

## Aunt Oriole, as I Remember Her

By Tillie Merl Whittle, 1980

In the beginning, I remember the old rambling log house. There were trees shading the house and one beautiful gnarled tree right in front of the porch, spreading it's branches over the house, offering shade and beauty. There was an orange-pink rose bush that sent its perfume up into the heavens, to mingle with the lilacs when they bloomed in the spring.

There was an old cellar on the east side of the house and further down in the lot was the toilet with and Sears and Ward catalogs offering the only toilet paper. The chicken coop was down south of the toilet and there were several apricot trees: when ripe the "white" ones made excellent jam.

The water tap was in the front yard and that was the source of all the water, winter and summer. In the summer, Grandma and Aunt Oriole gathered twigs and limbs to make a fire to heat the wash water. A copper-bottom boiler was placed over the fire to boil the white clothes, and all the clothes were scrubbed on a washboard. Rest assured, however, the white things, sheets and towels, were white as the driven snow. I think Grandma made her own soap out of scraps of fat and grease, saved up for a long time.

The interior of the house was neat and clean; linoleum floors with scatter rugs. A broom was the only floor sweeper and then there was a mop. A cot in the living room, some chairs, small table and chest of drawers (marble top); kitchen had a big range, table and chairs and a bin filled with flour. A heater in the living room provided the only heat in the winter. In the bedroom a bed with a feather tic. Grandma was proud of her feather bed and almost everyday in the summer she put it out in the sunshine and it would be fresh and wholesome.

About once a year or oftener, Aunt Oriole and Grandma would come to Sunnyside to visit. We lived on the old Whitmore Ranch and they came

by covered wagon, and it was always a great delight to me. I had typhoid fever once and was in bed for weeks, and Grandma would sit by me and tell me stories, and keep me entertained. How I loved her. She was so marvelously interesting.

Then we had moved into the ranch house and one time Grandma and Aunt Oriole were visiting. Grandpa did not come, but while they were there, the phone call came that Grandpa had a heart attack, and they had best come home. So we all went. Papa drove the team, and I can't remember if it were a covered wagon or just a buggy; it seems more like a wagon. It took all day long and I remember how tired I got. The road was bumpy, and it was hot, and when we arrived in Castle Dale Uncle Vern came right out to greet us. Mama asked, "How's Father"? Answer, "He's dead". I cannot remember of seeing him laid out. I was quite small, and maybe they sent me off to play somewhere.

I think about the time Aunt Oriole had just finished 8<sup>th</sup> grade. There was a high school there in Castle Dale, but students had to pay tuition and buy their books. Grandma was surviving on Grandpa's pension. He was a Civil War veteran, and the pension was very small, barely enough to keep body and soul together. So I think for Oriole to have gone on to school would have been a financial impossibility. However, she was a very bright student, with creative ability, and her teachers had recognized this, and reasoned that it was a waste and a shame for her to drop out.

So one day the Relief Society teachers dropped in on Grandma and told her that the town had considered the possibility of financing Oriole's high-school education and that she should go to school. Grandpa had served his country in the Civil War and they could at least help out that much. Grandma thanked them and said she would discuss it with Oriole, and think about it. Surprised by this response the teachers left, disappointed, to say the least.

When Aunt Oriole came dancing into the room delighted, of course, to be recognized in this manner, Grandma said bluntly, "you cannot go to school."

"Why?"

"What would I do here alone all day long". So that was that. Now Aunt Oriole could have got up on her hind legs and said, "I'm going," but she never defied authority.

However, it was different in my mother's case. She had spunk and did her own thing, but she was older, and the act was of much greater consequence. Grandma and Grandpa had betrothed mama to be married to Joe Cunha, who was Portuguese my nationality and culture. He was Aunt Nettie's father and Nettie was married to Will, mother's brother. Cunha was old enough to be mama's father, and the thought of marrying him revolted and threw her into a panic. Her wedding dress was made and the date set. What in God's name could she do? She ran away. She hitched a ride in a covered wagon with two peddlers, who had driven down from Sunnyside to buy beef and deliver it to some butchers in Sunnyside. Mama went to work for these butchers, one of them happened to be Pete Jones (my father) whom she eventually married.

Anyway, one evening after a hard day's work, scrubbing bloody butcher aprons and cooking three meals for the hungry men, she was taking a little stroll, when she looked up to see a man approaching on horseback.

"Hello, Joe". He looked down at her with all the hurt and love in his anguished eyes. She said, "It's all off. I'm not going to marry you".

His only answer, "my God, darling"...and he turned his horse around and rode away. That was that.

Now Oriole didn't have a tantrum, or plead to return to the halls of learning. It may not have meant that much to her. She could have reasoned "why should I spend the next four years cooped up in stuffy classrooms, listening to tiresome lectures, when I can be free, and romp and play outdoors with my dog "Bounce". Why should I be forced to read dry pages of math when I can choose the type of books I enjoy?"

She and grandma read books constantly. There was no public library, and getting the books to read was a problem, but they borrowed them and were given books at Christmas and somehow kept busy. Grandma did the reading. She had been in theatrical plays throughout Southern Utah as a girl, before she married, and she read with great expression and drama. She had a complete set of Bulwer Lytton's books, which she had no doubt read. Lytton was a scholar from Cambridge, England and among his poems and fiction, he wrote, "The Last Days of Pompeii". They enjoyed westerns and read prolifically such authors as: Zane Gray, Jack London, Rex Beach, Jeffrey Farnol and on and on. There were no radios, no TV, they made their own entertainment.

Oriole was growing up, maturing into a beautiful woman. Her long luxuriant red hair hung down her back so far she could sit on it. Her peaches and cream complexion was always scrubbed clean. She was slim, graceful, vivacious, witty and fascinating. How I loved her. To me, she was one of the most interesting people in the world. I adored my visits to Castle Dale to be with Grandma and Aunt Oriole. I was permitted to go in the summers for about a month.

Grandma's larder was limited to say the least, but what she had she made the most of. Her salt-rising bread was the greatest....never since she died have I tasted anything like it. And when she fried chicken it tasted like no other chicken ever did....her hot cakes were ambrosia. When the mustard grew in the yard wild, we gathered it for greens, which I loved. Sometimes someone would catch some fish in the nearby stream (suckers), and they were very good, but had to be eaten so carefully, full of small bones.

Aunt Oriole's beauty did not go unnoticed. She attracted the opposite sex like bees go to honey. She was popular at the dances, graceful, supple as a willow. However, I cannot remember her having any special girlfriends. Grandma was never one to fraternize with the town people. The Boulden's were a clannish bunch. During the Holidays all the families would get together for a card game of Euchre. They let me play too, and I loved it. There were Pete and Bell, Merle and Ray, (later) Oriole and Sam,

Vern and Gertie, and much later Tillie and Minx. That was certainly a gala affair. There would be marvelous food, roast pork, turkey, pumpkin pies, you name it, glorious things to delight the palate.

Grandma did not embrace the Mormon Church whole heartedly. She had been hurt by polygamy. Her mother's lot was one of poverty and deprivation. It was difficult enough just to be married in pioneer days, but to be married to a man with four wives...the emotional trauma, jealousy and sacrifice made the struggle almost unbearable.

So Grandma knew no other religion. She believed fervently in a Supreme Being, but to tie it all up in the Mormon Church was something else. However, everyone survived and are here today to carry on.

Aunt Oriole married Sam Jewkes and raised five children. She was a loving mother and her children and husband adored her. She was always immaculately groomed, and never lost her fascination for me. Her love of life radiated to all the lives she touched and our family was made richer by her beauty and love.

