

The Blizzard of 1977



I was hoping that we had some photos of the 1977 blizzard in our files, but couldn't find any. The ones that covered the front page of the Gazette weren't very good. Anyone who remembers those few days has a good story to tell. I posted a note on the website LeRoy Then and Now and asked for memories. About forty people shared stories. Tricia Vinci Riggi wrote "My cousin Jimmy was born on Church St. in my Grandparents house. They brought Dr. Baker over in the snow plow!!!" Sure enough the story was at the bottom of the page in the Gazette. It said that Dr. Baker had never delivered a baby at home before, and was assisted by Mrs. Brenda Vinci. George Henry wrote: "I was working at Genesee Memorial Hospital in Batavia. It was lunchtime and suddenly it was like somebody turned the sun off. It got dark and just kept snowing. I never left the hospital for 4 days. I went out on ambulance calls. I remember us taking turns walking in front

of the rig with a lite flare in our hand going from car to car on the Thruway checking for patients." Bonnie Coniber wrote, "Lucky to have family all make it home including a few extra travelers who ended up spending the week with us. Watched the premier of the mini-series "Roots"...but with the storm our TV reception was poor... roof antenna needed adjustment... no problem, the snow drifts behind our house were as high as our roof... an easy walk up to the antenna attached to the fireplace chimney... with a little back and forth communication using the chimney a clear picture was accomplished. " "I remember the moment it hit. We were in the cafeteria and the northern side was floor to ceiling windows. I happened to be looking out and suddenly visibility went from clear to zero. It was like someone had thrown a bucket of white paint on every one of those windows," Kevin Kinsley. Doug Snell was

working at the Stafford Highway Department and the men were headed over to the Golden Poppy for lunch. They never made it. The storm hit at noon. It was a complete whiteout. They ended up walking down Route 5 to the Stafford firehall for supper. The Auxiliary made goulash. He spent the next seven weeks trying to keep Routes 5 and 237 open. He ran the Trojan mounted snow blower 7 days a week. "Went through some long cold snowy winters since then in my 42 years at the highway department, but nothing like that one was." He also told that Dr. Horr, the Superintendent of the LeRoy Schools needed to be convinced that they needed to keep the schools closed. He was given a tour of the roads in Stafford. "During his tour, he couldn't believe his eyes . . . the rural houses were difficult to get in and out of, let alone stop a school bus out front in the whiteouts. He delayed opening, but not for long." Patrick Moran added that the "Roanoke Road had drifts so high that it took oversize machines to push the drifts back . . . They were the biggest vehicles I had ever seen . . . I never knew where they came from." Doug Snell added that the huge machines had come from the quarry. What I remember of the storm, was that I was coming home from Rochester. My son was in kindergarten in Caledonia. This was before cell phones. WHAM radio was broadcasting all the schools that were releasing students early, but there was no mention of Caledonia. I found a pay phone and tried calling the school a couple of times, but there was no answer. All I could imagine was my son being dropped off at our house, way out in the country, trying to get up the driveway to an empty house. I started out Scottsville Road, only to be stopped at the hill by the Wehle Farm. Luckily I knew the farm manager, and I was taken in. I spent the time trying to get through to the school and then tried calling

home. Still no answer. After what seemed like an eternity, my husband answered the phone at home. He had made it home from Kodak Elmgrove and he had heard from the school that our son was staying the night at school. My son recounts that the kids bunked down on the gym mats. " On Friday, January 28, the storm rolled into Western New York. Winter had already been particularly cold and Lake Erie had been frozen over since December 14. The Lake was covered with snow, and the storm picked it up and blew it inland and although there was only 12 inches of snow generated from the storm, gusts of wind measured up to 69 mph., blew the snow into drifts as high as 40 feet. The temperature dropped to zero, and with the wind, the wind-chill was 60 to 70 degrees below zero. The storm continued for three days. On Saturday, President Carter declared the counties in Western New York a major disaster area - - the first time ever a snowstorm had become a major disaster area. There were 26 deaths attributed to the storm - many people perishing in cars stranded on the highways.

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