



*Learning about
my ancestors gave
me courage to fight
my spiritual battles.*

REASSURED

Name withheld

When I was about 11 years old, I was exposed to pornography. That one instance developed into a greater problem that became the defining struggle of my teenage years. By the time I was in high school, I had turned away from pornography and toward Jesus Christ's Atonement. Although I experienced a miracle in having the filth erased from my mind, I still felt overwhelming guilt in my heart.

Around this time, my grandma lent me my great-great grandmother Thea's handwritten autobiography. Within days I felt deeply connected with Thea Martina Waagen (1883–1967). Thea's father tragically died just a few months before her birth, so she was raised by her widowed Norwegian immigrant mother. Growing up was difficult, but she found joy in picking wild strawberries and playing the organ at her local Lutheran church. Thea's mother remarried, and with her stepfather's help, she attended college. Later in life, Thea and her family converted to the Church and moved to Utah, USA. Things weren't easy for Thea. She and her husband divorced. She experienced great heartache and severe depression, yet she remained true to her testimony.

As I learned about Thea and her choice to persevere through adversity, I was overwhelmed with an intense love that reassured me of my worth

ILLUSTRATION BY ALEX NABAUM

The background features a stylized illustration. On the left, a large, dark blue silhouette of a person's head and shoulder is shown in profile, facing right. In the center and right, a golden temple with a spire and a statue on top is set against a light yellow background. The temple is surrounded by blue, crumpled paper-like trees. The ground is a solid orange-brown color.

OF MY WORTH

and helped me overcome my paralyzing guilt. I realized that if she could do hard things, I could too.

I went on LDS.org and requested Thea's patriarchal blessing. I was further touched when I read, "The seed of thy womb shall rise up and call thee blessed among the women in Zion." I realized that my profound respect for her was a fulfillment of that simple sentence. Thea's love helped heal my heart of guilt and turn my heart to my ancestors. This was my first witness of Elder David A. Bednar's promise that by participating in family history work, I would "be protected against the intensifying influences of the adversary" ("The Hearts of the Children Shall Turn," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2011, 27).

I feel an added measure of strength and clarity in my life as I continue to search out my family and learn their stories. By consistently participating in family history activities, I feel like I gained an entire army of allies who help me fight my spiritual battles. I can live without fear because "they that be with us [our ancestors] are more than they that be with them [Satan's followers]" (2 Kings 6:16).

Although I haven't found thousands of family names to take to the temple, I have learned my ancestors' stories and sought out their families through careful research. I have taken the time to remember their lives and respect their legacies. I know that I have been strengthened and protected against Satan as I've filled my life with the light of my family. ■