

# My Life Story

Watch ye therefore and pray Always.....

Luke 21:36

Ben D. Zoder

## MY LIFE STORY

My Father was with his third wife, Lizzie, when I was born on Feb. 15, 1905. I was the youngest of their three children, and was born in Reno County, Kansas.

I was only 3 years old when my Mother died. I just wish I could remember her. I'm sure children that have a Mother often take her too much for granted. Father had gone to Custer County, Oklahoma to buy a farm to move there, when Mother was taken to the hospital and died. So we, Father, my brother, sister, and half brothers moved to Oklahoma. Soon afterward in 1908, I remember how we were so lonely. Five years later Father married step Mother, Miriam Mullet with 9 children. We then moved to western Kansas to live on her farm until the estate was settled. Two years later we moved back to Oklahoma in 1915. I grew up there with my step brothers and sisters. I had one step sister Jemima, & also my real sister Jemima. They were only 3 months apart in age. I also had a step brother Ben.

There was quite a lot of activity around, with all of us. Of course the oldest ones didn't come to Oklahoma, Father was a farmer and kept us boys busy farming with horses. We had many horses. Later when I was grown, Father, George and I went to the gravel pit one day to get sand to build a barn, I think. As we backed down into the pit and started to load the wagon, I was shoveling sand and all at once I felt I should walk out as sometimes the top dirt caved in. I made one step, then several hundred pounds of dirt came down & threw me forward. I was covered with dirt up to my waist. Father and George had to dig me out. I feel the Lord led me out, or I don't know if I would be alive today.

Many things happened in my younger years. I wasn't too healthy when growing up, but I was kept busy. In the Spring of 1924 several girls from Kansas came to Oklahoma for a visit. Right away I got interested in one of them, Mary Nisly, and started correspondence.

The next winter I went to Kansas for 1 month, and worked there to get better acquainted with her. My Father-in-law, Eli Nisly was laid up several months from a fall off of the silo. While he was in bed, I asked him about

getting married to Mary, and he gave consent. At that time this was unusual to ask the prospective father-in-law, but he seemed to appreciate it. I went to Kansas by train and we got married there in Sept. 1925. Since it was during a rather difficult time financially for my father-in-law, he offered \$10, if we would have just a small wedding. So we were married in church, then had dinner at the home place, with only Mary's family members present. None of my family from Oklahoma were present. The young people were there in the evening to sing. Our gifts were few, but we were happy.

Our plans were to live in Kansas, but Father & Mother wanted to take an extended trip to the eastern states, and wanted us to take care of the farm while they were gone. So we came back & stayed there till they came back in Dec. Step brother, Neal Mullet helped us do the work while they were gone. Father said we could have a team of horses to take to Kansas if we have a way to take them. We decided we would go over land.

While my parents were gone, we bought a wagon & covered it with canvas. I also bought a driving horse to take along. Father thought it would be too much to undertake the trip in the winter. I picked out a young pair of grey mares almost 3 years old. Their names were Kate & Queen. They were only worked together once, and were very soft. We didn't have a load. We had only a bed in the wagon, a small perfection oil stove, and a few other belongings.

We left Dec. 22, 1925 for the 220 or so mile trip. We stopped along the road to stay where we could get water for the horses traveling around 30 miles per day. That was about all we could do. We left on Tue. and came to the Kansas line on Sat. night. We wanted to be at Harper for over Sun., but had to stay in Anthony, Kansas over night at a livery barn. Sun. morning it was zero, with a cold north wind. We started around 10 a.m., and had to go straight north to Harper. It was so cold and I walked all of the ten miles. Grandma had the door closed so she could keep warm. I got really cold, even with lots of clothes on. My ears, fingers and toes were frozen. We got to Henry Hostettlers around 1 P.M., & stayed there until Mon. We got to our place, the Eli Nisly home on Tue. eve., one week after we started. One day

on our trip, as we had Dandy, our driving horse, tied in the back we found he had gotten his rope loose. When we looked back, he was coming slowly about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile back. We just happened to find it out.

We had rented a farm, so around the first of Jan. we moved on it. Two main line railroads went over a corner of the farm. One day I went across to plow a small patch of sod, with four horses, and a walking plow. Soon two fast passenger trains came very fast and made a lot of noise. I went in front to hold them. They got so scared they just ran over me. They drug me quite a ways over the plowed ground, then tore loose from the plow, and circled around a hundred acre field. Then they went back over the railroad and went in to Noah Masts place, having scattered harness & plow in the field. Such a mess! I had my head cut some and was pretty sore for a while. I learned a lesson not to go in front after that. The grey team was so scared of trains & ran off several times later. We lived in Reno county six years, and had 5 children.

Fannie Mae was a baby when we moved to Nowata, Oklahoma. Father-in-law thought he could help his children by going to a place where land was cheaper and there was also much grass for cattle. So I again by myself went over land by covered wagon with 4 horses. It was over 200 miles, and took 5 days. Then I went back again to Kansas. Later we loaded a freight car to take our belongings and some stock. We arrived at Nowata, Jan. 1, 1932. We lived on the same farm 11 years right in depression time, with quite a struggle, as it also was so dry for several years. Looking back, we cherish the time we spent there. We had a nice church and helped each other much, as we all had our struggles. I think at one time there were about 14 families there.

When Father-in-law, our bishop died, we were like a sheep without a shepherd. So in the winter of 1943 we all decided to leave. We, with 6 other families went to Garnett, Kansas. Some went to Reno, Kansas; others to Ohio. Our children were growing up and nearly all closely related. This was one reason for our leaving. We prospered some financially in Garnett, but we weren't really satisfied to live there permanently. After 3 years of living

there, Grandma and I took a trip through the East, including Stuarts Draft, Va. Brother-in-law Ed Mast made us an offer to buy a farm and a herd of cows. We would build a dairy barn and large chicken house & pay for it by monthly milk checks. That kinda appealed to us. After Grandma Nisly died that Fall, the children finally were agreed to take that venture. Ed Mast bought the farm, and on March 1946 I came in an immigrant car with our belongings. The family came by train. There was much to be done before we were ready to milk cows, but we had plenty of help for building a dairy barn and chicken house. By Oct., we started milking 25 to 30 cows by hand for a year or so. The Lord really blessed us, and all the children co-operated. We were on the farm for 11 years, and had over half of our debts paid off. Then the children left home one by one and got married. Only Harvey of the boys, was at home when I had to have lung surgery, and wasn't able to do much work. We finally decided to sell out, which we did. We then bought an 11 acre chicken farm and were out of debt, with some money left. As chicken dust didn't agree with me because of my bronchial problems, we sold out again after 3 years.

In 1960 we moved to Madison County, Va. I wasn't able to do much physical work for a few years. Grandma and I worked at Mountain View Home for a while. In April 1964 we took our trip to Arizona & the West Coast, and were gone around 3 months. In the Fall of 64 we decided to go to Florida for the winter, for my health. It seemed to agree pretty well, and my health got so that I could work fairly well again. I did maintenance work and other light jobs.

Now I have been going winters to Florida. We moved back to Stuarts in 1971 when Mother was sick with cancer and passed on.

I guess you know all about what happened later. Praise the Lord for His wonderful goodness and mercy.