

Testimony of Lars Nielson

As told to Ellen Nielson Lyman and written down by her in his own words.

The first time I heard the gospel was after I came home from the Army. It was in the latter part of September 1851. I was sitting at my sister Anna Mikkelsen's house doing Tailoring. A man came in and said, "There are two men come with a new religion. They are going to preach at Hans Klocker's house tonight. Wouldn't I come and hear them?"

I had studied my mother's New Testament and I said, "Yes, I will go, for I know there will be false prophets in the last days." I thought I will go and tell them that. But I thought, "I must first hear them for I must not pitch in on something I know nothing about."

I went to the meeting at my friend's house. I made my way near to the front so that I might hear every word and tell the preachers what I thought of them. I prepared myself to hear false doctrine. I listened; they preached the Gospel of Christ as it is written in the New Testament. I listened to more, then I said to my friend, "They are teaching the very same Gospel that Christ and his holy apostles taught when they were on earth. I will not disturb men that teach the truth." So they knocked me down right off.

Shortly after, my sister and her husband, Anna and Rasmus Mikkelsen, joined the church. They and a young boy named Peter Larsen were the first to receive the gospel in that town (South Orslev).

I was young and full of fun. The young people couldn't spare me and I couldn't spare them. I thought the teaching was all right but I couldn't think of accepting it then.

One Sunday there was a wedding in the place and Hans Westenscow had to play in the band for the wedding party. I was invited too. While we were waiting for the wedding party we went down to my sister's house as there was a Mormon meeting there. We didn't go in because Hans was bashful and he must be there at the house to play for the wedding party as they came home from the church. So we heard the Elders sing and pray but left just as they began to preach as we were standing on the outside. Just as we went out of the gate I stopped and said "Hans, we two will be Mormons someday and you will help me to Zion." He was so surprised at what I said he couldn't say anything because at that time I was as well off as he, but he thought, "What can Lars mean with that?" He thought it was foolish talk.

One and one-half years (Sept. 1851) before I was married I heard the principles of the gospel explained.

In 1853, I married Sidsel Pedersen (18 May 1853) and a little later I moved away to a town where Mormons had never had a chance to come and where I was a stranger. I lived there about three years then two Mormon elders came to my house. They couldn't find anyone in the place that would open their doors and let them in. They came to my house and they were welcome. One of the Elders was P.C. Nielsen and the other was Elder Nessen.

One of them said, "Won't you see some religious books and tracts?"

I said, "Why, are you Mormon elders?" Elder Nessen said, "Yes."

Then I asked my wife to get something for them to eat. She was always willing to do that. Then I told them to sit up to the table and help themselves. I would look at their books and tracts. They were very thankful for they had not had anything to eat since morning and now it was toward evening. I knew when they said they were Mormons that they hadn't got anything to eat around there because the people were so bitter.

I looked at their books and tracts and I bought "A Voice of Warning" and two tracts. "A Voice of Warning" was the first Mormon book I had seen and that I bought, I read it and found out it was true. I read the tracts also and I compared their teachings with the teachings of the New Testament. Then I studied the Old Testament too and I found that they all agreed.

I had a beautiful little garden. I invited the Elders to go out with me to see it. When we got back to the house we saw a large crowd of boys coming down the street with Hans Westenscow as their leader. (Hans had moved to this town a few years before I did. A little before they got to the house the other boys stopped but Hans came nearer and made a sign to me to come to him, for he didn't like to come in where the Mormon missionaries were, so I went to him and said "What do you want, Hans?"

He said, "Are those two men stopping with you Mormon elders?"

I said, "Yes, they are Mormons."

Then he said, "We boys have never heard the Mormons. We would like to hear them. Do you think they will preach?"

I said, "I guess they will." Then I turned to the Elders and said, "This is Hans Westenscow. He and the boys would like to hear you if you will preach for them."

Then Elder Nessen said, "God knows we will preach if we can find a place to preach in."

They were not allowed to preach in the streets. I said, "You can have my place to preach in. Tell the boys they are very welcome to come to my place and hear these men preach but tell them I want order. I don't want mischief done."

Hans said, "We will keep order. We would like to hear them."

Elder Nessen went out in town and invited all the people to come to my house for the meeting. There was one woman who said, "I believe I will go down and hear what them fools have to say, but I won't go in the house for I have heard that they will smite." She stood on the outside of the oven window and listened. She was the fifth one in the town to receive the gospel. She afterwards said, "I could just as well gone in for they smote me anyhow."

We had a beautiful meeting that night. The people were quiet and listened. Elder Nessen was the speaker and after the people were gone he said, "Though I have been a missionary for about five years I have never preached with such power as I have done tonight."

After the people had gone quietly to their homes, the Missionaries packed their books and were going to their room in the city. It was after 11:00 o'clock at night so my wife and I invited them to stay and they did stay until the next morning and had breakfast with us. Elder Nessen said before he left that morning, "I feel to prophesy if you will allow me."

I said, "That is all right."

Then he said, "It is simply this, you and your wife will be Mormons and you can't help it, the way you have received us. I have been a missionary for many years but I have never been received in a stranger's house as we have been received here."

After that we had many meetings at my house and there were always some came.

That first meeting was held in my home in September 1858 at Stubberup, Falster. In 1860 on the 30th day of March, my wife and I were baptized and confirmed members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. I was ordained a teacher that day.

Out of that little town there were sixteen received the gospel in a short time. They all came to Utah but one young woman (who was Hans Westenscow's wife's sister. This young lady died while making preparations to emigrate. It seemed necessary and I felt that the Lord had sent me there to that town to open the door for the Elders.

A few days after I received the gospel the Priest came to my house, but I "as not at home. He commenced to talk to my wife but she said "I will have no argument with you, Mr. Priest. Lars can talk to you."

He then said, "Be sure and tell Lars to come up to me. He is too sensible a man to be deceived by the Mormons. I want to talk to him and show him how wrong Mormonism is."

He lived about two miles from my house. I went up there shortly after. When I got there I found him in his office sitting on his fine velvet sofa, smoking his long pipe. The pipe was sixteen feet long and reached clear across the room. When I arrived there he said, "I am glad you have come." Then he commenced to tell me about the Mormons, what a terrible people they were and said he could not see how I could be so foolish as to join them.

Then I said to him "Mr. Priest, I don't believe I could ever have found Jesus Christ in such a fix as I have found you in, sitting on a velvet sofa and smoking a long pipe."

He said, "We learned men have given lots of money for our education and shouldn't we live a decent life?"

I said, "I don't call that a decent life for a Christian priest. If you follow Jesus and his apostles you would go out and preach to the people instead of sitting like that."

Then he grumbled a great deal about the Mormons that was not worth answering so I gave him another question. "Mr. Priest, will you please tell me what kind of a preacher you are, for I cannot understand you."

Then he said "Don't you know that I am a teacher of Jesus Christ and of the holy apostles of Luther?"

I said, "No, I don't know that, for you don't follow any of it."

"Can you prove that?" he said.

I said "Yes, when I was seven years old I learned Luther's catechism by heart and I remember a little of it yet, Martin Luther said that every husband shall teach his children and his servant boys and servant girls to stand up or kneel down and pray every night and morning. He also told them that they should teach them to ask God to bless every meal before they ate it and thank Him for it after they ate it. Do you do that, Mr. Priest?"

"No, I must say, I am ashamed to say I don't."

"Then you are not a true Lutheran teacher," I said.

"Well," he said, "My servants, when they are out to work, use bad language, they swear and take the name of God in vain. They are not worthy of the word of God."

Then I said, "It is the sick that need the Doctor, Mr. Priest, and you need to commence right at home and preach repentance."

"Well, I preach every Sunday in the Church. They can come and hear me."

I said, "There are very few that go to your church."

"I can't help that," he said, "for I am there every Sunday."

"Yes, but you get six or seven thousand dollars a year to go there and preach about an hour every Sunday, then the people have to bring offerings to you three times a year (every Christmas, Easter and Pentecost - six or seven weeks after Easter) besides. Even if a poor man has many children and hardly enough to eat you will send a notice to him that he must pay his offering to you no matter how poor he is.

And look at the people in your own district (there were seven towns in his district). The poor house is full of children who have no father to provide for them. Go, Mr. Priest, and preach repentance to your people, for they need it and let the Mormons alone for they have repented."

Then he got angry and run about his room and opened his church book and said "Come and put your name in here for you've been here and cut yourself off from the Lutheran Church."

I said, "No, I won't take that trouble, Mr. Priest. I have the right to go to the Lutheran Church just when I please."

Then he said, "I wish you would go. I won't talk any more with you."

I told him, "Well, when I am done I will go, Mr. Priest. You sent for me to come and now I am here. I will tell you what I want to, for I know Mormonism is true and I want to tell you that, so you won't send for me any more." I showed him by the principles that Jesus taught that we had the very same gospel that was taught by Christ and his holy apostles. Then I left.

About two years after I received the gospel, Hans Westenscow and his wife received it. Hans' wife's parents were rich folks and got very angry when their daughter received the gospel. They sent word to the Priest to go to them and see if he could get them back again. The Priest went there. I didn't know anything about her folks sending for the Priest or didn't know that the Priest was there. That day I was sitting at home tailoring. Towards evening, about an hour before sunset it seemed as if something said to me "You should go out to Hans Westenscow's. I wondered. He lived a good way out from town and had a nice home close to a forest. I said to my wife, "I have to go out to Hans Westenscow's."

She said, "What will you do there?"

I said, "I don't know, I have no errand, but I feel that I must go, and I went.

When I came to the corner of the house I heard the Priest talking there. Then I knew why I had to come there for Hans had just received the gospel and was not much able to defend himself. When I went in Hans was standing with my Bible in his hand, for he had no Bible of his own at that time. When the Priest saw me come in he went and took his cap and his walking stick and said, "I must go for it is pretty near evening and I have quite a way to go home."

Then Hans Westenscow said, "No, Mr. Priest, here is Lars Nielsen, I will hear you and him talk about the Bible for he has studied the Bible and knows more about it than I do."

Then the Priest said "I have talked with him once and I will not talk with him anymore."

Hans Westenscow's wife said, "I want you to stay and talk with Lars Nielsen for we want to hear you and him talk together and find out which one is right."

Then I said, "Mr. Priest, are you a preacher of the gospel and then refuse to talk about the gospel? I will follow the Bible." Then I commenced with the first principles of the gospel and asked him, "Is not faith the first

principle of the gospel? Then after faith, baptism for remission of sins and then laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost? Do you preach that doctrine and perform those ordinances?"

"Well, no," he said, "We preach baptism and baptize small children so they can be saved."

I asked him where he could find that in the Holy Scriptures. I told him if he could show me that I would thank him for it. I said, "Can a little child have faith? And repent? And those two principles come before baptism. A little child has no faith and has nothing to repent of because he has no sin. Little children don't know the difference between good and evil."

"Well, there is the sin that came into the world with Adam and Eve," he said.

"We have nothing to do with that sin, Mr. Priest," I answered. "Don't you know that Jesus said as sin came into the world with the one man Adam, so it was forgiven in the one man, Jesus Christ."

We kept on and went through nearly all the principles and he couldn't answer because he didn't perform them that way.

At last he said "And that awful polygamy. How unchristian and sinful that is."

So I answered him and said "Mr. Priest, is that so sinful and awful in your eyes?"

He said, "Yes, of course it is."

Then I said, "haven't you read what Jesus says, that there shall many come from the East and West and from the North and the South and sit up to the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven, and they were all polygamists. So you cannot come up to that table."

"That was in those days," he said.

I said "Will you please to show me where God has changed his laws and commandments?"

He was so mad he grabbed his cap and his walking stick and away he ran without answering me. When the Priest had gone. Caroline clasped her hands and said, "I am so glad you came for now we find that the Priest cannot answer you nor clear himself and it strengthens me."

The next day the Priest went up to Sister Westenscow's parents and told them he had gone out to Hans Westenscow's home about two o'clock the day before and he had a good talk with them for a long time, and had a good hope he would get them back. "Then," he said, "a little before evening that bewildering tailor, Lars Nielsen, came and then I couldn't do anything more for where I had one passage of scripture he had ten and made them fit as my fist." Sister Westenscow's youngest brother, who was about eighteen years old, sat and listened to all that was said. That made him wonder. He couldn't see how that tailor could beat their Priest, who was a highly trained man, and the tailor had only a common education he had received in a country school.

So Peter, the boy, came to me in the evening and said he couldn't see how I could beat their Priest with the scripture when the Priest was such a learned man.

Then I said, "Well, I can tell you that in a few words."

"That is what I'd like to hear," he said.

I said, "I teach the gospel like Christ and his holy apostles and prophets taught it and that is the true plan of salvation and there is no other plan. Your Priest teaches man's doctrine and performs ordinances after man's doctrine." Jesus said, "He who serves me in man's doctrine serves me in vain," Matt 15. Then I said, "I will now take the Bible and show you what Jesus and his holy apostles taught." Then I kept him there three hours teaching him the gospel from the Bible.

He said, "I can see that that is right." He told me he had been so angry at me because he blamed me for his sister and his brother in law receiving the gospel, but before he left he told me that he wouldn't be angry at me any more. I invited him to come to our meeting and he came to our prayer meeting an evening or two after. While there we invited him to go with us to our meeting the next Sunday, which was held quite away off. His sister told him she went so it would not be too far for him to go. He went with us and listened to the preaching there and felt good. Two weeks after he became a member of the Church.

He said, "It is the Priests and not the tailor's fault, for if he hadn't come to my parents and told them that the tailor had beaten him so badly I might never have gone and heard the Mormons because I was so angry at them." One of his brothers and his sister received the gospel shortly.

We stayed in Stubberup until early in the year 1863. Hans Westenscow and I wanted to emigrate together. At that time Hans' wife was in a delicate condition and her folks did not want her to go that year, so he told me that he thought he would have to wait until the next year. He was now rich and he told me I could get the money from him just the same, but he would like for us to go together.

I said, "If you stay I can stay as we have our own home and enough to wear." Then these thoughts came to me and I said, "It King Frederic shall die then there will be war with Germany and we will both have to go to war."

We talked it over and we thought there could be no danger as King Frederic was not an old man and was strong and healthy. Then he said "Oh, go home with me and let us have a talk with Caroline, my wife, and see what she thinks." I went with him.

When we had talked there for a time she said, "Hans let us go while we can for if that should come what would become of Sidsel and me." So we prepared and on the 19th day of April, 1863 Hans Westenscow and his wife and I and my wife and children started for Utah. Hans paid my way so my prophecy was filled eight years after being made.

Hans sold his property as people had sympathy for him, but they blamed me for so many joining the church and would not buy my property, so I came away and just left it. I was the very first to receive the gospel in that town and I bore my testimony to as many as I could.

In the fall of 1863 King Frederic died and the war with Germany commenced in the spring of 1864, so if we had stayed we would have had to go in the Army as I said. Afterwards Hans Westenscow said, "There is another of your prophecies come to pass."

I commenced to study Mormonism in 1858. I could see it was right and I defended it from that time. All the time I lived there I defended Mormonism so much that they called me a "Defender of the Mormons."

We went to Copenhagen and stayed there six days. Then we went by sea from Copenhagen to Kiel, then from there we went on the railroad to Hamburg, from there over the North Sea to Grimsby, England, and stayed there three days. On the 2nd of May 1863, we went by rail through England to Liverpool. The morning of May 3, we went on board a big sailing ship, which was named "B. S. Kimball." I would sometimes say, "We are sailing on President Young's first Counselor so we will be all right."

There were about 700 Latter-Day-Saints on that vessel boarded for Utah. We were on the water 42 or 43 days.

We stayed in Florence 13 days, preparing for the journey across the Plains. I, being a tailor, was called to help make tents to take on the journey. Brother Westenscow, Brother Ole Madsen and I made a big tent. We made our tent of bed sheets made of linen that was made of flax. Mother (Sidsel, his wife) sewed a little, Sister Westenscow and Brother Madsen's oldest daughter each helped some with the sewing. Our families and a boy and girl slept inside our large tent. When we got to Salt Lake City we ripped up the tent and divided the sheets, each talking what we had put in.

Brother Variham was in charge of our company. He was sent back from Manti. He was a good man and would call to prayers night and morning. It took us 75 days, I think, to make the journey from Florence, Nebraska to Salt Lake City. I walked all the way. Some complained about having to walk but when I would hear them I would say, "I can go like a gentleman, if I don't want to carry my coat I can put it on the wagon.

One day a lady said, "Brother Nielsen, isn't it an awful trial to walk on the desert in this hot weather and sun over the ground?"

Then I said, "Yes, but remember Jesus. He stayed in the desert 40 nights and days with nothing to eat. He was fasting and praying. Now it is our turn and we have something to eat."

She said "Yes, that is true." Later she told me that was good counsel and she had come to think of that when she walked again, it didn't seem so hard for her.

There were about fifty wagons in our company. The teamsters used the long whips and said "Gee" (to the right) and "Haw" (to the left). When we stopped at night we made our camp in the usual pioneer way. We made supper and then sometimes danced and sometimes sang the Latter-Day-Saints hymns. Every morning and every evening we had our prayers. I remember how we danced barefooted on the plains in the sand when Brother Westenscow played for us. The music was good and we all enjoyed it.

I always was happy until my son Christian took sick. He would say, "I wish I could live to come to Zion and taste of Zion's fruit." And he did. We arrived in Salt Lake City on September 5 and he died October 5, and he ate lots of peaches.

One day Peter went by mistake into Brigham Young's office. The clerk asked what he wanted. He told him he wanted to see if they could get a few peaches because he had a sick brother. The clerk was a kind man and went to the door and showed him just where to go. Peter went there and found it was President Young's

home. There were two women in the room and they were so kind to him. They thought he was so smart because he could talk English so good. He had learned of the teamsters on the way. He told them he had a sick brother and said, "Would you please let me have some peaches because he can eat fruit."

The one lady took his little sack and went out after fruit and the other lady gave him some molasses bread. When the lady came back in she had his sack filled with peaches and grapes, beautiful grapes on top. Christian had all he wanted and we all had a good taste. That was the first time that any of us had tasted grapes.

When Peter came home mother said, "Where did you get all that, Niels Peter?"

He said "I got it up to President Young's. There were two of the best women and they were so kind to me."