

THE BLIZZARD OF 1978

CENTRAL INDIANA RESIDENTS SHARE THEIR STORIES

I grew up in Wisconsin, and my folks moved down to southern Indiana. They started a small "retirement" business, which quickly outgrew what they had planned, so they called me up and said "Why don't you move down here and join us in the business since it's the business you are in too--by the way they don't HAVE winter down here!"

So I moved, and about 9 months later after driving home one night in driving snow, I woke up and looked out the window and knew I wasn't going anywhere any time soon. I had been wondering why, out on our north-south oriented country road, nobody had put up their snow fences, and then found out that nobody even knew what a snow fence was. It might have helped a little if they had had some! The drifts in the road were higher than the houses and knowing the rural snowplow situation I didn't figure we were going to get out very soon at all. So I called the folks and told them in my best northern Wisconsin accent that it in spite of what they had told me, it sort of looked like winter outside and I didn't think I was going to make it to work very soon. They said for heaven's sake stop talking like an old farmer...

Soon people up and down the road were tramping around or skiing around trading things from their freezers so everybody would have some variety. A few days later when the announcement came out that highway 46 was cleared and would all doctors and nurses come to the highway and they would be transported to the local hospital and patients would be airlifted in to them, my neighbor, a pediatrician, showed up all wrapped up like a mountain man in buckskins and a coonskin cap, mounted on his little grey arab horse. He asked me to saddle up my big old Tennessee walker and go with him to the highway as he was determined to get to the hospital to help out--besides, he said, the neighbor on the other side of him was nine months and two weeks pregnant and he was afraid they would drag her on a toboggan in second stage labor up to his house to have him deliver the baby. I asked him what was wrong with that--he WAS a doctor after all and his specialty was babies and children, and he replied that he was used to seeing them in cute little outfits in his OFFICE not heading into the world--maybe feet first, and with umbilical cords still in place.

We didn't make it. I went ahead on my big old mare to break the path, and we tried going around the drifts and avoiding fences and such that were completely buried, but we ended up in a deep hole--with me sitting on top of the snow and nothing but a pair of brown horse ears sticking up out of the snow. The mare panicked, of course, and came flying out of the hole with me still clamped onto the reins. I didn't know how deep the REST of the hole might be, so I had to talk her into coming back exactly the way she went, and it took about 15 minutes to persuade her to come. Doc said he didn't think he was going to try it; His horse did some fancy footwork trying to tell him that NO WE ARE NOT GOING THERE. I finally got the mare out of the deep snow and back into the knee deep stuff and we went home. Doc called the hospital and told them he couldn't make it and he did NOT deliver babies.....

The neighbor went into labor and they sent a helicopter. The baby was delivered by two very startled young National Guard soldiers and it was, as Doc said, a good thing it was a girl or they might have felt an overwhelming need to name the kid Huey after the helicopter.

I remember a huge steam powered rotary snowplow coming through Marion In. on the C&O railroad. When it got to the elevated tracks through South Marion that thing threw snow for several hundred feet. I think several Western US railroads brought in their rotaries to help clear the rail lines.

Hi. I lived 20 miles South of Indianapolis when the blizzard of '78 hit. I was 17 years old and had spent the previous night at my friend's house in Whiteland, Indiana, and due to the blizzard, I was stranded there for an entire week. We couldn't open the front door at all because the snow was drifted so high in front of it. We managed to open the back door with a lot of force put behind it and went outside. The snow was 6 to 8 feet high in most places! It was hard on top, so we walked across the back yard to the swing set and the snow was drifted so high that only about 12 inches remained between the TOP bar of the swing set and the top of the snow drifts! We could not believe our eyes! My friend and I sat down on the snow and squeezed our legs under the top bar of the swing set and my friend's mom actually took a picture of us sitting atop the snowdrift! I wish I had a copy of that photo.

I remember it as being great fun and quite amazing to see. When I finally went home a week later, the snow was plowed/drifted 6 to 8 FEET high on BOTH sides of the country roads just east of Greenwood, Indiana, where I lived. There was so much snow that only one lane width could be cleared. If someone came from the other direction, someone had to back up into a driveway or road to let the other car pass. It was an amazing sight to see. The group of teens who drove me home actually went "bumper sledding" on the way to my house, which is sort of like "tubing" on a lake. Sledding behind a moving (not too fast) motor vehicle that has a sled tied to it. CRAZY! My mother never knew!

Had I been an adult, and responsible for children, job, etc... I'm sure I might have had quite a different perspective on the Blizzard of 1978...and most certainly wouldn't have gone "bumper sledding"! Still...I'll remember the Blizzard of '78 as a beautiful adventure!

I remember as a kid, the blizzard of '78. There was a huge snow drift in the front of our house and my sister and I were able to dig into this drift and make tunnels and rooms under this huge drift. Each day we were able to add more tunnels and rooms. Since school was out we had plenty of time!

I was in college in Bloomington, Indiana. A bunch of friends lived in a big old house, and we piled into a friend's car (few of us even had cars then) and went to the grocery store while it was still snowing, right before they issued a blizzard advisory. We made chili, drank lots of beer and wine, and listened to music for a couple days. It was great fun!

I have fond memories of the Blizzard of '78. One of my friends went outside in her bikini and made snow angels. Also, the university was closed and we could walk up and down Hanna Avenue without traffic. We walked to the Marsh store where very little people were there. The Blizzard of '78 was a great time!

I have vivid memories of the blizzard of '78. I was 13, very active, but not very smart. Somehow I failed to close the garage door the night of the storm. It was a 2 car job that faced south/southwest. My Father got me out of bed quite early the following morning to shovel the snow out of the garage. There was as much snow in there as there was on the drive. Good thing school was cancelled for a few days, because that was how long it took. To this day my Father blames me, and rightly so, for the spalling concrete on the garage floor.

I remember driving home to Bainbridge from Crawfordsville, and barely making it. Later that evening my fire phone rang. It was the rail road company. They were requesting our help in rescuing several people

from an Amtrak train that had been stuck in a massive snow drift about 2 miles north of Bainbridge. We met at the fire station and then went to the grain elevator by the tracks. From there a train engine took us about 5 firefighters at a time up to the scene. I remember the wind blowing at about 30-40 mph. Someone said the wind chill was about -50. When I jumped off the engine I was up to my waist in snow. We all made our way back to the car that everyone had been put into, there had been no heat for some time and the passengers were all bundled up in blankets. One of our firemen thought to cut a hole in the blanket and make a poncho. We the escorted each passenger back to the engine were they were taken back to our fire station to be checked out by our town Dr. and an EMT. The next evening we got a call of the beach house on fire at Van Bibber Lake. On a good day we could make it 15-20 minutes, not this time. Once we arrived the building was fully involved.

I vividly remember waking up and looking out my bedroom window and seeing nothing but white reflecting back at me. I went to all the windows on the same side of the house trying to look out and seeing nothing but white. What I didn't know at the time (but found out later) was that the complete east and west sides of the house were buried in 2 massive snowdrifts thanks to the wind breaks. Once we forced the back door open we looked to the west side of the house to find the garage door was covered and the snow had piled up to a depth of 8 feet the length of the house. I finally found my car which was out by the street a few days (and several feet of snow) later. The engine compartment was packed with snow and frozen solid. The worst part of this was we didn't get to the store before the storm was in full fury and we had to walk to local Marsh store which somehow was open. It took 90 minutes to get there---It was 4 blocks away. I stayed there and got what we needed and rested. It took 2 hours to get back. Things didn't get back to normal in Greenfield for at least a month

I was a first grader attending Tipton Community Schools (where I currently teach) I remember the 30 inches of snow...the bitter cold and the drifts. Once the sun finally came out after the snow stopped....we took our sled inside to the upstairs of my grandma's house...opened the window and sledded off of the rooftop! It was the best thing I have ever experienced, when it comes to winter!!

I was a sophomore at Wabash College in Jan. 1978 when the blizzard hit. Two distinct memories come from that colossal storm – still, by far, the most significant weather event of my life:

- 1) On that fateful Wednesday afternoon, Stan Wood of Channel 8 nervously described the impending snowstorm as a blizzard and first used the term “blizzard warning.” Having lived in Indiana all of my life, I had never heard that term before and have only once since (last February's storm).
 - 2) The local cable outlet in Crawfordsville positioned a camera in its office to look out on to Washington Street (State Road 231) – the main thoroughfare in Crawfordsville. The camera showed continuous live shots throughout the 40-hour blizzard, as the wind howled, the snow raced horizontally, and the snow drifts along the street continued to grow and grow and grow – with no cars anywhere in sight!
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I arrived home around 4:30 pm and the temperature was 37 degrees and no snow. A few flakes started to drift from the heavens at 4:37 pm. By 7 pm I began to realize what a blizzard was going to be as the wind picked up and the snow was falling heavily.

I went outside and started stuffing newspaper into the cracks of my garage door. I saw my next door neighbor pull out of his garage and disappear into the night. I thought he certainly didn't know what he was getting into. He wasn't reported as dead so I assumed he made it home.

The wind began to howl when we went to bed that night. We hoped the power would stay on. At the dawn on Thursday, it was quite apparent that a blizzard was taking place. Once again, we hoped the power would stay on. Of course, everything was closed and the TV told you to stay at home and off the roads.

Come Friday morning, the sun was shining and the wind was hardly blowing. Going outside, it was apparent that traffic was not moving and everything was closed Friday. The snow depth was anything but uniform. In some places it was only a few inches deep and in others more than half a house high. The fence in the backyard was "gone".

Fortunately, the power was still on. Soon we realized that we weren't going to be dug out anytime soon. One neighbor got on his snowmobile and went to the store for milk and bread. Of course, there wasn't any.

While watching TV on Friday, the national news kept telling how bad things were in Illinois and Ohio, but never mentioned Indiana. Even Amtrak thought there was "no weather" in Indiana as it dispatched a train from Chicago to Indianapolis. Just outside of Crawfordsville, the train ran into a "little weather problem"...a 14 foot snow drift that stopped the train in its tracks. This, of course, made instant national news and all of a sudden Indiana had a "snow problem".

Things slowly returned to "normal" during the weekend and we were able to go to work on Monday. Those people in northeast Indiana were not as lucky. Many people were stranded at home. Helicopters were dropping food from the air to people and livestock. As bad as Indianapolis was, northeast Indiana was worst.

THANKS TO ALL WHO SHARED THEIR STORIES!
