RIDING HERD:
A Conversation with Juanita Brooks

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Elsewhere in this issue Robert Flanders speaks of the New Mormon History as having begun in 1945 with the publication of Fawn Brodie's No Man Knows My History. *While Brodie's book is certainly pivotal, an argument could be made that the new history really began some twenty years earlier when a young woman from Southern Utah began her careful and courageous investigation into one of the darkest and most secret episodes in Mormon History—the massacre at Mountain Meadows in 1857.*

Juanita Brooks' The Mountain Meadows Massacre *is a landmark in the unfolding of Mormon history because it marks the first time that Mormons began to look at their past with true objectivity. Brooks surpasses Brodie in her careful reconstruction of the past. Her work is guided by one essential motive—to find and tell the truth. As she says in the preface to* Mountain Meadows, *"This study is not designed either to smear or to clear any individual; its purpose is to present the truth. I feel sure that nothing but the truth can be good enough for the church to which I belong."*

Not everyone shared this dedication to the truth, however, and in spite of her belief that she was doing the Church a service by the publication of her book, many considered her an apostate and an enemy to the Church. But she quietly and faithfully continued her work and, as the bibliography at the end of this interview shows, has made a major contribution to the history of the West. It is, we are grateful to say, a contribution that is still going on.

When Dialogue *began publishing nine years ago Juanita Brooks was one of our strongest supporters. A letter which she wrote to us in the beginning exemplifies not only the spirit of what her life stands for but to some extent what* Dialogue *itself has attempted to reflect. We reproduce it here as a fitting introduction to her discussion of her life and work:*

> My statement regarding my father's idea of "riding herd" is, like most analogies, subject to question because any analogy is bound to be faulty in some respects. But for whatever it is worth, here it is:
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> My father early recognized my tendency to question, to disagree, to refuse to take many of the Old Testament stories at face value. I could not admire Jacob's ethics in stealing his brother's birthright; I did not believe that the wind from tin horns would blow down the walls of Jericho, but insisted that they "fell" figuratively when the guards panicked and ran; if bears came out and devoured the children who called Elijah "old bald-pate," I didn't think God sent them, etc., etc.
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> One day Dad said to me, "My girl, if you follow this tendency to criticize, I'm afraid you will talk yourself out of the Church. I'd hate to see you do that. I'm a cowboy, and I've learned that if I ride *in* the herd, I am lost—totally helpless. One who rides counter to it is trampled and killed. One who only trails behind means little, because he leaves all responsibility to others. It is the cowboy who rides the edge of the herd, who sings and calls and makes himself heard who helps direct the course. Happy sounds are generally better than cursing, but there are times when he must maybe swear a little and swing a whip or lariat to round in a stray or turn the leaders. So don't lose yourself, and don't ride away and desert the outfit. Ride the edge of the herd and be alert, but know your directions, and call out loud and clear. Chances are, you won't make any difference, but on the other hand, you just might."

Dialogue: Your background seems to have been anything but ordinary. What memories of your early childhood in Bunkerville, your schooling, for example, stand out in your mind?

Brooks: There was the year they put me out of school. Mr. Gubler wouldn't have me in the sixth grade, because I looked like I had TB or something. When I met him years after, when I was teaching debating, he said, "Oh, are you still alive? I didn't think you'd last that year out, you were so little and so sallow, you know." Anyway, they took me in at school on Monday morning and put me out the same day. But Tuesday morning I got up and found a pony—my father had gone out and bought it early. It was a beautiful dappled blue mare, with a flaxen mane and tail. Not a little kid's pony; a good sized little horse. And she was mine; he gave

her to me because I couldn't go to school, because I was supposed to be out of doors.

Well, the first morning, I took the cows down to the pasture and back, and rode around, but you can't stay on a horse all day with nothing to do. Wednesday morning I got on the pony again, and took the cows to the lower pasture. And then I thought, I'll go up by the upper field and check on my calf, Latitude. We had this wicked old cow, you know, that was so mean, that my father always said, "You just give her plenty of latitude." So we named her calf Latitude. So looking for Latitude that morning I went up through the town and past the graveyard and on into the fields and up to the upper field—there was some dry stock in there—but she wasn't there. Then I saw on the river bed, quite a ways up, some cattle just standing on a little island, so I started out to see if she was there. I went on the road to Mesquite to the bridge, then turned off on a trail among some high willows. Suddenly I came head on with a big man on a big horse. He was a stranger to me. He had a five gallon hat and a fine mount, a large man with goodly trappings. He looked at me as if I were a ghost. "Who are you? What are you doing here?" he asked. Here I was, barefoot, bare headed, and bareback on my horse. "Don't you know," he went on, "that if you had an accident your body could lay here for years and your parents would never know where you were?" And I said, "Well, I'm going over to those cattle there on that island to see if Latitude is over there." Well he said, "Why aren't you in school? A kid like you ought to be in school." Of course, that got to me, and I started to cry. I said I wanted to go to school, but they wouldn't let me. "I like school," I said, "but they won't have me." "Well, I'll be damned," he said. And the next morning I was in school.

Not in Mr. Gubler's school. He still wouldn't have me. But in Grandma Cox's. She had quite a room full, even without me. But they put in one desk, right on the front of the outside row, and I sat there. She never called on me all during the year; I'd been through it all the year before. I didn't blame her. She had third, fourth, and fifth grades, and some students that really needed help, and I didn't.

So I read. Just brought a book, *Under the Lilacs*, or whatever I wanted to, and read all day. She was the one that stressed memorizing. Memorize, memorize. Don't paraphrase. If Shakespeare said it, it's good enough; you don't need to change it. She had programs, and in one I thought I'd participate, give a poem. I found one in a farm magazine:

> The spacious firmament on high
> With all the blue ethereal sky
> And spangled heavens, the shining frame
> His great omnipotence proclaim.

So I gave it. Show off! "Well that's very nice, very nice, Juanita," she said, "but the Psalm says it so much better. You go home and you turn to Psalm 19: 'The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork.' " So I went home and found it and memorized it.

Dialogue: That sounds like a good learning experience.

Brooks: That was, I think, the best year I had in school.

Dialogue: Any other memories of your childhood in Bunkerville?

Brooks: My childhood was very primitive in some ways. There were no cars, until 1916 or 1917. When the first car came to Bunkerville, the school stampeded. The kids went out the windows and doors and we lined the street; they had to let the whole school out that afternoon.

Dialogue: What was the town like?

Brooks: The town was made first of adobe houses. They had their own kind of adobe mill, to make the "dobies." And after two or three years they burned brick right there in Bunkerville and put up red brick houses. And somebody, a painter, would come and paint flowers on your ceiling and decorate your house. They got really quite fancy.

The townspeople held some things in common. My father had a partnership in the community threshing machine. And we made molasses. He made his own molasses; he thought his was better than anybody else's.

And wine. The wine was good. They thought, because they made it, it didn't have any alcohol in it. But it did. I had my own experience.

Dialogue: With wine?

Brooks: With drinking. One day I was up to my Grandma Hafen's helping her with the washing and I got this little bit of stomach cramp. It didn't amount to much, but Grandma sensed it, so she said, "I'll get you a little sweet wine." She always made some wine every year. She brought me out a glass, quite a small glass, diluted, with a little sugar. She gave it to me to drink, and I was instantly strengthened. I was so strengthened I was drunk. And I said, "Oh, when I get to be old and a drunkard, I'll tell everybody that I had my first taste of wine from my little Swiss grandmother." And she cried and went to my father and he set me up and he said, "Now look. There's some that can take it, and there's some that can't. And you're one that can't. When you get in places where they have it, don't make a scene or preach a sermon.But don't drink any of the wine. You're smart enough that you can take a cup and trail around then accidentally spill it in a potted plant or a toilet." So I knew that I had just better behave.

Dialogue: Your first marriage was to Ernest Pulsipher, was it not? Will you tell something of that?

Brooks: Ernest lived only a year after we were married. He had a cancer of the lymph gland, a little lump on his neck about the size of a kernel of wheat that gave him a stiff neck. There was no inflamation; there was nothing, only a little kernel there. And we didn't know, and the doctor didn't know. He went up to St. George and had his tonsils out, and that made it worse. To look at him, he was in pretty good flesh, and his color wasn't bad. But he evidently was in much more pain than he let on, than anybody else knew. But when we went to St. George to be married —Ern had given me my ring in April—he went to Doctor McGregor first. I had a school offer open in Bunkerville where I could have gone back and taught school

and not married Ern just then. And we wondered seriously if I ought not to do this. But I loved Ern, and we had planned on it. And so he went up and saw Dr. McGregor, and Ern told him, "I'm a sick man." But you see, I didn't realize it because he didn't groan, he didn't fuss; however it hurt, he didn't show it to me. "You're here to get married," Dr. McGregor said, "so go ahead and get married." So we did, and two days later, Ern went in and the doctor could see immediately that it was malignant.

Dialogue: Did you go back to Bunkerville then?

Brooks: Ernest didn't go home at all. He went straight from St. George to Salt Lake. I went home without a husband. I thought I'd take that school and teach a while, but I couldn't stay home.

Dialogue: So you joined him in Salt Lake. That must have been a mixed blessing, to be there together.

Brooks: One experience seems so incredible that I can hardly believe it myself. We were living at the home of a cousin of Ernest's, way up in the Ensign Ward somewhere, up across from the State Capitol. Ernest was really in a lot of pain; he was having a lot at that time. The family had gone away for Thanksgiving vacation, and we were there alone. I knew not a person, not anybody to call. A knock came to the door. I answered it and a man said, "Is there trouble in this house?" "Yes," I said. "Come in." He didn't have to look twice to see as he came in—Ernest was on a bed just across the room. He asked me if I'd like to have him administered to, and I said, "Yes, oh yes, yes." I got the oil, and he gave Ernest a blessing. He was relieved, and sank into sleep.

The man stayed there a while, and we talked. He didn't tell me his name, or if he told me, I forgot it. I didn't write it. He said he came from below Twenty-seventh South, and that he had felt impressed to catch a bus, and he came up Main Street to wherever the bus changed and got on another bus. And then he had to walk a block and a half to where we were. He'd never seen me, but he was directed to this place. He wasn't a large man; he was kind of a spare man, more slender. And he had a heavy, heavy kind of iron grey hair that he had parted in the middle, but he wasn't an old man. He'd lost the sight of one eye. He was a convert; very very wonderful. He was full of the spirit, and after his blessing, Ern went to sleep and slept all night long, the first night's sleep he'd had in a long time. This man was very real; he wasn't any apparition. He was flesh and blood. And I never saw him again, and I never heard of him again. I don't know why I didn't keep a better record.

Dialogue: How do you explain the man's knowing to come to you?

Brooks: I thought at the time, how wonderful, how wonderful. Could he be one of the three Nephites? I wondered. But the three Nephites would surely have had both eyes. And he seemed so earthy. He looked more like a farmer, like just a com-

mon everyday type of man. I think there must be an explanation, but I didn't have it then and I don't have it now.

Dialogue: Perhaps this fits into your rubric of "sunbursts," those moments of enlightenment you have told about before.

Brooks: When you know, and you know that you know, but you don't know how you know.

Dialogue: Have you had experiences like that yourself?

Brooks: Ernest and I were engaged—we had got engaged after the Christmas holidays—he had gone up and had his tonsils out. Across the street lived Warren and Leila Hardy. They had two lovely little children, and she was pregnant again, but she was having bad trouble with her tooth. We had no dentist, but Brother Abbott had a pair of forceps, so she asked him to pull this tooth for her. It was hard, and he dragged her around the place, and she had a heart attack and died, from having this tooth pulled. I played the organ for the funeral, and after the funeral Lew Pulsipher came over and said, "Ernie's home. He just got in early this afternoon, but I think he'd like it if you could ride over." And so I didn't go to the cemetery. I went and got my pony and rode over. It was just dusk, early twilight, when I rode up to the place. I'm sure he didn't see me coming, and he wouldn't have heard the horse—I just rode it up and put the reins over the hitching post, knocked, and went in. He was lying down. I went and sat beside him, and he raised up, put his arm around me, and kissed me. He lay back; he was miserable. I moved into the big rocking chair. After just a few minutes he said, "You know I had the strangest thing happen. Just before you opened the door—you couldn't have been farther than the gate—I saw you in this chair. You were sitting right there, just like you are now, and you were holding a whiteheaded baby boy in your arms. And something said to me, 'One year from today this will be yours.' " So we took that as an answer to our question. I had a chance to teach and was not ready to be married, and he didn't want to tie me up, either, unless he felt better than he did. But we thought this was the answer. So we got ready. We had decided before to be married at the time that they had their fall fair and fruit festival in early September, but he wasn't well enough, so we waited until October before we were married.

Dialogue: And then there was the long time in Salt Lake City seeing the doctors?

Brooks: They told him, "We will not deceive you, and we will not take your money. But the most you can hope for is six to nine months." Well, I had no idea when I became pregnant until after a few months. We had come back to the farm by then. Early in September, about the ninth or tenth, I said that maybe it was time to get over home to have the baby. I hadn't written down the date, but I remembered it was the day of Leila Hardy's burial that Ern said about "a year from today." Just as we arrived at our gate, Warren was coming right down the street, so I asked, "Warren, when did Leila die?" "Well," he said, "she died on the twenty-fifth of September and was buried on the twenty-seventh of September." I didn't say anything more to him, but I said to Ern, "We're over here two weeks

early." So we had supper with the folks, and stayed overnight, and went back. We came back again on the right day, and the baby was born. The clock was fast, and I had a long, agonizing ordeal. The midwife said three minutes after twelve, so they put his name on the records as born on the twenty-eighth, but it was really the twenty-seventh.

Dialogue: Not everyone would take such intuitions so seriously.

Brooks: My father taught me to. When my little horse was stolen, and I was having a tantrum over it, crying my heart out about it, and I said to my father, "I knew I should have taken her home"—he had said to leave the horse in the pasture —"and then see what happened!" And he said to me, "My child, when you have that kind of feeling, don't you let me or anybody else stand in your way. You follow that. You pay attention." He thought that was very important.

Dialogue: Did you often depend on intuition in other things in your life?

Brooks: I had a little boy in my school put a bee down a little girl's back. This boy came to school, out of nowhere, his mother dead, his father remarried. He hadn't been there long. He was a large kid for his age, and his father said that he belonged in the third grade. So I put him in third, but he was bigger than any other boy in the class. And I noticed after a while that he'd been doing the fourth grade arithmetic. One afternoon, just as we were ready to dismiss for outside, he reached for little Rhodella Abbott—she had a big gorgeous head of red hair, you know, with braids coming down her back—and pulled her dress. Instantly she jumped and shrieked. I ran and stuck my hand down her neck and pulled out a long bee. She was screaming when I opened her dress and got the stinger out, so I said, "You go across the street to Mary Ellen's, and she'll put some soda on it, or something." So she went outside, and so did everybody else, and left us alone, the boy and me. I was so blasted mad that I couldn't contain myself, so I got the eraser and I started erasing the boards. I erased them just as hard as I could, and as fast, to try to unwind a little bit. All I could hear was the girl screaming all the way across the street.

After a little while I came over to him, and I heard myself say, "Charley, how would you like to be promoted to the fourth grade?" I had no intention of doing what I did. But I said, "You go get that seat there, and bring it over into the fourth grade side." Well, he didn't know what to think of that. But he worked hard, and graduated out of the fourth grade that year. His family moved away, and I didn't see him after that. But many years later, coming back from St. George, I inquired about him: his son was a bishop, they said, and had a good family. That was once when I was pulled away from what I would normally do.

Dialogue: Another "sunburst"? But let's move on a bit further in your life. You went to Columbia for your master's degree, did you not? How did that come about?

Brooks: After we had graduated from high school in Bunkerville they told us that if there were as many as five high school graduates who would be interested in taking a teacher's training course they would supply a teacher, and graduates

would be guaranteed positions there in Nevada. Miss Connell came out from Columbia University to teach. I was in the first class. She gave us a review of the common branches, and a big book on the philosophy of learning. It was a college level thing. She was preparing us to teach in one-room schools, and giving us techniques and a lot of busy work and just general help. She was from New York, and she was so lonely in Bunkerville.

Dialogue: She was not a Mormon?

Brooks: She was not a Mormon, and didn't care to be. She was a rather small, perky little woman. She had a long braid that went around her head like a coronet. I loved her. I admired her so that in later years, when I was teaching at Dixie College. . . It was in the spring—and I'll tell you why I know it was in the spring: I had been out gathering squaw-bush gum, and I had come to faculty meeting with a lot of it in my mouth! Anyway, at that meeting the president said they had set up a plan whereby the teacher who would like to go on and gain a higher degree could have a year off at half pay. They offered it first to those that had been there longest, but one had a large family, and another a sick wife, and so on. I was scared to death somebody would take it before he got to me. Finally he looked

at me, and I said, "Don't look at me; I'd take it so quick you wouldn't know about it." "Would you really?" he said. And I said, "Indeed I would!" That would give me $85 a month to live on.

Dialogue: What about little Ernest? Since your husband had died, you had him to look after.

Brooks: I couldn't take him, of course. He was eight years old, so he stayed with my mother. You see, I taught school there in Bunkerville the first year after Ernie died, so she had tended him a great deal. That was earlier, when they called Charity on a mission. I had offered to support her, if she'd give me half the blessing. It's the only time in my life that I was counted as a part tithe-payer. My check then was $120 a month. I sent her $40. And then I paid tithing on my remaining $80. Then I paid Mother for tending the baby. When I got through, I didn't have much, you see, even to buy shoes. Well, when I went to settle tithing, the bishop said I had it all wrong, that I should have paid my tithing on my total income. "Well," I said, "I'll argue it out with you in front of St. Peter." "You'll go down on the records," he said, "as a part tithe-payer." And I said, "So be it."

Dialogue: Then later you went on leave from Dixie College to Columbia for your master's degree. What memories remain of that experience?

Brooks: I rode east on the train, the Flyer. I was so afraid of it, the first time I saw it, that I said, "Someday I'll ride that thing to the end of the line!" So many, many people said, "Why go way off there? Why not go to the University of Utah?" But I'd always wanted to see the Statue of Liberty and the places in the East. More than the degree, it seems, was just getting out of the desert.

There were five of us girls in the same program, one an older school teacher, one Quaker, a Mormon, and two girls, I don't know what religion, from the South. They were wealthy girls. One was the one who bought a car to match her gloves. Her boyfriend had given her a pair of kind of dark, plum-colored purple gloves. She had a car, but the gloves didn't match, so she traded until she got a car to match her gloves.

Dialogue: What about the school itself? Was the course of study difficult?

Brooks: They called us all in and told us how they did things: You stay and study with us here. Just do whatever you please. Take classes, or don't take classes; just pass the exams.

Dialogue: Did they all pass?

Brooks: No, only the Quaker and the Mormon of our group.

Dialogue: I presume you returned to Dixie when you finished.

Brooks: Yes, I came back. They gave me a $200 a year raise.

Dialogue: Did you have other responsibilities at Dixie than just teaching English?

Brooks: I was made Dean of Women when I got back from Columbia, I didn't know exactly what Dean of Women meant, except that girls came to talk to you. But about Thanksgiving time, early enough so that I had not had time to get real well acquainted with all my students, a little girl came to me in tears. They were having a program put on by the senior class; she had been participating in a dance, or singing, or whatever, and she'd left her coat in the ladies' rest room with a twenty dollar bill just in the pocket. She was going at noon to buy a coat, and now the money was gone. And of course, it meant so very much to her. So I set about right there, and deduced that no boy had taken this; the girls had it out of the ladies' rest room. Then I got on the phone and called two ladies' clothing stores in town, wherever I thought a girl might want to go to spend this money. And I said, "If anybody comes in your store to spend a twenty dollar bill, I wish you'd report to me immediately." Having done that, I went back to meet my afternoon class. It was a class in English literature, as I remember, and after they had all filed in and I had a full room, there, the second seat up, a girl slipped in just before it was time to open the class. As she sat down it said to me, "There's your $20." I went through the class. I had them write some little thing I cooked up so I could go down past her desk without seeming to go just to her, you see. So everybody wrote. I started to walk to the back to pick up the papers, and as I picked hers up, I said, "I wish you'd call in and visit me, as soon as you can this afternoon." I knew this was her last class.

I had just a small office, not very much in it. In she came and sat down. She was a beautiful girl, a nice, sweet girl, and I said, "Do you have any idea why I called you in here?" She said, "No, I haven't." "Well," I said, "you took the twenty dollars out of a girl's pocket during the assembly this morning, and I wanted to give you an opportunity to give it to me." "Mrs. Pulsipher," she said, "what makes you think I'm a thief?" I said, "No, you're not a thief. I know you're not a thief. But you took the money. And you won't know what to do with it. You won't know how to explain it to your parents. You can't spend it—I've notified every store in town. We all sometimes do things, but if you will just give it to me, I will hand it back to her and your name will never be mentioned as long as I live and as long as you live, unless you tell it." She sat for a minute, and handed me the money.

After she'd gone, I just went all apart. I had a horrible, horrible thought: suppose I'd been wrong. What would I have, what could I have done if I had told her to her face that she'd taken that money, and she hadn't done it? It would have been a load too heavy to bear. But it was like that, just so clear.

Dialolgue: Another "sunburst"?

Brooks: I don't know what. I wish I knew. I don't have any explanation.

Dialogue: Just somehow you knew.

Brooks: Something, something, somebody near, somebody. And it's never failed me.

Dialogue: It was while you were teaching at Dixie College that you met and married Will Brooks, wasn't it? Did you love him from the start?

Brooks: Oh heavens, no. I said I wouldn't have him. I'd been married. I didn't want any more marriage. I wouldn't have him.

Dialogue: How did he finally win you?

Brooks: Oh, he just knew he would, I guess. He didn't want people to know he was courting me, though. I lived on the hill, and he never took me through the town; he'd pick me up on the hill, then go up over the high road.

Dialogue: Your description of life with him in "I Married a Family," which appeared in an earlier issue of *Dialogue*, shows him to be supportive of you in your writing. Was that always so?

Brooks: Not many men would be like Will Brooks.

Dialogue: What did he do?

Brooks: What did he do? He'd say to me, "Look you've no business fooling with laundry. There's plenty in the world who would just be glad to do that washing. Here's a girl who wants to work her way through school. Bring her in. Let her do this kind of work. You stay at what you're doing." He never complained. He was so pleased and so proud that I would do it, that I could do it.

Dialogue: What did he think when the *Mountain Meadows Massacre* was badly received in some quarters?

Brooks: Will was such a sweet man. He didn't get embittered. And still in a way he did. He was a high priest; he'd been in a bishopric down in San Juan County; he'd been in the bishopric under two bishops in St. George; he'd been superintendent of Sunday Schools for years. He contributed to everything. But after the book, he was never asked to do anything. He was never asked to offer a prayer, never asked to participate in anything, never answered a question in class. The Sunday before he died, the very last Sunday, we had a new man come into town, take over the high priests quorum, and he called on Will to speak, just to the quorum. I was glad he did, because he unburdened. He told them that this was the first time in seven years that he had been called upon to do anything at all. And of course I hadn't been either. I went to Sunday School part of the time; he went every time. They let him collect money for the scouts; he could do that. And his ward teaching families begged for him to visit them, so he continued with his ward teaching. But those are the only two activities he had after the book came out.

Dialogue: What about your activity in the Church? Had you been active up to that time?

Brooks: Oh, I had been stake president of Relief Society for seven years. And on the MIA board before that all the time.

Dialogue: After the book appeared, were you called to any other position?

Brooks: No.

Dialogue: Do you figure it's because of the book?

Brooks: Oh, I don't know. I think it isn't like it was when it first came out.

Dialogue: What led up to your publishing career? How did you get started writing in the first place?

Brooks: It had to do with Nels Anderson when he lived there in St. George. You know his story. He was a kid, about fourteen or fifteen, too young to be away from home, riding the freights. They kicked him off out by the desert in the middle of nowhere. He gathered himself up and looked around and saw some green over here, and some green over there. It was the Wood ranch and the Terry ranch. They took the boy in and between them they kept him. They paid him enough so that he came in to St. George and went to school. He graduated from Dixie College, and then came and graduated from BYU. He was baptised, I think more as a matter of ceremony; it didn't change him.

Anyway, it was Nels that got me started on the diary collecting. He was involved in Roosevelt's brain trust and the ERA (Emergency Relief Administration), and when he came back here he could see the number of women without any visible means of support. He had me write to Dr. Dorothy Nyswander here in Salt Lake City and they set up a women's project in which women could go off with their pads and interview the old people. Then the women would write up their interviews and bring in the manuscripts. They also brought anything in the shape of a written record, so I started copying in the front bedroom of my home, diaries and such.

Dialogue: Was it hard getting people to cooperate with the project?

Brooks: That depends. Once we went, Vivian Leavitt from over to Santa Clara and I. She had a car and could drive, and I put in the gas. I had word there were some diaries in this home, and she needed to make a survey to send in her report. We came to the Virgin River, but it was too high and she didn't dare drive her car in. I wasn't about to come this far and not go on, so I sat down and took off my stockings and got my big purse, and held my dress. The water didn't come up only to my knees. Vivian saw that I got across, so she came, and we dried our feet and put on our shoes and went into this home. Vivian got the things for her report, and after she finished the woman looked at me, and said, "Now who did you say you was?" I said, "I'm Juanita Brooks. I'm the wife of Sheriff Brooks." "Well," she said, "why didn't you say that in the first place? The wife of Sheriff Brooks can have anything in the world I've got."

Dialogue: But how did the diaries and Nels Anderson get you started writing?

Brooks: He lived through the block and approached our house through the back yard, right through his back door to my back door. He was the most unconven-

tional mortal you ever saw. Half the time he'd come a-walking in my back door without knocking. He was working on this book, *Desert Saints*. He asked me if I would write a chapter in his book on polygamy, telling about my two grandfathers, Grandfather Leavitt and Grandfather Hafen in Santa Clara. So I hurried and wrote it; got the statistics, like how many children of each wife, and how many infant deaths, the number who went on missions, the number who were in jail. And wrote. I thought that was what he wanted, so I gave it to him. But he sent it back. He didn't like it. "You do it over again," he said, "in a more interesting, conversational style. Then send it to me." I was more than a little squelched. But I could see, too, that it was not very interesting. So I undertook to put some clothes on it, reworked it as best I could. In the meantime he had gone back east. He stopped at the post office to say goodbye to Will, and wrote his address on a card which Will put in the pocket of his white shirt, and forgot to tell me about it. By the time it had run through the Maytag washer and wringer, I couldn't read it. And the story was all written down, ready for something. So I took a long shot and mailed it to *Harpers*. And I got very prompt acceptance, to my surprise. I think the title was new: "A Close-up of Mormon Polygamy."

Dialogue: Was that the first story you sold?

Brooks: Yes. And when I got the acceptance, we were guessing how much they'd pay me. "If they give me less than $25, I'll send it back," I said. I got $150. So I started writing for *Harpers* again. Frederick Lewis Allen was the editor. He was very kind to me. On my next piece he wrote me a very nice rejection note. Then he assigned me to do a little study of the wartime housing projects, these villages that had grown up around the government installations, the military, a trailor house camp down on Provo Bench. So I did. I tried. I rode down on the bus and spent a lot of time in the towns and visited with the people. I sent it in, and had no response for a long time.When it was returned they said that Frederick Lewis Allen had been away and the thing hadn't come to their attention, and they were no longer interested anyway. So I didn't write any more for them.

Dialogue: Did you write for anyone else, then?

Brooks: I had written one story for a sporting magazine. It was a story about a deer and Wayne Gardner. He's famous. Anyway, he was out hunting, and he was hunting for one deer. All the cowboys knew this deer; they called him Old Granddaddy. He was a big, big old deer, and Gardner wanted the antlers. He lay where the animal drank; lay in wait for it, and shot it. The animal fell, and Gardner was so sure of himself, he dropped his gun and ran to cut its throat. It jumped up: he'd only just grazed an antler. His fight with that great big buck was something to tell. It was a life and death struggle for the man and the animal, the man trying to engineer the thing to where he could get back to get hold of his knife. It was quite a story, and I had it, I thought, very well written up. I mailed it in, but I didn't get any answer. No acceptance. No acknowledgement. I wrote to the editor, and someone answered and said, "Sorry, we seem to have lost it." Well, it appeared in their September issue the next year, under the title "It Can't Happen Here." And except for the change in name, it was exactly what I had written. It was my story.

Dialogue: You mean they didn't put it under your name?

Brooks: No, it was under someone else's name. But I didn't know then that authors had any recourse. I was in St. George, in the midst of a family, and I had no money and nobody to tell me that I might do anything about it. So that kind of killed my writing for a while.

Dialogue: So Nels Anderson encouraged you early in your writing. What other significant contributors to western writing have you known? You knew Dale Morgan quite well, didn't you?

Brooks: Well, I think besides his mother, Dale Morgan had as good a communication with me as he did with anybody.

Dialogue: How did you converse? He was deaf, wasn't he?

Brooks: He could lip read, mostly. And he'd talk in a metallic voice, clearly but without expression. We got him to speak once, just to a close little group. He stood there, behind my chair, and I had a black pencil, and a time or two I'd write, "Fine," you see, and then I'd put a word, maybe two, to suggest that he discuss something that I knew he knew.

Once he wrote me and asked me to meet him at Cedar City. He was driving his own car then. He'd ask me to be sure to listen to all the sounds. When we came to some creeks, he asked, "Does the water make a sound?" We were following the old Mormon trail, you know, and got some pictures. There wasn't much grass then; quite a difference between then and earlier. If you read the diaries of the fellows who crossed here in 1852 and 1853, they had herds of thousands and good brush right up to their bellies. And the Mountain Meadows, they said, would support thousands of cattle indefinitely.

Dialogue: So you and Dale Morgan communicated on such things.

Brooks: We kept up a steady correspondence when he was in the East. He said once that our last three letters had crossed in the mails, and if we were to check his time and my time, I was writing to him the same time that he was writing to me.

Dialogue: Have you kept those letters?

Brooks: The University of Utah has them. I still think he was one of our best historical writers. He was small, but he had a brilliant mind.

Dialogue: Was he LDS?

Brooks: He was grandson of Orson Pratt. He went in swimming or something when he was sixteen, got meningitis and nearly died. When the fever broke, he was deaf. That was when he was a boy. When he died I felt really lost. I didn't even know he was sick.

Dialogue: What about some of your own writings? How did you come to write the *Mountain Meadows Massacre?*

Brooks: I had gone through the high school in Bunkerville and the normal training course there and taught school my first year in Bunkerville, teaching the third and fourth grades. And then Mr. Kelly transferred me to Mesquite, where the teacher had had a little trouble the year before. It was a larger school. It had about forty-five students in two smaller rooms with aisles so narrow that some boy that wore his father's shoes to school all winter couldn't engineer them up the aisle. It was again the third and fourth grade. I went to church the Sunday before the school began and saw Brother Nephi Johnson, the patriarch, and as I was attracted to him, I went and made myself acquainted and visited with him. He had a long beard, you know, and big sharp, sharp brown eyes, and he didn't have this vacant look old people get so many times. You felt like he still had all his marbles. And so one afternoon I was at church and he was there too, and my cousin Donetta Leavitt came and said the crowd was going after meeting on a hayride down to the melons, you know, to get melons (she didn't say *steal* melons, you know, just *get* them, wherever we found them) and would I like to go along. And I said, "Yes, but I don't think I should go along in this outfit." I only had one Sunday go-to-meeting outfit, and I wasn't going to get on a hayride in it. So I said, "Well look, I'll run down and change and hurry back, and if I don't, you

go ahead." So I hurried home and took off my go-to-meeting dress, and put on a serge skirt and a pongee middy with a red tie and some walking shoes that I could stomp around among the vines in, and started back. I lived due west from the church about two blocks, and as I came up about half way, I met Brother Johnson, coming along with his cane, picking along, and I said, "Hi, Brother Johnson," and he held out the cane in front of me and stopped me, like the Ancient Mariner, and he held me with his steely eye, and he said, "I want to give you a patriarchal blessing." I didn't know he was a patriarch before. I said, "Well, Brother Johnson, I've never had a patriarchal blessing and I would like one, sometime." And he said, "I want to give you a patriarchal blessing, *now*!" And then he said, "Right across the street is Walter Hughes' home. His daughter Afton is my scribe. I work there, and my book is there, and we'll go there now." So we went. The house was wide open—the houses were never locked. So we went in and I climbed up on some chairs and got down this big book, the official book, and I wrote my blessing as he gave it.

Spring came on, and just a while before school was to close, he came to my schoolroom during the last period of the day. Everybody was working, each child was working at a drawing or something. So here he comes, tapping up the aisle with his cane and all the children stared—you know how they are—and he waved his cane and said, "Go right on, go right on. Don't pay any attention to me. I'm just going to sit up here a minute." And he went and sat at my desk. At closing time I dismissed the children and went over to see what he wanted. He told me that he wanted me to do some writing for him. "My eyes have witnessed things that my tongue has never uttered, and before I die I want it written down. And I want you to do it."

I've lamented and scolded myself all my life for this next fifteen minutes. Fool that I was, why didn't I get a pencil and say, "Now let's go ahead, Brother Johnson"? But instead, I said, "Well, Brother Johnson, this is Tuesday night and it's Mutual (I was in the Mutual presidency, and I had a few things that I needed to do), but I'd like to do this for you. I'd like to do your life. You know, take some time, a full day, a Saturday when we could sit down and really write it, and I'll do it. I'd like to do it, I want to do it. I will do it." So he was comforted and I went on my merry way, and I think that's about the night I got my little sparkler on my third finger, left. Anyway, I was involved in getting myself engaged. It was right on the end of school, only a few days, and I went back to Bunkerville, back home. I've forgotten what the occasion was, but Lew Pulsipher came over for something. He made a point to come down to our house—he was Maggie's husband, and Maggie was the only living child that Brother Johnson had in that area, and he lived with her. Lew came and said, "Brother Johnson is down and it looks like he's not going to get up again. And he's worried in his mind, he keeps calling for you. He doesn't know your name; he calls you 'the little school teacher,' and he tosses and mumbles and calls for you repeatedly. If you could, I'd surely appreciate it if you'd come over." So before sunrise the next morning, I was over there—I had my own pony. I came to the place just as they were having breakfast. The brethren from the Seventies quorum, the two brethren that had stayed with him the last half of the night, were having breakfast. Lew went in with me and Maggie went to her father and roused him and got his attention and said, "Father the little school teacher is here, she's come to see you." I sat down by him and got

hold of his hand. He recognized me and I leaned over and kissed him and talked to him, reassured him. It seemed to pacify him. But you see, I was too late, I guess. He settled down, but pretty soon he moved. I thought he died. His eyes rolled back in his head, and his jaw dropped down open, and he wasn't breathing, and his hands relaxed on mine. So I jumped up and called Maggie and she came in quickly, and shook him, patted him, talked to him a little bit, and then he caught his breath and the life processes went on. I went outside. My uncle, my father's older brother met me; he was very cross with me. He got hold of my arm and said, "What's the matter with you? Haven't you got any sense? Haven't you got any nerve? Why couldn't you sit still and let that old man die? He's been trying to die. He's ninety-three, you know, and it'd have been a kindness. And now he'll linger and linger. If this happens again, you just hang onto your shoelaces and wait. Sit quietly and don't move and wait and wait and wait. And then come in and say, 'He's gone.' Nobody wants to call him back."

So he lived then about two days. I stayed right there until he died. But he never had a period when he was lucid enough to tell me what he had wanted to tell me.

Dialogue: What made you connect Brother Johnson with the *Mountain Meadows Massacre* book?

Brooks: Because Brother Johnson was on the ground at the massacre.

Dialogue: How did you know that?

Brooks: I didn't know it until after he was gone and it was too late. As a girl I didn't know; I was like you. I was never taught Mountain Meadows massacre. I went through all of the Sunday School classes and all of the religion classes and the massacre was never mentioned except as a horrible massacre in which the Indians participated. But they didn't even mention John D. Lee. They just skimmed over the massacre itself. We could go through our teachings and read about the successful colonizations and the horrid ones and the floods, and all of these things, but never, never anything about the massacre.

Dialogue: Brother Johnson never intimated while he was alive that he had. . .

Brooks: No, I didn't have any idea what he wanted to say. When he said his eyes had beheld things that his tongue had never uttered, I didn't even know there had been a massacre.

Dialogue: But when you found out that there was a massacre, when you were gathering the diaries and the women working with you were reporting back this kind of thing, why did you feel so compelled to write this story yourself? Did you kind of feel an obligation?

Brooks: Oh, yes. I had told him I would. I told the old man, I promised him, you see, on that day when he came to my school; I said to him, "Oh yes, I will do it, Brother Johnson."

Dialogue: The writing of the book was your fulfillment of the promise to Brother Johnson?

Brooks: I felt that. But I'll tell you, after Ern died, I went with the baby, little Ernest, to stay a little while at the Truman ranch on the Mogotsu Creek in the hopes of getting out of that heat at Bunkerville. The family was going over to Enterprise to celebrate the Twenty-fourth of July. We traveled in a covered wagon from the ranch on the creek up and across the Mountain Meadows, the whole distance of the place where the massacre had occurred. I went over the road, in a wagon, and you know how you measure it step by step by step. And I thought to myself, "If ever any more than two men met at this place at any time, they had to come by appointment. Somebody had to send them. It's too far, too far from anybody, the most lonely, lonely place you could imagine, with miles and miles everywhere before there was a settlement. And I was remembering that it was the Mountain Meadows massacre that was troubling this old man. I could see that if the Mormon men came, they came because they were sent, and they came in a group; they didn't come by accident. If Nephi Johnson was there, he was sent there. If Dudley Leavitt was there, he was sent there. It would be three days travel for him. He'd have no reason to go unless he were sent. And so that's where I began with the *Mountain Meadows Massacre*.

I worked it through, oh, a long time before I submitted it. And then I wouldn't ever have had it but for my good friend Wally Stegner who pushed through the deal. The publications committee at Stanford all voted to publish it before they realized what it was. And then they wrote and asked me if I did not want to withdraw; encouraged me not to publish it; said, "Don't you know this may cost you your membership in your Church?" Then I answered that I had written it to be printed, and they had signed to print it. Right after that Miss Lee came in the picture.

Dialogue: Ettie Lee?

Brooks: Ettie Lee, yes. I knew she had homes for unwed mothers, homes for alcoholics, homes of different kinds, and boys' ranches started. She wrote me a letter. She said, "Who are you, and what business are you about, writing about my grandfather?" Then she said, "If you would, the next time you come, call me, and I'll send a limousine for you."

Dialogue: Where was she?

Brooks: She was in Los Angeles, and I was out at the Huntington Library [in San Marino, California] then. Anyway, I went, and Miss Lee was converted. She wrote a check for $3,350 for an advance order of 1,000 *Mountain Meadows Massacre* books. And then they had to print that many to fill her order, and having printed that many, they printed a small, first edition, maybe three thousand. I don't know. But that was what brought it onto the market.

Dialogue: Well, now, this book...

Brooks: This book branded me as an apostate.

Dialogue: Why do you think that was? It's not an attack on the Church.

Brooks: I know. But it's an open discussion of it, and it hadn't been done before.

Dialogue: Do you feel personally that the book has harmed the Church in any way?

Brooks: I hope not. I didn't want to harm the Church. I think always the truth is better.

Dialogue: What about your other, more recent books? The diaries of John D. Lee and Hosea Stout and Thomas D. Brown?

Brooks: Dale Morgan suggested the Hosea Stout one. And I found the Thomas D. Brown one by accident, when I was at the Historian's Office. I saw this bookcase, and on the back was "Diary of the Southern Indian Mission, Thomas D. Brown." Southern Indian Mission, I said to myself, that's Dudley Leavitt's mission. That's Jacob Hamblin's mission, and that's a mission I already know about. So I took it out and you know, that's what it was. Handwritten copy, I believe it was. Nice,

you know. Perfectly punctuated and capitalized and all that. Anyway, I read into it enough to see that here are things I hadn't seen before—the Indian burial, the Indian doctor, Indian wedding. So when Dale Morgan was appointed to go in there to work, I wrote him a note and told him to watch for the Thomas D. Brown diary and try to find the original, if he could, which he did. And he copied it during his noon period. He'd eat a sandwich and then he'd get it down and for one hour he typed. Then he'd put it back where it was, and he'd go on to the routine of his work in the afternoon. This was a sneaking, wicked thing to do, wasn't it. But he did it, and in the end we had it. He made a carbon which he gave to me.

Dialogue: Do you feel especially close to any of these men after working so long with their diaries?

Brooks: I feel like I know them, almost as much as if I'd have lived with them. They wrote so frankly and so fully.

Dialogue: Of the books that you've done, if your whole reputation had to rest on one of them, which one would it be? Which is your favorite out of all your books?

Brooks: I think *Mountain Meadows* had the biggest impact on me. But I felt better about the John D. Lee biography.

Dialogue: What are you working on now?

Brooks: Dale Morgan used to say I was working on seven projects all at once. I can't work at seven. But I can work at more than one. I must live through this autobiography, this *Quicksand and Cactus*. I'm not going to live to be as old as my mother. I'll give out before she will, I think. She'll live to be a hundred!

Dialogue: How old is she now?

Brooks: She's ninety-six, just twenty years older than I am. I'm seventy-six. I can remember when I thought that was a very ripe old age. Sometimes I think I'm not going to last this thing out. I've been well all my life, but now lately when I make a batch of "patience,"—that's a special candy that you have to stir all the time—my arm will just ache all night, until I have to get up and rub the darn thing. But it's just that I've spoiled my family with this special candy.

Dialogue: You said that your most significant book remains the *Mountain Meadows Massacre*. What would be your most significant contribution to date other than that?

Brooks: I think maybe the best thing that I have done is the collection of these diaries, the collection in Washington, D. C. I think that after I'm gone, when whatever I've done is appraised, that will be the most valuable. Except for my children, if they turn out well. . .

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