

ELSIE [or ELSE] RASMUSSEN NIELSON

Born: 1830 Denmark
 Age: 26
 Willie Handcart Company



As an infant, Elsie was taken into the home of the Beaboum family and had no recollection of her parents. She attended school until she was age fourteen, and then hired out as a farm hand. Here she met another farm hand, Jens Nielson, and they were married in 1850. When they joined the Church, they were shunned and persecuted by friends and family.

In 1856, the Nielson's sailed from Liverpool, England, aboard the ship *Thornton*. Traveling with Elsie was her husband, Jens, (age 35) and her son, Niels (5). The Nielson's were also bringing a little girl by the name of Bodil Mortenson (9), to meet a part of her family that had come to Utah previously.

Jens was known for being a generous man. As the company aboard the *Thornton* approached New York harbor, "an appeal was given to the brothers who had temporal means to help the brothers and sisters who did not." Jens was one of those who stepped forward to contribute to those in need. Upon arriving at the end of the railroad in Iowa, Jens and Elsie parted with the rest of their financial security. The money from the sale of their farm was reportedly donated in full to the Church, except enough to buy a handcart and to stock it with 17 pounds of belongings per person. It took a great deal of faith, courage and compassion for the Nielson's to be so unselfish.

After consuming their last pound of flour several days before, the Nielsons finally arrived at Rock Creek Hollow on October 23. Little Niels and Bodil Mortenson succumbed to their trial here on earth and were buried in a common grave with eleven others. The end appeared to be near for Elsie's dear husband also. His feet became so frozen he could not walk another step. This caused his right foot to be deformed the rest of his life. At this point Jens said to Elsie, "Leave me by the trail in the snow to die, and you go ahead and try to keep up with the company and save your life."

The author of Jens's life history told it this way in *Bishop Jens Nielson*: "In the fury of those storms which raged around them, the bishop and his faithful wife toiled through the frozen snow till his feet were shapeless and useless with frost. He could walk no further. What was to be done? Should he sink in the snow to die of despair? His young wife [less than 5 feet tall]. . . looked at him, how desolate the world would be without him. 'Ride—I can't leave you—I can pull the cart.'" Jens had to suffer the humiliation of riding while Elsie pulled like an ox for about a week until there was a wagon space available in which he could ride.

Elsie followed her faithful husband as he was called to pioneer the Utah communities of Parowan, Paragonah, Circleville, Panguitch, Cedar City, and finally Bluff, in San Juan County. Elsie was frugal and resourceful. She planted mulberry trees to raise silk worms, extracted honey from beehives and wove many beautiful strips of carpet for her home and her neighbors. She made countless hand-sewn buckskin gloves and most boys in town had a baseball covered with buckskin by "Aunt Elsie." She had three more children, all girls. Elsie died in May of 1914 at the age of 84, having been a widow for 8 years. Of their experience, her husband said: "No person can describe it, nor could it be comprehended or understood by any human living in this life, but those who were called to pass through it."

Sources: Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel website; <http://www.bsmarkham.com/julie/jens.html>; <http://ilovehistory.utah.gov/people/difference/nielsens.html>. See *Follow Me To Zion* by Andrew Olsen and Jolene Allphin, *Deseret Book*, 2013, for artwork and more complete family stories as well as new documentation.