

Verna's Letter

This is Friday September 26, 2008

My sister Mary Mathilda asked me to write about my experience when we were in Nephi.

I'll start when Cindy was born. Duane decided to take a job hail adjusting. We did have a car with a rusty body so he thought we could make payments on a more-up-to-date one but we couldn't so we had to turn the keys in. He walked two miles to teach that winter. It was over 30 degrees below for eight consecutive weeks. I never heard him complain. We took care of a little boy we called JD night and day, weekends, Christmas and all. He loved us and we loved him. He'd be 57 now. Duane's wages were \$250.00 a month. JD's mother had arthritis very bad so I earned \$30 a month. Rent was \$125.00. I worked in the Primary Presidency with the Seminary teacher's wife. Duane didn't have his degree yet so the Seminary teacher offered us to go take care of his and Ted Tuttle's motel in Nephi, Utah. Duane acquired a big old Nash car and we started out for the unknown. I remember Ralph's eyes as we left he said, 'You'll be back.' Arlen said, 'they are taking those little kids down there and they don't have any say about it.' It took 3 days to get there, somehow it did seem far away. We bedded kids down in the Nash. Cindy kept saying, 'Get out of mine bed.' As we left Grandma Forsyth's she came running with a chamber pot. "You might need this," she said. Did we ever! Cindy had diarrhea all the way.

There was a telegram at Ruth's. She came running out with the front page of the news that the motel was all in flames. The telegram said, "Keep coming anyway". Ruth said "Come in". I said, 'I'm stuck to the seat'. Cindy had been throwing up as well. Six units were burned but there was one Brigham Young used to stay in when Nephi had a wall around it in the early days with Indian troubles. The ceilings were falling down, there was a big fireplace in each end of the big room, 18 inch thick adobe walls with cockroaches 3 inches long, a bathroom had been built on and an office. Sometimes I'd find cockroaches on the bed. When I turned the light on in the bathroom it was like they were having a ball game and ran in all directions.

Duane started teaching school but was asked at night to haul second-hand furniture from Little America in Salt Lake, along with going to Provo to night school three times a week. They hired a crew of men to fix the burned out cabins. Being strange there it scared me to see them standing in a circle in the yard, they were all alcoholics and the Seminary teacher's brother was the boss of the crew. Robert was nine, Cindy two, Mary started school that year. Robert and I would go into the house and have prayer. The lady next door would watch me through her window and said she felt so sorry for me. They gave us a lady from the training center to help and she'd married a man from the same training school. They had been fixed so they couldn't have children. I tried to fix her up and do her hair. She didn't like him but he came around anyway. He was big and scary looking. We were anxious to go to conference so they said they could take care of the motel. We'd bought covered wagon piggy banks for Robert and Mary. When we came home Neil had taken their savings plus \$20 out of the till and taken off for Las Vegas.

I do remember when I saw Pres. McKay walk into conference. His eyes looked so very blue. I felt so overcome that I had seen the Prophet of the Lord, I thought I was going to pass

out. I took my job very seriously like my life depended on putting lots of people into the motel. They had us on a 60-40 deal and we paid all the expenses. So the free place to live wasn't very free. I felt safe because a kind old man rented a couple of rooms in the old house. He was the best cook in Utah. He made dressing for my Thanksgiving turkey that was so good even before it was cooked. There was an old cellar and I canned fruit as there was lots around for free. I'd carry the money to the bank with my two little girls and say to myself 'Why aren't you happy?' It was pretty there. We were accepted well; the children liked school. Duane would call me to pick him up for a teachers' picnic. I'd have to find a baby-sitter and someone to watch the motel and was nearly always late. I'd go sit on the running board at the picnic and look up at the moon and say, 'My family are under the same moon'. I was very homesick.

They asked us to be dance directors and we were in a study group. We were asked to speak in Church and sing also. One day the crew building brought a woman to a burned out cabin. They must have met her at the bus. She walked along with one after the other, flipping her dress. I could see she was drunk. I phoned Paul, the owner in Edmonton. My knees were shaking. He said get the sheriff to get her out. I was inexperienced with such things. Then my headaches started. To this day I can't look at a neon sign. One day a man came with a bunch of scatter rugs. I couldn't see plain so opened the till and bought them all to get rid of him.

I bathed legs for women who had come over the desert and their legs were swollen. I tried to sing with the ladies and had to rush outside for some air. I thought secretly I had a brain tumor. I never could see a doctor as they were taken care of two towns the size of Raymond. I felt no one would help me. The doctor said I'd be better after the baby but they got worse. Bums were going up and down Highway 91. Several stopped for food and I'd been taught to feed everyone. Cindy was a lively little girl and sociable. She knocked on neighbors' doors and said, 'I'm Cindy Verna Forsyth'. They thought it was so cute. Mary Olga, now six, tried to help me in the motels. The evenings were warm and one night we couldn't find her; we almost went crazy for fear she'd been hung in a swing of something. The whole neighborhood was out with flashlights and there she sat at a neighbors house in her little bathing suit, having a nice visit.

I thought I'd feel better if Mama came to Nephi. She soon made friends with the ladies. She enjoyed being closer to Aunt Blenda and Uncle Sam and Casper and Grace. When I went to see the doctor before Billy there were 4 women in beds in the office. They came to have their babies and go right home. One had a nervous breakdown and said she got up and was going to kill the doctor. He was 20 minutes from the time he walked out and felt he spent too much time delivering Billy. I felt so insecure when I'd get such headaches I couldn't carry my baby upstairs. Casper and Grace came that Christmas with goodies for everyone and a \$10 bill in an envelope. The Seminary teacher's father was warden of the prison. He was very good to me, even brought a little 10-inch TV. I had fixed him a bowl of peaches and he said no one but me would do that.

Duane would try to trick me to go out but I'd go in the bathroom and pray. Mama went home for a while and then came back. I was so glad to hear her voice on the phone. People told me to go see Doc Beckstead, he was a High Councilman,; he'll help you they said. He gave me a pill and said your husband has been thought of for some of the highest jobs in town. Don't spoil his chances. The next morning the world was bright ; I went to the Church. A lady came

over and asked how I was. I went to say fine but burst into tears. The pill had worn off. That scared me a lot and I couldn't wait for another pill. I grabbed up my baby and ran to the neighbors. She took him from my arms and I never felt another thing for hours. She phoned the doctor and he said I couldn't be very sick if a little pill would make me feel so good.

At this time the Superintendent found there was a spite thing going on between Canada's teachers and US and they wouldn't pay Duane as much as they'd promised. The next year he was hired at Lavon, it used to be called 'Robber's Roost' and Brigham Young would pick up a posse to go through that town. The warden's wife said I should go to the state hospital for help. I absolutely couldn't sleep. I'd kneel by my babies, buggery and pray that if I wasn't going to get better that the kids could have a better mother.

At this time Kelly, the nice old man, moved out as Paul said he'd been getting too cheap rent. He was an alcoholic too. He shot himself and I wheeled my baby to an old church on the outskirts. The first song of his funeral I had to get out of there so sat with Billy on the steps. The bishop came out and said 'these things are nerve racking aren't they?' Kelly's only son came for the funeral. I thought, 'Why didn't he come when he needed him?'. Kelly had been the oldest of 12 children when his Dad was called on a mission he had to help at 11 years of age to raise the family. He had to carry water from a creek and I think he felt a little bitter but he sure was a famous cook.

One Sunday they were having Stake Conference. Unbeknown to any of us the bishop brought Apostle Lee to give me a blessing. When he finished he said that prayer really went somewhere. He shook hands with all the children even little Billy and in the prayer he said my children would be protected and someday the sky would be lots brighter for me. Mary and Jim brought Mama back and Billy really bonded with her. It must have been hard for Mary and Jim to leave their family home and make that wintry trip. I sure wasn't thinking straight.

Grandma and Grandpa Forsyth came for Christmas. She made dresses for Mary Olga and Cindy out of the nice plaid cloth Grace and Casper gave them for Christmas. Mama was quiet and it was comforting; everyone said they couldn't see anything wrong with me. I began to worry that someone might steal my children when they walked home from school. They found Bob Felt, Paul's brother, in a bar when Bill was born they said he straightened right up and came back to help us but then borrowed money, even phoned from California for me to send him some but I couldn't. The end of April I decided on my own to go to the hospital. I'd lost 35 lbs. I couldn't think of a thing I could eat. We drove to the Temple, I felt as faint in there. I didn't go back for 2 or 3 years. About this time we drove one mucky Sunday to the cemetery in Spring City where Papa's little sister and his mother were buried. We ran about looking for the graves. It looked hopeless but I thought I wouldn't get back there for a long time so walked off by myself and prayed that if the graves were there I might find them. I never had such a quick answer to prayer. It was like my father walked beside me to graves covered with briars. Here was a little lamb with "Our Darling" on it, for Papa's sister and Grandma's was right beside it. We cleaned off the weeds, now I hear they have perpetual care there.

My headaches began to come every day, blinding ones. Mama and Duane packed up the two little ones and Elva met them in Great falls. Billy not quite a year and Cindy 3. I felt guilty,

H

there she was, a widow, and I was flaking out. Elva had nine children around her table. Cindy slipped away to go out and pretend she was a cowboy. She was dancing on the septic tank's big steel lid. Two bolts were missing and she slipped in and the lid closed over her. Elva thought she heard a little voice and went out and checked around the farm. She dreaded to look in the septic tank. There was Cindy clinging to the dirt sides with muck up to her nose. Cindy says she still remembers Elva reaching way down and pulling her out. She said she hugged me and spanked me and said 'Cindy get in the bathtub'.

Apostle Lee said I'd be able to help other young women with the same trouble someday. I wondered how that would ever come about. But it has. I've had girls and grown men say if they could only talk to me they would feel better. I thought at the time I was the only person in the world that had felt as I did. I would take chills where every inch of my body shook. It kind of hurts when I hear girls say, 'Oh, I was always too busy to have a nervous breakdown'. The doctor said I was heading for one all my life. When a knock came at the school door the teacher said I'd go white as a sheet for fear it was news that my father had taken another stroke. I watched him all the time. It had affected so much at 11 years of age I ran to the hill to see if he was riding home. I looked in the manger etc. Mama said it helped her out as it must have been very hard for them when Papa lost his strength. I helped her draw water for the cattle, that's how I learned about the birds and bees and Cindy said I explained things to her that way.

So much for all my ramblings. I may as well tell the whole story. They put me in a room with a nice girl named Diane. She started seizures after her 4th baby. Her Dad had taken her other sisters to Hawaii and her holiday was to the hospital in Provo.

The board of Doctors said they felt I'd had a rough time and decided to give me a few shock treatments. I carried my Patriarchal Blessing in my pocket until I had to tape it together and I'd say Apostle Lee said I'd be better. I fully believed what he said, that the children would be protected. I had a bath before the treatment and I thought if my Father could see how far I had sunk, he'd feel very bad. The doctor came in and said, "Hello, you pretty kid," then put a steel halo on my head and turned on the juice. I hear they put people out now before a treatment. It's supposed to change your thinking. Anyway they said they'd never seen anyone go into it so calmly. They tied my hands. I felt my ~~body~~ jerk but when I awoke I noticed the birds outside were singing. Diane came running to me and said, "Were you scared? If you had of been, I'd just die." I played the piano, did ladies hair. I didn't want to end up like a whole floor of beds with ladies that were put in induced comas to shock them out of their trouble. One sleepless night I sat on the bed wondering what would become of me and I looked over at Diane and thought she takes seizures and at that very moment she had a terrible one. I ran for the nurse, I'd never seen a seizure before. The next day I read on my chart that she was moved to another room because Mrs. Forsyth had worried all night she'd have another seizure. I went to 6 treatments. I'd fight my head off now if I thought I had to have one.

I said I had to go home to my children. The doctor said that was normal, that if I didn't shed tears to go home I wouldn't be normal. They said to go home and forget all about where I have been and for Duane to take me home to Canada. We drove into Cardston. A car stopped on either side of ours asking Duane to come to teach, one from Jefferson and one from Mountain View. We chose Jefferson because it was nearer my brothers, mother and family. I was almost

scared to take Billy home. We came on the 8th of July, Cindy's 4th birthday and Billy's 1st. He was an angel baby with auburn curls. I rocked him and sang to him. Elva had him nearly three months. How good of her to do that for me. Her children helped out. Cindy told her she missed her 'budder'. Elva told her to take her pick. I think she crawled in with Eldon but she stayed very fond of the whole family.

Now I'm 86 years old. I've told my story. I don't want to think about it anymore. There's lots more and we got JD after. The sacrament meant more to me after I'd tasted some suffering. I wrote this poem when sick.

Someday I'll have a happy smile like I did in days gone by.
Why does sickness come along to make me sit and cry?
The children are well, they run and play
Billy's so good, like an angel I guess.
Lord, please bless our home with more years of happiness.
My husband is sweet and kind as can be.
But it's hard having a wife needing sympathy.
I'm to get well 'twas said there's things yet to be done
But now my headache feels like a ton.
Please guide me, Lord, for I walk rather blind
I know Thou are good, gentle and kind.
Give me the courage and faith to carry on each day,
For life became hard, I must pay.
Help my faith to grow to a big ripe tree.
Please give me peace that was promised me.
I pray every day so I do believe,
But the way is long till the goal I achieve.
Let my body repair and my poor mind mend.
My mother, dear soul, has been so kind
A better mother I could never find.

