

Bud Styer, Snow Man

by Alanna Barr Gordon

When Bud Styer decided to go into the snowplow business, he could hardly wait for the white stuff to fall. To Styer, plowing snow sounded like easy money.

He got a lot more than he bargained for—a lot more snow and a lot more money. But it wasn't easy money. For Styer went into the snowplowing business during the snowiest year in Chicago's history—the winter of '79.

That year, nearly 90 inches of snow socked the city—including 20 inches dumped during a three-day blizzard, the second worst in local history.

More than once that season, Styer plowed all through the night. During the 20-inch "Blizzard of '79," as it is called, he plowed for 72 hours without rest. Meanwhile, the phone in his office rang off the hook. Everyone, it seemed, wanted his services.

That winter, Styer learned that plowing snow is a tricky skill—and that the skill requires hard physical labor.

Plowing is done in short, jerky bursts. "First you drive



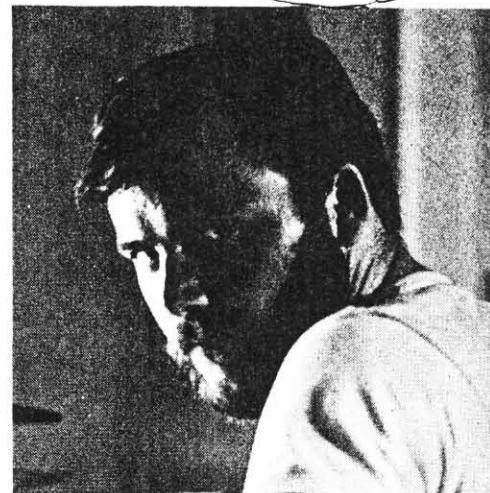
forward and bite into the snow with the plow," he explained. Then you stop. Then you back up as you raise the plow again. And then you shift the truck forward to take another bite.

"Your left hand steers the truck. Your right hand runs the plow control's stick shift. And your left foot stays pushed against the floor with all your might. That foot is the only thing that keeps you in your seat as the truck tosses you backward and forward, again and again . . . and again and again and AGAIN!"

After his first day of plowing, "my entire body was shaking," recalls big, strong Styer. "I felt ready for the grave. I lay down in bed and was out like a light in 30 seconds flat."

However, Styer's work was not all thankless toil, he adds.

He remembers how an entire neighborhood watched, spellbound, as he cleared their snow-choked driveways and



Photos: Ann Styer

streets. In their eyes, Styer was a hero.

He remembers the days he worked side by side with a plow run by a pal. The teamwork made the job easier, he says. At times, it was almost fun.

And he remembers with pleasure the fine profits he reaped from the snows of the winter of '79.

But things have changed this winter, the winter of '80. This year, the "snow man" has better equipment and more helpers. This year, he has time free to do the things he enjoys, like visiting friends or watching TV. And this year, he can relax by the fire in his Evanston, Illinois home, remembering how crazy life was in the long-gone winter of '79. ★