

WINTER MEMORIES

Encouraged by my grandkids last winter, I went sliding down the hill in their backyard; chilly air rushed past as I maneuvered the sled to the bottom. We also walked in the snow and looked for tracks left by wildlife, and enjoyed the delightfully crisp, clean air. I told them of my winter days back on the farm with my own siblings.

We used to snuggle beneath warm comforters, waking as daylight entered our frigid bedroom. The rays of sunshine made the lacelike frost filigrees sparkle like the diamond in Mom's ring. Lying in our warm bed, we three sisters enjoyed making up stories about the designs that Jack Frost had painted. Reluctantly, we left the cozy warmth and hurried downstairs. We were greeted by a hearty breakfast of scrambled eggs and bacon with Mom's homemade bread. Then it was time to get ready for whatever the day had in store.

After a week of school, we bundled up for outdoor fun. Warm knitted hats, mittens and scarves left just our faces exposed as we watched our puffs of breath meet the cold air. Our feet stayed warm and dry in socks, shoes, and high buckled galoshes as we plodded through the drifts, building snowmen to our heart's content. We snatched coal from the coal hod to give them smiling faces, and found corncobs for the noses. Then we clothed their stick arms in last year's ragged mittens. Knotted scarves and funny hats topped each snowman. Sometimes Mom joined the fun and we laughed as the snowmen took on wonderful, creative personalities. We built them facing the kitchen windows so we could show them off and admire our handiwork.

One time we had to stay indoors with colds and stuffy noses, longing to be out in the new fallen snow. Mom must have felt cooped up too, for she bundled up and began building a snowman as we watched from the window. Her joyful smiles as she added trimmings to that snowman are stored among our many warm memories.

Midmornings on washdays, we helped Mom hang the laundry on the clothesline. Whites were whiter after freezing, Mom said, and were worth the effort to hang them out in the snappy air. It was much better than draping them over the wooden clothes racks inside the house. We loved to see the long Johns swaying while they froze stiff as boards. We made up a song titled "Long Johns line-dancing to the song of the wind." Sometimes the clothes were still frozen stiff when we brought them in. Then they stood at attention briefly before thawing and bending over, as if bowing to us.

Our sleds were always ready near the back door. We could grab them and then slide swiftly down the hill, past the henhouse and toward the forlorn-

looking pigpen. Lady ran alongside us, her ears flapping. The slide down was such fun that we didn't mind the trudge back up the hill. We pulled our little brother, John, up the hill and listened to his "giddy-up" as he pretended to drive. At the top we were breathless, but ready for another ride. John especially liked being a passenger with Margaret, who skillfully sped down the hill, always hugging him tightly. Alice and I belly-flopped all the way down, because we found it easier to steer and keep from toppling over.

When we were quite cold, it was time to go in for a cup of cocoa and warm up by the potbellied stove. Then we curled up with our latest books from the library, and we were far away in the middle of a fascinating mystery, until it was time for chores.

WINTER CHORES

Dad never asked us girls to help with the morning milking on school days—he said he didn't want his girls to smell of the barnyard. But every afternoon, milk pails in hand, we walked through the horse barn, patting each horse on the nose, especially Daisy. She was our old gray mare that we rode in pleasant weather.

We glanced at the jostling pigs, safe in their pen, and told them "You'll be fed soon, so stop squealing!"

