

On Snow Days
Robert S. Griffin
www.robertsgriffin.com

To her delight, my twelve-year-old daughter Dee had a snow day today; no school, bad weather, too much snow. She and her friend Meredith romped in the snow together and had great fun—Mom took some pictures.

Ah yes, snow days. I remember back when I was first started my career in teaching--social studies (history and current events and the like) in a high school. Monday through Friday, I would drive a little tin box with wheels called a Renault Dauphine from the converted electrical appliances store with a cement floor where I lived in West Saint Paul, Minnesota to North Saint Paul High School, the home of the Polars. I weighed 226 pounds (I weigh 168 now) and it was all I could do to get the top button on my pants buttoned and I couldn't have been more uncomfortable and it would be 6:30 a.m. and there I was facing the unappealing prospect of sitting on a stool holding court in front of classes of 25-30 teenagers, fifty minutes each, one after the other, from 8:10 in the morning until 3:00 in the afternoon. The students, misnomer, would be unresponsive to my steady stream of initiatives except for a wide-eyed look that I think now was probably mild wonderment at the moon face with the bushy hair in a cheap green tie and yellow shirt (is that a food stain?) sitting on a stool—why the stool?—skittishly chattering away while in metronome fashion glancing back and forth between them and the back wall. Every once in a while, one of them would turn around and glance at the back wall, like “What’s he looking at back there?”

The classes, there were four of them—each one of which I experienced as a demeaning eternity--were broken up by one hour of lunchroom duty, as it was called, shared with Ron Hawkinson, whose other responsibility at the school was teaching driver education. Ron and I were charged with maintaining a close watch on the kids eating their lunches in case something untoward

happened. Ron--tall guy, I suppose he was thirty, single--devoted the hour to lecturing me on how he was going to make a killing in the stock market, posing money-making schemes for the two of us (“How about you and me refereeing basketball games?”), and recounting his successes with various women. With one exception it was an uneventful five years, as it turned out, that Ron and I spent on guard in the lunchroom. One day, just like any other, Ron talking and me listening, no forewarning, a skinny, innocuous-looking boy suddenly stood up and threw his plate full of school cafeteria food complete with mashed potatoes and gravy into the face of another innocuous-looking boy, who remained seated and silent throughout this unfortunate episode. Ron immediately marched the offender—neither Ron nor the evil-doer ever uttered a word, this was a word-free outburst come to think about it--to the principal’s office and I went looking for a custodian to clean up the mess. I never found a custodian, and by the time I got back to the cafeteria one of the cooks had taken care of it.

The point of all this is that the highlight of my life back then were the days at 6:30 a.m. when it was still dark and I was there in my bursting pants just about to put on my coat and squeeze myself into the little Renault and then clink the door shut--the heater didn’t work, so it would have been cold all the way to North Saint Paul, about fifteen miles--and it was announced on the radio that there would be a snow day that day at North Saint Paul High School. Yes! I could stay home and read every word of the Saint Paul Pioneer Press sport section and then shovel the snow in front of the store/apartment coming within a foot of heavy traffic, buses roaring up and stopping and the hiss and bang of their doors opening and closing, and then go inside and munch Mars candy bars and Old Dutch potato chips and drink Tab (diet soda--had to do something about the weight problem) and re-read old Sports Illustrated magazines I had piled up in the corner and take the first of a series of naps. I was 23-years-old. So it began.