MINNIE BELLE JARDINE FISHER
1886-1985

One of the foremost American pioneers of the 19th Century was Mormon leader Brigham Young. Despised by some and admired by others, he is nonetheless credited by all with leading the historic cross-country trek of Mormons from Illinois to Salt Lake City, Utah.

There, the church president literally made the desert blossom as a rose. By including an appreciation for industry into the minds of his faithful followers, the sometimes-stern Young headed up the master Mormon effort that turned the Utah barren desert into a habitable, fertile land.

An Oxnard resident who is in a unique position to appreciate the work of Brigham Young is his great granddaughter. Although she was born 13 years after the Mormon leader’s death, the stories of Minnie Bell Fisher by her mother and grandmother instilled in her a lifelong adoration for her forefather.

“Mother was a lot like Brigham Young,” Mrs. Fisher said laughing. “When she spoke, she meant it and we knew she wasn’t going to change her mind.”

At 96 Mrs. Fisher has not succumbed to many of the mental and physical frailties that normally afflict the elderly. Although she no longer is able to walk, she had retained her hobbies of handwork and reading. Her speech is clear.

She was born Minnie Belle Jardine in Lewisville, Idaho on 21 April 1886. Her parents were Richard Franklin Jardine and Luna Caroline Ellsworth Jardine. She was the 8th child of 13 children born to them. She described herself as a very happy young girl while growing up; on the family farm in Lewisville. She remembers children from all the families in the little country town gathering in the evening to play games, and her mother often would allow Bell and her cousins to come in the house and make candy.

Her passion as she was growing up was dancing. She learned to waltz when she was 10 and by the time she was 15 she would go dancing every night during holidays. She won 3 prizes for waltzing when she was a youth. “Then my life was just dancing and having a good time all the time,” she said.

Because she was a tomboy, she would finish her household chores as quickly as possible so she could ride the farm horses.

When she was born, the Mormons still were practicing polygamy. She said the practice never bothered her, until she found out that her father might be taking a second wife.

The Jardine children would whisper among themselves about the woman who might marry into the family, but noone had the nerve to ask their mother what she thought of the arrangement.

The plan was never put into action, however, because the Mormon Church announced shortly before the proposed wedding that there would be no more polygamous marriages performed for its members.

Belle’s entire family was active in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Her father was a bishop for 20 years and her mother was president for over 23 years of the Relief Society. The church’s women’s organization to perform compassionate service.

At 13 she began teaching classes for the children in the church, and when she was 16 she
was asked to be the instructor for the teen-age girls.

One of her father’s responsibilities as bishop was to distribute food to needy people in Lewisville. She sometimes would accompany her father on these visits, taking food collected from other church members to be distributed to those less fortunate.

She followed her mother’s lead as a seamstress, and by the time she was 6, she was making doll clothes by hand. She made her first full-length apron when she was 8, and soon graduated to her mother’s sewing machine.

Her grandmother, Elizabeth Young Ellsworth, was Brigham Young’s oldest child and would tell her stories about the Mormon leader. Some of her great grandfather’s characteristics must have been passed down through the generations, as she believes, because when she was 18 a man picked her out of a crowd as a descendant of Brigham Young because of the look on her face.

Her mother’s failing health forced her to quit school after the 7th grade and take care of the household, but she still pursued her love of dancing. That hobby brought her into contact with William Oliver Fisher, a man 9 years her senior. The 2 of them courted for 1 ½ years, mostly by going to dances, and they were married 2 March 1907 at Lewisville, Idaho.

The newlyweds moved to a ranch in Annis, Idaho, where they lived for 10 years and had 5 children. Then they were moved to Rigby, Idaho, where he ran a pool hall while his wife stayed at home and took care of the children.

10 more years passed and 3 more children were born, then things turned sour for her. Her husband deserted his family and she, who was pregnant with twins at the time, moved her family back to Lewisville to raise her 10 children alone.

The years were hard for the Fishers, but they had their rewards too. She supported the family by taking in boarders. There were times when the family would finish one meal and she literally did not know where the food would come from for the next meal, but something always happened and the food was provided.

“That’s been the one thing in my life that’s kept me going. I never worried about tomorrow. I would try not to think about unpleasant things anymore than I had to. I just made the best of it and (the children) never knew how I felt from the way I acted. That type of attitude was necessary for survival.” “If I gave way to my feelings, I wouldn’t have gotten by.”

In 1938 she moved the family to Ventura, California. Some of the children had already gone to California. She found a house to live in and continued her practice of taking in boarders to support the family. “We would pay $15 or $20 a month in those days for a house, and now they cost $600. It’s incredible.”

As the children grew older, they were given the responsibility of helping with household responsibilities—sometimes with less than desirable results.

Bell once gave her then 12 year old son, Mark, $3.00 to walk to a town 6 miles away and buy a turkey or chicken for Thanksgiving. The lad took off and on his way met a man who was trying to sell a large duck. Mark, thinking he would strike a real bargain, talked the man into letting him take the duck for $2.00. He was extremely proud when he returned home with the duck and $1.00 in change. She, however, was not as ecstatic as her son. A turkey or chicken would have been relatively easy to prepare, but a duck with its fine feathers took a little more, and she was up all night preparing the bird for the Thanksgiving dinner.

Belle said the thing in life she is most proud of is the way she raised her family. Being a good mother was her “first and foremost goal,” she said. There was a firm rule in her home that
there was not to be any quarreling. That is what kept her family together for many years. “I made a rule that I would never quarrel with my children and I never have. There have been no big quarrels and very few cranky words.”

Belle has had to slow down her pace since moving to the Pleasant Valley Intermediate Care Facility 10 years ago, but her interest in life has not subsided at all. She scans the newspaper headlines daily, continues to crochet items, which she gives to others, and reads her Bible regularly.

Her hair always is styles, her nails polished and a touch of blush accents her cheeks. She said she always has dressed up and she saw no reason to change her habits when she moved into the home. Thora Baldwin, a friend who has been visiting her regularly for 8 years, said she always finds her cheerful and alert, with a good memory and an eagerness to learn.

Although she is content with the present, she looks on the past with particular fondness and is pleased she was born when she was. “(People’s) attitudes towards one another were better then, she said, referring to her childhood days. “They were friendlier then.”

Of all the inventions that have come along in her lifetime, she believes the automobile was the “greatest to come.” She recalls seeing her first car in 1899, when she was riding in a horse-drawn buggy in Idaho. The horse started to act up a bit when the car got closer, and she jumped from the buggy and held the horse by the bridle to keep him from bolting.

Then she turned her anger on the motorist, who nearly ruined the teen-ager’s buggy ride. “Oh, you fool, get that thing out of here before you scare him to death,” she told the driver of the car. Her anger later turned to amazement at how the horseless carriages worked, and she became the proud owner of a car when she and her husband lived in Annis.

She does not like the women’s liberation movement and she believes the women belong in the home. “I don’t think it’s right for women to take all the jobs.”

She has seen her family grow to include 20 grandchildren and 40 great grandchildren, many of whom visit her or have her in their homes for dinner. (1982)

She is grateful to God that she still has her mentality and that she knows He is watching out for her because He still answers her prayers, particularly when she is having difficulty falling asleep and she prays for help so she can get some rest.

As for her longevity, her response is quick and to the point when she is asked to explain the reasons behind it. “I can’t feature why. There just must be something I need to keep doing, but I don’t know what it is.”

(The above information was taken from the Newspaper in Ventura-Oxnard, Ca. And printed 4 July 1982.)

Her children:
Annie Wilma Fisher born 29 Jan 1908 Annis, Fremont, Id. Died 18 Sep 1908 at Annis


Tribute from Ruth Jardine Norton 9 Aug 1990 (sister)

Belle was my 4th sister. She said she loved me from the time I was born and I know she did, she was always too good to me. I remember her bringing home a big enlarged picture of me when I was 3. I think she had been off working and used her money for the picture which I gave to my daughter Joyce. She was always giving Mary and myself something–so many little dishes I still have. She was so proud of her family–she had beautiful babies. Jim Kinghorn asked her once how she came to have such pretty kids.

After she came to California we saw each other quite often and she lived for sometime in a little apartment we had in our garage. I loved to talk to her–she tole me so many things. I still miss talking to her, so often I think if I could ask Belle, she could tell me. Her mind was so keen.

I think she was 5 ft. 6 in., had dark hair and gray eyes.

Tribute from Kathleen Jardine Woolf written 13 Sep. 1991 Niece

I did love Aunt Belle. She was so kind to me and loving. I remember staying at Lewisville once, when she was in part of Doc. Tucker’s house. She used to sing “I Get the Blues When It Rains.” She had a good voice.

She went through a lot for her children. She finally moved to California when several of them had moved there and they wanted to help her. She ended up in the same area of Ventura Co. Where my brother Earl, and his wife, Marcene, lived also. Earl had the privilege of conducting her funeral.

She seemed cheerful but must have suffered within. Even in the hospital during the last few years, she was shown painting her nails and putting make-up on and she always looked nice.

She told it as she saw it. The different articles in the paper when they would have a write-up on her, she openly said how rough it was being a single parent. She did not think much of her ex-husband. He made it rough on her.

She made me a dress once that I wore when I came back to school after having appendicitis. It was a blue jumper and so pretty. Mom made me a white polka dot long sleeved blouse to go with it and I did like them.

She got a lot of consolation from the twins, Howard and Harold. They were such nice looking kids and she did love them. Vonne was so good to her also in California. He came so
often to see her in the hospital, I’m told. Vonne’s first child by Elma was Ronald. Ronald was such a sweet boy.

She was so kind to me. Nola Rae and I were good friends besides being cousins. Earl and Marcene went to see her in the Care Center many times. She always was upper and active. She knew what was going on.

Typed into the computer 26 Nov. 2002. Kathleen Jardine Woolf Idaho Falls, Id. #Note: Belle or Bell spelling. Found both ways in different records. I have letters from her and she signed them Belle-right or wrong.