

## Final Journey of Patricia Frances Black Stratton

(26 July 1919 to 16 March 2014)

By her daughter, Margaret Emma Stratton Dana Jorgenson

Dear Family,

Troy, MI / March 17, 2014

I have spent the day sleeping, and emotionally and spiritually recharging after the death of our Mother and Grandmother, Patricia Frances Black Stratton yesterday, March 16, 2014. Before I begin cleaning her room, returning equipment, etc. I wanted to share a few of the events of the past few days. They are as precious to me as I believe they will be to you.

In reflecting back, Mom's final journey actually began in 2008. I know some of you thought I was crazy for planning such a huge, 4 day Family Reunion to celebrate Mom's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday in July of 2009 in Winslow, Arizona. Only a few of you knew of the dream I had that "lit a fire under me" as Daddy (Clifford Stratton) would say.

In my "dream", we were all gathered in a large room with chairs, tables, activity stations, food tables, etc. We were all laughing and having fun together. As I was watching Mother in the middle of the action, laughing and talking; I was reflecting on what a special woman she is. At that moment someone called my name and I turned around. There was Daddy with that cute, crooked smile. He stretched out his arms to me and gave me a huge, warm hug. I remember feeling so engulfed in love and joy, I thought I would explode with happiness. I knew he had passed away years before, but was not surprised to find him attending our family party. He told me as he looked lovingly at Mom, "Enjoy her while you can. I really want her with me. It's time for us to be together again."

When I awoke, I knew I needed to plan a Stratton Family Reunion to celebrate Mom's life and give all of her children and grandchildren a chance to say "I love you, Grandma"; not realizing you were actually saying "goodbye". It was wonderful to see how many of you attended. I told Carole, Cliff and Chuck about the dream, but I did not tell Mom at that time.

Although Carole, Cliff, Chuck and I had all invited Mom to come live with us, she enjoyed her independence and swore "I want to die in this house. I won't be a burden to anyone." Looking back, I can see a divine hand in the events that happened next. The end of August, 2011 both Chuck and I had planned to visit Mom in Winslow. The day before Sherrell and I arrived, Mom fell and dislocated her shoulder and sprained both wrists. She said she tripped on a blanket covering her favorite chair, but if I didn't know Daddy had passed away 15 years before, I would have blamed Daddy for tripping her. He knew that this was the only way we could convince her to go home with me. Bishop Miller met our train and Sister Miller had taken Mom to the doctor and was staying with her. Chuck was able to rearrange his plans and came to Winslow while we were there.

With the help of her doctor, Bishop Greenwood, Chuck and I were able to convince her to come home with me while she convalesced and had physical therapy. She did not come without a great deal of prompting. (This is the understatement of the year!) During the train ride to Michigan, she was incredibly courageous. She was in pain, yet she never complained in spite of the jerking movement of the train.

Bryan met our train in Michigan about 1:00 am on Sept 11, 2011. We joked that we were glad no terrorists had carried out their threats to bomb a train to commemorate 9/11 World Trade Center. However, Mom's arrival was not uneventful. We had all slept in the next morning. About 11:00 am I heard Sherrell going downstairs and saying to Mom, "Good morning, Pat." I heard a thump, then Mom started screaming, "Margaret! Margaret!" I ran down the stairs to find Sherrell in a twisted heap on the tile floor at the bottom of the stairs! I checked to see that he was still breathing while I settled Mom in a chair muttering through her tears, "I never should have come here, I never should have come here." Fortunately, the EMS came within 5 minutes because they were just down the street. (Our neighbor, "Farmer Sam" had passed away.) Carrie came to stay with Mom while I went to the hospital. Mom insisted Carrie go with me because I needed her more than she did. She was right. Sherrell's heart had stopped so he ended up with a concussion and a dislocated shoulder (his on the left to match Mom's on the right). After a week in the hospital, he came home with a pacemaker and was as good as new.

Our new "family" of three eventually settled into a routine and Mom finally agreed to make her home with us. Plans were made to sell the home in Winslow and Chuck, Bryan, Sawyer, Porter, and Sawyer's friend McCay and I were able to disburse Mom's keepsakes to her children and grandchildren, arrange for a garage sale, prepare the house and yard to sell, and say our "goodbyes" to her neighbors, friends and our family home of 70+ years. We never could have accomplished so much in just a week's time without divine intervention. We often felt Daddy's presence and had many prayers answered. Again we felt Daddy overseeing and planning everything.

Mom faced this new direction in her life as she had so valiantly dealt with so many of life's other challenges. Mom was sad to see the end of her 90+ years in Winslow but was able to make new friends here to play cards with, accepted a calling to help teach people how to do the church Indexing program for genealogy research, and enjoyed Sunday dinners with Carrie and her family. She came down for dinner and to watch the news with Sherrell and me. We ended up talking and sharing stories most evenings. Our lives were blessed with her in our home.

We felt Daddy's hand in our lives again at Christmas time. Carrie's family had moved to Utah. Margot, Liz and Keith (Sherrell's son) live in Utah. I was really missing them but didn't feel we could leave Mom here alone. You know how you feel when you are being led by the Spirit? Well, everything just fell into place for us to go to Utah, meet up with Kimball and Ben's family too, so we did. Sherrell's daughter, Shauna was able to come stay with Mom for those two weeks. I felt so rejuvenated sharing that time with my

children. It was unknowingly the calm before the storm, but I was better able to face it when it came.

In the weeks after our return, Mom had less and less energy, her arthritis in her hands and knee was more painful and she lost her appetite. Early in February she complained of her back hurting. She did not want to see a doctor so she took extra anti-inflammatory drugs, ice and heat packs, etc.

Mom did not want to go to the doctor in spite of her pain, but on February 10<sup>th</sup>, I called the doctor and she said to take Mom to the Emergency Room. While there for the next week, they discovered the pain in her lower back was the result of a compression fracture. Other tests revealed that she also had a two inch tumor in her left lung and a tumor pressing on her spine between her shoulders. When she first moved to Michigan two and a half years ago, she learned she had multiple myeloma, a type of cancer in her blood. She said "We all have to die of something. I'm too old for chemo, tests, and any other heroic measures. It's in the Lord's hands." So she preferred that we just ignore it. Well, now we had to face it. She decided it was time to cross over to be with Daddy and put her old, painful body aside.

Once that conclusion was made, she agreed to be a part of Hospice home care. She saw what a great support they were to the Caregiver and wanted to make things as easy for me as possible. Even to the end of her life she was thinking of others.

At the time, as we were living through one of the most difficult challenges of our lives, it felt like an eternity. However, in reality, four weeks is not much time. The hospice nurse was surprised at how quickly her body shut down. Once the decision was made, she was looking forward to seeing her sweetheart, Cliff, and her parents and sister again. After 94 and a half fulfilling years, life was no longer desirable to her.

Each day, as she cycled through the stages of dying, she could do less and less for herself. I have come to believe that morphine is one of the "tender mercies" of the Lord. The hallucinating stage was the comic relief we all needed. She insisted that the women who had come to bathe her that morning were trapped in the house and couldn't find their way out. It took a bit of talking to convince her they were not going to call the police because we had not kidnapped them. About 2:00 am she set up on the side of the bed all excited and happy. Reva, her favorite "Soap Opera" star had come to see her. Needless to say, we didn't get much sleep that night!

I was so glad that Joe, Janelle and Will Openshaw were able to come see Mom the first week she was home from the hospital, because soon after that, she was sleeping most of the time. When one of her children or grandchildren would call, her face would light up as I held the phone up to her ear and she was able to respond with "I love you, too".

My Daughter, Liz felt impressed to sing "Oh My Father" to her Grandmother. She recorded it so I could play it to her over the phone as she listened in bed. The words

explaining our journey through this earthly existence and our Father's love for us gave Mom much needed comfort. She smiled and whispered "I love you Lizzie."

They told us that hearing would be the last sense to go. I am convinced that she was staying with us until she received from Cliff her copy of the "Patricia and Clifford Stratton Legacy Collection" of DVDs and CDs. When they arrived, I played the interview with Daddy that Clifford James had recorded years before. Daddy said such loving things about Mom, she must have really enjoyed it. Since the CD player required head phones, I couldn't tell when the recording was over so I tried to remove them from Mom's head to see if it was still on. With eyes closed, body as still as can be, she called out "No! No!" so I put them back on. The next day, I played the interview I recorded in 1972 with Grandma Black. The same thing happened again. At one point she smiled and whispered, "Margaret and Margaret". They were also a great comfort to her.

In the days before she passed, she was agitated, confused, and a little fearful. I was holding her hands, facing her and walking backwards down the hall. She gripped my hands and stopped walking. When I looked into her pleading eyes she said, "Margaret, I don't want to kill myself!" I was shocked and asked, "Mom, what do you mean?" She had fought for 94 plus years to live her life to the fullest. She was afraid that if she quit fighting death and her frail, diseased body, that she was "killing herself". I assured her that it was all right. Daddy and her parents and sister were all happily waiting for her to cross over the veil and be with them again. I started praying in my heart to give me the words to comfort her. After I tucked her back into bed, I felt impressed to read her Patriarchal Blessing to her.

As we read her Patriarchal Blessing, I pointed out that she had fulfilled everything that was mentioned. We stopped after each sentence and phrase: *"the love of your children and husband shall be felt in your home"*, (See Mom, we all feel your love.) *"be a leader among women"*, (I reminded her of her many church callings). *"You shall bear your testimony in many nations and you shall visit many Temples"* (with your two temple missions and all the genealogy research that our family has done, especially the books that Cliff has published and is found in many genealogy libraries and data bases around the world, you have done this too!) And on it went... a *"worthy example"*, *many would come for counsel and be "strengthened in their weaknesses"*, *have a strong testimony of Christ and feel His guidance, blessed with the gift of faith and the power of discernment"*.

At the end of her blessing we found her answer...*"You shall live to a ripe old age. Ye, even as long as life is desirable unto you and when the time comes to leave this life, you shall not be asked to suffer...for you shall be changed in a twinkling of an eye."* (I pleaded. "Mom, claim your blessing. It is okay to let go and cross over to be with your sweetheart again. You don't need to suffer anymore! Daddy is waiting!")

I hope she took comfort in being reminded that she had come to the earth as part of God's Plan of Happiness to take on an earthly body, be tested, make covenants with

the Lord and then put this used up, pain filled body aside. It was okay to let go and cross over the veil to find joy with Daddy again. I bore her my testimony of Christ and reminded her that it was also her testimony because she had taught it to me. She relaxed and was at peace. Later she called out, "Cliff, Cliff". Those were some of the last words she spoke.

On Sunday, March 16, 2014 I carried the baby monitor downstairs so I could hear her while I got a bite to eat. After lunch, I had an uncomfortable feeling come over me even though I could still hear her labored breathing had not changed. I went back upstairs to sit near her. I wrapped myself up in the soft "butterfly" fleece blanket that Carole's daughter Deb had made us and heard her take her last breath at 2:15 pm. I set there for about 20 minutes crying and just waiting for her to take another breath. I thanked Heavenly Father for taking her so peacefully and for answering my long standing prayer that I would be by her side when she passed. I didn't want her to be alone. She wasn't alone, she passed seamlessly from my love to Daddy's.

You all have your special memories with her to treasure and enjoy. I hope you all can take comfort from knowing our Mother and Grandmother is at peace.

May God Grant You All the Righteous Desires of Your Heart,

With love,

Your Mom, Aunt Megs, Grandma, or just Margaret

