

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

Told by her son OTTO G. LUTZ  
of CARMEL, Sask.

(CONTINUED.)

### CHAPTER 7. MOTHER'S COURAGE

When mother resolved courageously to perform a task from which many a brave and hardy man had shrunk and drawn back cowardly, a storm was loosened in that little room. Anna, Mary and I tried our best to persuade her into letting alone such a daring plan, since there was every reason to fear that even if she would succeed in reaching the claims, her health was bound to suffer irreparable injury on such a long trip in an exposed wagon and in every kind of rough weather. Rosa and Henry wanted that all of us should abandon the whole scheme and go south again. All our talking was lost on mother, and we had to give her her will. Things were gotten in readiness once more. It had been decided that Henry should be the driver and that Anna and I should go along with mother. Also, John Cales was to go along and act as partner and guide for Henry again; Rosa, her baby, and Mary were to stay behind in Rosthern, till mother returned.

I remember well how Anna, light of heart and plucky as she always had been, saw to the smallest details in loading and packing the wagon. Our outfit, besides team and wagon, consisted of the smaller tent about 12x14 feet, a cooking stove with bake-oven, the most necessary kitchen utensils, bread, flour, coffee, bacon, yeast, and a few more articles. Furthermore, there was for each one an extra suit of clothes and a pair of shoes; a large quantity of oats for the horses, a breaking plow, shotguns, axes, pails, and Anna's dog Fortuna. After saying "Good bye" to those we had to leave behind, we left that very same afternoon in high spirits—anyway Anna and myself—prepared to give battle to and vanquish the mighty enemy called wilderness.

From Rosthern to Fish Creek on the river it is about 10 miles and we walked part of the way behind the wagon, as the load was quite heavy even without some of us riding atop. It was then about the middle of May. Along the roadside we saw some very pretty wild flowers. The land lies somewhat flat at Rosthern, there were no trees, and at times we saw farmers working in the fields with horses and oxen. When nearing the river, which was still hidden by the steep banks, we passed the first grove of poplars and clumps of willows. The guide had shot a few blackbirds which Anna had to fry for him for supper, as they were plump and fat.

Going down the steep banks to the ferry landing, the rear wheels had to be made fast by tying, so that they could not turn, but by sliding leave the wagon to go down gently. The ferry man was on the far side of the river and when he came across after some 10 or 15 minutes, we and the horses and wagon were taken aboard the ferry. The gates were closed and the French-Canadian ferry man worked a wind and the current of the big river slowly pushed the boat across. A cable that stretched high above the stream from bank to bank helped to steer the flatboat. It was a tough pull for the horses, on this side of the river, to climb the high bank. All but the driver Henry walked up ahead of the wagon, praying that nothing might break. At the top was the hamlet, and, near at hand, we found a place to camp for the night. Henry and the man were quite expert by this time in pitching the tent in record

time, while I drove in the stakes and rustled some fire wood. After the horses were fed, Anna asked us to supper and after supper we retired, though it was still daylight, around 9 o'clock.

A short time afterwards mother heard some one knock against an outer tent pole and Father Alfred stood outside, saying that he would say Mass in the village chapel in the morning, and he thought that we might wish to know. Mother thanked him and he bade us Good-night. Father Alfred with the other members of his community had also broken camp on that same day, and they were on the way to the Colony to locate the site for the new St. Peter's Monastery. In the morning all, with the exception of John, went to the little church in the village, and after returning to the camp we were soon on the way again. I was sent to the store—a tiny affair—for a few small articles, while the others were getting ready for resuming the journey.

### CHAPTER 8. GOING EASTWARD

The morning felt rather cold and raw, and the sky was overcast with grey clouds. Soon after we left the river and the hamlet, the wooded country, too, had an end, and we came into open country. Here a sharp Northeaster was blowing that quickly took on the qualities of a small gale. All began to dismount and walked beside, or behind the wagon. About noon the horses were unhooked, fed and we built a roaring big fire in the leeward of a clump of poplars and willows. When we were warmed and had eaten a hot meal, we took the trail again.

During that afternoon it began to snow, and the storm took on the form of a regular blizzard, as we marched on behind the wagon. Mother could not keep up with us in the snow, for we were going rather fast, in order to reach Leofeld before nightfall. She was forced to ride on the wagon, and Anna and myself bundled every quilt and blanket around and over her, and over all the tent was spread to keep out the snow and wet. In this fashion we, who walked, reached Leofeld wet and soaked at about dusk.

Here, as at Rosthern, there were some rude shacks put up during the winter and mostly all occupied by new settlers. Henry and John, having been here before, soon found an empty room, while mother, Anna and I were thawing out at a kind woman's stove. Soon the men came back and told us that our shelter was ready. They had set up our stove in a shack and had started a fire. But as the tarpaper on the flat roof was gone, the snow had begun to melt and the water came dripping down on us. There was not a blessed dry spot in the room, and we stood, or sat on boxes around the stove, drying a little in front and getting more wet from the top. Henry went out and shoveled the snow off the roof and spread the tent over it, weighing it down with stones. For the poor horses there was no place at all anywhere, and they were tied behind a windbreak, blanketed and fed. After a while the dripping stopped and Anna began to make supper, and we pulled off some of the wet clothes and shoes. Anna had set her wet shoes beside the oven, only to find them soon burnt and shrunk beyond recognition.

The next morning the report spread that the monastery people and Father Alfred had lost their way during the storm and, passing on beyond Leofeld, did not find their way back till long after midnight. The landscape looked winterly in the morning, and it was out of question to go on with our journey, before the snow had gone, and the trails had dried up a bit. Therefore, our party had to stay

here about a week. During our stay the feast of the Ascension of Our Bl. Lord occurred and the men and I helped Father Meinrad of the Monastery to erect a rude roof of poplars and willows where we could gather and celebrate the feast of the next day. Father Prior and others of his company had pushed on again the day after the snow storm.

On the first opportunity mother asked Henry to resume the journey. Two men, whose land was to be in the neighborhood of ours, started out at the same time as we did, and mother thought it would be a good idea to keep together on the way. They drove a team of oxen. Their intention was to strike straight south, as after a while there was no longer any trail to which we could keep. Going south one would strike the government telegraph line, which was built during the Northwest or Riel Rebellion. This line runs southeast and a good trail, following it, could be used by us for a number of miles. We decided to follow the ox-drivers.

At Leofeld we left the last human habitations behind and commenced to cope with ever increasing obstacles in our way. The lay of the land became low and swampy. We had to go around a great many mud flats, sloughs, lakes and lagoons. At times they were all connected together. When there was no other way but to splash through, Henry would shout and yell at the horses and whip them over the morass at a trot, or gallop. At such times, of course, we all got off and walked across to lessen the weight of the wagon. Our wagon had very narrow tires like most wagons from the States, and its wheels would cut through the swampy mud like a knife through butter. How many times did not the load get stuck in the mud clear up to the hubs, and the team could not pull it out! At such times the load had to be thrown off, willows were chopped and laid under the horses' hoofs and in front of the wheels, and then the team started, we doing all the pushing we could. And when the wagon was across, we had to carry after it the heavy load, piece by piece, and repack it on the wagon once more.

One day, when we were nearing the telegraph line, we came upon a very wide slough and stretching many miles in length. It was out of question to walk across, or to go around it. The water which was shallow seemed about two feet deep as shown by the clumps of grass that were growing here and there in it. Henry tried to ford it with all of us in the wagon. He started the horses from the bank in a run and they splashed through to the middle. There the wagon stuck fast, and the horses, jumping and straining in the harness and trying to get a foothold in the soft mud under the water, finally rolled over on their sides. Henry and John got into the water, unhooked the team and led them across. Mother, Anna, and I, also, went into the water and splashed over. Then, Henry, John and Anna carried out the camping outfit and all the heavy things. I still can picture Henry swinging the heavy breaking plow upon his shoulder and making with it for the shore. The tent was pitched on the edge of a fine wood near by, and a fire was started. The horses were wiped dry and fed, and then came the empty wagon which was raised with poles and pulled out.

The men with the ox-wagon crossed the slough a little to the side from us and got across in good shape, owing to their smaller load and wide-tired wagon wheels; also, to the slow and steady pull of the oxen which do not churn up the mud in a hard pull, as horses do. We had left the oxen behind on that day, because we could not

wait each day for the men, till they had hunted their oxen. The men would let their oxen graze on the prairie in the night, and in the morning these had disappeared. The first day it took the men till noon to find and return the animals. The second time it was nearly sunset, and, the next time, we waited no more. The oxen had contracted the bad habit (?) of always returning to Leofeld. A year after, mother happened to meet these same men, and they told her that they had reached their land, in spite of the slow and leisurely way in which they had been travelling. If we had stayed with them, we, too, would have arrived eventually. "Eile mit Weile," says Eulenspiegel, not without reason.

### CHAPTER 9.

#### MOTHER IS TAKEN ILL

On the following morning a fine drizzling rain was falling. We knew from experience that breaking camp was out of question now for two or three days, as the rain had a way of keeping it up that long. Mother had taken a bad cold from which she became quite ill during the night, so that she could not rise in the morning. And to make matters worse, Anna could not even provide a good bed for mother, for the best we had, was only a mattress and a few blankets. But ingenious, plucky Anna contrived at least, to provide for mother a dish that she thought poor mother might enjoy. And taking advantage of our delayed journey, she, furthermore, got a batch of dough ready to replenish our breadbox. While the bread was raising the two of us went out in the drizzling rain and hunted for eggs, that is, we looked for nests of wild ducks in the grass along the sloughs. After a while we found one with about a dozen eggs in it. Anna broke one against a stone for a test and found them still fresh and sound. Hastening back to camp, it took Anna only a short time to prepare for us all a big, steaming dish of noodles for dinner. The men, too, who had been out hunting, returned with ducks and prairie chickens. The ducks were quickly plucked and cooked. They made a fine broth for soup. As mother felt somewhat better on the next morning, she would not consent to a longer delay and, though she was not fully recovered, we moved on again, on the third day.

The weather had cleared and the sun shone bright and warm. In driving away I took a last look at the pretty camping spot beside the big popular grove and, if the place was not changed since, I could easily find it again among a hundred others. There the good Lord heard our anguished prayers and speeded mother's recovery from serious illness, so that we could continue on our way. The supply of food was getting low with no way of getting more, unless it be with the gun. We soon reached the looked-for telegraph trail which was travelled a good bit and by which we were led over the high land and the ridges. The spectre of marshes and sloughs appeared now only in our dreams. Following this trail we made good time, and the only trouble came when we wanted to camp, for there was not a bit of fire wood within many miles, so that we had to keep on, until we came in sight of the first willow bush. To guard against this absence of wood in future, Henry made it a rule to always carry a few armfuls of chopped sticks along in the wagon.

At last, we came to a spot that was marked Humboldt on the map. It is not the present town of Humboldt, but lay some distance to the southwest of the newer town. It was very deceiving to mark places with names on the map in those days, because here at this place named Humboldt, there was absolutely nothing deserving of a

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