

Jesser Farm, Baca County, Colorado

Electronic mail message from Velma

The Jesser Farm was located in Baca County, Colorado. As I lived on that farm until I was 16 years old, I remember definite seasons. Summers involved canning fruits from the nearby valley and vegetables from our garden. My father would wear long-sleeved heavy cotton shirts and a hat to protect him from hot sun as he harvested and planted wheat and barley and tended the livestock. Summer, hopefully, brought rain and a bountiful harvest. Summer brought lots of time for me to see farm animals at play. The weather was hot, fences needed mending, and buildings and equipment needed repairs. Maintenance was done by hand; if you didn't know how to fix something, you soon figured it out and often learned by mistake! Fall was a season of cool breezes and changing colors and a chance to go back to school. Because we were somewhat isolated, I much looked forward to going back to school and interacting with other students and my teachers. Fall was the time of year when we stored the potatoes, stocked dried beans, ate the last of the summer garden, and prepared for winter. Winter brought bitter cold and drifting snows but was also a time of sparkling beauty when the snow reflected the blue skies and bright sunshine. Winter was a time when animals needed special care, and most of the activity centered around keeping them well fed and protected from cold temperatures. We always kept a future supply of groceries on hand because it was often impossible to go into town. Winter was long so I completed jigsaw puzzles, ate popcorn, read, and learned how to sew. Spring brought relief from winter hardships and was filled with new calves, colts, chicks, piglets, and other newborn farm and wild animals. In the early years, spring brought dust storms and high winds causing barren fields and often lives. But mostly, I remember that spring was a time of planting, cultivating, and dreaming of successful crop.

I came from a family where women worked outside as well as inside, although I rarely remember my father working inside. My grandmother built her own house, farmed her own land, and tended her own animals alone. My father and mother often worked outside together, and my mother continued with all of the outdoor activities when my father died when I was 12. At that age, that also left me to tend to my three younger brothers and do a lot of cooking and other household chores. Harvest crews were hired to help in the fields, but it was commonly my responsibility to have lunch on the table for all of the crews while my mother supervised the activities in the fields. I learned to cook for crowds and find it hard to this day to cook a meal for one or two. What a waste of efficiency!

Most importantly, I remember my days on the farm as being days of excitement, constant activity, and interaction with nature. I remember those days as being happy days with much family interdependency of a health productive kind. I remember the farm as being peaceful with wide open spaces and opportunity for creativity. The farm taught me responsibility, endurance, a hard work ethic, and hope. It was a time when I look back and see that we were financially poor, but we didn't know that we were poor. In our culture and heritage we were rich and proud to be German-Russian Americans!