

A BRIEF LIFE-SKETCH OF  
ALMEDA GILES NELSON

Written by herself<sup>1</sup> at the request of  
Relief Society sisters of Oneida & Franklin Stakes.  
May 20, 1942

I realize now that "I was born of goodly parents," a fact I had not appreciated in the thoughtless years of youth. Like most children, I accepted my parents as matter of fact, seldom, if ever showing my appreciation for their tender care and wise solicitude in my welfare.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>3</sup>My father, Joseph Sinkler Giles, was born in Pennsylvania, Joined the forces of United States Army in his early youth, and came west with that notorious Johnston's Army to "wipe out the Mormons;" later becoming a convert to the Truth, in Fillmore, Utah.

Mother, Sarah Huntsman, was born in Kirtland, Ohio, came west with the driven Saints; her father, James Huntsman was one of Brigham Young's Company in 1847. One of her brothers was born in a blacksmith shop at Haun's Mill, her mother being with that much persecuted group of Saints fortunate to escape massacre.

The early teachings of my parents have ever been my life's standards.<sup>4</sup> From my mothers lips I learned of the Prophet Joseph with an everlasting conviction that he was indeed a divine instrument in bringing to earth this restored Gospel of Christ. I still retain in my memory the song she taught me about the martyrdom of the Prophet Joseph and Patriarch Hyrum Smith and with what sweet earnestness she sang this story to her children.

I learned my first lesson of Relief Society loyalty from this mother's devotion to duty as a "visiting teacher." I was not more than 5 years of age when I ran out to meet her as she was returning from one of her visits. The thing that then impressed me so deeply was her bare feet—she was carrying her shoes on her arm, her swollen feet telling me why. I've often wondered if

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<sup>1</sup>This sketch is from a copy which is in the possession of a number of family members. We have a copy in her own handwriting in a bound journal. This appears to be a draft with final corrections penned in. Since it adds some material which does not exist in the version generally available, we have decided to present the additional material as footnote. (Ron & Pat Madsen)

<sup>2</sup>... in my welfare by outward signs.

<sup>3</sup>Additional material: I first saw the light of day in a 2-room adobe house built at the foot of the hill in the south-eastern section of then Cedar Springs, later named Holden, November 1, 1870. My father and mother were both born in the eastern United States but came at different times to Utah.

<sup>4</sup>My father's advice to me was, "Remember who you are and what you are."

such conscientious devotion to duty could be found in her daughters.

I was doomed to lose this dear mother at the age of six years. She died in her thirteenth childbirth. I seemed to have felt this loss keenly at the time, but as I grew in years and experience, I've realized more and more the need of her wise guidance. To my older sisters I owe deep gratitude for they mothered me through the following years as only true sisters can.

I attended the public schools of the town and made some progress in spite of the poor equipment and inefficient teachers, who ruled largely with rod. Fortunately I completed 7th-and 8th grades under Oscar Berglund, a graduate of the Brigham Young Academy. From him I think I acquired my first ambition to become a teacher.

Graduating from the 8th grade at the age of 13, I was granted the delightful opportunity of attending the Church School established at Fillmore. After two years under Alma and Joshua Greenwood, and having taken a summer school under these able men, I qualified as a county teacher and taught my first year at Leamington, a mining town on the Sevier River.

Though there were many bitter experiences connected with my duties, I loved the work not only in the school room, but in visits to the homes of those struggling parents, many of whom were emigrants from Scandinavia living in "dug-outs" and having the crudest of accommodations. An epidemic of typhoid fever raged the greater part of the winter, caused by contaminated water and milk. To these stricken homes, I went with Relief Society Sisters to administer and comfort; thus, I had my first experience in real Relief Society work, and felt its significance.

In early spring I received word from my sister Jenny in Monroe that she was sick and needed my help.<sup>5</sup> I accordingly went to her in March and remained with her for two months. During this time I became acquainted with the village school teacher, Joseph G. Nelson. Out of this friendship a strong attachment grew and on June 27th 1888 we were married in the Manti Temple. In August of that same year we began our first work for our departed ancestors in this same glorious Temple.<sup>6</sup>

On our arrival at the Nelson home in Goshen, Utah Co., we found a call for my husband to fill a mission to New Zealand to which he readily responded, and we at once began preparation for him to leave in early autumn. He sold all his belongings, horse, buggy and guns. We had scarcely completed these preparations before another call from "Box B" informed us that his mission had been changed to the Southern States. We thought this strange for we had made no request that his mission be changed, but trusting in the Prophet's wisdom, he answered in the same spirit of obedience as he had the previous call.

Stranger still was the third call from President Wilford Woodruff to the effect that he was released from these foreign mission calls and was "to place yourself at the disposal of Dr. Karl G. Maeser who needs you in the Church School service." Within a few days we received the request to see Brother Maeser in his office at Provo. The result of this conference was our being sent to

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<sup>5</sup>The opening sentences of the draft read: Spring brought me a novel experience. I was permitted to travel all the way from Holden to Monroe to visit my dear sister Jennie who had always been like a mother to me. She needed me now and as the sequence proves, I was led to go to her aid. There being no automobiles in that age, it was quite a journey over dirt roads, and they were none too good of the kind [sic].

<sup>6</sup>Draft reads: ... this beautiful House of the Lord. While here I was privileged to hear angels singing.

Coalville to organize the Summit Stake Academy. This was indeed a new and entirely unthought of mission.

Trusting in Our Heavenly Father to guide us, we responded to this call, and succeeded far beyond our expectations. We taught here two years at the close of which time we were released to attend the B.Y. Academy, feeling much in need of further scholarship if we were to teach in the Church Schools efficiently.

We accordingly established living quarters in Provo, but had only been here a week or ten days when I was stricken with malignant typhoid from which I was miraculously healed in the Manti Temple.<sup>7</sup>

Shortly after this (and indeed before I had entirely gained full strength) Dr. Maeser again called us into the Church School service. This time we were sent to Preston, Idaho, to organize the Oneida Stake Academy.<sup>8</sup> While here I was privileged to hear angels singing. We, with our little daughter Zersia Mae, arrived at the “end of the railroad” in the early part of October, 1891.

Brother William C. Parkinson took us to his home, where we were treated very kindly until we could find room and furniture for house keeping. Details of how we managed to organize the school and provide educational advantage for the host of eager farmer boys and girls, cannot be rehearsed in this short sketch. Suffice to say, Through God’s blessing, we did succeed.

As proof of our efforts we point to many of our former students who now hold prominent positions in the Church and State. For all this manifestations of God’s mercies to us, His humble servants, we shall ever feel most grateful.

When the Government of the United States confiscated the Church property, it became necessary to close the Church schools for a time. The teachers were to go on missions during the readjustment. My husband was the only one in that group who responded. We had built a little home, and in order to keep this going and to provide for my husband and four little ones, I entered the public school service. (Brother Nelson was gone six months in the North Western States Mission.)

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<sup>7</sup>The draft text ends this sentence here, and then goes on: I was taken to the Manti Temple, a place I felt I must go if I were to live, and was indeed restored to health through the administration of the Priesthood in that holy house.

<sup>8</sup>The draft text adds a number of sentences in this paragraph: Dr. Maeser called Brother Nelson into his office and told him the Church needed a teacher to go into Southern Idaho and organize Academies, one at Preston, Oneida County, the other at Paris, Bear Lake County. He could have his choice of the two. My husband asked to take time to counsel with his wife. We acceded we’d better stay in school now we had begun the year and so reported this decision to Dr. Maeser, who, in his characteristic manner, waved his hand and said, “Oh that will do no good now, Brudder Nelson, I’ve already sent your name to the President of the Stake at Preston and they are expecting you. So without choice we went to Idaho, which to me then sounded a thousand miles away. This was in October 1891, and Preston was only in its beginning. We found no one to meet us and while our little Mae and I sat on our trunk, which contained all our earthly possessions, Brother Nelson went in search of someone who was “expecting” us and who would tell us where we were to go. (Almeda’s draft then continues with the paragraph about Brother Parkinson.)

During the succeeding thirty-five years our family increased to 12. How I<sup>9</sup> managed to teach, do my church duties and keep our children well and happy, cannot even be imagined by the casual observer; only this I know: the Lord blest us with unusually good health.

I served eight years as President of Y.L.M.I.A. when Oneida Stake extended to Pocatello, Gentile Valley and included the Baker City Branch in Oregon. Without this last named organization, it required two weeks, holding 2 to 3 meetings each day to visit the wards. The Ludlow buggy, a good team and driver, were always provided by our good Stake President George C. Parkinson.

After being released from this work, I was called to serve in the First Ward Relief Society from which I was taken into the Stake Board as an aid under Sister Louisa B. Benson and later under Sister Nellie Head. When the Franklin Stake was organized I was privileged to work in Sr. Vera G. Nash's and also Sr. Bertha P. Larson's Stake Board. In these years of service in the Relief Society I realized more joy than I dreamed could come to one in life.

My association with these dear daughters of God are cherished moments, which I hope I may enjoy throughout the eternities – that will be Heaven; to know and be known among the hundreds of choice sisters with whom I have studied, worked, counseled, mourned and rejoiced—all in the line of Relief Society work.

For years my husband and I had planned going to Logan after the children had all been helped through College. Daughter Z. Mae was a vital factor in this plan—she was to teach while “father and mother did the Temple work,”<sup>6</sup> but the Lord had planned it differently for her. While she was attending College to obtain a Degree in Education, she was suddenly taken by death—the shock to us was most severe. We, however, determined to carry on our part of the plan. When John A., our youngest was to finish his fourth year at the U.S.A.C., we disposed of all our possessions in Preston and established a home in Logan close to the Temple, where we could better attend to our chosen work.

All did not work so smoothly, however. In making the transition financial barriers were thrown up before us and we all but lost the home for which we had bargained. Through the worry of this misfortune facing us, Brother Nelson's nerves were shocked, and for many months we despaired of his living. Through the mercies of Our Kind Father and the faith to which we tenaciously clung, he has been sufficiently restored to do as much Temple work as we have been able to obtain records for.

Our son Jesse now in Army service, bought the home, and is providing a comfortable apartment for us for our remaining years. Thus, out of what once seemed a tragic mistake has come an ideal condition that enables us to “carry on” for our departed loved ones.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>The draft reads: How I taught school to keep the home from being “sold under the hammer” and did my church duties and kept...

<sup>10</sup>The draft has an additional paragraph as follows: Before closing this chapter, I must tell a little of the regrets I suffered in parting with the dear beloved sisters of the Relief Society. I knew I should never be privileged to work with another group, and even had the thought often that my usefulness on earth must be finished. It was while in this mood that the following pleading was earnestly offered to the One who always understands. However, the draft ends at this point. (One page further there is one additional paragraph:) All our eleven (obviously omitting Mae who had died earlier) are married to good companions and are holding honorable places in the communities where they reside. Our grandson Delmore Nelson, whom we have raised, is counted as our own. He is 19 now and expects to do his part in this great “world struggle” as a doctor. Perhaps it would be fitting to close this sketch with tributes written by our sons Scott and (blank) on our 54<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. It follows: 4 there is no more material in the journal from which this

