

Memories of my mother, Ida-Rose Langford Hall (20 Feb. 1921 – 7 Mar 2005)
by H. Tracy Hall, Jr., 12 Oct 2007

I begin with what I can't remember, what I first learned from reading Mom's journal shortly before her funeral. Mom really wanted Dad to be with her when I was born (Hill Field, Davis County, Utah, 19 Oct 1945.) It confirmed my life-long assurance that they were a team, completely committed to our family. Dad was able to obtain leave from the Navy from his post back east, but the train wasn't fast enough to beat me. The chemist in me took note that Mom greeted Dad with "an ethery kiss." (Ethyl ether, $C_2H_5OC_2H_5$, used in anesthesia for more than a century, has a long half-life for elimination.)

Other early events in my life are also known only from Mom's telling. She said that I was a very clingy baby, very demanding of her time and attention. At that time, doctors ordered mothers to bottle-feed their babies with the new "scientific" formulas. I suspect I just needed more of both nurture and nutrition than decreed by science.

Fast forward sixteen months. In those days women stayed in the hospital for about a week after giving birth. When David was born, Mom left Sherlene and me in the care of her sister, Aunt Irma Wilcox. When Mom came to get us, I punished her for "abandoning" me by having nothing to do with her. Personalities can sure make themselves known early!

Somehow Mom nurtured me to adulthood while I took my dependence on her for granted. It seems that we forget what we take for granted and remember only the unusual. Perhaps my earliest memory is of a strange man in a strange black robe and black cap tossing me in the air. That would have been Dad, getting his Ph.D from the University of Utah in 1948, when I was about 3. Mom, no doubt very happy, and dressed very prettily for the occasion, was just normal, and thus not remembered.

I've called her Mom for so long that I was recently surprised to see how I referred to my parents on the back side of photos that I took with my "Hawkeye" Kodak Camera, one of many thoughtful Christmas gifts that inspired life-long interests. 1959, when I was 14, as "Mommy" and "Daddy." I wonder exactly when I made the transition to "Mom."

Speaking of Christmas, for which occasion we have the most photos, the most excitement, and the most memories, Mom was always the person to whom we confided our wishes for Santa-Claus. I first learned the truth about Santa from Sherlene, who excitedly revealed the secret to me in the basement playroom of the house Mom & Dad built on home on Vly Road in Niskayuna, New York. (The house can still be seen in Google Earth at 42.7582°N 73.8368°W.) I would have been about five or six. Sherlene said Santa was Mommy and Daddy, but I finally came to understand that Santa was really Mommy, with financial underwriting from Daddy. Her frugality, learned no doubt during the great depression and the rationing of World War II, would not permit her to buy what she could make, and I have many memories of her sewing day and night in the weeks preceding Christmas.

Mom knew everything, of course. One of my first direct memories of a conversation with her came from about 1949, when I was four. This was in the large upstairs play & sewing room in our rental home at 401 Bedford Road in Schenectady, New York (probably the house seen at 42.8054°N, 73.9222°W). She was sewing a pretty dress for Sherlene, and I said, "I wish I was a girl so I could wear pretty dresses." "Oh, don't worry," she said. "Boys grow up to be girls!" Her sense of humor was lost on my naive understanding, and I'm not sure how long it took me to figure it out that I would never get to wear a dress. But she did sew for us boys, too, and I remember a suit she made for me, also corduroy

pants, tee shirts, and button-up shirts.

It was also at 401 Bedford Road where I first realized my great dependence on my mother. She became seriously ill, I believe with pneumonia, and was bed-ridden at home for what seemed like the longest time. I remember the Doctor's house calls, and how we kids were supposed to somehow keep quiet and not bother her. I remember gathering around her as she received a priesthood blessing. It had never occurred to me that my source of nurture, comfort, and strength was herself susceptible to illness. I understood nothing of death, but I distinctly remember the fear of somehow losing her. How happy I was when I could again take her for granted!

Mom was good at comforting childhood hurts, and I was always prone to banging myself into something. I remember crashing my tricycle into the outside stucco of the house on Bedford Road and hitting my head hard. I knocked a little piece of sand or rock so deep into my forehead that Mommy wasn't able to get it out -- or maybe I resisted her efforts to clean it out so bad that she finally gave up. At any rate, after the wound healed, the rock remained embedded between bone and skin. You could feel it and see its bluish color. Mom and I were equally proud of the "rock in my head" that was not finally absorbed until I was an adult.

Another memory from Bedford Road was the infamous steak incident. Our family did not waste food. Steak was a special treat, but no doubt this cut wasn't exactly tenderloin. Mommy chopped it into tiny pieces for me, but it was still "too tough." Or maybe I don't really remember the actual incident, but just the photo of me, pouting in the high chair?

Mom was always a good cook, an efficient and faithful one who fed a large family three times a day on a frugal budget. She learned how to make inexpensive powdered milk more palatable by mixing it 1/1 with fresh milk. We each had our chores; including setting and clearing the table and doing dishes, but it seems she always did the cooking, calling out for us to bring her this or that from the "fruit room." We always had our meals together, with some kind of loud bell to call us from the far corners of the house of the neighborhood. During my teen years, breakfast was the time for family prayer and scripture reading.

I mostly loved Mom's cooking, but she occasionally treated food like medicine, and liver was administered often enough to remember. Then there was French onion soup, which I guess must have been one of Dad's favorites. But if she cooked it, we all had to eat it. I still don't like French onion soup. But I loved creamed eggs with grated yolk on toast, her special "pineapple fluff" dessert, and especially home-made bread hot from the oven. She'd let us tear off the crust and smother it with butter and honey, and often she'd fry some of the dough. I think we called it fried bread -- not scones.

My earliest memories of what the Church now calls "provident living" probably come from about 1950-51, Vly Road in Niskayuna, New York. More than once we took a drive in the fall to a farm that had goats and concord grapes. I loved the smell of the farm. We'd take home several bushels of grapes, and Mom would turn them into grape juice, the hard way, putting all the hot juice through cheese-cloth. Mom also was a full participant in the maple sugar experiment Dad undertook one spring. There were many sugar maples in the woods around our home, and Dad placed the spigots and buckets. It was fascinating to watch the sap drip, drip, drip into the bucket. I was disgusted with all the insects that drowned in the buckets. Mom boiled and boiled and boiled the sap, and we did get yummy and precious maple syrup. In later years this memory gave me a small appreciation for the great labor involved when the family of Joseph Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith averaged a yearly production of 1,000 pounds of maple sugar around the time of Joseph Jr's first vision (1820).

Mom did lots of canning, and she actually managed to enlist our generally cheerful participation, because we learned to appreciate the delicious natural reward of our efforts! My favorite, which probably also involved the hardest work, was the annual production of about 100 two-quart jars of apricot nectar each early summer, in the kitchen of our home at 1711 North Lambert Lane, Provo Utah (40.2568°N 111.649°W). We picked the apricots from the orchard north-east of their home in Ogden, which still stands at 41.2041°N 111.963° W. The pits were sweet, and we dried them on the roof of the carport. We used large stainless steel kettles and put all those 'cots through the cone-shaped calendar, using a wooden pestle, and we had apricot juice for breakfast several times a week, year-round. In later years, without her crew, Mom still bottled the apricots whole and turned them into juice on demand in her "Osterizer," but the kind that went through the calendar was always the best. The canning success that most amazed me was pickles -- how such a yummy treat could come from that foul-smelling, mold-covered brine bath.

Mom loved her parents, and we visited them at least every two years while living in New York, and about twice a month after moving to Utah. She clearly learned her attributes of hard work, love of the gospel, and love and loyalty to her family from her parents. Grandma (Zina Charlotte Chlarson) Langford always hummed while she worked, a practice which continues in my family to this day. Both her father Ernest F. Langford and Dad's father Howard Hall lived with her and Dad, in turn, in their old age.

Mommy was a teacher. My earliest memory of her teaching me was helping me to memorize a talk in Junior Sunday School that was taken from a tale in "The Wind in the Willows" (Kenneth Grahame, 1908). I remember her patience and my agony in trying to memorize the story, and the joy I had when I successfully delivered it. I just reviewed the synopsis in Wikipedia and can't recognize the tale I told. In one story, Rat and Mole receive help from the god Pan in finding the missing son of Otter. I don't think it was that one, but who knows? Maybe Mom did a little creative editing, and Rat and Mole got help from Heavenly Father? I do look forward to a restoration of my memory of my childhood at the last day.

Mom freely admitted a deficit in religious education during her growing-up years, not having read the Book of Mormon until after her marriage. In fact, she gave a wrong answer to the first question about religion that I remember asking her. It was on one of our frequent trips to outlying branches in upstate New York, probably when I was about 7 or 8 (1952-3), when Dad was in the district Sunday School Presidency. I asked her how it was possible for God to hear my prayers when many other people might be praying to him at the same time. She answered that he has lots and lots of angels who help him. I wasn't quite satisfied with having my prayers filtered through angels, but I continued to pray. And when I was baptized Mom and Dad gave me a leather-bound LDS Bible, complete with maps, note pages, and "Ready References for Missionaries," imprinted with my name, I began my own acquaintance with and love for the scriptures. I read the whole Bible within the year. I thank her for that gift, and for the warm comfort and assurance I received as I read.

Mom made up her childhood deficit with devoted study of the scriptures in her adult years, and I was proud of her service in teaching and administrative positions in the Church and her acquisition of gospel knowledge. The letter she wrote at 4:00 a.m. on May 7, 1973, parts of which I read at her funeral, was inspired by her reading in Alma 7:15 about the sins that so easily beset us. It was a masterpiece of introspection and application of the atonement of Jesus Christ to her personal weaknesses. I will forever treasure her example of a broken heart and a contrite spirit.

Mom & Dad were very active in the small Schenectady Branch, and I remember modeling pajamas she sewed for me to raise money at a "Relief Society bazaar" for the building fund. I especially appreciate the attention Mom and Dad paid to the several young single professional men in the Branch, whom everyone referred to as "the bachelors." She would often take them baked goods and have them to our home for dinner. It seems that one couple conducted their courtship at our home on Vly Road -- I believe it was Hugh Woodbury and Joyce Nichols. They taught me to appreciate the comic strip "Pogo."

I have two strong memories associated with driving home from church in Schenectady. Once we passed a construction site and Dad witnessed a boy falling. He ran and brought him to the car, and Mom cradled him on her lap as we took him to the hospital for stitches. There was blood all over her.

The other was when my fingers got slammed in the car door as we were leaving Church. They were completely smashed. Mommy & Daddy were going to take me to the hospital, but since they had invited the missionaries to dinner and home was on the way, they decided to stop and ask the missionaries to give me a blessing. My fingers were healed immediately. Mom says that all through dinner I just kept looking at my healed fingers, flexing them in wonder.

Such was the faith of my Mother, Ida-Rose Langford Hall. That is what I remember best from her and which has the most lasting value in my life.