

The Journey to Pierre

Written by Jerry Herrman in 2004

It is a morning during the first part of November 1945. My parents are preparing to move my sister Barbara from the hospital in Philip to the hospital in Pierre, some eighty five miles, to be under the care of Dr Riggs. Barbara had been badly burned on her stomach, legs and one arm about two weeks before. Barbara is three years old and will be four on December 2. Dr Schlutz is the Doctor in Philip, but increasingly my parents have become dissatisfied with the way he has cared for Barbara. Dr Riggs has a very good reputation in Central SD and they feel it would be better to have Barbara under his care. When they want to talk to Dr Schultz he cannot be found. After talking to different people my parents learn he has gone to a medical convention in St Louis. My Dad calls the convention center and is able to talk to Dr Schultz. Dr Schultz is surprised to hear from my Dad, but gives his permission to release Barbara.

Uncle Wesley and Aunt Helen live in the Waggoner house (Waggoner was an attorney, Lake Waggoner is named for him, he was a friend of grandfather John, and his daughter Ruth and Mother went to high school together) which is about two blocks south of the hospital. The hospital looks like a two story residence, which is not surprising because it had originally been built as a home. The journey to Pierre will be made in two automobiles in case one develops problems. My parents Reuben, 44 years old, and Mother Viola, 34, will be in the front seat of their blue, two door 1941 Ford sedan. In the back seat is a nurse, Bernice Jenson. Bernice has Barbara in the seat beside her. Barbara is lying on blankets and wrapped in sheets and blankets. Uncle Wesley and Aunt Helen, both a few years older than my Dad, are sitting in the front seat

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Boy Smothers Flames To Save Small Sister's Life

Gerald Herrman, 8 years old, through his presence of mind and quick action, is credited with probably saving his small sister's life when her clothing caught fire Sunday forenoon.

Barbara, 4, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Reuben Herrman of the Hilland neighborhood, opened the door of the furnace in the Herrman home. Whether the fire blazed out on her, or just what happened is not certain, but her clothing caught fire. Gerald and another brother, younger than the little girl, were nearby at the time. Gerald immediately grabbed a coat and wrapped it around his sister to smother the flames. The fire was practically extinguished by the time Mrs. Herrman could get to her.

She was quite badly burned on the stomach, legs and one arm. Fortunately, the flames did not hit her face and she did not inhale any of the fire.

Mr. and Mrs. Herrman brought her to the Philip hospital and she is reported to be improving satisfactorily.

of their 1940 black, two door Chevrolet sedan. In the back seat is my lively 2-year old, soon to be 3, brother John, who everyone calls Johnny so as not to be confused with our grandfather John, and myself. The weather is mild, with little or no snow.

I know that Barbara is very sick but I am eight years old and this seems like an adventure. I have never been to Pierre and so everything is new and I expect I am wide-eyed with anticipation.

We head east and get on Highway 14 where it turns east after passing the two-story Dorothy Bros Garage with the gas pumps practically on the street. On our left is Pop Pohle's store and the brick Senechal Hotel, on the right is the bank where Aunt Helen works. We cross Main Street and go past the Red Owl Grocery Store which faces Main, go past Joe Heidler's shoe and harness repair shop and the Civic Auditorium all on the right. On the left is the white wood frame Lutheran Church, with the bell in the tower that can be heard all over town on Sunday mornings, and parsonage. We go a few more blocks and go up the hill and away from town. We are headed east and in a few miles go right by the airport where we can see the hangers and airplanes. We see the tower with the light on top (on a clear night when weather conditions are right, we can see the rotating light from our home thirty-some miles to the northwest). The highway is a narrow two lane blacktop. Between Philip and Midland the Bad River is to the right, with the railroad tracks and telegraph poles with the glistening silver wires close to the river. We are on higher ground so the road curves and bends a lot as there are many creeks and draws to cross; at other times the highway follows section lines. The highway takes us down Main Street of Midland, then turns left going north, upward and away from the river. We go north twenty miles or so; a few miles north of Midland we see a house that is being built on the right side of the highway.

The highway turns east and in a few miles we go through Hayes, where there is a general store with gas pumps, a school house and community hall (a few miles before Hayes we saw a brown church on the left). About eight miles east of Hayes the blacktop highway suddenly ends, and from here to Ft Pierre the highway is gravel. Where the blacktop ended the road turned north along a section line for two or three miles then in an easterly direction for many miles. The highway went up hill and down hill, over creeks and draws with narrow bridges and over ridges. The high wooden poles with telephone wires were parallel to the highway all the way from Philip to Pierre.

There was quite a lot of traffic. At one point we got behind a slow truck, and could not get around because traffic was headed our way or when there was no traffic it was not level enough to pass. Aunt Helen and Uncle Wesley got more and more agitated, especially Aunt Helen because of the truck being in

our way and not being able to pass. Finally when the line of cars was able to pass and we pulled up beside the truck driver, Aunt Helen opened her window, stuck her upper body out the window, waving her arms, and yelling at the driver "why wouldn't you pull over and let us pass? We have a sick child on the way to the hospital". Aunt Helen was very angry.

Finally the highway climbed a hill and turned south-southeast when we were on the bluffs overlooking the Missouri River Valley. In the distance was the river with trees on its banks. Across the river was Pierre, the most prominent building being the State Capitol with its black dome. The highway followed the top of the bluffs for several miles, with many curves. Eventually it wound its way down into the town of Ft Pierre, passing near the Verendrye Monument. The highway headed east on a street with homes, then the Court House on the left, then business and store buildings, after which the highway turned left on a street with more stores. After a block or two we were leaving Ft Pierre. The highway went north several miles, and in the distance we could see two long cantilever bridges, the darker one on the north being the railroad bridge. The highway turned east onto the southern bridge and we went across, one lane each way; the Missouri seemed very wide. Then we were in the city of Pierre and drove by the big red brick building housing the power plant, then commercial buildings, business buildings and stores. After going through this area we were on a street of homes. I don't remember how we were making noise in the back seat but all at once Aunt Helen turned around and said "be quiet, we are in front of the hospital". Everybody was quiet and there to our right was the long stately building, St Mary's Hospital. It was parallel to the street, two floors of light sand colored brick, with a lawn in front, trees and a hedge next to the sidewalk. We drove past the front entrance in the middle of the building, which had a porch or portico with a cross on top. We drove past the hospital and made a right turn to get to the emergency entrance.

I don't remember any more from that day. I am sure Dad must have talked to Dr Riggs on the telephone before leaving Philip so Barbara would have been expected. (Sister Agatha comes into Barbara's and Mother's lives at this point.)

I imagine we stayed in Pierre that night, possibly at the small Waverly Hotel at the south end of main street or the bigger St Charles Hotel on the hill near the Capitol. It is possible Uncle Wesley, Aunt Helen and Bernice drove back to Philip that night.

Note: Barbara was in the hospital for about nine months. The total bill for her care was less than \$1000.