



A WHEAT THANKSGIVING STORY

circa 1850

My Father's Story of His Father's
Dependence on God to Feed the Family.
*A true story of pioneering days and how Faith in God was
the foundation of this countries [sic] development.*

By Joseph Gillit Wheat, MD, of Mt Vernon, Iowa
January 19, 1907

Originally transcribed (from a manuscript written in pencil) by Thomas Guy Wheat, a grandson of Dr. Wheat, it was found among the papers of his father, George Guy Wheat.

Benjamin Patterson Wheat, the circuit riding Methodist preacher, was born April 7, 1811, and died at age 50 years (September 30, 1861) while "Josie," the story's narrator was away fighting the Civil War. The mother was Lucy Hunt Gillit Wheat, (July 18, 1813 to June 16, 1871).

The present transcriber has done minimal editing of punctuation for clarity of meaning. She is a great-granddaughter of Dr. Wheat.

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I remember so well when father went away that last time before comforts began to come to us. We had been cold and hungry many times. This was new and strange to us children and to mother and as she clung to father's neck told him about it just before he left, tears came slowly into his eyes and then his heart broke. He sank on his knees in the greatness of his struggle to trust in God to care for his children.

Father said let us pray, first brokenly asking God if he should go then triumphantly asking God with a ringing voice "Shall I go" his answer already came.

Then father talked to God and reasoned with Him, "Now Father, I'm obeying and I am your child, we are all your children. You have promised to take care of your children if they love and obey you. Now we must have better care, we will have faith and put all our trust in you and your promises. We will expect you to keep your word and take care of us."

Father kissed us goodbye, gave mother all the money he had, 90 cents in scrip, held mother close. I heard him say "Never fear little woman only trust Him."

Father rose in the stirrup over his saddle bags, the mighty horse he rode settled himself to the massive load he knew so well. God let father lose none of that wonderful strength of his near three hundred pounds of sinewy power which a marvelous build he began life with and years of sturdy frontier logging life and later years of blacksmithing had molded into a strength and skill that no backwoods bully or no number of them however large had ever dared to rouse his anger a second time.

Father went and mother proudly watched him to the turn in the road. Father did not look back. As I remember him now, I believe it must have been because he could not have seen mother had he tried.

Mother had a new light and courage in her face. I came to her and said, "Mother, I'll soon take care of you." She placed her hand gently on my shoulder and said, "Josie, the Lord will take care of us."

Then came hard days, mother knit and spun and sewed. Her work at best would earn no more than 30 cents a day and often not even that at the only market, the crossroads store a half mile away.



Sometimes we owed the storekeeper and a few times he was cross to me. Other times he asked me if mother was well and did we have plenty. I told him once that mother trusted God and I guessed God would help us. He said something about the time coming when no one else would and when I told mother, she looked gray and sick once more like I had seen her other times before Father came home.

I said, "Mother will God forget us?" and she clasped me in her arms and rocked me silently in her low chair and cried softly. Then I couldn't stand it any longer, I slipped down and took her head in my arms and whispered like father did, "Never fear little woman, only trust Him."

Mother turned and kissed me and dried her tears then I went out into the woods and made a deadfall over a rabbit run. I began to catch some rabbits and mother tanned the skins and made George and me warm caps and fur lined mittens covered with old sack cloth.

We gathered sticks and fagots for the winter which was coming. Days passed and sometimes we had milk and meal mush. Other times only meal mush and salt. Never any butter or coffee.

Some days I thought I must perish for a taste of sugar and I did drop my wet mittens on the counter at the store where sugar had been spilt. Then I went out in the cold to save each grain and eat it then my heart smote me and I went inside and dropped my sticky mittens on the counter again.

This time I saved it all and took it home to mother and Georgie, when I gave mother the 23 cents which the knit had brought, she looked sadly at it. For it was less than usual. And she had been almost ill that week only able to work part of Friday and Saturday, and but 23 cents for both days.

When I showed her the sugar she refused it and made Georgie eat it. She didn't ask me how I got it but her face looked hard and I was afraid to tell. Years after she told me she was afraid to ask me for fear she would learn something wrong, and she would have to refuse the sugar for Georgie, who cried for it as soon as he saw it.

That Sunday was the saddest Sabbath of our lives. God seemed to have forgotten us and mother talked to herself. But I couldn't get to hear what she would say and something in her eyes made me afraid to try to comfort her.

Then came the last test to mother, the test that Elijah put the widow to, would she share her last measure of meal and kruse of oil.

Two men drove up to the side of the road in front of our house and



stopped. One of them came in and knocked. Mother had been quiet for a long half hour and hadn't seen them nor heard them drive up. I had been standing by the window and watching first mother and then the road. Mother just seemed to be waiting for something.

When the knock came she rose and went to the door, she opened it, the man spoke pleasantly and asked, "May we camp here by you tonight and secure supper for ourselves with you?"

Mother turned silently to the cupboard closet and looked into the meal chest. She came out and very quietly said, "Yes, you may."

The men thanked her and turned toward the wagon, then he looked back and then went to the wagon and spoke to his companion.

Mother said Josie take this 23 cents and go buy a quart of milk, a pint of molasses and the rest in meal at the store. I took the money and started, but the man who came to the house saw me and before I was across the back lot he called to me, I waited and answered.

He came up and questioned me where I was going and what I was going to do, then he asked me where my father was and what he was doing. Then when I had told him he took me by the hand and led me wondering out to the wagon. I was somewhat excited but not with fear.

When we came to the wagon, the man said to his companion, "un-hitch and get ready to unload, this is the place."

After a little while we sat at supper, the men had allowed me to finish my errands while they cared for their team. In my excitement, I had not told mother what they had said to me. She busied herself at getting supper and I examined the wagon, it was a great high spreading rack [*moved? original transcriber could not read this word*] in the heavy hauling trucks, so common in early days in the timber country. The rack seemed just full of sacks and barrels, boxes and bundles, and apples—I could smell apples and syrup—Oh! how hungry I was for some to eat.

But as I said, we sat at supper finally and mother asked a silent blessing on our humble meal of corndodgers with molasses and mush with milk, the men ate heartily and seemed to be excited over something.

Sometimes they would nod at each other and sometimes I could not understand what they meant by some of the strange remarks they made to each other after mother had replied to some question about the house and family. Mother looked inquiringly at them at times but she was too gently reared in the old Pennsylvania home to display curiosity, so they would notice.

When supper was finished the man who had talked with me pushed back his chair and drew a long sigh of contentment. Then he said, "I have never had a happier hour in my life nor eaten a better meal and now if you will listen I want to tell you a story:"

"A few days [ago] this gentleman Mr B who is a large farmer near the town of X came into my big general store and said to me, 'Mr. K this has been a wonderfully prosperous year for me and feel very thankful. I am not a Christian but I feel like I would willingly do something for the Lords poor.'

"I thought a moment and then replied to him that it was very strange that I should have been thinking the same thing for several days. In a very short time we agreed to make up a load of goods and start out with farmer B's big wagon and team to find the place."

"The next day farmer B came in with his great rack wagon half filled with turnips, cabbage, potatoes, apples, flour, meal, butter, cheese, sorghum and other good things from the farm. OH! I must not forget, the fine fall pig that weighs 75 pounds dressed."

"And I began to fill the space he had left us [in] the wagon with tea, coffee, sugar, ham, bacon, and other groceries. Then I thought of the winter and we piled in some warm blankets and shoes and caps and mittens, then my wife came in and picked out some fine warm woolen cloth, some needles, thread, buttons and lots of other things that women need and like—wife just runs all the buying of those things for my store."

"Well we got filled up by noon, ate dinner at my house and started. We have travelled three days and have met many people but we felt no desire to stop or ask questions. We came to many fork roads but just let the team take their heads when we didn't feel like choosing."

"This afternoon farmer B said, 'I think we must be nearly to the place where we can find the Lords poor. We've come over sixty miles by now.' I cannot tell you how strangely happy it made me feel when we spoke and talked of it but we each said it was better than being a boy one more."

"Then when we came to your house the horses just looked up and neighed. I said let's stop and I came in. I questioned your boy before he went to the store and we decided to take our supper with you all at what you could furnish. We've made up our minds that if there are any poor that belong to the Lord you must be the ones. And so if you will allow us to we will begin and unload at once so we may start home bright and early in morning."

He rose at once and as he turned away I thought I saw a tear drop from his cheek. Mother had been crying slowly and silently for several minutes but she did not speak. Her nature was very deep and did not show. I came to her and clasped my arms about her neck. She seemed to shine thru her tears and she hugged me close and murmured, "God has not forgotten us Josie my boy."

Then I cried so I can't remember any more, it came all at once to me. Mother led me to her room and left me sobbing on her own bed. I suppose she helped the men and told them where to put things.

Next morning what a breakfast. I believe I shall never forget it and the men started away early. I ran before their team clear beyond the turn in the road and showed them where we had seen father last.

One of the men suddenly asked me, "Josie, what is your name?"

I said Joseph Gillit Wheat.

"What, are you a Wheat, is Elder Wheat your father?"

"Yes," I shouted, "Do you know him?"

They replied as glad as I, "Certainly no one can forget him, but we never dreamed he was not well cared for. He preached at X many weeks ago and he prayed that those with plenty might remember the Lords poor about them. Go home and tell your mother, lad, and tell her we did not ask her name because it might hurt her to tell us who she was."

Farmer B threw a dollar, a whole big dollar at my feet and said almost cross, "Run now, do as you are told." Then they drove away, but at the turn I looked back at them once more and they were talking earnestly and making gestures, I was sure I knew what they were talking about, but I ran home filled with joy that made my feet seem just like wing's beating the air.

Mother caught me in her arms and sat in her low rocker. She kissed me silently many times, at last she asked me, "Will you be like your father, Josie boy?"

I think I promised her, I can't remember now, but of course I must have. Then mother showed me what they had brought. There were as many things that the storekeeper Mr. K did not speak of, that I forgot almost that he had spoken of anything until years after the recollection came clearer to me.

Then in a few days father came. He was seldom away more than seventy or eighty days. Mother showed father all that was in the house, he suppressed a word or choked back "Praise God!" every moment, and

when mother stopped father stepped to the middle of the floor, just where he knelt before and said let us pray.

I have heard prayers but just to hear one talk with God so that you could hear the answer right along just like it was speaking back is different.

I don't know what we did then but it seems to me that father let Georgie and me go out to bring in his saddle bags and then play with old Dobbin. I know when I came in after while father held mother in his great arms and was smoothing her hair away from her temples and forehead, then he told me, "Josie you have a wonderful mother."

I looked at her and tears were in her eyes some yet. But then she can cry without being a coward and I told father that mother was God's own little girl.

We never starved or were cold at home any more, I never knew hunger after that until I went into the [Civil] war.

Next spring little sister came and father was home two whole weeks then. In the Winter he only stayed two days. Mother never looked gray anymore and in all her life after, even when I was a grown man and trouble had come to me. She used to come to me, put her gentle warm hand upon my shoulder and say,

"Never fear little man, only trust Him."