

The Secret Prank

Lydia Ketterling lives in Elgin, North Dakota. She recalls some of her experiences on the prairie as a child and as a young woman with small children of her own. Her account follows:

We were probably six or seven years old when two of my brothers got into a fight. The younger brother ran to a high hill in our neighbor's pasture, and we followed, chasing him. When we had climbed the hill, there was a big rock near the top. All of us were out of breath, and the boys had already forgotten about their quarrel, and so we all sat down on the rock, enjoying its warmth from the sun.

Then, one of the boys pulled out a match from his pocket. "I wonder if that grass would burn if I lit it," he said.

Yes, it burned alright! It burned and burned!

We tried to rub it out with our bare hands and bare feet, but it got too hot, and we were unsuccessful.

So we ran lickity-split back home, hoping our parents weren't awake from their afternoon nap. We were lucky. No one saw us return.

Then, all at once, one of my bigger brothers saw it. "Fire! Fire!" he yelled, waking Father up. They hitched up the wagon, filled a barrel of water, took burlap sacks and forks and rushed off to the hill. The neighbor also had seen the smoke, and he hurried over to the hill to try to save his pasture.

Finally, they got the fire out. Us kids were so quiet! We didn't say a word! We just kept watching our father's face as he kept wondering aloud how the fire got started—there were no clouds in the sky, no wind, there had been no lightning, he said.

The cause of the fire remained a mystery to him. Much later, when I was married, I heard him tell my husband about that miracle fire—so I thought I had

better tell him. (I figured I was safe now!) When I told him that my brothers and I had started the fire, he could hardly believe it. "How could small children keep such a big secret for so many years?" he asked.

We knew why! Father would have severely punished us if he had known.

The Flu in 1915

Then, in 1915, there was a bad flu. People called it the War Flu. Many people died. There was a lack of doctors, and people were careless. My mother caught it first. Father called the doc, and she got well. Then we all got it, except one brother, age 15. He had eaten garlic and onions sliced in vinegar and sugar. We always thought that's what kept him from getting sick.

Our oldest brother, Henry, was overseas in war. Often he was on the front line, but he never got hit, and came home without a scratch. Oh, how our parents prayed for his safety! Henry's 82 years old now. Out of our 15 children there are only five still living.

My parents came from Russia to the States—with five small children. Mother would tell us: "What a sail!" It was 17 days on the ocean. All the children got seasick, and Mother's sister was very sick. Oh, how they prayed none of them would die—as the dead they put overboard and buried in the sea. They didn't want that to happen! Fortunately, they all got well with the Lord's help.

When my parents came to the States, they went to one of my mother's brothers, who lived near Kulm, North Dakota. They lived in a two-room sod house, and had three children. For sleeping, straw was put on the floor and covered with blankets. We stayed there a couple of months, and, later, we moved in with another neighbor who had a bigger house. My father then found

Grasshoppers came in so thick that we didn't know what to do.

better land 12 miles north and bought our homestead. His farming increased. I remember we had 20 horses and some cattle. The horses stayed in the barn all winter. The boys even had to feed them before they went to bed! Them horses were precious to the farmers in them days.

When The Grasshoppers Came

When I grew up I married Paul Ketterling. We were blessed with six children. We bought some land, built up a farm, had nice crops—and a good life together.

One summer, Paul came running into the house. "Come out and see what's coming," he yelled.

"My God!" I said. "What's that?!"

It was a big swarm of grasshoppers coming against us. Some hit the buildings. The children got scared and ran into the house. The grasshoppers kept on traveling to our crops.

"Wife, they will chew up our crop," Paul said.

And so they did.

Later, Paul cut the hay—what the hoppers left for him. Finally, the fields got green with thistles. The farmers had to cut them for feed. We had to sell our cows. Got only \$25 a head. Six we kept. Pigs had to go too, but we kept a few hens.

We were lucky to have a good president—President Franklin Roosevelt. He gave the farmers jobs—\$40 a month hauling gravel with a team of horses and wagon, building dams, making roads. The president also gave out relief food, so we got potatoes, fruit, and other food. We had five children at that time, and so the relief food helped us along, and we were so thankful.

The following year, Paul put out our crop. The grasshoppers returned.

Then the government gave out sacks of bran, gallons of molasses and poison in order to try to control the grasshoppers. Paul mixed it up, and spread it on the land and pasture. We lost one horse from that! Many birds died. All the flies died too—they we did not miss. But the poison killed our grasshoppers. What a relief!

We belonged to the Lutheran church, four miles away. We usually didn't miss a Sunday, except in winter. Seems there was more snow then. The kids didn't like to miss because they loved to go to Sunday school.

So Paul bought us an organ. The children and I loved to sing. I could play the organ and so that was a pleasant past-time, especially on Sundays. □