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## The Runt

Before Myral dazzled Loa and his fellow college students with his musicianship, he was a very poor farm boy on a struggling farm, in a very atypical family. Myral grew up with little contact with his father, as Myral's mother was a polygamist wife and his father lived in another state with his first wife. Although Myral was always the light-hearted, witty entertainer, his childhood was very difficult and he never spoke of it. All stories about his childhood are compiled from his sibling's recollections.

### **Myral's Parents: Charles Rich Clark and Ann Elizabeth Waldron**

To understand Myral's childhood, we must go back a couple of generations.

Myral's grandfather was Ezra T. Clark, an extremely successful farmer and businessman with three wives. Ezra built his first farm in Farmington, Utah, with his wife Mary Stevenson. Charles Rich Clark (Myral's father) was the eighth child born to Ezra and Mary on April 1, 1861. Charles was named after the LDS apostle Charles C. Rich. Ezra named a few of his children after early Church leaders with whom he was closely associated. A few months later, Ezra T. Clark married a second wife. The two Clark families lived across the street from each other and all the children worked together on the Farmington farm—riding horses, caring for the stock, guiding the walking plows, and irrigating the crops. As the children grew older and had their own families, Ezra established a family cooperative system similar to the United Order. Over time, the Clarks acquired 700 acres in Farmington, Utah; Morgan, Utah; Franklin County, Idaho; and Georgetown, Idaho. Ezra sent his children and their families out to tend these farms.<sup>1</sup>

Myral's father, Charles Rich Clark, attended University of Deseret (now University of Utah) around 1879 and then also graduated from Brigham Young Academy (now BYU) in 1882. His favorite courses were history, mathematics, religion, and elocution—the skill of clear and expressive speaking. BY Academy Professors Karl G. Maeser and John M. Tanner were great influences in his life. Brother Maeser once suggested that

Charles remain at BY Academy, continue his study, and become a teacher at the institution. But after talking with his father, Charles saw he was needed at home, and he discontinued his studies and returned to the farm to develop his abilities of farming, ranching, and milling.<sup>2</sup>

Three months later, on June 28, 1883, Charles was sealed to Emma Woolley in the Salt Lake Endowment House. Soon thereafter, Ezra asked Charles and Emma to move to Georgetown, Idaho to tend the Clark family ranch there. Later, Ezra asked them to move to Farmington, Utah, and then out to Morgan, Utah to operate the grist mill, milk the cows, and herd the cattle. Never forgetting his love of teaching, Charles taught school in Morgan, as well.<sup>3</sup>



*Family of Ezra T. Clark and Mary Stevenson in 1891. Charles Rich seated third from the right*

While in Morgan, Charles “considered and accepted in his own mind the principle of Celestial Marriage as pertaining to plural wives.”<sup>4</sup> It’s hard for us, more than one hundred years after the fact, to understand what an important and difficult decision this was for Charles to make. In 1886, as he was pondering celestial marriage, the United States federal government was actively oppressing the LDS Church and its members in regards to Plural Marriage. Acquaintances and family members of Charles were being imprisoned and their property was being seized by the federal government. The Church was being disenfranchised—its land holdings, businesses, schools and all related organizations were being closed and taken. By “accepting in his own mind the principle of Celestial Marriage”,

the twenty-five year old, college-educated Charles was voluntarily rebelling against his national government out of adherence and love for his religion. He was risking imprisonment, financial ruin, and isolation for an indefinite period of time.

With the approval of his wife, Emma, and with Church leadership's encouragement, Charles sought out Ann Elizabeth Waldron, a 24-year-old school teacher in Morgan whom he had met a few times while on the Board of Examiners at the University of Desert. Annie had been born on August 31, 1862 in Richville, Utah, because Brigham Young had called her parents—Ann Dewhurst and Gillispie Walter Waldron—to settle



*Family of Gillispie Walter Waldron and Ann Dewhurst ca. 1905 (4 years after Myral was born)  
Ann Elizabeth Waldron seated, far left*

there. After speaking with her father about the proposal, Charles and Annie had a short and secretive courtship. They attended poetry-reciting parties and dances and pretended to not know each other, for fear that an agent of the federal government would find them and imprison Charles.<sup>5</sup> On November 24<sup>th</sup>, 1886, they took separate trains up to Logan and were sealed in the Logan Temple. To Charles, Emma, and Annie, this was the supreme application of their religion.<sup>6</sup> Annie was grateful for this opportunity to obey the Lord and receive his blessings.<sup>7</sup>

After their marriage, Annie moved to Farmington to live with the Ezra T. Clark family. She went by the name of Alice Smith and most people at the house had no idea that she was really their new sister-in-law. Charles,

whom Annie affectionately called Charley, traveled down from Morgan to visit her about once a month.<sup>8</sup> Charles and Annie's first child, Wallace, was born on the Clark ranch on October 6, 1887. She had two more children while there in Farmington: Lawrence (26 Aug 1889), and Gladys (9 Nov 1891).

In the fall of 1890, Church leaders issued The Manifesto which instructed members to refrain from entering into polygamous marriages. Existing marriages would not be annulled, but new polygamist marriages would not be performed. After this, the non-Mormon civil authorities left Utah and life for polygamist families became relaxed. Ann came out of hiding and she and her three children moved to her parents' newer brick home in Richville on May 2, 1892. Here, they were much closer to Charles and Emma's family. On July 2, 1895 Annie gave birth to twins: Lela who was healthy, and Leland, who was tiny and lived only one month. After this, Annie and her four children moved to an old house in Morgan.<sup>9</sup>



*The old Annie Clark home where Myral was born and raised. The concrete room is on the left. The wooden additions are on the right. Photo taken in 1917*

This old, one-room, concrete house was originally built as a shoe shop. Annie obtained it and then, with the help of her brother, Walter, built two log rooms onto it. And then it seemed that every time she had a baby, she built another room onto the house. Ella was born on June 6, 1897 and Carlos was born July 27, 1899. Carlos later wrote of the house, "By the time

she had seven children, that was a house of many colors and shapes and materials.”<sup>10</sup>

For nine years, Charles’ children of Emma and Ann grew up together in the same area, but in separate houses.<sup>11</sup> The good relationship between Emma and Ann was demonstrated when Charles left on a mission to the Southern States on October 20, 1891. They helped each other immensely to keep house and raise their children. Additionally, to raise money to send to Charles, Emma and her oldest son, Marion, rode a horse and wagon through eastern Utah and Wyoming selling encyclopedia subscriptions. Annie cared for Emma’s children while she was gone.<sup>12</sup>

After returning home, Charles worked on the farms, taught school, and became a prominent man in the community as Secretary of the Precinct Committee of the Republican Party, and an elected councilman of Morgan. He was also a delegate to the Fourth National Irrigation Congress in Albuquerque, NM, and President of the local Young Men of the Church. He was a very charitable man who gave away the fruits of his “Garden Spot” liberally. He always encouraged his children to do their school lessons well, and if they did wrong or failed to accomplish a task, they could expect a rather extended “talking to”.<sup>13</sup>

Back in 1886, Charles had gambled greatly on the prosperity of his family in taking upon himself the practice of Celestial Marriage. His little family with Annie had been secret for four years, and life had been very difficult. But in 1901, as Annie was pregnant with Myral, her seventh child, the family’s situation was far improved. They were free to interact and to work and to prosper.

### **Myral’s Birth and the Division of the Clark Land**

Myral Gillispie Clark was born on July 13<sup>th</sup>, 1901—the seventh child of Annie and the twelfth child of Charles. Myral would later remark that as the youngest of a very large family, born into the unique situation that he was, he counted himself quite lucky to have been born at all. So while most people would think that being born on the 13<sup>th</sup> was unlucky, Myral thought the date of his fortunate birth was the luckiest number of all.<sup>14</sup> Myral’s middle name, Gillispie, was chosen to honor Annie’s still-living father, Gillispie Walter Waldron.

In April of 1901, three months before Myral was born, Charles and Emma’s family moved to Georgetown, Idaho. Ezra T. Clark was nearing

the end of his life and wanted to break up his land among his children. He took 17 pieces of paper, on which were written some “best and “2<sup>nd</sup> best” properties, as well as some cash, personal items, cattle and horses. Each child drew his or her lot. Charles drew his “best” property in Morgan, and his “2<sup>nd</sup> best” property in Georgetown. Charles and Emma’s family moved to Georgetown, and Annie and her children stayed in Morgan<sup>15</sup>. Because Myral’s father was in Georgetown when he was born, Myral was blessed by Dan Heiner, the Morgan Stake President on Aug 4, 1901.<sup>16</sup>

With seven children from ages thirteen to one month, Annie began a different life in Morgan, 200 miles away from her husband. Her first two sons Wallace, age 13, and Lawrence, age 11, took over running the farm. Wallace remarked, “Since around fourteen years of age, the responsibility of providing for my parents’ family mostly rested upon me.”<sup>17</sup> The 1910 US Federal Census lists Annie as “Head of Household” and certainly she was. She tirelessly ran the house, ran the farm, and taught her children the Gospel. People in town commented that Annie was the hardest worker they ever saw, and that she often worked beyond her body’s capabilities.<sup>18</sup>

As head of the household, Annie worked hard to keep her children physically and spiritually strong. Her son, Carlos, recalled, “When she would call us for the morning meal, the chairs would be turned backwards, ready for family prayers. As we grew up, we had to take turns leading the prayer. The faith of that little Mother of mine was something to behold. She had a real testimony of the Gospel.” If ever the family forgot to have their morning prayer because they awoke early to do outside chores, she would say, “The day did not go well because we got too busy and disorganized to have prayer.” She would then call everyone back inside to pray together.<sup>19</sup>

Myral’s brother, Carlos, summed up life on the farm succinctly and powerfully: “Plenty of work and not too much play.”<sup>20</sup> The Clarks grew cabbage, cauliflower, and onions to sell.<sup>21</sup> They also got money by selling milk from their dairy cows and eggs from their chickens.<sup>22</sup> But green peas were the main crop on the farm.



*Myral age 5, ca. 1906*

During the summers, the Clarks hired young men and women from the town to help them plant the peas, weed the fields, pick the peas, and prepare the peas in the pea factory.<sup>23</sup> After pulling up the entire pea plant, the workers cut the peas off the vines and discarded the vines by the silo to rot, giving off a permanent rotten stench.<sup>24</sup>

Additionally, the Clarks grew potatoes, which was the grocery-money crop in Morgan. Carlos wrote of this: “The three stores would give farmers of Morgan credit for the year, then would take potatoes in the fall to pay the grocery bill. It was quite a sight at the close of the day to see all those many loads of potatoes, freshly dug, sacked in the field and brought to the town to be put into railroad cars and shipped all over the country. Very little money was exchanged, but lots of potatoes.”<sup>25</sup> When Ann went to settle her grocery bill with the potato crop, the grocer occasionally gave her a nice bag of candy for the children to enjoy.<sup>26</sup>



*A field of potatoes in Morgan, freshly harvested and bagged.*

While selling the vegetables, the dairy, and the eggs brought in a bit of income, the Clark family was quite poor, and subsisted mostly off of what the farm provided. They typically ate milk, eggs, and cracked wheat mush.<sup>27</sup>

Since Myral’s mother had previously been a teacher, she taught the value of education in addition to the value of hard work. Even though Myral’s siblings were desperately needed on the farm, their mother made sure that the children attended the elementary and junior high schools in town. Morgan did not have a high school then, so Annie sent Lawrence and Wallace alternately each year to the nearest high school at Brigham Young College and Utah State Agricultural College in Logan—80 miles away. It took them both eight years to complete high school.<sup>28</sup> The Morgan High

School was completed for the 1914-1915 school year, so the younger siblings were able to attend high school in town.<sup>29</sup>



*Annie Clark with her  
“Little Boys” Myral and Carlos*

As the family grew up, Wallace and Lawrence came to co-own the farm. With ten years and three girls separating the oldest boys (Wallace and Lawrence) and the youngest boys (Carlos and Myral), folks in town knew them as “Annie’s Big Boys” and “Annie’s Little Boys”. The “Big Boys” were like fathers to the “Little Boys”, teaching them how to work and showing them how to be men.<sup>30</sup>

### **Growing Up as the Youngest Child**

When Myral was a toddler, he went missing one day and gave his family a terrible scare. Myral’s sister, Ella, recalled, “We all remember our scare when he was lost for a couple of hours. Many neighbors joined in the hunt for him, the irrigation ditchwater was drained to see if he had drowned.

All were afraid he had drowned in the large mill pond that held a lot of water backed up to run the mill. Finally one of us was standing in front of



*Morgan School in 1910. Four Clarks: Lela top row, Ella 2<sup>nd</sup> row, Myral 2<sup>nd</sup> row from bottom, Carlos front row*



the secretary cupboard, in our front room when the bottom door began to open so Myral could crawl out from a 2-hour sleep, what a glorious sight.”<sup>31</sup>

Myral began school in September 1908 in North Morgan, when he was seven years old. With both his parents having been teachers, Myral knew he had to work hard in school. The following year, he was baptized by his father right on his eighth birthday—July 13, 1909. He was baptized in Mill Race<sup>32</sup> which was a narrow current of swift and powerful water in the town’s irrigation system that turned a waterwheel. Later that day Myral was confirmed by his brother Wallace, who was then 22 years old. Four years later, on September 12, 1913, Myral was ordained a deacon by J. W. Stewart.

Throughout his childhood, Myral was a lover of fun in the home. Most evenings he stayed home and enjoyed popping corn, making candy, and playing games. He always had a locked treasure chest in which he kept a variety of things including his picture taking supplies and photographs.<sup>33</sup> From a young age, Myral enjoyed taking and collecting photographs. Despite being an era in which photography was a complicated and costly practice, it was a hobby that remained with him throughout his life.

His siblings remember Myral as the runt of the family—small and frail—unable to do the hard labor required on the farm. But that was mostly



*Myral with camera, 1919*



*Myral with pigs on the Morgan farm, 1918*

because he wasn't yet husky like his older brothers were. Carlos wrote that "at an early age, it was very plain that Myral was never cut out to be a farmer. As a small boy he always said he did not want to be a farmer."<sup>34</sup> He was much more interested in school and in socializing and entertaining.

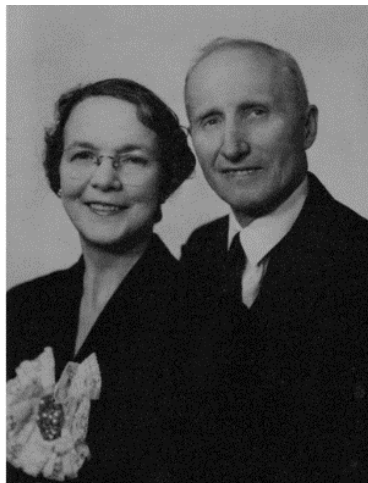


*Myral in Morgan, 1918*

Myral, or "Mike", as friends and family used to call him, had a great sense of humor. People described him as a "cut-up". In photographs, he often hammed it up for the shot and sometimes goofed around by dressing up in funny clothes. Carlos said that "He used to study the art of making people laugh and liked to see people happy."<sup>35</sup> Myral's boyhood love of performance and entertaining people would blend well with his soon-to-be-discovered talent for all things musical.

Myral's life took a pivotal turn when his older brother, Wallace, married Ella Jean Boyce in late 1911. Jean noticed musical potential in the then-10-year-old Myral, and began teaching him piano. Myral took to the piano dramatically. When the Utah Conservatory of Music came to Morgan, they offered to give Myral free piano lessons in exchange for the use of the Clark's family piano for other lessons. Between Jean and the conservatory, Myral got a great start at the piano.<sup>36</sup>

As the children aged, Myral's mother tied herself closely to Myral, her youngest son. Carlos, Myral's older brother, remembered, "In so many respects Myral was an ideal boy. Myral's best pal was his Mother. Not having a husband around very much, she kept her youngest boy with her a lot. That pair enjoyed each other a 'big heap'. He stayed home to help with the housework, etc. Much more than we older ones. He was so understanding of her hard life and would do all in his



*Wallace and Jean*

power to make her happy. We can give Mother so much of the credit for Myral's sweet disposition. When he was a boy, it seemed like old Satan had very little influence on his life. The rough and evil things of life didn't appeal to him. He looked and lived for the good things." Carlos continued, "I am sure Myral would join me in saying, 'all the good things we have accomplished in our life, we owe to our dear Mother.'"<sup>37</sup>

The harvest on the Clark farm had been poor for a few years, so even though they needed a better home, they remained in their old patchwork house a long time. Finally on February 14<sup>th</sup>, 1914, the Clarks had enough money to begin building a new home. A professional



*The new Annie Clark home where the family moved in 1914. (1915)*

builder was contracted, but Annie and her children proudly contributed in lathing, plastering, and painting. They moved in on the Fourth of July that year—just after Myral turned thirteen years old. The beautiful new home had a bath tub and a laundry tub, and Annie was thrilled at the convenience afforded by these things.<sup>38</sup>

The old patchwork house nearby was used for storage and for guests. In December 1914, a visiting friend built a fire in the old house's



*The remains of the concrete house and a wooden room in 1950.*

stove to warm up the place for his wife who had recently given birth. His well-intended fire caught on the flu and spread to part of the house. They managed to save the back bedrooms, the concrete room, and some of the

belongings inside. To make the old house still useable, they moved the wood and connected the two remaining parts, while adding a kitchen as well.<sup>3</sup>

A couple years later at the end of 1916, the Clarks found themselves in a very different situation—it was the first Christmas that any sibling had been absent. Lawrence was away serving for the LDS Church in the Eastern States Mission and was assigned to Boston. At the same time, his father Charles was serving his second mission, this time in the Southern States Mission, assigned to Florida. Annie sent them each ten dollars a month.<sup>40</sup> With one of the “Big Boys” absent from the farm, it was necessary for the other siblings to step up and work harder to support the family.



*The Clark Family on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, 1916 in Morgan, UT*

To assist with the family finances in the summer of 1918, Myral went to Salt Lake to work at the Jewel Tea Company. He had just finished ninth grade and was 17 years old. The Jewel Tea Company began in 1889 in Chicago with a man selling tea and other groceries door-to-door with his wagon. By 1917, this home-service-retail company had grown to \$15 million in sales and had over 1700 routes in operation.<sup>41</sup> Myral most likely worked at one of the warehouses from which food and housewares were loaded into the delivery wagons. It was a promising and exciting opportunity for the young farm boy from Morgan to participate in.



*Myral (right) with other  
Jewel Tea employees*

While working at the warehouse one day, a joking coworker said, “Here catch” and threw a piece of broken glass to Myral. Not knowing what it was, Myral caught it, slicing a tendon on his left ring finger. After it healed, he found that he could close it normally, but could not open it all the way. But no matter, he could still play piano.<sup>42</sup>



*The Jewel Tea Company in Salt Lake where Myral worked Summer 1918*

