

The 1963 Scout Accident

The year was 1963. It was a year that was to have a tragic impact on many of the families of the Pleasant View Ward.

Our family moved into the Pleasant View Ward in July of 1956. We first attended the Pleasant View Ward after we bought a lot in the Beesley Subdivision in Provo, Utah. The Hall family thought we should look over the ward in which our home would be located. The ward building at the time was a purple brick building at about 1800 N. Canyon Road. That building has been torn down and a new five-ward building is now on the same site. The present building houses BYU wards. During sacrament meeting that Sunday, the East Sharon Stake Presidency installed a new bishop, Harold Colvin. He was the first bishop in the Pleasant View 1st Ward.

By 1963 the ward had been divided until the boundaries, roughly, were all the area east of University to 700 East and with a few exceptions. The south boundary was a now obsolete road, which wound along the present path of 1700 north and took in Jess Ashton, Clarence Ashton and Frank Ashton, whose original homes were where the Marriott center is now and the proceeded on a diagonal back towards Canyon road where the Colvins and several other families lived. The BYU Cougar Stadium stands on the spot today, and the several tall pine trees near the BYU Cougar statue formerly grew in yards of the ward members. The north boundary went along Canyon Road as far as the Stephen Hatch home (2490 N.) and included the families who lived on the hills just east of the Canyon Road. The boundary then proceeded roughly east back to 700 East.

The ward had a new bishopric by 1963—Bishop Lory Free, and his counselors were Chase Allred and Tracy Hall. The ward was building a new chapel on Stadium Avenue, but we were still meeting in the old chapel on Canyon Road. At that time, the Church encouraged ward members to contribute labor as well as money to help pay for the chapel. Most of the priesthood quorums were involved in the actual building process and the women were involved with projects to earn money for the building fund.

Darrell Taylor was the scoutmaster and the explorer scouts had been planning for many months to go on a rafting trip down the Colorado River. The trip was to start on Monday morning, June 10, 1963. Excitement was running high! Tracy was to be the representative of the bishop and he was to act as chaplain. Tracy Jr. was the president of the priest quorum and was busy helping to plan the trip. Bill A. Creer, who had recently been reactivated, was the assistant scoutmaster.

All four of the Hall grandparents lived in Ogden, as did many of the children's cousins, aunts and uncles on both the Langford and Hall sides of the family. During the week prior to the planned scout trip, we made a trip to Ogden to see grandparents. Tracy's brother Eugene lived quite near the Langford grandparents at the time, so we dropped in to them on our way home.

Our children liked to visit these cousins because there were two boys, Randy and Allen, and two girls, Karen and Joan, who were close in the ages of four of our own children. David and Tracy soon told the Eugene Hall boys about the projected trip and of course cousin Allen, Tracy Jr.'s age wanted to know if there was a possibility that he could go on the trip, too. Tracy said he would check into the possibility when we got home to Provo. It turned out that a couple of more people were needed to help pay for the trip.

Arrangements were made for the cousins, Allen and Randy, to join the excursion. Randy had just turned 13. He was the president of his deacon's quorum. The rest of the week was spent packing and making final arrangements for the trip. Tracy had always wanted to go on a rafting trip down the Colorado River and he was as excited as the boys were.

Of course it happened! Tracy got the flu! We could almost always count on Tracy having a bout with the flu once or twice a year. And this time it was a bad case. I don't remember exactly when he came down with the flu, probably soon after we came back from Ogden. He immediately called the doctor and they got busy with shots, etc., but by Saturday evening, Dr. Wallace definitely told Tracy that there was no way he could go on that trip. Chase Allred, the other counselor in the bishopric, volunteered to take Tracy's place on the trip as chaplain and representative of the bishopric. The young men's president, Charles Pope, was also going along on the trip. Kilmer Roundy, father of Brian Roundy, of the explorer scouts was also going along to vie a helping hand.

Joyce and Gene drove down to Provo with Randy and Allen on Sunday afternoon and Randy and Allen spend the night before the trip with their Hall cousins. Everyone was excited about the forthcoming trip down the Colorado. Except Tracy, of course, and he was still trying to get well enough to go.

Monday morning Tracy got out of bed, even though he was still ill and all of us went down to the church to see the boys off on their river trip. When the bus came to pick up the boys for the trip, we were surprised to find that a Salt Lake Group had arrived with the bus and would be joining the explorers for the trip. It had been our understanding that this trip was for our Provo scouts only. The group from Salt Lake City included Dr. John Cook and his brother Robert Watkins Cook. Unknown to me that Monday morning was that Robert Cook had married my second cousin, Colleen Leigh Cook.

After a group prayer was said, the boys and their leaders boarded the bus. The bus rolled out of the church parking lot and started for Southern Utah. The families all returned to their homes. What we did not know was that when the scouts arrived in Escalante, Utah, they would get off the bus and load into the back of two and a half ton truck, which would take the passengers and their gear and supplies on a dirt road over to Hole in the Rock on the Colorado River. Once there, they would load onto the rafts and proceed down the Colorado River on rafts.

When we got home, Tracy went back to bed and I went downstairs to do some genealogy. It was going to be a quiet week and with the two boys away, I anticipated that I could get a lot of genealogy done, little did I know!

I do not remember the exact time, but sometime in the afternoon, Tracy came downstairs into the room where I was. I could tell from his face that something was very wrong. He told me that there had been an accident! That Bishop Free had called him. Some of those on our scout trip had been killed and some injured. No names of the injured, the survivors or the dead had been released by the police at that time! And no other details of the accident were available. The police would release the names of the dead and injured all at one time and as soon as they had accurate information.

Slowly it sank in! Were Tracy and David dead? Or injured? And if injured, how seriously? And what about our nephews? We suddenly wished that we hadn't made that trip to Ogden prior to the trip. And what about the rest of the scouts and their leaders?

Chase Allred had gone in Tracy's place. How was he? The worst part of the whole terrible ordeal was the waiting—not knowing where the scouts were or in what condition. The rest of the day we were glued to the radio waiting for news. There still was no specific news of the dead and injured of our PV1 scouts but over the radio we hear that our nephew, Randy Hall, 13 from Ogden had been killed. I cannot remember whether information about Randy's brother Allen was released at the same time. Allen was listed at first as injured, but later it was found that he was uninjured, except for scrapes and bruises.

We had previously called Joyce and Gene to alert them to the news that there had been an accident. When we called the second time, to give them the awful news about Randy they had already heard it—over the radio. I guess his name had been released because he was not of the Provo group. It was terrible for them to receive the news of his death that way.

Bishop Free had called former Bishop Colvin and asked his help. Bishop Colvin had a son J. Lee on the trip and he and Dr. Kezerian and Dr. Ross Phillips flew down to the hospital in Panguitch to help with the injured and see what help they could be in the situation. Dr. Kezerian, an orthopedic surgeon, was a member of the ward. Dr. Phillips was a young doctor who was living in Max Hill's home and attending our ward while the Hills were away on a sabbatical leave.

Later that evening, the grim news finally came in—eight scouts and four adults had been killed and many members of the expedition were injured. Two of the adults and six of the boys who were killed were from our scout troop. It was the third worst accident in Utah history. Bishop Free called the parents of the six boys who had been killed and seriously injured—we heard the sobs and gasps of parents. When he finally came to us, he told us that David was in the hospital, but that as far as they knew Tracy was all right. He didn't know how serious David's injuries were. I think most of us were in shock at that stage.

Because we didn't know how badly David was hurt, the hours seemed interminable from when we first hear the report of the dead and injured, until Tracy Jr. called us about midnight. All we could do was pray that he and the rest of those injured in the accident would be able to make a good recovery from their injuries. It turned out that David's injuries had been minor. He had a slight concussion and black eyes but otherwise was all right. After he and Tracy had been checked over by the doctors, they had been released to kindly residents of Panguitch who gave the boys tender loving care until arrangements could be made to return them to Provo. Other scouts received the same kind and compassionate treatment.

Tracy had been thrown clear of the truck when the accident happened. David told me that he didn't remember anything that happened from the time the truck spilled into the culvert, until he woke up in the hospital. Others in the group said that David just wandered around crying until someone told him to go sit down. He must have been in shock.

Slowly the full, awful truth of the accident came out. By the time the Tuesday June 11, evening papers came out in Provo and Salt Lake, the names of the dead and injured were stark before us. The ward was in shock. The Provo Daily Herald describing the accident said:

Shattering tragedy hung like a solid black cloud over Provo as families, friends and the entire community mourned the death of three men and six boys killed Monday afternoon in the truck accident east of Escalante which claimed a total of 12 lives.

A Salt Lake City man, Marvin Porschatis, died Wednesday in the Panguitch hospital bringing the dead to a total of 13. His head injuries had been too severe for him to be moved to Provo or Salt Lake.

On Tuesday, July 11, additional detail of the accident were revealed as the boys drifted back home. In Escalante all the gear, provisions and passengers for the trip had been transferred to the truck. The truck was heavily loaded. About 45 miles from Escalante, the young driver of the truck just made a sharp turn in the road and started up a steep incline. He attempted to shift down to a lower gear and the engine stalled. The driver tried to put on the hand brake but it did not hold and the truck began to roll backwards towards a steep curve in the road. The truck did not make the turn and rolled over a thirty-five foot embankment, spilling all its human and nonhuman contents into the deep culvert. On its way to the bottom of the culvert, it rolled over some of the occupants and pinned other victims beneath it when it came to rest. Eleven were killed on the spot. A Salt Lake reporter died enroute to the hospital. The thirteenth victim died Wednesday.

The accident occurred at 3:30 in the afternoon, but it was two hours before survivors summoned help from the closest town. It was very fortunate, almost miraculous, that the boys found anyone at all in the vast uninhabited wilderness. Fortunately it was a cool, overcast day. This helped to prevent dehydration of the injured. Dr. Cook, who was with the Salt Lake group was injured himself, but ignored his own injuries and treated as best he could under the circumstances, the dying and the injured. His own brother, the husband of my second cousin, Coleen Leigh, lay dead at his feet. Dr. Cook later said that if he had the right instruments, he would have amputated the foot of J. Lee Colvin whose foot was almost severed in the accident.

During the two hours before help arrived, those who were able helped to pull those injured from the mess of supplies and equipment. I think they must have grabbed the many sleeping bags and used those to lay the injured scouts on. There was no mention of this in the newspaper reports, but I surmised this to be the case, because our own sleeping bags were blood stained. I'm glad that they had all those sleeping bags on the truck. Those bags may have helped cushion some of the bodies of the occupants when the accident happened.

There were many heroes that day besides Dr. Cook, who (in spite of his own injuries) worked ceaselessly for 13 hours, far into the night, treating the wounded, and stopping bleeding. Even after everyone had been removed from the accident site and taken to the Panguitch hospital, he kept going from patient to patient, even though the hospital staff tried to get him to get some rest.

The two men most responsible for the trip, Dr. Darrell Taylor, our scoutmaster, and Dr. Merlin J. Shaw who was connected with the company who sponsored the rafting trip were both dead. So was our assistant scoutmaster, Bill Creer, a Provo Contractor and father of Reed Allen of our scout troop.

Charles Pope, the president of the YMMIA in our ward and Kilmer Roundy, the father of one of the boys in the ward, who had come along to help, stepped into the

leadership. Brother Roundy sent his son and Tom Heal, who later proved to have three broken ribs, to walk back towards Panguitch and get help. While the boys were gone, those who were able to help managed to free all but two of those who were pinned under the truck. The following account is taken from the Deseret News:

The boys walked about two and half miles (one report says 4 miles) until they came across a rancher who was working on his fence. The rancher, Clynn Haws, Escalante, drove the boys to Escalante where they met Sheriff Middleton at a café and reported the accident

Sheriff Middleton notified crews of the State Road Department who were just coming off work. They immediately drove to the scene and began shuttling the injured and dead to the Panguitch Hospital in state-owned panel pickup trucks. One of the workers was Worthen Allen of Escalante:

When I heard of the accident I immediately drove there in a station wagon. It was an awful thing to see. They loaded me up with seven and I immediately drove back to Escalante, where the injured persons were transferred to ambulances and taken to Panguitch and Richfield hospitals. It was the worst thing I've ever seen. I wouldn't want to see it over again, Mr. Allen Said.

After treatment at the hospital, the less seriously injured were taken into private homes in Panguitch where they awaited their families to return them home. Some of the more seriously injured were flown to Provo and Salt Lake City by private and chartered airplanes.

Sheriff Lanard Johnson of Kane County was in Kanab at the time of the accident. He drove about 175 miles to get to the scene and joined Sheriff Middleton who had taken charge although the accident was not in his county. Assisting the two sheriffs was Utah Highway Patrol Trooper, Paul Blackburn.

Sheriff Middleton said when he arrived on the scene he had to use jacks to raise the truck from two injured persons pinned underneath. Of the 46 persons in the truck, eight escaped without injury, including the driver. This means that only about one fourth of the passengers aboard that truck escaped with relatively light injuries. The people of Panguitch turned out in force when they heard about the accident.

Deseret News, July 11, Tuesday, 1963

It was probably Sheriff Middleton who instructed Tracy to make an inventory of the dead and injured to make certain that our whole group was accounted for. Tracy was 16. It was a trying experience for a young boy, but it had to be done and Tracy, uninjured, and one of the older boys was a logical choice. Sheriff Middleton and those who had come

from Escalante then apparently were able to free those who were still trapped under the truck. The Provo Herald quoted our David saying:

Someone pulled me out. I think it was my brother. We started up the hill. The bus (truck) couldn't make it. There was a stop sign—I think there wasn't really—the bus (truck) wouldn't shift. We started rolling back and everyone started screaming. We were thrown around and couldn't stand up. Some of the kids got thrown clear. My cousin is dead though. (Randy Hall of Ogden) of our family can't really be happy even though me and my brother (Tracy Hall Jr.) made it. I was only six inches away from Randy and he's dead and I'm not. I don't know why. Provo Herald, Tuesday, June 11, 1963. ("eye-witness" article. The interviews were taken at the Panguitch Hospital.)

Charles Pope had a similar experience. Two of the boys where were standing next to him in the truck were killed. He was not. There was a Bloodmobile traveling in the area and when they heard of the accident they went directly to Panguitch Hospital. The bloodmobile personnel stayed to help.

The reporters from the Herald interviewed Ronald Clark, who was pinned under the truck for 45 minutes:

Others were pinned too. They were dying and I passed out. I was pinned in the middle and couldn't breathe, but I'm alive, man, I'm alive. The tried to jack up the truck, but we were on sand and it wouldn't hold the jack. I don't know how they ever got me out.

The truck was impounded by the police. The subsequent investigation revealed that the brakes did not hold because there was no brake fluid in the brake cylinder. The truck had not been inspected for some time. We felt sorry for the driver, who was really too young for such a responsible assignment. He ended up having to have therapy in order to cope.

The dead and injured from our ward: (paraphrased from the Deseret News, June 11, 1963):

Dr. Harvey Darrell Taylor, 45, explorer leader, PV 1 Professor of Languages at BYU Killed. Wife, Barbara. Taken in the prime of his life.

William A. "Bill" Creer, 39, Provo contractor, PV 1, Assistant explorer leader. Wife Kathleen. Killed.

Joseph William Erickson, 16, son of Donna and Lloyd Erickson, PV1. Killed.

Randy Wayne Miller, 14, son of Faye and Delos Miller, PV1. Killed

Gary Lynn Christensen, 14, son of Wilma and Louis G Christensen, PV1. Killed.

Lynn Louis Merrill, 15 son of Voniel and LaVoir Merrell, PV1. Killed.

Also from Provo, but not in our ward were:

Dr. Merlin J. Shaw, 51, Bishop of the Manavu LDS Ward, Assistant Professor of Religion at BYU and leader of the expedition. Killed.

Gordon Henry Grow, 15, son of Mr. And Mrs D. Spencer Grow, 1600 N 150 E. Provo. Killed. He had come along on the trip with his best friend, Tom Heal.

From Ogden, Utah:

Randy Melvin Hall, 13, son of Joyce and Eugene M. Hall of Ogden. Killed. (Our nephew.)

From Salt Lake group:

Dorothy Hansen, 24, Salt Lake City, reporter from the Deseret News. Killed.

Robert W. Cook, 30, Son of Howard Cook, Sr. and Pearl Watkins. Married to Coleen Leigh. He left a widow and four small children. Killed.

Marvin Edom Porschatis, student, U of U, 30. Son of Mr. And Mrs. Paul H Porschatis, Salt Lake City. Killed.

Injured from our ward: (List paraphrased from Daily Herald, Wednesday, June 12.)
Sever were injured seriously. They were:

R. Chase Allred. 44. Wife, Virginia. Condition (day after) Fair. BYU Professor of Agricultural Science. Multiple fractures of the pelvis, dislocation of the left hip and fracture of the left shoulder blade. Chase's injuries bother him to this day (1994). He doesn't complain much. He has had several surgeries since the accident to try to correct the problems received in the accident.

J. Lee Colvin. 16. Son of Ruth and Harold Colvin. Shock. Compound fracture and dislocation of the ankle. His foot was almost severed. The foot was saved but gives him problems up to the present. He recently (1994) had surgery to stiffen this ankle.

James Taylor. 17. Son of Darrell Taylor, who was killed and Barbara Boshard Taylor. Head injury. Injured eye and cut forehead. James had a concussion. Condition, fair.

Ronald Benson. 14. Son of Simon and Darlene Benson. Fracture of the jaw and fracture of the pelvis. Condition, good.

Clyde Ashton. 15. Son of Norma and Frank Ashton. Fractured elbow. Condition, good.

Tom Heal. 15. Son of Murial and Ward Heal. Three broken ribs.

Roger Sheffield. 14. Son of Loftis and Blanche Sheffield. Lacerated lip, bruises, and injured ankle.

A survey (by the Herald) of the other members of the expedition who had not remained in the hospital revealed the following:

Jed and David Daley, son of Max and Wanda Daley. Jed received an injured knee and David, chest injuries. Both boys were bruised with welts all over their bodies.

Reed Allen, son of Mr. And Mrs. Dean Boshard. He was pinned under the truck for some time. He suffered a deep laceration near the eye, was bruised and has a sprained thumb and ankle.

Ronald Clark. Son of Sylvester and Vera Clark. No broken bones but suffered wrenched back, swollen, painful knee and head and jaw injuries. Suffered severe shock. He was pinned underneath the truck.

Allen Creer. Son of Kathleen and Bill Creer (who was killed). Scraped head and cut lip, chipped teeth.

Dennis Davis. Son of Mr. And Mrs. Earl Davis. Previously listed as injured but o.k. with no injuries.

David and Tracy Hall. (Our sons) David had blackened eyes and a mild concussion. Tracy was thrown clear and suffered only bruises and stiffness.

Charles Pope. Superintendent of ward MIA. Shock and lacerations.

Brian Roundy. Son of Kiomer and Phyllis Roundy. Hurt knee. Bruises and swelling. Brian Roundy and Tom Heal walked four miles until they found a farmer mending a fence. He took them into Escalante where the police notified the Highway Patrol. The boys then went back with the

officers to the accident site. Short of the site, Tom Heal had to be returned to Panguitch because he was having trouble breathing due to three broken ribs.

Norman Skiba. Son of Julius and Ruth Skiba. Pinned under the truck. In a coma for a while. He was protected by a sleeping bag and after recovering from the coma, his injuries were bruises and welts across his chest, chin and head.

Kilmer Roundy. Brian Roundy's father was also injured, but the paper did not list his injuries. It was he who sent his son and Tom Heal for help in spite of their injuries.

Allen Hall of Ogden, our nephew, was unhurt except for abrasions, etc.

David Shaw. 17. Son of Merlin Shaw, who was killed. Not of our ward, but of Provo Manavu Ward. Had severe dislocation and fracture of the shoulder.

A joint funeral was held at the Provo Tabernacle for the five boys killed in the accident the following Friday. Ben Lewis, our stake president and Reed Bankhead were the speakers. Ronny Clark, although he had an injured jaw, miraculously was able to sing at the funeral. We could not attend because Randy's funeral was being held the same day in Ogden.

Tracy was really torn between the two funerals. He was in the ward bishopric, and felt that he should be at the funeral, especially since Chase, the other counselor to Bishop Free was still in the hospital. Besides, we felt that even with Randy's death, we have been very fortunate to have Tracy Jr., David and Allen come out of that terrible accident with so few injuries. We finally decided that our primary responsibility was to our family and went to Randy's funeral.

How does a ward family recover from something so catastrophic as happened that June day on a lonely, isolated road, 45 miles from any town? It doesn't—not completely, of course. But people go on living and loving and doing the things they have to do and that's what the bereaved of our ward did. All we could do is put our arms around them and help them through it. I think we became closer to each other than we had been before the accident. Even after ward splits, there is a "tie that binds." The tie being of course, the deaths of those young boys just on the threshold of young manhood and of the two husbands and scout leaders—such a tragic loss.

The boys who were in that accident formed a "buddy" closeness. Those who lost brothers felt they had to some how make up for what their brothers hadn't had a chance to accomplish. Almost every boy who reached missionary age chose to go a mission. Would the have gone if the accident hadn't happened? Probably. But who knows?

IN MEMORIUM

On June 10, 1993, on the 30th anniversary of the Pleasant View Ward scout accident, friends and family of those who died in the accident traveled to Escalante again. The Escalante saints gave us a wonderful, completely unexpected, lunch and then we traveled in a caravan to the site of the accident. Several of the boys who were survivors of the accident had arranged to have a monument erected near the site as a memorial to those who had died there 30 years previously.

Tom Heal and J. Lee Colvin conceived the idea for the monument and sent us all letters soliciting the funds needed to make and erect it. They had a hard time getting someone to say the dedicatory prayer. They asked Bishop Free, but he couldn't handle it emotionally. They asked Chase Allred—but he wasn't sure his legs would be up to the terrain. Tracy finally accepted.

Some of the families still felt they did not want to open old wounds by attending. Many of those who did attend said that the excursion had a healing effect upon them. Jim Taylor, whose father was killed, couldn't remember much of what had happened on that day. Newspaper reports of the monument dedication quoted him as saying:

I've been thankful a lot of what happened was blocked out. I don't know how I would have handled it. I've had a lot of blanks for years and I want to sort through all those. I am glad that I came. I need to work out those details. As painful as it is, I just need to know.

Another who attended said:

Never until this day have we had the opportunity to thank the people from Escalante and Panguitch and surrounding areas for their efforts.

J. Lee and Tom said that as their dream of a monument worked itself in to reality, the feared might bring up old memories that many would rather keep hidden. It's been a healing process for many of us. The feeling of tragedy has changed now to peace—and it will always be that way, Heal added.

Eugene and Joyce did not attend. Joyce took Randy's death hard. She had a hard time going to sacrament meetings after he was killed. He had been his deacons quorum president and it was hard for her not to see Randy passing the sacrament with the other boys. Her doctor finally coaxed her into seeing a therapist. She had refused to put a marker on Randy's grave. It was the first thing that therapist insisted she do. Until she did, he felt that she would not let herself admit Randy was really dead. And all that time I had thought she had taken his death beautifully. She finally told me how difficult his death had been for her.

Forty-nine people attended the dedication. Among them was my second cousin Coleen Cook. She had never remarried. A couple of weeks after the accident, another cousin had called me and asked if I realized that Coleen's husband, John Cook, had died in the accident. I went to visit her shortly after that. Jon was a talented teacher and had

received an appointment to be a school principal the next fall. He was just thirty years of age, just beginning what promised to be a great career as an educator.

Writing this paper brought it all back. Our lives are full of joy and full of tragedy. Many of our ward membership received more than their share of tragedy on that dreadful June 10, 1963. It was healing for me to travel down to the spot where it all happened and remember those who died and who were seriously injured in that isolated, lonely spot, 30 years previously. Who knows, maybe the monument in that particular spot will act as a warning of “danger ahead” to those who make similar treks in the future.

Tracy gave a wonderful dedicatory prayer. A copy of the dedicatory prayer, which Tracy gave at the memorial site that day is attached to this paper.