



A CHRISTMAS THOUGHT, 2020



As we ponder and consider the blessings we have at this Christmas time, I think it's wise to think about our heritage as well as what we will leave to future generations—our legacy. Perhaps our trials, petty squabbles, and even those things that we deem as issues that are too great for us to get over, are brought low, especially at this time of the year when we think about what the Savior had, what He taught us that is important, and the legacy He left behind in His life and humble circumstance. Please read this story of a Christmas in 1926 exactly how it happened (well, exactly how it may have happened). — Mike Erickson, great-grandson

“Merry Christmas, Mother,” Leonard called as he walked into the warmth of the kitchen, through the swinging door from the backyard. The screech of the stretching spring and the bang of the quick snap of the light screen door announced his entry before his voice was heard.

His mother was sitting on a chair in the corner of the room with her grandson Max in her lap. She fanned a slight smile as she watched Leonard glide by. He carefully held an almost straight-stacked tower of small pieces of wood that he had been splitting to refill the wood bin used to fire up the already heated and smoking stove. His wife, Jennette, was making pancakes and bacon in the small kitchen area of Ane Marie’s

home in Mt. Pleasant, Utah. As she cooked, she sang a song that she had taught her children. “Falling snowflakes make me shiver, but a warm pile of hotcakes with plum syrup, to my tummy I deliver.” Then placing a pile of hotcakes on a plate for the kids, she laughed heartily.

Ane Marie, smiled and stroked the hair of little 18-month-old Max as he lay against her chest “He’s so happy,” she said, “He reminds me of Willy.” Leonard and his family had arrived the day

before by train from Hamer, Idaho

where Leonard worked for the

Union Pacific Railroad.

Leonard and Jennette had three children: Virginia, Doug, and Max.

“What time is Chris coming over?” Leonard asked his father, Hans, who had just walked into the room with a small bucket of



cream. "Oh, your brother will make it for dinner," Hans replied. "We would do well to start dinner early as his herd of kids will go through everything in the cupboards within minutes." "Hans!" Ane Marie shot toward her husband, warningly. Hans just smiled as he walked past, looking down at little Max as he went by. "He *is* a bit like Willy, isn't he?" he added.

A few minutes later they were sitting around the large dining room table about to eat Christmas morning breakfast. Hans bowed his head to say the prayer, but before he could start, Ane Marie said "Hans, please don't forget the children." Hans smiled and simply said, "Yes, of course." He thanked God for living in Zion, he thanked Him for the food they had. As his voice quieted slightly and his tone became softer, Hans thanked Him for the two children they raised on this earth. He then said, "thank You for those that we had for a little while and that we will surely have again." Then he very slowly and deliberately and with some emotion, said each name: "Hanna, Andrew, Hansine, Willie, Anker, Hans Jr., William and Ol-of." In this Christmas prayer he thanked God, as he had done every year since 1920, for the children they had and those children that they would again have, and never, not once in all those years in this certain prayer and on this very special day, did he ask for anything—for that gift was above all others.

Following breakfast, Leonard walked over to his Mother. Ane Marie was sitting in her big, cushioned chair, wrapped in a shawl. She spent a lot of hours in that chair these days, and as she watched her family moving around the large sitting room, her eyes slowly moved to the distance—a distance only known to those who had been on the trail for many years.

Leonard spoke softly, "I have a gift for you, Mother." He gently removed a folded piece of paper from his coat pocket and knelt in front of her. The gift was a simple tribute that he had written last year on the journey back to Idaho after their Christmas visit. "I will read it to you Mother," he said knowing she had never learned

to read English. Slowly and deliberately the words fell from his lips. All in the room listened intently.



WHAT I OWE MY MOTHER

“**T**he first conscious remembrance I have of my mother is of a wonderful smile hovering over me. It meant, My Mother... As life went by and perplexities, vexations, and tribulations appear, it became my habit to look to this smile for strength when courage was low and results uncertain. I well remember its stimulus as I lisped my first effort from the school stage, and timidly sought her face in the audience; its consolation when I was sick. When the time came that issues of life must be met without my Mother at hand, I found that such smiles as hers were rare and were not reflex. In process of analysis, I found that her smile was born of the spirit. It was the expression of her interpretation of life. My Mother's courage was not the sink-or-swim, live-or-die variety.

Life to her was not a struggle or an affliction, but a beautiful privilege to live and act. She loved the world and everything in it, and the Great Giver for allowing her to be part of His creation. This was the secret of her smile.

My mother's early life would be termed anything but pleasant. When a child of 10 years, her Father and Mother with two sisters and a brother crossed the plains from Nebraska to Salt Lake City in the Willie Handcart Co. and while journeying westward, one cold day, her Father with 12 others were buried in one grave by the wayside.

From a mere child to a young woman, she was compelled to work for others, and when she received her scant pay, she would take it to assist her widowed Mother.

She evidently had her full stock of what the world defines as hard knocks, cares and privations and difficulties.

As I saw her smile a few days ago when I came home to spend Christmas, I noticed it had lost none of its inspiration, but it was grown a bit wistful and tremulous, for my mother is past 81. But when I shall behold it no more in the flesh, this smile, its impress which distance cannot dim nor time efface, will still be my pilot even to life's sunset with the assurance that whatever comes must be best and good, for God is in His Heaven."—L. E. Hamer, Idaho Dec. 30, 1925

This gift would bless her life and the lives of many even down to the present generation and beyond.

Ane Marie quietly cried as Leonard finished, and he gave her a soft kiss on the cheek. The moment hung in the air, in the quiet, and the room was still for some time. Suddenly, someone called out, "Uncle Chris is here," and the reverence of the moment was replaced with the excitement of Christmas.

When Ane Marie and Hans left Utah, they were concerned they might not be accepted back into the church and the Zion they had once found, because they, for a time, had turned their backs on their faith and their people. But they were received with open arms, love, and words of encouragement, which is the way of people living the gospel, especially those who had been through so much for their faith.

In 1900 Ane Marie lost her dear sister Kristina. On June ninth, 1920, Ane Marie and Hans would go to the temple and have 9 of their 10 children sealed to them as a family for all eternity. It was the single most important day in their life. Leonard was sealed to his parents in 1931 at the Manti Temple.

That Christmas day in 1926 was three years before Ane Marie's death. Max's older brother, Doug, then 13 years old, walked up to the music box that Hans had bought for her when they lived in Grand Island, Nebraska. As he turned it on, Ane Marie got very sad as she had occasion to do, and Hans told Doug that she didn't want to hear it because it was too hard to listen to as it brought back painful memories. Doug replied that he liked the music. Hans gave it to him as a Christmas present with a protest from his father, Leonard, "What do you want with that old thing? If you want it, you'll have to carry it yourself." So, he tied a cord around it, and took it with him on the train to Hamer, Idaho. His children have it to this day.



Hans died in December 1928. Leonard was afraid of the bank situation and being liable for bank losses, so he and Christian sold the family house and paid the creditors. Ane Marie received a check from the bank in Hamer, Idaho where she lived with Leonard at the time of her death in September 1929. The Depression hit in October and the check was never cashed. ❄️

Doug, Virginia, Jennette, Leonard, and Max in lap

