When Jeff asked me to speak today, I told him I would only do so if I was able to choose the topic. He agreed – he’s been trained to do so☺ - so as I love stores, today I want to share with you three stories, and hopefully it will all come together at the end.

Growing up in Utah, Pioneer Day was always one of my favorite days of the year. It fell about a week after my birthday – so I was still in the glow of birthday magic, and honestly, Utah does July 24th right. It was always WAY bigger than July 4th – or at least it was in my family, where we never actually spent the money to go see the July 4th fireworks – but rather watched them from across the street while sitting on the hill outside the cemetery. But the 24th,The 24th meant home-made root beer, neighborhood parties, and usually night games late into the night. Moving outside of Utah at the age of 22, I was distraught to learn that the rest of the country did not celebrate July 24th! I’m trying to change that! I love that our ward celebrates Pioneer Day with the primary party. Something Sarah Thatcher and I started while in Primary. But I am digressing. In recent years, through experiencing being a Ma and Pa while at Trek, and most recently through working on some family history, my feelings and understanding of Pioneer Day has grown and deepened. So, the first stories I want to share with you today is one of my pioneer ancestors. Now I want my children and the Shannon children to listen up, because these are your stories as well.

My maternal great, great, great grandmother, Jacobina Wills Osborne, was born 1813 in Hillockside Scotland. She married James Paton at the age of 27, which made her a little old by the standards of the day. James was a clockmaker by trade. Together, they had 8 children. Three years into their marriage, they joined the Church. James was one of the first Elders of the church in Scotland, ordained by Wilford Woodruff and George Cannon who were serving as missionaries in Great Britain at the time. Jacobina and James decided early on that they wanted to immigrate to America and join the Saints in Utah; so they started saving their money. Their second daughter, Annie, was part of this as she started working at the age of 5 in a factory stirring dye pots. Like Seattle, the days could be short during the winter month in Scotland. Many days Annie would leave home before the sun came up and return after the sun went down. Remember, she was 5! Some of the older factory workers would hold her hand on the way to and from work so she wouldn’t get lost – or fall asleep. And all of this was so they could make their ends meet and save a little for their passage to America.

Tragedy struck the family in 1953 when James, along with 6 of their children died from what was termed “The White Plague” or consumption. Today it is called tuberculosis. With 7 burials to pay for, the trip to America had to be put on hold. However, Jacobina was determined to take her two remaining children to Zion. She saved and scrimped and was close to having enough for the trip when a dishonest Elder swindled the money from her. The record is vague as to the circumstances, but I can only imagine the heartache of having to save for the third time – but save she did. However, when she was ready to set sail for the third time, more adversity set in. This time in the form of her own family. She was the only member in her family and they were convinced she, and her new religion, were crazy. Her sisters locked her in a room until, as they put it, she “came to her senses.” Jacobina somehow managed to escape the room. But her sisters then resorted to physical force and literally pinned her to the ground. Jacobina escaped by tearing out her clothes. I can imagine my great, great, great, grandmother, who would have been close to my age at this time, running down the street, clothes torn, hair blowing in the wind as it had fallen from its usual tight bun. At this point, her brother stopped her and said to her, “Law, Bina, have you gone daft?” He then promised her he would protect her and ensure she would receive her portion of the family inheritance. I can only imagine how tempting a financial inheritance would have been to one who had struggled so hard to save money. But she knew his “protection” came with strings – and those strings were that she would have to leave her church. So she declined – leaving her family, the country of her birth, the graves of her husband and 6 children, and her family inheritance to set sail with her 13 year old daughter Annie, and 7 year old son Robert for America. The year was 1855

During the month-long voyage, she met a 19 year-old fellow member of the church named Sylvester Oliver Low. Sylvester Low had been born in Dundee Scotland. His mother called him Silve. ☺ Like Annie, Sylvester started working young as well – herding cows at the age of 7. When he was 18, he decided he wanted to improve his milling skills and left for the town of Arbroath located 20 miles away. It was in his new job that a fellow employee began talking to him of a newly restored gospel. He was baptized the following January.

Energized by his new-found faith, Sylvester went home to share it with his family and retrieve his savings so he too could make the trip to Salt Lake City. To say his family was less than enthusiastic would be an understatement. His father literally kicked him out of the house. Sylvester would never see him again. The next day his mother walked the 20 miles back to Arbroath with him. From his savings, he gave her money to take the train back home, hugged her goodbye and prepared to sail to America. He took one small silver spoon to remind him of home.

This is where the two stories intersect. Feeling bad for a lonely widow and her two children (and I would guess feeling some kinship to a fellow member of the church who had also suffered greatly to finally be on the voyage to join the main body of the church in Utah) Sylvester helped Jacobina with her luggage as well as other chores during the trip. They became good friends. At some point on the journey, Jacobina confided in Sylvester that she had had a dream of him before she had left from Scotland and knew that at a certain point in the future, he would marry her daughter Annie. On February 28th, 1858 Brigham Young would marry a 23 years old Sylvester and 15 year old Annie in the Salt Lake Endowment House. Of course, their stories do not end there. But I love this segment of their stories -- the unwavering faith, insurmountable odds, persecution endured, and fierce determination that my ancestors shared in their quest to get to Zion.

The second story I want to share with you is of my Great Great Great Great Grandfather William Taylor. He was born in 1787 in North Carolina - he never had his picture taken, but supposedly he was fair-haired and athletically built. He and his wife Elizabeth would have 14 children. William and Elizabeth got caught up in the pioneering spirit that was so common in this era, and kept moving further west, until they landed in Monroe County, Missouri. Owning 640 acres of land, they were quite well. At this same time, the Latter-Day Saints had settled in Missouri and were facing extreme persecution. As a result, Joseph Smith had organized Zion’s Camp with the intent of marching to the capital and demanding the Saints be treated fairly. There were about 200 recruits when they reached the fishing river near William an Elizabeth’s land. Here they stopped to make repairs to their wagons and gather some horses that had wandered away. They had heard there was a group of men marching towards them to destroy them, and tensions were high. At this point, a horrible storm came – a HORRIBLE STORM. It was so bad that the river flooded and was not able to crossed. The men who were intent of destroying Zion’s camp grew fearful of the storm and returned to their homes. As for the men of Zion’s camp, they were forced to take refuge in a church and local homes for a few days. They spent an entire weekend camped out and on Sunday June 21st, 1834 Joseph Smith preached a sermon on the Doctrine and Covenants at the church. William Taylor was there for the sermon, and immediately afterwards was baptized along with the rest of his family. He was the first man to be baptized in the State of Missouri. Two days later, he and his sons, and sons-in-laws left and joined Zion’s Camp.

William and his family would follow the Saints from that time on. Remember he had been quite a wealthy man, and with every move, the persecution would increase and they would be forced to leave – oftentimes leaving all their possessions. In total, William and Elizabeth would lose over 1000 acres of land, numerous homes, and literally all their worldly possessions. At the time of his death in 1839, William’s family was literally destitute; they had sacrificed all their earthy wealth to join the church. But never once did William, or anyone in his family, waiver in their testimonies or assurance that they had done the right thing. In fact, on his death bed, William called in all his children and asked them to promise to stay with the main body of the Saints no matter what. They would all do so. And when Elizabeth was approached by a kind man who knew of all they had gone through and offered her 40 acres of land if she would stay behind and not follow the Saints to Utah, she was not for one minute tempted.

Elizabeth experienced many miracles of her own. At one point, she was deathly ill and her son went to find Joseph Smith to bring him back so he could give her a blessing. He was unable to come, but sent a red silk handkerchief with a blessing and promised she would get well. She immediately did.

These stories are from just two strains of my family tree on my mother’s side; I have two more lines on her side as well four more on my fathers. I am sure I would find similar stories of determination and enduring faith in all of them just as I am sure that many of you have similar stories in your family tree as well. In the church we often refer to pioneer stories to illustrate examples of extreme faith. I remember many times growing up thinking how grateful I was to be born after that era because I was sure I could not have endured those trials. However, Brothers and Sisters, the persecutions, trials, and stalwart faith that the pioneers demonstrated are not unique to just those times.

The third story I want to share with you takes place in the 1990s in Copenhagen, Denmark. Tomas Kofod had been an exchange student in Utah during the late 80s. Upon learning he was to be moving to Utah, he talks about being warned that he was going to be surrounded by Amish people. I think he was surprised, and relieved, to find that Mormons were fairly normal people. Well as normal as my 16-year-old swatch watching husband was. Jeff and Tomas became fast friends. Although he enjoyed his time in Utah and America, Tomas had no interest in joining the church. Upon his return to Denmark, the missionaries quickly tracted him out (I am sure his host family had sent in his name.) For six years, different set of missionaries were convinced he was a golden investigator, after all, he knew their home towns and had even attended seminary. And for six years, Tomas would conveniently end the relationship with the missionaries before it could progress to a baptismal challenge. Because Tomas truly had to no interest in joining the church, until one day it hit him; he was avoiding asking if the church was true because he didn’t want to have to make the life changes that joining the church would entail. He was running away. So trepidatiously, he finally did ask, and received a powerful answer that it was indeed true.

I met Tomas shortly after he joined the church, and to say he was passionate about it would be an understatement. I have never been around someone with such a burning testimony. It was a beautiful thing. At this same time, there was a confluence of events in Tomas’ life. A few weeks after he joined the church, he went to a Young Single adult event and met Ane Marie. She had been an exchange student in Utah the same year he was there, although despite meeting once, they did not know each other. She had joined the church as an exchange student and had been praying for many years to meet a righteous man to marry. Within a few weeks, they were engaged. He was also accepted into the most prestigious theatre school in Denmark. It would be the equivalent of being accepted into Julliard in the States. Tomas’ future looked bright, and he was incredibly excited. A few months into his schooling, he was asked to participate in a panel discussion as a representative of the Mormons. While Denmark is well represented in the church today as many members can trace their ancestors to Denmark and other Scandinavian countries, Denmark as a country is quite non-religious today. So Tomas was a novelty. During this discussion, a hot-topic question was asked – which essentially centered on the Church’s views of the importance of family. Knowing how soft-spoken and loving Tomas is, I am sure his answer was non-confrontational and loving. However, it was not the liberal answer the audience wanted in a country where the marriage rate is ever decreasing and the traditional family is seen as archaic. Instantly there was an uproar; The discussion was stopped. Tomas, a good-looking, charismatic man suddenly became a pariah on campus. No one would even look at him, let alone talk to him. There was a petition started to suspend him from school. He was called to the Dean’s office to explain himself. The Dean was convinced he had been brainwashed by a cult and told him he would need to prove his sanity before he was allowed back in classes. He was ordered to visit a psychologist and get a certificate of sanity. After a few weeks of weekly visits, the psychologist concluded that Tomas was indeed sane and just had had an incredible spiritual experience that had affected who he was. So the school was forced to allow him back. Tomas is an amazing actor and has found much success in life, however, Denmark is small and the theatre community is even smaller. This event has certainly impacted his reputation among some circles – even today 20 years later. But Tomas has never wavered in his testimony and determination to live the gospel. Many of you would recognize Tomas. He played the role of the Savior in The Testaments and The Living Christ. He also has sung in his congregation a few times.

My point is, Pioneer stories are not just found in pioneer days. There are modern day pioneers. Chandler spoke last week about the people he met who are current pioneers in Colombia. I know that that my Young Women are pioneers as they walk the halls of Eastlake. And I am so proud of them for it. So this July 24th, let us not just think of pioneers trekking across the plains, but what it truly means to be a pioneer. To forge a path into unknown, and many times, unfriendly territory. To be resolved to live by what you know is true and hold sacred.