

Beth Letham Bassett

Recorded October 1981

Gwen was eighteen months younger than myself. I was born February 21, 1919. What I remember most about her was that she was the stubbornnest, orneriest, meanest sister I had! She used to whip me all the time, and she took my boyfriends away from me. I hate cats, and she loved to torment me with them. She would take my doll clothes and dress her white cat up in them, and then she would just leave them on until Mom or Dad made her undress that cat.

She always seemed to find a way to get out of doing the housework that she had to do. Whenever Mom would get on us about doing our chores, she would go outside and ask dad if he needed any help with what he was doing.

Angus was probably Dad's favorite child, but only because he was the first child born and the first boy. We were all treated equally.



Dad used to tell us stories about the old country – Scotland. I never knew for sure if the stories were true or not. Every time he would tell one, Mother would say: “Now Dad, you know that’s not true.” Dad was born in Wellsville, Utah and Mother was born in Beaver, Utah.

One day I was out doing chores, and I couldn't get a calf to go where I wanted it to. We had a wagon spoke that we used to herd the cows. I used it for a little extra persuasion. I hit the calf over the head hard enough that it knocked it out, and Dad had to kill it. He didn't get mad about it (that's one of the things that I remember about Dad – his even temperament), but just said that we would be having beef for dinner one day soon. He went out with a knife, cut its throat and let it bleed out. Shortly after that, I remember the wagon spoke disappearing!

On Sundays we could bring friends home. We would usually play kick the can. The rest of the week we worked. Everyone helped – everyone had a job that needed to be done. The bigger girls would scrub the floors and do harder work while the younger girls would make the beds and tidy up. We had a couple of straw beds that the boys slept on. The mattresses were filled with straw, just like the ones today are filled with synthetic materials. All of our pillows were made with feathers or from down from the geese.

Everyone had a place at the table that they knew was theirs. Everyone helped do the dishes and clean up after the meal – even the boys. With eleven kids, it usually didn't take long to get things cleaned up.

During the fruit season, when the chokecherries or the huckleberries would come on, Mom would get the kids that weren't working out in the field with Dad, and we would go with her to pick berries. We would have two gallon cans, and a picnic lunch. We would work until we had one can full, and then we would stop and have lunch. Then we would work until we filled

the second can. We would go back home after a hard day like that and would help milk the cows before supper. It always made for a long day. In the winter, there wasn't quite so much work, and that was nice! When Mom bottled peaches, pears, etc., everyone helped and everyone had a specific job from bringing the bottles down and washing them, to helping prepare the fruit, tightening the lids, wiping off the bottles, cleaning up the kitchen, and taking the bottles back into storage, put in their proper place.

Mom would bake a lot, and I remember that it wasn't uncommon for her to make thirteen loaves of bread twice a week for our family.

We had an outhouse that we had to use, rather than indoor plumbing, and boy, did it ever get cold when you had to run out there late at night. We had kerosene lamps too – no flashlights for us back in those days.

Mother sent Gwen and I to town one day to get groceries and to take some barley in to get it ground. Coming home, it got real cold. I was afraid the bananas would freeze if we didn't find something to cover them up with. We had two dozen of them. Gwen said, "Well give me one, and I'll eat it to save its life." So we started eating the bananas. Gwen ate twelve and I ate six. All we made it home with was one half dozen, but not before I got real sick. I haven't really liked bananas since then!

We would ride our horses to school. Dad had a horse named Teen that carried every one of us eleven kids through eighth grade. One day a guy came by the house and wanted to buy her to kill for dog food and other stuff. Dad said no, that when she was ready to retire she would go out into the best pasture he had to finish out her days.

On Sundays we would go to church in a white-top buggy pulled by a couple of the horses.

Mother was always quilting, or cutting out the blocks for a quilt, or sewing them together, or making clothes for us kids. I remember coming home from school and asking if we could help quilt. Especially when she was working on an old wool quilt just to keep us warm, and not for looks, she would let us. She didn't care how big and uneven the stitches were, and she felt that by letting us do it, we would eventually learn how well enough that we could help on the nice quilts. I remember my grandmother bopping me on the head with her thimble when I would do something that I shouldn't be doing.

On the Fourth of July, we always had dresses that had just been made, and I remember them always being white dresses. We would go into Driggs for the celebration, and it never took us long to get those white dresses all dirty, usually with some ice cream. We would have one quarter to spend during the day. That would get us a candy bar, an ice cream cone, quite a number of things back then.

Once in a while Dad would go to town, and forget to come home. One night Gwen and I decided that we would go into town to get him. We went in the pool hall and had a slight problem getting him out. Gwen drove one car home with Dad, and I drove the other car home.

At Christmas time, Dad would go to town alone. He would usually come home late, singing something as he came in the house like: "Ho, ho, ho, I think it's going to snow." Mom would ask him why he was so late, and he would say because he had a lot of things that he needed

to do in town. She would say, "Yes, I can see what you had to do." He always had a big box of groceries and one large sack of candy for the kids – hard tack, licorice, and etc. The candy was the only thing in the box that we could touch. A lot of the other stuff, fruit and etc. went into our stockings.

At Christmas, we would have a big party at the church house. Dad would get out the sleigh bells and put them on the team. Everyone would cuddle under the blankets and we would have hot bricks wrapped in towels to keep our feet warm. The bells would be ringing, and we would always sing. At the church, when it came time for Santa to come, dad would always disappear. One year when he was walking out to 'get ready' for Santa, one of us kids started to follow him. Mom asked where they were going and the reply was, "Dad hasn't been able to see Santa for a long time, and when he comes, I want Dad to be here." I guess it took some convincing to have them let Dad go, and to convince them that he really didn't need to be right there when Santa came!

The kids at school would draw names for gifts so that on the night of the party Santa would have something to give each of the children that were there. For the kids who were too small to be in school, the parents would provide something small for them. One year Vern Harris drew Ina Christofferson's name for Christmas, and he gave her a pair of beads. My name had already been drawn once, but it was soon drawn out a second time. When I went up to get the second gift, I saw that it was a set of beads just like Ina's. Vern had bought us both beads, because he liked us both, and couldn't decide which one to give the gift to.

The Christmas tree would be decorated with tinsel, popcorn and cranberry strings and some ornaments. Before electricity was common, we used candles once in a while. After that, we had the electric lights similar to the ones that are used today.

The Christmas I remember most was the one where there was a sleigh for the kids. I was quite young then. Angus went after the mail one day, the day that the sleigh came, and took it and stashed it in the wood shed. Gwen and I went out after wood, saw the box, and just knew that it had to be something for Christmas, so we were going to open it and find out. We were just tearing into it, when Angus came waling in and asked us what we thought we were doing with his harness. He mumbled something about not being able to leave anything out where someone wouldn't get into it, and took it out to the barn. We were happily surprised to find that it was the sleigh and not a harness.

We always had a big dinner with the relatives. The big people would eat first, and the kids had to wait until they were done before they could eat. Seems that things are backwards now a days.

In the middle of March, when the Relief Society had their birthday, the ladies would always cook up a big banquet type meal. Everyone always went out for it. You could find about anything that you wanted to eat at that meal.

We had a two-room schoolhouse with four grades in each room, and a big pot-bellied stove that we kept hot in the winter to keep us warm. When I was in the fifth grade, I missed about two months of school because of scarlet fever. Helen taught school at that time, and she would come home and help me with my studies.

Gwen, Dan (brother) and I went to high school in Rexburg at about the same time. Dan had a place that he worked for his room and board, and Gwen and I rented a small place. Mom and Dad would send money for us to buy food. We had a wood stove, and would bring wood with us from home. We would buy coal in Rexburg and drag it back to the apartment in a gunnysack. We got homesick, but it was too far to go home very often.

What did we do for fun? A little necking, roller-skating, candy making, wine drinking and basketball games. I skipped the dances, no one would dance with me, and so I didn't see any reason why I should be there. We would go to movies instead. We wouldn't eat very much for a couple of days to save the quarter that it took for the movie.

When I was a senior, I went to my first barn dance ever. Everyone got in a sleigh and went to this guy's barn that he had all decorated up. We used to go to mutual because they always had activities and it always gave us something to do.

After I graduated from high school, I waited for one year while Gwen finished up and the two of us were going to California to work. Right after she graduated she got married to Ross Blanchard, so I went to California without her. I lived in California for five years and loved every minute of it. I would ride the bus home once a year or so for four to five days, and that was plenty long. Home just wasn't the same any more. I liked the boys and the warm weather in California. I worked at Douglas Aircraft in the wings of C-54's. I wrote to Rex when I was in California, and would come to Lago sometimes and stay with June [Swensen] so I could see him. Sybil [Harris] used to line us up for dances and stuff, that's how I got to know him initially. He was always the life of the party, and I really liked him. After I got back from California, I married him. We had a double wedding in Pocatello with Bud and Martha Bassett on 25 May 1945.

(Beth passed away 29 November 1981 age 62)

From her daughter Korine Bassett Miller 17 Apr 2008