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Children on the Mormon Trail

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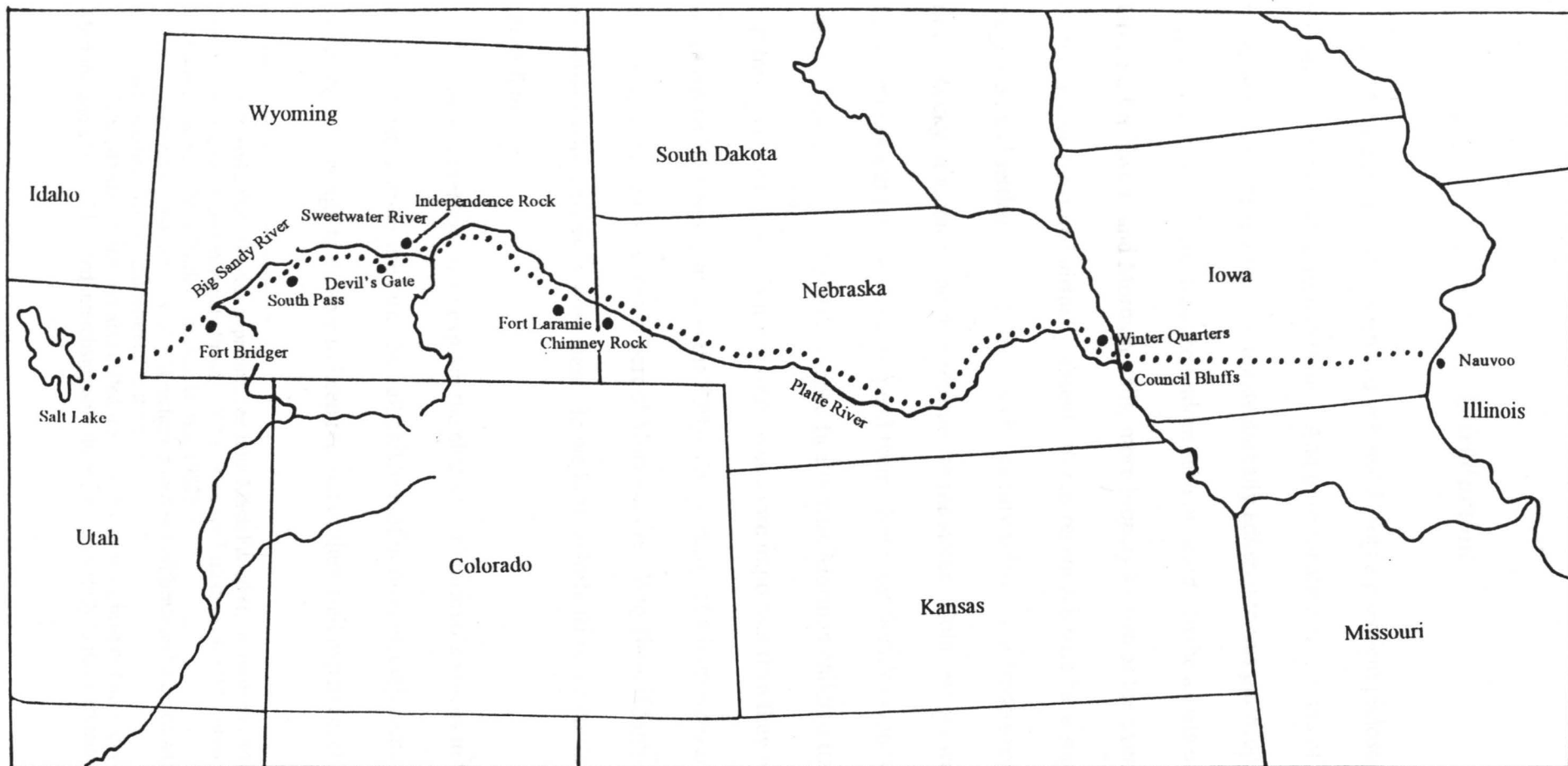
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**The Mormon Trail**

## Introduction

"Children should be seen and not heard" was a prevalent philosophy among nineteenth-century American families. And unfortunately, historians of the westward movement have intentionally or unintentionally adhered to this philosophy as well, in a modified form where children are seldom seen or heard. In the annals of history on the Oregon, California, and Mormon trails, more broadly known as the overland trail, children have remained virtually absent. But as recent scholars have suggested, western migration and settlement was very much a family affair.<sup>1</sup> Fur traders roamed and trapped in the Rocky Mountains and then returned to the states. Gold seekers went west to find their fortunes and returned east to spend them. But most families who went west to settle the land stayed.<sup>2</sup> This study deals specifically with Mormon children traveling west.<sup>3</sup> For this particular group, families were even more important than they were for many other westering people, such as the Forty-niners, many of whom were single men. The family unit was and is a central part of Mormon life. Why then, if families were so essential to the westward movement, do we hear so little from the children who made up those families?

Several reasons may explain the absence of children's voices in the historical record. First, sources are rare. Not all children of mid-nineteenth century Americans were literate enough to be able to keep records of their trail experiences. Also, with so

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<sup>1</sup>For works that take this approach, see John Mack Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979). Also see Lillian Schlissel, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982).

<sup>2</sup>Generally speaking. Some gold rushers stayed in California and married and some families who went west together gave up and returned to the east.

<sup>3</sup>The Mormon Church is also called the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The terms Mormon and LDS will be used interchangeably throughout this study to describe members of this faith.

many new and exciting things to see and do on the trail, the unexciting task of journal-keeping often could not compete for the children's attention. Furthermore, the rigors of trail life made journal keeping difficult, whether because of the jolting wagon, the lack of writing materials, or sheer exhaustion from the strenuous work. While actual trail diaries from children may be rare, many reminiscent accounts can be found – accounts written in later years by those who crossed the plains as children. Also, parents who kept trail journals often wrote of their children, providing yet another kind of source. Despite these sources, however, historians have continued to leave children out of the story.

This leads to another reason for the neglect of children in trail studies: perceived lack of value. Historians may question whether the stories of children can really add anything to current knowledge or understanding of trail life. We have adult accounts, from both male and female perspectives. Can children possibly shed any more light on this well-studied event?

Scholars have recently begun to realize that the answer to this question is yes. But even more, they are realizing that children's history can stand on its own, much as women's history and African American history stand on their own. Each has value in and of itself, regardless of what historical event it may or may not shed light on. During the past thirty years, history has been undergoing a shift in concern – historians are focusing not only on various minorities, but also on different life-stages, such as childhood or old age. African American studies have opened the door to social history so that historians are able to legitimately study individuals and groups previously considered insignificant. Scholars of the New Western History are recognizing the value of studying the west through the perspectives of the many previously ignored groups who were and

are a part of it. Children represent one such group and their stories of the Mormon trail merit interest not only for what they reveal about the trail experience, but also for their intrinsic value. Elliott West notes that “those who have studied the fascinating interplay of society, environment, and tradition . . . have left out one of the most important components of that change – the complicated process of growing up.”<sup>4</sup> Studying children’s perspectives reveals more about various historical events and also contributes to a greater understanding of childhood itself. The purpose of this study is to show exactly what can be gained by studying children who traveled to Utah on the Mormon Trail. While other works on this exact subject do not exist, related studies have recently emerged. A review of current literature may prove helpful.

The foremost historian of children in the American West is Elliott West. His definitive work, *Growing up with the Country*, has a broad scope. He studies children all over the west in mining towns, on mid-western farms, and on southwestern ranches. His purpose is to tell part of the neglected story of how the children affected frontier society and contributed to the development of their pioneer west. While this is a remarkable study, thoroughly researched and well-documented, it focuses on frontier life in general, not on the overland trail. Also, West does not mention Mormon children (he does not indicate why he leaves them out), although he discusses children in every state surrounding Utah including Idaho, Wyoming, Montana, California, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Nebraska. Thus he leaves ample room for scholarship on children traveling the Mormon trail.

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<sup>4</sup>Elliott West, *Growing Up With the Country: Children on the Far Western Frontier* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989), xix.

Emmy Werner has also recently published a book on children in the west, *Pioneer Children on the Journey West*. Her book focuses exclusively on children going to California. Emigrants bound for other western destinations are completely ignored, especially Mormons whom she mentions only once for their "hostile attitude."<sup>5</sup> Werner is a developmental psychologist and research professor and this work demonstrates that although her analytical skills are well-polished, she lacks some of the historical skills that could make her book more valuable.<sup>6</sup>

Another recently published book on this subject is Susan Arrington Madsen's *I Walked to Zion*. This delightful volume is a compilation of thirty accounts of LDS children crossing the plains. However, it cannot be considered a secondary work because it contains no analysis. Aside from its use as an excellent primary resource, it does not contribute to the small body of literature on children in the west.

Clearly, these few works suggest that there is much to be explored in the area of children on the Mormon Trail. Several articles have been written on children on the Overland Trail, mostly in connection with women on the trail, but none deals with Mormons. Historians have studied the Mormon Trail in general and others have studied American childhood in general. But none has studied the two aspects together. This study, therefore, is intended to tell the unique story of children on the Mormon Trail.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Emmy Werner, *Pioneer Children on the Journey West* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 139.

<sup>6</sup>For example, her 202 page book contains only 13 endnotes, she uses more adult diaries than children's, and some of her claims are not well-supported.

<sup>7</sup>Two examples of articles that mention children on the overland trail are, Ruth Moynihan Barnes, "Children and Young People on the Overland Trail," *Western Historical Quarterly* 6:3 (July, 1975): 279-94. Robert L. Munkres, "Wives, Mothers, Daughters: Women's Life on the Road West," *Annals of Wyoming* 42:2 (October, 1970):191-224. For works on children on the Mormon Trail see: Helen R. Grant, comp., "Children on the Trail" (Salt Lake City: Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, 1988), Vol. 11, *An Enduring Legacy*. This compilation by the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers is a brief attempt at looking at children's lives on the Mormon Trail. Most of the accounts used are not first person, and those that are, come from children over the age of thirteen. See also: Susan Easton Black, "Children on the Mormon

Telling this story requires in-depth examination of more than children's trail accounts alone. To understand the child's experience, we must understand childhood. What do children fear? What motivates them? How do they develop? How do they view their world? We must build on existing works on childhood to understand it as a life-stage itself. This will aid in understanding the children's writings.

Other important considerations require examination of sources other than the diaries of young LDS pioneers as well. For example, adult accounts must be consulted and compared to the children's accounts in order to understand the similarities and differences between the two. The trail obviously looks different from three or four feet off the ground than it does from five or six feet. For example, Sarah Sophia Moulding Gledhill, who was only three when she crossed the plains and could remember very little, always maintained a vivid memory of the jingle-jangle of the pots and kettles fastened underneath the wagon.<sup>8</sup> Her small size would have put her at eye level with the underneath side of the wagon where she would see and hear those pots everyday, while her taller parents would not notice them. We must look at the factors that influenced what children saw and experienced that their parents did not. Another important consideration is religion. How did Mormon culture and doctrine affect the experiences

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Trail," unpublished paper given at Brigham Young University, "They Gathered to Zion," September 26, 1997. For works on the Mormon Trail in general see: Wallace Stegner, *The Gathering of Zion* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992). Stanley B. Kimball, "Historic Resource Study: Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail" (Washington, D.C.: United States Dept. of the Interior/National Park Service, 1991). Hal Knight and Stanley B. Kimball, *111 Days to Zion* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Press, 1978). Leroy R. and Ann W. Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1960). For Overland Trail diaries and reminiscences see: Merrill J. Mattes, *Platte River Road Narratives* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988). For information on American childhood in general see: Joseph Hawes and N. Ray Hiner, eds., *American Childhood: A Research Guide and Historical Handbook* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985).

<sup>8</sup>Susan Arrington Madsen, *I Walked to Zion* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1994), 108.

that LDS children had? Setting the LDS children's accounts against non-LDS accounts will show us how the perspectives might have been similar or different.

In a study of this nature some parameters must be established. Exactly what age group do "children" fall under? Elliott West sets an arbitrary definition for children as those under the age of fifteen. He admits this is arbitrary because the line between childhood and adulthood could be very obscure on the frontier. Emmy Werner includes in her accounts children who were eighteen years old and married, some with babies of their own. This definition is much too broad as heads of families should not qualify as children. For this study we will use accounts from those under fourteen at the time of travel. Children over that age were often considered adolescents, and some even married or were independent over that age. We also cannot rely on accounts from children who crossed the plains under the age of four as their memories were probably not adequately developed until that age.<sup>9</sup>

This question of memory poses the major problem to this study. As mentioned, few accounts were kept on the trail; most are reminiscences written years after the fact. Time fades images in the mind and memory can play tricks. Thus we face the fact that some of these accounts may not be completely accurate. People's ideas and perceptions tend to change as they grow older, affecting the original, youthful perceptions they had at the time. Furthermore, people often intend written reminiscences to be read by the public. They attest to lives well spent, despite extreme hardships. This can color the reality of the actual experience. However, I will assume that people remembered and wrote about things as they actually saw them; that which impressed them as children

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<sup>9</sup>Patrick Huyghe, "Voices, Glances, and Flashbacks: Our First Memories," *Psychology Today* (September, 1985): 48-52.

likely would stay with them throughout the years and be revealed even in later writings. As Elliott West says, the only thing more foolish than accepting the available sources would be to ignore them. Perhaps Sarah Sharp, who traveled across the plains at age ten and wrote about her experiences many years later, said it best: "Of course, this is the memory of a 10 year old girl and may not be all perfect, but it stands out plainly to me or I would not write it if I did not think it right."<sup>10</sup>

This study does not examine every childhood account of the Mormon Trail in existence. It is limited to those accounts available in both the Harold B. Lee Library at Brigham Young University and the Historical Department of the Church in Salt Lake City.<sup>11</sup> It is also limited to first person accounts. To locate the accounts that fit my age parameters I used Davis Bitton's *Guide to Mormon Diaries and Autobiographies* and searched the available computer systems. These searches turned up a total of ninety-two accounts, all of which I have examined and used in this study.

As we look at various aspects of children on the Mormon Trail, our view of trail life will broaden. The unique perspectives children offer enrich our understanding of both the Mormon Trail experience and of childhood itself. Furthermore, the sources explain the many contributions children made along the trail, thus emphasizing the extreme importance of the family unit in westward migration and settlement. At the same time that children were working toward their destination, trail life was affecting them. The trail acted as a testing or training ground for many LDS children, preparing them for the great challenge of settling in the Rocky Mountains. The unique situations

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<sup>10</sup>Sarah Sharp, [typescript], LDS Church Archives, 5.

<sup>11</sup>I felt that a sample size of ninety-two accounts was sufficient for a work of this scope and that the accounts in these two repositories would provide a good representation of children on the trail.

encountered on the trail required children to accept responsibilities of adult proportions. Ultimately an important symbiotic relationship comes into focus: children greatly affected trail life, while life on the trail in turn had a major impact on them.

Most important, this study allows previously ignored voices to be heard. This is the reason I chose to study children. The story of the American West is a story of many diverse people interacting with each other and with a diverse land. This study attempts to tell the story of one of those groups of people and their first encounter with the west. By itself it cannot tell the whole story of westward migration. But as many other historians contribute studies of other people and their experiences in the west, the pieces of the puzzle come together and a fuller, richer picture results.

## Chapter One

### *First Perceptions and Impressions*

For most Latter-day Saint emigrants, the actual journey to Salt Lake City began at Council Bluffs on the Missouri River. Saints living in Nauvoo at the time of the Exodus embarked on their journey a couple of hundred miles to the east at the Mississippi River. Unable to practice their religion freely in the United States, they determined to establish homes in the Salt Lake Valley. They traveled across the treacherous, muddy plains of Iowa during the early spring of 1846 and made a semi-temporary encampment, Winter Quarters, at the Missouri before starting to Utah the following spring. Emigrants coming later generally found transportation to Council Bluffs where they organized and outfitted for the more than 1000 miles of travel that lay ahead. The Mormons traveled on the North side of the Platte River through Nebraska, while most non-LDS emigrants traveled on the South side. Around Fort Laramie the Mormon Trail joined with the general Overland Trail and from there to South Pass the two trails were one and the same. The Mormon then turned southwest to Fort Bridger, following an older fork of the Oregon-California trail. From Fort Bridger to Salt Lake City the Mormons followed the rough route cut by the Donner-Reed party in 1846. Eventually a railroad was laid and emigrants could travel as far as Florence by train before taking up the journey on foot. Saints coming from Europe started their journey even further east as they boarded ships at Liverpool to cross the Atlantic Ocean before tackling the plains and mountains of Nebraska and Wyoming. In 1869 the completion of the first transcontinental railroad made travel by train possible all the way into the Salt Lake Valley, but until then more than 70,000 Saints made the trek across the Mormon Trail.

Of the Saints who did make the journey during those twenty-two years, the majority walked. Most traveled in the traditional wagon companies, but even with wagons, generally only the sick and feeble or those too young to walk were allowed to ride. Wagon space was desperately needed for supplies and personal belongings and the emigrants could not afford to add the extra burden of humans to the loads pulled by the already overworked draft animals. Between 1856 and 1860 some emigrants traveled by handcart and they not only had to walk, they also had to push or pull their loads along.

The experiences that the pioneers had on the trail differed depending on the year they traveled. The trail has a life of its own, consisting of several basic stages. Until 1849 the trail was new and rough and required more actual pioneering. Travelers starting after the Gold Rush of 1849, however, had a slight advantage as the huge numbers of Forty-niners improved the rough trail. As previously noted, many emigrants experimented with handcarts between 1856 and 1860, which represents another stage. During the last stage, post-1860, LDS emigrants were brought across the plains by the “down and back” teams. Men in Utah would travel east with their teams to pick up emigrants and bring them back west. This method of travel was generally well organized and successful.

The time of travel varied. Generally the pioneers could plan on being on the road for close to three months. They usually left Council Bluffs in June or July and arrived in Salt Lake City in September. The wagon trains averaged somewhere around fifteen miles a day (more on a good day – one traveler remembers walking more than twenty miles one day), often having to stop for several days at a time to wait for high rivers to fall, to make repairs, to ferry wagons, or to round up cattle. The handcart companies were able to

travel slightly faster and were generally fairly successful except for the two well-known companies which met with disaster due to their late start and the exceptionally fierce and early mountain snows. Obviously the accounts written by pioneers in these two companies will differ substantially from accounts written by people in more fortunate companies.

The Mormon route spans roughly 1,300 miles from Montrose, Iowa to Salt Lake City. The pioneers traveled over the prairies of Iowa, crossing streams as needed, and then followed the Platte River through Nebraska. As they neared Wyoming the terrain changed from prairies, to sand hills, and then dry high plains. Through Wyoming they followed the Sweetwater River and crossed the mountain passes into Utah.<sup>12</sup>

The trail was a new experience for all the LDS pioneers. Though many families had moved several times in their lives, they had not moved such a distance at one time. The west to which they were heading was a country that these people, accustomed to the timbered and lush green country-side in the east or in Europe, had never known. Young and old alike would take in new sights and be exposed to new experiences. Examining the initial perceptions and first impressions of these youngsters embarking on a new, exciting, and often frightening journey can be illuminating.

Because of their age and stage in life, children's outlooks differ from adults'. The adults on the trail had to be practical and their diaries generally reflect that. They write about mileage, weather, quality of the soil or vegetation, road conditions, and water sources. Children on the other hand tend to be literalists and sensualists. As Elliott West

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<sup>12</sup>For information on the conditions of the trail see Stanley B. Kimball, "Historic Resource Study: Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail" (Washington, D.C.: United States Dept. of the Interior/National Park Service, 1991).

argues, rather than thinking practically, they see things literally and notice and write about things that provoke physical sensation.<sup>13</sup> For example, Catherine Greer who traveled to Utah at the age of thirteen and later wrote about her experiences spent sixteen lines (typed) describing the details of a spider web she saw one night.<sup>14</sup> While this may seem a trivial thing to write about, it shows that children tended to notice things that adults often did not. Children notice things that affect them physically because that is how they learn. From infancy babies learn the nature of objects by putting them in their mouths. Children may not understand their parents when they tell them a hot stove will burn them. But they understand after experiencing the physical sensation of getting burned. This is especially true for young children. Three-year-old Sarah Sophia Moulding retained a vivid recollection of the physical sensation of thirst. She was only allowed to drink from her father's canteen when the wagons stopped and her sister always got the first drink. "I can remember how I would dance up and down waiting for her to finish getting her drink, and how thirsty I was."<sup>15</sup>

Children also tend to be very literal. The abilities to think rationally and practically, and to realize that there is more to the world than what is immediately visible, develop gradually. The child's reality is very egocentric. Young children cannot comprehend that the world may look different to others than it does to themselves. If a young child closes his or her eyes, he or she thinks that everyone else is in the dark as well.<sup>16</sup> Although not an LDS pioneer, four year old Marianne Hunsaker Edwards D'arcy

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<sup>13</sup>West, 30.

<sup>14</sup>Catherine Greer, "Autobiography" [typescript], pp. 9-10, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo.

<sup>15</sup>Madsen, 108.

<sup>16</sup>L. Alan Sroufe, Robert G. Cooper, and Ganie B. DeHart, *Child Development: Its Nature and Course* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1992), 334-335.

provides an excellent example of children's literal way of thinking. She recalls asking her father what Oregon was and he told her it was a place they were going. He pointed west, which because they were in a house, happened to be in the direction of the fireplace, and told her it was that way. She writes:

After that, wherever I happened to be I would point to the fireplace and say Oregon is in that direction . . . I thought grown people were very stupid. Sometimes when I pointed to a neighbor's fireplace and announced that Oregon was in that direction they would nod their heads and say how smart I was, and when I repeated the performance at some other neighbor's they would correct me and point toward the setting sun and tell me that was the direction of Oregon.<sup>17</sup>

Julia Frances Miller, another Oregon pioneer provides another example. Once while traveling, she saw an Indian wearing a heavy linen bedspread with bits of clay on it. She found out that he had dug up the body of some emigrant and used the shroud in which the corpse had been buried. From then on five-year-old Julia thought that when people spoke of digger Indians, that is what they meant – Indians who dug up the bodies of dead people and wore their clothes.<sup>18</sup>

Because of this unique stage of life when they are more literally and sensually minded, children make valuable observations of their initial experiences on the trail. As children grow older they gradually lose these characteristics and their accounts begin to differ. Although children naturally experienced different things depending on their circumstances and age, the accounts show that the majority of children generally noticed and were impressed by the same aspects of their new surroundings. Among the most highly-noted of these are various natural wonders. Interestingly, however, while children did write about these natural wonders from their literal and physical point of view, many

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<sup>17</sup>Fred Lockley, *Conversations with Pioneer Women* (Oregon: Rainy Day Press, 1981), 283-284.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 245.

of the accounts show that, contrary to West's argument, children also viewed them from a practical, adult-like perspective. Often it was only very young children who viewed their surroundings according to West's interpretation.

The existence of a practical side can be attributed to a couple of different factors. First of all, the accounts available are mostly written by adults who crossed the plains as children. Only two of the accounts are actual diaries. Because they are looking back upon the experience with the greater maturity and experience, they may include information that they did not really notice as children, but learned later in life. However, while this may be true to a small extent, it does not provide an adequate explanation. The detail of the images that the pioneers describe suggests that the pioneers draw upon mental pictures kept in memory from their youth. A better explanation, then, for the existence of practical matters in the accounts would be that children on the trail were often forced to think more like adults, despite their tender age. Although they did have a greater capacity to view their new environment with a more carefree perspective, in many instances children were forced to grow up very quickly on the trail and assume the responsibilities of adults. Thus they had to think more practically to help ensure successful travel. This can be illustrated by examining the ways in which the young pioneers discuss some of the newly-found natural wonders.

One of the most frequently mentioned natural wonders was the buffalo. Of ninety-two diaries from LDS children, thirty-two mention buffalo encounters. Some of these reveal the literal and sensual viewpoint West discusses and others indicate that the children were sometimes more concerned with the practical matters of how these creatures affected their safety and well-being. Both types of accounts prove enlightening.

William B. Ashworth, who crossed the plains around the age of five, was one of those who simply marveled at the awesome sight of the great creatures. He describes "what looked like a black cloud which soon showed itself to be a herd of hundreds of buffalo coming toward us."<sup>19</sup> Ebenezer Crouch, age nine, records, "I well remember seeing the vast herds of buffalo as we traveled along the Platte river and across the Laramie plains. Day after day as we traveled along we passed thousands of them. As far as the eye could reach the plains were black with them."<sup>20</sup> Other children remember the thundering noise the buffalo made. Sometimes, in addition to the buffalo herds, the pioneers also encountered herds of deer or antelope. Rachel Burton remembers as a nine-year-old child being "delighted to see how nimbly thay ran."<sup>21</sup>

While these children remember mostly how the buffalo herds appeared, more children remember the practical side. They recall having meat for supper when the company encountered and killed buffalo. They remember cutting the beef in strips to dry for food. They also remember the trouble that stampeding herds caused the wagon trains.

Some children had very specific memories of the practical implications of the buffalo herds. Catherine Ellen Camp Greer records the following:

There were so many buffalo that we had to go right along between wagons and herd them away from the wagons. We had sacks and sacks of buffalo meat. We would take it and cut it up in 5 and 10 pound pieces and salt it down and then put it on racks made out of wood and stakes laid across the top of them and smoke and dry them just like ham and it was fresh and nice. We did the buffalo tongues and everything the same way, the "hump" of the buffalo is just as tender as a young calf. The men would kill the cows and yearlings, but not the bulls. When we wanted a buffalo, they would go right into the herd and on their fast horses

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<sup>19</sup>William B. Ashworth, "Autobiography of William B. Ashworth" [typescript], p. 4, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo.

<sup>20</sup>Ebenezer Crouch, "Autobiography of Ebenezer Crouch," [manuscript], LDS Church Archives, 6.

<sup>21</sup>Rachel Burton, "Autobiography of Rachel Burton" [typescript], LDS Church Archives, 3.

they rope the animal they wanted and drag it into camp, so the women could help care for the fat and of the meat.

She writes of how they would roast the bones and records, "You have no idea how much marrow would be contained in the larger leg bones; sometimes almost a pint, and we used this for butter." She also recalls that the buffalo tallow could be used for candles and that they gathered enough to last all winter. Catherine was thirteen years old when she crossed the plains, and at that age likely held some of the responsibility for cooking for the family and thus would remember the extra work and extra food that came from the huge buffalo.<sup>22</sup> Likewise, Mary Powell Sabin who crossed the plains at age twelve and who frequently mentions her duties as camp cook, recalls one occasion when the boys killed some buffalo for the camp. She writes, "We put twenty pieces of meat (each piece about fifty cents worth of beef) into our bake kettle. In this way we cooked for about twenty families."<sup>23</sup>

Although buffalo provided some often desperately needed nourishment to the hungry travelers, the animals could also cause problems. Joseph Moesser recalls the precautions they had to take against buffalo herds after having experienced one upset already. He remarks, "In traveling it was found that it would not do to travel single file, they then arranged to travel with the wagons three abreast, so if a herd of buffalo should come in contact with the train, they could not divide the camp."<sup>24</sup> Joseph was eleven when he crossed the plains and had been assigned to drive his family's team to Salt Lake

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<sup>22</sup>Greer, 11.

<sup>23</sup>Mary Powell Sabin, Autobiographical sketch, [typescript], LDS Church Archives, 12.

<sup>24</sup>Joseph Hyrum Moesser, "Sketch of the Life of Joseph Hyrum Moesser," [typescript], LDS Church Archives, 3.

City. Naturally he would be more concerned with stampeding buffalo upsetting his wagon than he would be fascinated with their wild beauty.

While children may naturally be literalists and sensualists, extreme circumstances such as those on the trail sometimes call for exceptions. Children with the responsibilities of driving teams remember how the buffalo made their jobs tough. Children who helped with the cooking remember that buffalo sightings meant a meat-drying session. Children who suffered from hunger tend to remember that buffalo meant a full belly for once. The rigors of the trail required children to quickly adjust their thinking to a more practical level.

Another common natural wonder that the children encountered for the first time was the terrible prairie storm. While undoubtedly exposed to severe weather previously, being out on the open prairie with little or no shelter in an electrical storm was a new experience that obviously evoked physical sensations – especially fright. Studies conducted by psychologists to determine the things that children fear show that natural hazards are very high on the list. One study concludes that fear of natural hazards comes in second only to fear of wild animals, which is the most common fear among children ages four to twelve.<sup>25</sup> Children paint vivid descriptions of these occurrences.

James Kirkham, who crossed the plains at age ten, recalls a terrible storm in the Utah mountains:

... and in the distance hughe dark clouds were to be seen and soon the heavens became black the Lightening flash and heaven. Artillery roard clap after clap came the thunder and soon the rain decended in Torrents. My brother had arrived Early in Camp at the foot of the mountain in the afternoon but I was left with my Father and as it was not safe for me to ride I had to walk. Had no coat or hat on and soon became very wet with the rain in the darkness of the night I soon got loss and wandered alone sometimes on the road and sometimes in the crick by the

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<sup>25</sup> Adah Maurer, "What Children Fear," *Journal of Genetic Psychology* 106 (1965): 272.

roadside up to my waist in water, when the lightning came I was able to see where the road was and by listning to the sound of a cow bell that was on the End of some waggon in the distance I by the time the Storm abated was able to overtake the waggon and was picked up and taken in Camp about two oclock in the morning. When I arrived in Camp I was wet and sore and very frighten.<sup>26</sup>

William B. Ashworth also relates a vivid account of a storm he experienced crossing the plains. He had been sent with another boy to fetch water about a quarter mile from camp. It was dark and on their way back, in company with two women who were also fetching water, it began to rain. He recalls, "The lightening and thunder increased terrifically, and the good women lifted up their dresses and covered us completely with their full skirts. They began to shout as hard as they could, and we boys were crying as hard as we could."<sup>27</sup> Eventually the rain ceased and they found their way back to camp. John Staheli, a mere four years old when crossing the plains, retains a vivid picture in his mind of one harrowing sight during a storm. He recalls, "one day during the sudden electrical storm, three young women were walking along arm in arm, when a bolt of lightning struck the center girl, killing her instantly, but leaving the other two unharmed. This was a harrowing event."<sup>28</sup> To small children who had not seen the elements behave so fiercely, storms posed a menacing threat.

As with the accounts of buffalo, some children leave more practical descriptions of the storms they experienced. Eleven- year-old Charles W. Nibley remembers, "the thunder and lightning and rain storms that transpired periodically along the plains of Nebraska were something terrific and occasioned us some inconvenience and

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3. <sup>26</sup>James Kirkham, "A Record of the Life of James Kirkham," [manuscript], LDS Church Archives,

<sup>27</sup>Ashworth, 5.

<sup>28</sup>John Staheli, "History of John and Barbara Staheli" [typescript], LDS Church Archives, 3.

considerable fright.”<sup>29</sup> Twelve-year-old Mary Minerva Judd remembers going to bed one night as the elements were gathering for a storm. She writes, “I slept until the raging storm awoke me. My assistance was then required to keep the wagon from being turned over and the cover stripped off.”<sup>30</sup>

In addition to buffalo and fierce prairie storms, children were exposed to another natural wonder of sorts that they had never seen: the Native American. Children had likely heard many of the stories, whether true or not, circulating about the Native Americans and many held them in great fear. Others were completely awed by their appearance. Some found them to be extremely helpful and friendly. As pioneers share their memories of their first encounters with these new people, they reveal both their youthful, curious perspective, as well as their necessarily acquired practical point of view.

One-third of the pioneers mention Indian encounters in their memoirs. Two of the children mention being afraid of them although they never encountered any. Agnes Richardson remembers all the kids having a “grand time” while traveling, “but mother was always afraid of the Indians and wouldn’t let them get too far away.”<sup>31</sup> Eleven children record both seeing Indians and being afraid of them, but the majority does not mention fear. Seventeen writers recall seeing Indians, but do not write about being afraid of them.

Most children remember the Indians’ begging for food. Thomas King, age twelve, simply notes, “We traveled on until we came to Pawnee nation Indians who

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<sup>29</sup>Charles W. Nibley, *Reminiscences* (Salt Lake City: published by author’s family, 1934), 21.

<sup>30</sup>Carter, *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 7:283.

<sup>31</sup>Agnes Richardson, Autobiographical sketch, LDS Church Archives, 1.

called us to a halt. As I remember they were a hard looking lot and wanted flour, beef, and everything they could think of.”<sup>32</sup> James Kirkham remembers having to pacify the Indians with presents or food in order to travel in peace.<sup>33</sup> William Steward recalls a band of 400 warriors who rode up to their train and demanded food. The emigrants offered them some bread, “but this they refused and boistrously called for a feast.” They fled, however, when the captain of the train showed them the corpse of a woman who had died from cholera.<sup>34</sup> Lucina Mecham Boren remembers being stopped by the Indians on one occasion. “I thought there were a thousand of them! They could easily have killed us all, but we gave them provisions by robbing ourselves and then suffering from want of food.”<sup>35</sup>

Other pioneers remember the appearance of the Indians rather than their habit of begging for food. Of the Sioux, Hyrum Weech notes, “They were a fine looking lot, camped along the river in their tepees made of buffalo skins. They were clean and well dressed in their buckskin clothes, and it was a grand sight to see so many of them.”<sup>36</sup> Mary Ann Hafen remembers the Indians’ “jingling trinkets” and “strange appearance.”<sup>37</sup> Charles W. Nibley writes, “The Indians were very plentiful and sometimes a little troublesome although we never had any conflict whatever with them, but I can remember that they were a haughty and insolent lot, as they would ride upon their ponies decked in

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<sup>32</sup>Thomas F. King, Autobiographical sketch, [manuscript], LDS Church Archives, 1.

<sup>33</sup>Kirkham, 2.

<sup>34</sup>William Henry Steward “Autobiography of William Henry Steward,” [typescript], LDS Church Archives, 1-2.

<sup>35</sup>Kate B. Carter, ed., *Treasures of Pioneer History* vol. 6 (Salt Lake City: Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, 1970), 307.

<sup>36</sup>Hyrum Weech, “The Autobiography of Hyrum Weech”, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, 4.

<sup>37</sup>Mary Ann Hafen, *Recollections of a Handcart Pioneer of 1860* (Denver: privately printed, 1938), 23.

their feathers and paint and would frighten most of us people who were not used to them.”<sup>38</sup> Catherine Adams Pilling was always afraid of the Indians, who came into camp “painted in all their savage, hideous war paint . . .”<sup>39</sup> Selina Hammond writes:

I remember well the first Indians we met. I think they were the Sioux or Shoshones. They were traveling, the warriors, squaws and papooses, with tent plies fastened to the horses sides, and dragging it along. I thought they looked queer as they were the first Indians we had seen and we felt a little afraid of them as we had heard what dreadful things they had done to the immigrants on the plains.<sup>40</sup>

Mary Sabin Powell remembers some Indians who stopped and examined her family’s handcart. “ ‘Little wagons, little wagons.’ said they. How the squaws laughed.”<sup>41</sup>

Some of the children had personal encounters with the Native Americans. One Indian Chief offered to buy eight-year-old Franklin Young for five ponies and two mules. He writes, “I thought it was more than I was worth, and went and hid under some bedding in the wagon. When asked what he wanted me for the big Chief said I should sleep in his lodge – ride a good horse and learn to kill buffalo, and when grown should have his own little girl for a wife, and be a big chief too.”<sup>42</sup> B.H. Roberts met his first Indian when he went with a friend to collect currants along a stream. With their caps full of them, they started back to catch up with the wagon train when they met three Indians on horseback. He writes, “It could be well imagined that the hair on our heads raised as we saw an inevitable meeting with these savages.” The two boys separated to go around the Indians but the Indians separated also and the boys knew they were in for it. “I approached my savage, knowing not what to do, but as I reached about the head of the

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<sup>38</sup>Nibley, 21.

<sup>39</sup>Madsen, 122.

<sup>40</sup>Selina Hammond, Autobiographical sketch, [manuscript], LDS Church Archives, 2.

<sup>41</sup>Sabin, 12.

<sup>42</sup>Franklin Young to his daughter, 1915, [manuscript], LDS Church Archives, 4-5.

horse, I gave one wild yell, the Scotch cap full of currants was dropped, and I made a wild dash to get by – and did – whereupon there was a peal of laughter from the three Indians.” He kept running but glanced back and saw the Indians bent over, screaming with laughter.<sup>43</sup>

Although the Indians could be frightening to the children, they at times were very helpful. Elizabeth Pulsipher, who was staying near Fort Laramie for a few days while her father worked for food, remembers that the Indians were very friendly and often came to see what they could do for the suffering family.<sup>44</sup> Another young pioneer, thirteen-year-old George Harrison, sought help from the Indians and received it. His handcart company was facing starvation and early snows and he decided to leave it so his family would not have to feed him. He wandered until he came to an Indian encampment, walked right into a teepee and asked for some of the meat that was cooking in a pot. The squaw in the tent gave him meat and he ended up staying with the Indian family and living happily with them, even calling the Indian woman his “red mother.” At Fort Laramie he joined up with Johnston’s army as a cook, thus earning his way to Salt Lake City to be re-united with his parents. His Indian family cried when he left.<sup>45</sup>

The pioneers encountered other new and unusual sights in the west, although in these accounts, buffalo, storms, and Indians seem to be the most frequently mentioned ones. Several of the emigrants also mention seeing some of the famous geographical landmarks on the westward trail. Elliott West notes that because of children’s tendency to think literally, they expected the landmarks to live up to their names literally. They

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<sup>43</sup>Madsen, 16-17.

<sup>44</sup>Kate B. Carter, *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 2: 267.

<sup>45</sup>Carter, *Treasures of Pioneer History*, 2: 108.

were sometimes disappointed to find that the Sweetwater River was actually rather bitter and that there were no ashes, nor anyone yelling at “Ash Holler.”<sup>46</sup> However, in the ninety-three accounts used here, few even mention the landmarks and those that do generally mention them as points of reference in passing. Only one seems to indicate any special fascination with the unusual rock formations or other natural wonders. Howard R. Egan describes several of the landmarks he passed. He remembers gathering salaratus at one of the salaratus lakes on the trail. “It was very hard and smooth and we had only table knives to dig it out . . .” Of Independence Rock he writes, “to me it appeared to be the shape of the Salt Lake Tabernacle, only very much larger. There was hundreds of names written on it. Some in large letters and far out of the reach of anyone standing on the ground.” He also commented on the perpendicular walls of Devil’s Gate and recalled the men calling and dogs barking from one cliff to another in Echo Canyon.<sup>47</sup> Aside from Howard R., however, who seemed to have a particular interest in some of these natural phenomena, few other pioneers seemed to remember them. One young pioneer did remember how she liked hearing the echo of her voice in Echo canyon and another briefly mentioned that Devil’s Gate was a scenic place. One other young pioneer, Rachel Emma Woolley Simmons, remembers the following about Independence Rock:

We heard so much of Independence Rock, in Wyoming, long before we got there. We nooned at this place, but Father stayed long enough for us children to go all over it. We went with the boys and with Catherine. It is an immense rock with holes and crevices where the water is dripping cool and sparkling. We saw a great many names of persons that had been cut in the rock, but we were so disappointed in not having a dance.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>West, 30.

<sup>47</sup>William M. Egan, ed., *Pioneering the West* (Richmond, Utah: Howard R. Egan Estate, 1917), 143-144.

<sup>48</sup>Madsen, 159.

None of the other accounts mention any landmarks or natural wonders. While their immediate reactions surely would have proven interesting, these landmarks did not make enough of an impression upon most of the youngsters' minds that they remembered and wrote about them in later years.

Examining the thoughts and feelings of these young pioneers gives us a basic understanding of what life was like for them and gives us greater insight into trail life generally. Adult perceptions of the frontier were affected by the pull of society behind them and fears of what lay ahead of them. As other trail historians have noted, adults saw along the trail pieces of the life they left behind. The names they gave to various landmarks suggest this – Independence Rock, Chimney Rock, Courthouse Rock. Adults' minds often dwelt on the past; they wrote of how much they missed their friends and family left behind. They also worried more about their future in a new land. Children, however, could not see as far into the future nor remember the past as vividly; their world of thought extended only to the farthest landmarks within their sight. But precisely because they were trapped in the present, their minds uncluttered by the past and future, they were able to view their immediate surroundings with a clarity their parents could not.<sup>49</sup> If the children had kept journals during their crossing this would be even more apparent. Because their accounts are written in retrospect, this can be difficult to see as their minds may have become cluttered over the years with later thoughts and memories. Howard R. Egan obviously did not think Independence Rock looked like the Salt Lake Tabernacle when he first saw it because he had never seen the Salt Lake Tabernacle. But writing in retrospect he could use the building as a reference. Elapse of time between the

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<sup>49</sup>West, 30,45.

actual experience and documentation of it does cloud our ability to see the experience clearly, but we still catch a glimpse of the unique perspective children share.

Furthermore, the fact that children's accounts often differ very little from their adult counterparts can be revealing. Some of the accounts seem very practical. For example, Charles Nibley records information about the baking skillet his family used to bake bread. He says it was "about eighteen inches in diameter, about four or five inches deep, made of cast iron. It had a heavy lid and it had three or four short legs to raise the body of the skillet from the ground and admit the fire underneath . . ."<sup>50</sup> These accounts, full of practical details, show that despite their young age, children were being called upon to deal with life on the trail as adults did. Some of them, especially the older ones, had to be concerned with practical things just as much as their parents.

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<sup>50</sup>Nibley, 20.

## **Chapter Two**

### *Trail Experiences*

Circumstances for each child traveling on the trail differ and thus their experiences and feelings while traveling differ accordingly. It is difficult to describe the “typical” juvenile experience, as that task requires much generalizing. Despite the differences, several feelings and experiences seem to recur frequently in the accounts. Adults experienced many of the same things as children, but other experiences, such as getting lost or left behind, seem to be more unique to the younger pioneers. Either way, the child’s perspective of common trail experiences enriches the story of the trail. While studying these experiences, it is important to remember that the normal forces of life were at work on the trail. The trail was not a suspension of time in which normal aspects of life and culture disappeared. Childhood issues such as sibling rivalry, peer influence, and discipline still existed. Children still felt basic needs such as love, attention, and approval. Trail life, however, often affected these basic aspects of childhood.

Death of loved ones is one aspect of trail life that children frequently experienced. Of the ninety-two accounts, eighteen mention death of family members and friends – or even beloved animals. Some companies of pioneers crossing the plains had higher rates of mortality than others, making it difficult to conclude that death on the trail was something all children witnessed first-hand. The Willie and Martin handcart companies both suffered extreme casualties – approximately sixty-seven deaths in the former and between 135-150 in the latter. But the Robinson Company of 1860 recorded only one death in the entire company and the Stoddard Company of the same year suffered no casualties at all. Most deaths occurred as a result of cholera or other illnesses or as a result of accidents along the trail.

Some historians argue that because the passing of loved ones was a fairly common experience for children, they became much more accustomed to it. Elliott West

writes that parents did little to shield children from the deaths of others. He says that youngsters accepted death very matter-of-factly and that journal entries concerning death "sit calmly beside notes of the ordinary."<sup>51</sup> Other historians argue that despite the high mortality rate in past years, people never become accustomed to something as tragic as death. In the accounts of Mormon children we see experiences that support both claims. Some children seemed little affected by death and others took it very seriously. How they respond can be affected by a couple of factors.

First of all, the age of the child can affect how they respond toward death. Young children, before the age of four or five, generally recognize death merely as immobility. If something that once moved no longer moves, it is dead. But they do not necessarily understand the permanence or significance of death. By the age of five, they begin to recognize the disappearance of the body and associate that with death. At this age they also begin to realize that death is not reversible. Generally, by eight years old, sometimes earlier, the child understands what may happen after death and is able to accept the fact that all plants, animals, and people will eventually die. For the most part, however, it is not until the age of nine or ten that children really begin to fear death themselves. Thus, depending on their age (and other factors, including exposure to death and parental teachings), children will respond differently.<sup>52</sup>

Furthermore, in examining why some pioneers write about death with great sorrow and others seem little affected by it, we must remember that these accounts are written in retrospect and thus the deep emotions that children might have felt at the time may have diminished over the years. Furthermore, some children might have experienced trauma at the passing of a loved one and not written about it later because they have suppressed the experience. It is impossible to ascertain whether seemingly detached,

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<sup>51</sup>West, 239.

<sup>52</sup>Marjorie Mitchell, *The Child's Attitude To Death* (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), 55, 57,

unemotional accounts of death are a result of passing years or are a true reflection of the children's feelings at the time.

Many pioneers provide good examples of practical and matter-of-fact responses toward death. For example, Elizabeth Pulsipher tells of the death of her baby sister:

She died the third day after we had started, and as there was no one to take care of her body, I had to bathe her and put a little dress on her, and sew a cloth around her body to be buried in as there was no coffin. As small as I was, no one came to help me and mother was not able to do anything.<sup>53</sup>

This account indicates that Elizabeth had to deal very practically with the death of her sister as she dealt with many other daily trail tasks. Other children also write about death with the same lack of emotion. Caroline Pedersen Hansen, age seven, writes about the hot weather and sunburns and the problems of crossing the rivers and in between these seemingly trivial things she inserts one sentence about waking up one morning and finding her brother lying beside her, dead.<sup>54</sup> Hyrum Weech, who crossed the plains at age eleven, describes how a man in his company was accidentally shot in the leg while hunting buffalo, simply remarking, "The weather being very warm, they could not save him and he died and was buried there. Out of all the men who went, they got only one buffalo."<sup>55</sup> Although Hyrum's account might have shown more emotion if he had recorded it at the time it occurred, the fact that he still remembered getting only one buffalo indicates that grief and shock may not have affected him a great deal. Similarly, John Fell Squires, age seven, writes very simply about the death of his brother, "My brother Dick died on the Big Sandy about two hundred miles east of Salt Lake City and

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<sup>53</sup>Carter, *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 2: 268.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 12: 67.

<sup>55</sup>Weech, 4.

was laid away and left in the usual manner.”<sup>56</sup> Eight-year-old Nannie Erickson Anderson shows little emotion in her account as well: “The journey seemed to be particularly hard on the babies, not one of which lived through it. My own little Sister and grandmother both died and were buried by the road side. No time was taken to build coffins for those who died.”<sup>57</sup> All that Charles Haderlie writes is, “Proceeding on, our trip, my little Sister, Anna, took seriously ill of fever and ague and died somewhere in the neighborhood of Evinston, Wyoming.”<sup>58</sup>

Although many children showed little emotion at the deaths that occurred along the trail, some of them did express the immense sorrow they felt. Heber Robert McBride, who traveled in the Martin handcart company, records the following:

... I went to look for Father and at last I found him under a wagon with snow all over him and he was stiff and dead. I felt as though my heart would burst I sat down beside him on the snow and took hold of one of his hands and cried oh Father Father there we was away out on the Plains with hardly anything to eat and Father dead.<sup>59</sup>

On a more humorous note, Peter Howard McBride, Heber's six-year-old brother, viewed the same death a little differently. He too showed great emotion at the death of his father and during his burial, ran away crying. When someone tried to console him he cried more and said, "My father had my fish hooks in his pocket and I want them."<sup>60</sup> Peter's young age and possible lack of understanding of death may account for his reaction.

Many other accounts show that children were not at all hardened or accustomed to death. Ann Jarvis Stickney, age thirteen, writes about the death of her mother and recalls,

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<sup>56</sup> John Fell Squires, "Book of Remembrance" [typescript], p. 1x, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

<sup>57</sup> Nannie Amelia Anderson, "My Life," Internet site: <http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Plains/4416/mylife.html>. p. 1

<sup>58</sup> Charles Haderlie, "Sketch of the Life of Charles Henry Haderlie," [typescript], LDS Church Archives, 3.

<sup>59</sup> Journal of Heber Robert McBride, typed 1959 by John C. Van Wagoner, p. 9, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo.

<sup>60</sup> Madsen, *I Walked to Zion*, 45.

"We mourned our loss greatly and it was hard to leave her as we were compelled to do. She was buried without a coffin . . . She was put into the grave and just as soon as it was filled we had to travel on, never to see the grave again."<sup>61</sup> When Lydia Holdaway's father died she lamented "how they rolled him in a blanket and buried him and how terrible it seemed to me for him to be left on that lonely plain and of wondering if the wolves would get him."<sup>62</sup> Another young pioneer, Mary Judd, records with much sadness the deaths of her family members: "It was nearly dark. I was very sorrowful. After walking around a little I came back to the wagon and found the body of my brother had been taken away . . . It grieved me so much that they had carried him off without me seeing him." She indicates, contrary to West's claim, that her parents did try to shield her somewhat from the harshness of death on the plains: "It was perhaps wise to not permit my young mind to be impressed with the rude, un-coffined way in which they were obliged to put his remains into the earth." This young pioneer also lost her mother. She describes the lonely feeling connected with burying the dead so far from human habitation. "But circumstances pressed us onward, and all our grief and tears would not bring back mother, who was buried on a little hill where we left her . . ."<sup>63</sup>

However varied the reactions to death, the experience was certainly an unpleasant one. Even though the emotions may not manifest themselves strongly in some of the accounts because of the passage of time, those children old enough to understand the concept of death undoubtedly felt grief and shock at the passing of loved ones. And because of the rigors of trail life, children often did not have the benefit of seeing their loved ones appropriately buried. In a more stable lifestyle children might have been afforded the opportunity to grieve and mourn, an experience that experts today say is necessary for young children learning to cope with death. But as Mary Judd points out,

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<sup>61</sup>Carter, *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 9:439

<sup>62</sup> Lydia Holdaway, "Life Story of Lydia Thrower Holdaway," [typescript], LDS Church Archives,

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<sup>63</sup>Carter, *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 7:283.

"Fortunately for the young, the keen edge of grief soon wears off."<sup>64</sup> Historians are thus left to question the full effects that death may have had on the young pioneers.

While deep sorrow for the loss of loved ones may or may not have been the most common feeling among children on the trail, several other emotions continually resurface in their journals and memoirs. One of those is fear. Adults also undoubtedly felt fear along the trail, but their fear arose for different reasons. They probably feared losing a spouse or a child or seeing their family go hungry and cold. But children felt fearful of different things that were as real and frightening to them as death was to their parents. Among the common things that aroused fear in children were river crossings, buffalo, rainstorms, and Indians. Such fears were common to all children, not just Mormon children. Lucy Ann Henderson Deady, an eleven-year-old Oregon pioneer records, "I remember how filled with terror I was when we experienced the violent thunderstorms with the torrential rains . . . our tents would be blown down, and everybody and everything would be soaked with the driving rains. I remember with what terror I saw the Indians come out from Fort Laramie. They looked so naked and wild."<sup>65</sup> Other fears were more unique to the children's individual circumstances. Rachel Emma Woolley Simmons, who drove a team across the plains at age eleven, expresses her fear of the vicious horses that would kick the board of the wagon to pieces.<sup>66</sup>

One fear unique to children was that of getting lost or left behind the company. Finding themselves alone in the middle of the endless prairie could be very frightening indeed. Mary Goble Pay, who was twelve years old when she crossed the plains, remembers being sent out from camp one night to fetch water. "When I had gone, I began to think of the Indians and began looking in all directions. I became confused and forgot the way I should go."<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 7:284.

<sup>65</sup>Lockley, 83.

<sup>66</sup>Madsen, 158-159.

<sup>67</sup>Madsen, 93.

Another common experience or feeling children mention is fatigue. Most children had to walk the entire journey and this could be very tiring for short little legs. The accounts we read from adults give us an idea of the extreme hardships the pioneers endured, but when we read accounts of the suffering of children, we begin to feel the force of the struggles they faced. John Settler Stucki recalls:

I have never forgotten how when I, a nine-year-old boy, would be so tired that I would wish I could sit down for just a few minutes. How much good it would do to me. But instead of that, my dear, nearly worn-out father would ask me if I could not push a little more on the handcart.<sup>68</sup>

B.H. Roberts felt so tired during the journey, and knowing that riding in the wagon was against the law, climbed up into the wagon box and found a barrel he could hide in and rest for a time. He was surprised to find as he lowered himself into the barrel that it contained three or four inches of molasses at the bottom. "The smarting of my chapped feet almost made me scream with pain, but I stifled it. Too tired to attempt to climb out, I remained and gradually slipped down and went to sleep doubled up in the bottom of the barrel." He had to face the laughter from the other emigrants when he later came out from his hiding place dripping with molasses, but the rest had been worth it.<sup>69</sup>

Eight-year-old Franklin Young, who was assigned to help drive the cow herd in his company, relates an incident about a girl in his company. Her father had no boys, so this young girl, eight or ten years old, had to help drive the cow herd. One day Franklin and his brother noticed that she simply gave out "and would have been left behind, but we boys caught a yearling heifer and got the poor, tired little miss on to the heifer,

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<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 54.

<sup>69</sup>Gary James Bergera, ed., *The Autobiography of B.H. Roberts*, (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 31.

astride, yes, and brought her safe into camp and she lived and grew and came to be a very nice lady.<sup>70</sup>

The fatigue that these young pioneers experienced was so acute that they can remember how tired they felt many years after the trek was over. Agnes Caldwell writes the following:

Although only tender years of age, I can yet close my eyes and see everything in panoramic precision before me – the ceaseless walking, walking, ever to remain in my memory. Many times I would become so tired and, childlike, would hang on the cart, only to be gently pushed away. Then I would throw myself by the side of the road and cry. Then realizing they were all passing me by, I would jump to my feet and make an extra run to catch up.<sup>71</sup>

John Nielson, who had his eighth birthday on the trail, remembers, “I walked almost the entire distance from the Missouri River. Many times I felt as if I could not go another step I was so tired, but the Lord gave me strength to go on.”<sup>72</sup> The teamsters in the commissary wagons of Caroline Larrabee’s wagon train would allow her to ride once in awhile in the wagon if she would sing for them, so of course she did.<sup>73</sup> Eight-year-old Ellen Burton Beazer writes, “. . . we had to walk most of the way. Sometimes, when we were very tired, we would get in the wagon to rest awhile, but the captain would come around and order everyone who could walk to get down to ease the load.”<sup>74</sup>

While some children experienced intense fatigue, other children recall no hardship at all. Evan Stephans, age twelve, writes:

I wasn’t spared much of the pioneering work. I had the privilege of walking all the way, excepting the Green River and Platte River which were too deep for me to ford, and the rest of the way I walked like a real pioneer. I don’t know whether all the pioneers enjoyed it. The journey across the plains was such an experience

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<sup>70</sup>Franklin Young, 4-5.

<sup>71</sup>Madsen, 57.

<sup>72</sup>Carter, *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 7:311.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, 12:197.

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*, 10:51

of pleasure to me, that I found it difficult to sympathize with the pioneers who thought it a hardship. . . I was too elated to walk, so I would run ahead and then would stop and wait for the crowd.<sup>75</sup>

Likewise, Jane Wilkie Hooper Blood writes about one day during which she had walked nearly thirty miles. She recalls, "When we reached camp I did not feel very tired. I think our backs were prepared for the burdens."<sup>76</sup>

Those children whose journeys were plagued with extreme cold or lack of food probably felt more fatigue than those children who traveled in more fortunate companies. Regardless of the success of their companies, the journey was arduous on the young ones. Agnes Caldwell, who traveled in the Willie handcart company remembers the relief wagons coming, allowing the old and infirm to ride. She and a few other children, hoping to be offered a ride, decided to see how long they could keep up with the wagons. "One by one they all fell out, until I was the last one remaining, so determined was I that I should get a ride. Finally a driver offered to let her ride. He gave her his hand to pull her up but instead of pulling her into the wagon, he clucked to his horses to speed up, making her run along side holding his hand:

On we went, to what to me seemed miles. What went through my head at that time was that he was the meanest man that ever lived or that I had ever heard of, and other things that would not be a credit nor would it look well coming from one so young. Just at what seemed the breaking point, he stopped. Taking a blanket, he wrapped me up and lay me in the bottom of the wagon, warm and comfortable. Here I had time to change my mind, as I surely did, knowing full well by doing this he saved me from freezing when taken into the wagon.<sup>77</sup>

Other children, especially in the Willie and Martin handcart companies, write of the extreme cold they experienced. Ten-year-old Josephine Hartely Zundle who traveled

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 10:85.

<sup>76</sup>Ivy Hooper Blood Hill, ed., "Diary of Jane Wilkie Hooper Blood, 1845-1848," [typescript], p. 14, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

<sup>77</sup>Madsen, 59.

with the Martin company writes, "My mother's and sister's skirts were frozen stiff. They would try to dry them out in the evening by the fires, but were not very successful. My brother, Samuel's, feet were frozen, and he lost one leg below the knee and he always wore a peg leg after that."<sup>78</sup> Caroline Larrabee writes, "Another item stays in my memory. At the South Pass it was very cold. My sister cried, her hands were so cold. Eliza King said, 'I will warm them.' She slapped them hard. It hurt, I tell you."<sup>79</sup> Mary Goble Pay, another young girl who traveled that same year, late in the season, had to have her toes amputated after being frozen so badly. She had gotten lost while out looking for water one night and wandered around in snow up to her knees until 11:00 when she was found. By then it was too late to save her frostbitten toes. Peter Howard McBride of the Martin Company could still recall in later years the bloody tracks his sister's bare feet left in the snow as she carried water from the river to do the cooking. He also writes:

Later we had a terrible cold spell; the wind drifted so much I knew I would die. The wind blew the tent down. They all crawled out but me. The snow fell on it. I went to sleep and slept warm all night. In the morning I heard someone say, 'How many are dead in this tent?' My sister said, 'Well, my little brother must be frozen to death in that tent.' So they jerked the tent loose, sent it scurrying over the snow. My hair was frozen to the tent. I picked myself up and came out quite alive, to their surprise.<sup>80</sup>

Peter's brother Heber recounts similar experiences. He relates, "... we used to pray that we might die to get out of our misery for by this time it was getting very cold weather

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<sup>78</sup>Carter, *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 9:457.

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*, 12:198.

<sup>80</sup>Madsen, 46.

and our clothing almost worn out and not enough of bedclothes to keep us warm we would lay and suffer from night till morning with the cold.”<sup>81</sup>

While the Martin and Willie companies experienced more exposure to cold weather than did the other companies, some children even in the “successful” companies, mention the cold through which they suffered. B.H. Roberts, who traveled in an 1866 wagon train that completed the journey before the snows came, recalls, “The only night covering I had was a petticoat that my sister Mary slipped to me after retiring into the wagon. This night covering I caught with eager hands, and I curled up under the wagon and generally shivered through the night.”<sup>82</sup>

Hunger was another experience that some children in more fortunate companies escaped, but that other children suffered through. Sixteen of the ninety-two diarists remember feeling extreme hunger, and several others expressed dissatisfaction at the boring and sometimes insufficient trail rations. Some children had their rations reduced to a mere two ounces of flour per day and nothing else. Heber Robert McBride writes, “Then was the time to hear children crying for something to eat nearly all the children would cry themselves to sleep every night my 2 little Brothers would get the sack that had flour in and turn it wrong side out and suck and lick the flour dust.”<sup>83</sup> Some of the children would find a piece of raw hide and chew on it all day to alleviate the hunger pains. Ann Jarvis Stickney went four days without bread or flour. She and her family had nothing during that time but what they could pick from the bones of an old ox that had been killed.<sup>84</sup> The Martin Company reduced flour rations for all travelers until the

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<sup>81</sup>McBride, 10.

<sup>82</sup>Madsen, 16.

<sup>83</sup>McBride, 14.

<sup>84</sup>Carter, *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 9:439.

flour was completely gone. The captain of this company was very kind to Josephine Hartley Zundle and her family and gave her Mother "some of the four sacks to scrape off with a knife what little flour was left along with the lint. With this she was able to make some cakes and mush to help sustain life."<sup>85</sup> Peter Howard McBride's hunger was so severe that he could never forget it. One of the teamsters in his company gave the McBrides a chunk of buffalo meat which Peter's father put in the back of the handcart. He told the children that it was to be saved for dinner the following Sunday. Peter writes, "I was so very hungry all the time and the meat smelled so good to me while pushing at the handcart, and having a little pocketknife, I could not resist, but had to cut off a piece or two each half day." He feared the whipping he would receive when he was discovered but the hunger was too great. On Sunday his father went to get the meat and asked Peter if he had been cutting some off. Peter acknowledged that he had. "Then instead of giving me the severe scolding and whipping he did not say a word but started to wipe the tears from his eyes." Peter also remembers when, ". . . some men passed us one day and stopped to talk. They gave my baby sister some cookies. She carried them in her little pocket, and I was always with her and would tease for a bite. She would give me a taste once in a while, and it was so good. No cake I ever tasted since was ever so good." He writes of another night, "They gave me a bone of an ox that had died. I cut off the skin and put the bone in the fire to roast. And when it was done some big boys came and ran away with it. Then I took the skin and boiled it, drank the soup, and ate the skin, and it was a good supper. The next day we had nothing to eat but some bark from trees."<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*, 9:457.

<sup>86</sup>Madsen, 46.

A few children remember having plenty to eat during the trek. Caroline Larrabee writes, "We had good rations on the plains. We had flour, bacon, dried peaches and apples."<sup>87</sup> Agnes Caldwell Southworth, who was in the Willie Company remembers, "Winter came in October with eighteen inches of snow, but in spite of this we did not suffer from hunger, due to Mother's careful and frugal planning."<sup>88</sup>

Other experiences emigrants unfortunately encountered were sickness and accidents. Trail historian John Unruh claims that nine out of ten deaths on the trail resulted from sickness – cholera, mountain fever, and scurvy being the top offenders. Accidents come in a close second.<sup>89</sup> Few children actually write about these things, mostly because many of the children who experienced them did not live to tell about it. John Nielson records that his company has gone down in history as the "Ox-team Cholera Company of 1866" because of all the sickness in their train.<sup>90</sup> In Mary Judd's company twelve out of fifteen members of one family passed away and she herself lost her mother, brother, and sister to the disease. Catherine Leishman became very sick on the journey and because her mother and older sister had died, had no one to care for her. "I, being ill with a burning fever, was not allowed to drink much water, a pint being the limit. But there was a beautiful spring near by to which I crept while Father was away and drank until my thirst was satisfied."<sup>91</sup> John Fell Squires was "reduced by diarrhoea to a mere skeleton unable to walk."<sup>92</sup> On the other hand, many experienced great health on the trek. Lucina Mecham Boren writes, "My Father, my brother, and sister Polly were all

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<sup>87</sup>Carter, *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 12:198.

<sup>88</sup>Madsen, 57.

<sup>89</sup>John Unruh, *The Plains Across* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1979), 345-346.

<sup>90</sup>Carter, *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 7:311.

<sup>91</sup>Catherine Leishman, Autobiographical sketch, [manuscript], LDS Church Archives, 3-4.

<sup>92</sup>Squires, 1x.

sick when we left for Utah. People said they were foolish for starting, but by the time they were half way they were all right.”<sup>93</sup> Some of the pioneers found that the dry climate and vigorous exercise on the trail improved their health and made them stronger.

Accidents were as devastating on the trail as sickness. Moving wagons, stream crossings, buffalo stampedes, unruly draft animals, and loaded guns in the wagons made avoiding accidents next to impossible. Howard R. Egan’s brother Erastus fell under the tongue of the wagon and would have escaped, but because he tried to get out of the way of a pig that was tied under the back of the wagon, his foot got under the wheel. At least he got to ride after that.<sup>94</sup> Gideon Murdock had the job of driving one yoke of oxen on the trail at the young age of six. He remembers, “This was quite an undertaking for me as I was only six and a half years old, and small for my age, it was hard for me to keep out of the way of the team and wagon, for in fact I had my feet and legs run over two or three times by the wagon in jumping out to stop the team . . .”<sup>95</sup> William Steward’s sister tried to jump out of the wagon, but her skirt caught in the drawbolt of the tongue and dragged her under the wheel, breaking her leg. “She hollered, of course, it stirred the cattle and the whole train came very near going in the Platte river.”<sup>96</sup> Franklin Young recalls, “One day I was riding in the wagon, and while moving along, I stepped down on to the wagon tongue, and slipped and fell to the ground, the front wheel passed over both my legs just above the ankles, but no bones were broken, and I got a ride for a week or ten days, before I was able to drive cows again.”<sup>97</sup> In all the stories about children falling under

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<sup>93</sup>Carter, *Treasures of Pioneer History*, 6:307

<sup>94</sup>Egan, 145.

<sup>95</sup>Gideon Murdock, Autobiographical sketch, [typescript], LDS Church Archives, 2-3.

<sup>96</sup>Steward, 1.

<sup>97</sup>Young, 4-5.

the wheels of the wagon, a surprising number of the children escaped with little or no injury. Historians generally conclude this was due to the deep and soft sand that allowed for some depression, thus relieving the full weight of the wagon.

Some, however, did not make it through such accidents. Peter Weston Maughan, age three, was one child who did not. He fell out of the wagon and the first wheel passed over him. He tried to escape the other one but, as his mother records:

The wagon stopped just as the hind wheel stood on his dear little back. . . He was bruised internally so that it was impossible for him to live long. . . The people left their wagons and gathered around mine, and all wept for the dear little boy that we knew must soon leave us. I had talked to him many times to be careful and not fall out of the wagon, or he might be hurt very bad. I did not know that his father had fainted, for the brethren stood to hide him from my sight. On my asking for him, they said he would come soon. As soon as he was able, he came to the wagons, covered with dust. But his little boy could not speak to him. He opened his eyes and looked so lovingly at us, then gently closed them and passed peacefully away and left us weeping around his dear little bruised body.<sup>98</sup>

Although children experienced intense suffering along the trail, their journals and personal histories also contain many references to the fun times they had as they traveled. As some pioneers reflect on their experiences, the enjoyable times stand out the most in their memories. Children were in a unique position to enjoy the journey. Generally the adults in the company carried the responsibilities and burdens associated with travel, so they were less able to enjoy the trip itself. The children, however, usually had less to worry about and therefore had more time and also more emotional freedom to find pleasure and amusement along the trail. Rachel Burton writes, "In all our worries and troubles I was never badly frightened . . . Father and mother carry all of the cares and all of the burdens."<sup>99</sup> Charles W. Nibley claims, "Altogether it was rather an enjoyable time for a boy of my age than any hardship. At least if it was a hardship I did not feel it so. Of course to my father and mother at their time of life it must have been very different,

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<sup>98</sup>Madsen, 86.

<sup>99</sup>Burton, 3.

and, no doubt, they suffered great inconvenience and more or less trial and sacrifice in it all.”<sup>100</sup>

So, while parents may have been more concerned with the struggles of bringing a family 1,300 miles across the country on foot, the children were concerned with having fun. Alma Elizabeth Miner, who crossed the plains at age six, remembers the westward trek only as a "delightful pleasure jaunt." She recalls, "We children would run along as happy as could be."<sup>101</sup> Catherine Adams Pilling, age twelve, recollects the many good times she had during the evenings when the company camped and held dances or sang together. T.A. Brady Stevens recalls, "Well do I remember the good times we would have at night, when the boys would smooth off a place on the ground, wet it a little, pat it down, wet it a little more, 'till finally they would have a very nice dance floor, on which we would all dance to the music of a fiddle and triangle."<sup>102</sup> Rachel Burton participated in sing-alongs and dances around a big bonfire. "The bigger the fire the better it seemed," she recalls.<sup>103</sup> Evan Stephans, another pioneer who had an enjoyable time, acknowledges that part of the fun was due to the fact that he was a twelve-year-old boy walking a thousand miles between two and three hundred Danish girls.<sup>104</sup> Some companies of emigrants experienced greater hardships than others, and as Evan Stephans traveled with a successful wagon train in 1866, he suffered minimally. Members of the Martin and Willie handcart companies, on the other hand, suffered tremendously and did not write of fun or "pleasure jaunts."

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<sup>100</sup>Nibley, 21.

<sup>101</sup>Madsen, 139.

<sup>102</sup>T.A. Brady Stevens, "The Life History of Tranquilla Ann Brady Stevens," [typescript], LDS Church Archives, 2.

<sup>103</sup>Burton, 2.

<sup>104</sup>Carter, *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 10:85.

Many aspects of the trail discussed – sickness, hunger, pleasure, etc.—were not necessarily unique to children. Although their accounts may differ, adults experienced some of the same things. Children, however experienced one thing their parents did not: discipline. Being on the road did not excuse children from being obedient and when they failed to measure up, consequences followed. The following accounts tell of several cases in which children learned a lesson in being obedient.

Rachel Emma Woolley Simmons tells one of these stories. Her mother had told her many times not to go bathing every time the train stopped to camp, but one night she disobeyed. The night was especially dark and she got lost. The dew on the high grass soon soaked her from the knee down. Finally, she found the wagon and her father gave her a well-deserved whipping. She records, “In consequence of getting wet that night, I had a crick in my neck the next morning. My head was drawn on one side. I tried to make myself believe it was because Father had whipped me and thought he ought to be sorry, but it didn’t seem to strike him that way.”<sup>105</sup>

T.A. Brady Stevens tells about a time when she disregarded her mother’s instructions as well:

Such things as needles and small things which were necessary to make the trip more pleasant for all, were guarded with the strictest of rules but one day I decided that I wanted to do some sewing so I got Mother’s coveted needle and being careful as I would of course I lost it in the road, which was thick with dust, so I started to look for it and was afraid of a scolding from my mother, so I ran off in the tall sage brush, while the train was stopped. Being a mere child I was permitted to ride in either of our wagons so when the train started up this day they never noticed whether or not I was with them, when in fact I was a long ways away from them in hiding. Perhaps I can lay my being rescued to the fact that I had on a very bright red dress and to the alertness of our Capt. For he it was who was riding around the train after it had started to see that every thing was alright, when he spied my very red dress. At that time he never knew what it was but

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<sup>105</sup>Leonard J. Arrington, *Sunbonnet Sisters: True Stories of Mormon Women and Frontier Life* (Salt Lake City:Bookcraft, 1984), 41.

came riding over to see, picked me up in his saddle and told me I was about a mile from where we had camped and asked me where I was going and who I was. After I told him, he took to my father, who reprimanded me but I had learned my lesson and never tried that trick again.<sup>106</sup>

Anna Clark Hale had a similar experience with needles and disobedience:

I remember Mother had to do some sewing on our clothing, but couldn't do so because she had lost her needle. The next day I showed up with a needle and told Mother I had found it. She said it wasn't hers, and asked me where I got it. My answers did not satisfy – and she demanded the truth. I finally confessed that in visiting another camp, I saw a lady sewing on a button and beside her was a little cushion with a lot of pins and needles in it – and I thought she could spare one needle for my poor Mother, who had lost hers. Well. Mother made me take the needle back and apologize to the lady. I can say right here that it was one of the hardest things I ever had to do; but it taught me a lesson that I never forgot. Later, the kind lady came over to see Mother and gave her one of her needles. Incidentally, Mother did have some more needles packed in a trunk down in one of the wagons.<sup>107</sup>

When Howard R. Egan disobeyed the order to stay close to the train, he received a punishment that fit the crime. He had been walking with the train but had fallen behind. When he realized how far behind he was he began to get scared and started to run to catch up to the wagon. But he ran out of breath and had to slow down again. He kept getting farther behind until finally his mother sent someone back to get him. The man who came for him took his hand and tried to make him run the whole distance back to the train, but as Howard R. explains, “finding I was about all in he swung me on his back and tried to rattle my teeth out by running at a dog trot, stamping his feet as hard as he could to give me a good jolting, and something to remember him by, which this proves I do, for I never got very far from the wagon again.”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup>Stevens, 3.

<sup>107</sup>Anna Clark Hale, “Memoirs of Anna Clark Hale,” 1965, LDS Church Archives, 17.

<sup>108</sup>Egan, 142.

Young Christine M. Larsen from Denmark also had an experience unique to children. While it had nothing to do with obedience or discipline, it would not have happened had she not been a young child. Although her native tongue was Danish, she had learned some English her first few weeks in America. Her driver in the wagon train had taken an interest in a young woman in the train. One morning he motioned for her to come and ride with him. But they could not understand each other as he spoke English and the young woman Danish. He motioned for Christine to come and sit between them, so that she could tell each one what the other said. This went on for some time during the journey but as Christine writes, “. . . love is such a beautiful language and so easy to learn, so as time went on I was not asked to sit with them. The last time she came and rode in our wagon she told me that when they got to Salt Lake City she was going to open her trunk and she would give me material for a new dress.”<sup>109</sup>

Viewing life on the trail through the eyes of children shows how experiences on the trail may have prepared them for what lay ahead on the frontier. For example, the children learned to push forward despite extreme fatigue and hunger. While many of them had been taught a healthy work ethic from the time they were born, the trail emphasized that work was a way of life. Children learned to endure hardship and be resourceful in trying to alleviate discomforts. For example, B.H. Roberts, who had only his sister's petticoat for a blanket each night, discovered a good way to keep warm. He rolled two boulders together and lit a fire between them with a blazing cowchip from a neighboring fire. After the fire had burned down a little, he curled himself around the stones with the fire in between. He recalled, "In the early morning when I awoke, to my amazement I was covered with an inch or two of snow which had fallen through the night

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<sup>109</sup>Christine M. Larsen, 254-255.

. . . I made my way to look for breakfast, grateful for this long night of pleasant and apparently warm covering . . .<sup>110</sup> The McBride children learned how to make an entire meal out of an old ox bone by either boiling it for soup or burning the flesh left on it and scraping it off with their teeth. We can see that the trail gave children their first taste of life on the frontier and they learned from their experiences. Furthermore, children learned to confront their fears. Whether the object of their fears was death, separation, Indians or other aspects of trail life, they learned to face them head on. These skills undoubtedly aided them as they faced the struggles involved in carving homes out of the desert. However, time spent on the trail was very brief and the skills and lessons learned may not have been very far-reaching. None of the pioneers remarked on how trail life helped them with situations they encountered in later life. We can only assume that this introduction to frontier living made their transition from the east or from Europe a little easier.

However, while life on the trail may have taught children some valuable skills that prepared them for frontier life, it worked to their disadvantage as well. And some of these disadvantages were much more permanent and significant than were the advantages. For example, the trail left eight-year-old Laura Swenson Fowers an orphan after her father died in a wagon accident and her mother died giving birth to a premature baby. Some children on the trail had to go through the rest of their lives without one or more limbs due to frostbite on the trail. The trail left other children with vivid and unpleasant memories of illness or accidents. Sarah Sophia Moulding, who could remember looking out the front end of her wagon at the “ever-present thistle and

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<sup>110</sup>Madsen, 22-23.

skunkweed that grew just beside the road,” got such a dislike for them that she claims, “to this day I cannot stand the sight of the color.”<sup>111</sup> And while life on the trail may have taught some children to face their fears head on, it undoubtedly re-enforced fears in some children’s minds. For example, Peter McBride worried all his life for fear his children might get as hungry as he had been on the trail.<sup>112</sup> But whether the effects were positive or negative, short-term or long-term, the trail impacted children’s lives and their detailed and vivid accounts of their experiences attest to this.

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<sup>111</sup>*Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>112</sup>*Ibid.*, 46.

## Chapter Three

### *Duties and Responsibilities*

At the same time that trail life affected children, we also see that children had a great impact on trail life. Just as frontier settlement is credited to the family, successful emigration should also be credited to the family, the children playing an integral part. As we look at the duties children performed and the responsibilities they had, we see the contributions they made to Mormon emigration. Some of these children came from mid-western farming communities and had grown up working both outdoors and around the home. Other children had performed very little work in their short lives and had bigger adjustments to make on the trail. Charles W. Nibley writes, "I remember how green we all were with respect to yoking up cattle or milking cows or greasing the wagon or in doing anything that pertained to frontier or pioneer life."<sup>113</sup> Hyrum Weech recalls, "It was amusing to see the way the teams were herded along. Very few of the company had ever driven cattle before."<sup>114</sup> Jane Wilkie Hooper Blood writes, "Before starting from home, I had never done any work, not even dressed myself."<sup>115</sup>

On the trail, however, working became a way of life. John Mack Faragher claims that the pioneers maintained traditional divisions of labor even on the trail. Whether working or playing, little girls stayed around the wagons performing domestic duties or playing games with other little girls; boys were expected to follow in their fathers' footsteps and take on more manly chores.<sup>116</sup> West disagrees on this point. Traditional divisions of labor, he claims, suddenly became impractical and when a task needed to be done, it didn't matter whether it was women's work or men's work; whoever happened to

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<sup>113</sup>Nibley, 19.

<sup>114</sup>Weech, 2.

<sup>115</sup>Hill, 14.

<sup>116</sup>John Mack Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 89.

be available did the job. Often, that available person was a child. The accounts of Mormon children show that this latter viewpoint is more tenable.

The most common assignment delegated to children was the collecting of buffalo chips for fuel. In some areas on the trail, wood was scarce or non-existent and the pioneers used the dried buffalo dung in its place. Every night when the companies made camp, the adults were usually busy pitching tents and organizing while the children, and often women, gathered buffalo chips so they could cook the food. This was understandably not the most enjoyable task, so children would sometimes make a game of it by having contests to see who could collect the most. Edwin Alfred Pettit, who crossed the plains at age thirteen, remembers all the children going out to collect buffalo chips "and some of the daintier sex, instead of picking them up with their hands, used tongs to gather them with. Before we had gone very far, they got very bravely over this, and would almost fight over a dry one."<sup>117</sup> John Nielson concurs that the competition for chips could be fierce, "Where we could not find wood we burned buffalo chips. As soon as the wagons began to make the circle for camp, the race was on. Many times, just as I stooped to pick up a nice, big chip, I was pushed over and would have to go further on."<sup>118</sup> Joseph Moesser, however, remembers that in his company there was more cooperation than fighting. "In many places there was no wood, so we had to gather buffalo chips for a fire. The children would have their sacks ready when they stopped and each go for their share of the chips, and yet there was no quarreling about it."<sup>119</sup>

Anna Clark Hale had not seen buffalo chips before and the first time she was told to collect them, could not understand what they were for. She recalls, "I would be assigned every time we camped across the prairies, to go and gather 'Buffalo chips' in my apron for our camp fire on cold nights and for cooking our meals. Before we came to

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<sup>117</sup>Madsen, 73.

<sup>118</sup>Carter, *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 7:311.

<sup>119</sup>Moesser, 3.

this, I asked my Mother: 'Why do we have to use these chips – where did all the wood go?' She replied: 'You'll find out soon enough, daughter' – and I surely did."<sup>120</sup>

For one young pioneer, gathering chips got him into trouble:

One of my duties was to gather buffalo chips for the campfire. One night I saw the train turn off the road, and thinking they were going to camp, I took my sack from the rear end of the wagon and filled it with buffalo chips. Then I saw that the train was yet going on, and had gone quite a distance while I was filling my sack. It was after sundown, too, so I emptied my chips out, took my shoes off, and began to run as fast as I could. It was after dark before I caught the train, badly frightened, and in my hurry I lost my shoes and sack.<sup>121</sup>

Chris Alston describes the hardships associated with the use of buffalo chips, "Think of cooking your supper, after a long day's walk, over a fire of 'chips' with the wind blowing over the great plains, and sometimes rain putting out the fire, and going to bed without any supper, getting up in the morning at daylight to find everything soaking wet and nothing to burn to cook your breakfast with, hooking up the oxen and traveling until noon, trying to find some dry 'chips' to make a fire to cook dinner!"<sup>122</sup> Howard R. Egan learned that chips were valuable and should be conserved. "I remember of helping Mother gather "buffalo chips" for fire material, as there was nothing else and they made a good fire. When we camped where there was plenty of them we would collect a couple of sacks full and carry them to the next camp, for sometimes they would be very scarce."<sup>123</sup> Elizabeth Jacobson Pulsipher recalls, "Toward camping time I would gather buffalo chips in my apron and take them to camp to burn. When I would get tired of carrying one load I would put them down and rest before gathering more."<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>120</sup>Hale, 17.

<sup>121</sup>Ashworth, 4.

<sup>122</sup>Carter, *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 8:36.

<sup>123</sup>Egan, 142.

<sup>124</sup>Roberta Flake Clayton, ed., *Pioneer Women of Arizona* (Salt Lake City: N.P., N.D.), 501.

Besides collecting buffalo chips, the other responsibility that all children had was simply to walk. While this may not seem like a tremendous responsibility, it actually presented quite a challenge. Many of the pioneers write of how they had to walk the entire trip no matter how exhausted they became. Peter Howard McBride remembers that the children and old folks would have to start early each morning so that they would not be too far behind at night.<sup>125</sup> Sarah Sharp walked ten to fifteen miles many days “without one bit of a ride.”<sup>126</sup> Rachel Burton proudly recalls, “I was barefooted and I walked most of the way from Winter Quarters to Salt Lake Valley.”<sup>127</sup> Another young pioneer on foot describes an experience he had. “I used to get very tired walking and I got to hanging on the tent poles that were tied to the side of the wagon. When the string that held them broke, I fell, and the hind wheel ran over my right shoulder and across my body above my left hip.”<sup>128</sup>

A surprising number of children carried the difficult and strenuous responsibility of driving ox teams or loose stock across the plains. Sixteen of the pioneers specifically mention their jobs as drivers. John Haslem Clark rode a stallion and drove loose cattle across the plains at age seven. His legs were so short, though, that they would scarcely reach across the horse’s back.”<sup>129</sup> Gideon Murdock drove his family’s team at the young age of six. Thomas King, another young driver, had to deal with a stampede:

I spoke to my new wheeler which is one of the most intelligent oxen I ever saw. His name was Darby and never said whoa to him before when he would not hold any pair of oxen that even looked through a bow. But on this occasion Darby had the spirit of the stampede and paid no attention to me. I immediately jumped from the wagon and ran to my leaders hitting them over the head with the butt of

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<sup>125</sup>Madsen, 44.

<sup>126</sup>Sharp, 6.

<sup>127</sup>Burton, 2.

<sup>128</sup>Carter, *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 12: 76.

<sup>129</sup>*Ibid.*, 9:423.

my whip. In some way my near leader struck me on the head with his horn knocking me senseless.<sup>130</sup>

Lars Oveson writes, "We hadn't been many days on the road before I had learned the language that it took to drive oxen. In two or three weeks, I was ready for graduation as a full fledged Bullwhacker."<sup>131</sup> Twelve-year-old Edwin Stott drove a wagon in a different sub-company than his family when the original driver got sent home by the captain for misbehaving. Joseph F. Smith, who was a teamster at age nine, writes about his experience with his oxen, named Thom and Joe. "Many times while traveling sandy or rough roads, on long, thirsty drives, my oxen were lowing with the heat and fatigue. I would put my arms around Thom's neck and cry bitter tears! That was all I could do. Thom was my favorite and best and most willing and obedient servant and friend. He was choice!"<sup>132</sup> Eleven-year-old Rachel Emma Woolley Simmons drove when one of their teamsters deserted them shortly after starting out. "I did so in fear and trembling, as one of the horses was very vicious. She used to kick up dreadful until she would kick the board of the wagon all to pieces, but it made no difference, I had to go at it the next day just the same."<sup>133</sup> Rachel Burton also had to lead her family's ox team when the lines which her mother used to drive them broke. She recalls her adventure descending Big Mountain:

I remember the descent looked long and rather steep, but I went on down without waiting for my parents. When we got started down, however, the hill seemed worse than I thought, for the wagon pushed the oxen and the oxen hooked the horse and it kept stepping on my heels, and I had to run. I called the children to sit down and we went down Big Mountain rather fast. The people at the bottom were very much alarmed and shouted 'That child will be killed! That child will be killed!' However, we arrived at the bottom in safety. I would not think of

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<sup>130</sup>King, 1.

<sup>131</sup>Lars Oveson, Autobiographical sketch, [manuscript], LDS Church Archives, 3.

<sup>132</sup>Madsen, 37.

<sup>133</sup>Ibid., 158-159.

letting go of that bridle because the children were in that wagon. My feet were dreadfully cut and bruised and my footsteps could be traced for some distance by the blood.<sup>134</sup>

As with Rachel, the older children in the families were often left with the very challenging responsibility of caring for younger siblings during the trek, in addition to their other duties. Elizabeth Pulsipher recalls, "Being the oldest child the responsibility of the family rested upon me, and nearly every night I had to be up with the sick baby." Elizabeth's mother was ill so often had to take care of her as well. She writes, "Many a night I have lain and held a quilt over mother to keep the rain off her."<sup>135</sup> Margaret McNeil Ballard crossed the plains at age thirteen walking with her sick four-year-old brother strapped on her back the entire journey. She would sit up alone all night and hold him in her lap.<sup>136</sup> Isabella Siddoway Armstrong had the job of caring for her little brother as well and can remember at night after a long day's walk how she would have to bathe the pebbles from her brother's torn and bleeding feet.<sup>137</sup>

Not only did children care for siblings, they also had to care for their own parents at times. If the parents became ill and could not take care of the family, children had no choice but to step in and take over. Heber Robert McBride was one of these children:

... the team was give out intirely and we had to take more load on our carts and had to haul Father and Mother sometimes we would find Mother laying by the side of the road first then we would get her on the cart and haul her along till we would find Father lying as if he was dead then Mother would be rested a little and she would try and walk and Father would get on and ride and then we used to cry and feel so bad we did not know what to do . . .<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>134</sup>Burton, 2.

<sup>135</sup>Carter, *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 2: 267.

<sup>136</sup>Madsen, 125.

<sup>137</sup>Isabella Siddoway Armstrong, Autobiographical sketch, [manuscript], LDS Church Archives,

170.

<sup>138</sup>McBride, 10-11.

Children performed other duties along the trail as well that were essential to the family's success. Margaret McNeil Ballard, whose mother was very ill during the trek, describes her duties:

Every Morning I would rise early and get breakfast for the family and milk my cow so that I could hurry and drive her on ahead of the company. Then I would let her eat in all the grassy places until the company had passed on ahead, when I would hurry and catch up with them.<sup>139</sup>

Mary Sabin had the responsibility of cooking for her family on the trek. While waiting in Iowa to start the trip, she watched the ladies bake bread in their bake kettles. "Each day I took pains to watch the women bake bread in their bake-kettles. I was taking lessons from them. I knew that I should have to do the baking when our own kettle came and I was anxious to learn the best way to do it," she writes. On one occasion a man in the company gave her family a piece of steak. Mary's mother wanted it partially baked so it would not spoil. Despite the lateness of the hour, Mary sat up cooking the meat until she finally fell asleep by the fire.<sup>140</sup> Mary also had to help push handcarts. Their family had two, one which her brother pulled, and the other which she and her father pulled. When she was not helping pull her own family's handcart, she helped pull one for another family which had a "lazy" father.

Because the children worked so hard along the trail cooking, caring for the sick and feeble family members, gathering fuel, pushing handcarts, and driving teams, families were able to successfully complete the journey. Children played an invaluable part in westward migration as they performed the daily essential tasks on the trail. And certainly the emotional support they gave to their families was invaluable. Although this

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<sup>139</sup>Madsen, 126.

<sup>140</sup>Sabin, 8

paper does not delve into the psychology of the pioneers, we can assume that the knowledge of having children to care for sustained many parents and motivated them to forge onward when they felt like giving up.

Although sometimes burdened with heavy work responsibilities, children found time to play on the journey. Indeed, for children, play was an important aspect of trail life. Adults occasionally sought to escape the rigors of trail life by participating in dances or sing a-longs, but for children play was not merely an escape; it was (and is) a natural instinct. It was a basic part of their lives at home, and being on the road did not change their attitude towards it. Because childhood and play are so closely intertwined, one would expect the accounts to mention play and recreation very frequently.

Unfortunately, very few of them do. It must be remembered that the accounts are written by adults who crossed the plains as children, and as adults, these people may not have considered play and recreation important elements to include in their life writing. Some children did not have as many opportunities for play on the trail because of heavy responsibilities, but others write about some of their favorite pastimes. On the trail, their imaginations and ability to find amusement in just about anything made it easy for children to develop creative ways to play. Elliott West, although not writing about Mormon children, describes the creativity children used to find entertainment in the west. One girl imagined a cow chip into a piano. Another girl gathered her dolls into a house made of buffalo bones. A few boys on their way to Oregon made a game out of bouncing off the bloated, tight stomach of a dead ox. They would run and jump into it, measuring who could bounce back the furthest.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>141</sup>West, 101.

Children on the Mormon Trail found ways to play as well. Splashing around in swimming holes provided one form of amusement. Aurelia Read Spencer Rogers even played “baptize” with some friends in a creek, taking turns ducking each other under the water. Mary Jane Mount Tanner enjoyed collecting Indian beads from the anthills to string into necklaces. She would try to walk far enough ahead of the train to get a little time to play. She and her playmates would “drive the huge crickets that were so abundant and build corrals of sand or rocks to put them in, calling them our cattle.”<sup>142</sup> Alma Elizabeth Mineer Felt played with rag dolls that her older sisters made as they walked along. Mary Powell Sabin enjoyed picking up the pretty rocks she found along the trail. When playtime was scarce, children found ways to turn work into play – for example, by making contests out of gathering buffalo chips.

Mary Jane Tanner’s account of driving the crickets as though they were cattle and Aurelia’s account of playing “baptize,” lend support to the claim that traditional divisions of labor may have been disregarded on the trail. Specialists today concur that play is a way of learning adult roles. Play permits children to fit themselves into their social world as they imitate the important adults in their lives.<sup>143</sup> If traditional sexual divisions of labor were the norm on the trail, we would expect most young girls to imitate their mothers in play by pretending to keep house, cook, sew, or tend children. Mary and Aurelia, however, pretended in their play, to perform more masculine duties. Driving cattle was generally a male responsibility and performing baptisms was exclusively a male duty. That these girls chose these forms of play suggests that sexual divisions of labor were not a concern for them.

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<sup>142</sup>Madsen, 112.

<sup>143</sup>Frank and Theresa Caplan, *The Power of Play* (New York: Anchor Press, 1973), xiv-xvi.

Children, because they were dependent on their parents, added to their workload. Parents who traveled with young ones had to worry about more mouths to feed and more gear to pack. But if the children had not come, the task of settling the Salt Lake Valley and surrounding areas would have been impossible. As children performed strenuous duties along the trail, they aided in the migration to Zion and also helped successfully settle a new land. Members of the LDS faith value strong families and children aided in keeping those families together along the trail.

## Chapter Four

### *Family*

As previously discussed, because of their more finite perspective, children's reality basically consists of their immediate environment. For children on the trail, the family was the dominant part of their immediate environment; children viewed the whole experience in terms of the family. Looking at children crossing the plains in context of the family unit as a whole is one of the most intriguing aspects found in the diaries and memoirs. Modern developmentalists stress the idea that the family is not a set of separate relationships, but an interconnected system; sibling and parental relationships are all affected by one another.<sup>144</sup> The trail experience, however, placed a great deal of stress on that system and the effects of that stress can be seen in the accounts the pioneers have left.

Children mention their parents far more frequently in the accounts than any other common aspects of trail life such as Indians, buffalo, fatigue, or hunger. Out of the eighty children who traveled with one or more parent, more than fifty accounts mention parents. Modern studies have shown that parents who are experiencing hard times are more likely to be depressed, irritable, and distracted than other parents. They are also more likely to use physical punishment.<sup>145</sup> The accounts of children on the Mormon trail, however, do not seem to support this. Only two children mention physical punishment: one received a whipping from her father for disobeying the order to stay close to camp, and the other remembers her grandfather throwing some corn at her when he was irritated by one of her pranks. Undoubtedly, other parents felt irritable and depressed and may

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<sup>144</sup>Sroufe and others, 51.

<sup>145</sup>*Ibid.*, 63.

have been harsh on their children, but the children did not record those things in their accounts. Some may not have wanted to record their disobedient actions that brought on punishment, and others may not have wanted to place their parents in a bad light by recording negative things about them. Others simply may not have remembered disciplinary cases. However, rather than displaying a mere absence of negative memories, these accounts reflect very positively on the parents. For example, Lucina Mecham Boren records, "We children were so anxious to eat we would keep asking how long it would be until we could eat. Our dear patient mother did not get angry with us" As previously mentioned, Peter McBride's father, rather than giving Peter a whipping for eating the meat saved for Sunday dinner, simply turned away and cried. Instead of seeing their parents as harsh and irritable, children looked up to, relied on, and were concerned for the welfare of their parents throughout the journey. Looking at the references to mothers and also fathers, we see the interdependence between children and their parents and thus the importance of the family unit in Mormon migration to Utah.

Parents' spiritual strength and physical determination are recurring themes in the various accounts. Parents often set examples for their children that helped them as they struggled through the trials of pioneer life. Joseph F. Smith remembers how his mother's religious faith helped them out of difficult situations such as retrieving their stolen oxen or healing them when they had been poisoned. Other children recounted similar experiences of how their mothers' faith and prayers sustained them through tough times. Agnes Caldwell admires her mother's abilities, saying, "I have often marveled of the wonderful integrity of character of my mother's planning and successfully completing

such a journey . . .<sup>146</sup> Mary Jane Mount Tanner was particularly impressed by her mother's fortitude. Halfway through the journey their driver quit, leaving Mary's mother to drive the team. One of the oxen was particularly unruly and would not learn to hold back when going downhill. Mary recalls:

. . . she had to hold his horn with one hand and pound his nose with the other to keep him from running into the wagon ahead of him, a feat which would astonish some of our belles of the present day, and yet she was reared as tenderly and as little accustomed to hardship as any of them. Many times the bushes caught her dress, and she had no choice but to rush on, leaving it in pieces behind her.<sup>147</sup>

Children seemed to be especially sensitive to the suffering their mothers endured.

Mary, after relating her mother's experience driving the ox team, writes, "She could never again after her life recall the hardships of that dreadful journey without a sigh and she felt that she would never in any circumstances take such another." Mary Ann Stucki Hafen, age six, recollects, "By this time Mother's feet were so swollen that she could not wear shoes, but had to wrap her feet with cloth . . . She would get so discouraged and down-hearted . . .<sup>148</sup> Likewise, John Stettler Stucki, her nine-year-old brother, recalls:

My dear mother had a little baby to nurse, and only having half enough to eat and to pull on the handcart all day long, day after day, she soon got so weak and worn out that she could not help father anymore. Nor was she able to keep up with the Company. Sometimes when we camped, she was so far behind the Company we could not see anything of her for quite a while, so that I was afraid she might not be able to get to the camp.

He also writes, "Dear mother got so sick it was almost impossible for her to walk the long distances each day. I began to be afraid that we might lose her before we could get

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<sup>146</sup>Madsen, 57.

<sup>147</sup>Mary Jane Mount Tanner, *The Autobiography of Mary Jane Mount Tanner* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 1980), 46.

<sup>148</sup>Hafen, 24.

to the end of the journey . . . ”<sup>149</sup> Mary Powell Sabin tenderly remembers her mother as she records, “The journey was very hard on Mother. Picture a lady with dark blue eyes, black hair and a face very pale from exhaustion. She is bearing the trials of the journey without complaint. That is my mother.”<sup>150</sup> Another young pioneer writes, “Mother, now a tiny woman weighing not more than 98 lbs., was a widow with three children to care for . . . Mother would pick up cloth on the way and when night came would sit down and take off her worn shoes; then wash her bleeding feet and wrap them up in the cloth she and picked up.”<sup>151</sup> Nannie Amelia Anderson expresses the fear she felt for her mother’s life, “We were afraid our mother would not live to the end of the journey. She was very ill and the rough trip across the plains merely aggravated her suffering.”<sup>152</sup> Caroline Pedersen Hansen remembers that when they arrived in Salt Lake City her “mother was so worn out with sorrow and with sitting in the wagon holding the sick children that she was so bent over, she could not straighten up. People said she looked like she was sixty years old.”<sup>153</sup>

This particular sensitivity to the suffering and sometimes death of their mothers can be attributed to several factors. First of all, for a Mormon child who was traveling to Utah, life was very unstable. Youngsters came from different countries, crossed unfamiliar waters, traveled unfamiliar terrain, moved from house to house, and then had no house at all on the trail. Mothers were the one element of stability in their lives that they could count on. So if a mother became ill or suffered hardship, thus threatening the

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<sup>149</sup>John Stucki, *Family History Journal of John S. Stucki* (Salt Lake City: Pyramid Press, 1932), 43,46.

<sup>150</sup>Sabin, 11.

<sup>151</sup>Carter, *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 9:462.

<sup>152</sup>Nannie Amelia Anderson, 1.

<sup>153</sup>Carter, *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 12:68.

one stable part of a child's life, they became concerned. Children can suffer from what psychologists label separation anxiety; they fear being separated from their main source of comfort and protection.<sup>154</sup> This phenomenon is considered to be applicable for very young children – from birth to four years. This is when instinctual responses such as crying and sucking are answered by the mother-figure. But some researchers agree that this phenomenon can extend into later years whenever a loving, caring relationship exists.<sup>155</sup> Because mothers were usually the essential source of comfort and protection, children were especially attuned to their welfare. In fact, Niels Johnson admits that the only thing he remembers about the trek west is that his mother was ill most of the time.<sup>156</sup>

Although fathers are mentioned just as frequently in the accounts as mothers, the references to fathers do not express the same concern and sensitivity. They usually refer to the work their fathers performed, such as yoking up oxen, putting up tents, or shooting buffalo. Other times, they write of their fathers' strength and abilities. Christian Christiansen tells of his father, a "large man" who at one time "carried 17 women across the river, who were too badly frightened to shift for themselves . . ." One of these seventeen women was his mother.<sup>157</sup> The accounts rarely speak of fathers with concern or a sense of protection as they do of mothers. Christian recognized his father's great physical strength, but when his father died, instead of focusing on his father's suffering (he was accidentally shot and died after enduring several hours of pain), he focuses on his mother's suffering: "It was wonderful to see the sympathy and pity and weeping for mother by those large husky women of the Great Sioux Nation . . ." Likewise, Niels

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<sup>154</sup>West, 34.

<sup>155</sup>John Bowlby, "Separation Anxiety," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 41(1960), 110.

<sup>156</sup>Niels Johnson, Autobiographical sketch, [typescript], LDS Church Archives, 1.

<sup>157</sup>Carter, *Heart Throbs of the West*, 9:2.

Johnson, who does not remember much about the trek except that his mother was ill, was carried on the back of his father the entire journey.

The trail affected sibling relationships as well. For example, older children took on different, more parental roles with their younger siblings. Also, children had to deal with the addition of new siblings as mothers gave birth on the trail, and the death of siblings as well. In more normal situations, parents may have prepared their older children better for the arrival of a new baby in the family. On the trail, however, other more pressing concerns took precedence and children may have had a difficult time dealing with this kind of change. The accounts of children on the Mormon trail show that children were very supportive of one another and helped each other during the difficult times on the trail. Catherine Leishman, for example, felt that she received strength from her sister who already passed on. Catherine was sick with a fever shortly after her sister had died. As she was resting one day, she began to hear beautiful music. She writes, "It seemed to me as though my angel sister had come to heal me. I was made well from that time. I did not chill after that day and my fever was all gone."<sup>158</sup> While we cannot be sure that Catherine's sister did have some healing influence, Catherine's perception that she did, shows the support that siblings were to one another. Mary Powell Sabin writes, "Being almost thirteen years old I felt quite responsible for my younger sister." She was very sensitive to the needs and suffering of her sister and remembers, "my little sister, aged four, usually walked beside the Captain. 'Come my little partner.' said he, 'let us begin our journey.' Some days she walked eighteen miles."<sup>159</sup> Edwin Alfred Pettit's story also shows how important his siblings were to him. His parents died before the trek

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<sup>158</sup>Leishman, 3-4.

<sup>159</sup>Sabin, 9, 12.

and he was placed with a guardian. He wanted to go to Utah with his sister instead of his guardian and tried to run away to her camp, but was unsuccessful. The second time he disguised himself as a girl, with false curls and a sunbonnet, and escaped to his sister's camp and was able to cross the plains with her.<sup>160</sup> Lucina Mecham Boren shares another example of sibling support. "My sister Sarah and I stopped to rest one day, and the wagons passed us. Sarah said she was not going any farther. I begged her to come with me, but she said she would rather be eaten by wolves than go on. She tried to get me to go and catch the wagons, but I told her I would not leave her. Then she said, "I will not see the wolves get you, so come on, let us go to camp."<sup>161</sup>

For various reasons, some children did not travel with their families. Alma Hales' parents died at Council Bluffs before the trek. Laura Fowers' parents both died en route. Other children traveled with friends or kin and met their own parents when they came to Utah. B.H. Roberts traveled with his sixteen-year-old sister and met their mother in Utah (his father stayed in England). Hannah Hill Hood Romney's mother died in Nauvoo and her father went on ahead to Utah without his children. They came later, traveling with strangers who, much to Hannah's dismay, cut off all her hair.<sup>162</sup> In some cases where the parents were absent, siblings were able to travel together and give each other support and encouragement.

William Van Orden Carbine also traveled with strangers who used him "rather badly." William does not indicate whether or not he was physically abused, but the fact that another man in the company, who saw how he was being treated, told him he was a

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<sup>160</sup>Madsen, 72.

<sup>161</sup>Carter, *Treasures of Pioneer History*, 6:307-308.

<sup>162</sup>Carter, *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 5:263.

fool if he didn't run away suggests that physical abuse might have been the case.

William did run away and join a family in a different sub-company.<sup>163</sup> Abuse might have been more common along the trail than these accounts indicate, but only one other child mentions it. Christian Christiansen tells about abuse his mother suffered. His family shared a wagon with another family. After Christian's father died, the other couple in the wagon "treated mother very cruelly by making her walk. He even whipped her. This went on for a short time until Nephi Johnson pulled his whiskers some, then things went some better."<sup>164</sup>

Sibling rivalry is another issue that these pioneers do not discuss, but which undoubtedly existed. All of the accounts portray the family as a close-knit, cooperative, and supportive unit. Survival on the trail necessitated this, and most likely, the pioneers' accounts are very truthful in this portrayal. However, children were children, and probably had their moments. Only one account comes close to suggesting a problem with cooperation. Ruth May Fox remembers an answer her father gave when asked on the trail how he was doing. He replied, "Oh! There isn't much the matter – I have a sick wife, two sore heels, and two dummies, that's all."<sup>165</sup> Ruth admitted that she was one of the dummies to which her father referred, indicating that she and her sister could be somewhat exasperating.

While we generally think of children as being dependent upon their parents (which they are), the accounts show us that often along the trail the roles were reversed and parents depended upon their children. Parents obviously expected children to

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<sup>163</sup>Carter, *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 6:206.

<sup>164</sup>Carter, *Heart Throbs of the West*, 9:3.

<sup>165</sup>Madsen, 33.

perform their usual daily duties, but often there were extenuating circumstances which required children to practically assume adult roles at tender ages. Young boys in fatherless families found themselves driving teams during the day and standing guard at night. Elliott West tells of one thirteen-year-old Oregon pioneer with ten siblings whose parents floundered amid the challenges of the trail. One fellow traveler wrote, "They all depend on her. The children go to her in their troubles and perplexities, her father and mother rely on her, and she is always ready to do what she can."<sup>166</sup> We previously mentioned how Heber Robert McBride and his siblings had to load their worn-out parents on the handcart and pull them along. This interdependence between children and their parents shows the significance of the family unit as a whole in western migration and settlement. They provided support for each other and the hardships of trail life taught them to rely increasingly more on each other. This bonded the family and strengthened it to endure subsequent struggles.

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<sup>166</sup>Elliott West, "The Youngest Pioneers," American Heritage 37:11 (1985): 94.

## Chapter Five

### *Religion*

In many respects, the experiences that Mormon children had on the trail differed little from the experiences of non-LDS children who traveled to other westward destinations. Religion, however, constitutes one main difference. Families going to Oregon or California or other parts of the west went primarily for economic reasons. The children in those families had little understanding of why they were moving. Children in Mormon families, however, tended to have the same religious convictions as their parents. The children understood, even at young ages, the concept of Zion. Many of them had endured persecution because of their religion in Missouri or Nauvoo and understood that they were traveling west to Zion, where they would be persecuted no more. Thus, they embarked on the trail and endured the hardships with a greater sense of purpose than non-LDS children.

Furthermore, LDS doctrine and practice at the time glorified the idea of enduring persecution for the gospel's sake. Saints were encouraged to bear the trials of life faithfully and the rewards would come. In the Doctrine and Covenants, a book that Mormons consider scripture, the Lord tells his Saints, "... thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment; and then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high; thou shalt triumph over all they foes." The Lord also tells them that all the trials they suffer will be for their own good.<sup>167</sup> Because of the persecution and this doctrine they believed, many Saints bore their burdens with the attitude of martyrs. They almost glorified suffering, if it was for the gospel's sake. Indicative of this prevalent

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<sup>167</sup>Doctrine and Covenants 121:7-8, 122:7 (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1987).

attitude is a letter which one woman wrote to her brother from Nauvoo, telling him of all the tribulations she had suffered, “just for the gospel’s sake, yet I do not feel in the least discouraged; no, . . . we have been enabled to rejoice, in the midst of our privations and persecutions, that we were counted worthy to suffer these things, so that we may, with the ancient saints who suffered in like manner, inherit the same glorious reward.”<sup>168</sup> Another pioneer in a letter to her husband wrote of her trials, ending with, “but I try to submit all things in to the hands of God.”<sup>169</sup>

Such statements were common among the pioneers. And parents, through word and example, instilled this idea in their children, which gave the children an even greater sense of purpose. Peter McBride remembers the song his father sang the night before he died, “O Zion, when I think of you, I long for pinions like a dove, And mourn to think I should be so distant from the land I love.”<sup>170</sup> Mary Ann Stucki Hafen remembers that when her mother would get discouraged, father “would always cheer her up by telling her that we were going to Zion, that the Lord would take care of us, and that better times were coming.”<sup>171</sup> Lydia Holdaway, whose father died during the journey, found consolation in one remark her father had made to her before he died. He said he was glad they had started in order that his family might be in Utah no matter whether he lived or died. This attitude that children learned from their parents made their entire trail experience much different from the typical non-LDS child’s experience as it gave the journey a greater sense of personal meaning.

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<sup>168</sup>Carol Cornwall Madsen, *In Their Own Words* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1994), 99-100.

<sup>169</sup>*Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>170</sup>Madsen, 45.

<sup>171</sup>Hafen, 24.

Besides giving children a whole different outlook on the experiences they were undergoing, Mormonism altered the practical side of their daily trail life. Mormon companies generally had very strict rules and organization that allowed for religious practice. Bugles called them to prayer morning and night and meetings were always held on the Sabbath. The companies did not travel on this day of rest. Anna Clark Hale writes, "I was always happy to take my bath and wash my dirty feet and put on some clean clothes and go to meeting."<sup>172</sup> Another pioneer remembers, "No traveling was done on the Sabbath. It was always a day of rest and religious worship."<sup>173</sup> Yet another recalls, "The company stopped over on Sundays for rest, and meetings were held for spiritual comfort and guidance."<sup>174</sup> Charles Nibley writes, "Meetings were held regularly, hymns sung everywhere and oft and the religious enthusiasm and spirit of the people were entirely different from what we had left behind in the east."<sup>175</sup>

While most children remember the positive aspects of having daily prayers and weekly meetings, Heber Robert McBride remembers one night when the company rules on nightly prayers were more of a burden than anything. It was dark when they got into camp and because it had been raining very hard, all the wood was wet. His mother was very sick and the children were afraid she would die soon:

We had gathered a few sunflower stalks and wet Buffloo chips and had just got a little fire started when all hands were ordered to attend prayers and because we did not go to prayers Daniel Taylor came and kicked our fire all out and spilled the water that we was trying to get warm to make a little tea for Mother. I then told him if I ever got to be a man I would whip him if it was the last thing I ever did on this earth. Father had gone to attend prayers and that was the reason he took advantage of us.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>172</sup>Hale, 17.

<sup>173</sup>Nibley, 19.

<sup>174</sup>Hafen, 24.

<sup>175</sup>Nibley, 17.

<sup>176</sup>McBride, 11.

A few non-LDS companies also abided by some type of religious guidelines, but even in the most zealous of companies, restricted Sabbath-travel and an occasional sermon were the only religious practices observed. Even those were flexible. But LDS companies adhered to their worship practices strictly. One very notable, non-LDS Overland Trail historian writes:

Whether to observe the Sabbath or not was a perennial issue among the emigrants . . . having religious observances and keeping worldly activities to a minimum. Translate in to trail terms, this meant that the wagon train should be halted for the day with sermons, prayers, and meditations the only legitimate activities. Such observances were built into company constitutions, and, although the regulation was one of the most violated, some devout companies did achieve the ideal . . . The Mormons of course, were models in this regard; but it must be confessed that the majority of travelers, overwhelmingly Protestant in their faith, were not quite equal to living the Biblical tenets.<sup>177</sup>

The accounts of children show further evidence of the pervasive influence of religion on the trail as they repeatedly attribute miraculous healings to the hand of God. Rachel Emma Woolley Simmon's mother gave birth on the trail and Rachel writes, "We never laid over a day in consequence of Mother's sickness. The Lord blessed her and fitted her to bear the journey, as he did many others at that time."<sup>178</sup> When Henry Butler fell under the rolling wheels of a wagon his father "rushed up and placed his hands upon me and pronounced the blessings of life and health upon me. The people declared that there had been a miracle wrought, for they declared that I was dead."<sup>179</sup> Susannah Turner Robison's mother was very sick at one point and everyone thought she would die. "But as mother says, the Lord was good to us and answered our prayers in her behalf and she

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<sup>177</sup>Merril Mattes, *The Great Platte River Road* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), 74.

<sup>178</sup>Madsen, 159.

<sup>179</sup>Carter, *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 12:76

was spared.”<sup>180</sup> Eliza Rawson’s little brother fell under the moving wagon and was picked up as dead. Her father stopped the train and had him administered to two or three times and she claims he was instantly healed. He was able to run around and play the next day. Mary Judd writes, “The following is a wonderful testimony of the care the Lord has for his people. While the cholera was very bad on the south side of the Platte River, on the north side the pestilence was harmless. I was informed that companies of Saints, who traveled on the north side of the river did not even lose an ox.”<sup>181</sup>

Some of the children even attribute the healing of animals to the goodness of the Lord. When one of Rachel Burton’s oxen became sick, her father poured oil on it and administered to it. “It lay perfectly still for a few minutes, then it shook itself, ate a little grass and it was alright after that.”<sup>182</sup> Joseph F. Smith claims that he saw his mother two or three times pour oil on sick oxen and pray for them and immediately they were healed. He also tells about a time when their oxen were lost. He and his uncle had looked everywhere for them and could not find them. He saw his mother pray for help and after getting up off her knees she walked directly to them.<sup>183</sup>

Other children remember witnessing such miracles as well. Members of Joseph Moesser’s wagon train found themselves in the direct path of a buffalo stampede, but at the last minute the herd turned. “We felt the Lord had surely turned them aside as they rarely turn out of their course.”<sup>184</sup> Matilda Wilcox recalls a time when the Lord intervened on behalf of her company. They had stopped to camp and dug holes for water

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<sup>180</sup>Ibid., 13:485.

<sup>181</sup>Ibid., 7:285.

<sup>182</sup>Burton, 3.

<sup>183</sup>Madsen, 36-37.

<sup>184</sup>Moesser, 3.

but found none. They went away to a private place and prayed and in the morning all the holes were full of water.<sup>185</sup> Two pioneer girls felt the protecting hand of the Lord when they ran into trouble with some snakes. Agnes Southworth writes, "One day we came to a section inhabited by rattlesnakes. Two of us, my friend Mary Hurren and I, would hold hands and jump. It seemed to me we were jumping for more than a mile. Due to the protecting hand of the Lord, we were not harmed."<sup>186</sup> Margaret McNeil Ballard remembers, "One night our cow ran away from camp and I was sent to bring her back. I was not watching where I was going and was barefooted. All of a sudden I began to feel I was walking on something soft. I looked down to see what it could be, and to my horror found that I was standing in a bed of snakes, large ones and small ones. At the sight of them I became so weak I could scarcely move; all I could think of was to pray, and in some way I jumped out of them. The Lord blessed and cared for me."<sup>187</sup>

Aurelia Read Spencer Rogers relates a more comical incident unique to Mormon children. They had stopped to camp one night and she and a dozen other girls decided to go to the river and bathe. One girl suggested they play "baptize." The girls agreed and proceeded to duck each other under the water as if they were baptizing each other. Suddenly, someone saw something white and strange looking coming toward them in the water. All the girls screamed and jumped to shore. They never found out what it was but "all agreed it was a warning, and felt that we had done wrong in playing baptize."<sup>188</sup>

Healings and miracles were not the only aspects of religious life on the Mormon Trail, but they are mentioned more frequently than other aspects. Personal prayers,

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<sup>185</sup>Matilda Nielson Wilcox, Autobiographical sketch, [manuscript], LDS Church Archives, 4.

<sup>186</sup>Madsen, 58.

<sup>187</sup>Carter, *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 3:200.

<sup>188</sup>Madsen, 27.

baptisms, and conversion experiences were other facets of religion that may have played significant roles but are not mentioned in these ninety-two accounts. Perhaps because they felt that healings and other miracles saved the lives of their loved ones, those incidents stood out more in the writers' memories.

Although religion may have been a priority in some non-LDS emigrant families, few of those pioneers write of healings and other miracles performed by the hand of God. Some attribute their success to a kind God, but rarely do they write of specific divine ministrations. Thirteen-year-old Virginia Reed, a Protestant, California-bound pioneer, made a vow one night that she would convert to Catholicism if God would spare her and her family. And because God kept up his side of the bargain, she converted at age sixteen. Few others mention seeking God's help in their time of trouble. When a boy in one Oregon-bound family was run over by a wagon, the parents did not seek divine help or medical help. They simply put their wounded child in the wagon, knowing there was little they could do. The wound became gangrenous and by the time a doctor was finally summoned it was too late. The boy died while the doctor was amputating his leg.<sup>189</sup> Twelve-year-old Oregon pioneer Marilla Bailey and her brother became very sick with cholera on the journey. Rather than pray over them, Marilla writes, "Mother gave us all the hot whiskey she could pour down us an put flannel cloths soaked in whiskey, as hot as we could bear them, on our stomachs. This cured us."<sup>190</sup>

However, while LDS children may be unique in their references to specific cases of divine intervention, many non-LDS children do seem to share some kind of belief in a higher power or hope that "things will work out in the end." Developmental psychologist

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<sup>189</sup>Mattes, 92.

<sup>190</sup>Lockley, 165.

Emmy Werner has discovered in her research that this faith is one very common characteristic of resilient children. They believe that life has purpose. She concludes, "This sense of meaning persists among resilient children, even if they are uprooted by wars or scattered as refugees to the four corners of the earth. It enables them to love despite hate, and to maintain the ability to behave compassionately toward other people."<sup>191</sup> She determines that this is the case with many pioneer children who survived hardship, regardless of their religious orientation.<sup>192</sup>

Because of Mormons' firm belief in a life hereafter, it would seem likely that these young pioneers would be better prepared to handle the deaths of loved ones. We would expect that even in their grief they would take solace in the knowledge that they would one day be reunited with their family members. This idea, however, seems to be of surprisingly little consequence as almost none of these pioneers remark on how they felt any amount of comfort because of this belief. The only reference to life hereafter is made by one twelve-year-old girl who buried her mother and left her "to rest until the resurrection day."<sup>193</sup> One study of modern children showed that among fifty-eight children between the ages of two and fourteen, who had lost a sibling, there was no evidence that religion consoled. Most of these children felt an intense fear of death and some even felt bitter toward God.<sup>194</sup> While the accounts here show no bitterness toward God, they also do not show a reliance on the hope of seeing deceased family members in the next life.

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<sup>191</sup>Werner, "Resilient Children," *Young Children*, (November, 1984), 70.

<sup>192</sup>Werner, *Pioneer Children*, 170.

<sup>193</sup>Carter, *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 7:284.

<sup>194</sup>Marjorie Mitchell, *The Child's Attitude To Death* (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), 54.

Religion constitutes the main difference between children on the Mormon trail and children on the Overland Trail in general. The sense of purpose and duty to God which some parents either consciously or subconsciously imbued in their children put the children in a better position to find personal meaning in the journey. And because they felt that God was with them, sustaining them through the many trials on the trek, their outlook was much different. They were selective, however, as to when they saw God's hand. He was always the one who healed them from afflictions and infirmities, but he is rarely mentioned as the one who allowed so much suffering and death. Nevertheless, they retained a faith in their religion and their accounts express tremendous gratitude at reaching their beloved Zion.

## Chapter Six

### *The End of the Journey*

After such a long and arduous journey, the pioneers were naturally very anxious to catch their first glimpse of the Salt Lake Valley. Most adults, when they entered the valley, either expressed disappointment that it did not look like the lush, green lands from which they came, or else expressed hope for the happy future they would have in their new home. Children's reactions sometimes fell into one of these two categories, but often, the young pioneers responded in unique ways. For example, B.H. Roberts didn't comment on the land at all. His concern was that when he entered the valley, nobody came for him. His mother had come to the valley four years earlier and his father had stayed behind in England; he and his sister, Mary, had traveled alone. He writes, "Mary remained concealed under the wagon cover, and I, lonesome and heartsick, sat upon the tongue of Captain Chipman's wagon, my chin in my hands and elbows upon my knees, thinking 'Zion' was no so much after all, if this was all of it." He did eventually find his mother.<sup>195</sup>

Peter Howard McBride shares another response unique to children. Shortly after they arrived in the valley a big dinner was fixed. "After the grown folks were through eating, there wasn't any food left, and we children were put to bed hungry. Yes, we were half starved. My little sister Maggie and me cried ourselves to sleep."<sup>196</sup> After having starved during most of the journey to the valley, this must have been a very discouraging welcome. Emma M. Guymon Kearns retains this distinct picture of her initial look at Salt Lake City: "Then the picture of Salt Lake, a little town with a red rag on a stick

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<sup>195</sup>Madsen, 24.

<sup>196</sup>*Ibid.*, 46.

nailed upon the log room to show that merchandise was for sale there and another log room with tin cups hanging outside to show that tinware and hardware was for sale there. In the evening we drove to Uncle Jim's on the Cottonwood where I saw the first irrigation. He was watering a garden from which we had green corn and pickled beets for supper. I enjoyed the sight of that garden."<sup>197</sup> This memory is a good example of the sensualist viewpoint Elliott West discusses. After three months of biscuits and dried meat, green corn and pickled beets likely appealed to a young child's senses.

A couple of the young pioneers entered the valley just as the peaches were ripe and remember the physical sensation evoked by the tasty fruit. William Henry Freshwater comments on it, as does Chris Alston:

The first words of greetings I heard were, "Come here my boy and hold your cap." I came near the wagon from which this voice came. There was a man kneeling in the bottom of the wagon on some straw, and the wagon was nearly filled with peaches. He scooped up his double hands full of peaches and put them into my cap, then scooped up another handful and put them into my cap also, and it was full of lovely peaches, the first I had ever tasted in my life. "There" he said, "now eat those." He kept handing out peaches until his load was given away. I ran to our wagon where my brother lay very sick and gave him some peaches, and then divided the remainder with the teamster and my custodian, John Ollerton, who had brought me from England, then I ate the rest. Now imagine, if you can, an eleven-year-old boy who had walked 1,100 miles and had an 1,100 mile appetite, and had never tasted a peach before in his life, having half a dozen nice peaches to eat!<sup>198</sup>

Mary Powell Sabin remembers being greeted by people offering watermelons instead of peaches. She writes, "We halted, they served us melons. Pres. Young told us to eat moderately of the mellon, to eat the pink, not to eat the green. Father said he was quite

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<sup>197</sup>Emma Kearns, "A Brief History of Emma M. Guymon Kearns," [typescript], 1921, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, 1.

<sup>198</sup>Carter, *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 8:37.

sensible.”<sup>199</sup> Some of these children had never tasted melons or peaches and their first experience with the sweet fruit made a lasting impression.

Other responses may have been more similar to adults’. Some express great joy on reaching the valley. Mary Ann Stucki Hafen remembers that “. . . the whole company stopped to look down through the valley. Some yelled and tossed their hats in the air. A shout of joy arose at the thought that our long trip was over, that we had at last reached Zion, the place of rest.”<sup>200</sup> Thomas King also felt overjoyed upon reaching the valley: “When we arrived at the mouth of emigration canyon and could see the valley city I leaped for joy that we had got to the place my mother had longed for for so many years.”<sup>201</sup> Anna Clark Hale felt happy as well: “As we came down through and out of Emigration Canyon, the beautiful valley of the Great Salt Lake stretched out before us. We all stopped our wagons and came together to look and wonder and thrill and what our eyes beheld. At last, we could see our journey’s end.”<sup>202</sup> Charles W. Nibley reacted similarly, saying, “I can very well remember with what joy and pleasure each one of our company, and even I, myself, looked upon the little growing city in the wilderness. We felt that all of our troubles and trials were practically at an end . . .”<sup>203</sup>

Other children agreed with their parents that the valley did not have much to offer. Ruth May Fox expressed her disappointment as she exclaimed, “Oh, have we come all this way for that?”<sup>204</sup> Mary Jane Mount Tanner felt discouraged as she took in her first sight of the valley which, “. . . presented a barren aspect; it was covered mostly

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<sup>199</sup> Sabin, 13.

<sup>200</sup> Hafen, 26.

<sup>201</sup> King, 1.

<sup>202</sup> Hale, 18.

<sup>203</sup> Nibley,

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

with sagebrush and sunflowers, with a few small streams of water running through it and some squalid Indian wigwams scattered about. . . I believe with us the one thought was rest and something that our journey was nearly over.”<sup>205</sup> Catherine Adams Pilling remarks rather pessimistically, “There was mighty little there at that time; in fact, it looked like a pretty discouraging country to settle in and try to raise a garden or crop of any kind.”<sup>206</sup>

Most children expressed relief at reaching the end of their journey, even if they were not very excited about their destination. One young pioneer remembers rather nostalgically, “The sky was blue and radiant, the valley fair, and the grand old mountains proudly guarded the home of the prophets. The family took a bath in a wash basin, put on our best clothes and went to the tabernacle services. My dreams came true, and all was well in Zion.”<sup>207</sup> While this woman may be reflecting back on her experience through rose-colored glasses, it reveals an appreciation for the things that the young travelers valued. They longed to leave the hot deserts and mountain snows and enjoy good weather. They longed to be near the Saints and their beloved church leaders. They must have been happy to bathe and dress in clean clothes after camping in the dirt for three months. And as they were coming to Utah to practice their religion in peace, they were undoubtedly happy to be where they could attend their church services. Even though Ruth probably encountered many challenges during her lifetime in Utah, when she first saw the valley, it represented to her the good life she had traveled so long to reach.

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<sup>205</sup>Madsen, 113.

<sup>206</sup>Ibid., 123.

<sup>207</sup>Ibid., 33.

## Conclusion

The symbiotic relationship between children and the trail comes out clearly in these accounts. Children affected trail life by performing necessary duties and strengthening their families along the way. But children were simultaneously affected by life on the trail. The degree to which they were affected, however, is difficult to measure.

The trek to Utah was neither long enough, nor intense enough to create huge and permanent personality changes. Some historians have studied how the frontier completely shaped the generations of people raised on it and these studies have merit. But these changes came about as a result of a lifetime on the frontier, not of a three month trip out west. Other researchers have studied how extremely intense hardships, such as the Holocaust, created lasting physical and psychological scars on children who endured them. For the majority of children crossing the plains to Utah, however, the experience was not as intense or traumatic as the Holocaust. A few of the children, such as the McBrides, truly did have intense experiences, the psychological effects of which cannot easily be measured. But for the most part, the changes that trail life prompted in children are limited. Children no doubt learned a few basic survival skills or learned how to perform the various types of labor required by the frontier lifestyle. Some of them were affected physically for the rest of their lives because of injuries and illnesses that left major scars. Others dealt with permanent changes in their families due to death.

Major character changes, however, are less apparent. It is unwise to assume that the trail shaped a new breed of children. But the way that children responded to their trail experience reveals something about their character. Studies have shown that all resilient children who have been through difficult experiences (war, dysfunctional families, etc.)

share three main characteristics: they had a good, loving relationship with a caregiver, whether it was a mother or relative or friend; they all held a belief that this life made sense and had some kind of purpose; and they all faced threatening situations which demanded they assume responsibilities essential to their families' well-being. Children who shared these characteristics were able to emerge from their experiences with a faith in their own abilities to succeed, and a faith that "things will work out." Despite their tough times, these resilient children were able to go on and lead happy, stable lives and develop loving relationships.<sup>208</sup>

The trail did indeed imbue children with a healthy sense of self-esteem as they realized their abilities to succeed when faced with a challenge. Their successful lives after the westward trek attest to their resilience. B.H. Roberts became a member of the United States Congress. Joseph F. Smith became president of the LDS church. Ruth May Fox became involved in the Utah Women Suffrage Association and helped draft the suffrage clause of the Utah constitution and Aurelia Spencer Rogers helped found the LDS church's Primary program. Peter McBride, who had one of the most trying experiences on the trail, married and had many children, and because of his musical talents was called by Brigham Young to help promote music and singing in their area, which he did for the rest of his life. Margaret McNeil Ballard married and had eleven children, was a president of the Relief Society and raised a son who became a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Mary Goble Pay married and raised thirteen children. She once drove Chief Blackhawk out of her orchard with sticks and stones because he was picking too many of her peaches. Catherine Adams Pilling and Lucina Mecham Boren both became excellent midwives, each delivering over five hundred

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<sup>208</sup>Emmy Werner, "Resilient Children," 70-71 and West, 256.

babies.<sup>209</sup> Gideon Murdock and Heber Robert McBride both went back across the trail to help bring other immigrants to Utah.<sup>210</sup> Many of the pioneers served missions, worked in the LDS temple, and served in church callings.

In addition to revealing more about the children themselves, the story of the Mormon Trail emphasizes the extreme importance of the family unit on the trek. Family cooperation was the key to a successful journey. Children depended on their parents, but parents also depended on their children to share the responsibilities along the way. Although children normally tend to focus more on the physical and sensual aspects of their surroundings, these writers remember the practical aspects instead. The rigors of trail life required children to shoulder responsibilities of adult proportions and maintain a practical point of view. Although they assisted their parents in traveling, children also caused their parents a great deal of extra work. But the Mormon migration could not have happened without families, because the Mormon faith places such importance on the family.

Along with emphasizing family cooperation, these accounts serve another purpose. They shed light on some of the possible "myths" of the trail. For instance, many people think of the trek across the plains as a long, grueling, painful, life-threatening hardship. For some children it was. But some of these children indicate that it was a three-month picnic -- a fun camping trip. Some people may pity the poor children who had to walk barefoot across the plains. Indeed, it was a hardship for some children and they remember the hot sands burning their feet or the sharp stones cutting them. But others preferred going barefoot over wearing heavy, awkward, uncomfortable

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<sup>209</sup>Madsen, 25, 28, 34, 37, 46, 95, 120, 123, 127

<sup>210</sup>Murdock, 7, and McBride, 28.

shoes. Mary Jane Tanner used to see other children running along with bare feet and she thought it looked fun. Another possible misconception is that children were forced to walk such long distances to conserve wagon space. While some children undoubtedly tired of walking and longed to ride, other children undoubtedly tired of riding along in a crowded, bumpy wagon all day and would rather have been running around exploring the trail. Mary Powell Sabin's favorite activity on the trail was exploring.

A possible reason for such differences of opinion can be found by looking at the purposes people had in writing their accounts. Many of these writers recorded their experiences at the request of children and grandchildren. Knowing that their accounts were for their posterity might cause some of them to emphasize the degree to which they suffered and yet succeeded despite hardship. Others recorded their experiences for personal reasons and may have seen no need to turn their story into a faith-promoting testimonial of their own fortitude. It is difficult to ascertain whether the majority of these accounts reflect happy, positive memories of the journey, or if they speak of hardship and heroism. Many seem to contain a little of both perspectives. A more extensive study of the authors' purposes in life writing, which is beyond the scope of this study, might clarify why the accounts contain or omit the things they do.

While these accounts offer a wealth of information, they also leave some questions unanswered. Previously mentioned is the fact that few accounts talk about play, which is a basic aspect of childhood. Also, none of the accounts mentions missing friends or relatives back home, or being homesick in any way. Perhaps this is because they did not feel homesick, or perhaps a wider sampling of accounts would show that some did. None of the writers mention cases of sibling rivalry, although they

undoubtedly occurred. And although at least two children had birthdays on the trail, none of the accounts contain descriptions of special occasions or specific celebrations of any kind. They do not discuss basic aspects of childhood such as pets or "best friends." The absence of these things could indicate that they did not exist or that the writers did not consider them significant enough to remember or record. Examining additional accounts, however, may reveal more information about these matters.

Clearly, while this study attempts to address many important issues concerning children on the Mormon Trail, it prompts further study and analysis. It raises questions concerning memory and life writing. It does not attempt to fully analyze the impact of the trail experience on adult life. This study focuses on young children, leaving the area of adolescence on the Mormon Trail untouched. It also looks primarily at the accounts of children themselves. New and different conclusions might be reached by looking at parents' accounts of their children. Studying parenthood on the trail would also prove interesting.

Many aspects of children's lives on the trail remain unexplored and these issues deserve attention. For when the children's voices are heard, the story of the Mormon Trail becomes more complete. Some of the children share a unique perspective that offers insights both into childhood itself and into the trail. Other children share a perspective that is more similar to the adult perspective, which attests to the adult-like responsibilities many children felt. Either way, their stories are essential to the understanding of both the Mormon Trail and western American history.

## Appendix

Names	Ages	Year Traveled
Chris Alston	11	1864
Isabella Siddoway Armstrong	11	1860
William B. Ashworth	About 5	Circa 1847
Nannie Amelia Erickson Anderson	8	1863
Margaret McNeil Ballard	13	1859
Ellen Burton Beazer	8	1866
Margaret Simmons Bennett Beck	9	1857
Jane Wilkie Hooper Blood	9	1854
Lucina Mecham Boren	12	1853
James Bryant	5	1862
Rachel F. Burton	9	1848
Henry Butler	9	1853
William Van Orden Carbine	12	1848
Christian Lyngaa Christensen	5	1860
John Haslem Clark	7	1850
Emma Lynette Richardson Conover	12	1853
Ebenezer Crouch	9	1859
Albert Douglas Dickson	12	1852
Howard R. Egan	9	1848
Alma Eldridge	6	1847
Alma Elizabeth Mineer Felt	6	1861
Lucy Hannah White Flake	9	1850
Laura Swenson Fowers	8	1866
Ruth May Fox	13	1867
Lars Frederickson	8	1865
William Henry Freshwater	11	1863
Sarah Sophia Moulding Gledhill	3	1861
Peter Gottfriedson	12	1858
Catherine Ellen Camp Greer	13	1850
Charles E. Griffin	12	1848
Charles Henry Haderlie	7	1866
Mary Ann Stucki Hafen	6	1860
Alma H. Hale	12	1848
Anna Clark Hale	7	1848
Selina Walker Hammond	12	1853
Caroline Pedersen Hansen	7	1866
George Harrison	13	1857
Lydia T. Holdaway	11	1862
Andrew M. Israelson	7	1864
Mary Minerva Dart Judd	12	1853

Niels Johnson	5	1861
William Derby Johnson, Jr.	11	1850
Emma M. Guymon Kearns	8	1850
Thomas F. King	12	1854
James Kirkham	10	1859
Caroline E.W.W. Larrabee	10	1862
Christine M. Larsen	8	1863
Catherine Leishman	13	1847
Nichli Christian Lund	6	1853
Peter Weston Maughan	3	1850
Heber Robert McBride	13	1856
Peter Howard McBride	6	1856
Anna Christina Jensen McRae	13	1857
Mormon Miner	13	1850
Joseph Hyrum Moesser	11	1847
Gideon Murdock	6	1847
Charles W. Nibley	11	1860
Frihoff Godrey Nielson	9	1861
John Nielson	7	1866
Annie Olsen	13	1854
Lars P. Oveson	11	1863
Louise Harriet Mills Palmer	11	1862
Mary Goble Pay	13	1856
Edwin Alfred Pettit	13	1847
Catherine Adams Pilling	12	1850
Elizabeth Jacobson Pulsipher	13	1863
Eliza Jane Rawson	13	1850
Agnes Hefferan Richardson	8	1865
B.H. Roberts	10	1866
Susannah Turner Robison	13	1861
Aurelia Read Spencer Rogers	13	1848
Hannah Hill Hood Romney	7	1849
Mary Powell Sabin	12	1856
Sarah Sharp	10	1861
Rachel Emma Woolley Simmons	11	1848
Joseph F. Smith	9	1848
Agnes Caldwell Southworth	9	1856
John Fell Squires	7	1853
Evan Stephans	12	1866
John Staheli	5	1861
T.A. Brady Stevens	4	1850
William Henry Steward	10	1852
Ann Jarvis Stickney	13	1859
Edwin Stott	13	1849
John Stettler Stucki	9	1860

Mary Jane Mount Tanner	10	1847
Hyrum Weech	11	1856
Mary Shumway Westover	12	1847
Matilda Nielson Wilcox	8	1861
Levi Wolstenholme	3	1852
Franklin Wheeler Young	8	1847
Josephine Hartley Zundle	10	1856

Total number of accounts: 92

Females: 47

Males: 45

Three-year olds: 3

Four-year-olds: 1

Five-year-olds: 5

Six-year-olds: 6

Seven-year-olds: 8

Eight-year-olds: 9

Nine-year-olds: 11

Ten-year-olds: 7

Eleven-year-olds: 11

Twelve-year-olds: 12

Thirteen-year-olds: 17

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Children Who Traveled*</b>
1847	9
1848	9
1849	2
1850	10
1851	0
1852	3
1853	7
1854	3
1855	0
1856	7
1857	3
1858	1
1859	4
1860	6
1861	7
1862	4
1863	5
1864	2
1865	2
1866	7
1867	1

\* Number of children from the 92 accounts used in this study who traveled each year

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 Caroline E.W.W. Larrabee 12 (1969): 195-201  
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 Elizabeth Pulsipher 2 (1959): 267-270  
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 Evan Stephans 10 (1967): 85-91  
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# Children on the Mormon Trail

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## ABSTRACT

Using first person, reminiscent accounts, this thesis examines children's lives on the Mormon Trail. It attempts to shed further light on the story of the Mormon Trail by sharing the perspectives of pioneers who crossed the plains as children. This study focuses on such issues as the children's impressions of the trail, their experiences on it, their duties, their family life, and the influence of religion. This study highlights the symbiotic relationship between children and the trail: children affected trail life and at the same time were affected by their experiences on the trail. Children shouldered responsibilities that were essential to the success of the family. Because the trail required children to work hard for the good of the family, children achieved a greater sense of their own abilities to succeed.

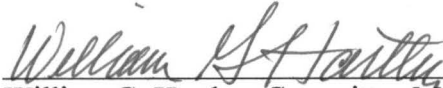
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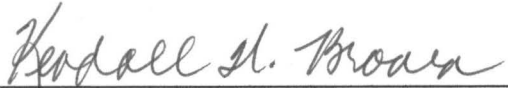
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