

RACHEL MARIA GOODRICH SLAUGH

As I Remember Mama

By Fern Slauch Olson

What a glorious day for my arrival! A September morn! I'll bet they'll really be glad to see me. The wise-looking old stork only flapped his huge wings and came to a precarious one-legged rest on top of a warm, red chimney. "Here?" I asked in alarm. They won't even appreciate me. Look at 'em, twelve of them already! I crave attention. What chance have I here?"

That dear old stork winked one very intelligent eye. "Isn't it better to receive attention from fourteen people than from just two?" "Oh, yes, but the thirteenth"...and then I saw my mother. Instantly I was in her arms, my very pink fingers curled snugly in the palm of her warm, kind hand. Her face was touching mine and I knew she was perfectly and completely happy. I wrinkled up my little nose, yawned and mumbled to myself, "That old stork knows his stuff." Then we both slept a long time.

Yes, ours was quite a group. But, lucky for us our parents loved us all. Life on the farm was great. No streets to stay out of. No traffic to dodge. We hiked on the nearby hills, swam in Green River conveniently one-half block from our front door, and we spent delightful evenings just listening to those wonderful, quiet sounds that you so seldom hear these days--sounds like the far-away cry of a coyote, the hooting of a night owl, the rippling of the river as it rolled along in the moonlight. And the crickets! That happy sound that swells like the crescendo of a thousand violins, then quietens down to the barest audible whisper.

We were a happy family and I'm sure the wonderful influence of our mother was felt throughout our lives. It takes a special type of person to remain calm while raising a family of this size. And besides us, there were always four or five extra hired men to cook for every day. Yet if there is one phrase I have heard over and over again as a description of my mother it was, "She was so calm and serene. She always worked so quietly you wouldn't know she was there, yet she got the work done before you knew it."

Mother was remarkably well qualified to cope with a family of thirteen, having come from a family of twelve. Her father, my grandfather Goodrich, was a polygamist and had three wives. They had a total of thirty-two wonderful children. In their families there was a feeling of love and unity that is difficult for 'outsiders' to believe. They were brothers and sisters, never half-brothers or half-sisters. These children grew up to be leaders and outstanding members of the community, both in civic and church affairs.

Mother worked at various times for both of her father's other wives and did so just as willingly as she worked for her own mother. She was, in fact, away from home working for one of them when real tragedy struck her own home. This was during the time of the diphtheria epidemic and within one month's time five of her brothers and sisters died. First Billy, full of fun and life and just two years younger than she. My

mother was not allowed to go near. Ten days later came the unbelievable report that Fanny was gone. But Fanny was not a child, she was a woman, twenty and adored. She and Mother and their brother Albert had always sung beautifully together and were asked often to sing at church and social gatherings throughout the valley. Coupled with Mother's grief was her feeling of helplessness and concern for her parents and the other children. In another ten days little eight-year-old Wallace was taken and six days later, her little sister Julia, thirteen, and Hyrum too.

The family was quarantined for two months. Fear of the disease was so extreme that one man was arrested for traveling the street in front of their home. Grandfather Goodrich, who had been away from home working at the Maeser mill, broke the quarantine to be with his family. He had to. There was no one else to help them.

For a long time after that Mother and Uncle Abe had no heart for singing, but then a Mrs.Griffen moved into their ward and took an interest in teaching the young people to sing and dance and do little concerts and plays. She taught Mother and Abe a singing act called "I Whistle and Wait for Katie." The stage had been fixed up by the boys and the girls made the curtains. Not much by our standards, but for those days it was elegant. That night Mother looked wonderful in a neat little dress and a wide-brimmed hat trimmed up just right. She came out as he whistled and they waltzed and sang, she the alto and he the lead. Every time she reappeared on stage they sang another verse. Every young man in the house fell in love with her that night. She could have had her pick of them.

Mother was pretty and it was only natural that she was soon singled out by one young man named George Slaugh, who came courting for about a year. In that time they had decided to get married and he had built a little house in Naples Ward. As soon as they returned from Logan, Utah where they were married in the temple on September 29, 1892 they moved into their new home.

They had twenty-nine wonderful years together, years filled with much happiness and much sorrow too. Their second-born, Alfred, lived only four days. And they lost another boy, Horace, with Scarlet Fever when he was four years old.

Father was called on an LDS mission to the Southern states while Mother had six young ones at home. She knew the call meant a great deal to him and she said only that of course he must go.

Frank was fifteen and Leonard twelve. They were a great help, but the management of the 360 acre Green River Ranch plus the 20 acre place in Davis Ward was quite an assignment for one as quiet and gentle as Mother. She was a hard worker, but not used to being "foreman." She managed very well, however, hiring the help that was needed.

The harvest was abundant and Mother was proud of it. She was mindful that the Lord was watching over her and had blessed her family very much. One Sunday Mother

had taken the children and gone to the Valley, leaving a hired man to watch the ranch. Imagine the shock when they returned to find everything--haystacks, grain stacks, corrals, stables, everything--a black smoldering mass of ashes. This proved to be almost too much for Mother and a few days later as she was standing in front of the stove washing dishes, tears were streaming down her cheeks and she just didn't think she could possibly carry on another day alone, when someone walked up behind her and put his arms around her. It was my father!

"Oh, George, what are you doing home and how did you know how badly I needed you?" Sure enough, Father had been released from his mission early because of an injured knee and had come home without letting Mother know because he didn't want to worry her. There was never in this world a more joyous reunion.

About a year after Father's return the twins, Owen and Reed were born. Father always said they were his "bonus" for having gone on a mission. They brought such happiness into the home the whole family felt blessed for having been given these beautiful adorable babies. However, when they were two years old they contracted a combination of whooping cough and measles and little Reed did not survive. This was an almost unbearable tragedy for the folks. But in time other children were born to them and as time always does, it healed the pain a little of losing this precious child. Altogether there were nine boys and four girls born to our parents. The last three were girls, and the last girl was ME! No wonder I've always considered #13 as my lucky number.

In spite of all the work there was in caring for a large family and cooking for extra help on the farm, Mother took time out to take the children swimming and hiking occasionally. I don't know how she did it. From what I can gather a day in the life of my mother went something like this: You get up at five, sometimes earlier, never later. George starts the fire, the boys and three hired men come in, dash water on their faces at the wash bench, pick up the milk buckets, and leave.

You go to the cellar for a ten-pound lard bucket of eggs and a quart bottle of ripe tomato preserves. You set the big table for fifteen, coax the slow fire with chips and more wood, call the girls, Fern three, Grace five, Gladys seven, slice cold boiled potatoes for hash browns, spread thick slices of home-made bread with home-churned butter and arrange it in two large drippers for warming in the oven, call the girls again, make an enormous kettle of Germade mush, then to the cellar again for a big pitcher of milk and a smaller one of thick cream skimmed from one of the pans, go and get the girls and wash their faces to wake them up. The minute the men come in you start the eggs a-frying.

Breakfast over you disappear into the cellar to care of the big, foaming buckets of fresh, warm milk and skim the cream from the pans already on the shelves. You emerge trying to juggle emptied milk pans, the buckets, the strainer and one pan of sour milk, calling as you near the house, "Open the door somebody," not really expecting anyone to be there. And you are right, they've all gone.

You set the pan of clabbered milk on the back of the stove for cottage cheese, clear a corner of the table and proceed to mix bread, enough for eight loaves and some cinnamon rolls.

"Oh my goodness, they're from a setting hen's nest." The egg drops. It's in an unfresh condition. "Show me where you found them. We have to hurry and put them back before they cool."

Gladys, in tears, lags behind. Grace, barefoot, comes running to investigate the sorrow, stubs her toe, falls flat and joins the chorus. The chickens, the turkeys, the geese, the dog all add their loudest voices until it is so funny you can't help laughing. Smiles replace the girls' tears and soon they're skipping along beside you.

"Where's Fern?" you ask. "Oh, she went to the house," Grace says. Dubiously you replace the eggs in the nest under the lumber pile. You and the girls pick up all the wood you can carry and go back to your work. No Fern. "My toe! My toe!" wails Grace upon discovery of a mud-caked red scratch. "Oh, my toe!" the tragedy increasing in volume and momentum.

You build up the fire, set the cooling dishpan on the stove, pour hot water from the teakettle into the wash basin, cool it from the bucket, set it on the floor and tell Grace to wash the dirt off her toe. You dig in the rag bag for an old pillow case from which you tear a strip, climb on a chair to reach the iodine on the top shelf of the cupboard (Grace's cue for wilder wailing,) quickly dab the injured toe, wrap it up, splitting the ends of the strip to tie into an impressive knot on top, wash the tear-stained face, anoint it with a kiss and Grace limps away, proud recipient of the purple heart, Gladys at her side.

"Go and see if Fern's all right, will you?" you call after them. Only now do you get a chance to clean up the egg. It's pretty bad. You start on the dishes again.

Fern appears, stars in her eyes and cocoa on her nose. She goes straight to your arms. "I made a cake. Come see." The look on the faces of Grace and Gladys impresses you with the necessity of going and seeing. You glance at the clock, put the dishpan back on the stove, fill the teakettle, take the empty buckets as far as the water barrel and follow the girls toward the ice house.

Apprehensive as you are you are not prepared for the CAKE. To ten quarts of beautiful cream in a five-gallon crock have been added, according to the remains, a can of cocoa, a bottle of vanilla, an indefinite number of eggs plus shells and sawdust. You don't know whether to laugh or cry. Fern's face showed pure joy. You suppress an impulse to love her to pieces.

"Oh Fern, in all my life I have never seen such a cake." As soon as withdrawal from the scene is decently permissible you take her by the hand and say, "We must hurry and get our work done" and they all trot along, happy to be included in your plans.

They help make beds. It takes about twice as long as it would for you to do it alone because they keep pulling the covers on the bias. Gladys sweeps the floor so energetically you have to put a pan of water on the floor to dip the broom into to keep down the dust. She sweeps only what she can reach without moving anything. You hope you will get a chance to do it over without her knowing it. Oh well, they love helping and at least you know where they are.

They all want to help mix down the bread, but you keep them happy by giving each a little ball of dough. They immediately set about rolling it into snakes. About that time they all decide they're hungry. Oh, that clock. Those men. At the stroke of twelve they will be taking their places at the table, expecting all they can eat of good stick-to-their-ribs food.

Right there, I, not my mother gave up. But I made a discovery--my mother was a magician. From some invisible 'where' she caused to appear three times daily big, nourishing meals. I couldn't think what she might prepare for even one. There couldn't have been meat, for there was no refrigeration and no store. There was meat on the hoof, but in 100 degree weather who could handle a whole beef? Chicken was usually for Sunday. Vegetables were unlimited, but they were in the raw and in the garden. No store-bought canned foods ever darkened our shelves. Of course Mother waved her magic wand and presto, there were at least a hundred two-quart bottles of tomatoes each year and she always did five bushels of peaches, two or three each of pears, apricots and apples, some black cherries, all the Damson plums the trees would produce, all the raspberries from a dozen long rows, sacks and sacks of dried corn, catsup, every kind of jelly and jam and, most delectable of all, her watermelon-rind preserve. I have seen Gladys try again and again to discover Mother's magic formula for those crisp, transparent little cubes of delicate perfection but, alas, no wand.

In addition Mother made all of the bread, the butter, the laundry soap, the quilts, the girls' clothing except winter long-handles. Father wanted to hire someone to help her but she said they would only be in the way. My older sister Nellie helped in the winter when she wasn't in school, and in the summer she worked in the fields.

Mother used to wait up for Father when he was late coming from the Valley. There was always patching and mending and this was a good time to get it done.

I think the most dreaded of all were the washing and ironing. No electricity. Wash day was all day and ironings were apt to be several, with big heavy irons heated on a roaring hot stove. All the work Mother had to do was over or very near that roaring hot fire, every day of every long, hot summer. In the kitchen you couldn't breathe. Her only escape was to her flower garden.

Seed-gathering was a fun time. There were so many interesting little fluffs and pods. We carefully packed them away in match boxes, Cloverine salve tins and Mentholatum jars, saved all year long for that purpose. Then came the seed-exchange visits to Aunt Dora's, Aunt Florence's and anyone else who may have admired an

especially beautiful flower in Mother's garden. They usually had curious and unusual seeds saved for Mother and we could hardly wait to see how they looked in our garden the next year.

Our ranch was really quite famous. Father was known all over the country for the wonderful watermelons he raised there. It was Father's policy to let visitors eat as many melons as they wanted while at the ranch, free of charge. They paid only for the ones they took away with them. So, as a result, we had many visitors.

Permanently situated under the trees in front of our house was a picnic-style table and benches of which my father was very proud. Sawed from a giant cottonwood at our own sawmill, the table was one piece, over three feet wide and ten feet long. Here the cold, crisp slices of delicious red melons were served. When one sitting had finished, the melon rinds were dumped into a big barrel, the table wiped clean and a new crew sat down and started in. Guess who washed all the dishes and kept the clean ones coming. Our house was also famous for my mother's delicious home-made ice cream, which was served generously with home-baked cookies or cake.

Mother was not a great talker. She was a good listener. But she had a surprising sense of humor and what she did say was priceless.

She loved music. The family had a hand-crank Victrola, one winding per discouragingly short-play record. Mother liked "Selections from the Old Mill" but she especially loved "Humeresque" (violin) and "The Rosary." She used to say, "I wonder if there could ever be sweeter music in heaven."

Mother took a course in obstetrics from Dr. Shipp and was a competent midwife. In the winter time when we lived in Naples or Davis she was called out many a frigid night to deliver a baby in a home where there was no money for a doctor. There were no cars in those days, so even when a doctor was summoned, it was a slow journey for him with a horse and buggy and Mother was able to reach many of their homes first. One of her own babies was born without assistance while Father was gone for help. She was sitting up in bed attending to the details when he returned.

You wonder how she could find time for church work, but she always did. At the time of her death 21 October 1921 she had been a counselor in the Davis Ward Relief Society for several years. She was never too busy or too weary to help others. Four days before she died she spent almost the whole day finishing a quilt for a motherless family.

And then, suddenly she was gone. "It was like a thunderbolt out of a clear blue sky," my father said. "It was a dark cloud that followed the flash and I thought the sun would never shine for us again." He said he felt that if he spent the remainder of his life caring for and educating us children, he could never repay our mother for what she had already done for us. His life was proof that he never forgot it. That her memory sustained him throughout his twenty-five after-years is so strongly evidenced in his stirring tribute to her. I would like to list the last two verses here:

Now, when I come home late at night
I see no light below.
The feeling that comes over me
No one on earth will know.
I see a bright celestial light
That shines for me above.
It fills my soul with sacred joy
Through memories of thy love.

I walk with thee in gardens fair,
Much grander than below.
And watch with thee in ecstasy
Our plants still here below,
To see them multiply and spread,
An honor to thy name
Until the Giver calls us back
To share thy love again.

Note: Since I was only four at the time of my mother's death, you may wonder how I qualify as a writer concerning her qualities. Among the many thoughtful persons from whose contributions I prepared this portrait of my mother are: Nellie Slaugh Nielsen, Leona Goodrich Manwaring, Vilate Goodrich Bodily, Albert G. and Lydia Goodrich, George A. Slaugh, Lucy Goodrich Lind, Gladys Slaugh Jacobson and Edith Goodrich Case.