

# "I GUESS JUST BEING A RANCHER'S WIFE WAS ENOUGH FOR ME." ELAINE GAY

**BY:**

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I've always had a craving for fudge, but have not been very successful in making it. I heard through the grapevine that a lady by the name of Elaine Gay made really great fudge. So, when it was time to find someone to interview for the TWW magazine, I thought of her. Maybe she could make some fudge when we went out to her home to visit.

In early October, we went out to the Gays' ranch up in Pleasant Valley. After eating delicious homemade cinnamon rolls, croissants and chokecherry jelly, we started our interview with Elaine.

"I was born in Logan, Kansas in 1918. We moved out here when I was eight years old. It was in May of 1926, and it was muddy! My

parents, William and Opal Becker, just couldn't make a living in Kansas. As it was the Dust Bowl days, my father came out here to look for a place to live. He went all over Colorado, and found this to be his favorite place in Colorado. When we came out here we came by train and wagon, before the Moffat Tunnel was built. We came from the little town of Sidney by wagon. We lived where the Brenners live now. I have lived here for 59 years, and we lived in this house for close to 40 years. Before that we lived right straight across the river where Sonny Kuntz lives now. I have two sister, Nadine and Eula."

We asked Elaine about the trip out west. "Well, when you are under eight years of age you don't think too much of the country. You're there



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and you take it for granted. I remember coming to Colorado and having a lot of fears about it. We came over Corona Pass. They didn't have the Moffat Tunnel at that time. I think they were building it. I was very frightened of the mountains. It seemed to me that that was a very scary experience looking down out of the train. I was sick all the way over. I think it was mostly from fear that the train was going to fall off of the track in places. It was very scary to me coming from flat country, and never having had ridden a train. There are places where you could see the front of the train as you were back here."

Elaine then told us a story about getting rewards for doing chores on the ranch. "Years ago, my dad raised pigs. It was up to us kids to take care of and feed the pigs. We would take grain out to big barrels. We would do that every night. It was our chore to carry the grain and the water to those barrels and feed the pigs out of it. Then, when that had soaked, you'd refill it. So our dad said, 'Okay, I'll give you each a pig for doing this.' Times were so hard we did this all summer. He said, 'I'll tell you what, if you give me the money from the pigs that you have this fall, I'll give you a calf.' When fall came, he said, 'If you will give these calves to me I'll buy you each a good shorthorn calf for a 4-H project.' This was when 4-H first came to the county and he wanted to buy us a good calf. So he went somewhere, I'm not sure where, but he got us each a good calf. We raised the calves, fed and took care of them, and showed them at the fair. I don't think we placed, I can't remember. Anyway, we did get \$65 per head for those calves. That was a fabulous price in those days. I think they were bringing in about \$10 or \$15 for each head. We took them, sold them, and received our money.

"We then went to town and bought coats and really nice clothes. At that time, you could get a pair of shoes for a dollar and a coat probably for \$10. We really got a wardrobe, and we gave the check to the Golden Rule Store. Monday morning the banks didn't open and the check bounced. All the banks had closed due to the Depression. We had to put in a big strawberry patch to make up for that check. We picked and sold strawberries all summer. My dad really felt bad about it. He didn't have any money, after the banks went broke. I don't believe we ever got our money back, but we had to work very hard to make up for the checks that bounced."

When Elaine moved from Kansas she was in the second grade. For the next six years she went to the Sidney School. We asked her what it was like in a one-room schoolhouse. "Cold; I can't remember it being warm. We lived in the Brenner place which was only three miles from school, but when you have to walk it's a long way. Later we moved from the Brenner place to



**"I'VE LIVED IN THIS HOUSE FOR CLOSE TO 40 YEARS."**

the Ben Hibbert place. We were then closer to school. We didn't bother riding horses to school because we only had one horse for the three of us kids. My younger sister rode more often than the rest of us. My older sister and I just walked. Oliver Bartholomew walked with us. We sometimes had to break the trail all the way to school. Sometimes you would be so wet when you got through wading through the snow. I don't think there was a teacher that really understood how to build a fire.

"But I don't think the teachers kept warm, either. The Sidney Schoolhouse was a very large, old building with big, loosely fit doors with no insulation. It was a very cold building. I can't ever remember getting my clothes completely dry before it was time to start out wading through the snow again. We didn't have warm clothing like we do today. We wore undergarments and stockings and when they were wet they were very uncomfortable. Girls did not wear slacks or pants in those days. We would wear wool, but that got just heavier and heavier as it got wet.

"We went horseback three miles to school, and of course in those days the roads were not kept open. We had a very thin old horse that a neighbor loaned us the first year we went to school. People were very nice to help us as we had no saddle horses of our own. We rode this old horse, since just my older sister and I were going to school at that time. Sometimes we would have to get off and walk. Since he had to break his own trail most of the time, he would sometimes balk. One time he balked and went up on Rabbit Ears road, which wasn't kept open in the winter. My

sister had to walk through the snow to go up and get him. She told us to walk on home and she would go get the horse. He kept just ahead of her enough so that she couldn't catch up with him. She walked about up to where that lodge is now, through the snow, to catch that horse. Our folks were very mad that I didn't go along with her.

"I enjoyed high school, but there was a line drawn between the country kids and the town kids. I don't know why, I think we probably felt that we weren't quite up to them. You couldn't partake in the school activities because you went home on weekends and you couldn't get back to town. Today I feel that kids, country kids, have a different attitude all together in everything. In those days, country kids were kind of set apart. Only they were used to being together. The country kids didn't have as much as far as clothing and stuff, as the town children had. I don't think they felt they were better, but somehow we had the feeling maybe that they had more. They got to do more than we did. I would have a different attitude today than I had then. I would have certainly done a lot more.

"While I was in grade school I met Robert. We were walking to school at Sidney, which is one-half mile on 131 and then west. He and a friend would drive back and forth to high school. Once in a while they would pick us up and give us a ride that half-mile. Somehow we didn't care to ride with them. We always thought they were grown up and were a lot smarter than we were. We would run like heck to get to the road that went to school, so we wouldn't have to ride with them. They thought they were doing us a big favor. That didn't happen very often. When they drove back and forth in the fall and in the spring when the road was dry enough, they would give us a ride for that little distance. In those days cars didn't go fast enough that you couldn't outrun them."

During the winter months Elaine and her sisters had to spend some time in town. "My

grandmother used to rent a little house and we would stay in town from Christmas through April. There were not student activities tickets that you could buy. Tickets for all activities were bought separately. This was during the Depression. I don't think people realized how poor everyone was, especially the farmers. They didn't have the extra money for anything. I am sure no one had much money during those hard time. They certainly were hard up. As a child I don't know that I realized how hard it was for my parents to make a living.

"Although we weren't making money, my folks never discussed it. It was very much a struggle for anybody to hang on to keep their ranch. You had food, because you raised your own. We raised a garden, chickens, and meat and you lived on that. But as for money I don't think there were any farmer or ranchers that had two pennies to rub together. It was very much of a struggle through the '30s. Nearly all of the banks closed in 1929 and the early '30s. The economy began to recover in the mid-'30s.

### **"I DON'T REMEMBER HAVING WARM FEET ALL WINTER LONG."**

"People who have lived out in the country for most of their lives tend to learn to make their own entertainment. We went to many country dances in those days. You would go with other couples, because you didn't have that many cars. A lot of them double dated. I double dated with my older sister a lot of the time and we would go to neighbors' homes and play cards. When we were kids at home, we played lots of games. We played cards. My dad loved to play cards, and we could get dad to fix popcorn. That was probably our favorite thing to do. You couldn't really visit with your neighbors too often as it took a long time to go by horse and sled. Then later there were many country dances. When we got older, I don't think we ever missed



a dance on a Friday or Saturday night, either one. All the kids would go dancing and that was probably the main recreation.



**"WHILE I WAS IN GRADE SCHOOL I MET ROBERT."**

"At this time there was a good market for strawberries. That was when Strawberry Park was raising strawberries. I can remember the kids would go out there and pick strawberries. I think they got maybe one or two cents for a quart. They were picking in quarts rather than pints. We raised a patch of our own and sold them to the Safeway stores. Safeway had just come into town, and had a contract to buy our strawberries. Dad was quite a gardener. It was awfully hard to get fresh vegetables in the winter. He would store cabbage, carrots and turnips in a pit and take them out and wash them to sell to the store.

"When I went to high school I went with other fellows. Bob was the first one I dated. I had gone with other boys quite a little, but I went with Bob the longest. Then we didn't go together while I was in college. I was away for three years, and when I came back at Christmas, somehow we got back together again. We got engaged and were married the following July in 1938.

"For our wedding we went to Craig with my sister and her boyfriend. We were married by the Justice of the Peace, not in a church. In those days you didn't have much money for a big

church wedding. Many people got married by a Justice of the Peace. If they had a church wedding it surely wasn't a large one. Usually somebody stood up with you and that was about it. I would very much still like to have a church wedding. I think for our 50th anniversary I will insist on it. That isn't too far off. It's only two years away.

**"AT THAT TIME, YOU COULD GET A PAIR OF SHOES FOR A DOLLAR."**

"Bob can remember when he paid 75 cents for a pair of Levi's at F.M. Lights'. Now that's back quite a ways. Lights' used to go with a truck and go down to Meeker and other towns to sell merchandise. (this was common.) There was a lady that ran a dress store in Hayden who sold merchandise the same way. She used to come to our place when I was a girl. She would have dresses to sell, and she would stay overnight at our place a lot of the time. Her name was Mrs. Brock. Of course you didn't get very far in a day. Your automobiles didn't go that fast. I think Bob remembers that truck of F.M. Lights'. It was orange with black letters like all their signs. Lights' store is very well-known. I think you could get a cowboy hat for \$1 or \$1.98.

We asked Elaine about her family, her kids and her husband. Life really hasn't changed for Elaine Gay, who realizes that one has to be both dependent and independent. "Bob always wanted to be a rancher and I guess just being a rancher's wife was enough for me. In those days women didn't work because it would have been very difficult to drive over the bad roads. They were very muddy. I had no desire to teach school and work, because we started having children and had no conveniences to speak of. We cooked with a coal stove, raised our own gardens and raised chickens. We also did our own milking, so it was hard work for the ranch women just to keep our homes going.



**"I DON'T THINK WE HAD SPRING UNTIL JUNE."**





**"I DON'T THINK THERE IS ANY PLACE I WOULD LIKE BETTER THAN HERE, IN THE SUMMER."**

"I really loved cooking on a woodstove. However, I didn't like a woodstove as much as an electric one. With a woodstove, you really had to be on the ball. You had to keep the fire up, especially when you were baking. It was hot in the summer to cook on. I cooked on one for many years, but I don't think that I could ever get a meal on if I still used a woodstove.

"I'm not too interested in wealth. It's never been my ambition to be rich. It certainly hasn't been my dream to have millions of dollars. I would not care for a real fancy home, but I do think our home is comfortable and that is all I care about. A lot of money does not appeal to me. I've seen too many unhappy people with lots of money. It took all my time to care for our home and children. We had three children. My oldest one, Roberta, was born in 1941. The next one is Margaret and the youngest one is Bill."

During the winter out on the ranch, it is very hard caring for the cattle and sheep. Lots of snow makes extra work in the winter. "One time I remember most vividly was when Bob and I got caught in a blizzard. We got as far as the Brenners' and Bob borrowed a horse from the Brenners to go on home while we stayed at Brenners'. It had drifted in so badly around their barn he had to take some boards off their barn to get the horse out." In the spring it is the most difficult to get around in the mud and snow. We would feed the livestock twice a day — in the morning and again at night. The cattle would tramp the hay down and eat it.

Elaine explained why spring is the hardest season on the ranch. In the spring, during calving you often get bad weather with wet

snows. Calves are born and they're cold. You have to bring them to the sheds and put them under heat lights. It's about a 24-hour operation. Sometimes you have to help the cattle have their calves, and it's very hard on the men. There were a good number of winters like that. Bob and I did the feeding all winter. I'll tell you, spring can really be rough. We had one spring we couldn't even bring calves to the barn. The sloughs had froze up and we would go across with the wagon. The water was clear up to the bed on the wagon. We made pens down in the stockyards. We put the cows and their calves in them. We'd have to change the hay. Also we would have to see that the little calves sucked their mother to get the milk. We would maybe work until 11 a.m. before we'd even get to feed the cattle. We'd have to pack water to those cows in that pen. Feeding and seeing that the calves got their milk. If they were orphans, you had to stay up most of the night feeding them. I would get up every two hours and feed the lambs. That was the worst spring we've ever had. I don't think we had springs until June.

"When we first moved here the roads were not kept open in the winter. We had to plow them ourselves. We didn't have much of anything to plow them with so we were usually snowed in most of the winter. We did not have to take the children to school then, of course. The kids rode horseback to the little school two miles from here. When the schools consolidated, a feeder bus came in to get the children. Now the roads are maintained by the county. The plows are in here at 7 a.m. nearly every day it snows."

Elaine's favorite seasons of the year are summer and fall. She says, "Winter is still not my favorite season, but the thing with winter now is it certainly isn't as bad as it used to be. Your cars start easier; you also have anti-freeze. Years ago we used to put water in the radiators



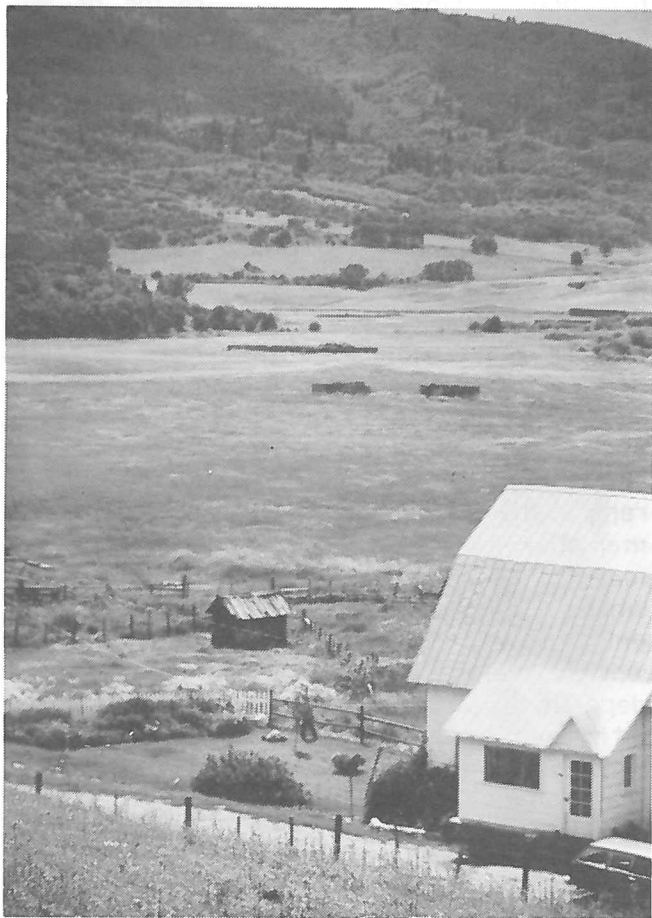
**"WINTER IS STILL NOT MY FAVORITE SEASON."**

of our cars. We had to fill them every time you went anywhere and they would freeze up and you had all kinds of problems. Our houses today are so much warmer too. We have furnaces now. In those days no one had a furnace, just a coal stove. Unless people kept the fires in the stove going all night and day it would become very cold. And the floors were always cold. I don't remember having warm feet all winter long!"

To get away from all the cares and troubles that go with the ranch, Elaine and Bob take time out to travel. "We went to Switzerland because that's where both Bob's parents came from. We enjoyed it so much. We went on a tour with the Bartholomews and many other farmers and ranchers. We have friends in Florida also, and one year we visited them. Our son lived in California for quite a few years and we have flown out and visited him there several times.

"If I could go anywhere in the world I would probably leave in the winter. I don't think there is any place I would like better than here, in the summer, on our ranch. I don't think there is a more beautiful spot, nor do I like any place better. I think if I could go anywhere, I would leave for a while in the winter to a warm climate and no snow. However, I do like winter. I think our winters are beautiful, but I don't like months of it. I think three or four months would be great and after that I'm pretty tired of it.

"For entertainment, I belong to a 500 club and a bridge club. I enjoy playing cards and being



with my friends. Bob and I still dance occasionally, but there are not many dances to go to anymore, not like when we were growing up and there were dances every Saturday night and often on Friday nights, too.

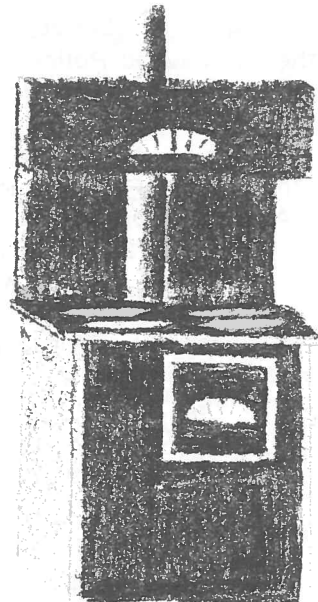
"My favorite thing to do is cooking, which I have always done a great deal of. I'm going to write a recipe book, you know! I don't raise a large garden anymore, but I love raising flowers and have many beds of them. A friend put in a waterfall and small pool for me in my yard. I have planted flowers around it and really enjoy hearing the water fall into the pool below. I also love to tile paint. While I am not the best at doing this, it is a great way to relax and I love doing it.

As we were leaving, Elaine told us that she is working on a book dealing with ranch life and cooking. She hopes to have the book published soon. We couldn't resist getting her fudge recipe. We hope the **Three Wire Winter** readers enjoy it as much as we did.

### Fudge Elaine Gay

**2 cups sugar**  
**2 tablespoons cocoa**  
**2 tablespoons white Karo syrup**  
**¾ cup milk**  
**2 tablespoons butter**  
**½ cup chopped walnuts**  
**1 teaspoon vanilla**

**Mix sugar and cocoa together well. Add Karo and stir until it is all crumbly. Add milk, stir well. Cook on burner at high setting. Continue to wipe sides and stir until mixture comes to a boil. Continue cooking on high heat until the candy thermometer reaches 220°. Take from heat and add butter. Cool and then add vanilla and beat until it becomes dull instead of glossy. Add nuts and beat until it does not spread out when poured onto a greased plate or pan.**



Pat Anderson