

Because I had been less active years ago, a member who knew me then couldn't believe I was called to be a bishop.

By Patrick J. Cronin III

During a priesthood executive committee meeting, our full-time missionaries reported meeting a member whose records were not in the ward. I recognized the name immediately and mentioned that she and I had been in the same ward many years ago.

One of the missionaries said, "Yes, bishop, she mentioned that and seemed quite surprised that you were the bishop."

I asked them, "What did she say?"

They said she looked very surprised and said, "*He's* the bishop?"

I had to laugh and explain that this sister knew me as a very different person 30 years ago.

As I contemplated this incident later, I thought about how much my life had changed during the 30-plus years that my family and I have been members. I have known many members of our ward for 20 years and have served as branch president and as bishop, but none of these members knew me 30 years ago. Although I occasionally share incidents from my past to teach about repentance and the Atonement of Jesus Christ, most of the ward doesn't know what an incredible journey my life in the Church has been.

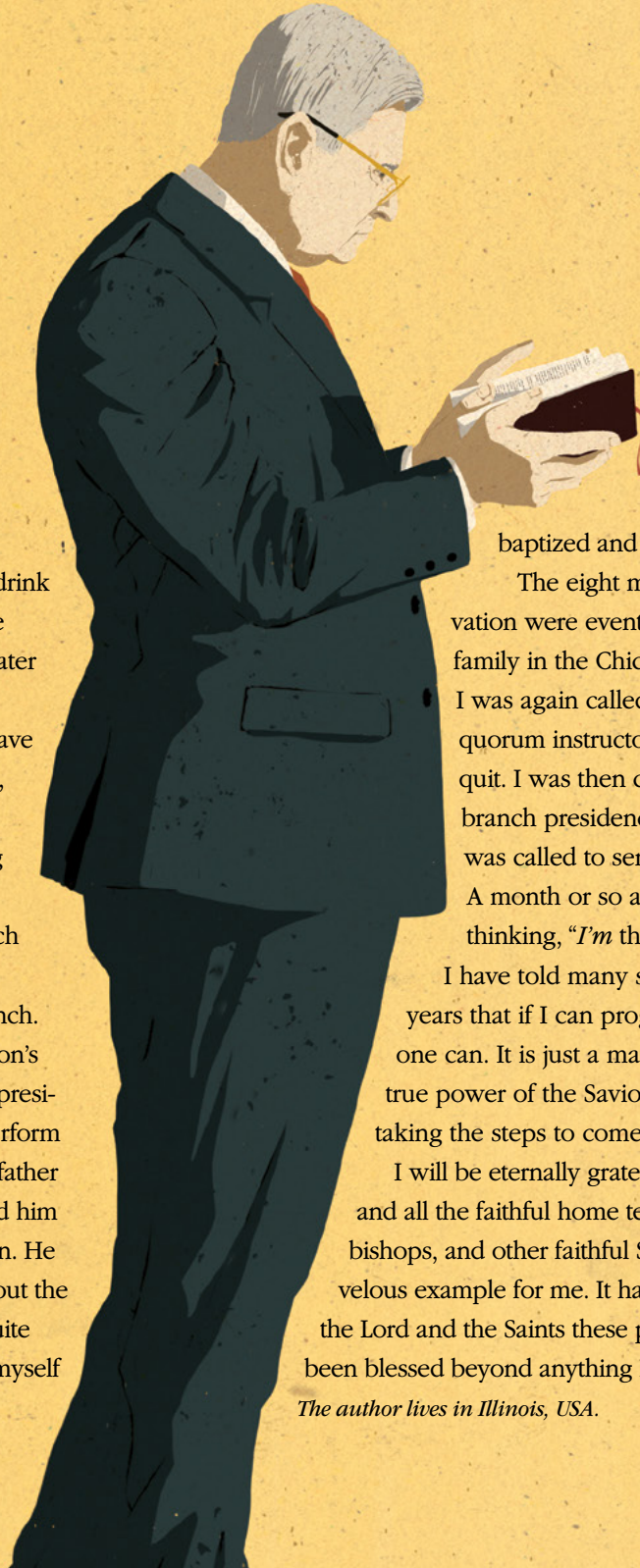
My family and I were introduced to the Church in May 1979, and I knew immediately that this was where we belonged. We were baptized in June, and at first we were all active, but it wasn't long before I stopped attending and returned to old habits. I never really had any doubt about the truthfulness of the gospel and the Restoration, but I did not think I had what it took to be a good member of the Church.

In 1982, because of my continued alcohol abuse, my wife, who had never failed in her faith, filed for divorce. At the time my family was living in Oklahoma, USA, but I had returned to Illinois, USA, where I had been raised. I had reached the point where I was about to lose the only thing that truly mattered to me: my family.

I began praying on my knees morning and evening to a God who I was no longer sure existed or, if He did, I figured He had long ago forgotten me. Yet for three months I prayed faithfully. Early one morning, while I was deep in prayer, a feeling of great relief came upon me and I knew that God lived, that He knew me, and that He loved me. I also knew I would never touch another drop of alcohol.

That very evening I received a call from my wife to let me know she was going to mail me the divorce papers to sign. During that conversation she suddenly said, "There is

He's THE BISHOP?



something very different about you. I don't believe you are ever going to drink again, and I am going to tear up these papers." We reunited, and two years later she gave birth to our third son.

One would assume that I would have returned to full activity in the Church, but I am a stubborn man. I returned for a time and even received a calling as an elders quorum instructor. But I soon began to feel inadequate to teach and again became inactive.

In 1991 we moved into a small branch. Several months before our youngest son's eighth birthday, my wife, the Primary president, asked him who he wanted to perform his baptism. Of course he wanted his father to perform the ordinance. My wife told him that probably was not going to happen. He did not accept that answer and set about the task of activating his father. He was quite relentless, and in short order I found myself serving as the Scoutmaster, and I later

baptized and confirmed my son.

The eight months following my activation were eventful. We were sealed as a family in the Chicago Illinois Temple, and I was again called to serve as an elders quorum instructor, only this time I didn't quit. I was then called as a counselor in the branch presidency, and five months later I was called to serve as the branch president. A month or so after my call, I remember thinking, "I'm the branch president?"

I have told many struggling Saints over the years that if I can progress in the gospel, anyone can. It is just a matter of understanding the true power of the Savior and His Atonement and taking the steps to come unto Him.

I will be eternally grateful to my wife and children and all the faithful home teachers, quorum leaders, bishops, and other faithful Saints who set such a marvelous example for me. It has been a privilege to serve the Lord and the Saints these past 20 years. My life has been blessed beyond anything I could have imagined. ■

The author lives in Illinois, USA.