

my  
"Blizzard Memories"  
1948 ————— 1949

Yes I lived through the "Blizzard of '48 and '49, and I do have a story to tell."

My name is Ralph Nielsen and I'm 76 yrs. old. At present my wife Cleo and I live in Hoehner, Nebraska in Seward Co., 25 miles west of Lincoln, NE. just off Interstate I-80.

At the time of the Blizzard of '48 and '49 I was a senior in High school, living North west of Bloomfield, Nebraska in Knox Co. which is located in the N.E. corner of Nebraska.

My Dad had just finished picking corn the day before it started to snow. (I think it was the 17<sup>th</sup> of November, 1948.) The cornpicker was parked next to the Machine shed, ready to be removed from the tractor.

Little did we realize how long of a winter it was going to be.

I can't recall how much snow fell the first day of the storm, but I think it was close to 18 or 20 inches. The wind and blowing snow was the problem.

Visibility was near zero most of the time. Snow banks in the sheltered areas were the worst.

By the end of the winter we crawled into the hog barn through the top half of the barn doors. Everyday it seemed we had strong winds which created a ground blizzard, and blew the snow into high drifts.

If the sun did shine once in awhile, we still had to contend with the strong winds.

Our farmstead had a nice shelter belt of trees on the North and west side, which caught a lot of snow, and also a white picket fence around the front side of the house, which made a wonderful "Snow fence"; and after awhile we walked right over the top of the fence.

The snow was wet and froze hard enough, that the cattle and hogs could walk right over the top of snow banks without sinking in. Hogs were the hardest to keep in. We would scoop a trench out along the inside of the yard fence so they wouldn't jump over the top wire. It was almost an everyday job, cause the wind would come up during the night and blow the trench shut over and over. In some places

we even built a temporary fence on top of the original one.

We were able to keep the livestock inside the barns during that winter, only letting them out just long enough to get a drink of water. I do remember how the frost collected on the walls inside the barns during the cold nights. We had to keep the doors closed, or we would have had snow inside the barns etc.

Manure accumulation became a problem, and had to be pitched out of the nearest windows and doors at least once a week.

Sometimes it blew for days and we did only the chores that were necessary.

We still milked by hand, and my mother and I usually took care of that part.

My Dad and younger brother Larry usually did the hog chores, carrying many bushel baskets of ear corn on their shoulders through the deep snow.

As for grinding ear corn and oats for the milk cows, I can't remember how Dad handled that. I think we just took a corn-knife and chopped ear corn into small bite sizes for the milk cows, and thank goodness the hay loft was full of alfalfa hay!

We didn't get T.V. until 1953, so the Radio Station WNAZ and WTAC Norfolk Station was the only contact with the Outside world.

Evenings were spent playing "CANASTA" or other board games into the wee midnight hours. Sometimes we made ice cream just to get rid of the excess eggs and cream.

I did miss some school at first but was finally able to walk the  $4\frac{1}{2}$  miles to Bloomfield on Sunday afternoons with other Neighbor kids, "Wilma and Shirley Bruns".

We always walked together as a group and usually stopped halfway at a farm place close to the road to rest and warm up.

Luckily the wind was at our backs.

If we were lucky at the end of the week, we might catch a ride home on Friday afternoons with a close neighbor who might have made it to town for supplies etc. with a tractor, or team and wagon.

Almost all the country kids stayed with friends or relatives, and many residents in town opened their homes to them. I stayed with my grandparents and sometimes on a "calm clear evening" the kids had Sleigh riding parties on the "Standpipe Hill", that was the steepest hill south of town

- where the water tower is located.

In those days going to a movie at the old "Star Theater" cost about .12¢, and after the movie or whatever, we gathered at the local hangout called "The Palace of Sweets."

"Curfew was at 10: p.m. for me!"

"Ground Blyzards" were almost an every day thing, due to the wind.

Snow plows worked day and night only to have the wind blow the roads shut right behind them.

Main roads and mail routes were kept open if at all possible! We did not live on a mail route, our farmstead was in the middle of the section with our lane 1/4 mile into the field and our mail box 1/2 mile west of our lane. Sometimes the mail was picked up in town by some close neighbor and then it was up to us to pick it up from them.

Telephone party lines were still in existence out in the country and neighbors kept in contact with each other that way.

All across the mid west we heard of hay lifts for stranded cattle and supplies being dropped by plane to farmsteads.

My Dad had a lot of hogs at that time and after farrowing time needed to have the small pigs vaccinated. So, "Doc. L.C. Donut" the veterinarian from Bloomfield was brought out on an Army Weasel by the Corp of Engineers and vaccinated all the pigs. — (must have been on a Sat. because I was home from school and had to help!!)

My youngest brother Dan was born that winter on Dec. 27<sup>th</sup> 1948 and the only way we could get out was by team and wagon.

Dad dug out the old Bob Sled running gear, repaired it and took my mother to stay with my Grandparents in Bloomfield to be close to a doctor. After Dan was born, and the mail route to the west of us was open for a short time, my Grandparents quickly brought mom as far as our mail box and Dad and Larry picked up her and baby brother Dan and took them home with the team and sled.

Every day was like the day before: "Snow and more blowing Snow!!"

There were stories of cattle that were stranded out in the fields, and crawled along or behind stacks of hay or straw and ate their way into the stacks, and were

later found alive.

There were stories of people that walked to town and stayed too long, and followed the fence lines to find their way back home. Some never made it.

The weather or storm track pattern's usually follow the same path as they move across the plains, starting with lows in the 4 corners area, and the storms usually move from S.W. Nebraska to the N.E corner,

After being cooped up most of the winter, I do remember one Sat. night when a Neighbor Dale Clausen, a friend of mine, called and asked if I could, or wanted to go to town with him. I jumped at the chance, only I'd have to walk a good 1/2 mile to where he would pick me up with his John Deere "B" tractor and a small 2 wheeled trailer hooked behind the John Deere. We promised our parents we'd keep an eye out for any changes in the weather!

We got to Bloomfield and "cruised" the main streets just as if it were a summer evening, and picking up friends here and there, who just happened to be in town. "We all piled into The trailer!"

He had a road gear and head lights

on his tractor and we burned up the streets back and forth, — once almost tipping over in the trailer as we made a "u"-turn!

Of course the stores closed up early for lack of business by 9: p.m. and by 10: p.m. we decided we'd had our fun, and headed for home, and none to soon, for as we turned west at the "Lovejoy Corner" we found a few places where it was drifting. We were facing a N.W. breeze, and it did get a bit cold.

One evening, after starting to write this, I called my brother Larry, who now lives in Yankton, S. Dak. and asked him if he remembered anything about the winter of "48-49", and he reminded me of a few things that I had forgotten.

I had gotten my first car, a 1942 Chev. 5 passenger Coupe, and I had gotten it stuck in a snow drift a short distance from our lane. I walked home that night thinking I'd scoop it out in the morning.

Well the wind blew and covered my car with a huge drift of snow. The Corp of Engineers were opening roads with

Bull Dozers, - so I took a broom, tied a red flag to it, and stuck it into the snow along side my car, so they wouldn't hit it.

When they pulled it out of the snow drift and raised the hood of the car, it was packed solid with snow around the engine.

My brother also recalls going to Country school just  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile to the east of us, and noon hrs. would be spent going sleigh riding in the field just S. W. of the school's house.

He remembers the Corp of Engineers not being able to get through the huge drifts of snow just to the west of the school, so they cut across the field and bypassed the corner intersection where the school was located. He also recalled the snow drifts were so huge, you could step over the Telephone lines.

There were times I would walk over the snow banks, up to the top of the hill in our lane and listen if I could hear or see the bull dozer coming our way.

I remember one day I rode on horseback to meet the Snow plow a few

miles away and helped a crew of Neighbors split the hard snow with shovels. The snow plow would back up a ways and take a run for the snow bank and sometimes only gain a few feet.

As I recall, the ground beneath the snow never really had a chance to freeze hard, except on the hill tops and ridges, where the wind had blown it bare.

When Spring and warmer weather finally arrived, and the snow began to melt, Dad would have me hitch up the team and drag a 2 section harrow up and down the lane and around the middle of the place. This stirred up the top soil and helped it dry up faster.

Sometimes it was hard keeping up with the team pulling the harrow, when the sticky mud, collected on your 5 Buckle over shoes, and felt like lead weights.

The gravel roads were almost "bottomless", but what a great feeling when we could finally walk on dry ground without heavy over shoes.

All the snow over the Midwest Plains caused many streams to flood.

I remember going for a ride with Walter Sewerenz one afternoon up to the Santee Indian Reservation, mainly to see the flood waters on the Missouri river bottom just east of Santee. \* In the picture that I took the flood waters were as high then, as the Lewis and Clark Lake waters are now, after the Gavins point Dam was built.

It has been quite some time since I have been to the small Indian Village of Santee, but there used to be a small church about a 1/2 mile east of the village, also if I remember correctly, a farmstead just below the embankment to the north.

As you can see ~~in~~ the photo, they have pulled a disk out of the bottom land up to the road. The small church would have been across the road, just to the east of where we stood.

The people in the picture are as follows:

- \* Walter Sewerenz - far left, with leather jacket,
- \* Eugene Erbst - far right, with black jacket
- \* Patricia Zigler - far right, with kerchief and ten coat.

(The above friends are all deceased.)

All I can say to end this is, that it was an experience to remember, a part of the "Good Ol Days"; — and growing up!

It was hard for my parents to struggle through, and all the hardships it caused.

I suppose I should have felt guilty for not being there at home some of the time to help my Dad, — but then, I was a Senior in Highschool, and it was a different experience for me living in town with my Grandparents!

I have enjoyed writing my story, — as I did this while I was in the hospital at Bryon L.A.H. for a week or so.

It helped to pass the time, or otherwise I would probably never taken the time to write my story.

One more thing I must add, I truly enjoy reading your magazine.

Sincerely,  
Ralph Nielsen

P.S.

Hope you are able to read my writing, — if you have questions Call me!