

# Tressie's Story

*As told by a daughter, Effie Mariah Burgess Kone.*

My mother, Tressie Jane Heath, was born near the Weber River on the fifth day of February in 1852, the fourth child of James Harvey Heath and Huldah Mariah Holden Heath.

Her father was an early convert to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from Hinds County, Mississippi. He joined the saints at Kirtland and passed through all the trials of the saints from then on. After joining the saints at Nauvoo, he lost his wife and three children to the terrible plague. Shortly after this he was sent to Louisiana and Tennessee on two missions for the church. In Tennessee he converted a family by the name of Holden to the church and later he married their daughter, Mariah, who is my grandmother. The Holden family owned plantations and many slaves, but when they heard the gospel nothing was as important as joining the saints. Consequently they left everything they owned. My grandfather and grandmother were married when he was thirty-two and she was twenty-two.

Grandfather was a very industrious person and could never stand to see people idle their time away and my mother inherited the same trait from him. All her life she was a busy person and nothing upset her more than to see people wasting precious time. Although my grandfather had no medical training he was very good with the sick and was in demand wherever he went.

When he arrived in Salt Lake City in 1848, he was

sent to Farmington. They had just about gotten settled after the long trip when they were sent up to Fort Jugars to spend the winter. In the spring the call came for them to settle on the Weber. They remained there for quite a while. They had a good farm and a good home. It was there my mother was born.

When she was about three years old she had a sister a little older than her die. She missed her very much because they had played together so much. One day she took her little pail and went to the creek for some fresh water. On the way back she was amazed to see her sister playing at the end of the house. She couldn't believe her eyes because she had been told she had gone to heaven and could never come back again. It frightened her so much she ran to her mother in tears. Her mother had a hard time convincing her it was her spirit she had seen for an instant. For years it remained in her mind and she shunned that end of the house.

By the time mother was nine years old her parents felt quite secure in their home, but in those days the most upsetting things could change their lives over night. In this instance it was for them to pack up with many other families and go to Dixie. The Heath family lamented that move, but their faith in God and his leaders was not to be taken lightly. So they left a very nice farm and headed for Salt Lake City where they were to remain for some time. In Salt Lake grandfather wasn't idle. He bought some land and built a house, but he was sent up to Kay's Creek to farm. Then the call came to move on to Dixie, so he sold his place to a Mr. Bybee on a time payment note. He didn't realize any cash for all he had put out on it. Two years later Mr. Bybee sold the place to the railroad for \$2000, but he forgot to pay grandfather.

They had a terrible time getting down to Dixie. The

roads were bad and the Indians stole all their horses. They managed to get back some of them, but it did delay their trip. They settled in Washington, six miles east of St. George. As soon as they were settled they started gleaning a cotton field at night so the whole family went to work. Grandmother spun the cotton into cloth then dyed it with grease wood and dock root. It made enough clothing for the family for the winter.

When my mother was about sixteen she delivered her first baby. She was passing a neighbor's house one day when the neighbor came to the door and motioned mother to come in. This sister was about ready to be confined and had no help. Neighbor's homes were far apart. Mother was frightened to say the least, but she did just as the sister told her to do. All went well and it was quite an experience for one so young. That was the first of several hundred she later delivered.

Mother was hired about this time by Mrs. Whitmore who had a very sick child. She went to help nurse the little girl. Mrs. Whitmore was a widow; her husband having been slain not long before by the Indians. The first night there, after she had taken her turn sitting up with the sick child, she went to bed and had a very vivid dream. She dreamed Mr. Whitmore came to her and told her everything was now in readiness for little Mary and the next afternoon he would be there for her. The next morning when she got up she was greatly troubled because she couldn't make up her mind whether to tell Mrs. Whitmore about the dream or not. But she did ask her about her husband and if he had the first two fingers off the right hand. She was told that he did and mother had noticed this in the dream, but she told Mrs. Whitmore that she had heard that he had. Along in the afternoon they were both sitting by the bed when all at once Mary sat up in bed, and, looking up

toward the end of the room, cried, "Papa, papa," and laid down and died. Mother began to think real seriously about these things and decided that God moves in mysterious ways, His wonders to perform. From then on she decided she would put her trust in the Lord.

Not long after this she went to work in the cotton mill in Washington. One night at a dance she met my father and in their conversation he told her he worked for a Mr. Ely over in Nevada who had lots of horses and cattle. He told her that one day he was out after some strays and ran onto an outcropping that looked like it might be some kind of ore, so he broke a piece off and took it to Mr. Ely. Mr. Ely was real interested and told him if he would show him where he found it he would give him a horse and saddle. Boys were no different then than they are now and that sounded like a real bargain. Of course we all know what it turned out to be, but to a young lad of eighteen a horse right then looked better to him than a fortune in the future.

Mother didn't see much of father for quite some time. He was called with some other young men to go to the Colorado as an Indian guard under Jacob Hamblin. But when he was nineteen and mother was seventeen they were married on June twentieth in 1869. They then moved to Pine Valley where the Burgess family ran a saw mill. They helped get out the timbers that made the tubes for the big tabernacle organ. Six of their children were born in Pine Valley. Two of their children, twin girls, lived only five weeks.

On June 12, 1875, a short time after the death of the twins, Tressie Jane Heath Burgess received her patriarchal blessing under the hands of John L. Smith as follows:

Sister Tressie Burgess, in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, I place my hands upon your head and seal

upon thee a patriarchal blessing. Thou art of Joseph and entitled to all the blessings promised to the daughters of Ephraim. Thy sons and daughters shall be among the mighty and fair ones of Zion, and to their increase no end. Thy table shall be well supplied. And with thee and thine there shall be no lack of priesthood, which forth cometh to thy sex, which will give thee powers to preserve the lives of thy children and drive the destroyer from thy habitation. Thou shalt be crowned a queen and reign in company with thy companion over thy posterity for ever. All the former gifts and blessings will be yours. I renew upon thee every desire of thy heart in righteousness. A wise counselor among thy sex, and many will seek thee for consolation. Thy labors for thy self and friends shall be honorable and thy reward shall be glorious. Thou wilt see the temple completed and officiate therein, see the Saviour stand upon Mount Zion and converse with Him face to face and enjoy all the honors pertaining to the glory of Zion, if thou art faithful to the end. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

On one of father's trips to St. George with a load of lumber he had quite an experience. Before ascending the hilly ground to go on to St. George he got mired in the mud. He was driving oxen and regardless how much he swore at them they wouldn't move for a while. Finally they began to move and by a lot more swearing and lashing made the top of the hill. In driving oxen the driver always walks. After resting the oxen a while on top of the hill he moved on, and as he went to flick one of the oxen with his prod he noticed a well dressed stranger with gray hair and beard walking alongside of him. Father looked around to see where his team or horse was, but nothing was anywhere in sight. About this time the stranger spoke up saying, "Well young

man, I see you had quite a lot of trouble getting out of the mud down there, your language wasn't very nice and you also had a lot of help." "Who helped me?" "Why the devil and all his imps." Then he proceeded to give father a real good lecture on his bad ways. He told him he had better mend them and take his family to the temple and have them sealed to him because there was a good work waiting for him to do. My father was real interested in all this and felt the man spoke with authority. He flicked one of the oxen, then turned back to ask a question, but to his surprise no one was in sight. He looked in all directions -- even climbing up on the load of lumber, but could see nothing but big empty country. Then he really began to wonder. Who could it have been to think him important enough to call on him out in the wilds?

After unloading his lumber in St. George he hurried back to Pine Valley as fast as he could to his father's place where he related to him what had taken place. "You better do exactly as your friend said, for without a doubt you have been visited by one of the Nephite prophets," said his father. From then on father changed his way and soon took his family to the temple.

Mother worked in the church in many capacities. She taught Sunday School for forty years. One time the Sunday Day School was putting on a play and my older sister Frona was to be in it. A few days before the play my sister's eyes suddenly lost their sight and she was heart-broken because she couldn't be in the play. When trouble came mother always took it to the Lord, whom she knew could help them. An answer came to her plain as some one next to her speaking, "Put one drop of blue vitrol in each eye." Mother could hardly believe what she had heard because she knew how severe an acid can be, but she felt prompted to do as she was

told. It really did the job. Frona's eyes were fine until she became an old lady.

Mother cared for the sick constantly, and whenever she went into a home to deliver a baby she turned to the Lord in prayer. She delivered many babies until she was about eighty.

My mother and a younger sister married brothers. One time when the men had gone away to work for the winter, they and the children were looking eagerly for the men to return in the spring. They managed to get through the winter, taking care of a number of children and the stock as well. One afternoon mother heard them coming plain as anything and pictured in her mind a big pile of flour in one of the wagons as they drove into the yard. But then she heard no more. Aunt Mary saw and heard the same thing that mother did. She couldn't make it out and was sure it was a warning that something bad had happened. The next day at exactly the same time they really did drive in and had a pile of flour in one of the wagons. They had had a breakdown or would have arrived as they had seen them.

My parents had quite a family by now and they decided to move over to Emery County. They ran a saw mill up in Huntington Canyon. One day my oldest brother Will was out in the mill watching the saw cut into the logs. I guess he must have gotten dizzy. Anyway, he fell into the saw and it took three fingers almost off of his left hand. Mother stopped the bleeding. She bandaged his fingers up in turpentine and then bound splints to each finger. Outside of his fingers being a little crooked they were all right. They stayed in Emery County for about two years. Then they bought a ten acre plot of ground in Price. Here they stayed for a long time and it was here that I was born. My father farmed and freighted. Mother went on

with her nursing under a very good Dr. Fisk. She learned a lot of useful things from him. If he was too busy to go look after a maternity case he always sent mother.

I have seen my mother spinning yarn many times. She also carded both wool and cotton for her quilts. I was always crazy about music and singing and my brother bought a new organ for us. I was so pleased I soon learned to play it.

Mother had a dream in which she saw a terrible explosion in one of the coal mines in Winter Quarters. It worried her so much because her dreams had a way of coming true. Two of my brothers were working there with several other relatives. She wrote a letter to my brothers, but they just thought it was another dream. Just one week from the time she had the dream they did have a big explosion and many men were killed.

One time we were going with father on one of his trips to Vernal and camped in Nine Mile Canyon. A man we had known for a long time came in the night to get mother to deliver a baby for one of his neighbors. I'll never forget how horrible I felt about it and I really put up a loud howl. I just knew they would have an accident of some kind and mother would be hurt or killed. But she returned by morning safe and sound.

Not long after this my father found a new frontier to conquer. He sold our place in Price and moved out to the Uintah Basin. He figured he still had a few years to farm. Here mother continued with her nursing. She went out in all sorts of weather and took her pay in anything anyone had to offer -- it was very little money.

I wonder some times how we lived. Work was very scarce. The first year there we got all the laundry from the White Rock Agency so every day was wash and ironing day. We were so busy it really kept us from

getting lonesome for our old home in Price. There were four of us girls and mother. Dad was kept busy hauling and cutting wood to get the wash water hot and the irons. But we were making enough to eat on and that was really something to be grateful for. We were all married here. Two of my sisters were or had been married and each had a little boy, but they were divorced so they were soon married again.

Several years later my parents sold out and moved to Salt Lake so dad could work in the temple which he did until his death when he was eighty-two.

Soon after this mother was visiting my oldest brother in Price when she fell and broke her leg. They sent her back here to the hospital. She was in the hospital for three months but her leg didn't seem to heal. The next ten years she was on crutches or in a wheelchair. But this did not stop her from working. She pieced quilt after quilt and knit yards of lace and other useful things. She had a radio and kept up with all the programs as well as kept up to date on all the news.

After my sister Della died she lived with my older sister Frona. Every day she would get the hymn book out and sing the songs of Zion. She had a fine voice and it was still good even though she was ninety-two. She lived a full, busy life and was a very good mother. She used to say that she would ask for nothing greater in this life than to know that each one of her children loved the Lord and would keep His commandments. She taught the gospel in the home by word and action. Shortly after her ninety-second birthday she had a bad fall. The shock was too much for her and she passed away quietly in her sleep leaving behind a big posterity. At her funeral service, her granddaughter, Vera Hales Quilter, read this poem written by a friend.

# Tressie Jane Burgess and Her Book Of Life

## **PREFACE**

Let's open "it" together,  
Her large and beautiful book,  
For a fond reminiscing,  
And a reviewing look.

Of a choice binding  
With the perfect paper used,  
And ink that's everlasting  
In a writing not confused.

## **PART 1 Chapters 1 to 23**

Part one, was penned long ago,  
By a tiny, guided hand,  
The way a beginner writes,  
But not hard to understand.

Happy, carefree scrawlings,  
Symbols of Springtime and smiles,  
Cheerfulness and laughter,  
That smooths the Traveler's miles.

Through Chapters, Twenty-Three,  
She lived and loved, and sang,  
Dreamed, danced, built castles,  
And sweetly her voice rang.

**PART 2    Chapters 24 to 46**

Short is the stretch of Springtime;  
Warm Summer is in the air,  
The once, chubby, little hand  
Is now, quite slender and fair.

Her writing too, has changed,  
The words are close and true,  
There's courage between the lines,  
And a purpose in view.

Romance in bud has blossomed,  
New interests bank her way,  
The service she gives broadens,  
And shines from day to day.

Hope seems to touch her pages,  
Filling the margins wide,  
And faith scrolls a rosy line  
That her pen cannot hide.

**PART 3    Chapters 47 to 69**

And summer passes quickly,  
How large her book has grown;  
How bright the illustrations,  
And examples she has shown,

Making the best of trials,  
Hardships, sorrows, and losses,  
Bearing uncomplainingly  
The weight of all her crosses.

Deaths, and disappointments,  
Weary and long-lone hours,  
Sicknesses, and heartaches,  
And chilling autumn showers.

How much of inspiration  
From her book is to be had,  
Packed with the best of living,  
There's little space for bad.

#### **PART 4    Chapters 70 to 92**

The winter snows are falling,  
Her writing is light, indeed,  
But done so painstakingly,  
That it's still a joy to read.

This is her book's last chapter,  
A chapter very certain,  
So harmoniously bright  
'Tis like a silv'ry curtain

That opens wide the twilight,  
And closes a busy day,  
Shutting out wind and snowflakes,  
For the bright, blossoming way.

A **MASTERPIECE** is finished  
In shining black and white,  
Signed by a noble mother,  
Under God's eternal light.

Zelda Davis Howard