

Snow in your eye
By Jerry Peterson
jerrypetersonbooks.com

A snow cloud shooshed up the sidewalk toward my dad and me as we stood in our driveway, me holding Dad's super scooper and my half-sized one and him sipping his coffee.

Coffee. Mom calls it hot tar in a cup. Makes it himself. I tried it once. And once I tried chewing a gob of tar, pretending to my little sister it was licorice and really good so she'd have some. The tar was better than Dad's coffee.

Dad eyed that billowing snow cloud with something more than casual interest. Me? I just wondered when we were gonna get to the business of digging out the driveway – the snow was up to my knees – so Dad could take me to hockey practice.

Now you're thinking, why didn't I start shoveling if I was so hot to get out on the ice. But you don't understand my dad. It's a rule of his. He's got to pitch the first shovelful of snow from each new fall over onto the lawn. It's a Norwegian thing, Dad says. We're snow people.

Really he was waiting for a neighbor to blow out our sidewalk. And here he came, Mister Rockowitz. Remember that snow cloud?

Mister Rockowitz was always trying to come up with a better way to do any kind of a job, some of the ways just gosh awful strange. His old snowblower was something of a wreck, but this one came on almost silently. Just a swish.

A long, steady, continuous swish.

As he came up to our driveway, we saw him. He had a silver beach umbrella over his snowblower, can you believe that? And he was wearing this silver suit like he was some sort of super hero. Mister Rockowitz stopped and he swiped at the snow that covered his goggles before he looked at us, this big grin on his face. You know the one if you've got a little baby brother and he's got gas.

"How do you like 'er, Charlie?" he asked my dad and waved a mittened hand at his snowblower and the umbrella. "I've gone green. Bought this electric snowblower, and I've rigged it for sun power."

Before my dad could ask how he did that, Mister Rockowitz pulled down on the edge of the umbrella. "See here," he said, "I covered it with a sheet of photo-voltaic cells, super-efficient – very experimental. And my coveralls, too."

He struck a pose, like a model does. I've seen them on television. "I've got heating wires inside my coveralls," he said, "so the photo-voltaics on the outside of my coveralls keep me toasty."

Dad was about to say something when a blatting machine came ripping down the sidewalk of the street that tees into ours. Johnny Wilson had told me his dad had put a snowblower on the front of his snowmobile, and here he came at a heck of a speed.

But down our sidewalk, from the other end, came this snowblower as wide as the sidewalk was, devouring the snow, and that machine just howled. I stuffed my fingers in my ears.

When it came closer – ohmigosh, it was crazy Mister Kilgannon wearing that Finnish snow cap of his, the kind with the little balls dangling from strings.

He cut the power as he nosed up to Mister Rockowitz's silent snowblower, patted the big motor that powered his machine.

"Ain't she a honey?" he said. "A V-Eight – two hundred sixty horsepower – got it out of

my cousin's junker Chevy truck. Just look at these twin exhaust stacks, man. And listen to this."

Mister Kilgannon twisted the throttle. He revved the motor up until the thunder shook our teeth, then he dropped it back to idle.

He motioned us in. "The radiator," he said, "see how I routed the plumbing through the handles to keep my hands warm."

My dad eyed the orange oven mitts that Mister Kilgannon wore and asked about the scorch marks on them.

"Well," he said, "I haven't got the temperature and flow adjusted just right yet. Sometimes a big slug of boiling coolant comes surging through the handles."

Mister Wilson raced his snowmobile-cum snowblower over. Musta wanted to see Mister Kilgannon's bellowing monster. Anyway, the three men got to jabbering about whose snowblower was the best, and Mister Kilgannon challenged Mister Wilson and Mister Rockowitz. "Bet you a keg of Leinenkugel's," he said, "that I can move more snow than you two guys put together because I got the power here."

Mister Wilson answered that he's got the speed, and he turned to Mister Rockowitz.

Mister Rockowitz hemmed some, then said, "At least I don't pollute the air."

Well, they agreed to go at it. They asked my dad to be the judge and the starter, and that gave him an idea. He whispered to me, "Watch this."

He waved for Mister Kilgannon, Mister Wilson, and Mister Rockowitz to follow him, and then did, moving en train to the top end of our driveway by the garage. Dad then motioned for them to line up side by side – Mister Rockowitz on the left, Mister Wilson on the right, and Mister Kilgannon in the middle. Told them to adjust their chutes so they wouldn't blast one another. Mister Kilgannon aimed his straight down the driveway, said with his V-Eight he could fire the snow fifty feet ahead so it wouldn't be a problem for anybody.

Dad told 'em when you get to the street, swing left down the center and go for hell.

So there they stood with their hands on the handles of their respective machines. Okay, Mister Wilson didn't stand. He sat on the seat on his snowmobile, but he did have his hands on the controls of his snowblower.

They peered at my dad.

He took out this red-checkered handkerchief, waved it over his head, then whipped the handkerchief down.

Snow, it went everywhere. It was a gosh-darn blizzard, and those three men left a cleared path down our driveway almost as wide as two of me is tall. They hit the end of the driveway and moved out into the street, Mister Wilson well in the lead with his snowmobile snowblower.

Dad and me, we chased after them, and that's when I saw it. A city plow came around the corner. It turned right into the snow stream from Mister Kilgannon's snowblower, and the snow must have blinded him because he started weaving.

I tore after our neighbors, waving and hollering at them, and they must have seen the truck coming because they raced their snowblowers out of the center of the street. Mister Kilgannon's, with all that Chevy power, ripped up an ice-covered snowbank at the side of the street and went airborne, him hanging onto the handlebars.

The snowplow swerved. It clipped a light pole as Mister Kilgannon let go of his machine just before it went through Police Chief Conover's picture window. Mister Kilgannon came down in a tangle of juniper bushes.

I ran up, shouting, "Are you all right? Are you all right?"

He rolled over, looked up and his eyes went wide, like he'd seen something awful. And

he had. The light pole sliced down. It sheared the limbs off one side of this big Scotch pine, releasing this wall of snow that thundered down to bury Mister Kilgannon and half bury me.

Dad and I dug him out, and he came up spitting, raking at the white stuff that had gone down the neck of his jacket.

“Charlie,” Mister Kilgannon said to my dad, “I threw the most snow, didn’t I? I get the beer, right?”