



THERE'S A REASON I'M STILL ALIVE

AFTER A MOVE AND A MEDICAL EMERGENCY,
PEYTON **FOUND HIS PURPOSE.**

By Jenni Whiteley

Elder Peyton Burke of Idaho, USA, stands in a trailer piled high with sandbags. He and his companion have been filling them and carrying them all day, placing thousands in front of homes and businesses in their mission area in North Carolina to protect against the flooding of Hurricane Matthew.

A little over a year earlier, this kind of work would have been impossible for Peyton. At that time he was battling a dangerous infection that threatened to paralyze him. On top of that, his family had just moved to Idaho from Oregon, USA, and during the months he was stuck in bed and making daily hospital trips, he relied on his new friends and his trust in God to get him through.



LONELY AFTER A FAMILY MOVE

Just before Peyton's junior year of high school, his dad got a new job in Idaho. The family packed up everything and started the drive. "It didn't really hit me until we started driving that we were actually *moving*," Peyton says. "Then I really got scared." Peyton's mom remembers him quietly crying through a lot of the drive. "In fact, it was one of the only times I've seen him cry," she says.

After the move Peyton joined the school soccer team. Although Peyton met a lot of new people, he had a hard time connecting with them. "It was all scary because everything was new," he says. "The first couple of months were super hard."

But his new friends kept reaching out to him. And it made a difference.

"There wasn't a specific day where everything magically changed," Peyton says. "It just happened slowly and over time as they kept inviting me to hang out with them. I slowly grew closer and closer to all of them."



BATTLING A MEDICAL EMERGENCY

From the time Peyton was little, he loved all sports—but he had dreamed of playing on a high school varsity basketball team. Even though he didn't make the team at his new school, he decided to play on the junior varsity team to prove himself.

Halfway through the season, Peyton noticed that his lower back began hurting, and gradually the pain got worse. For a while, taking a simple hot bath would relieve it. Then one morning Peyton woke up in intense pain, and over the next few days, he could barely walk. Finally, Peyton's mom drove him to the emergency room.

The doctors gave him painkillers. "After that," Peyton says, "I thought things would return to normal soon."

They didn't.

After a scan, the doctor told Peyton that he had a rare condition called a spinal epidural abscess—possibly from a freak hit to Peyton's back during a basketball game. It was serious. If not treated in time, the swelling from the abscess could cause paralysis and even death.

Because the doctors wanted to avoid surgery, they put Peyton on the strongest antibiotics available. A permanent IV was put into his arm to give him internal medication. Peyton had to return to the hospital every day for treatments and tests, and he couldn't go back to school. "I was scared," Peyton explains. "But mostly I was frustrated that I couldn't do anything I'd normally do."

WHOSOEVER SHALL PUT THEIR
TRUST IN GOD SHALL BE SUPPORTED
IN THEIR TRIALS, AND THEIR TROUBLES,
AND THEIR AFFLICTIONS, AND SHALL
BE LIFTED UP AT THE LAST DAY.
ALMA 36:3



THE POWER OF FRIENDS

Peyton's new friends visited him in the hospital after school. They texted, they heart-attacked his room, they helped throw a small birthday party for him, they even brought junior prom to the hospital for him, and they prayed.

"One of my friends, Ellie, would visit me pretty much every single day," Peyton says, "and it was such a big help, strength, and source of joy to me. My friends were so helpful and supportive."

But the weeks of treatments and waiting were still really hard. Peyton turned to the scriptures for comfort. One night, while reading in the Book of Mormon, he came across a passage that reached him: "And now, O my son Helaman, behold, thou art in thy youth . . . [and] I do know that whosoever shall put their *trust in God* shall be supported in their trials, and their troubles, and their afflictions, and shall be lifted up at the last day. . . . I do put my trust in him, and he will still deliver me" (Alma 36:3, 27; emphasis added).

"I trusted in those verses," Peyton says. "They taught me to look to God, and I knew He would help me get through."

Six weeks later Peyton had a follow-up scan. "I thought and hoped that I'd be declared infection-free," he explains.

The results: the infection had diminished but not been eliminated, and there was potential it would come back. That meant another six weeks of treatment and increasing his trips to the hospital to three times a day. "I was super sad and frustrated. That was really hard."

Finally, after the second round of treatments, Peyton was declared infection-free. "When they told me that I would be able to walk again and I wasn't going to be paralyzed as long as I was careful, I was so relieved. I still pray and give thanks almost every day for the ability that I have to be able to walk and to exercise."



More Hurricane Cleanup

Elder Burke isn't the only youth who helped during Hurricane Matthew. For more, check out Rockwell Palmer's story, "Helping Hands after the Storm," in the January 2017 *New Era* and at youth.lds.org.



MOVING ON IN THE LORD

With life somewhat back to normal, Peyton was eager to play sports again, especially basketball. "I really wanted to play, but I didn't know if my back could handle it. I knew I had to take my question to God. I prayed a lot. Then I started having dreams about playing basketball and getting hit and becoming paralyzed during a high school game. At first I just brushed it off, but I kept having them. Then I started having dreams about me being a dad in a wheelchair.

"I decided I shouldn't play basketball because one day I wanted to be able to play and do stuff with my kids. I felt like I was following a prompting."

The following March, Peyton began his mission in North Carolina. One month later, Hurricane Matthew ravaged the eastern coast of the United States, and North Carolina was in emergency status. Although he had to be careful, Peyton and the other missionaries helped fill and place thousands of sandbags to protect businesses and homes from the floods.

Peyton reflects: "All of my experiences in Idaho prepared me in different ways for my mission. All of my experiences made me physically, mentally, or spiritually stronger, and I've needed all those in helping the people here in North Carolina.

"I've realized that God gave me that trial to humble me and to give me more compassion for other people. This experience also made me a lot more grateful for all the things that I take for granted. There was a reason the Lord preserved me and that I wasn't paralyzed or dead. That's when it really hit me that I was here to help and bless others." NE

The author lives in Idaho, USA.