

Weird Yaakov Astor Winter Weather

Last year's winter was one of the coldest—and weirdest—of recent memory. It got so cold in Chicago that the zoo had to bring its polar bear inside! A freakish snowstorm paralyzed numerous southern states, caused deaths, created traffic jams that forced people to sleep in their cars and made the highways look like a post-apocalyptic world.

We learned about such things as the “polar vortex,” which we were told wobbled out of its place and caused the extreme weather. Others said it was the result of global warming (no kidding; find out why inside). Yet others saw in it the onset of a new Ice Age and predicted that this winter would be even worse, something dubbed a “Snowpocalypse.”

Read all about last year's wild, wacky, weird winter weather—in the United States and around the world—and why some saw it as the sign of a major climate shift that could spell doom for civilization.

Rebbit Shalom Horowitz, along with other teachers and administrators of the Torah Day School of Atlanta, was on a yellow school bus with his 8th grade class on the morning of January 29, 2014. They were traveling to a rally in the state Capitol to join thousands of other private school children, staff and supporters all over the state of Georgia to promote a \$50 million tax break designed to provide scholarships for families who opt out of public schools.

Once there, the students and teachers would meet with their local representatives, who would take them around, answer their questions, stand for some photo ops, etc. Rabbi Horowitz's group, in fact, was to meet Senator Jason Carter (D), grandson of former President Jimmy Carter, who was running for Governor of Georgia.

They arrived that morning as scheduled and met Carter. He took them on a tour and even showed them Georgia's House of Representatives, which was in session and debating an issue. Carter told them a little about how politics in the House worked. They took pictures with him, and then ate a hearty brunch.

When they finished at 11:00 AM, there were still about two hours until the rally was scheduled to begin. They got on the bus and drove about four blocks away to The King Center, a memorial to Martin Luther King Jr. consisting of a large museum detailing his life history, including his famous speeches, his role in the Civil Rights movement and his eventual assassination.

Weather forecasts predicted a little snow, but so far it had been a beautiful day. When they entered the museum, there was no sign of bad weather.

About an hour later they finished the tour. As they exited, they noticed that the sky had changed. It was now gray and overcast—and there was a thin white blanket of snow of the ground, just enough so that the grass was still peeking through. They quickly got on the bus and headed back to



Yeshiva *bachurim* from Yeshiva Day School of Atlanta meet Jason Carter (D), grandson of former President Jimmy Carter, on the morning of the day the fateful storm hit.



Sign cautioning drivers about ice just before it gets really icy. The driver of this truck got the message a little too late.

the rally, turning onto Capitol Avenue, the main street downtown.

Immediately, they found themselves stuck at the corner. The light kept changing: red... green... yellow... red... green... yellow... over... and over. They weren't budging. Everything was gridlocked.

They looked around and noticed two huge hotels on either corner, with parking garages and lots. Throngs of businessmen, government officials and lobbyists were walking with their briefcases and heading for their cars. Everyone was leaving.

Capitol Avenue leads to Interstate 85, which stretches all the way from Virginia down to central Alabama. At one point in downtown Atlanta, the highway has six lanes in each direction. Yet, it too was completely gridlocked!

Rabbi Horowitz and the other adults tried to assure the students that everything was all right, that the traffic jam would clear up soon, and that they would be on their

way. But inside they were trying to suppress their own panic that this was not the typical traffic jam.

When snow falls in places used to wintry weather, like New York, plows clear the roads and people go about their business as usual. In Atlanta, snow is rare and when it snows it usually does not stay long on the ground. Sometimes the snow turns wet and becomes ice, creating treacherous conditions that can last a day or two. Branches fall; power goes out. The city freezes. Usually when that happens people just stay inside for 24 hours. In this case, however, the storm came in the middle of the day with little warning and took everyone by surprise.

The school bus stood in its place at that corner for about 25 minutes. More and more people were exiting the buildings all around them, and the snow was getting heavier and heavier. They noticed a policeman at the corner. He obviously wanted to do something to help the traffic, but what was he to do? Tell people to move? There was nowhere for anyone to go.

Adding to the mayhem, all the local public schools began dismissing students due to the snow. Everyone was converging on the roads simultaneously: schools, businesses, government officials. Both the private and public sectors of the city were shutting down, causing the massive gridlock. The largest highway was now nothing but a long parking lot. Torah Day School's little yellow school bus was a tiny dot in an ocean of cars.

With all the major roads impassable, someone on Torah Day School's bus got the idea to navigate down the side streets. They called one of the *rebbeim* who knew every street in the city. With his guidance, they actually began making slow progress, inching along the side streets of Atlanta.

Meanwhile, the snow kept coming down and down and down. As it crawled along side streets, the bus came upon larger streets where cars were sliding all over the place. Some were already stuck in ditches. Gas stations were full of cars that could not leave. Restaurants and grocery stores were packed, too, because the people who had

gone in to get something for the trip home found they could not get out of the parking lot!

It was a harrowing experience for men and boys alike. *Baruch Hashem*, they eventually made it back to their school... in three hours. It was a trip that would normally take 20 to 25 minutes.

Even then the ordeal was far from over, because the children still had to get home. Some lived nearby and were able to walk home, but others had to wait for a ride. Parents had earlier set out at around 12:30 to pick up their kids when they heard about the storm on the radio. Some parents had not made it to the school by 3:30 dismissal, but others who did (after inching through traffic for two or three hours to get there) now had to drive back.

Many ended up spending hours and



Stranded motorists take shelter at a pharmacy in Atlanta.



Traffic is at a standstill on Interstate 65 as officials work to clear vehicles abandoned in the ice storm.