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Worth Their Salt Too

Colleen Whitley

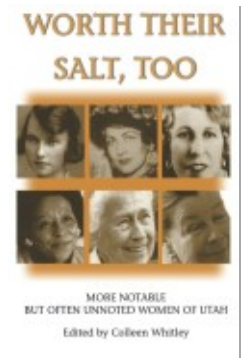
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ALGIE EGGERTSEN BALLIF

No Subject Was Taboo

Georganne B. Arrington and Marion McCardell

As a child growing up, Georganne Ballif Arrington knew her grandmother delighted in watching her dance. But it wasn't until Georganne was majoring in dance at Brigham Young University that Algie shared her own experience in helping to create that very dance department. Georganne went on to receive a B.A. in university studies and an M.A. in dance at BYU, writing her master's thesis on her grandmother's contributions to the school. Today she is a professional dancer and is currently the director of education for the Ririe-Woodbury Dance Company. Her neighbor, Marion McCardell, holds a B.A. in English and an M.A. in communications from BYU and has taught both subjects at BYU and at Salt Lake Community College. She has written a variety of free-lance articles. When Arrington offered to provide the research if McCardell would do the writing for this project, she gladly agreed since she also descends from early Utah settlers and is interested in their stories, especially those of the women.

The sins of the fathers may be visited on three generations, but positive parental traits are bestowed on countless children's children. Algie Eggertsen Ballif was the product of such parenting. Student, dancer, teacher, school administrator, political activist, daughter, wife, mother, grandmother, Algie Eggertsen was born 3 May 1896 to Lars Echart Eggertsen and Ane (Annie) Grethe Eggertsen nee Nielsen. As the second child, Algie entered a home already infused with education, art, conversation, and a firm sense of the individual's responsibility to improve the community, especially the lives of the disadvantaged.

Lars Eggertsen was born 3 March 1866 in Provo, Utah, to Danish immigrants Simon and Johanna Eggertsen. Annie Nielsen was born 8 January 1868 in Veddem, Denmark, to Back and Mette Marie Christensen Nielsen. Lars and Annie were married 28 October 1892 and raised six children: Luther, Algie, Thelma, Anna Marie, Mark, and Esther.¹ Together they diligently fostered and carefully nurtured learning in their home. No subject was taboo for intellectual quests, and two rules always applied: consider all sides and think seriously about any issue raised.² The community sometimes looked askance at this liberality of ideas—it led to questioning authority, discussing touchy religious philosophy, and forming unpopular political opinions. It also produced articulate, clearheaded children who would foster learning, thinking, and artistic endeavors in their own children and communities.

Lars was well equipped to inculcate thought and art in his children. He devoted many years to Utah County schools as “a teacher, principal, school board member and president, and superintendent of both public school and church seminaries.” His college experiences in eastern schools had given him a profound interest in culture and the arts, and he devoted his life to improving both in Utah Valley, an enormous challenge in a small community still reluctantly withdrawing from the frontier. Few Utah Valley towns had been settled for longer than fifty years, and the people of Springville had only recently felt the security of consistent crops and harvests, permanent homes, tolerable weather, peace with the Indians, and a humble amount of leisure time. The idea of “painting a picture” rather than a barn, a fence, or a wagon, was foreign to most residents. So when Lars was living in Springville, reorganizing its public school system, he began a concerted effort to educate the community about art and its intrinsic worth.³

He formed the Springville Art Movement and used it as a vehicle for finding ways to combine familiar art forms such as music, drama, and poetry—recreations that sustained pioneers on the westward trek and helped settlers keep faith and optimism while fighting illness, famine, and blight—to tell the story and illustrate the meaning of a wide variety of paintings.⁴ He sponsored “Library and Art Evenings” to help familiarize people with art as a legitimate way to spend time and express meaning. The *Springville Independent* describes one of these educational evenings: “Twelve beautiful pictures, subjects from our best painters, were the special gifts of the evening. The subjects of several pictures were explained by music, story, or verse.”⁵

Lars offered public access to his personal collection of books and art prints. He arranged for traveling art exhibits to include Springville on their itinerary and for businesses along Main Street to exhibit them. Although these exhibits only contained prints, not original paintings, he was able to attract the public and get people to pay a modest entrance fee, the proceeds of which would go to buy paintings.⁶ The Art Movement was eventually able to put together an art collection and even build an art gallery which opened in April 1907, bringing, as the *Springville Independent* wrote, the distinction that, “Springville now lays claim to the honor of being the first community in the State to acquire a public art gallery thru [*sic*] the efforts of the district schools.”⁷ This evolved into the renowned art collection now housed in the Springville Art Museum. Lars’s talent for taking something with which the community was well acquainted and comfortable to communicate the meaning of something unfamiliar taught Algie lessons she would absorb and utilize throughout her life.

However, Lars Eggertsen’s cultural interests did not end at visual art, drama, and music. He was also devoted to literature and “declamation.” He loved acting and had parts in many local theater productions when he was a young man, as evidenced by his collection of newspaper clippings and advertisements for plays and musicals and critical notes about his performances in them. He was also a fine orator and gave many public speeches such as the valedictory address at his Michigan School of Business graduation. And his personal library included books by Francois Delsarte, through which he became acquainted with the Delsartian method of combining speech with dramatic gesture.⁸ These wide ranging cultural pursuits so important to her father helped construct Algie’s paradigm of what was, or should be, a normal, well-rounded life—an ingrained assumption that guided her eventual desire to include dance in the BYU curriculum and reading in the Head Start program.

Annie Nielsen Eggertsen also had a profound influence on Algie’s world view. Annie was devoted to her family and her husband’s educational ideals. She stalwartly supported all Lars’s professional pursuits and was as dedicated as he to supplying their children with an appreciative background in good music, painting, drama, and literature. What’s more, Annie made sure her daughters had the same opportunities as her sons. Esther Eggertsen Peterson, the youngest daughter, observed, “We were certainly all education-oriented; that was just

assumed. Also, as I look back on it now, I think how wonderful it was that there was never a question but that all the girls would get the same education as the boys.”⁹

Ensuring cultural education required considerable creativity. The Eggertsens, as with most rural families at the turn of the century, had never-ending work and innumerable menial tasks to perform as part of their day-to-day existence. The only way to make enough time for recreation was by combining it with work, and Annie made sure culture was part of that combination, taking every opportunity to teach her children as they performed various household tasks. Caruso on the phonograph accompanied food preparation; someone reading from a novel enlivened rug making; adding to a progressive story sped raspberry picking. Even Sunday meant much more than church. “Sunday dinner was a time of excitement for the children; parents, older children, and guests provided a lively and informative discussion around the dining room table,” a pattern Algie was to continue for her own children and grandchildren. These Sunday visitors included artists, school teachers and administrators, local politicians, and in the summer members of Chatauqua, a touring group from Chatauqua, New York, which produced drama, music, lectures, and other cultural activities for the children. These varied visitors made the Eggertsen children feel they were “touching greatness,” and as Esther put it, “We were not concerned with things but ideas.”¹⁰

Algie never lost the appreciation for art and respect for intellectual inquiry inculcated by her parents. Diaries from her youth through early old age contain many more references to the quality of ideas, conversation, and thinking of the people she encountered than they do physical descriptions. Sometimes her early dedication to culture and learning could make her a little harsh in her judgments, it is true, but such innocent snobbery is easily forgiven. Three diary entries serve as samples: Tuesday, 30 November 1915, “Mr. Knight took me to the vaudeville. My, the people there. I can’t imagine what will become of our civilization. We don’t appreciate the big and beautiful. People enjoy amusement where they don’t have to think. No wonder Shakespeare isn’t liked or present dramatists like George Bernard Shaw.” Sunday, 28 May 1916, “After dinner Jessie put us in the car and we went over to Saratoga. It is a resort where people break loose from all moral restraint and do as they please.” Sunday, 4 June 1916, “Oh I hate Salt Lake. The Park [Liberty Park] was crowded with pleasure

seekers. Aimless girls and youths. Seeking only the showy side of life. The dreamy side where you don't have to think. Thank God I have parents who have inspired me in nobler lines."¹¹ Algie never did suffer fools gladly, and in later journals, she freely expresses disappointment, even disgust with boring activities and nonthinking people.

The quality of ideas and artistic endeavors were not the only things to mold Algie's life, of course. She had her share of all-too-real physical experiences as well—trials which enlarged and deepened her empathy, her “unflagging ability to identify with minorities and underdogs, whether of the racial, ethnic, impoverished, or handicapped variety.” Algie was born with a cleft lip, and while she didn't have the challenge of a cleft pallet as well, “the hurt of realizing, at some moment in her childhood, that she had a disfigured mouth, that she couldn't have it surgically repaired until she was in her teens, and that the operation would in any case leave a scar—this kind of pain, of particular anguish during the years of puberty, was to leave scars of an inward sort, which . . . figured significantly in the development of her enormous powers of empathy with disadvantaged people of all kinds.” While the proclivities of her parents would have taught Algie sympathy for the less fortunate in any event, without this deformity, it might not have been “as intensely and personally felt. It was her strength and good fortune to be able to divert what might have been a crippling self-pity into channels of active love and vital service to family, community, state and nation, and in doing so to save her *self* from her sense of blight.”¹²

The very establishment of her mother's household also shaped Algie's sense of self, duty, and the traits admirable in a woman. The Eggertsens were “a house plumb full of people.” For most of Algie's growing up years they lived in Provo at 868 North University Avenue and took in BYU students as boarders to supplement Lars's income. During the 1913–1914 school year, when Algie was seventeen, in an arrangement that the BYU Housing Standards Committee would never allow today, both boys and girls boarded with them. Four boys lived in the two north bedrooms upstairs: Harold and Clive Davis, Milton Marshall, and Harry Russel. Across the hall in the large south double bedroom lived four girls: Algie and her sister Thelma, Louise Howard, and Jessie Greene. According to Algie's daughter Gene, “Upstairs, between the north and south bedrooms, was a fair-sized hall-sitting room, and beyond that to the west front of the house was a small library

where many of the family books were kept and where there was a study-table and chairs. So what separated the boys from the girls in this arrangement was only this common-room hall and study—and of course their own good Mormon sense of where to draw the line.”¹³ The rest of the family slept on the main floor. With her own children plus boarders, Annie had a household of fourteen to manage, and there was a tremendous amount of work to do.

In her 1914 diary Algie mentions the arrangements for the boarders and spends considerable time analyzing their personalities and romantic entanglements, but refers only briefly and tangentially to the bane of all women in that era, trebled in such a large household, the Saturday work. Housecleaning was

a weekly labor of no mean dimensions in those appliance-starved days—and the Eggertsens did not yet have even a vacuum cleaner. Everything had to be swept with a broom, dusted, rugs taken out and beat clean; floors had to be mopped and bathrooms scrubbed; all the bed linen had to be changed. . . . And then there was cooking and baking and churning butter (they had their own cows) or killing, plucking, cleaning, and dressing chickens (they had their own chickens), and of course taking care of the cows and chickens themselves, and all that entailed. Then there was always sewing and mending and weaving rugs, and whatever chores might need doing—and there were always plenty of them.¹⁴

Algie’s entries note that she “worked good” if the Saturday work is finished by four o’clock.

The primary responsibility for heavy Saturday housecleaning tasks may have fallen on Algie and Thelma, but overseeing that work was only the beginning of Annie’s. She “had her hands full in the kitchen and cold-cellar, preparing food, cooking and baking, often helping her husband out of doors in the garden or cow-shed or chicken coop, or with their plots of fruits and vegetables, or tending to the irrigation.”¹⁵ Naturally, Algie and Thelma helped with these tasks too, and various other weekday tasks like the huge washing on Mondays and the endless ironing on the following days,¹⁶ but Annie was still left with more to do than time to do it.

Eventually, Annie's load became too heavy and Algie had to drop one of her favorite classes so she would have more time to help her mother. She wrote, "I decided to drop American Literature. It is too hard on Mama to have to do all the work. I had a right good cry this morning. So did Mama. I don't blame her for getting despondent sometimes. She works so hard . . . I suppose these days come in every woman's life and will come in mine when I get married."¹⁷

Annie's schedule left no choice but to give Algie a lot of responsibility. Algie sincerely admired her mother for being able to run a large household smoothly while keeping it pleasant and loving as well. She wanted to help her and felt duty bound to hold herself and her younger sisters to the same high standards as her mother set for herself. So she was rigorous in her supervision of the chores done by Anna and Esther. They would have said she was bossy. They were much less aware of Algie's desire to spare her mother than of her sometimes imperious manner, and some lifelong resentments grew in the hearts of the little sisters. Esther "several times recall[ed] the exasperation she felt on being compelled by Algie to dust every little curve and crevice of the parlor furniture, and get in between every little spoke and slat of a particular rocking chair that had a great many of them."¹⁸

In spite of her awareness of how demanding home management could be, by 1914 Algie saw her future through a mist of romantically idealized domesticity. She yearned for "someone she can love, who will love her in return, someone with whom she can hope for a full life, for marriage and a family as dear to her as the family she'd grown up in, and for a sense of personal meaning and worth."¹⁹ Even the hard work was made beautiful when Algie saw it in the context of being like her mother. "Whenever she envisioned her future as wife and mother the desire was always to be like Annie Eggertsen and to have a family as happy as the one she belonged to." On 8 March 1914 she writes, "My the kiddies are sweet. I hope I can have some like them someday," and during spring break she describes her family this way: "The kiddies are mopping the floor, Mama is making button-holes, Papa is reading the paper [*sic*]. My, what a happy home we have! I hope I can always make it happy too." The "kiddies" might not have been too thrilled about mopping the floor, but Algie "cherishes the whole scene."²⁰

That Algie wanted to improve herself in every way is shown in this Saturday, 11 April 1914 diary entry: "I worked good today.

Thelma and I had all the work done by four. I finished copying my short story [one she wrote for Girls Day and wanted to have perfect] and then I cut potatoes. My but it was fun! After that, Thelma and I planted potatoes, and my, the people that passed by were so silly! They made fun of me! But I didn't care. I want to be able to do all things." This ambition was the direct outgrowth of wanting to be able to do "everything her mother could do, as well as to be able to accomplish those things her mother encouraged and inspired her to do outside the domestic realm."²¹ These accomplishments included improving her education and excelling in school.

When Algie started Brigham Young High School, her main interests were elocution, drama, and literature, but she soon discovered a different art form: dance. "At this time, I was beginning to be aware through the reading I did and pictures in magazines that there were in the United States great people who were expressing themselves in the dance. I read all I could about these interesting activities."²²

She met a young woman, Margueritte Stewart, who had studied tap-dancing and ballet in New York. Algie admired Margueritte and thought her dancing was beautiful, but she was reluctant to become involved in dance herself until the eventful night when she went to the light opera *Madam Sherry* at the Provo Opera house. She recalled:

It was a lovely musical . . . but the one act that simply . . . took me off my feet was when the dancers came out. I can't call it ballet, because it wasn't ballet, but they had some dancers . . . and they all were gowned in white, filmy costumes with great sleeves that made lovely waves—and rather long below their knees. Well, they danced and I thought it was so beautiful; I even remember the words of the song . . . because this was really the theme of "Madam Sherry":

Every little movement
 Has a meaning all its own;
 Every thought and feeling
 By some gesture can be shown
 And every love thought
 That comes a stealing
 O'er your being

Can be Revealing
 In its sweetness
 With some appealing
 Little gesture all of its own

Well, I'll tell you, they did it—and it was just beautiful to me.
 I recall I came home completely carried away.²³

The concept of motion merging with meaning stayed with Algie, and from that time she spent many hours, when no one else was home, practicing what she had seen. She would open the sliding doors between the parlor, reception room, and dining room of her parents' house, rummage up old pieces of "torn sheet and anything else soft and filmy," and dance up and down the rooms, trying to match the steps of the *Madam Sherry* dancers. "I was simply overcome with joy of the music as well as the dancing."²⁴

There wasn't a trained dance teacher at Brigham Young High School, and folk dancing was only infrequently included in physical education classes; still, Algie managed to nurture her interest in dance on her own until her junior and senior years at Brigham Young University when she enrolled in "modern social dancing, folk dancing, group games, and social plays."²⁵ She would use all the techniques taught in these classes by Eugene L. Roberts and Edith Barlow—who trained at the University of Utah and taught physical exercise and personal hygiene and similar classes at BYU from 1915 to 1918, and who also had a little dance training which she shared with her students, helping them learn to move gracefully and easily—in the years to come as she taught physical education herself.²⁶

The many and varied activities of Algie's student life give insight to the innocent sophistication of the time. They also show her tremendous energy, dedication to study, and a social life many now would be hard pressed to keep up with, but which established the busy pattern she continued even in her "working grandmother" days. On Wednesday, 1 December 1915, she writes, "Had a short talk with Than, he thinks I am a fright the way I run from one place to another." Running from one place to another is an apt description. In her entries from 23 November to 1 December 1915, we learn she gets up at 5 A.M., studies, takes biology and a biology lab, teaches classes at the high

school, makes rolls for Thanksgiving, runs cross-country, does the family wash—during which she reads *The Tempest* and “two or three love stories too,” starts teaching private elocution students, goes to Salt Lake to hear the Honorable Mr. Hobson on prohibition, studies, organizes the Literary Society, takes gym, teaches gym, goes to rehearsal for a play she is in, goes to the vaudeville, takes elocution class, and goes to a “Board of Control Meeting.” She puts a lot into nine days. And in just one, not atypical day, Saturday, 4 December 1915, she attends Teacher Institute, goes to a discussion about George Bernard Shaw, comes home and “made me a gown,” does a little crocheting, and goes to rehearsal. Going to dances and plays two or three times a week and staying up until 2 A.M. was not at all unusual either.

During these busy school years, two of Algie’s teachers were especially influential. One was Miss Camp, who taught elocution, speech, and drama. For Miss Camp’s classes, Algie studied such things as *The Sorrows of Robab*, *The Soul of the Violin*, and *The Revolt of Mother*.²⁷ Many journal entries refer to memorizing cuttings from these, writing and practicing speeches, and wanting to please Miss Camp. They also document her struggle to swallow her disappointment when Miss Camp decides to produce *Cupid at Vassar*, the Gilbert and Sullivan parody of erotic renunciation, and after hinting at Algie’s taking an important role, not only doesn’t cast her for a lead part, but doesn’t put her in the play at all. Journal entries show her efforts to “show Miss Camp,” by working, practicing, and applying every little criticism to become proficient at both public speaking and acting.²⁸ She knew early the sweetest revenge is success and forcing herself to get over heartbreaks, or at least not let them show, and forging ahead in some positive direction was a typical coping strategy throughout her life.

Algie’s second influential teacher was Miss Alice Louise Reynolds, who taught theology and literature. For Miss Reynolds, Algie read Bryant, Shaw, and Henry Snyder Harrison’s play, *V.V.’s Eyes*. This play about “an enthusiastic young doctor, V. Vivian, who attempts to reform the selfish daughter of a factory owner, includes pleas for improved factory conditions, child-labor legislation, and women’s rights.” Clearly, “Algie’s liberal-reformist education may well have begun at home, but it was certainly nourished by some of the literature she read for Miss Reynolds.”²⁹ Miss Reynolds would continue to guide, instruct, and

motivate Algie throughout her life, and in appreciation Algie would help organize the Alice Louise Reynolds Forum.

School served another important role in Algie's later teenage years: a talisman against the unpleasantness of life as a spinster. By the summer of 1914, Algie's interest in romance was in full bloom, and the more her friends found beaux, the more she wondered if she would ever have one and the more determined she was not to let her eagerness for her own romantic entanglements show. She wrote, "Henry took Louise to the basket-ball game and I had to stay home alone. I don't care if I will be an old maid. Men are no good. Anyway, I can teach Elocution and be happy."

Much of Algie's early writing is exceedingly earnest and more concerned with the state of art and matters of the heart than with being witty, but occasionally she lets her wry sense of humor come through. On Saturday, 3 June 1916, she writes that she went to an outdoor performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and "just as we were leaving, the grandstand gave way. Jessie and I fell ten feet but we were not hurt. It certainly was an experience though. Very unique sensation too."³⁰

In the spring of 1916 Algie began seeing A. Ladru Jensen, and her writing chronicles her first love affair in classic forms of the romantic literature of the time: flowery language, pastoral settings, unrequited passions. Several entries illustrate the way her cultural and artistic background percolated into her prose and how noncynically innocent were those pre-World War I days:

The things he said to me I can't repeat or write, they are hidden deep within my soul. . . . After our talk we walked slowly home and went up in the orchard. We had walked in silence for some time. Oh those moments when two people can live in the realm of deep thought, and still feel the other's influence. I can't understand Ladru. When we got under a good old apple tree, he took my arm and said with such feeling and frankness, "Don't you think our friendship deserves a few liberties and familiarities between us?" and my answer will on that rest a dream and a hope. A dream of a few minutes that I can hardly think of as real. The hope that as Ladru said our friendship will last forever. The first time that my heart throbbed for some reason or other. The first time I utterly trusted a boy. [Wednesday, 31 May 1916.]

She says this after he told her at the beginning of their walk that “it is a good thing school was closing because we two could not go together much longer. We both would have to forget each other for a time.”³¹

Ladru has now gone and Algie is sad. She goes to a dance with someone else, and misses her “Perfect Day” dance with Ladru. “Came out in the orchard and had a good hard cry. Oh how I cried, some unknown Algie came up in me and made me sob. . . . I didn’t know how much of my joy depended on someone else until tonight. [Thursday, 1 June 1916.]”

I love my beautiful Utah home, the wildness and primitiveness of the scenery is what inspired me. After we left Stewart’s ranch we found a little island in the creek [*sic*] where we ate our lunch. The spot was so quiet and verdant, the boughs hung so low, the noise of the water blending with our voices made it very sublime. The boys did enjoy lunch, especially the sandwiches. While there it began to rain, we hurried on but it soon came down in such torrents that we had to seek shelter under the trees. The storm ceased a little, so we started on. Got on the wrong trail but it led through a most beautiful spot, up through the pines over a stream on a log. I love to go new ways so it pleased me. The air was wonderful scented with that fragrant pine odor, the damp earth and the rain-laden leaves all gave the scent of spring. The mountains were rich in vegetation. The most beautiful shades of green I have ever seen and right next to all this spring grander [*sic*] was great masses of white snow. Just beneath these mountains was a great grove of quaking aspen. Their silvery leaves were trembling in the wind. I can’t describe the joy I experienced in viewing such scenery. I love Nature, to me it is my inspiration.” [14 July 1916.]³²

As in any romance, Algie’s plot is complicated and then thickened. Her 1916 summer entries vacillate between euphoric descriptions of true love when all is well between herself and Ladru and distraught examples of her broken heart when he ignores or misunderstands her.

Her Saturday, 19 August, entry introduces what will prove to be a life-altering experience. “Went to Dentist Hansen and got my tooth

eased. Washed, dusted, crocheted, reconciled myself to going to Rexburg [Idaho].”³³ This is the first time she writes about going to Idaho and her less than joyful feelings about it. According to Algie’s daughter Gene, BYU president George Brimhall extended a call from the church for Algie to go on a teaching mission to Ricks Academy. She didn’t want to go, but her parents eventually persuaded her to try it for a year. Whether this stemmed more from their religious convictions or from their concern that Algie was more in love than Ladru and that her passions were increasingly more difficult to keep in check is not clear.³⁴

By 1 October, she is packed, ready, and the day of her departure is upon her.

It is 1:30 Sunday night. I am sitting by the fireplace and all is over. Ladru has gone and perhaps forever. Never to leave this house feeling as he does toward me as he does now perhaps. Our evening was oh! So beautiful and sacred. I felt I know him as no other person. My soul and his soul beat in such unison. I gave him my picture and then came the parting. I love him, by my soul I do, and his feelings are the same. I’ll miss the press of his big strong hand and oh! The absolute contentment when he holds me tight to him. Does it live or die?³⁵

So off Algie goes, “in the throws of love-bridled agony, not really knowing, but always striving to articulate the reason why, and make herself feel good about it.”³⁶

Her time at Ricks Academy tested Algie in a variety of ways. She got an intensely hands-on introduction to the demands of full-time teaching. Besides teaching gym, physical education, theology, and expression, Algie taught “lots of English” at the academy high school, something she hadn’t expected and didn’t want to do. She filled many of her lonely evenings preparing for her classes: “Came home and spent most of the evening studying, it keeps me busy to give my students something worth while. I am . . . going to try and do good work in everything. Praying God to help me I think I shall succeed. [Wednesday, 11 October.]” After spending hours trying to develop the right approach, “I talked to my physical ed. girls on how to keep their bodies well and clean. I talked real plain to them, some rather laughed at me, but they will get over it. [Friday, 13 October.]” “One more day

of experience gone and I am so busy I can't see how I am going to get through it all. My English work has kept me busy from 5 until 10. [Thursday, 17 October.]”³⁷

Hints at the tensions that would develop between her own conscience and the official pronouncements of the institutional Mormon Church also make their way into the Rexburg journal entries: “Sister Paxman gave me some brandy for my cold. [Sunday, 8 October 1916.]” She has been to the lyceum concert with several other teachers and “Lo and behold Dell took us into a cabaret. Just think, Academy teachers at such a place. A lady in a See-more gown danced and sang all the time. We sure felt foolish, yet enjoyed ourselves immensely laughing about it. [Saturday, 15 October 1916.]” “Had an excellent faculty meeting, yet some of the things they decide to do are so narrow. [Monday, 6 November 1916.]”³⁸

Ricks was an emotional refinery as well. Between being desperately homesick for her family, from whom she had never been away for a prolonged period, and longing for Ladru, to whom she was all but engaged, Algie's heart was sore at best. But the poverty of some in the community was wrenching, and her awareness of it propelled her burgeoning self-motivated, as opposed to parent-directed, concern for the poor. “Today I went to Lyman to visit S[unday] S[chool]. It was a good cold ride in an auto . . . it filled me with a new desire to work when I saw children walking for miles, and families ride in buggies three or four miles to go to SS. Could I do it? [Sunday, 22 October.]”³⁹

The lonely, heartsick fall quarter finally ended and Algie went home for Christmas. She spent an almost frantically happy vacation getting ready for Christmas and spending time with Ladru going to church and dances, playing games, reading literary works aloud, and having long, tender discussions. She was a nervous wreck when she got on the train to go back for winter quarter. It is possible some of this emotional upheaval was rooted in an event not recorded in her diary, but often told to her family later. One of Algie's duties as a faculty member was chaperoning school dances. In the course of one evening before Christmas break, a school official pointed out to her a certain young man he thought was “dancing too close” to his partner. He told her to correct the indiscretion, which she reluctantly (according to her) did, by tapping him on the shoulder and politely informing him of the official opinion. The gentleman then courteously inquired whether she

would be so kind as to show him “how to do it right.” Whereupon she did, making it possible for him to finish the dance in perfect Mormon decorum. After this he sought her out, introduced himself, and asked her for the next dance. “That’s how it all began, and if papa could hear this account of the occasion again he’d say ‘Yes, and she’s been showing me how to do things right ever since!’ And mama would laugh, and exclaim ‘Now George!’”⁴⁰

Algie might not have written about him, but she was impressed enough by this young man, one George Ballif, returned missionary and local boy, to cast him as the leading man in the play *Cousin Kate*, which she was producing, directing, and playing in as the lead female role. She had cast him for the play before the holidays and started rehearsing with him immediately after her return, before she had quite decided on the rest of the cast.⁴¹

By the end of winter term, Algie was “overwhelmed by the dilemma she finds herself in—virtually committed to Ladru and now falling in love with George.” Her diaries stop abruptly after George “startles and thrills” her by expressing his feelings for her, but four of his letters to her over the ensuing spring and summer are included in the 1917 transcripts and they “indicate very well what is going on between them and how intense the romance has become.” According to her daughter Gene, “From what he says we know that there were other letters of that period, and that Algie wrote him as often and as passionately as he wrote her. What happened to those letters I don’t know, but my guess is that so much of Algie’s conflict over her feelings for both George and Ladru get into them that she may have destroyed all of her own and probably those of George’s that revealed too much of it.”⁴²

Part of Algie’s indecision over whether to stick with her first love or transfer all her loyalties to her second came from Ladru himself. He was handsome, a good match, and had consumed her dreams, heart, and plans for over a year. However, he had “hurt her deeply when they were all but formally engaged, by asking what the risk might be of their having a child with the kind of hare-lip she herself was born with.” No doubt he brought this up with all the delicacy at his command, but Algie was excruciatingly sensitive to this birth defect, even after it had been surgically repaired, and that Ladru, who knew what a devastating thing it was to her self-esteem, would bring it up had to make her feel he would love her less, or perhaps not want to marry her, if he thought

she could pass on the defect. George Ballif's "unqualified love and ardent devotion harbored no such scruple."⁴³

Before Algie had completely sorted out her tumultuous passions, America entered the Great War, and both George and Ladru were conscripted into the army. By the time the war ended, George would be her man. He would transfer to BYU when he got out of the army and join the debate team. He and Algie would make a wager over the outcome of the BYU-Princeton debate: If BYU won they would get married. What they would do if Princeton won would not be specified, but people get engaged in all sorts of strange ways in Provo. BYU did win and George and Algie were married in the Salt Lake Temple on 24 December 1920, putting to rest any lingering fears Algie might have harbored about using teaching as spinsterhood consolation.

However, back in 1917, when her beaux went off to the war, Algie took her confused heart back to Provo and graduated from Brigham Young University in 1918. Her first job after graduation was to teach at American Fork High School for the 1918–1919 school year, but the flu epidemic closed all the schools in Utah County, as well as much of the rest of the state. So she nursed her family instead. She never went back to American Fork High because before the 1919–1920 school year started, President George Brimhall offered her a contract to teach at BYU. "Her responsibilities were to include classes in speech, English, physical education, and Book of Mormon—all teachers were required to teach one religion class. Her stipend was \$90.00 a month."⁴⁴

Algie earned every penny of the monthly ninety dollars and then some. During that school year she taught English, speech, religion, physical exercise and personal hygiene, social dancing, advanced gymnastics, advanced apparatus gymnastics, advanced marching and rhythmic exercises, dancing and social supervision, scout craft and beehive activities, and athletic coaching and directing. Not only did she have many individual classes, but each was rather all-encompassing. For example, in physical exercise and personal hygiene for women, the description in the 1919 BYU course catalogue said:

The exercise work in this course is designed to improve the health, strength, and physical efficiency of the students and to develop good posture, correct bearing, ease and grace of movement, and economical motor habits. The plan includes formal

gymnastics, marching, dancing, games, and sports suitable for women.

The hygiene instruction will embrace lectures and demonstrations in care of teeth, eyes, ears, throat, nose, hygiene of exercise, bathing, diet, sleep, work, study, recreation etc.⁴⁵

Of her teaching this year, Algie later recalled, “My interests were quite divided between the work I had to do in physical education—classes for all freshman, a class with folk dancing, and a class instituted by Director Roberts in social leadership. So one can well see how busy I was and how torn I was in my teaching between things that I wanted to accomplish and yet there was not sufficient time in the day to take care of them.”⁴⁶

Algie “quickly realized that she needed more advanced instruction and direction in the area of physical education.” What is more, Professor Eugene Roberts, the chairman of the Department of Physical Education, was eager to include dance in the department, and he wanted to make sure “its proper technique could be taught to the students of the University.”⁴⁷ This “proper technique” element was so important because the dance craze that swept across America in 1915 and 1916 had concerned and offended some BYU administrators. President Brimhall had called on Professor Roberts to “hold the gyrating dances in check,”⁴⁸ and Algie had had a few run-ins with the president of Ricks over which dances she was allowed to teach there.⁴⁹ So when Algie approached Roberts about doing graduate work in physical education, he agreed and suggested she concentrate her study on dance at a twelve-week summer session in Berkeley, California.⁵⁰

Algie spent the summer of 1920 in Berkeley with her father, who was also in school doing advanced work in educational administration. The techniques she later used to teach dance at BYU were instilled by her teacher Nesa Mathe Wehr. She helped Algie “recognize that the purpose of teaching dance should not be to encourage girls to pursue professional careers, but to help them appreciate their bodies and understand the necessity of their proper care . . . to be proud of a good figure and protect it through good nutrition and appropriate dress.”⁵¹

During her summer at Berkeley, Algie also took speech classes and participated in the campus Greek theater production of *Antigone*.

Algie was, of course, well acquainted with Greek mythology and tragedy, but she had never seen it performed. As a member of the play's chorus, Algie was fascinated by its role in the production. "According to classical tradition, as the chorus sang the 'strophe'—similar to every third stanza in a poem—they moved from right to left; while they sang the 'antistrophe,' they retraced their steps exactly and returned to their original place. When the 'epode' was recited, the chorus stood in place."⁵² Algie was impressed with this carefully choreographed stage movement and the way it advanced the dramatic action. "It seemed so much like dance to her, that she determined that one day she would combine drama and movement . . . for her own 'dance-drama.'"⁵³

Algie came home from Berkeley filled with new ideas and embarked on two more years of teaching, which would not only sharpen her skills in the classroom but hone her ability to assess what was needed, negotiate with recalcitrant administrators for all they would yield, and slide some of the things they rejected, but which she thought necessary, through the back door. This was a skill she would use again and again in dealing with school boards, the Utah House of Representatives, the American Fork Training School, and the President's Council on Women.

Because Algie was dedicated to Nesa Wehr's teaching philosophies about developing positive attitudes toward one's body, she "wanted to give her students something tangible that would allow them a sense of pride and freedom about their bodies." Until Algie came home from Berkeley, "all exercise and dance were performed in the wool gym suits with bloomers below the knee." She came home armed with patterns for "practice dresses for dance class," and chose one she thought was both "appropriate" and "allowed total freedom of the body." This "uniform was a checked gingham dress—the girls picked their own color—with skirts above the knee and no sleeves, finished with anklet stockings and ballet slippers. Algie had instituted the first dance costume at Brigham Young University. Her students were delighted."⁵⁴

Although it was not formally acknowledged in the course catalogue, Algie also began a specialized dance class for girls who had finished freshman physical education, and even though it was a no-credit class, she had so many students she had to teach a beginning section "especially for girls who needed help with relaxation," and an advanced

class for “those girls who seemed to have a natural grace and ease about their bodies.”⁵⁵ Thus the women’s dance department was born.

The dance classes were able to wear dresses, but the physical education students still had to wear the standard wool serge gym suits. Algie taught a class in the men’s gym on one side of the campus, and another immediately after in the women’s gym on the other side. This was a considerable distance to cover in the brief time allowed between classes, and to Algie it seemed eminently sensible to wear her thoroughly body-covering gym suit from one class to the other. President Brimhall thought otherwise. One day as she walked across campus she was summoned by a voice from an open window, “Miss Eggertsen, please come to my office immediately.” BYU was considerably smaller then, and the president both knew his teachers by name and had time to notice what they wore. President Brimhall gave her a firm reprimand for appearing on campus in a gym suit and ordered her to wear proper clothing from thence forth. Algie tried to explain the illogic of changing her clothes, only to carry her gym clothes across campus and change back into them less than ten minutes later, but he was unyielding. Her mother helped her make a skirt that would “discreetly cover her bloomers” so she could quickly pull it on over her gym clothes and still avoid the cumbersome business of a double, complicated lady’s attire change.⁵⁶

This solution filled the letter of President Brimhall’s commandment. It also served notice of his “rigid attitude” and that “she would have to be careful as to the speed and extent of the changes in dress and classroom instruction that she wanted to introduce.”⁵⁷

Her problem solving skills were tested once again during winter quarter, 1921. Her advanced class was going to “display their newly acquired dance skills” during the Senior Prom intermission in the spring. For weeks they practiced to Mendelssohn’s “Spring Song,” the BYU band learned the music to accompany them, and costumes were made. They were made of some lightweight fabric—not as filmy as Algie would have liked, but she was being careful—which was tie-dyed in a variety of spring colors, and the hemlines had “a scalloped, almost petal effect.”⁵⁸

The day before the Senior Prom “the Ladies Gym was filled with students decorating, the band rehearsing, and the dancers practicing in costume.” Unfortunately for Algie’s plans to evoke the feeling of

nature, President Brimhall and art department chairman Elbert Eastmond dropped by to check on things. They saw the bare-armed, barefooted dancers and called Algie on the carpet. They told her the dance was lovely, but the girls had to wear socks and their dresses had to have sleeves. Algie “diplomatically protested,” but the decision was final.

When I went back to the stage and reported to the girls what the decision of the President and the Head of the Art Department was to be, they almost broke into tears. But we went on practicing and then had a little get-together afterwards upstairs in my office to see how we were going to meet this need. It was very disappointing to me particularly because I couldn't imagine the girls dancing in stockings. But the decision was made by the girls that it was one of those things that we would all have to abide by regardless of what we felt . . . We would have to buy stockings and put a semblance of a sleeve in the dresses. Mother was an excellent seamstress; she suggested that we make a little cap sleeve that would cover the upper part of the arm. The girls learned how to do it, and I must admit that everyone of them tried to make it as small as possible. Then the stockings—all we could buy were white. We tinted the stockings in very pale shades and kept them as near tan as we could to simulate the color of skin.⁵⁹

Algie further recalls:

The night of the performance came, we had practiced in the gym, and the girls were ready. They performed beautifully. If you could have seen it today—if we'd have had a movie of it—you would have screamed with laughter and I likewise get the giggles when I think that I had the courage to do what I did. And yet the audience clapped and clapped and the girls had to come out and do it a second time. My one disappointment was that they couldn't dance barefooted. But I had a feeling that the introduction of dance at BYU as one of the major divisions of the women's physical education department was really on its way.⁶⁰

The dance department would indeed thrive, and in the 1970s there would still be friction between teachers and administrators over what classroom attire and costume designs were appropriate. For years girls had to special order ballet leotards to get the same capped sleeved coverage as Algie's students.

During the summer of 1921, Algie again went to school, this time in Salt Lake City, taking an intensive ballet course which met twice daily and was taught by Peter Christensen. This class increased her technical knowledge and helped her become proficient at barre exercises. In spite of her additional training, however, her fall quarter dance classes were "still unrecognized in the University Course Catalogue and still did not earn college credit."⁶¹

George Ballif graduated from BYU in 1921 and won a scholarship to Harvard Law School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Even with the scholarship, they couldn't really finance it, so Algie stayed in Provo, teaching and earning money during the 1921-1922 school year.⁶² Algie joined him as soon as possible after the BYU year ended. They lived in Boston for the summer, and Algie went to Radcliffe College, taking advanced gymnastics, field hockey, and eurythmics. She didn't care much for field hockey, but the gymnastics class, which "focused on exercises that manipulated props such as wands and clubs," gave her very helpful teaching information.⁶³ It was the eurythmic class, though, that captivated her. It was a new modern type of instruction helping women interested in dance to relax the body, to understand the movements and responsibilities of all the muscles, and to make them move smoothly and gracefully as they were portraying feelings, emotions, and ideas through dance.

Algie went back to Provo with a wealth of new teaching techniques to use in her finally officially recognized dance classes: PE 26 (Elementary Dancing), PE 27 (Elementary Dance Continued), PE 28 (Advanced Folk Dancing), PE 31 (Elementary Aesthetic Dancing: A course in dancing technique), PE 32 (Fundamentals of Position and Movement), and PE 33 (Interpretive and Descriptive Dances).⁶⁴ In this, her last year of teaching at BYU, she was able to "realize her dream of a dance-drama, 'Aphrodite and Adonis.'"⁶⁵

In retrospect, Algie called this production "a masterpiece of ingenuity and amateurish dancing." Her attempt to introduce Provo to the art of dance was not unlike her father's efforts to acquaint Springville

with visual art. His Library and Art Evenings combined poetry, music, and painting, and her *Aphrodite and Adonis* merged art forms to create acceptance of yet another new form, “visual art and ‘art’ dance.” “And of course when I think about it I want to laugh; I just keep wondering how I ever had the courage and the nerve to do what I did. Thank goodness there were no experts around that would call me on the carpet and say, ‘You don’t know what you’re doing Mrs. Ballif because that doesn’t conform’ to this, that, or what have you. But nevertheless, I did and the girls and I loved it; the audience enjoyed it, too.”⁶⁶

Spring quarter, 1923, was Algie’s last as a paid teacher. George had transferred to Bolt Hall Law School at Berkeley, and she was able to join her husband during his final year in law school. He graduated in 1924, and they came back to Provo to set up his law practice. Algie’s father was ill, her siblings had all left home, and her mother needed her, so she and George moved into the Eggertsen home, where they would live for the next ten years, and Algie entered her life’s next stage: motherhood.⁶⁷

Algie entered the middle phase of her life with the same enthusiasm and vigor she had shown her other endeavors. She bore and raised four children: Algene, Joan, George, and Ane Grethe. But she didn’t let little things like child care, housework, and home management slow down her other interests. Shortly after her first child was born in September 1924, she was called to the Provo Stake Board of Relief Society in charge of literary lessons. She served on this board for ten years.⁶⁸

In 1930 the American Legion Convention was held in Provo.⁶⁹ Algie was elected president of the state women’s branch, the Utah American Legion Auxiliary. “This gave me a lot of responsibility. I felt at the time I had no right to take it, but I did and I had a very successful year . . . I had the cooperation of my wonderful mother and my fine husband and family.” The National Convention of the American Legion Auxiliary was held that year in Boston, and as Utah’s president, Algie was responsible to go and represent Utah. “The state presidents were to wear the most historic gown we could get, gowns typical of the state we represented. I finally found and was able to obtain . . . the gown of Amelia Folsom Young, favorite wife of Brigham Young. She wore this gown to the inauguration of Ulysses S. Grant.”⁷⁰ Each state’s representative wore her costume and gave a ten-minute talk at the convention’s final banquet in Boston’s Symphony Hall.⁷¹ “My talk,

which I had memorized, was well received because I had a good voice and everyone could hear me.” (Take that, Miss Camp.) The dress became the “center of attraction at the banquet and people just hovered around our Utah table.”⁷² “That was quite an experience for me. I was very, very happy.”⁷³

In 1932 Algie became the national membership chairman of the American Legion Auxiliary, a position which gave her tremendous opportunities but also further raised the eyebrows of her disapproving neighbors. The national convention was at the end of January, and Algie was to present a paper she had written. There was just one small complication. Her fourth child was due 15 December, but “decided to wait too long,” and wasn’t born until 8 January. People were critical of her for thinking of leaving a six-week-old, but to go with a two-week-old was beyond the pale. However, “I had a good nurse then who came and took care of the child. A lot of people thought that I did something I shouldn’t have, but I was so delighted I did. Oh my, some of the people thought that was awful. But it was one of the finest experiences I had. It tells of the struggle that women have right within their own community. Sometimes those whom you feel know you very well can hardly understand why you get motivated to do these things. I couldn’t have given up some of these experiences without losing some of my education.”⁷⁴

In 1935, when the youngest of her four children was only three, some “very fine citizens” asked her to run for the Provo school board. Algie was afraid her young family should preclude such outside the home activity, but with George’s support, finally decided to run. She ran against two “very splendid gentlemen” and won. Algie didn’t gloat over her victory. In her usual understated fashion she simply said, “It was very unusual” for a woman to be on the school board. “Many years ago there had been one woman who had been on the school board by appointment. I guess somebody passed away, and she only served that one term.” Algie on the other hand was elected on her own merits for five five-year terms.⁷⁵

She served twenty-three of those twenty-five elected years, only missing the last two because Governor J. Bracken Lee changed school board elections to come every three instead of every five years. Of her time on the school board Algie said, “This was a most satisfying experience for me. It was a position which gave me insight, far more than I

had ever had into the problems of public education and I hope that I did some good.”⁷⁶

While she was on the school board, Algie also served two terms as president of the Utah School Boards Association. In both these positions she

worked very hard for the equal pay for men and women teachers. I worked for the women diligently because there was a time when I would sit in board meetings and some of the male members of the board would come out with suggestions that this particular girl shouldn't get the same salary as a young man who was married and had a family. Now I disagreed with that policy, and I fought to see that women were paid for the job they did and the preparation [was] just the same as men, that the school board had no right to take into consideration if they were single or married or their responsibility. That was their job. We got that into our policy which I felt was very, very good.⁷⁷

She thought the men on the school board were willing to listen to her because she had “learned the value from my mother and father in presenting problems without making the decisions . . . letting the decisions develop instead, and that is a long process.”⁷⁸

Algie wasn't finished shocking the neighbors though. In 1939 she worked on Governor Blood's Committee of the Utah World Fair Commission. Utah had a pavilion at the New York World's Fair in Flushing Meadows on Long Island, and the governor asked Algie to go back for at least a month as a pavilion hostess. She worried about leaving her family for so long, but Annie offered to care for them, and she and George convinced Algie to avail herself of the opportunity.⁷⁹

While Algie was busy with child rearing, school boarding, American Legion Auxiliary meetings, and church work, she also found time to be active in the political process. She worked the grass roots level of the Democratic Party going door to door trying to get people, especially women, to register to vote. This was often very discouraging. Too many people just weren't interested. Once in a while even her dear friends would say, “You take time to do all this Algie? Do you really think women ought to be interested in those things? I have such faith

in my husband that if he tells me how to vote, I am going to vote just like he tells me.” She had to use great tact and diplomacy to help both women and men see that political self-identity had nothing to do with supporting priesthood authority.⁸⁰

Eventually Algie rose in the party ranks to vice-chair and then chair of the Utah Democratic Party.

Now, that was an exciting experience. I think it was Roosevelt’s second and third terms. I was in for eight years. We were organizing the state for a good Democratic landslide, which we had. It was fascinating to meet the people that came from Washington. We had meetings and radio was just beginning to be used. I very frequently had to take to the radio because they said my voice carried over well; I got one or two commendable comments about it. [Are you paying attention, Miss Camp?] So, I was a very busy person. But, all this time . . . I was able to manage my home, see that my children were well fed and went to school on time and did their work. I think it can be done if you have motivation. Some people will always find criticism. Did I find that out!”

However, some people were encouraged by her activism. When people who were ordinarily not “very anxious to get out and make their politics known” could see there were a “few people that are leaders in reasonably good repute in their community” and “active in the church,” they could say, “Well, now Brother and Sister Ballif are active Democrats. I sort of like the way they think about these things,” and then go out and take interest themselves.⁸¹

By 1958 Algie had slowed down a little. “I am off the school board. I am out of the American Legion. I am no longer on a Planning Board in the city, but I am still working in clubs and organizational work.” Those clubs and organizations *only* included a few little things such as the Utah Federation of Women’s Clubs, for which she chaired the International Relations and Community Service Divisions,⁸² *Sorosis*, the American Red Cross, and Polio March of Dimes,⁸³ so naturally she needed something to do. The Utah Democrats asked her to run for the state legislature from her district. Again it took considerable thought, but she finally agreed. “I believed in women participating. I have

always been a great believer in women's rights . . . I felt I had the capacity because I had been in the legislature to lobby for school programs and I felt that I could do about as well as the men I had heard and talked with."⁸⁴ She again had two male opponents, and again she won.

Algie served two terms in the Utah House of Representatives. Her major work was in education and social services. She worked for "the increased equilisation fund in our schools" and was chairman of the Education Committee.⁸⁵

She was persuaded to run for the state senate in 1963, but lost to Dr. John Bernhard, a BYU history and international relations professor and friend who had been helping her with some American Association of University Women duties while she was in charge of its International Relations Division.⁸⁶ Of her legislative work, her daughter Gene would come to say,

If the essence of political life is the ability to practice "the art of the possible" then my mother is a gifted woman in both her private life and public endeavors, and as able and accomplished a mother as she has been civic leader and legislator. . . . She has always accorded her opponents equal respect and status and has always learned something worth while from her most difficult and costly encounters. In short, my mother knows that it is through the honest and spirited clash of ideas, opinions and temperaments that life sustains and enriches itself and that individuals can earn and enjoy the right to be themselves, to express their vital energies, and take pleasure in contributing to the welfare of each other.⁸⁷

From 1959 to 1960, while she was still in the legislature and chair of the Utah Democratic Party, Algie worked very hard for John F. Kennedy's election. During the course of the campaign, Eleanor Roosevelt came to some of the Salt Lake City Democratic meetings and Algie "had the occasion to become quite well acquainted with her." When Kennedy took office, he organized the United States Commission on the Status of Women. He appointed Eleanor Roosevelt chairman and Algie's sister, Esther Peterson (whom he had also appointed assistant secretary of labor) vice chairman. Eleanor remembered Algie and her years of dedicated Democratic Party service and asked her to serve on the Education

Subcommittee. “They wanted a woman from the West, a woman who had school board experience. Well, of course, I was just happily honored.”⁸⁸

As an Education Subcommittee member, Algie went to Washington, D.C., about once a month to attend meetings and listen to women from all over America describe their experiences. Algie thought, “Sometimes I probably was over-awed with their brilliance and their knowledge, but I did the best I could and I think what I did was appreciated.”⁸⁹ According to her daughters, one of Algie’s greatest foibles was never realizing how smart and talented she was and forever feeling at least a little inferior.⁹⁰ The subcommittee also met and visited certain institutions all over the country.

When Eleanor Roosevelt died, President Kennedy appointed Esther to take over the chairmanship.⁹¹ Algie and Esther had a complicated relationship. Each loved and was proud of the other, and each felt a little insecurity-based resentment toward the other—Esther toward Algie as the oldest sister, the one who had always been in charge and done everything first; Algie toward Esther as the one who had moved beyond Utah, had more postgraduate education, and now was famous and powerful. Sometimes this created a little friction when they worked together, but never enough to make either not want to be involved in what the other was doing.⁹²

The commission worked for a full year to complete its report, *The American Woman*. In October 1963 the entire commission assembled in Washington, D.C., and presented the report to President Kennedy in the Gold Room of the White House. This “was the highlight of my life.”⁹³

About a year later President Lyndon Johnson directed every state to make a State Status of Women Commission. Algie served on the Utah commission under both Governors George D. Clyde and Calvin Rampton. “This has been one of my most satisfying experiences, and I hope, achievements.”⁹⁴

In 1965 Algie entered her “working grandmother” phase. Governor Rampton simply called her one day and asked if she would serve as a member of the Commission of Public Welfare of the State of Utah. “I had had no training in social service work, only as it came through the multi-disciplinary things I had done in public service. But [I] finally accepted it and felt honored as well as humbled to think he would want me. This was the first salaried job I had undertaken since my family came. I was then over 65.”⁹⁵

With typical Algie fortitude and energy, she immersed herself in this new endeavor. The commission had responsibility for policy making and implementation, and spending the money appropriated by the legislature for public welfare throughout the state. "I will tell you, there was much to learn," she said, but she gave herself a crash course, reading everything she could and meeting with staff members. It wasn't long before she was fully competent in the areas assigned to her: day-care centers for children, social workers in certain areas, and the "general over-all policy-making of the entire organization, which took in about six other divisions, such as the Division of Aging, Division of the Blind, and Mental Health and Retardation."⁹⁶

This position both tested and demonstrated Algie's leadership skills. One approach, which she found particularly effective, her staff found particularly endearing. She often said to them, "Now, please help me to see wherein I failed in this area and give one suggestion that will enhance my work and make it more profitable and helpful for the people who we are trying to serve way down at the bottom end of the ladder, particularly the poor."⁹⁷

Algie had seen many difficult circumstances in her life, but her work on the commission "opened my eyes to problems that I [never] knew existed. Sometimes you have to have contact with folks who have had difficulties in financing, marital problems, children's problems, problems of not knowing how to live, how to budget. You seldom think of these as you are getting acquainted with the problems of your community."⁹⁸

Algie had worked on the Welfare Commission for two years when the Department of Public Welfare was reorganized. The Division of Family Services was established, and she was appointed its director. She held this post for two years, during which she lived in Salt Lake with her daughter Grethe and son-in-law Chase Peterson during the week and went home to Provo on weekends. She often had early meetings, and the drive was too hard on her.⁹⁹ Sometimes George came to Salt Lake during the week, but they were always together on the weekend.

The Division of Family Services had jurisdiction over all areas pertaining to family relations, such as day-care centers, nursing homes, the Utah State Training School, and the State Industrial School. She directed the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program and worked on implementing Head Start in the schools. She also supervised

the then-new aid from Medicare and Medicaid for “medical services for the underprivileged and the poor under welfare.” She thought one of the most important things she did was to train young mothers, so that they were ready to get jobs when their children were old enough to go to school.”¹⁰⁰

In 1967 President Lyndon Johnson appointed Algie to the fifteen-member Commission for the Study of the Health Facilities in the United States. This gave her “a great perspective of the total health problems of the United States.”¹⁰¹

In 1974, at least in part because she was suffering from macular degeneration, Algie retired from the Welfare Commission, ending her stint as a paid government employee and entering her “Grey Panther” phase of life. In the mid-seventies she, her sister Thelma, and her friend of sixty-five years, Helen Stark, earned this sobriquet because “they were fighters, never mind that their average age hovered around 80.” They could be found at any intellectual forum, political rally, or discussion of civil rights, “elegantly dressed in their handsome suits and stylish shoes, their grey hair beautifully coifed. There they would be on the front row of life: alert, taking notes, asking, with the greatest of tact and diplomacy, the most outrageous questions—the questions which, however hard, had to be asked.”¹⁰²

Much of her activism during this stage found both focus and outlet in the Alice Louise Reynolds Forum. “But lest you envision the Forum as a group of elderly women doing needlework and reliving the past, be advised that the informal name for the Forum was the Grey Panthers . . . They had the wisdom of their years, plus connections, know how, and, most wonderful to some of us in the younger contingent, they had the courage to act.”¹⁰³

While in this stage of life, Algie fought for universal health care, rights of the elderly, and passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. Algie had always been, as she put it, “a Danish Mormon,” and as such, from the time she was a child, activities in addition to church on Sunday were not controversial, keeping the consumption proscriptions of the Word of Wisdom meant moderation when having an occasional glass of wine or bottle of beer, and coffee klatches were both normal and necessary. Word of Wisdom questions weren’t a universal part of LDS temple recommend interviews until the 1970s, and even then, Algie and George both considered themselves, and were considered by their bishop, active members

of the church. Algie accompanied her granddaughter Gigi to the temple when she was married in 1978. Algie considered it part of her duty as a church member to make thoughtful, prayerful decisions, study out all issues, and speak up when she thought injustice was being done. Some people thought she was outrageous, but, “if, as concerns her church, she was something of a maverick, she was a maverick who nevertheless did not desert the herd, but contributed her talents generously.”¹⁰⁴ Of herself, shortly before her series of strokes, she said in a KUTV interview, “I love my church, but I won’t go back on my own integrity. It is quite a thing to still believe and be able to criticize.”¹⁰⁵

Her personal examination of beliefs included scrutinizing her thoughts about the role of women in the church in general and the Divine Feminine in particular. “I am still asking questions. I wish I knew what my concept of a Mother God is. I know there is one, or whatever it is, it is an essence of power, a great over riding something that I have to have in my consciousness . . . in order to be happy.”¹⁰⁶

It did concern her greatly that the church was so opposed to the Equal Rights Amendment. But she thought the official opposition was based more on misinformation than ecclesiastical ill will. In fact, the Alice Louise Reynolds Forum came about because she and five other women “decided it might be well if we had some meetings for the study of the ERA, because the opposition were bringing into the discussions what we called ‘red herring.’ They played on the fears that the legislation would ruin the home, the relationship between husbands and wives would be damaged, and women would become aggressive personalities.” They thought these “ridiculous things needed to be discussed” and that they needed to educate themselves and “learn things relative to the amendment.” So they got a group together and met in the Alice Louise Reynolds Room in the BYU library. According to Algie, they had the finest speakers they could get. “We have had some marvelous meetings, some excellent talks, and they have all been very stimulating.” There was no official organization at first, no membership, no dues. “We just call people up and promulgate the news about the meeting.” They were “open to discussion and disagreements and questions.” Algie said, “They tell me that I am the Sponsor and the one who has made this activity acceptable to women and men who are really in the vanguard. We might be wrong in some of the things we do, but we still feel we have the right to go ahead and explore these problems.”¹⁰⁷ Thus the Alice Louise

Reynolds Forum was born.¹⁰⁸ And Algie's response to those still-raised eyebrows of some of her neighbors was, "I am still a good member of the LDS Church and want to do what good I can . . . but if I am to be pushed aside and intimidated in my thinking because of this one great interest I've had, then I think it is most unfortunate."¹⁰⁹

Although for years Algie was blind and partially deaf, probably the most devastating trial in her entire life was George's death in October 1977. "I have a loneliness that no one ever knows about or dreams about because George's and my life together was so full of love and respect and devotion to each other."¹¹⁰ Algie lived another seven years and filled her time with typical Algie hard work and intellectual activism, but her joy in life was never quite the same.

Algie suffered a series of debilitating strokes in February 1984, which left her "with a still brilliant intellect, but robbed her of the power to organize thoughts into words."¹¹¹ She finally succumbed on 11 July 1984. In one final surprise to the neighbors, three members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles spoke at Algie's funeral: Marvin J. Ashton, James E. Faust, and Dallin H. Oaks. Their general consensus agreed with Elouise Bell's "In Memoriam": "Algie . . . [was] part of a tradition of noblesse oblige. Like the Roosevelts and the Kennedys, the Eggertsens, and in turn the Ballifs, were brought up to believe that if you had advantages in life—brains, talents, education, means—you therefore owed something to the world, especially to the less fortunate members of the human race. It's a tradition that deserves to be passed on."¹¹²



For forty years Marion Davis Clegg camped out in the family cabin, which became Trial Lake Lodge, a haven for campers, hikers, scouts, hunters, and fishermen. Photo courtesy of Photosynthesis.