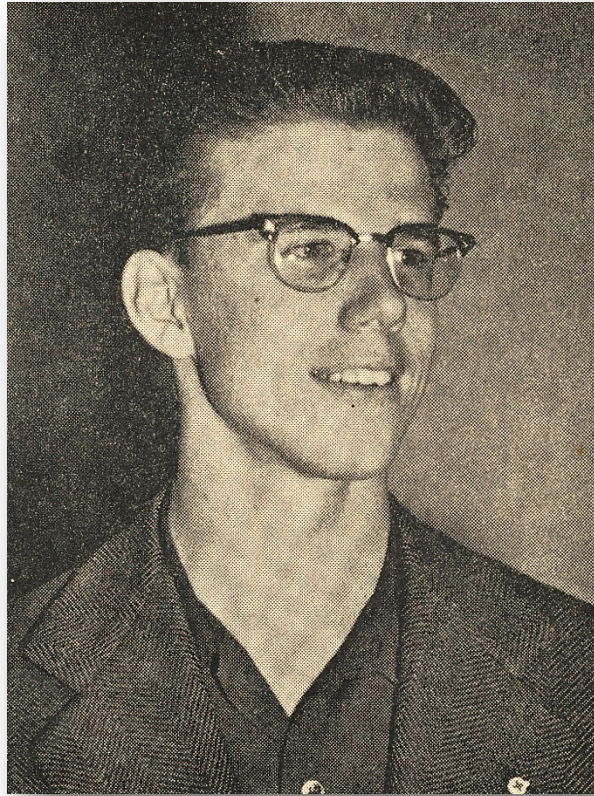


G. Leon Curtis

Compiled & Written by Jodi B. Kinner
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G. Leon Curtis was born hearing to a good family on September 3, 1932 at Dee Memorial Hospital in Ogden, Utah, on Labor Day. He was the fifth child in the Guy A. Curtis and Agnes Rasmussen family. His four siblings were Afton, Von, Dan and Max. He was told that Afton, his Deaf sister, prayed and begged diligently for a baby sister. However, when he and his mother returned home from the hospital, Afton took one look at him and fell in love. Since that time, they were very close (Leon Curtis, personal communication, February 7, 2009).

In 1938, Leon's parents took him to Dee Memorial Hospital for a tonsillectomy operation. When the doctor was removing his adenoids, he cut too deeply causing a problem with his hearing. His hearing loss wasn't even noticed until he was in the second grade at Madison Elementary School where he flunked the spelling test. His teacher took him to an audiologist and he was given a hearing test. Sure enough, he had a hearing loss (Leon Curtis, personal communication, February 7, 2009).



G. Leon Curtis
The Utah Eagle, April 1955

In 1940, Leon was transferred to the Utah School for the Deaf in Ogden where Afton and her husband, Kenneth C. Burdett taught. Leon was an uncle of their son, Ronald Burdett (Leon Curtis, personal communication, February 7, 2009).

In 1946, he enrolled at Central Junior High School then at Ogden High School during the mornings, then attended Utah School for the Deaf in the afternoons. He graduated from Ogden High School in 1951 (Leon Curtis, personal communication, February 7, 2009).

In 1952, Leon enrolled at University of Utah, majoring in pharmacy. He had a rough time making a decision whether to go into pharmacy or forestry service at the Utah State University. Finally, he went for pharmacy. In 1953, his education at the “U” was put on hold

because his father had had a heart attack. At that time, he decided to go into printing (Leon Curtis, personal communication, February 7, 2009).



G. Leon Curtis, 1964

In 1954, he graduated from Southern School of Printing in Nashville, Tennessee. He started to work at Salt Lake Tribune in Salt Lake City, Utah and later for the Ogden Standard Examiner in Ogden, Utah (Leon Curtis, personal communication, February 7, 2009).

From 1961 to 1968, Leon had the honor to teach the LDS seminary at the Ogden Branch for the Deaf. The students

walked two blocks from Utah School for the Deaf to attend the 6:30 am class. Many of those students were able to go on a mission when they completed their education program (Leon Curtis, personal communication, February 7, 2009). In 1968, Leon became the first hard of hearing teacher of the Deaf Seminary classes, assisted by J. Wayne Noble and Stephen Mecham.

Under his direction, the gospel was taught in three different classes – oral, sign language, and Braille. About fifteen students enrolled in each class and the classes were still held at the Branch until 1969 when he resigned and went back to college at Weber State College (George, -, Leon Curtis, personal communication, 2013).

After Max W. Woodbury, president of the Ogden Branch for the Deaf, was released from the position, which he served for 51 years, Leon was called as branch president in 1968 with two counselors, Kenneth L. Kinner and William Ronald Johnston and clerk, Arvel H. Christensen (The Ogden Standard Examiner, February 4, 1967; The UAD Bulletin, Winter 1967). He had served as president for one year when he decided to go back to college in 1969 (Leon Curtis, personal communication, February 7, 2009).

In 1972, he earned his bachelor degree in sociology/psychology from Weber State University. He continued his education at University of Arizona in Tucson, Arizona and graduated with a Master of Science degree in

Rehabilitation Counseling in 1973. He also has a special degree from San Diego State University in management, which he earned in 1990 (Leon Curtis, personal communication, February 7, 2009).

After he graduated from University of Arizona, he was employed at Arizona School for the Deaf as a school counselor for 6 years. During that time, he was also assistant football coach, and their team won the state championship in 1976 for the first time in school history (Leon Curtis, personal communication, February 7, 2009).



UAD Bulletin, Fall 1965

In late 1979, Leon was offered a position at the Department of Social and Health Services in Olympia, Washington as state coordinator for the deaf. As the program grew from 2 to 12 staff members, his title changed to director of the Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. He was one of the three employees out of 12,000 employees at the DSHS to receive the awards. In October 2004, he retired from the Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. This office is within the Department of Social and Health Services, (State Government) (Leon Curtis, personal communication, February 7, 2009).

From 1954 to 1972, Leon was very much involved in sports such as basketball and softball, and served in various offices for the Northwest Athletic Association of the Deaf (NWAAD) and American Athletic Association of the Deaf (AAAD). He was inducted into the Hall of Fame by both NWAAD in 1983 and AAAD in 1988 (Leon Curtis, personal communication, February 7, 2009).

Leon was as well-known Deaf LDS individual in the state of Utah as he was nationally. Leon said that from 1965 to 1968, he served as president of the Utah Association of the Deaf. He also served as treasurer for the UAD from 1956 to 1963 and secretary in 1963 for two years. During the 1965 Utah State Legislature session, he, as UAD president along with other UAD officers, lobbied the legislature for adequate services for the Deaf adults under the Office of Rehabilitation Services, which eventually led to the formation of the Sanderson Community Center of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (Curtis, UAD Bulletin, Spring 1965; Sanderson, 2004). He served as president of the Arizona Association of the Deaf from 1976 to 1979 (Leon Curtis, personal communication, February 7, 2009).



G. Leon Curtis, 1977

Later, Leon served as a board member for Region 4 on the NAD Board of Directors for NAD Board from 1984 to 1990 and again from 1996 to 2004. He was awarded the Golden Hand Award from Washington State Association of the Deaf in 2001 and Golden Hand Award and the Flying Fingers Award from National Association of the Deaf in 2002 (Leon Curtis, personal communication, February 7, 2009).

Leon was appointed by the Mayor of Lacey to serve as a member of the City of Lacey Planning Commission from 1993 to 1997. The City hired an interpreter to assist him to work

well with other members on the commission (Leon Curtis, personal communication, February 7, 2009).



G. Leon Curtis, 2011

In 1997, Leon was keynote speaker for the UAD Convention. While speaking, he shared his thoughts on the memories of being in Utah before he moved away. Leon emphasized that the National Association of the Deaf was really impressed with UAD's accomplishments in Utah (K.

Mortensen, *UAD Bulletin*, July 1997, p. 3). Kristi Mortensen, one of the UAD Convention attendees, shared Leon's impressive parts of talk given at the end, as follows:

“EVERYBODY wants it,
ANYBODY can do it.
SOMEBODY had to do it, but
So
EVERYBODY will not get it,
ANYBODY cannot do it,
SOMEBODY won't do it,
Because

NOBODY is willing to do it” (D. Mortensen,
UAD Bulletin, July 1997, p. 3)

Leon, as the director of the Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Washington State, was awarded for the 2003 Governor’s Distinguished Management Leadership Award. The letter to him stated:

“...outstanding managers are invaluable assets to state government, and this award offers special recognition to those who have demonstrated excellence in the performance of their responsibilities. Your leadership, initiative, and expertise reflect your strong commitment to public service and your quality management abilities.”

Leon was honored at a ceremony on June 4 of that year at the Governor’s Mansion. He retired in August after 23 years of service (*UAD Bulletin*, June 2003, p. 3).

Leon has five daughters, Sonia and Rebecca (Becky) from his first marriage to Eleanor Kay Kinner, and Susan, Marie and Sherrie from his second marriage to Connie Perkins. They have been blessed with 15 grandchildren and 9 great grandchildren (Leon Curtis, personal communication, February 7, 2009).



Connie & Leon Curtis
UAD Bulletin, October 1971

In 1985, Leon and Connie’s oldest daughter, Susan Ann, in a film, “Love is Never Silent,” played a young hearing girl named Margaret with Deaf parents, played by top roles, Ed Waterstreet and Phyllis Frelich, longtime members of the National Theatre for the Deaf. The film was an emotional drama set in three decades, from the Great Depression to the late ‘60s. The Emmy-winning “Love is Never Silent”

was broadcast as a Hallmark Hall of Fame special (Corry, 1985; UAD Bulletin, December 2006, p. 4).

Leon and Connie have lived in Lacey, Washington since December 1979. They are members of the LDS Lacey 1st Ward for several years and then moved to Olympia 4th Ward where sign language interpreters are available. During that time, Leon was called to serve as Membership Clerk, Ward Clerk at Lacey 1st; and at Olympia 4th Ward, Financial Clerk, and now as First Counselor to High Priest Group Leader and as Temple Ordinance Worker. They had eight Deaf members in the Olympia 4th Ward with four sign language interpreters (Leon Curtis, personal communication, February 7, 2009).

In 1991, Leon shared his perspectives about his deafness by publishing the following poem entitled, “Can’t Hear, But...” in the NAD Broadcaster, the primary publication of the National Association of the Deaf.

Can’t Hear, But...
By G. Leon Curtis

But I can feel...

I can’t hear the dog yelp when I step on its foot,
But I can feel the dog’s bite on my leg, or see the dog hopping
around the room in pain.

I can’t hear the knocks in the motor of my car, but I can feel the
rough vibration.

I can’t hear the words my daughters say on the telephone, but I can
feel that they speak in a nice way.

I can’t hear my daughter’s voice in the chorus, or playing the piano,
but I can feel the happiness and peace.

I can’t hear the loudness on the TV, but I can feel the vibration a
few minutes later or someone will come and turn it down.

But I can see...

I can't hear the car's honks, but I can see the red faced angry driver behind me.

I can't hear the doorbell, but I can see my dog barking at the door, or light blinking off and on.

I can't hear the words, but I can see the written/printed words.

I can't hear the man behind me asking for the time, but I can see his serious look on his face as I turn around.

I can't hear the voice from the speaker, but I can see the interpreter relaying the message.

I can't hear the words from a song, but I can see the singer's faces and feel the vibration.

I can't hear the children's voices, but I can see their smiling faces.

I can't hear the angry voice, but I can see angry faces.

I can't hear the burp, but I can see the embarrassed faces.

I can't hear the announcement, but I can see the confusion/concerned looks on the people's faces.

I can't hear the children arguing, or what it was about, but I can see the hurts on their faces and I will try to mend their conflicts.

I can't hear the child cry, but I can see the tears on her face.

I can't hear evil, but I can see evil.

I can't hear the siren from a police car or fire truck, but I can see the red lights flashing in my rear view mirror.

But I can smell...

I can't hear the gas released from a guy's stomach, but I can smell the gas.

I can't hear the timer on the stove, but I can smell the burning cake.

I can't hear, but so what! I am doing just fine!

* The NAD Broadcaster and UAD Bulletin, Vol. 15, No. 3. August 1991.

Notes

Leon Curtis, e-mail message to Jodi B. Kinner, February 7, 2009.

Leon Curtis, e-mail message to Jodi B. Kinner, January 9, 2013.

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