

Excerpt from

Blizzard!



by Jim Murphy

1 Ten-year-old Sam Strong was a determined child who lived in Harlem with his aunt and uncle, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Green, during the Blizzard of 1888, a blizzard that struck early on a Monday morning in March after a spring-like weekend. Sam didn't have to fight and argue to go outside that morning. His aunt actually gave him a list of items she wanted him to buy at Brady's notion store before going on to school. Among the things he was to get were whalebones, dressmaker's chalk, and a large needle, so his aunt could sew herself a new corset.

2 Sam glanced out the front window and saw a man get blown over by the wind. He also noticed that the front gate was completely covered by a five-foot-tall snowdrift. When he said something about this to his aunt, she made him wear his high rubber boots, a heavy overcoat, woolen cap, gloves, and a muffler. "There," she said as she buttoned up his coat, "you could go to the North Pole in that outfit. Hurry up now so you won't be late for school."

3 At first, Sam liked the experience of being outside in a wild storm, fighting his way through belt-high snow and fending off the wind. His aunt and uncle had instilled in him a strong sense of self-reliance and duty. He had been told to go to the store and then to school, so he was going to do both, no matter what the consequences.

4 Several blocks later, Sam came face-to-face with the violence of the blizzard. As he was crossing an intersection, the wind was on him like a wild animal. It picked him up and tossed him into a deep snowdrift.

5 Sam struggled and clawed to get free from the snow, but he was in over his head. The more he moved, the more snow fell on top of him. He shrieked for help, but no one heard him above the wind's mighty roar. His boyish romp had turned in a frightening trap in just seconds. Finally, just as his strength was about to give out, a policeman came along and yanked him free. "You hadn't ought to be out in this, Sonny," he recalled the policeman telling him. "You go straight home."

6 But Sam didn't go home. More determined than ever, he pressed on, going down 125th Street, past abandoned wagons and carriages. A cable car being pulled by four horses struggled along at a feeble pace, while the few other people out that morning were hunkered over against the icy gusts. "When I could get down out of the cutting wind behind a snowdrift, I was all right," the boy recalled, "but traveling took every ounce of power in my body."

7 When he finally reached Brady's, he discovered it closed, the front door and

window covered completely by a giant snowdrift. Instead of giving up, Sam continued along the street for several blocks, hoping to discover a store—any store—open.

There were none.

8 At this point, he stopped a fellow traveler to see if the man knew where he could purchase a corset needle. The man had no idea where to get the needle, but he did teach Sam something else. “[I] learned a few new and attractive profane expressions to add to my already fair vocabulary of cuss words, and with his help I about-faced and started the homeward trek.”

9 If anything, his return journey proved more treacherous. The drifts seemed to have grown enormously in height; the snow seemed sharper, the wind more cutting. Sam, like thousands of others, would later come to realize that as fatigue set in, obstacles he had handled fairly easily before were now much harder to deal with. Six times Sam got stuck in the snow and six times he had to be pulled to safety. Finally, at around noon, he clawed his way up his front stairs and tumbled into the vestibule.

Name: _____ Date: _____

QUIZ
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Directions: Circle the best answer.

- 1.** What can you infer about Sam's aunt?
 - a.** She thought Sam was lazy.
 - b.** She didn't pay close attention to the weather.
 - c.** She really wanted to sew a new corset.
 - d.** She didn't care about Sam.

- 2.** Which detail best illustrates the violence of the storm?
 - a.** The wind picked up Sam and tossed him into a huge snowdrift.
 - b.** Sam had to wear a muffler.
 - c.** The school was closed.
 - d.** The front gate was covered by a five-foot drift.

- 3.** You can conclude that Sam was a determined boy because
 - a.** his aunt trusted him to run errands.
 - b.** he valued education so much he went out in a snowstorm.
 - c.** he had a plan for getting to the store.
 - d.** he continued on to the store even though a policeman told him to go home.

- 4.** What can you infer the traveler felt about Sam asking him where to buy a corset needle?
 - a.** amazed that the boy liked to sew
 - b.** happy to have someone to talk to
 - c.** shocked that the boy was out in such bad weather
 - d.** scared the boy wouldn't make it home

- 5.** Hunkered in paragraph 6 means
 - a.** crouched.
 - b.** jumping.
 - c.** protected.
 - d.** smiling.