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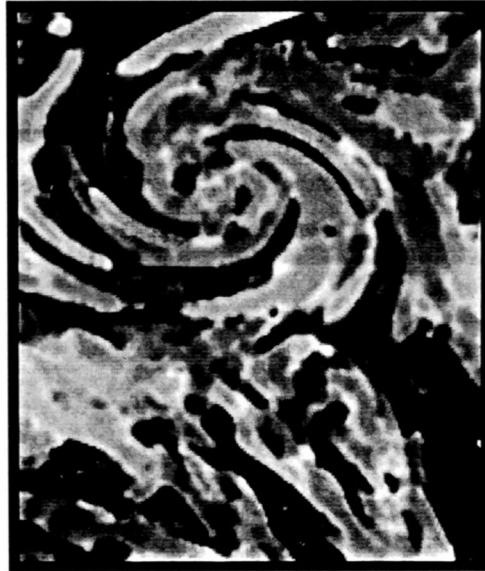
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# DUSTBOWL MEMORIES

by *Doris Hatchett Beverage*



To those of us who are old enough to have experienced the Dustbowl, forgetting is impossible. In 1933 and 1934, the day could begin with beautiful sunshine and cool clear air. By noon or mid-afternoon, though, those storms would roll in. The sky would turn as dark as night; visibility would reduce to less than a quarter of a mile.

Many times at the old Foss school, the superintendent would call the bus drivers and send the students home. Everyone loved my bus driver, Lula Jennings; she was a good driver, and she drove bus number 3 for over thirty years.

Rain storms, snow storms, and muddy slick roads—I've experienced all of them--and nothing compares with dust storms. Ordinarily, we had to walk either  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile or  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile to meet the bus. But on dust-storm days, Lula took us on home. When we would arrive home, my mother had old pieces of wet sheets tacked over the windows and doors. Sometimes I had to wear a man's handkerchief, wet and folded, half-tied over my nose and mouth to keep from choking or breathing the dust; but I could still manage to smell the brown beans with ham hock as I walked into the front door.

We would have to shake the comforters and sheets on every bed before we went to sleep at night. Studying by the light of an old kerosene lamp on the dining room table cast such an eerie shadow that we could hardly keep our minds on our lessons.

We always raised a big garden as well as a big flock of chickens, and we milked seven or eight cows. There were several years that we raised very little crop. It was very difficult to survive. We owned our 160 acres, and all of us worked really hard. Mother always raised five hundred or more fryers every year and made dresses out of 100-pound feed sacks. If one of us needed a new dress, Mother would buy two or three sacks alike and recycle them into a dress.

Our home place was three miles north and  $\frac{3}{4}$  miles east of Burns Flat. Rural Electric Association didn't come into being until 1938. There were a few farmers who had Delco battery systems, but we weren't so lucky.

We were Methodists and went to Page Methodist Church, a mile west of our home.. The church had only about forty members, most of them kinfolk, and was on a charge with Foss and Canute. In those days we had many tent meetings, where the

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preacher would deliver "hell-fire and brimstone" sermons. I still remember thinking that the world would end with one of those Dustbowl dirt storms, and one Sunday it almost did.

It was a bright and sunny spring morning in March, 1934. We were having an all-day meeting at the Canute Church with dinner at noon. My mother had made me a beautiful pink and white good-print dress with a white collar—one of the few not made from chicken-feed sacks. She also made a beautiful long white velvet-corduroy coat. I had new white shoes and my first long hose. The service was very good, as was the dinner. The afternoon service had just started when Dad came to Mom and said, "Alice, there's an awful dirt storm rolling in. I think we should go."

Dad, Mom, two younger sisters, and I hurriedly gathered our dishes and loaded into the car. By the time we had driven the Olds 66 to the Clinton Dam corner, we had to turn on headlights and barely crept the next fifteen or sixteen miles home.

After we got home, Mom and Dad started driving the chickens into the henhouse. Dad even put wet cotton sacks over the windows. Many times, the chickens would become frightened and get into piles and die. I burst into tears when I walked into the house and saw how brown my white coat was.

"Don't worry," I remember Mom saying to try to comfort me. "They will all wash."

I had a county voice contest coming up in Cordell the next week and had planned to wear my

new dress and coat to that contest. And to my surprise, my wardrobe for the event was spotless after Mother took care of it.

I never lived in a modern house until after I married. Our first home wasn't modern; it had a kitchen sink with water and a path to the outdoor toilet. Later, before Dad died twenty-seven years ago, he gave me the old washtub in which all ten of us used to bathe. I still have it today.

Soil conservation, tree shelterbelts, terraces, etc. helped rid Oklahoma of those devilish dust storms. So I believe in ecology.

With all the homeless people out of work now in our country, I give a prayer of thanksgiving when I crawl into a tub of hot water for a nice, soothing bath. I sometimes feel guilty that I have so much room and food for just one person that I fix food for the Jesus House, the Ark, and other shelters in

downtown Oklahoma City. But even after fifty years, I still occasionally have terrible nightmares of living in an old, very open house where I can't seem to get things clean. I call those my "dustbowl nightmares." □

*DORIS HATCHETT BEVERAGE* is a "child" of Western Oklahoma who daydreams about her "Dustbowl Years" in Midwest City, Oklahoma. Retired, Mrs. Beverage says that she counts as one of her blessings the opportunity to read WESTVIEW four times a year. Her works appear often in our journal.

