

Chalkboard

By

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There are always a few themes to resurface year after year in the *Chalkboard*. Keeping with this year's theme of "It takes many brush strokes to paint the portrait of a child", this article may be considered a "numbered print". Better, it might be entitled "How not to make a Snow Angel".

You know of Snow Angels. I bet sometime in your life you have laid in a fluffy bed of snow and waved your arms and legs back and forth to create a small masterpiece to accompany the beauty of newly fallen snow. Perhaps you have many pleasant memories of such fun activities from playing in the snow yourself as a child and then later watching your own children doing so.

Most of my snow memories are from my twelve years as your superintendent in Gentry. All of you faithful readers know my roots are in the red clay of southeast Arkansas. In my childhood, most snows were only a dusting on the ground. Three inches would have been considered a "big snow" storm and happened only as a rarity.

Again, faithful readers can look back to my first year or so at Gentry with mirth as most of my "Do we close school?" decisions were no doubt a source of entertainment. If not entertainment for all, then I provided at least an avenue of catharsis for frustrated souls needing a place to vent. Needless to say, I closed on some occasions when we should have had school. With worse consequences, I later overcompensated with some really bad calls and stayed open when we should have closed. Such occasions gave me recall, via not so jocular expressions from the handset of my school phone, of words and phrases that I had previously heard over the sounds of chainsaws from my youthful days on the right-of-way crew for Cleveland & Lincoln Electric Cooperative.

How then is a decision made? Ah, the joy of it all. It's 4:00 in the morning and light snow is falling. There is just a hint that it is beginning to stick to the pavement. A cruise around town in my '92 Lumina determines that the streets are indeed passable. A cell phone call to Richard at Gravette or Sherman at Decatur finds those guys out and about also. Ken, down at Siloam, is out too. Which direction did the snowfall begin? There is an obvious need to make the trek up to Y-City. If that's okay, then a journey across the back roads to Mason Valley is in order. Next a pass out to the

airport should be made. But what about the kids living out close to Allen Canning company on Fairmount? Hmmmm...better cut through County Road 6 and loop back up towards Sleepy Hollow. No need to go west as Shiera (Wilson) has that covered.

You get the idea. The decision to go or not go is formulated based on the circumstances existing between 4:00 and 5:30 a.m. so that T.V. and radio stations can be contacted by 5:45. Parents, who have to leave for work, need to have all the time they can to make arrangements, especially for elementary children. It's a bit of a guessing game as a lot can change between 6:15 when the first bus goes out and the time the first school bell rings. The worst transitional moment is often when the sun first rises and begins to radiate heat to the ice and/or snow thus causing melting which is immediately refrozen by the surface and/or air temperature making an extremely thin, ultra slick driving surface.

Before the school day has begun, the first and primary consideration is whether the buses safely travel. The next is whether the staff and parents of "car-riders" can safely transverse the highways, streets, roads and parking lots. Third, can students and staff safely walk about outside the buildings?

During the day when school is in session and inclement weather approaches or begins, the scenario changes. Along with the above thoughts, the question of "Is there someone at home to let the little ones inside?" vies loudly for consideration.

Hopefully, all of the above musings will remind you, the parents, relatives, and guardians of our children, to make a plan and tell your child what to do if the school district has to close during the day. I encourage you to let the officials at your child's school know in advance if that plan will change the daily routine for your child leaving school. Trust me, it is confusing for us and scary for your young child when no one knows that "Aunt Sue" isn't coming and you sent "Neighbor Bob" to pick up "little Billy" in his big Ford 350 4-wheel drive with the hay fork sticking out the back.

So, why should the article be entitled "How not to make a Snow Angel"? Because the ultimate goal of any inclement weather school closing decision is to keep your angel, your child, alive and well, physically safe and sound.