



**MICHAEL  
FINLEY**

# The Ice Father

Your Free Edoc

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## **MIKE FINLEY**



*(The following is a true story. I encountered it in 1977, in a wire piece sent to me by the South Dakota Associated Press, when I was the news editor of the Worthington Daily Globe.)*

We left home that morning in the single-seat sleigh, the thirteenth of February, my mama and papa, my brother Eldred and me, Leona, for Gramma's house twelve miles away.

Papa kept urging us, he'd say, You hurry up Leona, that wind is up to something or other, and aught but a fool would tempt it. And Papa wore his great brown coat with the horse's hair collar, the one that reached all the way to his boots, and I sat beside him and held on to his pocket, and Eldred and Mom held each other for heat.

Frazie, our old mare, at first she didn't want to go, you could see it plain when she looked over her shoulder, peering through her mane at the door to the barn and the straw-warmed stall.

But Papa liked saying that an old horse couldn't do else but obey, so eventually she lit out, headed into the wind already so strong it blew your eyes dry.

None of us talked up top in the sleigh, and the shrill in the ear even drowned out Papa's coaxing the horse.

Wind weren't nothing new to us, and Hankinson was but twelve mile, and Frazie was a good enough of a horse. Yet still the clouds took on a ugly look. Eldred, and he was older than me, began crying by and by, but I sat

still while the snow commenced to swirl. Papa cursed and Mama gave him the scold for that.

At one point he decided the kind thing was to fling down the reins and unfasten Frazie, and slap her for luck in finding some still place nearby. But before that horse took two full steps she vanished in the white.

I swear that storm must of hated us, because it swore and shouted and stomped for hours, shouted evilly every instant. Mama cupped her hands and called out into Papa's ear, but no one heard, and Mama looked on us terrible grievous, and just as grievous was what she said. She said Children, gather round my knees.

And we both of us knelt beneath Mama's petticoat and dress, Eldred holding her right leg and me having hold on the left, and Mama crouched over us two and Papa stood strong and tall in the single seater, the great brown coat teepeed around his shoulders and stretched down around us all.

And there he stood bare faced to the storm that screamed through the day, until I began to hear, in the midst of the clamor, my heart and my mama's and Eldred's hearts beating in threes, and no one said nothing. Eldred and I held hold to the hem of Mama's dress, tucking it time and again underneath us. Throughout, Papa never shifted weight.

I recall when Mama started to shake and I knew she was weeping, and Eldred'd gone to sleep on my arm, and I did what I could to try and be brave.

But for one small second when I thought of my Papa and couldn't hold onto myself any longer and dug my fingers into Mama's leg, and thought nobody'd hear me up top of the roar, I shouted Papa, Papa, don't die.

He stood like that for twenty hours, all through the night and on into morning. And when I awakened I knew from the cracking of ice outside it was over. All of us below lost fingers and toes and Mama lost both ears as well and almost lost her nose. We were a fright to see.

And Papa was dead like we knew he would be. He was all froze through and could not be lifted, not by the minister who came out from Hankinson to help the farmer from over the hill who showed up with Frazie tethered and well. Would you believe it, we was only ten trees from help all the while.

I wished you could of seen my Papa, his eyes was frozen open, still blue, you could tell he was thinking of something far off.

I tried saying goodbye but it was like tapping through ten panes of glass, and I had lost the feeling in my hands. The reverend backed me away by the shoulder but I pushed his mitt away and cried.

Oh Papa, I complained to him that Valentine's day, the way I always did -- How could you stand there that way, and still leave us?

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**Michael Finley** writes about topics relating to culture and change. His book with Harvey Robbins, *The New Why Teams Don't Work*, won a Booz-Allen & Hamilton Global Business Book Award. Mike has also been named one of a handful of "Masters of the Wired World" by Financial Times Press. BH SmartDocs™ are published by BrownHerron Publishing and are sold exclusively on Amazon.com ([www.amazon.com/brownherron](http://www.amazon.com/brownherron)).

