



THE HARVEY SKIDOO TREE

line Picture a tree in the distance. It's in a city park, surrounded by other trees, near to each other but lots of easy space between them for people to conveniently walk by or park themselves under. This particular tree was in front of me, in the distance. It was winter and as it's cold in Flin Flon at that time of year, we were bundled up good.

5 Harvey was one of my friends and he generously offered to take me for a ride on his snowmobile. Most families had one or even several. Ours didn't, partly because of the added expense and partly because my Dad wasn't really into it, so neither were his kids. I didn't mind, though. As I said, I wasn't all that into it but if one of my friends made the offer, I happily took them up on it.



10 On this particular evening Harvey was feeling especially generous. He asked me if I'd like to drive. We were still kids but these things are overlooked in the north. You don't need a license, or didn't at that time, at any rate. In a number of ways isolated communities in the north are not unlike the wild west where fewer rules dictate the directions its citizens take. (And also like the wild west, over time that perspective changes.)

20 You would think I would have jumped at the chance but I had never driven one before. I was worried I'd break it or something. He laughed and said it was easy. Like driving a boat or a motorbike. Well, I didn't have any experience with those, either.

25 He showed me the throttle, how to turn it and let more gas into the system, controlling the speed. And I steered with this, showing me the handlebars. And that's all you need to know. He assured me that I needn't worry – he'll be right there, sitting directly behind me. Okay. I'll give it a go. We changed places and there I was in the driver's seat. I revved it up a bit and off we went.

It was dark but the lone light in front of the machine shone brightly and the snow-covered trees whizzed by us like a silent army of tall haunting ghosts. I say whizzed by but we didn't get to a very high velocity. I really had no idea on how to handle the machine so I didn't want to get reckless in the first five minutes.

Just as well, too, because we met with the accident waiting for us long before that time was up.

30 I liked hearing the noise of the engine working. It sounded different with me driving. There was power there and I could feel the vibrations through my many layers of clothing. I bravely turned my wrist, upping the gas, quickening the speed. We were going faster now. And I was driving.

35 We were going straight. Harvey looked at that tree, long in the distance, coming closer. He casually suggested I might try turning. Gently does it, no sudden harsh moves. Just angle it a little to the left. Or to the right. It doesn't matter.

We weren't going all that fast but to me, it was. I could feel the swells of built up snow as we went over them, slight bumps occasionally beneath us.

That tree was still a ways away but definitely closer. Harvey saw it too and repeated his early suggestion that I could consider turning any time around now.

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I consider myself a person usually open to advice, especially when I am in a situation that is new to me. I full-heartedly accepted his advice. However, when I tried to act on it I felt unexpectedly stiff. I couldn't move my muscles the way I wanted. Not quite. The will was there but somehow the actions weren't being executed.

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By now Harvey was getting more excited and that tree was proportionately much closer now. "Turn," he demanded. "Turn," he begged.

I was locked on course with that tree. Like a deer frozen in a trance with the headlights of an oncoming truck. Only in this situation, the truck was a tree, heading right for us.

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I wanted to turn. I really did. But all my internal efforts couldn't break through to express themselves in that direction. Nor were Harvey's last minute frantic efforts successful in deterring us from our collision course.

We hit that tree.

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It was a good smack but fortunately we really weren't going all that fast, and one ski was safely on one side of the tree, and the other on the other. It was just that big tree trunk right in front of us.



Neither of us was injured and the snowmobile had only minor dents in it. The impact with the tree had shaken me out of whatever it was holding me fast. And shortly after that, Harvey drove me home.

That was the last time Harvey ever offered to let me drive.

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I felt bad about the whole affair of course. And it didn't do much towards making me want to try it again in the near future. For some time thereafter I puzzled over what had overcome me that one winter evening and wondered whether I should even consider ever driving a car.

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