

## CHIPS FROM THE NORTHERN BRANCH

From somewhere in the deep recesses of my mind, I have plucked a Christmas memory which will be forever important to me.

Christmas on the North Dakota prairie was a time of anticipation and joy, a welcome respite from the hard times and unrelenting toil of everyday existence. Families were extremely impoverished and no "store-bought" gifts were imminent for most of the children who attended Souris #1. Excitement filled the air as mothers baked once-a-year "goodies" and sewed and baked and built gifts to be opened on Christmas morning.

The Christmas program at school was a yearly social event for the entire community. No special lights or decorations were needed to enhance the appreciation of this day. The kids had planned, practiced and revised every noon hour for a month and were ready. A tree fashioned from prairie junipers decorated with strings of popcorn and thorn apples, and various homemade decorations was in place and a few small packages were already under it.

All year I had tried to get Frederic, a reticent second grader, to talk to me. An unusually polite youngster, he always had his work done but spoke to no one if it could be avoided. After the program was over, gifts were distributed and I was singularly impressed with the ingenuity displayed in the homemade gifts which were given to me. Coffee, hot cocoa and cookies were now being enjoyed by all. At this point, I felt a tug at my sleeve and found Frederic looking up at me. As I knelt down, he quickly placed a package in my hand. While he looked on, I opened it and found a sling shot and a bag of smooth stones. As I held out my arms, he hesitated only a moment before coming to me. Then he said, "I made it for you because I love you."

In my cedar chest (which holds all my "treasures"), I have a box which holds a sling shot, a bag of stones, and the memory of a very special little boy.

EXTRA SPECIAL THANKS to June Johnson, Bigfork MN (This story first appeared in the December, 1985, Top of the Range, Iron Range MEA. June was then a teacher at Bigfork High School. She has since retired.

