

MY FATHER'S LOVING EXAMPLE

Name withheld

My father showed me how to love my wandering children.

I joined the Church after accepting an invitation from two friends to attend seminary. My parents were always supportive of my decisions to be baptized, serve a mission, and marry in the temple. I recall, however, the pain I felt (and I assumed that my parents also experienced) at knowing that they were kindly waiting in the Provo Utah Temple waiting room while my bride and I were sealed.

We later had four children, and I remember the joy in knowing that each of them was sealed to us because they were born in the covenant. Our children were the first grandchildren, and although my parents and siblings never joined the Church, they grew very close to each of my children. For many years we lived near each other, and my parents were able to see our children participate in school and youth sports events. They attended each of our children's baptisms.

By the time our children reached their teens, however, my work

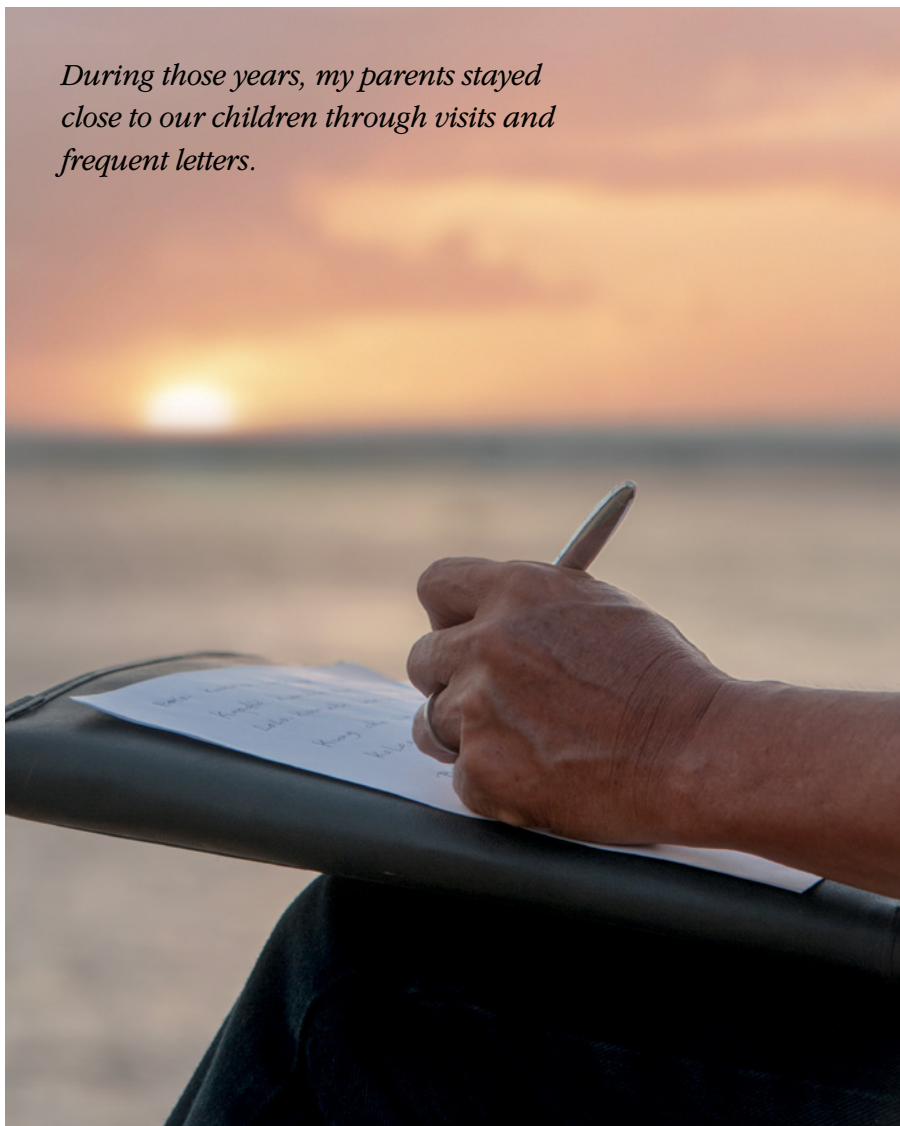
assignments had moved our family to another state. But even during those years, my parents stayed close to our children through visits and frequent letters.

As my parents reached middle age, my mother encountered early-onset

Alzheimer's. My father was determined to faithfully serve as her caretaker, even when her condition required full-time care. Even through these latter years, my father reached out to me through weekly, and, in some periods, daily, phone calls and



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letters. I had always had a close relationship with both my parents, but during the last 10 years of my father's life, we became particularly close. I realized then too that he was equally successful in drawing near to my three siblings in the same way—even given the differences in interests and faiths we chose as we all grew older.

My parents and my family lived on opposite coasts of the United States during those last years, and they made two cross-country visits, even though my mother's Alzheimer's had advanced to the point where assisting her on a long-distance flight was very difficult for Dad.

At this same time, one by one my children all decided to stop attending church. Two eventually had their names removed from Church records. This has certainly been the trial of both my wife's and my life. And even though he wasn't a Latter-day Saint, my father was pained and confused by our children's choices as well. He was a privately religious man, and

he joined us through those years in praying for them.

In 2005 my father passed away after being diagnosed with cancer, and my mother passed away three years later. My wife and I rejoiced in acting as their proxies in providing temple ordinances after their deaths.

I've long prayed to understand how best to relate to our children now that they're adults, some with their own spouses and children, none of whom are LDS. We are emotionally close to all four of our children, and we are grateful that they often reach out in love to us.

I eventually received a very clear answer of how I must conduct myself, possibly for the rest of my life, regarding these adult children. I needed to do what my father had done with me. In spite of the different lives we lived and the different religious perspectives we had, my father was determined to draw closer to me as a father and a friend while I experienced the pain of seeing my children choose different lifestyles and beliefs from mine. I realized I must follow the example of my father, who taught me how to treat children of a different faith: love them completely, just as the Savior would. ■