**Elizabeth Dixon Smith Geer, Journal (1847, 1848)**

*Like many families during the 1840s and 1850s, Elizabeth Dixon Smith Geer, her husband, and their small children made the journey along the Oregon Trail from Indiana. The migrants' motivations were often complex, but they all hoped to improve their lives. Oregon settlers like the Geers were promised 640 acres in the territory. In this selection from her journal, kept for friends back home, Elizabeth documents the difficulties of the overland journey.*

Dear Friends-By your request I have endeavored to keep a record of our journey from "the States" to Oregon, though it is poorly done, owing to my having a young babe and besides a large family to do for; and, worst of all, my education is very limited.

*April 21, 1847*-Commenced our journey from La Porte, Indiana, to Oregon; made fourteen miles. . . .

*November 18*-My husband is sick. It rains and snows. We start this morning around the falls with our wagons. We have 5 miles to go. I carry my babe and lead, or rather carry, another through snow, mud and water, almost to my knees. It is the worst road that a team could possibly travel. I went ahead with my children, and I was afraid to look behind me for fear of seeing the wagons turn over into the mud and water with everything in them. My children gave out with cold and fatigue and could not travel, and the boys had to unhitch the oxen and bring them and carry the children on to camp. I was so cold and numb that I could not tell by the feeling that I had any feet at all. We started this morning at sunrise and did not get to camp until after dark, and there was not one dry thread on one of us-not even my babe. I had carried my babe and I was so fatigued that I could scarcely speak or step. When I got here I found my husband lying in Welch's wagon, very sick. He had brought Mrs. Polk down the day before and was taken sick here. We had to stay up all night, for our wagons are left halfway back. I have not told half we suffered. I am not adequate to the task. Here were some hundreds camped, waiting for boats to come and take them down the Columbia to Vancouver or Portland or Oregon City.

*November 19*-My husband is sick and can have but little care. Rain all day.

*November 20*-Rain all day. It is almost an impossibility to cook, and quite so to keep warm or dry. I froze or chilled my feet so that I cannot wear a shoe, so I have to go around in the cold water barefooted.

*November 21*-Rain all day. The whole care of everything falls upon my shoulders. I cannot write any more at present.

*November 30*-Raining. This morning I ran about trying to get a house to get into with my sick husband. At last I found a small, leaky concern, with two families already in it. Mrs. Polk had got down before us. She and another widow was in this house. My family and Welch's went in with them, and you could have stirred us with a stick. Welch and my oldest boy was driving the cattle around. My children and I carried up a bed. The distance was nearly a quarter of a mile. Made it down on the floor in the mud. I got some men to carry my husband up through the rain and lay him on it, and he never was out of that shed until he was carried out in his coffin. Here lay five of us bedfast at one time . . . and we had no money, and what few things we had left that would bring money, I had to sell. I had to give 10 cents a pound for fresh pork, 75 cents per bushel for potatoes, 4 cents a pound for fish. There are so many of us sick that I cannot write any more at present. I have not time to write much, but I thought it would be interesting to know what kind of weather we have in the winter.

*1848*-*January 14*-Rain this morning. Warm weather. We suppose it has rained half of the time that I have neglected writing.

*January 15*-My husband is still alive, but very sick. There is no medicine here except at Fort Vancouver, and the people there will not sell one bit-not even a bottle of wine.

*February 1*-Rain all day. This day my dear husband, my last remaining friend, died.

*February 2*-Today we buried my earthly companion. Now I know what none but widows know; that is, how comfortless is a widow's life, especially when left in a strange land, without money or friends, and the care of seven children. Cloudy. . .

**Document Analysis**

1. Would Geer's account have been as compelling if all had gone well? Do historians and cultures value tragic historical accounts more than happy ones?
2. Given your prior knowledge of the Oregon Trail, what would you expect the arrival in Oregon to be like? Compare that view with what happened to Geer.