



Winter Activities By Dale Jorgenson

The farm, in Kinnickinnic Township where I grew up, was also the farm where my father grew up. I like that link to the past, and while the farm is no longer in the family I still walk the fields from time to time to reconnect with that history.

The 160 acres is split by the Kinnickinnic River, with part of the land in a lowland area that was only tillable in dry years. The soil there was deep, dark black and I always believed it was the best farmland in the world. During those years when it was dry enough to cultivate there was always the chance that one of our tractors would suddenly sink away in some unseen muck-hole still too wet to drive over. In the later years of my life on the farm my father gave up trying to plant crops in the lowland area because of its propensity for “eating” our tractors.

That lowland area was just adjacent to the river. At its other edge were high bluffs that I imagined were carved out by the river thousands of years ago. The downward slope of these bluffs provided wonderful sledding hills in the winter. The best and longest run lead into a swampy area filled with high grass and a few trees. As my brother and I grew older (and bolder) we learned to carry water from the river to ice down our toboggan runs on the hill. This made for a fun, fast and sometimes treacherous ride down the hill. The addition of “jumps” increased the fun and the danger.

Over time we tried different approaches to increase our speed going down the hill. One of those was to hold the toboggan with both hands, run toward the downward slope of the hill and throw ourselves and the toboggan onto the icy trail. Once, my brother tucked his head tightly into the front curve of the toboggan as he rode down the slope to protect himself from the flying snow. I watched as his snow-chariot sped downwards toward the swamp in what was perhaps a record-breaking time. As he approached the end of the ride, the toboggan veered off to the left and hit a tree, dead center. I suppose my brother’s wool cap provided some cushion for the blow, but for a while he wasn’t really sure where he was or what exactly had happened to him. As would be expected from a brother, I had a hearty laugh over the incident, and I still kid my brother to this day that the blow has had long-term effects on his ability to think.

Another time, after we had found an old pair of skis hanging in the machine shed, we attempted to duplicate some of our runtimes over the jump with the toboggan. The skis were long, wide and heavy. I didn’t then nor now know anything about skiing, but figured, “how hard can this be?” The only thing the skis had for attachment to our feet was a wide leather strap with buckles. Needless to say there wasn’t any turning we could do with this type of a ski, so we concentrated on going straight and fast. After some practice and many spectacular falls we were able to hit the jump with some regularity, but as I recall neither of us was able to complete the jump in an upright position. It’s probably a good thing we both wore heavy winter coats that protected us from falls we took. I watched my son ski at a resort in Montana a few years ago, and his skis and the technique he used were quite different from ours on the farm. While he certainly seemed to enjoy his type of skiing, nothing would compare to our ski runs along the bluffs of the Kinni.