

Excerpt from My Tender Soul – A Story of Survival

By

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(Pulled from Chapter Two)

The next thing that I knew was that, one week shy of finishing the school year, we were packing our belongings to move, again. This seemed like another quick decision and yet, for all I knew they could have been planning it for some time and never told us.

I came home from school one Friday afternoon and was told to go up to my room and pack my things, because we would be taking off very early the next morning. I asked where we were going and I was simply told, “We’re moving.” I asked where and I didn’t get an answer. I asked about school and was told that I was going to miss my last week.

I didn’t know what was happening and yet, it seemed pretty serious. I asked a few more questions and yet, didn’t receive an answer. I was told, rather sharply, to just get up to my room and to watch over Tim and Jessie. I grabbed those two and headed upstairs. Nathan was in his room and I tried to ask him what was going on but he shut the door on my face. I don’t know if he even knew where we were going or was just upset because he didn’t want to move again.

I was anxious about the move, still didn’t know where we were going and I had a hard

time falling asleep. I knew I had to get up really early the next morning and be on my best behavior and yet, I just couldn't sleep. I had tried that entire afternoon to talk to mom and she wasn't talking. Dad was in a bad mood and I figured I should just stay away.

The next day, as we were getting situated in our car, I found out we were going back to Minnesota. The furniture was still in the house and I was told that dad would make another trip to come back and get it. We had been gone for less than a year and my parents decided it was time to go back home.

I am not sure that either of my parents had a plan for this move. It was a long, quiet drive and I slept as much as I could. I was tired of being in the car, squished between my siblings and wanted to know how much longer. When we crossed the Iowa/Minnesota border I was told it would only be a little longer before we reached my grandparent's farm.

We went directly to Grandpa and Grandma Baker's place--my mom's parents. I always loved coming out to their farm. They owned about 80 acres and grandpa did most of the work himself. He raised corn, grain, alfalfa and beans. They had 17 milk cows, eight calves and a whole bunch of chickens. My great grandpa, (the one straight from Czechoslovakia), still lived on the homestead. He had an orange trailer at the bottom of the hill, south of the driveway, just down from the house.

As we turned into the long driveway heading up to the house, we kids were rather

jubilant. Our parents were not. At that moment, I wasn't aware of the negative mood in the car and yet, in hindsight, I know it was there.

Dad parked the car and the three older kids jumped out as fast as we could. Mom trailed behind with Jessie in her arms and dad brought up the rear. Grandma came out of the house, walked down the porch steps and came to meet us. She had been drying dishes; still holding the towel in her hands, she greeted us sternly.

Grandma is a rather short, stout lady with legs as big as tree trunks. She wore her hair in a typical no-nonsense style and rarely had a smile on her face; on that day, her demeanor was especially severe. She did not appear happy to see us at all. It kind of stopped me in my tracks. She stood there, with her hands on her waist and began to chastise my dad. My mom, still holding Jessie, went and stood by Grandma, Nathan followed her; Timmy and I stayed by dad.

Grandma kept saying over and over again, "I told you not to take Barb and the kids down to Missouri, how could you do such a thing?" "What are you going to do now?" "You should have listened to me." "I told you this was going to happen."

The tirade seemed to last an eternity, although in reality it was probably only for a few minutes. I didn't know what was going on. Dad told us kids to get our things out of the car and take them inside. This confused me because I thought we were just stopping by here for a visit, but I knew better than to question his demands at this point. Little did I know that my life was about to change dramatically.

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When our things had been taken out of the car, dad told us to crawl back in and get settled because we were going to go for a drive. The next thing I knew, all six of us were back in the car and heading down the driveway, away from grandma's.

At the end of the driveway, dad turned right and then took another immediate sharp right. He was driving into a cornfield and parked our blue rambler on the edge of it. He told us kids to get out of the car and we did. Mom was crying uncontrollably.

I grabbed my little sister and pulled her on my lap as I sat down on the ground. My two brothers sat beside me, one on each side. Mom had gotten out of the car and she was sitting way off to the side of us. We kids were looking directly at dad, who had stayed partially in the car. He was sitting in the driver's seat, turned towards us with his left leg on the ground, his right arm sitting over the steering wheel.

I was waiting for somebody to say something. It wasn't happening, so I finally asked what was going on. Mom told us, between sobs, that our father was leaving us and heading back to Missouri. I looked at her and said, "Yeah, dad is going back to Missouri to get the rest of our things."

Mom looked at me and said, "No, your father is going back to Missouri to stay." I looked at Nathan and he didn't say anything, I looked at dad, and he sat there with his face down. I looked at mom, and she was very upset and was crying even harder.

I didn't know what to think. I didn't understand why he was leaving us. I looked at dad again, and this time he looked up at me; staring directly into his eyes I said, rather matter-of-factly, "I don't want my daddy to leave."

I will never forget the look on his face after I said that. It was one of remorse, anguish and helplessness. He looked so sad and yet, he never replied to my statement. He just looked away.

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