

# DON'T WORRY . . . BEE HAPPY

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Stonehenge was a disappointment. If we had shown up for the summer solstice, we could have touched the stones while watching the sun rise. However, that would have involved fighting our way through a crowd of twelve thousand neo-pagans. Instead, we were only permitted to circle the formation from a distant sidewalk. So I bought my son Dylan a lime green dragon for his collection on the way back to the bus—even though we hadn't the slightest idea what dragons had to do with Stonehenge. Fourteen months later, that was the stuffed dragon I placed in my son's coffin just before they shut the lid.

The idea for a mother-son trip to Europe originated with Dylan's question: "Mom, can I study Polish with you at that university this summer?" I had attended an intensive Polish language program in Poland the previous few summers, but I was surprised by Dylan's request and asked him why. He said, "I just want to see why you like it there so much." My husband and I were already going to China in May, so adding a summer trip to Europe seemed a bit much, but the Spirit told me I needed to take my son to Europe *that* summer.

Many members of my family suffer from chronic anxiety and depression—including cousins on both sides of my family. However, most of us find ways to manage the problem. Nothing we tried seemed to help Dylan, my youngest son. He still had debilitating anxiety and had been self-destructive for many years. I thought maybe if Dylan could see how amazing the world was, it would give him the motivation to not give up hope. So I planned the ultimate family history adventure for a twenty-year-old young man who loved Broadway shows and was obsessed with his Irish heritage. He got to kiss the Blarney Stone in

Ireland and sit in the front row for “We Will Rock You” in London. I took him to our ancestral villages in the beautiful mountains near Krakow, and after our classes at the university in Lublin, we’d walk to the mall and order fantasy sundaes with kiwi, passionfruit, and gelato, topped with a fluffy cloud of whipped cream. My son fell in love with Poland, and he even decided that Polish girls were the most beautiful girls in the world.

Shortly after Dylan died, I was told in a priesthood blessing that my son was amazed at the eternal impact I’d had on so many lives, and that because of my temple work, many mentors wanted to help him. I felt grateful my son had fallen in love with Poland the year before because most of my temple work has been done for our Polish ancestors.

As we participate in family history and temple work, we are promised healing blessings. According to Elder Dale G. Renlund, one of those blessings is the “increased influence of the Holy Ghost to feel strength and direction for our own lives.” I didn’t know that was the last summer I would spend with my son, but God knew and, through the influence of the Holy Ghost, impelled me to take Dylan to Europe *that* summer. Memories of our adventures help me feel God’s love and provide “increased assistance to mend troubled, broken, or anxious hearts and make the wounded whole.”<sup>1</sup> It makes me smile when I recall sensory details from that trip, like sitting in the front row of a loud and raucous rock musical that Dylan found divine, but during which I had to keep my ears plugged with my fingers. Savoring happy memories can provide a temporary island of positive emotions in a sea of sadness. Savoring the future is also a source of peace and hope. Sometimes when I’m feeling sad, I visualize the joyous reunion I will have someday with my son Dylan, my father, who died when I was eight, and my elder brother, the Master Healer, Jesus Christ.

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1. Dale G. Renlund, “Family History and Temple Work: Sealing and Healing,” *Ensign*, May 2018.

On the eve of the fifth anniversary of my son's death, I returned to my hotel room, feeling sad and fragile, and pushed the television remote control button to break the lonely silence. I immediately heard and saw Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf saying: "My dear friends, the healing power of Jesus Christ is not absent in our day. The Savior's healing touch can transform lives in our day just as it did in His. If we will have faith, He can take our hands, fill our souls with heavenly light and healing, and speak to us the blessed words, "Rise, take up thy bed, and walk."<sup>2</sup> Elder Uchtdorf, speaking from a flat screen in Evanston, Illinois, didn't feel like some serendipitous "coincidence"—it felt like a miracle—a gentle hug from heaven.

My husband's job as a contractor required him to return to the East Coast a few days after my son's funeral, and I was left alone. A tsunami of sadness would hit me every night, and I'd curl up in a fetal position, imagining that I was a molecule of water in the ocean being tossed on the beach and then being swept back into the ocean with the rushing tide. I desperately wanted to fade into oblivion so that I wouldn't have to feel the intense pain of grief and loss anymore. Eventually, the Spirit would teach me to imagine myself as a fragile lamb in the Savior's arms, and immediately I'd feel a gentle blanket of peace and love surround me as the sadness melted away for the night.

One evening, feeling alone and on the verge of an emotional breakdown, I asked my best friend if her husband could give me a priesthood blessing. In the blessing I was told: "You are not alone; you are surrounded by people who love and care for you on both sides of the veil. You have many ancestors who are watching over you, and as you continue to serve your ancestors by doing their temple work, they will be close by, and will bear you up and give you comfort and strength. They will be on your right side and on your left." Juxtapose those words with another of Elder Renlund's promised healing blessings: "Increased love

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2. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Bearers of Heavenly Light," *Ensign*, November 2017.

and appreciation for ancestors and living relatives, so we no longer feel alone.”<sup>3</sup>

In 1976, I was told in my patriarchal blessing that I would enjoy an unusual portion of the Spirit of Elijah as I turned my heart to my ancestors who had heard the testimony of Isaiah and other ancient prophets in the spirit world, accepted that witness with all their hearts, and set their hearts and hopes upon me to do their temple work. My mother was the only member of the Church in her family, and her mother was the youngest child of Polish immigrants, but Poland was behind the Iron Curtain, as were my paternal grandfather’s ancestral lands of ancient Bohemia, so finding records for Eastern European ancestors seemed impossible. Poland led the way in revolting against the Soviet Union, and soon after the Iron Curtain fell there in 1989, the Church had photographers in the archives of Poland.

Back when the eighteenth-century superpowers of Russia, Prussia, and Austria divided Poland into three partitions, my ancestors lived in tiny villages in the Austrian partition, where the empire required the Catholic priests to keep meticulous vital records to facilitate the administration of their onerous military conscriptions—which was definitely a curse for my male ancestors at the time—but a tremendous blessing for twenty-first-century family history researchers. On my first trip to the family history library in Salt Lake City, I found microfilm with the vital records for our Polish ancestors, and for the next six years, my extended family helped me complete their temple work.

However, after the devastating death of my son, while I did find solace in attending the temple, I stopped doing family history research. I was nearly catatonic from grief; furthermore, we had completed the temple work for thousands of ancestors. That seemed quite sufficient. Now I just wanted to go home and be with my son again.

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3. Renlund, “Family History and Temple Work.”

About a year after my son's death, I flew to Utah to catch up with friends, do some family sealings, and maybe dabble in a little family history research. During the sealing session, I was told that there was still lots of temple work for me to do. In Salt Lake City, I ended up doing eighteen hours of research. I had forgotten how I loved to scan microfilm for hours, totally in the flow, immersed in the Spirit of Elijah, oblivious to the passing of time. I returned home and told my husband that I apparently had traveled to Utah to rediscover the passionate family history diva who had crawled under a rock after her son's death.

I once again had a purpose for living, and when I felt sad or anxious, I would open my laptop, start doing research, and almost instantly feel the Spirit calm my soul.

In 2019, I got the strong spiritual impression that I should return to Poland and study Polish in Lublin one more time. I flew into Krakow, where I planned to recover from jet lag while enjoying my favorite city in Poland. It felt like Dylan was with me as I attended the same chamber orchestra concert we had enjoyed eight years earlier in the Peter Paul Cathedral. Dylan had played the cello, and I wept when the concert commenced with a solitary cellist playing the famous Bach cello solo used as the background music for the video montage at Dylan's funeral. After the concert ended, I stopped to listen to a gifted cellist street performer. It felt like God had given me the tender mercy of one more magical evening in Krakow with Dylan.

As I roamed the cobblestone streets, I almost walked by "just another boring gift shop filled with touristy junk"—but something stopped me. Four years before my son's death, on my first trip to Poland, I won a whimsical glass bee figurine in a Polish tongue twister contest. The Polish word for bee is *pszczola*—a tongue twister packed into one solitary word! The glass bee was a precious memento of a magical summer, so I displayed it proudly in our living room. As the mother of sons, I should have known better. When Dylan accidentally knocked the bee out of the display cabinet and it shattered, he felt terrible that he

had caused the demise of my precious, irreplaceable bee. I soon forgot my sad loss, but my tender-hearted son didn't forget.

As I entered the shop, I was drawn to a small case of glass figurines, and as I casually scanned the case, my eyes settled on a whimsical glass bumblebee—the same size as the one I had won in the tongue twister contest. I didn't hear Dylan's voice, but I was told that Dylan wanted me to buy this bee to replace the one he had broken. Dylan hadn't forgotten, and while only Jesus Christ could mend his mother's broken heart after his death, perhaps that same Savior also helped a young man who deeply loved his mother find a miraculous way to restore his mother's precious *pszczółka*.

I know that my kind and compassionate son is deeply concerned about family members who are still battling anxiety and depression, because later that same year, I was alone wrapping stocking stuffers on Christmas Eve when Dylan communicated with me. He told me that Christmas was the toughest time for him because he missed all our fun family traditions, like opening elaborate and bounteous stocking stuffers on Christmas morning. I thought about Dylan's love of eggnog and our family's yummy nutmeg cookies. Dylan also told me that "while it is absolutely true that God is merciful, and everyone here has been kind and loving, I feel sad sometimes. My cousins are all married and having babies and I envy their joy. I know I would have loved being an uncle. I can visit my nieces, but they can't see me, and I can't play with them or make them laugh." Doctrine and Covenants 138:50 came to my mind: "For the dead had looked upon the long absence of their spirits from their bodies as a bondage."

My son Dylan wants his extended family, especially those who are chronically depressed or anxious, to savor the present, to savor the precious gift of having a body, to savor the scent of a stargazer lily and the taste of a raspberry picked from our garden. He wants us to laugh, dance, sing, play, and love life. Dylan fervently wants his entire family to complete their assigned missions here on earth.

When our ward transitioned to remote Sunday devotionals during the 2020 pandemic, assigned speakers would prerecord their talks and post them on the ward's YouTube site. When I was asked to prepare a talk on the blessings of temple work, I shared the healing blessings I had received from temple work after the trauma of my son's suicide. As I prayerfully wrote and rewrote my talk, I felt impressed to include my son's message of regret and his hope that others would choose a different path. After the devotional, I felt impressed to share the YouTube link of my talk with our extended family, and sometimes I feel impressed to share the link with friends who are worried about family members and want my advice. I don't have any advice to give them—but Dylan does.

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