

A Kansas Memory



Ice and snow on the farm. This picture is not nearly so bleak as my experience that day.

Recently the ranching disaster in South Dakota has been in the news. Not many people today have any idea what that kind of situation is really like. As a farm boy in Kansas in the 60s and 70s, I lived through a number of situations on our family farm that were not too different from what those ranchers found themselves in recently. Reading a facebook post by a cousin of mine sparked a cascade of memories. This is my attempt to capture the fact and flavor of those memories:

I remember being caught in a sudden blizzard when I was with my father on our West place. I was about 15. The tractor had slid on hard ice and gotten stuck in deep snow. There was no help and no phone. The warmth of our house and the safety of our farmyard was 3 miles away, not a long way in fair weather.

It was mid-afternoon and we were dressed for the cold, but the temperature was dropping and the wind was picking up hard. Soon we couldn't see more than a few feet in front in the heavily falling and blowing snow. We found our way to the little gravel road and began to walk. We walked together down the middle of a gravel road. Between the ice and the snow and the lack of visibility the only way we could tell where the road was was when we fell in the grader ditch. Then we would pull each other out and move on.

Who knows how long that walk took, but finally we reached home. Those 3 miles had taken hours, and dark had fallen. We were wet, numb from the cold, and beyond exhausted. My mother met us at the door, tears streaming down her face saying "Thank God you made it."

She would have come for us or tried. But, it was our biggest tractor that was stuck deep in that snowy ditch, my little sister was barely 8 too young by far to attempt such a trek and also too young to stay home alone in a blizzard. My mother had food on the table and something hot to

drink. I learned later that she had been warming it up off and on for hours, hoping we would get there.

My father's first words were. "It's past chore time'" He grabbed a quick cup of coffee and a sandwich, changed clothes and headed out the door never saying another word. A little while later I staggered up to follow him and my mother said "Dad can handle the chores." My response as I struggled back into my boots and coats: "I know, but chores are my job." I remember a small pause, as I gathered myself to face the wind, and the cold and the snow again. And the hug my mother gave me.

It may feel hackneyed to say it, but when things are difficult it is important to remember that we are born of survivors. The truth is simple, if you are alive now you were born to a lineage of survivors. You can handle it. They did.