

WHERE THE SAGE BLOOMED

by

LENA BODINE

A priceless letter was delivered, sometime in 1910, to a loving family living about three thousand miles away from Kuna in Pennsylvania. This letter was written in pencil on a tiny pad only three inches by three and three-quarters inches in size and nine pages long.

It was written by Sarah Bell Neglay, my mother, who gave a brief but informative and encouraging report about the trip she made with my father, my five brothers and me.

We had been advised by doctors to move to the dry Idaho desert area for more relief from my father's affliction with asthma. We shared about the same experiences as the first pioneers experienced except that we came by train. We traveled continuously from Pennsylvania in five days and four nights.

We had agreed to exchange our home in the green and cool and rainy state of Pennsylvania, leave our relatives and friends, perhaps never to see them again, leave most of our personal belongings and treasures, and all the comforts offered in a well settled community all for the possibility that the dry desert air would be easier to breath and our father would regain his health. The anguish must have been great for father to accept the sacrifices being made by his family for his welfare. Family love is the deepest and strongest force on earth as this adventure will validate. Kuna was chosen as our new home since my mother's brother lived here.

I can well remember how our hopes and expectations fell in despair as we left our green home state and found the farmland in Indiana and Iowa green and fertile but as we crossed western Nebraska we were discouraged and bewildered to see the bleakness of the sandhills and only open rangeland to the Rocky Mountains. These majestic mountains have always seemed worth the trip since they are indeed enormous and beautiful to behold. As we neared the Idaho area, we again experienced heartsickness in seeing only dry, desolate, barren, sage-covered rocky land. We had only

the bare necessities as we were not allowed to bring much freight. Mother had decided to leave her best dishes and treasures behind to get later and brought only the second best dishes and cooking utensils and bedding as well as many clothes as we could get into the barrels. The dishes and breakable items were packed in bedding and newspapers. Later we found that the things we left behind would cost too much to ship out so ~~there~~ were given to a niece on my father's side.

Our short breaths of dry dusty air must have been mixed with sobs and lumps in the throat as we approached Nampa.

-10 In the letter my mother wrote, she begins:

"Kuna, Idaho

To my brothers who are now living in my native state, Pennsylvania. Dear Brothers, I think it may be interesting to you to know of some of my experience in pioneer life in Idaho in the Kuna Community. You know we arrived in Nampa March 8th, 1908. There had been no snow and very little rain during the winter, but was sprinkling rain when we got off the train. Everything seemed to be suffering for moisture except Sagebrush. It seems to thrive without rain and O! the dust, just clouds of it and that is one thing I thought I could not get used to but time has changed that. In the few months that I have been here I can really welcome a dust storm, after the intense heat of a few very hot days. I have learned that they are followed by some cooler weather. That is one of the blessings of the dust storms.

My two oldest brothers filed on a Homestead five miles southwest of Kuna and we lived on it the first year. A very great disadvantage was the lack of water, there being none nearer than five miles at that time. We had it hauled in barrels, (these were the barrels in which the dishes, towels and clothing were shipped,) and after it stood in the barrels for a few days we could not drink it.

Well, we lived through the heat and dust of the summer. Then the weather was cool and rather pleasant at times but it got too cold to be comfortable in the tent. We

lived in a tent most of the time the first year. (There was a tent in which we slept and one in which we did our cooking.) We built a small house (12'x14') and moved into it in January. It was not so disagreeable when we had a warm place to live. There was some snow--one about 10 inches deep. This was a welcome change as we had plenty of water for a few days."

~~After~~ I remember the tremendous loneliness and homesickness those first months on the homestead covered by a sea~~s~~ of silver sage. The ^{water} ~~was~~ was taken from Indian Creek and sometimes we found dead animals, such as rabbits, floating in it. There was a large population of Horney Toads, which are not found in the desert so much these days. They were a small type toad with a bumpy skin and little horns on their heads. There were also owls to hoot at night, eagles to soar in the sky during the day, crows to call warnings and rattlesnakes and bullsnakes hiding in the shade during the hot day, small desert mice were always frightened as they scurried around trying to find food, and stay alive.

I recall when we arrived in Nampa how we were greeted affectionately by an apparently lonely uncle and we set out to purchase two tents to house our large pioneer family. We were a typical pioneer family of eight members and with expectations and hopes for a prosperous future, but with extreme problems since my father was very ill with asthma. Our family members were: ^{consists of my} Father: Joseph Neglay, Mother: ^{7 children} Sarah Bell Iden, Children: 1. Chester C. 2. Stanley D. 3. Elva Blanche (deceased at 11 months) 4. Vincent H. 5. Lena R. 6. Marion L. 7. Norman C.

We slept in one tent and Mother and I cooked the food in the other tent, which also served as the dining room. Our food was simple but nutritious and we had the luxury of having a Majestic cook stove which also heated the water, baked the bread and heated the tent. The cook tent had a hole in the roof surrounded by a square of metal and asbestos, with the stove pipe going through it. This was to protect the canvas of the tent from becoming too hot and catching fire.

While we were busy clearing sage and making a home on this flat valley land, first by living in two tents, as I have said, and then in a small house only 12'x14' we had some unusual experiences. I remember our sleeping arrangement very well. My parents had an iron bedstead on their bed. To make room for all of us they put a bedspring above it to make a bunk type bed for my two younger brothers and me. One night we had ten inches of snow and it was so heavy on the roof of the tent that it caused it to sag so much it came down to touch our bodies.

At this time Kuna had only two buildings. One was used for a store. It carried only a few supplies, mostly staples and a small variety of mercantile merchandise. I do not remember seeing any yardage materials. We bought such supplies in Nampa. Kuna, however, was on the main line of the railroad from Mountain Home to Nampa, as it still is, and provided us with transportation in this manner. The other building was a livery stable for the horses and a blacksmith to care for them and the wagons.

I remember the strong smell of the sage, to which we were not accustomed, especially after a rain. It was like it had rained a strong sage perfume. None of the sage was destroyed. It was carefully cut into stove length pieces and we carefully stacked it near the tents and house to be used as our only fuel. It was not entirely free since so much labor was required to prepared it for use. The sage ticks were ever present.

It was found that to clear 40 acres of sage land was about as much as one family could operate, so more homesteaders came to share the land. My brothers soon became expert at clearing the thick sage. All the equipment they had was a large pick, which they kept very sharp. With their strong muscular arms they gave each sagebrush two or three strikes and it was cut off and partly uprooted. The dryness and nature of the silver sage caused the shedding bark to be dirty with dust and small pieces of bark and leaves. It was hard to keep the kitchen area clean, but it produced a good hot fire.

My dislike for gathering the sage for the fire caused me to make comparisons with my Pennsylvania memories, which I left behind. (I had vivid pictures in my memory of the spring, which was about 1/2 mile from our home and how it flowed freely from the foot of a small mountain. Many years later, when I went back to this, my early home, (it was just a few years ago) to see the area I could visualize in my mind's eye so well, I found to my dismay, there now remains only a ditch where the spring was and it runs only in the spring after the snow melts or it rains.)

With fond memories, in my inner ear I can still hear the darkies singing as they came to carry my father down the hill where they spent the evenings singing at their meetings. They sang mostly songs of praise to God. I am still impressed and thankful for the gentleness of these kind loving folks.

Our homesickness and loneliness, since our closest neighbors lived one or two miles away, caused my brothers and me to urgently wish to return to our old home. We found it difficult to give up the cool greenery we were used to for this dry desolate area. We would find a large sagebrush to give a little shade and we would huddle together under it as we would plot and plan how to return to a home so far away. We considered running away and start the long trip back but we could not figure out what we would do to get food, and where we would stay at night. We were sorry we had no money to return. There was no money for train fare. It seemed that all we had was each other. We felt trapped at first.

The hot summer wore on and fall brought cooler weather and we were beginning to make plans, set goals and we learned we were a family with endurance. About this time the plans were underway to build the Mora Canal. This project would require at least 70 hard working men. Here was an opportunity to get in on the progress so in 1909, when I was 13 years old we built the Hotel in Kuna. The greatest joy was that each ~~of now~~ ^{now} would have a room. We moved in and began feeding many people before it was finished. It still had a dirt floor. We kept our Majestic cook stove and were happy to have more space. My mother and I took full responsibility for running the

hotel, including the cooking. We had the regular 70 strong, sturdy, hungry construction workers and anyone else who would come along, including some bums who would sneak in sometimes. Sometimes there were as many as 90 people to feed. Everything was served in large quantities. It was simple food. The meat was usually beef, pork or chicken. It was brought to the Hotel by my father every other day from Nampa, since there was no refrigeration, but we could get ice from Kuna. The workers thought meat and beans were a necessity, since they were the stick-to-the-rib kind of food. These hard working men used picks and shovels mostly in the construction of the canal.

Before they came in we would set out rows of wash basins so the workers could wash up before they ate. It took a boiler of hot water to add to the cold water to supply the amount needed (for these "Sloshers.")

The tables were covered with brightly colored oilclothes so they could be easily washed off before and after the meals. Many loaves of bread were needed each day for such hearty eaters. We used a sack of flour each day. My mother was noted for the excellent bread she made. We did not have time to churn the butter, since it was needed in such large amounts so Claire Bodine's mother, who became my mother-in-law later, made it for us each day.

We made jams in large amounts. We used the fruits grown in the area: apricots, peaches and berries, and we made very large amounts of apple butter, which was served with most meals. The construction workers all said it was "the best." The barrels we used to transport our household supplies out here we put to another use. We used them to make barrels of pickles, which were used for extra spice, frequently. We had to buy a large amount of vegetables to can for winter use. We were exceptionally busy during the canning time since we had to can from 500 to 600 quarts of fruits and vegetables, while preparing three meals on those same days. Each recipe we used was from basic ingredients. All cooking was put together from "scratch." We bought large amounts of potatoes from the neighbors. Fresh vegetables were hard to keep during the hot summer days but were brought in every other day along with the meat supply.

One day my mother had to be away from the hotel. We had prepared as much food as we could ahead of time, but I was left alone at the age of 13 to get the meals for 70 hungry men. I had made the bread and was very busily preparing the noon meal when several well-dressed gentlemen, who had come to buy city lots which were for sale, came. I remember having the beans prepared and felt my heart beating fast as I sized up the conditions of the still unfinished hotel, with the dirt floor and the one stove fired with sagebrush. I began to serve them dinner and they saw how hard it was to cut my freshly baked bread and one said "Don't bother to cut it just give me the whole loaf." The usual price we charged for each meal was 35¢ but they each gave me 75¢. They were pleased. My knees stopped shaking.

The school teacher and his wife boarded here and they sometimes stayed and helped wash the dishes which took until midnight many times.

I will continue with my mother's letter: "On April 8th, 1909 we moved to Kuna and began keeping boarders. There were no houses there at that time--just one that was used for the P.O., General store and dwelling. It is now used as a printing office. We began keeping boarders in two tents; one to sleep in, the other to cook and eat in and here we had more difficulties to contend with. As the wind would blow and turn things over it was impossible to keep the dust out of anything, but the boarders insisted it was clean dirt and that helped some, but still it was not so pleasant to live that way. Right along with the bitter part of pioneering there was pleasure, too. We all enjoyed company even if we had not any previous acquaintance. By this time quite a number had homesteads and we all need a few good friends, at least part of the time. Some were homesick and needed to be mothered a little, and I want to tell you the people who settled in the Kuna community were considered our very best friends.

From our cook tent we furnished the eats to the people on the day of the sale of lots in the townsite. There were quite a number of people who attended and I am safe in saying they were all hungry. Really, Idaho in those days was a great place to go

if you wanted to get an appetite. We all were hungry and sleepy, too.

By this time we had bought a lot and the hotel was well on the way. We moved into it the first of July. From this time on things went along better but there was always plenty of work to do.

At this time there was no organized church, but in the latter part of the summer of 1909 Reverend J.H. Ross came to the hotel and invited us to come over to the bank building to help organize the Church. We were very busy at the time. The evening meal had just been finished and dishes were to be washed for about 70 people, but he insisted that we go and he would return and help wash dishes, but I must say, he has very poor memory when it comes to washing dishes for he certainly failed to show up on that job.

But taking everything into consideration I know that the good out weighed the bad and a few years later, as we look over the vast acreage where sagebrush has disappeared and been replaced by vegetation of many varieties and an abundance of grain and hay and fruits of finest quality we feel well repayed for our labors and our disagreeable experiences are of minor importance considering the rich reward and I feel thankful that I had a part in this work. Although my part was of less importance than others, but the physical part of the body must be fed so that mind and soul may be better able to do its work.

Affectionately your Sister
S.B.N."
(Sarah Bell Neglay)

During our first year at Kuna the neighbors were few, living from one to two miles apart. There were not many school aged children, but these determined pioneers quickly started a school. The first year was in a tent. There was one teacher, a man. Later in the year we moved into a shack, with perhaps a dozen pupils the first year. J.H. Ross had 10 or 12 children. Then there was Helen Williamson, Claire Bodine, three of my brothers and I. I got to go about four months being I was needed to help with the cooking.

Even in those days both men and women were teachers. I remember a couple; a man teacher, and his wife, named Mr. and Mrs. Edgar. They came to help wash dishes many times while we served the regular canal construction workers. They were very jolly, helpful and kind.

We thought our shack of a schoolhouse was quite elite and elegant since the schoolboard had purchased the discarded desks from the Boise School District. We had real desks!

Our rural school, with all grades represented, helped us make new friends and we soon became a large part of the basketball team and the baseball team. We entertained ourselves with outdoor activities during recesses like we would if we were all of one family. We developed a deep love and devotion for each other. We took great pride in our teams and worked hard to beat Meridian and Nampa. My brothers practiced at home and needed me to hold a position. Even in the days before Womens Lib I was happy to show that a girl could also be good in sports and played any position that needed me...pitcher, fielder, baseman or catcher. I became a fairly good catcher. I am also reminded of the unpleasantness of being on the team, namely playing in the dust and dirt. Oh, such grit! The lye soap that my mother and I made from rendering fat was the best product for such dirty clothes. Most clothing was of cotton. My mother made most of the boys' shirts but bought the clothes they wore "for good" as we used to say. She also bought most of hers and mine.

I am reminded of the bloomer outfits needed for the basketball team. We needed all five girls to have a team. If one of us would foul out we would ask a boy to substitute or we would play with only four girls. We really tried to be careful about fouls for this reason. I can still see the large pushy girl from Nampa that I was to guard. She shoved and pushed me until my blood pressure rose and I belted her one. I was afraid I would be sent off the floor but was happy to listen to the lecture I received instead. We won the game. In fact, we won our share. We had nothing to be ashamed of.

The subjects taught in school were the basic subjects and we were all expected to do our best. Being I was the only girl to help my mother with all her work I did not have the opportunity to attend as regularly as I would have enjoyed. We all understood and did the best we could as long as we could attend.

Kuna was growing fast. My older brothers, having been masons before coming to Kuna, were very busy as they built most of the brick chimneys, plastered the walls and stuccoed the exterior of the new buildings. Now that our town had more than one building it was decided that there should be Church and Sunday School services. Chairs were arranged on the second floor of the Merc building to provide space away from the store, the work shoes, the work clothes and the straw hats. Straw hats were of great importance to those who worked under the hot sun in this dry unirrigated land, which would soon be changed. The Doctor's office was also on the first floor.

One Sunday we were all to go to the Kuna Cave for a cool Sunday School picnic. My brothers, having been masons and miners in Pennsylvania had checked out the safety of the walls of the cave by being able to tell about their strength by tapping the walls. The Kuna Cave was safe. A wire ladder with wooden steps had been hung down so we could go down into the cool cave for the picnic. There are a number of rooms in the cave and some are connected by small passageways. There was a very short, round, fat girl, a 200 pounder, in the group, but of course, she would also go through the small hole into the next room. She wiggled her way well into the passage but finally found she could not get any farther nor could she get into reverse. She was stuck solidly. Claire put his feet to her shoulder and others pulled on her feet to free her. She was as sore as could be the next day.

One sight I will never forget as I was watching people come to church services was a couple everyone dearly loved, but they had certain ways of doing things. He was an old guy, of small stature, while his wife was tall, weighed 250 pounds and wore a size 16 shoe. He very proudly drove his putt, putt car to church and when they got out of the car to make their way to the church he always hung on to her arm for safety. They were known as Pa and Ma Thomas. Later, they bought the hotel from us and kept boarders. The story was told that he always waited to the last to

get his drink of water before going to bed. One night he took out his teeth and put them in the teakettle. The boarder who saw this refused to eat there if he ever did it again.

After we sold the hotel we made plans to build the Kuna Merc, which is still in use. This same building provided us with space for social events. It had a Piano Box, which we all enjoyed. It was on the first floor where we played games. At first no children could play music. As time went on Mrs. Linda Fiss brought music to Kuna. She knew music well and gave piano lessons to many young people. This building is still stately looking and in good condition and still means much to me as I drive by and see it, since we put much sweat from the brow into it as my father and brothers built this large sturdy building. We lived on the second floor which had eight rooms, which I can still vividly see in my mind's eye. Each of us had plenty of space for any activity we wished.

The first floor had the recreation area in the rear where we played and had our social gatherings. The front part of the building had the Doctor's office, church and Sunday school, the postoffice, the city bank and an icecream and soda fountain. The lumberyard was built across the street with the hardware store next to it. Mr. Lillquist, the owner, went up to repair the roof one day and slipped and fell to his death as he hit some stairs. It was tragic, indeed. He was such a nice man.

We would have to go by horse and buggy to Meridian and then go on the trolley to Boise for musical entertainment. We also went to each others homes to be entertained by going horseback riding or playing games such as, The Flying Dutchman, Spin the Bottle and Postoffice. Sometimes we took evening walks (if you had a spare evening) or visiting or teasing lovers. The hotel burned down many years later and was rebuilt. This was a larger hotel. At about this time a two story building was built adjacent to the hotel and was used for social and civic gatherings.

There were no cars in Kuna for many years. Finally D.R. Hubbard was the first to get a car. Of course, we were all anxious to ride in it. We could hardly wait.

Finally one day he picked up a friend of mine and me as we were out walking. My first ride! What a thrill!

When I was 14 years old I had a train ride I will never forget. The Barnum and Bailey Circus had come to Caldwell by train through Kuna. I was so anxious to go! My parents finally consented to let me go by train, and by myself, which was frightening to me, and stay at my cousin's house. Since I was afraid to try to get to Caldwell by myself I managed to get there before dusk but to my horror I was not met at the depot by my cousin as planned. I will never forget my fright and loneliness as I waited there.

That same evening, after seeing the circus acts, we went to a show. As we were going home we saw two young men standing in a doorway. Just as we had stepped past them, they grabbed us, but they did not know until the next few minutes that what they saw in me was not a Honeybee but a Hornet. I put out my best athletic ability in pulling hair, biting, and kicking and pulled loose and ran off with the bums in hot pursuit. They didn't know I was good in making home runs and I soon outran them. I was glad to get back to Kuna.

During these early years Kuna lay as crossroads for the traffic to Silver City, a booming silver mining town in the Owyhee Mountains. We enjoyed watching the many people traveling through, some rich, some poor, some of notoriety and popularity and many looking for work. Among those traveling were a few Indians, who walked slowly on the trails. Other people stopped at Kuna to feed and water their horses. Kuna lies about 20 miles from Boise, making it a good days drive. We saw yearly progress in this transportation.

During all these harsh and difficult times my Father's health began to improve, as his doctors had hoped it would. I recall an experience with which to measure this. One day my father decided to walk to Boise to do business. He wanted to file on a city lot at the courthouse in Boise and also get another supply of his medication. To make the trip he left early in the morning. Two of my brothers went with

him as far as the water in the canal. To lighten the weight of wet clothing, to pull him down while swimming across the canal, one brother took the clothes across and came back to help ease him through the water safely to the other side. He dressed again and walked on to Boise. Having done his business he rested and returned the following day. The brothers again met him at the canal and all returned safely. My father did much walking here in Idaho as well as in Pennsylvania. My brothers filed on the Homestead land.) My father's establishments on 40 acres were where the Kuna Cemetary now lies.

Being that my father's health improved made all the hardships of those early days very well worthwhile. It is true that we would all do anything and everything we can to help a beloved member of the family. That has not changed.

As I grew up and (regained my health) I found that I would enjoy spending my life with Claire Bodine. Claire was no stranger. He was the young man who had come to Kuna with his family a few weeks before we did. This was our destiny. He grew up being like a brother to my brothers. When I was (20 years old I thought I was) 21 years old (so) we were married. Our wedding day was on November 30, 1916, which was on Thanksgiving Day. The wedding took place in the front room of the family home. We spent our Honeymoon in the Bristol Hotel in Boise.

In 1920 Loren was born, Marvin in 1925 and LaVerne in 1922.

Later with some regret and fond memories we moved to Meridian and began a new chapter in our lives.

As years went by and we children grew up and married and made homes of our own we remained a very closely knit family. We held together in work and family devotion, helping whenever we could. Perhaps the hardships of the early pioneer days caused this to become a "built in quality."

With the letter to the brothers written by my mother was a short yellowed clipping from a newspaper. It reads as follows: "Jacob Negley, "Little Jakey," also German, aged 12, stood with his father's long rifle and covered the retreat

of his mother, brothers and sisters as they fled into Fort Ligonier when Indians attacked their home.

Regina Hartman, is an ancestress of William Hartman Woodin, secretary of the treasury, and another secretary of the treasury, Andrew W. Mellon, is a descendant of Jacob Negley, the little boy who held back the Indians.

Our modern immigration laws will not allow people of that type to enter the United States. We have decided that we don't need foreigners."

WRITTEN BY LEONA BODINE

September, 1982

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