

## INTRODUCTION

The Upton family moved to the Green River near Richardsville, Kentucky, in 1801, coming from Charleston, West Virginia, where they were among the early pioneers in the area. The family was led by its patriarch, Joseph Upton, and his wife, Mary Frances, an imposing Scots-Irish woman at six foot one inch in height. My father, Lattney Earl Upton, was born on the Green River farm and was a descendent of this family.

I grew up in Bowling Green, but asthma was the scourge with which I was born, and it ultimately drove me to the mountains of the West. When I was 13, as a member of one of the very few Mormon families living in Bowling Green, a Mormon missionary, Elder Lamar Reynolds of Luna, New Mexico, encouraged my parents to let me go home with him at the end of his mission in 1954 and live for a time on his parents' cattle ranch. He thought the clear mountain air at the 8,500 foot elevation of the White Mountains might help my asthma. I wanted to be a cowboy, so I implored my parents to let me go. And they did.

My asthma disappeared after Elder Reynolds and I crossed the Mississippi River at Memphis, Tennessee, and has never returned. Once my parents were convinced that I was cured, they sold their home in Bowling Green and moved to Thatcher, Arizona, where they had friends from Morgantown, Kentucky. The move changed all our lives and has rooted our branch of the family in Arizona and its environs. Nevertheless, once a year we unite and remember and celebrate our Kentucky roots and heritage.

This year we celebrated the life of Stella Phelps Minton, who was the mother of my mother, Betty Minton Upton. Stella Minton was born in 1892 in Butler County and passed away in 1986 in Bowling Green. Included with this introduction is a series of readings performed by various members of our family at the 2013 Upton Family Reunion.

Larry Upton

## STELLA PHELPS MEETS THE MORMONS

My name is Lattney Brian Jones, and Stella Phelps Minton was my great grandmother. I am going to do a reading that tells a little about Stella's family, her childhood, and the family's first encounter with the Mormons, which occurred in Kentucky in 1899 when Stella was seven years old.

Johnny and Josie Phelps had ten children, six boys and four girls. When Stella was born in 1892, the family was living in a two room house in Love, Butler County, Kentucky. The house did not have a single glass window in it. When she was seven years old, her father tore down the existing house and built a new one on the same spot. To make way for the new house, Johnny moved his family, two adults and five children, into the barn. They moved their beds into two clean stalls and set up their kitchen in the old smoke house. In 1986 Stella wrote, "I remember so well waking up at night to hear the horses in the other stalls eating; seemed like they ate all night long. And the barn smell was awful to me. I was so glad when we got two rooms finished so we could move into our house again."

The new house after completion had two large bedrooms, a large hall, and a very large kitchen. The kitchen served as the bedroom for Stella and her younger sister, Zelma (All of Larry Upton's life he knew Zelma and her sister Velma, as Aunt Zelmer and Aunt Velmer). Sleeping in the kitchen was fine with them because they would wake up to the delicious smell of hot biscuits and ham gravy, which their mother prepared, almost daily, for breakfast.

Johnny's personality and bearing reflected the military tradition of the Phelps family. At five foot ten inches tall and 150 pounds with blond hair and red beard he was a fastidious man in every respect. He was personally very neat and clean and instilled the same traits in his children. He did not allow dogs or cats in the house and, frankly, didn't like them around at all. He sternly demanded the highest standards from his family, and, as is often the case, they minded him, but more from fear than anything else. At the same time, he was a very gracious and kind man to his friends and neighbors.

In January 1899, just prior to the time that the new house was built, two Mormon missionaries came to Butler County and arranged to hold a series of meetings at Centro, the school that Stella attended, in an attempt to attract new converts to Mormonism. Stella, age seven, her father, and his hired hand, Ruesaw Johnson, and his wife, Sarah, rode several miles in their wagon to hear the first night of preaching. It was curiosity that took them out on this very cold January evening as the Mormons were a hot topic in Butler County at this time. Although the Mormons had given up polygamy as a result of the "Manifesto" in 1890, people wanted to hear the message of the two "Utah polygamists." The speakers were Elder Call from Idaho and Elder Udy from Utah. After several hours of stirring speeches, the crowd got in their buggies and wagons and went home. According to Stella, "No one dared to ask them home. But my dad at this time was around 50 years of age and a very brave man, too. I've heard him

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say he feared nothing, 'God, man, or devil.' He said he had no reason to fear for he tried to live as he should, and he thought he was equal to any man, and if you resisted Satan, he'd flee away. After my dad had walked away several steps, he said, 'I can't let those poor men stay here all night,' so he went back and invited them to come home with us, and they gladly accepted."

At this time Josie was in bed with a new baby, Velma, who had been born on January 3, 1899. The baby was only three or four days old. Stella said, "Dad was the cook and I was chief bottle-washer." Ruesaw's wife, Sarah Johnson, came in every day, straightened up the house and cooked lunch and supper. All the family needed was two more adults in the house, but the Phelps' were hospitable people. It snowed and the weather was cold, and the elders stayed for about two weeks.

Johnny was a Campbellite, a follower of Alexander Campbell, who advocated a return to scriptural simplicity. He was not interested in joining the Mormon church at all. Frankly, he considered their religion ridiculous and forbade his children to read their pamphlets. Nevertheless, he made the elders feel welcome in his home. Stella says in her journal, "I remember them (the elders) cutting and sawing wood for our fire, while my dad hauled the logs in from a clearing with the horses. My mother had taught me to knit stockings, and Elder Udy used to sit and watch my needles click. He thought I was a wonderful little girl to be knitting the stockings and socks." Betty Upton, Stella's daughter, said that her mother was the hardest working woman she had ever known and, obviously, this work ethic was instilled in childhood.

While the Phelps' did not join the church, the Mormons had some success in the area. Then, as now, religious intolerance abounded. About 1900 or 1901 two elders, Stella recalled their names were Carlyle and Jensen, were flogged by the Ku Klux Klan at Brother Lum Johnson's place. The Phelps' learned about the flogging a few days after the event when Elder Carlyle came by the Phelps farm on horseback. He had been making the rounds visiting his new members and stopped to tell Johnny about it.

As a result of the Ku Klux Klan activity against the missionaries, the Mormons did not return to Butler County until 1903. Although Johnny Phelps would not join, the Mormons knew him to be hospitable and always came to visit him. Stella writes that some of the missionaries were married men with families back home but many were young men not yet married. In 1903, when she was eleven years old, two missionaries spent about two weeks with them. Her most vivid memory was of one lonesome young man singing plaintively in bed at night. The family moved in 1905 and did not see any Mormons for several years.

## THE 1918 FLU EPIDEMIC AND ITS IMPACT ON STELLA'S LIFE

My name is Savannah Jones, and Stella Minton is my great-great grandmother. I am going to read the story of the effects of the 1918 flu epidemic on Stella Minton and her family's life.

Today, most people take flu shots to protect themselves from influenza, a disease most of them have little or no knowledge of. On the other hand, many people eschew flu shots, saying that the shot gives them a greater chance of becoming ill or even catching the flu. Little do they realize what a deadly disease influenza is, and that the people who get a flu shot are protecting them from one of the most contagious and horrendous diseases in the history of the world. It was not always so easy to avoid the high probability of death from the flu. Our family has the horror of personal experience at a time in which people had no protection from the disease. It just ran its course through the population as people caught it through close contact with other people.

Influenza, commonly called the flu, is an acute, highly contagious disease that begins abruptly with fever, muscular aches, and inflammation of the respiratory system. Its more serious forms are bacterial pneumonia and bronchitis. Periodically, flu epidemics have decimated large populations. During 1918, an epidemic swept across the United States, eventually killing 500,000 people. About the first of November 1918, the disease struck the Mintons. Stella, Allen, and the children were afflicted with it; only seven year old Hurdel escaped. Stella became so ill that she was unaware of the extent of the disease in her household. The burden of care fell upon seven year old Hurdel. He cooked, cleaned and did more to alleviate the suffering of his family than ever could be expected of a child, but there was precious little that could be done other than provide comfort while the body's natural defenses fought against the virus. Hurdel had an extremely strong constitution; he lived to be 101 years old.

The neighborhood doctor would look in on the family periodically. On one of these visits, as he examined Gateward, he told Allen, "This little fellow's not going to make it." Although sick himself, Allen got out of his bed for good and stayed day and night by the side of his son, holding his hand and watching him slowly die. Gateward had a new sweater and, as he seemed to sense that he was dying, said to his father, "Oh, Pappy, please don't let anybody have my new sweater." And Allen never did; it stayed in the family's trunk for the rest of their lives.

Many years later, Stella recorded the horrific events with these simple words, "On November 8 we lost our second son, Gateward, five years old. The same week, November 14, our twin baby boy, Opie, died with the flu." Stella was still sick, leaving Allen to deal with the deaths and burials. He buried them across the ravine under the big trees on a hill near the house. Later, Stella was upset with him for not burying them in the local cemetery, but Allen explained that he used to help dig graves in Johnson Cemetery, and he would have to use dynamite to blast into the rocky soil, and by the time they lowered the casket into the grave, there would be a foot of water in the

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bottom. He was not going to put his boys into such a grave.

For weeks, he could not bear to leave them alone at night. In spite of the cold, he would take an old army blanket up on the hill and sleep between the two little graves, the distant stars of the winter night twinkling overhead. Paradoxically, it was probably 50 years or so before the graves were permanently marked with tombstones.

For many months after the deaths of his two little boys, Allen would insist on hanging their overalls over the foot of their beds. He would not let them be moved. He would come home from work each night, sit and stare at the overalls, thinking of his boys. Then he would pick up the pants and hold them tight while choking back deep, painful sobs. Throughout Stella and Allen's lives they kept a small trunk full of the boys' clothes, shoes, and money that they had saved. Once a year, Stella would open the trunk and put in new moth balls, and the children and grandchildren loved to see all the neat things in the trunks: little knee pants, button shoes with a long rod like a crochet hook to button them up, shirts, sweaters, overalls, and little pouches of coins.

Hanging above the bed in their extra bedroom at the 510 Glen Lily Road house in Bowling Green was an oval picture of these two little cherubim wearing the early twentieth century clothes that Larry Upton, a grandson, saw in the trunk. As a child it was just beyond his comprehension that he was somehow connected to these two boys and the clothes in the trunk.

Many families undergo the most unbearable challenges; their pain is almost beyond comprehension. Stella recorded her thoughts in 1977: "At this time I remember asking one of the elders why we had to lose our two little boys, and he said, 'Sister Minton, there is no blessing without sacrifice.' And I believe it's true, and I know I will have these little boys back to raise in another time and place if I live true and faithful to God, which I am trying my very best to do." On the other hand, Allen's new faith, without roots, could not handle the double atrocity that had been visited upon his family. He dropped out and did not show personal interest in the Church again. While Stella embraced and drew strength from her Mormon faith, Allen, in the words of the old country song, Whiskey Lullaby, "put a bottle to his head and pulled the trigger." This event may have been the catalyst that propelled him down a long, slow, torturous road to acute alcoholism.

In spite of the tragedy, Stella never wavered. She continued to do her work and raise her children. That is why she qualifies as a generational marker; she was deeply hurt, but nothing deterred her from living the principled life that was ingrained in her heritage.

## STELLA MINTON'S CONCEPT OF WORK IN HER OWN WORDS

My name is Paisley Prophet, and Stella Minton was my great-great grandmother. My reading comes directly from the letters she wrote to my grandmother, Betty Upton, which reveal her personal feelings about the value of work, any work. When my Uncle Larry Upton transcribed her letters he was puzzled by her constant referral to work. One continuing theme was that if she couldn't work, there was no reason for her to live. He thought of his grandmother as a housewife, what work was she talking about? She could not even drive a car! Ultimately, it became clear that she thrived on work in her garden and fruit trees, her chickens and egg business, maintaining her household, taking care of her husband's needs, cooking, canning, quilting, and her correspondence, among other things. Her day was filled with work and she loved it!

Uncle Larry began to view work not as a chore to be dreaded, but as something that should be valued and appreciated. After all, we must be doing something. Who wants a life filled with television programs? Larry began to see work as the means to a productive and fulfilling life, and to view Stella as a noble character, eventually elevating her in his mind to a "generational marker," a person who stands out in a long line of progenitors.

Here is Stella's view of work in her own words:

"Well here I am up at 6 and rearing to go; its daylight and clear, so I'm going to go and quilt until he is ready to get up.

"I am trying not too leave so much unfinished work. Of course I know I'll leave plenty undone, but when you know your time is so short you have an awful urge to hurry and get all done you can, or that's the way I feel. Of course I know if I don't die right away I'm going to get too old one of these days. My work is my life. It's the only recreation I have now. Well at least I'm in pretty good shape for 77, or I think I am, which means a lot. Of course we can never be 16 but once.

"Yes, my pleasures are very few now. But I'm still looking forward to a time in another life when I will get a reward for the good clean life I've lived here. My work is still a pleasure to me too. I can never find enough time to do all the things I want to do.

"I worked in the garden Monday; ironed today. Didn't get through but will finish tomorrow, I hope. I'm so slow it takes me a long time to get anything done. I canned four quarts of apples this evening makes me eight so far. I can never catch up on my work. "I'd like to sew a little. Time sure is flying. Our garden looks good and have tomatoes larger than eggs.

"I am very active for an 83 year old, but could have a heart attack and go any day.  
"I've been cutting some weeds for exercise.

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"I've been doing a little house cleaning when I feel up to it. This old Gray Mare is just not what she used to be.

"I think everone is happier at work. Keeps your mind off yourself. I never plan to retire until the end. I don't work because I have to, but because I love to work.

"Work is my life when you hear some say mother is taking it easy you can say mother is getting ready to die. And I will.

"I woke up at 3 and got up at 4:30. I could not go back to sleep. Too much on my mind. It seems like I'm always in a hurry. Too much I want to do and too little time left. I realize time is fast running out for me, but some times I feel like I will go on forever. I think it's a miracle. I have been here so long and still able to do all I do. God has surely blest me.

"I think its a miracle the way the good Lord has preserved me. I still walk without a cane and work like a quarter horse, but I'm getting weaker. I can tell a big difference each year.

"I've made \$525.00 on quilts this spring. Sold 4 and quilted 2 for others. I feel guilty asking \$50.00 to do a quilt, but I don't think any woman would work for less than \$5.00 a day.

"Do keep up your exercise, it keeps you young. I was in my prime at 61. Full of energy. Never thought I'd live this long, maybe you will make it to 90.

"This is monday morning I'm up at 5 oclock, I get up early. Still not enough hours in the day but I'm worn to a frazzel at the end of the day but I try to stay up until 9 because 5 or 6 hours is all I need at a time. I take a nap in the evening. When I was your age I thought I'd never grow old, but its got me now. It's no fun being 90.

"We never miss the water until the well runs dry; I try to be happy in the state I'm in but there is little pleasure if I can't work. To just sit and hold my hands is real torture to me. And I will be alone today."

Stella Minton died on December 27, 1986. She worked very little the last year of her life, which was misery to her. Nevertheless, she set an example for all of us that work is its own reward.

When all is said and done, someone has to do the actual work, the job has to be done, bring in the sheaves, and prepare for the long winter that everyone faces.

## A FEW OF STELLA MINTON'S OPINIONS

My name is Neeley John, and Stella Minton was my great grandmother. I am going to read a few lines from some of her letters regarding the opinions she held on a variety of topics. After writing to my grandmother, Betty Upton, for 32 years, her letters revealed an opinion on just about anything one can think of, and she had strong opinions. So strong, in fact, that Uncle Larry could not print many of her letters without perhaps hurting some feelings. Here are Stella's words:

War

1956

"Ken Shanklin asked if we were Rebels, said we talked like Rebels. I told him to call me no Rebel that my paternal grandpa was a Captain in the Union Army.

Cost of Living

1961

"Our \$84.00 Social Security just feeds us and pays all utilities if we are very careful, which your dad is not.

1970

"Did I tell you Marge and Cliff got them a brand new car? It's a Ford LTD and just liked \$100.00 costing \$5,000.00, what a price. You used to have bought a good farm for that. Inflation. Sure is ruining the world.

1971

"I don't get many letters since postage has gone to 8 cents. I think 8 cents is too darn much. All my life until World War One it was only 2 cents to send a letter, then it only went to 3 cents then to 4 then 5 then 6. Now 8; I think 5 should be the limit, don't you?

Children

1965

"Yes, its pitiful the ways these teenagers can't seem to appreciate their mothers. --- was like that, none of the rest of you girls were. I got along good with all of you, but --- was always so smart and thought she knew all the answers to everything, but she sure has changed. When her daughter was so hateful with her while here, --- said, "Mother I well remember how you used to tell me you hoped I'd have a daughter that would be as mean as I was, and I sure have one." She told her you can't go home with me and act like this for --- won't have it. If anyone shows his ass its going to be him.

"Yvonne and Al are getting married when her school is out. I think she is crazy. With the brite mind she has I'd let no man cloud it up. But you can't tell them. Tell Melanie I think she is being very smart not to marry. She will have plenty time if she waits until she is 25.



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1968

"When I was her age I wanted to go to Hi School but your Pap wouldn't let me. Well, he fusses because I read so much, but you are never too old to learn to do better, are you? Poor dad, he never wanted me to enjoy anything he couldn't. He liked TV as long as he could see, now he don't want me to watch anything and we have radio on only for the news. He can hardly understand anything at all, and when he drinks he is much worse.

1970

"Yvonne went to her doctor yesterday, and she is pregnant. Opal don't seem to be too glad about it. This is an awful world to bring children into. I'm glad I had mine when the world was a better place to live. Yvonne says they planned to have this baby. All of mine were pure accidents. I don't think I could ever planned to have a child. I was very blessed in you all being of sound mind.

1977

"These young people are so irresponsible. Here they are tearing up the schools and mugging the teachers. What a shame, but the Bible says spare the rod and you spoil the child and how true. Children boss the parents now days.

### Medical Advice

1969

"Your dad has quit coffee, but he won't quit the whiskey. Last week he drank 5 1/2 pints and then one on Sunday. He was sick for 2 days, but he don't think that caused it.

"She's crazy as a bessie bug. No one knows what has caused it. I say it's the birth control pills. Of course the Doctors don't want to admit that but some women just can't take them.

1970

"I take Prevention Magazine and live by vitamins; that's the secret of my better health. All the food you buy has been so messed up it's had all the life taken out. That's why so many have cancer and are sick and dying. But this is all going to be changed. The doctor had all the diabetics on the cyclamates, which goes to show how little the doctors know. They are killing more than they are curing. When old ones have a stroke they give them rat poison to thin their blood and 9 in 10 die. Why don't people wake up."

### Television

1970

"Well, I love to watch "As the World Turns" too. Your Dad thinks anyone is crazy that watches that program. He says all kind of hateful things to me because I watch it. I tell him it keeps me from wanting a bottle to suck on. He never wanted me to enjoy anything he couldn't. This is the only daytime one I watch. I'm mostly too busy at other things.

1971

"Betty your dad's wife is incredible. We both take Geritol ha ha. Do you see this on TV?"

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1984

"We had stake conference today. Big crowd...we had a good service. Pres Mckee is a great man, gave us some good advice on watching TV. He thinks it's sinful to watch the ole soap opras and so much immorality too. I care very little for TV. It can never take the place of Radio for me.

Hippies

1972

"He is the most hippie type boy I've seen. Long hair, red beard all over his face. Dressed like a tramp. What a pretty girl like her sees in a boy like that I don't understand. She is a doll, and if I were in her place I'd never look twice at one like him, tho if he'd cut that long hair and shave and put on decent clothes he might look very well. He is only nineteen.

Gay and Howard Luber

1974

"Well did Gay call you? She got married again the 22nd. She called me and said she had found a perfect man, do you believe it? I say there ain't no such animal. She married this Colonel Howard Luber. He is a German and a Catholic, so you know he can't be perfect.

1974

"She (Gay) goes with him to Catholic church. He swears like a sailor sometimes. Being a Catholic guess it doesn't matter since its the church of the devil anyway. But he is very good to Gay and that's all that matters to me, I guess. But do wish she'd go to her own church.

1974

"We like our new son in law very much. He is a very wonderful person and they seem so happy. I'm so glad to see Gay so happy again."

Odds and Ends

1958

"Well, I don't think anyone will ever go to the moon. Dad and I saw the Russian Sputnix late one evening last fall, it was gone in a minute tho.

"What's a pogo stick never heard of one.

1968

"I do wish women would not wear pants. I don't this is pleasing to the Lord at all.

1974

"Betty I never dreamed you had kept all those letters. I bet it is quite a book by now and I could write better then.

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1978

"Every day the girls come by from work. First thing they ask is did you get any letters from the ole bags today (Gay and Betty). If I have first thing they do is read them. They get a big kick out of reading my letters. Betty, we all got a thrill from the poem you sent, do hope you enter the contest and win. It made me think so much of myself and the way I live. Only it's my great grandmother who looks back at me when I look in my mirror now."

Few people write letters anymore, they use email. Just think, if my great-great grandmother had access to email, we would not have all these wonderful letters to read and enjoy. Nor would we have the depth of understanding of who she was and how she lived. We are blessed by her letters and the wisdom of my great-grandmother, Betty Upton, for saving them.

## **THE LAST YEAR EXCERPTS FROM THE LETTERS**

My name is Trevor Espinoza and Stella Minton was my great-great grandmother. I am going to read excerpts from letters she wrote to Betty Upton, my great-grandmother, during the last year of her life.

After 32 years of correspondence, it comes down to one last year and one last letter. Stella had always told Betty that if she couldn't work, she had no reason to live. This last year of her life, 1986, was a year of rapidly declining health, primarily due to a stroke that left her somewhat paralyzed on her right side. In her very first letter of 1986 to Betty, she said, "Been here too long. Too long just keeps running thru my head." Reporting on her 94th birthday, January 25, 1986, she says, "...people ran in and out all day. Too much company gets very boring to me..."

As the year goes on, Stella's letters get shorter and shorter. She repeats herself from letter to letter; she is leaving words out of sentences. She writes like a person talking who is out of breath, leaving out every unnecessary word. Her pain is obvious as is her frustration with living the life of a near invalid. Here are excerpts from her letters of 1986:

In March, Stella reports, "I wake up confused and last Wednesday I thought it was Thursday all day until I started to read the paper and it said Wednesday. Time hangs so heavy on my hands."

"Betty, do wish I was lookin for you all to come back. Seems so long since you were here. Tell Larry to bring you soon or he will be too late. I can't live forever and time is really flying by.

"Do you know that people who seldom smile get old faster than people who do smile a lot. So I always have a smile for everyone I meet.

"The girls are covered up with quilts. That Opal is a worker. She works like she didn't have a dime for breakfast.

"What fools some mortals be...wish you and Lattney could be here. I want to see you all so bad.

"I went to church on Easter...I got very tired, only stayed for Sacrament, and I had Buddy and Billy Decker give me a blessing. Soon as I got home I said I don't want to eat, I want to go to bed.

"I am so hungry to see you, Betty.

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"My life is good and bad. Don't expect to ever be well again. Too old, nothing left to build on.

"We moved to our old home on April 1, 1917; first home we ever owned. Benoni (Phelps) built the house.

"The good Lord has blest me; I still know where I am and what I'm doing. I get riled at Gay and Opal. They try to tell me where I got things, and I know they are wrong. They think I'm just an old judy doody who has forgotten, but it's them.

"What worries me is I may live a long time helpless in a rest home. But I know what I've endured is coming to all of you later. But we must endure all things.

"I would so love to see all my grandkids, especially Brian, Carrie, Lisa, and Amy.

"I feel rotten. Sorry to have to hang on so long and not be able to do anything.

"We want to see you so bad.

"If I could see better I try to work at something.

"How bad you want to see Sadie is how bad I want to see you.

"Been crocheting on my string rug again. Someone has to thread needle for me can hardly read at all.

"I think people overeat. Too much meat or eggs. I eat very little meat; I only weigh 115, less than I have weighed since I was 14 years old.

"I just got home from the hospital, my heart had a fit. Tried to jump out my throat.

"Betty, I'd love to see you again before I go, but I guess I never will..."

**THE LAST LETTER  
DECEMBER 4, 1986**

My name is Melanie Sumner and Stella Minton was my grandmother. As a child I used to spend the summers living on the farm with my grandparents, Stella and A. T. Minton. I am going to read the last of 32 years of letters written to my mother, Betty Upton. At the writing of this letter, my grandmother is just a little over one month short of her 95th birthday. Her last year has been difficult and constrained; she has been unable to work and just sits and watches my aunts, Margie and Opal, quilt. This inactivity is agony for her for she loves to work.

"Dear Betty, so good to hear your sweet voice. Hayward said, 'Mam, let me take you to Nashville in morning and be sitting there when they get to Betty's; what a surprise it would be to them.' I said, 'Hay, when you get to 95 you won't be looking for anywhere to go, especially on a plane by yourself.' I'm scared of a plane and someone with me. Besides, I need to stay close to the cemetery; a spell of tachardia like I had the 10th of November may take me away any time. Hope they be on their way home by time you get this. It's such a strain on Opal and Hay. And Paul sick. She needs to be with him all the time. I am worried she go home find him dead any day. Tho he seems to be better rite now. And so am I, but I can get very sick in a short time. I am very crippled too, can hardly use my rite arm at all, hurts to even rite. Just taking pills to ease, don't cure.

"Life is a burden now, be glad to give up. Don't want any one to grieve. Just be thankful I'm out of my misery. Unless you live this long you will never realize what I've lived thru but faith in the Lord sustains me here. I've lived a good clean life. No worry about dying. If any one makes it to heaven I know I will. Just a little corner with Jesus will satisfy me. God bless you everyone; lots of love from your Lovin mother."

Stella Phelps Minton passed away on December 27, 1986, in Bowling Green, Kentucky. At her passing, she had 118 living descendants.

Stella (Phelps) Minton, 1892-1986

**THE FINAL COMMUNICAITON, A CHRISTMAS CARD  
DECEMBER 18, 1986**

My name is Derek Espinoza and Stella Minton was my great-great grandmother. My three-month-old daughter, Lyla Espinoza, is her great-great-great granddaughter.

Melanie has just read what we thought was Stella's last letter to Betty Upton, my great grandmother. But there is more. My grandfather, Larry Upton, the keeper of the hundreds of letters that Stella wrote to Betty over a 32 year period, was fine-sorting boxes of family information last weekend. To his surprise, there was an envelope from Mrs. A. T. Minton, 510 Glen Lily Road, Bowling Green, Kentucky, 42101 that was postmarked December 22, 1986. He said that his hands shook as he opened the letter because he realized instantly that this letter was written after the letter that Melanie has read to us. It was a Christmas card and this is what Stella wrote verbatim:

"have a merry xmas and a happy n yr. if you get a vac bring your dad & mom to see me. I want to see you so bad. lots of love to all.

"wanting to see you all so bad. do let me hear how you are all doing. one day I won't be here. very poorly. nearly blind. Life is a burden. Lovin' ole granny."

As I read her feeble handwriting, and knowing that her passing was only five days after the postmark on the letter, I felt like I was privy to a great secret; I knew when she was going to pass to the other side. The words of her card also told me that she knew the end was very near, "Life is a burden." My great-great grandmother was a stalwart woman, true to her family and faith to the end. She never wavered. We can only hope to do as much.