

It is wonderful to see you all here in our beloved Stone Church where many, many years of wonderful memories still linger.

I am only going to mention a few things about two or three reunions and they are really a lot more personal than they are historical. I do give thanks to the folks who have created these reunions for many years and have put a great deal of love and sacrifice and money and time to see that we learn more about our history, that we learn more about our families, and that we all have a really good time.

I am going to start with the first reunion, Nauvoo 1972. It was a very hot morning in August when we loaded up our five little kids very, very excited to head out to Nauvoo. That was in a little station wagon that had no seat belts in it. I might add that it was the worst hay fever season in my memory.

After settling in our motel we hurried up to the lawn to meet up with our long lost cousins. It started with laughter as we went around comparing facial features, mostly noses. I felt very relaxed and at home with everyone. One especially was watching a very short exuberant cousin racing over to hug a very tall very reserved cousin. He was only able to grab him around the waist. Some Smiths are huggers – and some are not. The children had a great time running around in little mobs visiting the blacksmith shop, the bakery, and other historic sites, and of course throwing rocks in the river. There were excellent professional presentations and I am going to read the names because these are very special people and some are still with us and others are not. These presentations were given by Paul Edwards, Lynn Smith, Mark McKiernan, Truman Madsen, Richard Anderson, and Jaynann Payne. These were made into a booklet which I just found as I was looking through my dusty old files. I have just reread them and enjoyed them thoroughly. That's the reason I had this information. We also viewed Buddy Younggreen's Seeds of Greatness. For the first time, very impressive indeed.

Moving on to the Independence Reunion 1973. For some reason, I felt we were all walking around on egg shells. No one wanted to say anything that would offend the other but of course someone did. Some Smiths have been known to have quit wits and sharp tongues. I should know. No harm was done and all was forgiven. We were cautioned not to talk politics or religion – yeah, right, at a Smith gathering? Again, thank goodness for a sense of humor. As I looked over the program for the reunion, I discovered that I was in the program interviewing *Pearl Wilcox*, on her book, *The Latter Day Saints on the Missouri Frontier*. I remember absolutely nothing about this. I felt bad until I called my sister-in-law, Donna Larson, and asked her if she remembered doing the decorations for the banquet. She said, "I wasn't even there." Well, a couple of days later she called and said, "Oh, yes. We all sat around together at table and made paper flowers and scattered them all along the tables and it was really beautiful." She remembered every bit of it. So much for senior moments.

We had two excellent presentations. One by Leonard Arrington on Joseph Fielding Smith and one by Doctor Alma Blair on Joseph Smith III. Last week, Donna Smith Nagelund, phoned and said that she had found an audio tape of the banquet. We raced out and had a CD made of it and it had absolutely perfect sound quality. The voices reminded me of many loved ones that I had known.

Salt Lake Reunion 1975, this reunion stands out very vividly. My parents, Edward and Louis Larsen, my husband Tony Mackay and children, Andrea and Douglas, my brother Dan and wife Lenore, nephew Adam Larsen, and his grandfather, Vick Fisher, and Cousin Eric Smith and family, all who were very dear to me, they all were there.

Doctor Don and Alice Smith drove us from the airport to our host family. From the back seat I could look into Dr. Don's rearview mirror. Looking back at me in wire rimmed glasses were the gentle, wise, brown eyes of my grand dad, Fred M. Smith. A shock, but a pleasant one. I hadn't seen those eyes in 29 years.

Ann Nebeker took us in. I will never forget the feeling of warmth and welcome from her family. Cousins we had never met before and now will never be able to forget.

Other memories that come to my mind. The beauty of the shy sweet smiles of girl cousins meeting for the first time and discovering they shared the same name, Andrea. The yelps of eleven year old boy cousins trying to master getting salt water out of their eyes while swimming in the Great Salt Lake.

The sorrow felt when some of the historical articles at the Wilfred Wood Museum, brought too close the tragedies of our past. The hauntingly beautiful rendition of, *The Old, Old Path*, presented by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. The

laughter, glamour, and talent that Buddy's Jackson Hole troop brought to us. The feelings of a family relaxing together, conversing, laughing, teasing, sharing slides and pictures, children and experiences. There were more than a few tears in eyes as the plane lifted from the Salt Lake Airfield.

To me this is what a family reunion is all about. These memories are cherished.

Ann Nebeker stayed in touch for years. Ann visited us in Independence several years later and we decided to hit the road for Nauvoo. Her first visit. After visiting the usual historic sites we found ourselves out on the point viewing one of the most beautiful sunsets over the Mississippi that I had ever seen. A road trip never to be forgotten. Ann died last year. I am so glad we met in this life.

Salt Lake 2005, also had a precious memory. My cousin, Eric Smith, was there and I enjoyed his outrageous sense of humor for the last time. Eric died a few weeks later.

These reunions are about sharing with family our past stories and relationships and keeping these precious memories together in memory as long as we can.

This brings me to the cemetery project which started in 1991. A project that may not have been possible without the relationships formed during our reunions. We did not plan to create a shrine. We hoped to show love and respect toward those who had traveled the road ahead of us. To create a peaceful, lovely, resting place for all to enjoy the beauty of the river and to instill a sense of continuity for those that will follow us through time. The cemetery is beautifully kept. The flowers are still being planted by family members and one is still amazed at the amount of travelers who come and express interest in the history, pay respect to relatives, and admire the beauty and serenity of this sacred place. **We have done well in honoring our family for no one is really gone from us if their names are spoken often and with love.**