

## Alfaretta Neff Seely

Alfaretta Neff was born January 16, 1873 in East Mill Creek (now Salt Lake City) Utah, to Franklin and Frances Maria Stillman (Russell) Neff. Her father was part owner with his father John Neff of the Neff flour mill and also the miller, in that capacity he furnished flour free to the Indians who came to the mill. He also (by the request of Brigham Young) went with Porter Rockwell (his brother-in-law) among the Indian tribes to bring a friendly relationship between the white settlers and the Indians. He liked these Lamanite people and when this little daughter was born, he asked his wife to have her named Alfaretta, but she said this was a pretty Indian name. However, she didn't look like the people for whom she was named because her eyes were blue and her hair auburn. In her school years the boys called her "carrots" to tease her.

She has told me how she visited the mill often when people were getting flour, Indians were always among the people gathered there. She said sometimes the Indian children would chase her and she wasn't sure it was all in fun. One day a large boy took after her and she ran up and across the narrow boards in the top of the mill, and looking down at the machinery and water wheel she wondered how she dared to cross such narrow planking. But she loved the mill and the excitement of being there with her father. In her life time she carried out her father's admonition to be a friend to the Indian. I can remember the Indian women and children coming to our house in Salt Lake begging for food and mother always found something in the pantry or cellar to give them. Once they gave me a little cloth doll. I was a bit frightened of the Indian men. Is it not an interesting thing that my husband and I were called to serve a two year mission for our church among the Indian tribes of the "Plains States" and I would work closely with these women as mission Relief Society president?

The Indians did steal at times, maybe in the beginning from necessity, it became a trait with some of them, not all. The Neff family had brought some fine thorough bred horses with them from Penn-

Pennsylvania. They were prized animals. One of these animals had been stolen by some Indians and evidently mistreated, for when he was found and brought back to the Neff stables he would go into a frenzy when Indians came to the mill. He could sense or smell them, mother said, and then she was sent to the stable to cover the horse's head and hold him quiet until they had left.

After her father died (she was a young girl) she took over many chores to help her widowed mother. The feeding and brushing of the horses was one of the chores she shared with her brother Seymour. She loved to ride the horses, and she often was seen galloping up Salt Lake's main street, riding side saddle, her red hair streaming down her back.

She attended "grade school" and later graduated from the Young Ladies Academy.

She was taught to be a "lady". There were some things one did not do if she were a lady—a properly brought-up young woman. One never chased a young man and was most careful in displaying affectionate feelings in that direction. However, she and Art (Arta McLain) Seely lived in the same area, were mutually attracted and had an "understanding," so he was called on a mission for the church to the Southern States—serving in Alabama. Alfie's mother did not approve entirely of the young man, but mother said it was because she, Alfie, was the youngest daughter and only girl at home and her mother did not want her to marry for a very long time. So father and mother had to be a bit discreet in their correspondence, so father sent letters to her in care of a cousin while he was on his mission. We <sup>children</sup> now have some of those letters (mother treasured and kept them) among them is a beautiful poem father wrote and sent to Alfie together with a magnolia blossom.

Art contracted malaria and was so ill he was honorably released to return home before completing his mission. He was ill for some time and then when the young couple decided to get married, Alfie's mother relented and gave them a lovely wedding reception after their marriage in the Endowment House on May 3, 1899. We (the children) have one of the engraved wedding invitations. Mother (Alfie) said that day a heavy snow fall brought the branches of flowering fruit trees down onto the ground, also her

3) bridegroom was a sorry sight with the malaria fever sores still covering his mouth. It is interesting to note Alfie's mother (my grandmother Frances Maria) came, to love and depend on Art (my father). She lived with them and died in their home.

When mother was a young girl tragedy came into her life with the sad circumstances of the death of her sister Alice. Alice a young woman in her 20<sup>s</sup> became ill and her abdomen began to extend. People began to whisper to her mother that Alice was pregnant though unmarried, and "not to worry". Alice had always been a good person and told her mother she was not pregnant and please to take her to a doctor. Her mother did, the doctor operated and found Alice full of a malignant tumor. He said they could not take it out it was so entwined around her other organs, so she was sewed up and passed away a few days later. The family was grief stricken, the "whispering people" deeply ashamed - but it didn't bring Alice back. Alfie especially felt the loss of Alice. The Bishop asked Alfie if he could give her a special blessing and she said she would like to feel peace in her heart and in their home, and she said from the blessing she received, she could look at her sister Alice as she lay on the "library table" dressed for burial, and feel such a feeling of peace that she could put her arms around her and lie down beside her. Mostly she felt she could forgive the ones who spoke cruelly about Alice, and she also told us children (when we came along) that it taught her, Alfie, to be very careful in her judgement of others.

As a young girl Alfie was taught how to "keep" a house. Her saying to us children was "anything worth doing is worth doing well". She was also taught how to cook and to sew, making many of her own clothes and when she married and we children came along she sewed beautiful clothes for us, often making over the "hand me downs". Being a third child and first girl I remember the white, starched dresses trimmed in lace and insertion that I wore. One time when I was about four years old and in my father's

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orchard and my cousins picking cherries, nice, big juicy black ones. They suggested that I hold out the skirt of my pretty, white dress and they would throw down some cherries for me. They threw down the fruit that spattered all over me. I realized I had done a dumb thing and mother would be unhappy at the sight of my dress. She was more understanding than I deserved. I saw her cry though when my two older brothers carried me into the house minus one of my shoes, the other having been burned in the bonfire they had built to dry me out when they had accidentally dropped me into the creek at the bottom of our lot! I realize now of course it was not the shoe she was crying over. Another time I heard her say "darn it to damn" when our pet billy goat got into the dirt cellar back of our house in Salt Lake and ate the labels off her storage of canned food.

Mother's people on the Neff side came from Penn. and were called "high Dutch" - the Dutch really meaning German. Her mother's people from England to New York state. The Neff people brought some original recipes they handed down from generation to generation. Such as browning of the butter then adding to cooked vegetables, german strawberry short cake, cooked mustard ice cream and creamed cabbage, etc. These and others mother taught me how to do!

Before I was born my father and mother lived for a while with my grandfather Isaac Seely and took care of him. He was the one who said "When I die let it be with my boots on". This is what happened for him too, because one day he said he was ill, went to his bed, stretched himself out (boots on) and passed away. Mother was always kind to him and he loved her. He gave her a little bay mare called Nettie and mother drove places with Nettie hitched to a carriage. When Dad bought a ranch in Rosette, Box Elder County, Utah, Nettie and the carriage moved with us. I loved to ride Nettie and my sister Leola was generally riding with me. Nettie was a faithful and loved animal until she retired.

Mother (Abie) held positions in church organizations. I remember her talking about teaching classes, being a secretary and belonging to The Ladies Chorus in Salt Lake. When we moved to Rosette she was a Bishop's wife for many years, was Primary and Relief Society president, later a stake Relief

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aid in the burlew stake.

She served as Postmaster in Rosette for a number of years.

She was considered a lady - well born. People loved and respected her. The only time I remember her "cutting anyone down to size" as we used to say, was when a woman who was always needling her, who had been appointed to help organize and carry out a ward picnic with Mother. There were many things that had to be done and this woman left Mother to do them all and on the day of the picnic she stayed away. Meeting Mother a few days later as we were shopping at the country store she said, with sarcasm "So sorry I couldn't make it to the picnic," and Mother replied, "Oh, weren't you there?"

Mother never felt dressed to go any place without a hat and gloves. When money was scarce and Mother's hat gave out she would borrow father's to wear and wear it she did like a crown. No one ever laughed or made a joke of it either.

When father moved us out of the "city" to the ranch there was no electricity there. We learned to use kerosene lights. Mother's washer, electric, was left behind and as we turned the wheel by hand on the wooden one to wash clothes, or scrub them on a board by hand, Mother would say to me "we can manage, and you needn't mention how we wash

to your cousins in Salt Lake when you write". Oh yes, my mother had pride. It did away with a lot of complaining. She would have a lawn and flowers and borrowed father's irrigation water to flood the lawn and "pan dip" onto the flower beds. As water was scarce some seasons in that area, there sometimes occurred an interesting discussion between father and Mother as to the importance of lawn and flowers versus alfalfa and grain. I can't remember when we didn't have lawn and flowers!

Mother saved up the pennies and purchased a second hand piano from Jesse Hoopes in Brigham City. It was nearly new, but one of the Hoopes sons had used a hammer to break off the edge of some of the white keys and the Hoopes family didn't like the look of that and wanted a new piano. When we got the piano home father filed the edge of the keys off until they

6/ all matched - Presto! a new piano to us which we loved. It has a beautiful tone to this day. My sister and I rode a horse seven miles to Lillian Burton's house in Park Valley to learn to play the piano and then seven miles back home. Our teacher was not a professional, therefore we did not become professional musicians, but we could play church hymns and simple arrangements, and mother said it was good for her soul - though we didn't understand then what she meant.

Mother expected the best efforts from us children, namely: Arta Elwyn, Frances Leland, Verna May (me), Leola and Grant McLain - and usually received it. She trusted us, she also taught us things we never forgot.

I have always said she was the best friend I ever had. I didn't always understand all the things she did, but I do now. Like the time I was the age to be something of a nuisance to my older brother Elwyn, especially one Sunday afternoon when he and a girl were sitting on a large rug on our lawn - so was I. The girl's reputation was not the best. The girl would pull grass and push it down his neck and he did the same to her. Then they were rolling on the grass and my brother told me he was sure my mother wanted me in the house. So I went to her and she (who kept an eye on brothers too) said sure she wanted me - and giving me some lemonaid and cookies told me to take the goodies out to my brother and the girl and stay with them and help eat the refreshments. I did. I can see mother's strategy now and appreciate it.

On my first date with a boy I had enjoyed a good night kiss, in spite of the fact I had heard from many sources that girls didn't "go around kissing boys". The next morning before going from my room I held a preparatory talk with myself. I'd broach my mother with my new found knowledge that kissing a boy was not a bad thing. I said to myself "she will say this, and I will say that - etc. etc." I found mother at her treadle sewing



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machine, picking bastings from a garment she was making. I sat on the floor by her chair and out with it. "so what's so bad about kissing a boy, mother?" She smiled at me and said calmly "Nothing really, it can be very nice -" she paused and pulled a basting thread then continued "the problem is what it can lead to." The wind was gone from my sails and I sat and stared at her, then said "Don't stop there, tell me what you are thinking about". Then she told me, not the birds and the bees story, but a new "Beauty and Beast" one. The beauty of sex in the proper setting of love and marriage and the beast it can turn out to be to bring darkness into ones life. How the stirring of sexual responses is a natural thing and we accept this as we do all other physical needs and we govern each to our best emotional, spiritual and physical good - and well being of others concerned.

I could always talk freely to my mother about anything and always feel helped or comforted as the need may be.

It was a whole new life for mother, father and us the children - four of us (Grant the youngest was born later) when we moved from Salt Lake (East Mill Creek) to a cattle ranch in Rosette, Box Elder County, Utah. It was a learning period for all of us, the getting used to the climate of snow and blizzards, the acres of land to care for, the animals, the amount of machinery it took to operate and cultivate the land. But mostly mother was overwhelmed at the number of ranch hands to cook for at times, especially the first time threshing of the grain occurred. The threshing machine was operated by ten horses that walked round and round in a circle turning the machinery of the thresher, and there were fifteen men to take care of the various jobs in the procedure, including the hauling of the wheat crop from the fields and the finished kernels of wheat to the granary. We served the men three meals a day, the number of days according to amount of grain to be threshed and the time spent in setting up and sometimes the breaking down of the machinery. I remember my mother having me sit on the porch steps peeling potatoes, every time

8/ she looked out at all the threshing crew. she would bring me a few more potatoes to peel! a ranch meal always started with meat and potatoes as basis -

my mother's nursing ability extended from the family and people to the farm animals. Often I saw her with a bottle and nipple giving a sick lamb or calf a drink of ginger tea. I loved going with her to care for the many setting hens, both chicken and turkeys, she had, and when the eggs hatched I loved the beautiful baby chicks. She would let me hold them gently.

We fed these older birds the wheat we raised, the first feed for the chicks was cottage cheese (we made ourselves) and crumbled, hard boiled eggs. The wheat was large, white kernels and we would use some of it for our breakfast cereal, cleaning it well, soaking it in water over night and cooking it in the morning. During the war we had "fruit mush" the wheat cereal being made into little patties and fried in ranch butter. We had cream that was skimmed from pans of milk kept in our cool outside cellar. Some of this cream was hand churned into butter. Mother would wash the butter, salt it, work it well with a wooden paddle then press it into a wooden press that would hold a pound of butter, it came from the press as a square shaped goodness (sometimes mother added a bit of yellow food coloring if it looked too colorless) then the pounds were wrapped in clean, damp cloths, some to be stored in the cellar for our use, some sold to the miners who worked the century and Susanna mines. Mother learned the Susanna mine was named after a cousin of hers.

Father and mother would reprimand us children when needed. It was generally justifiable and thorough. It was a learning experience and one we remembered.

We had company at our house much of the time and mother seemed to handle all the extra work with serenity. father was a member of Boy Elder County School Board and when Superintendent Skidmore or other members of school board visited school in our valley they stayed at our house, over night and had meals with us. father was Bishop for many years and



9/visiting Stake leadership were also entertained in our home.

We learned when we moved into the valley that men from neighboring towns and communities, riding for cattle that had strayed off their range, considered it a western courtesy for ranchers to give them meals and a bed when night fall caught them in the vicinity of a ranch. Mother was taken by surprise "but soon recovered when she saw two strange, young men water their horses at the wooden trough, unsaddle and lead them into the stable and come to the house with the assurance of meals and a bed. Mother met the situation with her usual graciousness!

Our cousins from Salt Lake enjoyed visiting the ranch and we enjoyed having them come. I also remember mother sending me to visit in Salt Lake each year also, so I would remember, absorb some of the "cultural" things the country didn't have at that time! Dear mama.

For many years the school teachers boarded at our house in the valley too, because there was no other place for them to stay.

In the year 1928 my parents moved to Brigham City. Father served in the Stake High Council there and mother was busy in Relief Society work. She was a member of the Seagull Camp of the Daughters of Utah Pioneers.

She had lovely flower gardens and enjoyed working in them. She said you were among special friends when you were with your flowers. "show them a little love and they return it three-fold."

Mother was a "hard worker," told us often "anything worth doing is worth doing well," she had good health most of her life, however, she suffered hardening of the arteries in her later years. I remember father telling me the doctor had cautioned him to watch for her heart problems and keep her from shocks. Father said "no more can I drop down onto my knee, mew-ing like a cat to tease her, it always startles her a bit when I do." This had been a fun thing for them both. Father and mother made no secret that they had been sweethearts all of their married life. They had been kind to and so thoughtful of each other too.

Mother had the beautiful gift of appreciation. She made one feel so special over any little token of consideration we gave her. I have seen her eyes sparkle and she would tell father "it is just what I wanted - or needed" - sometimes the gift was but a small sack of peppermint candy.

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In January of 1943 mother suffered a blood clot on her heart, after a week in hospital she passed away January 19, 1943 and lies buried in the Seely family plot in the Brigham City (Utah) cemetery.

I feel I should include an inspirational experience I had after mother's death. I missed her very much and I thought often of what heaven or the spirit world is really like. One night my mother came to me in a dream - a very clear and real experience. There were (it seemed) a number of people in our home and mother opened the door and came quickly inside. She was dressed as I had seen her often on a Sunday. Under her arm she carried a packet of papers. She smiled and said "Bonnie (a pet name for me) I want you to know I love each of you & am very busy and can't stay long." I said "Mother what are you doing?" She looked down at the papers she held, and when I asked her to let me read them, she smiled again and replied, "as of now you won't be able to read what is written." I tried but I couldn't understand what they said. She gathered the papers up, smiled and left us. Thirty years later as I have become involved with genealogy work I know what was written on the papers my mother had and was busy with.

- written by Verna May Seely Carter

The following information is verified from Temple and church records.

Alfaretta Neff born January 16, 1873

Baptized June 5, 1881

Endowed May 3, 1899

married to Arta Mc Lain Seely May 3, 1899 in the  
Endowment House, Salt Lake City, Utah

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