



Daughters of the Future

Keepers of the Past

by Julie Thompson

Daughters of the Future. Keepers of the Past. If we were to look at this statement through negative lenses, it might appear that we are stuck in the middle. As Daughters of Utah Pioneers, we are anything but stuck. Instead we claim the privilege of being the link between the past and the future. And we refuse to be a weak link. If this were the case, the chain may be broken and the responsibility to repair it would be left to a future generation. We are a thriving organization and will continue to be a strong link between the past and the future.

We truly are keepers of the past. We keep a treasured legacy in our hearts and uphold the pioneering tradition by leading honorable lives. We are keepers of artifacts and relics, and perhaps, most importantly, we are keepers of pioneer histories. I am not sure that the Utah Pioneers understood the significance of their experiences in the very moments that they lived them, yet these experiences tested them, defined them, and strengthened them. I am also not sure if in these moments, they understood that their trials were not just about them. If they had kept an experience to themselves, the value of that experience would have died along with them. However, as soon as they recorded or shared an experience, it evolved and the experience became a story and stories were not meant to be filed away.

As the stories of the Utah Pioneers are told and retold, their value grows exponentially. Those who are fortunate enough to hear these stories of endurance and triumph draw on the strength of the pioneers as if drawing from a wellspring of stamina and unwavering faith. These stories give us the strength to pull our proverbial handcarts through our own Martin's Cove and up our own Rocky Ridge.

We are keepers of the stories, but we do not keep them to ourselves. We tell them to our own descendants allowing the waters of courage to continue to flow into countless tributaries.

Do we understand the significance of our own experiences? Do we understand that it is not just about us? That it is also about those who will follow? Have we transitioned them from experiences and memories to stories that are shared thus adding our strength to those who went before us? I often joke with my children when calamity strikes or as I am trying to convince them to join me in some shenanigan that it is not about what we are doing in the moment, but all about the story we will tell afterward. The story we leave behind is how we become "daughters of the future."

We were undoubtedly numbered among the legions of angels who cheered for and possibly walked beside the pioneers as they traveled the dusty and difficult trails. They return the favor as they accompany us and give us strength on our journey. In a coming day, we will link arms with them and

combine our efforts to strengthen future generations. These future generations will need our combined strength to navigate an increasingly treacherous trail.

Decades from now when these pioneers of the future share stories of those who came before, they might tell the stories of their pioneer ancestors, however there is a very good chance they will be telling your story. It is significant. It is inspiring. And you are also worthy of being honored and revered as are the Utah Pioneers.

There are many in this room who are descendants of the vanguard company of pioneers who entered the Valley. I would guess, though, that the majority of you are like me, are descendants of a later group. After being driven from Nauvoo with the other Saints, my ancestor Alvin Nichols was prepared, worthy, and willing to go with that very first company. As final preparations were made, Alvin was called as a bishop to stay behind and prepare everyone else for the journey. Instead of going with the first group in 1847, Alvin Nichols worked quietly behind the scenes to ensure all who made the trip were as prepared as possible. Instead of arriving in 1847 as a vanguard pioneer, he arrived 5 years later with the last of those who remained from the Nauvoo Saints. His name is not written in the history books or etched into historical markers, yet he is one of my vanguard ancestors. He was first. He led the way for us. His service and sacrifice are honorable and worthy of sharing by his descendants, but I cannot rely on books or markers to do this for me. The responsibility is mine.

Likewise, not everyone will be called to be out in front paving the way. The majority of us will spend our lives quietly working behind the scenes to ensure the safe travel of those we love. It is unlikely that our story will be told in history books. While we may not be deemed newsworthy, our lives are noteworthy as we emulate the courage and conviction of the Pioneers. One of the definitions of vanguard is "a position at the forefront." We ARE vanguard daughters whether our efforts are highly visible or seem largely unnoticed. We lead out in strength, courage, and example, sometimes only in our own families and sometimes on a larger stage, but we ARE a force to be reckoned with in a world filled with ever increasing uncertainty.

Daughters, there are wolves following your handcart today. They are vicious and seek to destroy what our ancestors sacrificed to build and you, you daughters fight off these wolves with the same tenacity as your ancestors. Yes, you are a vanguard pioneer woman today and while you may feel anything but heroic on most days, your efforts will not go unnoticed as you pass the legacy on.

Maintaining the integrity of this chain between the past and the future requires our devotion. It is not a burden but rather a privilege that we as the International Society Daughters of Utah Pioneers proudly claim. All truly is well as their story is left with us for safe "keeping."