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AROUND HOME

Snow days, redux

by Nancy Shobet West

Clear and cold for the next couple of days, and then, according to the forecasters, more snow.

I feel sheepish in admitting that my heart leaps a little bit with those words.

What is it about snow lately that sparks a pulse of excitement? Why am I finding myself in a state more typical of childhood than middle age, in which the prospect of being snowed in once again thrills me?

I'm not sure. All I know is that after several somewhat curmudgeonly years in which a snowstorm, while pretty, connoted all kinds of inconveniences, it seems I've reverted to childhood in my delight at the mere words "snow day."

When I try to trace the evolution of my relationship to snow through the past few years, it begins to make a little bit of sense. As a young professional in my twenties, I lived in the city and walked to work. Snow meant a cold, messy trudge through slush and over snowbanks to get wherever I needed to be, and against a backdrop of gray buildings and parked cars rather than meadows and forests, snow just didn't seem so pretty or romantic.

Then I discovered another perspective on snow, as a homeowner in the suburbs. In our first home, snow meant shoveling and snowblowing our driveway, and stress over how to get to the office. This was before the days of telecommunications, and a forecast of snow meant a restless night of worrying about the drive to work—or an anxious day in the office thinking about the homeward commute.

Once we moved out to the country, it wasn't a matter of shoveling or snowblowing anymore. We lived next door to my parents' farm, and they had all the snow-clearing equipment anyone would need to keep a driveway usable.

But that wasn't so ideal either. My father took care of plowing on the farm, our driveway as well as theirs, and hearing him out in the middle of the night plowing made me feel anxious and guilty, even though I knew he wasn't doing it specifically for my sake. Still, I couldn't much enjoy a heavy snowfall, knowing it meant he was setting his alarm at regular intervals throughout the pre-dawn hours to get out for another round of plowing.

And from there came my kids' early childhood days, when a snowday brought them glee but me still further worries. Which parent would be the one to miss work and stay home if the kids didn't have school? By this time, Internet connections and other telecommuting capabilities were a natural part of our lives, but little kids and a work-from-home day aren't a productive mix. It made me happy to see the kids having fun in the snow, but there was still an element of uneasiness as the unmet deadlines piled up.

But somehow in the past few years, that changed. We moved to a different house, where we pay for a professional plow driver whose truck headlights cutting through the pre-dawn darkness don't make me feel guilty at all. Of course, in the back of my mind is the awareness that across town, my father is still getting up before dawn to clear their driveway, but at least I don't feel complicit anymore. And the kids, now in middle school and high school, certainly aren't any trouble on a snow day: their preference is to sleep until ten, read, maybe play a few rounds of ping-pong.

So I suppose my reborn affinity for snow comes from the fact that we've come full circle. My life is now at the point where I can feel like a kid again when I hear that there's snow in the forecast. With my own kids, I can revel in the unexpected chance to sleep late, and then be home all day and not have to dress for work or drive anywhere. While they read or play ping-pong, I can still get work done and not worry about missing deadlines.

Somehow the coziness is back, the feeling of being unexpectedly but joyfully circumscribed by the house for the

day, the extra time created by cancellations. It wasn't something I expected to find again; I had come to assume in adulthood that only kids could really relish snow days.

But I was wrong. And if I have yet another chance this winter—this very week—to remember that, all the better.
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