

## WAILLATPU MASSACRE, 1847

(Excerpted from *Across the Plains*, by Catherine Sager Pringle)

In the fall of 1847 the emigration over the mountains brought the measles. It spread among the Indians, and owing to their manner of living it proved very fatal. It was customary for emigrant families who arrived late, to winter at the station, and some seven or eight families had put up there to spend the winter of 1847. Among the arrivals was a half-breed named Jo Lewis, who had joined the emigration at Fort Hall. Much against his will the doctor admitted this person into his family for the winter. We none of us liked him; he seemed surly and morose. There was also a Frenchman named Joseph Stanfield who had been in the doctor's employ since the year 1845. Up to the year 1847 the Protestant missions had been the only religious influence among the Indians. In the fall of this year the Catholic Church established missions among them, and the teachings of the two clashed. The Indian mind is so constructed that he cannot reconcile the different isms, consequently they became much worked up on the subject. Many long talks occurred between them and Dr. Whitman in reference to the two religious systems. Owing to the sickness and these other causes, the natives began to show an insolent and hostile feeling. It was now late in the season and the weather was very inclement. Whitman's large family were all sick, and the disease was raging fearfully among the Indians, who were rapidly dying. I saw from five to six buried daily. The field was open for creating mischief, and the two Joes improved it. Jo Lewis was the chief agent; his cupidity had been awakened, and he and his associate expected to reap a large spoil. A few days previous to the massacre, Mr. Spaulding arrived at the station accompanied by his daughter, ten years old. She was the second child born of white parents west of the Rocky Mountains, Dr. Whitman's child being the first. She had lived her ten years of life among the natives, and spoke the language fluently. Saturday, after his arrival, Mr. Spaulding accompanied Dr. Whitman to the Umatilla to visit the Indians there, and hold a meeting for worship with them upon the Sabbath. They rode nearly all night in a heavy rain. Dr. Whitman spent the next day visiting the sick, and returned to the lodge where Mr. Spaulding was staying, late in the afternoon, nearly worn out with fatigue. The condition of his family made it imperative that he should return home, so arrangements were made for Mr. Spaulding to remain a few days on the Umatilla to visit among and preach to the Indians.

As Dr. Whitman was mounting his horse to leave, Stickas, a friendly Christian Indian, who was the owner of the lodge, came out and told him that "Jo Lewis is making trouble: that he was telling his (Stickas's) people that the doctor and Mr. Spaulding were poisoning the Indians so as to give their country to his own people." He said: "I do not believe him, but some do, and I fear they will do you harm; you had better go away for awhile until my people have better hearts."

Doctor Whitman arrived at home about 10 o'clock that night, having ridden twenty-five miles after sundown. He sent my two brothers, who were sitting up with the sick, to bed, saying that he would watch the remainder of the night. After they had retired he examined the patients one after the other. (I also was lying sick at the time.) Coming to Helen, he spoke and told his wife, who was lying on the bed, that Helen was dying. He sat and watched her for some time, when she rallied and seemed better. I had noticed that he seemed to be troubled when he first came home, but concluded that it was anxiety in reference to the sick children.

Taking a chair, he sat down by the stove and requested his wife to arise, as he wished to talk with her. She complied, and he related to her what Stickas had told him that day; also that he had learned that the Indians were holding councils every night. After conversing for some time his wife retired to another room, and the doctor kept his lonely watch. Observing that I was restless, he surmised that I had overheard the conversation. By kind and soothing words he allayed my fears and I went to sleep. I can see it all now and remember just how he looked.

The fatal 29th of November dawned a cold, foggy morning. It would seem as though the sun was afraid to look upon the bloody deed the day was to bring forth, and that nature was weeping over the wickedness of man. Father's (Dr. Whitman) brow was serene, with no trace of the storm that had raged in his breast during the night. He was somewhat more serious than usual. Most of the children were better, only three being dangerous; two of these afterwards died. We saw nothing of mother (Mrs. Whitman). One of the girls put some breakfast on a plate and carried it to her. She was sitting with her face buried in her handkerchief, sobbing bitterly. Taking the food, she motioned the child to leave. The food was there, untouched, next morning.

An Indian child had died during the night, and was to be brought to the station for burial. While awaiting the coming of the corpse, Dr. Whitman sat reading and conversing with his assistant, Mr. Rogers, upon the difficulties that seemed to surround him, the discontent of the Indians, the Catholics forcing themselves upon him, and the insinuations of Jo Lewis. He made plans for conciliating the natives and for improving their condition. He said that the Bishop was coming to see him in a few days and he thought that then he could get the Indians to give him leave to go away in the spring, adding:

"If things do not clear up by that time I will move my family below."

Being informed of the arrival of the corpse, he arose, and after calling his wife and giving her directions in regard to the sick children, he wended his way to the graveyard.

A beef had to be killed for the use of the station, and my brother Francis, accompanied by Jo Stanfield, had gone early to the range and driven it in, and three or four men were dressing it near the grist mill, which was running, grinding grists for the Indians.

Upon the return from the funeral, the doctor remarked that none but the relatives were at the burying, although large numbers were assembled near by; but it might be owing to the beef being killed, as it was their custom to gather at such times. His wife requested him to go upstairs and see Miss Bewley, who was quite sick. He complied, returning shortly with a troubled look on his countenance. He crossed the room to a sash door that fronted the mill, and stood for some moments drumming upon the glass with his fingers. Turning around, he said:

"Poor Lorinda is in trouble and does not know the cause. I found her weeping, and she said there was a presentiment of evil on her mind that she could not overcome. I will get her some medicine, and, wife, you take it up to her, and try and comfort her a little, for I have failed in the attempt."

As he said this he walked to the medicine case and was making a selection. His wife had gone to the pantry for milk for one of the children; the kitchen was full of Indians, and their boisterous manner alarmed her. She fled to the sitting room, bolting the door in the face of the savages who tried to pass in. She had not taken her hand from the lock when the Indians rapped and asked for the doctor.

Dr. Whitman told his wife to bolt the door after him; she did so. Listening for a moment, she seemed to be reassured, crossed the room and took up the youngest child. She sat down with this child in her arms. Just then Mrs. Osborn came in from an adjoining room and sat down. This was the first time this lady had been out of her room for weeks, having been very ill.

She had scarcely sat down when we were all startled by an explosion that seemed to shake the house. The two women sprang to their feet and stood with white faces and distended eyes. The children rushed out doors, some of them without clothes, as we were taking a bath. Placing the child on the bed, Mrs. Whitman called us back and started for the kitchen, but changing her mind, she fastened the door and told Mrs. Osborn to go to her room and lock the door, at the same time telling us to put on our clothes. All this happened much quicker than I can write it. Mrs. Whitman then began to walk the floor, wringing her hands, saying, "Oh, the Indians! the Indians! they have killed my husband, and I am a widow!" She repeated this many times. At this moment Mary Ann, who was in the kitchen, rushed around the house and came in at a door that was not locked; her face was deathly white; we gathered around her and inquired if father was dead. She replied, "Yes." Just then a man from the beef came in at the same door, with his arm broken. He said, "Mrs. Whitman, the Indians are killing us all." This roused her to action. The wounded man was lying upon the floor calling for water. She brought him a pitcherful from another room, locked all the doors, then unlocking that door, she went into the kitchen. As she did so several emigrant women with their small children rushed in. Mrs. Whitman was trying to drag her husband in; one of the women went to her aid, and they brought him in. He was fatally wounded, but conscious. The blood was streaming from a gunshot wound in the throat. Kneeling over him she implored him to speak to her. To all her questions he whispered "yes" or "no," as the case might be. Mrs. Whitman would often step to the sash door and look out through the window to see what was going on out of doors, as the roar of guns showed us that the bloodthirsty fiends were not yet satisfied. At such times she would exclaim: "Oh, that Jo Lewis is doing it all!" Several times this wretch came to the door and tried to get into the room where we were. When Mrs. Whitman would ask, "What do you want, Jo?" he would run away. Looking out we saw Mr. Rogers running toward the house, hotly pursued by Indians. He sprang against the door, breaking out two panes of glass. Mrs. Whitman opened the door, and let him in, and closed it in the face of his pursuers, who, with a yell, turned to seek other victims. Mr. Rogers was shot through the wrist and tomahawked on the head;

seeing the doctor lying upon the floor, he asked if he was dead, to which the doctor replied, "No."

The school teacher, hearing the report of the guns in the kitchen, ran down to see what had happened; finding the door fastened, he stood for a moment, when Mrs. Whitman saw him and motioned for him to go back. He did so, and had reached the stairs leading to the schoolroom, when he was seized by a savage who had a large butcher knife. Mr. Sanders struggled and was about to get away when another burly savage came to the aid of the first. Standing by Mrs. Whitman's side, I watched the horrid strife until, sickened, I turned away. Just then a bullet came through the window, piercing Mrs. Whitman's shoulder. Claspng her hands to the wound, she shrieked with pain, and then fell to the floor. I ran to her and tried to raise her up. She said, "Child, you cannot help me, save yourself." We all crowded around her and began to weep. She commenced praying for us, "Lord, save these little ones." She repeated this over many times. She also prayed for her parents, saying: "This will kill my poor mother."

The women now began to go upstairs, and Mr. Rogers pushed us to the stairway. I was filled with agony at the idea of leaving the sick children and refused to go. Mr. Rogers was too excited to speak, so taking up one of the children, he handed her to me, and motioned for me to take her up. I passed her to some one else, turned and took another, and then the third and ran up myself. Mr. Rogers then helped mother to her feet, and brought her upstairs and laid her on the bed. He then knelt in prayer, and while thus engaged, the crashing of doors informed us that the work of death was accomplished out of doors, and our time had come. The wounded man, whose name was Kimball, said that if we had a gun to hold over the banisters it might keep them away. There happened to be an old broken gun in the room, and this was placed over the railing. By this time they were smashing the door leading to the stairway. Having accomplished this they retired. All was quiet for awhile, then we heard footsteps in the room below, and a voice at the bottom of the stairway called Mr. Rogers. It was an Indian, who represented that he had just come; he would save them if they would come down. After a good deal of parleying he came up. I told mother that I had seen him killing the teacher, but she thought I was mistaken. He said that they were going to burn the house, and that we must leave it. I wrapped my little sister up and handed her to him with the request that he would carry her. He said that they would take Mrs. Whitman away and then come back for us. Then all left save the children and Mr.

Kimball. When they reached the room below mother was laid upon a settee and carried out into the yard by Mr. Rogers and Jo Lewis. Having reached the yard, Jo dropped his end of the settee, and a volley of bullets laid Mr. Rogers, mother and brother Francis, bleeding and dying, on the ground. While the Indians were holding a council to decide how to get Mrs. W. and Mr. Rogers into their hands, Jo Lewis had been sent to the schoolroom to get the school children. They had hid in the attic, but were ferreted out and brought to the kitchen, where they were placed in a row to be shot. But the chief relented, and said they should not be hurt; but my brother Francis was killed soon after. My oldest brother was shot at the same time the doctor was.

Night had now come, and the chief made a speech in favor of sparing the women and children, which was done, and they all became prisoners. Ten ghastly, bleeding corpses lay in and around the house. Mr. Osborn's family had secreted themselves under the floor, and escaped during the night, and after great hardships reached Fort Walla Walla. One other man escaped to this fort, but was never heard of again. Another fled to Mr. Spaulding's station; Mr. Kimball was killed the next day; Mr. Spaulding remained at Umatilla until Wednesday, and was within a few miles of the doctor's station when he learned the dreadful news. He fled, and after great suffering, reached his station, which had been saved by the presence of mind and shrewdness of his wife. Mr. Canfield was wounded, but concealing himself until night, he fled to Mr. Spaulding's station.

The manner of the attack on Dr. Whitman I learned afterward from the Indians. Upon entering the kitchen, he took his usual seat upon a settee which was between the wall and the cook stove; an Indian began to talk to him in reference to a patient the doctor was attending. While thus engaged an Indian struck him from behind on the head with a tomahawk; at the same moment two guns were discharged, one at the doctor, and the other at brother John, who was engaged in winding twine for the purpose of making brooms. The men at the beef were set upon; Mr. Kimball had his arm broken by a bullet, and fled to the doctor's house. Mr. Hoffman fought bravely with an axe; he split the foot of the savage who first struck the doctor, but was overpowered. Mr. Canfield was shot, the bullet entering his side, but he made his escape. The miller fell at his post. Mr. Hall was laying the upper floor in a building; leaping to the ground, he wrested a gun from an Indian, and fled to the fort. He was never seen or heard of afterwards, and it is surmised that he was murdered there. The tailor was sitting upon his table sewing, an Indian stepped in, shot

him with a pistol, and then went out; he died at midnight after great suffering. Night came and put an end to the carnival of blood.

The November moon looked down, bright and cold, upon the scene, nor heeded the groans of the dying who gave forth their plaints to the chill night air. Mr. Osborn's family were concealed where they could hear Mr. Rogers's words as he prayed to that Saviour whom he had loved and served for many years. His last words were: "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!" The clock tolled the midnight hour ere death came to the relief of these victims of savage brutality. The dead bodies lay where they fell from Monday night until Wednesday, when the Christian Indians, among whom the doctor and his wife had labored for eleven years, and from whom the natives had received nothing but kindness, gave consent to have them buried, but not one of them would help in the task. Jo Stanfield was set at the work. A grave three feet deep and wide enough to receive the eleven victims was dug, and the bodies placed in it. Wolves excavated the grave and devoured the remains. The volunteers who went up to fight the Indians gathered up the bones, placed them in a wagon box, and again buried them, and this is all the burial these martyrs of Americanism in Oregon have ever received.