

NARCISSA AUGUST 1836

by Crystal Calhoun



Aug. 5th. 1836

Morn; came all of ten miles last evening, and did not arrive here till after dark. Mr. McLeod and his company started earlier than we did, intending to come but a little way. We could not get ready to come with him, and the man who piloted us led us wrong - much out of the way. Those on whom we depended to drive cattle disappointed us. Husband and myself fell in behind them to assist John Alts, who was alone with them. This made us later into camp than the rest of our company. We came through several swamps, and all the last part of the way we were so swarmed with mosquitoes as to be scarcely able to see - especially while crossing the Port Neuf, which we did, just before coming into camp. It is the widest river I have forded on horseback. It seemed the cows would run mad for the mosquitoes; we could scarcely get them along. Mr. McLeod met us and invited us to tea, which was a great favor. Thus blessings gather thick around us. We have been in the mountains so long we find the scenery of this valley very grateful to the eye - a large stream on my right and one on my left, skirted with timber. At Fort Hall was our first sight of Snake river. We shall follow the south side of it for many days. We have passed many places where the soil is good, and would be fertile if there were frequent rains; but usually the country is barren, and would be a sandy desert were it not for the sage brush.

Eve. We passed the American Falls on Snake river just after dinner. The roar of the water is heard at a considerable distance. We stopped during the greatest heat for rest and dinner. Now that the Indians are no longer with us we shall expect to make two camps. I expect this to be a great mercy to us weak females, for it was more than we could well endure to travel during the heat of the day without refreshment.

Aug. 6th. - Route very bad and difficult to-day. We crossed a small stream full of falls. The only pass where we could cross was just on the edge of rocks above one of the falls. While the pack animals were crossing, both ours and the company's, there was such a rush as to crowd two of our horses over the falls, both packed with dried meat. It was with great difficulty they were got out, one of them having been nearly an hour much to his injury. We have a little rice to eat with our dry meat, given us by Mr. McLeod, which makes it relish quite well.

Aug. 7th. - Sabbath; came fifteen miles and camped at a fine place, with plenty of good grass for our weary animals. Thus are blessings so mingled that it seems as if there was nothing else but mercy and blessings all the way. Was there ever a journey like this performed where the sustaining hand of God has been so manifest every morning. Surely the children of Israel could not have been more sensible of the pillar of fire by night than we have been of that hand that has led us thus safely on. God had heard prayer in our behalf, and even now while I am writing on this holy day is the sweet incense of prayer ascending before the throne of Heavenly grace. Nor are we forgotten by our beloved churches, at home in the prayers of the Sanctuary, we are too sensible of its blessed effects to believe otherwise; and oh! how comforting is this thought to the heart of the missionary. We love to think and talk of home with such feelings as these. It warms our hearts and strengthens and

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encourages us in the work of our beloved Master, and make our journeyings easy.

Aug. 8th, Monday. - Snake river. We have an excellent camp ground to-night; plenty of feed for our horses and cattle. We think it remarkable that our cattle should endure the journey as well as they do. We have two suckling calves that appear to be in very good spirits; they suffer some from sore feet - otherwise they have come on well and will go through. Have come eighteen miles to-day and have taken it so deliberately that it has been easy for us. The hunters came in last night well loaded; they had been in the mountains two days after game and killed three elk and two antelope. This is the first elk meat we have had, and it is the last opportunity we expect to have of taking any more game. We are told that many have traveled the whole distance from Rendezvous to Walla Walla without any fresh meat. We think our will last until we reach the salmon fishing at Snake Falls. Thus we are well provided for contrary to our expectations. Mr. McLeod has excellent hunters; this is the reason why we live so well. There is but little game and that is found at a great distance from the route.

11th. - Tuesday and Wednesday have been tedious days, both for man and beast - lengthy marches without water; rocky and sandy. Had a present to-night of a fresh salmon; also a plate of fried cakes from Mr. McLeod. (Girls, if you wish to know how they taste you can have pleasure by taking a little flour and water, make some dough, and roll it thin, cut it into square blocks, then take some beef fat and fry them. You need not put either salt or pearlsh in your dough.) Believe me, I relish them as well as I ever did any made at home.

12th. - Friday; raised camp this morning at sunrise and came two hours ride to the salmon fishery. Found a few lodges of Diggers, of the Snake tribe, so called because they live on roots during winter, who had just commenced fishing. Obtained some and boiled it for our breakfast. Find it good eating; had we been a few days earlier we should not have been able to obtain any fish, for they had but just come up. They never go higher than these falls and come here every season.

Friday eve. - Dear Harriet, the little trunk you gave me has come with me so far, and now I must leave it here alone. Poor little trunk, I am sorry to leave thee; thou must abide here alone, and no more by thy presence remind me of my dear Harriet. Twenty miles below the falls on Snake river this shall be thy place of rest. Farewell, little trunk, I thank thee for thy faithful services, and that I have been cheered by thy presence so long. Thus we scatter as we go along. The hills are so steep and rocky that husband thought it best to lighten the wagon as much as possible and take nothing but the wheels, leaving the box with my trunk. I regret leaving anything that came from home, especially that trunk, but it is best. It would have been better for me not to have attempted to bring any baggage whatever, only what was necessary to use on the way. It costs so much labor, besides the expense of animals. If I were to make the journey again I would make quite different preparations. To pack and unpack so many times, and cross so many streams where the packs frequently get wet, requires no small amount of labor, besides the injury of the articles. Our books, what few we have, have been wet several times. In going from Elmira to Williamsport this trunk fell

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into the creek and wet all my books, and Richard's, too, several times. The sleigh box came off and all of us came near a wetting likewise. The custom of the country is to possess nothing, and then you will lose nothing while traveling. Farewell for the present.

13th. - Saturday; Dear Harriet, Mr. McKay has asked the privilege of taking the little trunk along, so that my soliloquy about it last night was for naught. However, it will do me no good, it may him.

We have come fifteen miles and have had the worst route in all the journey for the cart. We might have had a better one but for being misled by some of the company who started out before the leaders. It was two o'clock before we came into camp.

The river is divided by two islands into three branches, and is fordable. The packs are placed upon the tops of the highest horses and in this way we crossed without wetting. Two of the tallest horses were selected to carry Mrs. Spalding and myself over. Mr. McLeod gave me his and rode mine. The last branch we rode as much as half a mile in crossing and against the current, too, which made it hard for the horses, the water being up to their sides. Husband had considerable difficulty in crossing the cart. Both cart and mules were turned upside down in the river and entangled in the harness. The mules would have been drowned but for a desperate struggle to get them ashore. Then after putting two of the strongest horses before the cart, and two men swimming behind to steady it, they succeeded in getting it across. I once thought that crossing streams would be the most dreaded part of the journey. I can now cross the most difficult stream without the least fear. There is one manner of crossing which husband has tried but I have not, neither do I wish to. Take an elk skin and stretch it over you, spreading yourself out as much as possible, then let the Indian women carefully put you on the water and with a cord in the mouth they will swim and draw you over. Edward, how do you think you would like to travel in this way?

15th. - Yesterday Mr. McLeod with most of his men left us, wishing to hasten his arrival at Snake Fort, leaving us a pilot and his weakest animals to come in with us at our leisure. This is a relief to us, as it is difficult to bring our cattle up to the speed they wish to travel. We passed the hot springs just before noon, which was quite a curiosity. Boiled a bit of dry salmon in one of them in five minutes.

16th. - This eve found plenty of berries called hawthorn on the stream where we have encamped. They are large as a cherry and taste much like a mealy sweet apple. Our route on this side of Snake river is less hilly and difficult than on the south side, and said to be two days shorter.

19th. - Arrived at Snake Fort, Boise, about noon. It is situated on Bigwood river, so called because the timber is larger than any to be seen this side of the mountains. It consists chiefly of cotton wood and is small compared with timber in the states. Snake Fort is owned and built by Mr. Thomas McKay, one of our company, whom we expect to leave here. He, with Mr. McLeod, gave us a hearty welcome; dined with them. Mr. McLeod was ready to leave on the morrow, but said he would stay a day longer to give us the opportunity of doing some necessary work, for which we were thankful.

20th. - Saturday. Last night I put my clothes in water and this morning finished washing before

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breakfast. This is the third time I have washed since I left home—once at Fort Williams and once at Rendezvous. Mr. McLeod called this evening to see if we were ready to leave. He observed we had been so engaged in labor as to have no time for rest, and proposed for ourselves to remain over Sabbath. This I can assure you was a favor for which we can never be too thankful, for our souls need the rest of the Sabbath as well as our bodies.

21st. - Sabbath. Rich with heavenly blessings has the day of rest been to my soul. Mr. Spalding was invited to preach in the Fort at 11 o'clock. The theme was the character of the blessed Savior. All listened with good attention.

22d. - Left the Fort yesterday; came a short distance to the crossing of Snake river, crossed and encamped for the night. The river had three branches, divided by islands, as it was when we crossed before. The first and second places were very deep, but we had no difficulty in crossing on horseback. The third was deeper still; we dare not venture horseback. This being a fishing post of the Indians, we easily found a canoe, made of rushes and willows, on which we placed ourselves and our saddles (Sister Spalding and myself), when two Indians on horseback, each with a rope attached to the canoe, towed us over. (O! if father and mother and the girls could have seen us in our snug little canoe, floating on the water.) We were favorites of the company. No one else was privileged with a ride on it. I wish I could give you a correct idea of this little bark. It is simply bunches of rushes tied together, and attached to a frame made of a few sticks of small willows. It was just large enough to hold us and our saddles. Our baggage was transported on the top of our tallest horses, without wetting.

As for the wagon, it is left at the Fort, and I have nothing to say about crossing it at this time. Five of our cattle were left there also, to be exchanged for others at Walla Walla. Perhaps you will wonder why we have left the wagon, having taken it so nearly through. Our animals were failing, and the route in crossing the Blue Mountains is said to be impassable for it. We have the prospect of obtaining one in exchange at Vancouver. If we do not we shall send for it, when we have been to so much labor in getting it thus far. It is a useful article in the country.

Now, for Edward's amusement, and that he may know how to do when he comes over the Rocky Mountains, I will tell how we got the cattle over the rivers. Our two Indian boys, Richard and John, have had the chief management of driving them all the way, and are to be commended for the patience they have manifested. They have had some one or two to help usually, but none so steady drivers as themselves. When a stream is to be crossed, where it is necessary for the animals to swim, Richard comes back after the cows. Having obtained consent he rides over, accompanied by his fellow drivers, all stripped to the shirt. Then they return with their horses, if the stream is wide and difficult. If not they leave their horses, tie their shifts over their heads, swim back, collect the cows and drive them through, all swimming after them. If the stream is very wide, and they return with their horses, they drive them swimming on the horses behind them. This saves them from the too great fatigue of swimming for the river twice. They love to swim, as they love to eat, and by doing so

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have saved me many an anxious feeling, for the relief it has given my husband many times. In this case all the horses and mules were driven across likewise. Usually the best Indian swimmer was selected and mounted the horse that was good for leading to go before the animals as a guide, while many others swim after them to drive them over. When once under way, such a snorting and halloaing you never heard. At the same time you can see nothing save so many heads floating upon the water. Soon they gain the opposite shore, triumphantly ascend its banks, shake themselves, and retire to their accustomed employment.

26th. - Friday. On account of our worn out cattle and horses, it was thought best to separate from Mr. McLeod's party, at least some of us, and travel more deliberately. Two mules and a horse have almost entirely given out. It is necessary that some of our party go to Vancouver immediately for supplies and see Mr. Parker before he leaves. It was thought best for my husband and Mr. Gray to go. As Mr. McLeod intended to make but a day's stop at Walla Walla, we came on with him, leaving Mr. and Mrs. Spalding, the hired men, with most of our baggage, and the Nez Perce chief, Rottenbelly, to pilot them in. We parted from them about 3 o'clock and came as far as the Lone Tree. The place called Lone Tree is a beautiful valley in the region of Powder river, in the center of which is a solitary tree, quite large, but the side of which travellers usually stop and refresh themselves. We left our tent for Mrs. Spalding, as we expect to be out only a few nights, while she might be out many. Mr. McLeod kindly offered his for my use and when I arrived in camp found it pitched and in readiness for me. This was a great favor as the wind blew quite hard and the prospect was for a cool night.

August 27th. - Came in sight of the hill that leads to the Grande Ronde. This morning Mr. McLeod remained behind in pursuit of game, and did not come into camp until we had made a long nooning, although we had begun to feel a little concerned about him, yet about 3 o'clock he came into camp loaded with wild ducks, having taken twenty-two. Now, mother, he had just, as he always did during the whole journey, sent over nine of them. Here also, Richard caught fresh salmon, which made us another good meal, and if we had been out of provisions we might have made dinner upon the fresh-water clams, for the river was full of them.

Girls, how do you think we manage to rest ourselves every noon, having no house to shelter us from the scorching heat, or sofa on which to recline? Perhaps you think we always encamp in the shade of some thick wood. Such a sight I have not seen, lo, these many weeks. If we can find a few small willows or a single lone tree, we think ourselves amply provided for. But often our camping places are in some open plain and frequently a sand plain, but even here is rest and comfort. My husband, who is one of the best the world ever knew, is always ready to provide a comfortable shade, with one of our saddle-blankets spread upon some willows or sticks placed in the ground. Our saddles, fishamores and the other blankets placed upon the ground constitute our sofa where we recline and rest until dinner is ready. How do you think you would like this? Would you not think a seat by mother, in some cool room preferable? Sometimes my wicked heart has been disposed to murmur,

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thinking I should have no rest from the heat when we stopped, but I have always been reproved for it by the comfort and rest received. Under the circumstances I have never wished to go back. Such a thought never finds a place in my heart. "The Lord is better to us than our fears." I always find it so.

28th.

This morning lingered with husband on the top of the hill that overlooks the Grande Ronde, for berries until we were some distance behind camp. We have now no distressing apprehensions the moment we are out of sight of the camp, for we have entirely passed the dangerous country. I always enjoy riding alone with him, especially when we talk about home friends. It is then the tedious hours are sweetly decoyed away.

We descend a very steep hill in coming into Grande Ronde, at the foot of which is a beautiful cluster of pitch and spruce pine trees, but no white pine like that I have been accustomed to see at home. Grande Ronde is indeed a beautiful place. It is a circular plain, surrounded by lofty mountains, and has a beautiful stream coursing through it, skirted with quite large timber. The scenery while passing through it is quite delightful in some places and the soil rich; in other places we find the white sand and sedge, as usual, so common to this country. We nooned upon Grande Ronde river.

The camas grows here in abundance, and it is the principal resort of the Cayuses and many other tribes, to obtain it, as they are very fond of it. It resembles an onion in shape and color, when cooked is very sweet and tastes like a fig. Their manner of cooking them is very curious: They dig a hole in the ground, throw in a heap of stones, heat them to a red heat, cover them with green grass, upon which they put the camas, and cover the whole with earth. When taken out it is black. This is the chief food of many tribes during winter.

After dinner we left the plain and ascended the Blue Mountains. Here a new and pleasing scene presented itself-mountains covered with timber, through which we rode all the afternoon; a very agreeable change. The scenery reminded me of the hills in my native country of Streuben.

29th. - Had a combination of the same scenery as yesterday afternoon. Rode over many logs and obstructions that we had not found since we left the states. Here I frequently met old acquaintances in the trees and flowers, and was not a little delighted; indeed, I do not know as I was ever so much affected with any scenery in my life. The singing of birds, the echo of voices of my fellow travelers, as they were scattered through the woods, all had a strong resemblance to bygone days. But this scenery was of short duration-only one day.

Before noon we began to descend one of the most terrible mountains for steepness and length I have yet seen. It was like winding stairs in its descent, and in some places almost perpendicular. The horses appeared to dread the hill as much as we did. They would turn and wind around in a zigzag manner all the way down. The men usually walked, but I could not get permission to, neither did I desire it much.

We had no sooner gained the foot of this mountain than another more steep and dreadful was

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before us. After dinner and rest we descended it. Mount Pleasant, in Prattsburg, would not compare with these Mount Terribles. Our ride this afternoon exceeded anything we have had yet, and what rendered it the more aggravating was the fact that the path all the way was very stony, resembling a newly macadamized road. Our horses' feet were very tender, all unshod, so that we could not make the progress we wished. The mountain in many places was covered with this black broken basalt. We were very late in making camp to-night. After ascending the mountain we kept upon the main divide until sunset, looking in vain for water and a camping place. While upon this elevation we had a view of the Valley of the Columbia River. It was beautiful. Just as we gained the highest elevation and began to descend the sun was dipping his disk behind the western horizon. Beyond the valley we could see two distinct mountains - Mount Hood and Mount St. Helens. These lofty peaks were of a conical form, separated from each other by a considerable distance. Behind the former the sun was hiding part of his rays, which gave us a more distinct view of this gigantic cone. The beauty of this extensive valley contrasted well with the rolling mountains behind us, and at this hour of twilight was enchanting and quite diverted my mind from the fatigue under which I was laboring. We had yet to descend a hill as long, but not as steep or as stony as the other. By this time our horses were in haste to be in camp, as well as ourselves, and mine made such lengthy strides in descending that it shook my sides surprisingly. It was dark when we got into camp, but the tent was ready for me, and tea also, for Mr. McLeod invited us to sup with him.

Dearest mother, let me tell you how I am sustained of the Lord in all this journey. For two or three days past I have felt weak, restless and scarcely able to sit on my horse - yesterday in particular. But see how I have been diverted by the scenery, and carried out of myself in conversation about home and friends. Mother will recollect what my feelings were and had been for a year previous to our leaving home. The last revival enjoyed, my visit to Onondaga and the scenes there - these I call my last impressions of home, and they are of such a character that when we converse about home these same feelings are revived and I forget that I am weary and want rest. This morning my feelings were a little peculiar; felt remarkably strong and well - so much so as to mention it - but could not see any reason why I should feel any more rested than on the morning previous. Then I began to see what a day's ride was before me, and I understood it. If I had had no better health to-day than yesterday I should have fainted under it. Then the promise appeared in full view: "As thy day, so shall thy strength be," and my soul rejoiced in God, and testifies to the truth of another evidently manifest, "Lo, I am with you always."

30th. - In consequence of the lengthy camp yesterday, and failure of animals, two of the company's men left their animals behind, with packs also. This occasioned some anxiety, lest the wolves should destroy their beaver. To-day they send back for them, and we make but a short move to find more grass. On following the course of the stream on which we encamped last night we found cherries in abundance, and had time to stop and gather as many as we wished. They are very fine - equal to any we find in the States. When we arrived Mr. Gray had the dinner waiting for us. This afternoon the men rested and made preparations to enter Walla Walla. The men who went for the animals

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returned late. We all regretted this hindrance, for Mr. McLeod intended to see Walla Walla to-day and return again with a muskmelon for Mrs. Whitman (so he said). he will go in tomorrow. It is the custom of the country to send heralds ahead to announce the arrival of a party and prepare for their reception.

31st. - Came to the Walla Walla river, within eight miles of the Fort (Wallula). Husband and I were very much exhausted with this day's lengthy ride. Most of the way was sandy with no water for many miles. When we left Mr. Spalding husband rode an Indian horse when he had never mounted before and found him a hard rider in every gait except a gallop, and slow in his movements, nor could he pace as mine did, so for the last six days we have galloped most of the way where the ground would admit of it.