

History of Clark Worthen Higgins

(The first part of this autobiography was written in 1964 while stationed at Langley AFB, Virginia.)

I came into this world on 14 November 1908, the son of Joh McMurtrie Higgins and Effie Worthen Higgins, the place: Garland, Utah. This little town is about 15 or 20 miles northwest of Brigham City. My father was employed by the Utah Idaho Sugar Company. I consider it quite a coincidence that my wife was born in Brigham City.

My parents moved to Garland from St. George soon after they were married. A few years later we moved to Antelope Island in the Great Salt Lake where my father worked for a company engaged in the livestock and ranching business. My father was a finish carpenter. Other than growing up some during our stay there, the two things that I remember them telling me about were how white they got on an emergency trip made from the island to Salt Lake. The wind and waves sprayed the groups all the way, and when they dried off, they were left with white salt covering them. The other event was my getting stuck in the quick sand. I was up to my neck when they found me. Other than swallowing a spoon, eating lye, and going head first into a drinking barrel, this comprised the excitement of my early childhood.

We moved to St. George about 1911, from there to Salt Lake again where my father attended Barber College. From Salt Lake we traveled to Loa, Utah, a very small little town in the eastern central part of Utah not too far from Richfield, Utah, and Fish Lake where we used to go fishing for about a week at a time, even after we moved back to St. George, Utah.

I started school in Loa, then we moved to St. George to start my second year in school. This was like home to my parents, I'm sure, because their parents were there. Along about the time I was reaching the fourth grade, my grandfather Worthen found me playing with an old violin they had used playing for square dances in early pioneer days. He told me I could have it if I would learn to play it. So began my musical career, carrying that violin down to take my lesson with it wrapped in a newspaper each time. I did get a case later on. (In some notes he commented that he stashed the violin in weeds after his first lesson.)

A few years later I convince my father that he should let me manage the shoe-shine during the summer and manage the stand like a business during the school months. I made as much as ten dollars some Saturdays at ten cents a shine. Shortly after World War I I had a chance to buy an old German violin. I paid for it with shoe shine earnings. I still play this violin today, and its appraised value is over \$2500.

Finally I started high school and all the way through that period my interest was music together with business law, and the required subjects. During two summers I managed to go to Salt Lake City where I studied with Willard Wehe, at the McCune School of Music. It seemed the normal thing after graduation from high school in 1926 to go to Los Angeles where I studied under Davol Saunders at the College of Music, University of Southern California. I look back on this period with pride. I practiced 6 to 8 hours daily and held the practice record for the two years I attended. During my first year at the college, I won the Symphony Conducting competition. With private instruction at \$500.00 per week plus tuition, the money was short. The Junior College (Dixie) wanted me to teach violin, so I returned to St. George to teach. I met my wife there, and we were married the next year on 14 November 1930, in the Logan Temple. It was the first year of the crash, but that made no difference.

At that time my family operated a barber shop, beauty shop, men's clothing store, and a hotel. Shortly after we were married we sold out the clothing store and Mary and I moved to Los Angeles. We lived there about a year, then moved to San Bernardino. During this time my main occupation was music.

Word reached us that the bill had passed to start building Boulder Dam. We felt that this was opportunity knocking. I could get in the schools with music. They wanted me to teach, but on a tuition basis due to lack of appropriations. This did not work out to satisfy me, and waiting for appropriations was not the answer. I worked in a drug store for about four years and also organized a dance band. Between the two, things went pretty good. Around 1937 I started work in Manix Department Store as Display and Advertising Manager. I really enjoyed the work. Then came December 1941. I procured a job with McNeil Construction Company who was building the plant for Basic Magnesium, Inc., at Henderson, Nevada. I was then working ten hours a day, six days a week, plus playing three nights a week with the band. We were hoping to save enough in the event I was drafted. We had only two children then, Mary Lee our first child had died at the age of five while I was working at Manix Department Store. When the plant was finished, I worked for BMI in personnel and timekeeping. Later I worked for Rheem Manufacturing Co. at the Henderson location as Employment Manager. In April of 1945 I volunteered for duty with the Army. I finished basic training in Texas and was in Japan as Chief of Labor Relations and Repatriation sections of a Military Government team. It was a real experience in that I working with Japanese people whose offices were in the Ehime Province Capital Building. In addition to my regular duties, I organized a small symphony orchestra in the city of Matsuyama. I still have some newspaper clippings of General McArthur when his son visited him. So much for that. During September the criteria for those who could be released from the service included me, and home I came about October 1946.

Bugsy Seigel had built the Flamingo Hotel in Las Vegas about this time and many other push hotels were beginning to line "The Strip" in Vegas. The Musicians' Union passed the six day

law which meant that no musician could work more than six consecutive days. This meant that each hotel would have to be without entertainment one night a week because the band played for the shows as well as for dancing. A band was formed to play each of the hotels one night each week. They needed a bass player who could read and play the scores for topnotch entertainment such as “The Andrew Sisters”, Kay Starr, Vic Damone, Sammy Davis, Jr., Eleanor Powell, Sophie Tucker, Jimmy Durante and so on. I was given the job. This meant a different show to rehearse every day and play for that night. I will say that we had one of the best show bands in the business. Didn’t see much family during those years in that when I was sleeping, they were awake, but it was a great experience.

I was recalled to active duty, reporting to Nellis AFB 13 July 1951. From then until 1956 I was stationed at Nellis working in personnel. In July 1956 I went to Bitburg, Germany, with my family, Mary, Judy Lee, Clark, Jr, and John Norman joining me in October. We enjoyed our stay in Bitburg. Of course, I was still working in personnel. We were able to see parts of France, Belgium, Switzerland, Holland, England, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and, of course, Germany. We returned to Nellis AFB, Nevada, in July of 1959. I attended the TAC NCO Academy in May of 1962 and was asked to join the staff. I came to Langley AFB in July 1962 as an instructor in the Communicative Skills Division, later became chief of the division. I was assigned duty as Director of Training for the Academy on 1 April 1964, and am still serving in that capacity

I think that I should say that my wife has been a real partner and an inspiration to me. We’ve shared many things during our marriage. They have been experiences endured or enjoyed because of each other. I’m blessed with a wonderful family. Mary has been teaching since just before we left for Germany. Judy has her masters degree from BYU. Her husband completed a mission just before they were married. They have a little boy and are expecting a baby in January. Clark, Jr., will have his Masters degree by March. John Norman graduates from York High School in June. Time flies.

My early years in St. George were filled with Sunday School and Sacrament meetings on Sunday, during the day; and MIA in the evening. Monthly meetings were held conjointly with the other ward in the big red Tabernacle. I was ordained an Elder in 1930 and a High Priest on 12 April 1964 by Elray L. Christiansen.

Most of my early activities and work in the church were in the area of music. I was involved in MIA plays as well as ward and school productions. I remember playing in the Dixie college orchestra for productions of “The Student Prince”, “Bocaccio”, “The Chocolate Soldier”, “The Mikado”, and many others. My first actual assignment was music director for Boulder City Ward MIA which was after I returned to active duty with the Air Force. I had given professional advice on numerous occasions but working nights as a musician prohibited much further

participation. I was MIA Superintendent in Boulder City Ward for approximately two years before going to Bitburg, Germany, in July 1959. During our tour in Germany, I was involved in music, MIA and anything that was needed in the Branch. Upon returning to the U.S. in 1959, I again became MIA Superintendent for Boulder City Ward. I held that position until my reassignment to Langley AFB in July 1962. I might mention that our gold and Green Balls were looked forward to by the entire community. We were outnumbered by other denominations, but they respected and admired our activities. The Gold and Green was considered the highlight of local social events. Planning and production for the event was not simple. Until the new chapel was finished, it meant rental of a facility for one evening, and the planning of decorations, preparing them, putting them up in a minimum of time and taking them down in the same manner—really meant planning. Everyone had a job, knew what his job was, thus making the event a success.

Of course, my activities in the East coast started with music director for Newport News MIA. The next assignment was Stake Director of Teaching. I held that position from May 1963 and still continued it after being set apart as high Councilor until mid 1966.

(This section was hand written between 1985-1987.)

1967 gave us an assignment to the Philippines (Clark AFB). We did not travel concurrently, Mary and John Norman joined me after his high school graduation in June—(two seasons: rainy/dry). John Norman was attending the AF Academy and visited us twice while we were at Clark—two years in the land of “Tagalog” (Mary counselor; I was training director in the district). Then back to the States and Suffolk County AFB, Long Island, New York. Six months later the base was closed and we headed for Hamilton AFB, California, not far from San Francisco.

June 1970 and retirement ceremony at Hamilton AFB marked the end of my active duty with the USAF.

We returned to Boulder City, 19 July 1970, refurbished the house ending our efforts with new carpeting and central heating and air conditioning.

In September 1970 Mary and I were called to serve on the Stake Sunday School board (teacher training and music).

In November 1975 I was called, sustained and set apart as Boulder City Ward choir director with Gloria Gregerson as organist. Gloria was replaced by T. Denning, she was replaced by Beverly Hirschi.

During the next few years I became involved with the Las Vegas Civic Symphony playing 1st violin and acting as assistant conductor—a very enjoyable experience.

During the period following our return to Boulder City, we kept in touch with Mary's Aunt Olga K. Lee. She was living in northern California, then moved back to Los Angeles, the home she loved. We visited her every month and sometimes more often until her death in November 1976.

Keith and Judy and their 5 girls and 2 boys live in Las Vegas and are doing very well. Keith is one of the prominent attorneys in Las Vegas, the senior member of the law firm and a bishop in their ward.

Clark, Jr., and his wife Pam and Matthew Clark are living in Anaheim, California. Clark is director of Sales and marketing for T.M. Cobb of San Diego, a multimillion dollar corporation.

John Norman, Joyce, Brian and MariLee are an Air Force family living at Luke AFB. John Norman is an instructor pilot with the rank of captain.