

CHAPTER TWO

GOING WEST 1889

The month of May 1889 had the smell of spring. The still new year was fresh and bestowed with hope for most people. The days remained cold until afternoon, most of the snow was gone, but you could still crunch on the frozen grass when you made the early morning trip to the outhouse. The houseflies were cold and dormant in their non-flying about stage. They were waiting for the warm days to bring them to life and cling to the screen doors and come in from the cracks in the walls. Fannie could still open the window without the bugs coming in and let out the smoke from the wood stove. Smoke, bugs, and cold were facts of life. The shanty was cold, but supper could be enjoyed without the flies in the meal. Some bugs stayed all winter- bed bugs. Fannie washed the homemade quilts and checked the children's heads for bed bugs. John made a special solution of fishberries, and a foul smelling liquid that made Claude hold his nose and Annie disappear in the back of the woodpile

"I am sure things are going to be all right, John." Fannie held on to the shaking coffee cups. The train chugged by, rocking the dishes on the shelf. John sat at the table with a mug of brewed coffee and watched Fannie chopping up vegetables for dinner. "There are other families going to the State of Washington. I asked the man signing up the people - Big Jim Shepardson, Henry Williams, and some people who live a ways from here." "I never heard of them." "We will probably meet them in Minnesota, Saint Paul," he said. Fannie took the butcher board and sliced pieces of bread from the long loaf. She was glad she had finished her baking early. Warm fresh bread always made John happy. "Oh, I forgot; I was so excited about the mines. When I passed by old man Crouches' farm, Martha asked about your health and the kids. She gave us fresh biscuits, some new potatoes, and a piece of calico for dresses for the girls." "Bless that lady." Fannie was happy indeed and she sang to herself as she worked at the sink. The vegetable peelings went into the slop bucket under the sink. She pulled it out and handed it to John. "Could you empty it before dinner?"

The children climbed up on the high wooden chairs at the table, and Fannie ladled out bowls of stew. "I'm down right starved." John scooped the hot gravy up with the bread. He talked between bites of the warm gravy-soaked bread. "Things will be better up north for the kids too." It was a comfortable illusion. He was not sure this was true, but it was nice for the moment - at least through the dinner. "How do you know that,

John?" He defended himself with a description of what he knew about the State of Washington: "Lots of trees there, and the man said it was healthy for children." Annie climbed down and stood by John's arm. "I don't know anything about riding on trains all that way." "Well now," John put Annie on his knee, "It won't be hard for a six year old. The train just goes chug chug, the smoke pours out of the smoke stack, and the engine does the rest. We sit on seats, maybe. You kids can watch the houses and trees go by real fast." The meal was finished, and the children sat against the wall, staying quiet.

The conversation was exciting, and they did not want to miss a word. There was a time for reflection and planning. Fannie had mending and a new quilt she worked on regularly after dinner. John sharpened his knife, and they talked about how they would get to Minnesota from Buxton, Iowa. "It will be in the Lord's hands how we get there. Jesus did a lot of walking." There was no bitterness. Privations and hardships were a way of life. Your feet got tougher the longer you walked without shoes, and your body gets used to the cold if you have never had a completely warm set of clothes in the winter. There were ways to stall hunger; a little extra water to drink, or chew on a grass straw.

The night settled the activities in the shack by the railroad tracks. Fannie covered the children sleeping on the mattresses in the backroom. Claude opened his eyes. "Tell me again, Mama." "Lord willing, we're going on a train to Washington State." He smiled and fell asleep. The children dreamed the untroubled dreams of children soon to be traveling far away to the State of Washington, near the Pacific Ocean. Their daddy said so!

The rooster crowed from the top of Crouches' smoke house, telling the early time of the morning. John cut the clothes line to take with them and rolled it up. He walked back to the shack and pulled the door latch shut on the grey clap board two room shack. The only way you could tell any humans had lived there was the holes stuffed with pieces of rags not good enough for Fannie's quilt. Claude found an extra minute to hunt up an extra finely carved sling shot he had left by the water pump.

John picked up two of the heaviest bundles and slung them across his back. "Claude, here are your two." "I want three; I am seven now." "Two, the girls each get one." Annie didn't care much about bundles at all. "He can have mine." "One bundle, Annie. You must take care not to lose track of it, otherwise we will lose all of our under things and we will be naked." "Oh!" Annie had visions of going on the train half clothed. They trudged along the dirt roads with three children; there was no fast going. John met another family carrying all of their household with them. "Are you going north to the coal mines in Washington?"

"We are, unless the land looks better before we get