MEMORIES OF THE LIVES OF SOLON HUFF AND LOUCRETIA MCGEE FAMILY BY THEIR DAUGHTER LOUELLA MCGEE NORMAN

My father, Solon Huff McGee, was born on November 26, 1853, in Loweryville, Tennessee, to James Giles McGee and Sally Davis McGee. My mother, Emily Lucretia Robinson McGee, was born on August 14, 1855, in Columbus, Mississippi, to James Harvey and Margaret Fergah Fenster Robinson. My father and mother were married on May 4, 1876. My mother died May 4, 1919, in Springdale, Utah, and was buried there. My father died February 3, 1934, in Draper, Utah, and was buried there.

My mother's people were Scotch. My father's people on the McGee side were Irish. He used to tell us that three McGee brothers came to this country from Ireland and that his great-grandmother was the daughter of a Cherokee Indian Chief. He also told us that his great-grandmother on his mother's side was a sister of United States President James Madison.

I can remember my dad telling me about this as a youngster and again about a year and a half before he died. He came down from Draper with Herb to spend the weekend. That is when he told me about it again. He said this information had been handed down through the years by family records and word-of-mouth. My father was always so proud of his Indian heritage, and he had many of the Indian characteristics.

My Grandfather McGee had negro slaves, but I don't remember how many. My dad used to tell us as youngsters about his life during the Civil War and slavery days. Three slaves I do remember him speaking of so often were two women who did the cooking and housework and a negro man they called Friday. He, as I remember, was a sort of a handyman. He did the yardwork and sort of looked after the young children of the family. Many are the stories my father, or "papa" as we used to call him, used to tell us of Friday and his wild yarns of slavery days. The people on the plantation next to my grandfather's owned Friday's wife and children. My father was about ten or eleven years of age at the time of the Civil War. He would tell us about standing as lookout or guard in a "thicket" as he called it, or a large patch of willows bordering the road leading to my grandfather's farm, watching for guerilla bands engaged in harrassing the enemy in small bands (petty warfare). They roamed the country pilfering, looting, and forcing the younger boys who were not quite old enough to join the regular army to join up with them. My father's brother who was about sixteen years of age was running to hide in a corncrib, as they called it, when he was shot and killed by the band. They would just ride in and help themselves to anything they wanted. I recall my dad saying they would take supplies of all kinds. They would go into the Smokehouse, where my grandfather cured and smoked meat, hams, and bacon, and take all they wanted. They would

then go to the stables (barns) and take the best horses and leave the poor, tired horses behind. They would go into the kitchen and order the two negro cooks (at gunpoint) to fix whatever kind of food they wanted. I recall my dad telling us and laughing as he told it, about the two negro cooks planning how they were going to be so dirty about their cooking if ever the gang came by again and ordered them to cook a meal for them. But the very next morning the gang came by real early, before the cooks got things lined up. Two of the men went into the kitchen and ordered the cooks to fix their breakfast and told them that they wanted a good, clean meal and to wash their hands real clean--they were very particular about their food. They stood with guns on them to make sure that everything was cooked and served just right (it seemed as though they suspected something).

After the war was over and the negro slaves were freed, there was nobody to pick cotton. Much of the plantation was ruined, and then came the Carpetbaggers, as they were called, who also took everything they wanted. My grandfather and his family decided to move to Missouri. In the meantime, my grandfather had given the negro they called Friday a piece of land and built him a small house so that he could have his family with him. But Friday had become so attached to my grandfather's family and felt so helpless without them (he had never been on his own before) that he was determined to go to Missouri with them. But, of course, they couldn't take him. When they left, my father said they could hear him for a mile or more screaming and yelling just like he had lost everything in the world. He could not read or write, so they never heard from him again. However, a boy from Tennessee who went to Wasatch Academy with Rowland said that on their farm there was a grave with a headstone, which was very old, which bore the name "Friday."

At about the same time my grandfather McGee moved to Missouri, my grandfather Robinson and his family left Mississippi and went to the same part of Missouri. Later on, my father and mother met and were later married. My grandfather McGee owned a large flour mill, and my dad worked with him. Henry, my brother, told me that when he went back through that part of the country a few years ago, the flour mill was still standing as was the big, two-story house where my grandparents lived years ago. He took a picture of it and was going to let me take it and make a copy, but it got mixed up with a lot of pictures he was showing me and at the time I had to leave, so I didn't get it. Henry said my dad and mother lived up the lane, and at that time it seemed such a long way; but he said in looking back at it now, it was only about three or four blocks. My six brothers and sister Sally were born in Missouri. When my dad and mother and my father's people moved to the Indian Territory later becoming the state of Oklahoma where they homesteaded land, my brother Camm, just older than me, was born there and died when he was seven or eight months old.

I was born in Ruby Indian Territory, Oklahoma, just after midnight December 28, 1894. I can remember but very little of my

life in the Indian Territory Oklahoma, as I was around four and a half years of age when we left there. But I can recall a few things such as the black funnel-shaped clouds--cyclones or tornados as they are called now. I also remember the cyclone cellar where we went for protection when they thought there was a possibility of a cyclone striking our place. I can also remember one time we went to the town of Veneta, I think. On the way home (we were in a one-horse buggy), we could see a storm coming up, and we hurried so fast trying to get home before it struck. I don't really remember this, but I have been told about it. In fact, Ross mentioned it just a short time ago when we stopped by to see him. When I was just a little tot, I was taking a nap on a folded quilt on the kitchen floor when a sudden storm came up. All the family ran for the cyclone cellar. After they had all gotten in, they heard a loud clash of thunder and they happened to notice that they had left me behind. My brother Ross said he ran back into the house to get me and found that I was safe--but he found that the lightning had struck and gone down the kitchen wall and splintered the floor right under me. It hadn't harmed me at all.

I have been told about several Mormon Elders (missionaries) laboring in the area where we lived and that they stayed with my folks and eventually converted them to the LDS Church. One of the missionaries, by the name of Palmer, lived in Cedar City, Utah, and had contacted my father through the years. He came up to Draper and talked at my father's funeral. He told of the bitterness against the LDS missionaries in the Indian Territory at that time and that my father, a tall man, over six feet, acted as a bodyguard when they held cottage meetings.

The land that my father homesteaded was Indian land, and even though my people had Indian blood, the Government reclaimed it. I just don't know the details, but soon after they joined the Church they decided to move someplace where there were Mormons.

I remember hearing my parents speak of three Mormon missionaries from Utah--Elder Palmer from Cedar City, Elder Kirby from Hyde Park, up by Logan, and Elder J. W. Anderson of Mt. Pleasant. They also spoke of Elder Boyce of Manassa, Colorado. At the time of the death of Mrs. Emily Peterson, Miriam's mother, Miriam's sister Helen Kirby of Hyde Park stayed with us for two nights. In talking about me being born in Oklahoma she told me that her father-in-law served a mission there in his younger life at the time it was Indian Territory. My folks had told me that Elder Kirby had something wrong with one arm, so I asked her about it and she said, "Yes, he had a bad arm." So we decided he was one of the elders that converted my parents to the LDS Church. He had been dead for several years.

I'll get back to the time my folks left the Indian Territory. My grandparents, the McGee's had died, and my Uncle Josiah--or "Uncle Doc" as we called him, as he was a medical doctor--had also

died. He had had three wives at different times. They had died, but I recall my dad telling me that his third wife gave birth to a baby. It died, and the following week she died, and the next week he died. My father's younger brother, Uncle Jess, and his family and his only sister, Nancy Ward (I don't remember her husband's first name), and their family remained in Oklahoma. My father's older brother, Uncle Bill, and his wife, Aunt Lou, and his children by his first wife who had died (Walter and wife and children, Tom and Dora and family, and two single children--Billy and Sally, or Sarah as she was called,--Billy was a lawyer--, along with the Hilderbrand family, parents of Dora) all left together. But when my folks went by way of Manassa, Colorado, to see the family of Elder Boyce, they became separated and didn't get together again. Uncle Bill and all their family went to Aztec, New Mexico. None of them had joined the Church, and as far as I know never did. My family went to Fruitland, New Mexico, about twenty-five miles south of Aztec. We bought a 160-acre ranch on the San Juan river, about six or seven miles up the river towards Farmington. But we still had to go to Church in Fruitland. Now they have the church and school in Kirtland up on the Mesa, but there was a little adobe schoolhouse with just one big room. This was just a short distance from where we came down from the mesa to the ranches along the river. I think it was about three miles from our ranch. There was just one teacher, always a man, for the group. They didn't have grades; we were segregated according to how well we could read and do arithmetic.

I'll explain now how I got the name of Louella. My mother had a close friend by the name of Ella, so they put the "Lou" from Uncle Bill's wife with the "Ella" from mother's friend.

When I started to school at about seven years of age, it seemed like an awful long way to walk, but we had plenty of company along most of the way. Our ranch was the next to the last. There was the Ben Black family--he was a polygamist with three wives, two with schoolage children. The Haddens and the Pipkins also had schoolage children. The Stolworthy and Palmer families lived just under the hill leading to Kirtland. One thing I especially remember was this one man teacher, I think he was the teacher when I started to school. We as youngsters thought he was really mean, but in looking back I guess some of the older boys were really hard to manage. I recall when they would get to acting up he would send them out to a large willow patch close by for a willow stick. He would tell them the size to get. They always brought it back, knowing if they didn't he would get it himself. He would always give them a good lashing. We younger children were too frightened to get very mean.

We only went to school during the late fall and winter months because the older boys had to work on the ranches as much as possible. They always had a teacher come in from some other place. We would take our time going home from school, playing along the way until we left the last farm next to ours. Then we would run the rest of the

way home, knowing a good hot meal would be waiting for us. My mother always cooked a big dinner at noon for my dad and the older boys. She always made sure there would be plenty for us younger kids.

The only thing that bothered us was the fact that about three times a week a middle-aged man in a one-horse buggy, a man with red hair and a short beard and mustache, would come back from Farmington, where he went regularly to pick up his mail and groceries. He never looked one way or the other--just straight ahead. He never talked to anyone or bothered us in any way, but we as kids were just scared to death of him--probably because there were lots of rumors about him, where he came from and why he was there. He lived in a little one-room, red brick house just on top of the sand hill above the Stolworthy farm (he was a polygamist too). But when I grew older and read the book, "Riders of the Purple Sage," I just wondered if he was someone trying to get information about polygamy. I do recall that when we saw that buggy coming in the distance, we ran for the high sagebrush along the road.

At that time, we had to go to Fruitland to church, and in those days the women all wore long dresses, some with trains on the back. Sometimes they would pin them up on the side, but I recall one time we went to conference (we went early and stayed all day, having dinner with some friends), as I was going back to the church, the lady was carrying her baby and asked me if I would hold up the back of her dress so that it wouldn't drag in the dirt. So I went along in back of her and held that dress up in the back. I'll never forget how silly I felt, but after she gave us our dinner I didn't dare refuse.

We did have Primary in the little schoolhouse, so we didn't have to go to Fruitland. The boys let us ride the two riding horses. Sally would take Etta and ride the one horse, and I would ride the other.

My father, as I recall, had a large herd of Texas long-horn cattle, which grazed on the rolling hills just above our ranch. Each spring my dad and the boys would brand all the newborn calves and dehorn part of them before turning them loose on the range. Etta and I would sit on the corral fence and watch from a distance. We thought that was great fun. In the fall, they would bring part of them in to fatten for the market. They had to either take them to Durango or Denver, Colorado.

Much of the ranch was planted in alfalfa hay. They had a big derrick, and two loaders each brought in a big load of hay at one time. They also raised grain and corn and had a large orchard with all kinds of fruit. They took the apples to Durango, Colorado. At that time, that was as far as the railroad went. They also raised sorgham cane and made molasses. My dad had lots of hives of bees. I remember as he worked with the bees he would get stung once in a while, but it didn't seem to hurt him at all. Sometimes they would

start to swarm and wouldn't settle down in a hive that he had ready, so we would get out with tin pans or anything that would make a noise, and what a racket we would make until the bees would settle down in clusters on a limb of a tree (if they didn't go into the hive). If they clustered on a limb of a tree, he would cut the limb off and lay it by the opening into the hive.

Christmas was about the only time we had store candy, as we called it. I would always save part of it for my birthday, which was on the 28th of December. But otherwise we had all the honey and molasses candy we wanted. We raised lots of watermelons and cantalopes. We would just go out and pick them whenever we wanted them.

We hardly ever had snow, but it would get mighty cold sometimes in the winter. I'll never forget those cold north winds we had to walk through to school, but sometimes we would catch a ride on a coal wagon as they came from Farmington. Most of the people those days were farmers, and they hauled their coal in the wintertime from the coal mines at Fruitland.

Our ranch bordered the San Juan river, so the folks built an ice house, filled it with sawdust, and always put in ice during the coldest part of the winter. That was where we kept our milk and butter. We made ice cream a lot, as long as the ice lasted. As I said before, our farm bordered the San Juan river, which separated the farms from the Indian reservation.

When we first settled there, I was so frightened of the Indians. They would often, when the river was low in the summertime, wade across the river and come up through the fields. In the Indian Territory, the Indians were civilized, and I had never seen an Indian wearing a blanket and dressed as they were. I recall that I would dream about them and wake up screaming at night.

I can remember being baptized in the San Juan river down by a big flour mill in Fruitland. I was eight years old in December, but had to wait until summertime so that the water would be warm.

I recall that my dad was one of the first people to get a surrey with the fringe on top, and were we proud going to church with our Sunday-best clothes. The folks had two of the prettiest horses that were just used for the surrey. They were sort of speckled gray.

I well remember the first automobile I ever saw. Somebody had called on the telephone from Farmington saying an automobile was coming down through the country and should be by our place in a short time. So Grover and Carr climbed the tallest cottonwood tree in the yard in order to get the first view of it coming down the dugway. It didn't stop, but we all watched it go by. What a thrill it was to see that horseless carriage.

It seemed as I grew up everybody had a job to do. Sally, my older sister, helped my mother with the housework and cooking. Etta and I just did little odd jobs, but had plenty of time for play. We didn't have well water. It was strange that we didn't get typhoid fever, but we didn't. We had some big wooden barrels which were kept up by the driveway into our place and just across the road from a large canal, which was usually muddy. So Etta and I had to carry water from this canal in buckets and fill the barrels so that the water could settle for drinking, cooking, and washday. The folks dug a deep well and struck water, but it wasn't fit to drink, so they just covered it with boards and left it that way. I recall we had a couple of ducks for pets, and one morning we couldn't find the one anyplace. We looked everyplace, and as a last resort we looked down the well. It was swimming around in the water. A board had gotten pushed over a bit, and the duck had fallen through. But the boys tied a long rope onto a bucket and scooped it up.

We had a small flock of turkeys. I believe we had around fifty or more, and they just ran loose over the 160-acre ranch. My sister Etta and I as kids had to follow them around in the spring and try to find where they made their nests. Inevitably, about an hour before dinner or lunchtime, those turkeys would take off for parts unknown. We would have to follow in the background after grabbing a sandwich or something to piece on. Turkeys, when they run wild, try to hide their nests. They can be walking around eating and all of the sudden they will crouch down close to the ground and slip off into the bushes or anyplace they might have their nests. So we would have to watch them real closely, and when we found their nests we would put a long stick in the ground with a white cloth on the end of it and thereafter keep a close watch on the nest so that we would know when they started to set on the eggs. When the eggs hatched, we would take the little turkeys with the mother hen up to the barnyard until they were big enough to be safe on the range.

Sometimes when we were following the turkeys around, we would see a snake, sometimes a rattlesnake, but mostly blow snakes, which are not poisonous. We would throw rocks or hit them on the head with a big stick until they were dead. Then we would hang them on a fence. There was a superstition that it would rain if we did that. There was but very little rain in New Mexico, so we took advantage of every snake-hanging we could. Later on in the day when the turkeys started to go back to the barnyard, and as our work was done for the day (as far as the turkeys were concerned), we always beat the turkeys home. By that time we were good and hungry for a good, hot meal.

Etta and I used to like to play jokes on the boys while they were eating their meals. We knew they all would try and get to the telephone first if it rang. As I grew up, the kids always had to wait until the grownups were through eating. Then we could eat. So several times (until we were caught), we would take the alarm clock and crouch down by the open window. The telephone was just

inside the open window, an old style one that we had to crank. I recall that our ring was one long and two shorts, so when the boys were about half through eating, we would ring our number, and the boys would all try and get to the telephone first--hoping it was a girlfriend.

I believe it was about two years before we left New Mexico that early one morning Willard Stolworthy came by our house on a horse and yelled there wouldn't be any school for a while because the schoolhouse had blown down. I'll never forget how excited we were. We thought it was great to not have to go to school, but it was only a short time until a room was arranged for in the home of a Mexican family. It had a dirt floor, I think. It must have been clay because it was almost as hard as concrete. We went to school there for the rest of the winter and the next. They still hadn't built a new schoolhouse when we left there, and I understand that they later built it at Kirtland.

In the meantime, Henry had gone on his mission. He labored in Illinois and Indiana. I was around 10 years of age when he left for his mission. About once a year my mother and dad and us younger kids would go up to Aztec to visit my dad's brother and family, and Uncle Bill and Aunt Lou would do the same. I recall we went up to Aztec the summer before we left New Mexico. It was my mother's birthday while we were there, and we had quite a celebration.

It was in July, I believe of 1906, that my dad sold the ranch, and a few days later had a big auction sale. They sold everything, even to the last dish. Our clothing and bedding were the only things that weren't sold. In a few days Jim Washburn took us to the train. I believe it took two days, as we stayed overnight with some friends by the name of Tanner. My brother Elwood's two girls, Stella and Ruth, later married their two boys.

The train was a narrow gage, and the first train I had ever seen. We went on to Grand Junction, Colorado, where we had to wait a few hours for the train that was to take us to LaGrande, Oregon. Ross and his wife, Irene, had gone there in the spring. While waiting for our train--it was early in the evening--the Salvation Army group paraded around the depot playing their instruments and singing. That was another thing that we had never seen before, and I was really fascinated by it all. Ross had rented a house for us until the folks could find a home to buy. We three girls picked fruit during the rest of the summer.

We found school quite different than we had been used to. Etta and I were the only ones that went to school in LaGrande. Jim Washburn came out in the fall and lived at our place. He wasn't going to let Sally get away from him.

It was a short time before Christmas that we moved into the home that my dad had just bought. It was a bungalow-type frame home,

painted yellow. It had three bedrooms, a living room, dining room, and kitchen. We had a pump on the back porch over a well, so we had water handy, which was really wonderful to us. The house was almost new and was on an acre of land. We had a big new barn with board walks leading to everything. LaGrande was noted for its big sawmills, so all the sidewalks in town were made of wood. A big sugar factory was only a couple of blocks from our home, and my dad worked there. Grover worked at one of the sawmills. Henry came home from his mission in the late winter, and he also went to work at the sugar factory. We had to walk several blocks to church, or at least we had to go through town.

I will never forget when the Church President Joseph F. Smith visited at conference a short time after we moved to LaGrande. The people stood in line just outside the chapel to shake hands with him as he came out. I think that was just as thrilling to me as if I had touched Christ Himself. I won't forget his long white beard.

In the spring, after school was out, my dad and mother, Grover, Etta, and I moved out on the farm for the summer. In the meantime, my dad had planted a large garden at our home in town, which he had to go in and water each week. Sally stayed in town and kept the house up and cooked meals for Henry, Carr, and Jim Washburn.

It was in October that Henry and LaRetta Wilson and Sally and Jim went to Salt Lake City and were married in the LDS Temple. Shortly after, Carr went back to New Mexico. He was engaged to Pearl Stolworthy. In the spring, they were also married in the Salt Lake Temple and came on to LaGrande. I recall that my dad had to send notorized papers giving his consent to the marriage. I also recall the first time I ever saw a circus, "Ringling Brothers." To me it was one of the most wonderful experiences I had ever had.

It was later that fall that Elwood and family, Ulys and family, and Jim and Sally and Ross and Irene moved to Nampa, Idaho. They bought a big machine to clear sagebrush off the land, but I don't recall how all this came about. I do recall that my dad, Grover, and Henry stayed on in LaGrande and worked in the sugar factory that winter and early spring. Then we also sold out and went to Nampa, as did Carr and Pearl. It seemed where one went, they all went.

My dad and Grover leased a farm. It had a new white house on it with a windmill that pumped the water for culinary purposes. I remember we had a riding pony, and that summer I rode around to the farmhouses and sold subscriptions for a magazine. I received a nice set of dishes for my work, which I gave to my mother. Otherwise, I didn't do much of anything except help my mother with her housework. It was far from town to go to church. The people that lived on a farm next to us had two girls around the same age as Etta and myself, and we occasionally spent the night with each other.

We moved into the town that fall and went to school. My dad and Grover worked in the sugar factory, and two young fellows that worked with Grover roomed and boarded with my folks. Two Mormon missionaries stayed with us at times. One of the Elders was a fellow by the name of Gifford from Springdale, Utah, and I recall hearing him talk of the beautiful climate down there and of all the things they could raise down there as they could in the South where my father was raised as a youngster. I believe this influenced my dad in moving there later. In the meantime, Henry and LaRetta had moved to Burley, Idaho.

It was during that winter that my dad, Grover, and Elwood decided to move to Oakley, Idaho (about twenty miles from Burley), and go into the picture show business. (When we left LaGrande, Oregon, my dad had rented a car on the railroad and brought everything with us.) Again, they had a big auction out at Elwood's place and sold everything.

We moved to Oakley, where we bought a lot and built a showhouse and called it the "Empire." Up until then, there had never been a picture show in the town, as it was just a small Mormon town without electric lights. So my folks operated the picture machines some other way (I have forgotten just how). Elwood operated the picture machines, I sold tickets, and Grover took tickets. He and my dad managed it. My dad rented a house to live in. It had at one time been a small hospital just a block from the church. We didn't have shows on Sunday at that time, and of course we always went to church. We also had Mutual on Sunday nights at that time.

It was in the spring after going to Oakley that I graduated from the eighth grade. I recall that the following winter the folks started to let me go to dances; that is, if I had a date, which I did most of the time. My dates would call for me at the show after I finished selling tickets. The dance hall was close by. I really enjoyed selling tickets.

It was during that winter that Jim and Sally came from Nampa to visit with us for a while before going back to New Mexico to live. Their little girl, Neta--I think she was close to two years old--took ill suddenly one night and died. This was a real tragedy for us. They buried her in Oakley, and in a short time left for New Mexico. I was still going to school that winter.

It was in the late summer of that year my brother Grover (he was about eleven years older than me but was still single) went to Richfield to investigate starting up a business there. They had one picture show there, but he thought it could support another one. So they sold out in Oakley. In the meantime, Ulys and his family and Carr and Pearl and baby had moved back to New Mexico to live.

We moved to Richfield in the fall of 1912. My dad rented a building, remodeled it, and it was a real nice place. My brother

Elwood operated the picture machines, Grover took tickets and managed the business along with my dad, and I sold tickets. They also bought a player piano.

I went to school that year and also sold tickets at the show house. I surely enjoyed selling tickets. There was never a dull moment. I hardly ever had to walk home alone. It was only three blocks, but it seemed there was always some fellow waiting to walk me home. It was really hard for me, going to school and selling tickets every night except Sunday (we didn't have shows on Sunday night). We always went to Mutual on Sunday nights, and it seemed that was the night the boys and girls got together and went to one of the girl's homes for a party of some kind. Sometimes we would play cards, and when my brother Elwood heard about it he almost raised the roof. Until this day I have never played cards since. I recall that my folks would never have a card in the house (they had been brought up that way).

I went to school the second winter until Christmas. Then my mother's health got so bad that I quit school. She wasn't able to do the housework. I had been doing the washing for a long while on Saturdays--and did it the hard way on a scrubbing board. I would always go to the dances on Saturday night. My dates would always call for me at the show house.