

Ruth Walker Lerwill

Ruth (born January 16, 1900, Fruitland, New Mexico):

In Fruitland we had a large two-story house in which 13 people lived. It was near the San Juan River (the river eventually took the house). We had many large dinners and dances; it was no doubt one of the happiest periods of my parents' lives. A few years later we traded this place for a larger one in Jewett, New Mexico. The place in Jewett had a large fruit orchard, a number of acres of farming land, flocks of turkeys, hives of bees, and a grape vineyard.

I remember the large willow tree, under which we used to swing by the hour, and the mulberry tree nearby covered with luscious fruit. The 12th child of the family was born at Jewett. I wasn't quite four, but I remember holding her and rocking the buggy. We had a gentle pony that we would climb on and ride by the hour. When he became tired of our nonsense, he would head for a low branch of a fruit tree and scrape us off. There was a small branch of the Church there, and my father was called to be the branch president, and Lavina was the organist. There was a fancy buggy we went to church in each Sunday. All through my life, each member of the family was required to observe the Sabbath day.

When we moved to Jewett, Ethel was a baby of delicate health. Before Ethel was born, Mother had what was called "chills and fever." As a result, Ethel was born prematurely and remained in delicate health for a number of years. Later when we moved to Colorado, the severe cold caused her to suffer from tonsillitis and later rheumatic fever. She was bedridden the greater part of one winter and the greater part of the next.

When I was seven years old, Dad traded our place to a Mr. Parker for a larger ranch in Colorado. We needed more land, and the environment there seemed better. We should have been able to have made a good living, but water was scarce and we had dry land. The struggle for a livelihood went on.

At first we lived three miles from school and had to go either by buggy or sleigh. Later we moved our house onto an acreage near the townsite. There it was handy to both church and school. Dad and the boys sawed the frame house down through the middle and placed each part on logs. Various men in the ward brought their teams, hooked them on to the house, and pulled it across the fields to the new location. This was the house that later burned.

The schools which we attended were one-roomed, and the teacher taught all eight grades. They were heated by heaters which stood in the middle of the room. You were either too hot or too cold. With the supplementary teaching that we received at home, we turned out to be fairly good students. Ethel, Mae, and I went to high school at Fort Lewis; it was a boarding school and a branch of the agricultural college. Mother was very ambitious about our education. First of all, she wanted us to have a firm testimony of the Gospel. As a result, there was always some form of instruction going on. Instead of family night once a week, we had one nearly every night—practicing on the organ, family singing, oral reading and discussions, and there were stories from the *Bible* and the *Book of Mormon*, whose personalities became as real to us as our next-door neighbors.

In a large family, there is always lots of work to do. The work was divided and most often done in pairs. One learns to give and take and develop a healthful attitude as well as a strong sense of loyalty.

We enjoyed the school at Fort Lewis. I took a mixture of classes in domestic science, science, and education. I finished high school in three years, took the state teacher's examination, and, having passed it to the satisfaction of the board, received a teacher's certificate.

In a country school near home, I taught the first four grades.

World War I had just ended; we had been depleted of our sheep, cattle, and grain. Father had to sell the livestock, as he was no longer able to take care of them. The Government had taken our grain.

We girls decided that it would be to our advantage to leave the farm. What would be a better place to go than Provo and continue our education? Ethel, Nellie, and I enrolled at the Brigham Young University. Ethel and I taught school, and Nellie became the city librarian.

As children, most of us were robust and healthy, with the exception of my oldest brother, who had rheumatic as a child. This resulted in a heart condition which took his life at 16 years. Another brother was affected with quinsy each winter, which, no doubt, contributed to his poor health later. While fighting in World War I in France, he developed a rheumatic heart as a result of sleeping in the mud weeks at a time. This was a cause of his death in following years.

Most of us had the usual childhood diseases. When I was a baby, there were ten of us who had whooping cough at the same time. Mother always maintained it was most trying. Finally she made a large bed in the middle of the floor and placed them around the circle, so she could give them attention. When I was two years old, there was an epidemic of smallpox, and we all came down with that. Fortunately, we all had mild cases, coming through it with no ill effects. Mother never had a doctor, but she cared for us herself and depended on the power of the priesthood and faith to do the rest. When I was 14 my brother Ezra had typhoid fever. He had contracted it while working with a haying crew. His wife was in poor health, so mother brought him home to care for him. As a result, three more of us came down with the disease. Ethel and I lost all of our hair. We were sad-looking sights until it grew out.

There was always plenty of excitement around. We had our ball teams. My sister Josephine's basketball group was the winning team in our section, and the boys' baseball team won everything in the whole country. In order for them to get in their practice, we had to play with them. I got so that I could pitch, bat, work on any of the bases, and run. I excelled in basketball until I came down on the side of my foot one day and broke it.

We had several good riding horses and could ride with the best of them. On the 4th and 24th of July, the community would put on a big celebration. We would ride in the parades, waving our flags, and then go to the picnic grounds by the river. Usually there were outstanding programs. In the ward, there were many activities. We participated in plays, musical and speech contests, dances, picnics, and overnight camping trips. In the winter, we would ice skate, toboggan, and sleigh ride.

In the fall of 1913 we had a disastrous fire that destroyed our home and most of our winter supplies. The only thing saved from the fire was the organ. Except for Josephine and Mae, the rest were away from home. Josephine was ill and had come home for a week, and Mae had stayed to take care of her. The fire started by the flue in the attic. The house being lumber, the fire spread rapidly. The neighbors saw it and came to help. They were able to save the barns and the haystack. We stayed with the Deans for a week, then in my brother Carl's home for the rest of the winter.

In the spring my father built a one-room cottage and boarded in a large tent. We lived there for a year. In the fall my father and two brothers went to a saw mill to work and to get lumber and materials. The men at the mill needed a cook, so mother cooked for them. She took Ethel with her, since she was just getting over typhoid fever. By spring they had enough lumber and material for the new home.

Gwendolyn, daughter, November 1996:

In looking over Mother's material again, I came across the diploma she received on graduation from Fort Lewis, date: September 26, 1919, majoring in domestic science. Next, she went to BYU and received her certificate to teach. During the three years she taught school in Latuda, Utah, she was assigned to the second and third grades. Our father was working as a supervisor at one of the mines. Previously, he had

been in the army at Fort Douglas in Salt Lake City. After coming out of the service, he went to college at the University of Utah and graduated with a mining degree. They were married in Salt Lake City on June 11, 1924. My brother and I were both born at home in Rains, Utah—Gwendolyn November 21, 1925, and Roger Joseph, March 23, 1927.

Our family was moved to Billings, Montana, in 1929. We arrived on the Fourth of July. Our father worked in the geological survey as a mining supervisor. There was a great deal of travel connected with his work. Starting in September he could be away for weeks at a time. He went to a number of western states and a couple of properties in Canada. Mother would keep us occupied in addition to our school activities.

Throughout her life she maintained her interest in religious assignments. She held offices in the Relief Society, besides taking turns in instructing. She enjoyed the activities in Sunday school, sometimes heading the Gospel Doctrine class and genealogy. This seemed to be my start, since she asked for someone to take different topics. There were several activities in which she participated in civic affairs. There were handicrafts that she found time to do at home.

Roger and I graduated from high school in 1944 and from college in 1949, I from BYU and he from Stanford University. He spent some of the time at Fort Douglas in Salt Lake City and the remaining part at a fort near San Francisco, California. He was made a corporal and was assigned to the medical corps.

I went into training for laboratory technician work at the LDS Hospital in Salt Lake City, and Roger took some post-graduate classes at the University of Utah. About 1952 Roger began working in the defense department. His first job was at Dugway, Utah. By 1959 he was transferred back east. Even though he worked in the capital area, he lived in Arlington, Virginia. There he met his future wife, Carolyn Myers, who worked in the same division. They were married on June 30, 1962. At one point his superiors wanted him to accept a post in the pentagon, but he declined. However, he chose to go to the Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland. Their daughter, Julia Gail, was born December 11, 1967, in Harford Memorial Hospital in Havre de Grace, about four miles from Aberdeen.

Roger was a member of TECOM (technical command unit of the army) until he retired in 1989. The previous year had been a difficult one for him. The couple's marriage came to an end after 25 years.

Their daughter Julia was married on July 1, 1989, to Michael Bouffard. At this time the couple has two sons: Michael Kenneth, born July 10, 1990, and Ryan Joseph, born June 30, 1994. Both were born in Franklin Square Hospital in Baltimore County.

Roger decided to move out of his home area and has established himself in different circumstances, giving him more opportunities in continuing his education.

The 1950 period was the beginning of changes for the family. Our father contracted polio from unsterilized equipment used in a myelogram. He was kept in isolation and on the critical list for about three weeks. He was taken to the Marine Hospital when he could travel. There he underwent intensive physical therapy.

I remained in Seattle for a couple of years and was able to stay with Aunt Ethel and her family—her husband Elmer and my two cousins Elwyn and Eleana. Elwyn had returned from Brazil, where he had filled a mission, and Eleana was in her high school years. For a while I worked in a private laboratory and then found a position at the University of Washington in one of the research departments. There were a number of opportunities in church activities, the experience of teaching a group of lively teenagers (Mildred Rostrom, another cousin, was among the group). I went into stake work later on. By 1955 I was called on a mission to the Hawaiian Islands and served from May 1955 to December 1956.

Dad had wanted to make a change when he retired. When that chance came, we moved to California. After making some inquiries, we found an apartment in the Westwood area, a suburb of Los Angeles. It was close to the temple and chapel, besides the genealogical library. It was not too long before mother started volunteering at the library. Kay Kirkham was the director. I was fortunate in getting a job in the temple as a typist. A bit later I became an ordinance worker; this lasted about three years.

Our parents started their night classes at the Santa Monica College. They tried some sketching and painting classes, first in acrylics and then water colors. By 1967 Dad developed diabetes and needed insulin injections for six or seven months. We realized that he needed a change, and someone had told us of an adult community in Orange County. We made the change to Leisure World in Laguna Hills. In this new location I learned of an excellent neurosurgeon who could give me relief from a whiplash condition I sustained in a car mishap in Seattle. Due to complications which arose during the surgery, Dr. Williams extended the post-opt check-ups for an additional year.

The folks became active in some of the programs—Mother started working in oils in her painting while Dad became interested in rocks. We went on a few field trips with him. It wasn't long before he began to work on intarsias. He was able to assemble two—one was of a grist mill and the other from a post card of a tunnel in Switzerland.

Dad developed a heart condition and passed away from a massive attack caused by a clot. He died July 4, 1978, in the Saddleback Hospital.

Mother and I moved back east to be near Roger. By 1992 she passed away from a condition involving two brain tumors. The last four years of her life were hard for her. I decided to keep her at home. There were two organizations which provided help for terminally ill patients. On May 1, 1992, she passed away.