

Saskatchewan

Girl Recalls

Gift of Love

Alyce Orton  
Box 194  
Birch Hill, Sask.  
SOG 0G0  
Phone: (306) 749-3463

Saskatchewan Girl Recalls Gift of Love

Page 1

I remember as soon as I was old enough to understand the words my parents, reliving things that happened years before my life began, like a door opening and looking back into their past.

The wedding day in Minneapolis, Minnesota was the beginning. Albinus Leland a young man of Norwegian ancestry, having just recently arrived in this new land and Anna Arness a flaxen-haired Norwegian girl joined hands in marriage.

About one year later their first child arrived. Arnold was born June 9, 1915. Around 2 years after his birth, they decided to move to Saskatchewan Canada, where our Dad had already taken out a claim. A new piece of land, untamed and wild like the animals that roamed free through the tall timbers and berry bushes that grew in abundance.

What a change in comparison to the big city! This I'd say, would be a very frightening experience for both of them with their baby boy to care for. Their life here wasn't easy. Always around the bend there were problems-almost beyond their comprehension. But with prayer, courage and a strong faith to move on with what lay ahead, they settled into a community of strange people who were all in the same boat. Sharing each other's problem grew to be a way of life.

(Orton) Saskatchewan Girl Recalls Gift of Love

Page 2

Even in those trying times, years had a way of slipping into the past. A daughter, Janet Marie was born (October 21, 1918) two years later. Ruth Margaret joined the family on July 30, 1920. Three and a half years later on November 11, 1923 a chubby baby girl, Alyce Effie (me) came along. I guess you could call it the beginning of their worries.

As I grew older, they noticed things about me that other children did not do. For instance, I took an extra long time to start to crawl. I had strange ways of moving my legs when I finally started to walk.

My Mother and Dad spent a lot of time encouraging me in hopes that they could improve what ever the problem was, but to no avail. They found, as time passed, my condition was getting worse. I was beginning to have a lot of discomfort and noticed differences in my self and my little friends. I noticed that other girls and boys could run around and do many things that I couldn't do. So I grew to be a loner in many ways. Not to my liking but a matter of circumstances that followed me wherever I went.

When I was 7 years old, I started school but it didn't last long. As the more I walked the worse I got. My Mother and Dad were at their wits end not knowing what to do for me. They had taken me to Dr. White in Birch Hills many times but he always said it was a habit.

Finally they heard of a hospital in Winnipeg for handicapped children which was run and paid for by the Shriners. Between Robert Dunning, Dr. White and Mother and Dad they made arrangements for me to go to that hospital.

By this time, my condition had deteriorated a lot. I wasn't able to walk ahead in a straight line so I had to go sideways and the pain was always a part of my days and nights.

Times were hard in those days. Travelling long distances took hours in our rumble wagon. Our closet town was Birch Hills which was eleven miles away. Money was scarce but because they loved me, they did without many things and went through many hardships to get me there.

It was a hard trip over rough roads to get to Birch Hills. It was spring time so we had to go in the wagon. I remember the morning we left home; I was 8 years old and old enough to wonder what the future held for me. I knew that the present was very painful as the rough wagon slowly made its way to Birch Hills, I had to sit on someone's knees to stand the pain.

It seemed to take hours but we finally got to Birch Hills in time to board the train heading for Winnipeg and the Shriners' Hospital. Even then, I felt so sorry for my dear mother who was not happy to be taking me there but she knew it was for the best.

As the train started up the conductor called out, "All aboard," and we were on our way. I don't suppose my mother slept a wink, what with her responsibilities worrying. Knowing her, she would



(Orton) Saskatchewan Girl Recalls Gift of Love

Page 4

have a prayer on her lips as we sped through the night. When we arrived in Winnipeg we had to take a taxi to the hospital. The nurse who received us was very nice.

Of course, I didn't know what was going to happen to me and I was really disturbed when they took me into an examination room. I went through a lot of tests and x-rays. Then they took me to a ward with 4 beds where I had to stay for a couple of days. When I was settled down in my bed they let my mother come into the room to see me for awhile. I was happy to see her; she gave me a nice red autograph book. She told me to have the doctors, nurses, workers patients etc. write in my book so I could remember them. I did! (I treasured it for years).

Before my mother left the hospital that day she said, "I'll be staying here in a place close to the hospital, so I can come to see you every day for awhile. Then I'll have to go home. If the Dr. thinks he can help you, you'll be staying here after I go home." I tried to be brave but when it was time for her to go the tears came. she kissed me and hugged me and said, "Try to be brave or you'll make me cry too". So I dried my tears.

When my mother came back the next day she did her best to be calm, but she'd been talking to the Dr. and he had told her he didn't know if he could do anything for me as both my hips were dislocated, one to the front and one to the back. The ball was worn out of the socket but he said he'd do his best. (Of course, my mother didn't tell me this).

(Orton) Saskatchewan Girl Recalls Gift of Love

Page 5

Time passed so quickly until the day for mother to go. She seemed so nervous when she got up to go. She came over and hugged me and said, "I won't be coming to see you tomorrow, as they'll be waiting for me at home. I'll be praying for you everyday. Be a good girl and always say your prayers." I hugged her, kissed her and cried. As she walked out the door, I wondered when I'd see her again. I cried most of the night. Mother told me later she could hardly wait to get out of the ward and into the ladies room before she broke down and cried.

After my mother had gone home, it didn't take long until my operation started. One morning they came to get me with a stretcher into a cage of iron bars and it went up to another floor. Then they took me into an operating room. They moved me to an operating table. They put a mask over my face and put some ether on the mask. What an awful smell!! I could hear something like a hammer pounding. That was the last thing I could remember.

When I woke up I felt awful. I didn't know where I was and I was very sick to my stomach. I had a cast on from under my armpits all the way down to both my ankles. Both my legs were twisted around so there was a foot on both sides of my pillows--a very painful and uncomfortable position. There was a wooden slab buried into the plaster cast for when they had to move me around, or make the bed, etc.

(Orton) Saskatchewan Girl Recalls Gift of Love

Page 6

There was a frame resembling the shape of a half a barrel up-side down with light-bulbs fastened to the top of the inside so they could dry out the cast faster. This made it very hot as well as painful and uncomfortable. This had to be on for 2-3 days or until the cast was dry.

I was moved into a big ward where there were a lot of young patients about the same age, so we could have a lot in common. I wasn't able to be active with the kind of cast I had on so I couldn't take part in most of their activities. This put me in a sad position. I had to have this on for about 2 or 3 months. I had a lot of bone grafting done which took a lot longer. About this time they took me back to the operating room to go through another procedure. I had eight operations--each one to change the positions of my bones.

While I was going through all these operations, I was making many friends. My dearest friend was Frances Thornstenson; I wonder where she is now. Although I was a bit older, we wore the same size clothes and we usually wore the same patterned dresses.

In the summer time when the weather was nice the nurses would push our beds down a ramp to a large wooden platform with a huge awning top (in case of rain). They even brought our dinners down in a large cart which carried our food in large covered steel containers. This was a special treat for all of us who couldn't be up and around.



(Orton) Saskatchewan Girl Recalls Gift of Love

Page 7

It was so nice to feel and smell the fresh air. We used to watch the janitor cutting the grass. He was so nice; most of us called him Uncle Mack. He would come and hug us if he thought we were lonely; some times he had a big bag of maple buds in his pockets for us to find.

Quite often the Shriners would come through the hospital. Most of the time they would bring beads for us to string necklaces, etc. Lots of times they took us to the parks. They were so nice; we were always glad to see them.

I will never forget the many things that happened when I was there for nearly 2 years, the first Christmas I got a beautiful Eatons Beauty Doll; it was all dressed up in a lovely yellow dress. The second Christmas I got a sewing machine that really worked; I used it for years after I got home. Yes all these things stayed in my memory.

But, how I waited for my dear mother's letters. Almost every other day there was a letter between the window panes where they put them for a day or two to be in quarantine. (to get rid of germs before they could give them to us). Most of the time a nurse would read them to me.

I can't remember time--whether it went slow or fast but after so many casts went on and off I was changing with each one. I can't remember how but I'll never forget the time I didn't have an anaesthetic. This time they came with a big cast cutter and



started to cut. Some time parts of my skin got in the way and I still have big white patches where the skin had been pulled off. The worst part was when they lifted me up. The sensation of being dead came over me; my whole body felt like it wasn't there. It took a long while before the feeling came back.

Finally, I could sit up but it took a long time after my cast was off. Someone would take me down to the rehabilitation room in the wheelchair. It took a long time to move my legs. No matter how I moved them they were very painful, but with each passing day it became a little easier and they gradually improved.

One beautiful summer day a nurse came in to see me. She asked me if I would like to go with some of the other patients to one of the parks around Winnipeg. I was surprised! I was happy but I was kind of scared too! I hadn't had my real dressed up clothes on for so long. It was really nice to have a car ride and to see so many things after not being out especially so many animals, birds, etc. Some of them were very scared so we had to keep our distance but we all had a nice time.

As time went on I tried very hard to strengthen my legs, so I could start walking without the wheelchair or crutches. I wanted so badly to be able to walk on my own like everyone else. Often at night I prayed to God to give me the strength to do this.

Then One day I was in the wheelchair to go for exercise. There was a small raised place on the floor and the wheelchair over balanced and tipped backwards. I fell out and bent one of my legs.

(Orton) Saskatchewan Girl Recalls Gift of Love

Page 9

I landed back in bed for about a week or more with sand bags on my leg.

After this hold-up things went pretty good so I stated to walk around the bed holding on as I went. It was really like I had the world in my hands which gave me more confidence and the feeling I was doing it by myself. I noticed that the other bed in the ward was quite close to mine--only one step would take me there. So I let go of my support and I did it! I had taken one step on my own! I was so happy when I could show the Dr. and nurses that I could walk alone and they were happy too! Everyday I was getting a lot better; I was able to walk around outside the hospital. I was really surprised when one of the nurses brought a tricycle for me to exercise my legs. I had a hard time getting on it but as I struggled away one of my legs went all the way around. I had climbed the highest mountain and I kept right on going.

So I spent a lot of time on it. As I was going around on the tricycle the cook happened to come out. She told me to come in and have a cookie. It sure was good! I stopped there every once in a while; she was very nice.

There were so many people and things that were nice. "I'll sure miss this place," I often thought when I started to get around. It was so long ago since I came. I went through a lot of pain but now that I was feeling better I had started doing a lot of thinking to my self about just how lucky I'd been, and how thankful I should be.

Then without warning a nurse came in. She had a bunch of clothes and things; she put them down on the bed. Then she said, "you're going to go home today". What a shock! I felt a lump rising in my throat. I was happy to go but I knew I'd be sad to leave them all behind.

After I tried on all the clothes she said, "Which dress do you like the best?" I picked the brown dress with white specks and long sleeves. When I told her that she said, "That's the one I picked too. It looks the nicest on you and it's a perfect fit."

They had made all the arrangements. One of my legs was shorter than the other so I had to have a high heel and sole on one of my shoes (which was strange to get used to). The nurse had a lunch all ready for me to take on the train. Then I had to say good-bye to everyone. There were so many people I had to say good-bye to.

I was looking for Uncle Mack and at the last minute there he was! He hugged me and held me close. I could see the tears in his eyes when we said our good-byes. Then we had to go. I never saw Uncle Mack again.

After I'd said my goodbye's I had to get on the train that took me there almost 2 years before. My nurse who got me ready to go, took me there and she also helped me on to the train. I thanked her, kissed her and hugged her and said "Goodbye." She talked to the conductor and told him to look after me. He was a very nice Negro who watched closely over me. She waited until the train started. Then she waved to me until we were out of sight. I was



alone. The conductor made a place for me to sleep. In the night I took a trip to the ladies' room. When I was in there he stuck his head around the door and said, "Oh! Is this where you is?" I got back to the bunk ok. I had a good night's sleep. When I woke up in the morning I couldn't find my shoes. When the Negro came around he had my shoes; they were all polished. I could almost see my face in them. He sure looked after me! He even brought a nice dish of rolled oat porridge for breakfast. I was sure in good hands!

It was getting closer to the end of my journey and my mind was thinking of what was ahead. I had closed the door to the past for the time being and looked forward to when I meet my own dear family again. It had been a long time. I could almost see my mother's smile waiting for me. As the train got closer I thought, will they take me in their arm's and hold me like they used to? I could hear the whistle of the train slowing down at the Birch Hills station. I heard the conductor calling out the name of my old home town in Saskatchewan. There were a lot of people standing on the station platform. "Will they be there waiting for me?" I thought. The conductor came to get what I had to take off the train. Then all of a sudden they were there. I was being loved again by my dear family. I can't remember whether they came in the wagon or what. But that didn't matter to me. I was home again, back where I used to be. Before we went, mo mother took some pictures of me at the station in my new dress with my Eaton's Beauty doll.

I know my family worried about me for quite a while after I got home. It took me a long time to get used to everything again. I really missed all the friends I'd left behind. I often found myself in tears for no reason at all.

After I'd been home for awhile my mother decided to send for a correspondence course as I wasn't able to go to school and I was 10 years old now. After it came, I was a little more satisfied as I had the chance to start to learn something. I took this course for about a year before I started school. After that I went to school for about two years. The Shriners sent a letter to me asking me to come down for a check up and to get a new pair of shoes. So I had another trip down to the Shriners Hospital. I stayed just a short while and had a chance to see them all again which was very nice. I felt a lot better after I got home the second time.

Now after all these years, I still think of the Shriners Hospital and what they did for me so many years ago. The Shriners were so wonderful. So were the doctors, nurses and other workers. I still thank God for giving me a chance to be out of constant pain. I thank God that my mother heard of the Shriners Hospital and had the courage to send me there.