



THE LONG WINTER

based on the story by Laura Ingalls Wilder

A HomeschoolRadioShows Listening Guide

The Long Winter is a Newbery Honor novel by Laura Ingalls Wilder, first published in 1940. The story is set in South Dakota during the severe winter of 1880-1881, when Laura turned fourteen. It is the sixth book in the Little House series. This week's program is a half hour dramatization of the story which originally appeared on the Hallmark Playhouse on March 15, 1951 and stars Edward Arnold as Pa.

The story begins in Dakota territory on a hot August day in 1880. Laura and her father ("Pa") are working hard to bring in enough hay to feed the livestock over the winter. When they come across a muskrat's house, Pa tells Laura that he knows the winter is going to be hard because muskrats always build a house with thick walls before a hard winter, and this year, they have built the thickest walls that he has ever seen. In mid-October, the Ingalls wake one morning to find an unusually early blizzard howling around their frail claim shanty. Impressed, Pa decides to move the family into nearby De Smet for the winter. The story of how the family and the town face the incredibly harsh conditions of that winter follows.

About the Author

Laura Ingalls Wilder was an American author who wrote the Little House series of children's books based on her childhood in a pioneer family. She was born on February 7, 1867 and died February 10, 1957 at age 90.

Laura Elizabeth Ingalls was born near the village of Pepin, Wisconsin, in what was then known as the "Big Woods" of Wisconsin. Her actual birth site is commemorated by a period log cabin, the Little House Wayside. She was born to parents Charles Phillip Ingalls and Caroline Lake (Quiner) Ingalls. Charles' paternal grandmother was Margaret Delano, of the famed Delano family, and was a descendant of Mayflower passenger Richard Warren. Laura

was the second of their five children: Mary Amelia, who later in her life became blind; Caroline Celestia, whom they called Carrie; Charles Frederic, who died at nine months old, and Grace Pearl.

When Laura was still very young, her father took a homestead in what was then known as Indian Territory. After less than two years living near Independence, Kansas, the family returned to the Big Woods. Before long, her father's restless spirit led them on various moves to Walnut Grove, Minnesota, South Troy, Minnesota, and Burr Oak, Iowa. The family eventually established a homestead claim near De Smet, Dakota Territory, where in the spring of 1879 Charles Ingalls accepted a railroad job. After staying the winter of 1879–1880 in the Surveyor's house, the Ingalls family watched the town of De Smet rise up from the prairie in 1880. The following winter, 1880–1881, became known as one of the most severe winters on record in the Dakotas, which Laura later described in the book dramatized in this week's program, *The Long Winter*.



For more information about Wilder's life, see the very informative wikipedia entry under her name, from which this biographical information was excerpted.

The Ingalls girls from left to right: Carrie, Mary and Laura, around 1880, the time of this story.

Below: Laura shortly after her marriage to Alonzo Wilder.



Laura at age 70, at the height of her writing career.

Interesting Links:

The Laura Ingalls Wilder Museum has lots of interesting photos, articles & activities about the author of the “Little House” books.

<http://www.lauraingallswilderhome.com/>

De Smet in the National Archives

– tracing the history of the Ingalls & Wilders through “The Long Winter”

<http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2003/winter/little-town-in-nara-1.html>

Discussion Questions:

1. Even though it was mid-summer, the muskrats seemed to know it would be a harsh winter. Pa pointed out that men are quite different than animals, however. What do you think of Pa's observations?
2. Pa saw trouble ahead and made preparations for it. Do you ever think ahead about situations or deadlines you know are coming up, and take actions accordingly? What does the Bible call a person who sees trouble ahead but does nothing about it?
3. What temperature is it outside your house now? How do you think you would feel if it was 40 below as in the story?
4. The grocer, Loftus, sought to make a profit from the wheat that Pa and Alonzo hauled into town. What do you think of his actions? What were his priorities?
5. Even in the midst of adversity, the Ingalls family was thankful for what they did have, and came up with several resourceful alternative ways to make do. Do you grumble and complain when things don't go your way, or are you content in adverse situations? Can you think of a scripture verse that gives us advice in situations like this?

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