

Laurel, Nebraska
03/16/08

*Counted
for you post to
get home*

Dear Editor,

One day last week while I was spending some time in a waiting room I picked up a copy of your current Nebraska Life magazine.

One of the things that I noticed was that you are looking for stories about the winter of 48 and 49. I remember that winter well. I have enclosed my memories which you are free to use .

Thanks for putting together a very interesting publication.

Sincerely,
Mary Ann (Paulsen) Christensen

Laurel, Nebraska

As I think of the winter of 48 and 49 the first thought that comes to my mind is fun and adventure. At least that is how the winter began. By early in December of 1948 it was endless sleigh riding down the hill by the silo out into the pasture. There was always hot chocolate prepared on the cook stove when I returned to Mom's kitchen. There were many days when we didn't have school – many nights when we didn't have electricity. Kerosene lamps and candles provided enough light to play endless checker games. Then there was more snow, more wind, and more cold. For me it was a great time. I was eight and loved the adventure.

I'm sure my parents didn't enjoy it as much as I did. There was live stock to feed, water to thaw and our home to keep heated. We anxiously watched for the snow plow. When the roads were opened people would scurry to town for supplies and many days worth of mail. It wouldn't be many days until it would be more snow, more wind and more drifts. As drifts became too difficult for the snow plow we looked forward to seeing the bull dozer. Finally paths were made through open fields that the relentless wind had blown clean.

My maternal grand parents lived in Norfolk at that time. Needless to say we did not see them often that winter. One bright sunny day in mid January 1949 my parents decided we could make the trip to Norfolk. The roads were open and the wind was calm. I was excited! A visit to Grandma's has great appeal to an 8 year old.

Our visit that day was short. We needed to get home to take care of the livestock. The closer we got to Randolph the worse the weather became. Visibility was poor. After we arrived in Randolph we still had 6 miles of country roads. The first mile went fine – somewhere in the second mile as we headed west; our car became mired in a snow bank. After some scooping and pushing it became evident we were there to stay. And the relentless wind kept blowing.

My Dad decided we would walk to a farm place close by. We walked using fence posts sticking out of the snow as our guide. I remember my Mom begging my Dad to let her go back to the car. Dad insisted that we had to stay together. Finally we found a grove of trees and a farm home. The family shared their hospitality not only with us but also two other families that night.

Sunday morning dawned beautiful – as the day wore on the wind went down; but the roads were blocked.

My Dad left Mom and I warm and safe. He would walk the four miles to our home to care for the livestock and bring a tractor to try to get our vehicle out of the snow and eventually we would return to our home.

Monday morning we expected the arrival of the tractor. We watched and waited. Eventually there was a knock at the door. Dad had been hurt in a tractor accident. Neighbors were scooping and pushing snow in any way they could make a road to get Dad to town to the doctor.

Dad's walk home in the cold and snow had been uneventful. After caring for the livestock he started the Farmall tractor and began his trip to get his family. A short ¼ mile from home he encountered a snow bank that he thought the weight of the tractor would simply sink through. The cold and wind had made the bank so hard that instead of sinking through the snow the tractor went over the top on it's side pinning my Dad underneath. The early morning temperature that day was -20 degrees.

Fortunately a neighbor, who was outside caring for his livestock, heard my Dad's calls for help. He could not see the tractor but walked in the direction that the pleas were coming from and found Dad.

Thankfully the phone was working that day. Many times people were frustrated with the lack of privacy on the old "party line". On a day like this when someone needed help you simply rang four long rings and everyone was alerted that someone in the neighborhood was in need. Neighbors came from near and far –on foot, on horse or tractor to assist in Dad's rescue. They were able to free him and ultimately able to make that 6 mile trip to town for medical assistance.

The highway was blocked between Randolph and Osmond. It was impossible to get Dad to the hospital. The doctor arranged for him to stay in Randolph with a couple who would help care for him. Together (the physician and the couple) cared for Dad's physical needs.

Eventually we all got back home. Dad was unable to work. A young man in the neighborhood who was looking for work was hired to take care of the livestock and the constant task of moving snow.

It was my job to be Dad's legs while his healed. One day that even involved helping remove stitches from his wounds. You guessed it --- we were once again snowed in and couldn't get to the doctor.

Spring came as it always does. My Dad was finally able to return to the business of running the farm. We were forever thankful for neighbors (some who were mere acquaintances) and their willingness to give of themselves.

The young man who helped us that winter met and started dating my Mom's youngest sister. In a few years he became my uncle.

My parents stayed in the farm until 1977. You could say that they experienced many more winters there. None would be quite like the winter of 48 and 49. As a result of the accident my Dad's back would often bother him and a nagging pain in "that leg" was a reminder of what might have been if it weren't that someone heard and acted.

To this day I am very respectful of snow storms in Nebraska. As my own children were growing up they would sometimes ask to go somewhere when it was snowing – my reply would be ---- Have I ever told you????