

# Everybody Loved Snow Days With Dad

by Tara L. Cale

March 11 2022 9:00 AM



This story would have been better for the February issue of The Buzz since we got a major snow storm the day after we finished delivery. But I didn't know the forecast enough in advance. And it was, in fact, that snowstorm that brought these memories back to life in my mind, and made me decide to share them with you. For the sake of the story, it would be nice if we had a major snowfall in March - which conceivably could happen but it won't this year. Weather.com says temps will range from 46-61 degrees this month. And I won't complain about that.

The snowfall on Feb 2-3 this year in this area of Illinois ranged from 10-15 inches, depending on where you live. I think we got about a foot here at our house. The second day high winds caused drifts on already cleared roads and parking lots. We can see the interstate from our house and if I recall correctly, this is the first time I saw that interstate with almost zero traffic for that long of a period. People buckled down and stayed in if they could. Stores announced they would be closed days in advance. They cautioned that ice and heavy snow may cause power outages but as far as I know, The Buzz coverage area was fortunate enough to avoid that.

As an adult, predictions of such weather are a bit scary, especially if you own a business. As a child, predictions of such weather just meant fun for me!

Weather patterns have shifted now, but in northeast Iowa in the 70s, where I grew up, we were accustomed to such weather. A major snowstorm could hit any time from October through April back then. It had to be pretty major for schools to close too. They were prepared. Farmers were required to install “snow fences” to keep drifts off the major roadways. Buses ran on snow routes. Still, there were times when school was canceled, sometimes for up to two weeks straight.

School cancelations were not what excited me as a child. It was the fun that the snow brought to my life. We lived only about a mile from the high school, which had a nice big hill that was perfect for sledding - but that was a cold walk home. Mom always said, “Start home before you get cold,” but you know, we never did. We would wait until we were so cold we couldn’t stand it anymore, and THEN walk home. It was torture. We would literally fall through the front door, my siblings and I helping each other pull off our gloves, coats, and wet jeans and lay them over the heater vents while Mom made us hot chocolate and admonished us about not starting home before we got cold. I guarantee you there were always fresh-baked, homemade cookies ready to go with that hot chocolate too! No prepackaged snacks at our house, they were always homemade.

Sledding with my brothers and sister was fun, but not as fun as a snow day with Dad! He would go sledding with us occasionally and all four of us kids would pile on top of him and try to make it to the bottom of the hill without falling off. We rarely made it without losing one or two kids though.

Dad worked for Grief Oil Company. It was comprised of one gas station, two car washes, and a fuel oil delivery service. In warmer months we got to help dad count quarters at the car wash. We would pump gas for customers (before self-serve and pay-at-the-pump) and clean windshields. When we were older we got to check oil and tire pressure. But mainly we restocked the soda machine, the candy bar shelves, swept the sidewalk in front of the station, and helped clean the bays of the car wash (using the power wands, that was great fun!). But THE best thing was snow days with Dad.

As you can imagine, fuel oil deliveries were heavy during the winter months. Especially if we had a major snowfall or the temperatures dropped for an extended period of time. People may think they had enough fuel oil to last, but would be calling for emergency fills. Dad was on the road a lot during the winter months, out in that brutal Iowa winter weather, making sure everyone else was safe and warm. (It's one of the reasons he moved us to Missouri in 1978 - he was tired of working outside in the cold).

If fuel oil deliveries were on a Saturday, or on a day that school was canceled, Dad would most often call home and tell Mom he was getting ready to go out on deliveries, and any kids that wanted to go better be ready in 10 minutes. That was all the advance warning you got. It was the exact amount of time it took Dad to hang up the phone, get in the delivery truck, and drive to our house. When he pulled up outside you better be ready and running out the door, or you weren't going. No ifs, ands, or buts. Each of us was left behind more than once for failing to be ready.

At any given time Dad would have 2-5 kids bouncing along with him on the raggedy bench seat of the tanker truck. (I only have 3 siblings but we were a foster home and foster kids were treated no different than biological kids - they got to go too.) The radio station in the tanker was always set to country music, and we would all sing along to songs by George Jones, Tanya Tucker, and the hot country artists of that era. Deliveries in town didn't take long so while Dad was filling the customer's tank we would just run around in the snow, throwing snowballs at each other, making snow angels, and the like. There was no dilly-dallying when it was time to load up and head to the next delivery either. You did NOT want to delay the deliveries, or make Dad mad, for any reason. But many of the deliveries were in rural areas. Their tanks were larger. The delivery could take an extended amount of time. And then even Dad would have time for some snow play with us kids.

All of my siblings remember these things:

When the fuel tank was full and it was time to reel up the hose, Dad took the nozzle and hooked it in a special place, then hit the button for it to wind up automatically. Us kids would lay on the ground, holding on to the hose, and as it reeled up it would pull us through the snow. It was a game to see who, if any, could hold on until the very end. The success of that depended on how deep the snow was.

Oftentimes, when we pulled into the long lane of a rural property, Dad would let us get out of the tanker and climb up on TOP and ride there! Seriously! There was a ladder going up the side to get to the top, a "walk" area down each side of the tank, and some metal handles. The lanes were rough, the truck really bounced along, and we had to hold on tight to keep from falling off. It was best if you laid down on your stomach and held the metal handles. Less likelihood of falling off. I found out recently that my mother

was not aware of Dad letting us do this until several years after he left his employ at Grief Oil. That was probably a good thing.

On the old country roads, Dad used to let the kid sitting closest to him shift the tanker truck, on his command. Early driving lessons. I remember when he actually put me IN the driver's seat and let me drive it completely myself. I was 10-12 years old and could barely reach the gas/brake/clutch. We came to a "T" in the road. He instructed me to slow down and shift into a lower gear to make the turn. I actually shifted into a higher gear, but with a little help from a frantic father, we made that turn! I don't remember, but that may be the last time he let any kid drive!

We built snow forts, played duck-duck-goose, and had snowball fights. One snowball fight I remember vividly to this day. I threw a good one, right at my father's face and it hit hard, with the snow packing between the lenses of his glasses and his eyes. He stood there completely still for a moment, the snow still stuck behind his lenses. My heart was about to beat out of my chest because I just KNEW I was in trouble. I was waiting for the hammer to fall. I stood there, eyes wide open and mouth gaping open as well, but silent, as he took off his glasses and wiped away the snow. I knew my life was about to end. Then he just laughed and said "Good one, Tara!" and proceeded to pelt me upside my head with a huge snowball before I could fully understand that my life was not actually going to end at that moment for what I had done!

Sometimes Dad would say, "I have several more deliveries, do you want to go along or go home?" We could be freezing, fingers numb, like the days we didn't leave the sledding hill until it was already cold, but we always said, "Don't take us home yet, please Dad!"

Sometimes we got to go back to the station and refill the tanker and go out again. But most of the time, when deliveries were done, or when he was tired, he would pull up to the house and bid us farewell. Sometimes he would shove us out the door into a snowbank - his final "gotcha" for the day. And there waiting was Mom, always, with hot chocolate and homemade cookies, putting our snow-encrusted and wet clothing on the heater vents to dry. Until the next time.

It's funny how certain things can bring back childhood memories. To this day, I still love the smell of gas, oil, and fuel. It reminds me of how my dad used to smell when he came home from work. It reminds me of snow days with Dad. A dad who may not be able to buy his children everything he - or we - wanted, but a dad who loved his kids, and showed his love by spending quality time with them - hunting, trail riding and horse shows, camping, floating, scary movies with popcorn - and snow days.

*This story was originally printed in the March 2022 issue of The Prairie Land Buzz Magazine, a free magazine distributed monthly in 11 Illinois counties. For more information, additional stories and more, visit <http://www.thebuzzmonthly.com>.*