

Life Story of Ethel Walker Smith

Taken from her notes and transcribed by her daughter Eleana S. Hurst, April 1980

My folks moved from Taylor, Arizona, to Fruitland, New Mexico, on the bank of the San Juan River, where I was born. At that time the folks had seven children—four boys and three girls. My sister Lavina was two years old. Jesse was born August 25, 1896, two years later. I never knew my eldest brother, as he died shortly after my folks moved to Fruitland, New Mexico.

I was born prematurely. Mother was very ill at the time. Neither she nor I were expected to live. Mother said that she could hear the neighbors deciding which children they would adopt. Mother said she felt that some of them were sorry when she lived, because they wanted her children. I was born September 3, 1902.

I was very frail for years. Because of some infection in my system, I would at times go into convulsions. At one time I had a sick spell and fell in an ant bed and was stung all over my body before I was found. I remember this and that I had to be carried around for a long time. The last one I remember was at the dinner table. We loved to eat peach pits, and mother seemed to think it was these pits that caused the convulsions. I still can't eat many walnuts and peach pits . . . never.

I do not remember much about living in Fruitland. From there we moved to Jewett, New Mexico. I think it was in Jewett where we had a large apple orchard. I remember Father carrying me back and forth to the orchard. I think they were the best apples that ever grew.

I remember a few people there, such as the Baldwins who had a store near a rock mountain called the "Hogs Back." They had two girls about the age of my sister Ruth and me. Seems like we spent more time roaming over the Hogs Back than we did at home. They had some Guinea hens that would hide their nests in the rocks. We would hunt for them. They had a lot of exciting things to play with, things that we could not afford, such as the Teddy bears I remember so well and loved to play with.

Another I remember was a dear old neighbor lady. Mother would send us there to get buttermilk. She always had goodies for us. I liked the goodies, but always hated her white mice and usually screamed when they would come near me. When I was seven years of age we moved to Redmesa, Colorado. We moved in wagons. The trip seemed long but was very exciting.

Again I became ill with dysentery, and after trying everything that she and the neighbors could think of without any results, someone told Mother to feed me blackberries. And so to the La Plata Mountains Mother and Dad took me for a week (where the blackberries were), and I began to get better.

Because of poor health, I didn't start school until I was seven years old. And because of the distance to school, which was about two miles, I couldn't go when the weather was bad. It was a one-room school heated with a wood stove. Tramping through snow up to our knees, I got rheumatism; at least Mother thought it was that. Anyway, my legs became so stiff and my joints pained so much I again had to be lifted from my bed to a chair and miss school.

My brothers and sisters were very good to me. In fact they spoiled me very much, and I began to throw tantrums and usually got my own way. We were a very happy family, in spite of the fact that we were very poor. Dad tried to be a farmer and do a little blacksmith work, but 12 people are a lot to feed and clothe.

I never knew the older children very well. As soon as they were old enough to work, they left home to do so.

Mother was a good seamstress, and she sewed for the community, enabling her to help out with the livelihood. Mother was a very proud woman, and she always saw that we were well dressed. Even though our dresses were handed down or made over, we were the best dressed in town.

I think I was about 12 years of age when our house burned down. Most of the family were away picking up potatoes at the Burnham place. I know that Mae and I were home. I can't recall who else. Mae was ironing and baking bread when the fire started. We dragged the organ and a couple of quilts out but nothing else. The whole neighborhood turned out to help us. We were taken into different homes for a short time. Mother couldn't stand to have the children in the different homes. She wanted us all together again. Dad had built a log one-room house that we used for a milk room. Mother and Dad got a large tent, and between the milk house and the tent, we were all together again. The neighborhood helped us out with bedding and clothing.

The folks mortgaged the farm for some milk cows, and between sewing and the milking, we began to plan for a new house.

Again fate struck home. Jesse, Ruth, and I came down with typhoid fever. Most of the community had it. Found the germ in the drinking water.

The folks were determined to have better water, so Dad began to dig a well. Everyone laughed at Dad. They thought he was wasting his time trying to reach water. The other people used cisterns. Dad did strike water, and it was free of the typhoid germ. Even though it was the dry season, our well always had water in it, and people would come from miles away to have water when their cisterns had gone dry.

Jesse and Ruth were over the fever when Mother had an opportunity to cook at a lumber camp. My brother Walter was already working there. We lost our hair. I was still very sick. Mother left me in care of Dad and the older children. She knew that by her going we would be able to have the house that much sooner. But she was there only a short time, and she worried so much about me and was so homesick without the family that as soon as I was able to be up, Ray Dean, the owner of the saw mill, sent for me. With Mother's care and the good food, I gained my strength fast. My hair began to come back in.

I loved to play the phonograph. There were a lot of Hawaiian records, and Mother and I were so homesick, we would both cry when some of them were played.

Walter and Mother took their pay in building materials. Walter went home to help Dad build the new house. Mother and I stayed on just until there was enough material to finish the house.

The reunion was great, and we thought the house was the most beautiful in the country. We moved into it before it was finished. In fact, I believe it never did get painted on the outside. The new slide windows were just out of this world, and I will never forget the wall paper on the living room wall—it was of lilies all in bloom. Everyone turned out to see it.

I didn't enjoy school very well. Having missed so much, I was behind my age group. Finally, I finished the eighth grade. Georgia Pinkerton was the teacher, and she helped me a great deal. Another teacher that I remember was Mr. Frank Bush. He took the entire class to Durango, my first trip to a large city. I tasted my first weenie. We stayed in tents overnight, girls in one and boys in another. Of course there were chaperons—Miss Wagner, Carol Decker, Mable Green, and others.

Our community had to make their own entertainment, which consisted of dinners, house parties, and dances. Old as well as young went to the dances. I never enjoyed the dances; seemed that my legs were too stiff and my feet were always where they shouldn't be.

Mother was for higher schooling for the kids. Mae and Ruth went to Fort Lewis to high school. Mae went one year and was married. The summer I finished the eighth grade, I went with my sister Lavina

to help in the mess hall at the Indian school at Shiprock, New Mexico. It was just for the faculty. Lavina did the cooking, and I and an Indian girl named Julie set the tables, served, and washed the dishes.

The next winter I went to Fort Lewis to high school. Ruth and I had one room. We cooked, slept, and what not in this one room. But it was fun, and we enjoyed being with the young people.

During the winter our dorm burned down, and everything we had was burned for the second time. But the building was insured, and we had better clothing than we had before. Ruth and I were given work in the dining room and the commissary to pay for our board and room. We lived in the dorm and ate in the dining room. We got along much better.

We were not allowed to be out after dark during the week or stay with any of the other girls in the other dorm. And they were not allowed to stay with us. But one of the girls in the dorm had a room that had an outside window that we could climb in and out of, and we made good use of it. The matrons, Miss Paxton or Miss Porter, would hear someone giggling and would trace it to the room, but we would hear them coming and hide in back of the bed. One night some of the girls were caught climbing back in the window, not by one of the matrons but by one of the male teachers, who just happened to be passing by, and that was the end of that. Don't know why we did it, but it seemed exciting at the time.

After we moved to the dorm, we played the usual pranks. One night when most of the girls had gone to some kind of social, those of us who didn't go decided to make some candy. We broke into the kitchen and got started when we heard Miss Porter coming. We dashed out the back door through the side window and upstairs to our room, Ruth and mine, because it was a larger room and the only one used for a bedroom on that floor. We finished cooking the candy on the radiator, and was pulling it when Miss Porter walked in. She had fooled us by crawling up the steps. I will never forget how scared we were, but she had such a different expression on her face than we had expected. It was an expression as much as if to say, "I used to play pranks too." She just said, "I wondered where you girls went. I see your candy got done. I like candy too, you know." She joined us for a while, then she said we better go down and see if we left the kitchen tidy, so Miss Paxton won't know. She was our friend from then on. Before that we had feared her.

Some of our best friends were Katherine and Peggy Dennis, Grace Cook, Clarence Snyder, Chuck —, and others I can't recall.

One time I was ill with tonsillitis, and Katherine and Peggy brought me a lovely fuchsia from their home. I believe that is the first time I had ever seen a fuchsia and the first time anyone had thought of bringing me flowers. I think that is why I love the fuchsia so much.

I think Fort Lewis was the most beautiful place I had ever seen, and it was really a privilege for us to be able to go there to school. It had a lot of trees and a lawn and a few flowers.

When we went home in the spring, everything seemed so dry and hot. We were glad to be with the folks again, but we had sprouted our wings, and things didn't seem the same. But when we went back in the fall, the leaves had fallen and the grass was brown. Many of our friends did not return. I had a feeling of sadness, a feeling of wanting to cry for no particular reason. And I always have that same feeling when the leaves begin to fall. I can't express it, but a feeling of loneliness.

I think Ruth graduated that year and had a contract to teach school at Kline. Jesse had married and lived at Kline. Ruth stayed with him and Nettie. I didn't go back the next year. The boys had all married, and Dad was failing in years.

There were only the four girls left now, and mother felt that the opportunities for better education, and of course more young people, were away from Redmesa. We were encouraged by Apostle Lyman and also Bertha Roberts to move to Provo.

Walter could see that we no longer could run the farm, so he offered to buy the farm. Lavina had taken over most of the sewing by now, and I was taught to assist. For two years we sewed and Ruth taught school, and finally the day came when we had enough money to take us to Provo.

We hired a large car, driven by a lady, to take us to Green River and we went the rest of the way by train. Seemed like the whole town was there to see us off. It was sad to leave, but we were never sorry.

We arrived in Provo, on Memorial Day. Brother Tom Fielding met us at the train and took us to his home in Orem, where we stayed until we could find a place in Provo. I believe the first place we lived was at Mrs. Anderson's—two large rooms—outside toilet. We all worked in the strawberries that summer except Lavina. I believe she did sewing. It was hard work, but we didn't mind.

By fall there was enough money for Nellie and I to register in the Brigham Young high school. Ruth taught school, and Mother went to work as a chambermaid at Roberts Hotel. We were so hungry for shows (movies or picture shows) and music that we would go to every new show that came along, even if we didn't have anything to eat. We all did any kind of work that we could find—house work, ironing, washing, etc. Before long we found that working at the hotel paid us the most money. Many times we would wait on banquets at noon and dash back to school for afternoon classes, then back at night to wait tables again. I don't know when we studied.

I made a lot of girl friends that first year—Rula Michie (Wrigley), who is still my very best friend; then there was Nola and Rita Cluff, Etta Phillip, May Swensen, — Warnick, Zina Mulestine, Emma Snow, Carol Dunn, Nettie Oaks, Grace Cook, Fern Bloomfield, Alta Anderson, Ilean Benett, and others.

For two years Rula and I were almost inseparable. When I wasn't at her house, she was at mine. We both took a business course, but I didn't like it and dropped out. Rula went on and obtained a good position as secretary to the principal at Provo High. I went on to Normal school. It was in my freshman year that I met Smith.

We had moved into a larger apartment—a large living room, kitchen downstairs, and two bedrooms upstairs. McIntosh was the owner. We shared the toilet and bath with the landlady, who had two sons and a daughter with two children who were there most of the time, and another apartment. We were lucky if we got in the bathroom once a day.

Zelda and her mother lived in the other apartment. Nellie and Zelda were pretty good about going places and getting dates to bring them home. Anyway, here they came home with a couple of fellows. I think it was Sunday night. Lavina and I had been cutting up, and I had backed too close to the stove and burned the back out of my dress. Lavina was seeing what damage I had done when I walked Nellie and her friends. Nellie was with Otto Baker and Zelda was with Elmer Smith. I thought I had never seen anyone with such a smile in all my life, and his teeth were so pretty, and to top it off his hair had such pretty waves. I had backed into the corner to hide the back part of me. It seemed they would never go.

The next time I saw him was on a sleigh ride. I think he was with Cynthia Lyman. But after that we seemed to be in the same crowd and were paired off together. It just seemed natural that he was my date.

Note: Ruth needed more schooling to be able to get a teaching job in the state again. So she went to school the next winter.

I will never forget the first time we went on the "Y" hike. Edwin Baird was just crazy about Ruth, and he had invited Ruth on the hike. Ruth didn't particularly like him but wanted to go on the hike. She

told him mother wouldn't let her go unless I went along. It was all right with him. We needed shoes for the hike, and we found some on sale which didn't fit and wore them on the hike. I believe they cost \$1.60 a pair. It surely spoiled the hike for us. Our feet were so sore and covered with blisters we couldn't get our shoes on the next day.

I didn't think much about Smith one way or another—he was just one of the gang—until he told me he wouldn't be able to come back to school the next year. He had run out of finances, and his folks were not able to help him. Then I knew that he meant a great deal to me.

We moved into a still better place—the Mayhew home, living room and kitchen downstairs and two bedrooms upstairs. Ruth had gone to Rains, Utah, to teach school. Lavina had bettered herself in a traveling sales job, and mother was able to quit work.

Dad's mind had failed so that we had to send him back to Colorado or have him put into an institution. He would wander away from home, and the police would find him and bring him back. So Walter took him back to Redmesa and hired a Sister Tooley to take care of him.

I wasn't able to get my certificate for teaching that first year. So I went to summer school and the next winter.

I don't remember going with anyone regularly that next winter, but looked forward to the letters from Smith. I was the envy of all my friends to have boy friend who had such beautiful penmanship.

I think Smith came back to Provo the next summer to work and in the fall I went to Bonita, Utah, to teach school.

Ruth had married and was living at Rains, Utah. I thought that life wasn't worth bothering with after she married. You see, I still depended on her a lot. It seems like I had gone to the end of the earth.

We had teachers institute at Duchesne before we went to our different schools (1925), and of course we were introduced to our principal and other teachers. Bonita was a two-teacher school. I rode to Bonita with the principal, and it was late in the evening when I got there, and there had been no arrangements for me to stay. But he stopped at the nicest house in Bonita—a two-bedroom brick house. He coaxed them to let me stay there until some other place could be found. They put the hired hand out on the back porch, and I took his bedroom. I stayed there for several months until I was able to get a room with Brother and Sister Madson, who lived closer to the school. I was very homesick that year. The school house wasn't too bad, and I liked the children, but there was no recreation of any kind and no young people at all except some of the cowboys. So I began riding horses and learning to be a cowgirl. I loved horses anyway.

I was offered more money if I would take a one-teacher school at Highland, just north of Myton. I was told that there was a few of the older children who had given the teachers a bad time, but Supt. Paxton was sure I could handle them. \$110 was a lot of money in those days. I was getting \$80. So to Highland I went. I boarded at Highland for about two weeks. The food was so full of flies, and I had to climb a ladder to get to my room, so I wrote to the superintendent about it, and he said to see if I could find a place in Myton, and I could ride with the High School bus that took the kids in to Roosevelt.

One of the fellows, Floyd Oderkink, had a car, and we would visit the different towns where I knew other teachers. Nola Cluff was at Myton, Ethel Vernon at Lapoint, and Emma Louis at Blue Bell, so we really had fun.

At first I got a room at the Wheeler home, but Mr. Wheeler snored so loud all night that I could not take it. Besides, I shared a room with their spoiled daughter. I stayed there just three days and moved over to Mr. and Mrs. Blains. Their daughter was away to school at Mt. Pleasant, and I had a room all to myself.

It was much nicer living in Myton because there were four other teachers there. But of course the Highland people didn't like it because they depended on the school marm for their entertainment. We did have a few parties, but it meant I would have to stay overnight or get someone to take me home, which wasn't always so easy. One night I slept with a man and his wife, and one night a neighbors daughter who had been divorced, or I borrowed some quilts and slept in the school house all night. Those people had so many kids and most of them were so poor that they didn't have floor space for a bed on the floor.

I told the superintendent about it, and he said to try not to give them parties unless they could provide transportation for me. So there were no more parties.

There were so many children that one teacher just could not handle them all. We could not get enough chairs in the room. So after about three months the older children were sent to Roosevelt. That little one-room school house lasted only one more year. The children were transported to larger schools.

That summer I went with Rula and her sister Hilda up into the Granddaddy Lakes for two weeks. We were the guests of her older sister and her husband. Some of the fellows that I knew heard that we were up there and paid us a visit for a couple of days. Rula's sister was quite put out, but the fellows were really good by making their camp some distance away. Their extra horses came in handy.

The first summer, Rula and I went back to Colorado with my brother Walter. We stayed most of summer. The house that we were so proud of looked mighty bad. The porches had never been finished, and still no paint on the outside. The roof leaked like a sieve. But we enjoyed our visit with all the folks. Nettie and Jesse at Breen, Colorado, and Mae and family in New Mexico. Dad was still alive, but did not know me. It about broke my heart. But Walter explained that he didn't know him either. I think he died the next year. On our way back from Colorado, we had car trouble all the way.

The next winter (1927) I went to Neola to teach. It was much nicer. Miss Cook had the first grade. Sora McConnick had the second and third. I had the fourth and fifth. Jonie Yack had sixth and seventh grade, and Mr. Lee, the principal, had the eighth grade. Miss Cook had a brick building to teach in. The rest of us had one-room log buildings until Christmas, then we moved into a nice modern building. It was really nice.

I stayed with a widow lady and her daughter, Mrs. Costella and Thelma. It was fun. We had a lot of good times. I knew Jonnie at school, so we chased around quite a bit. It was his home town. Our house was a living room with a bed in it for Mom and Thelma and a kitchen. We used the bedroom. Miss Cook and Miss McConnick slept in the big bed, and I slept on the small bed. It was nice to have just two grades to teach.

Smith graduated in June of that year (1928), and we were married in July. He had a job with Utah Power and Light Co. in Salt Lake City. We had a rather nice apartment on the second floor—living room, kitchen, bedroom, and bath. We had our usual financial problems. It was lonesome in Salt Lake City. I knew no one there and was not used to the city.

Our first baby, a boy we named Elwyn, came premature (January 8, 1929), and the expenses seemed to mount up—one doctor bill after another. In 18 months another baby, a little girl, was born prematurely. She lived only 2 days. My health was so poor that the Doctor advised against any more children.

When Elwyn was two we were transferred to Provo, where we lived for ten years. We had a small apartment at first. Then Nellie and Vina (Lavina), who had both married, were leaving. Vina to California and Nellie to Florida. So we moved into Mother's house. She lived with us part of the time. It seems like we always had someone living with us. We had a living room, kitchen, and two bedrooms and a back porch with a bed on it. Smith and I used the front bedroom, and mother had the back bedroom. LaRilla, Smith's sister, was in an auto accident and got her pelvic bone broken. She stayed with us for a while and

had to remain in bed, so we gave her the front bedroom, and Smith and I used the bed on the back porch. Before we moved into Mother's house, we rented from a Mrs. Waters. It had a bedroom, living room, kitchen, and a shared bathroom.

The next winter Troy, my brother Dick's boy, came to go to school and lived with us. He stayed one winter. We next moved to a house on 8th North. That year we had "A" Call, Estella's oldest boy; Alden, Smith's brother; and Wayne Harris with us. They slept in the basement. Alden and Wayne moved out in February (1936), as I was carrying Eleana and the work was getting too much for me. "A" stayed on to help with the housework. I believe he graduated the following year. While there he had scarlet fever, as also did Elwyn and Eleana. Mildred (the girl he later married) used to bring him dinner trays and visit with him through the window. We enjoyed having "A" with us; he was just like one of the family. He used to babysit with Elwyn and help him with school work.