

PERSONAL HISTORY of LAVINA HARPER

I was born on October 18, 1924, the second daughter of William Walter Harper and Alma Ishmael Aycock. This was the home my mother was born in and the home my great grandfather had built for his family. Here on this farm, consisting of about 70 acres, I spent a happy childhood. Our family was made up of five girls and one boy.

The evenings our family spent around the fireplace, playing games together such as blind man's bluff cemented our family together. In the summers we would picnic together, go to the beach (100 miles away) sing in the evenings on the front porch together, entertain our parents with "made up" plays and just visit. As the long evenings drew to a close, we would reluctantly go inside and to bed.

We had lots of nearby relatives our own age. The Herman Barnes Aycock family, the Adrian Harper family and the Charles Maples family were not only our relatives but our friends for we were the only Mormons around.

At an early age we attended the Quaker Sunday School occasionally which was located across the road from our school about three-fourths of a mile from our home. Two days after my birthday -- the eighth one -- I was baptized in Uncle Herman's "swamp" with Ruby Maples and Fred Harper. It was on this, the 20th day of October, that we raised our hands to say we wanted to organize a Sunday School. Little did we realize the effect that that Sunday School -- forerunner to the Nahunta Branch -- would have on our lives. Heretofore our religious training had been left to our parents and an occasional Branch and District Conference in the nearby town of Goldsboro. Our Sundays had been long play days which left us exhausted at the end of the day. We started having Sunday School in homes then and continued to do so for the next eight years. Here in the kitchen, hall, bedroom or porch our classes were held; here I was taught the Gospel, here I learned that we were different from our neighbors.

I went to school, the first grade, when I was five as I would be six the following October. I was then and continued to be the youngest in my class until I graduated at sixteen. Ruby Maples and I started and graduated from Nahunta School together for the school then had all eleven grades -- now of course twelve. I loved school, even now I can remember all my teachers' names and with only one exception I liked and respected them. My school days were happy ones. I did quite well in school and was president of my Junior and Senior classes in school. The classes were small all the way through so there were many more chances to participate in all activities such as plays, sports, etc.

As a child I felt my parents were rather strict but now I appreciate their love and good training when I remember our weeks to help with the dishes, our weeks "to look up eggs," and all the other chores. My father felt the need for good breakfasts, a glass of water before breakfast, dental visits, getting home when told, etc., which many parents did not demand. Then, as I said, I felt them a little strict. Now I am grateful for the discipline.

I enjoyed and am still enjoying close companionship with my sisters. It was with Neva I lived for six weeks in Washington, D.C. after I graduated from high school. When her office transferred her up to Newark, New Jersey, I asked for and was granted a transfer to her office and lived with her in East Orange, New Jersey. Here we became members of the East Orange Ward under the efficient and kindly leadership of Bishop O. Wendell Hyde. He was what I thought a Bishop should be. Here in New Jersey we worked at the Office of Dependency Benefits of the War Department six days a week. Here we met fine members of the Church as we became active in the ward. Here I saw my first opera, "Aida," my first legitimate theater, the Statue of Liberty, and all the sights of New York. Here (1943-45) in the war years there were more fellows than girls. Here Lyle Whitmer who had been on a mission at home was stationed; such fine fellows we met through him.

In the ward I taught a Primary class, was later Secretary and then President of the Mutual. Actually with distance and gas rationing, our Mutual functioned best on weekends when we had various activities with the Manhattan Ward. I was also New York Stake Sunday School Secretary for about a year and a half and enjoyed the counsel of such good men as those in the Stake Presidency Brother Guy Rose and Carl Christensen. Brother and Sister Hyde, the Bishop and his wife, were surely good to us. So were the George Mortimers. One of my nicest experiences in New Jersey was meeting Winifred Morse. She entered nurses training in Jersey City and was baptized while Neva and I were there. Through her I learned to appreciate the full meaning of the word "friend."

Neva was a good influence on me. It would have been easy to have gone the ways of the world on Sunday, our only day off, but it was she who got us off to church on Sunday, morning and evening meetings. I was taken off my feet by her whirlwind romance and marriage to J. Theron Smith in June 1944. I missed her when she joined him the following December. With the continued friendship of Winnie and my new friend Carol Cherrington and my church activities, I was not lonesome.

I resigned from the "O.D.B." in August 1945. I cried like a baby when I left. The office had been good to me -- what a diverse group of people -- Zoe, the negro girl, Smitty, negro or white?, Hilda Weiss, the Jewish girl, Helen Sheridan, from the Bronx, an Irish Catholic, Joe, boss, whose wife was in Washington, D.C., Malvina, an Italian, high tempered, generous. And the amazing thing they all liked me. When I think of it now I marvel that my parents allowed me to go -- I was awfully naive. The day following my resignation,

peace was signed -- such rejoicing in and around. We went to Times Square where people went crazy.

Vivian (fourth in our family) came up to go home with me. We stopped on our way home to visit Uncle Bayron, mama's youngest brother in Baltimore. He was a doctor there, a very fine surgeon. He and Aunt Irene were most hospitable to us. I was not home but a few days when I boarded the bus for my first trip to Salt Lake City. It took five days and five nights because of war time traveling conditions. It was a most interesting and tiring trip. In Salt Lake I stayed with Neva and her in-laws as Theron was still overseas. They were lovely to me and while I was in Springville, Utah visiting Carol Cherrington and her family, Roger, Neva's first son was born. Carol took me horseback riding up the mountain and I was impressed with the majesty of the Rockies. I liked the mountains and their changing color at twilight.

On my return to North Carolina, Wilma (third in the family) and I attended East Carolina College in Greenville, North Carolina. We lived together in the dormitory and worked in the dining hall to help pay our way. We both majored in Home Economics and Social Science. Two years later we were delighted to find another Mormon girl in the dormitory, Margaret Cartledge from Tarboro, North Carolina. School went along smoothly and was fun. I missed the LDS association and put into practice "no studying or school work on Sunday." I tried to study the Gospel then and though I did not follow any set pattern I was uplifted as I browsed through Church books on Sunday afternoon.

We visited a number of churches in Greenville and felt a little out of place in them. I attended school the year round and so was able to graduate in three years. Wilma stopped after her first two years and went on a mission. She and I are closer today, perhaps, because of our two years together. The second year she went to school, she worked in the library. The second summer I was in school I also worked in the library and continued to do so until I graduated. When I was a Junior in college we got a new head of the Physical Education Department. When I read his name in the paper, Dr. Nephi Jorgensen from Idaho, I was positive he was a Mormon and so he was. I learned to love Sister Jorgensen and his sister Gudrun Hisgen who lived with them. That year they organized a Sunday School in Greenville. While in college I was active in the YWCA and the Home Economics Club. I was also a reporter for the college paper and a member of the Dramatics Club.

In December of 1947 our only brother, Billy, was hit by a car on his way home from school. It was the first tragedy of our family. He was a dear boy, only eleven, and what a shock to the whole family. I was proud of the way the family rallied around and the kindness of our friends and neighbors could not be equalled.

Upon graduation in August 1948 I signed a contract to teach at Gardners High School in Wilson County, North Carolina about five miles from Wilson, North Carolina. It was a

straining but a fun year. Sue Tharrington, the fourth grade teacher, and I lived together in the "Teacherage" and I received valuable experience in teaching. I taught four classes -- small ones -- of Home Economics and a tenth grade class in Biology. I coached the girl's softball team, amazing what one can do! I went home weekends so I could attend church. I continued as Goldsboro District Sunday School Secretary.

In June following my first year of teaching school, our family, mama, papa, Vivian, Letty, and I started to Salt Lake City. Wilma was still on her mission in the western part of North Carolina. We stopped en route to see her and on to Salt Lake City. We visited Neva and I stayed the summer (1949). Almost by accident I got a job teaching school in the Granite School District. I then moved to 68 R Street with Winifred Morse who had now been in Salt Lake City for a year. I received my endowments. We belonged to the East 27th Ward where I taught a Sunday School class. My school work found me in a beautiful new school, teaching nothing but Home Economics classes, under a fine principal, Mr. Clark Frei. I taught there until 1960.

Car pooling was a way of life. Most faculty lived in Salt Lake. Other car poolers with whom I became well acquainted were Virginia Richardson, Jay Ridd, Alice Scott, James E. Houston, Walter Reichert, Helen Hales Pearson and Bob Melville. I still keep in touch with Helen and with Bob (in Kentucky) at Christmas time.

I lived with Winnie a year (1949-50) and that summer she married James McLachlan. Our friendship has continued to the present.

During the next ten years I lived in several places. From 1950-1957 I lived at 7th East and 3rd South in an apartment with my sister, Vivian. During this time mama died and Vivian and I flew back to North Carolina for the funeral.

During the summer of 1951 Vivian went on a mission to the Northwest. From 1951-1953 I shared a room on 7th East and 6th South with Roberta Read in the home of Susie Streadbeck, a 70ish year old widow, the oldest person I had known well prior to that time. She was a darling lady. I was still in the Tenth Ward of the Park Stake. While there I served in the Park Stake YWCA with Bernice Stevens and Alice Fox.

After two years with Roberta and Sister Streadbeck, Roberta moved back to her home in California. I then moved to 136 South 300 East with my sister Vivian, who had returned from her mission and Delma Aycock (a cousin). Later we shared the apartment with a former missionary companion of Delma's, Shirley Farnsworth and remained there only a short time before moving to an upstairs apartment on 500 East and South Temple. This kept us in the same ward, North 13th in the University Stake. Vivian had married Clive A. Pope from the 3rd East apartment.

During the years in the North 13th Ward I served as ward, later stake, Gleaner leader, activity counselor and later ward YWMIA president. From 1958 until I left for Logan in 1960 I was stake YWMIA president.

During this time I met Gladys Banks and Arlene Hawkins. We've enjoyed a warm friendship ever since. I also served with Elizabeth Fletcher, Betty Brown, Edyth Johnson, Irwin Hunsaker, Weldon and Earl Hyer. I also got to know Keith Jenkins who was a counselor to Bishop Oscar McConkie in my ward and he later became our Bishop. Friendship with Keith and his wife Betty have endured to this time. I also met and enjoyed LeRue Snaff, Marguerite Humphrey and Edna Richardson in the North 13th Ward.

My eleven years in Salt Lake City were busy, growing years professionally, socially and spiritually. I was reluctant to move out of my comfortable "rut" and move to Logan, Utah. In the spring of 1960 I accepted an assistantship at Utah State University and resigned from the Granite School District.

In the summer of 1960 my sister Neva, her father-in-law, George Smith and a couple of her children, Wendell and Wanda drove to Boiling Springs, North Carolina to visit papa. We were there only a day when he was hospitalized and within the week he died in Columbia, South Carolina, 4 August 1960. His five daughters attended his funeral. His death created a great void in my life.

While living in Logan and completing a Masters Degree (1961) I enjoyed proximity to my cousin, Ruby (Maples) Haws and her sister, Shirley Maples Olsen and their families. I enjoyed association with Edith Nyman. This friendship has endured to the present.

I served with Glenn Baird (superintendent) as Young Women's President in the Logan 5th Ward. I lived in Inez and Urven Larsen's basement apartment. I was within walking distance of the Logan Temple and attended frequently.

With thesis finished at the end of the summer 1961 I visited my sister Wilma in Washington, D.C. From there I sailed to England and spent three months there and in Scotland, Ireland, Spain, France, Switzerland, Germany, Austria and the Holy Land. I returned to Washington, D.C. in time for Christmas.

I joined the Utah State University Faculty in 1962 and taught there (in Edith Nyman's department) until 1965.

Edith and I team taught a class at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver the summer of 1965. Afterwards I joined Gladys Banks in New York City where we attended the World's Fair.

I joined the CCH (later became BYU-Hawaii) faculty in the fall of 1965. I kept a journal from the fall of 1965 until the present. Be my guest for the years since! (Most years I summarized the main events of the year.)

*written by Lavina Harper
in 1954 (up to 1949)
February 1997 from 1949-1965*