

The Old Family Album:

The Power of Family Stories

My ancestors' legacies live on through me, continually influencing my life for the better.

By Amneris Puscasu

One summer morning before World War II, my great-grandfather woke up as he always did—before sunrise. He went outside his house on a hill overlooking a green valley and his village in Romania, and sat on the grass covered by the early morning dew, deeply absorbed in his thoughts—the same thoughts that had been on his mind for a while. An educated man with a big heart and an inquisitive mind, he was loved and respected by everyone in the village.

His village, situated in the land of the ancient river Olt, was the prototype of the eternal image of the

Romanian village, in which archaism combines with fairy-like landscapes, a treasure of picturesque customs, and a natural responsibility to care for the objects and traditions one inherits from one's forefathers and pass them to the next generation.

After the sun arose, he went inside the house and confessed to his wife that he had been curious to see what his funeral would be like, and he wanted to have a dress-rehearsal funeral. He set the date, bought the coffin, hired the priest and professional mourners, and acquired all other items required by the Greek Orthodox tradition. The day of the dress-rehearsal funeral came. The tables were set in the middle of the village for the remembrance feast, the family was all dressed in black, the priest came, my great-grandfather lay down in the coffin, rearranging the pillow so he could have a comfortable view, and the funeral procession began. When the ceremony ended, the whole village was invited to the feast, where my great-grandfather fulfilled his dream of dancing at his own funeral. He lived another 20 years, often checking to see if his coffin still fit him.

Not Just Names and Dates

I have never met my great-grandfather, but his story has always been my favorite. It was passed down to me by my



grandparents. Every day they would tell my siblings and me stories about our ancestors: where they came from, what they were like, their values, dreams, and hopes. After every Sunday meal, my grandparents took out the old family album. With every turn of the page, stories came to life, past and present, as hearts were knit together in a tapestry of love that defies the test of time.

They were not just old photographs with names and dates scribbled on the back. Behind every face was a father or a mother, a son or a daughter, a brother or a sister. To us they were real people with hopes and dreams, struggles and disappointments, successes and failures. Though they are no longer physically present, their stories continue to live, their legacies continue to shine, and their faces continue to smile from an old family album that today binds in love the hearts of six generations.

Strength in Times of Trial

By the time I was 19, my parents and most of my immediate family were dead, and many of the possessions that I had inherited were lost or stolen. And yet there is one thing that time, natural calamities, or even death could never destroy: the bridge spanning past, present, and future that

each of my family members built. Because of their diligence, the thread that binds our hearts has proven stronger than any mortal trials and has given me the strength to overcome difficult circumstances.

When my parents and grandparents died, I felt such deep sorrow that I wondered if I would have enough strength to keep going. But I felt their influence from beyond the veil, and that helped me gain an unshakable testimony of life after death and, later, of temple ordinances.

I don't remember how my mother looked, nor have I met my great-grandparents, but every time I pick up the old family album, I see myself in their eyes. I am who I am because of all those who came before me, and their experiences and wisdom have shaped my character and guided me.

I think often of my family on the other side of the veil and of the sacrifices they made for me in order to have a better life. I think of the temple ordinances that enable us to be together again as a family someday. And I think of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, who made all of this possible. He paid the price so that we might live. For this we love Him and worship Him with gratitude today and forever. ■

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