IN MEMORIAM

JUANITA BROOKS

By Levi S. Peterson

JUANITA BROOKS was born 15 January 1898 in Bunkerville, Nevada, a village culturally connected to that arid southwestern corner of Utah called Dixie. Her parents were Henry Leavitt and Mary Hafen. During her childhood, Bunkerville was little changed from frontier conditions, a fact which contributed to her later achievement as a historian of pioneer Dixie. Juanita died on Saturday, 26 August 1989, after a long debility from Alzheimer's disease. I felt greatly honored to be asked to speak at her funeral in the St. George tabernacle on the following Wednesday. I will here relate what I learned from that experience. I will also review Juanita's accomplishments, hopeful that this essay will serve as a tribute to her.

When I began research for my biography of Juanita in 1985, she already lay in a near coma and could contribute nothing to my work. It seemed to me, as it did to many others, that nature had paid a particular affront to the human species by destroying the mind of this remarkable woman without according her the mercy of a timely death. Sometimes I fancied only a subliminal perversity kept her alive. On the day before she died, a friend asked me how long she might last. "Who knows?" I said. "She was always tough and tenacious, and it would be just like her to hang on for another five years." The next day her daughter phoned, saying Juanita had "slipped away" during the early morning. After Willa had hung up, an image entered my mind. About a month earlier, my wife Althea and I had climbed to Angels Landing in Zion Park. While we toiled up the final precarious pass through broad, uninhabited sagebrush valleys, skirts timbered mountains, and offers vistas of sun, sky, and cloud. As I drove to Juanita's funeral, the beauty of southern Utah both comforted and grieved me. I was awake to the land's eloquent promises but keenly aware of my limited prerogative to own and exploit them. Juanita's passing had shaken me from the lethargy of the routine. It had reminded me that my tenure on the earth is brief and unutterably precious.

The next morning Althea and I went to the viewing at a St. George mortuary, accompanied by my brother Charles, who had known Juanita longer and better than I. There we expressed our condolences to Juanita's children and their spouses, who stood in a long line near the casket. A gathering of intelligent, good-willed human beings, they were living proof of Juanita's unflagging devotion to family. In 1919, Juanita Leavitt married Ernest Pulsipher, who died of cancer less than a year and a half later. A son was born of this union. An impoverished but plucky Juanita Pulsipher pursued an education, acquiring a bachelor's degree from BYU and a master's from Columbia. Securing a position at Dixie College in St. George, she became an instructor of English and debate and later the dean of women. In 1933 she resigned from the college to marry widower Will Brooks, with whom she composed a compound-complex family, as she liked to call it. From the beginning there were her son, Ernest, and Will's four sons, Walter, Robert, Grant, and Clair. Quickly the couple added a daughter, Willa, and three other sons, Karl, Kay, and Tony. Only Grant, who died in 1955, was absent from Juanita's viewing. In his place stood his widow, Maxine, with her present husband, Jesse Phillips. That this remarried sister-in-law retains her place among the Brookses is indicative of the magnetic force of family which Juanita and Will exerted. I will add that Will, who died in 1970, was the most affectionate and congenial of men.

Ordinarily I dislike looking at a corpse. In Juanita's case, I seemed unable to finish looking. She was remarkably serene, remarkably like herself. Her beaked nose, her stubbornly set jaw were precisely from life. She wore the white, pleated robe and green apron of the temple, marks of the faithful Mormon she had always insisted she was. Willa, who stood next to the casket, stroked her hair, saying, "Isn't it beautiful?" Truly it was. It was black, streaked by white, and delicately wavy. Willa spoke bravely yet struggled against tears. Why did she weep when Juanita had at last been released from her ruined body? The answer, of course, is that funerals are never happy, not even when they follow a death long overdue. That body had persisted as a concrete reminder, a palpable symbol, of the vital, loving person Juanita had once been, and now, dear even in its ruin, it had to be relinquished to the earth from which it came.

The funeral began at eleven. Grandsons and nephews bore the casket into the tabernacle, followed by a mass of relatives who seated themselves in reserved front pews. Except for the balcony, the historic building was full. The sun cast an opulent light through great high windows. The pulpit, from which it is said all presidents of the Church except Joseph Smith have preached, loomed before the congregation. The All Seeing Eye, an icon attached high on the wall behind the pulpit, stared down upon the gathering. In 1906, the eight-year-old Juanita had first entered this famous hall and noted how the large, mysterious eye seemed to follow her no matter where she positioned herself.

The proceedings were largely a family affair. Juanita's son, Kay, a bishop from Mapleton, directed the service. The invocation was offered by a son, Walter, the benediction by a brother, Francis. A friend sang "Lead, Kindly Light," significant to those who knew Juanita. On a lonely September evening in 1928 when she had first arrived at Columbia University, Juanita threw open her window and heard the comforting strains of "Lead, Kindly Light" from the carillon of a nearby church. She resolved to listen to vespers every evening thereafter, and when, nearly a year later, she returned safely home to her son and parents, she carried with her an indelible
fondness for that beautiful hymn.

I was the first speaker. Five others, Juanita's children, followed. Clair, Tony, Willa, and Karl reminisced affectionately. Clair spoke of the time Juanita had ministered to his sunburned back soon after her wedding to Will; at that instant, the thirty-five-year-old woman and the eight-year-old boy bonded to one another as surely as if she had carried him in her womb. Willa spoke of the Christian care Juanita gave an ailing, aged neighbor. Tony recalled how he had returned home in tears because other children had said he would belong to Juanita's first husband in the Hereafter. It was true that Juanita had been sealed to Ernest Pulsipher in a temple marriage; according to a common Latter-day Saint belief, the children she bore with Will would be aligned with her eternal mate. Juanita calmed Tony by assuring him the matter was of no practical importance because God would adjudicate it for the good of all. Karl remembered his mother as an exacting teacher of English after she had rejoined the faculty of Dixie College during the 1950s. She once gave him a C on a theme, and he asked why. She answered, "Because I didn't want to give you a D." Finally, Kay, a bishop, as I have said, appropriately concluded the funeral with a brief and moving sermon on the resurrection.

As for my remarks, I began them with ambivalent feelings. The truth is that, while writing Juanita's biography, I had often fantasized about speaking at her funeral. I fancied that I could somehow declare her achievement more forcefully amidst the fervent emotions a funeral arouses. But as I composed my remarks during the several days preceding the funeral, I realized I had absolutely nothing to say that I had not already expressed many times over in print and in speech, and I doubted that a congregation composed of Juanita's relatives and friends stood in need of any special persuasion as to her significance. As I delivered my speech, however, an intuition of its propriety came over me, and by the time my wife and I had attended the internment at the cemetery and had participated in that most benign of Mormon customs, the funeral dinner provided by the local Relief Society, I had realized that, yes, Juanita's professional achievement requires a constant reiteration and defense among her fellow Mormons. Juanita was, after all, a rebel among a people who valued conformity above almost every other virtue. From all appearances, her descendants are devout, church-going Latter-day Saints. I think her children, knowing her personally, had no reason to doubt her loyalty to Mormonism.

I'm not sure her grandchildren and great-grandchildren, when they first learn of it, do not find her express defiance of a president of the Church disloyal and shocking. I hope my speech helped assure them of her faithfulness to the Latter-day Saint cause.

I will briefly summarize my remarks. After she married Will Brooks in 1933, Juanita compensated for her interrupted academic career by becoming a historian of her native region. Though she always thought of herself as an amateur, her achievement was that of a professional. She was exceptionally good at locating pioneer diaries, which she collected as a field agent for the WPA and the Huntington Library. She edited a number of pioneer diaries, those of John D. Lee and Horsea Stout being of first rank. She wrote numerous essays, articles, and sketches about the history of Dixie, of especial note were her Harper's essays on polygamy and desert irrigation and her articles about Jacob Hamblin and the Indians of southern Utah. She authored a variety of family narratives, including a biography of her pioneer grandfather, Dudley Leavitt, and her own autobiography, Quicksand and Cactus. She served twenty-four years on the board of the Utah Historical Society. She traveled widely in Utah, usually at her own expense, to deliver speeches on historical topics and gave generous research assistance to many scholars.

It was Juanita's elaboration of a single complex theme within the history of Dixie which made her into, not merely a respected historian, but an authentic Utah hero. That theme was the Mountain Meadows massacre and the consequent scapegoating of John D. Lee. Her history, The Mountain Meadows Massacre (1950), and her biography, John Doyle Lee: Zealot, Pioneer Builder, Scapegoat (1961), demonstrated that Mormon militia, acting upon prior orders, assisted Indians in the treacherous massacre of nearly a hundred California-bound emigrants in 1857 and that Lee, excommunicated from the Church and tried and executed for the massacre, was unjustly singled out from among a number of responsible officers.

Juanita feared from the beginning that this subject endangered her standing in the Church. Most Latter-day Saints, eager to preserve the good name of the Church, believed it better to let the massacre slip into the oblivion of the past. As the publication of her history of the bloody event approached in 1950, her non-Mormon publisher asked her to respond to the possibility of excommunication. She replied: "I do not want to be excommunicated from my church for many reasons, but if that is the price that I must pay for intellectual honesty, I shall pay it—1 hope without bitterness." I think we can scarcely conceive of the courage required of Juanita, enmeshed in a large and loving Mormon family, to write those words. Confronted by two great virtues which had come into conflict—the good name of the Church on the one hand and truth on the other—Juanita chose truth.

Although Juanita was not excommunicated for her history of the massacre, she sensed bitterly the atmosphere of disgrace which descended upon her and her loyal husband. With great excitement, therefore, she learned, in the spring of 1961, that the First Presidency had ordered the posthumous reinstatement of John D. Lee to his former status in the Church. Feeling vindicated, Juanita wanted to include the reinstatement in her biography of Lee, which was at that very moment in process of publication. President David O. McKay assigned Elder Delbert Stapley to dissuade Juanita; he would, he threatened, rescind the reinstatement should Juanita publish it. Ultimately an agonized Juanita decided to include the reinstatement, knowing that her decision put her into the greatest jeopardy of excommunication of her entire life. She did so not from mere stubbornness but from a sense that, in the case of a prominent public figure like John D. Lee, the suppression of an important fact was a violation of the integrity of all who knew of that suppression. Time has proven Juanita's instinct sound on this matter. Happily she was not excommunicated, nor was the reinstatement rescinded, and readers of her biography, Mormon and non-Mormon alike, have universally congratulated, rather than condemned, the Church for the reinstatement.

In all of this, Juanita became something larger and greater than simply a respectable historian, as I reminded those who attended her funeral. For the numerous Mormons who, early or late, have accepted her interpretation of the massacre, she has served as a tragic and a shriver. She has confronted us with grishly, disillusioning facts, roused us to grief and vicarious contrition, then led us to understanding and forgiveness of our errant ancestors. Equally important, this courageous little housewife inspired and encouraged non-conformists and protesters of all varieties among the Mormons. Her files are replete with letters and manuscripts from dissenters on both the fundamentalist and liberal sides of Mormonism, some timid and secretive, others angry and bold. Unquestionably, Juanita Brooks will remain famous as one of the

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foremost champions of free inquiry and open debate in the history of Mormonism. I hope I left this point in the minds and hearts of Juanita's young descendants as I concluded my remarks at her funeral: in no sense of the word was she an apostate. She loved the Church and valued her membership in it enormously. Dissent does not necessarily mean apostasy. There is such a thing as loyal opposition. Organizations desperately need loyal opposition. Without it, they become complacent and autocratic. In her preface to the history of the massacre, Juanita wrote: 'This study is not designed either to smear or to clear any individual; its purpose is to present the truth. I feel sure that nothing but the truth can be good enough for the church to which I belong.'

God grant that such
tegrity may long flourish among the Mormons.

NOTES

PSALM

SONG OF PRAISE*

I will praise Thee, O my God.

In the midst of the daughters of Zion—in the presence of the honorable Judges in Israel, I will exalt Thy name.

The first fruits of all the nations of the earth, are here—Thou hast associated me with choice spirits, even those who have done nobly from the beginning.

Thou hast cast my lot with those whose faith is more precious than all the glittering treasures which our small mother Earth is now folding in her bosom; and whose integrity is a brighter ornament than the most brilliant diadem that ever decorated the head of an earthly monarch.

Thou hast imparted to me a portion of the pure oil of gladness, even the Spirit, which creates in my bosom, a perpetual fountain of joy; and which constitutes both the law of affinity and the power of attraction, to lift my heart upwards, and give me faith and confidence, to trust in Thee.

Thou hast committed to thy servants, the key of knowledge with which they have unlock'd the treasures of wisdom & understanding, and have opened the fountains of light to this generation.

Thou hast delivered Thy people—Thou hast led them forth from under the hand of oppression, and although they sacrificed their rightful possessions in the lands of their nativity; they know that the cattle upon the thousand western hills—the earth and the fulness thereof, are Thine; and they rejoice in the deliverance which Thou hast wrought out for them.

Thou didst sustain Thy Saints in the midst of the ordeal of affliction—Thou hast brought them forth from the fiery furnace.

As Thy Son Ahman stood by the three Hebrews, who anciently were cast into the flames according to the edict of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; as Thou Ahman wast in the midst of Thy people, the Latter-day Saints—they have come forth unhurt, and the smell of fire is not on their garments.

Those who have turned their backs on their brethren, have perished; and those that have halted by the way, through fear, have been enticed to revel at the waters of Lethe until the dark shadows of Oblivion have swallowed them up forever.

But those that adhered to Thy statutes and have maintained their steadfastness in the sacred covenants of the Holy Priesthood; have been led forth from the foaming vortex of mobocracy and from the contaminating corruptions of the nations—they have landed safely on the terra firma of peace—their feet are established on the mountains of Israel, the chambers of the West; in the strongholds which Thou Ahman, had prepared for them with the strength of the everlasting hills—the munition of rocks for their bulwark and defence.

Thou has placed the sceptre of Government in the hand of Thine anointed, even Thy servant Brigham, on whom has fallen the mantle of Joseph. Thou hast endowed him with knowledge & understanding—His councillors are men of wisdom—his administration is that of justice and equity; and Thy people dwell safely, and rejoice in the multitude of blessings of the reign of peace.

Well may Thy praises resound throughout all the rich valleys of Ephraim; and let the lofty snow-crown'd mountains reverberate with shouts of hosanna to Thy name.

I rejoice in Thy statutes and in the holy ordinances of Thy House—my lips shall praise Thee in the social assemblies of Thy Saints.

In the silent meditations of the night, when my thoughts reach after thee, and when the vision of my mind seems to penetrate the dark curtain of mortality; I am swallowed up in the contemplations of Thy greatness & majesty, and the condescensions of Thy love for Thy degenerate children.

Then I feel to say in my heart; although it might be through the furnace of affliction—though it should be by draining the cup of bitterness to the dregs, if that, in Thy wisdom, is deemed necessary, to purify and prepare me, let me be prepared, that I may behold Thy face—that I may come up and dwell in Thy presence.

Then, and not till then will my soul be fully satisfied, O, my God, Adam, Ahman, the King, the Lord of Hosts.

—ELIZA R. SNOW

* ELIZA ROXCY SNOW, Diary and Notebook, 1842 ff, holograph, Relief Society General Presidency, Vault. Relief Society Building, Salt Lake City, Utah. photocopy in LDS Church Archives. Published in Deseret News, 25 April 1855, and St. Louis Luminary, 1 September 1855. This was text prepared from the original by Maureen Ursenbach Beecher. The word Adam in the last line appears in the Deseret News version but is not in the holograph. The poem was first read before the Polysynodal Society, Salt Lake City, 6 February 1855.