

“THE OLDEN DAYS”
MARY PEARL JOHNSON BEUTLER



Mary Pearl Johnson, 1935

(Ivan’s Brigham: “Hello Aunt Ione, It was great to see you at the Beutler Reunion hosted by Uncle Lloyd & Aunt Kandis Labor Day weekend 2016! I’ve attached the letter that I told you about that I recently found in a box that Grandma Beutler wrote for me when I was in 1st grade 23 years ago. It was a response to my request for an assignment to find out about the “**Olden Days**” from our Grandparents. Most of my classmates received one or two handwritten paragraphs, so needless to say they were shocked to see that Grandma Beutler had taken time to write several pages and have it typed up! Thanks for sending this out to the family.)

My Dear Grandson Brigham,

January 1993

Now you would like to know what the “**olden days**” were like. I was born 24 August 1909 in Hyrum, Utah, a small town south of Logan. I am 83 years old and can truthfully say that I have seen many marvelous changes in the world during my lifetime. I will try to explain all of them to you, but it may be hard to do so that you will understand. A few years ago I was telling your cousin, Andrew, about the “olden days”. When I finished he said, “Oh Grandma, you’re just kidding me!”

I remember the **first airplane** I ever saw. The plane ran out of gas and landed in the fields about a half mile from our home. My sisters and I, with many of the neighbors ran up there to see it. We watched it fly away and marveled. Little did I know that some day I would fly in an airplane. In 1975 Grandpa and I flew in an airplane to Germany and we also visited Switzerland where Grandpa’s father and mother **Beutler** were born. We also flew in an airplane to visit your parents in Missouri and your Aunt Ione in California.

Most people in Hyrum had a wagon pulled by horses, or a buggy pulled by just one horse. We didn’t; **we walked** most everywhere we went. It was only two blocks from our home to the Church house.

The city of **Hyrum** was settled by **Danish immigrants**. They built their homes in the city, but their farms were outside the city. During the day they drove out to their farms and returned home to the city at night when they were through with their work. The city of Hyrum was divided into three L.D.S. wards. Each ward built a chapel and a one-room building for a school house. I went to the one-room school, in my ward for first grade. My older sister, Edith, and my brother, Albert were in the same room. Mrs. Gunderson was our teacher. For second grade, a new school, Central School, had been built and I went down to the middle of town, about a mile, to attend this school. In Central School, there was a teacher for each grade. We always took our lunches; we took bread and jam.

I was the **first one in our family to attend high school, and later college**. The high school wasn’t built in time for my older sister and brother to attend. We had no buses and the high school was almost two miles away. As I remember there was a street car (or electric train) we called the “Leaping Lizzie” that ran by rail from Hyrum, Utah, to Preston, Idaho, and then back again. The high school students from the towns of Nibley, Providence, and Millville rode the “Leaping Lizzie” to school. Hyrum students all walked to school.

The **city of Hyrum** is much different in 1993. Everyone has a car and a new high school has been built. We had only three wards; now, I imagine there are many more because there are three stakes in that area. There are numbers on the houses, street signs and even stop signs. But, when I lived there

and people wanted to know where I lived, I could give them directions by saying, “You go down the street two blocks, then turn right, and I live in the yellow house in the middle of the block.”

My Uncle Christian Thompson, the undertaker (as we called him) or owner of the mortuary, was one of the first to have an **automobile**. His son, Elmer, wanted to take my mother for a ride in the new car. She went with him to Logan, twenty miles away and back. When she got back home safely, she said, “I will never ride with Elmer again; he just drove too fast! He went 15 miles an hour!”

We had **one milk cow**. She furnished the family milk, buttermilk, butter, and cottage cheese. We made our own butter and cottage cheese. My mother or older sister, Edith, would milk the cow if my father was not home. The cow was milked by hand. We churned the butter by putting the cream in a two-quart bottle shaking it until the cream turned to butter. If the cream was sour, it churned into butter faster. We emptied the butter and buttermilk out of the bottle into a pan, then poured out the buttermilk and washed the butter in cold water two times, added salt and patted it into a cube of butter. The buttermilk we drank.

My sister, Violet, just younger than me, and I had the **job of herding the cow**. When she had eaten all the grass in the pasture below the hill, we would herd her along the roadside. We were to see that the cow did not get on the road and stayed “within seeing range.” We enjoyed this because there was a stream of water coming out of the hill that we went wading in, and used to make mud pies. But when the **Indians came to town begging**, we did not herd the cow. We were afraid the Indians would steal us. (Little did I know that years later Grandpa and I would take three different Indian boys into our home on the Church Indian Program and help raise them.)

When **the Gypsies** came to town we didn’t herd the cow then either because we were afraid of them. They always dressed in very bright clothes, wore lots of jewelry, long dangling earrings, rings on their fingers, and lots of painted make-up on their faces. What they wore was very different than what we wore. They came around to each house wanting people to pay them to tell their fortunes. One time they came to our neighbor’s place and wanted to tell her fortune. She told them she didn’t have any money. They said, “Yes you do; you have \$50 under your bed mattress!” She slammed the door shut and locked it! She did have \$50 under her mattress! After the gypsies left, she came to our house almost frightened to death, thinking that the gypsies knew about her \$50 under her mattress! My father told her to go home, lock the door, to go to bed and not to worry. He was right; the gypsies didn’t know and they didn’t come back.

My sisters and I used to **play house** out under our apple trees. We took our dolls out with us and had a lot of fun pretending. We used leaves from the Burdock weed; one would be the table, half of one a chair, and several put together would be beds. Our dolls would be on the chairs or in bed while we made dinner out of mud pies filled with rocks or seeds or whatever else we might find. We enjoyed eating the seeds from the “cheese-it” weed. Whenever our mother called us to come help her, we would kiss our dolls goodbye and say, “We are going to help the hotel lady.”

Going as a family up the canyon with our neighbor and his family in his wagon was another thing I really enjoyed. We would take our lunch and spend the day picking wild chokecherries and other wild berries to take home for mother to make into jelly that we would eat during the winter months.

Our family and all other families **planted a garden**, and harvested the garden for winter food. We had two cellars outside. One was about six feet wide by six feet long. A hole was dug in the ground and a roof of lumber was made on top of the hole. Dirt and straw were put on top of the lumber. Steps were

made to go down into the cellar with a door at the top of the steps. In this cellar, we stored potatoes, carrots and sometimes apples. The other cellar was made the same way, but was large and it was next to the house. Instead of bins to hold vegetables, it had shelves inside upon which we stored bottled fruit, jams, jellies, and apples.

Stores in that day did not sell any fresh vegetables or fresh fruit of any kind. I was rather old when I tasted a banana! Somehow, Santa Claus would bring us an orange for Christmas and that was the only time I got an orange. No cake mixes, no frozen vegetables, nothing like we have in the super markets today, no drive-ins like Arctic Circle, Pizza Hut, or J.B.’s. Stores did not sell bottled or canned drinks.

We dug a trench to store our cabbage. We put straw along the side, pulled up the cabbage out of our garden, then placed the cabbage head down in the trench. The root was pointing up. We covered it well with straw. When we wanted a cabbage we felt under the straw until we found a root and then pulled the cabbage out of the straw. The cabbage did not freeze in the trench.

In my early life, we did **not have a refrigerator, no home freezer, electric stove, clothes iron, washer or dryer, curling iron, or any other electric appliance.** We did have electric lights. An electric cord came down from the ceiling with a socket at the end into which we screwed a light globe. There was a little switch on one side to turn the light off and on. We had that kind of a light in every room. We had **no television, radio, nor tape player, but we did have a phonograph that we cranked by hand** with a handle on the side.

We didn’t have a telephone. There was **no running water** in most homes. Our father piped some water into our home. My mother built a wash stand and placed a granite bowl under the tap to put water for washing our hands and faces in. All of the hot water had to be heated on our coal stove. At one end of the stove was a reservoir that kept the water hot. We could dip hot water out of that whenever we needed it. All of our food was cooked on the coal stove. This stove also heated the room. Each room had to have some kind of a stove to heat it.

We had no bathroom in the house. We had a privy (or it was also called an “out house” which is an outside bathroom) some distance from our house. It looked like a little house and was put over a hole in the ground. Inside of the privy was a bench with a large hole for adults and on the other side was a small hole for children. We did not have any toilet paper, but used pages from the old “Sears and Roebuck” and other paper catalogs.

If we got sick, Uncle Chris Thompson would come and help give us a Priesthood Blessing. If we got measles, chicken pox, or any contagious disease the doctor would come in his horse and buggy, nail a sign up on the house by the front door telling everyone what we had. We were usually quarantined for three weeks, which meant that all of the family had to stay home for that period of time and no one was to come into our house until we had all had the disease and were all well. When this happened, we would miss a lot of school. When we were all well again we had to fumigate the bedrooms to kill the germs. We would put some powdered sulfur in a saucer or plate and light it with a match. We could not go inside the room until the sulfur was all burned and the room was aired out.

On **Memorial Day holiday, the last of May,** we did not work. Our home was across the street from the Hyrum Cemetery. No grass was planted in the cemetery. A week or so before Memorial Day father would take us with a pick, a shovel and a rake to the cemetery. First, we would clean all the weeds off of our relatives’ grave lots. When we had cleaned and raked smooth all of our relatives’

graves, we took care of others that had not been cleaned. At sunrise on Memorial Day, army soldiers came to the cemetery and put a United States flag at the head of the graves of soldiers that were killed in the war. They would also blow taps on their bugles. We had lots of early blooming flowers—tulips, peonies, bridal wreath, Lilac trees with lavender and white flowers around our home. Mother would help us pick the flowers and put them in tubs with a little water. She also knew how to make beautiful artificial flowers. Early in the morning, we would take the flowers over to the cemetery and first decorate our relatives’ graves, then put flowers on some of the other graves. We would hurry home, get dressed in our Sunday clothes and go to the Patriotic Meeting. We had lots of relatives that came to visit on Memorial Day. Mother always had a large kettle of chili, bread and cookies or cakes to serve them. This was a day we paid our respect to the dead. We did not see pleasure on this day.

The **4th and 24th of July were big celebrations in Hyrum!** My sisters and I always got a new dress for the festivities that our mother sewed. She was an expert seamstress and designer. She could make any style and did not use patterns. Each year we got two new Sunday dresses, one for the 4th of July and one for Christmas. We also had two school dresses. They were usually our Sunday dresses from the year before. We wore one to school one week and one the next, while the other was getting washed.

On the 4th of July we had **15 cents to spend!** I usually bought an ice cream cone for a nickel, a candy bar for a nickel and a box of Cracker Jacks, or a ride on the Merry-Go-Round for the other nickel. One girl, Mable Sorenson, had 15 cents to spend on the 4th; when she asked her father for money to spend on the 24th he said, “You didn’t give me any change from the money I gave you to spend on the 4th!”

I must tell you about **killing our pigs so we could have meat.** We did have a meat market in town, but seldom purchased meat there. (One time we all got sick from eating some of their meat.) We fed our three pigs well during the summer and then in the middle of November, my father killed the pigs so we would have meat to eat. That was a big day for us! Water was boiled on the coal-burning stove, carried out to the pig pen and poured into a barrel. A platform was built; the pig was taken out of the pen, carried up on the platform, stabbed in the neck and dunked into the hot water two or three times. With sharp knives they would scrape the hair off the pig, rinse it again, and then take out the insides, its stomach and intestines. Grandmother Johnson would clean the bladder out, then blow it up like a balloon and tie it with a string which we kids used for a ball and had lots of fun. The pig would be cut into different sized pieces. Father always gave our neighbors a piece of pork. We would save the spare ribs to roast for our Thanksgiving dinner. We cleaned the barrel good, filled it with cold water, then we stirred salt into the water. When an egg would float on top of the water, that told us that there was enough salt in the water to keep the meat from spoiling. The meat was put into the barrel for us to use as we needed it. To eat the meat, we first had to boil it to get the salt out.

We had **lots of snow in the wintertime.** We loved to go **sleigh riding** down “Thompson’s Hill” and the “Cemetery Hill”! Our friends often went with us. The snowplow would come early in the morning and plow the snow off of the sidewalks. The plow was made with two boards fastened together on one end to form a “V”. It was pulled by a horse. We did not get marked late for school if the snowplow didn’t get to our home on time. Yes, believe it or not, the snow was so high it covered the fences. In the warmth of the day the snow would melt a little and then at night it would freeze hard. We could walk on top of the snow over the fences. We had fun playing games with our friends in the snow!

We did **not have an ice cream freezer** to make ice cream in. We would put the ingredients into a bucket and bury the bucket in the snow. Now and then we would go out and shake the bucket. When the contents started to freeze, we stirred it with a spoon. Soon it was ready to eat with cookies or cake!

Our bedrooms were cold in the wintertime. We would heat an iron or a brick on the coal-burning stove, then as we went to bed we would wrap it in a piece of heavy cloth and place it at the foot of the bed between the blankets to help warm the bed.

Santa Claus always found our home! I always got a doll with a china head and sawdust body and legs. By the next year, the dolls head would have got broken. I also got a little mouth organ, a play horn to blow, a new dress, long stockings, some underwear, and an **orange** in the toe of my stocking, and lots of nuts and some candy. My father made candy from the recipe book. None of our gifts were wrapped in fancy paper. At noon on Christmas day the family would go to the church house where an excellent program was prepared. Then, of course, Santa Claus came and gave each a large sack of candy and nuts! We all looked forward to **Christmas day!**

I must tell you how **our father entertained us some evenings.** He would say, “Do you want to see how I can make the cat dance? He brought the cat into the kitchen, tore newspaper up, then tied the newspaper on all four paws. He took his mouth organ out of his pocket and started to play music. When he put the cat down on the floor it really danced a jig. (As I got older, I realized the cat was trying to get the paper off her feet.) Father would also go outside in the dark and get the dog to howl by playing his mouth organ. He told us that when he was in the mountains herding sheep sometimes the clouds would almost touch the ground. If he put his finger up into the cloud, rain drops would fall out. (My father was a good storyteller!) In the winter when it was too cold to play games outside, we would sit around our big kitchen table and play games and eat popcorn and apples.

Just one more item: I’ve seen the day when **sugar beet fields** had to be planted by machinery, thinned, hoed and topped by hand. Now my son, your Uncle Wesley, has machinery that can thin, top and load the sugar beets into big trucks and take them to the sugar factory to be processed into sugar! The same with the **green string beans!** We used to pick them by hand and now a machine can come into the bean field, plant the beans, pick the beans, throw the vines out on one side and put the beans into a hopper. Then throw the beans into a big truck, haul them to the factory to be washed, canned and ready to sell. What a marvel!!

We were taught to **enjoy work, how to do a job well, to be dependable and honest in our work and work together as a family,** to be friendly and help our neighbors when they needed help. Our mother was a “saint.” She was always helping those in need and took good care of her own family. She was a good seamstress, good in all the arts of homemaking and taught her children by her example. We ate our meals together, had our family prayer together and worked together. We were a **happy family,** happy without all the modern conveniences! We were healthy and didn’t need the doctor very often.

I will make this comment. I had 9 sisters and 4 brothers—14 of us! I am one of the oldest girls. Our lifestyle changed as I got older. The younger family members lived a bit differently. Albert, the oldest, is 86; I’m 83, and the youngest is 60 years old. Two sisters and one brother have died. Each year all of us try to get together and celebrate a birthday dinner. We have an enjoyable time, not bad feelings at all, just love for each other! I hope you will have that same experience when you are my age, Brigham.

Much love, Mary Pearl Johnson Beutler

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Grandmother Beutler". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.