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Beehive Archive

Welcome to the Beehive Archive—your weekly bite-sized look at some of the most pivotal—and peculiar—events in Utah history. With all of the history and none of the dust, the Beehive Archive is a fun way to catch up on Utah’s past. Beehive Archive is a production of the Utah Humanities Council, provided to local papers as a weekly feature article focusing on Utah history topics drawn from our award-winning radio series, which can be heard each week on KCPW and Utah Public Radio.

Verla Gean Miller: Traveler, Teacher, Persian Princess

Verla Gean Miller FarmanFarmaian – beloved teacher to many Utah school children – made one decision to travel that set her on a fantastic journey that changed her life.

In 1945, Verla Gean Miller made a decision to travel to the eastern United States – a decision that would radically change the course of her life.

Born the daughter of a beekeeper in Smithfield, Utah, Verla Gean moved around with her family’s honey business, sparking a life-long interest in new people and different ways of life. She put herself through college at the University of Utah and taught fifth grade in Cedar City. Eager to see more of the world, she declined another year’s teaching contract and chose instead to leave Utah.

Verla Gean’s travels landed her in New York City, as a governess and student at Columbia University Teacher’s College. One night in 1952, she skipped class to attend a play. Next to her sat a man, Manucher FarmanFarmaian, who was a prince from an old Persian royal family. The two soon married and moved to Iran.

For Verla Gean, living in Iran would prove to be both a geographical and cultural journey. Iran was adjusting to social and political changes resulting from a recent military coup. Verla Gean’s new family was large. Some were Muslim, others were not. Some of the women wore the traditional chador, others were more Westernized. Verla Gean struggled with expectations for women and with the Persian language, but enjoyed Persian food, art, and literature. She also worked, helping the queen with her charities, teaching English at the Iran-American Society, even leading a Girl Scout camping trip to the Caspian Sea.

In 1955, Verla Gean and Manucher had a daughter, but eventually decided their differences were too great, and separated. Verla Gean raised their daughter in Holland, before returning to Utah after twenty years of international adventure. She also returned to teaching fifth grade, and inspired a generation of students until her retirement at 73.

Verla Gean had come full circle. Her journey from Utah and back was filled with the richness of life few can rival. And all from one fateful decision to travel.

Beehive Archive is a production of the Utah Humanities Council. Sources consulted in the creation of the Beehive Archive and past episodes may be found at www.utahhumanities.org © Utah Humanities Council 2015.

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