

## A MIRACLE IN A MONTANA BLIZZARD

By Lucille Bulman

Lucille Bulman was a teacher and also held the office of Hill County Superintendent of Schools in Havre, MT. (Published In the Bitterroot Journal, February 1978)

That particular morning, when I awoke in our vinecovered house in Highland Park, I thought, the world is beautiful. The sky was blue the sun shone brightly in our east window. Our baby son was sleeping in his crib.

Tom, my husband, soon wakened and the day continued to be beautiful. We went to church dressed in our Sunday clothes, and afterwards, were invited to my sister's and brother-in-law's home in downtown Havre.

A soft wind was blowing and the temperature was just right for a typical, pleasant winter day. We enjoyed a lovely dinner and talked together as we always did when members of our large family got together.

Suddenly the wind seemed to be blowing harder, the leaves were rustling, and scampering across the lawn. "It sounds like another chinook," said Cal, shuffling the Pinochle cards as all good Norwegian players do. "I hope it melts all the snow this time."

"We must be lucky tonight," Tom said to Cal. "I never win this many times."

The game continued until it got later than we had intended. "We ought to hit the trail," I urged. "Your luck might change. Besides, Mid and I aren't doing well and we have a long trip home. Donnie is already asleep on the davenport."

Reluctantly we ended the game, made our usual well-deserved remarks about Mid's cooking, said thanks and went out to the car.

The water was standing in the streets. The air was like that of a fresh spring breeze. Tom was driving our old Whippet car, which could not always be depended on to keep going. As we went down the street, over the viaduct and up the hill on the Old Wild Horse Trail, in route to where I taught school, we could see more snow and could feel a difference in the temperature.

"We should have a heater in this thing," I said to Tom. It's beginning to look like a blizzard is starting.

The snow was flowing in opposite directions, and it sometimes seemed to come from all directions at once. We couldn't see the trail very well with the snow hitting the windshield. Though I had the utmost confidence in Tom's driving, once in awhile I would think to myself, "How can he see where he is going. (continued )

"A MIRACLE IN A MONTANA BLIZZARD"

The snow was falling faster and now nearly two feet covered the road; the temperature kept dropping. We kept on. Tom was driving as carefully as he could, while I held young Donnie in my arms wrapped in a full sized Pendleton blanket.

"I'm glad George and 'Hap' gave us this blanket for a wedding present," I said cheerfully. I was worried, but I wanted Tom to believe I wasn't scared and that I still had confidence in him. We had traveled quite a few miles, it was hard to say how far, and the storm kept getting worse and worse.

Suddenly, the Whippett stopped. Tom got out and tried to see what was the matter. It was sometimes a little something on the carburetor that gave us trouble. After some tinkering and testing, Tom said decidedly, "We must start walking."

"Do you know where we are?" I asked fearfully.

"No, but there must be a house somewhere around here." Tom said, trying to reassure me.

"You're really not dressed right for such weather," he said. "You only have slippers and rubbers on, I'll carry Donnie."

We started walking, going in what we felt was the right direction. The snow kept falling; it felt like stinging icicles. The visibility was zero; we couldn't even see the road. We would go to the left until we'd be aware of the slope, indicating the ditch. Then we would turn to the right, only to find that we were about to go into the ditch on that side.

"Are you cold, Honey?" Tom kept inquiring. "Your feet and legs must be cold. Your coat doesn't come together in front. I told you it was not a good winter coat when you bought it."

"It cost only eleven dollars. It took me three months to pay for it. It had such a nice furry collar." I tried to explain in selfdefense.

Tom could not hear everything I said because of the wind getting worse. The icicles were getting sharper.

"Is Donald warm?" I asked anxiously.

"Yes, he's warm." Tom said, "but I didn't realize he was so heavy."

I knew he must be very tired as I was nearing the point of utter exhaustion; he was struggling through the storm carrying a two and half-year-old baby. I knew it must be very tiring.

He didn't complain again.

Suddenly I thought to myself, "We're going to freeze to death right here with our baby on the Wild horse Trail."

"Let me lie down just for a minute," I pleaded. "Then I'll keep on trying."

Tom, sensing that thought which people often experience when facing what seems an

### A MIRACLE IN A MONTANA BLIZZARD

insurmountable obstacle, said sternly and firm, "If you lie down, I'll kick you."

We struggled on, stopping for a moment or two once in awhile to catch our breath. We didn't dare turn around to keep the storm from hitting us like stinging needles; we both realized that if we did we might simply retrace our steps and lose sense of direction.

"I must pray," I thought. But I couldn't remember any except one I had learned when I was a child; "Now I lay me down to sleep..." "No, that's not the one to say. There isn't any use, we must keep on going." My whole life seemed to be passing through my mind.

Then, what seemed to be a miracle happened. "There's the wagon wheel on the post," I shouted above the wailing whistling wind. "I know where we are! That's Draeger's mail wheel."

The mail wheel was set on a post in such a position that it could be turned around from one mail box to another to accommodate the rural mail carrier.

"Good old Lou!" I thought. "We are saved!" (Lou was the mailman.) "The fence is right near it," I exclaimed gleefully. "All we have to do is follow the fence. I'll hang on the fence. You carry Donnie. We'll soon be to Draegers!"

By that time, far beyond a farmer's bedtime, there was no light in the window. We followed the fence for a few yards, let go of it then walked a few yards across the open yard. We were "flying blind", like a pilot with a plane in trouble.

All at once, right in front of us, the house loomed up, seeming as large as the White House.

We both saw it at once. "They will take us in. We've made it." I said to Tom in a weary yet joyous voice. Remembering the door was around the corner, we stumbled toward it. One of us rapped on the door.

Mr. Draeger appeared dressed in long, white underwear; we almost fell in we were so tired. An angel, with a gold crown and white wings could not have been a more beautiful sight.

He seemed shocked to see us, but immediately said, "Come in. Where have you been in this terrible storm?" He took the small child from his father's arms; he was toasty warm, even perspiring.

I remember thinking that was strange; I felt so cold, my legs and hands felt stiff as a board.

Mrs. Draeger got out of bed at once and got us something warm to eat and drink. I remember the coffee most of all.

Mr. Draeger shook the grate, started the fire and lit the kerosene lamp while his wife got breakfast. She helped me remove my coat, slippers and rubbers and rubbed my feet, hands and legs to start the circulation.

I was in a daze, thankful that at last we were safe from the cruel, relentless grip on the storm.

### A MIRACLE IN A MONTANA BLIZZARD

A bed was prepared at once and we were covered up to our chins with the child between us.

At first my legs felt stiff and painful; a little later they began to burn and hurt like a bad toothache or a vicious migraine headache.

"I can't stand it," I called quietly to Tom. "My feet and legs feel like they are on fire. The pain is terrible."

"Go to sleep, Darling," he said. "You'll soon be better."

Mrs. Draeger, perhaps because she was a real, old Montana rancher's wife prepared for any and all emergencies, appeared to see what was the matter. She was clad in an outing flannel nightgown and I strained to see her through my pain-fogged mind.

"I know what to do," she said. "I'll soon be back with something to help you."

I remember the tearing sound of the strips of an old sheet. She seemed to be applying an old medicine that I remembered, the smell was familiar.

"It's some remedy Mother used to use," I mused. "It's helping a lot," I said to Mrs. Draeger.

After that, weariness and anxiety relieved me. Sleep over came me. The fear no longer haunted me; we were safe and all was well.

The next morning, although the pain was still there by intervals, I was better. Blisters started to form on my legs and feet.

The Draegers got up early, shook the grate, removed the "clinkers" and added coal to the fire bed. Soon breakfast was ready. I couldn't eat much, but the warmth and security meant so much to me that my less than usual appetite was unimportant.

Later, Mr. Draeger hitched up a team of horses to the sled, retrieved the car, hauled it and us home; bandages, baby and all. Our provisions were frozen from the sub-zero temperatures, along with my laundry.

Later, the Whippet was restored to service once again.

Tom, started a fire in the old-fashioned range, and soon we felt secure once more.

Tom was tired and I was tired, but Donnie was as chirpy as ever. Our friendship with the Draegers continued. As the old saying goes. "A friend in need is a friend indeed."

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DID YOU KNOW: that Liberty County will be 75 years old in 1995 and that we've had Postal Service in Chester for 100 years? Chester was part of Chouteau Co. until Hill Co. was created in 1912, the Liberty Co. was created in 1920. The community is planning a BIG Celebration June 30- July 1- July 2 of 1995 in Chester, Mt.