

# Book of the Week

***The Children's Blizzard* by Melanie Benjamin**

**Book Review by Maureen Lang**

*The Children's Blizzard* by Melanie Benjamin is a mesmerizing tale that mainly centers on life in the Dakota Territory and Nebraska in 1888 and beyond. It all starts on January 12, 1888, which began as an unseasonably, warm, sunny day. Everyone took advantage of the nice weather by shedding their heavy woolen clothes for lighter cleaner ones, taking their livestock away from the barn into the open spaces, or getting the horse and wagon ready and making a quick trip to town to get long needed supplies.

Gerda and Raina Olsen, 18 and 15 years old respectively, are both teachers in their own one-room schoolhouse. Gerda has always been the daughter that has been favored, and Raina, even now, keeps asking herself during this first year of teaching, "Is this how Gerda would do it, or what would Gerda say?" It was just about time for school to be dismissed and as the teachers let their students go, a big cloud appeared overhead blocking out the sun. Both girls paused as they considered whether to send their students home or not. It would appear to be an easy choice, since most students live nearby, and there was not enough wood left at the school for the stove to keep them warm. This is where the girls and their personalities affect their decisions, and all the lives concerned would never again be the same.

Annette Pedersen's life is changed as she and her best friend Fredrik ignore the teacher and run for Annette's home in the storm. Fredrik is her one true



friend and insists on staying with her. Annette's life has been so hard that all she can think of is to not offend the family her mother has sold her to. Finally, the newspaper man, Gavin Woodson, uses the storm to resurrect his own failing career. He has been sent out west from New York City and is desperate to write something that will get him in Mr. Pulitzer's good graces again. He also wants to do whatever good he can for those who have suffered, especially Annette and Raina.

This was an interesting book and was based on memoirs of people who struggled through this horrible storm. It is a story of true courage and the determination to survive whatever the odds. I highly recommend it. #folstarkville #melaniebenjamin #starkvilleMS #bookoftheweek

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