

SAVING MY

By John C. Gaetz

Mother

When I was three years old, my mother started drinking. She became an alcoholic.

As I was growing up in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, I would often hear my father chastising my mother for her drinking and what it was doing to our family. As I got a little older, one of the jobs my father regularly gave me was to gather up all the alcohol I could find in the house and pour it down the toilet.

When I was 15, Mom died. An autopsy revealed she had been suffering from a brain tumor for approximately 12 years, the same amount of time she had been drinking. Doctors said she had endured excruciating agony, and we realized she had been drinking to dull the pain.



From right, clockwise: John's mother with him as a toddler before her battle with alcoholism began, John's father with him as a young teen, and John on the waters of Nova Scotia at age 17.

After my mother passed away, we realized we had horribly misjudged her. Then missionaries showed us there was a way to make amends.

John's mother (right) endured excruciating pain for years before she passed away. His father (far right) was sealed to her in the Washington D.C. Temple at age 83.



A memory came back to me. When I was just a little boy, I went into my parents' bedroom and found my mother kneeling by her bed, begging God to take her life. She knew her drinking was hurting our family. She must have felt desperately alone.

My father and I both expressed regret that we had misjudged Mom. We felt guilty that none of us had been aware she was so horribly sick. How we wished we could see her again and tell her that we now understood and that we loved her.

At age 35, I met the missionaries. I told them about my mother. I had always felt that she was now in heaven. I still longed to console her, even though I felt I would never qualify for heaven.

"In the temple, you can do work for your kindred dead," one of the missionaries said.

"What does that mean?" I asked.

He explained that I could help my mother to progress in the eternities by having saving ordinances performed in her behalf. That caught my attention. I didn't yet understand everything I could do for her, but if I could do anything, I wanted to do it. Then the missionaries explained that by becoming worthy and doing temple work, not only could I help my mother now, but someday we could be together again as a family.

As I learned more and more about Heavenly Father's plan of happiness, I came to understand the great importance of eternal families. As my gospel knowledge grew, so did my conviction that I must become a member of the Church. By doing so I could actually save my mother, if she would accept the ordinances done in her behalf.

After my baptism and confirmation, I had a year to prepare to receive my temple ordinances. Then I wanted to be present as temple ordinances were performed for my mother. In the meantime, there was something else I could do—I could help my father.

Dad was aware of my conversion. He had a lot of

questions, but he was still in Halifax, and I now lived in Calgary, Alberta.

Dad was an avid reader, so with the help of a

former mission president who had become my friend, I selected some good books about the Restoration and sent them to my father. From time to time, we would send additional books.

When the year had passed, I was able to receive my endowment in the Cardston Alberta Temple and to witness the temple ordinances performed for my mother.

I went to general conference in Salt Lake City, Utah, and in a restaurant at the hotel I saw a man wearing a missionary badge that said President Sorensen, Canada Halifax Mission. I found out he had been called to be mission president in the city where my father lived.

"I want you to baptize my father!" I said. He was surprised but said he would be happy to visit him. He told me to purchase a set of scriptures and have my father's name engraved on them. I did so and delivered them to President Sorensen just before he left for the mission field.

He delivered those scriptures and taught my father the gospel. It took two years, but my father finally embraced the truth. He was 82 when President David E. Sorensen (later a Seventy) baptized and confirmed him. A year later, President Sorensen escorted him as Dad received his temple endowment. Then my mother and father were sealed to each other, and I was sealed to them. Six months later, my father passed away.

I joined the Church thinking I had found a way to help my mother. But I had also found a way to help myself and my father, not only to make amends but to be with Mom eternally. ■

The author, formerly from Alberta, Canada, now lives in Utah, USA.