



## THE STORM

by Gerta (Krause) Botchek

I never see a Christmas cactus but what I think of the terrible electric storm that hit on the 18th of December - must have been 1921 or 22. I was either 8 or 9 at the time. Remember when the huge pine tree fell over the full granary and the top landed right by the kitchen door? Mom and Dad must really have had some anxious hours expecting the other trees to fall, the one that was even closer and leaning towards the house. (There were six huge primitive pine trees in our yard - three north and westerly of the house and three south and westerly.) The tree that had come down was the farthest north of the house, the other two trees on the north side were in direct line with the house and the storm was from the northwest. They decided not to risk staying, so we all bundled up and walked over to Uncle Alfred's (Flatt's) house a distance of about three fourths mile. We had to face the strong wind and blowing snow, and by the time I got there my hands were white with frost even in my mittens. I was so cold I broke the lock off of their door trying to get in. I didn't even give them time to open their door. A short distance behind me was Carl Peterson pulling Erna and Alfred by their arms. The rest of you kids and Mom and Dad made it too. We stayed at Uncle Alfred's all that day expecting the storm to die down but it didn't so the men hitched up a team of horses and with the sleigh went to our house to get some food and bedding. The biggest relief was to see the house still standing and the huge trees roots were still holding. That night only the grown ups slept in beds. We youngsters thought it was great sleeping on the floor. The storm continued all the next day and we had to stay for the second night. We kids didn't mind, it was just two days we didn't have to sort beans. Bad weather was no fun until the quota of beans was met, then we could go out coasting. That day Harry had just come in the house from the red granary with a half a gunny

sack of beans to clean when the tree fell right behind him. I guess these sort of things happen to prove to us that there is Someone watching over us. Mama must have had a constant prayer in her heart, and the Lord spared all of us and the home our folks had worked so hard to build and maintain.

The third day the men went back to our place to warm the house and see that everything was alright. The Christmas cactus and all of Mama's beautiful plants looked lovely until they thawed out, then, of course, they hung like rags around the sides of the pots. We all felt badly but at the same time were thankful it was only plants we lost and not one of us. This is why a Christmas cactus has a special significance for me.

I don't believe Hanna was with us at the time. If I remember right she was becoming a woman of the world, going to high school in the big city of Kalispell, Montana.

I'd like to add a little postscript to Gerta's story on "The Storm". I found a picture of that disastrous storm with a notation in Mom's handwriting, "Sturm, Dezember 14, 1924." It was an electrical blizzard - in parts of the storm, area people could not cook on their wooden ranges, sparks of electricity flashed and danced on the tops of the stoves. Temperatures dropped in the neighborhood of 80° in 24 hours. It had been warm and raining Sunday evening when Dad took me to town where I was staying with Walt and Clara Krause during my junior year. The next day Walt came to the school about 1 o'clock to take me home one mile against the wind. The drifts were already so deep Walt had to stomp out a path for us. No car traffic whatsoever. And the temperature dropping fast. Also, just the day before, Sunday evening, Dad had taken Carl Peterson out to the farm with him. Remember! He had come, via Great Northern rods, to Kalispell the day before with Art Schultze, a

nephew of Walts. Carl, 18, an orphan, had no place to go and you know how Mom and Dad were, always ready to lend a helping hand to anyone that needed it. Carl was originally from Wisconsin and this was his introduction to Montana.