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The Girl from the Brick House

Loa's childhood was dreamlike. She grew up on a beautiful Idaho farm with parents who were deeply in love. Her father and older brothers worked hard on the farm and the family became well-off. Life was ideal for this young schoolgirl, but sorrow entered the family when a number of siblings—both young and old—died. Throughout these hardships, though, Loa remained bright and positive about her childhood and her life.

Loa's Parents: Phoebe Emerett Bates and Judson Isaac Tolman

"Good morning, children," said Judson's school teacher from the front of the classroom.

"Good morning, Teacher," replied the students.

"Time for roll call," the teacher announced.

"Alice Augustus?"

"Present," said William.

"William Augustus?"

"Present," said Alice.

From the back of the Tooele schoolroom in about 1878, Judson could recognize nearly all of the children from the entire valley. Judson's parents, Cyrus Tolman and Alice Bracken, had settled the Tooele Valley in Utah at the instruction of Brigham Young nearly 25 years ago. Many families had moved there since then, but all the children could still pack into



*Alice Bracken and Cyrus Tolman
J.I.'s parents. Aug. 9, 1901*

one classroom. And even with them all together like this, little Judson thought he knew them all.

“Emerett Bates?” continued the teacher.

A new girl jumped to her feet and corrected, “My name is not Emerett Bates; it is Phoebe Emerett Bates!”

Little Judson immediately looked up at this spirited little girl. All the other students looked up, too. This Phoebe Emerett Bates was brand new to the valley and everyone very quickly learned her full name.

Judson later wrote about that moment: “All eyes were upon her and I suppose mine never turned away.”¹



*Luvana Abigail Adams and Arlin Henry Bates, Sr.
Emerett's parents*

Very soon thereafter, Judson's family left the Tooele Valley for Oakley, Idaho, leaving little Phoebe Emerett Bates and her free spirit behind. Much to Judson's joy, however, his family was serendipitously followed by the Bates family, resettling from Tooele to Oakley just as they had done. Here the two children

became reacquainted. They discovered they had the same birthday, though Judson was three years older. Phoebe Emerett Bates let Judson call her “Emerett”, and Judson let her call him “J.I.”

They began courting when Emerett was 13 and J.I. was 16. They were allowed to attend dances with their parents accompanying them. They were always welcome in each other's homes. Emerett said that “no gathering was just right for me unless he was there.”² After five years of courtship, they decided they were old enough to be married.

To prepare for their life together, Emerett made a trousseau of sheets, quilts, rags, and rugs. J.I. built a house in nearby Marion, ID of pine logs which he cut himself—so straight that they seemed to have been sawed with a machine at a mill.³ Finally, when J.I. was 20 and Emerett was 17 they took a long trip in a wagon to Logan, Utah and were sealed in the Logan Temple on October 15, 1890. On their way home, they made a couple quick stops in Ogden to pose for a photograph and to purchase some home furnishings for their new life together. Emerett wrote, “These were loaded

into our wagon and we were soon on our way home, the proudest two in all the world.”⁴



*Judson Isaac Tolman and Phoebe Emerett Bates
Shortly after wedding. Taken in Ogden, UT, Oct. 1890*

For the next few months, J.I. worked on a goat farm for a dollar a day.⁵ In the next three years they had two healthy boys, Ivan (born 30 Sept 1891) and Royal Clifford (born 3 Nov 1893).

In the spring of 1895, the 25-year-old farmer and father accepted a mission call to the Southern States Mission for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. J.I. had two months to prepare for his departure. He sold and traded animals and other farm items to get enough flour and supplies for his family to survive during his absence. He chopped, hauled, and stacked against the house enough cedar wood to last his family the entire three years he would be gone.⁶ Then J.I. left Ivan, Clifford, and Emerett, who was expecting a third child. Gratefully, Emerett's younger sisters were close by and assisted immensely with her household duties and with the children. The Bates sisters often sang to the children beneath the bedroom window while playing their mandolins and guitars.⁷



Clifford, Emerett, and Ivan ca. 1894



*The Bates Sisters who serenaded the Tolman children
Top: Angeline, Vilate, Bottom: Ida, Luella*

During one particularly ferocious storm at night, Emerett gave birth to Alta (27 Aug 1895). During that winter, Emerett slept with Ivan at her feet, and her babies on either side. At midnight, she awoke to rebuild a strong fire to keep them warm.⁸ Spring finally came and they planted a garden and sold eggs and butter to survive.



J.I. shortly after his mission, 1898

After 37 months, Judson returned home to three much older children who had grown “hard as nails” as they survived his absence. Judson took up tending sheep with his brother Ammon. It began slowly and their losses were great, but after a few years they got ahead and became quite successful. This business led J.I. and his family on many long journeys through the valleys and the mountains with the grazing sheep. The older children were out camping with the sheep so often, that they received very little formal schooling. They ate mostly fish and wild chickens on their journeys.⁹

During this time two more sons were born to Emerett and Judson, but both lived only a few months (Erroll 4 Jan 1899, and Judson 4 Aug 1903). Emerett beautifully said about one of them, “He was only loaned to us for nine months, and then was taken sick and one evening closed his lovely eyes in sleep only to be awakened when the trump of God shall come forth.”¹⁰

Loa's Birth and a New Home in Murtaugh

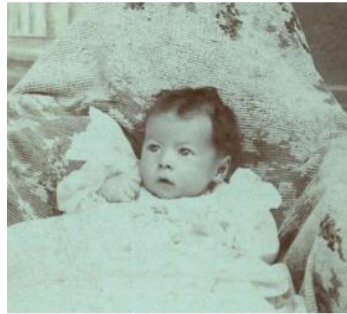
It was into this tightly forged family that Loa Jennie Tolman was born on February 27, 1906 in the snow-covered, wooden cabin which J.I. had hewn from the trees surrounding their farm. Emerett remembered later that after their years of grieving, the Lord



Log cabin in Marion, Idaho that J.I. built. Loa was born here.

blessed the Tolman family with “a beautiful, darling, dark-haired, brown-eyed baby who blessed their home, and made them very happy.”¹¹ After losing two sons before Loa’s birth, Emerett and J.I. were glad to see that their new baby was a *girl* and that perhaps their luck had changed. Perhaps they would be able to raise her to adulthood.¹²

In the early spring of 1906 when Loa was just six weeks old, the family moved from Marion 150 miles northwest across Idaho to Murtaugh, along the newly constructed Twin Falls canal. Earlier that year, Loa’s father, J.I. had passed through the area and watched scores of horse-teams and straining men building the incredible canal system. When he saw the first stream of water pass through it, he “decided then and there to get [himself] a piece of land.” He searched diligently for a plot with the best soil, as he wanted to have a large farm.¹³



Baby Loa, 1906

Judson described the move as follows: “Knowing that it would take some time to build the home I wanted, I set to work, dug a cellar, rocked it up on the sides, put a good roof on it, a carpet on the floor and prepared to move. I had already bought a 12’ x 20’ tent which I set up next to the cellar and we had a temporary home.”¹⁴ The family lived in this cellar and tent combination for the few months it took for the walls and roof of the home to be completed. Once they were complete, the family moved into the living room of the house. That night, a terrible storm destroyed many things outside including the tent they had left that very day! Emerett said of the timing: “It was nothing more or less than a miracle that we were all safe inside a good strong home”¹⁵

Judson paid a man named Axel Erickson \$3,000 to build their home, and after a little while longer, it was complete. It stood two stories high with nine rooms: four bedrooms on top, and on the main floor were a kitchen with a pantry, a living room and parlor, and a screened-in porch.¹⁶ The Tolmans were very proud of their new home; it was a large and beautiful contrast to their cabin in Marion. (Although slightly remodeled over the years, this brick home in Murtaugh still stands today.)

Loa grew up in this proud and loving atmosphere. As the first brick house constructed on the Twin Falls tract, it would become home to wonderful childhood memories, parties, and church gatherings.

In addition to caring for so many children, Emerett was a wonderful and tidy homemaker. J.I. was confident that he could bring anyone home and the guest would find the house clean and orderly.¹⁷ The house had two guest rooms upstairs in which a visiting bishop or a stake president, or even a traveling salesman could stay. In building these guest rooms, J.I. may have remembered the kind people who took him in while he was serving his mission without purse or script.



Loa, 1907

In August 1906, a few months after they moved into their new home, Loa's father went by train to Chicago to sell several train cars of sheep. While there, he went to the Kimball Organ factory and bought an organ to be sent home to his family. Emerett commented that "it was grand



*A Kimball Organ,
similar to the one the Tolmans had.*

to have in our home. I was thankful to be able to play it and help others to sing and play." Emerett inspired her daughters to develop their musical talents, which they used to entertain and to bless many people.¹⁸

Before bed each night, Emerett read Bible stories or other stories to the children in their formal parlor. Afterwards, the children had to trek up the stairs to their rooms through the scary, darkened hallways. Loa's little brother, Bion, later recalled, "We had no lights because there was no electricity in the area at that time and my parents wouldn't trust us children to carry a kerosene lamp which was our source of light. So we'd leave the door at the bottom of the stairs open, so as much light as possible could shine up the stairway. That would get us about two-thirds of the way up and then we had to go the rest of the way in the dark and feel our way down the hall clear to the east end of the house where we went to sleep."¹⁹ Loa remembers

having bad dreams and going down the stairs in the dark to her parents' room. She'd crawl into their bed and her mother would scoot over to make room and rub Loa's back.²⁰

Outside the Tolman's Murtaugh home there was room-a-plenty for curious little girls like Loa to explore. Behind the house was a cistern—a huge plaster-lined hole in the ground that held several thousand gallons of water for use in their home. Near the cistern was the meat house where pig meat hung, and underneath they stored vegetables after the harvest. Behind that was the icehouse where the Tolmans stored ice that they cut from the frozen lake in the winter. Sometimes they used the ice for making ice cream. Beyond these buildings were apple orchards and fields of hay and grain.²¹



Loa (4) and Bion (3), Christmas 1910

In addition to farming on their new land, Loa's father continued with the sheep business which kept him away from home much of the time.



*The brick house in Murtaugh where Loa spent her early childhood.
Loa (left), Bion (right). ca. 1914*

He was gone mostly during the summers as the sheep grazed in the mountains that time of year, and were sheared at a shearing corral up there.²² Loa and her family often accompanied her father, following the 12,000 head of sheep from winter grazing pastures to summer pastures and back again. On their shepherding sojourns, they lived in the sheep wagon which afforded none of the comforts of life. If supplies were lacking, Loa's father stayed with the sheep while her mother and the children traveled with the horses and wagon over a



Loa and Bion, ca. 1912

hundred miles on desert trails to home and back for supplies. To mark their path for return, Loa and her siblings stacked piles of sagebrush along the route.²³

During one summer in the mountains, Loa and Bion found two chipmunks and brought them home to Murtaugh as pets. J.I. made a part-wood, part-screen cage for them which sat on the screened porch. When the weather became cold, the chipmunks became very sleepy. The kids put sheep's wool in the cage and put the cage in the cellar where it was dark so the chipmunks could hibernate. Occasionally the kids brought the cage upstairs to warm the chipmunks by the fire. When the cats tried to catch the chipmunks, Loa and Bion chased them away with brooms, screaming and banging.²⁴ Loa kept the furry little pets for years.

The Early Church in Murtaugh

As the first LDS family to settle in Murtaugh in 1906, the Tolmans soon discovered that the citizens and the government of Idaho were extremely hostile towards members of the Church. For the twenty years

leading up to 1908, J.I. and other Latter-day Saints in Idaho were denied the right to vote, as an anti-Mormon provision was written into the state constitution. For the Tolmans, their faith made them an island within the community around them.

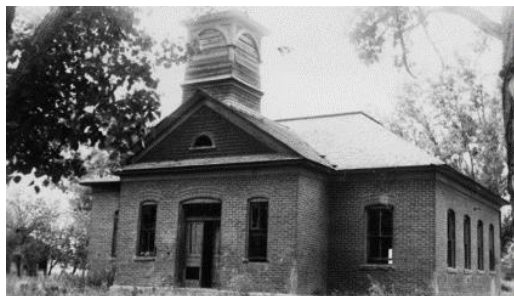
In the years that followed, LDS membership in the area grew and Sacrament Service was held at the Tolman's large brick home.²⁵ Loa's family hosted "cottage meetings" where everyone enjoyed bearing their testimonies. After a wonderful session, the members often lingered for a while to enjoy a pan of fine, red Jonathan apples.²⁶

From the years 1911-1914, the Church members in Murtaugh attended Union Sunday School—a class at a nearby school house taught by a non-LDS teacher and attended by people of all denominations. While the children all got along very well, the adults fought like cats and dogs over lesson discussions.²⁷ J.I. "usually took the lead because of his natural and great ability and understanding of both the Gospel and the beliefs of the members of other faiths."²⁸

Near the head-gate of the Tolman's irrigation ditch, there was a wide and deep area called the lateral, which was a pool large enough for people to swim in. The Murtaugh members used this area for baptisms. Once a year in July, everyone gathered for a large celebration during which all the children who had turned eight that year would be baptized. After the ordinances were performed, the families all stayed to play games and have foot races on the lawn. They ended the celebration with cake and ice cream.²⁹ Loa was baptized in the lateral by her father on July 5, 1914.³⁰ She was thereafter confirmed by her brother Ivan.³¹

Elementary School Days

In 1912, when she was six years old, Loa began attending Murtaugh Elementary School, which had only two rooms—one for the upper grades and one for the lower grades. Loa had looked forward to starting school for a long time, and she loved it. The Tolmans lived outside of town and three miles south



Murtaugh School – Loa attended 1st and 2nd grades here

of the school. When Loa and her younger brother Bion weren't lucky enough to get a ride in the family's one-horse buggy, they walked to school. Their buggy horse was named "Old Frisky", because if they weren't careful while hitching him up, he'd reach around and bite them on the arm. When J.I. thought Loa and Bion were old enough and smart enough, he let them ride to school by themselves on a good, reliable cow-herding horse named "Old Balley".³²

Perhaps from the miles and miles of walking together to and from school, Loa and Bion became great buddies. Since there was a ten-year gap between Loa and her older sister (the two brothers before Loa had died in infancy of pneumonia), but less than a two year gap between Loa and Bion, they became a pair who did everything together. In the upstairs of the brick house, Loa cut up the old Sears catalogue to make paper dolls while Bion made doll furniture with little blocks of wood.³³ They also cut out pictures of men and women, and used a flour paste to put the pictures all over the inside of the outhouse.³⁴ During the winter Loa and her younger brother went ice skating and sleigh riding.³⁵



Loa and her cousin Amy, ca. 1917

Loa wrote of her younger brother, "The day finally came when I couldn't hold him at arms-length and he would strike out and hit or scratch. Father told him he'd get a whipping if I had any more scratches on my face. Realizing that I still had scratches in spite of the whippings, father finally, finally said that he'd whip us both if I had any more scratches. I began to think twice before I teased Bion to make him mad."³⁶

One day, Bion went missing. No one knew where he was. Loa and her siblings called for him and searched all over the property with no luck. J.I. and Emerett were worried that perhaps he had drowned in the lateral (a

stream from the canal), so they dragged the lateral with the rake to search for his body. As they were doing this, Loa searched in the gooseberry and currant bushes by the fence at the end of their house lot. As she walked up the rows, she saw Bion's little foot sticking out from a bush. He had curled up in a little nest and was sound asleep, completely unaware of the excitement and worry he had caused.³⁷ Loa hollered for her parents, and Emerett came, crying her eyes out. The family had given him up for dead, and were greatly relieved to have him back.³⁸

One of Loa and Bion's favorite games was riding the pigs: "One of us would straddle the pig and the other would switch the pig with a willow- until it took off like lightening and the rider soon fell off."³⁹ "It's a wonder we didn't break an arm or a leg. Father found out about it and made us quit."⁴⁰ She and Bion also liked riding an old sow that roamed free on their land. They'd find her lying down, they'd get on her back, and they'd poke her back until she stood up and ran. One day, their father commented, "You know there is something wrong with the sow. She's getting sores on her back near her rear end." Because Loa and Bion were responsible for the sores, they quickly ducked their heads; they knew their father would be cross if he found out about the sow racing. They never did it again.⁴¹



Loa (top row, 2nd from right) in 6th grade in Murtaugh, 1917

J.I. and Emerett worked hard to discipline their children and keep them out of mischief. Loa vividly remembered a time she learned to always listen to her father. She and Bion found a deck of cards in the orchards that the Mexican farmers had left. J.I. told them to get rid of the cards, but Loa and Bion hid them. Soon afterwards, Emerett saw them with the cards and said, "Come here and put those cards in the stove." Loa and Bion protested. Their mother replied, "If Father knew you still had those cards and that I had let you keep them, he would be very cross with me as well as with you."⁴²

The Tolmans had wonderful Christmas traditions. J.I. brought home a cedar tree that he had cut in the mountains. The children all made strings of popcorn and cranberries to hang on the branches with tinsel and special ornaments. On Christmas Eve, J.I. clipped candles to the branches and lit them for a while as the house filled with wonderful aromas. Santa always brought J.I. a new harmonica, on which he played traditional tunes and Christmas songs as the children clapped and sang along. Emerett always made plum pudding and mincemeat pies which the children loved to see all warm and lined up on the pantry shelf. When her sage-dressing-stuffed turkey came out of the oven juicy and golden, everyone gathered around the table for dinner. Afterwards, they headed off to Aunt Minnie Prickett's home on the bobsled, enjoying the crisp air and the sound of the sleigh bells on the horses' harnesses.⁴³

The Kindness of Ivan

Loa always had a soft spot in her heart for her oldest brother, Ivan. She said, "As I grew up Ivan was a great favorite of mine. He was so quiet and patient and loving."⁴⁴ He got married when Loa was two years old and had two children soon thereafter, but he still lived in the Tolman's brick house and worked on the farm with J.I.

Even though he had a family of his own, Ivan still cared for his little sister. Loa recounted: "When [Ivan] and my brother Clifford would be going out into the farm to work, sometimes I'd want to go with them and Clifford would say 'Oh you can't go' and Ivan would say 'Come on, I'll take care of you.' So I went along with them one day and we came to a ditch, a lateral, because it went through our property and furnished water for our crops. Clifford put his shovel down in the water and lifted himself across the ditch. Then Ivan did the same thing and I was left on the other side and

I said, ‘Help me I can’t cross now.’ Clifford said, ‘Oh go on back home, we can’t be bothered with you.’ And Ivan said, ‘I’ll help you’ and so he heaved himself back over the ditch and had me sit on his shoulders and over we went. I went on walking with them. I’ll never forget how he helped me when I wanted help so badly.

“I used to go with him when he went fishing in the canal and he’d always say ‘Be quiet. You mustn’t make any noise. You’ll scare the fish away.’ And so I wouldn’t talk. If I had to say something to him I’d say it in a whisper. And we got along beautifully. Then sometimes he’d go hunting jack rabbits and he’d take me with him. I never did use the gun, but I watched a lot of jack rabbits hit the dirt.”⁴⁵

Ivan was then called on a mission to Germany at a time when the nation spun into war frenzy. He was occasionally “banished” from Germany but he only pretended to leave; he always returned later in different clothing and a mustache to fool the guards. When World War I broke out in 1914, the Church called all missionaries out of Europe. Ivan came to America and joined his younger brother, Clifford, on his mission in the Northern States.⁴⁶



Ivan while on his mission in Germany before World War I broke out in 1914

Loa was in third grade when he returned home and she was so happy to have him back. One day he said, “I surely wish there were some Germans here so I could talk German with them. I get so lonesome to speak German to someone. I’ll teach you how to count in German. Do you want to count in German?” Loa eagerly learned and she always remembered how to count from *eins* to *zwölf*.⁴⁷

Loa’s Younger Siblings

On July 20th, 1910, a baby girl named Roma was born at their home in Murtaugh, but she wasn’t very healthy. She had a telescoped bowel and became dehydrated very easily.⁴⁸ This illness remained with her

throughout her life, which was sadly cut short when she was only eleven.

Inez was born next, early in the morning on March 1, 1913. Loa described it well: “Dad got up and started a fire in the living room. Soon Mother came out with a hard pain and Inez was born, caught by father as she dropped.”⁴⁹

In the following years, Emerett gave birth to two stillborn babies. Loa remembers clearly one of the baby’s births: “I was in the pantry of our kitchen and could see the doctor in our dining room working with the newborn baby trying to get it to breathe. I could see him holding it by its feet and spanking it, trying to get it to cry or catch its breath. All these things horrified me for I remember how carefully mother handled the new-babies. When I was told that the baby was dead, there was no doubt in my mind but that the doctor had killed the baby[...] It wasn't until I was quite well-grown and understood more about birth and its hazards that I realized the true situation that morning.”⁵⁰

J.I. and Emerett were very scared and cautious before the birth of their next child. A week before the baby was born, J.I. took Emerett to her sister’s house in Burley so they could be closer to a hospital in case the baby needed advanced medical care. On June 21st, 1917, a healthy baby girl was born without complications. J.I. and Emerett named their daughter June Pearl. Loa, who was eleven years old when June was born, described her sister as “a bright, happy baby, the joy of my life. I was old enough to care for her a lot and I remember that I enjoyed it very much. I learned quite a bit about the psychology of raising children from my mother at that time.”⁵¹



Loa in Murtaugh

The Tolman family into which June was born contrasted greatly to the family that Loa was born into. When Loa was born, her three older siblings—Ivan, Clifford, and Alta—were young teenagers at home. But June was born when Ivan was 25 with a wife and three children, Clifford was 23 with a wife and a baby, and Alta was 21 with a husband and two children. While these older siblings lived nearby, they had families of their

own to care for. However, June did have four older siblings still at home: Loa was 11, Bion 9, Roma 6, and Inez 4.

A New Building for the Mormons

Around 1915, Loa's father donated a plot of land on which to build a new LDS chapel, and he also contributed much of the money for the building. For almost ten years, the Mormons had been meeting at the Tolman's home for Sacrament Services and at the school house with other denominations for Sunday school. The building chairman of the new chapel said, "Let's build a Church so when a stranger passes by and asks, 'What Church is that?' we can proudly reply, 'Why that is the Mormon Church, by gad.'" The members were so happy to sit in this peaceful, lovely church after long hours of labor and enjoy the Spirit of the Lord, knowing that the building was all theirs.⁵²

Loa's father, J.I., was the Branch President during this time. Loa's oldest sister, Alta, always played the organ and her mother, Emerett, led the singing.⁵³ The Tolmans were a pillar of spiritual strength in the fledgling branch, and their children often heard J.I. and Emerett testify of their faith and conviction in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Once a week for Sunday School, the members transformed their large, open building into a series of classrooms. The main assembly room was divided down the middle with curtains to make four rooms, and the stage was divided into two rooms, and the basement into four rooms. Bion later recalled, "As I look back on this, it is a wonder to me how we learned anything because you could hear lessons being given by two or three other teachers as well as your own."⁵⁴

One Sunday, the Primary teacher asked if anyone had a song to sing. June promptly started singing a song that Loa had learned from the kids in town and had taught to her, "Johnny fell down the bucket, The bucket fell down the well, His wife cut the bucket, And Johnny went down to h**l". This colorful song easily carried through the dividing curtains and into her parent's blushing ears.⁵⁵

Each week, the one glass mug of Sacrament water was passed up and down each row, so as many as 100 people took a sip from the same mug each Sunday.⁵⁶ Loa did not like this, and made sure not to sit next to any mustached man who would drink from the cup before she did.⁵⁷

About their activity in the Church, Emerett commented that “The Lord was very kind to us and blessed us with plenty and some to spare. We found great joy in serving Him, in paying our tithing and helping those in need. Things went nicely for us, and we spent many happy evenings with the young people and our friends at the organ.”⁵⁸