



THE POWER OF FAITH AND Family Stories

We are more resilient in the face of trials when we are familiar with the challenges our own ancestors faced.

By Adam C. Olson
Church Magazines

Rosalene Pacini has always felt a special connection with her great-great-grandmother Elizabeth Xavier Tait because of the faith-filled stories Rosalene grew up with. The stories of Elizabeth's trust in the Lord as she traveled from Bombay to Liverpool to Zion, as well as her endurance through heart-wrenching trials, captured Rosalene's imagination as a young girl.

Those stories also played a role in preparing Rosalene to develop and rely on the same kind of faith when she faced similar challenges in her own life.

LEAVING HOME, LOSING FAMILY

Elizabeth, 1850s, Bombay, India

Elizabeth Xavier was a well-educated young woman who enjoyed a life of ease as part of a wealthy, noble family in India. But life took a challenging turn in 1850 when she married William Tait, a regimental drill master in the British navy who had been baptized by Elder Parley P. Pratt in Scotland.

Elizabeth's family deeply disapproved of her baptism. The stress of strained relationships was followed by the tragedy of losing her first son to cholera. Then, eight months pregnant but yearning to be with the Saints and become an eternal family, Elizabeth sent William and their second son off to prepare a home for their family in Zion.

After the baby was born, Elizabeth's family begged her to forsake her husband and her religion and stay with them. But fixed in her determination to follow the Savior, she left her family and homeland forever, sailing for Liverpool, England.



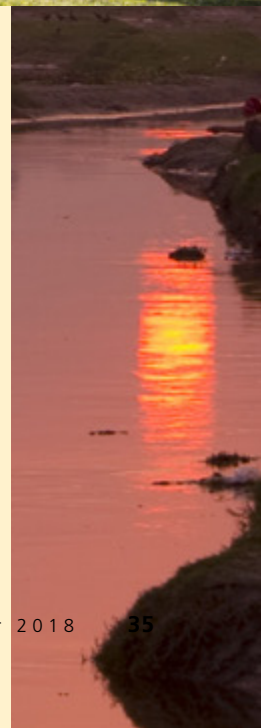
Rosalene, 2003, Colorado, USA

Rosalene grew up as the youngest child in a large family in Enterprise, a small community in southern Utah, USA. She had many opportunities to witness the power of faith in Jesus Christ during her years at home and on her mission. After marrying in the temple, Rosalene embarked on a testimony-stretching journey of her own when her husband started a career that would take her farther and farther from home.

After moving to the state of Colorado, Rosalene watched from afar as her mother battled cancer until passing away a few years later.

"I could have been happy to live in my hometown next to my parents my entire life," she says. "It broke my heart when I had to grow up and move away. Losing my mom was life-shattering. Even now, not a single day goes by that I don't miss her.

"I have to believe that there were days when Elizabeth missed her home desperately. But she believed in Jesus Christ and allowed His power to work in her life. That was enough to carry her through. The same power has helped me as I rely on my Heavenly Father for strength, whether or not my earthly family is close by."



THE STING OF DEATH

Elizabeth, 1856, Liverpool, England

On the long journey by sea from India to England, Elizabeth's infant daughter became seriously ill. She died and was buried in Liverpool. Elizabeth later said that losing her baby was so painful that she didn't know if she could continue. Heartbroken and alone, but encouraged by Elder Franklin D. Richards of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, who was serving as president of the European Mission, Elizabeth sailed for Boston, Massachusetts, USA.

Rosalene, 2006, New York, USA

Shortly after the Pacinis moved their growing family to New York, Rosalene went into preterm labor. The doctors considered surgery to deliver the baby because his heart rate kept dropping. But when his heartbeat normalized, the family went home relieved.

At a follow-up appointment a few days later, the doctor couldn't find a heartbeat. Their baby boy was delivered a few hours later—stillborn.

"Losing my baby was heart-wrenching," Rosalene says. "I have never felt as empty as I did after they took his little body from my arms."

The family flew to Utah to bury him next to Rosalene's mother. For weeks after, Rosalene couldn't bear to leave and move on with life.

"I think I understand a little how Elizabeth wondered if she could go on," Rosalene says. "But she did. We may all find ourselves in that place at some point in our lives. But we can't stop. We move forward by relying on our Savior more than we did before, and eventually we recognize the miracles that have surrounded us all along."



EVER ONWARD, BY JOSEPH BRICKEY

THE WINTERS OF LIFE

Elizabeth, 1856, Iowa, USA

After crossing an ocean, Elizabeth found herself in a completely new culture. She traveled by train to Iowa, USA, the end of the westbound railway at the time. Arriving in July 1856, Elizabeth joined the Willie handcart company.

The suffering of the Willie and Martin handcart companies is well chronicled. The companies left late in the season and got caught in an early winter in the Rocky Mountains. Freezing and low on food, more than 200 died.

Among the rescue party sent by President Brigham Young was Elizabeth's husband, William. The couple was reunited in deep snow and freezing wind.

After recovering in Salt Lake City, the couple ended their journey in Cedar City, only a few miles from where Rosalene's began.

Rosalene, 2007, Hong Kong, China

Like Elizabeth generations before, Rosalene soon found herself crossing an ocean to settle in an unfamiliar culture when her husband took a position in Hong Kong.

"Some people thrive on change and adventure, but it was almost too much for me," Rosalene says.

She again found strength in her Savior and in God's plan for her. With the support of her family and dear sisters in her ward, Rosalene came to love and treasure her new surroundings and experiences.



OTHERS HAVE PASSED THIS WAY BEFORE

As we strive to follow Jesus Christ, we all travel through trials—our own plains and oceans to cross and harsh winters to face. But others have passed this way before. We can find hope and strength in their stories of trust in the Savior.

Rosalene recognizes she's likely only in the middle of her journey, but having seen the full scope of Elizabeth's story, she can't help but consider the end of her own.

"Maybe I have some attributes like Elizabeth, maybe I don't. But I hope that when my children see my life, they will see similarities—that we were both faithful to the end and that we allowed our trials to shape us to be more like our Savior."

Recognizing the strength she has gained from those who have passed along before, Rosalene is passing those stories on to her children.

"Knowing their stories, we know they did hard things," Rosalene says. "And we know the reason and the motivation. Now it is my turn to carry that tradition of faith in Jesus Christ and dedication to His gospel, and pass it on to my own children." ■

The stories of their ancestors have helped strengthen the faith of Rosalene Pacini and her family.

FAMILY STORIES IN THE SCRIPTURES

Studies show that children become more resilient to the challenges of life when they are familiar with the stories of challenges their own ancestors faced.¹

In the Book of Mormon, Helaman also recognized the power of connecting his children to family stories that had been passed down through writing and retelling. He told his sons:

"Behold, I have given unto you the names of our first parents who came out of the land of Jerusalem; and this I have done that when you remember your names ye may remember them; and when ye remember them ye may remember their works; and when ye remember their works ye may know how that it is said, and also written, that they were good.

"Therefore, my sons, I would that ye should do that which is good, that it may be said of you, and also written, even as it has been said and written of them" (Helaman 5:6–7).

NOTE

1. See Robyn Fivush, "Collective Stories in Families Teach Us about Ourselves," *Psychology Today*, Feb. 2, 2017, psychologytoday.com/blog/the-stories-our-lives/201702.

