

# Mrs. Patton—the Story Continues

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I miss my colleague James E. Faust today and express my love to his dear wife and family and am assured he is serving the Lord elsewhere. I welcome the newly sustained General Authorities, President Eyring, Elder Cook, and Elder González, and assure them they have my full support.

Thirty-eight years ago, at a general conference held in the Tabernacle on Temple Square, I spoke of one of my childhood friends, Arthur Patton, who died at a young age. The talk was titled “Mrs. Patton, Arthur Lives.”<sup>1</sup> I addressed my remarks to Arthur’s mother, Mrs. Patton, who was not a member of the Church. Although I

had little hope that Mrs. Patton would actually hear my talk, I wanted to share with all who were within the sound of my voice the glorious gospel message of hope and love. Recently I have felt impressed to refer once again to Arthur and to relate to you what transpired following my original message.

First, may I tell you about Arthur. He had blond, curly hair and a smile as big as all outdoors. He stood taller than any boy in the class. I suppose this is how, in 1940, as the great conflict which became World War II was overtaking much of Europe, Arthur was able to fool the recruiting officers and enlist in the navy at the tender age of 15. To Arthur and most of the boys, the war was a great adventure. I remember how striking he appeared in his navy uniform. How we wished we were older or at least taller so we too could enlist.

Youth is a very special time of life. As Longfellow wrote:

*How beautiful is youth! how bright  
it gleams  
With its illusions, aspirations,  
dreams!  
Book of Beginnings, Story without  
End,  
Each maid a heroine, and each  
man a friend!*<sup>2</sup>



Arthur's mother was so proud of the blue star which graced her living room window. It represented to every passerby that her son wore the uniform of his country and was actively serving. When I would pass the house, she often opened the door and invited me in to read the latest letter from Arthur. Her eyes would fill with tears; I would then be asked to read aloud. Arthur meant everything to his widowed mother.

I can still picture Mrs. Patton's coarse hands as she would carefully replace the letter in its envelope. These were hardworking hands; Mrs. Patton was a cleaning woman for a downtown office building. Each day of her life except Sundays she could be seen walking along the sidewalk, pail and brush in hand, her gray hair pulled back into a tight bob, her shoulders weary from work and stooped with age.

In March 1944, with the war now raging, Arthur was transferred from the *USS Dorsey*, a destroyer, to the *USS White Plains*, an aircraft carrier. While at Saipan in the South Pacific, the ship was attacked. Arthur was one

of those on board who was lost at sea.

The blue star was taken from its hallowed spot in the front window of the Patton home. It was replaced by one of gold, indicating that he whom the blue star represented had been killed in battle. A light went out in the life of Mrs. Patton. She groped in utter darkness and deep despair.

With a prayer in my heart, I approached the familiar walkway to the Patton home, wondering what words of comfort could come from the lips of a mere boy.

The door opened, and Mrs. Patton embraced me as she would her own son. Home became a chapel as a grief-stricken mother and a less-than-adequate boy knelt in prayer.

Arising from our knees, Mrs. Patton gazed into my eyes and spoke: "Tommy, I belong to no church, but you do. Tell me, will Arthur live again?" To the best of my ability, I testified to her that Arthur would indeed live again.

In general conference those long years ago, as I related this account, I mentioned that I had lost track of Mrs. Patton but that I wanted to once

more answer her question "Will Arthur live again?"

I referred to the Savior of the world, who walked the dusty paths of villages we now reverently call the Holy Land; who caused the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the lame to walk, and the dead to live; to Him who tenderly and lovingly assured us, "I am the way, the truth, and the life."<sup>3</sup>

I explained that the plan of life and an explanation of its eternal course come to us from the Master of heaven and earth, even Jesus Christ the Lord. To understand the meaning of death, we must appreciate the purpose of life.

I indicated that in this dispensation, the Lord declared: "And now, verily I say unto you, I was in the beginning with the Father, and am the Firstborn."<sup>4</sup> "Man was also in the beginning with God."<sup>5</sup>

Jeremiah the prophet recorded: "The word of the Lord came unto me, saying,

"Before I formed thee . . . I knew thee; and before thou camest forth . . . I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations."<sup>6</sup>

From that majestic world of spirits

we enter the grand stage of life to prove ourselves obedient to all things commanded of God. During mortality we grow from helpless infancy to inquiring childhood and then to reflective maturity. We experience joy and sorrow, fulfillment and disappointment, success and failure. We taste the sweet, yet sample the bitter. This is mortality.

Then to each life comes the experience known as death. None is exempt. All must pass its portals.

To most, there is something sinister and mysterious about this unwelcome visitor called death. Perhaps it is a fear of the unknown which causes many to dread its coming.

Arthur Patton died quickly. Others linger. We know, through the revealed word of God, that “the spirits of all men, as soon as they are departed from this mortal body, . . . are taken home to that God who gave them life.”<sup>7</sup>

I assured Mrs. Patton and all others who were listening that God would never forsake them—that He sent His Only Begotten Son into the world to teach us by example the life we should live. His Son died upon the cross to redeem all mankind. His words to the grieving Martha and to His disciples today bring comfort to us:

“I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:

“And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.”<sup>8</sup>

“In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

“ . . . I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”<sup>9</sup>

I reiterated the testimonies of John the Revelator and Paul the Apostle. John recorded:

“I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; . . .

“And the sea gave up the dead which were in it.”<sup>10</sup>



Paul declared: “As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”<sup>11</sup>

I explained that until the glorious Resurrection morning, we walk by faith. “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face.”<sup>12</sup>

I reassured Mrs. Patton that Jesus invited her and all others:

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.”<sup>13</sup>

As part of my message, I explained to Mrs. Patton that such knowledge would sustain her in her heartache—that she would never be in the tragic situation of the disbeliever who, having lost a son, was heard to say as she watched the casket lowered into mother earth: “Good-bye, my boy. Good-bye forever.” Rather, with head erect, courage undaunted, and faith unwavering, she could lift her eyes as she looked beyond the gently breaking waves of the blue Pacific and whisper, “Good-bye, Arthur, my

precious son. Good-bye—until we meet again.”

I quoted the words of Tennyson, as though spoken to her by Arthur:

*Sunset and evening star,  
And one clear call for me!  
And may there be no moaning of  
the bar,  
When I put out to sea, . . .*

*Twilight and evening bell,  
And after that the dark!  
And may there be no sadness of  
farewell,  
When I embark;*

*For tho’ from out our bourne of  
Time and Place  
The flood may bear me far,  
I hope to see my Pilot face to face  
When I have crossed the bar.”<sup>14</sup>*

As I concluded my message those long years ago, I expressed to Mrs. Patton my personal testimony as a special witness, telling her that God our Father was mindful of her—that through sincere prayer she could communicate with Him; that He too had a Son who died, even Jesus Christ the Lord; that He is our advocate with the Father, the Prince of Peace, our Savior and divine Redeemer, and one day we would see Him face-to-face.

I hoped that my message to Mrs. Patton would reach and touch others who had lost a loved one.

And now, my brothers and sisters, I share with you the rest of this account. I delivered my message on April 6, 1969. Again, I had little or no hope that Mrs. Patton would actually hear the talk. I had no reason to think she would listen to general conference. As I have mentioned, she was not a member of the Church. And then I learned that something akin to a miracle had taken place. Having no idea whatsoever who would be speaking at conference or what subjects they might speak about, Latter-day Saint neighbors



of Mrs. Terese Patton in California, where she had moved, invited her to their home to listen to a session of conference with them. She accepted their invitation and thus was listening to the very session where I directed my remarks to her personally.

During the first week of May 1969, to my astonishment and joy, I received a letter postmarked Pomona, California, and dated April 29, 1969. It was from Mrs. Terese Patton. I share with you a part of that letter:

“Dear Tommy,

“I hope you don’t mind my calling you Tommy, as I always think of you

that way. I don’t know how to thank you for the comforting talk you gave.

“Arthur was 15 years old when he enlisted in the navy. He was killed one month before his 19th birthday on July 5, 1944.

“It was wonderful of you to think of us. I don’t know how to thank you for your comforting words, both when Arthur died and again in your talk. I have had many questions over the years, and you have answered them. I am now at peace concerning Arthur.

... God bless and keep you always.

“Love,  
“Terese Patton”<sup>15</sup>

My brothers and sisters, I do not believe it was a coincidence that I was impressed to give that particular message at the April 1969 general conference. Nor do I believe it was a coincidence that Mrs. Terese Patton was invited by neighbors to join them in their home for that particular session of conference. I am certain our Heavenly Father was mindful of her needs and wanted her to hear the comforting truths of the gospel.

Although Mrs. Patton has long since left mortality, I have felt a strong impression to share with you the manner in which our Heavenly Father blessed and provided for her, a widow, in her need. With all the strength of my soul I testify that our Heavenly Father loves each one of us. He hears the prayers of humble hearts; He hears our cries for help, as He heard Mrs. Patton. His Son, our Savior and Redeemer, speaks to each of us today: “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him.”<sup>16</sup>

Will we listen for that knock? Will we hear that voice? Will we open that door to the Lord, that we may receive the help He is so ready to provide? I pray that we will, in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

#### NOTES

1. In Conference Report, Apr. 1969, 126–29.
2. “Morituri Salutamus,” in *The Complete Poetical Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow* (1883), 259.
3. John 14:6.
4. D&C 93:21.
5. D&C 93:29.
6. Jeremiah 1:4, 5.
7. Alma 40:11.
8. John 11:25–26.
9. John 14:2–3.
10. Revelation 20:12–13.
11. 1 Corinthians 15:22.
12. 1 Corinthians 13:12.
13. Matthew 11:28–29.
14. Alfred Tennyson, “Crossing the Bar,” in *Poems of the English Race*, ed. Raymond Macdonald Alden (1921), 362.
15. Personal correspondence in the possession of Thomas S. Monson.
16. Revelation 3:20.