



# Old but ever new

Laurie Oswald Robinson

*I want to be  
just like you  
when I grow  
up—old but  
ever new*

**T**he blue eyes of my 90-year-old dad, Paul Oswald, twinkled with delight. He was pleased to offer me coffee in his new home, an apartment at Kidron Bethel Retirement Village in North Newton, Kansas. Just a few days before, our family helped him move into the apartment after he had left Manson, Iowa, where he lived for almost 75 years.

When he was 18, he left his boyhood home in Beemer, Nebraska, to shuck corn in Iowa. He could get four dollars a day in Iowa doing the same thing for only a dollar a day in Nebraska. By making the move, he could send money home to his family, caught in the dust-bowl depression days. Manson is where he met my mother, the late Dorothy Egli Oswald. She was the daughter of the late John O. Egli, owner of a John Deere farm implement store. Soon Dad was working for Grandpa and dating her. They married and raised a family of five kids, as Dad took over the successful business.

As the baby daughter who lived in Newton, Kansas, a few minutes from his apartment, I watched his new life unfold into yet another adventure. And true to form, he was not about to stop adventuring now.

“Laurie, I have been praying ever since I got here that God would show me what my new mission will be.”

Amused but proud of my never-say-die father, I said, “So has God talked back to you yet?” I didn’t expect an answer. But neither had I expected Dad would think about mission just after a major transition. Wasn’t it time for him to rest awhile?

“I don’t just want to sit here and rot,” he teased. “I guess God will show me in time.”

“Well, at least give God a few days!”

It didn’t take long for me to see that God and Dad didn’t need my help. Soon Dad was walking a couple miles a day about five times a week, golfing every day the weather was fit, and making new friends. He visited different congregations in order to find the one that felt right. And he volunteered on Monday mornings at the nearby Mennonite Central Committee regional office to bale clothes, can meat, and anything else that was needed.

If that weren’t enough, he helped Al and me to navigate through rocky marital waters. Al and I struggled financially due to my new freelance business which hadn’t taken root yet. And we struggled emotionally over the loss of a foster child who had been in our care for two and a half years. He gifted us with meals at our favorite restaurants. He helped us take boxes of old stuff to the local Et Cetera Shop and to the city dump. He befriended Al and lavished him with fatherly concern, as they sat down in the basement to watch golf.

Overcome with his generosity, I asked one day, “Dad, why are you doing all of this for us?” It’s not that my dad hadn’t been generous to me all his life. But his extra-attentive love seemed above and beyond even what a good father gives.

“After I asked God what my new mission would be, I didn’t have to look far, did I?” He grinned and pulled me into the embrace of an old man, forever the father who wanted to provide for his daughter. As my cheeks became wet with gratitude, I said to myself, *I want to be just like you when I grow up—old but ever new.* 

