

Promise to Grandma

Kerry William Bate

WHEN SARAH ROUNDY SYLVESTER was fighting death in the fall of 1938 she must have felt her life was unsuccessful. The promises of a good education, the status of a significant and unusual Church assignment, the potential of an unexpected marriage, and her early leadership in an important town civic group had promised much. On her deathbed she swore her daughter, sister, and mother to a solemn vow which, to their Mormon minds, would theologically have left her eternally isolated. Yet they took the oath. Obviously, the strength and power of the mind left in this expiring fifty-year-old woman was not negligible. Her life — and her death — exemplified Samuel Johnson's maxim, "There has rarely passed a life of which a judicious and faithful narrative would not be useful" (Bronson 1961, 84).

Sarah's story was always a part of me. During my childhood, I spent untold hours seated unobtrusively in an obscure corner while the grown-ups visited — visited before a missionary farewell or wedding, after a funeral, during a family reunion. And often the talk would turn to Sarah and her unique characteristics: usually with pride, but sometimes with puzzlement or even chagrin. And I'll never forget my mother's horror when her siblings violated Sarah's solemn deathbed pledge.

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Young Elizabeth Steel Stapley, the first Mormon child born in Utah and named for Brigham Young, sits in rare repose. Standing left in the striped shirtwaist is her daughter, Sarah Catherine Stapley Roundy. Her daughter and the subject of this essay, Sarah Elizabeth Roundy Sylvester, her hair braided on top of her head, stands next to her grandmother, while her daughter, Nell Sylvester (Wilson), now seventy-two, cradles a doll.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF REBA ROUNDY LEFEVRE

Sarah was my grandmother.

She was the town clerk or something there [Kanarraville] — No, not the town clerk, that would be a man. She was something to do with the clerking part there when I was a kid but I don't remember what it was (Pollock 1983, 12).

Lila Berry Pollock was elderly, trying to reconcile present-day realities with her memories of early twentieth-century Mormonism. In fact, Sarah did hold a "man's job" in her community, a job held only by men before and after her tenure (Lovell 1980, 28–30). She was Kanarraville ward clerk from 1912 to 1914, succeeding her uncle, William Tarbet Stapley.

She brought impressive credentials to the job: first were her familial ones. Born during a terrible storm on 11 January 1888 in Kanarraville, she was related by blood or marriage to nearly everyone. The first of Sarah Catherine Stapley and Joel Jesse Roundy's nine children, her people had been in Iron County since its first settlement in the 1850s. Sarah's father was something of a saint and mystic, soft-spoken, but with unfailing good humor, flexibility, and tolerance. Both of her grandmothers — powerful matriarchs — were town midwives for many years and helped bring most of her contemporaries into the world. Her mother seems pale and invisible before her maternal grandmother but was still a woman with spunk and spirit — "a spitfire" my Aunt Gwen Sylvester Hunter said (Bate and Hunter 1985, 31). Townsfolk expected unusual achievements from the women in these families.

Sarah was well educated, comparatively speaking. She "passed high grade" from the local elementary school, her sister, my Aunt Reba Roundy LeFevre, recalled (LeFevre 1983, 11). This qualified her to teach school: and on 10 December 1909, the *Iron County Record* reported that "Miss Sarah Roundy is taking her place in the schoolroom" in Caliente, Nevada. Twenty-year-old Sarah didn't remain a teacher long because she didn't enjoy it — Rulon Platt, son of Kanarra's schoolteacher John Platt, thought she didn't have the personality necessary for a teacher. "She could have been a marvelous teacher, but with [being] temperamental she couldn't handle it. . . . She [was] . . . sulky. Sad disposition" (Platt 1982, 17–18). The only memorable thing she brought back from Caliente was a thirty-pound weight gain (Platt 1982, 17; LeFevre 1978, 21; 1983, 11).

The next year, 1910–11, she obtained the equivalent of her high school education at Murdock Academy in Beaver — quite an accomplishment for a pre-World War I rural Mormon and probably more than any of her predecessors and many of her successors as ward clerk had. She enjoyed singing in the choir at Murdock, took carpentry, and would remain proficient with a hammer.

Besides those secular achievements, Sarah had had a variety of Church callings: she was a member of the ward choir, an aid in the YLMIA, a Primary teacher, and later first counselor in the Primary presidency (KGM, 3 Dec. 1905, 4 March 1906, 11 Nov. 1906).

It was appropriate that she be selected as ward clerk in 1912. She was twenty-four, and it was the Progressive Era. Despite tiny Kanarraville's isolation, it was much infected with new ideas. Progress was in the air. The U.S.

Congress was passing laws regulating trusts and monopolies; the Utah State Legislature was restricting child labor, establishing minimum wages, and mandating pension reform (Alexander 1978, 418–21), and the towns of Utah were making all kinds of civic improvements.

Iron County twice elected socialist mayors in Cedar City during the 'teens. Kanarraville Saints heard lectures from their bishop to "improve" — and they did. They built a new water system, installed telephones and gas lights, and considered electricity — all between 1910 and 1916.

Kanarraville also revived its drama club. Sarah was a prominent member along with her father, sister Annis, and brother Jesse. Aunt Reba said she was in "every kind that come by there" (LeFevre 1983, 8), and her quick mind gave her prompt command of her lines. Generally, New Harmony and Kanarraville would exchange plays during the year, and there was always a good deal of socializing between those communities. Her father was probably even better in the plays than she was, because he was famous as a story teller and dramatist.

Despite the opposition of the bishop, townspeople enjoyed the movies, riding over to see them at Cedar City's Thorley Theatre; and Sarah's brothers were enthusiastic members of a vigorous town band, though Rulon Platt said none of her family "had a damned bit of music in 'em" (1982, 15). Horse races, foot races (at which Sarah's sisters and brothers excelled) and "fat lady races" (Sarah's 168 easily surpassed the 150 minimum) were other popular community activities. In addition, the town bought a new piano for community dances, farmers looked at new farming techniques, and townspeople pointed out shocking paragraphs in their county newspaper, such as an exciting tale of women in Portland being arrested for wearing "x-ray dresses."

In short, in the years around 1912 when Sarah was selected as ward clerk, she was a member of a respectable family in a dynamic, forward-looking community. Still, it was unusual to move a woman into a man's job, which is what happened when William T. Stapley left town in early 1912 (his last minutes are dated 16 February) and Sarah Roundy was called as his replacement on 14 April.

"They couldn't get a man to take it," Aunt Reba recalled, so they selected Sarah because "she's smart and she can do it." Sarah thought it over, consulted her father — who was in the bishopric — and with his encouragement said, "Well, if you think I should, I should," and accepted it. Her fellow townspeople were at least grateful — "they was glad she got it because they wouldn't have to do it," Reba said (LeFevre 1983, 17–18). As ward clerk she kept minutes, vital statistics, and financial records. She efficiently set to work, sketching in the minutes as well as she could during the two-month hiatus (KGM 14 April 1912).

On the same day, she was sustained as second counselor in the YLMIA (KGM 14 April 1912). She served as ward clerk until the end of January 1914. Thereafter, she is never again mentioned in the Kanarraville General Minutes in any capacity though she continued to live in the town until 1920.

But she took her clerking seriously. First, she was conscientious, recording minutes fully and consistently during her tenure in office, something not all

ward clerks did, as I have found trying to research the history of certain wards in southern Idaho. Once she wrote, "No minutes kept Sept. 8, 1912. Ward Clerk at Mutual Convention." She used adjectives to help better describe the nature of talks and Church activities: a returned missionary gave a "beautiful account" of his mission, the bishop gave "excellent warning," Sister Ethel Ashdown delivered "an instructive talk," and her father preached an "interesting and consoling" funeral sermon (KGM 8 Sept. 1912, 9 June 1912, 7 July 1912, 1 Sept. 1912, 1 Oct. 1912).

Her spelling was not always orthodox — we find "Parawon" for "Parowan," "Seccion" for "Session," "Converction" for "conversation" and a phonetic "posponed" for "postponed" (KGM 5 May 1912; 13 Oct. 1912). The trials of polygamy were already receding so far that its spelling proved a trial ("pylogamy"), and genealogical work was of so little interest then that it comes out "genology" (KGM 23 June 1912; 14 Sept. 1913). A certain Mr. Andrus's first name is a mystery choice among "Randolph," or "Andolph," or "Audolph." (KGM 12 Oct. 1913; 16 March 1913; 14 Sept. 1913.)

The congregation of around a hundred was treated to a few frank details of the personal lives of their neighbors, and Sarah did not flinch from recording them. "Charles Parker Sen. expressed his desires to fulfill his marriage vows to his wife" (2 Feb. 1913). John Platt (for good reason, as will appear), reminded ward members of the "sin of scandal" (16 June 1912), and one father publicly confessed that his daughter had fornicated "with her husband" before marriage. The congregation, after the bishop gave "excellent warning to the young people," extended "a unanimous vote of forgiveness" (7 July 1912; Platt, Aug. 1985, 21–22).

As ward clerk, Sarah attended the only "Bishops Trial" held during her tenure, where she took good minutes. On 13 October 1912, her former teacher, John W. Platt, charged Sarah's paternal cousin by marriage, Rachel Griffin Roundy, with promoting the story that, nearly twenty-five years before, Platt had had an affair with Harriet Berry Stapley, his own sister-in-law, while Harriet's husband was on a mission. The result, the gossiping Mrs. Roundy asserted, was a pregnancy and miscarriage.

Platt's fury lasted a generation and his son Rulon told me, over seventy years later, that Rachel Roundy was "a bullshitter" and "prevaricator" who would "hatch up a story and tell it" because "she was just a offbreed" that "fell off the log and got bumped" (Platt July 1985, 49).

Mrs. Roundy pleaded not guilty to the charge and "asked for other witnesses, some of her friends, not enemies," and finally fell back on her husband, who asked for "coencided evidence." The case was postponed, but eventually Platt prevailed and 29 December, more than two months later, the bishop announced the outcome from the pulpit ("There was no truth in the charge") and urged communal unity (LeFevre 1983, 11; KGM 29 Dec. 1912).

Like many of the girls in Kanarraville, the twenty-five-year-old Sarah found her first beaux among the young men of nearby New Harmony. Her name is linked to a Hammond's in friendship, a Davies in some slight romance, but Andy Schmutz of Harmony — "very fine looking" and "very religious,"

according to Rulon Platt (July 1985, 59–60) — was her most serious suitor (LeFevre 1983, 15; July 1984, 4). Platt described Sarah's looks at this time as "not too goodly, rather large, rather composed," and gave what was probably the official town position on her: "She was getting up in years" (1982, 17; "Appendix").

Most expected her to marry Schmutz, but then a twenty-year-old man from Bellevue (now Pintura) came to town to work as a sheepherder for his cousins, Jim and Andy Berry. Victor Leon ("Lee-own" in the local pronunciation) Sylvester was described by a nephew not given to profanity as "the orneriest bastard that ever lived" (K. Olds 1984; Atkin 1985, 9), and Vic's youngest sister, Gladys, said he was "a mean brat" who "teased me constantly and I hated him when I was a kid" (G. Olds 1976, 3). Bessie Davies says he was "kind of a backwards fellow" (Davies and Davies 1985, 2). A childhood schoolmate who later married Vic's sister Gladys, Andy Olds, said his most vivid recollection in grade school of Vic was of that young man standing in a corner, both hands uplifted, one holding a dictionary and the other a geography book, as punishment for bad behavior. Vic loved a good fight, liked a little wine, and hated a bully. "Oh, he was a rough, tough little bugger," Uncle Andy summed up (July 1984, 1, 10; Oct. 1984, 1). More charitable Rulon Platt, a "shirttail cousin," since both were related to the Berrys, herded sheep with Vic for several years. He said Vic "was a natural-born, self-made comedian" and "a wit" (Aug. 1985, 24).

Vic's father, Joseph, had inherited the moribund family acres in dry and sterile Bellevue, a town whose only cash crop was wine (traded to Kanarraville people for coal and farm goods) but whose winemakers were overshadowed by the better known vintners of nearby Toquerville. Joe began making wine and was soon religiously drinking his tithe of it, his occasional bouts with drunkenness a trial to his successive wives, Jane and Emma, and his ten children. Jane died when Vic was eleven years old, and his father remarried two years later to a woman who already had several children and soon gave birth to two more (Hunter 1981, 11; C. A. Olds July 1984, 15–18; Munford 1984, 2; L. Sylvester 1984, 11).

Though Vic was bright, he was not interested in education. He quit school before the eighth grade and later referred to college as a "paid vacation." He worked at cowpunching with his father and Wallace Stewart, a stepbrother, then bought an elegant cowboy hat which he proudly wore on the dusty red streets of Toquerville. "The loftier the hat was, why — it was just right," remembered Uncle Andy (Hunter 1981, 25; C. A. Olds July 1984, 10–11).

After a few years of cowpunching, Vic and his stepbrother rented his father's Bellevue acres, hopeful that new agricultural methods would wring a living from the dying acres. They plowed up the ancient alfalfa patch to rotate crops; and Joe, in a drunken rage at this desecration, "beat the hell out of old Vic and Wallace and told them to get the hell out of there." They hitchhiked up to Kanarra and Vic worked for the Berrys on Suicide Ranch, so-named because "some feller kicked his bucket over there — purposely," said Uncle Andy (Olds July 1984, 4).

So that is how a prickly, sensitive, aggressive cowboy five years Sarah's junior happened to be in town. He loved to dance, and it was at the New Harmony and Kanarra dances that they courted. Vic would "have a drink or two, and then he was really a high stepper," dancing and singing, my Aunt Gwen recalled (Pickering, Wilson, Hunter and Sylvester 1983, 3).

Unlike his father he wasn't an alcoholic (Bate 1982, 2; L. Sylvester 1984, 7). Still, Sarah's parents frowned upon this relationship. Sarah's mother was particularly upset about Vic's lack of religious commitment. But Sarah was an independent-minded woman; and she promised her father that if he gave his permission to marry Vic, she would never complain. As far as her family was concerned, she kept her word.

The ceremony was quick. Sarah abruptly married Vic, reportedly in a wedding dress borrowed from Vic's older sister, 28 October 1913 in Parowan (K. Bate 1982, 226-27; LeFevre 1983, 20; Platt July 1985, 10). Rulon Platt said she was motivated by obstinacy and advancing age but her daughter Ruth echoed the official family version when she said they were much in love, with one second-hand report describing their courtship as "so fun and cute!" (Pickering 1984, 13-14; Pickering, Wilson, Hunter and Sylvester 1983, 25). The *Iron County Record* notes "Mr. and Mrs. Victor Sylvester gave the public a wedding dance last Monday night" (14 Nov. 1913) and Rulon Platt and Uncle Andy attended the dance with music supplied by old Dan Barney — "he was a fiddlin' son-of-a-gun!" (Platt 1982 "Appendix"; C. A. Olds July 1984, 13-14; Hunter 1983, 9; *Iron County Record*, 14 Nov. 1913; Platt July 1985, 10, 13). Uncle Andy recalled with relish that Barney would be escorted to the back door at occasional intermissions and given a swig of wine and then would return to the fray with new zeal.

Vic and Sarah both loved reading, singing, and dancing. Rulon Platt recalled that "Vic . . . could read novels as fast as you could throw 'em at him" (Platt July 1985, 6) but he also read history, science, and the Bible. Platt also averred that Vic couldn't "carry a tune in a sealed casket," but a tape of him singing "Mighty Like a Rose" has survived, proving that he had a good voice. Vic could sketch, braid, and fingerweave, while Sarah was skilled at hatmaking, tailoring, and needlework (J. Bate 24 Aug. 1980, 6-7, Pickering, Wilson, Hunter and Sylvester 1983, 3; Wilson 1984, 10; LeFevre 1983, 10; July 1984, 12.) Vic's Aunt Midey later wrote his Aunt Rony: "Tell walace [Davis] I wish him and wife all the prosperity and hapiness in the world I honor his jugment in a wife I dont go much on these buterflyes Powder and paint" (K. Bate 1985, 2, Almira ("Midey") Hanks McDougall, Hanksville, Utah, 15 December 1921, to Irona Wealthy Hanks Davis, Kanarraville, Utah). Perhaps Vic was honoring a family value in marrying a settled older woman.

Sarah's younger sister Reba passes on a family story that "the town was all up in airs about her gettin' married" although she does not say why (LeFevre 1983, 16). On 26 January, two months later, Sarah wrote her last minutes. She was released, already pregnant — and seven months later Nell was born, 28 June 1914. "Soon as they said they got a man to put in it she just handed it over to them and said that's okay," recalled Aunt Reba (LeFevre

1983, 18). However, the man who succeeded her, R. J. Williams, Jr., seems to have always been in town and at least theoretically available for some time.

Within two years of Nell's birth, Sarah turned her considerable intellect and energies into another direction: she helped organize the Kanarraville Poultry Club sometime in 1915 (LeFevre 1983, 17; Wilson 1984, 2; *Iron County Record* 18 Aug. 1916). The women of Kanarraville made money selling eggs. Efficient egg and meat production were not casual interests but the serious dollars-and-cents activity of practical businesswomen (J. Bate 1983, 2).

Sarah was elected president, and many of the other ladies in the town joined the club, including Sarah's mother and maternal grandmother. Sarah's favorite chickens were Rhode Island Reds and Barred Plymouth Rocks, which she thought a good compromise between heavy layers and fast meat growers (J. Bate 1983, 3). Sarah was interested in incubators and encouraged their use, though the *Iron County Record* reports that her coal-oil incubator caught fire and burned up nine dozen eggs, a "substantial granary," two work horse collars, one pair of lines, breeching for a set of harness, and a pair of nosebags (2 April 1915). Still, that did not discourage her. Her most detailed activities with the club were published in the county newspaper after that event.

The club also subscribed to *Everybody's Poultry Magazine*, thus ensuring that members had access to the most up-to-date literature. In 1916, proud club members were photographed displaying a white hen, their magazine, and their numerous children (Wilson 1984, 2).

To help educate members, the club invited speakers. One was Branch Academy College professor David Sharp of Cedar City, who lectured to a dinner group of women about modern poultry methods (*Iron County Record*, 2 Feb. 1917, 9 Feb. 1917).

The club also met social needs very successfully. My mother recalls Sarah as loquacious: "She'd talk-talk-talking and she'd talk-talk after they got through talking, and she'd decide to go home, and they'd talk all the way out to the gate, sometimes half the way home, and then she'd walk back with the lady or something — we'd always say she got hung up by the tongue" (J. Bate 17 Aug. 1980, 8A-9). The *Iron County Record* records this 1916 outing as well:

Last Thursday the Poultry Club took a hike onto the mountain, stopping at the Will C. Reeves ranch, where they had dinner. Those participating in the hike were, Mrs. Sarah Sylvester, president of the club; Mesdames Jesse Williams and Charles Parker, Jr., Mr. and Mrs. John Stapley, Mrs. Hannah Williams, Miss Jennie Reeves, Mrs. W. C. Reeves. The mountain road being washed out, the party went on horseback. After dinner they all went over to the LaVerkin. Some returned home the same day and some not until the next day. The young people both male and female intend going to the mountain again Saturday and stay over Sunday (18 August 1916).

After Nell's birth came a six-year hiatus before my mother, JoAnn (1920), was born, but children followed regularly thereafter: Gwen (1922), Ruth (1925), Rex (1928), and Leon (1934). (A daughter Shirley, born in 1917, died the day she was born.) Sarah had firm ideas about making her children independent. "I don't believe in holdin' my kids back like some people do,"

Aunt Reba quoted her. "I'm teachin' them that they got to stand up for their own rights. They can't depend on anybody else." So while the children "had to learn to scratch for theirself while she was out workin'," they grew up to be independent minded and self-assured (LeFevre May 1984, 7). Once, when Vic's father Joe came to visit, my mother, JoAnn, answered the door. She was a lively little towhead and Joe called her a beautiful sweet thing. "Well, I'm not a thing!" she replied indignantly, demonstrating a strong sense of perhaps misplaced self-worth (Munford 1984, 3).

However, Sarah wouldn't tolerate "disobedience and sass" from her children, and her mother deplored her temper. Sarah would threaten them, "I'll skin you alive!" or swear: "Dammit to hell, leave me alone!" (J. Bate 1982, 26; LeFevre 1983, 29).

By the time her children were born, however, it was clear to her that she would be, for all practical purposes, a single parent. In early 1920 Sarah's parents moved to Hurricane (pronounced "Hair-kin" by oldtimers), further south and much warmer than Kanarraville. She sold their small home and followed her parents to Hurricane, reportedly without telling Vic, who was off herding sheep. Aunt Reba counters that Vic made sure she was moved to Hurricane, telling Sarah's father, "I'm movin' Sarah down here because I know if I don't get anything for her to eat, you'll feed her," but that doesn't fit very well with my mother and Nell's recollections that Vic was angry ever after because she sold the house and moved without telling him (LeFevre July 1984, 2; J. Bate 24 Aug. 1980, 3).

After the move to Hurricane, Vic tried homesteading on Lake Pahranaugut in Nevada. At first he went out alone but later he took his family (Wilson 1984, 3-5; Pickering, Wilson, Hunter, and Sylvester 1983, 1; LeFevre July 1984, 1-2; C. A. Olds July 1984, 24-25). Sarah was skeptical and lonely, glad when the venture failed and they came back. "He don't know anything about farmin'," she complained (LeFevre July 1984, 1-2). Rulon Platt corroborated, "Now Vic never was a farmer. You give him a shovel and he'd probably cut you in two with it, he just wouldn't have anything to do with it. And he was not good with an axe. That kind of labor didn't interest Vic" (1982, 37-38). Yet he was not lazy: "He'd work his damned head off to supply his wife and his girls" (July 1985, 4; Aug. 1985, 26). He seems to have been diligent and reliable as a sheepherder, cowpuncher, miner, and road worker. However, none of this led to much prosperity, and all of it led to long and continued absences from home, leaving all of the household and child-rearing responsibilities to Sarah. He spent several years working for his brother Frank, a fast-talking mine-owner with an operation near Delta. Instead of sending his money home, Vic had Frank save it for a house, but the mine went bankrupt, Frank lost everything, and Vic's money was a casualty (C. A. Olds 1984, 11-12, 35; Pickering 1984, 7; J. Bate 1983, 17). Sarah was probably not surprised since she had reportedly called the mining venture "another crazy idea" (LeFevre July 1984, 14).

Gwen and my mother recall playing outside one day when a man came up with a suitcase in his hand. "We were just — stood and gawked at him, be-

cause nobody ever came up that way with a suitcase clear out to the edge of town," recalled Mom.

"Well, hello," he said.

"Hello," they replied.

"Is your daddy home?" he asked.

Mom replied, "No, my daddy's not home."

The stranger answered, "Well, I think he is." Then the girls knew he was not only strange, but crazy.

"Well, he is *not*!" they insisted.

"Oh, you go in and ask your mother if your daddy's not home," the man persisted.

"Oh don't be silly," Mom answered. "We know our daddy's not home!" Of course, it was Vic (J. Bate 24 Aug. 1980, 1).

The scenes from early days of marriage — rocking the baby or singing with Sarah — more often were replaced with violent outbreaks. "He had a violent temper," recalled Mom, and added, "he would whale the daylights out of us. . . . He didn't hit Momma, but he'd sure spat his kids a lot, or whip them, or whatever you want to call it. So, he became violent. It was all right with me if he didn't live around home too much. . . . There wasn't anything I ever did in my life that ever pleased him" (Wilson 1984, 12; J. Bate 24 Aug. 1980, 2, 7; 1983, 6–7).

When he found out Sarah was pregnant with Leon, he shoved her, and Gwen pulled his hair to defend her mother (Bate and Hunter 1985, 45–47). His youngest daughter Ruth remembered that "sometimes he would have tantrums and act childish. . . . He's knocked me down and kicked me in the ribs before" (Pickering 1984, 7).

Underneath the conflict was religion: Sarah and Vic worshipped different gods. Vic was a rough, practical man who herded obedient sheep throughout the Nevada-Utah-Arizona range. When he saw the Mormons in church devoutly praying for rain, he scoffed that if they wanted rain, they should live where it rained. He could not take seriously a stratified heaven, gold plates, and temple ceremonies. Sarah, in contrast, was a devout and practicing Mormon who regarded his views as sacrilegious, his Bull Durham as disobedience, and his inactivity as spiritually perilous.

He reportedly complained that there were "two things I can't stand. A dirty house and a nagging woman" (Bate 24 Aug. 1980, 2–3). My mother admitted that he had both. Even Sarah's mother agreed that she "was jawin' all the time" (Bate and Hunter 1985, 31). She resented his drinking (Uncle Andy said Vic sometimes made bootleg from his father's grapes during Prohibition), and she was furious that he didn't build her a house, forcing her to shift the rest of her life from rented house to house, in one case living in the Isom granary, in another sheltering her children in an old tent on her father's lot (Pickering 1984, 14; Wilson 1984, 4, 6, 9; J. Bate 17 Aug. 1980, 8–8A; Pickering, Wilson, Hunter and Sylvester 1983, 15).

Shortly after the shoving incident, Vic asked Sarah for a divorce. She reportedly replied, "Okay, you can have a divorce, but you're goin' to pay for

the keep of the kids," and he decided to stay married (LeFevre July 1984, 6). The stressful relationship was exacerbated by increasing poverty. More and more she found herself making the living. "She had to get out and earn her own," recalled her sister, "She went out and worked ten hours a day" (LeFevre July 1984, 3).

My mother and Aunt Gwen laughed that they were "already so poor anyway" that "at first we didn't even notice the Depression" (Bate and Hunter 1985, 20). Vic's sister Gladys visited him the winter of 1935-36 and wrote to another sister, "On Victors birthday I went over and had supper with him. He has managed to keep off relief and this winter when there is so much project work around they wont give him a days work. He is so anxious to go on a job. It sure gets him down" (K. Bate 1985, 11-12, Gladys Sylvester Olds, Toquerville, Utah, 25 Feb. 1936, to Lavinia Sylvester Leeds, Los Angeles, Calif.). Aunt Reba thought he contributed to his own unemployment by sometimes refusing to take jobs that didn't pay the wage he wanted, although his daughters denied it (LeFevre July 1984, 3, Bate and Hunter 1985, 48).

In making her own way, Sarah found a number of creative and innovative solutions because she was a woman who "thought you could do anything your self" (Bate and Hunter 1985, 30). In addition to her chickens, she was an extremely competent seamstress, something she had learned from one of her numerous correspondence courses, and something for which she had had an interest and ability since childhood despite being blinded in the right eye in an early accident (Pickering 1984, 8-10; Hunter 1981, 9; LeFevre 1983, 10-11, 21). Her daughters went through new catalogues and selected what they liked, perhaps a ruffle here, a sleeve there, a pocket somewhere else, and she would make them new dresses without the use of patterns. (Her favored colors were delicate blues and subdued tans.) She also remodeled old clothes for her children and for others in exchange for more old clothes, mutton, or other produce (Pickering, Wilson, Hunter and Sylvester 6 Aug. 1983, 9; LeFevre 1983, 27-28).

She did cutwork, Battenberg (she won a prize at the Iron County Fair, according to the *Record*, 21 Sept. 1917), embroidery, netting and crocheting. She took a millinery course and remodeled and made hats, straw hats, and bonnets. Through another correspondence course in cooking, she acquired the most up-to-date information about nutrition and was also a gifted cook.

She did housework, laundered, and sold magazines like the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Ladies Home Journal* for a free subscription herself and a small commission (Bate and Hunter 1985, 41). This, of course, fit well with her personality, for she loved to visit and talk; selling magazines along the way was an easy task.

She was an excellent soapmaker (she could tell when it was just right by the taste) and a dedicated gardener who grew mushmelons, canteloupes, watermelons, cucumbers, squash, corn, beans, carrots, beets, tomatoes, onions, and sometimes sweet potatoes. She saved the weeds for the pigs. Some edible kinds, like pigweed, were cooked and served with vinegar and salt and pepper — "Oh how I hated them!" recalled Aunt Gwen (J. Bate 17 Aug. 1980, 17B-19; Hunter 1981, 14; Pickering, Wilson, Hunter and Sylvester 1983, 13-14).

She carefully preserved what she grew, canning pickles (all kinds — bread and butter, dill, mustard and sweet pickles), fruits and vegetables. She bottled enormous quantities of food, at one time more than 1200 quarts of tomatoes, and always by the hundreds. She also preserved pork and beef and churned butter. Her children remember skipping across the hot corrugated tin roofs (“cat on a hot tin roof, nothing!” said Aunt Gwen), laying out slices of apples, pears, peaches, and apricots to dry (J. Bate 17 Aug. 1980, 11, 13–19; Pickering, Wilson, Hunter and Sylvester 1983, 14). In later years, her children thought a two-year food supply simple by comparison with Sarah’s code.

What they didn’t grow, they got by gift or barter. Sarah’s parents provided farm and garden produce. Once a year there was a trek to Vic’s father’s house, where they picked black, red, and yellow currants. In Hurricane she and her children picked Himalaya berries on shares using long stockings to protect their arms from thorns and straw hats to protect their faces from sunburn. The buckets of berries were made into jams and pies. In late fall they would pick almonds on shares, burning the hulls in the winter to supplement the wood pile. They would also pick black walnuts on shares, and pecans when they were available. “We spent all summer getting ready for winter,” sighed my mother (J. Bate 17 Aug. 1980, 13).

In addition they raised chickens, had a cow, and sometimes a young beef and a pig or two. Neighbors gave them scraps of meat that were considered undesirable — beef brains, tongue, and liver or a pig’s head for head cheese (J. Bate, 17 Aug. 1980, 14–15).

Sarah bought her first electric washing machine from Emil Graff’s store for thirty-five dollars. She got five dollars together, paid it to Graff as a down payment, and then washed clothes for two cents a pound, making payments of five dollars a month. Vic called this “buying on tick” (credit or on time), and exploded angrily (J. Bate 17 Aug. 1980, 9).

Unfortunately she did not inherit the vigorous constitution of her parents (both of whom lived into their eighties) or her maternal grandmother (who lived into her nineties and ritually appeared in 24th of July parades as the first white child born in Utah). She had difficult pregnancies and several miscarriages, attributed to “bone structure” and allegedly cured by a chiropractor. She is said to have had a bad heart, and once got a serious case of blood poisoning in her leg. The problems with her heart and legs made her give up the dancing she loved (Pickering 1984, 10, 15–16; Pickering, Wilson, Hunter and Sylvester 1983, 3).

Vic initially viewed her health problems with indifference, if not hostility, as malingering (Pickering 1984, 15). But as the situation got more serious he took more notice. By the spring of 1938 when she was fifty years old, she had “dropsy,” then-incurable water retention caused by malfunctioning kidneys. When my mother graduated from high school in June 1938 — a proud valedictorian for the art department of Hurricane High School — Sarah could barely make her a new dress (LeFevre May 1984, 8). At this time, Sarah collected some money and had a photograph taken of her children. Neither she nor Vic are in it. No photographs of Vic Sylvester while he was married to Sarah have survived.

Sarah's parents took her in as she grew sicker, buying a refrigerator to provide ice for her and putting her in the bed where her grandmother had recently died. The hardest part for her was inactivity. She had always been on the move: visiting, tending chickens, selling magazine subscriptions, earning food and clothing for her family. Vic moved into town to stay with the children and tended bar. Her body began to swell. She fretted about her children, asking first her mother to take care of them, and then her unmarried sister Reba. Both assented. Sarah knew that Vic would not take care of them, and she worried about Ruth, who had always had a stormy relationship with Vic, and Leon, who was the only one she had not been able to teach to read because he was only four (Pickering 1984, 10–11; LeFevre July 1984, 1, 6, 11; J. Bate 11 August 1982, 31–33).

Something else was on her mind and she once called for the bishop. He brought his counselors and refused to dismiss them, so she left her message forever unsaid.

Nephritis is not an easy death, and the thought of dying frightened her. Vic's sister-in-law, Lena Stevens Sylvester, came to visit her in the fall of 1938 and later sadly described her: "Sarah had this — what is it — they bloat up. She swelled up with water in her until she just looked like a bloated cow. That poor thing suffered something miserable! Oh!" (L. Sylvester 1984, 8–9).

Only days before her death, she asked her mother, Reba, and my mother to promise that after her death they would not have her sealed to Vic in the temple (Wilson 1984, 8; Pickering 1984, 14; J. Bate 1983, 14–15; LeFevre July 1984, 11). My mother recalls the scene as beginning in incoherence: "Now I don't want you to do that."

"Do what?"

"Well, you just see you don't do it."

"What are you talking about?"

"Well, I don't want you getting your dad and me sealed in the temple," and then she complained lucidly about Vic's irreligiosity, his quarreling, and his refusal to build her a house. She summed up: "See that you don't do that! Don't ever do that!"

"Well, I won't."

She repeated her requests to her mother and Reba. Reba remembered her as lucid and coherent. "Now you promise me you won't do it!" she demanded (LeFevre July 1984, 11). Both women assented.

Of course, the implications to the devout were not lost on Sarah. Her grandmother Priscilla Roundy had pointed out years before that Mormon women who die and are not sealed to a husband "would be servants hear after" (Priscilla Parrish Roundy, Venice, Utah, 16 Jan. [unknown year], to Jane Parrish Lindsay). Sarah was risking being a celestial menial in the Mormon hierarchal heaven. Only the intensity of her conviction could have won assent from the three believers who agreed to honor this last request.

By September, 1938, her sickness grew so serious that the only thing that brought her any comfort was to move her, and even that was painful. My mother and Reba took turns getting up in the night, turning her, propping her

up with pillows, and taking care of the bedpan. Finally her lungs filled with water. "Oh Reba!" she said terrified, "I'm going to die! I'm going to die whether I want to or not! I've just had the death rattles!" (LeFevre 1978, 13-14; 1983, 37). Reba informed their mother, who had the county nurse come see her and give her a sedative. She died peacefully in her sleep on 19 September 1938, with some family members present (J. Bate 1983, 16; 11 Aug. 1982, 33).

For the first time in his life, Vic faced responsibility for his children. He handled the death with his usual lack of diplomacy. Next morning at the breakfast table, the girl who had been staying over to help said, "How is your wife?"

"She died last night," he replied (R. Sylvester 1984, 5). That was how the younger children learned of their mother's death.

The *Washington County News* described Sarah Roundy Sylvester in her obituary as "an excellent seamstress having made sort of a profession or trade of this work," and added, "She was also a good artist and especially loved to do fancy work. . . . Her personal characteristics were of a type that will live forever in the memory of her friends and all who knew her" (22 Sept. 1938, 1, 5). That is probably a fair summation.

She was a powerful and courageous woman, her talents circumscribed by poverty and progeny. Mormon family biographies were written about Sarah's mother and her two grandmothers (all written by women), but the story of her father and her two grandfathers remains unrecorded. Sarah took the openings that were available to women and made them her opportunities. She had hopes, she had failures, she had fears, but in the end she had courage enough to face her eternity without the man with whom she had unhappily shared her earthly life.

Her children didn't share her courage: in 1965 they had her sealed by proxy to Vic in the Manti Temple. That final act, instead of asserting her character, her womanhood, and her independence, was a surrender of all three.

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