to keep learning.”

After serving a full-time mission, she started dating Alph. They married in the temple, raised a family, and now look back at their journey that includes Lucette’s 14 years as ward Primary president, Alph’s 32 years on the stake high council, regular trips to the temple, visits with children and grandchildren, and always, always, gratitude for the truth they embraced when they were young.

“We have been blessed to walk side by side,” Lucette says. “And with each step, our faith has grown stronger.”

I learn a lot from these friends who are older than I am. Larry and Elizabeth teach me to play the changing roles of life with dignity and with assistance from the Lord. Merle shows that faith to endure to the end must be built on faith in the Savior today. And the Passeraubs rejoice in the gospel every day. All of those are lessons that will strengthen me before my journey is through. ■