

Beef Ring at Purple Hill

VANTAGE POINTS FLASHBACK

Most everyone 'round here has a nick name - mine's Billy – because I'm Father's sidekick. He's Willis. Mother is Molly.

It's 1911 and I'm 13. I'm pretty strong for my size, likely because of the lifting and carrying. We eldest kids grow up fast. Most everything, except school, is about physical work. I'm just happy I'm not in the city. I've been there once to visit cousins. 'Not my cup a'tea' – as mother says.

I doubt you know Purple Hill. We're northwest of Medora and east of Napinka. Nope, there's no hill! The creek has trees as it runs north to the Souris. But mostly it's wide open prairie. Looking to the sunrise in winter, Turtle Mountain appears, hill-like and purple. So, our school and church are called Purple Hill.



The Purple Hill Church

Back a couple of years, we had a problem. We couldn't keep meat frozen. We'd eat salted pork, because that keeps, and chickens are easy. But we really like beef, even in summer.

My father called a meeting and 20 families agreed to take turns offering the group one steer a year. When it's a family's turn they chase an animal over. My father and our neighbor, Jay, kill, skin, gut and hang it.

Saturday early we cut and wrap and Saturday afternoon the 20 families come for the pick-up.

We call it Purple Hill Beef Ring.

Saturday mornings I get up first call, jump into pants and hurry down where Mother has porridge going. 'Sticks to my ribs,' she says. My job is to keep up to Jay and Father. I set

aside tongue, heart and liver for the family who brought the animal. Jay saws the ribs. And then meat flies off the bone. Those knives move fast. Father has it set up – who gets which cut. I take the sugar bags with folk's names embroidered and make sure everyone'll be happy when the day is done. Father winks when my timing's perfect. Teamwork's the best!



A typical Beef Ring Building - This one near Gilbert Plains

My friend Becky's family went their own way last year. They dug a hole and filled it with ice. They call it an ice well. Now they can keep their own beef, cream and even fresh carrots. Most folks still prefer to hire us. I like the work. But I'm a bit of a 'tomboy' I guess.

Saturday afternoons, folks bring baking and Mother puts on tea. Even Becky comes over. It's a party! Somebody usually teases me for doing boy's work. But it's worth it. If Mother would let me, I'd never wear dresses!

David Neufeld adapted 'Beef Ring at Purple Hill' from a story written for Vantage Points 4.