

Texas, April 6th 1860

Dear dear Isabella.

*It Is useless for me to try to tell you of my sorrow. Just to think that our dear, darling, good Mamma is dead. Oh Isabella, what will I do In this cold world without dear Mamma. If it was not for praying to God to give me patience to bear my trouble, I could not live. I got a letter from you last Saturday. It was dated the twentysecond of December, it was sent from Georgia here. You said that Frankie's mother was dead. I pity her indeed if she feels it as I do. Socrates is very kind to me now; he surely feels sorry for me; he has got me mourning. He is making ten dollars a week by his School.*

Goodbye

Ellen

In 1860, Abraham Lincoln rode the abolitionist wave of federal governmental power into the White House, and the balance of power shifted in the young country. In late 1860 the movement for secession had already begun in congress. The rumors of war were growing louder throughout the south and Ellen wrote to her sister sharing her concerns.

December 11, 1860

My dear Isabella,

*It has been three months since I had a letter from you. Baby (their sister Elizabeth) told in her letter that you were preparing to go to Ohio. I can't help feeling sorry, for I am afraid I will never see you again, but I must hope for the best. You must be sure to send me your likeness before you go. I will send you mine after Christmas.*

*There Is great excitement now about the, President. They say they will fight rather than he shall take his seat; they are the greatest pack of fools I ever saw! Socrates, school Is broken up. One man said that a northern man should not get one cent of his money. If there Is no war, I think Socrates will get a place as a bookkeeper on the Railroad. They have commerce near that. We have got a sewing machine. I will tell you how I like it In my next letter.*

*Baby told me in one of her letters that Willie's (their brother) little baby wore gold rings. You know I like brass but I can't say I admire gold rings on a baby. I think Willie has a very hard time of it; he has to dress Frankie and her sisters so fine that It takes all he can make to dress them, Baby says she takes no care of her clothes. I think It Is just as mama said. They married Willie to take care of them.*

*I got a long letter from Aunt Mary some time ago; she said Robert (their cousin, Robert Allen) was going, to be married, Ben has gone to Illinois this winter to live. He says he will come here next spring. (Ben was their younger brother). A dog bit Gusty six weeks ago and his leg is not well yet; he looks very pale. How Is your baby?  
I have no more to say, but remain your own dear, dear Sister,*

Ellen Best

In December of 1860, South Carolina seceded from the union and the Texas legislature became an inferno of heated debate. Socrates' school was shut down. After the war broke out, Socrates attempted to avoid the Confederate draft. He made powder until his supplies ran out. Then, he was forced, along with Benjamin, Ellen's younger brother, to join the Confederate army. It was their only alternative to being hanged by a Confederate mob. He did so on May 26, 1862. Chronic diarrhea, typhoid fever, and diphtheria were rampant throughout the camps of the North and South. Many soldiers were dying on both sides of the Mason Dixon Line at that time due to unsanitary conditions within army camps. Benjamin became ill and his brotherinlaw came to attend him. There in a confederate hospital, Socrates held young Ben in his arms as he breathed his last breath. At the first opportunity, Socrates escaped to the union lines in Elm Spring, Arkansas. There he immediately enlisted as a private in Company B of the 2nd Kansas Cavalry on January 2nd of 1863. He was made ward master and steward of the hospitals. Socrates had no way to notify Ellen, though he loved her

deeply, and certainly was searching for a way to get word to his abandoned wife and children. From Arkansas he wrote to Isabella who had the unenviable task of informing her family of the tragic loss of Benjamin.

*To: Isabella Lathrop from Milwaukee Jan. 29, 1863*

*My dear Isabella*

*What can I say to you to tell you of the great trial which has come to us so unexpectedly. Isabella, Ben dear good Ben is no more. It Is very hard to have to tell you this but it is a bitter, bitter truth.*

*Willy got a letter from Socrates last night telling us that he and Ben had been impressed into the Rebel Army last July, and that Ben was taken sick the 29th of last November, and died the 23rd of last month. Socrates said about half an hour before he died, he spoke of his sister, told what to do with his property and then a few minutes before he breathed his last, on being asked how he felt, he said he was tired and asked him to hold his hand and kiss him, after which he said no more; died very easy Best said.*

*Oh Isabella, I am almost heart broken just to think that I will never never see that dear laughing face again. I can't realize It. Socrates has deserted the Rebels and enlisted In an Arkansas regiment. He had not heard from Ellen since November, at which time she was well. He says he don't expect to see her until after the war Is over. Poor Ellen. what a hard time she must have, Write the minute you get this.*

*Love to all, your affectionate sister,*

*Baby*

Afterward, Ellen wrote to Isabella, expressing her grief and deep sense of loss:

*(From Texas probably Dangerfield) June 14 1863 (Possibly January, before Ellen is notified of Socrates ' supposed death?)*

*My own dear Sister,*

*I got Your letter the other evening with the Pictures. You look so much more like Poor Mama than you used to. The Dr, (Byron Lathrop) looks Just as well as when he was married. I showed Your picture and Frank's to a stranger yesterday. I told him one of you was my sister. He Pointed you out first one. Oh Isabella my own love. I was so sorry to hear You are unwell. You must take good care Of yourself. Oh, how I wish I could see you but I am afraid that won't be very soon, as Socrates has to serve his full three years. There Is a great deal of sickness here. 25 soldiers have died within a week at the Hospital. There is nothing but misery here, killing and murdering.*

*Don't you think I have but one letter from Baby (Lizzie) since I have been here what do you think of that? I saw the Doctor that tended poor Ben he told me that his lungs killed him. Isabel, when I lost Ben I lost a great deal. The poor fellow never went to town without buying me something. Everyone In Texas respected him. He was just as nice about his dress as Papa, and he was one of the finest riders I ever saw and road such a beautiful Horse, I have nothing more to write.*

*Ellen,*

After Socrates escaped to the North, the confederates notified Ellen that her husband had been killed. She became ill along with her children, and buried their youngest child as he expired from illness on their journey home. Deeply grieved and sore in heart, Ellen sold all she had and headed home to Wisconsin. On the way through the union lines, she was wondrously reunited with her husband in Arkansas as seen here in *The Genealogical and Biographical History of Chippewa Valley: ...hearing of the death of her husband, while he was in the Confederate service, started north to join her relatives. Arriving at Dardanella, Ark. she was taken sick, but as soon as she was able she started for the Union headquarters to see Col. Cloud, for transportation and protection to the north. The Colonel told her he had a man of the same name in his regiment, and that it might be her husband; but she told him that he had been killed as she had been supposed he had been, while trying to desert the*

*Confederate army. She was given a pass and privileged to go with a supply train north. While going after her family, and while but a short distance from headquarters, she met her husband, who had succeeded in joining the Union Army. He brought her and the children to the Union lines, and then tried to induce her to go north to her people. She declined to leave him again as long as she lived. .*

After their reunion, Sarah stayed with him for about one year, giving birth to another child who died of German measles. Shortly afterward, Ellen died of the flux in October, 1864, at Fort Smith, Arkansas. The deceased mother left behind two sons, Augustus L. Best ("Gusty" age 4), and William J. Best (age 1) to her grieving husband.

Socrates was forced to send his children to his mother's care in Big Spring as his unit moved on. He gave all of the money he had to a parson to whom he entrusted the boys care for the journey home. The preacher ran out on them, stealing their money and leaving them high and dry. Upon arriving in Springfield Illinois, sick and penniless, the two refugees were taken in by the good people of that city and provided for with loving kindness. (For more information, read the obituary of Augustus L Best at the end of this chapter.) The deep family love and emotions of these times are further seen in the letters between Ellen, her sisters, and. Socrates.

One can only imagine the roller coaster of emotions that Socrates experienced in those few years. From being conscripted by the enemy into bondage, to serving honorably with his country's cause. From separated from wife and child, to reunited, to separated again by the endless chasm of death. From the joy of child birth to sudden illness and infant death. These are the times that test a man's heart and try his soul in the furnace of affliction; times when his Christian faith is purified in a smelter's fire of deep emotional anguish. Socrates subsequently became a man of deep faith and compassion who ministered love and understanding to others in their times of loss.

The family love and turbulent emotions of those times are further seen in the letters between Ellen, her sisters, and Socrates. Their sincere faith and leaning on God in those times of trial are also reflected here.

*To sister Isabella Lithrop from her sister, Elizabeth Langson. The letter is postmarked, Milwaukee. Dec. 8. 1864 & addressed to Cottage Hill. Dubuque Co.,Iowa, but is forwarded Dec. 15 to Painsville. Ohio. It is bordered In black.*

*Milwaukee. Dec. 7, 1864  
My dear Isabella.*

*I have very sad news to tell you. I received a letter from Socrates yesterday in which he said that dear dear Ellen had gone to her last rest. She had a baby on the 20th of July, and when It was five weeks old, she took measles and soon after the chronic diarrhea set in, and finally bloody flux which resulted in her death on the 20th of October.*

*The baby unfortunately died when It was five weeks old. To think that dear Ellen Is gone forever, Isabella. I cannot realize it at all. That sweet gentle being so good and kind to every one we will meet no more in this world. But it Is selfish to grieve for her. You know how good she was and what is sorrow and grief to us is a crown of glory to her. My precious. precious sister. Oh, Isabella, I almost worshipped her. Socrates said she was perfectly conscious when she died; gave instruction as to what kind of coffin she should have, and wanted to have Ben taken up and laid by her. She was buried with her dress on; he sent me a piece of the riffle which was around her neck and a lock of her hair. He said he would write to you in a few days. I presume he will send you the same.*

*Oh how my heart aches for those precious little children, Gusty and Willy, the latter only four years old and motherless. Is it not sad? He said it was Ellen's last request that they should be educated and brought up right. How I wish it was in my power to do so.*

*Dear Isabella. do write to me soon. You are my only sister now and I am very lonely and wretched, although I try to say "Thy will be done.". I could say more now, only take care of your health and God Bless you. Give my best love to Byron and the little ones, and believe me as ever.*

*Your fond sister,  
Baby Langson.*

On August 10, 1865, Socrates was "mustered out" at Lawrence, Kansas. He then returned home to Big Spring where he was reunited with his mother, his siblings and his children. He continued to keep relations with Ellen's family and his gentle loving character is reflected in this letter to Isabella.

*Big Spring Wisconsin Sept. 11th, 1865  
My dear sister Isabella,*

*I am at last at home in Wisconsin. Augustus and Willie is well. I saw Lizzie in St. Louis; she was quite well; she is setting type in the office of the evening News. I cannot tell why she went to St Louis but I hope she may do well. I stayed In Milwaukee and paid Willie (Langson) a visit. I was very much pleased with Willie and my visit; he has three lovely little children. They acted as though they had always known me. I like Frank (Wm. Langson's wife) very much. Remember me kindly to the Doctor and your dear little ones, and believe me, I remain your Brother and friend truly.*

*Socrates T. Best  
P.S. Please write.*

Augustus L. Best (Connorsville, Dunn Co. was born in Adams Co. WI, April 4, 1854 and is the eldest son of Socrates T. and E. Francis Langson Best. While he was yet young, his parents moved to Texas where they remained until he was ten years old. His mother, hearing of the death of her husband, while he was in the Confederate service, started north to join her relatives. Arriving at Dardanelle, Ark. she was taken sick, but as soon as she was able she started for the Union headquarters to see Col. Cloud, for transportation and protection to the north. The Colonel told her he had a man of the same name in his regiment, and that it might be her husband; but she told him that he had been killed as she had been supposed he had been, while trying to desert the Confederate army. She was given a pass and privileged to go with a supply train north. While going after her family, and while but a short distance from headquarters, she met her husband, who had succeeded in joining the Union Army. He brought her and the children to the Union lines, and then tried to induce her to go north to her people. She declined to leave him again as long as she lived. He then procured a house for them to live in. There she resided until her death in November, 1864. Mr. Best was detailed to hospital work near her.

After his wife's death, Mr. Best(Socrates) was ordered to join his regiment, but before leaving put our subject (Augustus) and his fouryearold brother (William) on board a transport, in company with 300 other refugees at Little Rock ' Ark., and in care of Rev. "Parson" Leard, of the 6th Kansas Regiment At that time he entrusted all his money, \$1575 to the "Parson" in trust for the boys, and told them that he did not expect to see them again. When they arrived at Cairo, Ill, they were all put in box cars, the weather being very cold, and sent to Springfield, Ill. During this time, the "Parson" only furnished the two boys with hard tack, bacon, and coffee, although the younger boy, William was sick with chronic diarrhea. When they arrived at Springfield, the "Parson" left with the boys' money that had been intrusted to his care by Socrates. At Springfield the refugees were taken by citizens and every want supplied them. Our subject and his little brother were taken home by Mr. D.P.Brandwell, of that city and cared for 10 days. That gentleman , learning that they desired to reach their grandmother in Wisconsin, took them to the clerk of the court, who gave them five dollars and a letter of introduction to Dr. Smith of Chicago, who as soon as they arrived in Chicago, took them home for a short time and then started them for Portage, WI. They remained there a few days with an uncle and were then forwarded to their grandmother's in Adams County, where they lived until their father returned from the war in 1865.

Augustus L. lived with his father until twentytwo years old, then carried the United States mail for three years from Prairie Farm to Menomonie. He then went to North Dakota, but remained only one year, when he returned to Wisconsin, and engaged in buying and selling stock which he shipped west. In 1884 he and his brother, William, formed a partnership to saw lumber in New Haven township, Dunn Co. where they have since continued. Their mill is now located on section 24, where they have been since April 1, 1891. They have been reasonably successful in their business venture. Mr. Best married 6 April 1878 Miss Alane Landt, and to them have been born five children, all living, namely: Allie, Eugene, Elsie, Benjamin, and Clebourn. Politically Mr. Best is a republican, and has held the offices of township treasurer and school clerk.

OBITUARY Augustus L. Best  
(Feb. 4, 1909)

Augustus L. Best, aged 55 died at his home in Prairie Farm, after a lingering illness of more than a year. Mr. Best was born April 4. 1854 at Big Spring,, WI. In 1893 he came with his family to Prairie Farm where he had since made his home. On Aug. 1, 1895 his companion was called to the better land leaving him alone with seven little ones to care for: Allis, Eugene,

Elsie, Bennie, Clehern, Lorin, and Earl to fill a mother's as well as a father's place to them. On Feb. 17, 1897, he was married to Mrs. Laura Rindon at Necedah. Three children were born to them: Homer, Laura, and Genera, all of whom with an adopted son are left to mourn the loss of a devoted husband and father. All of the children were home except the second son who lives at Couer d' Alene, ID. In the years here Mr. Best won many friends. He was a member of the N.B.Church and his large heart was ever ready to aid in the hour of sorrow. The funeral services were held from the home at 11 a.m. Sunday. Rev. Hausen officiating and the remains were laid to rest in The Evergreen Cemetery.

#### ***Reference Materials for Chapter 3:***

- 1.) Americans All, Ethyl Rybarczyk, Hawkins, Wi 1989. Provided the primary geneological references for family members, dates of birth and death.
- 2.) Historical and Biographical Album of Chippewa Valley, Wisconsin; edited by George Forester, indexed by Mrs. Sturges Bailey. Published by Wisconsin State Geneological Society Inc., Madison, Wisconsin 1979. Originally published by Warner Publishing, Chicago, IL 1891-2. Biographical data for Socrates and Augustus Best was found here.
- 3.) History of Dunn County. Published 1925, written by F.Curtis Wedge & George O. Jone & others. Biographical data on the children of John and Sarah Best was found here.
- 4.) History of Edgewood, Iowa, formerly Yankee Settlement, compiled by the Edgewood Historical Society.
- 5.) The Military History of Wisconsin by E.B. Quiner, Esq., Chicago, Clarke & Co. Publishers, 1866. The rosters of the voluntary regiments, their involvement during the Civil War, and notations of killed and wounded in actio were found here.

#### ***Other Reference Materials for Chapter 3***

- 1.) Location of Langston Family from Letters to Isabella Langston Lathrop. Compiled by Laurel Mussman.
- 2.) Socrates T. Best (Timeline) Compiled by Dorothy Petry. This recorded the dates and times of Socrates' location throughout his life from Ohio to Wisconsin with his family, then with Ellen through Iowa, Missouri, Texas, and Arkansas, through his later days in Dunn County.
- 3.) Genealogical charts prepared by Dorothy Petry provided the most up to date information regarding dates of birth, children, etc.
- 4.) Iowa State Census 1850 Clayton County, Yankee settlement.
- 5.) Langson Family Letters were provided by Dorothy Petry
- 6.) Military Records of Socrates Best, 2nd Kansas Cavalry, January 1863-to August 1865, United States Archives.
- 7.) Obituary of Socrates Best.
- 8.) Obituaries of William and Augustus.
- 9.) Wisconsin State Census 1855 Adams County, Big Spring.
- 10.) Wisconsin State Census of Civil War Veterans 1890.
- 11.) Pictures presented in this chapter were all provided to me by Ethel Rybarczyk. The picture of Socrates and Sarah was originally provided by Marjorie Landt, daughter of Judith Geraldine Best.
- 12.) Record of divorce: Circuit Court case No. 404, 1854.
- 13.) Wisconsin 1890 Civil War Veterans Census.