

## **Chapter LXIII**

### **An Ever Growing Family**

May 18, 1977 – June 5, 1978

Now that Geoff's ordeal was over, everyone could breath easy. Sheffield and Ramona had been so worried about him through it all and it had consumed a lot of their time and energy. One day during the end of May while Ramona was volunteering at the hospital, she was working in the office. Jim Welkington, the business administrator, was talking about automating their business processes by going to a computer system. She mentioned that her grandson was going to major in computer science at Virginia Tech.

That got Jim's attention. He said "Its almost impossible to find anyone with the ability to operate a computer, let alone write the programs. Virginia Tech has the same the system that were considering and we've talked to them about training the people that we need. Do you think your grandson will be interested?"

"I'll mention it to him." Ramona replied.

"Good. If he's interested, have him come talk to me."

Ramona told Geoff about her conversation with Mr. Welkington and he jumped at the chance. He called the hospital and made an appointment to meet with him later that week. He explained that they had an arrangement with Virginia Tech, in which they would train their data processing staff. The computer they were getting was the IBM System 34, which had just been introduced by IBM. It was a midrange, multi user, multi task machine. They had selected some key people already employed by the hospital, but they needed two more people than what they had. The class would start on July 5<sup>th</sup> and run for twenty four weeks, concluding the week before Christmas, just in time for the arrival of their computer system in January. The course had two objectives; the first six weeks was to teach the operating system and the rest of the time was to teach the programming language RPG II. In the process, he would be exposed to everything he would need to know. At the conclusion of the interview, he asked Geoff, "I believe you have what I'm looking for. So what do say?"

Geoff accepted on the spot and was offered a job and a scholarship to cover the cost of his training, providing he would agree to work for the hospital for two years. Then if he stayed beyond that, they would consider sending him back to complete his bachelors degree.

Geoff went back to Virginia Teach to enroll in the course. With what schooling he already had, he could receive an associates degree at the end of the class and have extra credits that would go toward his bachelors degree. For not knowing what he wanted to do, he now had both an education and a career path all laid out in front of him. Ramona was glad that she just happened to be working in the office that day.

At the end of May, Sheffield and Ramona got together with Craig's family for Memorial Day. As usual, they went to the cemetery to put flowers out on the graves and later had a picnic in the trees down along the river. Four days later, Ramona celebrated her seventy fourth birthday. Geoff and Todd talked her

into going with them to see Star Wars for her birthday, which had only been released a week earlier. Sheffield really liked it, except for some of the odd alien creatures. The idea of “the force” gave him something to think about. He thought that it was interesting that the Imperial Star Cruiser looked very similar to the Japanese battleship Yamato and the attack on the death star reminded him of the times that the Reprisal came under attack during the war. As for Ramona, she enjoyed it for the whimsical adventure fantasy that it was.

A week later, on the 10<sup>th</sup>, Sheffield and Ramona flew to Washington DC in the Staggerwing and picked up Mace and Pat and flew on to New York City for the Reprisal Reunion. As her first captain, Sheffield was always a guest of honor at these events. This was the first one since she had been decommissioned after a long career and at the time she was being held in reserve at Philadelphia. Although several thousand men had served aboard her during her thirty two year career, only a fraction of them were in attendance, including many who had served under Sheffield such as Hank Terry, Morris Gover, and other old friends.

The reunion consisted of a reception on Friday night and group breakout sessions on Saturday broken down by time periods. Sheffield chose to attend the one for the period of 1942 to 1945, although he had had flown his flag aboard her in 1952 and 1953 as well. The reunion culminated with a banquet for everyone on Saturday night. In honor of her retirement, there was a video presentation that covered her entire career. Among those making remarks was her first captain. During the business portion of the meeting, new association officers were chosen and the date and place of the next reunion was set for June 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> 1982 in Portland, Oregon.

The Brasons and Owens spent Sunday sightseeing in New York City, including a carriage ride through Central Park. Then on Monday, they flew home. While in the East, Morris and Sheila came to spend a couple of days with Sheffield and Ramona before flying back to Utah.

Later in June, Sheffield and Ramona flew back up to Washington for the day in the Staggerwing, with Stirling and Mary Ann riding along, while Craig and Edith had Geoff and Todd with them came in his Bonanza. They landed at the College Park airport and took the bus from there over to the Temple for Todd to go through for the first time before his mission.

The 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend was a special time. For starters, the it marked ten years since Sheffield and Ramona had been home from their mission. Todd celebrated his nineteenth birthday on Saturday the 2<sup>nd</sup>. On the 4<sup>th</sup> they went to the parade in Salem, had a barbecue in the trees down along the river, and in the evening went to watch the fireworks display. The very next day, Geoff began his training at Virginia Tech. Rather than get an apartment in Blacksburg, he opted to live at home and make the forty five minute commute each day. Since Todd was leaving soon, Geoff claimed the Mustang as his own

Over the next few weeks, Todd spent a lot of time with Sheffield as he coached him on what to expect on his mission and worked with him on memorizing the discussions and the scriptures that went along with them. He had told Todd that any head start he could get before he left would make the transition that much easier. He also took advantage of going out with the missionaries from the Virginia Roanoke Mission who were assigned to the Salem Ward.

By the time he had his farewell on July 31<sup>st</sup>, he was about as ready as anyone could be with the first two discussion down pat and several scriptures to boot. As he stood before the Salem Ward in Sacrament Meeting that evening in his new suit and spit shined shoes, something else his grandfather had taught him, he sounded more like returned missionary than one who was just leaving as he gave a powerful sermon on the need for the restoration.

Since President Winder was out of town and Todd was going out west with the family to attend Teresa's wedding and the family reunion, arrangements were made for him to be set apart for his mission in Salt Lake. That freed him from being bound to the mission rules like Geoff had been before entering the mission home three years earlier.

The next day, Sheffield's Staggerwing and Craig's Bonanza flew in formation across the county. Craig had saved his entire three week vacation just for this trip. When they got to Western Wyoming, they parted ways and Sheffield flew to Rexburg and Craig and his family flew on to Burley. When Sheffield landed at the airport in Rexburg, Wade was there to meet them and took them home.

As opposed to the previous year, Wade and Norma actually had a lawn and a garden. The pasture and alfalfa had come back and there were a number of calves and two horses in the pasture. Wade had rebuilt his barn and repaired the fences. He had replaced his pickup with a 1975 Chevrolet and his tractor with a 1969 Farmall 544 row-crop tractor. It was about twelve years newer than Sheffield's 340 and had more power.

The only evidence of the flood was the HUD trailer that they had lived in while rebuilding. Teresa had already moved into it and had set up housekeeping. Together she and Roy had already bought some furniture, including a bedroom set. They were just waiting until they were married when Roy could move in with her.

The next day when they went into town and again there was hardly any evidence of the disastrous flood. There were a lot of new homes and several under construction and a lot of HUD trailers everywhere. There were a few abandoned homes still in they're damaged condition. All of the roads and bridges had been repaired and life in Rexburg was pretty much back to normal.

On Wednesday, Sheffield and Ramona set out with Wade and Norma and their family, including Teresa, in the Suburban with the trailer in tow for Granite Creek. They were the first ones there and were

getting set up when Craig and Edith and their family, including Gean, Nathan and Dwayne arrived in Nathan's uncle's motorhome. The same one that they had stayed in the year before while helping with the flood clean up. Dwayne was now two and half years old and Gean was six months along in her pregnancy.

The next to arrive were Janet and Jerry and their family, followed by Takara and Manti and their family. Takara was a much a part of the Brason family as were Craig, Norma, and Janet. The only reason they didn't adopt her was because she was already eighteen when she first came to stay with them. Her kids were growing up just like the rest of the grandchildren. The only one was missing was Geoff who had to stay home so he could attend his training.

The next three days were spent doing what they always did at Granite Creek. Everything about it had become tradition, including spending a day in Jackson. They were joined by Teresa's fiancée, Roy, on Friday afternoon after leaving work early that day. It was the first time that he had ever been there. On Saturday they broke camp and everyone went home; Sheffield and Ramona to Rexburg and Craig's family to Burley. But that wasn't the end of their time together.

On Thursday morning, the 11<sup>th</sup> they all met again at the Idaho Falls Temple for Teresa's wedding. This time they were joined by Roger and Chentelle Rowan and many of their family, including Jolene and Sedric who came up from Blackfoot and may of Chantelle's family. Roy's family made a good sowing as well. By the time they went to the sealing room, there were people left standing as several from Teresa's and Roy's wards were also in attendance. Of Sheffield and Ramona's family the only one missing was Geoff. His presences was missed, but no one missed him more than Teresa' after all, they were the twin cousins.

Following the wedding and pictures on the temple grounds, the wedding party reassembled at the restaurant on the first floor of the Westbank Hotel along the falls, across the river from the temple. The long, busy day concluded that evening with their reception at Wade and Norma's ward meetinghouse just up the road.

Following the reception, the newlyweds spent their wedding night in their honeymoon cottage. Roy had moved all of his belongings in the day before and now that they were married, he claimed his bride. The rest of the family crammed into Wade and Norma's house while others stayed in their camp trailer.

The next day, Teresa and Roy left for their honeymoon and Janet and Jerry and Gean and Nathan left to go home. Upon parting, Gean said goodbye to her brother. The next time he would see her, he would have another niece or nephew. Craig and his family remained there so he could spend a few days with Norma. On Saturday, they all took a day trip through Yellowstone, traveling in together in two cars.

On Monday, Sheffield and Ramona, Craig and Edith, and Todd and Tina flew down to Clarkston in both planes and landed in Wayne Gover's pasture. Sheffield and Ramona stayed with Wayne and Gail while

Craig's family stayed with Janet and Jerry. In the time that they had together, they had a picnic up on the range one day and another day they attended the Logan Temple.

Later in the week, Sheffield and Ramona accompanied Craig and his family to Salt Lake where they stayed at Little America. They visited Temple Square and some of the other attractions that Salt Lake had to offer. Then on Saturday morning, they delivered Todd to the Mission Home. Before being separated, they accompanied Todd across the street to the Church Office Building where he was set apart for his mission by Elder Paul H. Dunn, who remembered Sheffield and Ramona from when he met them in Hawaii.

With Todd now on his mission, they drove back up to Clarkston and spent the rest of the weekend with Janet. On Monday Morning, they started home, but first, they went by way of Burley and stayed the rest of the day with Gean. The next morning, they took off from the Betts lane and flew back across the country in formation, arriving home on Tuesday the 23<sup>rd</sup> just in time for Tina to begin her junior year at the brand new Salem High School, which combined the student bodies of both Andrew Lewis High School in Salem and Glenvar High School in western Roanoke County.

At the end of the week, Craig and Edith received a short letter from Todd. He said that he arrived in Los Angeles on Thursday, the day he wrote the letter, and had been assigned to Torrence, a suburb of Los Angeles. He said that thanks to his Grandpa, he had already passed off the first two discussions and was working on the third. He was excited to go with his companion to his first discussion later that evening.

In the meantime, Geoff had really enjoyed his training so far. He said that it was the perfect fit for him and that he was really getting into it. He had already completed the operations part of the course and was getting into the basics of RPGII. As it turned out, Lewis Gale Hospital wasn't the only ones with people in the class; the city of Roanoke had sent some people as had two or three other companies, all who were gearing up to have IBM System 34s delivered to them.

He didn't mind the commute. The reason was because he liked living at home, he felt safe there. He hadn't really socialized a whole lot since his divorce, especially not where women were involved, other than at church. He didn't want to go to any of the young single adult activities because that was where he got into trouble to begin with. Dating again was out of the question, at least for the time being. He didn't want anyone pushing him either. He was going to take it slow and easy until he felt he was ready,

On the last day of August, Sheffield had his annual physical. "Other than your left leg, you're in pretty good shape for and old man." the doctor joked with him as he gave him a clean bill of health. "Just keep doing what you've been doing. It seems to be working for you."

"So you'll let me keep my pilots license for another year?"

"I don't see why not. Your reflexes and response time are as good as any body's. Just be sure that you wear you glasses." Then he concluded, "I'll see you next year, Admiral."

Sheffield left the Salem VA hospital satisfied with the outcome. Other than being a little slower than he used to be, he felt fine. As for his leg, he had put up with it for so long that it was just part of life. It didn't hurt, it just felt numb and tingled. With time, the sensation was more pronounced. Using his cane helped take the pressure off. Although he could get along without it, he preferred using it.

The VA hospital was only two miles from home, a little over a half a mile as the crow flies, which made it convenient. On the way home, he was stopped behind a truck at a red light at the intersection of Roanoke Boulevard and Electric Road, also known as State Route 419, waiting to make a left turn.

He glanced in his rear view mirror to see a car coming up behind him too fast. The teen age girl behind the wheel seemed to be distracted by the other teenage girl in the front seat. There wasn't time to react or brace himself. The impact pushed his car forward, as his head flung backwards. Having been a pilot all of those years he was accustomed to being strapped in by a safety harness, so wearing a seatbelt with a shoulder strap was second nature to him.

In almost the same instant, the front end of his car was shoved under the bed of the truck ahead of him. The force of the second impact threw his head forward with equal force. His seatbelt kept his forehead from bouncing off the steering wheel. When it was all over, Sheffield was little dazed by the whole incident, but was well aware of what had just happened.

Bystanders who had witnessed the accident rushed across the street to see if anyone was hurt. A man approached Sheffield's car, motioning for him to roll down his window. The engine died when it rammed under the truck, but the key was still on so he could roll down the window.

"Are you alright?" the man asked.

"I think so." Sheffield replied.

"Good. Just sit there and try not to move too much. Help is on the way."

The man who had just talked to Sheffield moved to the car behind him. He went to turn his head to see what kind of shape the car behind him was in, but was stopped by a pain in his neck that went down to his shoulders. He knew right then that he wasn't as alright as he had first thought.

The truck driver, who was unhurt, came back to inspect the damage. He too asked, "Are you alright?"

"No I don't think so." he answered. "What about the girls behind me?"

"From here it looks like the passenger hit her head on windshield."

A police siren could be heard approaching the scene of the accident. It grew louder as it got closer. It sounded like there were one or two more sirens as well.

In a moment a police car was on the scene. Within seconds a second squad car arrived, followed by an ambulance and a fire truck was approaching from the north.

"One of the police officers, approached the car and asked, "Sir, are you injured?"

"I've got this pain in my neck." He answered.

"Sit tight, sir. Someone will be with you momentarily."

As best as he could, he watched what was going on behind him through his rear view mirrors. The ambulance attendants were removing the girl from the passenger side and placing her on a gurney.

Just then a second ambulance arrived. The two attendants got out and approached Sheffield. They too asked how he was and he gave them the same response. One of them opened the door so he could get close enough to examine him.

"Get me a neck brace." he called over his shoulder to his companion.

"Sir." he said addressing Sheffield. "We need to immobilize your neck as precaution and get you to the hospital to have you checked out." As he put the brace on him, he continued, "Do you have a preference as to which hospital?"

"Um, take me to the VA hospital."

"Alright sir. Sit tight for a just a moment."

After the attendant had stepped away for a moment, Sheffield could see in the mirror that driver of the car behind him was being loaded into the first ambulance. When the attendant returned, he and his partner had a gurney. "Let me help you out." one of them said as he reached around him to unfasten the seat belt. "Now, I'm going to swing your legs around." he said as he reached around his knees and rotated his body a quarter of a turn and placed his feet on the ground. "Can you stand?"

"I think so."

The attendants on either side of him took him by his arms and gently lifted him to his feet and turned him around and sat him on the gurney. "Just lie back, sir." one of them said.

Sheffield complied and while they were strapping him down, the other ambulance left.

One of the police officers approached Sheffield and said, "Don't worry about your car, sir. We'll take care of it. I'll accompany you to the hospital and take your statement after they check you out."

Sheffield was placed into the back of the ambulance, which was a Dodge van. One of the men got in the back with him while the other got in behind the wheel. A moment later the the ambulance was heading back in the same direction that Sheffield had just come, the seven tenths of a mile to the VA Hospital.

As they unloaded Sheffield from the ambulance, they asked him, "Who's your doctor?"

"Doctor Carl Hawkins."

As they took him in, a nurse and a hospital orderly came to his side. "What do we have here?" the nurse asked.

"A possible case of whiplash." one the attends said. "He said that his doctor is Doctor Hawkins."

The gurney came to stop and the nurse and the orderly began taking his vitals. He could hear over the intercom the call that went out for Dr. Hawkins. By the time they were finished taking his vitals, Dr. Hawkins was at his side. "Well Admiral, I didn't think I'd be seeing you again so soon. They tell me that you might have whiplash. How do you feel?"

"My neck hurts."

"I'm sure it does. We need to take an x-ray and have a look. Do you want me to call Ramona?"

"She's not home. Could you call my daughter in law, Edith Brason. The number is three eight one, three three one three."

When Sheffield was brought out of the x-ray room, Edith was there to greet him. "Are you alright, Uncle Sheffield?"

"Yeah, I'll be fine. Its just a case of whiplash. I'll have to wear this brace for six weeks or so." Then he added, "My car looked in a lot worse shape. Oh well, I've been thinking of trading it in anyway."

As promised, the police officer was there to take his statement regarding the accident. Sheffield told him what happened and asked, "How are the two girls in the car behind me?"

"I don't know. Sir." He then asked to see his drivers license. After taking down the information, he continued. "Your car has been taken to Salem Salvage. Once your insurance adjuster has taken a look at it, you can decide what to do with it from there. When we get all of our information together we'll give you the details and you can work out the insurance issues with the other two drivers."

"Thank you officer." Sheffield said

"Well Admiral." Dr. Hawkins said, "I don't see any reason why you can't go home. Just be sure to wear the brace and try not to move your head anymore than you have too. Come back in about three weeks and let me take a look."

When Edith took him home, Ramona had just returned from her errands and Sheffield had to explain everything to her. She was just thankful that he was alright.

A few days later the investigation was complete. The girl in the car that hit him was at fault for the entire accident and had been cited for inattentive driving. She had escaped with only a good bruise on her forehead from hitting the steering wheel. Her friend, who was not wearing a seat belt has suffered a concussion and lacerations, and had to miss a few days of school. Her father's insurance was quick to respond and made a settlement, which included Sheffield's anticipated medical bills and the value of his car, which was a total loss.

While Sheffield was incapacitated and unable to fly the Staggerwing, Craig gave it the once over and determined what needed to be done to it. Over the next few weeks he repaired or replaced what needed to be done to it to keep it in pristine flying condition. For a thirty seven year old airplane it was in top notch



shape. It gave Craig a chance to get his hands dirty for a change, since he spent most of his time behind a desk. Craig kept Sheffield's old pickup and tractor in the same shape.

During the time that Sheffield had to wear the brace, he did what he could and was able to stay caught up with giving blessings. Ramona saw to it that he didn't do anything to cause further injury.

In the middle of September, Sheffield watched the coverage of the second test flight of the Space Shuttle Enterprise on the news. He had missed the first flight a month earlier while they were out west. This flight was similar to the first as the shuttle was taken up to an altitude of twenty six thousand feet on the back of Boeing 747 and released. The flight lasted all of five minutes after being released before landing on the dry lake bed at Andrews Air Force Base in California.

In an interview after the flight, one of the astronauts said that it was like flying a brick, because without power there was only once chance to land. The idea of landing a spacecraft like an airplane was intriguing to Sheffield. It still had more test flights over the next month or so, but the first space flight was still a few years away.

When Sheffield went back to see Dr. Hawkins at the end of three weeks, he found him to be mending nicely but insisted that he continue to wear the brace for the next three weeks, which he did. Finally in mid October, he was able to take it off. Even more so, he was able to drive and fly again.

Craig had the Staggerwing all put back together, but he needed another car. He was satisfied with



the Buicks that he had owned over the years and knew exactly what he wanted and where to find it. After looking over a few cars and test driving some of them, he settled on a 1976 Buick LeSabre. It was a red four door sedan with a white vinyl roof. That model had a similar sleek body style to his 1971 whereas the 77's were more boxy. It had the more

fuel efficient brand new 3.8 liter engine, which made a difference with the higher gasoline prices that resulted from the 1973 Arab oil embargo.

Ramona, on the other hand, was happy to keep her 1967 Mustang, even though it was now ten years old. Of all of the many cars that she had owned over the years, she really loved that car. Like everything else, Craig kept it in mint condition for her.

At the end of September, Geoff was half way through his computer training. It had gone well. He was actually working on customizing the billing software that would be loaded onto the hospital's computer; so in addition to learning, he was doing actual work. He found it quite rewarding.

Even though it kept him busy, he did find time to start dating again. Initially he had sworn off women altogether, but six months after his divorce was final, he had a change of heart. The reason for this softening

was Brenda Gordon. Geoff had known her all of his life, as she too grew up in the Salem Branch. She was ten months older than Geoff and was a year ahead of him in school. Brenda's parents, Leland Gordon and Natalie Little, were the same age as Wade and Craig respectively. In fact Natalie and Wade were cousins. Her grandfather, Nathan Little, had been Sheffield's first counselor in the branch presidency, so Brenda was no stranger to the Brasons.

After graduating from high school in 1972, Brenda attended Hollins and received an associates degree in 1974. After graduating, she took job in Lynchburg where she met Matt Blackman. He was five years older than her and wasn't a member of the church but feigned interest so she would go out with him. During their brief three month courtship he was baptized with the same deceitfulness so she would marry him with the promise of taking her to the temple in a year. They were married in September and she got pregnant right away. Only then did she realize that he had no intention of keeping his promise and became controlling and abusive.

It all came to a head the following spring after another beating. This one sent her to the hospital and she nearly lost the baby, a baby that he had made clear that he did not want. After having been isolated from her family, she reached out to them and they took her home with them after she was released from the hospital. She immediately filed for divorce, which became final in June of that year. In the divorce, she took back her maiden name and demanded financial support. He refused any financial responsibly and signed away all rights to their child.

Brenda's baby was now two years old and her mother watched him while she was at work. Like Geoff, she too had been hesitant to return to the dating arena. But one Sunday after church, they got to talking and found that they had found someone in each other who knew what they had been through. In confiding with one another, they developed a trust and friendship. Filially they agreed to break the dating barrier and went out. After the first three or four dates, they mutually agreed that they were "going together" but made it clear that they were "taking it slow" when asked about the future of their relationship.

Geoff wasn't the only one of the grandkids in a budding romance as Samantha was in a serious relationship as well. She was going steady with a young man that she had known in high school. He had returned from his mission during the summer and was attending his second year at Ricks. Norma told Ramona that she and Wade were hoping that that something more would come of their relationship.

Whether or not anything came of Geoff's and Brenda's romance, the family was set to increase by one as Sheffield and Ramona looked forward to the arrival of their second great grandchild with Gean due in the middle of November. When the time got close, Edith flew to Idaho to be there with Gean and to help out.

She called home on the 16<sup>th</sup> to announce the birth of Lujana Gean and said that both mother and baby were doing just fine. She made a proposal that changed everyone's plans. Since the kids had all come

home for Christmas the year before, they were planning on coming for Thanksgiving that year. Since it would be too soon for Gean and the baby to travel, she suggested that they have Thanksgiving at Gean's home instead since they had a big house with lots of room. Besides there were fewer of the family in Virginia now than there were in Idaho and Utah.

Her suggestion made sense, so the new plan was to meet at Gean and Nathan's home south of Burley for Thanksgiving. Geoff had break in his training that week, so on Wednesday, Sheffield and Ramona took off in the Staggerwing. Craig, Geoff, and Tina met up with them in his Bonanza and they made the cross country trip to Idaho. When they arrived late in the afternoon they landed on the road just south of Gean's house. Sheffield was the first to land, with Craig right behind him.

The very first thing inside the door, Ramona rushed to pick up her new great granddaughter. "What a beautiful baby. Just look at all of that hair." she exclaimed. "I really love her name. Where did you come up with it?"

"Our bishop's wife is named Lujana. She's such a gracious lady so we borrowed her name."

After Ramona had her turn, Lujana was passed around. Next she went to her grandfather, then to her Aunt Tina. Eventually Sheffield had his turn, and finally Uncle Geoff. Not wanting to be left out little Dwayne, who was just a couple of days less than eight weeks from his third birthday had to have his share of the love.

On Thursday morning, Ramona and Edith began working on Thanksgiving dinner while Gean took care of Lujana. The first to arrive was Norma and her family, including the newlyweds and Samantha's boyfriend who she brought along to meet the family. Sheffield and Ramona saw for themselves why Norma and Wade had spoken so highly of him.

Collin Rogers was a such a polite young man, as well as good looking. Ramona told Samantha that he was keeper. He had graduated from high school a year ahead of Samantha, attended Ricks College for one year before serving a mission to Japan, where Wade had served nearly twenty five years earlier which gave them something in common. Now that he was home, he was finishing his second year at Ricks with plans of going on to BYU.

A little later in the morning, Janet and Jerry and Takara and Teacum arrived as well. With the items that Norma, Janet, and Takara had brought with them, dinner quickly came together. After the blessing was said, the turkey and all that went with it were passed around the table. Nathan was proud to point out that the "spuds", as he called them, had been grown right there on their farm. Over dinner they had a chance to get to know Collin better. Eventually, he, Wade, and Takara got involved in conversation that none of the rest of them could understand, because it was in Japanese. While they were thus engaged, Geoff borrowed Gean's telephone to call a good friend from his mission who only lived a mile and half to the east.

It was one of those perfect Thanksgivings with the entire family together, except for Todd in California. However in his place was one other potential member of the family, Collin. Brenda, who stayed behind to have Thanksgiving with her family, also appeared to be another serious candidate.

As it started to get late in the afternoon, everyone began getting ready to go home, but before leaving they all agreed to come to the extended Brason family reunion on Memorial Day. Sheffield and Ramona and Craig's family spent the night again and on Friday morning said goodbye and they took off and flew home. On the return trip, there was an extra passenger, as Edith went home with Craig.

On Saturday, Sheffield and Ramona and Craig's family, including Brenda and her son Barry went up to the cabin to get their Christmas trees. It was obvious that Geoff had become just as fond of Barry as he had his mother. This time it was just a day trip as they went up and came back with their trees in the same day.

On Wednesday December 7<sup>th</sup> Sheffield celebrated his seventy ninth birthday with Walt and Sarah and Emily. Walt's condition had deteriorated since being diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease a few years earlier and it was beginning to take its toll on him. Sarah was about the same. Her memory was not very good. She could remember those closest to her who she had known for years, but she could not remember any one she had met recently. As far as remembering events, sometimes she could remember things from the past, other times she couldn't. The same was true with recent events, like whether or not she took her medication that morning. Their children who lived close by had to look in on them every day. Emily who was not quite eighty wasn't in too bad of shape and was still able to take care of herself.

At the end of the week before Christmas, Geoff completed his training and had the entire week of Christmas off before formally beginning his employment at Lewis Gale Hospital. Christmas was on Sunday that year and Brenda and Barry spent it with the Brasons. Craig and Edith got a call from Todd that afternoon and everyone, including Sheffield and Ramona, got to talk to him. He had recently been transferred to Santa Monica to be a senior companion. Sheffield and Ramona also got to talk with the Norma and Janet and most of the rest of the grandkids as well. A week later, they were celebrating the new year. 1978 promised to be a good year with some possible additions to the family.

But first Sheffield had to say goodbye to his brother, Walt. In January he caught the flu, which later developed into pneumonia. It was severe enough that he had to be hospitalized. It was complicated by his Parkinson's Disease and he took a turn for the worse and he died on February 3<sup>rd</sup> at the age of eighty one. Sheffield spoke at his funeral the following Wednesday.

Now that Walt was gone, their kids had to make a decision regarding their mother. In her forgetful state, Sarah couldn't be left alone. Their choice was to either put her in a senior living home or one of them would have to take her in. Emmaline and Willie stepped forward and made a place for her in their home.

In February, Norma called to tell them that Samantha and Collin had announced their engagement. They had set their wedding date to coincide with graduating from Ricks so both sets of her grandparents could attend both in one trip out west. Then in March, Norma called again to say that Teresa and Roy were expecting in September.

So the family was set to increase. But would that be all for now? Geoff and Brenda seemed to be getting quite serious in their relationship. Geoff's job was off to a great start and they were spending a lot more time together. Nearly every time the family got together, Brenda and Barry were there. Although it was quite obvious, they didn't want to talk about what plans that they might be making for the future. If the subject came up, they quickly squelched it by saying that they were taking it slow and changed the subject. Clearly they were in love, and Geoff obviously thought the world of Barry. Brenda and Barry had wormed their way into the hearts of the Brasons so deep that there was no getting out.

Then one Sunday in early April when they came for dinner, Brenda had a diamond ring on her left hand. So much for taking things slow. After the initial excitement settled down, Geoff announced that the plan was to get married on the 26<sup>th</sup> of May in the Washington Temple; they wanted to do it when Gean would be there for the family reunion. In fact the whole family would be there except for Todd, who had just been transferred to San Louis Obispo to be a district leader.

So Sheffield and Ramona had an exciting couple of months ahead of them with two more grandchildren getting married. In the process they would pick up an instant great grandchild with another on the way in the fall.

On Tuesday the 25<sup>th</sup> Sheffield and Ramona, and Roger and Chantelle took off in the Staggerwing for the cross county trip to Idaho with their customary stops in Springfield, Illinois and McCook, Nebraska for lunch and to refuel. The trip went without incident, other than encountering a lot of cloud cover over the mid section of the country.

When they landed at the Rexburg, Airport, Wade was there to meet them to take them home. They had recently traded their Suburban for a newer model. After their long trip, they just wanted to relax the rest of the day. Sheffield and Ramona spent Tuesday with Norma's family, while the Rowans spent the day seeing Chantelle's family.

Thursday was the first of the two big days that they had made the trip for, Samantha's graduation from Ricks College. She was one of more than twelve hundred sophomores who received their associates degree that day. The graduation was held in the Hart Auditorium with Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Presidency of First Quorum of the Seventy as the speaker. Also gradating that day was her fiancée, so Collin's family was also in attendance. It wasn't exactly picnic weather, so Wade and Norma hosted the celebration in their home for both Samantha and Collin.

The next morning Norma and Wade drove down to Idaho Falls where they met Samantha and Collin and his parents. Sheffield and Ramona and Roger and Chantell drove down later and were there in time to go through with them. By they time they were ushered into the sealing room after the session, they were joined by Janet and Jerry who drove up from Utah. Craig and Edith weren't able to make the trip. After the wedding, pictures were taken on the temple grounds even though the weather was still rather blustery. Then the wedding party gathered for a luncheon at the West Bank, across the river from the temple before going back to Rexburg to get ready for the reception later that evening. Since Collin's father worked for food services at Ricks College, the reception was held in the Manwarring Center and catered by food services.

Their immediate plans were to move to Provo and get settled into an apartment were they would be attending BYU in the fall. That way they didn't need to find a temporary place to live in the meantime, just to move again later.

It had been a busy couple of days without a lot of time to spend with family, but there would be plenty of that later in the summer. So on Saturday, Sheffield and Ramona and Roger and Chantell flew home. That gave Sheffield and Ramona a month to prepare for the next wedding and the extended Brason family reunion.

As their wedding drew near, Geoff began to have cold feet, after being burned once before. It wasn't that he didn't love Brenda and Barry, because he did – very, very much. It was that he was scared. It seemed reasonable to him to just continue their relationship as it was, without getting married. He might have suggested it if not for the fact that he loved her and wanted to have a family – something that he wouldn't do without being married. After a few days of wrestling with his own fears, he mentioned it to Brenda, to find out that she was scared too, but not to the point of calling off the wedding. They decided to set a side what fears that they had and face the future, whatever it held, together

So the day before the wedding, Sheffield piloted his Staggerwing to Washington, with Ramona riding in her customary seat and Stirling and Mary Ann in the back. They were followed by Craig in his Bonanza with he Edith and Tina and Brenda's parents. Geoff, Brenda and Barry drove up in his Mustang. The rest of Brenda's family drove up as well.

Once they landed at the College Park Airport, they took the bus to a hotel near the temple. Later in the day the rest of the Brason family arrived at the Washington Regional Airport, which included everyone except for Todd, even Takara and Teacum came with their three kids. They too made their way to the same hotel. That evening there was a family reunion of sorts at the hotel, as all of their rooms were on the same floor. For Samantha and Collin, this was part of their honeymoon.

On Friday morning, they all rode the bus over to the temple. Tina and Brenda's younger sister were put in charge of the younger children while everyone else went inside. Wesley, Marty, and Takaraka's son

Christopher stuck together, distancing themselves from the girls and the little kids, while they waited.

When the time came, they all gathered around the temple's main entrance while they waited for the bride and groom to come out. All of the rest of the family had already come out and waited with them for the bride and groom to make their appearance. When they finally did come out for their pictures, they made a handsome couple, she in her wedding dress with puffy sleeves and high collar and he in a rented tuxedo.

After the pictures, the wedding party went back to the hotel for the luncheon. The bride and groom were the last to arrive and the first to leave, as they were anxious to get an early start on their wedding night since that was all the time they would have for a honeymoon at the time. Sheffield and Craig flew back to Roanoke with their respective passengers, while the rest flew down on a commercial flight. That evening the reunion continued at the Two Star Ranch.

On Saturday, everyone pitched in to set up for the reception at the stake center. Geoff and Brenda showed up later in the afternoon so they too could get ready. That evening, their reception was well attended by family, friends, and neighbors. Again everyone pitched in to clean up and clear away. That night, Geoff, Brenda, and Barry went home to their little three bedroom rented house in Salem.

The Salem Ward was glad to have the entire Brason Clan attend church with them on Sunday. Norma, Janet, and especially Takara got to see a lot of their friends who they hadn't seen for a while. They all got together for Sunday dinner at Sheffield and Ramona's home before going back to sacrament meeting in the afternoon. Then that evening, Sheffield had an appointment to give two patriarchal blessings; one to Tina and one to Wesley who would be seniors in high school in the fall.

That year, Memorial Day was on Monday the 29<sup>th</sup>. It began with a trip to cemetery as the entire family went to set out flowers on the graves of loved ones who had passed away, which now included Walt. It was a perfect day as the extended family gathered at the Two Star Ranch. Tim jokingly claimed to have slipped the weatherman at the television station where he worked a twenty dollar bill to arrange for good weather.

Now that Walt was gone, Sheffield was the only one of the second generation remaining, which made him the patriarch of the entire Brason clan. Most of the cousins of third generation were there and many of the fourth generation now had families of their own. No one really counted how many were there. It would have been easier to count those who weren't. From Sheffield's family, Todd was the only one missing. It was a much larger gathering than five years ago since there had been so many marriages and births and most of them still lived in the area. When it was all over and everyone went their way looking forward to the next one in five years.

On Tuesday, Nathan had to go home to plant beans and Jerry needed to get back to the ranch. The rest stayed for the rest of the week. That gave Norma and Wade time to spend with the Rowans and to look

in on their Diet Center franchises. At the time, they had Diet Centers in Roanoke, Lynchburg, and Charlottesville. During the week, Ramona's bathhouse was a popular place, including a reunion of the sisterhood with Janet, Takara, Olivia and Beverly. Since the newlyweds didn't get a honeymoon, they came over when Geoff got of work and they too had some alone time in the bathhouse.

On Saturday the week culminated with Ramona's 75<sup>th</sup> birthday on Saturday. The kids threw a birthday party in honor of her three quarters of a century. The best compliment she could have ever received came from Geoff. He said, "Grandma, you're the youngest old lady I know. Just how many grandmas drive around in a red 1967 Mustang convertible?" It was true, her "gift of youth" continued to grace her by keeping the last ten or twelve years from showing.

On Sunday, everyone attended church together before returning home on Monday, with plans for getting together again out west in August. After such a wonderful ten days together, Sheffield and Ramona set their sights on the next big adventure.

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