

## SNOW SOUP AND BLUEBERRY PIE

by Gary Lark

We used to have some snows around here. I'm telling you—snow up to your belt buckle, snow up to your nose, snow up to no good. I remember one year it snowed a foot before I got my boots on. Two feet. Three feet. Cars disappeared. Horses and cows headed for the barn. I looked out of the dormer window upstairs, there was a lump of snow where the barn used to be. It kept snowing until it was plum over the roof-top.

One evening, I think it was evening, it's hard to tell when the sky is gone, we had a conference.

"We've got plenty of food in the larder to last a month or two," said Ma.

"Can we go out and play?" asked my brother Billy.

"We need to feed the cows, down at the barn," said Pa.

"Billy, you can't go out and play. We can't get out the door," said Ma.

"How are we going to get to the barn?" I asked.

"Can we make a tunnel?" asked Billy.

"We'll have to tunnel our way out there, I suppose," said Pa.

"Oh, boy!" said Billy, running for his coat.

We all got our coats. Luckily the shovels and wheelbarrow were on the back porch. We started digging into that wall of snow. But what could we do with the snow?

"Put it in the guest room," said Ma.

So we wheelbarrowed the snow into the guest room. Load after load, we packed it in, closets first. In the meantime Ma put it to use: she made snow tea and coffee, snow Jell-O, snow jam, snow jelly, snow salsa, and started a big pot of snow soup.

We dug and we dug, packing the tunnel walls smooth. Ma brought out a lantern to light things up. It was a fine tunnel.

"Looks like we're going to have a lot of soup," said Ma, when we came in for lunch.

We tunneled all day and half the next.

"Shouldn't we be to the barn by now?" I asked.

"We'll get there soon enough," said Pa.

So we dug some more.

Now, back at the house Ma was making supper. I could smell the good smell of soup coming up the tunnel. Then it hit me: blueberry pie. Lord, nothing like blueberry pie in the middle of winter. That really got us going. We shoveled like crazy machines.

We were about ready to give it up for the night and head toward the blueberry pie when we struck a log.

"I'll be durned," said Pa. "Looks like we're off a little bit."

"What do you mean, off a little bit?" I asked.

"We missed the barn, a little bit," said Pa.

"Oh," I said, thinking about those blueberry pies.

About that time we began to hear a strange noise, like a little motor, humming on the other side of the logs.

We got the sticks and limbs and logs cleared away and the little motor got louder. We held up the lantern and there was a bear! In a cave! That little motor was the bear snoring. We started to back out of the cave and cover it back up when the bear's nose began to twitch. It sniffed and sniffed, moving its sleepy head. While we were backing out the bear started to move toward us, still asleep.

We walked quiet and careful back to the house with that bear lumbering behind us. We shut the screen door on the porch when we got back, but the bear just hooked its claws around the edge and peeled it right off the hinges. Pa decided to leave the kitchen door open so he wouldn't have to fix it.

It was following its nose. I can't say I blame the bear any, the smell of blueberry pie is a powerful force.

Anyway, the bear clopped across the kitchen floor, still fast asleep, sniffing its way right to the table where two fine looking blueberry pies sat cooling. My, they looked good. We all stood in a little circle, watching, as the bear sat down on the chair and stuck its big brown nose in the middle of one of those pies, and began to slurp. When it was through with that one it switched to the other. We were all quiet. Even Billy knew better than to wake up a sleeping bear. It finished the second one, sniffed in the direction of the soup, burped, then climbed down from the chair and went back out the door.

We followed the bear up the tunnel and watched it shuffle back to bed. Pa and I shoveled snow back over the logs and sticks, packing it nice and tight.

That evening we had our soup and wished for blueberry pie.

"I'll make some more, there's still berries in the freezer," Ma said.

"I sure would like one of those pies right know," I said.

"I could eat two myself," said Billy.

"Maybe you should wait a day or two, Ma," said Pa. "We'll put a little more snow between the bear and the pies."

After we worked on the tunnel another day, Ma baked two of the grandest blueberry pies ever.

Oh, the cows? We studied the tunnel a bit and found where we zigged instead of zagged. The cows were a little hungry, but the barn had been cozy warm beneath the thick quilt of snow.

Come spring, when the snow had melted outside, we looked in that cave. The bear was gone. I'll bet it had the sweetest blueberry pie dreams any bear ever had.

And we used the last of the snow from the guest room to make snow-cones for my birthday on the 14th of July.

Now that was some snow.