

My Life Since I Remember

Mrs. Nancy Ann Boyd McCaslin, Born in Butler, PA, May 16, 1851

My parents always tried to do their best to raise us up in the right as they thought it best. I thought that they were too strict with me. But I don't think that now, for they thought that they were doing the right thing for us. There was seven girls and two boys. One died when a baby, the rest lived to manhood and womanhood. One sister died when she was in the thirties with typhoid.

I stayed at home most all the time until I was 15 past. I always had to work hard. When I was about eight years old, I had to hoe corn and clean all the weeds out of it. We walked two miles to do it, hoed all day, and walked back. And we done it every summer.

When I got a little stronger and a year or two older, I had to go to the timber and help Daddy chop down trees and make rails, grub out stumps, cut sprouts off the stumps thicker than my wrist. Helped to build fences and when harvest time came, I went out and took a mans place. Raked and bound bundles all day and gathered schoked grain to stack, also pitched bundles to my Papa to stack, and bundles to thrash. Thrashed some with a flale and turned the fanning mill to clean it out. My Dad always said that I was his big boy and called on me every time he needed help. I was the second one of the family. There were three girls before the boy and he was always delicut until he was nine or ten. We thought at the time he was going to die, but he fought it out and got to be a stout man, and is living yet, so I had to take the place of a boy.

When I came in in the evening, I went after the cows and helped to milk. My younger sisters and I had to do the chores in the winter. Feed the sheep, milk the cows, clean the barns, we also went to school and sometimes I was late. The snow was so deep, it was over the fence, and we walked right over them.

I never said a word back to my parents when they told me something, I went and done it, without a word. That is one thing I never had to regret.

When I was 15 past I went to town to stay with my Aunt. She was sick and unable to do her work. She lived in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She went to the country that summer. I kept house for my Uncle and four young men and a small girl, eight and a boy some older. I done all the work, washing, ironing, three to four shirts a week for the boys, baked bread and pies. All

the help I had was the little girl. When school started, I got her ready for school. My Aunt said I done better then she. Put up more fruit and made more jellies than she ever did. I made my home with her off and on till I was married.

At twenty-on I married Wesley McCaslin. He was working in the railroad shops in Pittsburgh. He went to Kansas bought 160 acres of land, put cattle on it and hired his brother to look after them, while he came back and worked in the shops until fall.

His brother wrote him that he would have to come help put up hay. He could not hire help. I was not able to go, I was so poorly after my baby was born. They thought that I could not stand the trip, so I had to wait until spring to go. So I and my little boy went. After I got there, I helped milk cows and made a large garden. I was nearly all that had any in that neighborhood. The grasshoppers came and took nearly all the gardens around. I thought that mine would go one evening, the air was full of grasshoppers, but they settled on the hill above it and raised in the morning and left.

In the fall I had the chills for a month or more. My husband had sore hands, there was 11 boils on them at one time. During that time I had all the horses, cows, and hogs to care for and feed. He sold out and moved to Iowa, bought land and built a house. He broke some ground out for sod corn, and then went to brake some ground for a man. I stayed and took care of the chores for a month or more. On the fourth of July, it came a hard rain storm. The roof leaked, everything was soaked, beds were wet, not a dry spot in the house.

I was not well, got a terrible cold and sent for my husband to come home. I took the fever and chills and had to doctor all fall. People thought I had consumption. I drank water of pine tar for a year, that is what helped me.

That next summer he put in his crops and then went to work for a neighbor, again I was left alone to do the chores.

We had four or five hogs, a cow to fetch and take a quarter of a mile to water. I went a half of a mile to pull weeds and pack them home in a sack for the hogs. I done this twice a day, corn was scarce. I also had my two children to care for. We were only starting in life so we had to do the best we could. I was always willing to do my part and sometimes more. So that is life in the west for me.

I was not well I had choleryfantum every summer, and chills every winter. He got dissatisfied and we moved to Nebraska in 1879, took a homestead and timber claim in Custer

County.

We left Iowa in November, stopped and worked on the railroad till it froze up, then we went on. We got as far as the river, the ferry had stopped and they crossed on the ice. They had been cutting ice. It was dark, a man told us that we had better not try to cross for we might get in a hole. We camped on the river bank or rather the old river bed. Everyone knows how it moved from one place to another.

(1880) It was awful cold that night it froze a curdle in alcohol. I thought we would freeze. We had stove in the wagon, we took turns keeping the fire. His sister was with us, she said she would keep the watch the first time. I took the babe and laid down. Our oil ran out so I made a lite by putting a cloth in a pan and put lard in it. I took two forkes and stuck them in between two boards on the wagon. She got up to fix the fire and put more lard on the light pan. I told her there was too much on it and it would run over, the stove was red hot.

I hardly spoke the word until she shook the wagon and it didn't hardly touch the stove until it was all in a flame. It burned near all we had, our bedding except two quilts were on fire. I put out the fire with snow. It burnt all our clothing except what we had on. We saved the wagon, we wrapped up in the quilts and sat there all night and kept the children from freezing. He got his hands badly burnt. They hurt so badly he could not cover them and they froze. He could not work for a long time. He took us to his house and we had to sell a team of horses, the best we had. They were a nive 6 and 5, and there were dandies. I hated to see them go. But there was no other way to get the things fixed to go. We stayed there till spring, March, his hands were so bad they gathered.

In March (1880) we came to Custer County, reached here the last part of march. We built a sod wall 9 or 10 foot high and another one 5 foot high, stretched the wagon sheet over them. A blizzard came up we were afraid it would take it, so we stood and held it down until we could get it tied. The storm was so bad we couldn't see any distance. It lasted three days. We had a quilt for the door and window and only had \$10.00 when we landed in Nebraska. He went and got a load of cedar and made posts and took them to Grand Island to be able to get things to live on and feed for the horses. I stayed with the three children alone for a week.

The wolves howled around every night. They came so near they drove the dog back to the door. I got up, loaded the gun and shot it. It was so dark I could not see any distance from the house. But I drove them off, and they never bothered us again for a night or two.

I had to lead the cow from place to place so she could get something to eat for we had no hay and the grass was short.

When he came back he built up the walls of the house and went again. Got more cedars, made more posts to sell so we could buy windows and doors. So I stayed another week without a house.

With two ranches near, cattle were running all around. I was afraid to leave the cow out for fear they would come and hurt her. The dog helped keep them away. I got along right well till he got back.

We finished the house and furniture out of open boards and cedar. He went for another load. Our chairs were blocks made out of the end of logs.

He broke up some land planted some corn and potatoes. Made a stable out of poles and hay. Broke a fire break around the house and stable, so I could back fire to save the houses. The grass was higher than a horse and some places a man could hide on a horse riding thru it.

When I saw a fire coming, I would go and start a fire back, and kept it from the place. Sometimes, the flames would jump over the river or a fire break 40 or 50 feet wide. I fought fires and saved a lot of hay that was in canyons. I stopped more than one fire and saved hundreds of tons for the ranch men.

The next year we had two cows and one yearling and two calves and three colts. I had to picket them out and draw water out of a well 50 feet or more over hand with two buckets. The empty one went down as the full one come up.

They started to build up Broken Bow, the railroad was not through yet and he freighted back and fourth to Grand Island. He was only home long enough for me to fix up his lunch box. He had two teams so he freighted a good share of the lumber for the first houses in Broken Bow. I can tell the first houses that was built and some of them are standing yet. The railroad wasn't through and I was not sorry.

(1881) He broke more land out and put in more crops. We put in about two acres of potatoes and a fine garden. He got to put up hay for two ranchers. We tried to hire help but not many to hire, as everyone had to put up their own. I told him not to run around to hunt help, spending the profit, because I would help him. So we went at it and put up enough for two ranches. We took the children with us. I would rake awhile as he moved. He pulled the hay with a bull rake to stack it. We had no sweeps or stackers. On wash day I would put the clothes

on to boil and go after another load of hay. Next time we came in I rined as he unloaded. He worked out in the fall, potato digging, he had no time to work at home, so one day I took the team and plowed a lot of potatoes out and picked them up. I had a wagon load of potatoes. When he came home in the evening, he helped unload them. This is the way we got our start in Nebraska.

We started with one cow, he bought another, we traded calves and got hefers. It was not long till we had a herd of cattle for the boys to herd. He took a pre-emption then he had a lot of wheat, he had wheat all over the neighborhood. It took six weeks to harvest and thrash. I done all the cooking, milking, and churned everyday. I worked night and day, never went to bed till 11 or 12 o'clock. Had all the dishes to wash and make ready for breakfast. That made it easier in the morning.

The men slept in the barn. I cared for my two children, besides, I wasn't well myself. After the harvest was over I was hardly able to do much for a good while. I could hardly do my own work. I have worked hard all my life and tried to save all I could to get a start but failed. My husband was reared in town and worked in the shops. He didn't know much about farming or management. He made a lot of money and worked hard but didn't manage it right. He was a man that thought a woman ought not try to be boss, as he used to say, so I never tried to. There was things I could tell him but I knew it was no use. He would think that I was trying to boss him. He was very queer in his ways but very good to me in other ways.

There was drouth here, we moved to Oklahoma. I took sick on the way. When we got there the water was so bad it ate the tin of the teakettle. I took the chills and fever and never saw a well day all the time we were there. I had the Malaria fever. The water had a bad taste and was so warm.

I told him the next fall I was going to go back to Nebraska for my health. About Christmas I began to get ready to go. He came home from the shop and said he could sell out and go too. I was glad for that, for I knew it would be the same thing over again. He sold the shop and some of the household goods. We might as well gave it away for the price we got out of it. As soon as we got back in Nebraska, I began to get better except for my stomach and that I doctored for. At times, I got so bad I could only eat crackers and water. My boys wanted me to go to a chiropractor. I thought that it was of no use but I did go. I was so weak I could hardly go up stairs. I looked more like a corpse than a living woman.

After I two 2 or 3 cards of treatments I began to feel better. I can eat most anything I want. I am 73 years old. I live alone, do all my work, spade and make a garden. I have good health for my age.

When my husband had a stroke I took care of him as long as I could. He got so I couldn't lift him so our son Frank took care of him, when he died I stayed alone. I thank my Dear Heavenly Father for my health. He is all to thank for my life. My life is in his Hands and is all I have. He has brought me up out of the miry clay and set my feet on the rock, Lord Jesus.

My parents taught me to pray, I never said a word back to them, but I done as they said. For I knew better and had more respect for them. They told my sister that I gave them less trouble than any of the rest of them.

If the family wanted to go for a visit or entertainment and someone had to stay home the rest could go and I willingly stayed home. One time they all went to see my Uncle, at the time I was away working. They said I could go if I got home in time. I walked two miles and when I got home they were gone. Mother said it wasn't fair for me to stay home all the time and I could go saddle the pony and go. Daddy never waited on anyone when he was ready to go.

Mother took it awful hard when I left home and moved west. She said she never expected to see me again. But I got to go back and see them, but poor Mother was so thin and lame, she could not walk alone and never looked like herself. When I left she was fleshy. I was glad I did my best for them I only wish I had done more.

I want to so live so I can do my best for Jesus. There is no other friend so near as he. My friends on earth can forsake me but He is always ready to help. If I only ask Him in faith, believing.

Mrs. Nancy Ann Boyd McCaslin
Mother of Eight Children

*NOTE: This story was written by Nancy Ann Boyd McCaslin, daughter of John Robert Boyd and Lydia Young Boyd. No copies are to be published or professionally distributed without the written consent of the family.