

The Christmas Blizzard of '82

The year was 1982 – not 1882. It was the type event that embellished memories, if not legends, are made from. We were the 9th family to move into what is now called The Charter HOA area. A few roughed in streets, farmland and bluffs covered the rest of what is now the City of Lone Tree.

We were preparing for a special Christmas with old and young from both sides of our family. A 17 foot tree had been obtained from a ranch owned by the mother of friends. On it we had placed approximately 800 decorations and 1000 lights. The angel on top just cleared our family room ceiling. Since most of our guests would arrive before Christmas Eve we had made all the necessary gift and food purchases and therefore avoided the last minute rush.

In perspective, the nearest gas station was Amoco (they no longer retail in Colorado) at the northeast corner of I-25 and Arapahoe Road. As to shopping for food we had to go to the Safeway at the corner of Arapahoe Road and Quebec. For gifts the nearest mall was Southglenn on the southwest corner of Arapahoe Road and University Boulevard. Now we have five gas stations, the outstanding Park Meadows Mall with its outdoor Vista addition, for food Safeway plus Costco and Target, and many other shopping, dining and entertainment opportunities all within the City of Lone Tree.

In 1982 I worked as the Operations Manager for a small oil company. As such, and having a separate telephone line in the house for work, allowed me the flexibility of working from home. I had already planned to do so on Christmas Eve.

All was in order for lasting memories, some of which we were not anticipating, as Christmas Eve arrived and then it began to snow ---- and snow ---- and snow. The storm, created by a low pressure area (counter clock wise flow) south of the metro area and a high pressure area (clock wise flow) north of the city of Denver, was a perfect up slope combination for dumping a lot of snow locally. In Greeley some played golf and wondered what all of the fuss was about in Denver on the radio. Remember this was in '82 before 24/7 weather, widespread internet, twitter, slither, etc. ----- where every snowflake, real or imagined, now gets it own 30 minutes of prime time coverage. Besides it was Christmas with family, in-laws and outlaws.

For the young and not so young we built a ski run off our lot and across an adjacent lot. Others enjoyed the 36 inches of level snow on the street and the six foot drift at the front door. As we dug out the cars on the drive our brother in-law's (on my wife's side) main worry was being stuck out here in "the territories". I believe he thought that a glacier would form on the bluffs, or certainly in the foothills, and grind us all to turquoise powder. He had read of such things where he lives to this day in southwest Kansas and where the flat terrain does not pose such a possibility. We have gotten him back to visit, including to a cabin in the mountains, and it always results in an unusual snow event.

One of the local TV Stations should note this so as to beat their competition in the winter by being less than a 100% wrong.

One neighbor, just down the hill on our street, had a unique problem. They had taken their children to a babysitters home near Tamarac Square (east on Hampden Avenue for you newer residents). He called and explained that the children were still at the babysitters home and he had observed the 1976 Toyota Landcruiser in front of our home. Once the snow stopped he wanted to borrow it to go and retrieve them. I said that would be fine but I had to put the license plates on it since I had just bought it before the storm and he needed to know that things like the speedometer did not work in that it had been totaled three times before I bought it. Actually that was good because all the major parts had been replaced by others during its life, or periodic lack of life. I next heard from him when he called and said he had chained up the two rear tires and spent about 8 hours getting to our subdivision entrance and back. No children. His next try was successful after chaining up all four tires and running the farm ridges (where the snow was thinner) to I-25. A few days later when the Lone Tree developer sent in a front end loader to plow us out he called and said he was done with the Landcruiser if I needed it back. I walked down to get it and noted the chains on all four tires. When I offered to help get them off he said okay but that I could have them in case this happened again. It hasn't; but that old Landcruiser is part of some other stories and was very useful at times before I sold it..

The Christmas Blizzard of '82 is the standard that us "Old Timers" measure every snowfall since then. In part, because of the memories it created, (none have come close) and my snow blower, purchased in more recent years, often sets idle all winter.

For the younger residents in The Charter HOA area who do not relate to much, or any, of the above information the question is when will the next memorable blizzard occur. "Memorable" is the operative word. My prediction, which is as accurate as anyone else's at this time, is the "Valentine's Day Super Blizzard of '76".

My logical, or not so logical, reasoning is as follows. Those that will bring this into the long (and I mean long) range forecast and eventually narrow it down to a totally inaccurate weather for the day of the event are probably not born yet and will not be influenced by the past century.

It needs to be on a very recognizable national holiday (of which we may have several hundred more by then but I have to stick by the current list) that relates to a specific date. A date without a holiday label is just a date and not memorable. Thanksgiving, Easter and Memorial Day cannot qualify because they do not occur on a specific date.. We are left with Halloween, Veteran's Day, Christmas, New Years, Ground Hog Day, Valentine's Day St. Patrick's Day and My Birthday. The most recognizable ones are Halloween, Christmas, New Years and Valentine's Day. Halloween is early, but a blizzard can happen; however it would not have the romance factor of the others. Christmas may have historical confusion from the 1900's. New Years occurs at midnight and therefore the year could be a problem by including both years, like '89 and '90 where non-participants might think the blizzard lasted for two years. We are left with

Valentine's Day which is romantic and becoming very recognizable through retail marketing. If current trends continue by 2076 Valentine's Day may be the last stand alone holiday, with the after Christmas sales of the previous year having ended the day before and displays for the next Christmas retail push going up the day after.

As to the year, it needs to be in the last quarter of the century. Years like the blizzard of '12 just don't work. In 2076 we will be approaching the 100 year event, popularized by the 100 year flood plain, since the last memorable blizzard in 1982. This becomes the long range forecast excuse.

A future forecaster's education needs to include a course roughly titled "Tabloid Hype" so as to capture the anticipation of the possible blizzard as early as possible and to focus mass hysteria and attention on the first snowflake that starts every blizzard, or snow event of any kind from less than a trace on up. They need to develop the ability to incorporate every politicians desire to have a snowfall of more than a trace so that they can recommend that everyone stay at home from work and vote for them at the next election for having given them a day or more off. However, if my prediction is correct then a true Super Blizzard could be a politicians nightmare by the voters remembering they couldn't get anywhere on their free day or days off.

As a prerequisite to "Tabloid Hype" the future forecaster needs to understand "The Butterfly Effect". This will add a touch of reality that may prevent them from believing their own forecasts. "The Butterfly Effect" basically says that the best computer model is completely changed by a butterfly flapping its wings in the Amazon Jungle, or a computer large enough to handle an infinite number of data points (which cannot possibly be collected with any known technology) is needed to make an accurate forecast.

None of this should deter those that would join me in predicting the "Valentine's Day Super Blizzard of '76" in that weather forecasting is the only job where you can be 100% wrong all the time and still keep your job. We talk about the weather but we cannot do anything about it. The weather is the one thing that we can talk about and not offend anyone.

We old timers, and many others, will fondly remember "The Christmas Blizzard of '82".

Merry Christmas and a Happy, Prosperous New Year
God Bless all of you,

Lee
(as in Lee B. Van Ramshorst)

(12-2-09)