

Here's the photo taken at the intersection of Route 51 and Wallace Run Road after the 1950 blizzard.

Here also are my recollections of that storm.

The great blizzard of 1950 is pretty clear in my memory, since I was 17 years old at the time, had my own car, and was unpleasantly immobilized by the snow. I do think that 1950 was probably the worst blizzard in these parts, at least in my memory. At the time, I was working for J.T. Marquis Motors, a Nash dealer, in downtown Beaver Falls, Pa., and was at work on the Friday after Thanksgiving, when the snow started to really pile up. After work, I started on the fifteen mile drive to our farm in my 1948 Nash 600 sedan. The Nash went pretty well on slippery roads (it didn't have enough power to spin the wheels) and I made it most of the way without too much trouble. Right after turning onto Route 168 from Route 251 was a long winding hill we called "Garvin Hill," that I couldn't get up, but no problem. In those days, everyone who lived in the country carried in the trunk, or on the back seat floor, a set of tire chains, and most folks were quite practiced in putting on and taking off these traction boosters. I put on my chains, got home OK and put the car in the garage, where it stayed for about four days.

Saturday, after we'd shoveled enough paths to do chores, I tried to get out with our Ford-Ferguson tractor, but no luck. We had no blade of any kind for it and it just sat in the snow, spun its wheels, and hopped up and down. I was all for waiting for a snowplow to rescue us, but Dad, knowing that South Beaver Township had no equipment even remotely possible of clearing the roads, insisted we shovel our way to the state road. I'll tell you, a good quarter mile of road, clogged with two to five foot drifts, looked pretty daunting to two guys with shovels, or at least it did to me, Dad seemed to have no doubt that we could do it.

About all I remember of the next couple of days is the unending thrust, lift, and throw of shovel full after shovel full of snow, as well as the snail-like pace of our progress. Sometime on Monday, with us a little more than halfway to our goal, down Moore Road came a Caterpillar D-6 or D-7 bulldozer, driven by one of the Watterson boys from Darlington, Pa. The township trustees, bless 'em, knowing they couldn't deal with the snow, hired the Watterson's, who had a contracting business and owned heavy equipment, to clear the township roads, saving us from having to shovel the rest of the way.

At last! I was free; to go to work, to see my girl, and to drive to all the places a busy teenager found it necessary to go. In those days, no salt was used on the roads; they were plowed and then ashes were spread on hills and at intersections. Roads stayed snow covered for a long time and the tire chains stayed on for a long time also. I remember the dreaded sound of a cross chain that suddenly broke and began beating against a fender. A box of repair links was always carried in the glove compartment for such an emergency, and you had to stop and rejoin the broken cross chain with one of these links. If left to batter a fender, the broken chain could soon beat a hole through the metal. If tire chains were always run on muddy or on snow covered roads, they didn't wear out very fast but, inevitably, the main roads became bare, while the back roads were still slippery. This meant that the temptation to run across bare pavement with your chains on was strong, and this is what wore cross chains to the point of breaking.

Snow tires and road salt have virtually made tire chains obsolete, and no one misses them much. They were a pain to put on and take off, and tough to keep in repair, but they did get us through snow, ice and mud that would immobilize today's traffic.

Here's another story I recall from that blizzard. A gentleman, whose name I've forgotten, but who lived in a red brick house at the southeast corner of Route 251 and Georgetown Road, had passed away at home that snowy weekend. Campbell's was called to pick up the body but the roads were closed due to the storm. Dave Marquis, who was my boss at Marquis Motors, also drove ambulance and hearse for Campbell's part time, and he undertook the trip. Dave later told me that he had tire chains put on all four wheels of the hearse and set out, getting as far as Blair Ferguson's on Route 251, before being stuck. Blair tried his Farmall M tractor, but it could make no headway so a team of horses was hitched to the hearse. With the help of Blair and his team, Dave managed to get the poor man's body and take it back to the funeral home.

I remember that when I did get back to work in town the next week, snow was piled up everywhere. At that time the four-lane section of Route 51 was being built and the City of Beaver Falls apparently hired the contractor on the Rt. 51 job to remove snow from downtown. I recall big Euclid and Caterpillar earthmovers roaring up and down 7th Avenue loaded with snow, which I think they dumped in the river.