From Adrietta Applegate Hixon, *On To Oregon* (Fairfield, WA: Ye Galleon Press, 1973), 61-68

After we had been in Wyoming for several days, we found a different soil, more rocky roads, and the country began to seem a little more mountainous. All the way up the Platte we occasionally had thunder storms that fairly **peppered** us with rain and hail for fifteen or twenty minutes, until our wagon sheets became **saturated** with the water; for a little of it **sifted** through onto us like Oregon mist. It was in these parts that we had a storm that was certainly a record breaker. The downfall of rain and hail was accompanied by thunder and lightning that was terrific. **Peal** after peal seemed to shake the very ground, as if it would tear up the earth. The continued lightning struck one of the tires of the Grant wagon and ran round it for several seconds, looking like a ball of fire; the wind also shook our wagon until it felt as though it would upset. We were dripping wet and scared. The men had to stay out with the teams. They had them unhooked from the wagon, and they held onto the horns of the lead oxen to keep them in check. This storm lasted for about half an hour. There was a regular flood of water all around our wagons. My! But we were glad when it was over, and the sun came out again! The water about our wagons did not turn off, but stood about two feet deep, so the men had to drive their oxen back into all that water and hook them up to the wagons and pull us out.

[...]

Ever since Mr. Grant had been successful in killing an antelope he had persisted in making hunting trips. Perhaps our desire for fresh meat also might have spurred him on. He usually returned weary and discouraged.

One evening when we had made an early camp, he prepared to go out quite a distance back in those low hills in quest of game. Mounting his horse, he waved “Goodbye” to his family, and was gone. Meal time was past, and evening came on, but Mr. Grant did not appear. Darkness settled over those wilds, yet there was no Mr. Grant, his wife and son came to our camp, in grief over his absence. Father thought he might have killed something late in the evening, and as he would have to carry his game on his horse, it would take him some time to walk in. We lighted up Mrs. Grant’s lantern and our light, and hung them up as a guide to help him in finding our camps. We kept them burning all night, and still he did not come.

[...]

[My father and David] ate a hurried breakfast, and made ready to go out in quest of the lost man. Each took a **canteen** of water, a lunch, and a little bottle of stimulant. As they went out, they also took Mr. Grant’s horse. Looking out over this vast wilderness, how they must have wished that his horse might only talk and tell them which way to go!

[...]

The women folk tried to do a washing, but our anxiety refused to be **quelled**. We kept looking and watching. The shadows marked noon and still they had not returned. A **merciless** sun beat down all that afternoon, causing us to hunt the shade of our wagons. Yet, some one of us was ever peering out into that lonely **vastness**!

The afternoon was wearing to a close; then evening came… As the sun was setting far out to the west, all that great expanse was lit up with its gorgeous rays, but its rare beauty found no reflection in our hearts, for our eyes were strained and dazzled with trying to look out in the distance.

Just as the last rays were sinking beyond the horizon, once more I climbed up onto the hot **tongue** of our wagon, peering out beyond. Dimly outlined in the distance, there seemed to be something moving down that **incline**. Could it be only my **fancy**? Closing my eyes for a moment, then looking again, “Yes, yes, it is some men on horses!”

[...]

Now, they are nearer. Yes, there is father on Polly, and David on his horse, and Mr. Grant’s horse is between them, and each of them are reaching in toward the bundle that is on Mr. Grant’s horse. Now they are here; and look! Can that be Mr. Grant, who is all **lopped** over, his eyes **bleared**, his face purple and swollen? Yes, it must be.

[...]

As his wife reaches out to him, he tried to say something, and ends in a groan. Tenderly he is carried to his bed in the tent. Then his worn shoes and jean clothing are removed.

He must have nourishment, so they managed to get him to swallow several spoonfuls of hot milk. He was then bathed and some sort of medicine was given him. After some time they were rewarded, when he fell into a feverish sleep. Later, father told mother than they would need to be up with him most of the night, as he would often require warm **nourishment**, and his fever must be kept down. He said he thought that with care he would recover in a few days, but that he would have been gone if he had not been found.

[...]

Father said, “I tell you, it was hard to get him here. He must have gotten lost and wandered about, without water, until **famished** and exhausted.”

Father looked so tired and weary, as he tried to eat a little supper, that my heart ached for him. But I did hope that Mr. Grant might soon be able to talk, as I longed to hear his part of the story. The next morning he still groaned in feverish exhaustion, but he was tenderly cared for, and by evening he was better, and able to talk a little.

The second day was so far recovered that we journeyed on, with him lying in his wagon. The next morning, while seated in an easy chair about the camp fire, he told of his terrible experience, as follows:

“After I had gotten out several miles I saw some antelope in the distance and kept following them up, hoping to be able to get a shot, but they seemed to be traveling, and I kept moving on over hilly stretches until we were far out, and I never did get within shooting range of them. I kept on until I was just **ascending** to the top of a range of hills, and noticed that the sun would soon be down. I was thinking of turning back when I **chanced** to see down not far below, quietly feeding, a small herd of buffalo. I drew back out of their view, and was glad that they were headed the other way. Then I decided that in order to get a sure shot I would tie my horse there and creep up nearer to them. So I kept creeping along, and was just in the act of shooting, when the old bull put up his head and **bellowed**! I shot, but must have missed, as they all **wheeled** and ran away over the hill in the direction of my horse. As I neared the top of the slope I could still hear the **clattering** rumble of their hoofs. But my horse -- was also gone! It had pulled up the little bush to which it was tied. I caught a glimpse of it as it mounted a hill in the distance. Thinking that I must be eight or ten miles out and realizing that the sun had disappeared, I began to run after my horse.

“That horse was surely needed; also the canteen of water that it carried. Then I thought it might stop over the next rise, so I put my gun under my arm and ran with all my might, only to be disappointed again and again. Finally I realized that I was getting nowhere by tiring myself, and I found that I was also very thirsty. There was no horse nor water in sight. **Chafing** over my predicament, I had to slacken my speed.

“As I trudged on, it grew dark, and I felt lost as to direction, but tried to reason from the lay of the land, also the location of the familiar stars, as to the direction I should go. Then for several hours I tried to keep going, but I was getting very thirsty, and my gun was so heavy. Again, I seemed to be lost, and tried to locate myself. I do not know how much longer I kept going, but the strain of violent running, excitement, and thirst was telling on me, and I just had to drop down for a little.

“Later, I was aroused by the howling of wolves, and knowing that I dare not lie there, started onward again. The gun again seemed such a burden, yet I knew that it might serve soon, so I clutched it and staggered on. By this time, I was all mixed up as to the lay of the land; also the stars, dipper, and all seemed strange. But I just kept going until I again dropped down, and again was aroused by the nearer cry of those beasts. Again I **bestirred** myself, but did not know which way to go, so gathered up some dry grass and little twigs, making a small fire, hoping thus to scare the creatures. Wearily I tried to keep this up until daylight. Time and again, I saw the firelight shining in the eyes of those wolves, and I took a shot out in their direction and still kept trying to keep my fire going. It was a long night.

“When the daylight came, the animals **slunk** away. Starting out, I kept thinking something familiar would come in view. But I must have back-tracked during the night. I tried to keep going, often **staggering**, until noon, and yet no camp was in sight. I was still suffering horribly with thirst and weariness, and realizing that I did not see one thing to help me to know my whereabouts, I grew **despondent**, and felt like giving up; but that burning thirst urged me along. The **sweltering** sun seemed to be cooking my very bones. My throat felt tight and choked. In trying to push on, I noticed that my hands and feet felt as if they would burst, and there seemed to be a tight ring about my head. My lips and tongue were parched and hot, but I tried to stagger on until some time in the afternoon I fell in an agonized exhaustion. Later, I tried to crawl to a partial shade of a little bush, and there I lay in that burning heat until you found me. I never would have imagined that thirst and exhaustion could have caused such intense suffering, but I certainly have much for which to be thankful! What if you had never found me?”

***Vocabulary***

Peppered - verb - To cover, as if with pepper

Saturated - adjective - Soaked through completely so that it can't hold any more

Sifted - verb - Passed through something filtering it

Peal - noun - A loud, long-lasting sound

Canteen - noun - A small bottle or container used by soldiers or travelers for water

Quelled - verb - Quieted

Merciless - adjective - Without mercy; cruel

Vastness - noun - A huge and seemingly endless space

Tongue - noun - A long pole from the center of a wagon or carriage which animals are attached to

Incline - noun - A slope or slanted area

Fancy - noun - Imagination; an illusion

Lopped - adjective - Fallen over like a tree that was cut down

Bleared - adjective - Dim or hard to see from tears

Nourishment - noun - Food; especially food that sustains someone

Famished - adjective - Hungry

Ascending - verb - Climbing

Chanced - verb - Happened as if by luck

Bellowed - verb - Roared or cried out loudly

Wheeled - verb - Turned around like a wheel

Clattering - adjective - Like a rattling noise

Chafing - verb - Becoming annoyed by something

Bestirred - verb - Moved into action

Slunk - verb - To move along slow and carefully, especially when afraid or ashamed

Staggering - noun - Walking unsteadily

Despondent - adjective - Feeling deep hopelessness or gloom

Sweltering - adjective - Overwhelmingly hot