

Grandma's
Story

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She never told me the year nor the season it happened. I don't even know what it's called in the history books, or if it's even in the history books. All I know is what she told me, and that Grandma called it "The Bombing Range Days."

She lay in bed that day, a little longer than usual. With nine kids underfoot and one on the way, the peace and quiet of the early morning hours were a luxury she seldom enjoyed. She thought about all the chores that needed to be done that day and the chores that were left over from yesterday. Mentally, she made a list assigning each child to a job. Still there were chores left to do. Chores that would probably be left over for tomorrow. Inwardly she groaned, rolling over and smothering any sound escaping into her pillow. Sighing wearily she got up to make coffee. Stepping carefully over the bodies of her children sprawled all over the floor, she made her way into the kitchen. She put the last of the wood into the stove. As she poured the kerosene and lit the stove, she decided to let her husband sleep a while before asking him to fetch more wood for the afternoon meal. She put the coffee on the stove and started to mix the batter for pancakes.

The sun was barely warming the earth when the man came. Her husband had risen an hour ago and was out back chopping wood. The sound of the knocking frightened her, none of her friends or neighbors ever knocked. They always yelled by the gate, and she ran out to meet them. The knocking continued. Backing away from the door, she bumped against her eldest son. "Take it easy Mom, I'll get it," he assured her. The man at the door stood tall. He was dressed in a green hat. This was the dress of an Army man. She knew this and it frightened her more. "Where's your man?" he demanded of her. She could only nod towards the back. The man turned to leave and she followed. She listened in silent rage as the man told her husband they had until nightfall to get their belongings together and get out. "It isn't fair," she thought. "First they take all the good land away from us and put us on this worthless tract of nothing-land; now they're taking that too." She listened on in new-found horror as the man explained what use the land would be to the Army. "New recruits need to be trained to fly and to know how to drop bombs. This worthless land will be perfect for this area of training. Tomorrow at eight o'clock, a squad of new recruits will be in for the first day of training." With that the man turned and left. She stared at her husband in shock and fear. Her husband's face reflected her own emotions. Together they quickly turned and ran toward the house, gathering objects as they ran.

Breathlessly she ran into the house shouting orders. Her oldest son, understanding immediately, ran out to help his father herd the cows together, heading them towards the boundary line. There wasn't much time and some would probably be lost or stolen before the day ended, but still they represented the food and money they would need later. The three oldest daughters started packing the household and personal items. The younger children were outside chasing and catching the hens and the old rooster, putting them in cardboard boxes, flour sacks, or whatever else would hold them. She ran out to hitch the team to the wagon. Almost immediately it began to fill. She started tearing apart the outhouse, throwing the planks down as she took them off. The wood was important, more useful than clothing, almost. Not paying attention to where she was walking, she stepped on a protruding nail. The nail was old and rusty. The pain was so great she found she couldn't stand on the foot for more than a few minutes. Sitting down, she cried in frustration, screaming at her children when they dared come close. Her husband, upon returning, found his wife sitting in the middle of a toilet, half-up half-down, crying her eyes out. He examined the wound then bandaged it with an old sheet he found, soothing her as he worked. Lifting her gently, he put her in the already filled wagon.

Together they raced across the country to the boundary line. As they neared the line, she stared in shock at what she saw. Her friends and neighbors were all over, unloading their wagons in a pile next to the fence, then jumping back into their wagons and racing off for the next load. Unlike the friendly faces she was used to, their faces were grim and determined. Her husband finished unloading, then took her off the wagon, setting her down next to the load. He raced off in the direction of the house. She looked at the sun, it was sitting dangerously close to the west. She only hoped they had time to get everything of importance. Looking around she saw her neighbors' belongings all along the fence. The older women were clearing out spaces for the tents. Some of the children were gathering wood for the fires. Suddenly she realized her family hadn't eaten since last night and started searching through her stuff for pots and pans and food. Sending her young son off for some wood, she began preparing the evening meal.

It was well into the night when her husband returned with the last load. The coffee was hot, the soup long since done. She just finished setting up the tent. Wearily she sat down, her leg throbbing in pain. Her swollen body ached with exhaustion. She watched as each of her children ate, then one by one crawled into the tent and to bed, till there was only herself and her husband. He hadn't said a word but only sat and stared into his coffee. Tears of frustration threatened her as she sat and looked at her husband. "What will happen now?" she asked. "Are we going to live on this hill, in this tent, the rest of our lives? Will we ever get to go back to our home?" He didn't answer her but only sat and stared into his cup. She looked at him for a while then put her head down and cried.

For as long as I can remember I heard my grandma tell this story. Sometimes a friend would drop over and together they would tell tales of that day with horror or amusement, whatever mood they were in. I can never tell the story as she told it. Each time she told it, she would be able to raise some emotion in me. I would laugh with her or I would cry with her. She left us last summer.