

CHAPTER 2

ON OUR WAY HOME, IT TURNED INTO A BLIZZARD. DAD
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TO GO, AND THEY SOMEHOW GOT US HOME.

- DOROTHY KITTLESON -

(Born May 28, 1921)

My mother was killed in a factory explosion in Des Moines, Iowa. I was three at the time, and my

sister was one. Mom had been canning at the time, and she needed lids for the jars she was using. She told me that, "She'd be right back." She went across the street to the store. She had been gone only a couple minutes when suddenly there was a huge explosion. The refrigerator system at the store blew up while she was there and my mother was killed.

After my mother's death, my sister and I went to live with my grand- mother at her farm in Worth County. Her farm was on the road that formed the dividing line between Worth and Mitchell Counties. Her home was about a half-mile out of the town of Meltonville, Iowa. The town no longer exists. In those days, it had two grocery stores and an active church.

Grandma's house was a big farmhouse. There was a wood cooking stove. We had to carry the wood in to make it hot. We heated our bath- water on that stove. That's where Grandma canned all our foods.

23

24 • JOHN DONALD O'SHEA

Besides the kitchen stove, there was also a heating stove. I don't ever recall that we had central heating, but later we had an oil-burning stove in the living room.

After a while, my dad remarried, and he and my stepmom came to live with us at Grandma's. Dad worked the farm there.

When I was young, there were no indoor “facilities” at Grandma’s house. We used an outhouse. Later, Dad put in running water.

In the early years there, we had kerosene lamps, which we had to wash every day. The Rural Electrical Cooperative brought in electricity. When we got electricity, it was much nicer.

We never went hungry during the Depression. We had a huge garden. And there were chickens and hogs. In the fall, they always butchered a hog.

During the summers, we would go barefoot all summer long. Our feet were growing fast and shoes were expensive. Then, in the fall, they’d buy shoes for us for school.

In the early years, the road was unimproved. I can recall when they made the improvements. I think that was while I was still in grade school. They graded it using mules.

We had two big horses—Bill and Barney. One winter evening we went to my aunt’s house in Otranto, about three-and-a-half miles from our home. We went by horse-drawn sleigh. When we arrived, Dad put the horses and the sleigh in my aunt’s barn. While we were there, it started to snow. On our way home, it turned into a blizzard. Dad couldn’t see. So, he just let the horses decide where to go, and they somehow got us home.

I began school when I was six, in 1927. Our school was one of five new schools that the county had just built. It was District 5 in Meltonville. It was very modern and nice. It had indoor restrooms, but no running water. But it did have electricity. And we always, as far as I can remember, had a phone.

My younger sister and I were very active in our church. The Episcopalians and the Methodists shared the church. We were Methodists, and we shared our pastor with the church in St. Ansgar.

MEMORIES OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION VOL 11 • 25

There were always meetings, and after the meetings, there would be card games and music. The church had an old-style pump organ. I played the piano, but I wasn’t able to push the big pedals down to play the organ. So, one of the boys would do that for me.

In the 1930s, there were parties in the town of Otranto. And there were roller skating rinks in Lyle, Minnesota, and in St. Ansgar and Northwood. Once, I fell while roller skating, and I got pretty badly banged-up. There was a nurse there who told me I needed stitches by my mouth. So, we had to find a doctor that night. Getting the stitches wasn’t much fun.

There were movie theaters in St. Ansgar and Northwood, but we didn't go to the movies very often. And of course, there was radio.

I had two stepbrothers by my dad's remarriage. My stepbrothers had "horses." They were actually sticks with horse heads. They put them between their legs and pretended they were riding horses. One day, they "rode" down to the grocery store in Meltonville. The grocer, told them that it was too far to walk. My brother told the grocer, "We didn't walk; we rode our horses."

My sister was a year behind me in school. When we graduated, I was seventeen. My grandmother didn't want us to have to take jobs as housekeepers or waitresses, so she insisted that we go to business school. We went to Hamilton Business College. I worked really hard while I was there. When I graduated, they told me that they thought they had something for me. They sent me for an interview at International Harvester, and I was hired, and learned to use a bookkeeping machine. I worked there for two years. Then my sister and I moved to California. The people at International Harvester didn't want me to go.