

LYNN DAVIES LEAVITT

I am Lynn Davies Leavitt. I had better inform you at once that I am not of the masculine but the female gender. I give this explanation solely because all my days I have been mistaken for a boy. When a child, strangers seeing my name inevitably jumped to the conclusion that careless scribes had written Lyman. Consequently, I was a boy to the end of the chapter. My childish sensibilities were wounded and I suffered great humiliation. Some amusing (now) experiences grew out of this. Our primary secretary was a dyed-in-the-wool English lady. Always she read my name Lyman. Each time there were smiles and nods and my tragic face. That British humor, that bulldog tenacity that fights on to the end in spite of all pain and difficulty never once broke down, never once caught sight of the real difficulty, small though it was. I can laugh today. I couldn't then. However - that is my name.

I was born April 27, 1895, on a Saturday, too, in a log and adobe house in Hinckley, Millard County Utah. There you find the lucerne fields, irrigation ditches and bog holes. So many and so dangerous are these same bog holes that farmers and their helpers proceed very carefully through wet ground, remembering to carry the shovel in front with the ends sticking out by their sides to act as life-savers should they suddenly be catapulted into the bowels of mother earth.

Our old adobe house had been previously blown down in one of those disastrous wind storms, so damaging to that country. There the current moves up instead of down as does ours. Kites really sail there, while here boys have great difficulty persuading their kites to go up. It was in November 1892, that our house blew down. It was a severe experience for my mother. She was taken to Hutchinson's and there Nell was born. Mrs. Hutchinson had no children so this baby arrival was named for her, Ellen H Davies. She was a Tuesday baby. The wind had a pernickety trick of arriving in the night, and my mother was very frightened of wind. This was also the land of grease-woods, and often have I heard my mother tell of bundling us all up and sleeping out in them during a violent storm. These grease-woods had, of course, all been eradicated from the farm, but so thick did they still stand that once ensconced there the wind was almost silenced. Only a very faint sighing proclaimed its presence without the stronghold. I think I remember the grease-woods well, though whether it is memory or stories I've heard I cannot say, for in some way, in my mind, I have them strangely mixed with sagebrush. Mother says they are a greenish gray, often ten feet tall with stalks as big as your arm. The wood is very hard and burns brightly, especially when dry.

My father was Thomas Davies, son of Thomas Davies. Father was of Welsh descent and had a beautiful singing voice. Many a night has he sung us to sleep, his arms full of kids, while others leaned against him or sat on the floor- anywhere. My mother usually sat near with her knitting or sewing; she was always busy. Quite often she sang, too. She had a sweet, lovely voice, although she always said she couldn't sing. In the evenings, we often gathered around and sang, all of us. We had some very special favorites: Lady Elgin, Brown Cot, and O My Father were three of them. Those were blessed times before life began to lash at us. I can see us now. Dad with his arms full of kids, mother busily working away, and kids scattered all over the room. We all enjoyed this singing time. I still feel a homesick ache for the quiet before the troublous times came blotting out the good days of our early childhood.

Father, too was born in Utah, at Fillmore on October 21 1854. I must have been a serious annoyance to him, for I had one trait that constantly brought me into disgrace and seriously displeased him. I am rather at a loss to put a name to this bad habit, so I suppose I just as well confess and tell the whole story. Some people have called me stubborn, though I vehemently deny the charge. I am not. Just the contrary. It has always been extremely difficult for me to stand out against those I love, even in the simplest instances. But when I was a kid the

slightest sternness, criticism, disapproval or what you will, sent me off into the darkest hole I could crawl into. Quite often, I was found under the bed. Like a whipped puppy, I stayed there until forced out. Many times has Nell pulled me out by main force, dragged me every step of the way. For whole days have I stayed there. Why I don't know. If father came home and remembered that I had flipped into hiding, I was brought out instantly. He never whipped me. Perhaps his very sternness was more distressing than a sound thrashing would have been. Of course, I rebelled and looked defiant. My face appeared much as it does in that picture of us five girls. So probably father was very much justified in thinking I was headed for the lake of burning. To this day, when I see children flip off into a pout and retreat from life I am in a turmoil. I'm sorely tempted to catch them by the hand and insist on helping them to stand and face the problem immediately, have it out at once instead of festering inside.

Father's father was a shoemaker. I've often heard him say that he was never allowed to go barefoot. He still has a prejudice against barefooted kids, and we always had a struggle to get our shoes off even in the nicest weather. One day, when father was a young boy, he was pushing grain back in the bin when the scythe fell on his wrist cutting a great gash in it. It bled profusely. Finally grandma took a handful of soot from the fireplace and bound it on his arm. This proved effective and the bleeding stopped. When he was a young man, he farmed forty acres on what was called the north ditch. He was taken violently sick and uncle John Cooper took him over to Fillmore. He had, I suppose, what we today would call a ruptured appendix. They thought he was going to die. Grandmother took the flesh of a freshly killed chicken and placed it on the appendix. It seemed to draw out the fever. The meat would be cooked in a very short time from the heat of the disease.

Father and mother were married in the St. George temple, a distance of one hundred and sixty miles from Fillmore. Father went on a mission to the southern States when Ivan was a young baby. He was there when Gibbs and Berry were killed. The Southerners were very bitter against the Mormons. One very fat man was whipped. I've heard father say that this man would carry the scars of whipping to his grave.

Father's father was also named Thomas Davies. His mother's name was Mary Ann Jones. She was from Springfield Illinois (?), a real old Southerner. She came from quite a large family. Its amusing to know that a big lawyer in Salt Lake (I think the name was King) offered just lately to regain her property in Illinois for our family. (Note - Aunt Lynn is mistaken on the location, the family inheritance was in Tennessee. Mary Ann Jones and husband went to Illinois with the saints.) Of course, we didn't accept his offer. Decided we had troubles enough without quarreling with each other over an inheritance which, when split ten ways, maybe more, wouldn't equal a large sum anyway.

Mother was named Mary Ann Cooper. She was also born in Utah at Meadow,Creek. Grandma lived there and stayed too long. So mother was born at Meadow Creek instead of Fillmore as had been planned. (Note - the family home was in Fillmore but apparently her grandmother had gone to the farm just before her Mary Ann was born and had not returned in time to Fillmore) July is the month, the thirteenth and she is a Saturday child. I've heard her say that she had enormous eyes as a baby. Her older brother tried constantly to explore them with his baby fingers. Grandmother had real difficulty keeping them separated. Her father's name was John Cooper of Loughborough, Leicestershire England. He was a traveling elder in England and grandmother (they were not married then) saved enough money from her wages to put in the emigration fund to pay his way to Utah. They came to America and started west together in the ox - team company of William Hodgett's. This company was not allowed to pass the handcart company. It grew very late in the season before they arrived in the valley and grandmother froze her legs to her knees, "black as the chimney back", she said. Every winter they bothered her, even in slightly cold weather. Grandma Cooper (Mary Ann Lewis) back in England was an

overseer in a lace knitting factory. They were fairly well to do. She and her brother, Tom, were the only children. When she wanted to come west, he advised their mother to let her come, "That she'd be back in a fort-night", referring to an experience of hers when she had attempted the work of a nursemaid.

Grandmother often said that it was by her own desire that she worked. She wanted to be independent. She brought with her many pairs of shoes and lots of dresses, etc., but they were stolen on the way across the plains. The curtains she brought were later darned by little Grandma, John Cooper's mother, who was a lace darner. Possessing no fine thread, she split sewing cotton and worked in the flower. It was perfect. But that was her trade. Grandma Cooper used her knitted lace bonnet for thread after reaching Salt Lake. Grandfather Cooper was one of about twenty men who was left at Devil's Gate to guard the cache. Supplies grew so short that they were forced to boil the hide mats on the floor. They (grandmother Mary Ann Lewis and grandfather John Cooper) settled in Fillmore and resided there the rest of their lives. Grandpa Cooper lived to be eighty eight years old. Grandma died when Leah was a year old, she, herself, being fifty seven.

I was blessed sixth of June, 1895, by my father. I was baptized in Raymond, 3 July, 1904. I remember it was a very cold, windy day. We drove out to the canal south of Raymond in a wagon. The girls dressed in the wagon. I don't know what the boys did. Leah Wall was being baptized that day for her health I recall that she swore quite expertly at the cold, the wind, the day and all. Also as we left town, one boy (I've forgotten his name) ran away so he wouldn't have to be baptized. I believe he was very scared. Anyway, his father caught him and dragged him to the wagon and flung him in. The result was a bloody nose and a Mormon by conquest. David F Fawns baptized me and Arthur E Fawns confirmed me.

I received my Patriarchal Blessing while teaching in Magrath. Leah, Mary and I were at Florence Mercer's. John L Gibb officiated as patriarch and Earl Pingree Tanner acted as scribe. This patriarch is the father of the Gibbs found in Magrath. I recall the feeling I had. We were interested in knowing how we would feel. To me, it was like great rolling flames of fire down a long tunnel which converged to a tiny opening at the far end. Leah said she thought of one question and it was answered. I was rather disappointed because the patriarch told Leah she would be a good teacher and he didn't tell me that. I suppose he hit the mark. Though he did say that I would do good in what ever calling I was placed.

When we reached Canada, father bought land at Spring Coulee. He owned the property now occupied by Jelliff. No school accomodations being close there, father sold that place and moved to Raymond, hoping to give us a few drops of the fountain of learning. Consequently, we were all good sized kids when we started to school. I remember Nell was a big longlegged, black haired, wild girl of nine. She, Mary and I all started at the same time, but Nell out-stripped us. That was the year of 1903. I finished public school in 1908 with a departmental certificate of graduation. Most of our teachers were eastern women,, many of them from Nova Scotia. They were for the most part good teachers. It must have been very trying for them to teach us bigoted Mormon kids, for we built up a strong wall of prejudice against any foreign influence. Strange as it may seem to others, and certainly it is to me now, I never believed what those teachers told me. I learned what I couldn't avoid, but always thought that I'd find out the real truth about it some day. I'm regretting this attitude very much now, for I see how much more information and knowledge I could have had at my command had I cooperated with my teachers then instead of resisting them. I remember one of them, a Miss MacDonald, a tall red -haired woman. She combed her hair high on her head. We also had another one who always dressed in black. She had a very bleak look on her face. One of the boys had a fight with her, and pulled off her wig. He was quite subdued. We were afterwards ashamed of ourselves for being such little heathens with her for we learned that

she was keeping an invalid mother and was in very poor health. I had quite an experience with stealing. Our class was installed in the old Beehive house, the regular building being full. A girl pal and I got in the habit of playing around for a while after school. One night we each stole a pencil. I chose a little one about two inches long. I know it wasn't more than three at the most. The next morning I sneaked back and returned it. But that was quite a lesson for me as well as being a harrowing time.

A Mr. Keeler was one of our principals, not, I believe any relation to these Keelers of Magrath. He was an eastern man, very much respected and beloved by his pupils. While in Raymond, he married one of the lady teachers, a Miss Laycock, also of the east. In our estimation, she was really not in his class. Keeler was a broad, tall, splendid looking man. He could scowl with the best of them, but was fairly just with his pupils, a quality for which there is no substitute. One winter, we had some very poor children who constantly came late. I believe it was a Jones youngster. One day, Keeler took the strap and met this chap in the hall; then he'd hit the wall with a resounding whack. At each crack, that kid yelled like a Comanche.

Finally, some of the big high school boys could stand it no longer and investigated. At another time, a boy constantly came to school with dirt caked feet, so Keeler prepared to scrub them. The high school folks peeked out the window. Keeler caught Laura Redd spying and sent her out with the soap, at the same time deploring "curious minds". Later Keeler left Raymond to study for a doctor. We had another principal, a Mr. Curtiss. He was small but made up in hot headedness for his lack of stature. He was a good teacher, but never beloved as was Keeler. Mr. Baker was another cast away on the desert of Raymond Mormondom of early days. He was quite old. His wife taught music lessons. She grew quite disgusted with some of the girls because they helped with the washing and then went for their music lessons. Baker quite often stared dreamily off into space and seemed to go off into a trance. He once laughed heartily at my use of the word 'preserves', in describing jams and jellies displayed at the fair. Heaven knows, I nearly expired getting that word on paper even. Imagine such a subject for kids.

After the church school was erected (the Knight Academy), we attended that and spent most of our high school days there. Mr. Bramner was chief. He was a very able teacher and a broad and fair minded man. Mr. Ursenback, father of this man in the temple, was also a teacher there. He, organized a band in which I played the mandolin. It was in those days that the church tried desperately to reclaim many of its wild, uneducated and untaught youth. Especially did they make easy entrance into the school an inducement to farm and ranch boys to educate themselves. Will Leavitt was among the backward fellows.

I first met him there and wasn't especially impressed. Not till later did I learn the true worth of the man. I remember we had a picture of all the students there that year. Vard L Tanner was one of the teachers, a red - headed sandy whiskered man with a ready blush and an embarrassed laugh. Hugely ugly, but we liked and respected him. He taught Biology at one time and made us chloroform a squirrel and cut it up to watch its insides work.. Leslie Stevenson did most of the knife work in our group. We had it nicely carved when suddenly the heart began to beat violently. I administered the anesthetic profusely, fearing it would wake up and suffer. Well, the animal died on the operating table. Vard L Tanner laughed and said the poor thing was only trying to live and I had killed it. He later married a Miss Rasmussen, the education teacher at the academy. She wasn't especially beautiful or pretty, but wore beautiful clothes and her pupils adored her. She had a rather square face with large, blue eyes and a big mouth. My sister, Nell studied education under her and learned Rory O'More, among many other poems. Nell was very good at this work. Others besides the family thought so too. Miss Rasmussen's sister, Florence, lived with her and went to the church school. Florence had the loveliest laugh I ever heard. just like rich toned, silvery bells. Wilfred Woolf and his wife also taught for a short time in that school. Most of the kids hated

both of them. I did, anyway. We had another little dark haired sewing teacher who fainted when ever one of her favorite male colaborers was present to lift her up in his arms and carry her off. She was there but a short time. She married her supporter.