

ON THE LEAVENWORTH TRAIL

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There's goes Tunis on his bugle. I can hear it better with the door open. Today is so warm, I can have the door open. The fresh breeze is so nice after all the cold we've had. It's been a long, long winter. Daddy would be here if the fields were dry enough to work it. We're two weeks into April and he's not yet able to get into the fields. So, he's still walking into town every week to work there. I keep the place going while he's gone. We thought of moving into town for the winter, but someone is needed here. A lot of other women winter over on their claim, so I'm not the only one.

Tunis said he would do that whenever he passed by, then I would know to go get the papers he delivered. I'll finish feeding the baby, then we'll go. I've fixed a shawl to go around my shoulders in a way that she can ride on my back. She likes the walks we take and often goes to sleep. That's good.

I wonder how many papers Tunis delivered today? I never know, but that's fine. He doesn't know ahead of time how many he can deliver. It doesn't matter.

In the last batch of papers there was news of the marriage of Abe Lincoln's boy, Robert. I hope he's found a good woman, that family's had so much tragedy. And all the rallies for U.S. Grant for President. I hope he wins. He was a good general. He won the war for us. He'll be a good President.

There was that notice about the consolidation of the three Leavenworth newspapers into one, now called the Times. All were free-state papers. It stated very clearly its position. I've memorized it, it gives me such courage. "We believe that every human being is a child of God and entitled to every right which we claim for ourselves. If the Constitution of the United States or the Constitution of the State of Kansas does not recognize that principle we shall fight it openly and boldly." * I'm sure my parents would have been glad to read that. We weren't alone in wanting Kansas to be a free state. And, we achieved it, thank the Lord! I aim to live this in my life and teach my darlings the same.

I wish I could know ahead of time when Tunis will pass by, then maybe I could run down and at least wave to him. Just seeing him would be wonderful. There's no way for that though, and he says he can't stop. I know that, but it would be nice to be able to see him once in a while. We're the only ones left in our family now, since the war took our brothers Jaxon, Levi and little Tompkin. He was so proud to be a drummer boy. He died like a true soldier, they said. At least it's nice to know that Tunis was with him.

I wish I could put flowers on their graves, but they are so far away down south. At least we have locks of their hair. Mother and I braided them into flower cameos, one from each of them for each of us. I have them all now. It's sweet to see them and remember them. I need to write their names on the back of the frames. I know I won't forget who's is who's, but my little Sweetie, and any other children that will come, may not know after I've gone to the great beyond. Oh, my.

When Tunis goes west, like today, he gives three short blasts. He doesn't call them that, but that's what they sound like. When he's returning east he uses a different call of five blasts. It's our code. I don't know if he's on some campaign to pacify the Indians, or just hauling supplies to Fort Riley. Maybe he was able to leave a note in the papers he delivered.

There is a certain tree where he leaves the papers. He can toss them from his horse as he goes by. He's not allowed to stop; the troop must make its time.

Since our parents died, he's the only one I have left. I didn't want him to stay in the army after the war of the rebellion, but he said he likes the army life. I can't imagine it, but what can I do to change his mind?

If I could find a nice girl for him to settle down with, he might change his mind. He teases me about being a career bachelor soldier, but I know that's not true. He's also said he's looking for good farmland while he's out west. I know people are moving west, but I'd feel better if he settled around here. The country here's not filled up yet.

As soon as I bank the fire, we can set out. I don't want to lose the flame, matches are too precious to waste when the embers can keep burning.

"All right, my precious, Olivia, are you ready for a walk? You ate all your lunch like the big girl you are. Mommy is so proud of you! Upsie daisy, onto my back you go! You like to see from high up, don't you, Sweetie? That's a good girl. As soon as I go out and shut the door, we'll be on our way."

"Do you want Momma to feed the chickies as we go past their pen. They'll be excited to have some extra food.

"There you go, chickies. Here's some more cracked corn. Make good eggs for my Sweetie.

"That was fun, wasn't it, Honey?"

"MUFFIN! Where are you?"

Where is that dog? I don't want him following me. He needs to stay here and protect the place. You never know when a coyote may be lurking around. I don't want to loose any more chickens!

"He's not... Oh, there you are. Good doggie. Stay here and guard the chickens while I go walk. No. Don't come with us. Stay! Good doggie. Sit. Good doggie, good.

"I feel better now. The barnyard sure is empty without the cattle or the hogs. Your Daddy wanted to make life easier for me while he was away. He only kept the milk cow to make sure you have plenty of good, rich milk! And one cow is much less work for me than all the other livestock. We'll get more in the spring, though. In a couple years you'll be able to raise your own calf.

"We need a good barn. The shelter we built with the grass roof was good, but a real barn will be better. Maybe Hiram has earned enough this winter we can begin to build one this summer. He's cut trees down by the creek for lumber. They've been curing since autumn, by spring they should be ready to cut into boards. Hiram heard of a traveling sawmill. If it can come by here, we'll be doing good.

"The pigsty is empty now. We butchered the last hog before your Daddy left. Now we have lots of good ham meat curing in the smoke house. We have enough to last through to summer, easy.

"Butchering is messy though. We'll keep you out of the way so you won't have to see it. Daddy shot the pig right between the eyes, so it didn't squeal at all. I always hated hearing that when I was a little girl. No matter how tight I held my hands over my ears, I could always hear it squeal and scream. I would cry every time. My oldest brother would tease me, but Tunis would defend me. He understood, but he still had to help with the butchering. I think it's worth the bullet to kill it quickly.

“Maybe next year when we butcher, you’ll be able to play with the bladder. When it’s filled with air, it’s so much fun: a ball that almost floats in the air! I loved it when I was a little girl. I’m sure you will too!

“Now we’re walking in the lane past the orchard. The trees aren’t very tall yet, but in the summer you’ll be able to play under their branches. The trees will be talk to you as the breeze blows through the leaves. The buds are getting larger. When they begin to blossom, it will look beautiful! The trees will make shade for you even though they don’t come up to Momma’s head; not yet anyway. In a year or two they should begin to bear fruit. That will be good. We’re all looking forward to it. As long as we get enough rain. That’s always a question.

“I can see the end of the lane where your Daddy has left the top rails down at this place in the fence around the pasture. Since the cattle are gone, it’s okay. It’s easy to stop over the bottom one.

“Do you think we’ll see the train today, Baby? From the top of the rise just ahead we’ll be able to see it if it’s passing by. You know I mean the smoke, the train itself is too far away. It runs on the other side of the Kansas River, and that is fifteen miles south of here. If there’s a strong wind, and when does the wind not blow in Kansas, the wind will blow the smoke and we can’t see it from here.

“Funny, how this hill seems higher than it used to be. I know it’s not. The only change is you, Sweet Baby. You’re getting so big and strong, you’re heavier than you were in the fall and certainly since last summer. You were just a tiny, little thing then. Next summer you’ll be able to walk and you can walk with me. You’ll find lots of flowers to pick on the way. There will be lots of flowers here in the pasture in the spring and summer.

“Well! We’re at the top now. Here the land is flat, a big lovely pasture. We can see for miles and miles and miles in every direction! It’s like being on the top of the world! I like to come up here just to see the sky. It’s so HUGE!! One can really appreciate the grandeur of God up here. The sky is so big – and God is even “bigger!” I’ve loved hilltops like this since I was a little girl. We’ll come up here sometimes just to run and play. I promise.

“Your Daddy would like to have a field up here, but the soil is too thin, there are too many rocks. The bottomland is easier to farm, there are no rocks down there. The plowing there is easy.

“OH! I see it! Right over there, Baby!! The train! That little stream of smoke just above the horizon. I know you can’t see it, but it’s there. The rail line was only put in three years ago. At least, I think it’s been three years. Yes, it was... We heard the railroad had reached Topeka while we were at Sam and Lilia’s wedding, and that was in January, just three years ago: 1866. Their little boy, Abe, is two years old now. I’m sure the two of you will be friends when you go to school. They live close enough you’ll both be in the same district.

“I wonder what it would be like to ride in a train. They go so fast. I think it would be frightening. I’ve heard it’s dirty too, with all that smoke blowing back into the cars. But, my! What an experience that must be! Maybe, when you are a great big girl, and are all grown up, you can ride on a train and tell Momma all about it. You’ll do that, won’t you, Sweetie? Of course, you will.

“There’ve been so many changes I’ve experienced in my life: My family leaving Pennsylvania for Kansas. My brothers dying in the war between the states that almost tore this country apart. My parents dying afterwards. The coming of telegraph and railroads to Kansas. It’s different world than I was born into! I wonder what changes you’ll see?

“Then there were all the new machineries Hiram heard that people saw at the State Fair this last September. It was impossible for us to go, you were too new and tiny to take all the way to Leavenworth. Hiram was so sweet. He said if you and I couldn’t travel all those forty miles, and we just couldn’t, he would stay home too. And he did! I’m so glad I have him. He’s a wonderful husband and Daddy for you!

“I sure feel bad for Mrs. Barbara Hilty. It must be awful for her, losing her husband like that. I don’t know what she’s going to do. Joseph was drunk, I heard. It’s just terrible! Dead as soon as he hit the ground, they say. With two little children too; baby Josephine, just about your age and a big boy, Leonhard, about eight. He can be a help, but not for the whole farm. Maybe her brother, Michael, can help. It’s so sad!

“He was veteran of the war too, survived all that, though wounded once, I think I heard, but still, to die because of the drink. Such a waste! I’m glad your Daddy took the pledge.

“I heard Mrs. Hilty has a sister, Elizabeth, out west at Loudens Falls. Her husband, Hoffman, I think his name is, built a mill out there on the Smoky Hill River. It’s not even settled country out there, I don’t think, though a county was organized, about ten years ago. They call it Dickinson. I don’t know what for. I’m plenty content right here. Indians won’t come this far east. I like it here, just fine.

“On a clear, still day like this, from the top of this hill, we can see for twenty, thirty or more miles around. We can see the people living around us. We can see the smoke from their homes. When the wind blows hard, we can’t see it though. Cooking fires are too small most of the year and don’t make much smoke, but when we’re all trying to stay warm, there’s enough smoke most of the time to see.

“I can see smoke from houses in every direction. The country wasn’t this settled when we arrived ten years ago. We were some of the first people here in Jefferson County. It wasn’t even a county then! The county was organized shortly before we got here, in 1855. We helped build it up. Those first years were hard. Even as a little girl, I knew that! I didn’t know how hard it was for my parents, though. Without the help from the New England Immigrant Aid Society, we would have had to return east. We might not even have left home. The society helped us get here and stay here. My parents wanted to help Kansas be a free state, and we did it! Our hardships and sacrifices were worth it! Life is so much easier now. And slavery is gone! Banished forever from this country! Praise the Lord!

“Do you see the white spot over there, to the east? On top of the hill? It’s not far, about a mile away. That’s where you’ll be going to school. It is Pleasant Hill School, district 40; a nice little school. You’ll meet other children there and learn so many things. I was a teacher when I was younger. I’m glad I did it. Now I’m a teacher of one: and that one is you! And I love every minute of it! Someday there’ll be more, when you have brothers and sisters. Right now you’re my only student, so I’m teaching you as much as I can.

“The Military Road, the Fort Leavenworth-Fort Riley Trail, which is its actual name, connects the two forts. Fort Leavenworth was the first in Kansas. It’s near where the French had a trading fort when they were here. They traded for furs from the Indians. Now the French and the Indians are gone and people are moving in. The army uses the trail for troops to travel back and forth. Settlers can use it also, but the army has priority.

“With the train going west from Topeka now, there’s a little less traffic on the Military Road. A lot of settlers going west still use it though. I’ve heard it costs less to ride the riverboats up to Leavenworth and then travel the Military Road, than it is to take the train from Westport. The

people who have plenty of money do take the train, and it is faster, but there's plenty who can't. There's still lots of traffic on the Military Road. Some people even walk the whole way, those can't afford a horse and wagon. When you're poor, you do what you have to do.

“You must be getting cold, Baby. I'm going down the hill now and we'll be out of the wind soon, it's not bad though. I can barely feel it. I wouldn't have come if it was really cold. Then, the papers could wait. Going home it will be colder, we'll be walking into the wind then. We can barely feel it now, but walking into it, we will feel it.

“Of course, you're on my back, and you won't feel it at all! I'll be the one!! Maybe you'll fall asleep on the way back to the house. That would be good.

“Now we're entering the trees at the bottom of the hill. The stream is down here. With a source of water, more trees grow. Next summer I'll bring you here to play. It's such a lovely place. I'd rather the house be down here, but the bad night air of the summertime is dangerous. One is likely to come down with fever and auge. It's serious. Some people even die. To protect ourselves we built the house on the other side of the hill. It meant digging deeper for a well, but your Daddy was willing to do that. The water he found tastes wonderful!

“Are you going to watch Momma step over the fence rails? The cattle are gone now, Daddy took them all to Ft Leavenworth to sell before he went to Ozawkie to work. He was able to get a good price for them. Tunis told him the soldiers at the fort were tired of pork and wanted some beef. He sold all ten head. The money helped us get through the winter. His pay from working in Ozawkie will help too. That's why Daddy isn't with us every day. He's away working, but he'll be home in two days. The ten miles to Ozawkie is too far to walk every day. He boards in a room there with some other men. At the end of the week he comes home to see Momma and his Sweetie. At least

he didn't have to go all the way to the fort to work like some men. Then he would have been gone all winter.

“Pleasant Hill would be closer, but that town never really got started. Pleasant Hill was to be a free-state town which your grandparents tried to help start. It was right where the Military Road crosses the Grasshopper River. That would have been a good place for a town, but Ozawkie was already on the other side of the river. Your grandparents came here to support the free-state cause and Pleasant Hill was a free-state town. Ozawkie was already larger and has continued to grow. Though Pleasant Hill was on our side of the river, that didn't count for much when the general store and post office were already in Ozawkie. As much as we don't like shopping in a town started by slavers, it's the only store around. A pity, but that's how it worked out.

“Here we are, at the newspaper tree. At least that's what Tunis and I call it. And, here's the bundle of papers he left. Oh! There's two! This one looks like it's been here longer. I must have missed his call. It's harder to hear when the door is shut, like on cold days. Well. Neither are very big, I guess I can carry one in each hand. This'll work.

“He tries to leave the bundles close to this tree. That way I won't have to search all around for them. Sometimes the bundle is real small. It just depends on how many papers he can find to save and how often it's between times he goes west. Daddy usually comes and gets them when he's home. Now we go back home. I'll stop talking so you can sleep.”

It's such a nice day. The sun is bright. If the ground wasn't so frozen, I'd be tempted to work in the garden. There'll be plenty of time for that next month. Maybe. We've had one mid-winter thaw, back in February. But this year March was too cold. Some years it's been nice to get a head start on the garden.

The snow is melting from the last storm. The sky is so blue and the air is crisp. It doesn't burn to breathe like on colder days. And, the wind is not as sharp as I expected it to be going back. On the on top of the hill, it will be stronger, but here it's not bad.

If Olivia will stay asleep when I put her down, I'll be able to read some of the papers. It'll be nice to catch up on what's been going on. Not much of it affects us here, but it's nice to keep informed.

The house is in sight now. Everything looks fine. The trip back always seems shorter than the trip going. I don't know why that is, but it is. I see Muffin. He's still by the chickens, protecting them. I wouldn't be surprised if a coyote came, even in broad daylight. There are so many of them, and they do love to eat chickens.

"Here, Muffin. Momma's back. Good doggie, good doggie. You stayed with the chickens to protect them for Momma and Baby. Good boy. You didn't let any coyotes or possums get our chickies. That's a good doggie, good Muffin. I have to go in the house now."

The door is still locked. Good. No one has been here. Very good. Now, lay down little baby. There. Stay asleep, baby. That's good. You need your nap. Momma needs your nap so she can read.

Now, I can open the bundles of papers and see what we have. I'll save the string and oiled paper he wrapped them in. It may come in handy some day. You never know what you might need in time. I'll open the oldest bundle first.

Let's see... The oldest papers are dated December, that's almost four months ago. No matter, it's still news to me.

This is interesting, in a paper dated the 17th, it says the people of Atchison voted in favor of supporting the expense of getting a railroad to come to town. That must be a very progressive town. Ozawkie wouldn't vote for that much expense, at least not from talk I've heard.

Here's a list of churches in Leavenworth. One, two three... there must be about two dozen here. I can't imagine so many churches in one town, but then, Leavenworth is the largest city in Kansas. There must be thousands of people there. One of these churches, I see, is called the Society of Friends. That's another name for Quakers. They were a primary force for abolition. Without them there would have been no Society to help us come out west and the Negroes would still be enslaved. Such a pity that would be.

And here is a synagogue in the list. That's not a church, that's Jewish! And some colored churches. Well, that's good. I'm glad there are some freedmen in the town with their families, they deserve their own churches. Leavenworth must be a pretty diverse place to have all those kinds of people there. There's a lot of ads here that have no meaning for me, but I'll save this for Hiram when he gets home. When he's done with it, we'll use it for insulation. Layers of paper do stop wind coming through the walls, and we can read them too!

Nothing here on the new fashions. Oh, well. I can't keep up anyway, but it's nice to look at the new dresses. Maybe some other paper will have illustrations of the new fashions. The most beautiful styles come out from Paris. The clothes I wear here are so drab, but it's all we can afford, and who will see me on the farm, anyway? I'll not complain to Hiram like some women do to their husbands. I know he works hard. His money needs to go to improve the farm. Without the farm we would be lost. I put up as much food as I could last year that we kept in the root cellar and with the cow and chickens, we got through the winter. I'm not worried. He takes care of the farm, I take

care of the house and children. We'll make improvements as we can. A real barn is next. This will be a prosperous farm one day.

Here's a paper from December 29. The headlines and ads on page one aren't very interesting. We'll see what's on page two... Well. This is interesting. The headline reads: "A New Religion." I wonder what that's all about?

"A Frenchman who visited this country a dozen years ago said he found in the United States one hundred and thirty nine religions, but only two soups."

SOUPS? That has nothing to do with any religion! How far down do I have to read to find that?

Oh, here in paragraph four: "Having supped up some of the more recent religions in such a manner as to satisfy the most critical we come to *Babism*, which is the very latest yet heard in Kansas.

Babism? I've never heard of that. It must be new.

"Our information on this subject is derived from an article entitled "Bab and Babism" in the January number of *Hours at Home*, by Prof. E.P. Evans, of the University of Michigan. Those who have read his articles in the North American Review (and everybody ought at least to read the one on Pompeii – the most scholarly and accurate statement ever presented to American readers on that ever-interesting subject) need not be told who Prof. Evans is.

"Babism is Asiatic, like the cholera..."

Well that's not a very nice thing to say. Christianity is Asian too, for that matter. Christ was Asian! The Holy Land is in Asia. Do people not know that? If they taught school, they would.

“...though only a quarter of a century old, has already millions of adherents – its proselytes coming from the most intelligent classes of society as well as from the poor and ignorant. Its founder, Mirza-Ali-Mohammed, was born in 1824. His father was a silk merchant of Shiraz. The young man studied at Kerbela – and studied not only the Koran, but the Old and New Testaments. He welcomed truth, no matter from what source. He was early called “the elect of God,” and was supposed to have the gift of working miracles. His purity of life, the wonderful charm of his countenance and his marvellous eloquence surrounded him with disciples. He took the name of *Bab* or *Door* by which alone one can attain divine knowledge. His apostles were sent out and missions established at Ispahan, Kashan, Teheran, and in all the chief cities of Persia.”*

Is this just a religion for Persians? Have they sent any missionaries out? Wouldn't it be interesting if they sent missionaries to Europe? To America? We've sent plenty of missionaries to the rest of the world, it's our turn to receive some. I'm sure we could learn something from others, though not everyone here will agree with me on that. What does the Old World have to teach us? We don't know. We might be surprised. Could there be some new truth here?

I don't know why, but a dream I had last summer has come to my mind. It was a hot day in August and I dreamt of water. We were so dry then. There was a small open boat on the water, bobbing up and down. It was beside a grim rock wall, with a large sort of door in the wall. People were on the boat and were trying to get into the door in the wall, but the boat couldn't be still in the water. The waves heaved it up and down and threw the people around... it was awful!

Now, I have to look at something steady for a moment. I was beginning to feel sick at my stomach. That picture on the wall....that's better now.

I wonder if that's how the women felt. There were women in the boat, being lifted by the men up to other men reaching out from the door. And, children crying in confusion and fear. There was

shouting, but not all from the boat. Angry shouts were coming from inside the door. People inside were hateful toward the people in the boat. They even threw things at them. The people in the boat were exhausted and resigned, ready to give up.

Yet, at the same time I looked up and, above the wall, in the clouds in the sky, which were amazing and glorious, in colors more magnificent than I can remember, there was a sort of banner waving free and on the banner were letters, big as anything: B A H A.

I wonder what it all could mean?

Then I woke up and it took me a while to come back and realize I was in my bed, and then the heat, and Hiram snoring softly beside me as if nothing at all had happened.

I could not shake off the horror of that experience. Now, it all comes back. Why now? I don't know... Could there be some connection with this new religion in the paper? I don't know how it could be... Is this BAHA in it anywhere?

What does it mean? Oh, well...

“One of his most effective missionaries was a woman, Zerrin Tadj, or ‘consolation of the Eyes.’ She was a woman of great physical beauty and her knowledge of Arabic was equaled only by the most celebrated scholars of her day. She preached with a simple but fervid eloquence which won thousands of converts to Babism.” **

A woman? Well, what do you know? A woman disciple. This is something interesting. It's nice to know that not all religious leaders have kept us women out. What might it have been like if one of Christ's disciples had been a woman? If there had been, I'm sure history would have been

really different for the past two thousand years. Maybe this religion will make a difference in its time. I want to learn more about...

(CRASH!)

“Olivia! What did you do? NO!!”

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Notes:

* Leavenworth Times Conservative, December 17, 1868, p.1

** Leavenworth Times, December 29, 1868, p.2. (spelling in original)

Some of the events in this story are true. Brother Michael did move in with Barbara Hilty to help with her farm, then, together they moved to Louden's Falls where they built a store which they operated. Around the store and mill, the town of Enterprise was platted. Barbara married another Joseph, this time Joseph Ehram, who had forged the equipment for the mill. He then opened his own machine shop which, under various names, remained in operation for a century. In 1897, in response to a letter from baby Josephine, who was then living in Chicago, Barbara invited the first teacher of the Bahá'í Faith in North America, to vacation in Enterprise and give his lessons. He did that in July and August. As a result, Enterprise, Kansas was home to the second Bahá'í community west of Egypt. The newspaper account contains several errors of fact, among them inaccurately referring to the religion as 'Bábism,' its precursor, though simply, Bábí, is more accurate.

Interestingly, also in 1868, Bahá'u'lláh, the Prophet-Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, a prisoner of the Ottoman Empire, arrived in Akka and established the Bahá'í World Center there, which is now in the state of Israel. Many Kansas Bahá'ís have traveled there as pilgrims and served there in various capacities, two simultaneously, for twenty years as members of the highest administrative council of the Bahá'í Faith.