

Name _____

The Promise of a Prairie Summer

Grandpa died in 1925 when my mother was just five years old. She was the youngest of five children and the only one still living at home. Grandpa's death meant that Grandma had to run their 4,000 acre farm in North Dakota. With all of the responsibility, she found that she didn't have time to look after a five year old.

During the growing season there were often as many as twenty to thirty hired hands and several kitchen girls to feed them. The farm had at least 100 working horses, 20 riding horses, 200 head of cattle and young bulls, as well as chickens and pigs. In those days all of the plowing was done with horse drawn plows. There were too many hazards on the farm for a little girl and so my mother spent most of her childhood years in California.

Grandma and Mother spent the winters in Los Angeles together, but Grandma had to be back in North Dakota every year for the spring planting and she had to stay until the fall harvest was finished, usually after the first snow. Mother stayed in Los Angeles with family friends those first few summers, but she was finally allowed to take the train to North Dakota on her own when she was eight years old. The promise of a prairie summer and time with her mother filled her childish dreams.

Grandma's best friend rode the streetcar with Mother to the train station in Los Angeles during the first week of June. She made sure that she found the right train and left her in the care of the porters. Mother took books and magazines along to read during the weeklong trip. She had a prepaid punch card for meals in the dining car and the porters turned down a sleeping berth for her each night. There really wasn't much to do during those endless days and nights while crossing the mountains and the plains on the way to the family farm.

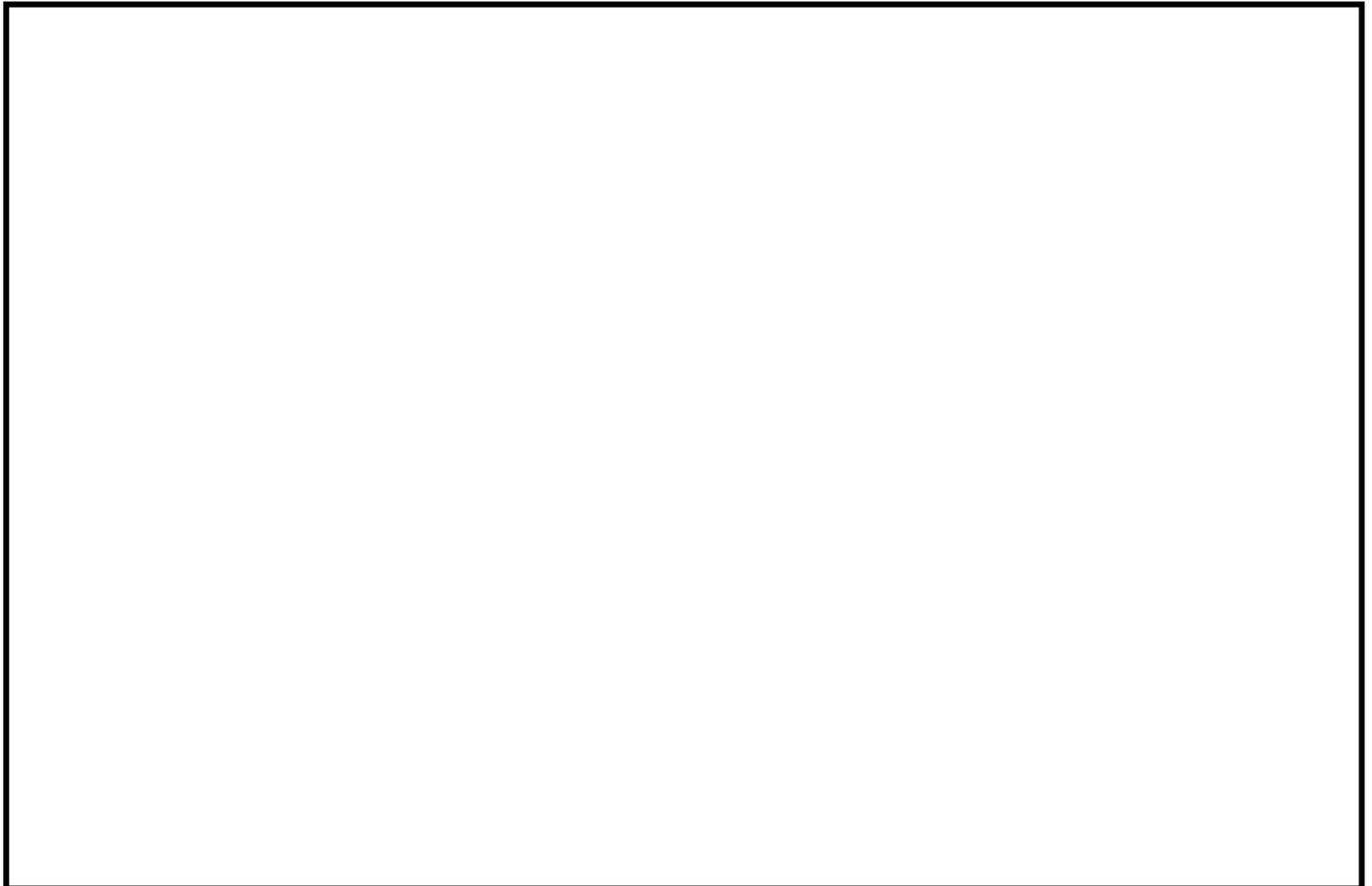
When the train finally pulled into Valley City, North Dakota, Grandma sent someone to get Mother in a horse and buggy. Haying was already under way and since Grandma was too busy to look after her, she was placed under the care of the kitchen help. She was well fed, but had to find things to do on her own.

What was a California girl to do on a busy farm in the summer? She didn't know anything about horses and was afraid of them. She explored the three and a half story house and the basement, too, looking for anything she could find to read. Unfortunately, many of the books she found were old and boring, but she read everything she could find. She had her own room and spent many hours by herself. That promise of a prairie summer didn't live up to her dreams.

Find and circle the special story words. How many did you find?

under _____ read _____ why _____ own _____ found _____

Draw and label pictures of the animals on Grandma's farm.



Fill in the Blanks

Read each sentence below. Circle the missing word and write it in the space.

1. Mother _____ everything she could find that summer.
_____ read red

2. She was on her _____ with nothing to do.
_____ one own

3. She was placed _____ the care of the kitchen help.
_____ under wonder

Yes or No?

1. Did Mother travel by herself on the train? yes no
2. Was she going to see her Grandpa? yes no
3. Were there a lot of animals on the farm? yes no
4. Did she go on the train in the winter? yes no
5. Did she have fun that summer? yes no

How did my mother get to North Dakota?

How many days did it take to get there?

How did she get to the farm from the train?

What did she do all summer?

Did she have a good time in North Dakota?

