

Francis Tschacher: My name is Francis Tschacher.

Tom Manning: Tell me about where you were living before the blizzard struck and then we can get into the blizzard.

Francis Tschacher: We lived 4 miles west and about 2 miles south of Manville.

Tom Manning: Tell me about your living quarters.

Francis Tschacher: We had only been married about 5 and a half months. We moved into this old house, it was about 3 rooms, so we just moved into the 1 big room. We had wood and some hay bails in the one room, and we had dog and we had dog food.

Tom Manning: So pretty Spartan living there as newly weds?

Francis Tschacher: Yes.

Tom Manning: Then January 1st was New Year's Day and I don't know if you recall what you did that New Year's but January 2nd is when it hit, right?

Francis Tschacher: Yes. We hadn't gone anywhere on January 1st because we were supposed to be up that morn, celebrating the brother-in-law's birthday. We had gotten up that morning to feed the cattle and it was cloudy, and it just started lightning and thundering. Then it started snowing while we were out feeding the cattle. That was pretty spooky. Anyway, we decided then and there that we weren't going. The longer we were out there the worse it got so we took the cattle back to the corral.

Tom Manning: It was thundering and lightning and snowing at the same time?

Francis Tschacher: Yes.

Tom Manning: That must've been really scary.

Francis Tschacher: It was, and I was raised on a ranch all my life so that was scary. Anyway, the longer the day went, the worse it got. It just snowed and blowed and we went in the house, and of course the old windows and stuff, it whistled threw the windows. It just was spooky.

Tom Manning: Did you get accumulation of snow in your house?

Francis Tschacher: I do not remember any in our house but I don't know how.

Tom Manning: Do you remember having problems with static electricity like Jimmy was talking about?

Francis Tschacher: No, I don't. I don't remember that. I know there was static, we had an old radio, a battery radio and we tried to get the weather on it. Of course, you couldn't and there was a lot of static but that was different.

Tom Manning: You had no phone?

Francis Tschacher: Oh no, you didn't have no phone. No electricity, just coal-oil lamps. We just had an oil burner and every time it started it's go boom. Anyway, we run out of oil right away and we had a dog and she had pups behind the oil burner and of course, they died. Then we had a little cook stove, it wasn't the big, old comforter stoves and stuff they had, it was just a little one. We did have wood cut in this other room, so we kept it going. It would get so hot, I mean it warped the top but you didn't get warm. Your feet were cold, you wore all the clothes you could put on. When you sat around we usually, for our wedding present we had about 5 wool blankets given to us and a comforter, we'd put them around us to try and keep warm.

My husband would go out probably about every 2 hours to check the cows and we did not at the time have a rope or anything, so we headed toward the windmill and then toward the barn. There was a fence about halfway through that we would follow if you'd get there. Anyway, the longer the cows were there they'd stomp and they'd get up higher and higher. I'd go out with him a lot of the time and we would knock the icicles off of their eyes and their mouth every time because they'd get too hard and too long. One of them was our milk cow and we tried to milk to her but of course, no feed, no water she didn't give any milk so we didn't try after the first time.

Tom Manning: You said, "No feed and no water" at what point were you able to start feeding your cattle again?

Francis Tschacher: When it was over. When it was over, Edwin's dad clobbered up a sled and came over and moved us out. We put the chickens in a ... Well, we finally got down to the chickens, this was quite a while after it was over but we put the chickens in gunny sacks. He had brought one bail of hay and we coaxed the cows that way. But anyhow, going out we tried putting boxes over our face but that didn't work because the snow whirled up under the box and that was worse yet. It was so cold it just would take your breath away.

We had a lean-to again, an open shed, next to the cow barn. We tried putting them in there and we cut blocks of snow to block them in and anyhow, that didn't work because it filled in around them. You couldn't cover up all the holes so we had to get them out of there again. When it was over, why the cows were level with the top of the barn roof. We couldn't have held them another day.

Tom Manning: They had to come down the snow bank then to ...

Francis Tschacher: Yeah. The wind would blow the snow higher than the window. I'd hang a lantern in there in case he got close or got lost, Edwin. That snow bank would be down and then it'd be up in a different direction so you never knew by the snow banks. You couldn't go by them because they would change all the time.

Tom Manning: It just kept changing on you?

Francis Tschacher: Yes.

Tom Manning: That would make for getting lost a lot easier.

Francis Tschacher: Yes, but we both made it back every time. I did go out with Edwin a lot.

Tom Manning: You said your dad came over to move you over to his place during the blizzard?

Francis Tschacher: No, this was way after. That was my husband's dad, his folks lived by the highway on the north side. They had the sheep and like Carmen said there was very few we saved but you could see where there'd be an air hole up through they'd breathe through. After a while they'd just ... it lasted too long. I don't think we saved very many sheep.

Tom Manning: How many sheep are we talking about roughly?

Francis Tschacher: There was probably a hundred head.

Tom Manning: They were encased in a snow cave that they melted with their warm breaths?

Francis Tschacher: Yes, but they'd drift of course.

Tom Manning: I've heard stories about the sheep that their legs would freeze up and they'd break their legs when they tried to walk.

Francis Tschacher: Yeah, that was pretty bad.

We had a hog and the milk cow calf and they were next to where we had the milk barn and the open shed and the chicken house, or the little lean-to for

them. We had oyster shell on a shell there to feed the chickens. Anyway, they ate that, the hog and the calf, and when we did get them out of there, the hog was just like a razorback. He was skinny as I'll get out, but the calf lived. We did put grain down the ... whatever you call the hole in the chicken house.

Tom Manning: I think you called it the stink hole.

Francis Tschacher: Yeah, the stink hole (laughs). Anyhow, when we got to them finally there were lots of frozen eggs but the chickens were alive.

Tom Manning: What did you say? You fed the calves, I mean the pig and the calf ate, shells?

Francis Tschacher: It was oyster shell which you feed chickens to make their shells, the egg shells hard.

Tom Manning: I see.

Francis Tschacher: I don't know how they could eat that but they did.

Tom Manning: The calf ate it too?

Francis Tschacher: Yeah, I guess. They both lived anyway.

Tom Manning: The chickens made it but the eggs didn't?

Francis Tschacher: Nope.

Tom Manning: What do you do with the frozen egg? Throw them out I guess?

Francis Tschacher: Throw them out (laughs).

I'll never forget when the train finally did come through of course it was the old coal fed, and that noise they made. That was awesome to hear that finally but that was a long time after.

Tom Manning: After hearing nothing but the howling winds.

Francis Tschacher: Yes, and you never get over that fear completely and I hate wind to this day. Especially when it blows hard because it allows reminds you of that.

Tom Manning: Did you make it into Lusk at all after the blizzard?

Francis Tschacher: Oh no. We got to Manville, finally.

Tom Manning: What kind of shape was Manville in? Do you recall?

Francis Tschacher: Not too good of shape, I know we got to the grocery store. There was an older feller there named Mr. Blankenship and everybody charged their groceries to him. He did have a big supply of groceries.

Tom Manning: He never ran out of groceries for folks then?

Francis Tschacher: As far as I know, no.

Tom Manning: That was fortunate because weren't the groceries supplied to this area by trains?

Francis Tschacher: Yes. Well, I never thought of that. I don't know, were some of them brought by trucks?[crosstalk]

Tom Manning: Everything was shut down though so he must've had a really good supply laid in.

Francis Tschacher: He did, he was good about that. I know we were one of the first ones that paid off the bill, everybody charged. I had a third daughter then and she was just little. He bought her a tricycle for us paying off the bill. That went through the rest of my kids and my oldest son's kids. That was a good tricycle.

Tom Manning: Wow, kind of a souvenir of the store.

Francis Tschacher: Right.

Tom Manning: You've been around this area for a long time and you've been through a lot of winter storms since the Blizzard of 49. Do any of them stack up?

Francis Tschacher: In 50, the year after that, we got 30 inches of snow on the level and no wind. That was a different story too.

Tom Manning: But nothing quite like that?

Francis Tschacher: No, not like that. Until this one. Well, we had the other day, the second of June. That's a different story.

Tom Manning: Yes, indeed. Were you ever really afraid during the storm that you weren't going to make it?

Francis Tschacher: I don't remember being afraid that we weren't going to make it. I think I was afraid Edwin wouldn't make it back or something. I think that was another reason I went out with him a lot. I was born and raised in the country and he wasn't always.

Tom Manning: Okay. Anything else that you can think of? I'm looking at my notes from last time and you really stuck to your story. So it must be true (laughs).

Francis Tschacher: Yeah (laughs). It just seemed like it lasted forever but it finally quit.

Tom Manning: You don't want to experience that one again?

Francis Tschacher: No.

Tom Manning: All right. I'm looking over this. Oh, you talked about washing your floor.

Francis Tschacher: Oh yes. After it was over, here came Edwin's dad and his older brother. I thought, "Oh my gosh, I've to scrub my floor." Of course, I had the warming oven on the stove and I put some water in a bucket and a mop in it. I stuck it down to mop the floor and the mop froze to the floor. That ended that.

Tom Manning: Let them come over with a dirty floor.

Francis Tschacher: Yup (laughs). I don't think they noticed but ...

Tom Manning: I think that's it. If you can't think of anything else, I don't have anything else here.

Francis Tschacher: I can't remember cooking or anything like that but must've had something on the stove all the time, I don't know.

Tom Manning: Thanks so much, Francis.

Francis Tschacher: You're welcome.

Tom Manning: Appreciate it.