

The First Four Years

By Laura Ingalls Wilder

Q and A Discussion Guide

The First Year		
1	When does this story begin?	After <i>These Happy Golden Years</i> ends, and just before Almanzo and Laura get married.
2	What deal did Almanzo and Laura have about farming?	They would try for three years, and then something else if it didn't work out.
3	Prologue: How did the road look?	It was a dim trace across the grasslands
4	In 1885, why did no one mind hot sunshine and harsh winds?	There wasn't a choice and it was just how things were.
5	Why could Laura see Almanzo from 1/2 a mile away?	There were no trees or buildings in the way and so people could see a distance away.
6	What do you think of a school section of hay that was first come first served?	It seems odd to us when everything except parks and government property is owned. It may seem like a good idea to some of the students. Maybe some of the students are familiar with community gardens.
7	Why did Laura wear a black cashmere dress for her August wedding?	She had just made it as she thought a married woman should have a black dress. She didn't know ahead of time when she would be getting married. She and Almanzo were trying to avoid relatives planning a wedding for them. It was just practical.
8	The farm life was busy and there was much work for both Almanzo and Laura. What did do all day?	Almanzo: Farming work including walking behind the plow behind the horses, caring for animals, working outside, milking the cow, and more. Laura worked inside. She churned butter, cooked all homemade meals, sewed clothes, knitted socks, fed the threshers when they came over in the fall, washed clothes, and more. They were busy and happy.

9	What did Laura and Almanzo do for fun?	They took buggy rides on Sunday afternoon. The rides had to be short when the horses were working a lot during the week. Even they needed a day of rest.
10	Name two things they bought the first year.	2 work horses, a sulky plow, Trixy and Fly the saddle ponies, new wagon, new harvester (\$200), saddle, set of glassware, Bread Plate
11	How did Laura buy a saddle for Trixy?	She ordered one from Montgomery Wards catalogue.
12	Which pony was faster, Trixy or Fly?	Trixy was faster.
13	Laura thought she could make butter and sell it with eggs in town. Why didn't that work?	No one bought the butter, and eggs only would bring in 5 cents a dozen. Almanzo said he wasn't worried.
14	Why did Ole Larson make a poor neighbor?	He borrowed things and didn't return them, or broke them. He borrowed many things. He did not share meat like a good neighbor should have done.
15	In the fall, Geese formations flew in V-shapes day and night. The "world was full of their calls." What did Almanzo say about that?	"Everything is lovely when the geese honk high."
16	What are some things that happened in the four day blizzard?	Almanzo almost couldn't find the house. The milk was frozen when he got there. One man died. Three children spent the time in a haystack and lived, although they were weak. Many range cattle died. People had frozen hands and feet.
17	Why did the next blizzard have a better outcome?	People were prepared for the storm and did things like ran a rope from the barn to the house. The next blizzard was expected.

18	How did Laura know the neighbors were fine after the storm with no phone and without talking to them?	The fire in the chimney was making smoke.
19	Why were the horses fat and happy in the winter?	They didn't have to work so hard, and on the rides they didn't go so far in case a storm would blow in.
20	Which holiday did Laura and Almanzo host?	New Year's Day was added to the seasonal get togethers.
21	Why was Laura sick for many months?	She was pregnant and sick the whole time. She did try to do her work.
22	When did they name the baby?	Before the baby was born, Laura named her Rose. (The smell of prairie roses was in the air.) No ultra sound, she just knew!
23	Why did they have to move on their first anniversary?	Almanzo needed a mortgage and the only way to get one was to move to the homestead. \$800 was the amount!

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1	What was Almanzo always saying?	"Everything evens up in the end. The rich man has his ice in the summer and the poor man gets his in the winter."
2	Almanzo thought the saying was hopeful. Did Laura feel the same way?	No, Laura saw the saying more literally and less hopefully. She especially was thinking about how the hail ruined crops in the summer, and hail is ice.
3	Why was hay the only crop this year?	Because of the hailstorm
4	Did Laura mind helping with the hay and working with Manly?	No, she felt better outdoors anyway, and she would have to stay inside much of the time after the baby was born.
5	What were some of the second year expenses?	Coal, taxes, interest on notes for machinery, seed
6	How much money did Manly make from the hay?	\$120
7	Why did they know the second winter wouldn't be as hard and cold as the first?	The geese showed them by not being in such a hurry to fly south.
8	What did Laura do to stay outdoors in the winter?	She and Manly went on sleigh rides. She and Old Shep went sledding together.
9	When and where was baby Rose born?	In December, at home, before Christmas
10	How close was the nearest neighbor?	A mile

11	What was their Christmas like?	They stayed home, alone, and bought a new clock for all three of them.
12	Describe baby Rose's first outing.	It was 15 below zero and people didn't think babies should be out in weather like that.
13	What did Mr. Boast want to trade for baby Rose?	A horse. Almanzo and Laura said no.
14	In the second year, when did the worst storm of the winter happen? Were they expecting it?	April 12, and they had no idea it would happen.
15	Why did people die in the storm? Why didn't they have weather forecasting?	People were unprepared for a storm in April and they had no way of knowing when storms would happen. They wouldn't be prepared for a spring storm.
16	Why did Old Shep leave?	Old Shep was jealous of baby Rose.
17	What was the Saint Bernard's special job?	He seemed to think his special job was to watch over baby Rose.
18	What did Laura do instead of ride horses after the baby was born?	She could drive Barnum with a road cart and a box to keep Rose safe.
19	Did they make much money the second year?	No, the season had been too dry. The price of wheat was low.
20	What did they do with their money?	Pay all the interest and some of the smaller loans.

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The Third Year

1	What did Almanzo buy for cooking and warming the house, and why?	Almanzo bought a new stove. It would use less coal, all the cooking and baking could be done with it, and the floor needed to be warm for Rose.
2	What was the third Christmas like?	Manly wore his new wool undershirt, and they went to Christmas with the home folks. There was snow and finding the way home was slow and difficult.
3	What was the third winter like?	Cold, but no big storms. They had a visitor every Sunday.
4	Why did Ma take Rose for awhile?	Laura caught a dangerous case of Diphtheria. Rose did not catch it.
5	When Manly caught Diphtheria, who cared for Laura and Manly?	Almanzo's brother, Royal (and his care wasn't great).
6	When Almanzo worked too hard and was still sick, what happened?	Almanzo had a stroke from overexertion.
7	Why did they sell the homestead? How much money did they get?	The doctor bills were high and Almanzo could not work all the land. \$200
8	How did the planting and spring go?	Rains came, wheat and oats grew well, three new little calves were born and two young colts, and Laura had to help Almanzo often
9	What did Laura and Almanzo do for fun?	They went riding at night after Rose was asleep.
10	Why did Mr. Whitehead sell his sheep at a low price?	He was a Republican and was sure the Democrats would win at the election and the sheep would be worth nothing.

11	Why did Peter move in?	Peter was going to shepherd the sheep. He lived with Laura and Almanzo to do so.
12	What ruined the wheat the third summer?	Hot, dry winds that blew for three days.
13	What was their only crop?	The hay on the school section first come, first served, and they were first.

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The Year of Grace, Year Four

1	Why did Laura stop helping in the field?	Rose could have been hurt. She was too little for Laura to be so busy and not watching over her.
2	At the end of three years, and the agreement was farming would end if it hadn't worked out. What happened?	Almanzo talked Laura into trying another year.
3	What did Almanzo buy the fourth year?	Almanzo bought two Durham oxen which were cheap. He needed them to do the work.
4	How was the fourth winter?	Cold but there were no bad storms.
5	What did Almanzo and Peter do much of the winter?	They tended the stock which was a huge amount of work.
6	What happened when Almanzo and Peter were a mile from home and it was snowing?	It was dark and wolves were howling. They were worried the wolves would get the sheep.
7	What helped Laura get through the winter when she was sick (pregnant)?	A neighbor gave her some books.
8	What happened in the April storm?	Almanzo made it home safely, then he went to look for Peter. The sheep kept being blown over by the wind. Then there was a terrible Prairie fire.
9	After the fire, what did they do?	Almanzo reseeded the oats and wheat.
10	Were the sheep worth the investment?	Yes, and more! The wool was sold and there were baby lambs too.

11	Why did Rose almost have accidents?	On the farm, dangerous things could happen to Rose, but Laura did not want her to only stay in the house. And Laura's work took all day.
12	Who was home when the tornado came?	Laura and Rose were alone.
13	What happened to the baby boy?	He died of spasms before the doctor could even arrive.
14	Did they still owe money?	Yes, so much. (see page 120)
15	What happened to their home when Laura and Rose were alone?	It burned down before neighbors could get there and help.
16	How did they live after the fire?	First, they lived with Pa. Then, Mr. Sheldon gave Laura and Manly houserom and use of his furniture in exchange for board for himself and his brother. Laura had to feed and clean up after them, her family, and Peter. Then Almanzo and Peter built a shanty house of tar-paper in September.
17	After all that happened, did they give up farming?	No. Almanzo remained hopeful and Laura had spirit to deal with it all, after all.