

# Crocuses in the Snow

by Kathleen Smith

Winter can be brutal. In North Dakota where I was raised, winter is more than just a season, it's a way of life. Blizzards and cold weather would start in late September and run a steady course until April. Temperatures would range between zero and 40 degrees below and when the temperature would climb as high as freezing we knew it was time for spring. This harsh, inhospitable climate was where all of my great-grandparents built their homesteads and raised their families. To me it is nothing less than a miracle that they survived and it makes me wonder if I could do what they did.

In the early spring, long before the last snow is melted from the snow-drifted prairie you can walk around the Dakota pastures and look for flowers. The wild prairie Crocuses shoot out buds and blossoms right through the snow. My Grandmother used to take me by the hand when I was small and walk with me out to the barn, sometimes taking little detours to see the Crocus heads popping up above the snow. I wondered how they could survive in the cold and ice that surrounded them. I always felt the beauty of the Crocus more deeply than other flowers because of the snow.

It isn't easy being a Crocus. Long, cold winters with little sunlight would easily kill most flowers. But the Crocus is different. Nature has endowed that little plant with the necessary equipment to survive even the worst climate and still come back year after year with it's tiny and beautiful display.

My great-grandparents were like Crocuses. They lived, year after year, in that harsh and forbidding climate, farming and raising families with hardly any worldly gain to show for all their work. Each year of survival was a triumph of human nature and a miracle of renewal.

But I am not unique in this thing. Everyone has ancestors who lived under harsh conditions. Each of us is the result of ancestors who survived the winter of life and brought forth new life. But what about me? I live in the twenty-first century. I have more conveniences than all of my ancestors combined. I have modern medicine, motor vehicles, central heat, indoor plumbing, electricity, and computers! Figuratively speaking, this Crocus is living in Hawaii! No more snow and ice, no more long cold winter and no more frozen ground.

However, today we have winter of a different kind. World-wide war, the crumbling of our political and moral underpinnings, terrorism, abuse of power, the break-down of the family and growing apathy are some of the icicles that threaten our existence. But the human spirit is strong, like the Crocus. It has potential beyond our understanding. The temptation is to bury our heads in the snow and say, "It's too cold, too hard and too deep. The answer is to push harder, rise higher and do better. It reminds me of the story I read about George Washington at the Camp of Valley Forge. His men were starving, cold and in many cases without shoes. They felt beaten, broken and were on the verge of complete collapse. They were losing the war and George knew it, but he wasn't willing to give up. He persuaded the men to endure the winter, and then in the spring, with new information and renewed courage, they were able, against all the odds, to defeat the British in a key battle. This turned the tide of the war and our country was born as a result.

In the winter of our lives the good news is that pioneers survived the terrible prairie winters, George Washington founded a great country, Crocuses bloom, even in snow and so can we.