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Mountain Music Man

Myral's life took a pivotal turn when his teenage years ended. He had grown up a farmer, but had discovered a unique talent for piano. As the youngest child, he had the freedom to leave the farm to go wherever his fingers led him. Over the next decade, Myral traveled to a number of famous mountain resorts to perform for dances. He also earned a bachelor's degree and led bands, choruses, and acting groups at schools. His musical bachelorhood was a sharp departure from his youth on the Morgan farm.



*The Charles R. Clark and Annie Waldron Family, ca. 1919
(top) Wallace, Charles, Annie, Myral (front) Ella, Carlos, Lawrence, Lela
Gladys had recently passed away and Carlos was about to leave on a mission*

The Clarks in 1920 and the Summer at Blue Creek

By January of 1920 when Myral was 18 years old, his family had changed quite a lot. Some siblings were married and lived in town, others lived in distant towns, one had passed away, and one was preparing to serve a mission.

Wallace and his wife Jean and their four children were living only four houses away. Lawrence and his brand new wife, Bernette, had fixed up the old concrete “shoe-store” house and had just moved in. Both Wallace and Lawrence were running the Clark family farm. Gladys had married Myron Crandall in 1912, and they later moved in with Annie and the younger Clark siblings into the new Morgan house as Gladys was recovering from partial paralysis after her second pregnancy. One month after their third child was born in 1918, already-weakened Gladys died of the flu.¹ Myron and the three children stayed in the house for almost two years as Annie cared for her three mother-less grandchildren. Myral’s older sister Lela had been gone for many years teaching, and had recently married a widower named Osmer Lamb with five children and had moved to Mount Carmel in southern Utah. Myral’s other older sister Ella, 22, was still at home.²

The most exciting thing in January of 1920 was that Carlos had received a mission call to serve in New Zealand. He was scheduled to leave in February.³ Carlos was the second Clark child to serve an LDS mission; Lawrence had left for his mission in the Eastern States just four years prior. Imagine the excitement and nervousness of the whole family as they prepared to send Carlos away for three years to this exotic land about which they knew nothing.

All these changes were taking place as Myral was becoming an adult. His older siblings were nurturing families of their own and Myral was no longer the youngest Clark on the farm. Besides giving him an example of what a future family would look like, his older brothers relieved Myral of the obligation to support his mother and the family property. He was neither a young child like his numerous nieces and nephews, nor was he a man, expected to take over the property and work the soil. The next several years of Myral’s life show him unfettered to Morgan and traveling to adventurous places—seemingly for simply the sake of adventure. The free-spirited young man is hard to keep



Carlos in a Maori costume in New Zealand on his mission, Sept. 1920

track of during these years, but from glimpses of his surviving photography, his exciting bachelorhood was far from the struggle of the farm.



Farming at Blue Creek, summer 1920



Myral at Blue Creek, June 1920

In the summer of 1920, Myral, Lawrence, Ella, and other young men and women from Morgan went up to a newly purchased 640 acre dry farm at Blue Creek, Idaho. Myral spent long days plowing the ground with a Titan tractor to prepare it for wheat.⁴ His sister, Ella, cooked for the boys. The closest town to the farm was Pocatello, so the Clarks and the other young workers attended Sunday School there. Myral was the organist there, and he also played with an orchestra that performed at the Pocatello school house that doubled as a dance hall.⁵ In spite of the farming operation at Blue Creek never developing as well as they hoped, the young men and women there definitely had a fun time.⁶

As Myral drove that tractor back and forth across the ground all summer, his mind drifted to possible futures his life could hold. Would he remain farming in Morgan forever? Would he pursue music? Would he have to leave Morgan to do that? He began contemplating a move to Logan, Utah.⁷ Perhaps he wanted to attend the schools that Wallace and Lawrence had



Myral on his Titan tractor at Blue Creek, summer 1920

attended during their high school education, or perhaps he wanted to live in a more populous city for his musical endeavors. Or perhaps he wanted *both* further education and further musical opportunities.

Move to Logan

When Myral and crew went up to Blue Creek for the summer, Annie turned over the newer house in Morgan to Wallace and his family. She spent the summer traveling all over Utah, visiting her dying mother, her sick daughter Lela, and other friends and family. When Annie returned to Morgan, she felt unsettled and thought it was time for a change.⁸ She and Myral discussed the possibility of moving to Logan, and they decided to do it.



Annie Clark's boarding house at 210 West 100 South in Logan, Utah



Myral at the organ of the Logan 1st Ward chapel.

On November 11, 1920, Ann and Myral moved to 210 West 100 South in Logan.⁹ It was a house built by Apostle Ezra T. Benson that was directly across the street from the new Logan First Ward building in which Myral was the organist. Their house also

shared its east side fence line with the beautiful Brigham Young College (BYC) campus. It was also a short walk to the Logan Temple.

(BYC was eventually torn down and Logan High School was built in its place. Where the Clark's house once stood, is now the parking lot for the high school.)

It was a large house in a prime location of a college town, so Ann wanted to make the house acceptable for student boarders. She lowered the first floor ceilings and inserted a fully-functioning upstairs level in place of the attic. The following year she wrote, "The summer was spent in improving the house. I did



The Logan Temple

much of the work myself. I lathed cellar and storeroom and made a new bathroom...Charles dug out a coal room under the porch."¹⁰ After all additions and renovations, they had two complete apartments to rent, as well as some single rooms for students. They rented the front rooms for \$20 a month and the back ones for \$15. A few of her boarders helped her add a new toilet, a new sink, and a new chimney to the house. What a change for Annie to go from digging out a life on a farm to taking care of student boarders.



Annie and Charles Clark

Myral's mother knew Myral did not want to farm his whole life, so Annie worked hard to prepare him to make a living doing what he loved—music and teaching. Myral's father, Charles, had given up his dreams of being a full-time teacher in order to work his father's land as a farmer. Charles and Annie's life may have been very different had he been able to pursue his dream to teach. With that in her past, Annie wanted to provide greater freedom for her youngest son so he could follow his dreams of music and teaching.¹¹ Living in Logan and having an income from boarders was the perfect way to provide that opportunity for Myral.

Logan was a very different town than rural Morgan, as it was a college town and a gathering place for many educationally-minded Mormons. It housed both the Brigham Young College (BYC) and Utah Agricultural College (The AC). BYC was established by Brigham Young in 1877 and served as a high school, a junior college, and predominantly a normal school for training teachers. (BYC Catalogue 1922-1923) The AC was originally founded in 1890 to teach agriculture, but by the time Myral was there it had expanded to offer other majors, too.

Myral did not attend his senior year of high school in Morgan when he should have in 1920-1921. He was most likely too busy finishing up

farming at Blue Creek to even begin the school year, and then too busy helping his mother fix up the new house in Logan to catch up with his missed classes. Thankfully, there were places in Logan for Myral to complete his final year of high school and graduate. The following school year, 1921-1922, Myral attended BYC (next door to his house) and



Brigham Young College in Logan, Utah
completed his general high school courses.¹²

The music teacher at the school took special interest in Myral and his musical gift. He offered to give Myral free vocal lessons if Myral would accompany him when he performed. Myral enjoyed accompanying his teacher at many lovely places and on many special occasions, but Myral never did make time to receive the free vocal lessons.¹³

During this year, Myral joined a few dance bands that performed for dances in town. Dancing was the main form of fun and affordable entertainment for youth in the 1920s. All they needed was a floor and a band. This was before recorded music and DJs, so live bands were the only way to have music at a dance. Many dances had themes for the decorations and the costumes of the attendees. With so many young college students in Logan, dances were held a few times a week at a variety of locations. Myral, the extremely social and lively 20-year-old,



*Annie with her "Little Boys"
Myral and Carlos. ca.1923*

loved the switch from his former quiet farm life to his new dynamic city life.

A Teacher and a Dance-Band Pianist

In 1922, right after Myral completed his high school education, the small farming valley of Ridgedale, Idaho was having trouble finding a teacher.¹⁴ Ridgedale had been settled in 1854 by Myral's great-grandfather, Benjamin Waldron, so the community was filled with Myral's relatives.¹⁵ Someone there contacted Myral and convinced him to come teach that school-year for the combined class of 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th grade children.¹⁶ Even though Myral had only just recently completed high school himself, the Ridgedale School Board thought him qualified enough to teach their youth.



Myral (top left) with his students at Ridgedale School



The small schoolhouse in Ridgedale Valley where Myral first taught, 1922-1923

After his long, cold winter teaching in that tiny valley in Idaho, Myral was ready for some freedom, some fun, and some music. He traveled up Ogden Canyon to the world-famous mountain resort called the Hermitage, visited by presidents, foreign royalty, and other dignitaries traveling around the western United States. Myral performed with his bands from Logan called The Victorians and The Collegians. He also played with The Gold and Blue Orchestra at the lodge.¹⁷ Myral must have loved playing piano with dance bands again—accompanying lively vacationers in the Hermitage dance hall sometimes as late as 2:00 am. When not seated at the piano, he had many adventures in the canyon: exploring the trails, swimming in the streams, riding the trolleys, and watching the waterfalls.

(Sadly, the beautiful and famous Hermitage Lodge burned down in 1939, sixteen years after Myral played there.¹⁸)



*Gold and Blue Orchestra at The Hermitage Hotel in Ogden Canyon, Summer 1923
(back row, left to right) F. Kinney, Lloyd Webb, Myral Clark, Ralph Hansen
(front row, left to right) Eddie Donaldson, Marian Harrison, Warwick Lamoreaux
Myral's musical gift extended to many brass instruments as well.*

BYC Normal School

Upon his return to Logan, Myral furthered his goal of becoming a teacher by enrolling in the normal school at BYC to earn his teaching certificate. His mother and father had both been teachers, and his sister Ella was one, too. The normal school at BYC was a two-year program that fully certified its students to teach. On campus there were eight training classes made up of children from the town. Each class was taught by experienced teachers. BYC's teachers-in-training observed these classes and had opportunities to practice teaching under the watch of the experienced teachers.¹⁹ Myral was thrilled to receive training that would double his salary from the \$800 he received in Ridgedale with no teaching certificate.²⁰



*Myral (right) in
"The Marriage of Nanette"*

Myral continued being involved with music and nature at BYC. He acted in the plays "Varsity Coach" and "The Marriage of Nanette", he sang in the BYC choir, he continued to play with dance bands, and he hiked around the mountains with friends from school.



*Flat tire enroute to play for radio, Ogden, UT, May 1925
Myral (center), Chester Swinyard (left), Geo. Bough (right)*

The Musical Summers in Yellowstone

After receiving his teaching certificate at BYC in 1925, Myral returned to work with his older brothers on the dry farm in Morgan for the summer. But one day, he received a telegram to come play piano for the summer visitors at Yellowstone.²¹ Apparently, Myral had auditioned earlier to play with the dance bands at Yellowstone, but hadn't heard back from them until he was in Morgan on the farm. How thrilled he must have been to know he was going to have another summer like the one he had spent at the Hermitage in Ogden Canyon—playing piano all night and exploring the mountains all day.



Myral (right) and these two band mates lived here at the Dew Drop Inn at Yellowstone. Note their instrument cases lined up on the porch. These three friends were so fun and so close, that everyone called them “Windeallanmyke”, a mix of all their names.

From June 21st to September 16th of 1925, Myral lodged with two other musicians in a leaky cabin called the “Dew Drop Inn”, which they spent much time repairing. He performed at the main Yellowstone lodge with the famed dance orchestra called the Bon-Ton Entertainers and with other musicians in less formal venues.²² His daily diaries show that he played at different venues across Yellowstone Park and the Grand Teton mountain range all summer—covering many miles each week. Some nights

Myral played for the tourist dancers until 3:30am. He made special note of the night he received a whopping \$4.75 in tips.²³



Leaping Lena frequently got a flat tire on the bumpy dirt roads. Myral (right).

In between dances and concerts, Myral and his musical friends drove their rickety cars over the bumpy roads to explore the outdoor wonders of the parks. One vehicle Myral grew especially fond of was named, “Leaping Lena” for all the lurching it did over the bumpy mountain roads. After all the

lurching on each trip, the band’s instruments were severely out of tune. With the help of Lena, Myral and his friends also visited many gorgeous lakes, rivers, dams, and mountains.

After the 1925 summer tourist season, Myral returned to Logan to begin his bachelor’s degree. But he left Yellowstone knowing that he’d return there the following summer. His second summer in Yellowstone—1926—was just as exciting as the first.



Myral (far right) with The Frontier Band in concert on the frontier. This is one of Myral’s many ensembles during his summer at Yellowstone.



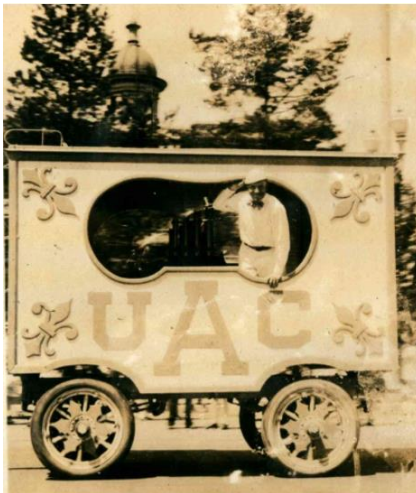
*Caption: "AΔE Goating Days, The T.T. Brigade"
Myral (center) with fraternity brothers, holding a broomstick
stacked with toilet tissue*



Myral in his ROTC uniform

Utah Agricultural College

After losing himself in his music in the mountains, Myral returned to Logan to focus on his other talent—teaching—the one that was to be his career. To earn his bachelor’s degree, he enrolled in education, English, and music classes at Utah Agricultural College.²⁴ The money that his



Myral in the AC’s calliope wagon

mother made taking in boarders helped pay for his tuition. Myral joined the Alpha Delta Epsilon Fraternity and lived with 22 other young men in the frat house. He was also in the ROTC, as World War I had galvanized this program on campus across the country about eight years prior. The ROTC had frequent marches and formations on the campus lawn.²⁵

Myral was also the AC’s resident calliope player. A calliope is an

instrument with a keyboard that produces a very loud sound by shooting steam through long metal whistles. The AC had a special calliope in a booth on wheels that Myral sat in and played for school sporting events and in parades.²⁶



The Tavern Strollers performing in Lewiston, Utah – (left to right) Eugene LacKey, Karl Stohl, Tommy Thomas, Angus Pond, Myral Clark, Dennis Lewis, Byron Darley. Myral was part of this band in Logan, Utah in and around 1926.

During his college years, Myral was clever and witty, with a great sense of humor. He was a great entertainer and was the “life of the party” wherever he went. His brother Carlos remembered a witty moment when they dropped in on Myral’s friend Mabel: “She had just finished a very large piece of cake and grapes for a chaser. After serving us, she stood, waiting for Myral's customary praise on her cake. Myral was quick to take note of it. He said, ‘Mabel, these are the best grapes I have ever tasted!’ The look on her face really changed.”²⁷

With a teaching degree from BYC’s normal school under his belt, he needed only two years to earn his bachelor’s degree. After his first year at the AC (1925-1926) he spent the summer of 1926 playing piano for dances in Yellowstone again, and then he



Myral graduating from the AC April 1927

returned to the AC for his second year (1926-1927). He graduated in 1927 with a Bachelor's of Science degree, and with a teaching position already lined up in Victor, Idaho.²⁸ He was thrilled to have a job, but he was in no hurry to leave Logan just yet. He had a whole summer ahead of him to have fun with the friends he had made during his seven years in Logan.

The Summer of Loa

During the summer of 1927—after graduation and before his teaching job began—Myral decided to further develop his musical talents and take a class in opera productions at the AC. One day as he and the other students were leaving after class,



Loa and Myral met in an opera productions class

someone called out to him, “Hey Mike, come and play the piano for us!” So he sat down at the keys and played the latest, most upbeat song he knew, “The Doll Dance”.²⁹ The jolly group tapped their toes and clapped along. Myral also played popular songs that the students sang

along with. One singer was especially enjoying herself—her smile was so beautiful and her almond eyes glowed brighter with each song she sang.

A few days later, Myral ran across this beautiful singer in the campus book store. Her name was Loa Tolman, and she continued to smile and glow as they talked. The conversation ended with Myral asking her for a date. The two of them went together quite a few times that summer.³⁰ Logan was a town filled with college students and fun things to do for dates. Additionally, the LDS students had use of the new assembly hall attached to the ward building, so Myral and Loa spent the summer with other LDS single adults rehearsing and performing a play called “The Bohemian Girls”.



Myral & Loa in costume for The Bohemian Girl

Myral and Loa enjoyed a wonderful summer, but they knew that their time together would end with the beginning of the school year. They promised to write during those nine months, and return to summer school at the AC the following summer. So as fall approached, they parted ways. Loa returned to her teaching position at the grade school in Murtaugh, Idaho, and Myral returned home to Morgan for a couple months before he began teaching chorus and band at Victor High School.

On August 1, 1927, as Myral was driving a tractor, plowing and cultivating the Morgan farm fields, he received his first letter from Loa.³¹ The details of the arrival of that first letter were so memorable, that Myral still remembered them fifteen years later when writing in his diary.

Teaching at Victor High School

Victor was a remote town on the Idaho-Wyoming border which was inaccessible by car in 1927; only a train could carry people and goods up through the Teton Mountains to Victor. There weren't even cars *in* Victor! Myral wrote in a letter to Loa, "It will perhaps be some time yet before cars will be able to run up here. But I know I'll be glad to see what a car looks like again."³²



Myral (top) with his sixth grade class in Victor, ID

Myral and a fellow teacher "Jep" roomed together in the second floor of the Pardini family home.³³ The Pardinis had three children and were likely pleased to have such a jovial and musical tenant above them. Assuming that he was going to be stationed in Victor for many years, Myral



Myral playing the mini piano for “The Laughing Song” of Boy’s Glee

involved himself in every musical activity he could find, and became an active and beloved member of the community.

At the school, Myral taught many classes. He taught music appreciation, English II, General Sciences, and he led the orchestra, band, and glee clubs. He also produced plays and operettas with the students—“The Whole Town’s Talking”, “Gypsy Rover”, and “The Arrival of Kitty”. Myral brought so much music, excitement, and laughter to the students in remote Victor. He also formed and led a band with a few older students; they called themselves “The Victorians”, and they performed in and around Victor. In his free time, Myral hiked in the Teton Mountains, sometimes even in the deep snow.³⁴

He and Loa wrote back and forth during that 1927-1928 school year and were excited to reunite during the summer session at the AC.



Victor, Idaho

The Second Summer of Loa

During the next summer in Logan, Loa and Myral spent as much time together as possible. Loa lived close to campus in a boardinghouse with other single ladies. The landlady told her female tenants that when they came home from a date, they could sit in the living room awhile and talk, but they couldn't take men up to their rooms. One night after a date, Loa and Myral stood outside the house and talked and talked and talked until very late. Finally, the landlady came down and said, "Loa, why don't you come in the house and let that poor fellow go home so he can get some sleep and rest?" Myral and Loa laughed out loud before saying "goodnight". When Loa went up to her room, her roommates all gathered to say that the landlady was, in fact, very upset that Loa had stayed out so late.³⁵ But what are young lovers to do?

One weekend during their summer session, Loa traveled south with Myral to his hometown of Morgan for a Clark family picnic. There Loa met many of Myral's family members for the first time.³⁶ They all loved her and her sweet smile.

On one particularly beautiful day that summer, Myral and Loa were sitting on a cement bench on the AC campus when he asked her to marry him. She was thrilled about the idea, but said they would have to see her father first. When summer school ended, they visited Loa's parents in Murtaugh and Myral asked her father for permission to marry her. Judson responded, "Well yes, but you have your school to teach this winter, but when you're through with school, then ok."³⁷



Loa at the bench on the AC campus where Myral proposed to her

Again they parted ways, but unlike the previous summer, they knew that this nine-month separation would end with the most joyous union—their wedding.

Love Letters

During those nine long, cold months, Myral and Loa wrote love letters to each other almost daily. The 200 miles between them only made their hearts grow fonder.



A simply-addressed envelope from one of Myral's letters to Loa 1928

He always began with talk about how much he loved receiving her letters, "Your letter today seemed so wonderful Loa that I just wanted to cry for joy as I read each word you said."³⁸ If ever a letter from Loa was delayed, Myral became so anxious, "Oh but Sweetheart I thought your letter was never coming... You say you just devoured mine. Well I've completely digested yours. I was just so happy to get it that I could hardly contain myself."³⁹

Myral always clearly stated his love for Loa. He wanted to make sure Loa knew how serious he was, so that she didn't let any other man into her heart. "But my dearest, I do love you oh so much -- more than perhaps I have made you feel that I do, or there would not be the least doubt in your mind."⁴⁰

He told her of his adventures decorating for school costume dances and then playing for them with his band. There were also lively dance parties that he performed for after all sporting events for the high school. "Well Loa I sure wish you had been with me tonight. We had such

a lovely time and I tried to imagine you with me, but oh my realizations couldn't quite stretch far enough cause no one can take the place of you my dearest. Oh I'll sure be glad when Thanksgiving comes cause then I'll have you in my arms again."⁴¹

Myral loved the town of Victor and its people so much that he encouraged Loa to apply to teach in Victor beginning in the fall after they were married. She sent in her application and Myral wrote back to her in detail everything that he heard from the principal and the school board about her possible employment. Myral shared this quote from a member of the school board, "Judging by Principal Merrill's recommendations of your friend (my dear sweet wife to be, he meant) we'll be very anxious to have her come teach in the grades. The board passed very favorable upon her."⁴² Myral was thrilled at the possibility of them teaching together in Victor the following school year.

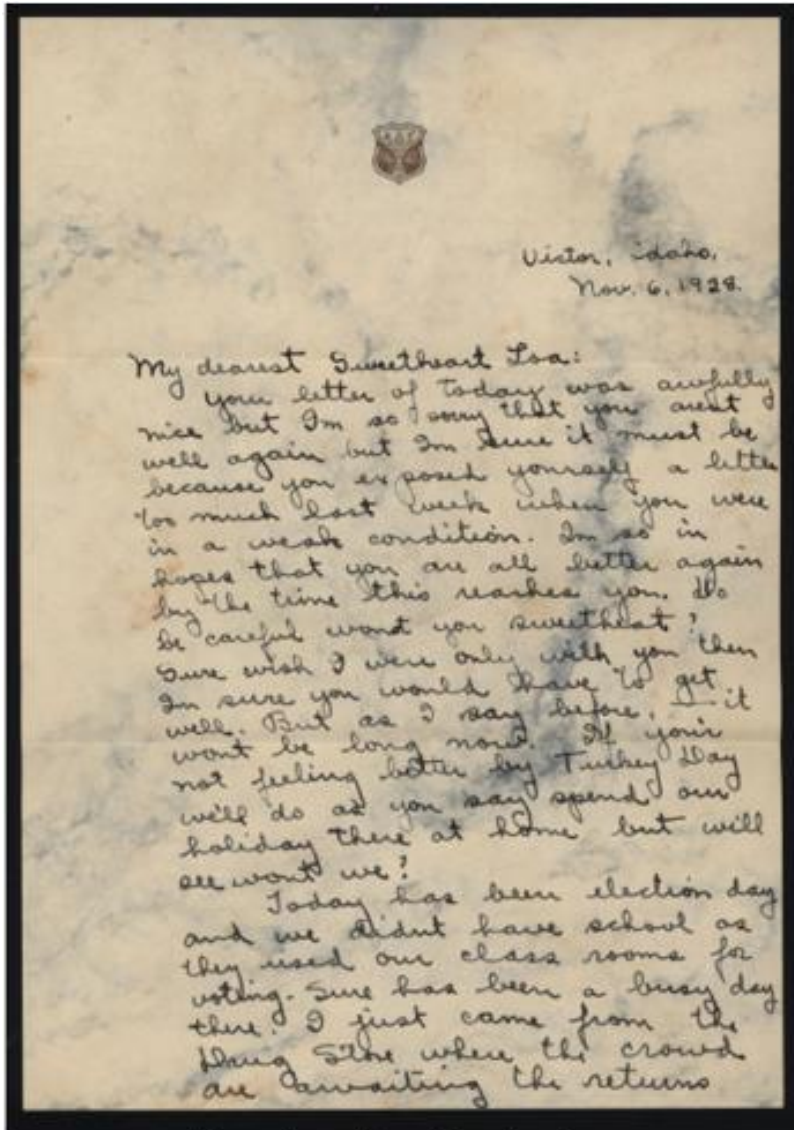
Myral tantalized Loa with talk of the wedding ring he was purchasing, "Dearest, did you say your ring size was 8 1/2, you tell me again will you? I hope you'll like my taste! It's hard to pick out those things. Seems like I see one better looking all the time."⁴³ He also spoke of their honeymoon plans, "But I'm so determined that we will go to California some time because I just feel like we have that coming to us and we'll just have to go some time if we don't go now."⁴⁴

Being so far from Loa in the wintertime, Myral expressed concern for her health, "I'm so in hopes that you are all better again by the time this reaches you. Do be careful won't you sweetheart? Sure wish I were only with you, then I'm sure you would have to get well."⁴⁵

But most of all, Myral expressed his deep and growing love for Loa, "Oh I'm so happy that I'm walking in the air and Loa I just think you are more wonderful as each day passes."⁴⁶ Myral also showed how much he wanted to be together again, "Jep and all the boys have gone down to the election dance at the Driggs Hotel but I'm staying at home. You see I'm saving my good times until I'm with you. Now may that time hurry and come. I have never wanted a winter to pass by so quickly in all my winters yet."⁴⁷

Throughout his letters, he always referred to Loa very tenderly, calling her "Dearest" and "Sweetheart". He must have felt so blessed to have found such a beautiful, gentle, musical, and happy woman to marry.

Halfway through the school year, Myral spent Christmas time with Loa and her family in Murtaugh. He played piano often while others sang, and the Tolmans enjoyed their holiday with their future son- and brother-in-law very much. After getting to know Myral better, Loa's parents became convinced that she had made a good choice.⁴⁸



*A love letter from Myral to Loa,
written on Alpha Delta Epsilon stationery. Nov 6, 1928*

