
Oral History of
Lester Gee

Collected By
Justin Gee

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Us Studies 4 period
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LESTER GEE

NAME: LESTER JOSEPH GEE
BORN: NOVEMBER 6, 1908
BORN IN: MAMMOTH, UTAH
HE PASSED AWAY IN SEPTEMBER 28, 1983
INTERVIEW: MARCH 19, 1982

Dennis Barnes: This is an interview with Winnie and Lester Gee. The date is March 19, 1982, and we are at Winnie and Lester's home. To begin with we are going to get some of Lester's life history. Maybe you could tell us, Lester, first a little bit about your birth, of dates, and this type of stuff.

Lester: Well I was born in Mammoth on November 6, 1908. Son of James Gee and Engabor Christine Sorensen Gee. My father was born in England and came to Utah when he was just a small boy. My mother was born in Denmark and came to Utah when she was about five years old. They was married in Moroni, Utah and they lived there most of their married life.

Dennis: What brought them to the United States? Did they uh...

Lester: My father's parents joined the church, and moved to St. George, Utah. And then to Washington, Utah. They lived in Washington for I don't know how long. I think about 3 years. And then moved to Moroni. My mother was born in Denmark and then she came to Utah with an aunt and some other person before her parents moved to Utah. They were converts too, they came to join the

church, and they settled in Moroni, Utah. I don't remember the date they were married. They lived in Moroni and my father was working in the mines in Mammoth, Utah. He went up there sometimes in the winter, and they were living there when I was born. They lived there after that, I don't know how long, they moved back to Moroni sometime in the summer and sometimes go to the mine during the winter. The last time they lived in Mammoth I was about 4 or 5 years old. I can't remember too much about Mammoth, there are a few things I can remember, I can remember riding with my father to Eureka, my brother Tindle had a tooth ache, and we got on a slay up in Mammoth and rode the slay down to the railroad track and then walked the railroad track back to Eureka. We ditched the slay in the brush, went to the dentist, and on the way back picked up slay and went on and that was it. My dad pulled me and my brother up the hill. I can remember some of the people, my mother had a brother living in Mammoth who had family there.

I remember one time, a water fight with his name was Eland Chris Sorensen, he and the neighbor, they had a water fight when I was about 4 years old, each of them had big buckets of water.

Another time I remember I got lost and mother got quit excited and got some of the neighbors out looking for me, I got in large cardboard box put on the road, it was just a dirt road that wagons from the store used to run a delivery wagon at home that would run groceries around to the houses. And there was just dirt roads, really dusty and I got on this road and I got in this cardboard box and just made heaps of dirt and went under there and played until I fell asleep, they couldn't find me. Finally the wagon came and,

the delivery wagon, tipped the box over and I was under it. And a few little things like that is all I can remember about Mammoth.

When we went back to Moroni my dad farmed some in the summer, we had a small farm and we would go get it ready in the spring. We did what they called team work man and team. We always had a good team of horses and we'd get paid so much for man or team per day. You'd get about 3 dollars for a man and about 5 for a man and team. That was pretty good wages at that time.

Dennis: Did your brothers, did you have any brothers that was older that worked with him?

Lester: No, there was I had an older brother that was the first born. Died when he was just a day or two old. Then I had a brother Tindle Swen he was two years older than I, he was born in 1906. And a sister about two years younger. I had a younger sister Elsie. She died when she was about eight years old with appendicitis. We lived in Moroni, and there was lots of little happenings. It seems like I can remember driving cows out to the west of town, there is lots of small pastures. We had a pasture for the cows and sometimes we had horses out there driving cows to the pasture, we would go out and get them at night. I'd ride one of the work horses sometimes and my uncle Josiah Blackham had a horse he would race some. I imagine I must have been about 9 years old when I first started to drive uncle Josiah Blackham's horses to the pasture. And old fellar he was all right when you took the cows out to the pasture. Put them in the gate got on and you start home and about more than half of the time he would run away with me. It was quite a hilly streets and he'd go up there and one time

he run down and turned the corner to go into the yard. I didn't turn. I guess I must have lit about 20 feet out there in the dirt.

I remember I think it was about the second car that was ever come to Moroni. My Uncle Josiah Blackham bought a Ford it was a 1913 or 14 model. It had brass headlights, they were back by the windshield, and there was coal oil. I don't ever think he ever did light the lights. He would run it a little in the summer time and as soon as the first snow would fall he would put it in the garage and there it would sit until spring. It was open, I don't even think it had a side to it as far as that time. I think the tires and wheels were 30 by 3 or 30 by 3 1\2. Nobody carried a spare.

Dennis: Were they solid rubber or Pneumatic tires?

Lester: No, they were pneumatic tires 30 by 3 inch. I don't think it had a battery, I know it didn't have a battery in it. You would crank it with a crank in front.

Dennis: Do you remember about this time about how many people was living in Moroni and around that area.

Lester: Well I imagine there must have been about six or seven hundred, just more or less guessing. It never did grow a whole lot it got up to about maybe a thousand or nine hundred but I don't think there was over twelve hundred people know but, well maybe fifteen.

Dennis: Was it mostly just farming and ...?

Lester: Just farming entirely at that time there were lots of farms around and quite a few sheep, cattle.

Dennis: When did they start the turkey business and that down there?

Lester: Well that hasn't been until maybe the last fifteen or twenty years since they started the turkey business down there. There's lots of sheep in Mount Pleasant and Fountain Green is quite noted for sheep.

Dennis: So you started school there then, living in Moroni.

Lester: Yes, I started kindergarten there when I was five years old. In fact I went there before I was five, I was five in November. They raised quite alot of sugar beets about that time and they built a sugar factory there. My dad raised some sugar beets. I started working for farmers in the sugar beets when I was about seven or eight years old. We used to crawl on our knees and pick them down to one beet in a spot and they would have men with hoes they had long handled hoes and they'd do what they called blockem and they would cut them down to where there was only two or three beets maybe in a clump and us kids would crawl on our knees and thin out all but maybe the, we were supposed to pick the best plant and leave one about every foot.

Dennis: Just kind of thin them out then huh? Umm let's see what about, do you remember anything about or any experiences about your school days the things that, how it might differ from now you know the things that they taught and the way that they done it.

Lester: Well I believe that it was about the same they had a grade school there and I don't remember when they finally built a high school. It was only about a block from where we lived I guess I went to high school and the grade school and the building room. I had eight years of grade school and four years of high school at that time. I remember the first, I think I was in kindergarten.

Sierra(?) Christensen was my teacher. And she later married, she finally married an Anderson I don't remember his first name. They later moved to Nephi, Forest Anderson, he was her son. Dennis: The fellow that ran the gas, use to deliver gas.

Lester: Yes. And I don't remember who my second grade teacher was I think she was a Christensen too. The town was full of Christensen, about half I guess. Laughter. And I don't think remember much about third grade but my fourth grade teacher was Miss Clara Stark, I remember her quite well she was kind of a strict person. I remember one time me and some of the other boys were quite noisy and she told me to leave the room and not to come back until I had saw the principal. There was two doors going out of the room, one on the north west corner and another on the west side of the room. So I went out the northwest corner and into the hall and another hall went south and went out the front of the school building. And she said don't come back until you've saw the principal so I poked my head back in and said, "All right old Stark." And when I passed the west door she nailed me by the ear. (Laughter from all in room) She got a hold of my ear and boy did she box my ears. She was a real good teacher and we always got along real well after that.

Dennis: Got straightened out huh. Did you, what kind of sports and that did they, do you remember any of them?

Lester: Well the town had a ball team but they didn't have no little leagues or any thing like that. The kids had to invent their own recreation pretty much. We used to play alot of marbles. There were several different kinds of ring marbles. We used to

have a game we called Guinea (?) you'd whittle a piece of hard wood handle or something down on each end and you would take a stick and hit the end and one would bounce up in the air and you would try to knock this guinea with stick you had in your hand and then you would give the person who was playing so many jumps to get to the guinea and if he could jump it then he got to knock the guinea and if he couldn't then you got that many points and then knock it again. Then we used to play bell, a game we called bell. You would get a cow bell or something and four or five kids would take the bell and run and they were supposed to ring the bell every block or something and you would give the one that had the bell the head start and they would run through town and through the lots I don't believe we were supposed to go near the corrals if I remember right we had some restrictions. And the other team would run after us and try to find us and try to catch us. They would be maybe one way and we had gone the other and then we would ring the bell and they would hear the bell sound and they would run after the bell again. And then we used to have alot of fun with the thrashing machine. We used to have the old steam thrashers and then they had the steam engine would pull the separator. They had coal bins on the steam engine and they would haul coal and they had a man with a team of horses would haul coal and they had a water tank that would also haul water. And it would turn to steam, and they set the separator that would haul the grain and put it in stacks and bundles. And they would set the separator close to the stacks. I imagine it was probably 40 feet of belt between the old steam engine with the fire in it to the stacks of grain. The flywheel on

the engine would pull the flywheel on the tractor and we've have guys pitch bundles into it. It would carry the grain to the grainery in sacks whatever they could carry a bushel or a bushel and a half or whatever. We'd have two or three men carrying sacks and two or three pitching bundles. The separator man and the engine man and the water hauler. At night they would shut down and they would have quite a head of steam on it still in these engines. Us kids thought it was great fun climb up on the engine and pull the whistle they had a whistle to blow. It was quite a loud whistle they would use it for signaling. We would just get up and pull it and somebody would come after us and we would run and hide. One time we took a scoop shovel and tied the wire on to the whistle and threw it over the side and it honked for quite a long while before somebody came and shut it off. And they chased us kids around town but they never did that much to us.

Dennis: Did most of the food you ate, I guess you raised. And what did you get from the store mainly flour and sugar and this type of thing?

Lester: In the fall they'd take as much wheat as they'd figure we'd need to grind for our years supply of flour, then we'd take it to the mill. And for 100 pounds of wheat you'd get so many pounds of flour, and so many pounds of bran. Mash was a little richer there was a little more grain in that. If you'd get so much flour and so much mash and so much bran for each 100 pounds. It was about 40 pounds, well maybe about 60 pound of flour and 20 of the mash or 30, well I don't remember the portions. But we did take the grise (?) to the mill every fall to get our years supply

of flour. We always had a few chickens and a teams of horses and at least one milk cow. We'd put the cow out in the pasture in the summer time and feed them a little hay and maybe some bran in the winter time.

Dennis: And then you just with your meat did you just raise stock?

Lester: We raised pigs, we had pigs all the time, I don't think we raised any beef. I don't remember, we did have sheep quite often we'd buy a sheep and butcher it.

Dennis: How was the hunting back then did many people hunt?

Lester: No, not many people did. There was a few people around town more or less, a few mostly business men. There was a man over at the pool hall, he liked to hunt deer and ducks. They had a sage hen hunt but I don't remember much about that.

But my dad always had a good team of horses and he had a wagon with a deep box and a cover. Alot of years I know quite a few years I know anyway four or five people would have my dad take them deer hunting and they would go up on the mountain above Wales, Utah (?). I don't think dad even had a rifle at that time.

Dennis: Was the deer population did it seem to be...

Lester: It don't seem like they got too many deer really. I don't think anybody hunted them and there didn't seem to be very many deer either.

Dennis: What about maybe the predators what about cats and coyotes and stuff?

Lester: About the what?

Dennis: About the cats and coyotes was there quite a few?

Lester: Well you didn't hear too much about them.

Dennis: So it wasn't like they weren't really overly plentiful or anything?

Lester: I don't think so. I saw a few like up in the area we used to haul wood. When we were up in the hills north of town through cedars and sagebrush and kiddelwood, you get that in the summer. We'd chop it up and put it in the shed for the winter, alot of it. We used to see an occasional coyote and quite a few rabbits.

Dennis: Did you ever eat much rabbit?

Lester: Yes, we ate rabbits. I got a .22 when I was about eleven years old and my brother was about thirteen I guess. We had little, a small horse that we had for a pony. It was about the time, I guess it was before I was that old. It was during the war hay got an awful price, it got as high as \$20 a ton. Imagine that? One year we kept the horse and we bought sugar beet and molasses, go up to the sugar factory and get molasses and buy straw. And put the straw in the manger and pour a can of molasses to kind of as an appetizer and that is what the horses ate. Dad always had a team there, I think he might have fed the horses a little bit of hay but not all of them. The cows ate molasses and beet pulp and I know you couldn't drink much milk when you fed them beet pulp.

Dennis: Oh it was pretty rich huh?

Lester: (Laughter) I remember one time a bunch of us were going hunting rabbits we had a team of horses it was mostly older boys and I had a sleigh with a team of horses on it and we went up north of town and had a old wagon box on the sleigh and the bottom

of it had holes in it and there were rabbits up the side of the road running by Elmer Neilson. He had a double barrel shotgun that had hammers on it and he picked up his gun by the barrel and his stock had fell down through the holes in the boards in the bottom of the wagon box. And when it pulled out one of the hammers had cocked and pulled back and it went off and blew the whole side of his head off. It was an awful sight I'll tell ya.

Dennis: You was there, you were there at the time. Oh ya I'll bet.

Lester: And I remember definitely and always will remember the day the Armistice of World War I. It had started working for my brother and I both were working for and I believe my dad was. I used to harvest the beets they would have a beet plow and it would kind of lift them and loosen them a little bit. Young kids take them by the tops and bump two beets together to knock the mud off and lay them in wind (?) rows. And then they'd have grown men or bigger boys come in and top them in the wind rows and throw them into piles. They had a V shaped thing to smooth the spot between the wind rows. They would top them and kind of throw them in piles, then load them with deep forks on the wagons to take them to the sugar factories. Out south of Moroni was a little town called Chester. The Christensen brothers had quite a large batch of beets there. I was working with my brother, I don't remember if my dad was there or not. But anyway, it had snowed a little bit and it was muddy and nasty there and cold. This one Christensen brother had taken a load of beets to the sugar factory, it was about a mile or two, and he came back but before he got back to the beet field

they got word that the Armistice was signed. They blew the sugar factory whistle, just tied it down or held it, and he came down the gravel road by Chester's store just before the he turned into the field there was a ditch, and he had the horses running just as fast as they could run, and as he turned into the field he tipped the wagon over and the beet box fell off the wheels. They would just set them on the bolster. Then they would raise one side and tip the beets into the pile at the sugar factory. Anyway the beet box fell off the wagon, it didn't hit old Christensen, he was just trapped underneath it and he couldn't get out until somebody came and lifted it. But there was quite a celebration there was noise, racket, squealing, hollering, and the sugar factory whistle was blowing.

Dennis: Let's see, what year would that have been?

Lester: It was 17th, 18th, or 19th. ^{Armistice day} Bar mitzvah day.

Dennis: Let's see, how old would you have been eleven or twelve years old?

Lester: I was born in 1908, I would have been about nine.

Dennis: Do you remember any of the fellows around town that you hear about having to go to the war, or coming back or getting..?

Lester: No, I knew alot of them at the time that went but I can't recall the names too much now.

Winnie: Any of your uncles or..?

Lester: Stanley Simms, he married my cousin. He was in the war and Alvin Simms. Edward Neilson my cousin was in the Army. Eland Chris Sorsenson from Mammoth join the Navy, he was about 17.

I can't remember alot of their names. A couple of Story boys went. There were several killed but that was quite awhile ago I can't remember.

I attended public schools in Moroni through the 7th grade and I was ordained a deacon while we still lived in Moroni.

Dennis: Did you remember people being very active or place much of a value on attending meetings? Were times hard enough that they just had to worry about making ends meet?

Lester: Well some people were real religious. I had an uncle, my dad's youngest brother, he went on a mission.

Dennis: What's his name?

Lester: Irvin Gee. He was a patriarch in Provo for 25 years, I guess he was. Up until the time he died. He went on a mission and he taught school in Moroni for 35 years I think. He was my teacher in the 7th grade. He and a fellow by the name of Bill Prestwich. I had two teachers. He was quite religious, Blackham's were mostly real religious. One of them married my aunt Mary Jane Gee. Josiah Blackham, and he had four or five sons and about three daughters. Most of the people, about like there are here in town, some was religious, some went to church all the time, and some didn't go to church but they were still about as religious, some of them. But, my uncle Irvin always was real strict on religion.

Dennis: Then it was about this time that your family went to Delta, was it when you was...

Lester: There was a comical incidence there. We used to go to school Mr. Prestwich, I think he was the mayor of Moroni at that time and he had a real loud booming voice. You could hear him for

a city block if he just talked natural. We went into class and there was a boy in my class and he was alot larger than I and his name was Leo Story and he'd got up on the desk part of the seat on the front row. And as I come through the door, he jumped and held right around my neck and down on the floor I went. And Mr. Prestwich was right behind me. He said "Story you big ole tumble ov'r and bawl for milk". And this Prestwich one of his daughters name was Anna. She married a Robertson, from Fountain Green, he was a sheep man and they had a daughter, Maurine. And she married a Lynn Stewart from Fairveiw and they live in Spanish Fork now and their 3rd daughter married Monte our youngest son. Sandra's great, great grandpa, well great grandpa I guess it would be. This is the Prestwich that taught me school in the seventh grade.

Dennis: It's funny how small, you know. The whole world is when you look at it.

Winnie: Ya, I'll say. Now it's Delta huh?

Lester: Well when I was about 13 things wasn't going very well. Well between 12 and 13 I guess I was. My dad's brother Sam Gee moved to Delta and my dad helped him move down, they moved everything with teams and wagons. Sam had alot of equipment, some stock when he lived in Freedom. He helped him move down there he got to looking around and decided he wanted to move to Delta. So he bought some farm ground in Delta and we moved to Delta at that time. I believe I finished the 7th grade in Moroni school and 8th grade in Delta. We use to ride horses to school, it was about 6 miles Sutherland into Delta. And high school in Delta they called high school the 9th grade. I went to 9th grade until March.

My dad was sick he had anemia and couldn't do the farm work so I quit school to do the farm work as much as I could. And the next year I only got to go until Christmas, the chores needed to be done and this that and the other. Me and my brother Tindle we use to ride the horses from Sutherland into High School and back, and sometimes a buggy. He tried to raise Alfalfa and beets, they had build a big sugar factory in Delta and everyone was going to raises sugar beets in that heavy clay soil but they didn't do very well. Alot of hard work to raised a few beets about 7 or 8 tons to an acre, 10 was tops. And the ground that dad bought was too good of ground or too much water, the hay grew too rank and tall or something the seed don't farm right good when it is real heavy and it wouldn't ripen real good either on a count of the heaviness. The seed grew lots better on the alkali ground that wasn't worth anything or good for anything else and on it the alfalfa grew bunches. It was the best feed ground, but anyway it was kind of a starvation proposition the ground had got water logged they had all the water they needed and they used way too much and the type of soil and everything went water logged and we had a big drains they dug, oh eight or nine feet deep, and put 16 and 12 inch tile in them and some of our grand was sandy and the water washed the sand and it would sink down between the tile and pretty soon the big hole would be big enough to put two or three cars and just cave right in to it.

Dennis: So you used quite a few wells then?

Lester: No we had to use the water out of the Seveir River. They had canals run all over through Delta, south of Delta, and

over toward Deseret and Oasis, out to Sutherland and Abraham, and Woodrow and Sugarville, and the towns on the north tract. We tried to farm there quite a few years. I worked for farmers some, I did alot of work for farmers besides working for dad.

Dennis: How long did you live in Delta?

Lester: Oh, about seven or eight years, I guess. I don't remember the dates very well I guess, I think it must have been about 1921 when we moved there and we moved away in 1928.

Dennis: Now where did you move to from there?

Lester: Lehi.

Dennis: What did he do up there?

Lester: At Lehi, he was sick mostly, he was sick the last several years we lived in Delta and wasn't able to do alot. I remember one time he had been sick and they didn't think he would live, just any day, and he asked to have Patriarch Robinson from Deseret and President Hinkley, I think he was the president of the stake. He asked if they would come up and administer to him and it was just before the beet harvest, and he'd been in bed for a month and I guess. They had given him blood transfusions and I don't know what all, anyway he wasn't expected to live hardly at all. Those two gentlemen came up and administered to my dad, I think it was on a Saturday or Sunday, and he was hauling beets within a week on the beet wagon with the team. And he got by that whole beet harvest and did pretty good that winter and in the spring and summer again he got down again he just didn't have... He was in and out of the Salt Lake Hospital and they gave him transfusions.

Winnie: I think it was anemia.

Lester: So then we moved to Lehi, I guess it was the spring of 1958. Moved up there with a team of wagons everything on it.

These were just a few of the events that happened in my grandpa's younger life. It was filled with fun but also trials as he learned to work at a very young age.

Lester married Martha Winnifred Burraston, who was a very happy person and brought very much joy into his life. They had seven children six boys and one girl.

My grandpa died only a year and a half after this interview was given.