

BY MARCIA L. AKES

When people first met my father-in-law, they would usually see a tough, retired construction worker who wasn't afraid to share what was on his mind. But those who knew him well remember him better for the way he treated his wife and for his tremendous devotion to her as she grew ill. He loved her dearly both "in sickness and in health."

Their commitment to each other began in 1942 when my father-in-law, Charles Akes, first spotted Elaine Spencer on a train. He was in the army and headed home on leave. They began dating, fell in love, and soon married, but they were forced apart as Charles was shipped overseas to the war in Europe. He hated leaving his new bride, and like many soldiers was afraid he wouldn't return. They wrote back and forth and missed each other terribly until he returned home.

Elaine and Charles, whom I grew to call Mom and Dad, began building their life together. Dad worked hard to support her and their four children, driving a truck, farming, and ranching—and when he couldn't find a job, he'd make one. He ended up in construction, running his own backhoe service.

Dad often gave thanks for Mom's constant encouragement, inspiration,



Dad's

ILLUSTRATION BY GREGG THORKELOSON



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Lesson in Love

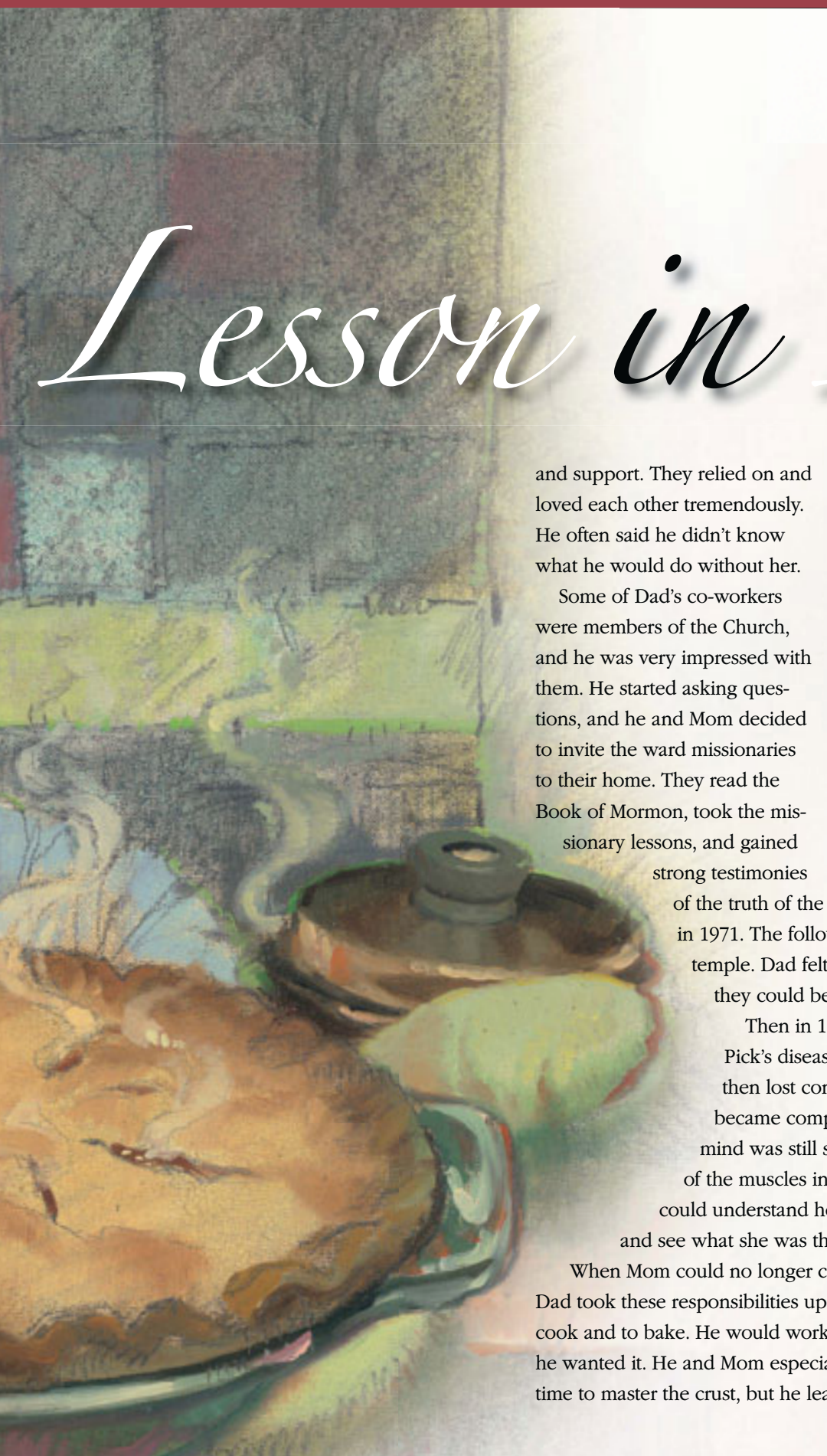
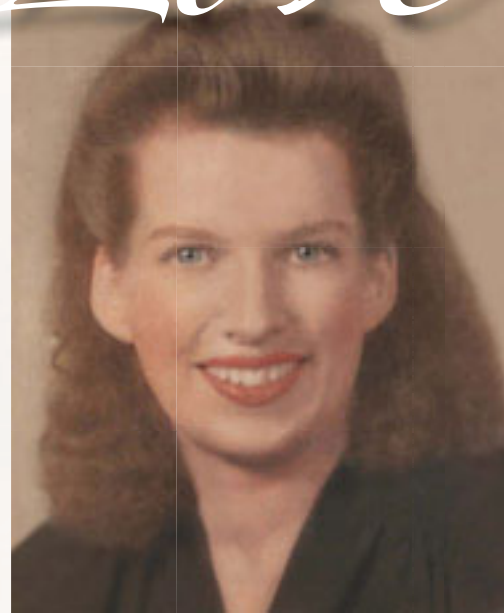
and support. They relied on and loved each other tremendously. He often said he didn't know what he would do without her.

Some of Dad's co-workers were members of the Church, and he was very impressed with them. He started asking questions, and he and Mom decided to invite the ward missionaries to their home. They read the Book of Mormon, took the missionary lessons, and gained strong testimonies

of the truth of the gospel. They joined the Church in 1971. The following year they were sealed in the temple. Dad felt incredibly blessed to know that they could be married for eternity.

Then in 1996, Mom was diagnosed with Pick's disease. She lost her balance first and then lost control of her muscles. She finally became completely bedridden. Though her mind was still sharp, she no longer had control of the muscles in her throat to speak, but Dad could understand her. He could look into her eyes and see what she was thinking and feeling.

When Mom could no longer cook or do the household chores, Dad took these responsibilities upon himself. He taught himself to cook and to bake. He would work on a recipe until he got it just like he wanted it. He and Mom especially loved pies. It took him a long time to master the crust, but he learned to make delicious pies, and



"I'm just a common man with common thoughts, and I feel I've lived a pretty common life; there will never be any monuments dedicated to me, and undoubtedly my name will soon be forgotten; but I've loved another with all my heart and soul, and to me, this has always been enough."



they became his specialty. Sometimes he would share his new recipes with the Relief Society sisters. He invited people to their home for dinner so that Mom could enjoy their company and wouldn't feel lonely.

One day Dad discovered Mom's sewing machine. He said it was a shame to let such a nice machine sit there, so he took sewing lessons. Because Mom was bedridden and

dressing her was difficult, Dad took all of her dresses, cut them up the back, and put in snaps or Velcro so they would be easier to get on and off without hurting her. For her birthday, he sewed her a beautiful wrap-around skirt to match the sweater he had bought her so she could wear a new outfit to her party.

Each night Dad would give Mom a facial with her favorite face cream because that was something she had always done and she had such soft skin. He took her to swim therapy every week to keep her muscles toned. He spent hours looking through books for any new ideas on how he could help her feel more comfortable.

But Mom was not the only one with health problems. Asthma had been an issue for Dad his whole life, and he also contracted emphysema. Pneumonia had afflicted him so many times that he had permanent difficulty breathing. Even a cold meant a visit to the hospital. Doctors often predicted that he would not survive, but each time they did he fought for life because he worried about what would happen to Mom if he wasn't there to take care of her.

On one particular hospital visit, doctors warned him that the circulation in his legs was so bad he would soon be confined to a wheelchair. Dad knew that if it came to that, his wife would have to go to a nursing home, so he did physical therapy, breathing treatments, and special exercises until his circulation improved. His intense effort enabled him to continue walking and keep Mom at home.

Some days, though, were harder than others. The hardest ones were when Dad could barely breathe and Mom was deeply worried about being a burden to him. He felt terrible that she was suffering in a body that could not move freely. Often he would say how incredibly grateful he was for the gospel and for a knowledge of Heavenly Father's divine plan. Because of the gospel, he knew the pain would only be temporary and that he and his wife could be together forever.

Dad fought a good fight and defied the odds for years, but in January of 2003 he knew he wouldn't win another one. He was admitted to the hospital with his lungs and body giving out. The doctors told him he would never leave his hospital bed, but he knew he had something left to do. Going on nothing but sheer determination, Dad left the hospital and checked himself and Mom into a local nursing home. For the next two days he trained the caregivers and staff on how to take care of her—how to feed her, how to tell when she was hurting, how to help her feel comfortable, and all about her diet and medicine. When he felt they understood and he was sure she would be in good hands, he passed away peacefully, by her side.

The things Dad did to take care of Mom touched the lives of family, friends, neighbors, caregivers, and even strangers. People often speak with me about the influence he had on them. I have seen more dedication in marriages and commitment to family from those who watched my father-in-law go to great lengths to care for his wife.

Although he could be pretty rough around the edges, Dad embraced the gospel and its teachings on love and devotion with all of his heart. I often heard him exclaim, "Oh, how I love that woman!" And he showed us, by the way he treated her, just how much he did. ■