

For Her Children's Sake OR A MOTHER BRAVING A WILDERNESS

TOLD BY HER SON
OTTO G. LUTZ OF CARMEL, SASK.
(CONTINUED.)

CHAPTER 14. A HARD WINTER.

A short time after we had established ourselves in the newly built log cabin, winter set in with the first snow that stayed and which is regarded as a rule in western Canada as being the start of winter. Most all of the neighboring settlers shouldered their rifles or guns and went in quest of game which was very plentiful then. They secured a lot of meat for the winter. This, however, was not the case with us. Mother would not permit me to go out hunting, claiming that I was too young and too inexperienced to be trusted with firearms. When leaving Nebraska, my brother had given us a shotgun, and during the winter, I was allowed to pop at a few prairie chickens and rabbits that had come close up to the house, or barn. As I was only a mere lad and small for my age the heavy gun would almost knock me over with its kick or recoil, when I fired it.

During the first few years the rabbits were so plentiful that every clump of brush or poplars was overrun with them. One could return in less than an hour after leaving the house with at least a dozen, or as many as one could carry on a stick, slung over the shoulders and the back. I knew of many a boy and man who would not squander powder and shot on rabbits, but would get them cheaper with snares laid by the scores over their runs, and when they had finished would start back to look them over, when they would take a strangled rabbit from pretty nearly every snare. I did not like this method, as I thought it was more merciful to the rabbit to give it a quick death by fire and shot, than to use this slow and cruel way which I consequently never used.

Towards Christmas there was a good foot of snow covering the ground and the temperature had fallen, at times, to below zero. The days were getting so short—in fact there were only 7 to 8 hours of daylight from 8-8:30 a.m. till 3:45-4 p.m. and we had to burn the lamp for many hours each day, unless we preferred to spend 12 to 15 hours in the warm, snug bed. Besides the log cabin was not the least bit tight to keep the heat in and the cold out, though we kept two roaring fires going all day long. This again kept me busy all the time during the short days in sawing the wood into stove length the while Mary would carry it into the cabin and feed it to the stoves.

On Saturdays especially I was bucking wood all day, so as to provide a supply for Sunday, for mother would see to it that none was cut on the Lord's Day. Some days a good imitation blizzard—the like of which we had never seen before—was blowing and we could not see to the sod barn only about 15-20 yards removed from the cabin. It was difficult, then, to do the chores, such as feed the cow, calf and chickens, and saw the wood. And then these snow storms would last, as a rule, two and more days and when the wind at last would stop and the air would become once more calm and clear, the cold would increase, sending the mercury clean out of sight to 45-50 degrees below zero. Yet we found, no matter how cold it was, just so that there was no wind, it was far easier to stand this intense cold than the misty cold of southern Nebraska. Colds

and coughs were only commented upon because of their absence.

One good thing was there were settlers scattered by now all along the way to Rosthern, else many a man with his team would have frozen to death, when caught in one of these storms without being able to find shelter anywhere, while on the trails to get supplies from Rosthern. Mother had to depend on the neighbors to bring out our most necessary supplies, and in return she did much knitting, and for one who was a bachelor, she did also his baking and laundry work, while he lived near us. Anna's husband and this neighbor were in a sort of partnership all during winter, logging in the bush and keeping busy with such like work. They would fell a supply of logs and, then, haul them home with the neighbor's team, when they would hew them flat with a broad ax. They also made doors and frames. When spring came, or when it had become a bit warmer, they built good, flat-walled cabins both for themselves and for a few other people. I remember that after an unusually severe blizzard, they drove to their logging bush, but came back empty, as the team was played out from breaking the trail. On the following day they intended to fetch a load of logs over the broken trail, but, alas, a wind arose during the night and drifted their trail quite shut again; they reported that they had encountered snow banks on one side of the bush, drifted 12 to 15 feet high.

Thus the winter wore slowly to an end and up to April we had burnt about a dozen loads of dry wood. A few times we had run completely out of this necessary commodity and we were forced to chop a few green trees close by, in order to keep the fires burning. At last, Easter came, April 3, and with it mother's birthday. We went to church with the neighbor and on the way passed over bare spots of prairie only here and there, as most of the ground was still covered with snow. After church there was a little family feast at our home and Anna, her husband, and the gentleman with his two sons, whom we knew from having met them on the train from Nebraska, were invited and present. This man had also made entry and lived on a homestead close to the monastery, but in a northern direction.

The rays of the sun were mounting higher and higher from their wintery slant and his warmth grew each day. By the 15th of April the prairie had been uncovered but the snow in the bush and willow clumps still lay many feet deep. But what a sight, when the end of April had arrived! Everybody would have preferred a row-boat or a canoe to any other means of transportation. In whatever direction one looked he could see nothing but water. Each low place and flat was full and creeks and rivulets flowed from one slough to the other. About 50 yards south of our place flowed a wide stream which cut us and Anna off from each other. I looked for a long log and pushed it across, but it barely reached over. No matter which way one wanted to go, he had to wade through water. As far as I can judge, we never had as much snow in any of the later winters since.

On clear starry nights during the winter we could witness a strange phenomenon which we had not seen before, namely the Northern light—aurora borealis. It was a grand sight to watch the lights flashing across the northern heavens, first here, then there, then disappearing only to flash still more brilliantly again and zigzagging in streaks of yellow and purple colors. We witnessed also during the winter on clear cold mornings very

distinct and fine mirages of distant landscapes, reflected against the horizon. One could actually make out long white stretches, or lakes, then hills and forests and open prairie, also, spots and objects that looked like settlers' buildings and haystacks.

One cold Sunday morning, having just come from attending Mass at the monastery, I stopped at the little store to inquire if there was any mail for us. Mr. A. Nenzel, the postmaster, was calling the people's attention to a stack of little newspapers which were being distributed as samples. He explained that they had come from Rosthern and were published by the Benedictine Fathers of the local monastery. Everybody helped themselves to a copy, thrusting it into their pocket to read at home. I took one also, and, on reaching home, gave it to mother. The little paper's heading or title was "St. Peters Bote," and it contained such an abundance of interesting reading of Colony and world affairs—mostly of the former—stories, letters and other news, that we all fell in love with the little paper instantly. Mother gave me a dollar—the subscription price—the next time I was sent to the store, to order the paper. Henceforth it was read aloud every week by Mary or myself, while mother and we children were sitting around a brightly glowing fire, with the lamp's soft rays falling around us. Those were indeed blessed hours! For the time being we forgot the loneliness and gloominess of our situation. Since then, over fifteen years have passed, and times have changed, but St. Peters Bote—now grown a sturdy youth—has held its place amongst the members of our family; and from a stack of papers, it is always chosen and read first by myself, as I look upon ourselves as pals, having grown up together from the stormy and trying pioneer days.

Kind reader! you will certainly join in when I give expression to the hope and sincere wish that the St. Peters Bote may, in years to come, continue to grow and become more and more influential, ever alert and watchful, fighting our battles, as it has so loyally done in the past. Lastly, but by no means least, may St. Peters Bote again be able to come to our homes, issued in our mother tongue which is sacred to us from the days of infancy, and in which we lisped our first little prayers.

CHAPTER 19. SPRING AND RAILWAY CONSTRUCTION

During the early part of spring Rev. Father Mathias taught and prepared a class of boys and girls for first Holy Communion. If we had stayed in Nebraska, I would have made my first Communion in the year before, as I had been already enrolled by Father Emmanuel, our pastor. But, then, we left before the great day arrived. Mother, therefore, was anxious to have me go as soon as possible now and had already spoken about this matter to the Father Prior during the first summer. When therefore the class was formed during the spring, I was sent regularly to the monastery for instructions. These were held, besides on Sundays, twice during the week. I remember that about one mile west of the monastery there was a stream of snowwater, flowing from the north towards Wolverine Creek. The stream was too wide to jump across it, therefore, I would always take off my shoes and stockings and ford over, and on the other side, I pulled them on again. May the 12th was the great and happiest day of my life. There were about 12 of us who received our first Holy Communion out of the hands of Rev. Father Mathias during a solemn High Mass. Mother, Mary and myself were the guests at the

home of Anna and her husband on that day, and they certainly had prepared a fancy repast. The monastery had very kindly given us our breakfast, as some of the First Communicants were from a great distance.

During the early part of spring mother sold the remaining wagon and the set of harness which she still had on hand without having any use for it. As the old sod barn showed signs of falling in, and as our log cabin built in the greatest haste and with crooked and bulging out walls, was more fit for a barn than for a human dwelling, mother decided to have another cabin built of hewn logs with warm and tight walls.

This new house was only 12x12 feet of one room below and a garret above, but having a floor this time. The floor was taken out of the old cabin and used in the new one, the windows were also made use of. But mother wanted more windows in the new cabin, because her eyesight had suffered greatly in the dark sod shack and also in the old log hut, as there had been only poor and scanty light. During the cold winter the single window was always covered with at least an inch of frost admitting scarcely any light, so that it was quite dark inside even on days when the sun shone brightly outside. Mother was near-sighted from her childhood days and during these days of pioneering her eyes became so weak that she could no longer read or write even.

During May the snow water had somewhat disappeared and the ground had become dried up to some extent, but the sloughs were still brimful. The wild flowers were again blooming all over, especially the anemones and crocuses which show their lavender stars only a few brief days above the prairie surface, being without stem or leaves. The pussy willows shed their blossoms and together with the poplars were putting forth their freshest green. We had planted some potatoes and a few acres of new breaking were sown to oats. The cow and the calf were roaming at large yet and our homestead did not suffice them, as they grazed over several homesteads besides ours, while down in Nebraska a 50 foot rope was the limit for this same cow's browsing activity. Mother had also made a small garden in a few furrows of sod which the original occupant of the homestead had thrown up during the first year. My brother helping mother and us in every possible way and within his power all along, had also sent us by mail a collection of garden seeds, which we planted together with such seeds as we had on hand already.

To be continued.

Fifteen Years Ago

From No. 38 of St. Peter's Bote

The president of the Catholic Settlement Society announces that the preparation for the opening up of a new colony 60 to 100 miles west of Saskatoon, the nearest railway station, are now completed. St. Joseph has been chosen as the patron saint of the new colony. The six men who had been sent out to inspect the land, have each made oath in presence of the spiritual head of the colony, the Rev. P. Laufer, O. M. I. that they have inspected every homestead which they describe and that the description is correct to the best of their knowledge. The new colony is 35 to 75 miles south of Battleford on the new C.N.R., the road that passes through the St. Peters Colony. The grading for this line is completed as far as 90 miles west of Battleford. Since nothing else but the building of trestles and the laying of the steel is re-

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