

Emma Belgum
Narrator

Lee Tempte
KMRS
Interviewer

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- LT: 00:00 This is Reminiscing in West Central Minnesota, a Saturday KMRS news feature. Today, we're talking with Emma Belgum from Kensington. Emma, tell us a little bit about your parents, so where were they born?
- EB: 00:14 I was born on the Sletten farm about five miles southwest from here. I was born in a dugout where nine children were born. My folks came to this country in 1871.
- LT: 00:32 Okay. Which country were your folks born in?
- EB: 00:36 In Valdres, Norway.
- LT: 00:39 Okay. You mentioned about dugout house. Tell us a little bit about that. We've heard of sod houses from some people, but a dugout, is that pretty much like a sod house?
- EB: 00:50 Yes, it is.
- LT: 00:52 How are they different or what's the difference between the two?
- EB: 00:54 Well, I just don't know, but this is a dugout with the roof on.
- LT: 01:00 So everything was below ground except for the roof?
- EB: 01:03 Yeah.

LT: 01:04 Were you—were there many of them around, and did you live in that dugout very long after you were born?

EB: 01:12 No, not very long. Because that year, the house was built on the place.

LT: 01:19 So you were one of the younger kids?

EB: 01:21 Yes, I was the youngest.

LT: 01:23 Okay. So shortly after that, then you moved into a more regular type of home.

EB: 01:28 Yeah. That's right.

LT: 01:30 Your dad, too, was—had to go to St. Cloud to get things out. Tell us a little bit about that.

EB: 01:40 He went to St. Cloud and carried home a 50-pound sack of flour. That was the closest place he could get the flour, and he carried it on his shoulder. It took him two days to get home. And my mother was alone when my father had gone to Holmes City to cut wood for the winter. And five Indians had come to the door and wanted something to eat, my mother got scared. She had half a loaf for bread in the house and she gave the other half to the Indians.

02:27 We lived in a dugout for a long time. My father got a pair of oxen from the neighbor. He broke up about five acres, and in the summer, the grasshoppers came and there wasn't anything to harvest.

LT: 02:49 Okay. That sounds like some pretty rough times that your family went through. How old were you when you got married, Emma?

EB: 02:57 I was 22 years old.

LT: 03:00 Okay. And your husband, how did you happen to meet him?

EB: 03:03 We met at church.

LT: 03:05 At a church, and he lived just, what, pretty close by then?

EB: 03:08 Yes.

- LT: 03:09 After you got married, you went and lived on your husband's home place. And how big a farm was that eventually? Was it—did you add on to it or—
- EB: 03:20 Yeah. We bought—we had 160 acres and then we bought—so we had 400 acres of land.
- LT: 03:30 Okay. There were some times that were pretty rough, too. Shortly after—a few years after you got married, there was a bad storm that came through this area. Tell us just a little bit about that. Your husband was gone, I believe.
- EB: 03:45 Yeah. He went with the neighbor to Glenwood to hear a speaker, and it had been so warm that day that we expected a storm. And about 9:30, the storm came and I was all alone with the two children, Thelma and Herb, Herb was only a few months old. And the storm came and I could see through the window, the lightning that the barn and the silo and the windmill was all down, and the trees were all down so we could hardly walk. We had to jump over the trees to get places.
- LT: 04:34 Okay. And you had some cows, too. That was a problem trying to train the cows after that.
- EB: 04:40 Yeah. We had 16 cows that we had to milk by hand, and they had been—used to being in the barn in the stanchions, and we had quite a time to run around the yard to milk all these cows. And we didn't have a separator to separate the milk, we had to try and do the best we could, bring it in to the basement where it wasn't more than a day before, the milk was sour, so we didn't know what to do with it.
- LT: 05:14 Okay. This was in 1916 and just 6 years after you got married and were starting out.
- EB: 05:20 Yeah. That's right.
- LT: 05:21 So basically, what you had to do then is almost just start over again.
- EB: 05:25 That's right.
- LT: 05:29 Today, if a tree goes down, they come with these big chainsaws and it doesn't take too long and everything is back in shape. How long did it take just to clear some of those trees and—

EB: 05:41 I think it took us all summer to clean up the trees besides all the other work that had to be done.

LT: 05:50 You mentioned something about your husband saying that it was such a frustrating type of summer for you.

EB: 05:56 Yes. He said that he wasn't afraid of work, but he said he hated to get up in the morning because he didn't know where to start.

LT: 06:06 Now, the house—you were inside the house, and when this hit, that wasn't touched at all.

EB: 06:11 No, the house wasn't touched. The house and the granary was the only thing that was standing.

LT: 06:18 You had some help or some hired hands that helped with the cleanup, too, but that of course meant more work, more food, and more washing clothes for you.

EB: 06:26 That's right. I washed—I used to wash clothes for them. I started to wash clothes in the morning when I thought I was through with the morning work. And I used to rub on the board every hour I had until the sun went down in the evening.

LT: 06:47 Sun up to sun down, work was never done then.

EB: 06:51 No, that's right.

LT: 06:52 I bet you're one person that really appreciated when you got your first washing machine.

EB: 06:57 I think so. I think we were really happy when we got a washing machine.

LT: 07:05 Okay. You lived on the farm until your husband died in 1940 and you lived there for a few years after that.

EB: 07:13 Five years.

LT: 07:14 And then you decided to move to Kensington?

EB: 07:16 Yes. I was baptized at the Ole Tollefson place, and confirmed in the Nora Church where I had always belonged.

LT: 07:28 Okay. Now, right now you had mentioned you had four children, I believe. How many grandchildren do you have, Emma?

EB: 07:36 I have 17 grandchildren and 17 great-grandchildren, which I love so much.

LT: 07:44 I bet you get along with them and they get along pretty well with you, too.

EB: 07:48 That's right.

LT: 07:50 I understand you had a pretty big birthday party here not too long ago.

EB: 07:54 Yes, I did. And I should be so thankful to Mannie and Manda Hegberg for bringing my—calling me every morning and see if I'm all right and ask if there is any letters to mail and bring my groceries if I need them. And also, Oscar and Grace Hagstrom that takes me to church every Sunday.

LT: 08:27 So you've got some real good friends here in Kensington.

EB: 08:30 I have.

LT: 08:31 From what I hear you've got some pretty friendly people. Just about everybody in Kensington is a pretty friendly people, aren't they?

EB: 08:36 Yes, they are. They are very friendly.

LT: 08:40 Well, what do you think of about farming today when you hear—of course, the farm wives, they've got some automatic washing machines and their work is perhaps a little bit easier with some of the labor-saving devices we got today. Would you like to be a young farm wife starting over today?

EB: 08:59 Yeah, that would be better than what I had to do.

LT: 09:03 Be a little bit easier, but there were some—I'm sure you had some good times, too, mixed with some of the bad times, didn't you?

EB: 09:10 Oh, yes, we did.

LT: 09:12 Sundays is—still is, I guess, but used to be a big day, the big social day, wasn't it?

EB: 09:18 The only thing we did on Sunday is we used to go to our neighbors to visit. Then we used to rest on Sunday. We never went on long trips or anything.

LT: 09:30 How did they used to do that? I know that everybody was at the neighbors on Sunday. Did people take turns, or how did—who decided that?

EB: 09:38 Yes, they took turns. We had fun.

LT: 09:42 Sunday was the social day then. Well, Emma, there's always one thing when I end the interviews, and I ask some of your age, we talked about the big birthday celebration you had last October. How old were you then?

EB: 09:55 I was in 90 years old.

LT: 09:57 And you enjoy living in Kensington?

EB: 09:59 Yes, I do.

LT: 10:00 Well, thank you much. We've been talking with Mrs. Emma Belgum of Kensington on Reminiscing in West Central Minnesota, a Saturday KMRS news feature.