

Sarah Williams Perkins

In far away South Wales at Lantwet, May 23, 1860, I was born. The daughter of Evan and Mary Davis Williams, and sixth child in a family of twelve. My parents joined the Mormon church before I was born. Father became dissatisfied and finally left the church. Owing to my parents different religious opinions we children were left to make our own choice in these matters. Most of my associates being Methodists I naturally went to that church, very much to Mother's disappointment. Occasionally myself and companions would stop at the L.D.S. street meetings, but I was not impressed with their teachings.

My father and brothers were coal miners. Because of the life my father lived and the particular kind of work he did, he was called "Evan the Saint," or "Evan the Timber Man."

In 1871 he was placed in charge of a company of men and sent to Russia to open some mines there. He remained there about two years. The extreme damp climate caused him to develop asthma. We had doctors from far and near attend him, but he gradually grew worse. Acting on the doctor's advice, he made preparations to dispose of his property and sail for America. The change of climate, they thought, the only chance he had for regaining his health. He had never left his chair for over a year and hand to be carried to the carriage to begin the journey.

I can never forget the heart aches and strange feelings of emotion I felt in preparing to leave the old home and associates. Among those hardest to leave was a young man about my own age, for between us there existed a warm mutual friendship. He accompanied us a number of miles on our journey.

My minister was much concerned about my going to Utah and warned me repeatedly to keep away from the Mormons. He presented me with a hymn book and Bible to keep me "going right."

We set sail from Liverpool in 1878, surrounded by relatives and friends many of whom we were never to see again in this life. With heavy hearts and wet eyes the last adieus were said, and we were speeding on our way to America.

We were on the ocean eleven days. Father's health began to improve at once and he gained rapidly. While making the ocean voyage I had my first real contact with the Mormons, there being a number of missionaries and converts among the passengers. Being a lover of music, I was attracted by their fine singing and enjoyed especially their hymns.

When land was sighted all was bustle and excitement. Though I was eager to be off the water I perhaps would have felt more of a thrill in landing had I not had the misfortune of losing my hat in the ocean while standing on the deck. Knowing I would have to choose between going into New York bare headed or use a handkerchief as a substitute for a hat I chose the latter way.

I had carefully saved my money to spend in America, but found to my humiliation I could have spent it with much more ease in my native land. Though I talked some English it was very embarrassing to talk to those who understood no Welsh. After spending a day and night at the depot where accommodations were prepared for immigrants, we took the train for Salt Lake City.

We were met at York (a small town near Salt Lake) by my sister Mary Ann and her husband, who had been in America about ten years. Our journey was now to be made in a covered wagon, the first I had ever seen--an awful way to travel, I thought. My first breakfast in Utah, I shall never forget. So strange, I thought, to have cakes for breakfast, but to my surprise the cakes proved to be bread---baking powder bisquits, the first I had ever seen. We went immediately to Cedar City, arriving there July the first.

Oh what a place. Everything so different from my Welch home. But in spite of the strangeness and newness of conditions I enjoyed the Fourth of July celebration.

In time the barrier began to break down and life seemed more bearable. In less than six months father and my brothers had made adobes and built us a comfortable home.

To help out in our new conditions I went out to do domestic work, My first job was at the home of ~~Patla Patla~~. I took dishes and furniture for pay.
David Davis

Another trial I had was becoming accostumed to the American way of cooking. Custard pudding was strictly an American dish as far as I knew. I had watched Mrs. Davis prepare the same, so upon being told to make one, proceeded to do so without asking any questions. I beat up a dozen eggs added sugar and nutmeg and placed in oven to cook. Imagine my humiliation on being told I had left out the milk.

As the Mormon church was the only church in Cedar, I must go to that or none at all. Dancing being about the only amusement I must also learn to do that; an art I knew nothing of, as dancing was forbidden in the Methodist Church.

In the summer of 1879 a call came from the head of the Mormon Church for volunteers to go to San Juan to begin a settlement there. My brother-in-law, Benjamin Perkins, was among the volunteers. I was persuaded to go along to help take care of my sisters children. Imagine my surprise and indignation when but six miles from Cedar I had the lines of one of the teams put in my hands and was told that was my team and wagon to drive. An experience I had never before had. It was expected that the trip would be completed in about six weeks time.

The journey was begun in November, with eighty wagons and about (150?) people. As the journey continued it was found the trip would be much longer than at first anticipated so teams were sent back to Escalante for provisions. Travel was very slow as roads had to be made as we went. Although we had to put up with many inconveniences and unpleasant situations I thoroughly enjoyed the trip and was deeply impressed with the lives and actions of those with whom I traveled. There was something different about them. Could it be their religion? As I considered it more, I became convinced it was, and began to investigate their teachings.

There were a number of good singers and musicians in the company and many a pleasant hour was whiled away singing and dancing by the light of the moon or a camp fire, on the sand or on slick rock. As far as I remember there was no ill feelings, deaths or serious sickness on the journey, and all shared alike at the table. When we wanted something a little extra for supper "lumpy dick" and molasses was the dish----a mush made from stirring flour into boiling water.

When we neared the Colorado River, we found it solid rock down the steep cliffs. We camped here for six weeks; giving the place the name of the "Hole in the Rocks."

In crossing the Colorado the animals were made to swim across, the wagons and provisions were taken over on a ferry boat. After crossing the river the country became rougher, feed and water scarcer. The stock became so poor that travel became very difficult, making it impossible to cover more than a few miles some days. Whenever a good supply of was found camp was made and a general wash day held. We arrived at what is now known as Bluff on April 6, 1880/

My feelings I think were similar to Sister Clara Young's when they landed in Salt Lake. I didn't see anything there to stop for, nor could I see how it was possible to take a town in such a place. How thankful I was I didn't have to make my home there. The men erected brush shed, these and wagon boxes were the only shelter we had that summer.

There was no time for building as crops must be planted and ditches made. The longer I lived among these people, the more convinced I became that Mormonism was the religion for me. I entered the waters of baptism in the fall of 1880. I was baptized in the San Juan River, by C.E. Walton Sr. The same fall I returned to my home in Cedar City. The following year my sister and her husband came home on a visit. On October 28, 1881 I became the plural wife of Benjamin Perkins. We were married in the St. George Temple. This was during the Crusade, so for safety sake it was necessary for us to make the journey under the cover of night. After returning from St. George I made my home with my husbands' sister. Here I had the opportunity of taking part in family prayers--the first time I ever prayed vocally.

My parents were very much opposed to me entering polygamy, in fact they warned me if I did I should never be allowed to come home again. When father found I was willing to sacrifice home, parents, and all for the religion I had accepted he left home, saying that he could not bear to meet me after going so contrary to his wishes. It was several years before I saw him again. Though I had been forbidden to return home, I did so repeatedly only to have the door shut in my face and to be told there was no place there for me. Hard as all this was to bear I felt in my soul that I had made no mistake and that they would be made to see they were in the wrong.

In the early part of November we returned to San Juan. As a fortification against the Indians a fort had been built, during our absence. Living in the fort we came in very close contact with one another, some very close ties were formed, and the children played together almost as one big family. As conditions became more settled and the Indians more peaceable, the fort was abandoned and more homes built. The new life I had chosen brought with it trials as well as joys, and I was never quite able to throw off the sorrow occasioned by the attitude my parents had taken. Words cannot express the relief and comfort that came to me in a letter from Father some months later expressing his and mother's regret for the course they had taken. They bade me welcome home. Owing to the difficulty in obtaining water for farming, also trouble with the Indians stealing and driving off stock, some of the settlers became dissatisfied and felt the task was bigger than they could handle.

A visit from some of the church authorities resulted in their releasing all those who wished to go, with the promise that those who left should be blessed and those who remained doubly blessed. I have lived to see these promises literally fulfilled. Bluff became known as one of the wealthiest towns for its size in the United States. Not only was it blessed with wealth, but it grew spiritually, having at one time thirteen missionaries in the field. We were among those who left and returned to Cedar City. Not being able to secure farming land here, my husband moved to Wayne County, leaving me on the Cedar Mt. to run a dairy. In the late fall my brother Will accompanied me to Beaver, where I expected to exchange my cheese and butter for woollen goods and other supplies. While on the desert we had the misfortune of breaking a wheel off the wagon, to add to this trouble we were caught in a raging blizzard and snow storm, with no means of making a fire. Will managed to make a cart with the front wheels and running gears. We traveled in this fashion for about ten miles. We reached a cowboy's shack but I and my infant daughter were almost frozen to death, had it not been for the help and kindness of the cowboys I feel that we likely would have perished.

The following spring I joined my husband in Wayne Co. In 1884 there had begun a specially persecutive assault on the Latter Day Saints, particularly aimed at those who lived in plural marriage. Owing to this condition we were never quite at ease and in the spring of 1889 my husband was imprisoned in the Utah Penitentiary, kept there six months and fined three hundred dollars. This prison life was no strain upon his character, but proved his fidelity, to his conviction of right. During his confinement at the penitentiary I made my home at Hanksville with some friends by the name of Wrights. Their kindness and consideration shall ever be remembered with the deepest gratitude.

During those trying days I was made to sense fully the meaning of the words "A friend in need is a friend in deed." Life would have been bitter indeed without the association and help of those kind friends who came to me in time of deep trouble. After my husband's release we moved again, to Mancos, Colorado. My husband remaining in Bluff with his other family. My stay in Mancos was short; returning to Bluff about 1892. Farming conditions being so much more favorable at Monticello, my husband moved there, leaving me at Bluff. I raised a family of ten children--nine girls and a boy. As life is always hard in a new country we were often taxed to the limit to know how to provide food and clothing for our children. Life was especially hard for me, being left alone so much of the time with my small children. Many times I felt like giving up in despair, especially in times of sickness. Having to depend entirely on the priesthood and the help of the neighbors, there being no doctor nearer than ninety or a hundred miles.

Many were the trying times we had with the Indians. Not only would they pilfer and steal, but threaten to take our lives if denied things they asked for. At one time I had an Indian boy chop me some fire wood promising him bread for his work. When the wood was chopped he refused the bread and demanded money. I had no money so could give him none, he goes away in a rage but soon returns with his father, a Ute chief Mancos. I explain to the father but he insists that I give the boy money as I promised saying his boy "no lie". They declare if I didn't, when my and my papooses go to sleep they will come and burn the house down.

Often I have been warned of danger. I recall in particular one morning while in Sunday School I felt impressed to return home. I could see no reason for doing so as I had my children with me and could think of nothing at home needing my attention, but the warning came ~~pre~~peatedly and so clearly I could not disregard it. On reaching home I found an Indian in the act of carrying off what few provisions I had.

Besides caring for my family I did a good deal of work for the neighbors to help my husband in his task of providing for his big family. I also made most of my furniture I had from goods boxes and I think I as proud of what I had as many a young matron is today of her upholstered set. My first screen door I made from coffee boxes. More than one stranger stopped to ask if I sold coffee, seeing the writing "coffee" on the door, they mistook it for a sign.

My children's Christmas was quite different from the Christmases of today. One year, by washing, I had obtained enough yarn to knit each child a pair of woolen stockings to be their only present. After hours and hours of knitting they were completed, washed and hung out to dry. When no one was looking one of our dusky neighbors helped himself to every pair and the children were left without any Christmas. I can't think of those days of severe trial without recalling the bishop Jense Nielson, who was ever solicitous of our welfare.

One of my most trying times came when my twin girls were born. They weighed at birth two and one half, and three pounds. For nine months we despaired for their lives. Our lights were never out and for weeks at a time I didn't have my clothes off. At another time my daughter Alberta, was severely burned and but for God's goodness could never have lived.

About the year 1913 my husband felt that he could more easily provide and assist in rearing my family if we were living in the same town with him. Accordingly we were called to again establish ourselves in a new home, at Monticello. This however proved not to be the hard ordeal that myself and daughters had felt it would. Many of the people we found were old acquaintances. We found ourselves among friends and relatives instead of in a land of strangers.

Many and varied are the experiences I have been called to pass through. While some have tested my courage severely, I have never doubted God's wisdom. I have buried my husband, my only son and his wife and a daughter; both son and daughter leaving four little children. I am now in my 70th year and my testimony of the Gospel's the most prized of all my possessions.