

The Autobiography of
Lydia McMurray Call

1893-1981

I was born December 22, 1893, in Liberty, Bear Lake County, Idaho. I was the second child in a family of seven children: five girls and two boys. My parents were John Stevenson McMurray and Clara Drucilla Hymas.

Liberty was just a small little country town about ten miles west of Montpelier. Its entire population was only about 200 people and most were related in some way. All were engaged in dry farming, so none were very prosperous.

My parents were very poor, but I often heard it said that they were the most loved, congenial, contented couple to be found anywhere. Our home was just three rooms, built upon a hill with no shade and very little grass around it. We always had a good garden and some raspberry and currant bushes; we seldom tasted any other fruit.

Our house was built of boards about an inch thick and a foot and a half-wide, placed straight up and down on the outside with narrow boards nailed over the cracks. On the inside, the same kind of boards were nailed crosswise, and a plaster like material called factory was pasted over the cracks. The space between was filled with dirt. The inside was whitewashed with lime and always looked and smelled clean. Steps going up the outside of the house reached a room in the attic, and there was father's workshop and grainary. We had a woven rag carpet on part of the floor and the rest was bare boards. A coal oil lamp, wood burning stove, a bench holding a water bucket and a tin cup, an outside toilet and tin wash tub were all the conveniences we had.

I think the very first thing I remember was seeing a tiny, little white casket being brought into the house for my baby sister, just younger than I, who passed away when only a few weeks old.



I remember very little of my mother, as she passed away December 23, 1901, the day after I was eight year old. She had been ill and in bed for three months with typhoid fever. This left father with six children with the oldest being nine and the youngest nine months.

I can never forget that Christmas, as her body had to be prepared for burial and kept in the house until time of burial. Sad as it was, old Santa found us and brought gifts for each child. How could a husband and father endure this?

The funeral was held December 26th, and what a day. The worst blizzard one could imagine, so much snow and wind we could hardly find our way to the tiny one room building which was used for both school and church services. I can never forget when we went home from the funeral to a cold house. In those days we did not have furnace-heated homes, not even coal to burn, just wood fires in the kitchen range. The house was so cold and the wind just moaned as it came down the stovepipe and in the keyholes. It sounded so sad, we children started to cry and even today I hear the moaning sound when the wind blows. Poor father finally got the fire going and fixed us something to eat, which none of us wanted.

An aunt took the baby and kept him until he was four years old, then he came back to be raised with the other children.

I spent the following winter in Farmington, Utah, with an aunt. I went to school, finishing the second and third grades. While in Farmington I went many times to the home of Grandma Rogers. A wonderful little old lady who was Aurelia S. Rogers, the lady who first started the Primary in the church and served as it's first president.

The following summer I went back home and we had a funny little old English lady come to keep house for us. This proved to be unsatisfactory, and she only stayed a few months.

Father never quit grieving, but kept us all home and together. My oldest sister and I took turns staying out of school to watch the younger children and keep the house warm. I was mixing bread for the family when I was nine; of course I had to put the pan on a chair and my arms would get so tired of kneading the dough. I was also milking cows by this time.

All was not sorrow and hard work, for we had the best father in the world; loving and kind and always so thoughtful of the needs of each child. He was very studious and studied

much. He always took so much pride with his horses and always came home with his share of blue ribbons.

When I was twelve years old I went away to work for the first time. I went to a neighbor's home to help with the housework, washing, ironing, tending children, etc., and I got 75 cents a week.

Father could never get over his great loss and was never well after mother died. He really struggled trying to make a living and raise the family too. On April 21, 1909, he passed away during the night. It was a terrible shock when we went to his room and found he had been dead for several hours.

We were then all taken to different homes to live, except the twins Ray and Rhea, who both went to the home of an uncle, father's youngest brother. I went to the home of my aged grandparent's, because it was thought I could help them. A bachelor uncle lived with them. He was farming a lot of land, also had lots of cattle, pigs and etc. I was compelled to milk cows, feed pigs, saw wood and work in the hay and grain fields. After milking I would and separate the milk by the light of the lantern and be in the fields by daylight the next morning. I worked right along with him doing a man's work until dark of night with never a penny to spend and never any decent clothes. At one time I was promised a new dress and when it came it was a dark brown outing flannel for a skirt – what a thrill for a teenage girl!

I stayed there until I was eighteen and decided I wanted to go to school as I had only finished the eighth grade. I had a few precious dollars saved from the sale of our place when father died, so I took this and went to Salt Lake City where my older sister was going to school. I was almost frightened to death, as I had never been away from home before. I stayed the first night with my sister and in the morning bought a paper and started answering ads for schoolgirls so I could attend school at the L.D.S. High School. I found a place where I could get my room and board and one dollar per week, but I had so much work I did not have a minute to study and conditions were so unpleasant I had to make a change. I finally went to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Henry McGee. They were very fine people. They gave me a nice home and I was the happiest I had been since father's death. Right after Christmas, Mrs. McGee became ill and they had to go to California, so I was looking for a home again. I went to the home of Professor and Mrs. Hugh Dougall. He was the grandson of President Brigham Young. They

had a lovely home and two beautiful children whom I learned to love very much. I quite enjoyed living there although I had lots of work, but there was trouble in the home. She was going out with other men and they were finally divorced.

The following spring I went to Farmington to get work, thinking I would go back to school again in the fall. I had worked all summer in different homes and was already to start school again when I was taken with appendicitis and had to go the Dee Memorial Hospital in Ogden, Utah for an operation, which was no little thing in those days. I spent ten days in the hospital in a nightmare wondering where I could go and how I could pay my bills. Some dear friends, Mr. And Mrs. M.C. Udy, took me to their home. They were the most wonderful, generous people in the world. They always had three or four people at their home who were either homeless or unable to care for themselves. To my knowledge they would never take one penny in pay. I am sure people like them will receive a great reward.

Of course, this put an end to my school, but I worked and in time had all my bills paid. I worked quite a little at the home of Dr. A. Z. Tanner to help pay my bill to him. He was a fine man and seemed more like a father to me than a doctor. I later found steady work at the home of Mr. And Mrs. Harold Daynes. They had two children and it was a nice place to stay. They paid me five dollars a week, which was top wages. They lived in Farmington in the summer and in Salt Lake City in the winter. Mr. Daynes was the grandson of Joseph F. Daynes, who was organist for the Tabernacle Choir for many years. He was a wonderful man, so kind and good-natured. He was always composing songs and music for the grandchildren to sing. I spent many pleasant hours in his home. His wife was a wonderful, kind and generous person. Mrs. Daynes was the oldest daughter of Apostle John W. Taylor, who was then the mayor of Farmington. I knew Apostle Taylor real well, and all three of his lovely wives and all of his children. I was in their home many times. It was at this time that Brother Taylor took more wives after the Manifesto had been given and this along with a few other things caused him to be excommunicated from the Church. It was a terrible thing. I have never seen anyone suffer as he did. His wives all left him. He did not have a home or one thing. It got to where he did not even have a change of clothes. He would come to his son's home where I was living and get me to wash and iron his clothes and he would wear a robe while I was doing this. He would

not talk, just walk up and down the room, wringing his hands and shaking his head and grown. I have never seen anything so sad.

In the summer of 1915, I went to Syracuse to visit a friend and while there I met Aaron Willey Call. We started keeping company almost a once and on December 15, 1915, we were married in the L.D.S. Temple in Salt Lake City by Apostle George F. Richards.

We rented a nice little three room house and had it all furnished and ready to move into complete – all bedding, linens, dishes, etc. and all paid for. We did not have a honeymoon but went straight to our home and to work early the next morning.

The first year we stayed in Syracuse and farmed. On January 4, 1917 we had our first baby, a boy, whom we named Dean M.

In March 1917, we moved to Burley, Idaho with Grandfather and Grandmother Call and family. We farmed with them for the first two years. On June 7, 1918 we had our second son, Merrill John. He was a good baby, but I felt I had my hands full, as I had very poor health.

During this summer we bought a farm in Springdale. Russell, Will's brother, and his wife, Lavern, bought with us. The house was just four rooms, so we each took two. We lived on this place one-year and at this time the Armistice was signed bringing World War I to a close.

In 1918, my sister Della came to our place and made it her home in the summertime and holidays while she finished school and then taught school. She was with us until 1924. Then in 1920, my brother Ray came and stayed with us for four years. In 1921, another sister came and was with us for two years. My dear, kind husband never complained about this although they were grown people. How we ever managed and found food for that many mouths I do not know.

In 1919, we sold our place in Springdale and bought 80 acres in Unity, Idaho. We gave part of this place to build the Unity Church House. Again we had to do with two rooms apiece. While living there I worked as a teacher in the Primary. While we were here we had two more sons born to us.

Wayne M. was born March 19, 1920. We had whooping cough brought to our home just before he was born and of course he contracted the cough immediately and as a result we

almost lost him. With faith and prayers and a good doctor his life was spared. It was a year or two before he was entirely over the effects of the disease.

On January 31, 1922, another son was sent to our home. DeVerl was a premature baby weighing four pounds with all his clothes on. The night he was born, there was such a storm and blizzard the doctor could hardly make it to our home and after that could not come again as the roads were blocked for two weeks and the storm raged for most of that time. The Lord blessed us and saved the baby and he grew to be a man, not very big in stature but a giant in principle and character. A wonderful example to all and loved by all who knew him.

This year there was no sale for crops. The highest prices for potatoes was 25 cents, wheat was 7 cents a bushel. The banks closed and we lost our farm and moved back to Burley to farm Grandfather's place again. We made exactly nothing this year. One sister got married and a brother and sister left.

January 12, 1924 we had another son, Ray W. He was a big husky baby weighing $9\frac{3}{4}$ pounds. We were completely happy although this made us five boys and no girls.

These were depression years and it was next to impossible to find work of any kind. We heard of an opening for one man at the creamery so we were up before daylight and Will went to try and get the job. When he arrived he found at least a dozen men waiting for the job, which was to pay \$1 a day. Because Will was a man with a family, he got the job. We had a cow and a garden so we were able to get along fine although we had five children and had to pay \$9 a month rent. We had a three room unmodern house, but got along fine and were content and happy. It was at this time we bought our first car, a second hand Ford. We felt prosperous and ritzy!

During the winter of 1925, we were quarantined with the smallpox. At this time our sixth child was born. A beautiful little girl born on January 11, 1926, which we named Lois. We were overjoyed at having a girl in our family.

In April we rented and moved to a farm on Overland, about five miles south of Burley. This was a very poor farm and the house was small, just two rooms with a sleeping porch. Not convenienced or modern in any way, not even electricity, but it was alive with bedbugs! I had to wash on the washboard and as I had poor health and suffered with a bad back since the birth of my first child this was a very hectic summer.

It was necessary to make another move, so in the spring of 1926 we bought an acreage and nice little house on the outskirts of Declo.

On February 3, 1928 another little girl was born to us. Maxine was a beautiful baby and we were indeed very happy with two little girls.

The depression was beginning to fade some, but it was a terrible thing. No work and men walking through the country begging for something to eat, some of them with a piece of an automobile tire cut the length of their foot and wired on for shoes. Sometimes two or three would come in a day. One day a poor fellow came without shoes and wanted to know if he could stay and rest for a day or two, he was too ill and tired to go on. I gave him a couple of blankets and told him he could rest in a little shack we had there. When I fixed the meals we would fix a plate for him and send it out with one of the children. One evening he said he felt better and would be leaving in the morning. When we sent his breakfast, we also sent a silver dollar and a pair of shoes, which were partly worn out. They just fit him and he was so happy he cried and said that was the biggest dollar he had ever seen. He said to the boy, "God bless your folks, they will get it back." He went on his way feeling much better.

I really don't know how we survived this depression with no steady work and a family of seven children. One time, Will and one or two of the older children got a job to thin a few beets for Theron Jacobs. This helped out but when the money was all spent, except \$10, we knew we owed tithing. We held a little conference – would we spend it on much needed groceries, shoes and overalls for the children? We all agreed to pay the tithing, so father took it right to the bishop's in case we might weaken. When he came back home we sat down on the steps and were wondering what we were going to do. No job and no money! One of the boys said they were going for a ride on the pony so he left and in a short time he came back and said, "Daddy, I rode down past the third left canal and a man came out and said someone in Burley wanted to talk to Will Call." So father got on the pony and went to the phone. It was the manger at the Farmer's Equity in Burley. He said they needed a man to go to work, and he thought of Will, and did he want the job? Imagine our surprise and happiness. He took the job, which was an answer to prayers and paying our tithing. Men worked ten and twelve hours a day, so I was left home with the children from daylight in the morning until after dark at night.

We always had from one to half a dozen neighbor boys at our place so I had my hands pretty full and had many serious, as well as funny experiences. At one time DeVerl was riding a horse and fell off. The horse stepped on his leg and broke it just above the knee. The children carried him home and it was several hours before we could get father and the older boys home and a doctor to come. They were four hours setting the leg and he spent weeks flat on his back. The bed was propped up at the foot, his leg was strapped up to boards, which were fastened to the top of the bed and a bucket of rocks hung onto his leg. After that he spent many weeks on crutches, but came through it with no bad results.

Dean had the misfortune to break his arm twice in the same place, once from falling off a horse when a small boy and once while cranking the car.

While living at this place another boy came to our home on November 2, 1931. A husky ten pounder with lots of black hair who we named Jay; the idol of us all.

During these years we had some very happy and wonderful times although we had such hard winters with so much snow. One day coming home from school, Lois froze her hands perfectly stiff. As a result she almost lost her hands. We managed to save them, but some of her fingers were left crooked and still bothered her as an adult in cold weather.

In 1933 we sold our place and bought a farm of eighty acres two miles south of Burley in Overland. Here we spent the happiest years of our lives. We remodeled the house making it modern with three bedrooms and plenty of room. The older children were grown and all active in the church. They always had some of their friends at home, some of them staying overnight and even days at a time. We had many friends and our home always seemed to be the place for them to get together for many happy times. While here, father's health began to fail.

In 1939 Dean was called on a mission to the South Central States. He had only been gone six-months when he was sent back to Salt Lake City for an operation to remove his appendix. In a very short time he was able to return and finish a very successful mission.

During this time Father's ulcers ruptured and hemorrhaged and he spent the greater part of two years in the hospital and in bed. The first time this happened we called the doctor. He came and said father could not last an hour unless something could be done. He said he would rush back to town, send an ambulance and he would make arrangements at the hospital. Merrill had just been ordained an Elder and he was there with his friend, who had also just

been made an Elder. I asked them to administer to father. At first they were frightened and said they had never done it and could not. I told them it was up to them and they had to do it. Shaking and very humble they did. The ambulance was there about that time and I went with them. As soon as the doctor saw dad he said there is a change and the bleeding had stopped. He could not understand it. After transfusions and a few days stay in the hospital, father came home again. He never did have good health after that.

It was quite a problem to get the money each month to send to Dean while on his mission, as father was unable to work. The doctor and hospital fees were no little things and kept our finances tight. At one time Dean wrote and said he needed \$50 extra as he had to have his eyes tested and needed glasses. He hated to ask but needed the extra money. In those days there was just no money to borrow as we were just recovering from the depression. We tried everything and just could not come up with the answer. We had three cows, which were giving us milk, and butter and the sale of milk bought us groceries. Living on the farm we only got payday in the fall and so milk income was important. We were very discouraged as we had prayed and tried every way to get the money and could not. One morning father said if I would go to town with him he would try to drive the car (he was still sick) and we would go and see if we could sell one of the cows. We could not afford to have a telephone so we would need to go to town to do business. We went out to get in the car to go and saw the mailman coming. We never did find out why he came early that day. I went to the mailbox and there was a letter. We opened it and there was a money order for \$50. A short note said, "I have owed you this money for a long time" and was signed by a man we did not know or could recall. There was the \$50 we needed and we did not have to sell the cow, which would really have been a sacrifice for us. We always felt that the man who sent the money was the same man we helped when he came to us hungry and barefoot, but we never did know for sure. It was indeed a miracle from God.

By this time the boys began to marry. First married were Dean and Wayne in the same month (June), then Merrill in February and DeVerl in October. We decided we must get a smaller farm. We sold out and bought forty acres at the end of Burton Avenue. The land later became know as Call's Addition and was covered with beautiful homes. While there, Wayne and Ray were called to the Armed Forces in World War II. Wayne went into the Air Corps

leaving a wife and darling baby boy. Ray served in the Marines. Both had many harrowing experiences, but both came home safely.

At this time we decided to take a belated honeymoon. With some dear friends, Asel and Ethel Parish, we left for a month of sightseeing. We went east to Washington DC, Virginias, Arlington Cemetery, Smithsonian Institute, Grand Canyon, Zion and Bryce Canyons. We went through the Black Hills to the Dakotas and Illinois.

Lois was married in February of 1946 and moved to Idaho Falls. The following September Ray and Maxine were married.

I was called to work in the Relief Society as a counselor to Sister Delva Hanks. I enjoyed this work very much. At this time father's health failed completely and we were forced to leave the farm. We sold our farm and moved to Twin Falls. We had just been there a few months when I was asked to teach a Sunday School class. In a very short time I was made counselor in the Relief Society to Sister Hazel Stevens.

We had only been in Twin Falls about a year and a half when I had to have an operation. I had quite a time but it was a complete success and I experienced perfect health since.

In 1950 father had a very serious operation for the prostrate gland and then an operation on his eye. He came through both just fine.

Jay was married about this time and we were left alone. This was really a hard adjustment to make.

In September of 1951 we moved to Jerome and in April of 1952 I was made President of the Relief Society, a wonderful privilege and opportunity. I served for two years and then because we had not sold our property in Twin Falls we moved back. We had just been there a year when on July 14, 1955 our house caught fire. It was caused by faulty electrical wires in the attic. It burned all the ceilings and roof but nothing else was hurt. In six weeks everything was all fixed. We did some remodeling and changes and had a lovely home again.

I again served in the Relief Society as counselor to Sister Oles Bingham. I have worked in every organization of the church. Secretary and teacher in the Primary, secretary and teacher in the Sunday School and have worked in the Girls Organization, teaching the Gleaner Girls for seven years, assistant to the Financial Ward Clerk and four different times in the Relief Society.

The Lord has indeed been good to me. A wonderful husband, eight children, all with lovely companions and all married in the Temple. All are active in the church holding important offices in their wards and stakes. They have always been obedient, kind and considerate to us. Is it any wonder I am a proud and happy mother?

--- December 1975

My dear companion passed away November 9, 1961 at 70 years of age. Brother Carl Shaner and his family came and bought our home and I moved to the house on Keegan Lane, January 1, 1962. The Shaners are wonderful, lovely people, so good and thoughtful of me. My own children could not have done more for me.

I have lived alone for fourteen lonely years. But the years have brought many blessings and happy memories. The Lord had indeed been good to me. I have good health and so many dear friends and neighbors. My children are kind and thoughtful of me. I have so much to be thankful for.

As of this date I have 44 grandchildren and 59 great grandchildren. I am now 82 years old.

-- December 5, 1981, Lydia McMurray Call passed away at Burley, Idaho.

This Autobiography of Lydia McMurray Call is published as she wrote it and as it has been preserved through family members.

Names, places, and dates have been verified with family genealogy information and records in possession of K. Oswald, and family history records in possession of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.