

## A Short History of Pearl Vilate Stolworthy

by

Fern McGee Duckworth

The history of Lydia Roseanna Young Stolworthy records, that on August 6, 1888, a tiny baby girl was born in Huntington, Utah and named Pearl Vilate. She was welcomed by her father, Henry Thomas and three older sisters—Matilda, Lucy and Allie, as well as a host of other relatives.

In early 1899 because of trouble from new laws concerning plural marriages and the realization that despite all of their hard work, the small farm just was not adequate to support their growing family, Pearl's mother and father decided to find another place to live. Lydia's brother, Newel K. Young, who had been at B Y U was returning to Mexico, so this was a chance for Lydia to take her children, Allie, Pearl, Hazel, Wilma and Jesse to visit her mother, Lydia Knight Young, prior to the family moving there.<sup>1</sup> Matilda was married and Lucy would stay behind to make the move since she could drive a wagon. There was a period of hectic sewing, patching, packing and planning before they went to Price to board the train. They had never seen a train and when it came clanging and puffing into the station -the children were all frightened. To them it looked like a monster coming to take them away from their home and father. The seats were hard and narrow and the family had to sleep as best they could with their own meager bedding and furnish their own food. At the Mexican border they were delayed for several days and had to room in a Mexican's house. The train to Dublan was even more primitive and there was only one passenger car. The natives were very curious about Jesse's red hair and that made the little family nervous. Fortunately, Uncle Newel was a good story teller and also knew how to buy food from the local vendors. Grandmother Young was living in a small adobe house but was happy to see her daughter and grandchildren.

Allie and Pearl soon made friends so quite enjoyed their visit. One day when she had been left with the younger children, a Mexican broke into the house. Luckily Pearl saw him as he climbed into the window so she ran outside, pulled the sash down on him, then went back inside and hit him over the head with a piece of firewood. When help came he was still out cold.

Pearl's mother soon saw that it would be impossible to live in Mexico and since her father, John R. Young, was living in Fruitland, New Mexico, Henry Thomas decided to move there with his plural wife and their little family. He bought a small farm with a three room adobe house but in late September, Johanna died.

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<sup>1</sup> Lydia's brother Newel K. Young spent the 1898-99 school year teaching in Lyman, Utah after studying at BYU.

Pearl had enjoyed the love and care she received from her Grandmother but had missed her father and was curious about the New Mexico home. Without Uncle Newel the return trip was very hard. When they got into Gallup there was no one there to meet them so they found a room to stay in. One day they learned that some men from Fruitland were in town to sell apples and luckily, Henry Thomas was one of them. The trip across the Navajo reservation was long and uncomfortable. Too, they had never seen Indians before so it was frightening.



A "cutout" image of Pearl from 1899 family photo

With twelve people in the little three room house the first winter was a bit hectic but the three older girls found homes to work in and Allie and Pearl had many home chores to do while going to school. In the spring, their father built a leafy shed between the kitchen and front room. This made a cool, shady place for working and sleeping. Each evening it was a family ritual for the parents to wash the children's faces, necks, arms, hands and feet before family prayers. Washing and ironing was done on Saturday so they had clean clothes for Sunday. Too, the house was cleaned and cooking done in case they had company. Pearl was very proud and worked hard to make her home attractive. Her mother taught her to scallop paper to put on shelves and the fireplace mantel. She also made pretty cardboard frames for pictures and she treasured every scrap of pretty paper or tinsel.

Pearl was a good student and liked school. She loved helping her mother with rehearsals for plays and programs they put on for church and community entertainment. She was a quick study and memorized every part so she could stand-in when necessary. She helped with the costuming and props as well as writing and revising. At an early age she was an accomplished seamstress and embroidered and crocheted beautifully.

Unlike her sisters and brothers, Pearl was a petite young woman. In later years her father often embarrassed her sisters by bragging that with her exception, he could take any of his seven other children onto a set of scales and "shade" a ton. Pearl was devoted to her family and her religion was important and a great joy. She cherished her Young and Knight family roots and accepted that they demanded much from her. She loved to dance, enjoyed parties and socials which made her popular with the young people in the San Juan Valley.

In November of 1899, Solon Huff McGee, brought his family to Kirtland from Oklahoma. They were converts to the LDS Church, had Cherokee blood and most of their ancestors had lived in the south and owned slaves. They had originally planned to go on to Arizona, but were so cordially welcomed by Pearl's father and other church leaders that they stayed and purchased a farm in the Harper Hill area on the banks of the San Juan River. The youngest son, Joseph Carr, was just Pearl's age but at eleven it probably wasn't "love at first sight." They saw each other often and attended school and church together.



Joseph Carr McGee

Although the McGee farm was productive and they were doing well with their orchard, bees and cattle, in the spring of 1907, Solon Huff decided to move his family to Oregon.

For several years, Pearl had been living with and working for the Kennedy family. She helped with the housework, cared for the children and clerked in the store. She was treated like a member of the family and loved Mrs. Kennedy like a second mother.

After the McGee's left, she corresponded with Carr and realized that he was important to her. In October of 1908, Carr returned to Kirtland for a visit. After

getting permission to marry, they set a date and he returned to Oregon to earn the necessary money.



Pearl Vilate Stolworthy McGee

Times were hard, but with the help of the Kennedy's and her own family, Pearl sewed, quilted, crocheted and embroidered a small trousseau and early in February, her father put her on the train in Mancos. It was a sad parting since her mother was not well and Pearl realized that she might not see her again.

Though her worldly goods were few, Pearl took much of infinite worth with her—memories of a humble home filled with the laughter of children, the song of a mother, the strength of a father. The warmth of loving hearts, the joy that came from having a family that treasured kindness, loyalty, sharing and compassion. A home where she learned an abiding love of God, freedom and country. A home that had been her first school, her first church, where she learned what was right and what was wrong. Where comfort was found in sickness and hurt. Where joy was shared and sorrow diluted. Where a father and mother were respected and children cherished. A humble home where the simplest of food was "fit for kings" because it was earned through hard work and prepared by loving hands. These things were to be the pattern and standard for her own home and family.

Although she was looking forward to being married to the man she dearly loved, the trip was not easy or uneventful. The train wound through the Colorado mountains and was stopped several times by snow slides. As the time passed Pearl worried about how Carr was managing in Salt Lake City. Would he think she had decided not to come and go back to Oregon without her? Her worries were not groundless, since Carr had no friends or family in town and his money was limited, he was forced to work for meals. Luckily, he was able to do chores for a family who allowed him to sleep in their warm cow shed. After Pearl arrived, a relative of hers took them in and kindly helped them prepare for their temple ceremony. She also gave them food for their trip to LeGrand, Oregon, where they joined his family.

By July of 1909 the McGee's were in Nampa, Idaho, clearing sagebrush. This kept the men on the move and life for the women and children was difficult. Pearl found the almost communal living hard and the family very different from her own. Traditionally, they served hot bread and meat at every meal and laughed at her habit of having bread and cold milk for supper.

After a difficult pregnancy, Melvin Carr was born prematurely on November 3, 1909 and they barely survived the severe Idaho winter. By 1911 they were in Oakley and Pearl's family was greatly concerned for her. A pregnancy early in 1912, prompted her father to send money for her to return to New Mexico to visit her mother who was less well than usual. Despite their hardships, Carr was and had been a considerate, gentle and loving husband. He encouraged her to go and promised to join her before the baby was born.



Melvin Carr McGee

Pearl, exhausted after her long trip with baby Melvin, was welcomed with loving arms and with good food and tender care, became much like her old self. True to his promise, and somewhat against the wishes of his parents, Carr returned to Kirtland in late July of 1912 and their second son, Roscoe Henry, was born on August first. He was a few weeks premature and so small that the midwife covered his little body with consecrated oil, wrapped him in cotton batting and kept him warm with bottles of hot water. With many hands to care for him he survived and soon became a beautiful baby with soft red curls.

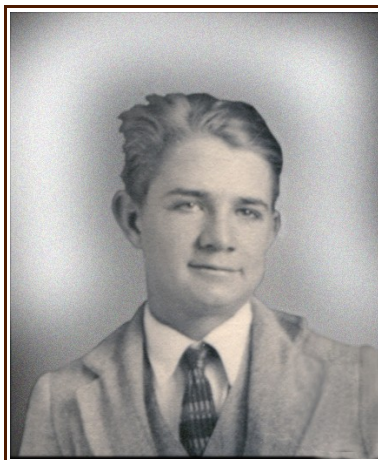
After surviving the hardships of living in an undeveloped area, the San Juan valley seemed like a "little heaven on earth" and at the urging of family and friends, Carr and Pearl decided that they would not return to Idaho. This decision meant that Carr did not ever see his mother again and his father only once.



Roscoe Henry McGee

Their needs were simple, an irrigated farm large enough to produce what was required for their own use and a little to sell. A garden plot for vegetables, fruit trees and berry bushes. A team of horses, a wagon, a plow, a harrow, a mower, a hay rake, an ax, a shovel, a wheelbarrow, and some hoes. A flock of chickens, a cow and some pigs. A small house with a cook stove, a heater, a few pieces of furniture, some pots, pans, dishes, eating utensils and some bedding. Tubs for bathing, doing laundry, buckets for carrying water and coal. What they had in abundance was frugality, a willingness to work, practical knowledge and dedication so they set out to acquire what was necessary to provide for their growing family. Some basic things would come with the farms they rented, some would be borrowed from family and friends. Others they would simply do without.

In 1914 a third son was born. Full term, chubby, bright eyed, rosy cheeked, A TRUE TREASURE AND HIS MOTHER NAMED HIM JEWEL.



Jewel Solon McGee



In 1917 a daughter was born and named FERN in keeping with a promise that Pearl had made to her cousin and best friend, Fern Young, when they parted in Huntington.



Fern McGee

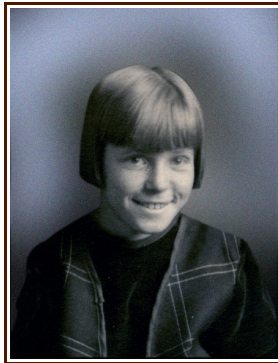
When Pearl's sister, Hazel Washburn was widowed in 1919, she, with her six children were welcomed into Carr and Pearl's hearts and humble home.

In 1921 Pearl's fourth son and last child, KENNETH (Kelly) was born and when he was a toddler the family moved to Coal Mine Hill and operated the mine and a small fifteen acre farm.



Kenneth Lemar McGee

When Hazel died in 1925 her six year old daughter, Ardell, became part of the family.



Ardell Washburn

In a mine explosion Carr was seriously burned. There was no such thing as 911 or other emergency help so Pearl had to cope with this and still care for Melvin who had typhoid fever. Fortunately, Carr's sight was not impaired and both he and Melvin recovered.

Without neighbors life was lonely and the family welcomed visits from Grandfather Stolworthy who generally stayed over night when he came for coal. In the evening he would sing the songs that he had used to entertain his own children, A frog that went courting and the sly old crow. He also told stories about his early life and when he was a cowboy in the United Order.

Days were long since there were chores to be done before going to school and after returning home. Carr and Pearl were always supportive of the children's participation in sports and other school and church activities. She was a good neighbor and diligent in her many church callings.

Each evening, Pearl, gathered her children around the kitchen table to do their homework, talk over the events of the day, share family news and to take turns telling a story or read aloud from a favorite book or magazine. One evening Kelly chose to tell a joke about two men who were sitting on a bench watching the women walk by. One of the men said that he could tell what a woman was like by the clothes she wore. When one woman walked by and he was asked to tell what she was like the man looked at her scant attire and answered "insufficient evidence " Kelly pronounced it as "scant atter" and afterwards asked his brother Mel "just exactly what is a woman's "scant atter?" Family prayer always ended the day and started it in the morning.



Irrigated land was not easy to buy but in 1927 the Cline place in Fruitland was purchased. About 18 acres it had a large, many windowed brick building which had been built for a school, and it was remodeled into a very nice home.

In the early 1930s Pearl had major surgery in Durango, Colorado. The McGee's had a nice herd of cattle in the hills around Fruitland and since there was no such thing as Medical Insurance, they had to be sold to pay her hospital expenses. Her recovery required a long time and she often rested in the screened front porch. The family dog (a stub tailed Collie) named with much originality "Old Bob" spent a lot of time with her. One day while visiting, Mrs. Eva Noel, mentioned that her dog had just brought a new canvas water bag home. Pearl patted Old Bob and replied "the only thing this silly old thing ever brings me is a stinky bone." A morning or so later we heard a commotion out in the front yard and found Mr. Noel in hot pursuit of Old Bob who was dragging a smoked ham through the front gate.

Jewel graduated from high in 1932 and went to work on the reservation as Roscoe had done. The small farm was about what Carr and Kelly could manage and Pearl felt a real sense of security.

By hard work and careful planning, the family survived the "Great Depression" and were in a period of financial stability when on the morning of June 21, 1934 their house burned to the ground. With no fire department few of their possessions were saved.

Once again, Pearl and Carr, literally started from scratch. They had no insurance but the crops were intact and the house was rebuilt and refurnished. Pearl never worked in the fields but was a master gardener. She always canned fruit and some vegetables for out of season use and made delicious jams, jellies and pickles.

Although she did not work outside the home, her sewing skills provided economical clothing for her family and work she did for others was added and welcome income. She also sold surplus cream, butter, eggs, fruit and vegetables from her garden. Whenever possible she raised turkeys to be sold at Thanksgiving. Three Navajo men generally helped prepare the turkeys for market and one of them was very good at killing them in a way that left them easy to dry pick. They worked in an outside building cold enough that the birds could hang for a day or two. One morning when the men came to work there was a lot of shouting before they all took off running down the road. On investigation Pearl found several plucked turkeys reeling around the shed and she never saw the Navajos again.

Her priority for this extra money was tithing, a 100 pound sack of sugar, jars with lids for canning, magazines, school and church books, taxes and the expenses incurred when she went to Salt Lake for Conference or visited around the Stake.

On September 19, 1937, Jewel married Leona Christensen and took her to Red Rock Trading Post to live. Melvin and Bessie were at Chilchinbeto and Roscoe and Ruthie at Red Mesa.

Later that fall, Carr had an opportunity to buy into and operate the Mancos Creek Trading Post. Since she knew that it had been his lifetime dream, Pearl agreed and they moved there.

They were both happy in their new venture and as always, worked together to make a successful business. In 1939 they decided to build a new store on the Shiprock-Cortez highway. It made for a busy summer and Pearl, with Fern's help, ran the store while Carr and Kelly worked on the building site. By late August the move was completed and they looked forward to a successful lamb season and quiet winter.



Pearl and Carr McGee

Pearl had five grandchildren, Melvin's Joyce and Carr. Roscoe's Grace and Sharon. And Jewel's LaVoy. She loved them all and even though they didn't live close to her she liked to sew for them and they were always in her heart.

On Sunday, September 24, 1939, while on their way into Kirtland to attend church and visit Grandfather Stolworthy, Carr and Pearl had an accident. Both were injured and Carr died of his injuries in the Cortez hospital that night.

Pearl was always frail and never considered being left alone so she was unprepared for making the decisions required to leave Mancos Creek and move into Farmington where Fern and Ardel had found work. They rented a small house near Aunt Lucy Burnham and moved in October. Aunt Allie Wade also lived there and there was a nice LDS ward. Pearl's recovery was slow and an ordeal for everyone who knew her.

Fortunately, she had always loved Relief Society and embraced the Church's new Stake Welfare Plan. She soon found several families to help and Fern and Ardel learned to keep their thoughts to themselves when they saw someone else wearing their clothes.

One morning, Uncle Roy Burnham, stopped to talk to Pearl as he was going to work and when she pointed out that he was wearing two suits, he told her that it was because he didn't want her giving one of them away while he was gone.

Pearl had always been outspoken with her children and they always knew just what she expected of them and where they stood with her. After Carr's death, little they did seemed to please her. She seemed to feel a great need to keep them on "the straight and narrow path" because she wrote in her diary "I had to give Kelly a good hard talking to. I first prayed for vision, he has been so reckless lately. I wish I could know the best course to pursue with my children. I pray for wisdom always, yet never see any evidence of having done good. I might accomplish more, at least have more companionship, if I went their way more often. But I'm too worried to be frivolous."

But there were less serious entries:

"Today is Jewel's birthday, I gave him a pretty red hassock. It will surely be one step up for LaVoy."

"Kept Bruce Beckstead for awhile today...He is about as good at getting into things as LaVoy is."

"Made a little yellow dress for Patsy's birthday. Ardel got her a pretty new blue bonnet so now she is all prettied up. She is sure a darling and can walk but is still a little scared."

"Jewel and Leona came in and bought a new Buick."

"LaVoy caught a wasp and told his Uncle Mel it was a 'hot bug.'"

"For my birthday, Jewel and Leona gave me a new nightgown and some stationary. My kids are really good to me."

As the war escalated in Europe, Pearl, with four sons had much to be concerned about. When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, she wrote— "War flashes. Radio news until you couldn't think of anything else. War was declared today in Washington. I heard the Star Spangled Banner for the first time of my life in it's full meaning. After President Roosevelt had talked and the band played the last verse, I thought my heart would break in two."

When Kelly had his twenty first birthday in late May of 1942 he enlisted in the Air Corps and Fern joined the new Women's Army Auxillary.

Like so many other mothers, Pearl survived Kelly's World War II daylight bombing raids and his many months spent as a German Prisoner of War. She welcomed him home and for the rest of her life busied herself as a sister, mother, grandmother, mother-in-law, aunt and friend.

In a short, handwritten autobiography Pearl wrote:

*"We moved to Fruitland when I was eleven years old. This is the first I remember taking part in my religious life. I remember going to Sunday School and I very seriously helped my Mother with a Primary she held in Kirtland. I was a teacher in Sunday School at the age of fourteen. My health was very poor while my children were small. With my husband's help and understanding, I was able to care for my children and home and work in the Ward organizations. I held positions in every organization and loved it all.*

*Carr was also active and we were happy and proud of each calling we received. I was always humble and thankful to my heavenly father and liked to feel that he was watching over me. I know that if I did anything well it was due to my Heavenly Father answering my prayers for guidance and my dear husbands encouragement and support.*

*One time I had made all plans to go to Salt Lake to a convention and the night before my departure my two year old baby was real sick with croup. I felt I could not go but my husband insisted that I should. We called in the Elders and they blessed the choking baby and he seemed better so I joined the others who were going to SLC. I would cry every time I thought of my family at home. In our first meeting David O. McKay spoke to us. He realized most of us were mothers and had left babies and children at home and would be away for some time. He promised us in the name of the Lord that all would be well with our dear ones. I was comforted and never had fear again."*

She also wrote about the many positions she served in and closed with this:

*"I am grateful for having these wonderful opportunities. I know they have enriched my life and I thank my Heavenly Father for my blessings and my family. For the gospel and my understanding of it and my membership in His church. I pray to remain faithful and useful to the end of my life."*

Pearl did remain faithful and useful. At the time she was seriously injured by a careless driver, she was Secretary of the Farmington Ward Primary and had just attended opening exercises before leaving to do an errand down town. She died on February 19, 1953.

On the morning after her funeral, as I returned to my home in Abilene, Texas with my two little boys, the plane made a turn over the Kirtland Cemetery and as I looked down on her flower covered grave in the snow, I knew she was exactly where she had wanted to be for the last fourteen years, by the side of her beloved companion in time and for eternity.

Fern McGee Duckworth  
Jewel McGee Family Reunion July 25, 1998

Sources:

Personal memories  
Pearl S. McGee's Autobiography  
McGee Family History  
Stolworthy Family History



Ardel, age 18



*Mrs. Joseph Carr McGee*

*requests the honor of your presence at  
the marriage and reception of her daughter*

*FERN*

*to*

*CAPTAIN GEORGE H. DUCKWORTH  
United States Army*

*Wednesday evening March twentieth*

*L. D. S. Church, Farmington, New Mexico*

*at eight o'clock*



*Mr. and Mrs. Don L. Walker*

*announce the marriage of their daughter*

*Donna*

*to*

*S. Sgt. Kenneth Lemar McGee*  
*Eighth Air Force*

*on Sunday, July Twenty-ninth*

*Nineteen Hundred Forty Five*

*Farmington, New Mexico*