

Blizzard of 1949

The morning of January 2, 1949 we had church services in the church my father pastored, Zion Lutheran Church, eleven miles southwest of Crookston, in what was then known as the German Settlement. It was a warm, sunny morning for January. The weather forecast was for increasing cloudiness with possible snow flurries.

After the church service, my Mom walked to our nearby house to start lunch, while the rest of us visited with our friends at the church. When my Dad arrived home about a half hour later, Mom told him that she had heard a new forecast and a snowstorm was headed our way.

After lunch, my father prepared to take my brother, Ron, to Crookston to catch a train. He attended St. Paul's Academy in Concordia, Missouri so would travel to my aunt's home in Omaha to spend the night and then go on to Concordia. Dad and Ron got less than a fourth of a mile from our house, when the blizzard struck. My Dad couldn't see the car tracks behind him so he turned around and came back home. After putting the car in the garage, he took a rope and tied it to the corner of the house and across the yard to the chicken house and from there to the barn. He used that rope for three days to find his way to care for the chickens and milk the cow.

The temperature dropped drastically and the wind howled as it blew the rapidly falling snow. The temperature dropped to 30-40 degrees below zero and the winds often blew at 65-70 miles per hour. This continued for three days and three nights. We burned corn cobs and coal in the kitchen stove to keep warm, and we had an oil heater in the living room. By the time our roads were opened, three weeks later, my Dad was worried that we would run out of fuel oil.

My brother didn't get back to school in Missouri for two weeks. Then a neighbor from across the road took Ron and my Dad to Crookston in his pickup. They took equipment along so they could take down barb wire fences and put them back up after they passed through. The roads were blocked so they cut across pastures to get to Crookston. Then they loaded the pickup with groceries for several families and came back home.

Ron's train was delayed because of blocked tracks, but he finally arrived in Omaha, where my cousin met him.

Our roads were finally opened by Army equipment, and much to the relief of my parents, coming right behind the huge vehicle was the fuel oil truck.

We did not go to our country school, District 45, for a month. Every time they would open the roads in the morning, they would drift shut in the afternoon. My mother kept track on the calendar and recorded six blizzards in 48 days, after the big blizzard.

There was a 20 ft. tall drift in our garden. The blowing winds and the cold had made the snow as hard as cement, so we made steps going up to the top of the drift and walked across the drift to the roof of the garage. We had great fun sledding down the sides of the drift, but this activity was called to a halt in the spring when the drift started to melt. It was almost the end of June before the drift completely melted.

I remember helicopters dropping food and supplies and especially dropping hay to stranded cattle. Small planes often flew over after the big storm stopped. We didn't get any mail for weeks.

I don't think we ran out of food. Dad would milk the cow every day and gather eggs, and there was a stockpile of canned goods in the cellar. Mother made homemade chicken noodle soup from chicken she had canned the summer before.

After about three weeks of no school, my sister, Arlene and I walked the mile and a quarter to District 45. We were tired of having no school. When we arrived at the school, there was a huge drift in front of the school door, so we walked home again with new understanding of the massive snow storm.

Said my brother, Ron, "It was the worst storm I had every heard of before or since. Birds and deer and other wild animals died." "The wind blew about a constant thirty miles per hour, and it lasted so long."

- Carroll Neben Dinse