

**Some of the words:
Snow day**

Grace Hols

Remember the saying “A picture is worth a thousand words”? Well, I have a lot of pictures: black and white, some already fading. So I am trying to write the words, or at least a few of them. This process involves an intimate study of a photo, to the point where I take a magnifying glass to zoom in and capture details otherwise overlooked. The result of all this is a growing collection of vignettes that I am calling “Some of the words.”

Snow day

It’s a bright day in March in 1953, warm enough for sweaters and no hats. There is a small hill just beside the old farmhouse, and the snow has thawed and melted and thawed and melted to a hard crust that glistens under the clear blue sky. We are outside, my mom and my brother and sister and I. Mom has brushed my hair and put in a starched white ribbon, ubiquitous on all the heads of most immigrant girls in those days.

My mother and I are at the top of the hill on a small sled. The sled looks like something my dad must have made. He probably cut out the runners with a handsaw after tracing the outline with his carpenter’s pencil on a piece of lumber he cut on his own sawmill from trees he felled himself on the property we owned five miles out of town. Dad was all about being self-sufficient. The sled is two runners with a small raised platform nailed on top. Mom is crouched on the sled, two feet firmly planted on the platform and her bare hands wrapped around the front bar. I am draped across her back with my arms around her neck. We are both looking at the camera. It is as if Dad has just finished making the sled and has brought it out of his workshop for us to try for the first time. He probably carried it out proudly, still brushing the sawdust off the raw edges. Maybe he rubbed bear grease or candle wax on the runners to make them glide. Anyway, it looks like he

gave us the sled to try and then went back to the house to get the camera. He took a lot of pictures in those days because he sent many photos back to family in the Old Country. It was, I think now, a way of justifying their move, a way of proving to parents and other relatives that emigrating had been the right thing to do, that things had worked out well for them in this new frontier of northern BC.



My Mom and I sledding, March 1953. From the author's personal collection.

So there we are, Mom and I, smiling at Dad behind the camera. The sun must have been brilliant, because we are both squinting and I doubt if any of us owned sunglasses in those days. I don't know if that sled really worked. It looks good, but did it slide? Our shadows are very clear but there is no sign of tracks that a sled would have made. My younger brother and sister are off to the side, carefully walking down the hill, and our two large dogs are running circles around them. It must have been a Saturday or a Sunday, because I was in school already and this was in the middle of the day.

It is good to see this photo because it proves that life then was not all work and no play, which is what we often remember about that time.