



# Glen Elder, KS -- Heritage & History

~ Memoir Lane ~

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## Glen Elder Dust Storm, c. 1935

-- by X Miller

In 1935, my Great Grandfather, Lylburn Orion Norris, went out to visit his farm. Of course, he took me everywhere he went, so I was the first to climb up into his BIG, shiny, British Racing Green, 1928 Dodge touring car. This lovely vehicle had Gangster sidewalls with two extra spare tires housed in the front fenders, right along side of the collection of Gabriel horns that I was allowed to play if we were in an area where noise would not be a distraction. It also had a Boot on the back that was kept supplied with emergency auto parts and necessities such as the blanket we used for spontaneous roadside picnics, a few munchables in tight containers, the ever-present oyster crackers, canned snacks like peaches and apricots, tableware, a tablecloth, napkins, and a bottled beverage or two. Our family was really into spontaneous picnicking!

In the early 1930's, it was suicidal to venture out without your canvas bag filled with water, which was hung from the hood ornament on the front of the radiator grill. The water bag was always refilled and draped on the front of the automobile before a cautious driver would venture anywhere. It was a necessity for overheated people and overheated vehicles. Back then, who would ever believe that less than 40 years later it would be almost impossible to purchase any vehicle without air conditioning and that radiator coolant would be considered as necessary as oil or gasoline?

That day, the sky was filled with ominous murky tan clouds, but back then this was a common occurrence. It certainly didn't proclaim thoughts so menacing that Grandpa Norris would decide to postpone such a short trip. The trip to the farm was uneventful, if you didn't include his many stops to appraise the condition of the wheat fields of his fellow farmers. His sad commiserations about the loss of the year's wheat crop put us both in a somber mood, even though I was too young to be cognizant of exactly what this loss would mean.

We spent quite some time evaluating the condition of the soil and the wheat at the farm of my Grandpa Norris, but he became quite concerned when suddenly the wind started to blow up sand and dust. He grabbed me and hurried to the car and we started the return trip. Unfortunately, not fast enough to out race Mother Nature. The light suddenly disappeared from the sky, and it became almost midnight dark. Grandpa pulled over to the side of a wide spot in the road and pulled down into a ditch. He grabbed the water bag, poured it over his undershirt, covered his head and face, then removed as many necessities from the boot as would fit inside of the sling he made from the blanket. He then attached a glowing flashlight to both corners of the car to protect it from oncoming vehicles that would be blinded by the furry of the swirling dust.

He then covered the windward windows with tablecloths and napkins rolled up in each window, and covered my face with a dampened napkin tied on like a bank robber or a cowboy. With the blanket covering our heads, he told me stories until The howling wind subsided and the worst of the storm was over. When we were finally able to come out from under our blanket igloo, we found that it was still pitch dark. There was not a sign of light from any source. When Grandpa went to reconnoiter, he found that the car was totally covered by a drift of tons of sand and dust. There was no way that we could get out, nor would we be able to move the vehicle. Not to worry! Grandpa said that Uncle Ernie would know where or how to find us. We had food and water, enough air was being vented in from some source free of dust, we had a soft place to sleep, and a Grandpa with stories to tell. What more could a four year old ask for?

When we were still absent when the 6:00 pm siren blew, my Uncle Ernie became alarmed. He took his biggest wrecker and a long pole and began looking, making frequent return trips to town see if by chance we had returned home. Finally, when it became very late, Grandma Carrie read Ernie the riot act. She told him that his father was very enterprising, far smarter than him, and that she was not receiving any bad vibes that we were in trouble. She almost forcibly sent him to bed and told him to start at daybreak

and we would be home before dinnertime. We slept very comfortably that evening curled up on the front seat of the Dodge, and Grandpa kept chuckling about how upset Ernie would be with us missing. He knew that Carrie would know precisely what condition we were in, and would not worry. After so many years of a wonderful marriage, they did not need to talk to communicate.

True to his word, Ernie started at daybreak, and backtracked all the way to the farm. Since there were several ways to make this trip, he would travel one way, go back another way, and then start out on a different path. At every place the dust had been blown into high drifts, he would stop and poke the drift with the pole to see if anything was inside of the mound of dust and sand. Finally, with one poke, he heard a metallic clunk, and knew that he had hit his mark. We were still sleeping comfortably when Ernie discovered where we were entombed in an immense drift of sand and dust.

With almost inhuman energy he cleared a path to the car and was very relieved to see that we were in excellent condition. He hooked the wrecker to our bumper and pulled the Dodge out of the drift. After clearing off all of the windows, we returned to Grandma in Glen Elder. Carrie kissed Grandpa on the cheek, hugged me, then shook her finger at Ernie and said, "Yee of so little faith! I told you that they were alright and that you were worrying for nothing."