Hitting the Dusty Trail

Family left a parched homestead for the promise of a better life.

Many years ago, Life magazine described Jordan, Montana as the most isolated spot in the United States. It was there, in a dugout 14 miles out of Jordan, that a neighbor lady serving as a midwife delivered me into the world.

I was born to Joe and Frances Graham on January 2, 1918, at the time of the terrible flu epidemic. World War I was still raging, and drought conditions prevailed until 1926.

Yet my memories of life at our homestead are happy ones. I recall being rocked to sleep by my father in our snug dugout as he sang Red Wing and Buffalo Gals in his beautiful baritone voice.

I was the little sister to my brother, Carroll, and sister, Allene. One Christmas Eve, when I was about 5, our family held hands and walked a mile across the snow to the local schoolhouse for a holiday program and gift giving. Father led us back home over the snow, singing It Came Upon a Midnight Clear.

Due to the drought, our only cash crop was a very small amount of wheat. The only way my father could get the grain to the railroad in Ingomar was to freight it 75 miles on a lumber wagon hitched to a four-horse team. The round trip, over dirt roads, took a full week.

We always lived on very little expenditure of money, purchasing

only kerosene for our lamps, sugar, kitchen matches, shoes and dress material from catalogs. We raised chickens, swine and cattle.

In 1925, my father rode a horse more than 100 miles south and traveled the rest of the way in my uncle's Model T Ford to look for a place where moisture was more plentiful. He finally bought a small ranch at the foot of the Bighorn Mountains.

When I was 8, in 1926, we loaded our possessions on a lumber wagon driven by my mother and put the farm machinery on a hay wagon driven by my father. Carroll, who was 12, and the two Gibson boys (several other families moved at the same time) drove 75 head of cattle 200 miles.

The 3-week journey included a stop at my uncle's property after the first 100 miles. The hooves of our cattle had worn down to the point where the animals were limping. It took a couple of weeks for the hooves to grow out.

When we arrived at our new home, we were delighted with all the rain, the wild plums and the trout stream flowing out of the mountains.

Mother named our new land Mountain View Ranch, which has been enlarged many times over. She sold Mountain View to Carroll, and the land is still being ranched by his sons and grandsons. Mother lived to be 87, outliving Father by 24 years, and never lost her love of Montana.

My father always valued education after he had to quit school in sixth grade to help support his family. He became quite educated by reading any books available. From our ranch, he once rode a horse 14 miles over mountain roads to Wyola to cast his Presidential vote for FDR.

My siblings and I each finished a year of college before following other pursuits. Carroll served as a state senator for 24 years, Allene married a rancher and I bought and sold real estate.

Now, at 88, I still enjoy playing cards and my favorite hobby—floating in a boat with a fishing rod in my hand.

—Regina M., Billings, Montana