"If Thou Wilt Provide A Way"

By Wendy Bentley

My Great-grandmother, Johanna Christina Pahlsson, was the fourth wife of Phineas Wolcott Cook.
I took my facts from my grandfather. Carl Cook's journal as well as an account of her life written by her granddaughter, Eva Covey Madsen and published years ago in the Phineas Wolcott Cook Newsletter.
The dates were added from LDS Church and Swedish official records.

A Readers Theater Skit from the life of Johanna Christina Pahlsson Cook
Seven Characters: (5 women). (4 men) (1 Narrator)

Johanna (pleading): "Oh Carl, don't leave me! You will always be the love of my heart!"

Narrator: Johanna Christina Polson was born in Sweden. Her sweetheart was a boy named Carl. However, before their dreams of a life together could be realized Carl, who was a fireman on one of the first railroads in Sweden, was critically injured in a train accident. As he lay dying he pleaded with his friend and cousin, Jim Jensen.

Carl: "Promise me you will take care of Johanna."

Jim: "I will Carl. I promise."

Narrator: And so two years later Johanna and Carl's cousin began their life together. Their daughter, Tekla was born in 1870 and eleven months later Johanna gave birth to Hilma. During this time she heard the Mormon elders preaching of Joseph Smith and how the gospel of Jesus Christ had been restored, believing their words she prayed:

Johanna: "If Thou wilt provide a way for me to be baptized I will serve thee all the days of my life."

Narrator: And the Lord did open the way and she and Jim were baptized 1n 1871. As she anticipated the birth of a third child Jim announced

Jim: "I will go to America, get a job and earn enough money to send for you and the babies."

Narrator: He sold most of their belongings to pay his passage and left. Johanna received one or two letters from him, and then there was silence. Forced to earn her own way she took in washing and sewing, to provide a meager existence for her girls and herself.

Johanna: "Tekla, dear child you must try to eat something to give you strength. I cannot bear to see you growing weaker with each passing day. Besides I will need your help when this new baby is born."

Narrator: But despite Johanna's loving care 3 year old Tekla died three months after Elvira was born. Four long years passed and Johanna struggled and pleaded with the Lord in constant prayer:

Johanna: "Oh dear Father, open the way for me and my babes to flee Babylon. Please provide a way for us to gather with the Saints in Zion!"

Narrator: And then a letter arrived from her dear friends, Brother and Sister Bunderson.

Sis. Bunderson: "Johanna, I have such news! I know you've been faithfully praying for a means to come to Zion. There is a rich, American, Mormon here who is willing to pay your fare and that of the girls if you will work for him to repay the debt when you arrive."

Johanna (grasping the letter to her heart): "Dear Father in Heaven, thank you for the good, kind man who is an instrument in your hands of providing the means for me to gather to Zion with my little ones."

Narrator: Johanna was thirty-three years old when she sailed from Sweden and crossed the American continent. It was not an easy journey, but she rejoiced to be in the company of other Swedish immigrants who had left their native land to join the Saints in Zion. On July 18th 1878 when they arrived at the railroad station in Ogden, Utah and she was greeted by the Bundersons.

Sis. Bunderson: "Dear Johanna how good it is to see you. Please stay with us a few days and rest before traveling on to the Cook Ranch at Swan Creek."

Johanna: "We will stay tonight, but then we must leave in the morning for I have a debt to pay to the kind man who loaned me the money to come to Zion."

Narrator: No amount of coaxing would convince Johanna to tarry, and so in the morning the Bundersons loaded Johanna and the girls into their wagon and made the three day trek over the mountains to the Cook ranch.

Hilma (5 yrs old): "Oh Mother, look at the trees and mountains; isn't it beautiful!"

Elvira (4 yrs old): "I like the birds and the streams. It smells so clean!"

Narrator: Upon arrival at Swan Creek

Bro. Bunderson: "Phineas, I've brought Sister Johanna and her girls."

Phineas: Thank you Bro Bunderson for making the trip. Welcome Sister. I hope your travel was pleasant.

Johanna (turning to Sis. Bunderson): "I can't understand a thing he is saying."

Bro. Bunderson: "You will learn to understand. For now just nod your head and say 'Tack.'"

Johanna (bowing her head): "Tack, tack, Bruder Cook"

Narrator: With interpretation from the Bundersons Johanna was told her duties however it only took two months for Phineas who already believed in and was practicing polygamy, to forgive the immigration debt, propose and with Johanna's grateful acceptance, take her to the Endowment House in Salt Lake where they were married the 13th of September 1878, and her girls were sealed to him.

Johanna: "Bruder Cook, now dat vi (vee) ar (air) sealed vill du send fer min (mean) mama to join oss (oh-ss)? Jag (Yag) would like to have her med mig (meeg) vhen vara (vora) barnet is born.

Narrator: Sixteen days after Johanna's mother, Ulrika Johanna Lundgren's arrival Johanna gave birth to her first son, and the first of seven children she would bear Phineas.

Johanna: "Look Mother isn't he the most beautiful baby you've ever seen!"

Ulrika: "Yes my child, he will always hold special place of love in your heart. What will you call him?"

Narrator: And, gazing into her baby's eyes Johanna remembered another pair of eyes:

Johanna: "His name shall be Carl."

Narrator: When Johanna married Phineas she was 34 years old. He was 60 years old--26 years older than she was. Carl was born the year after their marriage, followed by six more sons and ending with a daughter when she was 45 and Phineas was 70! We should be aware of the importance placed by these early pioneers on eternal family relationships. Johanna knew she needed to be sealed to a righteous priesthood holder, which is the reason Johanna's mother, Ulrika Johanna was also sealed to Phineas.