



I MARRIED A FAMILY

Juanita Leavitt Brooks

I often spoke in jest of our “Compound-Complex Family,” but I was firm in my resolution to make this marriage and our family life a success. I well knew that I could never have the complete love of my husband, Will, if I could not in some way earn the love of his children. At the time of our marriage, Will’s oldest son, Walter, was on a mission. The three Brooks boys at home were Bob (16), Grant (14), and Clair (8). My son, Ernest Pul-sipher, was 13. How to establish good relationships among us all was a continual challenge.

Clair was mother-hungry. He needed to be loved and approved of and encouraged, and was in turn affectionate himself. I won him completely on the day Will and I returned from our brief honeymoon. Clair, Ernest, and a cousin, Waldo, had spent all afternoon playing in the river. There was hardly enough water to swim. Clair’s skin was thin and tender, so that when we got home, he was, as Will expressed it, “burned to a frazzle.” Will reached for the mentholatum — his favorite remedy for everything, I was soon to learn — and started to apply it with a heavy hand. Clair screamed with pain.

“Don’t you know better than that?” I said, taking the jar. “Let me show you how to treat sunburn!”

I hurried to the cellar and came back with some cream skimmed from a pan of cool milk. This I carefully patted on, Clair lying on his stomach. It was soothing and he was so worn out that he fell asleep almost instantly. He never forgot it; from that time on he saw me differently. One day he came home from school with his shirt torn and his hair disheveled. He had been in a fight with a kid who said that I was his step-mother. I was nothing of the kind! I was his real mother. And so I have been to this day.

As a gesture to win them all, I presented the family with a new refrigerator, which I called a wedding gift to us all, myself included. They took pride in showing it to their friends, for very few families in Dixie owned one at that time. Now ice cream could be a daily dish.

Grant was our problem child. He disliked school and took every chance to play truant. After one full day’s absence, which he had spent roaming the fields and wading the sloughs in search of birds’ nests, I asked Will not to punish him and to let me deal with him. I told Grant some of my own experiences robbing birds’ nests, and encouraged him instead to make a collection of nests and eggs, selecting them carefully and putting them

into a glass case. I would buy the case, and type a card for each nest with full information about where and when it was found and by whom.

He took this very seriously. I would put up a lunch for his expeditions, praise his work to visitors in his presence, and let him show off the collection. A set of tools and a few weeks' training with a local taxidermist enlarged the scope of his activities, until he had a worthy display. After that instead of being the biggest problem in school, he even co-operated in getting his routine lessons.

Bob was our musician, playing wood-wind instruments in both band and orchestra. He was very clean and fastidious in his dress, so for his first Christmas I fitted his room with new curtains, bedspread and matching rug and table lamp. He still says it was the best Christmas gift of his life.

My own son, Ernest, had a harder time than any of the other boys, for my new marriage meant a complete change for him. It troubled me that for the first year he did not live in the Brooks home, but with his grandparents in Bunkerville. I wrote quite often; I didn't know that his new "Dad" wrote also, and enclosed a dollar bill in every letter. In those days a dollar meant a lot to a teen-age boy.

We had bought the old homestead on the hill, rented the house, and proceeded to clear and plow the back lot for garden and clean the corral, chicken house and pig pen. We brought up a splendid milk cow, an offspring of one given me at my first marriage, and bought a couple of young pigs, a dozen hens, and a rooster. Ernest took over all the chores. The run of three blocks up-hill night and morning conditioned him to become a distance runner for both Dixie College and B.Y.U.

I had my own problems adjusting to life in another woman's home. Will had cleared out all Nellie's personal things and put her pictures away. Yet wherever I turned, I seemed to feel her there. To help overcome this I brought down my new bedroom set from the house on the old homestead.

Two months after Will and I were married, I was appointed Stake Relief Society President, a position I held for seven years, through the births of four babies. This made me conscious of the families in need, especially widows with children, and resulted in a "make-work" program started in 1935. At the suggestion of Dr. Nels Anderson, of whom I will speak later, we copied diaries and records I collected for the W.P.A. Program.

My first real difference with Will came in the fall, as time for the annual deer hunt approached. Preparations began weeks in advance. Boots were dragged out and oiled, guns were stacked out by the back door to be cleaned and oiled, shooting expeditions to Red Hill tested the sights and loosened up trigger fingers.

I didn't enter into the spirit of it at all. The tales of past years' exploits left me cold. My sympathies were all with the deer; in my opinion, beef was better than venison and much cheaper. At last Will sat me down, pulled another chair up close and said, "Now you get this! Some men get their recreation one way, some another. They get drunk, gamble with cards, chase the women. I hunt deer. I have gone every year since I could carry a gun. I'll take care of all the preparations, but it would be pleasanter all around if you would cooperate just a little. If you can't help, at least don't fight it."

So that was that. I helped, but not with enthusiasm. I did introduce the Brooks family to jerkie or dried venison. That fall we had a flour sack almost full of it hanging from a wire in an unfinished part of the upstairs. Toward spring I remembered it and went up to get some to pound up and put into a gravy. The sack was totally empty. A small hole had been made right in the corner where the stitching thread had come loose, and one little piece after another had found its way out at night as boys went to bed. I didn't blame anyone, for I was happy that it had been put to such good use. Dried deer meat is best disposed of in just such a way.

Deer hunts notwithstanding, Will was always helpful and understanding. His admonition to the boys that "Your Mother is always right," placed a great responsibility upon me. He was always quick to cover up for me if the occasion demanded it. I remember the incident of the curdled tomato soup, for example.

One evening the group was having a basketball game in the back yard. They had only one backboard and were divided two on a side, Will and Ernest against Grant and Bob, with Clair a spectator. I was preparing supper on the big wood range, the only stove we ever had in the big house. I had a good supper going for them: a fresh apple cobbler in the oven and tomato cream soup on top of the stove. A large pan of bread cubes (croustons) was waiting to be slipped in on the top rack at the last minute.

I had made the white sauce, with a generous amount of butter, in the large skillet, and had a quart of homemade tomato juice simmering on the back of the stove.

I went to the back door and called, "Supper is ready!"

"O.K.," Will answered. "We'll be right in."

But they didn't come in. Somebody had made a basket, and they wanted to even the score.

I pulled the cobbler out of the oven and slipped the croustons in. Again I went to the door and called, and again they said, "Coming!" This time I believed them.

Then I poured the tomato juice into the white sauce. Too late I remembered that I should have added a pinch of soda to the homemade juice; too late I knew that I should have waited until the very last minute to combine them. But I did neither. I dumped it in and began to stir. Horrors! It curdled! It was simply awful! To me, it looked like something the dog had rejected. I wanted to heave, for I was pregnant and my times of nausea — what few I had — came in the evening when I was tired. Now when I went to call I was furious. Will knew a storm was brewing.

"If you had come when you said you would, I might have had a decent meal," I said. "Now you can just get your own. Go ahead and play as long as you want. I'll just dump this into the toilet!"

Will got possession of the ball and held it.

"Soup's on!" he said. "Get in and wash up! Quick!"

He washed his own hands at the sink, while the boys all trooped into the bathroom. He gave the soup a few vigorous stirs and began serving it up in generous helpings into the bowls, putting a handful of the browned croustons on the top of each.

After the blessing was asked, Will began. "This soup is just extra spe-

cial tonight, soup like you've never tasted before. Clean it up good and you can have your cobbler in the same bowl and save on the dishwashing."

He ate his with evident relish, and the boys followed suit. The game had sharpened their already healthy appetites. The apple cobbler was always a favorite dish. I stayed away until the soup was gone, but joined them for dessert.

"You are excused," Will said to me. "You relax in the front room while two of these boys wash the dishes and the other two clean up that bathroom. They left quite a mess in there, and we must have things clean for morning. Be nice if you felt like playing the piano."

With Will as inspector, things in the kitchen and bathroom were soon put straight. A week or so later Clair asked in all seriousness, "Mother, why don't you ever make any more of that good *lumpy* soup? That was the best soup I ever tasted!"

Will was very easy with his children; I never saw him strike one. I might slap little hands that got into mischief or swat a little behind if its owner disobeyed an order. But not Will.

We had a rule that the boys could go to only one show a week. If they wanted to see more, they must earn their own money. And one thing was sure, when their father said "No," that was it; it was useless to coax or cry.

One evening Clair said, "Daddy, may I go to the show?"

"Have you been to one already this week?"

"Yes." Will seemed to be waiting for me to comment, but I did not.

"If you've already had your show for this week, that about answers it. You'll have to stay home tonight, son."

Clair didn't say anything, but he looked pretty dejected. He leafed through a book a little, but he really didn't enjoy reading. After a few minutes he said, "Well, good night, Daddy," and kissed his father, "Good night, Mother," kissed me, and went upstairs.

About half an hour later, I went upstairs. Clair's bed was empty. Without saying a word to Will, I went to the telephone and called Bob, who was then working at Penney's store. In as pleasant a voice as I could muster, I asked, "How long has it been since Clair left there, Bob?"

"Oh, about fifteen minutes."

"O.K. Thanks," still in a voice that would not indicate that anything was wrong. The picture show was just through the vacant lot and across the street from our house. I called and asked the manager to page Clair Brooks and tell him that he was wanted at home.

In an incredibly short time Clair, all out of breath and crying, came through the back door. I said nothing. Will was in his easy chair.

"Come here, Clair," he said, reaching out his hand. Pulling the boy onto his lap, he went on, "Now stop crying, and tell me what this show is that you wanted to see so bad."

Clair explained that it was a skiing show, and his friends were all going, and they planned to sit together.

"I wondered what could be important enough for you to lie to us and deceive us. You might have told us a little more about it; we want to be fair with you. But if you lie to us and deceive us, we'll not be able to believe you at times when maybe you are telling the truth. We are your parents.

We want you to have what is good. Here, take this quarter and go back and see that show.”

Though I married one family and had another, none of them knew much of my writing activities. My daughter, Willa, was at B.Y.U. when the *Mountain Meadows Massacre* appeared, and was much surprised when she was told about it. I did not talk about it and did not work at it while they were around. In fact, my experiences have provoked laughter from some of my friends; they think I am slightly “teched.” Maybe I am.

I kept my ironing board set up in the living room of the big house, a rack with an ironed shirt or two on it and damp ones in the basket. I would type blissfully along until someone came to the door. Then I'd throw a fancy cloth over the machine, plug in the iron, and go to the door. I'd seat my caller with her back to the typewriter, facing me as I ironed. The minute she left, I'd finish what I was on and go back to the typewriter. A neighbor spoiled that by telling it to the club I belonged to.

It was during this time that I published my first major article. I had placed an article or two in local church magazines, and I had been made correspondent for *The Salt Lake Tribune*, with a base salary of thirty dollars a month and extra per inch addition for all stories above a certain minimum. But this was different.

After many years away, Dr. Nels Anderson came back to St. George searching for material for a book on the Mormon frontier. It appeared several years later as *Deseret Saints*, an excellent study.

Nels wanted to include a chapter on polygamy in the book, and when he found that both my grandfathers had plural families, he asked if I would like to write about it. He would include my work as a chapter in his book and give me a credit line. Indeed, I *would* like to do it! My Grandpa, John G. Hafen, for many years Bishop in Santa Clara, had four wives; Dudley Leavitt had five, one of whom was an Indian. I would gather facts about each: number of children born, number who grew to maturity, offices held in the Church, missions filled, etc.

I became much involved in assembling the facts regarding the two families, but when I took my first draft to Nels, he didn't like it at all. “Do it over,” he said, “and write in an easier, more conversational manner. How was it in the different homes? Were the wives friendly with one another? How did the children feel about this kind of set-up? You know, just sort of visit about it all.”

His time here was up, but I could mail it to him when it was finished. By this time, Will was postmaster, so Nels stopped at his office to leave a forwarding address. Will put the card into the pocket of his white shirt and promptly forgot it, and by the time it had been run through my Maytag washer and wringer, it was totally illegible. Here I was, ready to mail the article, and no place to mail it. Why not offer it to *Harper's* while I waited for Nels to write again?

I could hardly believe it! A prompt acceptance! Evidently the title, “A Close-up of Mormon Polygamy,” caught the eye of Frederick Lewis Allen. He said a check would follow. We tried to guess the amount, and settled at \$25 or may \$30. When it was \$150, I could hardly believe my eyes. Never had money seemed more important to me. The things I stretched it to

cover: part of the layette, a second-hand typewriter, a set of silver for the table, and a new Temple apron. The magazine appeared while I was in the hospital. A baby girl and an article in *Harpers!* It was almost too good to be true!

I was so thrilled with this first success that I kept on writing. I sent many articles which were rejected. These I hid away; I think I never sent one out a second time. I did place quite a few, though, over the years.

I undertook another project upon orders from my father. Someone had told him that I was writing a biography of Jacob Hamblin, so he came to St. George at once.

"I want you to write the life of my father, Dudley Leavitt," he said. "Everybody keeps talking about Jacob Hamblin! Jacob Hamblin! I know that Uncle Jacob was a good man, but when he had something too hard for him, he sent Dudley Leavitt and Ira Hatch! Who was it that sacrificed his horse when the company was freezing and starving at Pipe Springs? Dudley Leavitt!"

"He didn't learn to read much, and he could only sign his name. His family left Canada when he was small, and traveled to Kirtland and the Nauvoo area, then across to Winter Quarters, on across the plains to Utah to Tooele, then Santa Clara and Hebron and Gunlock, and the lower Virgin Valley; he was always on the frontier with his large family. Now I want you to do this, and get it into print before I go."

I did just that, and I have been thankful ever since. At that time there were at least twelve of his children living, and I interviewed every one to collect incidents that each remembered. I had the journal of his mother, Sarah Sturdevant Leavitt, to provide early incidents, and family genealogies to supply names and dates of all his children. I was never very proud of the book, but now each year it seems more valuable.

There is one incident connected with my writing which I'll never live down. My first baby boy was a good-natured, healthy child. As I prepared him for bed one night, sponged him off and rubbed him down and fed him, I noticed that he had been sweating. The house was too hot; we had no air conditioning. So I wheeled his crib out onto the front porch, but even there he couldn't get any breeze. I pushed him down the steps and out the short walk and parked him near the thick hedge along the sidewalk. He stretched out and immediately went to sleep.

Soon everyone else was abed and asleep. It was one of those times when my writing seemed to be going so well that I was almost drunk from my own wine. It is a pleasure like nothing else, and rarely felt.

By two a.m. I had finished, dead tired. I stripped, pulled on my nightgown, and rolled in, asleep almost before I hit the pillow. At six a.m., by signs which every nursing mother would easily know, it was time to feed the baby. I reached blindly for the crib. Horrors! He wasn't there!

"Where's the baby?" I said, jumping up.

"I don't know," said Will, rousing. "Where did you put him?"

"I don't know!" But once on my feet, I did know, and ran through the house to the hedge. He was sleeping peacefully as an angel, his little hands above his head.

Another story I have often told had to do with Frederick Lewis Allen

of *Harper's* magazine. During the years following my first acceptance, I sent several items to him. He always returned them with a warm, cordial letter that kept me writing. Finally, after copying the diary of the water-master at Bunkerville, it occurred to me that most people do not realize how precious water really is. It just might appeal to him. I sent a query, but received a negative answer.

In the meantime, I had worked over the article carefully, and I felt that it *was* good. I wrote the last draft sitting on the oven door of my wood range, my portable typewriter on the kitchen stool in front of me. My four young children were all asleep; their father and all the older boys were at a basketball game.

When they trooped in, all excited and playing the game all over again in their discussions, I entered into the spirit of the thing, got out snacks from the fridge — left-over roast, home-made bread, butter, jam and milk — and learned who went out on fouts, who made the high score, and how, in spite of everything, Dixie had won!

After they all went to bed, I returned to my machine, and wrote on through the wee hours, all pepped up and wonderful. The next morning I got a new manilla envelope, put on an address sticker and air mail stamps, attached a self-addressed sticker and stamps to the article, and wrote something to this effect:

Dear Mr. Allen:

You remind me of the kind old lady who warmed the water in which she drowned the cat. You say NO so beautifully.

I know you said that you would not be interested in this, but glance through it and fire it back to me in the same envelope. Address and stamps are supplied.

Very sincerely yours,

This time I really expected him to accept it, and he did. It was later condensed in the *Reader's Digest* and included in an anthology. This was in 1941, seven years after my first article.

As I read over what I have written thus far, I think I might, with a little different slant, have called it "A Corner of My Own." We moved a number of times, trying as best we could to accommodate the needs of our numerous children. Soon the older boys were all gone — on missions, to school, married, in the military (we had four of them in World War II). Walter had finished college and was teaching. We traded the big house for a home and farm in Hurricane where we lived through one season; we renovated the little home on the hill, and found it very adequate for the four little ones; we operated a motel for two years, living in the comfortable house attached. Finally we came back to the old homestead where, after some years of indecision, we added more spacious living quarters, and Will lived out his long life. In each place I had a small room, if only shoebox size, which all the children knew was not for them. What Mother did there was none of their concern, unless, by chance, she sold an article. Even then she usually forgot to mention it.