

## ***By Golly! We Found Snow!***

Nineteen Ninety Five was our second Christmas in America. After a scrumptious Christmas luncheon of roast leg of lamb with all the Christmas trappings, including snapping crackers and ending with homemade creamed meringues, leaning back in his chair, my husband moved his bright green Christmas paper hat further up his head and asked:

"Who wants to go up north to find snow?"

Coming from South Africa, our kids had never seen snow and we had only experienced a couple of freak snow days in Johannesburg ourselves. One on June 18th 1964 and the other on September 10th 1981. We decided that North Carolina along the Appalachian Mountains would be our best bet after listening to the national weather channel and with much excitement we poured over the large Wal-Mart map book to plot our route.

In the morning we woke at sunrise and busied ourselves packing and making some padkos (an Afrikaans word meaning 'food for the road') until Burlington Coat Factory opened. Then we headed over there and spent some time choosing warm jackets, knitted hats and waterproof gloves. After all, snow is wet and we had snowmen to build and snowballs to throw! Our next stop was a lube place to get the oil changed in the car but finally, after filling up with gas we hit the road. It was close to 12.00 p.m.

As we shot past houses, shopping centers, strip malls, lakes, parks and fields, we sang our favorite children's and folksy songs. "There was an old lady who swallowed a fly ...ooh, perhaps she'll die..." and many of Sam Hinton's folksongs like "Old Blue" the Robin the Bobbin" and all the others from the "Whoever Shall Have Some Peanuts" and "I'll Sing You A Story albums and the Oldsmobile chewed the miles along the I-75.

As the day faded into night and the darkness deepened and we were just a few miles out of Franklin in North Carolina, we called the Days Inn where we had booked a room for the night. We wanted to let them know that we would still be checking in since it was nearing 11.00 p.m. They told us they would warm the room for us and sure enough its toasty interior welcomed us from the icy cold outside.

The next morning with an early Days Inn breakfast under our belt we made a quick tour of the charming little city of Franklin surrounded by mountains, streams and valleys before hitting the road to Ashville for lunch in our search for snow.

Close to lunchtime, the large IHOP sign caught our eye as we entered Ashville and we pulled into its parking area as sleet began to cascade around us. Needless to say, we all bristled with excitement and while eating, we eagerly watched for signs through the restaurant window that the sleet had turned to snow. To our disappointment, by the time we left the restaurant, the sleet had stopped and even our hopeful looks up at the gray cloud laden sky did not produce any flurries. We bundled into the car and turned its nose towards the mountains and slowly began to climb as if into the clouds.

It wasn't long before we glimpsed thick snow on the ground and icicles hanging in artistic patterns from the trees along the mountain road. Our anticipation grew as the wheels turned and the scenery around us became a wonderland of white. There was an eerie quiet around us. Almost as though nature was holding her breath for something enchanting to happen and then it did happen; the startling beauty of great big fat snowflakes floating down from the heavens made us gasp in awe. By the time we'd gone a few hundred yards into Linville, it was snowing heavily.

We pulled into a gas station-cum-country store to pull on our jackets, hats, scarves and gloves. The open patch next to the gas station had a fair layer of snow from an earlier snowfall and now the concrete around the gas station began to whiten as the snow stuck to its surface.

We watched in fascination as the big snow truck appeared as if from nowhere and started salting the road on which we would travel to Boon for the night. The falling snowflakes were the biggest captivation of all. Their grace and stillness was magical; touching our heads and clothes and upturned faces with gentle caresses.

After a long while of just staring at this incredibly beautiful phenomenon, we made snowballs and flung them at each other with squeals of glee and built our first snowman with much difficulty. Inexperienced in rolling snow, he didn't look quite like he did in the movies; but did it matter? We had travelled north to find snow and by golly, we had found snow!

*Pamela McMonagle ©2009*