



PHOTO ILLUSTRATIONS BY DAVID STOKER, POSED BY MODELS

Saved

AFTER MY DAUGHTER'S SUICIDE

*My ward stepped in to help me
through this trial because I
was without family of my own.*

By Le Etta Thorpe

A friend of mine recently asked me a question that took me by surprise. Of all the questions that are left unanswered after a loved one takes his or her life, she had just one on her mind. Her question was, “How has the Church helped you after the suicide of your 15-year-old daughter?”

My initial thought was, “It hasn’t. I pushed everyone away, hibernated in my home, and suffered in absolute solitude.”

But after a few days of reflection, I realized that thought was totally off base. I have no doubt that the unimaginable horror I experienced clouded my perspective.

While at the hospital where they took my daughter Natalie (who had already passed), I was in a state of shock. I was completely numb, physically and mentally. Things were happening around me that I could see but not feel: police asking questions, friends crying, medical staff informing. It’s all a blur yet perfectly clear.

My former bishop and his wife were there. A colleague of mine had called them. My daughter, Natalie, and I had moved from their ward only a few months prior. My bishop and his wife were beloved friends of ours.

The bishop’s wife, also named Natalie, said I would be staying with them. The next thing I knew, I was in their vehicle riding back to my old neighborhood. I had no comprehension of time passing, yet I was aware it was dawn

of the next day when I received a priesthood blessing from the bishop and a friend.

I was kept in the loop with all of the funeral arrangements, yet I was unaware of all the details. I would get dressed when I was told to get dressed. I would get in the car when I was told we had somewhere to go. I was a robot following simple commands. That was all I was capable of doing. Surprisingly, I had not yet shed a tear.

My daughter’s funeral was beautiful. There was a lot of laughter mixed with tears, and the Spirit was very much present. My oldest daughter, Victoria, traveled back to Utah from another state. She wrote a song and performed it at the funeral.

I was never approached about the funeral costs except to be informed it was being handled. Within a few weeks the funeral had been paid in full by donations from Church members.

At the time, I was still staying with my former bishop’s family. Members from my previous ward were looking for a new place for me to live. A cute little basement apartment became available, and the next thing I knew, I was signing a lease. This did not happen by my own doing. It was the actions of a network of Church members, including my dear friend Natalie, the bishop’s wife.

Ward members helped move my personal effects and got

me and Victoria settled in. The first two months' rent had been paid in advance—again, by Church member donations. I still had no perception of time, and I was still emotionally numb to a certain degree, yet I was starting to get feeling back.

A few weeks after my daughter's death, the realization and magnitude of what had happened started to creep in. It was like heavy, thick black smoke seeping in at first, followed by all-consuming billows until I was surrounded by complete darkness. Grief in its rawest form has its own dimension of blackness.

Natalie had died on Thanksgiving Day. It was now Christmas. The holidays only magnified my loss. The agony lingered throughout the day and tormented me throughout the night. It was relentless. The tears poured endlessly for days. Minutes passed like hours. Hours passed like days. Days passed like years.

As a divorced woman, I did not have a husband who could go out and earn a living. If I could have, I would have curled up in a ball, locked myself in a closet, and remained there forever. But I didn't have that luxury. I had to somehow gather the strength to function. I had to find a job. I was working when Thanksgiving Day happened, but somehow in all the chaos, I had forgotten about my job. I could have gone back to it, but my Natalie loved to hang out there, and

the thought of going back without her was unbearable.

By the first week of January, I had gotten a low-paying job. I tried to act like I was normal. My body kept going, but I felt like my soul had died. No one knew I was a hollow shell of a being just going through the motions. It was only during the drive to and from work that I was able to break down emotionally. This was my new normal.

I started going to my new ward a little at a time. I just knew if someone asked me how I was doing, I would fall to pieces. I desperately wanted to go to church, but I didn't want to talk to anyone, much less make eye contact. I wished with all my heart that I could be invisible. More than anything, I just wanted to rip this all-consuming pain out of my chest! But it wouldn't begin to diminish until sometime later.

I have no idea what the sisters in Relief Society thought of me, and at the time I didn't much care. I was too busy just trying to breathe! I'm sure I gave off the impression that I wanted to be left alone, for none of them bothered me. They did, however, occasionally give me a warm smile that I found a little comforting—just the exact small dose to keep me from running out the nearest exit, which was a constant thought.

Time is a healer. It doesn't erase events, but it allows gaping wounds to slowly close.

That fateful Thanksgiving Day was in 2011, and it took me a few years to realize just how much I was helped by my brothers and sisters in the Church. I felt like I was carried off the battlefield after having been critically wounded. I was nursed back to health and cared for until I could stand on my own.

Countless blessings have come my way, in a variety of ways. My testimony has grown to near full maturity. I know now what it feels like to be held in the loving arms of our Savior.

So to answer my friend's question, "How did the Church help you through this ordeal?" I say, "They didn't help me. They saved me." ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

Natalie was a source of joy and laughter in my life. I am grateful for the support of my friends and ward members as I grieved her loss.



LEFT: PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID STOKER, POSED BY MODELS

