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A Tolman Goes to College

When Loa was 11 years old, her family life began to drastically change. With her father seeking adventure after retiring from the Murtaugh farm and with her sister, Roma's, health failing, Loa found herself attending a new school almost every year for years. After graduating high school, Loa did something that no other Tolman had done before—sought after further education. She had loved her years as a young student in school and she wanted to become a teacher.

Long Beach, California

As a step towards retirement and as an attempt escape the snowy winters, Loa's father and the family temporarily left Murtaugh for southern California in the fall of 1917. J.I. packed his five youngest kids into their seven-passenger Cadillac. June was 4 months old, Inez 4 years, Roma 7 years, Bion almost 10 and Loa was 11 years old. The "highway" across Nevada was just two ruts in the road, and they could only travel about 30 miles an hour on account of the deep dust.¹ Needless to say, it took them a long time to get there. They drove throughout each day and camped out each night.

When they finally got to Los Angeles, they spent three weeks looking for a place for a big family to live. Loa recounted, "When the Landlords saw the car full of children, Father always got the same answer, 'We don't rent to anyone with children.' I was very sensitive and thought mother and father would be sorry that they had us. Finally someone suggested that we should go to Long Beach. We soon found a nice duplex on Ocean Blvd."²

It turned out that this was the greatest place to live for the Tolman children that school year. They only had to cross the street and walk about a half block south to reach The Pike, a famous boardwalk amusement park that featured a huge roller coaster, a fancy carousel, a house of mirrors, and a hundred other stands with games to play, such as ring tosses, shooting galleries, weight guesses, fortune telling, nickelodeon viewers, and strength testers. Loa loved to ride the Jack Rabbit Racer roller, which had been built

only two years prior, and was the second biggest racing coaster in the country.³ It was built over the ocean, so everyone could see the water through the tracks while riding it. There were many movie theatres on The Pike and for ten cents, Loa could see a Fatty Arbuckle, a Charlie Chaplin or a cowboy movie. Loa said about her time there, “I believe I had more fun that winter than at any time in my childhood.”⁴



Loa and her family lived minutes from The Pike in Long Beach, CA

By the time the Tolmans finally settled into their duplex on Ocean Blvd, school had already begun. The school building was close enough to their home that Loa and Bion roller skated there and back.⁵ On her first day of school, Loa walked into class and the teacher said there wasn't enough room for her. So the teacher had Loa sit at the side of the room, which made her feel awful and very unwelcome. When Loa later became a teacher, she remembered this sad moment and resolved to always make students in her classes feel welcome.⁶

The Long Beach city school was very different from her country school in Murtaugh. While the small school in Murtaugh had one class for all the younger grades, their school in Long Beach had enough students to have a separate class for each grade. Because of this, more class subject options were available. Instead of just doing reading, writing and arithmetic, Loa was thrilled to be able to take art classes, too.⁷ During recess in Long Beach, the boys and girls were separated on different playgrounds, so Loa and Bion really missed playing with each other.⁸

Another one of their exciting new experiences that year in Long Beach was their introduction to peanut butter. Loa said, “Mother used to buy it at a place where they ground it while you waited. Was it ever good!”⁹

At the close of that school year in spring of 1918, the Tolmans returned to Murtaugh. J.I. sold his sheep, purchased an additional large farm, and built a new brick home closer to town.¹⁰ The garage was built

first, so they lived there while the house was completed.¹¹ It was one of the first homes in Twin Falls that had electrical appliances—powered by batteries in the basement that were charged weekly by a kerosene generating engine.¹²

In May 1918—twelve years after the Tolmans settled in Murtaugh as the first Mormons—the branch was organized into a ward. Loa and her family were delighted to have seen and participated in the growth of the Church during their time in Murtaugh. At the time the ward was organized, J.I. was the presiding elder there.¹³

Ivan's Death and Scarlet Fever

On August 10, 1918, when Loa was twelve, her older brother Ivan suddenly and tragically died. One evening, Ivan noticed that the pigs had escaped from their pen and were in the field, so he got on his horse to round them up. During the night, his wife woke up and noticed that Ivan wasn't home yet. So she ran down the stairs of the brick house and told J.I. that Ivan wasn't home. They went out and saw Ivan's horse in the field with the reigns over its head dragging along. They looked further and found Ivan lying on the ground unconscious.¹⁴

They brought him to the house and called the doctor from Twin Falls. He said that Ivan had a fractured skull. They figured that Ivan must have been thrown off the horse and been hit in the head by its hoof. He lived just 48 hours before passing away. His death was a great loss to everyone.¹⁵ Ivan was the oldest child of J.I. and Emerett and was loved by all seven of his younger siblings. Since he had always lived in Murtaugh, he had grown so close to all of them. He also left behind a grieving wife, and three small children.

Shortly after Ivan's death, several of the Tolman children contracted scarlet fever. This was a very hard time for the Tolman Family, as J.I. and Emerett's hearts were still heavy with the pain and fear of death. In 1918, there was a world-wide pandemic of influenza, scarlet fever, and other viruses that was spread by soldiers returning home from the trenches of World War I. The diseases affected 500 million people and killed 5% of



Ivan Tolman

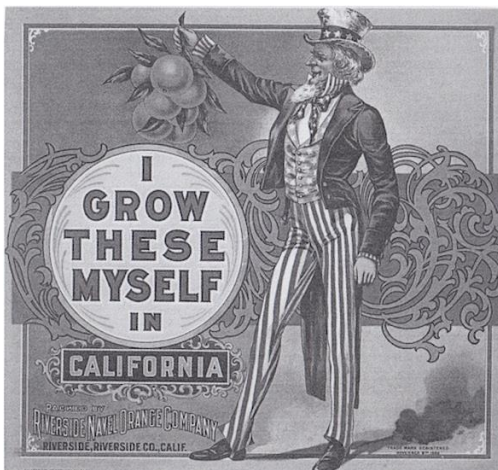
the world's population.¹⁶ The possibility of more of their children dying that year was very real and very scary for the Tolman parents.

Loa described her near-death experience with scarlet fever: “I was 12 when I got sick with it – and was so very ill. I can remember how my hands and feet would swell from the rheumatism – Mother finally got my ring off my finger with soap. She would warm the coal shovel in the heater – then would hold it near my feet to help take the pain away. Finally the doctor came from Twin Falls and said I had rheumatic fever and was very ill. I had to stay in bed all the time. A bed was moved into the living room so that I could be kept warm day and night and then it was easier, I guess, for my Mother to take care of me. I remember when my brother Clifford came and sat in a chair by my bed all night to give me a drink – take my temperature, etc. Father and Clifford administered to me often. I can remember how hard my heart used to beat against the bed. I also remember one day when I looked up and saw Alta and her children on the front porch by the front window – looking in at me. I was told later, that they didn’t expect me to live through the day - or night – but I did live, although I was still in bed on my 13th birthday [Feb 27, 1919] and couldn’t go to school any more that school year. The teacher finally sent work home for me to do – which I’m sure helped me for the next year.”¹⁷

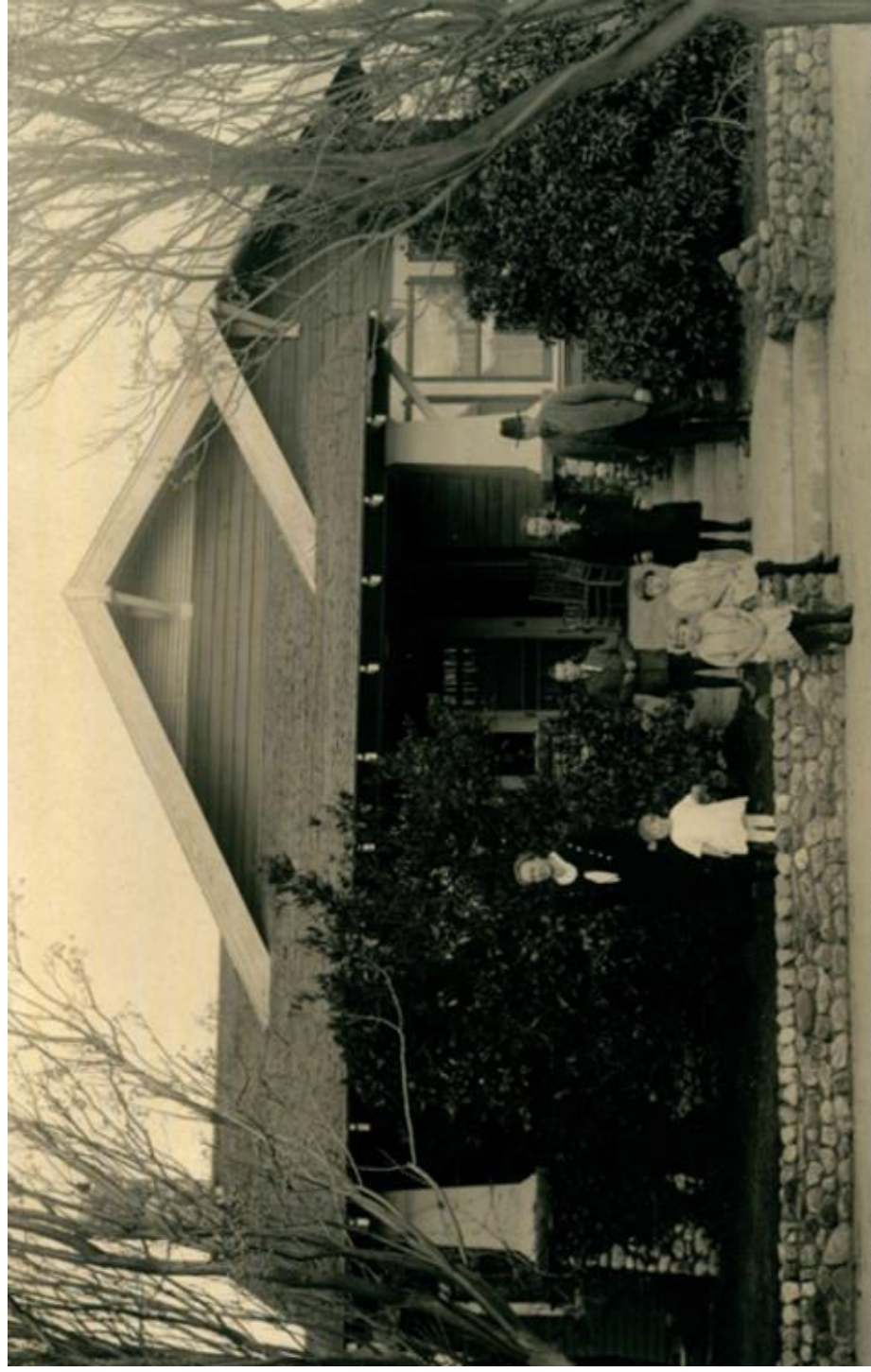
Orland, California

While they loved their new brick home in Murtaugh and were doing well financially, they didn’t feel comfortable. The combination of the family’s unrest from Ivan’s passing, and the fact that J.I. had been “bitten by the California bug”¹⁸ made them open to big changes.

Upon seeing some advertising about the lush farming opportunities in the Sacramento Valley of California, J.I. was intrigued and looked into it further.¹⁹



An ad similar to the ones that sparked J.I.'s interest in California



The Tolmans in Orland, CA. Emerett, June, Bion, Inez, Roma, Loa, J.I. ca.1920

He and his son Clifford traveled to California and were shown the endless fields of waving golden wheat that grew higher than their car windows. They came back to Idaho only to discover that, while they were gone, their crops had frozen and had been destroyed. That disappointment confirmed their decision to leave cold Idaho and move to sunny California.²⁰ They sold the Murtaugh farm to family and friends and drove west to the coast in the fall of 1919. They had been in Murtaugh just over a year since their return from Long Beach.

J.I. bought a lovely bungalow on Walker Street in Orland, CA, not far from town. Both J.I. and Clifford bought and cultivated farms in the country. Loa recalls the family being very happy there.²¹ Judson described their home this way: “It was a lovely home with several lots upon which grew every kind of fruit that I ever heard of—apples, plums, cherries, peaches, apricots, olives, and figs. We could pick fruit from the trees any time of the year, and also grew garden vegetables the year around. We felt it was really grand.”²² Every Saturday afternoon, Loa and Bion sat next to several stacks of walnuts and tediously picked the nuts out of their shells.²³

Several other Mormon families from Murtaugh moved to Orland along with the Tolmans. For church, they had to drive fifty miles to the closest branch in Gridley. But they informed the California Mission President of the Mormons’ presence in Orland, and a branch was soon set up there.²³

The Tolman’s wheat, rice, and corn crops did wonderfully for a couple years, but in 1920 there was a large economic crash and crops barely sold at all. Times were really tough. It didn’t help that the family was attacked by fleas! Everyone broke out in sores like boils. The kids couldn’t even play without twisting and scratching, and sleeping was almost impossible. Emerett rubbed them with every concoction possible, but nothing helped. Finally they learned from the locals about a special spray for the rooms and a powder for dusting their bodies. It helped immensely.²⁴



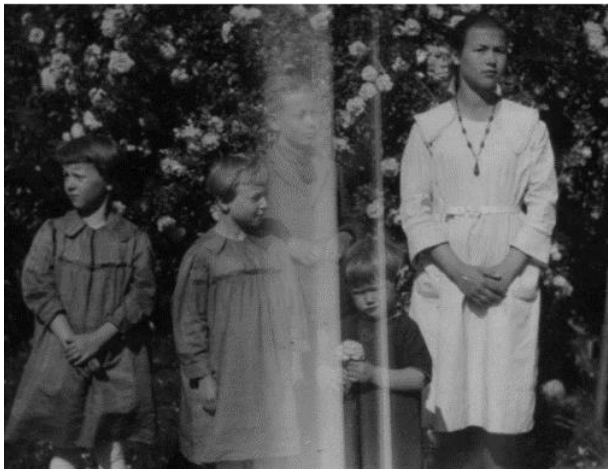
Loa (right) and friend Eleanor Younger in Orland, CA, ca. 1920

Shortly after arriving in Orland in the fall of 1919, Loa began eighth grade; she was 13 years old. As she was still recovering from her bout with scarlet fever, she came home during lunch to rest and take heart medicine. In spite of her weakened condition, Loa studied hard, often waking up early to study in bed. Before entering high school, Loa passed all the county examinations highest in her class and third highest in the county. She was so proud of this accomplishment that she kept the certificates for years.²⁵

One day, her music teacher came in and said, “I’m going to teach all you boys and girls a lullaby. And if any of you have a little brother or sister at home, you can help them go to sleep at night by singing it to them.”²⁶ The song is called “How Do You Like to Go Up in a Swing?” and it is taken from the poem written by Robert Louis Stevenson in *A Child’s Garden of Verses*.

How do you like to go up in a swing, / Up in the air so blue?
Oh, I do think it the pleasantest thing / Ever a child can do!
Up in the air and over the wall / Till I can see so wide,
Rivers and trees and cattle and all / Over the countryside—
Till I look down on the garden green, / Down on the roof so brown—
Up in the air I go flying again, / Up in the air and down.

Loa listened carefully, remembered it, and then sang it to her little sister June at home. All her little sisters loved hearing it. When Loa grew up, she sang it to her own children. She sang other lullabies, too, but this was always the favorite.²⁷



*The youngest 5 Tolman children in Orland, CA, ca. 1920
Roma, Inez, Bion, June, and Loa*

Salt Lake City

Unfortunately, their time in California was cut short. Judson wrote, “We were not destined to stay in California. Our little daughter, Roma, began to fail in health, and in spite of all the doctors could do, she grew worse and worse. We felt that perhaps it was the climate which disagreed with her, and that perhaps we’d better leave.”²⁸ After only two years in Orland, California, they swapped houses with Dr. Beehler, a chiropractor from Salt Lake City, and moved in early 1921. They said they felt the Lord’s hand in the move.²⁹



Loia in Brighton, 1922

Their house was at 1329 Emerson Ave, not too far from Liberty Park. From there they could walk to church at the Wasatch Ward where Marvin O. Ashton was the bishop.³⁰ With a ward building so close and no farm to tend, this was the beginning of a period when the Tolman family was always able to attend all church meetings.³¹

Bishop Ashton was the president of the Sugar House Lumber Company, and got Judson a job there as a log truck driver for five dollars a day. After spending a considerable amount of money on Roma’s doctors and being so poor for so long, this money made them feel like millionaires. Emerett earned additional money by ironing people’s clothes and linens. Sometimes she and other family members, including Loia, would iron four or five hours a day.³²

Tragically, Loia’s younger sister Roma died on Christmas Eve 1921 at 10:30am in their home. She was eleven years old. The cause of her death was Chronic Parenchymatous Nephritis³³, an inflammation of the kidney and its connecting tubes—a condition she had since babyhood for which there was no cure.³⁴ The after-effects of scarlet fever had also weakened her already weak body. She was buried December 27th at Wasatch Lawn Cemetery. Bion said of her, “Even though she was a young girl, she really left a hole in our family.”³⁵



LDSU stood directly east of the Salt Lake Temple.

Loa spent her last three years of high school attending the Church-sponsored LDS University on North Main Street across from the temple, where she studied hard and often was on the honor roll.³⁶ She often sat up until midnight doing homework to earn her “A’s”, thus setting the bar very high for her younger siblings. Her brother Bion was a poor student and said, “If you have to work as hard as Loa does for an ‘A,’ then I’m not interested in getting one.”³⁷ Loa also belonged to the high school glee club and choir, and loved attending football and basketball games. When she attended school dances, she was always embarrassed because she thought she was taller than all the boys.³⁸

Halfway through Loa’s senior year, in January 1924, Loa’s parents moved back to Murtaugh to save their old farm from the family members and friends who couldn’t make payments. They had been in Salt Lake City for only three years. Loa stayed in Salt Lake and lived with the Kimball and



Loa on “Temple Block” with Tabernacle, 1922

the Corfield families, watching their kids and working for her room and board.³⁹

After she graduated in spring of 1924, she and Bion returned to Murtaugh. Because there wasn’t much to do in the Murtaugh countryside that summer, Loa and Bion went to dances together in Twin Falls on weekends.

Loa the Teacher

In the fall of 1924, Loa entered the Teacher's College at Albion



Albion School from a distance

State Normal School in Albion, Idaho, which was only 40 miles east of Murtaugh. She was the first person in her family to attend college, and one of the first women in her generation, too. In 1900 in America, only 85,000 females attended college.

In 1940, about 600,000 did⁴⁰—that is a 750% increase in female college-goers during Loa's generation. She was one of the pioneers of the huge expansion in women's education.



Loa (2nd from right) and fellow dancers before a performance at Albion

Albion Normal School was a small institution that drew its students from the region of south-central Idaho. For most of its existence, the college just offered a two-year course of study that certified people to teach.⁴¹ In her free time, Loa became involved with singing and dancing, and had

a grand time hiking and visiting with new friends.

Loa's first teaching job began in the fall of 1926 at the elementary school in her hometown of Murtaugh, where she taught the third and fourth graders together. Her sister June, her niece Virginia Lee, and her nephew Roger Tolman were all students in her class. She taught first grade in Murtaugh for two school years. Of her time there, she simply wrote, "I loved it."⁴² During this time, Loa lived with her parents in their newer brick house in town, and was also a Sunday School teacher in the Murtaugh Ward.⁴³



Loa graduating from Albion



Loa with her second batch of students: Murtaugh 1st Grade, 1927-1928

As her first year of teaching in Murtaugh neared completion, Loa looked at the summer months ahead and wondered what to do. She considered traveling, but she didn't have anyone to travel with, and she didn't want to go by herself. Loa then remembered all the good things her brother Bion had said about the AC—Utah State Agricultural College in Logan, Utah (which later became Utah State University). He was presently serving a mission, but before he left, he had taken classes at the AC and had spoken very highly of it. Other people suggested Loa attend BYU, but she didn't know anything about it, so she stuck with the AC.⁴⁴

So, in the summer of 1927, Loa attended summer school at the Agricultural College, which offered a large variety of interesting classes beyond agricultural, including education and music. She rented a room in the home of the Sessions family where Bion had boarded previously.⁴⁵ While there, she befriended Lucille Morgan, who had dated Bion and was waiting for him as he served his mission.



Loa in Logan, 1927

The AC was full of people who were earning their bachelor's degrees and were planning on moving away and doing exciting things, but Loa was planning on simply taking a few fun summer classes and returning to her simple life in Murtaugh with her family and her new class of first graders. She didn't realize that this summer would completely alter the course of her Murtaugh-bound life.

Loa always had a talent for music and so she naturally gravitated towards the Opera Productions class at the AC that summer. It was taught by B. Cecil Gates, the assistant director of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. One day, after Professor Gates had finished his lecture and the students were leaving, one student called out, "Hey Mike, come and play the piano for us!"

A blonde-haired young man with a firm jaw stepped back into the classroom and seated himself at the piano. The class members all gathered around the piano and began singing along to a fast, "jumpy" number called "The Doll Dance."⁴⁶ The young man's hands danced on the keys as comfortably as Loa's eyes danced on him. Song after song, the budding opera singers sang and cheered to the accompaniment. Everyone had a wonderful time. Loa was smitten by the man at the piano. She later joked that she didn't know if she first fell in love with him or his piano playing.⁴⁷

This is the moment that Loa met her future husband—the young, blonde musician, Myral Gillespie Clark.



Loa & Myral (both 1st row, far right) in a Music Methods class 1927

