

MY LAST WINTER AT HOME WITH MOM AND DAD

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Now I will take you back to long ago in this story. I was 20 years old at the time and it was my last winter home with Mom and Dad. It was the best winter I had ever spent with them. The other kids (I had one brother and three sisters) had all left home and I was the last one to leave. Dad and I worked side by side that fall gathering in the crops. Seems like Dad had changed a lot and I liked it much better that way. He seemed more like a big brother to me that summer. Dad had been pretty rough on us kids as we were growing up and he had us kids working all the time.

As Dad and I worked in those fields together that last fall, I learned more about Dad than I had learned in all the other years before. Dad told me many stories and shared with me his different experiences down through the years. I learned some poems from him as we worked together. Dad liked poetry very much and did a lot of writing. He wrote many stories and a number of poems in his years of life and left behind a nice album of them. At that time of my life, all his writings seemed to be a big waste of time to me. Now I find I am doing the very same thing 45 years later.

One very cold winter morning in the first part of January, Dad and I were building some feed troughs to feed our cattle in. After we had completed the troughs, we started building a fence on the north side to keep the cattle in. We were going to winter around 25 head of cattle there. Even though the weather was very cold, we almost had the fence built by late afternoon. We were making our last stretch to a big oak tree right on the edge of the creek bank. I was pulling the wire and Dad was hammering in the

staples. Dad said, "You've got to pull the wire tighter than that!". I said, "This is hard work pulling on this old used barbed wire. If this wire should break, I would fall right off the edge of this bank 20' into the icy water below." Now Dad got somewhat put out with me and said, "This just won't get it - That wire has got to be tighter than that!" Then he handed me the staples and hammer. He said, "You do the nailing and I will show you how to stretch that wire humming tight." Then Dad got hold of the barbed wire and put one foot on the big oak. His face turned red as he started pulling hard on the wire. He said, "You've just got to put some pressure on it like this." At that very moment, the old wire broke. Dad went sailing off that bank, turned two backward somersaults in mid-air and fell 20 feet below crashing through the ice and disappeared out of sight. I will never forget that surprised look on Dad's face when his head shot back up out of the icy water.

It was a while before he could get his breath and his teeth were chattering like crazy. I wanted to laugh about this little acrobatic stunt but this didn't seem to be the time. Just a little ways down, there was a low place on the bank. I ran to that point and told Dad to come that way. The water around was around eight feet deep and the ice was around 1/4 inch thick. When Dad got there, I pulled him out of the icy water. I had driven my car there to haul our tools so Dad got in the car and I took him home.

I had to help him out of the car when we arrived home because his clothes were frozen stiff. The temperature was a little below zero. As we were walking from the car to the house, I asked Dad if he was very cold. Dad said, "No, I'm not. I am warm because I'm insulated in all this

ice." Dad got on some warm, dry clothes and was allright was again. We went back and finished up our fencing. Dad and I went around a lot that winter.

I left home in the springtime and I never went back home to live with Mom and Dad ever again. I have many fond memories of the time I got to spend with them. Dad passed away at the age of 69 years old. I believe his was the biggest funeral I had ever attended. I had never seen as many beautiful flowers as there were that day at Dad's funeral. Mom lived a little over 14 years after Dad passed away. Mom died at the age of 83.

There seemed to be a deep, lonely feeling that came over me as the weeks and months slowly passed on by. Both of my parents were gone now and I found that fact hard to deal with for a long time. I knew that one day I would lose them, for death always has the final say. But it was hard to let them go. It gives me a lot of comfort in knowing they were both Christians. They have gone to a much better place to live. My hope is that one day I will reunite with them and we will come together once again. Mom and Dad walked down some hard roads in life together. They endured many hardships along the way.

Now this is how it was in those days. God bless you, Mom and Dad, and may you both rest in peace. And Dad, thanks for showing me how to pull a little harder in life; there are many times I have had to.