

## RECOLLECTIONS OF HIS EARLY LIFE

By Lester Hansen

(He died 23 March 1973, almost 90 years old. He was the youngest son of Christian Hansen and Hansine. This is transcribed from a tape Melvin and LaWana Hansen made in an interview with Uncle Lester.)

My father Christian Hansen was a good inborn Dane. He never learned to speak English very fluently. My mother was also born in Denmark, but came to this country at the age of 13. My father was a profound student of the scriptures and taught me much of what I know to this very day, at age 75. The first I remember of my mother's teachings was when I was called to kneel at her knee and say my prayers.

I lived through the days of polygamy, with all its hardships and privations. If you wish to condemn polygamy, please open your Bible to Chapter 13 of Luke and read from verse 24-28. Then if you still wish to condemn, settle with the Lord. Remember, all those men referred to by the Savior were polygamists.

My father tells this faith promoting experience, which took place while they were living in Brigham City, 1855 to 1858, when just his family lived there. They had been called to settle by President Brigham Young. Because of grasshoppers and drought, there were no crops harvested for a year. By chance, a patch of what they called segos was discovered just west of the city in the swamps. This was a small patch about the size of an ordinary dwelling. They grew close together, and day after day they would dig all of them and then wonder where the next food was coming from, but, upon returning to the same spot the day or two after, they found as many growing as were there the days before this. They were provided with food until the next crops were harvested. From that day to this there has never been a sego on that spot. They all felt that those segos were provided as the manna in the wilderness for the children of Israel.

This is not the only day that women help their men. My mother wove rag carpets until she was too old to work so hard. This helped with the finances and keeping of the family. It was very hard for her to read the English language, as she had never had the opportunity of going to school. She seemed to get along better with reading the Bible and Book of Mormon, and I don't think any church member had a more abiding testimony of the gospel than she did.

I remember an experience my mother and I had in Collinston. We had a huge red bull we called John. She and I were alone in the rock house where I was born. John came down from the pasture in the east hills roaring and bellowing and paid no more attention to fences than if they weren't there. He came through our garden gate and up on the porch with his front feet, and I can still see those glarey eyes as they looked through the window. He backed off and walked around the house pawing and roaring and looking in at the windows, roaring and carrying on until we were almost petrified. In my fright, I came to my mother and with her calm composure; she placed her hand on my head and reassured me that the Lord would protect us. She advised me to go and pray which I did and we were protected. Soon some of the boys came home, and drove the bull away. The only way we could control him was by loading a gun with salt and shooting it into his hide. We also had a little dog called Penny. He could handle the bull. He

would jump up and grab old John's leg with his little sharp teeth and the bull would kick and try to shake him off, but he just hung on causing the blood to run. When we called Penny the bull would move. He became so mean that father didn't even try to sell him for meat, but gave a good rifle to my brother Eph (Ephraim) and told him to ride up in the east pasture and kill him wherever he met him. I think his bones might be seen to this day.

My mother was never happy on the Collinston place, which she sold for a good price on the advice of an old gypsy woman who told her that she would be offered a good price by a dark complected man and to take it, as the property was worth it. While we lived in Collinston, I was baptized in a spring of cold water, which was about a half a block north from our house, by my brother James C. Hansen.

I was about seven when my Mom and I went to Logan where I started school. We lived with Zena Mickelsen, a good close friend of the family.

My father cut the first grain crops on our place there at Collinston with what was called a cradle. Someone came along one day and told him there had been a machine made which would cut grain and hay while the horses walked right along. It was awful hard for Father to believe such a thing could be possible, but he waited for the day when he could own one of these and was one of the very first to own a mowing machine. We cut the grain with this machine and tied the bundles by hand, until another improvement came along in the self-binder.

When we finally moved to Brigham City, we were only two blocks from the 4<sup>th</sup> Ward Meetinghouse. This was a change from the 5 or 6 miles at Collinston. To you who read this, this little distance is insignificant, but then it meant half a day on foot, or about an hour with a pair of horses. We had plenty of horses, so of course we didn't walk. We settled in the 4<sup>th</sup> Ward where they had a quaint old adobe building for a meetinghouse, but the meetings will long be remembered. We held Fast Day on Thursday, and they often would last three or four hours, but still I liked to go with my Father and Mother to those meetings. That building was always filled to the walls. Have we strengthened or have we weakened since then? You answer. In some of these meetings in the old 4<sup>th</sup> Ward, I can still hear old Brother William L. Watkins testify that after the Prophet Joseph Smith was killed, and they were trying to decide who would lead the church, Brigham Young spoke and they saw the features and heard the voice of Joseph Smith. This was enough for the faithful saints

(The following is a conversation between Melvin and LaWana Hansen and Uncle Lester talking about Melvin's dad, James C. Hansen.)

Lester: That's how he got those round shoulders.

LaWana: Was from milking the cows?

Lester: No, they had him carry milk. And they had a yoke that fit around their neck here and then it went out to there. I've seen that old yoke, and them two ropes. Those ropes went down with snaps on, and, when they'd milk the cows, they'd put that milk in some big cans about that high. Then they'd snap these snaps in and he'd carry them, one on each side, when he was just a kid. And he'd carry that from clear over at that milking yard over into where they made cheese in the cheese factory. And he claimed to his dying day that that's what made him—you know he

was always just a little bit stoop shouldered. He said, "That was heavy on me when I was young there and kind of pulled me over there, and I just stayed that way." Now you can write that down because you'll remember it.

I wasn't big enough to do anything. I can just barely remember that that was there. That's all. I can remember that when Father was making that cheese cause he used to ship cheese. They sent it. They didn't ship it much. They hauled it off with four horses on a wagon, and take it down to Salt Lake and Ogden and sell it, and all that. But I can remember when he changed the name to Danish Cheddar cheese. And your grandmother and the other women there told him he was foolish. He'd never sell any of it when he called it Danish Cheddar cheese, but from that time on he never got an order that didn't specify specifically Danish Cheddar cheese. They didn't want any other kind. As far as that, when they were working there I wasn't old enough to get it. But they had those ranges all up in there south of the old dairy. Up in those hills south of there was where they ranged all those milk cows in the summer. And a couple or three fellows came in there with a couple of bands of sheep. And the kids that were herding the cows and them had a great big dispute, and they got mad and was going to shoot at each other and everything. And so when they came in with the cows that night, that was when W.S. had a lot to do with it. That was Willard, my oldest brother. And they told Willard there was going to be trouble because they was taking the range away from their cows. And the cows and horses don't like to eat behind sheep. And so they told Willard about it. So he says, "I'll go up and talk to those fellows." And they was all nervous about it. But, Willard was a man of profound judgment. He didn't lose his head quick, nor fly up nor anything. And he went up there and talked to them, and was gone two or three hours, and when he came back he had a nice big fat lamb across his shoulders that was killed and dressed. They gave him that for what grass they had taken and told him they'd never get on his range any more, because he didn't fight with them. He went up there to reason and talk with them.

It was the son of old William L. Watkins, that I just read to you from here, that heard the voice of Joseph Smith and everything, and he lived right there by the Beaver Dam Meetinghouse, right down below the Beaver Dam meetinghouse. And your folks lived up the road a ways and back in that big hollow. You've been up in that hollow? (Melvin said "yes") Well that's where they lived up where Frank Early lives. Well, Frank's living up there alone yet. Poor cuss. And they lived right by the church house there. And I remember once when they was to a social. And they was great people in Beaver Dam to hold socials. And they was to a social once and I don't know how it came about. Anyway, Joe Watkins says, "That's one thing nobody can lay at my door. I do not milk my cows after dark." And your father stood up and he said, "No sir, he always lets them go till the next morning."

In fact it was old Lon Boosenbark's house that we lived in when them old sisters said not to let Vaughn get any night air. We were living in that house. Lon Boosenbark owned a big dry farm, for that country it was a good big one. And he was real well heeled. And I don't know, he got rebellious to the church someway, awful rebellious. And the bishopric went down there to see him. I remember when that happened. He cursed them, he got mad and cussed them right good. The bishopric left their curse on him. They said, "From this day on you'll not prosper any more." And old Lon Boosenbark says, "I'll show you, I'll work night and day and all day Sunday. I'll show you if I won't prosper." So it wasn't long after that till his wife had a big difference

with him, and she separated from him and took half his property. That was the Utah law. It went on for a while. He went on working what he had left. She came back and freed up to him again and married him again, and wasn't with him long until she left him again and took half of what he had left. So a few years after that I was in Collinston Station one day and there was a little wooden box sitting there lashed up with thin rope. It was just sitting out there on the ground in front of one of the stores, and I says, "Whose is that little box?" Somebody says, "That's Lon Boosenbark's. He's going to get on the train and I don't know where he's going north, but he's going to leave there." Then they said, "That's all Lon Boosenbark owns in this world is what's in that little box." And pretty soon I saw a little old, ragged man, he'd got old in the meantime, come out of the saloon or one of those stores and walked over and got on that train and took that little box. He didn't even have a suitcase. Now he took all his earthly belongings. So I says, "I don't want anyone cursing me in the name of the Lord." I don't want to take a chance on that.

I remember when they took my Father up to the old narrow gauge station at Collinston when it was up on the hill. And old Whetstone came and took him for polygamy. Whetstone had to have a drink and so he went into a saloon up there and left father in the station house, and he sat there a few minutes, then he walked over to Cottonwood Hollow and went down among the trees there. And the train pulled in and old Whetstone had to leave without him. He came back quite a while after and he says to Father, "What did you run away from me for, Mr. Hansen?" And Father said, "I didn't run away from you, you ran away from me."

LaWana: Your father wasn't a polygamist was he? Lester: Oh, you bet he was.

LaWana: Oh, how many wives did he have? Lester: Three

Yes, Aunt Maria down there, that's Sim's and Dan's mother. And then I don't think in all these years there's ever been a soul to put a flower on her grave. Now, Mom and I go there every year at decoration time and we decorate her grave. Aunt Maria was a wonderful little woman. She and my mother were two polygamist wives that really got along. I never remember a Christmas or a Thanksgiving dinner that wasn't in one or the other of those houses.

LaWana: Well, what was the other mother? Lester: Well, the other mother didn't fit in like those two did with each other. She was all right, but she kind of lived to herself more.

Melvin: Who were her children? Lester: W.S. and Lorenzo. That's all the kids she had was the two. The rest of them all died off.

Since we had a header, in them days we headed the wheat and stacked it up in stacks and then thrashed it after. Now, we always worked together on that header, all of the time. I daresn't tell you what we did because we were crazier than hoot owls. Because, when we'd start to head, he'd start to chew tobacco and I'd start to smoke. I'd smoke cigarets and he'd chew tobacco all the while we was heading, and just as quick as we was through heading, he'd throw his away and I'd throw mine away and we'd never touch it till the next year. But we sure would enjoy it while we were heading. That would take us about three or four weeks, usually. And, I'd get my header box unloaded and drive out in the field, and sit down with my back against the wheel.

Say, there's one thing I'm going to put on that. That's taking it right now isn't it? I remember the day when we was cutting wheat up there on Willard's place and we had the low wheeled wagons, and old Brother John Ekstrom always worked with us. And he sat out there that Sunday morning on a good warm Sunday, because we never did cut wheat on Sunday. And he sat out there with his back leaning against that wheel and I went out there and started to talking to him.

And he said, "I'd give anything on earth if I was back to my people." They lived out on Raft River. He was homesteading out there. He says, "There's something wrong out there." He said, "I don't know what it is." He had a wife and quite a family out there. He says, "I'd give a whole lot if I was out there today." And I says, "Oh, you're just having pipe dreams like we all do and getting worried." "No," he says, "I'm worried. There's something either going to be wrong or it is wrong out there and I wish I was there."

So we went on to about noontime and went down to Bear River to have a swim. And old John Ekstrom was a right good swimmer, and he got undressed a little ahead of the rest of us and ran out into Bear River, and it made a quick circle off to the left from where we were and it had a little whirlpool in there. And he went over there and started to swim around there, and he was an awful good swimmer, and he started to yell for help. And we ran, but we couldn't get there fast enough, and he'd gone down for the third time and he never come up. He lost his life right there. And I was there all the rest of the day. We was trying to get him out, but that's quite a deep hole right in that turn. And we finally got him out and laid him in the back of a black top buggy, and took him up. And then, of course, they got him ready for burial. But, ooh boy, that blew that family up; we knew that. That poor little woman just couldn't manage that layout.

The schoolhouse, I think, is still standing there in Calls Fort. I've been by there a few times and noticed that old schoolhouse there. I know right who lives all around it and everything. We had to go through there up to Collinston and back all the time, up to the dry farm, from Brigham City.

Melvin: Well how old were you when Dad got married?

Lester: Good gosh, I don't know; I can't remember.

LaWana: He was married at 18. Dad was only 18 when he married the first time.

Lester: I can't remember when.

------(Couldn't understand this part) job out there. Cause I remember Lou Watkins went with him out there and he said Lou didn't have too good a wagon and whenever they struck a rocky spot on the road, he says he always drove his horses on a lope across there so his wagon wouldn't have time to break down.

One story that your father told me about two fellows up in Rexburg. He says they were standing there on College Avenue just talking to each other, and pretty soon a fellow turned the corner a block west of them. And he started up that way a little ways, and then he turned around and went back and went across the road north. And the one fellow says to the other, "Did you see that fellow start up here?" He says, "Do you know why he went back?" The other one says, "Nope." He says, "He owes me." And he didn't want to come up past there, so they stood there

talking for a few minutes. Pretty soon another fellow turned and started up that same sidewalk right up towards them, and the same fellow who just said that says, "Come on, let's go." And the other fellow says, "Why, what's the matter?" And he says, "There comes one I owe."

There was a fellow in Rexburg that was looking for Owen Ricks, and he came up to a man on the street and he says, "Are you Owen Ricks?" And this fellow says, "Sure, I'm owin' Ricks and ever other damn man in Rexburg that'll take my name for anything."

This is what got me reminded of that, he says: There was a little English boy come over here from England to be here a while and his mother says, "Now if that is a free country over there, for pity sakes write back and tell us." So he was over here just a little while and he wrote back and says, "Dear Mother, This is certainly a good free country. It's so free that if you wanted to starve to death, they'd let you."

And he used to tell us, "You know it pays to get in politics," he says, "because if you steal a sack of flour, you're sure to get 90 days in jail. But if you ever get clever enough to steal a railroad system, you're sure of a seat in Congress."

We never did get the habit, you see, because just as quick as we was through we'd throw it all away right straight the day we was through. Never touch another one till the next year. One time though, I did decide I would take on smoking, and I was going up that old hill from Collinston Station up onto the hill, and I fixed me a smoke and there was a little cold breeze blowing from the east. The dashboard of the buggy was high, made out of leather and was up there high. I crawled down behind there and fixed me a smoke and I laid there pulling on that darn smoke, and I just got to thinking what my mother would think of me if she just knew what I was doing right then. And I grabbed that out of my mouth and all I had in my pocket and whanged it out in the sagebrush, and never wanted any more.

We was sleeping in a wagon box up there on my 160 acres and one of them old east winds come in and, brother, I'm telling you it was blowing. And we had hay in the wagon box so we was up almost even with the top of it. And we had a quilt over us. It was just cold enough so we could stand that quilt over us. And we'd get that and tuck it up over our heads and down over the other side on account of that wind, and the darned thing would pop just like a flag with the end that was supposed to be over our feet. Pretty soon that would be way out in the stubble in the field, and one or the other of us would get up and go get it. And I think we made fifteen trips out there, at least, that night after that lousy quilt. We were sleeping together there in that wagon box and it would blow up and away it'd go. And we'd get cold as quick as that went off, and we'd have to get up and go after that quilt.

Melvin: Well, wasn't he farming with you when he married Mother: Wasn't he working with you when he---

Lester: When he married your mother, oh yes, I'll say. That was up here in Newdale above Rexburg.

LaWana: Well, where's Moore now? That's where you were born.

Melvin: You remember Newdale. We were in Newdale the other day when we went out with Steven.

\_\_\_?\_\_\_ Rexburg. We couldn't tell who belonged where. It was so mixed up.

Lester: Yeah, it was just funny up there. Oh well, up there, of course, that was when Sadie wouldn't go with him. I remember when he went up to Yellowstone one year there, and he left Esmore in charge of the place, and he didn't do very much. And your Dad was so disgusted when he got back because he was expecting so much land to be plowed and everything. So he went out there and looked up on that hill and saw where he hadn't plowed very much or anything. He looked up there and he said, "I'll be damned if I don't believe that boy is going to be a kid till he's 50."

(NOTE: I don't know if this paragraph is referring to Esmore or who. He died in 1949.)  
The night he was buried, his wife and her brother and the undertaker, not one of the three of them could sleep. So the undertaker came down in his car and got her brother, and they each had a shovel and they went out and dug him up. They found out that his temple clothes was not on him 100% as they should be and they straightened that all up and nobody laid awake after that.

Two of his girls and one of his boys was there to Aunt Louisa's funeral in Tremonton. And when that was out, Mom and I got hold of them on the corner of the church house lot. And we was talking to them and we says, "That was some experience you had with your father, wasn't it?" And, ooh boy, they all drew a long breath and they says, "Wasn't that an experience. That's something that we'll never forget in our lives."

This is a poem that I wrote in the basement of the Motel, oh I guess, 12 or 14 years ago. And it was lost for six years, and when Mom was so sick and we went to Salt Lake, she found the pencilled copy, and so she says (this was 1964) and she says, "Every one of our children has got to have a copy of that." So I says, "You title it. It's not got any title." And so she titled it "Love Unfeigned."

We look into your faces, oh you children grand,  
And wonder why you left us, you beautiful sweet band.  
You came from heaven, that we know, because you brought a light,  
You placed it on our path by day and left it through the night.  
You made us happy all the while, we fondled you with love,  
You all remained here with us, but one who went above.

But oh the days and years went by and one by one you left,  
Then tears flowed down our furrowed cheeks we were so sore bereft.  
The laughter died, the stories stopped, the songs you used to sing  
Are only memories to us now and joys and sorrow bring.

By day and night our prayers went up, we wanted you to be  
Men and women, true to God, through all eternity,  
For though you may have faltered some, we still have faith in you,  
We know the path that we have trod has flaws upon it, too.  
Joys and sorrows come and go, it is the fate of man,  
But who in all this wide wide world could make a better plan.

You come to us at intervals and brush the clouds away;  
Once again we have you, you child of yesterday.  
So we struggle on, our dears, though at times our hearts are hollow,  
And strive to leave a path for you to struggle on and follow.

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What did you do with the day you just had?  
Did you make someone happy or make someone sad?  
God gave it to you to do just as you would,  
Did you do what was wicked or try to do good,  
Did you help someone up or just push someone down,  
Did you hand out a smile or just give 'em a frown,  
Did you help lift a load or some progress impede,  
Did you pluck up a rose or just gather a weed,  
What did you do with that beautiful day?  
God gave it to you, did you throw it away?

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You can carry a pack if it's strapped to your back,  
You can carry a weight in your hands,  
You can carry a bundle on top of your head  
As they do in other lands.

A weight is light if you carry it right  
Though it weighs just as much as a boulder,  
But a wee tiny chip is too heavy to bear  
If you carry that chip on your shoulder