

SNOW DAYS CHIP DENTON

My neighbor with the purple coat and red hat hates snow days. She was angry with the world a couple of weeks ago, when the first snow flew, because she had to go to work while all the school kids and half their parents stayed home to build snowmen and drink hot chocolate.

That was during the first storm, when somebody with an “essential job” and a four-wheel drive could make it into work if he had to, or wanted to.

Just across the way, in apartment 104, lives a seven-year-old who experienced this winter weather very differently. The first snow was exciting and the unexpected holiday was a joy. Then came the big snow. When we put him to bed that Monday evening, it was already coming down hard and steady. I will never forget the wonderment that twinkled in his bright, brown eyes as he lay in his bunk and gazed out on the flakes falling thick as pancakes outside his window.

What we woke up to the next morning was enough to turn us all into seven-year-olds. Even the lady in the purple coat had to stay home and play in the snow that day.

Such a snow cancels nearly everything that keeps us busy: school, school meetings, church and church meetings, appointments, violin lessons, breakfast meetings and evening lectures, Bible studies, prayer meetings, basketball practice and basketball games, tutoring, dinner engagements, workshops, hair appointments, shopping trips, quizzes, tests, and newsletter deadlines--to mention only a few. The wonder of it all soon wears thin--just ask parents with kids in the public schools--but for a while it is a marvelous thing. I don't know anyone who didn't experience, at least for a day or two, a different quality of life last week: slower, more relaxed, more communal. Neighbors stopped to visit and chat, fathers built ice forts, families played card games. If only we had lost our televisions without losing power we might have mistaken it for the kingdom come.

Snow days are good for us. They remind us that there are things more important than school--things like warmth and safety and conversation with the people we love most. Yet when they hang on for such a long time, freezing and refreezing, they turn dingy like the piles of soiled snow plowed on the roadsides. Then we can remember why the routine of school and our ordinary commitments are not such a bad way to spend our time. But most importantly, to us of weak faith, they are God's pedagogical coup, bringing home to our hearts what we have heard but would not believe: that such a snow has fallen from heaven as has covered all our sins. “Cancelled” is God's unbelievable good news that changes all our plans, and makes our eyes twinkle with delight. Let it snow!