The winter of 1949-50

This was the hardest winter that I have ever experienced. It was normal for the snow to fall deeper than the normal fences and in most years the schools would have to be closed for a few days because the buses could not get through due to roads being closed from winter storms. I believe that is was after the Christmas Holidays that the storms started in and just continued for over three weeks. The snow had long before covered the fences and now continued to pile up. Shortly after Christmas, my sister Margaret and her husband Dean and daughter Cheryl had gone to Idaho Falls, along with another couple, friends.

When the storms got worse they started back to the Valley. They got as far as Teton and stopped at Uncle Lee and Aunt Welma. There they found out that the road into the valley was closed with snow.

Cheryl was only a baby at this time. Uncle Lee and Aunt Welma had only a small basement home, so with their family, consisting of them and 5 children, and then add four more adults and a baby, to say the least it was crowded. The snow was so deep that they couldn’t go anywhere except to walk a block to town. Town consisted of a gas station/grocery store, a post office and a pool hall. Uncle Lee could walk to the barn to take care of the animals but that was about it.

At the end of the second week, they felt a little cabin fever, having mainly occupied their time playing Pinochle. On the news, they got the report that the road to the valley had been opened. They quickly packed up and ran for the car. They said goodbye to Uncle Lee and Aunt Welma and left. When Aunt Welma re-enter the house the radio reported, a travelers warning, that the road had again blown closed and no one should try driving to the valley. Uncle Lee ran back outside but it was too late, for they had gone out of sight.

Aunt Welma called our house to let Mom know that they had left and what the News had reported. Mom called Dean’s mother to let them know the situation. Dean’s step-father also worked for the High Way Road Department, I believe he was the Supervisor of the Road crew. He therefore immediately started the road crews and equipment to work on reopening the road. Plows could not push through the snow so they started with the huge rotary snow blowers. The concern however was that with the snow being so deep, it would cover a stalled car. The road crew therefore had men on snowshoes walk ahead of the plows with long probing polls, shoving them deep into the snow, hoping to locate any covered vehicle. The next big concern, was could they keep air into the car if it was covered with snow.

By morning the storm subsided and that made work go much faster. By early afternoon Dean and the other man skied into the valley for help. They had both became snow blind due to the sun shining. They reported that they had left the car at day break; that they had been able to drive past the Green Canon Bridge plus another couple of miles, when they came upon another car that had slid sideward’s and blocked the road. The other car had a couple and a baby in it. They got all six adults and two babies in to Dean’s car, where they stayed warn and kept an passage open to the surface, both for air and escape. With the report of approximate location of the stranded cars, the road crews were able to move faster. By evening the cars were located and everyone brought back into the valley.

Another interesting side event to this rescue: was at that period of time, all phone calls out side of the valley were long distant calls and had to be connected by an operator. Also our phone lines were party lines and so there was three to six families all using the same line. From the first call from Aunt Welma, the operators, kept all lines connecting our place, Aunt Welma’s, Dean’s parents and Aunt Vida’s lines open so that if anyone of those homes picked up the receiver, an operator was there to connect to anywhere they wanted. As far as I know, there were no charges for that service.

A second story relating to that winter happened a couple of week after schools had been closed. Dad had pigs at his slaughter house which was located one mile outside of town. Dad became concerned that the pigs would be out of feed and possible unable to get to the creek for water. He and I loaded three, 100 lb bags of wheat on to our toboggan. We rapped our legs with burlap sacks, over our winter clothes and pulled the toboggan one block to the road that went west of town, to the slaughter house. That was not to bad of a pull as teams of horses and slays had kept the main street somewhat open, but all other roads were snow bound. As we turned west, Dan and I would crawl to the end of Dad’s lariat, which was tied to the rope of the toboggan. We would both then pull until we got the toboggan to us. The first pull was so hard that we took one bag off and did it again. That pull was still too hard so we rolled another bag off. We continued that way to the slaughter house. We were both exhausted and soaked to the skin by the time we got there.

Just before we had got to the slaughter house, we met men, using three teams of horses, on a bob slay, trying to get milk from the farmers into the creamery. They had started before daylight and it was now mid-afternoon. Dad spoke to some of the men as they let the horses rest. They had gone about half way out on the normal milk route and then started back to town picking up the milk cans. They had picked up 2 and ½ layers of cans and found that the horses could not pull the bob slay that heavy, so they started unloading can to lighten the load. By the time we met them they had only ½ a layer of cans left and the teams were done in. I don’t remember seeing any more stacks of milk cans along the way back so they must have made it with a few cans.

At the slaughter house dad made a fire in the stove and had me warm up and we dried our wet clothes. We dumped the grain into the feeder, and got the pigs up to the feeder. We also shoveled a path for them to get to the creek for water. After getting dry and dressed warm we again crawled back to town although we didn’t have to take anything back with us and we could somewhat follow the bob slay tracks.

At the end of being snowed in for three weeks, the 1st Class Mail was flown in and dropped by parachute. The three stores, which were in town, looked like they had moved out and left one or two cans of odd type food behind on the shelves.

The snow became so deep that we were warned, to stay away from the power lines. It was reported that some cattle had been electrocuted because of walking into the power lines. When the road that went by the slaughter house was finally opened the snow banks had been pushed so high that Irven and I had climes to the top and looked down on the top of a school bus as it went by. Craig Sherman’s mother, my age, has a picture of her sitting on the top of a telephone post with her feet on the snow. The snow was so high on the roof of our house that Dad laid a 2 X 12 from the snow to the eve of the roof and we walked across it and shoveled the snow off the roof.

We missed over five weeks of school year.