

Elder Dale G. Renlund

AN OBEDIENT SERVANT



Opposite page: Elder Renlund and his siblings (Anita, Linda, and Gary) grew up in Utah, speaking Swedish. Their parents, Åke and Mariana, moved from Sweden to Utah in 1950 to be sealed in the temple because there was no temple in Scandinavia or Europe at the time. Right: Elder and Sister Renlund and their daughter, Ashley, lived for six years in Baltimore, Maryland, USA, where he completed his medical residency and cardiology fellowship at Johns Hopkins Hospital and she attended the University of Maryland School of Law.

By Elder Quentin L. Cook
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Life couldn't get any busier for Dale and Ruth Renlund. They were in their late 20s, living in Baltimore, Maryland, USA. Dale had completed medical school at the University of Utah. He and Ruth had moved across the country so he could undertake a demanding and prestigious medical residency at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. They had a beautiful young daughter, Ashley. His precious wife, Ruth, was undergoing cancer treatments, and Dale had obediently accepted a call to serve as bishop.

As he visited ward members, Dale sometimes took Ashley with him. One day they visited a less-active member. "I knew that no one would be able to turn away this adorable little girl at my side," remembers Elder Renlund. He knocked on the door of a man who had angrily dismissed Bishop Renlund's counselor sometime earlier.

When the man opened the door, he was so large he filled the doorway. He glared at Bishop Renlund. Four-year-old Ashley blurted out, "Well, can we come in or what?"

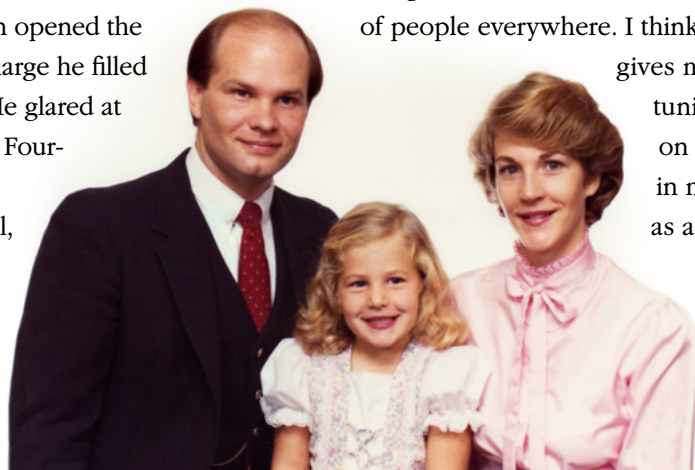
Surprisingly, the man said, "I guess so. Come in."

When they were seated inside, the man told Bishop Renlund he did not believe the Church was true, nor did he believe in Jesus Christ. He kept talking angrily while Ashley played with a toy. Finally she got off her chair, cupped her hand to her father's ear, and whispered loudly, "Daddy, tell him the truth."

So he did. Bishop Renlund bore his testimony to the man. He recalls, "The man's attitude softened, and the Spirit came into his home."

Now as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Elder Renlund has the opportunity to tell the whole world the truth (see D&C 107:23). "The greatest joy that comes," says Elder Renlund, "is helping to bring the Atonement of Christ into the lives of people everywhere. I think this calling

gives me the opportunity to do that on a bigger scale, in more places, as a witness of Christ to all the world."





Elder Renlund's sister Linda C. Maurer, who is nine years younger than him, states that as all four of the children have grown older, "they realize how remarkable and faithful their parents were to uproot with no English-speaking skills and little support in order to have the blessings of the gospel and a temple marriage."



Nordic Upbringing

Dale Gunnar Renlund was born in Salt Lake City, Utah, USA, on November 13, 1952. He and his siblings grew up speaking Swedish. Their mother, Mariana Andersson, was from Sweden, and their father, Mats Åke Renlund, was from a Swedish-speaking town in western Finland. They immigrated from Sweden to Utah in 1950.

Dale's parents met at church in Stockholm. After deciding to marry, they were determined to do so only in a temple. Because there were no temples in Europe at the time (the Bern Switzerland Temple was dedicated in 1955), the couple came to Utah so they could be sealed in the Salt Lake Temple.



When Dale was 11, his father, a skilled carpenter and builder, was called to serve as a building missionary in Sweden for three years. The family spent time in Helsinki, Finland, and Gothenburg, Sweden. They attended a small branch of the Church, and the children attended Swedish public schools. Dale's sister Anita M. Renlund, who is one year younger than her brother, recalls one of the difficulties in the transition: "This was initially a shock to us because, even though we spoke Swedish at home, we did not know the grammar or spelling of the language."

As a boy Dale had a testimony-strengthening experience after reading the Book of Mormon. The mission president in Sweden had invited the young men of the Aaronic Priesthood to read the Book of Mormon, so Dale's older brother, Gary, who was 12 at the time, accepted the challenge. Eleven-year-old Dale also took the challenge. After reading the Book of Mormon, he prayed and asked if it was true. Elder Renlund recalls, "I had a distinct impression:



With his wife and daughter, Elder Renlund spoke at the 2016 RootsTech family history conference in Salt Lake City. Opposite page: Married in the Salt Lake Temple in 1977, Elder and Sister Renlund have served the Lord wherever and whenever they have been called.



‘I’ve been telling you all along that it’s true.’ And that was an amazing experience.”

Dale and his siblings—Gary, Anita, and Linda—remember that when the family moved back to the United States, they continued to speak and pray in Swedish. They also recall their parents’ remarkable emphasis on scripture knowledge. They said, “The best way to make a point with our parents was by using scriptures.” Anita jokes, “Knowing the scriptures in our family was a survival skill; it was not optional.”

Remarkably, both Gary and Dale were called to serve in the Swedish Mission at the same time. They were never companions, but both were able to use their Swedish-speaking skills to serve the Lord as missionaries for over two years. Elder Renlund describes his mission as a lot of work but a wonderful experience: “It was life-changing in terms of commitment and deciding to do the best one can to be a disciple of Christ.”

The Most Amazing Blessing

After returning from his mission in 1974, Dale attended the University of Utah. He was an excellent student and received a bachelor’s degree in chemistry. His siblings and close friends all remember his capability, focus, hard work, and commitment in every undertaking—traits he continues to exhibit. Gary exclaims, “He is the hardest worker I have ever seen.”

In his ward Dale met a young woman named Ruth. She was the daughter of a member of the stake presidency, Merlin R. Lybbert, who later served in the Seventy. Dale’s recollection is that he mustered the courage to ask Ruth out on a date, but she said no. When he tried again a few months later, she said yes. Ruth’s version is a little different. She remembers that when he spoke in sacrament meeting about his mission, she was impressed. They got better acquainted, and she was thrilled when he asked her to go on a date, but she was hosting a party that required her to decline. She was pleased to accept when he asked again.

Dale and Ruth married in 1977 in the Salt Lake Temple while he was attending medical school at the University of Utah and she was teaching at South High School, also in Salt Lake City. “Aside from the decision to be active in the Church,” Elder Renlund unequivocally states, “marrying Ruth has been the most amazing thing in my life.” Their daughter, Ashley, was born one week after Elder Renlund graduated from medical school in 1980.

Elder Renlund was then pleased to be accepted by Johns Hopkins Hospital, his first choice for his continuing medical education.

The family moved to Baltimore, Maryland, where he became part of the hospital medical staff.

Growing through Trials

In October 1981, Sister Renlund was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. She underwent two surgeries and nine months of chemotherapy. Struggling to take care of Ruth and their daughter, Elder Renlund recalls, “I was hurting, and it seemed as if my prayers wouldn’t go heavenward.”

When he brought Ruth home from the hospital, she was weak, but they wanted to pray together. He asked Sister Renlund if she would pray. “Her first words were, ‘Our Father in Heaven, we thank Thee for priesthood power that makes it so that no matter what happens, we can be together forever.’”

In that moment, he felt a special closeness to his wife and to God. “What I’d previously understood about eternal families in my mind, I now understood in my heart,” Elder Renlund says. “Ruth’s illness changed the course of our lives.”

To take her mind off the illness, Sister Renlund decided to attend law school. “I just thought, ‘This will only be a bad experience unless we make something good of it,’” Sister Renlund says. “It wasn’t in our plan for me to have cancer as a young woman and have only one child. And my survival was in doubt. But we felt like law school was the right thing.”

She pursued her studies even as she continued treatment for her illness and her husband continued his residency.

Baltimore’s Inner-City Bishop

As Elder Renlund was transitioning from three years on the medical house staff to a cardiology fellowship, he was interviewed to be the bishop of the Baltimore Ward. Brent Petty, who

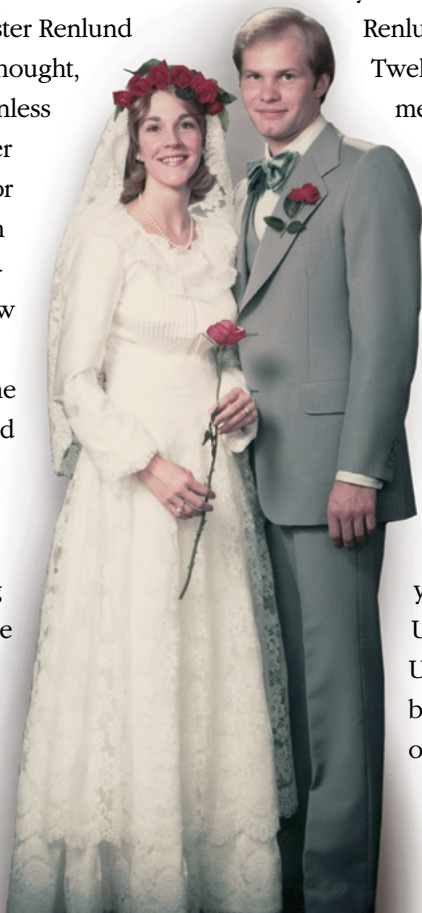


was the first counselor in the Baltimore Maryland Stake at the time, remembers that interview. Both he and the stake president, Stephen P. Shipley, felt “the strong influence of the Holy Spirit” as they interviewed him.

Brother Petty recalls that “he distinguished himself as a superb bishop,” even with the professional and family challenges he was experiencing. When Elder Renlund received his call to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles last year, Brother Petty notes that members of the Baltimore Ward as well as Elder Renlund’s medical colleagues, most of whom are not Latter-day Saints, were pleased. They expressed their love for him and their admiration for his service and exceptional moral character.

Distinguished Careers

In 1986, after Sister Renlund graduated from the University of Maryland School of Law and Elder Renlund completed his three-year internal medicine residency program and three-year cardiology fellowship, they returned to Utah. Sister Renlund began practicing law at the Utah attorney general’s office, and Elder Renlund became a professor of medicine at the University of Utah. For 18 years he was the medical



Elder Renlund left his successful medical career as a cardiologist to accept a call to serve as a General Authority, first assigned to the Africa Southeast Area Presidency. Opposite page: When Elder Renlund saw this Heinrich Hofmann painting of the Savior in President Monson's office, he knew he wanted a copy for his own office.

director of the Utah Transplantation Affiliated Hospitals Cardiac Transplant Program.

In 2000 he also became the director of the Heart Failure Prevention and Treatment Program at Intermountain Health Center in Salt Lake City. The program included implantable cardiac pumps and the total artificial heart. Donald B. Doty, M.D., an internationally recognized heart surgeon, was a colleague and friend of Dr. Renlund at LDS Hospital. Dr. Doty says, "His remarkable training, in-depth focus, capable administration, and compassion were exceptional."

Dr. A. G. Kfoury, a devout Catholic who worked closely with Dr. Renlund for many years, states that Dr. Renlund was the lead transplant cardiologist in the region, "unmatched in his character, integrity, humility, and compassion." He says Dr. Renlund "brought out the best in people. He

did it quietly. He listened well and cared, and he was immensely interested in the success of those who worked with him." Dr. Renlund led quietly by example and was always concerned about the families of his co-workers.

Dr. Kfoury particularly noted Dr. Renlund's compassion for patients. For example, if a patient didn't have means of transportation, Dr. Renlund would drive significant distances to the patient's home, lift him or her into his car, and then drive the patient back to the hospital. Dr. Kfoury said this was extraordinary.

Serving in the Seventy

After serving as stake president for five years in the Salt Lake University First Stake, Elder Renlund was called in 2000 to serve as an Area Seventy in the Utah Area. Then in April 2009 he was called to be a General Authority Seventy. His first assignment was to

serve in the Africa Southeast Area Presidency, an area that has Church units in 25 different countries.

Sister Renlund shares their response to the calling: "It was a surprise, of course. And people have said, 'You're leaving your careers at their peaks.' And that's probably true. But if the Lord needs the peak of our careers and this is when we can be of service, then that's the time to go."

Speaking of his wife as his hero, Elder Renlund says, "She made the greater





Called to Be a Special Witness

On September 29, 2015, he received an unexpected call from the Office of the First Presidency. At the Church Administration Building, “I was welcomed warmly by President Thomas S. Monson and his two

sacrifice.” Sister Renlund left her job as the president of her law firm and left positions on several prominent boards to serve with him. “We were sent to Africa and tutored by the Saints about what really matters,” says Elder Renlund.

One Sunday in central Congo he asked the members what challenges they were facing, but they couldn’t think of any challenges. He asked again. Finally, an old gentleman in the back of the room stood and said, “Elder Renlund, how can we have any challenges? We have the gospel of Jesus Christ.” Reflecting on that experience, Elder Renlund explains: “I want to be like these Congolese Saints, who pray for food every day, are grateful every day for food, are grateful for their families. They have nothing, but they have everything.”

Serving in the Area Presidency for five years, Elder Renlund traveled thousands of miles through the vast Africa Southeast Area, visiting members and missionaries. He studied French because it is spoken in several of those countries.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, who was the member of the Twelve assigned to work with the Africa Southeast Area Presidency at the time, says of Elder Renlund: “No one could have invested himself in the area and its people and their needs more than Elder Renlund did. He labored unceasingly to know the people, to love their cultures, and to help move the Saints toward a place of redeeming light.”

counselors. After we were seated, President Monson looked at me, and he said, ‘Brother Renlund, we extend to you the call to serve as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.’”

Elder Renlund was stunned. He humbly accepted the calling and recalls, “I think President Monson sensed that my bones had dissolved, and so he looked at me, and he said, ‘God called you; the Lord made it known to me.’”

Elder Renlund returned to his office, closed the door, and fell to his knees in prayer. After collecting himself, he called his wife. “Her reaction was one of astonishment,” he says, “but of absolute commitment to the Lord, His Church, and to me.”

Their daughter, Ashley, acknowledges, “My dad has excelled because of the blessing of heaven and has been prepared by a lifetime of service for this call. He has a big heart; it is full of love.”

Similarly, Elder Renlund’s brother, Gary, says Elder Renlund “was prepared from a long time ago, both by challenges and by service for the call that has come to him. This is part of the larger plan that is in place, and it is easy for me to sustain him.”

Reflecting on the magnitude of the calling, Elder Renlund says, “I don’t feel qualified, with the exception that I do know that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world. I can witness of His living reality, that He is my Savior and your Savior. I know that that’s true.” ■