

## Anna's Story

This is a story about a woman, who, as a young girl, dreamed of coming to America. Leaving behind the oppressions and poverty of her country, she overcame the hardships and tragedies throughout her life. This is a true story. I've written it just the way she told it to me.

Anna Melanec was born in a small community in Austria in the principality of Galicia. She was a middle child in a family of three girls. Her father was employed by the post office; her mother took care of the home and family. They lived in a duplex house located on a small plot of land. Her uncle and aunt occupied the other half of the house.

Her father moved out and left the family when Anna was just a little child. No one ever explained to her why he left. She would have been upset and missed her father more had she not had her uncle living next door. She adored him and her aunt. Occasionally, she would run into her father when she went to the store, hoping he would buy her some candy. Many times she would come home empty handed. He helped very little, if any, towards the support of his family, thus forcing her mother to get odd jobs to help out.

Her mother became the unofficial "village doctor", healer and midwife. With no medical education, she relied on intuition, common sense and an instinct for herbs and potions gleaned from her ancestors to help heal the sick of her village. Perhaps she tossed in a goodly portion of prayer, also, being a very devout woman.

Her uncle was very good to them and helped as much as he could. Anna's mother would often say how fortunate they were compared to others. They had a nice house and always enough food to eat. Anna spent many happy hours with her uncle next door. She felt so close and secure with them. They looked forward to seeing her and missed her when she didn't come for some reason or another. Lately, she noticed the two of them weren't as jovial as they used to be. She wondered what had happened and it worried her, but she was hesitant to ask for fear of hurting them.

One day, quite by chance, she discovered the cause of their unhappiness. The uncle was drinking more and more often; her aunt was unhappy and disgusted with him and didn't know to whom to turn. Anna pleaded with him to stop, or, at least to cut down. He would get short with her and tell her to leave him alone. Since it was unnatural for him to be so annoyed with her, she would stay away from him feeling very hurt. After an absence of a few days, she stopped by one Sunday morning on her way to church. The uncle was delighted to see her again and offered to go to church with her. He sang in the choir every Sunday. As he was getting dressed, he asked Anna to pour him a glass of wine. "Good for the throat", he said. She asked him not to drink anything before Mass, but he insisted. She went into the kitchen to get the wine. When she entered, she saw a box of salt by the bottle of wine and, immediately, pounced on an idea. She would poison his wine with salt: not enough to kill him, but enough to make him very sick. She hurriedly poured a large amount of salt into the wine, mixed it thoroughly, brought it to her uncle and, with one big gulp, it was in his stomach. Her aunt watched the proceedings quietly and was secretly amused.

In seconds, he became nauseated. He was retching and heaving, getting sicker by the minute. Anna became frightened, but her aunt reassured her that he would be fine as soon as he had gotten rid of the salted wine. She told her to run along to church, that she would take over now; but Anna wanted to stay there to be with them. She didn't like to miss Mass, but being where her uncle might need her seemed more important at the time. She stayed for most of the day. He got better and mentioned that the wine must have been poisoned. The subject was never brought up again, but Anna suspected that he might be wise to what had happened. It was many years before he drank again!

In the early years of her life, Anna would listen to the stories people told about the big country across the sea - America. It intrigued her! She became more and more interested and asked many questions. She was told that it was a rich and spacious country with land for everyone, not just the rich. People could settle on the land, build houses, and till the soil - all free. It was called homesteading. They could have acres and acres of land; not just small plots like they had here.

As she became older, she became more fascinated with the stories and vowed that someday she would go there. The more she thought about it, the greater her desire became. She knew that if she ever went, it would have to be on her own, Her family could not afford to pay her way.

So, at 16 years of age, she went looking for work. Before long, she was hired by a doctor-dentist (a man who repaired teeth as well as bodies). He and his wife needed a girl to look after their children and do house work. For that, she would be paid \$7.50 a month. It sounded like a great deal of money to her and she really enjoyed taking care of the children. Sometimes, she would help the doctor in the office by answering the phones and cleaning. She liked working in the office. Later, he put a phone in her room so she would be available to answer night calls. He depended on her more and more and told her often how pleased he was with her work. He also told his wife how much he liked Anna and her efficiency. As time went on, the doctor had her help in the office more often than she did in the house. This upset the wife because she did not want them together so much of the time. She told her husband and asked him to let Anna go. He asked her to be reasonable, reassured her that there was nothing between him and Anna, but that she was too valuable an employee to fire. The wife was determined and persistent, so, to avoid problems in the household, he told Anna the reason she had to leave. Anna was shocked to hear such a thing and cried bitterly. She loved her job and would miss the children. Why was this happening to her? She done nothing to provoke it.

There was no time to linger over her sad fate since she needed to find another job immediately. It wasn't long before she was hired to do outside farm work in Germany. It was hard work in the fields. She wasn't used to such labor, and, in just a few weeks, she became very tired, run down, and terribly depressed. One evening, after a strenuous day, she felt so dreadful, she went to bed early without eating her supper. The next morning, she awakened and felt feverish. As the day progressed, she became worse. The doctor came, admitted her to the hospital, and diagnosed her illness as typhus. She lay in bed for many weeks fighting the dread disease. Communicating with the hospital staff was almost impossible since she didn't understand the German language.

She was afraid she might die without ever seeing her mother again. She became terribly homesick, and her longing for home seemed to be worse than the disease she was suffering from. Slowly the fever subsided. Every day, she became stronger. After a few more weeks, she was released to go home. She was still wobbly and weak, but the joy of leaving this place gave her courage and strength. The money she had saved by working so hard, paid her bills, and she was relieved to be able to be rid of those obligations. With the hospital and doctor bills paid, she felt free and independent. It was good to be well again. She'd be working again soon, but, right now, the most important thing was to go home and be with her mother.

Anna's father heard that she was home again and sent word that he would like to see her about an important matter. She wondered why, all of a sudden, her father was interested in her. Curiosity allayed her mistrust, so she went into town as soon as she could. Her father greeted her warmly, told her how pretty she looked, and how happy he was that she was well again. "He's unusually nice," she thought. "He must be up to something". Then he told her that she was at the age when she should be thinking about a suitable man for marriage. He had such a man in mind, he said, and would like her to meet him. The man her father had chosen for her was a bit older than she was, but he had money.

He would be a 'good catch' for any girl, according to her father, and he wanted Anna to be the one. Anna was furious that he would even consider such a thing. She told her father that she was not considering marrying anyone just yet. She hadn't met the man she would want to spend her life with, and when she did, it would be her own choosing - not her father's. It would be a man she loved even if he weren't rich. But, right now, she had more important things on her mind. She planned to go to America. He became very angry with her. How dare she defy her own father! He vowed to have nothing more to do with her; he would wash his hands of her completely. With that, he turned on his heel and walked away. Anna was aghast. She couldn't believe what she had heard - marrying a man her father's age just because he had a little money. Never! Now she was more determined than ever to leave here and make a new life in America,

Anna had a friend named Catherine, who, too, wanted to go to the new country. She, like Anna, thought about nothing else. They would take any job and work hard so they could earn the fare. Catherine heard of job openings at the immigration building where they needed girls for the kitchen and dining room. They went there immediately and were hired. The job paid well and they worked long hours, but they didn't mind. They would make enough money here and would sail away to the land of their dreams.

Since they were busy, the time went quickly and the savings grew, Soon it was time to buy the tickets for the boat that would be taking them away from all of this. Anna didn't have quite enough money saved she borrowed from her sister, Polly, who was already married to a man of some means. Polly was delighted to lend Anna the money. She was excited about her sister's adventure and wished she could go, too. The night before they sailed, family and friends came to say good-bye. The next day, it was hard to say a last good-bye to her mother, who was crying very hard. Anna promised her mother that as soon as she could, she would send for her and hoped it wouldn't be too long.

Her mother was sad and reluctant to let her go, but she reasoned that it was a good opportunity that her daughter may never have again. She held her close, kissed her, and then - Anna was gone.

It took six weeks to cross the ocean, and they were treacherous ones as the sea was very rough. Anna became very sick, spending most of the time in the cabin and not being able to eat. At times, she was so miserable that she wished she could die. The weeks went by slowly, and, finally, they landed. What a relief to put her feet on solid ground again, with no more tossing about on the rough waters. She was so thankful to God that they had crossed the ocean safely. They boarded the first train going to Winnipeg, Canada. That was where most of her countrymen that had come before her had settled. It would be good to hear someone who could speak her language.

April 21, 1911. They got off the train at Winnipeg, tired, bewildered, and homesick. This was the end of the road. Now they were on their own. They walked away from the station carrying their bags, wondering where to go and what to do next. The bags were heavy, so they set them down to rest their arms. Suddenly, the gravity of their predicament overcame them and the two girls sat down on the curb and started crying. Tears were rolling down Anna's face. When she felt a hand on her shoulder and heard a gentle voice saying, "Why are you cry?", in a language she understood, She looked up into the face of a kind and gentle woman who wanted to know if she could help. Anna talked rapidly, between sobs. She wanted to get her story told before this nice person disappeared. She told her about being strangers in this country where they knew no one, had no place to stay, had very little money, and didn't know where to look for a job. The woman smiled sympathetically. She, too, was a stranger here once, some years ago. Someone was kind and helped her: now she was glad she could help someone else. That she was here at the right place at the right time; "God has a hand in this, I know, she said". She told the girls of a hotel where she was the manager and needed help. "The hotel is just a short distance from here. Come with me. I'll show you and maybe you would like to work for me". The girls quickly accepted the job offer. Just seeing her, was enough for them; she was so kind and told them they could have their meals and room starting tonight. It was too good to be true. They would have a place to stay. The tears were quickly dried, they picked up their bags and followed the woman. It was good to walk after the long train ride.

After a good night's sleep, the girls were up early, anxious to get started on their new jobs. Anna's appetite returned; she enjoyed a big breakfast, felt very happy and healthy, and was ready and eager to start a new life in this new world.

Catherine's job was in the laundry room: washing, ironing, and folding linens. Anna was to clean the rooms and make the beds. When the woman told her that she was to make the beds, Anna looked perplexed and said that she had never be taught how to use lumber, hammer, and nails. The kind lady laughed and told her she meant for her to put sheets, blankets and bedspreads on beds - not build them! Anna was relieved. She would enjoy doing that. The job paid \$15.00 a month, a princely sum for a girl to make. Why, even the men in her country didn't make that much. She was so excited that she wrote to her mother that night.

It wouldn't be long until she would make enough money for her mother's fare, pay Polly back, and have some to put away for savings. Maybe Polly and her family could come with Mother, as well as her other sister. She prayed for the day her mother and sister could come. She missed them so very much.

The girls enjoyed working at the hotel; the woman was easy to work for and treated them well. They made friends easily and soon they were going to shows and for walks with other girls. Life was becoming very pleasant since there was so much to do and to see. Anna became good friends with a girl named Mary, who later was instrumental in introducing Anna to her uncle, who became Anna's husband.

In the meantime, a man she used to see at her own uncles house in the old country, when she was growing up, found out she was in town working in the hotel. This man had come here earlier and was working nearby. Her uncle had written to Harry as he was called, and encouraged him to visit his niece. He assured him that she would be glad to see someone from home. Harry was looking forward to seeing the pretty little girl he used to know.

He surprised her one day, came to the hotel, and asked to see her. When Anna came out and saw it was someone she used to know and a friend of her uncle's, she was delighted. How wonderful to see someone from home! She rushed over to him, and, all out breath, started asking one question after another. Of course, Harry was pleased that this beautiful young girl was so overjoyed at seeing him. Since he had never married, she seemed like a good choice. He misunderstood her joy at seeing him for love, and thought she was really crazy about him. Before he let her go, he promised to see her again, and soon, maybe a show tonight? Anna accepted gladly.

And so it went. He came often, wanting to see her alone without her friends. Anna would argue that they were her good friends, that she enjoyed being with them, and if they couldn't go along, that she'd stop going with him. Anyhow, she thought he was too old for her and quite boring and possessive. She felt more and more uncomfortable with him and wanted to discourage his romantic intentions.

One evening, a group of her friends went with Anna and Harry to the show. As they were getting their seats, she, gently and playfully nudged one of the girls to sit next to Harry. The show was dull. With Anna not beside him, Harry dozed off. As soon as the girls saw him sleeping, they tip-toed out of the theater, thinking that they were well rid of him. They hurried out into the street, talking and giggling about the joke that they had played on Harry. As they neared the hotel, there sitting on the steps was Harry. He hadn't been entirely asleep and had heard the girls, so had gotten up and taken a short cut. The joke had backfired and the girls were furious at him.

Meanwhile, Anna was beginning to dislike him more than ever. Mary, her good friend, was insisting that she meet her uncle, Tom Obach. One day, she brought him to the hotel. Anna liked him immediately and they became good friends. He was young and handsome; they enjoyed being together and getting to know each other.

Before long, they were dating steadily. She had always been around older men, and, it was different, somehow, being with this man who was just a few years older than she. She liked that very much. They had so much in common; so much to talk about. She felt so at ease with him, and had this wonderful feeling. Could she be falling in love? Tom had come to Canada a few years earlier, had bought a small farm, and was doing very well. How nice it would be to have a home, she thought, to settle down and have a family. "Tom is such a nice person", she said to herself. "I think I could live with him the rest of my life". She smiled as she secretly made this decision. Harry was very unhappy at the turn of events. "No one can have my girl. I'll see to that", he loudly proclaimed to whomever would listen.

Anna was so engrossed in her happiness, she didn't pay any attention to the stories she heard about what Harry was saying. When he called her, she refused to see him. That made him angrier than ever and he became obsessed with his hatred for Tom and Anna. If he couldn't have her, no one else could. His jealous mind was becoming twisted and he went as far as asking a man to get rid of her. The man agreed, but only to protect Anna, so he could prevent Harry from harming her. Harry was sick. He was certain of that. He had blown this all out of proportion. He needed help, so, to stall him, the man promised that he would take care of Anna. And that he did. He told Anna about Harry's plans, and what he was asked to do. Anna couldn't believe such a thing could happen. The man warned her that Harry was sick and that he would see that he got attention, but for her to be careful - not to be out alone, ever, especially at night. She became terribly frightened but didn't tell anyone about it; not even Tom. She hoped it would soon all blow over, but she was extremely careful never to be alone.

She and Tom continued seeing each other often. She found so much happiness with Tom that soon the problem with Harry faded from her mind. She hadn't seen him for so long that maybe he had gotten well and left town. "I hope and pray he did", she said silently.

Some time later, one beautiful summer evening that Anna will always remember, Tom told her he loved her and asked her to marry him. She was thrilled and excited and said "yes" quickly, not believing what she had heard. This was one of the most beautiful times of her life. This very moment, she could hang on to forever. The news about the engagement spread quickly. Her mother, sisters and their families were already settled here. She was happy that she could share her plans with them.

The young couple set a date for their wedding, then everybody got into the act. There was great excitement. Time didn't stand still and there were many preparations to be made.

The evening before the wedding was a cold, dark, bleak, November night, but Anna set out to her bridesmaid's home with great anticipation. She was alone, but had not thoughts of fear. This was the first time she had been out by herself at night for a long time. Her path led her under a train trestle. As she approached it, someone stepped out and struck her hard across her face. It stunned her momentarily, but it was too dark to see who it was, and, whoever it was, disappeared as quickly as he had appeared. All she could do now was to run as fast as she could, and she did, arriving at the home all out of breath, her face flushed and stinging.

The girls saw that she must have been running, saw her flushed face, and teased her, asking her if Tom had been chasing her to steal a kiss, then they giggled. She let them think that, but the memory of that moment under the trestle haunted her all evening, even as she joined in the merriment. The bride and her attendant spent the rest of the evening weaving wreaths from fresh flowers to wear in their hair. They had such a gay time; visiting, laughing joyously, and eating tidbits from tomorrow's feast.

Tom Obach and Anna Melanec were married November 10, 1911. She was a lovely bride and he, a handsome groom. The wedding celebration lasted two days, with plenty of food, drinking, and dancing. She was very happy. She had come to America and found her Prince. Her dream had become a reality. Anna moved into the house with Tom and, happily, began her married life. In the five years that they lived there, she gave birth to two beautiful girls, Mary and Rose. They were healthy, active babies who gave Tom and Anna great joy.

After five years on his little farm, Tom realized that, with his growing family, they would need a bigger farm. He read where the United States Government was letting out large tracts of land to anyone who wanted to homestead, especially directly south of them, in the state of Montana. He became interested enough to inquire about it and wrote to the state of Montana for more information. By return mail, he got good news. He could homestead in Montana. All he needed to do was to pick the land and register the area at the county seat, build on it, and till the soil to make a living. Anna sensed great excitement in his voice as he was telling her of his plans. She didn't know what to say. She was so happy here with her family and many friends. She couldn't imagine leaving it all behind and moving to a strange place. She didn't want to disrupt her children since they were happy here, too. What did they know about Montana? Who could tell them? There was no one that she knew that was ever there.

There was no dampening of Tom's enthusiasm. He hoped and prayed that Anna would join him in his excitement as he talked about the vast amount of land they would have to farm and to raise cattle on. He felt confident that they would make a good living and raise a big family, too. Anna finally agreed, but only if her mother could come with them. Of course, no question about it. He'd be delighted to have her. He even suggested that her sisters and their husbands and families should all come with them to homestead their own land. He wanted his mother to come, too, but she decided against it and agreed to come later.

When Anna told her mother of their plans, she tried to paint a beautiful picture of their future home and said that Tom would make it so. Her mother was aghast! Why would her daughter want to leave all of this and go to some wild place where the cowboys and Indians were always fighting? And, now that she was with her third child, it wouldn't be safe for her or her children. "Don't go", she cried pleadingly, "you've had enough trips by coming here. Don't expose yourself and your family to all that danger".

Anna was upset by her mother's reaction, and she cried too. She said she didn't really want to move, but Tom was insistent and she wouldn't let him go alone. She so hoped her mother would reconsider - everything would be more tolerable if she came. The children would miss her and may not even remember her later. That did it! Her mother would not let the babies go without her. In the excitement of packing and parties, she almost looked forward to going. It shouldn't be too bad, she prayed silently.

They sold their house, their farm, and many things they couldn't take with them. Most of the personal things, such as furniture, a few head of cattle, and some chickens, they hauled by train headed towards Saskatchewan. From there, they would go to Montana by horse-drawn wagon.

Her sister, Polly, her husband, Mike, and their two children, Anna and John, decided to head West with them. The younger sister and Tom's mother preferred to wait and go later.

When they boarded the train, they lacked one seat- one person would have to go to the cattle car. No one volunteered, so Anna's mother said that she would. It upset Anna to have her mother there with all the smelly animals; but the men didn't offer to take her place, and Anna had to be with her children. Her mother didn't complain. She huddled in the corner of the car and prayed all night. By day-break, she was cold and sore from sitting up so long, but soon she warmed up and felt better. Soon they would be there.

After a long, crowded train trip, they arrived in Saskatchewan. It was a small town situated in the vast, open prairie; the cold North wind was chilling, the ground covered with snow - not very inviting, it even looked hostile. Here they would buy their provisions for the trip to Montana. Since Anna was with child, Tom didn't want to risk her and her baby's life by going on by wagon. She had only a few weeks before delivery. They would wait here until the baby was born.

The two families made a comfortable shelter with the tents and proceeded to wait. Anna was more anxious about this delivery than the others. What if something should go wrong and she would die so far away from anyone they knew, but as always before, Ana turned to God to stabilize her. She prayed through the night. By morning, she was sleeping well, and when the first sign of labor began, she was ready for it. Miraculously, this labor was shorter and easier than the other two. She had another little girl - Bronie. Even with the joy of having this healthy baby safe and herself well, she thought about Tom, wishing she could give him the son that he so desperately wanted.

They didn't start on their journey until Tom was sure Anna and the baby could stand the trip. Finally, Anna gave the word that she was ready. The trip to Montana took three days of hard, rugged, travel: the wagon was rough and bumpy over the rocky trail. It was hard to keep the two older children occupied in the wagon all day. They were tired of being so confined and too little to walk with their grandmother and Polly's son John, who kept the cattle in line. The baby was no problem. She slept and ate and seldom complained.

The coyotes howled mournfully and eerily at night. Anna feared for her children in case the coyotes came looking for food. Tom reassured her that coyotes were cowards who wouldn't bother them; they just liked to hear themselves howl. After what seemed like such a long time they arrived at their destination - the place where they would spend many years.

As her eyes scanned the horizon, Anna was dismayed when she saw a vast, open area of nothing. She shuddered, not from the cold Montana wind, but from within herself. She felt panic.



There was a lump in her throat, and suddenly, she became terribly angry at herself for allowing Tom to do this to her and the family. She would leave here if at all possible.

Tom noticed that she was withdrawn. He understood that what she was seeing was entirely different from what they had in Canada. He was disappointed too, with the barren land, no trees, no mountains, no lakes or streams. He had a strange urge to turn around and go back, but instead he put his arms around her; told her that he too, was thinking the same thoughts she was. But, together they could do it, he knew. He had great faith in God. With His help everything is possible.

"How can anyone survive here?" Anna asked with tears filling her eyes. "Let's go back", she pleaded. Tom would not hear of it. He was a strong and a stubborn man and too proud to admit his misgivings. He would not run away from this; he would face it head on. Anna underestimated her husband. He did face the challenge, and with his brother-in-law, Mike, they set up a temporary dwelling to keep the family comfortable and proceeded to build a sod house. The ground was thawed now as it was April; so they could cut the sod in block-like shapes and lay them like they would lay cement blocks. It was hard work for the two men and John, who was still a very young boy. They worked from sunrise to sunset. Before long, the walls were up and windows set in. The lumber they had brought with them finished the interior and the roof; then the roof was also covered with sod. In later years, grass was seen growing on the roof.

The house was rugged, but comfortable; the sod was thick, it insulated the house well. The inside walls were white-washed with a paint substance they made by baking lime rock until it turned white and crumbly, then mixing it with water. They brushed this on the wall with brushes made from tail string grass they found growing near by. The string grass was tied in a bundle and boiled in water to make it more pliable. It was a horrible, sloppy job! The running paint adhered more to everything else instead of the walls. Most of it splashed in the eyes, head, face, and clothes. Many times, Anna would get some splashed in her eyes which almost blinded her. It had to be washed out immediately; the lime would smart so badly. In later years, she would say that she thought part of her eye problems might have been caused by the lime. Little by little, the walls would finally look spanking clean and white.

The floors were made of rough lumber that splintered badly. The baby was not allowed to crawl on the floor for fear of the splinters. It was hard for an active baby to be restrained. She wanted to crawl around, but, Babu (Grandmother) would carry her around in the house and only let her crawl outside - where it was safer. but dirtier. Soon, she learned to walk. Before the new babies arrived the floor was improved.

Anna was well enough now to leave the children with her mother while she helped Tom. There was so much to do. They needed to build a house for Polly and Mike, a barn for the animals for both families, but most important, were the two outhouses. By Autumn, through sweat and toil, they had finished enough to survive the winter. Besides doing all the building, they had to plant a garden for the fall harvest, There was no time to be lonely or sad, When evening came, they were so tired that they would eat and go to bed. They dug a well by the house and one by the barn where water was pulled up by a pulley. Later, Tom bought a pump.

It was so much easier to pump the water rather than pulling up bucketfuls by pulley for the animals. The well by the house was also used as a cooling place for perishables. When the first frost came in early fall, Anna, in her snug house, wondered how much work could be accomplished in such a short time. They had even brought in all their wood from the creek, miles away, had it chopped and piled, ready for the cold days and nights ahead. They made a wagon trip to Canada and brought home a load of coal to supplement the wood. They should be very comfortable here this winter. In fact, Anna was looking forward to the days when she wouldn't be working so hard and the quiet, restful evenings at home by the fire. She had so much sewing to do and wanted to give the children more time. She would like that. All summer long she was hardly ever in the house except to eat and sleep. The rest of the time she was out working with Tom or in her garden. She held her baby only when she nursed her and was thankful for that precious time.

The winters in Montana were treacherous. The temperature would get far below zero and stay for weeks in that frozen state. The cold blizzards would often blow the snow into six-foot snow drifts that almost buried the squat buildings. Life, out-of-doors was at a standstill except for feeding the animals and milking the cows. No one would venture far from home. It was dangerous to be caught in a snow storm on the prairie, since there was no shelter of any kind for miles around. Neighbors were far apart and the roads were merely trails. The nearest doctor was in a town forty miles away; a two day trip by horseback or sled. How could a family survive this hardship and loneliness? What power of faith they must have had and what strength within themselves.

Anna was fortunate that she had a healthy family and they hadn't needed a doctor yet. If any one developed a sore throat, cold, or an infection she had a cure or remedy for everything; but, first, there were her devout prayers. She relied on God for every start of her day and for seeing her through the night.

Castor oil and turpentine were the mainstays that were used for healing. Goose grease was a very valuable treatment for chest colds and sore throats. The turpentine was used to wash out a wound to prevent infection. Many times, for no other reason except that it was time for good cleansing out, the children lined up for a dose of castor oil. They would protest loudly, but in the end they would receive their share. Tom would use castor oil for the hangovers that he got for imbibing the 'home brew' he made. When he couldn't wait for it to age and drank it 'green', he suffered the consequences. He learned from experience, so after a few batches, he would wait until the brew was ready.

The animal's infections were also treated with turpentine. However, for a sore or scratched eye, the treatment was with sugar. A small amount of sugar would be placed in a little funnel made out of paper, then forced into the eye by blowing into the funnel while it was applied against the eye. It required several people to accomplish this, since of course, the animal rebelled. In a few days, the eye would be healed. For entertainment during the cold winter evenings the family played cards, read, did homework, or just played with their dolls and toys. The card games were fun. Tom enjoyed playing them with the children. He was an excellent player, especially at poker. In order to be sure that there were always cards on hand, he bought several decks at a time. Because his mother insisted that card games were 'play of the devil', she'd toss them into the flames wherever she could get her hands on them.

In fact, she would even take them out of her grandchildren's hands and throw them into the burning pot bellied stove. Anna didn't have much time or desire for card games. She tried to learn, but eventually gave up. She preferred sewing, or just sitting and watching the others play. Tom was a good player and had great luck at poker. Sometimes, the ranchers and neighbors would play all night. Tom was a consistent winner and the stakes were high - such as; horses or farm machinery. He even won a combine once, but he shared it with the others and helped them harvest their grain with it.

All the farmers would work together during the harvest. They would go from one farm to the next until all the grain was in. That was, indeed a busy time for the women too. Since the men worked extra hard, they required more food than usual; at least three big meals and a mid-morning lunch. This took a lot of cooking and baking. The women helped each other and the children pitched in and did as much as they could, helping with the cleaning and the dishes. The older ones were out in fields helping the men. None was ever idle for long - Tom saw to that. During the slow time of the summer, between the planting and the harvest, the children would weed, hoe, and dig rocks to prepare more land for plowing. The rock piles became bigger and bigger. Much of the land was never plowed even after the rocks were removed. Later, when the children became adults, they realized why they had been kept so busy digging rocks and preparing the land that was never cultivated. It was to keep them from becoming bored on this lonesome prairie.

Although the post office was only 12 miles away, it was a vast distance by foot and an all-day trip to get the mail each Saturday. Sometimes, Anna with her sister Polly or her nephew John would walk there. Other times, her mother would go. Occasionally, Tom would ride his horse but those occasions were rare as he was usually too busy.

The terrain along the Frenchman Creek was rugged and steep. To cross the creek you either waded or used the basket pulley - for those brave enough to sit in the basket that hung over the water. Held by a rope which was tied at each side of the bank to poles, the basket moved across as you pulled on the rope. Anna wasn't one of the brave ones. Instead, she would carry her shoes, pull up her skirt, and wade across at the most shallow place. In the hot summer months, it was most refreshing. In the cold, winter months, they got their mail infrequently; only when someone was coming to visit and picked up their mail to bring it along. In later years, as the land became more populated with more homesteaders, the government gave them a closer post office. The children would then go on horseback and be home in an hour.

There were more and more families moving in with children. Tom saw the urgency for a schoolhouse. He was very anxious for his children to learn at a real school; the opportunity which had been denied to him and Anna. Although they could read and write in two languages, most of their education had been self-taught.

Since the family had outgrown the old sod house a few years ago, it was not used much anymore. They now lived in a bigger house, built of lumber. Tom contacted the Superintendent of Schools in Phillips County and offered the sod house for a school room. The Superintendent, gratefully accepted and named it the "Obach School". Tom enjoyed the books the children brought home. He read them all. He especially liked US History, which was fascinating to him.

If there were things he didn't understand, he would ask either the children or the teacher. He was learning, too; he was so hungry for knowledge.

It was time for Anna to give birth to another baby, a little boy this time. All of her deliveries were at home with assistance of her mother and her husband. It worried her a great deal each time she got pregnant that things would go wrong, but her great faith always pulled her through without any mishaps. At last, she had a precious little boy. How the family adored him - and Michael thrived on all that love. he was a great joy to all who knew him.

As the years went on, she had four more girls; Paula, Elka, Kay and Marge. Each was as precious as the first. She was so busy now, but the older ones helped with the younger and the two grandmothers did their share of the work, too. It seemed like every two years, Anna had a baby. The youngest baby girl was born as fragile as a China doll, not robust and healthy like the others. She was very beautiful; it was as if God made her for Himself and just lent her to the family for a very short time. He took her to heaven when she was only six months old. Anna had cared for her day and night, but the baby cried constantly as if in pain. Because of bad weather, there was no way to get her to a doctor. On the day she died, the whole family felt as if they had died with her. The first tragedy had struck the family and they were grief stricken. Anna's arms felt empty. She was not sorrowful. Her baby was with God now, never to suffer again, but, oh, how she missed her!

The one room schoolhouse was filling up fast; all eight grades were taught in that one room. The teachers came from many different places. One year, the teacher came from as far away as North Dakota. Because the community was so sparsely settled and isolated, they suffered from loneliness and rarely stayed for more than one term. Occasionally one or two would come back for the second term. Anna was very kind to each teacher and each repaid her kindness with friendship. The family would be highly honored when one would be invited for supper, and the teachers, too, were grateful for the nice change. The young male teachers would notice the pretty girls, but Tom was a strict father. He allowed no dating.

One year, Mr. Alswager came to teach. He became popular, immediately, with the families and the students. He was a very nice person to have around. Just by talking with him, Tom and Anna were learning so much about the world outside their own small world. They asked many questions which he readily answered.

Mr.. Alswager enjoyed his walks and would go for miles around the countryside. He often took long hikes on weekends and sometimes would be gone overnight. One day after a cold weekend spent outdoors, he developed a bad cough, became very feverish, and had problems breathing. He was very sick and Anna feared that pneumonia would develop. She wanted to take care of him, but women were not allowed in a man's bedroom, her husband and mother-in-law protested. She felt so helpless. She knew he needed help badly.

As luck would have it, Tom had to be gone for a few days. Since he would not be there to help the teacher, Anna took over against her mother-in-laws threats that Tom would hear about it.

Anna moved the teacher into her home and made him comfortable on a cot near the stove. She sponged his feverish brow, put poultices on his chest and fed him quarts of chicken soup. Soon, he was responding to her nursing care and love, she had been up with him day and night and never ceased praying. His mother didn't follow through with her threat when Tom returned from his journey, and Mr. Alswager was well on the way to good health again. Tom praised Anna for what she had done and the teacher was forever grateful.

One year a nice young girl, named Margie Jones came to accept the teaching position. The contract was for only one year, but she stayed on for several years. She was a great deal of fun and popular with the families. When she came, she brought a phonograph and many records with her. She organized parties and dances. On Sunday afternoons, she'd push the desks against the walls in the schoolhouse, turn on the music, parents and children would come and dance all afternoon and into the evening. The parties were so popular that people would come from quite a distance. Young men on horseback would come to dance with the young girls. Often, the parents danced with their children. Anna would usually prepare a meal for everyone, and they all had such a wonderful time.

A young cowboy took a liking to Margie. Liking turned to loving and they were married. For a short while, she lived near by, but didn't teach. Everyone missed her so very much when she and her new husband moved away to live in town.

Riding on horseback was a great pastime for the older children, now entering their mid-teens. Bronie, especially, enjoyed the sport and loved working with a horse. She helped round-up the cattle, brought in the milk cows at night, or just went joy-riding. Tom bought a nice, gentle, mare for Michael and he shared her with his sisters. He named his favorite friend and pet, Babe.

Tom, also had a horse that only he would ride. He had a black, satin smooth shiny coat and he was a spooky animal who did not care to have the children around. Bronie was persistent, and hung around him as long as her father was close at hand. She tried making friends with the black, touchy horse; petting him, talking soothingly to him, until he started nudging her, showing her that he liked her. Bronie persuaded her father to lift her into the saddle and to lead her new friend around the yard while she rode him. Tom did. The horse reacted a bit strangely at first, but after a few more times he seemed relaxed. Tom handed her the reins and she rode him around the yard all by herself. She thought he was such a pretty horse, so black and so shiny - and she liked his spirit. The two of them got better and better acquainted and soon became really good friends. One Sunday, she asked if she could ride him all alone, away from the house. To her surprise, her father consented, but warned her to be careful. He saddled and bridled him, put her in the saddle, and away she rode - off down the road to adventure. The horse was walking at a leisurely pace, not being in a hurry to go any place special. Neither was Bronie. The view approaching the creek was always so beautiful at the spring time of the year.

Along the bank, trees were sprouting new leaves, some of the early flowers were blooming, the air was fragrant and heavenly, and she was riding this wonderful, big, black animal. Neither she nor the horse were paying attention to the trail. He was just walking by instinct, when suddenly, he reared up and screamed with pain.

Quickly she jumped off his back, not knowing what the problem was. She gently tugged on the reins, talking softly to calm the him. She saw that the back of his front hoof was caught by a barbed wire. While he was stepping over it he felt it and backed away just enough to catch it under his hoof. Now, he was frantically trying to remove it by sawing back and forth, cutting into the flesh. It took some coaxing and prayer before he finally stopped fighting the cruel barbs. When his hoof was on the ground, she quickly stepped on the wire, dropped the reins and with a slap on the rump he went across, free from entanglement. At first, she feared he would run away, but he stopped, stood still, and turned to look at her as if to say, "thanks". By now tears were streaming down her face. She was so upset. Walking up and gathering the reins, she petted him and slowly led him toward home. The hoof was bleeding badly and they had to stop and rest often. She soothed him with gently words and rubbed his neck and head. She was so worried that he'd lose too much blood. The house seemed an eternity away.

In the meantime, Tom was becoming concerned about her. She must have gone farther than she should have; maybe she was in trouble he thought. He called for Michael to get Babe saddled to go and hunt for his sister. As he was giving Mike directions, he raised his eyes toward the west and there was Bronie walking the horse very slowly.

He hadn't told Anna that he had let Bronie ride by herself as she would have been very concerned, so, he was indeed relieved when he spotted her. Wondering why she wasn't riding and why she was walking so slowly, he and Mike waited and waved to her. Bronie was too absorbed with her bleeding horse to notice them; she just kept trudging along. Finally, she heard their voices. She looked up and saw all the family out in the yard urging her to hurry. The word had gotten around that she was long overdue. When she finally got near enough for them to hear her, she excitedly told them what had happened.

Her father, immediately started treating the horse's wound. The bleeding had subsided a bit; it had begun clotting because of Bronie's good sense in walking the horse very slowly. Tom washed the wound thoroughly with soap and water. While Mike held the bridle tightly, he applied small amounts of turpentine so as not to burn the flesh too much. It didn't feel very good, but the horse knew he was being helped, so he submitted patiently. Next, he got a good rub-down, food, water and rest. He healed rapidly and recovered quickly, but Bronie never rode him again. It was soon after that painful experience that he was retired. Because of old age, he was put out to pasture. Occasionally, Tom exercised him by riding him around the pasture. He really missed the old horse when he died.

Anna and Tom had two more babies - Helen, a darling little girl, and two years later, a little boy name Roy. Her family was now complete, she thought. At last, they had another boy. What a joy he was! There were ten living children. What a brood! But all so wonderful! The girls loved the baby boy and spoiled him dreadfully, but he grew up, never-the-less, into a fine young man. The two grandmothers made their home permanently with Tom and Anna, so it was pretty crowded with such a large family. The house that they built after they outgrew the sod house, was quite adequate - it was a two story frame house. The top story had room for several beds. Downstairs, there was a nice living room, big kitchen, and a bedroom. Maybe it was a bit crowded at times, but they got along well.

Tom's mother was a big domineering woman who was always finding fault with Anna and the children. She would tell Tom things that weren't true and it hurt Anna when he preferred to believe his mother instead of his wife. The children liked their other grandmother better. She was a tiny, agile person, quiet and very loving towards the children. They were very precious to her. She taught them their prayers, bathed and fed the little ones, and soothed them when they were hurt. Anna was so busy with the out side work, she wasn't always there when the children needed her so they turned to Babu.

It seemed that every time Anna was pregnant, her mother-in-law demanded more and more work from her. She didn't think they should have so many children and so advised her son. When Anna was big with child, it was time to dig the potatoes. It was hard enough work for a normal person; the bending and stooping to pick the potatoes was not meant for a pregnant woman. Anna asked her mother-in-law if she could do the digging with the fork rather than doing the bending and picking. She thought it would be easier on her back, and, besides she could rest a bit as she leaned on the handle of the fork. The domineering woman (of whom Anna was afraid) refused and insisted that she bend down and pick while "her royal highness" did the digging. It was a slow process and her back ached dreadfully. At night she would be so tired that it felt so good to stretch out on the bed; sometimes, she even neglected to eat her supper.

After a delivery, she was out in the fields with only a few days allowed for recovery. Tired and worn out from carrying the baby, she worked along side of Tom, doing a man's job. She was grateful for a short rest when the infant was brought out into the field for her to nurse. She prolonged the nursing as long as she could; it felt so good to hold her baby and relax.

Anna always had a large garden and spent many hours weeding and hoeing. It represented food for the family and needed much attention. She canned vegetables and meat; made sauerkraut in the crock and pickles in the barrel. The potatoes, carrots, and all root vegetable were stored in the root cellar. The meat that wasn't canned was ground into sausage; the rest was hung from the granary rafters and stayed frozen during the winter months. The root cellar was located near or under the house. The dirt floor was lined with a layer of straw on top on which the fresh vegetables were placed, topped with another layer of straw with more dirt added on top. This way the vegetables were preserved all winter.

The farmers got together and stored ice the same way. They cut the blocks of ice, lined the bottom with straw then covered with a deep layer of straw and sod. The ice stayed frozen and ready for use during the hot, summer months ahead. On a hot summer day how good the ice cream tasted; how refreshing to have a cold drink or just to chew on a chunk of ice.

Mice were a real threat to the food supply in the root cellar as well as in the granary. Grasshoppers and garden worms were also big enemies of the garden and had to be constantly guarded against and kept under control. They could destroy a garden overnight.

One day, while hoeing her cabbage, Anna noticed an unusual amount of chewed leaves that must have been damaged during the night when the pests usually came out to eat. That evening, she prepared to spray the vegetables with the bug poison. She waited until the cool of the evening, finished spraying, and went to bed. She was very tired by now.

She was aroused during the night when she thought she heard a noise, or was it a dream? She was too tired to investigate and went back to sleep. Suddenly, at dawn, she awakened to an eerie silence. Usually, when the sun came up, the animals were stirring, eager to be fed; but this morning, it was too quiet. She felt uneasy and got out of bed very quickly. Running out the door, she noticed the garden gate was open. She ran to close it, and to her horror, she saw the terribly devastated garden. Nothing was left! She looked toward the pig pen. There they were, lying on the ground moaning with pain. Then she knew that somehow the pigs had gotten out of their pen and into the poisoned cabbage and they were dying. She ran into the house, awakened Tom and the grandmother, told them what had happened and begged them to hurry and help her with the pigs. Tom, who had been sleeping soundly reacted with anger, saying, since she had put out the poison it was up to her to take care of the pigs. She was so stunned by his remark that she staggered out of the house.

There was not time to lose. She had to work fast and alone. She quickly mixed raw eggs and lard, and with a large spoon forced this mixture into the mouths of the pigs. It was very hard to do by herself. She needed someone to pry their mouths open but no one was there. She had to do it alone; with God's help she would save the animals. She fed the emetic to the larger pigs first; they were not resisting now, just lying and moaning with pain. She went from one to the other until all six were treated. The perspiration was pouring down her body; the tears were blinding her eyes. She had done all she could. Now, it was up to God.

Suddenly, she heard a sound that was like music to her ears. The big sows were struggling to get up; they were retching and vomiting up the poisoned food. Soon, all the pigs were on their feet again, trying to rid themselves of the poison. "What a miracle!" she cried. She waited until she was certain that they had recovered, then placed them in another pen and cleaned up the poison off the ground.

Anna dragged herself back to the house. It seemed as if it had been hours ago when she had first opened her eyes to disaster but it had only been a few minutes. The sun hadn't completely risen yet. She went into the house quietly and lay down so as not to disturb anyone. She was so very tired now and drained of most of her energy. As she was dozing off, she heard Tom's mother in the next room complaining, "There will be no meat for the winter. What will we do?" In another part of the house, her own mother was somewhere on her knees, praying; but no one had been there when she needed them so badly. She didn't go into the room where Tom lay. She needed to be alone now - to thank God for His miracle and for using her as His instrument. She felt so exhilarated, so alive, so strong! Her fatigue and depression disappeared like magic. She didn't need to lie here any longer; she must be up and doing things.

The incident of the pigs was not mentioned again. When Tom saw them alive and well, he didn't seem interested in how Anna had saved them. He didn't ask and she was glad he didn't. She wanted to forget the whole episode as soon as possible; her momentary feelings of abandonment, helplessness, and hopelessness. But, there was a puzzling doubt in the back of her mind. Why was the gate open? She was the last one through and felt certain that she had fastened the latch securely, as she had all the other times.



Why was it open last night?

Anna would get more apprehensive every time she conceived, especially as she was getting older. She remembered her other deliveries; some were quite difficult. It wasn't the pain that worried her. What really concerned her was that something might go wrong and she would die, leaving all those little children. There was never a doctor present at any of the births. Tom and the two grandmothers helped her, and somehow, everything seemed to go quite well. Even if they had needed a doctor they wouldn't have been able to get one on time. The closest one was forty miles away which meant a 2 day trip on horseback.

At the earliest hint of labor, the older children would be sent to bed early, only to be surprised the following morning with a brand new baby. Tom's mother would take the baby immediately after birth, clean the tiny body, then wrap it snugly and warmly. Meanwhile, Tom and Babu took care of the other details of delivery. After the baby and mother had rested for a few hours, they were reunited for mother to hold and love the baby and later to nurse it.

Then, Tom's mother would take the infant to check it out thoroughly. To make sure the bones and joints were normal and healthy, she would stretch the elbow and touch it to the opposite knee, repeating the process to the other side. Next, she would bend the knees to touch the chin. If the baby did not react with pain, that meant the spine was straight and healthy. After this ritual, she would pronounce the baby hale and hearty. They were very fortunate to have such normal, healthy babies. This grandmother had an obsession about a "straight as an arrow" baby. She would put the infant on a blanket with its tiny arms pressed against its little body, straighten its legs and wrap it tightly in the manner of a papoose. She defied anyone to unwrap it, except when it was time to bathe or change the child. Anna knew that babies needed to kick and exercise, so she would unwrap them every chance she found. The babies would be so happy to be released and would kick and smile with joy. As the girls became older, they wouldn't let grandmother do that to the younger ones and took over their care.

When ever they needed another work or saddle horse, Tom would buy untrained horses or break the horses he had raised from colts, which also needed to be trained. Training took a lot of time and energy. Usually, he started by putting a novice together with a horse already broken. The wild horse was teamed with a strong, tamed animal that would help to control the unbroken horse. He would hitch the two together to pull a heavy load; the heavier the load the less trouble he would have with the high strung horse. And so it went, day after day, until finally the habit would be formed and the horse would be trained.

One weekend, Tom and Anna were preparing to go to Canada to take their young baby, Paula, to be baptized. Anna was so excited about the trip. She didn't often get a chance to go out. It would be nice to get away from all the chores and children and leave everything in her mother's competent hands. She was eager to see Tom's nephew, Pete and his wife Pearl, whom she dearly loved. She and Pearl had so much to talk about when they got together. They would stay there for the weekend and go to church on Sunday for the christening. Her excitement turned to anxiety when Tom announced that he was taking an untrained horse on the trip. He explained that the long trip and steady pulling was tiring and the horse wouldn't have enough energy to get too frisky.

Also, he would be teamed with a reliable mare and nothing would go wrong, he assured Anna. The evening before the trip, the clothes were washed and pressed; the baby's things and Anna and Tom's good clothing were folded and carefully packed. They went to bed early that night, looking forward to an early start tomorrow.

Up at dawn the following morning, they were eager to be on their way. Meanwhile, Bronie, who was still a very little girl, was taking in all the fuss and excitement. "Why does the baby get to go," she wondered, "while I miss out on all the fun". No one would notice if she crawled under the buggy seat. The blanket on the seat draped to the floor and she would be hidden from view. The family was busy getting organized and no one paid any attention to the little girl who climbed in the back of the buggy and crouched down under the seat. Bronie could hear her father talking soothingly to the new horse and patting the gentle mare. Someone held the reins while he hitched the horses to the buggy. The novice horse had been hitched before on a trail basis, but had never pulled before, consequently he was a bit jumpy, but the mare held him back. Bronie could hear her mother climbing in and wished she could sit beside her, but someone was handing the baby up to her. Since her mother would have enough on her hands, she decided to stay where she was.

Finally they were on their way. The road was rough and the horses were jerking the buggy, making it sway from side to side. Time meant nothing to the child. It seemed to her as if they had been traveling for hours and she felt a bit cramped. She poked her head from under the blanket to look around and could still see the house. Just as she was getting up to stretch her legs, Anna turned around and saw her. "Tom, she exclaimed, "Stop the horses ! Bronie is with us"!

Hearing her mother's upset voice and impatient remark, the frightened child began to cry. Anna climbed down and put her arms out to Bronie. Her voice was gentle now. She felt sad that they couldn't take her with them. She told her small daughter that there was no change of clothing for her and promised that they would take her some other time. Besides, by now Babu must be frantically looking for her. They could see the house in the distance. Anna asked Tom to turn around and take Bronie home, but he refused, saying that she could follow the road and that she would be perfectly fine.

Anna lifted the sobbing child down and turned her towards the house, warning her to be sure to stay on the road and follow it home. "Babu will see you and come to meet you," she comforted. As Bronie started on her way, she looked back to see the agonized look on her mother's face. Then she started running blindly. Not following the road, she ran into a nearby cornfield. The corn was taller than she and she couldn't see where she was and became confused. She walked and ran for what seemed like miles, until she fell exhausted. She must have fallen asleep.

In the meantime, Babu had missed her. She and the other children were looking for her, calling loudly. Some of the children were screaming at the top of their lungs. The loud voices awakened Bronie. She got up quickly and ran towards the noise. There they were. Her beloved Babu and her older sisters. She was not afraid now, feeling so secure in her grandmother's arms and promising never to be a "bad girl" again. Meanwhile, Anna's weekend was spoiled.

How could she enjoy herself not knowing if Bronie had returned to the house safely. She imagined all sorts of things. There was no way to find the answer until this long weekend was over. There was no telephone or anyone to send back to find out if all was well. She tried to join in the festivities, but her mind was worried and her heart was with her little child. The beautiful weekend that she had looked forward to for so long was miserable, and the longest that she had ever spent.

The trip back was uneventful. The horses were rested and "raring to go". The sooner they returned, the better she would feel. She prayed that all would be well at home. As they came up over the hill in sight of the house, her eyes scanned the area hoping for a glimpse of the child. Soon, she could see children playing and running toward them. Yes! There she was! Little Bronie - rosy cheeked and happily running forward as fast as those little legs could run. Tom stopped the horses and the children all climbed in back, except for Bronie, who sat in front with her father and mother. Anna hugged and squeezed her with joy.

Picking berries was always a happy outing for the children. Their cousins would come by with a sack lunch and empty buckets; together, they would leave to spend the day, picking and eating berries and having fun. Babu usually came along. She enjoyed being with the children and was always there in case of problems. One day almost ended in a near tragedy. That day they had taken their dog Rueben with them. He enjoyed running ahead, scouting and sniffing, occasionally chasing a rabbit that he never seemed to catch, then returning to check on the children that he had left far behind. After a fruitful day, with all the buckets filled with berries, they started back on their way home. Gently sloping hills suddenly gave way to become steeper terrain. The other children started walking up a slight incline, but Paula decided to take a short-cut, straight up the steep, rugged hill; the dog running on ahead of her. Apparently he liked the challenge too.

The rocks were sharp, the bushes prickly, and it was hard to get a handhold. As she was trying to struggle up while slipping backwards, she'd yell whenever she bruised herself and mutter under her breath. As she debated whether or not to continue upward, she spotted a flat rock directly above her head, an ideal place to climb to and rest awhile. Looking up, she strained for one last handhold, when - Horror! There, in the the same spot she was reaching for was the biggest rattle snake she had ever seen, writhing with fury. They were face to face, looking at each other. Apparently, he had been sunning himself and was aroused by her noisy approach. Because she had been talking loudly she hadn't heard his warning rattle. There he was! So very close!

She let out a piercing scream, lost her handhold, dropped her bucket and went tumbling down the hill, berries and bucket ahead of her. After she landed at the bottom, bruised but safe, she realized why the rattler had missed her. The snake had struck just as Reuben attacked and Reuben had deflected the fangs and venom into his own body. He had saved her life! He was a hero! Somehow, he managed to get back home before he collapsed. His body swelled to double his usual size as the poison took effect. They built a shelter for him where he lay, to shade him from the hot sun, bathed him with cooling water and gave him gallons and gallons of cooling water to drink. His soft brown eyes were sad and pleading, as the fever raged through his burning body. Slowly he recovered, started eating again, and his swollen body returned to normal.

Now that he was well again, they'd sing their favorite song about him: "Reuben, the Booben, the big-bellied dog. He ate more chickens than a good-sized hog." It wasn't much of a tribute to his heroism, but he was a polite dog, so he just smiled a little smile and wagged his tail in forgiveness. Reuben lived with the family for many years and finally came to a very sad ending. When he was about fourteen years old, some neighbor boys were hired to help with the haying. Even at his advanced age, when he was losing his eyesight and hearing, the dog was always around wherever the activity was. It was never proven whether it was accident or a cruel prank, but one day he was found dead with a rope around his neck, hanging from a hay hoist. Poor Reuben, he deserved a better fate than that.

There was another frightening incident which occurred while picking berries, this time involving Mary, the oldest daughter. They were out gathering buffalo berries, which ripen late in the summer, sometimes just before the first frost. Buffalo berry bushes have almost as many thorns as other berries. In order to avoid those sharp needle-like thorns, blankets were spread under the bush to catch the berries as they fell to the ground. The children gathered around hitting the branches with sticks to make the berries fall. It didn't take long to fill the buckets that way and the sour berries made delicious jams and jellies. On this day, the cousins came along. Just as they had finished and were ready to leave they heard a weird, eerie sound coming from the other side of a small hill. It became louder and rose to a shriek, and suddenly over the crest of the hill lumbered a dreadful apparition shrouded in white. It started running toward them.

The children panicked, dropped their buckets and ran wildly leaving Mary behind with the buckets, the berries and the blankets. She was frozen with fear as the form approached, closer and closer. It was almost within touching distance, when it threw off the sheet. There stood Aunt Polly, laughing fiendishly at her little joke. To her it was just a hilarious prank. For some reason the frightened children found it hard to laugh, especially Mary.

There comes a time in every family of pretty girls when young men are attracted like bees to honey. The girls were growing up and becoming interested in socializing and dancing. More and more young men came to call. Dances were held in schoolhouses and sometimes, they had barn dances. Almost every Saturday night there would be a dance somewhere, and they would drive many miles to attend, sometimes going as far as into Canada. Tom believed in chaperoning his daughters, there for he would either drive them himself or else would tag along with their dates, always taking the front seat.

The girls were not permitted to wear makeup, however if they had some on at the dance Tom wouldn't say anything in public and forget to mention it after they got home.

So, the girls really didn't mind their father's sitting in the front while they sat in back. It gave them a chance to apply makeup secretly, while he was engrossed talking to the driver. He said he didn't like to see pretty faces smeared with paint. Gradually, as the girls got older and he saw others using it, he learned to accept it. "But not too heavy," he warned.

Whenever Tom took the girls to the dances, he would dance with each one, then retire to the card room with the other fathers.

Occasionally, he'd peek out to let them know that he was still around. Anna seldom went anywhere. She was usually with child or with a new baby, or too tired, but she encouraged Tom to go. She wanted her girls to have all the fun growing girls deserved. Since farm life was often tedious and monotonous, they needed the diversion.

One particular Saturday morning, before a big dance that night, the girls were up early; doing their chores, pressing the pretty dresses, pressing their father's suit, fixing their hair and feeling very happy in anticipation of attending this dance. Earlier, they had met some young men that they liked and they were looking forward to seeing them again.

Tom had some problems with the backend of the touring car; there were some adjustments he had to make. He had to repair it so it would be ready by this evening. He jacked the back up and crawled underneath. Somehow, the jack slipped, the handle struck him, and the car went down. Luckily for him, cars were built higher in those days or he would have been more seriously injured. As it was, the car barely touched him but he got quite a wallop from the jack handle, which shook him badly and he decided he wouldn't be going out that night.

The girls were terribly disappointed but were very grateful that their father was not badly injured. There will be other Saturday nights, they consoled each other. Later that afternoon a rancher stopped by. He was about Tom's age and he came often to visit and eat Anna's good home-cooking. He was a bachelor, so he never refused when she asked him for supper. Occasionally, he would drive Tom and the girls to a dance. He had bought a brand new car and enjoyed showing it off. When the girls saw him coming, they were delighted, hoping that maybe he would take them tonight. Shorty was sorry to see Tom all bruised and offered to take the girls. At first Tom wouldn't agree, but after much pleading from the girls, he consented to let them go. Unlike Tom, Shorty would not dance with each one, since he considered himself too old; but he would join in the card games in the next room and check on them once in a while during the course of the evening. The girls loved this kind man.

Michael, the fourth child and the only boy, was everyone's favorite. He and Tom were together a great deal; they were good friends as well as father and son. Tom taught him things about farming while Mike observed and listened. He was very fond of all living creatures; fixed broken wings, fed the hungry and even walked around a worm instead of stepping on it. And he especially loved horses. His father gave him a saddle horse to call his very own; a gentle, little, roan mare that he named "Babe". The two of them would roam around the countryside, spending many enjoyable hours together. Babe was a good cow-pony. She enjoyed the excitement of rounding up the cattle for branding and was always ready to go. Mike was the first one to learn how to drive the Model T Ford. He, also was an expert with the old Avery tractor; plowing the fields and cultivating them. He was an eager and willing worker. Anna depended on him a great deal; the girls confided in him: he was everyone's friend. He loved Babu; he was so gentle and patient with her and listened and memorized while she taught him his prayers. He was a devout little boy.

The evening of New Year's Day, Mike was riding his horse, doing some of the routine chores.

It was a treacherous, icy evening; Babe slipped and fell with Mike under her, breaking his leg. Tom was nearby and ran to help his son. He put a splint on the leg and carried him into the house. Anna gasped and paled when she saw him brought in. She expected the worst, but Mike forced a smile to reassure his mother that it wasn't all that serious. The whole family was upset and crying while Anna comforted him and prayed over him. It was getting dark, so they would have to wait until morning to take him to the doctor. They would start at daybreak. Anna and Michael put in a very restless night; her heart ached watching her son suffer. She was beside him all night long.

Finally, the dawn arrived, the sled was lined with straw and covered with blankets, Mike was bundled warmly and gently laid down, with his mother seated at his side. The journey was long and uncomfortable but eventually they arrived with no undue problems. The cast was applied, and for the first time in two days, Michael was relieved of the agonizing pain. The parents spent the night at the hotel after checking Mike into the hospital. The doctor examined him the following morning and decided that he should stay there for a few weeks rather than endure the exhausting ride home so soon after the accident. Sadly, they said goodbye. He would be home in just a few weeks but they seemed like exceptionally long weeks. Ever since the accident Anna had felt uneasy. Perhaps it was a premonition, but she couldn't shake the irrational, gnawing fear. She kept reliving her feelings of dread as she remembered Mike's being carried into the house; She prayed she wouldn't have to live through that miserable day again.

After spring arrived and the fields were in bloom again things seemed much brighter. Mike's leg was completely healed and he was in good health, without even a limp to remind them. She put aside her feelings of trepidation to plan for the future. This year, they hoped to sell their farm and move into town to be with the children who had advanced into high school. The younger children would be going to a school in town too. Later they planned to buy fertile land in western Montana where there was water available for irrigation.

The family was excited about the move into town, there would be so much to do and to see there. They would be near stores, church, doctors and hundreds of people. Although it was in reality a very small town, it seemed like a big city to them after all those years of isolation on the prairie, with nearest neighbors miles away.

Both of the parents were tired of the gamble of dry-land farming. It was time to move on to easier times - and they did. They took only the things that they could haul in the back of their truck; the rest they sold, gave away or just abandoned. The faithful Avery tractor and the big rockpile were left behind and will be there until the end of time. They turned back to take one last look at the old homestead; in their hearts and minds they knew that they would never return to this place again. They had mixed emotions, remembering the happy times as well as the sad times, they were leaving behind. Now, they would look ahead with hope for a better future.

Michael and his father took turns driving the truck. It was great fun for Mike. He had never driven into town before, surrounded by the laughing happy family. He had driven in alone a few times, when he worked at the Fort Peck Dam, but this was different. Everyone was filled with excitement and joy as they embarked on this new adventure.

They arrived at the place they were to stay at dark, and unloaded the truck. Then Mike went out to move it off the street into the driveway. He had to crank it in order to start it. As he stepped in front of the truck to put the crank in he saw headlights of an approaching car. Before he could move out of its way, the car hit. He was trapped between the bumpers of the two automobiles; caught right at the legs.

He was stunned momentarily, but still conscious. Tom and Anna heard the crash and ran out as Michael collapsed. The driver staggered out of the other car and, by sheer brute strength, they removed Mike and laid him down, calling for someone to get a doctor, fast. They turned and looked at the man who had done this terrible thing. They recognized him; he was their former postmaster, a friend and neighbor - and he was drunk! Tom glared at him and pushed him aside. Anna cradled her son in her arms, crying softly and praying like she had never prayed before. Michael was in shock. Anna was urging the speeding car to go faster. They arrived at the hospital where medics were waiting with a stretcher. They hurried the injured youth into surgery and were frantically working to save him. Anna and Tom were allowed to be near and could see Mike's face. They were huddled with their arms around each other and saw Michael raise his head ever so slightly. He looked straight into their eyes, raised his hand as if to wave, smiled, laid back down - and died. He had lost too much blood; there was no way the doctor could save him. The parents were too shocked to cry; the tears would come later. They got down on their knees and prayed. Their beautiful son was dead. He was only 17. School was closed for the day and the whole town came to the funeral.

In the agonizing days that followed, Anna tried to reconstruct the happening and how it could have been prevented. Each time came to the only conclusion; that Michael who loved to live, was dead. He would not have wanted to live without his legs. It was small consolation. She missed him so painfully.

There was an inquest; the man was acquitted. The plea was that he had a large family, and he vowed to the judge that he would never drink again. To put him in jail would not bring back our beloved Michael. Both Tom and Anna tried hard to continue living a normal life here, but it was impossible. There were too many reminders. They had to leave as soon as school was out.

Some time ago, before they moved to town, they had taken a trip farther west with Pete and Pearl. They had heard that there was plenty of land for sale there. When they returned, they described the place they planned to buy. The land, near a small town called Charlo and not too far from Missoula, the home of the State University. The land was fertile under irrigation and sprawled at the foot of the beautiful Mission Range Mountains. It was the grandest, loveliest place they had ever seen. The mountains were majestic, with their jagged peaks topped with vanilla ice cream snow that never completely melted, not even during the hottest summer. What a lovely place to start their new life. They, as well as Pete and Pearl were so excited and eager to move immediately. But everyone had to wait impatiently for school to end.

Anna was beginning to think that there was no end to her moving. Maybe, when they were settled at this new place, they would stay a long time. She liked the house that was on the property and all the other buildings.

There was even a bunkhouse for extra sleeping space. During the long trip to their new home, Anna's thoughts reverted back to the past. Her mind dwelled mostly on the old homestead when she had been surrounded by her large family. She tried to remember only the good times, but couldn't control her memories.

The farm had usually brought them a good living, but there were bad years too. The depression years were the worst. For those who live off the land, drought and depression often go hand in hand. She remembered the long, hot, dry summers when nothing grew. Sometimes, it was too dry for the seeds to sprout, the ponds dried up and the well had less and less water for pumping. And those dust storms - those terrible dust storms, when midday turned into midnight and the whole world seemed covered with a blanket of brown. The wind roared across the barren prairie, tumbling tumble weeds, and anything else in its path. North and South Dakota and Wyoming dust clouds mixed and mingled with the Canadian and Montana dust to be dumped in Western Montana, stopped by the towering Rockies.

In the winter those howling winds blew snow instead of dust. The drifts were six feet and higher in some places and almost covered some of the lower buildings. One winter was especially bad. The flu that had killed so many people while World War I was devastating Europe finally found its way to this isolated community years later, and attacked Tom. He became deathly ill. Outside, a blizzard raged and the temperature dropped lower and lower to forty degrees below. Inside, Tom's body was burning with fever and his temperature was climbing higher and higher - dangerously high. Anna was worried and distraught and as usual turned to her source of strength in times of trouble - her God. She prayed for Tom's life, asked God to spare him and show her a way to bring down that burning fever that was threatening to destroy him. God answered in a most unconventional way.

From somewhere she got the idea that a hot, salt bath would help. She heated gallons and gallons of water and filled a barrel that was standing in the kitchen. Next, she poured in a vast amount of salt and half-coaxed, half hauled her weakened, near delirious husband to crawl into the barrel. The water was very warm but not hot enough to scald. When Tom emerged from his bath a half hour later, he was still very weak but his fever had broken and his temperature kept going down. He was a long way from being well, but he got progressively better as his appetite and strength increased.

Meanwhile, outside, the blizzard still raged, covering the landscape with a thick blanket of white and effectively burying the cattle's food supply, the dry grass on which they normally grazed. They had been rounded up and kept close to home at the onset of winter. Now, they must be corralled and fed hay from the haystack to keep them alive. Since Tom was so sick and weak there was no one else to do it except Anna. She dressed as warmly as possible and went out to brave the storm. She must do what she must do.

How well she remembered the other time when sickness had struck most of her family. The older girls came down with typhoid fever. It was summertime so they were taken into town to the hospital. Mary was very ill and not expected to live, hovering for days between life and death. Then, by some miracle she started to rally, was able to eat again, and gained strength.



It took many months for her to get back her former good health and the hair she had lost during her illness. Later, she told her mother about a strange experience she had while she was sick. It wasn't a dream, she was certain. It seemed as if she had died; everything was so beautiful and peaceful. She saw a beautiful, radiant lady who spoke to her and said, "Not yet, you still have a life ahead of you". Then she heard her mother's voice, getting louder and louder. She didn't want to come back but her mother was crying and calling her name; she had to return. Gradually, she opened her eyes and saw the family looking at her. She was glad to see them again, glad to be alive; but in her mind she knew that she would never again fear death.

Anna had just had a new baby when the typhoid first struck, a baby girl named Helen. Anna became run down, tired and worn out from caring for and worrying about the sick family. Tom and the two grandmothers didn't get sick. It was fortunate because they could take some of the burden from Anna. Her tired body had no resistance left and Anna was struck down with the disease. She became terribly sick. Tom feared she might die. The new baby was taken from her to protect the baby; an infant could not have survived that terrible fever. It was up to Babu and Bronie to be the substitute mothers.

Helen was a sad little baby and fussed day and night; she needed her mother. Nursing from a bottle didn't seem right to her and she would spit out the milk. Cereal or bread soaked in milk didn't taste like her mother's milk either. She had to be coaxed constantly and almost had to be force fed. She needed the food so badly for her little body to stay alive. Bronie carried her around all day long while Babu rocked her at night. This went on for such a long time that, little by little, the baby got used to this way of life and gradually began to forget her mother. She became very attached to her sister, Bronie. Even after her mother got well she would call Bronie, "Mamma". The first time the baby was brought to her mother after she started getting better, Helen refused to go to her and clung to Bronie. No amount of coaxing would relax her hold. Instead of being hurt, Anna was pleased. She knew the baby was in good hands. Eventually, the baby and mother were reunited and became good friends.

Shortly after the family recovered from their illnesses, Tom's mother had a stroke. Her advanced age plus the work and worry about the family, all contributed to it. She lay in bed for several days. It was now Anna's turn to stay well and nurse her mother-in-law, who lived only a short time after the stroke. Tom bought lumber and built his mother's coffin and painted it black. He also constructed a black cross to put over her grave. She was buried in a churchyard in Canada, the nearest sanctified ground.

All of a sudden, Anna was brought back to reality from her reminiscence, when she heard Tom exclaim about the beauty of the countryside, pointing out the mountains, trees and lakes. They were nearing their new home.

They settled on a 45 acre parcel of land which was all under irrigation. no more having to depend on rain for their crops to grow. The house was a two story frame house, large enough for their family. There was a big red barn with a hay loft and even some hay left behind. They bought some milk cows, pigs, chickens and couple of horses. The money they used was proceeds from the homestead they had sold to the ranchers before they left.

Tom wanted a goat or two, but Anna refused to consider it.

When they had lived on the homestead, they had a mean buck (male sheep). Anna was afraid he would hurt or even kill someone someday. Often, he would escape from his pen and chase anything within sight. He would chase the frightened children until they almost dropped from fatigue, fear kept them running until they reached safety. He waited until someone had to go to the outhouse, then lay down outside the door, ready to charge when they came out. Someone else would have to lure him away, so they could get back to the house. Anna begged Tom to get rid of the animal, but he only laughed and said he was just playing. "Some play", Anna said. "It's deadly and for keeps".

One day, Anna was going to the barn. She always carried a pitch fork with her whenever she went, for fear of the buck. This time, she was waiting for him. He was loose again and she saw him coming toward her at a fast pace. As he came near, she stopped and braced herself and held the fork straight out. As he came charging full force with his head lowered, the tines of the fork pierced his skull and entered the brain. He died instantly and that was the end of the beast. There were no tears shed over him.

She must stop living in the past so much she scolded herself. She is here - today - now. She must look forward to a promising happy future. They had a wonderful home, a friendly community, a church nearby and a school bus that stopped in front of the house. It was good to feel alive again. There was still much work to do but now they had more conveniences; electricity, water in the house, cream separator, refrigerator and even a warmer climate.

Anna enjoyed the close neighbors. They stopped by to chat or she and Tom would go to visit them. The little town of Charlo was near by to buy their staples, the things they couldn't grow. The Farmer's Cooperative bought their milk and cream and resold it in the city. She also sold eggs to them.

Anna always had a nice garden and shared it with her neighbors. She had more freedom now than she ever had before. There were no little babies; the children were able to take care of themselves. She could sit down now, once in awhile and not feel guilty. Her mother was feeling quite well still, and helped around the house a little, but was quite limited in her activities. She didn't go out much; only sat and prayed a great deal. Every time Roy, age five, would go near her he would hug and kiss her. She thrived on that from day to day. He continued loving her until she died.

Anna, Tom, and their family had two beautiful years in their new home in Charlo. They spent many hours just being a family. The children were growing up; getting acquainted with neighbor children and new classmates. Mary and Rose were married. Bronie was away at nursing school. The others were still at home. Some were in high school while the little ones were in grammar school. Life seemed so serene and peaceful for such a little while. Then - the storm clouds gathered again and once again there was pain and sadness.

Tom started having stomach pains which the doctor diagnosed as cancer and recommended immediate surgery. "How can that be?" Tom questioned. "I am only 52 years old. I have just begun to live". The only answer was surgery as soon as possible. Anna was told that day that Tom had only six months left to live. The words felt like bombs; She reeled and felt faint.

When the terrible news sank in, she wondered how she could live without him.

Rose was with her that dreadful day, and gave her mother great support. Rose lived in Missoula, quite near the hospital, and she stayed with her father almost constantly. Anna had responsibilities at home so she divided her time between her home and her husband, visiting Tom as often as possible. It was a difficult time for her; some days she could hardly get out of bed, she was so exhausted. Her emotions were strained to a breaking point and she could cry no more.

Rose sat by her father's bedside all the free time that she could spare from her work. She had always felt close to him as a child and when she was growing up; but now she felt closer than ever, as she held his hand, and with a soothing voice, tried to reassure him that everything would soon be alright again. When Tom dozed off, she would lean her head back and remember the days when her father was so young, so handsome and so very healthy. She remembered him as always working, building, plowing and doing so many things. How she wished they could all go back in time and relive the happy times when she tagged along after him through the golden fields of grain.

She remembered the first horse-back ride, when he lifted her gently into the saddle and led the horse. The time he found her sound asleep beside the 'salt lick' that was used for cattle. She loved the salty taste and would doze off beside it in the warm sunshine. As she thought about it now, she shuddered that she had been allowed to do such a thing. He would carry her in the house and lay her on the bed to continue her nap.

There were other happy times; the picnics, rodeos and dances when he always took his girls. He liked to look his best on these occasions and she would clean and press his clothes for him. Going to town was fun, too. It took two days by wagon. Eating in the restaurant was a joy; she even pretended that she liked iced coffee when he ordered some for himself and her. She was brought back to the present when she heard the doctor enter the room. He told her that Tom's blood count was low and he needed a transfusion. Her blood matched her father's but the doctor advised against her donating since she was underweight and under great stress. It could be harmful for her. Rose begged him to take her blood. She wanted so much to help, even if it was just a little. The doctor agreed to accept a half-pint; he got the rest from other donors.

When there was nothing else they could do for Tom, Anna insisted that she should bring him home. She wanted to care for him herself. She made him as comfortable as she could, but he got progressively worse, suffering excruciating pain. The older girls, who lived away from home, were called home. Bronie came from her nursing school. The day she arrived, he begged for relief from pain. She got morphine and a syringe from the druggist, gave him a hypo and in twenty minutes the pain was gone. Anna held him as he died, quietly in her arms. It was if a part of her was torn away, but she mustn't grieve. He was at rest now; no more restless days and nights. No more pain.

She felt so helpless and alone. She depended on Tom for so much.

He had managed all of their affairs; her interest was more in the welfare of the children and the household duties. He had once offered to teach her how to drive, but she refused. "There will always be someone here to drive", she said. Now, she wished that she had learned; and had listened more carefully when he talked about the business of the farm, the financial part of it. She felt panicky, but quickly turned to prayer and God. She prayed that he would get her through one more crisis.

There was no time for grieving now or feeling sorry for herself. There was work to be done and it was up to her to do it. She was responsible for her children, her aging mother and the running of this farm. Somehow, she would find the strength and wisdom.

The echo of Tom's feeble voice as he lay dying, pushed her forward. "Anna", he said, "I'm not worried about what will happen to you and the children. You are a strong and intelligent person. You will do all right." She cried as she recalled his words. She would treasure them forever; she would live up to them.

A few days after the funeral, Anna went to the desk and gathered all the papers there and took them to a local lawyer. He looked them over and told her that there was some insurance; not much but enough to pay some of the debts. It was like money from heaven. The rest of what they owed she could pay with her egg and milk money. What a relief!

That night she slept better than she had for the last six months. The next day didn't look so bleak. She felt better and she was learning; the lawyer explained many things to her. Maybe Tom was right. She suddenly felt very strong and very smart; she felt able to face any obstacle that might come her way. As time went on, there were many of them, but she met them all head on. She continued selling milk, eggs and garden produce. She raised and sold beef and pork. Her good neighbors assisted her and she depended on them a lot. She especially liked the Evans family. Mr. Evans was invaluable in teaching her many things about running the farm. The Evans children and hers were very friendly and still are. Ella Evans was like Anna's own child. Anna depended on her so much. She was a great little worker and responsible person. Anna and her dwindling family lived in Charlo for seven years.

Time went on and so did the children. Paula and Elka went away to college to become teachers. Like Anna herself had been so many years before, many of her children were restless and adventurous and wandered to far away places. Teaching in isolated lumber camps and mining camps was rewarding work but as lonely as living on the prairie. The glamour and excitement of the big cities beckoned, and Paula went to work in Seattle.

World War II, which had started with the invasion of Tom's native country, Poland, was being fought in Europe. In the United States, this country was preparing for war; young men were being drafted and jobs were no longer scarce. Then came Pearl Harbor. The whole country basked in patriotic fervor and jobs were plentiful.

Elka, Kay and Marge went to Spokane and joined a Civil Service class to learn how to install and repair aircraft radios. They were grateful when the class was disbanded. The theory of radio escaped them, and the electricity shocked them often enough to make them wary of joining two wires; never knowing whether they were negative or positive. From there, they went to Portland and ultimately to Seattle to work at Boeing.

Adventure still called and the girls answered. Elka joined the Red Cross and traveled to far away southern Korea, which was not yet partitioned. Kay joined the Marine Corps Women's reserve and went to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, not quite so far away but just as foreign to her. After boot camp, she worked in the Washington D.C. area.

Marge learned Morse code and became a control tower operator in Anchorage, Alaska. She was working alone one night and the weather was so cold and blustery, even by Alaskan standards, that all aircraft were grounded. With nothing to do during the long, stormy night, she became bored and her imagination started working overtime as she watched the snow swirling outside and heard the wind beating against the building. She imagined a horrendous tidal wave coming ashore, destroying Anchorage, and carrying people out to sea.

On impulse she telegraphed the carnage to the wire services, complete with graphic details of screaming people clinging to rocks. The Washington Post head-lined the story the next day, her sister, Kay, read it with horror and awaited word of Marge's fate. Marge's fate was demotion to Fairbanks. She apologized and they needed help so badly that she wasn't fired. The following day war news again claimed the headlines, with not a word of the terrible disaster in Anchorage.

Anna didn't like to have her girls go so far away from home. She realized she had no right to hold them; her mother had let her go. They would be back to visit, she knew, and happier because she had let them go. Of the eleven children she had borne, there were now only two children left at home, Helen and Roy. She was getting older and tired of the hard work on the farm; she needed something smaller. She made plans to buy near Missoula. She was responsible for only four people now, herself, her mother, Helen and Roy.

Orchard Homes was on the outskirts of Missoula, within walking distance of town. It was a lovely community and she made friends easily with her new neighbors. The house was in a lovely setting on 5 acres of land, with a river bordering one side. She continued selling eggs and garden produce but only milked one cow, enough milk for their own use. They lived there until Roy was ready for high school.

She made another move, each one more profitable than the last. She was able to sell the Orchard Homes property and bought two houses in Missoula. They were side by side on the same street. Anna chose to live in the big two story house with a basement. The other, she rented out. Her children tried to get her to rent the big house as it would bring her more money but she said she wanted the extra rooms when her children came to visit.

Helen and Roy both graduated from high school in Missoula and started on their travels. Her children were, like Anna, curious about what was on the other side of the mountain.

Now, Anna was where she had started years ago, alone with her mother. What a lot living she had lived since then and how fast time had flown. Her mother was getting old and very helpless. She needed constant attention. Anna was with her day and night. When she had to leave, a neighbor would come over and stay with Babu.

In the early morning, while her mother was still asleep, Anna would quietly slip away to attend morning Mass. She was always back before her mother awakened. Her mother was like that several years, then one cold November day, she died.

Just as suddenly as they all came, they all left. The children had come to the funeral to say goodbye to Babu. Now they were gone and Anna felt so terribly alone and sad. If it hadn't been for her wonderful friends and neighbors, she would have been lonely indeed. All her life, she had worked and taken care of someone. Now, there was nothing to do; no one to take care of. Gradually time healed the wounds and she began to enjoy the freedom from hard work and responsibility. She could make plans to come and go as she pleased; no need to hurry back. She became more relaxed and enjoyed her life without worry.

The big house was soon filled with college boys, renting rooms. In the summer, she worked in her garden, raising beautiful flowers as well as vegetables. Life was calm. She was happy but there were moments when she was lonely for her family.

Most of the family settled in the Los Angeles area. The girls were pressing their mother to move near them; to get away from the cold Montana winters and enjoy the mild California climate. It didn't take much persuasion. She sold her Missoula home and went to live with her youngest daughter, Helen and her family. Life was enjoyable living near so many of her children and grandchildren. She made friends with the people from Church and continued going to daily Mass. She was so happy here.

Then tragedy struck again. Her daughter Marge died. She hadn't been feeling well for several years, but rarely complained, so no one realized her illness was serious. She died suddenly. Again, another part was taken from Anna. How many of her family had she buried and mourned? How could she continue with so much grief?

A few years later, it was her turn to be taken care of after she suffered a slight stroke. Her right side was affected, and for a short while, she could not speak or move. After days and nights of constant, devoted, care and attention from her two daughters, Helen and Paula, she slowly regained halting speech and mobility. Months later, she could speak quite well again and walk slowly with the aid of a cane. Her right arm however, has never regained it's strength.

She has undergone successful cataract surgery in both eyes, but the years have taken their toll. She can no longer see well enough to read, but still enjoys and laughs at her favorite television program, "I Love Lucy".

Her life spans more than years - it spans countless modern miracles. The greatest wonder to her was watching a man walk on the moon.

Instead of going by horse and buggy, she can fly and watch the clouds below. Instead of washing and filling a coal oil lamp, she can flood a room with light by flicking a switch. She can flush a toilet instead of trudging to an outhouse in inclement weather. Cooking with gas has replaced chopping and carrying in wood. She can fill a room with music by turning on a radio. All the inventions of the last century that her grandchildren and great grandchildren and great-great grandchildren take for granted, fill her with awe, and she remember to thank God for the privilege of having lived during these wondrous times.

## Epilogue

Bronie, who wrote this tribute to her mother, died of cancer just before Christmas last year \*(1980), after a brave, painful, six month struggle to stay alive. To spare her more grief, Anna was never told, and still thinks that Bronie lives. And she does. Somewhere.

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My notes:

This epilogue was included with Anna's story. It appeared as the last paragraph on the last page. Obviously it was not written by Bronie, although the writing style is so like hers. I assume her daughter Cindi added it.

\* I added the date- pjq

Anna died four years later in October of 1984 in Los Angeles.

Anna Marie Obach 09/08/1893 - 10//1984

\*\*Tom Obach 03/14/1886 - 08/19/1938 in Lake Co. In Anna's Story he was diagnosed with cancer at age 52'

\*\*Michael Obach died 09/22/1935 at age 17 he died in Phillips Co.

\*\*Mary Milanec died 11/27/1951 at age 88 Anna's mother

I have seen Anna's last name spelled three ways; Anna Milanec, Milanek and Melanec. I think her middle name was Marie.

Note: Tom and Michaels age at death seem to be confirmed in the story. As a child I assumed Anna's mother lived longer than 88 years. I don't recall her real first name but Mary seems appropriate and she was the only Milanec that died in Missoula county in the 1950's. She died in the month of November which is confirmed in the story.

\*\* I discovered the death dates for Tom, Michael and Anna's mother at

<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~mtlcgs/mtmsgs/mtdeath300.htm>

There appeared to be some confusion regarding Anna's birthplace. Bronie gives it as Austria in the Principality of Galicia. Other relatives think she was born in the city of Lvov, Ukraine. Founded in the 13th century in Eastern Galicia, the city of Lvov was under Austrian rule (Austro-Hungarian Empire) from 1772 to 1918. It fell under Poland's aegis from independence in 1919, until annexation to Soviet Russia in late September, 1939. Germany captured it in June, 1941; and the Soviet Union again, following the defeat of Germany in 1945. Presently it is within the borders of the recently independent state of the Ukraine. Anna immigrated to Canada in 1911 when Lvov was under Austrian rule, so she could have been born in Lvov, and probably was. Anna spoke Russian, Bronie and her sisters spoke some, and when we would visit grandma the Russian language was used often.

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