

THE BLIZZARD OF '49

Stan Pearson

It was not so much 'a' storm, as a series of storms. It hit New Year's Eve. My best buddy, Harold Westman, (my brother's brother-in-law) and myself, double dated to a movie at Broken Bow. We were all from Arnold, in western Custer county. After the movie, we found a note on the windshield wiper of Harold's '36 Ford Coupe,(that he incidentally, had converted into a 5-passenger coupe. Two could ride in the back seat, if you were friendly.) My father, Alvin Pearson, was town marshal of Arnold, and he had called a State Patrolman in Broken Bow to stop us from coming home, as a bad blizzard had already hit Arnold.

We took the girls, who must remain nameless to protect their good name, to one girl's Grandmother in Broken Bow, and we went to the hotel in the middle of town. I had just sold my old Chevy for \$200 and we lived high on the hog for a week. We ate at the hotel, and just hung out while the storm was doing a job on the whole state. We could barely make it back and forth to pick up the girls each day, and take them back every evening. It was not my idea of the ideal situation, but that's how it was, darn it.

We had spent all our money that week, and for our last night's lodging, scooped snow at a motel on the west side of town for Harold's and my room the last night. The next day, the roads were open in places so we made it home by going south out of Broken Bow, to Oconto, then to Callaway, and eventually to Arnold. We made it home just about dark.

The first week after the first big storm, my friend Harold and I got a job with a State Highway crew, working with a rotary snowplow. Yes, they had them in those days, though not quite as efficient. They would only lift about 4 feet high. They would push into the snowbank, blow it out, back up and about 10 men would cave off the snow so the rotary could blow it out again. We would do this over and over, if the cut was 20 ft. deep, that is how deep the snow was.

We were hanging around town on Saturday night, when my Dad got a phone call from my brother Don, 7 miles west of Arnold. His wife Veneda was quite sick. After a visit with Dr. McShane, he decided she must have appendicitis, and must be gotten to the hospital as soon as possible. The only thing moving was a National Guard weasel, a kind of Jeep with lightweight metal tracks, from North Platte. It was north of Stapleton bringing in a man who had broken his back, falling from a haymow. We left a message at the Stapleton hospital for them to bring my sister-in-law to the Arnold hospital. Then the phone went dead.

I was volunteered for the job of walking out to the farm mailbox to leave a signal for the crew of the weasel, as they were strangers to that country. The doctor gave me a box of capsules with instructions to punch them full of holes and feed them to Veneda so she might get some good from them, but at all costs, get her to the hospital quickly. I left town about 10:00 at night, on foot. There was no moon, nor stars, for light. I took a flashlight, but even using it sparingly, it went dead about 2 miles out. The weather was ideal, no wind, or snow, just pitch black. I found a lath with a small red flag the state marked washouts with, and carried it with me. I walked off 10' snow banks, and into others just as high, because I couldn't see them. Sometimes

there would be stretches where the highway was bare and then again, telephone poles were completely covered. I was a big, strapping young man, but this was hard work. When I did get to see that country in daylight, REA poles, telephone poles, and trees were about the only thing visible, sometimes a house top or barn roof.

About 5 miles out, I had company. Coyotes. I couldn't really see them, sometimes a blur or shadow moving in the dark. They were all around me. They never made a sound, except for their feet in the crusted snow. I had never been afraid of coyotes, but there were several of them, and they hadn't had anything to eat for several days. To say the least, I was plenty nervous. The lath and a flashlight was all I had for weapons. I sure wished for my Dad's .38 about then. When I got to the farm turnoff, I stuck the lath up in the snow, in the middle of the road, and went down the driveway about 3/4 mile to the house. Before I got there, I cut across the hayfield and angled to the house. Later, I saw where that weasel stuck right to my tracks, and crossed the fence right where I did. When I woke up it was daylight and everyone was gone, so I was stuck there doing chores and hauling hay with a team and hayrack for another week.

About halfway to town, the weasel slipped sideways and threw a track. A farmer saw what happened and called some neighbors. They could do that with those farm lines. Though no one could ring town, neighbors could call one another. Men came with bars, sledge hammers, and jacks, and got that track back on. They got Veneda to the hospital about noon. Her appendix had been broken about 12 hours.

Luckily, she recovered nicely.

Star Pearson

P.S. I have just published a book named "Bound Away". It is on the front page of the Arnold Sentinel dated Feb. ~~20~~ 21. You may view it on the internet.