

ISAAC JOSEPH SEELY

"When I die, let it be with my boots on". It was Isaac's way of saying "I've met the adversaries in my life face to face and conquered them while I stood upon my feet. When I meet death, my greatest challenge, let me not be a coward, but let me be standing in my boots." So it was that one day at sixty-five years of age he complained of feeling a "bit under the weather" and as his son and daughter-in-law watched anxiously, he went to his bed, stretched himself full length upon it and died--with his boots on.

But this is the end of the story. In the beginning, Isaac Joseph Seely was born August 25, 1837 in Chicago, Illinois. His parents were William Seely and Lucy Ann Decker. He had a younger sister, Harriet, and there was another baby who died in infancy.

When he was four and one half years old, his parents separated, and it was during this period of his life that his mother Lucy Ann joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. After the separation from her husband she took her two children, Isaac and Harriet and joined her parents and friends on their move westward.

Lucy Ann Seely became the first plural wife of Brigham Young on June 15, 1842 in Nauvoo. Isaac lived in Nauvoo and he and his sister Harriet crossed the plains with their mother and when they reached Great Salt Lake became part of the busy household of Brigham Young and Lucy Ann.

When Isaac was fifteen years old, he went to California and stayed there for six years. We have no record of who he went with or what he did while there, but when he returned to Salt Lake as a young man of twenty-one, it was to find that his beloved sister Harriet had died during his absence. She was a young eighteen years.

Brigham Young appointed Isaac to be one of his body guards and during the time he served as such he had a number of dangerous experiences and "rough and tumble" contacts with would-be assailants, from which he emerged a first rate wrestler. He was also an expert marksman.

He met lovely brown eyed, black haired Elizabeth Jane Fisher and they were married May 17, 1862. Records show they were later sealed in the Manti Temple.

From this union nine children were born: Lucy Evaline, Helen Marr, Frank Clifford, Isaac Vance, William Henry, Arta McLain, Eugene, and Don Ralph.

Elizabeth was a gentle and loving wife to Isaac and mother to their children. The children learned to pray at her knee.

Isaac said there were two special women in his life, his mother and his wife.

He named his first daughter Lucy after his mother. This daughter spent happy days in association with her grandmother Lucy Ann. She learned to sew, and baked her first cake in her grandmother's home and under her direction.

With a young family, Isaac was called to pioneer in Hoytsville, Summit County, Utah. The family later moved to East Mill Creek, Salt Lake County, Utah, where they lived until the parents' deaths.

Elizabeth died October 14, 1885, and Isaac was left a widower. The two oldest children, both girls, helped with the younger boys and when Lucy married, she took one of the young children into her home for a while, and kept reminding the children to remember the religious training their mother had given them.

It was said of Isaac that one would not call him a particularly religious man, but one who was "straight as a string" and "honest as the day was long."

There are generally two sides to every story. Isaac said that at one time a group of men, church men, approached him about making a change in his main irrigation ditch on his property. Knowing that water is the life blood of the soil, and believing the change would be disastrous to his welfare, he refused. The group of men then told him to be at a "hearing" to be held on a certain date. Isaac smiled--and did not attend. Shortly afterward, he was informed that a "hearing" had been held and he was "cut off from the Church." Years later and after his death, a son had Isaac reinstated in the Church. The minutes of that memorable "hearing" when Isaac was cut off from the Church had been recorded upon a torn piece of wrapping paper. An insignificant piece of paper to influence a man's life.

Once a daughter said to him, "Dad, how do you expect to get to heaven?" and he replied with a twinkle in his eye, "Well, Brigham Young told me once he would help save me and I'm sure counting on that!"

A son came to him and told him he would like to go on a mission for his Church and his father did not stop to complain he was a widower caring for the family who were not married, but gladly sent the son into the mission field.

Isaac raised an honest family. He gave to the poor and was available at all times to help those who needed it.

Among the family stories the children told was the one about the baking powder biscuits he made for them every day. It was one of the younger boys who ran home from school one day, bursting through the kitchen doorway to shout, "Hold everything, Dad--our teacher said if anyone ate baking powder biscuits every day of his life for thirty years it would pretty near kill him!" His father said, "Well son, let's keep track of time and when you reach the age of twenty-two we'll stop eating 'em."

So lived a hardy, early pioneer who had an abundance of "intestinal fortitude" and a great compassion for the down-trodden.

--Verna Seely Carter, granddaughter

* Arta M. Seely was baptized for Isaac Joseph Seely June 5, 1936 and all ordinances were restored to him.

This life sketch was published in a lesson manual of daughter's Utah Pioneer, and is now on file in the Miller building in Salt Lake City.