

History of Matilda Sarepta Jolley Ahlstrom

Matilda Sarepta Jolley was born January 16, 1876, in Mt. Carmel Utah, to William Jackson Jolley and Elizabeth Jenkensen Stolworthy. Her parents feared she would not live because she had been born prematurely, so she was christened minutes after birth. She was named after both of her Grandmothers, a fact she took pride in.

Her Father and his Brother built cabins in a lovely green meadow and because they both played violins and supplied the music for dances in the community, the meadow became known as fiddlers green.

Over the hill was an Indian encampment and when a child, Grandmother would lie in her bed at night listening to the chanting and the drums of the Indians. This was a frightening experience because the Indians were still quite hostile. Her Mother and Aunt would plan just what to do if the Indians came when their husbands were not at home. They planned to hide their babies in the wheat bin and keep weapons within reach to fight with if it became necessary... and many times the Indians did come. The family would give them provisions or try to give them what they asked for. They tried to be honest with them and they did come to be respected by the Indians. When Grandmother Jolley would go to the door the Indians would ask if her "Mormon" was home.

Grandmother Ahlstrom told of counting out every tenth bushel of corn or wheat or every tenth squash or food item they raised to give to the tithing house...and her father never left for the fields in the morning without calling his family for prayers. When the weather was bad and they couldn't get to church, they held a service right in their home, reading from the bible and singing hymns by the hour...the family loved music so.

One of the greatest things my Grandmother felt a person could be thankful for was a strong healthy body. She had been given a weak body at birth and later her parents sent for a brace to give strength to her spine. She was determined to keep up with the other children her age and developed her body by participating in all of the sports. She delighted in the fact that she could hit a ball or run a race as well as any of the young people. I'm sure one could use the words optimist and determined to describe her; no one ever heard her complain about her lot in life. It was her opinion that you could do anything if you put your mind to it.

When fifteen years of age Tillie was called to serve as president in the first MIA in that part of Utah. She and her sister would hurry home from school, walking the three or four miles and then do their chores and hurry back to ready the school house for Mutual. They had great times putting on plays and presenting musical numbers...and increasing their talents in this way. She appreciated so much the 6th ward girls visiting her and paying her honor in her later years, because Mutual was always her favorite organization.

In 1896, Tillie met James Peter Ahlstrom at a dance and after a period of courting they were married and began raising their family. In 1908 they had their marriage solemnized in the Salt Lake Temple.

Grandfather Ahlstrom built a lovely two story home with a veranda on two sides. They were happy there, raising their family but Grandfather wasn't satisfied with the way that part of the country was building up or producing. So midst tearful goodbyes they set out for Idaho by wagon. Grandfather felt that this part of Idaho had a great future and would be one of the most productive areas because of the abundant water.

They settled in Basalt and built up a nursery along with their farming. The work was heavy for a young mother during this period of time. Water had to be heated on the big Monarch coal range, soap had to be made; sometimes the lye was extracted from ashes to make the soap, butter was churned, cheese made, and Tillie would make her treadle machine fly, sewing for the family. She was a resourceful woman and when found in a difficult situation she some how always found a way — frequently using her resources of faith, prayer and works! She managed to save enough money, mostly her butter and egg money, to buy a "Jesse French" piano for the family.

Many times she would have three or four children in bed with a contagious disease or other serious illness...diseases that we don't have now...only the names are familiar...typhoid, small pox, scarlet fever. At one time when her children were down with diphtheria, she would blow potash into their throats through a tube in order to break the membrane that would form and cut off their breathing. For days at a time she would go from bed to bed nursing them, afraid to go to sleep herself, afraid one of them might slip away into death.

But then she said the happiest time of her life was when her children were young enough to be at home. Her most pleasant memories were when she and her husband were raising their family and she cautioned her children later to enjoy every minute they were raising their own families because that would be the happiest time of their lives.

You might wonder if mother could give every child of such a large family his just dues...or if it wouldn't be natural for a mother to have a favorite child...I concluded that Grandmother did have a favorite child. Her favorite child was the one who was farthest away, or the one that was sick...or the one who was having particular difficulties and problems. When each one was going through some kind of a crises in life, that one became the object of her love and devotion. And I'm sure each of her children know that at some time or another, their Mother's prayers carried them through a trial...her prayerful concern helped them through.

The family later moved to Idaho Falls and purchased their home on South Water Ave. This home turned into a regular boarding house, many of Grandmother's nephews came into Idaho Falls to work. Grandfather passed away May 6, 1940.

Grandmother lived by a strict moral and religious code and expected her children to do the same. She didn't compromise--there were no gray areas in her thinking. A thing was either good or bad. I've seen her run across a deck of playing cards that some how found its way into the house and these would go directly into the fire accompanied by some scorching words of her own such as," No one will keep the tools of the devil in my house". And, how many times we have heard her say, "No man will ever get one foot ahead by breaking the sabbath and doing his work or business on the Lord's Day".

She always reminded us of the wonderful age we are living in...all of our modern conveniences. Such a contrast from when she was a girl and everything had to be hand made. It had been a big thing in her life as a child to have a pair of "store bought" shoes.

A difficult period of her life came during the First World War when her son Dewey was sent to the front lines in France. During the Second World War she had two sons, Paul and Farrell, and one grandson, Delbert, serving in the armed forces and she proudly hung silver stars in the window for these boys with hope in her heart that the silver stars would never have to be changed to gold.

While the family was living in Shelley, Tillie served as a councilor in the Primary for 13 years. She gave many years service as a visiting teacher and she also taught the Theology lessons and visiting teachers message in Relief Society at different times. She had a clear, true, soprano voice and enjoyed using this talent especially singing with the Relief Society Singing Mothers. She was an active member of the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, having served as Captain, and she was the last of the Charter Members of the American War Mothers in the Idaho Falls area to pass away. She enjoyed doing handiwork of all kinds, knitting, crocheting, quilting and others.

I am thankful for the memories I have of the happy times our family has had. The Christmas Eve Party that has been held every year since I can remember...the summer picnics...and another traditional gathering was January 16, to celebrate Grandmother's birthday.

When preparing Grandmothers history for the family genealogy book, she was asked what her philosophy of life was...what she would pass on to her children, and she said, "Philosophy of life? Oh pshaw, I have only tried to work hard, to be honest, stay close to the church and teach my children to do the same."

At her funeral, after the family prayer and the closing of the casket, which is one of the most difficult times for a family, one of the young granddaughters, Marilyn, was heard to say softly, "Thank goodness for the gospel". I believe this is the greatest tribute my Grandmother could receive. The knowledge that she has raised her children and grandchildren to love the gospel and know that it is true, that the family will be reunited again and will enjoy eternal life together.

Obituary compiled by a granddaughter

Donna Smith Chandler

The children of Matilda and James Ahlstrom are: James Dewey Ahlstrom, William Ahlstrom, Lila Preece, Vesta Perry, Beth Hayes, Wanda Thornton, Paul Ahlstrom, and Farrell Ahlstrom. Opal died when three years of age and one child, boy, was still born.