

A PIONEER'S EXPERIENCE ON THE WESTERN PRAIRIES

by

G. W. C. Jones

In 1871, my father, together with many other adventurous men, entered the unoccupied public domain in Kansas, taking an allotment of one hundred sixty acres of land, which was granted by the Government under the Homestead Act. In that year, my father and mother moved to Kansas from Missouri, bringing me and another boy who lived with us, to make our home on the western prairies.

We were filled with hope and untiring energy. We broke the prairies and prepared the soil for our first crop. We were rewarded abundantly. The following year we worked with undiminished vigor, planting much corn and other spring crops.

The other boy, George, and I had worked hard and there was a good crop of corn and spring wheat. By the first of December all the crops had been harvested, the corn shocked and ready to be husked. My father was so pleased with what we had done that he resolved to celebrate with a Harvest Home Feast, as it was called. After the meal was over, we fed our horses and sat on an old plow to discuss our achievement.

It was in that conversation that George first suggested that I ask my father to permit us to go on a buffalo hunt. His suggestion was a surprise to me, in a way, but I had often thought of doing this very thing. The buffaloes roamed in countless thousands about a hundred miles to the west of us, the settlers were hunting them for their winter's meat and the road was at all times filled with those hunters, either coming or going. Because I was fond of hunting, George's proposition enthused me and I immediately went in search of my father to make the request. I was not much surprised, for he was an indulgent parent, when he gave his consent and said we could go. This was in the early part of December 1872. I was seventeen at the time.

In those days, the west was a great barren waste. The monotony was unbroken as far as the eye could reach. There were no trees except along the streams, no houses, nor cattle ranches. The vegetation on the prairie was short buffalo grass.

The buffalo were a blessing to the early western settler. As I look back, I wonder what the settler would have done in those days, had it not been for the fact that he could hitch up his team, drive west a few days, where he could kill buffalo, bring the meat home for use, sell part of it for a cent and a half a pound, sell the hides at from two to four dollars each. These hunts brought in a revenue. They kept the wolf from the door and supplied necessities that we could not get otherwise as money was an almost unknown commodity.

The settlers of those days were not professional hunters. They hunted and they killed what they needed for use. They did not set up camps and shoot down the buffalo for their hides alone. It was on one of these hunting trips that the experience I am about to relate occurred.



G. W. C. Jones

It was in the early winter of the year 1872 that we embarked on our trip, filled with high hopes of hunting buffalo in the daytime and wild turkey at night. We had two splendid guns and had mustered enough money to buy ammunition for the "big kill." Though we had warm clothes, they were not adequate for the experience ahead of us. With "Smut" and "Polly" for our team and old "Kit" for our extra horse, we headed for the headwaters of the Medicine Lodge River a few miles away from some sand hills where the buffalo came every day.

The first day we camped for noon on the North Ninescah River. We were still jubilant; though as we gazed over the boundless expanse, there came over us the feeling of awe and solemnity at the vastness. After eating our lunch and feeding our horses, we again took the trail, camping that night on the South Ninescah River. A little more solemn, but no less jubilant, we did miss the home surroundings and the stillness was oppressing. This was our first night on the western prairie. It was scarcely dark when the howling of the coyotes dispelled the quietness. Coyotes were not strange to us, because we had heard them frequently at home, but for numbers and noise they surpassed anything we had ever experienced. They seemed to be a whole regiment. We had fried fresh pork for supper and the coyotes had caught a whiff of its tantalizing odor. We were not frightened, but the everlasting ki-ki kept up until after midnight and it was late before we could sleep.

We were up before the sun the next morning and on our way. The same boundless prairie, dotted here and there with prairie-dog towns, the bark of their inhabitants greeting us as we drove along. Little else.

To anyone driving over that country today, seeing those prairies with comfortable farm houses, the uplands checked by green fields of wheat, stock grazing on the hillsides, it would be hard to realize that it was ever in the condition

that it was in on that December morning more than half a century ago. Then it was a barren waste, as I have said. There was nothing to relieve its monotony in the way of trees, just a prairie-dog town once in a while, or an occasional antelope, standing like a statue on some hillside, gazing at us in wonderment. In fact, a person has to be acquainted with the habits of an antelope to realize that it is an animal, its white breast looking more like a white post standing on the prairie. We would get up pretty close to them, then with a bound they were away and soon lost to view.

This was the experience of that entire day, but at evening we crossed the north branch of the Chikaskia River--at this point a little stream. We were aiming for what we hunters called Buffalo Lake. It was nothing more than a wet-weather pond, an indentation on the prairie into which the water drained when heavy rains fell, but there was usually water in it and there we intended to camp for the night.

I was driving along and was startled by George's excited "Look There." Towards the west and south of the road were two buffalo, gazing peacefully, unconscious of any danger. Our blood tingled--we were excited--we were in sight of game--and a day before we had expected. We dropped off the road, fastened our team the best we could and started for the animals.

There was a little mound within range of the buffalo and we were able to get within fifty yards or so of them. They were both bulls, evidently having been driven from the main herd and now roaming by themselves. We hurried, though carefully, both took aim and fired at the same time. Each scored a hit. One animal fell immediately, the other staggered for a short time and then fell.

We had beef! Not the choicest steak, but it was beef and buffalo beef! We set about skinning the animals. If ever you want to skin something, try your skill on a bull buffalo. The hide around the neck and shoulders is an inch thick and the hair is full of sand. It was long after night when we finally got them skinned and it was fortunate for us that we had bright moonlight for the job.

We had our usual audience of coyotes that smelled the fresh meat and for the first time we were greeted by the howl of a gray wolf. There was only one and he didn't howl very frequently, but he howled often enough and long enough to make the cold chills run up and down our spines. We were glad when those buffaloes were skinned and we had the choicest pieces of their carcasses loaded and we pulled out for Buffalo Lake.

We reached Buffalo Lake an hour or two later and were surprised to find an Indian camp on its banks. There were only two tepees. We had unhitched our team, started a fire, when an old Indian stalked up to our camp. He was typical of his race--while didn't look pleasant, we had the feeling that he was not antagonistic. He was able to utter one short speech very vigorously, which he did no less than eight or ten times. Raising his hand above his head he growled "White man

kill wuffalo cow! White man kill wuffalo cow!" We were only two boys but we got the gist of his protest.

There were thousands and thousands of these slain buffalo within sight from any little hill. On a great many, the skins had not been removed. It was wanton carnage. The old Indian realized that the white man was destroying his means of support, his winter supply of meat and the prospects for the future. We realized that his anger was justified and we hastened to show him that the two buffaloes we had killed were bulls. He did not speak, but appeared appeased to some extent, at least, as he majestically started back to his tepee. We were further convinced when, a few minutes later, a squaw came over to us, carrying a part of a quarter of an antelope, which she laid on our grub box and returned to her camp. We were satisfied it was a peace offering from the old buck to make amends for accusing us of killing a "wuffalo cow."

We fried a big frying pan full of the antelope steaks, with a buffalo steak apiece. No exaggeration, for the capacity of the western hunter was something enormous, but it didn't disturb our sleep, for we had no more than curled up in our blankets than we were lulled to sleep with thoughts of the morrow.

Up again at dawn and we were soon driving over the northern tributaries of Elm Creek--one of the leading tributaries of the Medicine Lodge river. We passed over these, then over an expanse of high prairie and toward evening pulled into the timber of another tributary farther west, known as Soldier Creek. The last two hunts I had taken, we had camped in the last grove of trees on this stream and we were aiming for the same place again, but found it was occupied by a large hunter's camp, so we were forced to make our camp in a little wooded ravine about a quarter of a mile below. We soon had a good rousing fire and buffalo steaks for our evening meal.

At this camp we had our first flapjacks for breakfast. This is something to warm the hunter's heart--not mixed up with any of the fancy touches of the home table but they reach the spot as nothing else can. I proudly showed my accomplishments as a camp cook. Much, I think, to the amazement of George, for after they were cooked on one side, with a flip I threw them into the air and caught them on the other side in the frying pan. A meal fit for a king! A meal in the open air, with the flavor of smoke and a little ashes spread around!

The hunter's camp north of us showed that they were having good success, for on every tree hung from one to three quarters of buffalo meat and buffalo hides were stretched on the ground in all directions. We thought that if these hunters were able to get so many, we should be able to get a few. These men told us that the main herd, owing to the onslaught made upon it by the regiment of hunters that had been camped along the streams, had drifted northwest, but that there were still a good many scattered herds left. So our

guns were examined and with the ammunition made ready, we rolled in early, all prepared and eager for the next day. But the weather was threatening. At sundown the sky had become overcast with dense clouds and we could feel moisture in the air and could see an occasional snow flake, but this did not dampen our ardor. In the night, however, I stuck my head out from under the wagon sheet and saw the ground was white and the snow was coming down in blinding sheets. We got up in the morning to find six inches of snow on the ground, though it had stopped falling.

We made rapid preparations. We found a little bump on the ravine and placed the sacks of corn on it, over which we piled our bedding and provisions, then our wagon sheet over all. We thought the little eminence would prevent water from melting snow the next day from wetting our supplies. We were soon hitched up and on our way, hoping that our first day would be a successful one.

We were not expecting a large number of buffalo. A load usually meant from ten to fifteen, that is, their hides and choicest meat. We had gone about two miles, when way across the undulating prairie we got a glimpse of a herd of buffalo, probably fifty or sixty. They were traveling west and in order to get within range without their seeing us, we had to detour to the east and by following ravines, keep out of sight. All of a sudden, in a little ravine, we ran onto two old bulls which we were determined to try for. We did not hesitate. These two old stagers would bring four dollars each. Driving our team out of sight, we climbed out and prepared for game. We got a good range on them, they were unsuspecting and kept on grazing through the snow.

George and I were behind a little break in the prairie and each selected his quarry. Our guns spoke simultaneously, I got my bull in the most vulnerable spot, just behind the shoulder where the short hair meets the long and about half-way up. At this point the bullet pierces the lungs and the animal will stand with his feet together before he falls. George was not so successful, as his bullet struck a shoulder blade and the animal did not fall immediately, nor did he hesitate, but bounded away over the range. We followed his trail a short distance and soon saw by the blood on the snow that he was mortally wounded, that it would be only a short time until he too was down. Just over the ridge we found him. We hastily ripped up the hide on his throat and between the jaws we took out his tongue. This was the hunter's sign to other hunters that the game was claimed. We then returned to the first bull and prepared for a tough job. These were extremely old bulls, of great size and very tough skinned. When this was done, we drove the team up, loaded the hides and such pieces of meat that we cared to save and started again.

The buffalo were quite scarce, only a few scattered herds, which were always on the move. Hunters were thick and we didn't see a herd that we did not soon hear shooting. After traveling until after sundown, we had about come to the conclusion, though we had two good hides, that our first day's hunting was not to be regarded as highly successful. But upon

driving on a little eminence, we saw a mixed herd coming up one of the trails headed for the north. Driving our team and wagon out of sight, we hid ourselves in close range to the trail, expecting that the herd would follow the trail. But for some reason they became suspicious. After standing in their tracks a minute or two, they veered off up the western bank of the canyon or ravine. We could not spare the time to try to get a better position and hastily aiming at one that was nearest, I fired.

It was a long shot, but the animal dropped dead in its tracks. George did not get a shot and the herd was soon out of sight. We crossed the ravine to find that my quarry was a barren cow and very fat. "Well! Good eating here." These animals were the best to be had for beef. The sun had now set and while the cow was not as hard to skin as the bulls, it was long after dark before we had carried the skin and the four quarters of meat to where our team was, the sides of the ravine being too precipitous to drive across. We ate the bull beef when we had nothing else, but now we had the best of buffalo meat for the remainder of our hunt. After loading our beef, we turned our horses' heads towards what we thought was our camp.

But this had been our first day out and we didn't have the proper lay of the land and soon sensed that we were headed the wrong direction. Old Kit sensed it too, for she stuck up her head and pulled off to the right. She was a dependable horse and on any question of location she was always to be relied upon. She was tied to the side of one of the other horses. Old Kit's uncanny instinct for location proved to be right and we soon found our wagon tracks from our morning's trek.

We had made a very accurate drive and were now not more than two miles from camp, so we turned down the sloping prairie to the banks of the creek and up to the bank of the camp. "Where is that smoke from?" cried George. The air was filled with smoke, it was from burning wool fabric. We both jumped out of the wagon and ran to our camp where, horror of horrors, we found that all our inflammable goods had burned. Our bedding, wagon sheet, clothes, even the sacks containing the corn for the horses were burned, leaving the scorched corn lying there in piles. We had had our camp fire in an old rotten stump the night before. A stiff breeze of the day had scattered the embers of our fire, reaching the mound where we had left our things.

Well! It was a pretty hard jolt. We now had no bedding, just the one blanket George had taken along--everything else was destroyed. "Well, George," I said, "we will have to sleep under green buffalo hides from now on." We knew that would protect us so long as we were in the timber where we could keep a fire burning all night. In case of stormy weather, we had no wagon sheet. It was calculated to dampen our spirits, but after we had cooked supper and built up a fire we began to look at things more philosophically. We had a good start for our load and had really hunted only one day. We expected that in another week we would be on our way home again. We got out

our two big bull hides, spread them on the ground a few feet from the first, hair side up, laid down on one half and pulled the other half over us. No danger of being cold as we had piled up a large pile of logs to keep our fire burning all night.

Next morning, on our way to water our horses, we inquired of our neighboring hunters how they had fared the day before. They were despondent and said they would have to move on. We, however, were hunting for only a wagon load, so decided to try it there a while longer. We drove north over the same country we had gone over the day before, but the buffalo had disappeared. We kept traveling north until we came to the sand hills. We expected to find buffalo there as the ground of sand hills was warmer than down on the prairies, the snow melted much faster and the timber furnished shelter from the north winds. About four o'clock in the afternoon we ran across a small mixed herd and each of us downed a buffalo. They both were bulls, one was extremely old and hard to skin. It was dark before we were ready to head for camp.

In our winding around in the sands we knew we had lost our location to some extent, though we thought we were in the same general direction as we were the night before. In this we were mistaken. Instead of striking the trail by going southeast, we had unconsciously passed to the north of our camp. Realizing that we had missed our camp, we decided to camp for the night. We unhitched and fed our horses. The little corn that we had had in the sack we had carried with us of course was not burned. We built a large "chip" fire and cut some juicy steaks of buffalo meat. Then we realized that we had nothing to fry the meat in, nor anything to melt snow in for drink and no pepper or salt. But that didn't matter much to hale and hearty boys who were as hungry as wolves, so we cut sticks and stuck them through our meat and cooked it over the blazing fire and managed to fill up.

We spread our buffalo hides in the wagon preparatory to going to sleep, when of a sudden the prairie was filled with the howls of coyotes, increasing every moment and in less than an hour there was a cordon of these noisy brutes surrounding our camp. They kept out of gun shot, but they sure made a noise. The smell of the cooking buffalo meat had reached their nostrils for miles away. Nor was that all! In a short time their number was augmented by gray wolves. Their howls were altogether different, more curdling, and while we knew we were safe, their long and mournful howl, longer and more mournful than any dog, made the shivers creep up our spines. We fired a few shots at them but did not get one, though when we went out in the morning we found some blood on the snow. Evidently some of our shots had taken effect, but there were none dead. We started out early the next morning, decided to cook our breakfast after we reached our camp. We hoped to get to camp in good time, recuperate for the following day and prepare for a turkey hunt that night.

It was a bright sunny day, the snow glistening and the air invigorating, charged with ozone from the fields of snow. We started southwest. The horses seemed to realize we were on

our way to camp and they trotted along very briskly. All at once George spoke up excitedly and pointed to the southeast. I looked for a moment before I could realize what it was. It seemed to be a dark animal running across the prairie in our direction. Shortly we were able to see there were some other animals with it and in two or three minutes could discern it was a buffalo being chased by a pack of coyotes. They were coming in our direction, or nearly so. We stopped and soon over the hill came a buffalo, a young bull, probably about two years old. These animals, when young, are very fleet of foot.

They were coming, a pack of eight coyotes, trying to reach the hamstrings of the buffalo. The coyote is rather small to hamstring a full grown buffalo, but they often attempt it and sometimes succeed in worrying the animal to such an extent that he is in their power. This young bull was giving them a merry chase, his instinct urging him not to stop. He kept on at a terrific speed, going in a northwesterly direction. This, we knew, was in the direction of the main herds, something the young bull understood perfectly well. We figured he must have been cut out of his herd by hunters. We remained still until he passed.

The buffalo had not gone more than a quarter of a mile, when from a deep ravine to the southwest came two gray wolves to join the chase. "Well George, he is gone now," I said. I knew that gray wolves were abundantly able to hamstring a buffalo and that it would be only a question of time until he would be helpless. We decided we were going to see the last of this battle royal and quickly swung our team in the direction of the chase.

The gray wolves immediately fell in behind the buffalo, one behind the other. As they passed his hind legs they made an accurate vicious snap at the hamstring. One time the leader fastened his teeth in so firmly that he was thrown several feet away, only to get up with renewed vigor and return to the charge. In the meantime the other had taken his turn and was snapping at the bull. Their accuracy was something wonderful. They seemed to gauge themselves so as to fasten on the hamstring while the foot was on the ground and the jerk of the animal in bringing his foot forward again would assist in the cutting process.

It was easy to tell that the buffalo was losing ground. They hadn't run two miles before we could see that his right hind leg was disabled and that he was running on three legs. In another half mile, the hamstring of the other leg was cut and the poor brute was floundering in the snow. He couldn't rise, except on his front feet. He did this and gamely shook his head in defiance, but the wolves continued their savage onslaught for the inside of the ham where the skin is thinner.

Our team had been traveling fast, enabling us to keep in sight of the chase and we could see the wolves attempt to tear open the hide of the buffalo. When this was done, the ravenous brutes commenced on the flesh and we could see them tearing out chunks of living flesh and devouring it, first one and then the other. The gray wolves were the leaders but the

coyotes came in for a good second. The buffalo, in its frantic attempt to save himself, would occasionally throw himself on his side, but this made it easier for his enemies. He finally floundered to his feet again and was in a sitting posture in the snow, with the wolves gnawing at his hind quarters, tearing out pieces of flesh and eating it.

Then it was that I heard the most mournful cry I ever heard from a buffalo--or any other source. I have read accounts of where buffalo roar, but I never heard one roar, tho I have seen them attacked in numerous ways. The only cry I ever heard from a buffalo was a short, thick grunt. I've heard the main herd in the breeding season of September and October. Then the bulls--a thousand of them in unison--would emit this grunt, their voices blending in a continuous roar. But this poor creature, as he sat there in the snow, being devoured by the blood-thirsty brutes that were his natural enemy, did not grunt or roar. The sound is hard to describe, though it was terrible and heart-rending. His mouth was open and this moan was continuous. Tho we were three or four hundred yards away, we could hear it distinctly over the rattle of the wagon.

When we were up to about a hundred yards, George jumped to the ground, declaring, "I'm going to get one of those scallions." I stopped the team and prepared to shoot another. Both were successful. George brought down a coyote and I got a gray wolf. At this, the other beasts ran away, leaving the poor mourning buffalo. "Well, George, put him out of his misery," I said and George placed a bullet at the base of the skull, behind the ear. After a short struggle, the beast was dead. The wolves were unwilling to give up their feast, but they had respect for our rifles and kept out of range, circulating around, waiting for us to leave. The hide was badly damaged by the wolves, but we thought it was still salable. We hastily skinned the animal, rolled up the hide and departed for camp, leaving the carcass for the wolves to finish.

We had little difficulty in finding our camp, reaching there about three o'clock in the afternoon, and hastily preparing a feast fit for a king. We had saved the humps from the best buffalo, and to those who have never tried it, let me say that a good thick buffalo steak from the hump comes as near satisfying the appetite of an epicure as anything can. We cooked a big thick pancake, made a pot of coffee and sat silent, thinking of the turkey hunt we had scheduled for that night.

We started out near sundown, turkeys being easier to locate at that time, as many of them are flying up to roost, where they plume themselves before going to sleep. We planned that George should take the east bank and I the west and we were to meet at the confluence of this stream with another stream from the west, then I should return on the east side and he on the west, thereby giving each an equal show as to territory.

There were small side-ravines or canyons that ran back into the brakes and it was in these brakes that the turkeys resorted for the night. The trees afforded plenty of food, oak trees with acorns and much hackberry brush. I had not gone a half-mile up the creek, when I paused at the mouth of a little side-ravine and listened. I could hear a turkey flying up to roost and I knew I was on the hunting ground. I cautiously traveled up the dry bed of the water force and discovered three turkeys feathering themselves on a limb of a huge oak tree. They were too far off for a shot and then came the task (and a task it is) to get within shot of a turkey standing on the limb of a tree. All hunters know that a wild turkey is one of the wariest game birds of America. Their vision is keenly accurate. They get the glint of a hunter's gunbarrel flashing in the moonlight. George and I had prepared for this by wrapping the remains of our burned blankets around the guns.

I proceeded to sneak up on my turkeys, but had not gone far when a warning "Quent, Quent" came from the tree and I knew they had seen me. I was pretty disgruntled, for I had always thought I was pretty fair at stalking game, and felt now I had lost my first chance. I dropped to the ground and waited. In a very short time I again heard the whirr of wings and looking up, saw a fine old gobbler looking down at me, not thirty feet away. He had flown in from the top of a ridge in plain view. In less time than it takes to tell, I had my gun uncovered, took aim and brought the old fellow down. I had a treasure. His bronze plumage glistened in the twilight. I hung him up in a tree and prepared to go farther up the canyon. I got two good shots, but bagged only one turkey. I brought the bird back to hang with my gobbler and started down-stream for the next canyon. There seemed to be a great many turkeys in this canyon. They had bunched up and were roosting in a flock.

This was the month of December and the country had been settled by buffalo hunters since early fall. These buffalo hunters often took a few turkey hunters on their trips to get a supply of turkeys to take home with their buffalo meat. One of them made a business of it. I know of three men who went with a wagon and in a week had a wagon-load of turkeys for the Thanksgiving trade. As a result, the turkeys were thinned out considerably and those that were left were very scary and gun-shy. I crossed the stream on a fallen tree-trunk and on the way down-stream I got two more birds. When George and I met at the appointed place, we found that between us we had an even dozen turkeys to take home to the folks. After recounting our experiences, we rolled up in our buffalo hides and slept.

The buffalo hunt was resumed next morning and we followed the same plan for the remainder of the week. Some days good, some bad. By the end of the week we counted our loot and found we had thirteen hides, twenty quarters of meat, two or three hundred pounds of humps. All this, with the turkeys, made a pretty fair load and we prepared to start for home, pretty well satisfied with our success. The only detraction from our enthusiasm was the fact that we had burned up a fine

lot of bedding, among which were some fine woolen blankets which mother had brought from New Zealand when we emigrated from there years before. We consoled ourselves with the thought that from the proceeds of our hunt we could buy enough bedding to compensate for the loss.

In the morning, we broke camp and loaded everything up in as good shape as we could, placing the beef in the bottom of the wagon box, with the hides we used for bedding on top. The weather was bright and clear, though piercingly cold, and we started for home in high spirits. We were intending to make Buffalo Lake by night if we could, though we realized we could not make fast time with our heavy cargo. We failed to reach Buffalo Lake by five miles.

After we had stopped, it commenced to snow with driving winds from the north. We feared we were in for a blizzard. Next morning a heavy sleety snow was falling, driven by gales. It was so severe we were afraid to try to drive, so prepared to camp there until the storm was over. The blizzard was most severe and our resources were taxed to the utmost. While we had plenty of wood, we could not lie close enough to the fire but what the buffalo hides froze hard as boards, only the side next to the fire remained unfrozen. We stayed in this camp for three days, when the storm broke, the winds subsided and we were off again.

The roads were very heavy with snow and the drifts made our travel slow. We had a very heavy load and the horses strained against it. Just at sundown we came to a place where I had camped at previous times. There was a spring and good grass in the ravine below it. By the time we had cooked and eaten our supper the wind raised again, snow was falling and was driven by icy blasts of hurricane force. The hides froze as stiff as boards.

A boy of seventeen is not supposed to have mature judgment. As I look back, I realize we were not as resourceful as we should have been. We should have hunted up a snow-drift, made a place in it for the hides, covered them with snow, crawled in and we would have slept warm. Lacking that judgment, by morning we both were chilled to the marrow and hardly able to move. I believe George's feet were frozen at that time. We didn't cook any breakfast. It took us two hours to harness our team, our hands being so numb and partly frozen so that we couldn't handle the leather and buckles. Every buckle had to be fastened with our teeth.

There had been two other wagons on the ground the night before, but they had plenty of warm bedding, also hides, and did not have the trouble we had. Consequently they pulled out an hour or more before we were ready. After finally getting our team hitched up, we started. I was walking beside the wagon, driving the team. George was walking close behind. The snow was blowing, or rather it was sleet, sharp cutting sleet, which struck us in the face like thrown shot, stinging painfully. By hugging the side of the wagon we were able to keep out of most of it, but not so with the team.

We had one horse, Smut, who was a very touchy, skittish animal. As the sleet stung her face, she would rear and plunge and it was almost impossible to control her. Also, she was balky and would not keep to the road. I had to hold the lines very tight and at the end of a mile my hands were virtually frozen. We decided we would have to leave the wagon and travel on horseback. First, however, we felt we must try to warm ourselves. On a bare spot on the prairie where the snow had been blown away, we tried to start a fire, but the wind, blowing a gale, caught up the pieces of burning wood and scattered them, so we had to abandon the idea of getting warm. We unhitched our horses and started off. I was riding "Smut" and George was riding "Polly," leaving "Old Kit" to follow.

In a very short time, we were numb with cold. We then dismounted and catching hold of the horses' tails, drove them ahead of us in a good run. This limbered us up somewhat and we climbed back on our horses, walking and riding alternately. We kept this up for two or three hours, but George began to hesitate about getting off and running. I didn't know it then, but I am satisfied now that his feet were badly frozen and he couldn't run. He had remained on his horse too much and had gradually frozen more and more. By the middle of the afternoon he couldn't walk at all. Once he fell off his horse, but with hard labor I got him back on again. His legs were frozen stiff, shaping themselves to the contour of the horse's sides. There was a ball of ice as large as a hen's egg on his left eye, the right eye frozen white. He couldn't see and could hardly speak so as to be understood. We came up onto an eminence and ahead of us about a mile I saw the teams and wagons that had been in camp the night before. I tried by leading George's horse to whip up and overtake these teams, but he couldn't stand to ride faster than a walk. I explained to him that if we could ride faster we might catch up with the wagons and get help, but he indicated to me to go on and hold the others until he caught up.

By the time I rode up to the team, I was badly frozen. The men with the wagons took me off my horse, one taking me by one arm and the other by the other arm, dragging me backwards and forwards over a bare place on the prairie until I limbered up a little. I told them I would be able to walk if I would hold on to the end-gate of the wagon. I refused to do this unless they would go back for George, but they refused. They all were in a more or less frozen state and hesitated to delay. They said they would drive up on the next ridge and if they saw George coming they would wait for him, but before we reached the summit of the other ridge, "Polly" came galloping up without him and I knew poor George had fallen off his horse, frozen to death. I insisted on going back to bring his body, but the men refused to let me. This, of course, saved my life. Mournfully we started again. I fastened my hands to the tail-board of the wagon and it wasn't difficult for me to hold on, because my hands set frozen almost solid. After two or three miles I was limbered up so I could walk and my hands were pried loose from the tail-board of the wagon.

By this time it had stopped snowing, the wind was still very strong and it was intensely cold. Of course we had no

way of knowing how cold it was, but we learned later from those at home that it had been 22° below zero, without the wind. We were now about fifty miles from the first and only house on the trail home. It was about three o'clock in the afternoon when we decided to start out.

It was then that a little braggadocio helped me. A characteristic of mine--if anyone told me I couldn't do a thing, I accepted the challenge. I heard one of the men saying, "What are we going to do with this boy? He can't make it in his condition." Then I spoke up in boyish boast, "You fellows go on and find the end of the road. When you get there you will find me right along with you." This braggadocio saved my life. We kept up continuous travel all afternoon and night. Many times I would stumble and fall head foremost into a drift and I would feel that I could stand it no longer. Then the boast I had made would come to my mind, I would struggle to my feet and go on again. I don't think I exaggerate when I say this occurred fifty times during the trip.

About three o'clock the next morning we came to a claim-shanty, located at the extreme outside of the line of settlement, occupied by a man, his wife and one child. But now there were fourteen other occupants in this 10 x 14 hut, all of them in a more or less frozen condition, several with their fingers and ears frozen. I was very badly frozen, my feet were frozen half-way to my knees, my hands and ears were frozen and my face was a solid sheet of ice. Though the other hunters were packed in the room like sardines, the settler insisted that we come in. The snow was too dry to use for packing my feet, so he put buckets of it on the stove to partially melt and put my feet in it. The other hunters had moved on and just I, with my two horses remained. "Old Kit" had failed to keep up.

When my feet were thawed somewhat, I decided to start out again. I knew we were only five or six miles from home. The creek of course was frozen solid and I decided to follow its course. We would have to cross this creek in order to ride in home. "Smut" went on a careful walk and I was getting along pretty well, though in intense pain from having my feet hanging. At last we arrived at the ford-crossing of the creek. The drifts were five or six feet deep, very heavy and there was a stretch of about eight feet before we could reach the bank proper on the opposite side. "Smut" took the drifts courageously, but the snow was up to her belly. While she was gallantly floundering on, I was thrown from her back into the snow drift. Then, for the first time, I really lost hope. I knew this horse so well!

She was a skittish animal and her greatest fault, when she got loose, was that she refused to be caught. She struggled up the bank and as I looked up at her, I said, "How shall I ever get home." It was a mile and a half to the next house. I knew I was doomed. But I made a try. I spoke kindly and coaxingly to the horse, trying to get her to come back to me. Then I prayed earnestly, the prayer of a soul in distress. Some may say it was uncanny intelligence in the

animal, others may have different theories, but I believe it was the direct answer to prayer. By a superhuman effort, I crawled up to the horse on my hands and knees, she made no attempt to move, simply stood still so that I could hook my frozen claws in her mane. Then she lowered her head so that my breast-bone rested on her neck, threw up her head and I slid onto her back.

I have hesitated about writing this, knowing that many people would think it fiction, but it is literally true. "Smut" saved my life, whether by animal instinct or by Divine intervention, I will let the reader form his own opinion. "Smut" knew every foot of this ground; we had hunted antelope over it many times. We were about three miles from our house and I rode into home with my head to her tail.

I found my poor father and mother wild with grief. "Polly," the second horse had come on home ahead of us. Reports had reached them of the terrific storm on the western prairie and of the hunters brought in frozen, some of them dead. While they were joyous over my return, they were grief-stricken to learn of poor George being frozen to death and left on the prairie.

I could go on and on. I could tell of how my sweet mother, in her tenderness and wanting to ease my suffering, had me brought into the warm house instead of packing me in snow to draw out the frost. I could tell of those two months of suffering that followed, of how the doctor from Wichita (a crude operator and very drunk at the time) came out to the farm to amputate my limbs, one at just below the knee, the other at the ankle; how he placed me on the kitchen table and bucked away at the job for a whole day and those were the days when there were no anaesthetics. I could tell how later, when the spring thaw came, my parents learned that there would be a representative in town for a firm fitting artificial limbs and I was placed in the wagon-bed and was being taken to Wichita to be measured; how, on the muddy road we met up with this same "country doctor"; how my father refused to give him right-of-way, ordered him to get off his horse and then horse-whipped him within an inch of his life; how, some time later, my father needed medical attention for varicose veins and had to go to this same "country doctor"; how the doctor saw his chance for sweet revenge and put oil of vitriol on the legs, causing my father to have running sores for the rest of his life. Truly, those were the days of the "Wild and Woolly West." But it was only of the hunt and the blizzard that I had intended to write.