

The Big Snow

The winter of 1962-63 was bad. It was very cold since before Christmas and lasted for months. After the Christmas holidays I started back to school as usual. At this time I lived in Riverdale, Andersonstown, and went to St. Gall's school in Waterville Street, behind Clonard Monastery.

Usually my dad took me to school by car when he was on his way to work. He had a old black Ford Popular at the time. After school another Riverdale boy and myself made our way to the bus-stop and took the trolley bus to Casement Park terminus. Then we walked the rest of the way home.

On the 5th February 1963, dad had dropped me off to school as usual. It had been snowing slightly that morning but in those days school never closed – certainly not for a wee bit of snow.

Our school building was old with huge big windows and classroom doors opening straight out to the open corridors. We were allowed to keep our coats on that day and I remember the teacher even had a gas ring lit at the back of the room to help add some heat into us.

The snow got heavier and was beginning to get thick out in the street. By 11am the Principal had decided to close the school as conditions worsened. Most of the boys were delighted. A day off to play in the snow! This was unheard of.

For some of us however this presented a problem. Fintan and Damien McGivern and I had to get a bus to Andersonstown. Fintan was in my class and Damien was his older brother who usually kept an eye on us on the way home. The snow continued to be heavy as we made our way down Clonard Street to the Falls Road. When we got to the bus stop it wasn't long before we were told that the busses had been taken off the roads. We had no other option but to walk.

Luckily we had Wellington boots on, we never seemed to get out of them that winter, along with long thick socks and a heavy coat topped with our woolen balaclava hats.

We were in good spirits heading off our 'great adventure' but soon as we became cold and wet we began to wish we could get over this and get home to the warm fire.

Fintan came up with the great idea that we should call into their aunt and uncle's fruit shop on the Falls Road at Beechmount. Luckily the shop was still open though the fruit had been taken in from the pavement outside. It was three wet cold boys that walked in to meet Mrs. McGivern.

We were 'scooped' up. Brought to the fireplace and soon given bowls of soup. Our coats, socks and balaclavas were all hung up to dry. Attempts were made to phone our parents but there was no phone in our house and Fintan's phone wasn't answered.

There was nothing else for it, we had to go back out in the snow. I remember there was no slush. No melting snow. Just deep soft snow. Very few cars were on the road and those that where went very slowly.

As we got close to Casement Park I spotted my dad in his car trying to drive along the road. Waving frantically at him he totally missed us! Thank God we didn't have to venture out again to school the next day. All schools were closed for a week.

