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MY MEMOIRS

RECOLLECTIONS OF PIONEER LIFE

IN BEAR LAKE VALLEY

Written by Walter Edward Clark

Chapter XII

MY TWO SWEETHEARTS

As previously stated, Violet Catherine Christensen and I were married on March 3, 1920. Violet's four grandparents were born in Demark. She is the daughter of Joseph M. Christensen and Emma Christensen (Christiansen). She is the third of three daughters. She was born March 12, 1892, at St. Johns, Arizona. Three years and three months later, her mother died, on the 3rd of June, 1895.

Joseph Christensen, in answer to a call, had moved to Arizona to help colonize. He was a carpenter and helped build dams, bridges, and houses. He contracted a fever which kept re-occurring so he was released to return to Farmington. His unmarried sister, Mary, lived with him and helped with the children. The three were living together when I met Violet. Violet's father packed up the dishes and cooking utensils for his daughter to start housekeeping. He did the same for his two older daughters. Violet also had a sewing machine. She was a good cook and seamstress.

Violet was a normal graduate from the University of Utah. She was accepted in the community and was soon a member of a mixed quartet. She had

been a Y.W.M.I.A. President and was a natural leader with a special gift in dramatics. She served as a drama director and supervised several plays. After we returned from college she gave a cutting of a three-act play, "The Return of Peter Grimm," which she had memorized in a dramatic class. She performed it in both Georgetown and Montpelier without a prompter.

When we were first married we moved into the front two rooms of Mother's house. I had a hired man to care for the cattle. I missed one week of teaching. The summer of 1919 had been frosty and the crops were very light. The following winter was long and corn was being imported into Bear Lake County. In the spring of 1920, the hillsides were bare in February. But in March it started to snow and the snow remained on the ground until May. The school board gave me permission to discontinue teaching, and Violet, a teacher of seven years' experience, completed my term. A depression followed that winter. Our Ford was placed on blocks the fall of 1919 and remained there until the spring of 1921. We had no money to buy a license or gas.

After three years of married life we moved to Provo for three years to attend B.Y.U. Wayne was born our second winter in Provo, on January 18, 1925. We returned to Georgetown for the summers. One summer we lived in the log, winter home of Milton Smith's. The third and last winter at B.Y.U. we lived in the Baird home. Aunt Ellen, Mother's sister, had given up cooking for boarders, and we took boarders. One was Ross Dickson who came to Georgetown at my request, and followed me as high school principal. Chestina and Orrin Baird also

stayed with us.

After graduation in June, 1926, we returned to Georgetown. Dean Nuttal had asked if I would accept employment in the Paul, Idaho school system, but I seemed to have no interest. John C. Swensen asked if he could recommend me as an assistant to an L.D.S. professor who was devoting of his time to sociology and to psychology in an Oregon University. I was to help in sociology and continue my education. I was consented, but just before I went to Georgetown to help a week with seeding crops, word was received that the professor had transferred to the east and the school was cancelling the offer and employing a young Ph. D man to devote full time to sociology. When the clerk of the Georgetown school board asked if I would come home and try to create an interest in education, I accepted the challenge.

When we returned to Georgetown we moved into Mother's house. It was here that Alan was born on July 15, 1928. The winter of 1926-27 Annie Starr boarded with us. Later Ross Dickson boarded with us. This home was sold to LeGrand Clark and we moved in a house on 1st West belonging to Joseph Bee. In 1929 we built a brick home. In mid-summer we moved into the basement, and in the fall onto the main floor.

In January, 1930, Violet discovered a growth on her breast. She suspected the trouble. Our doctor recommended an operation which revealed the cancer had spread. We went directly from the hospital in Montpelier to Idaho Falls for x-ray treatment. It was, at that time, the best x-ray center in the Rocky Mountain area. When we were advised to come back at a future date, I realized that a cure was not likely. When the Idaho Falls equipment became available because of managerial problems we transferred to Salt Lake City for several treatments, extending from a week to ten days. Violet stayed with her father and his sister Mary.

Violet would go to Salt Lake City in the morning and go to the temple and then take the treatment in the afternoon. Wayne and Alan remained in Georgetown with me and my mother. On one trip

when I went for Violet I took the boys. Alan did not know her. She did look worse. She cried and said, "My baby doesn't know me." She passed away November 4, 1930.

I have always been a sound sleeper, but at times I have dreams. Most are warnings of possible danger, as the dream of being dragged by a horse. Most of my dreams consisted of run-a-ways and a falling of the ricker teeeth, all of which have happened, but without anyone being hurt. Many of my problems have been solved in a dream. Most are in detail, but the experiences I will relate next were very different.

Not many weeks after Violet's death I woke with a start and the distinct thought was that Violet had come back to see how her children were. It was a long time before my heart was back to a normal beat. A few weeks later she seemed to be in the room, dressed in white. I wanted to embrace her, but she seemed to say, "Not now." From then on I remember her with a smile on her face. From the time of her death until then I remembered only the lines of suffering the undertaker could not erase.

The load was not easier to carry. I have no idea how many times I have saddled my horse and gone to the field to turn water or fix a fence in an effort to get my attention on something other than my loneliness. I continued to teach school and work on the farm. One day I asked John Hoff, a widower, if time erased the burden any, and the tears rolled down his cheek as he replied, "It gets worse." I was younger than he and had more to occupy my time, but found what he said to be true.

February 22, 1932, a school holiday came on Monday. My sister, Rhoda, asked me to come to Salt Lake City on a Friday evening and meet her the next day at the home of our cousin, Julia Clark Wunderly. My sister had two friends, a missionary companion, and her teacher in nurse's training she wanted me to meet. When I entered Julia's home I was introduced to Lela Willett, who was Rhoda's teacher. I had the advantage of knowing who she was. A few minutes later she laughed. I experienced something I thought impossible. My "heart

stings” vibrated in tune to that laugh.

The next evening I went with Rhoda to visit her missionary companion but I had no interest in her missionary friend. In fact, I had a guilty feeling of not being true to the woman I wanted as a companion. A later experience convinced me my feeling at first meeting was not infatuation, but love.

October 3, 1932, Lela and I attended a Saturday morning session of Conference in the Tabernacle on Temple Square, then went up a canyon, had lunch, and spent the afternoon at or near Brighton. That evening we were sitting in the car under a light at Liberty Park. Her head was in my lap and I was looking directly in her face, but I was seeing the features of Violet. I received the assurance that Violet approved of Lela to be a mother to her children and a companion to me.

As much as I would have liked to have kissed her, I refrained until she accepted my request to become my wife. I expect my grandchildren will think I am an odd one when I truthfully say my lips have not touched the lips of any girl until after we were engaged. We were married Saturday, June 3, 1933 in the Salt Lake Temple by my Uncle Joseph S. Clark.

Lela, the third of seven children, born to Volney Howard and Lena Weigel Willett, was born April 6, 1902 in Illinois. The family were converts to the L.D.S. Church and moved to Utah in the spring of 1918, going to the home of John Hutchings in Lehi for a few days; then in a rented house for the summer. In the fall they moved to the north east end of the Provo bench –now Orem. She attended the Pleasant Grove High School secured credits enough to enter B.Y.U. She picked berries, cherries, peaches, apples, and other fruit to earn money to attend the “Y,” and walked several miles a day to get to B.Y.U. classes. In Illinois she and her older sister and brother each received a certificate admitting them to any state school tuition free as a result of their scholastic achievements. After attending B.Y.U. two years she taught school three years, then entered the L.D.S. Hospital to train as a nurse. After receiving her R.N. degree she supervised a year, attended schools at Berkeley, Califor-

nia and Greeley, Colorado, and taught nurses two years.

After our wedding we took an extensive honeymoon trip to the East coast and the World’s Fair in Chicago. Copying from Lela’s diary: June 27, 1933 –up at 4 a.m., eager to be off for home. At 8:45 again viewed the snow-capped peaks of the Rockies. June 28 –eleven-thirty, at home. A happy honeymoon and a happy bride. June 29 –Busy getting acquainted with my new family. Happy response from Wayne and Alan. June 30–Friday. Mother Clark left with Bryant. Weight of responsibility was deeply felt. 9 p.m., a real “chivere.” The next day churned 3 pounds butter and Monday a “family-sided” wash.

Lela was more than equal to the occasion. A wife and mother of five of her own who made bread, churned butter, cooked dinner for hired men, improved the unfinished home, and made everybody happy. If she ever regretted leaving a promising career for a life of physical toil, she never revealed the fact. How fortunate I am to have had two such lovely companions.

I must acknowledge I have been protected from making mistakes, and guided in making a choice of life’s companions. I have loved and respected my wives. It makes me sad to think I was not more thoughtful of them. They sustained me and endured the hardships of farm life without the modern conveniences of today or baby sitters to give them time for recreation.

I think this sentence is an honest statement of facts: No one at any time could come in our home and detect there had been a break in our family life. I know a man can love two women equally just as a parent can love two or more children, and a woman can love another’s children as she loves her own.