

Snow Pact

By Marilyn Reeves

The second weekend of October, 1971, my younger sister Rosie was looking forward to celebrating her 21st birthday with our folks in Salida. We planned to head out Friday afternoon from my place in Lakewood as soon as I got home from work. Although the weather report said it might snow, it was blue skies in Denver that day and we were both homesick and didn't think a little bit of snow would deter us from our mission. Our plan was to take 285, stop in Fairplay for a late dinner, then proceed on to Salida, expecting to arrive there around 9:00 o'clock.

So we stuffed our bags in the trunk of my old Chevy Nova and settled our two little boys – hers and mine – in the back seat. It was starting to get dark but the skies were still clear as we headed out about 5:30.

We probably should have stopped in Baily for supper, but decided to press on and stick with our plan. By the time we passed Santa Maria it was snowing lightly. No biggie – the road ahead was clear and visibility was still okay. But at the top of Kenosha Pass we were greeted by a *blizzard!* It was terrifying trying to work our way down that long, steep descent, literally feeling our way along, with only the occasional reflective post at the edge of the road to guide us.

I don't know if you've ever driven through South Park during a ground blizzard, but it can be a harrowing experience. It can be a perfectly clear, bright day, but if there's an accumulation of snow on the ground and a strong wind blowing, it can cut visibility to zero.

Well, this wasn't a ground blizzard, it was a blizzard-blizzard with fresh wind-driven snow falling heavily from the sky, with the same effect on visibility. Somehow we managed to limp our way along, still guided only by those little reflectors marking the edge of the road, until we reached Fairplay. At last – a place to stop, find somewhere to eat and enjoy a brief respite from that treacherous driving. Except that it was already 9:00 o'clock and nothing was open but a filling station. So our "dinner" consisted of chips, Coke and some candy bars.

Standing out in the blasting storm we used their outdoor pay-phone to call the folks collect and update them about our situation. Dad recommended that we keep on coming, as the distance from Fairplay to Salida would be shorter than turning around and heading back to Denver. Plus, he said the sky was clear in the Arkansas Valley.

We finally pulled into their driveway a little before midnight. Tired, cranky and jittery from the ordeal of driving through all that blinding snow, Rosie and I made a pact that night ... to pay attention to the weatherman, and if he's predicting snow then it's *no go*, no matter how homesick we might be. Live and learn! We learned our lesson the hard way.