

Magnificent Flying Lids

Jim and I cut and sold a lot of firewood through the summer, fall, and early winter. When the rains came, we burned the limbs and tops we had piled as we worked our way through the dead lodgepole, and we kept cutting wood.

Cold weather hit, and the ground froze hard, and people came up again to buy, load, and haul away the wood.

Then snow blew into the valley.

We worked as long as we could. We plowed a road through the snow with the wheel-tractor to get to the timber where we were cutting. But the snow kept falling and was deeper and deeper on the meadow. Too much of our work went into getting through the snow, and too little went into cutting and selling firewood, until the day came when we agreed, this is it, that time of winter when it's no longer worth fighting the winter.

We'd been looking forward to it. We stored all our tools. We played a lot of chess and started teaching my daughters to play. We snowshoed across the meadow.

Early Tuesday morning, Jim and I stopped by Mike's place to see how he was doing. We talked for a while, but neither Jim nor I cared for long conversations. Jim went out the front door and stood on the porch.

There were several plastic coffee can lids and margarine-tub lids on Mike's table, and I picked one up and sent it across the air, through the door to Jim. It made a better frisbee than a Frisbee. It had a straighter flight and was easier to control. I picked up several and said, "Hey, Mike, could we borrow these for a while?"

He said sure; we could take them and keep them, so I sent two more to Jim. He increased the distance between us, and I went out the front door and sent him two more as he returned the first two to me, airmail. We headed up the road, with from 20 feet to 150 feet between us, and up to six plastic lids in the air at once, going both ways.

Laura and our daughters saw what we were doing and came out and joined us. The road was too narrow for all of us to spread out, but the snow had formed a hard crust, so we stepped over the fence and spread out into the meadow, and plastic lids flew in five and 10 directions at the same time.

Laura eventually went back into the house and the girls picked up their toboggans and headed up the hill, but Jim and I wouldn't, or couldn't, quit. We ran, walked, jumped, and circled our way all the way up the ranch on the north side of the river, throwing and catching, and laughing. We crossed the river on the irrigation dam and went all the way down the south side of the river. We developed as fancy throws as we could think of, through the legs, over the shoulder backward, left-handed, both hands at once.

We saw beaver slides at the river, coyote tracks on the meadow, vole tunnels coming up through the snow, and wing marks where a hawk or owl had picked up a vole for lunch. An owl sitting in a fir tree probably wondered what humans had come up with now. A red-tailed hawk that flew down close didn't accept our invitation to join in, and two ravens decided

finding lunch was more important than playing our silly game.

Down the meadow, we crossed the river again on a beaver dam, with the plastic lids spinning between us all the way. I reached for one and slipped and fell in to my knees but scrambled out so fast that the water didn't penetrate my gaiters and get into my boots, so I wasn't in any trouble from iced feet.

It took me a while to find the lid I'd been reaching for when my feet went out from under me, but we kept the other two going as I looked, and we didn't miss more than a throw and a half when I slipped into the water and scrambled back out. I picked up the missing lid and ran on across the dam, receiving and returning lids as I went.

Then on across the lower part of the meadow and onto the county road and about a mile back to the house and across the yard, where the crust was softening in the sun, so that sometimes we broke through and sank to our hips in the snow. That made for some misses. Then up onto the front porch and into the house, where Laura gave us cookies and hot chocolate and said, "Don't throw them in the house. I'm afraid you oversized boys are going to break something in here."

And we figured we had covered at least six miles on foot, and the little plastic covers had flown, as Jim said, "Hundreds of miles. Must be just hundreds of miles."