

Transcript of Oral History Interview with Sharon Christensen

Interviewed by Kathy Bradford in Brigham City, Utah, October 5, 2012.

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Kathy Bradford: Today is Friday, October 5, and I'm speaking with Sharon Christensen at her home in Brigham City. Sharon has a history of being a temple ordinance worker and attending the temple often. I would like to have her talk about some of her experiences.

Sharon Christensen: I first started at the temple as an ordinance worker with my previous husband, Von Roy Olsen. He passed away in 2004 from cancer. Two years after he passed away, I met and married Dick Christensen. So now I'm Christensen, instead of Olsen.

When we were first called to be ordinance workers at the Ogden Temple, Von had been just retired for a year or two. We worked there for two and a half years. We got there at 4:15 in the morning and helped open the temple every day. That was quite an experience. We served with a Brother and Sister Beus from Clinton, and they were just excellent people and excellent trainers.

KB: Well, you didn't do ordinance work at that hour of the day, did you?

SC: No, we got the temple organized. There were things there that had to be moved for cleaning at night, and we put it back together so that it was ready for the 6 o'clock session, and we were on the early-morning shift. We got there at 4:15 every morning and helped open the temple every day, and that was quite an experience. Brother and Sister Beus were just excellent trainers. We got the temple organized. There were things there that had to be moved for cleaning at night, and we put it back together so it was ready for the 6 o'clock session. So we'd get there at 4:15 and quickly go through the things we needed to do and then be ready for our meetings.

KB: Did you have a checklist of things you had to do?

SC: We just followed Brother and Sister Beus around because they had been doing it for years. We had a really special time with those two special people working in the different sections of the temple making sure everything was put back where it needed to be.

About 5:15, we would go to our prayer meeting, and then by quarter to six, we were dismissed from our prayer meeting and would go out to our different stations and be ready to greet the patrons. We worked at everything except the baptistry and the new endowees – the new brides. We did everything else in the temple. It was just fantastic.

KB: What time did you get finished for the day?

SC: We would finish about 2 o'clock in the afternoon. We were there about eight hours, and the other shift would come in around noon. We did this two to five days a week, depending on what was necessary. Sometimes we worked three-day weeks, and sometimes we'd work two-day weeks. Every two weeks we would do a different schedule. It depended on the days. We'd work three days for two weeks; then we'd work two days for two weeks. When it came close to the

cleaning time, then we'd work all five days. Then the shift behind us (when it was time for the five-day week) would work the five days. Then each shift would have three weeks off for that cleaning. Then we'd have that whole three weeks for family vacations and plan different things to go and enjoy.

KB: Was Von's health starting to decline at that point?

SC: No. We decided to quit because he was diagnosed with his cancer, but he was in good health at that time.

KB: So he was not hampered with poor health while you were working there?

SC: No. I'd say it was six months into his cancer when he didn't feel like he could continue. He started getting what I would call anxious because of all the treatments that they were giving him. I needed to be here to help him, and I needed to go to work and get some insurance. He'd retired, and all we had was that one insurance, and his shots were \$2300 every three months. We just couldn't afford it. There was no way on his retirement that we could afford that medical expense and still keep up our home. I came home and found a job. I worked for the Brigham City Police Department as a dispatcher for about two and a half years. Then I went into the Records Department where they didn't have really enough to keep me busy, and so they assigned me half a day down at Emergency Services.

I enjoyed working with them and had a lot of fun with the different departments. It was a very different job because I worked two different jobs.

KB: I'd think it would be eye-opening because it was a lot of emergency response at both places.

SC: Yes, and I loved working for the Police Department, and I loved working for Emergency Services, and I got to meet a lot of people who were fantastic volunteers for the Brigham City community.

KB: It was a good time for you except for watching Von decline.

SC: That was hard, watching him getting worse, but we got through all of that, got our lives back together. My sister introduced me to Dick, and we got married. Now we're off another adventure.

KB: How did you feel when you heard about the new Brigham City Temple?

SC: It was so exciting! We just were sitting here watching it, just glued to what was being said. He said, "We're going to announce these three new temples." He said, "Brigham City, Utah." And I went, "What!"

Then he said, "Fort Lauderdale, Florida." And that's where my cousin and my aunt live. We were so excited that I can't tell you where the third temple was.

KB: Was it Payson, Utah? That seems right to me because that's where my grandma had lived.

SC: Maybe it was Payson Temple, but I cannot remember. All I could think about was the one here in Brigham. We actually backed it up. We had that ability on our television to back it up and hear it again.

KB: We have that, too, but I didn't think of that. By that time our phone was ringing, and our kids were calling about it.

SC: It was most exciting! And then to watch it and get ready for it and to watch the dedication of the ground and the groundbreaking ceremony.

KB: Everybody was involved with it.

SC: They were, and we'd meet people from other places who would say, "What's happening at your temple grounds?"

We say, "Nothing yet, but I'll let you know the minute we see anything." Then up went the fence, and we couldn't see anything. It was hard to work there at the Ogden Temple those last three months and know that it was closing. We sat there in our prayer meeting that last morning and it was really hard. They had scheduled the cleaning for February, which was just three or four weeks before the closing of the temple. There were questions from everybody. "Why are we cleaning the temple when they're going to tear it down?"

Our Temple President said, "We are cleaning the temple, so that when we turn it over, we want it to be like the homes in Nauvoo – spik and span – just as clean as it can be, knowing that it's going to be torn down, that it's going to be demolished. But everything will be done just as if at the last minute Christ will be in there. That was a really humbling experience to have him say those things to us. So we went through and everybody made sure all the lockers were cleaned, picking up little pieces of lint and paper off the floor. It was just spotless when we left that day.

KB: That's a touching story to me, and then our community turned their focus on the Brigham City Temple. Did you have family that got involved with it, or are they all too far away?

SC: Dick only has one child that lives here, and that's Dick's son and his wife and two grandsons. We would get with them and listen to what they had experienced. They went to the different events as we did, depending on their different work schedules and things. We would talk about it and their feelings.

All of our kids from out of state would call and ask, "What's going on?" We'd get the emails and forward them to the others so that they could see what was going on. As it got closer, the kids were more and more excited. In fact, our one son who lives in Nampa, Idaho is coming in November for his family to be sealed in the temple. That's Michael, and they have four children. They brought them down in August to see the temple because they'd been talking about it.

That was before the open house had started. They couldn't get off from school.

KB: That's so exciting, Sharon!

SC: It is. As it was getting closer, I was texting all the grandkids, and they're so excited. Then when we got our call, we'd text everybody again. It was really neat because the grandkids were saying, "Oh, awesome, Grandma. This is so neat, Grandma."

We were not here for the dedication, which was really hard because we'd been building up to this. When we got the call to be ushers and tour guides, that was so neat. We put our names in knowing that everybody was going to try and do it.

KB: Tell me what things you were asked to do when you got there.

SC: Well, Dick went for three of the days without me because I was recovering from that illness, so the fourth day I reserved. I thought, *I will be well no matter what happens because I'm going to try and do that.*

We were put in the group that was supposed to be on the first and second floors of the temple. Dick got to run the elevators for five hours. He said he loaded hundreds of wheelchairs in that elevator, taking them between the four floors there. He loved that!

My first assignment was at the marriage waiting room, and I was there for about an hour. Then they came and said, "We need you to change because there are people here who haven't done anything in the temple until today. So they took me down outside of the refreshment area, and I got to help people find their way back to the buses and stay out of the traffic patterns and talk to them that way.

Then they came and said they needed me to go over to the booties, so I was experiencing several different things, and that was exciting because they had groups of people come through. Some would say, "Why do I have to put booties on?"

We told them it was to try to keep the dust of the outside world off of the carpets. They would say, "Oh, put them on." It was just really neat to work with them.

Then we were sitting there in lull time before another group came out, and one of the sisters came out and said, "We need two of you to come over here and help with a special assignment."

We said, "Okay!" We got up and went over, and she said, "We have a group of five blind sisters to go through. We need six of you because we need somebody to tend the dog."

Sister Meredith took care of this dog, and she walked it outside and took care of it. An hour or an hour and half later she met the sister whose dog it was.

Anyway they said, "Will you take one of these sisters through?"

KB: Did they tell you what to do, or what she could touch?

SC: They said, "You will know. The spirit will tell you what to say and how to answer their questions. You will be talking. It's not a silent tour for them because they can't see, and you will have to explain things to them."

I had only been through it on Monday, and this was Thursday. So I got introduced to her. Her name was Myra, and she was not a member. She said, "This is the first temple I have been able to go into."

She hadn't been blind all of her life so she knew color, and so I could tell her colors.

KB: Were you kind of separate from the group, or did you go as a group?

SC: We were all together, but some of us got separated when some wanted to go on the elevator and some wanted to climb the stairs. So a lot of the time I was just there with her.

KB: I'm guessing that would work better just being with her one-on-one.

SC: It was, and Brother Randall (I can't remember his first name.) had the one sister with him, and I had Myra. We started by listening to the film part. We were walking around in the hospitality.

We had the booties put on, and when we got to the door going into the baptistry, she said, "Will you describe the door for me?"

I looked at the door, and I was thinking, *How do I describe a door?* I told her it was this beautiful glass door with brass surrounding it, and the glass was etched and beveled so you couldn't really see in, but you could see through it. As we went in, I said "Here is kind of a foyer with beautiful tables and flowers."

She said, "Let me touch it."

We went over, and she put her hand on the table and said, "Oh, this is beautiful! What kind of wood is it?"

I was so taken back because the words just popped to me. I knew the names of the woods.

KB: Would you have known them before?

SC: No. I would not have known.

KB: So they knew and told you that you'd know what to say.

SC: Yes, and then I had to describe the pictures that were on the walls, the frames. Then we came to the second door and I was explaining that this door was a different door from the other one. We walk in, and she said, "Oh, we're on a tile floor."

I said, "Well, it's marble."

She said, "I have to feel it." So she bent down and felt the marble on the floor. She said, "Oh, it's so smooth!"

When she stood up, I said, "We're going to go past what they call a recommend desk."

She said, "What do they do there?"

I said, "Members who have been through the temple, after the temple is dedicated, have to show our recommend that we have talked to our Bishop and our Stake President, and we're worthy to come into the Temple and do these sacred ordinances"

She said, "Okay. Let me touch the desk." So we touched the desk, and there's a molding underneath the edge of the desk. She said, "Is this plastic?"

I said, "No, it's wood."

She said, "Oh, it's too smooth for wood."

And I said, "Well, it was hand-done in Honduras and some of it here in the United States, and it's been sanded and painted."

We walked into the baptismal font, and she noticed the marble around the walkway there. She was touching it. I told her there were pieces inlaid in the tiles that represent peach blossoms, and she was down on the floor feeling that.

KB: Could she feel the separation?

SC: She could feel the separation of that design in the tile. Then I described the pictures. She said, "What is the baptismal font like?" And I said, "It's like a big bowl, and it's all tiled with this beautiful tile that's on the floor with the peach insets, and it's sitting on the backs of twelve oxen. They're kind of pewter bronze color, and each one is different."

She said, "Can I touch them?" Then I had to explain to her that it was down another floor, and there was no way we could get down there. We went out to get on the elevator, and we were walking on tile and carpet. She said, "Well, what color's the carpet? And what design is in the carpet?"

And she got down and felt the carpet.

KB: Were other people going by on tours all this time?

SC: Yes, and they had to go around us because she was touching everything. She was touching the wood and feeling the design in the wood – the tree dots and a dash.

She said, "What is this?"

I said, "It's a design that's been carved into the woods here."

She said again, "Isn't this plastic?" And I said, "No, it's wood." We got on the elevator, and she was touching the door. There's an embossed design on the doors of the elevator. I didn't see it the first time I went. She was touching it, and she said, "Is there braille here so that people can find their way?"

I'm looking around thinking, *Well, there should be*. And here was the number with the braille on it. She's saying, "Oh, yes. That's floor number one and basement. As we get off, she said, "Here's floor one."

So now I was starting to notice things more. We got off on the first floor and were walking through the training room there, and she had to touch the podium and the chairs and felt the fabric. I told her about the windows and how they're embossed and beveled and the beautiful lace curtains, and she was feeling the lace. She said, "Oh, this is beautiful! Are there peach blossoms in the lace?"

I'm looking at it, thinking, *Are there?* I was just looking at beautiful lace curtains, and she was seeing things that I couldn't see. She said, "Describe the chandeliers."

In the training room, it's a white bowl with something like a brass ring around the top, and underneath there's a fleur de lei that goes up and holds the fixture to the bowl. I was trying to explain all those things to her so that she could see them.

Then we were going on the walkway toward the front desk, and I said, "We're coming to this last wall."

Well, she had to feel it immediately, and she'd say, "Describe the marriage room." Describe the waiting room." The carpets weren't put down at this time to keep them as clean as possible, but there was the carpet in the marriage waiting room, and it had the peach blossoms in the border. She got down with her hands and was feeling the peaches in that carpet and said, "Tell me the colors of the carpet."

I was trying to tell her to touch here and here's this color, and it looks like the organ at the Tabernacle. Here's this peach blossom, and here's this three dots and a dash. I later learned what that meant.

KB: What does it mean?

SC: It's Morse code for victory. We were getting on the elevator to go from the first floor to the second floor, and she said, "Does this elevator door have stuff on it, too?" I told her that it does, and she said, "Can I feel the wallpaper and the painting?" And she was touching the wallpaper and saying, "Oh, that's got texture to it. Describe the pictures."

How do you describe a painting on the wall to somebody and the frames? She had to touch the

frame to see what design was on the frame. “What color is the frame?” “What's this picture of?” All these things as we were going in, and they took us through the chapel. I tried to describe that, and she touched the organ and felt the keys and the benches. She had to feel the fabric on the benches. Then we went into the ordinance rooms, and she asked, “Is there anything on the walls here?”

I said, “There are beautiful murals.” I told her about the mural that has beautiful marshland in it – the ducks and the birds and water on one side. Then you turn to the other side, and there are mountains and deer and animals there. She said, “Is there wallpaper?”

I said, “Well, the mural goes all the way around. There's no wallpaper here.” We went through into the second room, and I said, “Oh, the wallpaper is different here where there's no mural.”

She said, “Can I touch it?” As she did, she said, “It's like somebody stenciled it.” It's like wallpaper that they've cut out and peeled parts of it out, so it has an embossed, raised texture to it. I never would have noticed that.

KB: I don't think any of us would. Just from you telling me this, I'm going to notice things a lot differently that I have when I've been in there before.

SC: Yes! And then we were feeling the bottom half and the texture of the woods again. Then I looked over, and on the sides of the benches, I saw it was all metal on the ends of the bench, but it was a design. It was a basket with florals, and she felt this side and said, “Oh, this is gorgeous! Tell me what it is? What color is it? Let me feel the upholstery of the chairs.” I thought, *Wow! I've seen things that I've never seen before.*

Then we went into the largest sealing room, and I was telling her about the altar in the center, and that we kneel at the altar.

KB: Were people all around on their tours?

SC: They were, and a lot of them were watching her. Oh, I have to tell you we went into the locker room, and she could feel the round windows. She wasn't tall enough to touch the glass, but she could feel the curve of the wood. She said, “Oh, this is just elegant!”

I told her that these were lockers for the sisters to change into their white clothes, that they wore white clothing in the temple.

She said, “Let me feel the lockers.” And she went into one of the lockers and felt it and said, “Oh, they're very narrow!”

I told her, “Yes, we just use them to hang our street clothes when we put on our white temple clothes.”

She said, “They're long, but they're narrow.” Then she felt the different things in the lockers – the keys and the numbers on them.”

She felt the wall. She was always touching the walls and the carpet, and again she asked the color of the carpeting, and I said, "Well, this is the same carpet that is in the hallway and on the stairs."

"Okay."

And we had to feel the bannisters and the pillars on the stairs, but I want to get back to the sealing room. The gentleman that was in there said, "Let her touch the altar." So she touched the altar and felt the embossing and everything on the altar. I told her that we kneel at this altar and make our sacred covenants. She was touching it, and we came around and the man said, "Have you noticed the ceiling?"

I said no, and I told her that there was this chandelier in there and was describing it. He said, "Notice the peach blossoms and branches and leaves. It's all hand-done."

I said okay, and I told her about it, and he said, "There are 16 bumblebees up there, and they go to the map coordinates – north, south, east and west."

KB: When I go there next time, I'll be looking for all of these things. It's wonderful!

SC: I was just thrilled! We came out of there and went into the Celestial room, and I was trying to describe to her this beautiful white carpeting. I said, "There are peach blossoms that have been hand-cut into that carpeting." She was kneeling, and we were going around the border so she could feel it.

Then I described the table, and she said, "Can I touch the table?" "What kind of wood is it?" "What color is it?"

The flowers – she touched them and asked, "Are they real flowers?" And I said, "No, they're silk."

She said, "Well, these are high-quality silk flowers. They're not just regular silk flowers."

I took her around the room, and she was feeling the credenzas, and she said, "What's sitting on the credenzas?"

I said, "There are beautiful crystal, very high-class cut crystal vases." So she was feeling these beautiful vases and the lamps. She had to touch the lamps and the shades in the hallway. I don't know if you've noticed it, but it was pointed out to me that you can go toward the Celestial room and turn around and look in the mirror on the south. It reflects the mirror on the north, and it reflects the picture of Christ in the hallway that you can't see. If you look down the hallway, you don't see that, but if you look in the mirror, you can see Christ. I was telling her this, that we can see all of this.

KB: Did you know this?"

SC: I didn't know it. I hadn't noticed it. We were touching the mirrors and the baseboards. It wasn't until we came out of the celestial room after I started working, "Did you see Christ?"

"No." And a sister takes me over and shows me that there is Christ in the mirrors.

Then I took her down the elevator from the third floor down on the first floor to the hospitality area, and I got her her water and a cookie, and she said, "What's this room like?"

I said, "It's got beautiful furniture in here – chairs, couches, tables with beautiful lamps and vases on them." Then I went back, and they had those six panels explaining exactly what was going on at the Temple and what will go on at the Temple. I read them to her, and she was just thrilled to hear this. She said, "I need pamphlets. I need to take pamphlets to people so that they know what's going on." So I went back and got her a half a dozen or so of the pamphlets.

As I was leaving, I saw that statue by Elder Peck, the temple construction missionary. I said, "Oh, I have to take you to see this before we leave. It was done by our temple missionary, a man who has been here during the entire construction." And she was feeling it with her hands. She said, "This is beautiful work!" I read the tribute to her, and she said, "He is an artist like you will rarely see because he has features here that are so detailed. He is a brilliant artist!"

I didn't look at it as a detailed statue. I need to feel it to see what she saw – close my eyes and feel the detail.

SC: Then we came to the large mosaic just outside, and she said, "Well, tell me what it's got on it?"

I said, "Well, there are little squares. And the temple is there"

She said, "Is the angel on top of the temple? I said, "Yes."

She said, "Is Christ anywhere on these tiles." And I said, "Over and over." She said, "I know that we can't feel that because it's been hand-painted, and He's there in a lot of them?" I said, "Over and over!"

I read her the tribute about it, about how many tiles were turned in and how many pictures there were now of this mosaic, and that they chose just these to do this one. She was just amazed!

But I saw the temple through her eyes, which was so different than what my eyes saw.

KB: Well, you'll never see the temple in quite the same way again, and who better than you to do that for her!

SC: I was so humbled!

KB: You would be. It's humbling to me to think that you were able to do that and to tell her

things that you didn't know before. Then the first day you went there as an ordinance worker, you must have been looking at things in a different way because of her.

SC: Yes, I saw it so differently. Just to go in there and see those beautiful things like the fabrics. I had seen all those things before, but I didn't see it. I was sitting there in the hallway while I was waiting to go in and do some of the ordinance, and I was looking at that wallpaper that she was touching. I was up close to it, so I couldn't see. But when you stand back from it, there are the most beautiful patterns in that wallpaper that are just elegant. To stand back from it, you see it. I don't think I ever would have paid any attention to all that beautiful detail because I'm seeing it through my human eyes and not her blind eyes.

KB: I think your amazing experience with her will make your whole time more meaningful.

SC: Oh, every day I look, and I see something different and think, *Oh, I wish I had know this. I could have told her this, and I wish I had know about the dots and the dash. I could have told her so much more.*

KB: Did Dick ever meet her?

SC: In the elevator going from the basement to the first floor and from the first to the second.

KB: Did you tell her that was your husband?

SC: Yes. She said he sounded very handsome.

KB: Did she touch him?

SC: Oh, yes! And when we were all through, I walked her out. The group was waiting for all of them to get together. We were outside of the Temple and were sitting there on the benches with all the beautiful flowers there on the grounds. Dick had finished and joined us while we were waiting for the bus to arrive.

They were talking among themselves. "What did you see?" "What did you see?" I had the opportunity to walk her out to the bus and help her get on because there was only one sighted person with all these ladies. It was the husband of one of them. He had brought them in a van. One lady had her 8 or 9 year old grandson with her. I was impressed that these two had brought these five ladies for this very special experience. It was a really humbling experience.

KB: What a blessing! And you deserve it. I can't think of a person who would be better with this than you.

SC: I had felt so bad that I'd given up those other three weeks when I was sick, and I wanted to be part of this experience, and I couldn't. I just felt like I needed to experience this with the people coming through, and so that I would have a greater appreciation of the Temple – and I did!

KB: I know that you created some beautiful altar cloths for the Temple with your exquisite handwork. Tell about that, and we'll close the interview with that story.

SC: I have had a very special opportunity to crochet some altar cloths for the temple. I started right after the Ogden Temple closed and finished two of them before our temple opened. About two weeks before the opening I was called and told that the sizes I was given were wrong and that neither one of them would be used in our temple as they did not fit. I was able to give them to the temple committee to be used in another temple somewhere in the world. I immediately started another one with the new measurements. On the second day working at the temple, sister Steed came up to me and asked me to follow her into one of the sealing rooms. There on the altar was one of the cloths that I had crocheted. The temple committee member said that it could be used in that sealing room. I was thrilled and humbled.

KB: I am so touched by your story and very glad that you were given that great blessing. Thank you for sharing it today.