Utah Valley Orchards

Overview
1. Her ancestors, specifically Peter Conover, one of the first settlers of Provo.
2. Ancestors plant peach trees which still exist and were taking care of by her husband Bud.
3. Life when she was first married.
4. Her children and the farm.
5. Selling the farmland.
6. Her childhood, marriage, and WWII.
7. Her first child, a daughter has physical complications.
8. More about her children, grandchildren, and the farm.
9. More on selling the farm land.

VS: The Conovers had twins and this is Peter Conover. He was a guard to Joseph Smith and he joined the LDS Church back in Nauvoo. He was one of his guard when he traveled and took care of him. He was one of the fellows that went over and brought him back when he was martyred.

My great grandparents and my husband’s great grandparents were both in Nauvoo at the same time. They came across the plains with the pioneers. My great grandfather came on the tenth handcart company. Now Peter Conover was the one that took the ground up here, and he went as far as Winter Quarters and he lost his father and mother and his wife and he had eleven children and the youngest one was only two. Brigham Young went to him and said that they would see that the children got to Salt Lake. They put the children into different groups that would take them and they went to Salt Lake.

Peter Conover was one of the people that Brigham Young sent to see what Provo was like. They came across the Provo River, the group of them, and he homesteaded. He took a parcel of ground up at the mouth of Provo Canyon and they lived there for quite awhile. Then they divided it up and handed it down. They did the Smith ditch which comes from the waterfalls south of Bridal Veil Falls. They dug the ditch from there to water their farms, and it took them three years. They paid people with the fish that they got from the river. That and the logs that they floated down the river. There was no money to pay them, but they went and hired men to come over and work for them. In the meantime their twins, Alveretta and Alceta married two of the Smith boys.

RA: I was about to ask how the Smith name came into it.

VS: They divided up the land, this goes for a long period of time from 1948 up until about 1960. Then the four brothers went from there down to where they took and divided it. They divided it by putting the numbers one to four in a hat and the brothers drew numbers. That’s how my Dad got this part that was the farm. I don’t know this as well, but Peter Conover was the father of the three children who married in the Smith family. Henry B. Smith married Alveretta. Harriet
Conover had her brother, William Edward Smith or Ted as he was called, marry Alcetta. Mary Emma married Alfus Alonzo Conover, a brother to the twins Alveretta and Alcetta. Then it goes on to tell about them being placed in a guard house and you probably wouldn’t be interested in that.

Peter was one of the first men to plant wheat in Utah. They hadn’t had bread for four months and so he planted wheat. They had such a big rainstorm it dampened it down, and they couldn’t take the wheat off of it. Finally they did take it out and it reseeded, so they took two things of wheat that summer.

But these trees up here were purchased by a man named Klinger that ran a nursery over the hill, and he ordered them from France. They wanted to plant fruit trees on top of the hill, and so that’s where it is. It took them three years to dig the ditch, and in that time they planted all these trees. Alveretta hauled water from the river for all those trees for three years. She would hand water them everyday. They claim that those are the same trees that are still alive up there. There’s about 40 of them and they have lived all this long time.

RA: What kind of trees are they?

VS: Peaches. My husband wrote to all the fruit places and asked them if there was any chance of getting any more fruit trees that would live that long, they ordinarily don’t live that long. They said, “No, they didn’t make them anymore.” He has pruned these trees and taken care of them so that they’re still bearing fruit. He was attached to these trees. My husband couldn’t part with the orchard. He loved it. He took it over from his Dad when his Dad and Mother died. He loved every one of those trees and he took very good care of them all. Then he had a heart bypass surgery, five bypasses and his heart was not strong, so had this heart attack and died. I tried to get him to sell it beforehand and get rid of it, but he said, “I just can’t, I love it too much, I just can’t let it go.” So the boys have not taken as good care of it as they should have done, but they have helped with it. We’ve got it up for sale now, because the boys don’t seem to want to farm. There isn’t that much money in peaches anymore. People don’t buy peaches to can like they used to. I had the fruit stand for 20 years and I lifted bushels of peaches into people’s cars, but everybody canned peaches then for $2-$3 a bushel. We put fruit in half bushels and sell them for $12. You can’t make as much money on peaches as you could back when we sold so many.

His Dad used to raise watermelons. He’d bring them down and cover them over at night with the foliage, weeds and stuff, and keep them cool for people. When my oldest daughter was born, she was a real sick girl and she had to have a bottle and so I had to sign to the government to get a refrigerator. We didn’t have a refrigerator and I had to buy this refrigerator for $200 to keep her milk in. That was the first refrigeration on our street. We have lived through this, and it needs to be put down in history. We have loved the farm. The kids have worked on it. My husband worked on it until he died. I’ve had four sons and one daughter.

RA: As they were growing up, did they all work on the farm?
VS: We’ve always had horses. We’ve always had food and his cousins raised vegetables down in the south end of Provo, and so they would come and get all the fruit they wanted. We would go get all the vegetables we wanted, so we never went hungry. We always had potatoes, carrots, and celery. We’d just go down and load up the truck and bring it home. The kids had horses. We had 18 horses. In this field below us here, they could come home from school and grab a horse and put a saddle on it and ride. We’ve had a good life here and our kids have had a good life. We have a fruit stand up along the road here. My oldest son’s home is on this side of it, and the second son’s home is on the north side. Then there’s one back at home, so all the children are all right here still. They all have an acre of ground that we have given them of the bottom part. They’re keeping that land.

RA: How much are you selling then?

VS: Just the hill area. There’s about 50 acres up there.

RA: What do they have on the acres that they’re keeping?

VS: Just peaches. We just have peaches up there on the hill.

RA: Do peaches grow better up here? Most of the people I talk with seem to just do peaches up here and then apples and other things as you get down lower on the bench.

VS: Peaches grow where care is taken. Peaches will grow, but you’ve got to take care of them. You have to prune them every year. They used to just spray them once or twice and now they have to spray them 5-6 times to keep them. You have to go along with the times. We sprayed them five times this past year, but we didn’t have near the crop that we should have had. I think the trees are just getting old, and they’re not producing like they did. We own land clear to the forest up on the hill and so it’s going to be a nice piece of ground for somebody. It will be homes just like these up here, but we didn’t want a lot of homes. A lot of people living around there don’t want all the homes. One guy that wanted it, he wanted to put 77 homes up there. You’d have to build a school to take care of 77 homes, and we don’t want that. We want people to enjoy it. The water is still coming, Provo city they piped it. We piped it. It cost us $10,000 to pipe it about 10-15 years ago. It’s culinary water, and so they turn the water to Provo city on the first of November. Provo City uses it, turns it into their drinking water and uses it all winter. They turn it back to us the first of April to use on the farm.

RA: With homes up there, would they be able to do that still?

VS: They’d have to buy water stock with it.

RA: It’s fairly expensive now, isn’t it?

VS: About $300, I think. If they wanted irrigation water or something, they would probably get the Smith ditch. You’d probably get Provo city water like they do here. I don’t know if they’re going to build a big water tank across the street here. That’s going to be maybe three months working up here. I can’t figure them not putting a water tank over here an electrical tank, an
electrical place, but they don’t have any other place to put it. We built this house in 1950. We have loved it here. It was quiet and it’s far enough off the road that nothing bothers us. It’s been very sufficient. It’s the warmest little house in the wintertime and the best, coolest little house in the summertime. It’s lonesome now without my husband. He’s always been the happy one around.

RA: Where did you grow up?

VS: I grew up on Twelth North, where the Skagg’s Druge Store is was our whole lot. I was about 5 years old when we moved out there. My Dad left my mother when I was 9 years old, so she raised us pretty much alone there. My husband and I went together four years before we graduated and then he got a four-year scholarship to Brigham Young University. He went one year and then the war came on December 7, 1942. We had gone together quite awhile, I was about 20 years old, and he said he wanted to get married. We married Jan the 28th. I found out I was pregnant in August and he left in November and went overseas. He was gone for three years. He was on New Guinea, he went with the (NU) and they built the barracks for the (NU) and everything. Then he came home to a three-year old child. We lived in an old house that the Smith’s had bought, fixed it up for two or three years and then we decided to build here. It was a barracks and the ends were out, and he moved it up here. We built the basement for $200. We fixed a nice family room downstairs and a bathroom and a bedroom. That’s where my son lives. He’s been divorced twice. He fought ten years for his two kids and finally lost them so he lives here with me while he works and takes care of me. The other kids are doing just fine. The three of them live up on the farm.

RA: Going back, what did you do doing the war while your husband was gone?

VS: I went home to live with my mother because I was pregnant. I had two other sisters that came home, and so they all worked except me because I was pregnant. I stayed home and took care of the house and took care of my sister’s little girl while she worked. We managed just fine that way.

RA: Were you on a farm? Not just during the war, but while you were growing up?

VS: We had an acre down there, but we just had a nice garden behind the house. I got $50 a month from the government, that’s all Bud got in the service, and I paid mother $25 to help out. All the kids went in $25 a month, and we kept track of things like that. My daughter was born and her head was all out of shape. We didn’t think she would live. The doctor told me to just take her home and love her. I took her home, but the blood had come up from her brain, up between her skull and her top thing, and she cried constantly. My sisters helped me with her, and finally the doctor said, “We had better take it and lance it and draw the blood out and that will leave her to where she’s not mentally right.” I called the LDS Bishop and he came right down and brought the neighbor with him. We blessed and gave her a name and she went to sleep while we were doing it and then we took her. The doctor examined her and when he got through he looked up and the tears were running down his face and he said, “This little girl is going to be alright.” The blood was going back down into her brain and she has been a lifesaver to me. She’s married and had six children of her own. She lives in Bountiful and she’s been a very, very nice person.
RA: How many grandchildren do you have?

VS: We have 19. You can see an interesting difference in our boys. This one boy and this one here, but this little boy here was born when this girl was 17. There’s quite an age difference. It doesn’t mean that much now as they get older. Oh they’re all grown up now. There’s quite an age group in them. My daughter had six children of her own and they’re all having babies now.

RA: What was it like to raise your children on the orchard? How do you think that affected them?

VS: They had their horses and could visit each other, because they built up there. It’s been real nice.

RA: Do you think that they learned things or were in any other way different from kids who were raised in the city?

VS: I don’t know. Kids have their own way of growing up and they have their friends and they have their school things. Stanley was always busy with his schooling—he had BYU. All the kids have had plenty to do. Lots of times they would come home from school and they wouldn’t do anything except maybe ride a horse on Saturday or Sunday or help their dad. Their dad was here then and he had jobs for them to do like piling limbs or cutting the limbs off. It’s been a working place. It’s been a working place for our family.

Since we came off our mission in 1990, I tried to get Bud to sell the farm because he was not well and I didn’t want him going up there. But he just couldn’t part with it. He said, “I just can’t part with it, that’s all. I love those trees too much.” He did too and he took such good care of the trees. The kids decided that we’d keep it this year and try to farm it so we did, but we didn’t make very much off it. The kids had to thin and prune it, and had to pay for spraying and stuff like that. I don’t think it can be a going proposition for us now. I think we’re just going to have to sell the ground. We haven’t sold it. We’ve had several people look at it, but they haven’t contacted us back yet.

RA: You said somebody wanted to do 77 homes, you haven’t had offers that you like.

VS: We could sell it. Lots of people want building lots up there. We’d like to sell it all in one piece. I don’t want to have to worry about it. I’m too old for that worry. I want to sell it and divide the money up with the kids and then call it quits rather than just go along and dibble out little things. I don’t have that in me anymore. I’m 80 years old and that’s too old. So we’re going to try and sell it.

RA: How do you feel about that? Is it a relief?

VS: I’ve always lived here. This has been my home since 1950. The farm has been something that I’ve put up with, my husband spending his time up there and stuff like that. So I won’t miss
it. I’ll miss the peaches once in awhile, but I’ve got my own out here. It just comes to the point where you just don’t physically have that kind of endurance.