

## Chapter LVI

### Patriarch

August 28, 1969 – February 23, 1970

When Sheffield and Geoff returned that afternoon, his parents and grandmother wanted to know about their day. Geoff was happy to tell them all about his new found friend, a friend that he would never know. Attending Camille's funeral was just what he needed, because he quit obsessing over wondering who the person was who belonged to the dead body that he had found in the rubble. Now that he knew, he was able to process the information and put everything into perspective. Once he had connected the dots, he was satisfied and was able to move on. That's just the way Geoff was. It had been obvious for sometime that he was a very analytical thinker.

The following Monday was Labor Day, which marked the unofficial end of summer. To celebrate, they had a picnic down in the pasture by the river. It was scaled back considerably from previous years with just Sheffield, Ramona, and Craig's family. Two days later, Craig's kids went back to school.

Sheffield turned his attention to putting up the third crop hay. He mowed it on Tuesday and raked it on Wednesday. Conditions were just right and he baled it on Friday and Saturday mornings. With the help of Craig and the grandkids, it was all in the stack by Saturday evening. Later in September, Sheffield and Ramona made a trip to Denison to spend a few days with Harvey and Marcella

During the fall, the pile of limbs and branches had dried sufficient to burn them. One crisp Monday evening in mid October Sheffield set it on fire. With Ramona and Craig's family gathered around. At first it burned so hot that everyone had to stand back as the flames shot high into the air. Once it began to die down, they moved in closer and roasted some hotdogs. Eventually it was a pile of coals and embers, perfect for toasting marshmallows.

During the middle of November, Sheffield followed the mission of Apollo 12 with its all Navy crew, beginning with the launch on Monday the 14<sup>th</sup>.

It just so happened that at the same time a movie about a space saga was playing in the theaters. On Friday night, Sheffield, Ramona, and Craig's family went to see *Marooned*, about the crew of an Apollo spacecraft who were stranded in space when the main engine failed to ignite after separating from a space station and the effort to rescue them.

Sheffield watched the lunar landing on television on Wednesday the 19<sup>th</sup>. Unfortunately, the live film footage from the moon was abruptly ended when the astronaut setting up the TV camera inadvertently pointed it directly at the sun, which rendered the camera inoperable. As it was, the second moon landing didn't get nearly as much coverage as the first one had. Regardless, Sheffield followed it closely with what coverage was available.

As Thanksgiving approached, Sheffield got things around the ranch ready for winter. It was a lot

easier with fewer cows to take care of.

That year was the year to get together for Thanksgiving since the kids came for Christmas the year before. Two years ago Norma had hosted it, so this time it was Janet's turn, even though her house wasn't very big.

On Monday the 24<sup>th</sup>, Sheffield and Ramona took off in the Stagewing and flew to Utah. Since there was snow on the ground, they landed at the airport in Logan, where Jerry met them and took them home. Sheffield missed watching the splashdown of Apollo 12 earlier that day, but he did get to see it on the evening news.

Wesley and Andrea had school on Tuesday and a half a day on Wednesday. Ramona watched Pearl and helped Janet get things ready for Thanksgiving. Pearl was lively little girl and was into everything. She jabbered ninety miles and hour but it was impossible to make out what she was tiring to say. Her overly exaggerated gestures didn't help much either.

On Tuesday evening, they went over to Wayne and Gail's to visit with them and Morris and Sheila, who had come out from Logan. Then on Wednesday, Craig and his family flew out in his Bonaza. Because of bad weather across Nebraska, they had to fly well to the south, which took them longer. The sun had just gone down when they landed in Logan. Janet's house was crowed but they fit everyone in that night.

With the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade on the television, the kitchen was busy place. Janet, Ramona, Edith, and Gean were busy getting things ready. There wasn't any room for anyone else, so the men stayed out of the way. Their job was go over to church and bring home a banquet table and some folding chairs. That didn't take very long, but they managed to stretch it out. Norma and Wade and their family arrived around elven thirty and dinner was at one o'clock.

It was very tight squeeze in the old farm house as they gathered around the table to give thanks for their bounteous blessings. The patriarch of the clan said it best, "What more is there to be more thankful for than to all be together, all eighteen of us."

There was plenty of food for everyone with leftovers for later. And for desert, Norma had brought some pumpkin pies with her that she had made the day before. That night, Janet had to get real creative as where to put everyone. To make it a little easier, Sheffield and Ramona stayed with Wayne and Gail.

On Friday morning Gean and Grandma Gover watched the grandkids so Sheffield and Ramona could attend they temple with their kids. Again that night Sheffield and Ramona stayed with Wayne and Gail to make room in Janet's house.

When everyone went home on Saturday, Sheffield and Ramona stayed the rest of the weekend and then on Monday they went to stay with Norma and Wade for a few days. Before going home, they made a side trip over to Boise on the 3<sup>rd</sup> to see Hank and Teri Terry and spent the night. As Hank had promised,

they served up some of the pheasant that he had bagged the day before. It didn't taste like chicken, but had more of a game taste. The closest thing Sheffield could compare it to was duck, which he had eaten on occasion. Hank packed some pheasant in ice in a styrofoam cooler that kept it cold on the flight home.

It was a week later than usual, but on Friday Sheffield and Ramona and Craig and his family went up to the cabin to get their Christmas trees. It snowed that night, which added a bit of nostalgia to getting their trees the next morning. With their trees in the back of Sheffield's old pickup, they came down off the mountain and spent the rest of the day getting decorated for Christmas.

Sunday was Sheffield's seventy first birthday. That afternoon, Craig and Edith invited them over for Sunday dinner and birthday cake and ice cream. Both Norma and Janet called to wish him a happy birthday. As with each December 7<sup>th</sup>, Sheffield couldn't help but reflect on all of the significance that date had. Had she lived, his beloved Geannie would have been celebrating her seventy first birthday as well and it would have been their fortyeight wedding anniversary. That day marked twenty eight years that they had been gone. He often wondered how life would have been had she and the kids lived, but then. . . .

He came to the same conclusion that he had always come to when he wondered such things. Life couldn't be any better with them than it was. He was the patriarch of his second family which included Ramona, their three adopted children, Craig, Norma, and Janet and their spouses, and twelve grandchildren, including Janet's Anthony who only lived one day. One day his family was sure to grow to include great grandchildren.

He took comfort in the hope that not only would they be his for eternity, but so would his first family that had been taken away from him all those years ago. And with that hope, he knew that one day he would be rejoining Geannie.

The following Sunday, they attended church in the new Stake Center for the very first time, as it was now complete and ready for use. As the completion of the building approached, Sheffield had been involved in things on the District Counsel that helped pave the way for the district to become a stake. They even had a date. It would take place on the 11<sup>th</sup> of next month. With that, the entire Virginia West District vibrated with excitement for what it meant.

But first there were the holidays. Sheffield and Ramona had just spent Thanksgiving with the kids and grandkids out west and the year before they had come home. That left them to share Christmas with Craig and his family. They got up early Christmas morning and walked up the road to their house to watch the grandkids open their presents. At their ages, Gean and Geoff didn't exactly exude the childlike magic of Christmas. Even with Todd who was eleven and Tina, who was nine, it wasn't quite the same as when they were little.

They stayed for Christmas dinner which they shared with Stirling and Mary Ann, who came over

around noon. Later in the day, Sheffield and Ramona went home and called Norma and Janet to talk to them and each of the grandkids.

In anticipation for what the new year held in store, the Virginia West District held a New Year's Eve dance for families at the new stake center. They went so far as to bring in a live orchestra, actually an eight piece mixed ensemble featuring strings and brass, plus a male and a female vocalist.

As the members of the district mingled, there was a lot of talk and speculation as to what was going to take place and who would be what. More than one person told Sheffield that they thought that he was going to be the stake president because of his prior leadership experience.

All he said in response was, "That will be the day." He didn't let himself get caught up in speculation and he certainly didn't aspire to anything. He never had, not in the navy and not in the church, although things seemed to come his way.

The dance was well attended, and the ensemble was quite good. They were quite versatile as well, capable of ranging from big band, to rock and roll, to country and western, so there was something of everyone to dance to.

While he and Ramona were on the floor, Craig and Edith moved up next to them. Edith let go of Craig and asked, "Uncle Sheffield, may I cut in?"

"Why certainly." Sheffield said as he switched partners, leaving Ramona to dance with her son.

A little while later, while Sheffield and Ramona were watching from the sidelines, Gean who had been kept busy by a number of young men, came over to them while ensemble was playing Proud Mary. "Hey Grandpa, Would you like to dance with me?"

Before he could answer her, she had taken him by the hand and lead him out on the dance floor. He had no idea how to dance to a fast song and didn't know what to do.

"Just shuffle your feet and sway with the music." she encouraged.

Sheffield looked around and then began moving his feet, bobbing his head, and swaying rather randomly.

"Yeah, now your getting it." she said.

When the song stopped, next up was "The Nearness of You". "Alright Gean." Sheffield said. "I danced that one with you. Now you dance this one with me."

He took her into the classic dance hold and asked, "Do you know the foxtrot?"

"Sort of."

"Just remember slow, slow, quick, quick and follow my lead."

Gean, who wouldn't be caught dead dancing with her father or brothers actually enjoyed dancing with her grandpa. When the song was over, she was again ready to make herself available to guys her age.

She walked with Sheffield back to where Ramona had been sitting and said, "Thanks Grandpa. That was fun."

Sheffield looked around to see where Ramona was. He chuckled when he saw her out on the floor with Geoff doing the swing to Light My Fire. The dace lasted until just after midnight, ending early by most standards. But after all this was a family activity with young children. Sheffield and Ramona took to the floor for the last dance as 1970 arrived.

As with every other new year, the cows were calving. With only ten cows, they had all had their calves by the end of the first week of January. Despite isolated scattered snow showers and temperatures hovering between the upper twenties for lows and the lower thirties for highs, the newborn calves were quite resilient and didn't seem to notice.

In addition to the cows and their new calves, he had the calves from the previous year and the horses. Roxy and Red were too old to ride anymore and had been retired. But Admiral and Blaze were still in the prime of their lives. Ramona still had her little brood of chickens that gave them enough eggs and some to share with Craig. Other than that, the only other animal at the Two Star Ranch was a stray cat that lived in the barn. It earned its keep by keeping the mice population under control. Even though they had been in the city limits for a year, the city hadn't encroached on them anymore that it already had.

The second weekend in January was district conference, the one that had everyone talking about for the last several weeks. On Saturday morning Sheffield received a call inviting him in for an interview with Elder Mark E. Petersen of the Council of the Twelve, who had been sent to organize the stake.

"Maybe those who say that you're going to be the stake president were right ." Ramona teased.

"I highly doubt that." Sheffield responded. "He's meeting with anyone who has been in leadership callings."

"I know. I was just giving you a hard time. Tell him hello for me."

Sheffield changed into his suit and was at the stake center at his appointed time. There was one other person waiting ahead of him when he got there. Then it was his turn and he was ushered into the office.

"Hello, President Brason." Elder Petersen said as he extended his hand. "It's good to see you again."

"Its good to see you too. Elder Petersen."

He turned to his companion on this assignment and said, "Elder Ashton, this is Brother Sheffield Brason. He's the former president of the Hawaii Mission. We got to know each other when I toured his mission two or three years ago."

Returning his attention to Sheffield, he said "Brother Brason, this is Elder Marvin J. Ashton, one of

our newest Assistants to the Twelve.”

Sheffield replied, “Its good to see you again too. We met when you accompanied Elder Hinckley to Hawaii, after we first got there. At the time you were in the Young Men's general presidency.”

“I'm sure we met then, but I'm sorry, I don't remember. I've met so many people over the years. I don't know how some of the brethren seem to remember everyone they've ever met.

“Well we did spend most of a week together.” Elder Petersen answered. “You know, you're the only mission president who personally flew me around on a mission tour.”

Then turning back to Elder Ashton he said, “Brother Brason was a Navy pilot before the Second World War and went on to serve with distinction as the captain of a ship and later as an Admiral.”

Then to Sheffield he said, “If I remember correctly, you have an incredible conversion story. Would you mind briefly sharing it with us?”

“Not at all.” Sheffield went on to give a very brief version of the account.

“Thank you, Brother Brason.” Elder Petersen said. “I see that you are currently serving on the district council. As you know, we are here to create the Roanoke Stake. It will be the four hundred and ninety ninth stake in the church. Our assignment is to find who the Lord wants as the stake president. That's why we're conducting these interviews. Tell us, in your opinion, who do you think we should consider.”

“Well.” Sheffield said. “Three names come to mind. Of course President Bennett, the District President would be one. The other two are Roger Rowan and Hyrum Fielding.”

“Anyone else?”

“Perhaps Nathan Little.”

“Thanks for the suggestions. We need to talk to as many men as possible so the Lord can show us who he wants. You know, several men have mentioned you. If it were to be you that the Lord calls, would you be willing to accept the call and serve.”

“Yes, of course. My entire life I have answered call after call to serve, whether it be in the Navy or in the Church. Not once did I seek them, nor do I now, but I am ever ready and willing to serve where I'm needed.”

“Thank you for your faithfulness Brother Brason. Let me just give you an idea as to what will take place. Once we find the stake president, after considerable prayer, we will issue the call and ask him to select his counselors so we can issue their calls. Then tomorrow morning in the general session of conference we will present them for a sustaining vote. Then after the meeting they will be set apart and the president will be given the keys to direct the work. You know how that goes from being a mission president.

“Then our work here will be done. The rest will be up to them. They will need to organize the stake by calling and setting apart the high council and stake auxiliaries. The branches will remain as they are until

the stake presidency submits the necessary paper work to the First Presidency for consideration for the branches to become wards, along with the name of who the bishops are to be. Once they are approved by Salt Lake, they will go ahead and extend a call to the bishop and his counselors and from there they will organize their wards.

“As you know, there is order to how things are done in the church. Nothing is done without the exercise of keys. I hold those keys and act under the direction of the First Presidency and tomorrow, I will confer the keys to the stake president, whoever it happens to be. Then, using those keys, he will proceed to organize the stake and the wards and branches.”

“That has always been a testimony to me that the church is divinely directed.” Sheffield said. “My father and brother were ministers and that was an element that seemed to be lacking. When I was investigating the Church, that was one of the things that really hit me.”

“Well, thank you for coming in President Brason. If we need to talk to you again, please be available. If not, hopefully we can visit again before we leave. Oh, and give my regards to Sister Brason.”

“Thank you, Elder Petesen, Elder Ashton. I almost forgot, Ramona asked me to tell you hello.”

At that Sheffield shook the hands of both general authorities and left the office. Their interview had taken a little more than the allotted time and there were three more men waiting for their interviews. He went home and told Ramona all about his meeting.

“What do you think, Babe?” she asked.

“I’m not sure, but I think in all of this, there is something for me to do once the dust settles.”

“Well, Dear whatever it is, I will support you all the way. Just like I’ve always done.”

“Thanks Sweetheart. That means a lot to me.”

The rest of the morning went by without a request for an additional interview. There was still nothing by the time he went to the afternoon leadership meeting. Later in the evening he and Ramona attended the evening session. After the meeting, he and Ramona had an opportunity to visit with Elder Petersen, recalling the time that he had spent with them in Hawaii.

When they got ready for bed that night Sheffield said, “Surely they have it all figured out by now. I think I’m off the hook.”

The next morning, Sheffield and Ramona were in attendance at the general session when Elder Petersen organized the Roanoke Stake. In his business, he released the current district presidency, who had served long and faithfully, and all of the district leadership. Then he presented the names of Steven Winder from Lynchburg as the stake president, Roger Rowan as the first counselor, and Alan Rose from Blacksburg as the second Counselor, along with Rupert Casper as the stake clerk and Thurman Kidder as the stake executive secretary, a new position that had just been implemented throughout the Church.

Sheffield knew these men well and was satisfied that they were the ones the Lord had called. He had served with Steve Winder on the district council. He was originally from Salt Lake and had vast leadership experience in the Church, including having served as a counselor in a stake presidency. Of course he had known Roger for many, many years. Alan Rose was the president of the Blacksburg Branch. And they also knew Rupert Casper very well. He was Edith's brother in law, married to her sister Misti, and was the son of Bill and Marge Casper. But he didn't know Brother Kidder. He and Ramona joined the rest of the congregation in raising their hands to sustain them.

Following his business, Elder Petersen explained what would take place next, much as he had explained it to Sheffield. He turned the time to the just released district presidency and the newly called stake presidency. They were followed by a number from the choir. Following the music, they heard from President Anderson, the mission president, Elder Ashton, and Elder Petersen was the concluding speakers. At the end of his remarks, he dedicated the building, something that most people hadn't considered in the excitement generated by their anticipation of the creation of the new stake.

The following Wednesday night would have been Sheffield's district council meeting, but since the Virginia West District no longer existed, there was no meeting. Instead the stake presidency was busy organizing the stake. That didn't mean that Sheffield had the night off. Brother Kidder had called the night before to invite Sheffield and Ramona in for an interview. Sheffield had a pretty good idea what it was about. He was right. They called him to serve on the High Council, a call that he willingly accepted and carried with it the same responsibilities that he previously had.

The following Sunday in Sacrament Meeting, Roger Rowan who was a member of the Salem Branch, was presiding as member of the stake presidency. After the introduction, he asked for a moment to make an announcement.

"Brothers and Sisters," he began. "It is with great sadness that I inform you that our beloved Prophet, President David O. McKay passed away earlier today. Please remember his family and the Brethren in your prayers." That is all he said and sat down.

Instantly a feeling of sadness fell over the congregation. For many, he was the only President of the Church that they had known, having served as such for nearly nineteen years. Sheffield and Ramona always fondly remembered meeting him when he ordained Sheffield a high priest and set him apart as the President of the Hawaii Mission.

Despite the sad news, the meeting went on. Following the opening hymn and invocation, President Rowan had further business to conduct. He presented the names of the newly called high council, including Sheffield's for a sustaining vote. Several men were also presented to be ordained high priests. After the sacrament, the speakers who had been asked to speak each set aside their prepared remarks and instead



spoke of their remembrances of President McKay.

The following Wednesday, Sheffield attended his first high council meeting, although it wasn't their usual night. But in organizing the stake, there was a lot of business to attend to. President Winder told them that they had sent the requests for the wards and bishops to Salt Lake, but that they expected a delay in getting approval due to the pending reorganization of the First Presidency. That night their business included approving the stake auxiliary presidents, high priest group leaders in each branch, the stake seventies quorum presidency, and a number of men to be ordained seventies and high priests. Because of all of that and much more, it was quite late when he got home. Ramona had already gone to bed and she barely groaned when he climbed into bed next to her. The next day was their twenty sixth wedding anniversary.

The following Sunday, it was announced in church that the First Presidency had been reorganized. As expected, the ninety three year old Joseph Fielding Smith was the new President of the Church. Harold B. Lee, who Sheffield and Ramona had met in Hawaii when he came to tour the mission, was the First Counselor, and President N. Eldon Tanner, who they also knew, was retained as the Second Counselor.

Over the next few weeks, the organization of the stake continued to unfold. Once the First Presidency had been reorganization, the approvals for the wards and bishops were received. During their high council meeting on the third Tuesday in February, the names of the new bishops were revealed and the names counselors they had recommended were presented for approval. Not all of the bishops were the current branch presidents. One case was that of the Salem Branch. Sheffield smiled with great satisfaction that Phil Moncur was to be the Bishop.

Sheffield first met Phil when he had been recalled to active duty during the Korean War. Phil was his personal assistant, like Morris Gover had been years earlier. He served under Sheffield until he retired from the Navy for the second time. While overseas, Phil became interested in the church through Sheffield's example and began investigating it. He wrote to his wife, Anita, telling her her about it and suggested that she look into it too. When Sheffield was assigned to Washington, Anita moved to Washington to be with her husband and they continued to investigate the church together. It wasn't long after that in July of 1952 that they were both baptized by Sheffield.

Phil resigned his commission in the Navy at the same time that Sheffield retired. Since they had been ostracized by both of their families when they joined the church, they decided to move to Salem to settle. They came without a job or a place to live. He immediately started looking for work and soon had two offers and took a job with the City of Salem as the assistant city manager. Ramona had a little house in Salem that she thought was just right for them. They fell in love with it when she showed it to them and they agreed to buy it on the spot.

At the time, they had two children; their daughter Maureen was five years old, and their son Pete was only about six months old. Since then they had another daughter, Allison, about two years later. Pete and Allison were the same age as Gean and Geoff. In fact, Pete was on one of the boys who were vying for Gean's attention.

During the intervening years, they sold their home and bought a bigger one, also in Salem. Eventually Phil left his job with the city to go to work for Roanoke College where he was now the Director of Public Relations.

When Sheffield served as the president of the Salem Branch, Phil had been his branch clerk. At the time, he was serving as the first counselor in the branch presidency, a position that he had served in for about two years. And now he was going to be the first bishop of the Salem Ward.

Sheffield and Ramona had always been close to Phil and Anita, and had kept in touch with them while they were on their mission. And so, that was the story behind the smile on Sheffield's face.

Sheffield's smile broadened all the more when Craig's name was presented as Bishop Moncur's first counselor. All of this, along with something that most people weren't expecting, would be taken care of on Sunday. Sheffield did tell Ramona about Craig, but that was all. She would have to wait to find out the rest on Sunday along with everyone else.

As Sheffield expected, Craig and Edith received a call from Brother Kidder to meet with the stake presidency on Sunday after the morning meetings. But what he didn't expect was that he and Ramona were also asked to meet with them. If it had been a calling for Ramona in one of the auxiliary presidencies, he would have known about it. Their appointments were back to back, with Craig going first.

When he came out of the office he looked like a deer with its eyes caught in the headlights. He had been serving as the Elders Quorum President for nearly three years. He had no idea that this was coming. He asked Sheffield if he would do the honor of ordaining him a high priest. Of course he agreed.

Next Sheffield and Ramona went into the office. Seated around the desk were President Winder, President Rowan, and President Rose. To one side was Rupert Casper and to the other side was Brother Kidder. After a round of hand shakes, Sheffield and Ramona were seated.

"So what do you think about Craig?" Roger asked.

"I think he will do a great job." Ramona answered.

"Now Brother Brason," President Winder said after a little small talk, "We have a something very special for you. We have spent a lot of time on our knees seeking the Lord's direction as we have sought who he wanted to serve where. So accordingly, we submitted your name to the Quorum of the Twelve and they have approved our request. I have here a letter signed by Spencer W. Kimball, the acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve, authorizing me to extend a call to you to serve as our stake patriarch. Will you

accept this call from the Lord?"

Sheffield's face went white and he began to tremble. Sheffield knew enough about the calling to know the awesome weight that came with it. A million things ran through his mind in an instant. Among them were: How will I know what to tell people? Where can I turn for help? Are you sure you have the right person?

Then, as had been the case with him on so many occasions, the calming influence of the Spirit came over him. "You have never been left to yourself in the past, nor shall you be now." He set aside his questions and remembered so many times when he had been lead by the Spirit to do or say what was needed at the moment.

After what seemed like a long time to Sheffield but was only a split second he responded, "Yes, of course. I'll accept."

President Winder turned to Ramona and asked, "Will you support your husband in this calling?"

Her answer was a simple, "Yes."

"Very good. We gave this a great deal of consideration and it was very clearly made known to us that you were who we were to recommend and the Council of the Twelve agreed. They sent along these instructions for us to give you."

Rupert handed Sheffield a thin manila envelope.

"That's it?" Sheffield asked as he looked inside.

"That's everything you'll need. That and a lot of prayer and pondering. Trust me, you'll come to know what you need to do. Now, we'll present you for a sustaining vote in all of the meetings through out the stake this afternoon. Then I am authorized to ordain you as patriarch and set you apart to function within the stake. Of course, this means that we will also need to release you from the high council. Do you have any other questions?"

"No not at the moment, but I'm sure I will."

"Feel free to call me any time and I'll do what I can to help you. And thank you for accepting."

President Winder stood to shake Sheffield's hand.

Sheffield and Ramona stood up, as did the other men. After another round of hand shakes, Sheffield and Ramona left the office. Craig and Edith had already left to go home. All the way home, Sheffield didn't say a word as he was deep in thought. Ramona understood and didn't attempt to force a conversation.

When they got home, all he said was, "Don't set a place for me." and disappeared into the study and closed the door.

Ramona knew what he was doing. She could hear his muffled voice through the door and wondered who he was talking to.

He spent the next three hours either on his knees in prayer or reading from the scriptures. Then he pulled out his own patriarchal blessing and read it, and then read it again. "You have the gift of prophesy and revelation. It will guide you in what you shall be called upon to do in the Lord's kingdom. With this gift, you shall impart to others the course in life that they are to follow."

All of a sudden he understood what that was saying. He had always assumed it applied to when he was the branch president and later a mission president. He had understood it to apply to the counsel that he gave people, and it did. But now it took on a much deeper meaning.

He read on, "You have also been given the gift of the ministering of angels. Angels shall attend you and bear you up. Sometimes you will not be aware of them. From time to time your eyes shall be opened that you may see. Some of these angels may be as mortal as yourself, others will come to you from beyond the veil."

He paused, remembering with clarity the time that Geannie had appeared to he and Ramona to tell them that they were about to discover what she had been searching for. He remembered the many times that he had felt her presence.

"If there was ever a time I needed a ministering angel, its now." Sheffield said out loud.

Then out of nowhere, Geannie was there in the room standing before him in the air. She was dressed in a long white gown and glowed like the angel that she literally was. Her beauty was beyond any image of her that was captured in his memory.

"Hi flyboy." she smiled down on him.

"Geannie. Am I glad to see you. I need your help."

"That's why I'm here. I've been sent to give you assurance and help you understand what you need."

"So you're aware of what I'm wrestling with?"

"Yes, I am. You need to understand that this is something that you were foreordained to, just like everything else you have been asked to do. Don't doubt or underestimate yourself, because you have a gift within you that will allow you to function in this capacity. Up until now, you have only had a taste of what you are capable of."

"But..."

"But what?" Geannie countered, perceiving what he was going to say. "You don't need to know the end from the beginning. What you will be given won't be for you. It will be given to you what each person who will come to you will need and it will be given in a manner that they will come to know and understand. Your job is to deliver the message, not understand or interpret it."

"I see." Sheffield acknowledged. "That was one of the things that I was struggling with."

"I know."

“Of course you did. You always seemed to know. That's why I was so lost without you.”

“And that is why I guided you to Ramona. It took you a while to figure it out. You don't remember this, but while you were laying on the deck of the Reprisal that day off Salerno, I came to you. I was allowed to show you what would be so you could choose to come back with me or remain in mortality. What I showed you involved Ramona, Craig, Norma, and Janet. What I showed you involved everything you have done up until this point and until the day that I shall come for you and you can rejoin me.

“At that time you made your choice and you lived to fulfill those things and this is one of those things. It was only given to you for that specific choice and nothing more. That's why you have no memory of it. It would not have been wrong if you had chose to come with me right then and there and it would not have been counted against you.

“But you chose to fulfill the full measure of your creation and for that you shall be greatly blessed and will greatly bless countless others. You already have and there are countless more who shall be blessed by you in a very special way.

“Do you remember when you used to take me flying?”

“Of course.”

“Close your eyes.”

“Why?”

“Just close your eyes Admiral.”

Sheffield's did as he was told and instantly, he found himself soaring through the clouds. He glanced over to see Geannie holding his hand. All of a sudden, they swooped down out the clouds into the clear skies directly above the ranch. He could see the house and barn. He could see the cows in the corral. His vision penetrated the roof and the structure of the house until he could see Ramona. They zipped right over and passed over Craig's house. Likewise, he saw him and his family. Their lives collectively passed before his eyes and he saw grandchildren with their spouses and their children. In an instant they were over Norma's home in Idaho and he saw the same thing, and an instant latter, he had the same experience with Janet's family in Utah.

Then up they flew, high above the earth and back into the clouds. High and higher they went, faster than a rocket. Then ever so gently they touched down on a cloud. “There is someone else I want you to see.” she said.

Then out of the mist of the cloud stepped Sandy, Austin, and Charles Emmett. They smiled but didn't say a word. Then Geannie looked down and an opening appeared in the cloud and with telescopic vision he saw Ramona and the children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren all gathered together, but he was not with them. Then without a word, Geannie let go of his hand. Without her touch, he began falling, spiraling

down towards the earth.

“You can open your eyes now.” Geannie said.

He opened them to find himself exactly where he had been.

“Did you enjoy the ride, flyboy?”

“Man, what a ride. What was that all about?”

“Just glimpse of what you chose.”

“Will I be permitted to remember any of this?”

“Everything, except that last little part. That was just a little bonus. But remember what I have told you and think upon it when you feel overwhelmed or doubtful and it will buoy you up. My time is up and I have to leave you now. But I promise, when it is your time, I will return for you. But between now and then I won't be far removed and will be watching over you. Who knows, perhaps you will see me again sometime. Above everything I have said, remember this, I loved you, I still love you, and will love you forever.” And then as suddenly as she had come, she was gone.

Sheffield sat there pondering what had just taken place. Every bit of it was etched into his memory, except for the instant that he had his eyes closed. After a few minutes of reflection, he opened the envelope that he had been given and read it again. This time he had a greater understanding of what it meant.

When he came out of the room, his countenance still glowed.

“She was here, wasn't she?” Ramona asked.

“Yes. She was.”

“Well, what did Geannie tell you.”

Sheffield rehearsed to her the entire conversation. When he finished, Ramona said, “I think this is something that we should keep just between you and me.”

“I agree.” Sheffield said and then added. “I think I will be up to the task.”

That morning it was announced that the Roanoke and Salem Branches would be meeting together in a combined sacrament meeting at five thirty that afternoon at the stake center. Sheffield was privy to what it was all about, but it didn't take long for others to speculate about what it might mean.

Sheffield and Ramona went a little early in order to get a good seat. Seated on the stand were the President Winder and Roger Rowan and the presidencies of both branches. Roger stood and went to the pulpit to conduct the meeting. He introduced the opening hymn and invocation. Dispensing with the business portion of the meeting until later, they went right into the sacrament. With both branches there were a lot of people in attendance, bolstered by curiosity. Even with that many people, the Aaronic Priesthood administered the sacrament in a timely manner.

Then President Winder came to the pulpit. "Brothers and Sisters," he began. "It has now been six weeks since the stake was organized. During that time, all of the stake positions have been staffed and the auxiliaries and High Priest Groups and the Stake Quorum of Seventy are up and functioning. There is just a little fine tuning that remains and we shall take care of that here.

"He had hoped to have had the wards organized by now, but that was delayed by the reorganization of the First Presidency. We now have the approval to proceed, and that is that is the purpose of this meeting this afternoon. We have just come from Blacksburg and can report that the Blacksburg Branch is now the Blacksburg Ward. We note President Rose's absence. He is finishing up some business there and will be joining us shortly.

"Before I go any further, I shall first conduct some stake business, the same business that we presented to the Blacksburg Ward earlier. At this time we extend a release to Brother Sheffield Brason from the High Council. All those who wish to join us in thanking him for his service, please indicate by raising your right hand."

He paused while the congregation raised their hands. Then he continued, "Brother Brason's time on the High Council was brief, but prior to that he had served on the district Council. Now Brother Brason would you please stand. Brother Brason has been recommended to the Council of the Twelve and has received a very special calling. Acting under the direction of Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, I present for your sustaining vote Brother Sheffield Brason to serve as our Stake Patriarch. All in favor please manifest it by the usual sign."

As near as anyone could tell, every hand went up.

"Any opposed please manifest it by the same sign."

Not one hand went up.

"Thank you Brothers and Sisters. As you know, having a stake patriarch is one of the blessings that comes with being a stake in Zion. Up until now, we have not had that blessing. Anyone who desires to receive their patriarchal blessing, contact your bishops, who will be sustained shortly, for an interview. Then contact Brother Brason to schedule an appointment.

"Now in other business..." President Winder presented Nathan Little as Sheffield's replacement on the high council and a number of men to be ordained high priests, including Craig and Phil Moncur. At the conclusion, he continued, "Thank you. That concludes our stake business.

"Now for what you all have come for. You might be wondering why we asked that both the Roanoke and Salem Branches meet together this afternoon. As you can imagine, we've had a busy day and still need to go over to Lynchburg when we're are finished here. So it just made sense to kill two birds with one stone, or in this case three."

Many caught on immediately to what he was getting to and a low, muffled rumble rolled through the chapel and over flow. There were some who had guessed right. The rest were caught off guard.

President Winder continued, "Will all of those in the Roanoke Branch who live south of the Roanoke River please stand and remain standing." He paused for just a moment. "Now will all of those in Salem Branch who live south of the city limits or more than four miles south of Interstate Eighty One please stand." Again he paused. "You now reside in the Roanoke Second Ward." He proceeded to present the bishopric of the new new ward. After they were sustained he continued, "Thank you. You will meet in the Grandin Building. You may be seated."

When he had concluded with them, he asked, "Now will the rest of the Roanoke Branch please stand... You are now the Roanoke First Ward." He went on to release the current branch presidency and presented their their new bishopric for a sustaining vote. "You will meet in this building. Thank you. You may be seated.

"May I have the rest of the Salem Branch stand.... you are now the Salem Ward." After the same manner he released the current branch presidency. "Now, will Brother Philip Moncur please stand.... Brother Moncur has been presented to and approved by the First Presidency to serve as the Bishop of the Salem Ward. All those who can support Bishop Moncur in this calling please manifest it.... Any apposed. Thank you. Brother Craig Braosn, will you pleas stand.... Brother Craig Taylor Braosn has been called to serve as the first counselor to Bishop Moncur. All in favor, please manifest it.... Any apposed?" He went on to sustain the second counselor, ward clerk, and the ward executive secretary. After they were sustained he continued, "You will continue to meet in this building, You may now be seated.

"Thank you for your sustaining vote. Now it will be up to the bishoprics of the three wards to fill the ward positions. Please continue to function in your current callings until then to help make the transition. What has taken place here this afternoon will be a blessing in your lives. A division is never easy to adjust to, but you will soon see the blessings as more people will have the opportunity to serve. Our membership will continue to grow, and I anticipate that in not too may years these three wards will become four. By the time we're through with our business in Lynchburg this evening, we will have five wards in the stake. The rest of the branches will remain as they are until they have grown sufficiently."

In the time remaining, he called upon the two branch presidents and the three new bishops to say a few words. That amounted to four men as the former president of the Roanoke Branch was now the bishop of the Roanoke 1<sup>st</sup> Ward. At the conclusion of the meeting, President Rowan announced the closing hymn and benediction.

After the meeting, the three new bishoprics and their families were directed to the Relief Society room to be set apart. First President Winder Set apart the three new bishops. Two of them first



needed to be ordained high priests. When it came to Phil, he had asked for Sheffield ordained him.

Then President Winder said, "I have a minute before I need to leave for Lynchburg, If I'm late, President Rose can start without me. Brother Brason, since your family is already here, why don't I take care of you now. Come up here and take a seat."

Sheffield stood up and moved to the front of the room and sat down. President Winder assisted by Roger, placed their hands on his head and proceeded to ordain Sheffield a patriarch and set him apart to serve as the patriarch of the Roanoke Stake and gave him a beautiful blessing of guidance and instruction.

After Sheffield's ordination, President Winder excused himself to go to Lynchburg, leaving Roger and Brother Little to set apart the rest. When it came time for Craig to be set apart, first Sheffield ordained him a high priest.

When it was all over but the hugs and handshakes, Ramona said to Craig and Edith, "Since its Washington's Birthday, I have two cherry pies and some vanilla ice cream at home, why don't you stop by on your way home."

While having pie and ice cream, they called both Norma and Janet to tell them about what had transpired during the eventful day.

"Grandpa," Gean asked, "can I be the first one to get my patriarchal blessing from you?"

"Why yes, Sweetheart." he answered. "I'd love nothing more than that. Make an appointment with Phil, I mean Bishop Moncur and get your recommend and I'll put you at the very top of my list. I have a feeling that I'm going to be busy at first. I'm sure there are a lot of folks in the stake who haven't had their blessing yet."

After pie and ice cream and visiting, Craig and his family went home, leaving Sheffield and Ramona to get ready for bed. Before getting in bed, they prayed together before having their individual prayers. Sheffield's was longer than usual. When he climbed into bed, he reflected on all that had happened that day, including his visitation form Geannie.

The next morning, Ramona asked, "How did you sleep, Babe?"

"Pretty good." he said. "Except I had a strange dream about falling out of the sky. Speaking of the sky, after breakfast I'm going up in the Staggerwing."

"Where are you going?"

"Nowhere in particular. I just need time to think and get my bearings on what I need to do."

"I understand." Ramona agreed.

So after breakfast. Sheffield took off from his landing strip. He mostly just circled around the area. He used the time to think and to pray and to listen to inspiration. At one point he shut off the engine and simply glided with the wind. There was enough of an up draft to keep his altitude. In the quiet solitude he

began to receive the direction that he was seeking. After several minutes of gliding, he started the engine again. He wasn't ready to come down just yet, so he started up through the Shenandoah Valley.

“How about taking me for a ride, Flyboy.”

Startled, Sheffield looked to see Geannie sitting beside him.

“I think you're beginning to get it, Curly.” she said. “You'll do just fine.” And then she was gone again.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Roanoke Stake was created on January 11, 1970 as the 499<sup>th</sup> stake of the Church by Elder Mark E. Petersen of Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Everything else related here, including the involvement of Elder Marvin J. Ashton, who at the time was an Assistant to the Twelve, and the stake presidency is fictional. The timing of the completion of the stake center is also fictional. President Arthur S. Anderson was the president of the Central Atlantic States Mission at the time.

Likewise the division of the wards, boundaries, and leadership are all fictional. At some point in time there was actually Roanoke 2<sup>nd</sup> Ward.

For the Story of Phil and Anita Moncur's conversion, see New Beginnings, Chapter 38 and Chapter 40.