

My Uncanny Discoveries and a Prayer that Preceded Them



I'm holding one of the stockyard images from the Alice Petersen collection

Uncanny, I think, when the archivist hands the old photographs to me, a jackpot of images related to the Ogden Stockyards. These 60-year-old albums illuminate exactly what I need to see. The Special Collections Director says, "These literally just came in, so new they haven't even been indexed yet. I knew you would be excited." When I ask their origin she says, "The estate of Alice Petersen just donated them." Alice Petersen died in 2015, but the collection arrives exactly when they can help tell the stockyard story.

A nice coincidence, that just happened to follow an intense prayer I said a few days earlier: *"If there are people's stories that should be told right now, then please help them come my way. I could use some help in this work."* The project feels important, and I want to do it justice.

Now, as a thinking person, I must consider that good fortune such as this could be the result of possibilities wholly unrelated to my prayer:

- Mere coincidence

- Hard work paying off
- The power of paying attention

To be sure, these are forces to be reckoned with, and I'm a fan of each one. My own pride too often propels me to muscle through problems with brute force, figuring God has more important concerns than my trivialities.

Yet, again and again, when I'm desperate and humble enough to [ask for help](#), what I need falls into place more beautifully and with less effort than I imagine possible. So as a person of faith, I'd be seriously ungrateful if I did not acknowledge that I said the words asking for help, and days later these incredibly useful photos fall from the sky and onto my desk.

This experiment follows something Sheri Dew told us at RootsTech. She believes that departed loved ones are ready and able to help us. "Man, I think that is so real...I think there is more help available to us than we realize, and we just need to ask. Ask. Have faith. Believe. And sometimes, I'm asking for specific people to come..." Here is the video clip:

<https://youtu.be/5vFEGIMyqvE?list=PLMhIXFs2PaFcyqT00gWDzonzhgMDksZ06P>

Her words touch me. Power, right there. So in this instance, I try it. I ask for help, and I put my spiritual energy into love for individuals on the other side who have stories that might be unearthed. I want these people to know I am thinking of them, regardless of whether I know them yet. Also I need some help. It is a palpable, tingly feeling when I say the words. (By the way, it occurs to me Dew has a new book coming out called *Worth the Wrestle*, and this is a perfect example of a lifelong wrestle my own. Pride keeps me from asking for help, but becoming humble and open enough to ask and receive is, indeed, "worth the wrestle.")

Here is a second idea that interweaves with prayer: Is it possible that ancestors want to be known to us? Is this one

reason that religious traditions around the world have ceremonies and rites for the dead?

The more I do the work of telling family stories, the more I feel the answer is "yes."

Here is data point #2.

A few days after the photo incident, it's Saturday and I am on the phone with my brother Matthew. We get talking about our recent genealogy finds, and he mentions that he came across an intriguing story. One of our ancestral relatives adopted a Native American baby. Matthew tells me this brief and somewhat random tidbit, and then our conversation turns to other topics.

That night, at around 2 a.m., I wake up and can't sleep. This is unusual for me so rather than lying there, I get out of bed. In the wee hours I feel at leisure to clear paperwork from my desk so I peruse the winter edition of the Utah Genealogical Society newsletter, piled there from January. Skim, skim, skim.

Then an article catches my eye, "Adoption of Indian Children by Mormon Pioneers, by Joan E. Healey, AG." I read it and find it to be an interesting overview, although nothing specific jumps out at me. Since it relates to Matthew's comment, though, I email it to him with a quick note: "I thought I'd forward in light of our conversation yesterday."

A few hours later, Matthew emails me back, "Very Interesting, Rhonda. Look at the last full

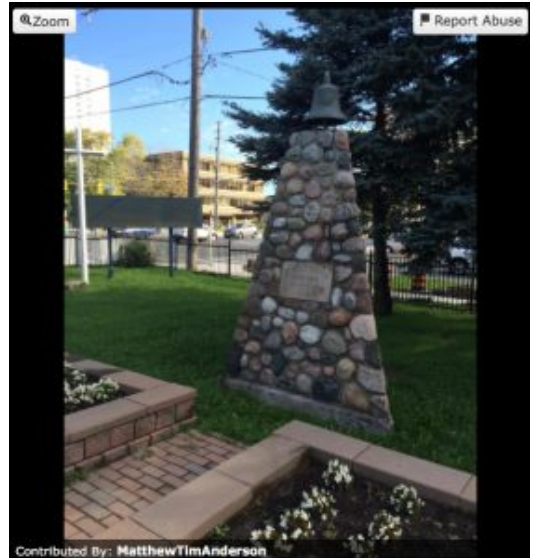


Family of Deborah Lamoreaux Leithead, husband James Leithead, and their children including adopted Nellie (Waddie) on the right

paragraph on page two. The Indian girl, Waddie, is the exact girl I was reading about and mentioned to you.” The hairs on my arms prickle, as though I was awakened at 2 a.m. to find this story.

Turns out, it intertwines with another uncanny discovery by my brother Matthew. Waddie (renamed Nellie) was ultimately adopted by Deborah Lamoreaux Leithead and her husband James Leithead. Deborah’s maiden name is L’Amoreaux, a family line that Matthew has come to love recently. He began tracking it down, and was delighted to discover that our L’Amoreaux ancestor hailed from a part of Canada where he does a lot of business. So on a recent trip, Matthew located a park associated with our ancestor and when he went there, found more than expected: a tall stone monument erected to honor our sixth great-grandfather and the community he founded. In the church next door, the ladies treated my brother, a direct descendant, like a celebrity.

Want to know the *really* weird part? That park, church, and monument are in the very same place where Matthew *always* stays when he is in town. Has for years. That land is our ancestral home.



L'Amoraux obelisk near
Toronto, Ontario Canada

Is it possible we feel drawn—for reasons we do not understand—to places where our families once lived? That pin-prickly feeling again when I think of it.

Back to Nellie (Waddie). As I process all of this, I wonder if it is pure coincidence, or does she want to be known?

I feel a sense of awe, and decide to dig deeper. When I read the story of Nellie, her adoptive parents and her dear husband, it touches me in a profound way. But what to do with it? Well, since telling people's stories is what I do, I want to tell about her beautiful life and family. I chronicle the life of Nellie, her dear husband Daniel and posterity in [this article](#). Check it out, you won't be sorry.

Beyond learning about Nellie, I am also curious if there are other reasons for me to find this information. Is there anything more to discover? I want to be sure, so I spend (probably too much) time reading related accounts on FamilySearch. I am rewarded for the effort by learning that this story weaves with the lives of my direct ancestors far more than I could have anticipated.

Nellie's adopted father, James Leithead, kept detailed

journals and at least four separate ancestors of mine—all unrelated to each other—turn up in his writings. James and Deborah Leithead crossed the plains with my ancestor from the Lamoreaux line (not a big surprise, being cousins), but I was also surprised to see my ancestor Isaac Behunin in that same company. This journal gives a detailed account of the journey they made together, something I haven't found in my own family records.

Before that, James Leithead talks about coming to Nauvoo with the Allred clan. Both my mother and my husband's mother are Allred descendants through brothers of that family. Later, James Leithead writes about his friend John Hess, in Farmington, and John Hess signed the baptism record for the adopted Nellie (Waddie). John Hess is another patriarch of my family. There's more, but you get the idea.

This started with a prayer for help, and almost immediately, these uncanny details showed up. As Sheri Dew put it, "Man, I think that is so real."

In my life right now, I am experiencing so many blessings that I didn't expect by knowing and remembering those who have come before. I feel power and peace through these roots, anchoring me to something bigger than my daily concerns. Rather than this feeling like work it is the most profound privilege, and I look forward to seeing where these fresh details lead...I have a feeling this is not done.

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Rhonda Lauritzen is the founder and an author at Evalogue.Life, where we tell personal and family stories that inspire. (Let us help you tell yours!) Rhonda lives to hear and tell about people's lives, especially the uncanny moments. She and her husband Milan restored an old Victorian in Ogden and work together in Evalogue.Life, weaving family and business together.