

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

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

CHAPTER 15.

FORSAKEN AND ALONE

On one of these days I was first in seeing a large band of Indians riding on horseback towards our camp. We all began to feel uneasy and curious at the same time. Henry was not around, but John, the one time guide, happened to be with us. While we awaited the coming of our red skinned visitors in the tent on the hill, John hiked himself away to the larger tent behind the clump of brush. The Indians dismounted and gathered in front of our tent. Being curious I went out among them and, like any other boy, I took much interest in them and looked them over quite closely. All the male Indians wore gandy buckskin jackets, pants and moccasins, laden with trimmings and fringes, and pretty patterns of glass beads that were worked and traced on the clothes in all the colors of the rainbow. I also noticed that they were well supplied with rifles and with large hunting knives in their belts. One young fellow had his jetblack hair braided very neatly, and for additional adornment wore strips of white ermine fur over his braids. The squaws and the children of the party were dressed in cheap calico or blanket cloth. None of the entire band of Indians wore a head-gear of any kind.

Mother and Rosa offered them bread. After turning it over and looking at it, as if they had never seen such a thing before, they kept it. Not knowing exactly what they wanted, Rosa and mother showed one old squaw into the tent and by signs made her understand that she should point out what she wanted. She saw a flour sack in the corner, and talked a great deal, and went out to her party. She quickly came back again bearing a white cloth and motioning to Rosa to fill it with the flour. Then she went outside and spread the cloth with the flour on the grass and all the Indians sat around it on crossed legs. We gasped, thinking that they meant to eat the flour there and then, raw and uncooked. However, after some lengthy talking and pow-powing they got on their horses and rode away, taking the flour along. Presently John showed up again, saying that the Indians would have tomahawked and scalped us, if it were like 50 years ago (which idea probably caused his hasty retreat, when he saw them approach). After that John was the butt of many teases and jokes about the way he vanished and sought hiding.

On a beautiful July morning, well towards the end of the month, Henry and Rosa with the baby climbed on the highly laden wagon for their return trip to Rosthern and civilization. John did the driving and on the way home he was to bring out a load of mother's belongings still lying in the shack in Rosthern. After a sad fare-well Mary and I stood a long time yet on a hill and waved handkerchiefs. Rosa sitting high on the wagon answered back. At last, when they had disappeared, we went back to mother whom we found weeping bitterly in the tent. She who had a heart of overflowing love for her children and who wished only their welfare, had suffered in that hour a terrible shock. One of the most bitter scenes in her life had been enacted. All alone with us two children, forsaken by the ones in whom she trusted and for whom she had converted all her substance into the "wherewith" for obtaining an independent existence in this new country, mother, poor and old,

must stay in the prairies! Mary and I could hardly understand mother's exceedingly great grief, nor did we know how to comfort her, for we were just children and knew nothing of the burdens and sorrows of life.

The days wore on to a week, and then one day John returned with the team and a load of mother's goods. He told of Rosa's and Henry's safe arrival in Rosthern, and that they had found a place to live in, and work for Henry. From Anna he brought word, too, that she would come out to us soon and give mother a hand in managing matters for the deal that confronted us now. We noticed that the horses needed at least a short rest, for they had lost considerable flesh and were very poorly now.

CHAPTER 16.

DIVINE PROVIDENCE TO THE RESCUE

Thus things had come to a complete standstill, when the month of August arrived. One Sunday, while assisting at Mass in the monastery tent, mother received a most comforting letter from our brother. This greatly helped her to keep up courage and to continue onward again. The letter contained also a sum of money. It was the first money we had possessed for a long time and we were thankful for our brother's kind aid in our distress.

One day, on a Sunday, I think, two men came out to us (Mr. Eimer and Mr. J. Brinkmeier) from the vicinity of the monastery. They had a long talk with mother, urging her to move to a homestead that lay two miles closer to the monastery and the prospective railway. The homestead had just been abandoned by one of Father Alfred's relatives. And since we were not on any homestead land and had to move anyway, and as the other land was just as good as the land where we were, mother decided to avail herself of the proffered opportunity. The men, also, offered their help to mother in the moving and she accepted it with great gratitude.

On one of the following days the camp was removed and the big tent was pitched for the last time on the new homestead. The half-finished log cabin was broken down, too, and all the timbers belonging to us were hauled to the new homestead. Mr. Eimer helped us to get started by digging a shallow well and by putting up a sod shack of about 14x20 feet. The water from the well could not be used, because it contained too much alkali. In putting up the sod house Mary and I carried the heavy slabs of sod to the site of the shelter on a stretcher. We lived in this sod shack for about three months and used it as a barn in the following winter.

While the above work was going on, John was sent to Rosthern, more upon Mr. Eimer's urging than upon mother's wish, in order to get supplies and the balance of mother's household stuff. This last trip cost us the loss of the biggest of our horses. Having waited the usual time for John's return, mother and we children became uneasy and anxious to know what might be the cause of his failure to show up. And as a neighbor was reported as having just come home from Rosthern, mother sent me there to enquire about John and our team. How surprised was I, though, when I found John at the neighbor's top! I got him to explain that the biggest horse Prince had died of the colic or something similar at the feed stable in Rosthern, and that Anna had taken charge of the other horse and the wagon. Why he did not tell us unasked of the accident any sooner, was owing to his feelings of aversion to face us with the bad news, he said, when asked for the reason.

When mother learnt the bad news it had almost the effect of a calamity on her, for she realized in her far-seeing mind what it would mean to us living 100 and more miles from the nearest source of supplies and now deprived of the only means of reaching the outer world, or of using the animals for gaining a living from the soil. But we were not the only ones who suffered these losses. There were scores and scores of the very best horses lost by these killing trips to and from Rosthern, as many old settlers remember to their sorrow.

Mr. Eimer gradually succeeded in raising mother's courage again by telling her that in one way it would be the best move to get rid of the horses altogether, because we could not keep on buying oats and high priced feed and haul it out from Rosthern, while, on the other hand, a yoke of oxen would be a lot more useful under the circumstances, cheap to buy and to maintain, as they could very easily live on grass and hay, even if they are slow for travelling, and nothing better could be found for breaking prairie. Towards the end of the month Anna came out from Rosthern with a family who located a few miles to the west. By using the same chance she also brought the remaining horse and wagon along back.

Haying, though late, was now in full swing. I hired out to a neighbor for 40c per day to help in loading and tramping down the hay on the wagon. I remember yet that this work kept up all through September and a part of October, till the grass had been killed by the heavy frosts that were nightly occurrences now.

At an opportune time mother sold the remaining horse. The man who bought it was to pay for it in labor. He was to raise our cabin, using the logs we had, and cut grass for a few loads of hay for the cow and calf. And for the balance he was to haul wood for the stove in winter and break a few acres of ground in spring, as it was too dry, then. While he was putting up our little stack of hay, I helped him, as well as I could.

On one of the Sundays we witnessed a very sad sight and heard the saddest story ever. A young man was walking about the tent in which Mass was said and held in his arms a tiny, new-born baby that was wailing so bitterly, as to turn a heart of stone, as the saying is, while the poor father tried his best to quiet it with a bottle of milk. Its young mother lay still and lifeless in a rough coffin in a near-by house, awaiting burial in the new cemetery which was not yet located, or laid out in plots on the monastery ground. The young couple had come from far away Oklahoma and from Rosthern only a short while ago in a prairie schooner drawn by oxen. The woman had died only a few days after reaching the Colony in her first childbirth, and, as the people said, from lack of proper attendance and nursing. The infant girl was baptized and adopted by a kind family on that same Sunday. Today the baby is a grown-up young lady and is still at the home of her foster-parents, while her father, many years ago, went west and north to the far away Peace River country.

CHAPTER 17.

OUR HOMESTEAD

It was in September, when the long expected government surveyors arrived at last in our part of the colony and got busy to survey the land in every township. When I saw them at work on our west line one day, mother and I went out to them to see, where the right line and corner was. Until then we had no idea of the lay of the land and which way the bulk of it was fronting, or on what part of it

we had located our farmstead. We found that most of it lay northward and our building site, midway facing east and west and only a short distance from the south boundary. But for an intervening strip of 150 to 200 yards we would again have missed our homestead. Mr. Eimer adjoined us in the south, and Mr. Brinkmeier's land and was directly east from ours. Bergermann's bought this land 3 years later and now, also, mother's. The projected railroad was staked out only 1/4 of a mile north of our land, though it was not yet certain, if this line would be chosen, as there were several others staked out elsewhere, one of which crossed our former land 2 1/2 miles southwest.

Our homestead contained about one half of open prairie, the other half was covered with sloughs and these made fine hay meadows in the dry years that followed. There were also patches of poplars, not much more than sapling size, and clumps of willow brush. For water we had a hole dug beside a slough, the same as during our travelling days. When this dried up during that first winter, we were forced to melt snow, both for ourselves and for the animals in the barn. Mother hired two men to dig a real well, but the water which they found at a small depth was useless as in the case of our first well and for the same reason. And when a year later a third shaft was sunk to a depth of 40 feet, there was plenty of water, but unfortunately of the same objectionable alkaline taste. Our homestead was tested out with many more drillings, just as it happened to many other settlers, till some years later, when I had become older and stronger, I found a likely location for a well close to a poplar grove and beside some willow brushes, and I started on the fourth well hole. After I had reached a depth from where I could no longer throw out the earth, I rigged up a winch with a rope and bucket and Mary, by this contrivance, took out the dirt which I dug in the bottom of the deepening hole. When I had dug only 14 feet down, I struck a vein of spring water which promised a good flow of the first really good water. I went immediately to town with mother, where we bought lumber for curbing the well. Henceforth, there was an end to our water famine.

Our log cabin was started in October, but on a smaller scale this time, measuring 14x14 feet. Mother sold the tent, in order to get money for the floor, door, windows, and roof. The roof had gables and, thereby, afforded room for a garret. However, we had not enough boards to cover the upper floor. We spread an old carpet over the log joists and tacked it down to keep the heat from the lower room going to waste in the garret during the winter.

Unlike in later years, when the summers and falls have been excessively dry, it rained often and long during the first year, when we were housed in our sod shack. Many a time we had to rise from our beds during the night and leave for the tent, because the rain and mud was dripping from the sod roof on our beds and spoiling everything, besides. The mosquito pest was also very severe on the new settlers. These pernicious blood suckers were of a size of which only Canada can boast, and they multiplied by the billions towards the latter part of the summer. We could only defend ourselves against the poisonous, little devils, especially when rain was threatening, by building smudge fires inside the tent and sod shack, as well as on the outside, evening after evening. Even for the cow one was made every night. It

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