
Biographical Sketch

Vernon Marriner Norr

May 1970

On the second Sunday of each month one or more members of our High Priests group in Arlington Ward have been called upon, alphabetically, to tell all about ourselves so we may become better acquainted. The following is about what I said or intended to say, with some details added.

In our group there are doctors, lawyers, men high in the military and naval services and in the Federal government, with most of the known academic degrees represented in this room, while I don't even have a high school diploma. I did attend BY College in Logan (long since closed), the Agricultural College of Utah (now Utah State), where I was a school dropout, and a couple of years at George Washington University here, but received no diplomas and no degree. I was born and raised in the Church but, because there was no real branch here when I first arrived, I was an adult priest for quite a few years. Never did I have any doubts about the Gospel, however, or the first vision, or the Book of Mormon, etc. But in this priesthood group I feel like I'm the least in many ways, so I have tried to think of how I might claim "greatness" in some other ways.

At first I planned to say that I was born in a log cabin with a dirt roof, and I have a picture of our family in front of it taken about 1901. Grant Moon last month nullified that claim by relating that he was born in a log cabin in 1918, so I countered by pointing out with a playful smile that although I was born in the same state and the very same county as he I didn't have to admit it happened near the shrinking town of Malad. I noted also that the year he was born was the same year I received my discharge from the U.S. Army after World War I. And during the year Norman Coleman was born I was wearing out my third car (1930).

So I tried claim No. 2 by asking for a show of hands of all whose fathers were polygamists, because mine had two wives at the same time prior to the Manifesto of 1890. Not a hand went up.

My No. 3 question was: Is there anyone else who has never been a patient in a hospital overnight? Henry Bradford tied me in that one.

So I had to try again, saying, you know it is only 30 years now until the year 2000, and we hope many of us will still be living. While I may not be, it is not impossible and if I do live that long I will be able to say that I have lived in three consecutive centuries! Is there anyone else here who can hope to live in three centuries? Not a hand. No one had such a hope. So I turned to Leo Herbert, the instructor, and jokingly charged him with utter failure to inspire us regarding our lives during the endless centuries of eternity which he has often diagrammed will follow our pre-existence and this earth life.

While I can't boast of high-ranking titles or spectacular achievements such as many of you can, I have had a very interesting life. Let me mention a few incidents: When I was age 14 and probably a teacher in the Aaronic Priesthood, I was selected to offer the opening prayer in Logan tabernacle at, probably, a stake conference presided over by Pres. Joseph F. Smith who in his address later, having been told no doubt that I was 14, called me to his side, put his arms around my shoulders and pointed out that I was just the age of the Prophet when he went to the woods to pray. I have never forgotten that thrill. The next summer I worked all of August as a derrick boy during the wheat harvest at Blue Creek and was so completely homesick that I would not wait 3 days for a ride to Logan, but lit out on foot on the early morning of September 1st and walked 53 miles home, arriving at 10 P.M. It took a couple of days to limber up.

My first employment when I quit school at the A.C. was with Marriner Eccles who later became chairman of the Federal Reserve Board in Washington. Some months later I came here to the Treasury Department at \$1,240 per year including the wartime bonus, which was raised when I returned from the army after the first Armistice Day to \$1600. Strangely enough, in 1919, I wrote a check for three billion dollars, which didn't bounce when presented for payment. It was made payable to the Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of the Government of the United Kingdom and Ireland, as I recall. I only wrote the check! It was signed, I suppose, by the predecessor of our own member of this group, David Kennedy, Secretary of the Treasury. About that time Andrew Mellon became Secretary, deploring the fact that the public debt had already risen to the alarming total of 30 billion dollars--about a tenth of what it is today.

I did something else in my first year here which I feel sure none of you ever did or could do now: With

several others we climbed the stairs to the top of Washington monument and when ready to go down there was room for all in the elevator except me. So I ran down the stairs, 3 to 5 steps at a time, and beat the elevator to the bottom. I see by your face that you don't believe me, because you know the elevator descends in about one minute, so I'll inform you that 50 years ago the elapsed time was about 5 minutes. The car was an open-cage affair where the passengers could see out and who spurred me to greater speed by extra applause when I lagged behind and then caught up.

My government service ended a year or so later when I went to Chicago on a temporary sales trip, where I was charmed by a girl at Logan Square Ward (this happened before I met Fessie), and I wasn't quite ready to come back here when my leave expired, so I wrote a letter requesting another month's leave without pay or, if this could not be granted, to use the letter as my resignation. Needless to say, when I got back I was out of a job. They reinstated me at once, but working for the government seemed duller than ever so I soon resigned and have been self-employed ever since. Fessie and I were married in Baltimore by a Mormon missionary. Our cash on hand that day was \$150, so how we managed to finance the ensuing good times is still a mystery even with pork chops selling at six for a quarter. We were sealed in Logan Temple in 1950. Back in the 1920s, with Matthew Cowley (later Apostle) and Elva, we were stopped on Pennsylvania Ave. in Washington by a cop who charged us with speeding at 22 m.p.h. The limit was 18.

My business ventures began in the duplicating and mail advertising field and was quite successful in a small way. Later I landed an annual contract with a trade association to supply lists of every grocery store in the U.S. that had a license, which was then required before oleomargarine could be sold. Other interesting customers were Senator Ruy Long (kingfish) of Louisiana, later assassinated, and several congressmen as well as a number of downtown specialty shops. About 1929 Morris Cafritz decided to build the Ambassador Hotel at 14th and K Streets, so he gave me \$10,000 to relinquish my lease on the building that had to be torn down. I thought, "Oh, boy, I'm on my way to wealth!" I invested it in stocks and took a trip to Utah, watching the quotations go up each day to amply cover all expenses. Soon after we returned, the market crashed and I was broke.

But I still had my little duplicating business. The great depression of the 1930's was eventually tackled by the National Recovery Administration which called for all industries to adopt codes of ethics, most of which were formulated here in Washington by representatives in daily sessions, who required each morning enough copies of the previous day's progress to supply all members. These often ran many pages for each one of several associations involved and had to be produced at night which meant most of the work was billed at time-and-a-half or double time, less 10% commission to the go-between, usually a public stenographer at a hotel. So for quite some time, along with a couple of other fortunate shops, I was making sizeable profits while thousands of people in this area and millions nationally were jobless and hungry during the depression -- which about half the people now living don't even remember. In 1943 I sold out and bought the bowling establishment in Arlington in which I still have half-interest. It was then only a couple of years old but was offered for sale because of the wartime gasoline rationing which so crippled auto traveling that most of the bowling leagues had to cancel out and the previous owner considered the business doomed. When pin-setting machines were invented we installed them at our place and, in addition, I sold a substantial number of them to other establishments in Maryland, D.C., and Virginia. The manufacturers issued stock and I accumulated 5,000 shares of coupon valued at 5¢ a share. Later a broker offered me 25¢ a share, then \$1, and finally \$2. I said, "2.50", and he bought it all. A short time later a Boston broker phoned and offered me \$8 a share. I didn't admit I had already sold. A week passed and he phoned again, offering \$15. In a couple of months the stock was quoted in the Wall Street Journal at \$44 a share, making my 5,000 5¢ shares worth \$220,000.00, but I no longer owned them. Eventually the company went bankrupt.

About 1928, I joined the Masonic Order knowing that George Washington and even Joseph Smith were Masons, and in 1938 I became master of Stansbury Lodge #24, which had over 1,000 members at that time. This called for the memorizing of lectures and rituals word for word which would require some 2 to 3 hours

if recited in one continuous period. During that year I presided at about a dozen funerals. Let me remind you now of the special program we had here in the chapel last season when five or six of you were assigned a few sentences to read at certain intervals and how much more effective Arlo Brady's contribution was when he recited his part from memory. In 1938, to make my public funerals more effective, I memorized the entire graveside service and because it applies usually to all of us, I would like to recite the opening sentences to you now. Imagine me standing at the head of the grave wearing a high silk hat and white gloves, with the mourners seated nearby and with my deacons (men) at each side crossing their staffs above my head, while I say:

Again we are assembled among the habitations of the dead to behold the narrow house appointed for all living, and to (pay our final respects to) a brother who has departed for that land where our fathers have gone before us.

Here around us in that peace which the world cannot give sleep the unnumbered dead. Stones and lettered monuments symbolize the affection of surviving friends, yet nothing proceeds from them save that silent but thrilling admonition: Seek ye the straight gate and the narrow path that leads unto eternal life.

It is, (in) passing, strange, notwithstanding the daily mementos of mortality that cross our path, notwithstanding the funeral bell so often tolls in our ears and the mournful processions go about our streets, that we would not more seriously consider our approaching fate. We go on from design to design, add hope to hope, and lay out plans for the employment of many years until we are suddenly alarmed at the approach of the messenger of Death at a moment when we least expect him.

Then the service continues for six or eight minutes longer.

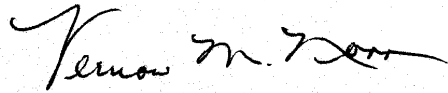
L. P. Steuart was grand master that year; he is now deceased but you have no doubt heard of his oil and automobile companies which still flourish. I must have done a fair job in 1938 because my friends urged me to stand for election to the foot of the grand line, which could have made me grand master about 1948. But I declined for two reasons: because it would require a lot of time and money, and because Fessie kept reminding me that the Church frowned on Priesthood bearers joining secret orders. I might interject here that I am one of the few men in the world who know the secrets of freemasonry and who also have participated in the Temple ordinances. Thanks to Pres, Byron Dixon who was then our bishop, in 1948 I became president of the 1st quorum of Elders and have been active in Arlington Ward ever since. I served as assistant and as ward clerk under the next four bishops.

I have been very close to death several times. First, I fell off a tame old mare when I was four years old and remained unconscious until the next morning. When I was a teenager I was riding my pony alongside a barbed wire fence, lazily leading a calf to summer pasture; suddenly the pony when pricked by a barb reared and came down with its front leg over the top wire which broke and curled up around me as the pony jumped forward along the fence. I still have the scars. The pony later bled to death. A few years ago at the bowling alleys, while checking the pinsetters during bowling hours, I hurried along to a trouble carelessly left the catwalk open, and I fell headfirst down in front of the bowling pins, breaking the fall with one hand as my head nearly touched the floor. At that instant a bowling ball at high speed passed between my hand and my head, missing a fatal accident by inches. Also in the last few years I have seen three autos turn completely upside down while I was the only witness. The last one was when I was approaching a curve where I could see another car speeding toward me. That car ran off the pavement and struggled to regain the highway, finally bouncing back out of control and crossing a few feet in front of me before hurtling down the hill on the opposite side, and fracturing the driver's neck. This was exactly the kind of accident which caused my father's death many years' ago when he was not so lucky as I was.

Often I have asked myself why am I still alive? Could it be because of my in genealogy? Hardly so, because many others have been at death's door more once who profess no interest at all in genealogy. Or maybe those are the who are planning to devote their last twenty years to research and temple If so, when do they start?

I then showed the group my "Norr Family Autobiography" completed in 1958, and "Some Early English Pedigrees" completed in 1968.

As I sat down, a most unusual reaction occurred--this being a church meeting: They all applauded!

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Vernon M. Norr". The signature is written in black ink on a white background.