

## HOMESTEADING

In 1917 Angus enlisted in the Cavalry because he loved horses. However, after a short time he realized that the cavalry was completely outmoded and would never get into action so he transferred to Field Artillery which was still horse drawn. He was soon sent to Fort Snelling, Minnesota to Officer Training Camp for a three month course. Usually after finishing at Fort Snelling the officers were sent to a three month assignment in the army and then had a two week home leave before permanent assignment. When he graduated, seven of them, including Angus, were ordered to join the 10th Field at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. But when they got to Fort Sill no one knew where 10th Field was. After frantic calling they found the regiment at Douglas Arizona under four hours notice to go overseas.

So our optimistic plan to marry during his home leave was shot down. For about three weeks I resisted urgent telephone calls from Douglas, interrupting my one o'clock class, asking when I was coming down to marry him. So at the end of the semester, Jan, 25, 1918, Mother and I went down to Douglas. We were married that night with seven brother officers and several wives and sweethearts in attendance. Mother went home the next day and we had a glorious two months honeymoon, though we couldn't go more than four hours away from camp.

After the 10th left for overseas, I enlisted in the army as Reconstruction Aide, working with the veterans in the hospital at Fort Riley, Kansas. I worked at Fort Riley the whole time that Angus was gone.

His Third Division, which included the 10th Field, finally came home in 1919, after nine months in Germany in the Army of Occupation. (The first troops to go over were the last to be brought home!) They very kindly transferred me to Connecticut where I could resign and hurry to Philadelphia to be there when he landed with Rolf von der Vogelweide, the devoted friend he had acquired in the lonely time in Germany. Rolf was a sweet tempered German Shepherd dog, partially trained for police work. Angus had worried about his "one-man-dog" accepting me, but right from the first, when Angus and I had good natured scuffles, Rolf always took my side.

My folks were in Des Moines, Iowa then, so we went there for his discharge and then on to Kearney, Nebraska to see Angus' parents. From there we went to Moorcroft, Wyoming and signed up for 320 acres up against the hills - the last available land available for homesteading in that area.

We borrowed a couple of saddle horses - the owners were glad not to have to feed them through the winter -and hired two men to haul lumber the twenty three miles out to our land. They built a 12x14 shack in one day, and we slept in it that night. It was nicely insulated on the outside with black tar paper. The little 14x14 inch "range" dancing with pitch-filled cedar wood kept us snug and warm all winter. One corner was the bedroom, one was the kitchen, my big trunk was the table in the dining room corner and the other was the entrance.

Angus nailed some boards together and made a chair big enough for us both. We didn't expect any company so one chair was enough. We were startled one day when the doorknob started to turn, but we relaxed when we found one of the ponies trying to open the door. As was the custom out there the ponies grazed freely with hobbles to keep them from straying too far.

Our cabin was built beside a nice little stream and we felt lucky to have such a convenient source of good water all winter. However, as we explored a little farther upstream, after the spring thaw, we found a dead horse in our nice clear water supply!! This may prove that "What you don't know can't hurt you"

We built a two sided shelter for the ponies and spent much time cutting a supply of cedar fence posts to qualify for "improvements" on our homestead. Angus cut and trimmed the posts, and then it was my job to tie a rope around them, loop it around the saddle horn, and snake it to a stack in a safe place above the reach of spring flooding.

Spring flooding reminds me of our first trip out from town with a rented team and wagon carrying our things. It was raining when we arrived in Moorcroft - the only rain of the season -so the Belle Fourche River was very high. When we came to the ford we could see clearly the tracks going in and coming out on the other side so we didn't hesitate but plunged right in. The water came up into the wagonbox and through my trunk but that was to be expected. What we didn't expect was to find instead of a smooth submerged road to the other side, a four foot bank where the road had been washed out. We hit it hard and broke something on the wagon

and scared the horses so much that one of them gave up and was ready to collapse in the water. While Angus ran a half mile to Rivenberg's Ranch for help, I stood in the water and held her head up so she wouldn't drown herself.

The first trip out to our land on our ponies, we lost our way. There were no sign posts on the dim trails we were travelling, so when we came to a homesteader's shack we stopped to ask the way. Incredible!!! The woman living there was Helen Foster, who had gone to school with my sister in Cedar Falls, Iowa, where we had lived for years. If we had not lost our way that day we would never have met them, but we became close friends and had many good visits on our way to town and back.

That first day they asked us to stay for a snack and I got bacon to contribute from our supplies. Later she told me that she thought I didn't know much about cooking because I fried the bacon so crisp! Another time we were at Foster's on April Fools day, and Helen and I fooled the fellows. She had a package of lemon pudding which was quite bitter without some sugar added, so we made some for us with sugar but left it out of theirs. They didn't dare complain because they didn't know who had made it, and each husband was sure that it wasn't *his* wife. So they manfully downed the bitter stuff until we cried: "April Fool!"

Rolf was the third member of our family and he revelled in the life on the homestead. We travelled on horse back as we had no wheels [until Dad Steadman came out later in his old Model T Ford and left it there for us to use]. It just suited Rolf to run alongside us as we rode. In winter, we would watch out the window as he would run up the hill and slide back down on his shoulder, and play ball all by himself with a chunk of ice.

Our faithful "one-man-dog" gave us a real scare that winter. He disappeared for a couple of days and we were sure he had been killed. He loved to chase the herd of Shetland ponies which roamed freely on the prairie. Rivenberg had bought a pair for his daughter, and by the time we were there the daughter had gone away to school, and the ponies had multiplied to a sizable herd. Rolf had great fun chasing them, but unlike the antelopes who would fade away in the distance, the ponies would suddenly turn and in a perfect half circle bear down on him while he fled for his life before them. So we knew he could have been killed by the ponies or shot for a wolf. We had stopped at Rivenberg's Ranch once in a while on our way to town, and of

course Rolf enjoyed the meat they fed him. After a couple of days someone asked us if we had lost our dog! He had been visiting the ranch very happily until we went over and brought him home. Our diet was quite limited - canned milk and oatmeal for our breakfast and cornmeal mush for Rolf - so we couldn't really blame him for going visiting.

Galloping home one night, my pony, Twostep, stepped in a gopher hole and I went flying over her head and landed firmly seated on a cactus plant. It was a week before Angus got all the stickers out. But when Rolf caught a porcupine, everyone said we would have to shoot him for he would not let us take the quills out. But he was no ordinary dog, for Angus took the pliers, and while I held his head Angus pulled all the quills from his nose, neck and throat.

Then there was the time Angus took him up the ladder to the top of the silo. No problem! But how do four legs descend a ladder he can't see? But Angus went down with him, carefully placing each foot one at a time. Angus thought a playground slide would be fun with Rolf, and it was - the combined weight gave them the speed of lightning and a thunderous, jarring bump at the end.

During the three years required to prove up on a homestead the homesteader was allowed five months of each year off the land to earn enough to live on the land for the other seven months without starving. So we hired a team and wagon and drove 44 miles south to Newcastle, Wyoming and freighted heavy piping from the railroad to the oil fields. We lived in a tent at first, and then rented a log cabin just out of town. We invited Mother Steadman and granddaughter, Jane, to come and visit us.

There was one room partitioned off by a new lumber wall and another bedroom in an open corner. We used the closed room for a store room until they came, then moved a bed next to the new lumber wall and gave them the open room, instead of the cluttered store room. We were glad we had taken the store room when Angus and I began to have "flea bites" which we blamed on Bluey, a fluffy little sheep dog that had adopted us. Did you know that new raw lumber is often infected with bed bugs? We learned the hard way and had to douse the place with kerosene, and set the four bed posts in cups of kerosene to get rid of them. That solved the problem.

One morning, when I was ready to scoop out flour for biscuits from the flour sack in our orange crate cupboard, I noticed Rolf standing with head cocked staring at the flour

sack. Angus came and discovered a rattle snake coiled neatly behind the flour. He called off the dog and shot the snake with his pistol, and we had biscuits as usual.

Rolf loved to trot along with the wagon on the trips to the oil fields, and I enjoyed them, too. One day, a female coyote came out of the woods and pursued Rolf, but he wasn't much interested. When a male appeared, the female disappeared, and the male became much more aggressive till Rolf turned without breaking his stride and made one quick snap. Then the coyote limped off into the woods on three legs.

In September 1920, Angus went back to the homestead and I went to Madison, Wisconsin where my father had got me a job teaching fifth grade. My father and mother had moved from Des Moines, where he was state inspector of schools, to take a similar position in Madison, Wisconsin. I moved in with them while Angus stayed in Wyoming to prove up on our land. In October 1920 he joined us in Madison and enrolled in the College of Agriculture in the University on the G.I. Bill for Veterans. We stayed there three years until he graduated.

Then Mother Steadman moved to Mansfield, Pa. to head the Music Department at the State Teachers College there and asked me to come and teach with her again [I had taught under her, in the music department of the State Teachers College in Kearney, Nebraska. It was through her that I initially met Angus.]. That meant that Angus could commute to Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, where he took rural engineering. Mansfield was our home for many years, but we never forgot the excitement of our homestead years.

Margaret Dick Steadman

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