

Text C

This extract is taken from an essay about the author's experience of surviving a blizzard as a child.

We didn't question. Or complain. It wouldn't have occurred to us, and it wouldn't have helped. I was eight. Julie was ten.

We didn't know yet that this blizzard would earn itself a moniker that would be silk-screened on T-shirts. We would own such a shirt, which extended its tenure in our house as a rag for polishing silver.

So I didn't make up the blizzard, though it sounds made up, the grimmest of Grimms, windchill forty below, three feet of snow and snow still falling. You had to shovel your drive daily. Later, a neighbor would tell of coming home after two nights away and having to dig down a foot to reach his own keyhole.

My dad had a snow blower, which spewed sheets of snow out of the side of its mouth. Sheets became mountains, and mountains became walls on either side of our front path, reaching almost to the sky. I could still view sky by tipping my head back, but seeing it was no relief because the sky was snow-white, tearing itself into pieces and hurling them at us.

And then the world began shutting down. The airports, which was bad because Mom was in Toronto, visiting her sister. The schools, which was great for the first day, and good for the second, and then less good and less good yet. Because the roads were impossible; the fridge, emptying. *Does this smell OK to you?* Couldn't watch *Little House* because Channel 5 covered the blizzard all day. A motorist, dead of exposure in a stranded car. A man, dead of a heart attack while shoveling snow; ambulance couldn't reach him. Coat drive, shelters for the homeless. *Check in on your elderly neighbors, folks. If you can get out, that is.* Amtrak trains abandoned. Hundreds of cars lining the highway, buried by snow, white lumps pierced by antennas. Family of five, killed when their roof collapsed. We were a family of four, but with Mom far away, we were only three. I got out of the bathtub to answer her crackling long-distance call.

Then it was Sunday, so Dad said get ready for mass. We didn't question. He helped us tug and wriggle into our snowsuits, and we slid our feet into plastic bread bags before yanking on our boots. He pushed open the door into the shrieking tunnel of white. We trudged between the walls of snow to the unplowed road. *Follow me, Dad said. Step where I'm stepping; this part will hold our weight.* Except sometimes we couldn't match his stride, or the snow wouldn't hold our weight and Julie's boot or my boot would crunch through crust and we'd plummet to the groin, feeling nothing below but more snow. *On the count of three,* Dad said, and hoisted us out, and we battled on, snow melting into our boots, heads lowered against the wind. When we reached the plowed road, we scrambled down, easier walking. I couldn't tell how far we had to go. It hurt to look up.

At last, the dark church loomed. We climbed the stone steps to the doors. Locked. My father raised his gloved fist and knocked. He must have known, even as he knocked, but still he knocked. There was no sign on the door saying that mass was cancelled. But why should the priests post a sign? Probably they couldn't even get out of the rectory themselves.