

Life History of Russell Alonzo Christensen

By Katherine Christensen

Russell Alonzo Christensen was born July 20, 1923 in New Castle, Iron County, Utah, the fifth child of Alonzo Christian Christensen and Cassie Alene Forsyth.

His father, Alonzo Christian Christensen, was born August 30, 1891 in Oasis, Millard County, Utah. He was the oldest child of Anton Christian Christensen and Mary Dorthea Andersen, both immigrants from Denmark. Anton stated in the 1900 U.S. Census that he had immigrated in 1873 when was only about 18 years of age. Anton and Mary Dorthea were married in 1890.

Alonzo Christensen, or Lon as he was called, went down to Hurricane with a friend, Alfred Stanworth, to visit some of Alfred's friends, but they ran out of money. They were looking for work and heard of the Desert Reclamation Company west of New Castle. Willard Jones was the superintendent of this project, and his wife, Sophia, was a sister to Cassie Forsyth. Lon had been staying with the Jones and so he became acquainted with Cassie.

Cassie was born January 16, 1894 in Pinto, Washington County, Utah, to Neil Donald Forsyth and Sophia Elizabeth Harrison Forsyth. She was their last child and grew up in Pinto, which is up the canyon from New Castle. Lon would ride a horse up to Pinto to court her. Lon and Cassie were married March 14, 1914 in the St. George Temple.

In 1915, they bought a small home, which was approximately across the street south of the Carroll Tullis home (2003). They ran a small general store out of this home for about seven or eight years. Their first child, Caine, was born January 5, 1915 in St. George. Later, they had two little girls, Lucille born February 24, 1917 and Kate born February 17, 1918 in New Castle, both of whom died soon after birth. Then they had another daughter, Norma, born July 24, 1921 in Cedar City where Cassie would be close to a doctor. At that time she stayed with her sister, Sophia Jones, who was living in Cedar at the time. Russell was born July 20, 1923 at home in New Castle, and Boyd, their last child, was born November 13, 1925 in New Castle.

New Castle had been settled around 1909. Many of the people from Pinto came and settled there and Russell spent his childhood there. At the time there was no electricity or running water. Russell's mother told me that once, when he was little, he came home from Primary and she asked him what he had learned. He told her that he learned about "that man and the dishes," which turned out to be "Joseph Smith and the Gold Plates." She also said Russell was always such a good little boy and liked to be home. He had all of the early childhood diseases and his mother had given the dates to me many years ago: measles in 1927, mumps in 1930, whooping cough in 1935, and chicken pox and scarlet fever in 1936. She said that when he had scarlet fever they kept him in the small south-east room of the house and kept the door closed, so that no one else in the family would contract it. In those days you had to put a sign on your gate or door displaying a quarantine sign for a week or two.

As he was growing up, Russell and his brother Boyd were close. They raised doggie lambs and rode horses. At one time they raised some pheasants for the Division of Wildlife.

They had a pen for them, just north-east of their house, made of chicken wire to keep out predators. They were paid when the Division of Wildlife took them. They had other chores such as feeding chickens, chopping wood for the wood stoves and taking out the ashes from the cooking stove, and drawing up water to fill the reservoir on the stove for washing, bathing, cooking and drinking. They would divert ditch water into a cistern, which is somewhat like a well, and they would let the water settle before using it. They would draw it up in a bucket that was on a rope and pulley. They had a little white short-haired dog with some black spots on that they called Rickie. It would sleep at the foot of their bed, which was the northwest room of the house.

Russell started school in New Castle on Sept. 16, 1929 and his first teacher was Roberta Leigh. The school building had two large rooms and had been moved in from out on the desert and was located just south of where the chapel is now. The ground was originally owned by the school district, but when the present chapel was built in 1969 and 1970, the land was sold to the church. Our kids would remember this building because they attended Primary and MIA there when they were growing up.

I am glad that I had written down some of this information I had gotten from his mother on his personal information sheet or it would have been lost. After his grade school years in New Castle, Russell rode the school bus to Cedar City where he attended Junior High and High school. He had some classes at the college in what they called the "Old Main" building. They packed their lunches from home and Russell said they usually had sandwiches made with bottled venison. He said that when they would be walking to the building where classes were held, they would throw their lunches in the bushes outside and at lunch time they would retrieve them.

Some the boys he grew up with in New Castle that were his age were Warren Platt, Norman Hulet, Clifton Hulet, Carroll Tullis and Phil Beacham. Unfortunately, Phil died young. They had to create their own entertainment back then. The old time games of years ago were "Run Sheep Run", "Kick The Can", "Annie Over", marbles and chasing girls. Russell told me that when they were Scouts years ago, Leo Knell took them to Boulder Dam in his little pickup, pulling a small trailer. He said they would walk from the bed of the pickup to the trailer as they were going down the road. They must have not been going too fast, or they would have ended up on the highway. What a difference from those years; now it wouldn't be allowed.

When Russell was in his late teen years, he said they used to go to Modena and Enterprise to the dances. Back then they held dances all the time; it was a place that they could meet and see girls. They didn't have the T.V. and some of the entertainment that they have now days. They did go to movies some of the time if one of the boys could take car, but they liked to dance and Russell was a good dancer.

In Aug of 1943, a bunch of these New Castle boys, Russell, Clifton Hulet, Scott Tullis and Carroll Tullis, went to St. George. They decided they would go to Leeds and pick peaches for Scott and Carroll's uncle, Dave Stirling. The picking didn't last too long as it was hot and they didn't much care for the fuzz. I think it was an outing to see what girls were around there. That is where he met me, Katherine Stirling, his future wife. Russell and some of his friends continued to come down to Leeds once in a while, and would go to dances at the "Santa Rosa" in Santa

Clara and out to Anderson Junction.

One of the memories I have is of Russell, Clifton Hulet, and Scott Tullis in Scott's old Teroplane, with myself (Katherine), Cherrill, and Laurel McMullin, driving up to Oak Grove, a campground at the base of Pine Valley mountain above Silver Reef. It is a steep drive going up, and coming back down Clifton was scared to death. Scott was driving and he said that his brakes weren't working, I'm sure he was just spoofing, and I think it was just to try to scare us. I'll never forget that Clifton was so scared he got down on the floorboard.

After I had graduated from High School, I decided to go up to Salt Lake to a Nursing School, along with Cherrill and Laurel McMullin who had graduated the year before. It was a government program and it didn't cost us anything except our personal things. We spent the summer up there, then we quit after that semester. Russell and Clifton came up there that summer to see us and we spent some time down at Liberty Park. I think they were up there for one day.

That fall, Russell came down to see me on September 10, at the time of the Dixie Rodeo. He asked me to marry him and gave me a ring. Afterwards, we went to Leeds and, although the folks had already gone to bed, we went in to tell them of our engagement. We were young and dumb and didn't take much time in planning a big deal as they do now days, but we were happy and in love. We planned the wedding for October 27, 1944, which was during the second week of Deer Season. We were married in the St. George Temple, and that evening we had a reception at the Leeds Ward Chapel. Some of Russell's buddies were home on leave from the service and were able to come. There was gas rationing at the time, so we never had a honeymoon.

We lived with his folks until we fixed up a couple of rooms in their basement. His brother Caine had joined the National Guard and Boyd had been drafted and both of them served in World War Two in Europe. Russell had been deferred to help on the farm. Russell was called up and had to go to Salt Lake for a physical; his folks and I went with him but they still didn't call him up. At the time, they were feeding a few cattle and raising turkeys. They had an old fellow (all I ever heard them call him was the "Old Man") who lived in a sheep wagon and helped with the turkeys. They provided food for him and he never left the place until he got sick and they had to place him in a care center in Parowan. They raised turkeys for a few years and there was a brooder house over where the trailer house stands that Steve and Deb first lived in. One year at Easter, when some of our kids were little, we had our Easter picnic there with Caine and Verona and their Lonnie. It was very clean, as new turkey chicks are subject to diseases and the building had to be very clean. Off and on, they fed out cattle and then they would truck them to Los Angeles to the stock yards there to sell. On one of these trips, Steve must have been only 4 or 5 and he had to go to the bathroom; Russell didn't want to stop, so he had to use a pop bottle.

We got power in New Castle in 1946. In early 1950, the family had traded some ground with Lee Forsyth for a piece that was about 2 miles west of here. This was about the time that they had started drilling wells in the valley, and so they were able to start farming out there. They raised grain, some hay, and one year they planted about 10 acres of carrots and hired Indians to do hoeing. At that time it wasn't as easy as it is now with the wheel lines and circular sprinklers, as they had to maintain ditches and make dams and furrows or flood irrigate. They were also

feeding Hereford cows that they would raise to sell in the fall. Russell and Boyd had a few milk cows that they milked with a milking machine and they had a cream separator. They shipped cream on the mail to Salt Lake for a while, but finally gave that up.

Boyd had decided to go to California for work, but came back in a couple of years. When they were building the Reservoir in about 1955, Russell worked there for a while, a lot of times going up at night to check on it. The New Castle Reservoir was dedicated in the summer of 1956. It was a great celebration and people were glad they had a place to store water that came from Grass Valley and not waste it. Russell's father and others at that time worked to get this dam built.

After their father died in 1962 and Caine had gone to Las Vegas to work, Russell and Boyd got into the business of feeding of dairy heifers for dairymen in California. This was good for us, except when they had 1200 to 1500 head and had to buy hay. They also raised field corn for silage to feed them. Russell always liked the tractor work and he always planted the field corn for silage.

Russell liked to get away once in a while. We always went fishing the first day of fishing season, and camping at the Deer Camp in the Fall for Deer Season. We always stayed in a tent, roughing it. One summer we went to Salt Lake, went to the Zoo, to Lagoon, and to the Airport to watch the planes coming in and going out. One Summer we went out to the Kiabab Forest, and stayed in the tall pines; the Platts went too. Another year we went to Yellowstone Park to see Old Faithful. We also stayed in tents there, and we even had bears that came around in our camp. This was the summer after Beverly had gotten married so she didn't go with us that time.

Russell had many different church callings throughout the years. In 1959 he was called as Ward Clerk when Mont Sorensen was made Bishop. After that Charles Hart was Bishop and it was during this period of time that we were trying to raise money for a new Ward Chapel. We had many projects that we worked on during this time, and families were also ask to commit so much money a year for the Ward Chapel. In 1970, Lister Woods was made Bishop with Russell Christensen and Melvin Gardner as counselors. We helped with much of the finishing of the chapel. The men helped with putting on the shingles and a lot of us did the staining of the woodwork in classrooms and the library. The Chapel was finally finished and we started to hold meetings in November of 1970 and it was dedicated on August 5 of 1971. The building has had two more additions since then because of Ward growth.

We added on to our home a garage, laundry room, a bedroom, bath, and a walk-in closet during the winter of 1979. However, Russell never got to enjoy it for long as it was the 8th of January 1981 when he passed away. It was a great shock to me.

We had gone over to Cedar, he went and got a haircut at Holmes Barbershop where he always went. I went into Antone's furniture store to just look around. When Russell got finished he came and got me and we walked down the street to a cafe which was across the from the old Train Depot. We had lunch and I said I needed to go to the restroom. When I came back Russell started to get up from the bench and he collapsed to the floor. Gene Butler happened to be in there having lunch and he helped Russell up into the booth and he said "I'm okay". They called

paramedics but I said I would take him up to the hospital.

At the hospital, they hooked him up to a heart monitor and decided it was a heart attack and put him in the intensive care unit. I called Linda and she and Steve came over. It was a bitter cold day and night and the Hospital was full, so I came home with Linda and one of her kids came and stayed with me. When we went to bed and as I knelt down and prayed, I had the feeling all would be all right. We were in the tomato business and had to pick the next morning. While we were sorting the tomatoes the telephone rang. Boyd answered and they told him Russell was gone. We went right to the Hospital and Dr. Brown took us in a room where Russell was laying and told us that they had done all they could but he didn't respond. This was heart breaking to me, but I was so grateful for my family and friends to help me get through this. We had a nice funeral service, and I was amazed of all the flowers and help that I had. I had helped Russell with the farm books which was a blessing for me, and when we had our accountant come from Provo he was a great help in seeing the things we needed to do.

It was a blessing to have children and grandchildren around to bring smiles and happiness to me, and to make life worth living and going forward. Thanks to you all.

Love, Mother and Grandmother Katherine.