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1955 to 1985**

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**SNOWSTORMS ALONG THE
NORTHEASTERN COAST OF THE
UNITED STATES:
1955 to 1985**

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Dedication

Paul J. Kocin dedicates this monograph to his wife Marla, his sons Matthew and Joshua, his parents, Eugene and Irene Kocin, and to his sister, Barbara Wallace.

Louis W. Uccellini dedicates this monograph to his parents Louis and Margaret Uccellini, his wife Susan, his children Anthony, Francesca and Dominic and his friend Frank DeLaurentis who shared many a snowstorm on Long Island and is a retired snowplow operator living near Troy, NY

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Prologue

Saturday, 8 February 1969, was not the bitterly cold day that often serves as a harbinger of a severe winter snowstorm on New York's Long Island. Instead, it was generally sunny and cool, about 40°F (5°C). The weather forecast that morning, though, provided a little bit of encouragement to a 13-year-old snow fanatic: "Tomorrow will be cloudy with rain OR SNOW likely."

I¹ knew from experience that the probability of a big snowstorm on Long Island was not very great because of its close proximity to the relatively warm Atlantic Ocean. I had already felt the crushing disappointment when potentially major snowstorms became rainstorms, and sure days off from school became days like all the rest. My pessimism was reinforced by the local weather reports on Saturday evening, indicating southeasterly winds, a bad sign for impending snowstorms. As I went to bed that night, I prepared myself for the usual disappointment, since outdoor temperatures held well above freezing and the wind continued to blow from the ocean.

When I awakened the following morning, a strong wind was whistling through the air-conditioning unit that extended outside my room. This sound was not enough to arouse me until I suddenly realized that the glow emanating from the translucent shutters covering my window was unusually bright for early morning. I shot out of bed and flung open the shutters to discover that the world outside was white. There wasn't very much accumulation on the ground yet, maybe an inch, but the snow was falling fast and flying horizontally from the northeast. A busy day lay ahead of me!

While my family still slept, I ran from window to window to see how the storm was changing the environment outside. I turned the radio on, only to become annoyed at the weather forecasters' insurances that the snow would soon end. After a while, confidence in the original forecasts eroded as the storm grew more and more intense.

By late morning, my family awoke in astonishment as they gazed out the window, wondering what to do now that they knew the day would be spent inside. The snow had picked up in intensity, falling at perhaps 1 or 2 inches (2.5 to 5 cm) per hour. Savoring every moment, I felt victorious when the weather forecasters finally succumbed to the storm and admitted that they didn't know how much more would fall or when the storm would end. Then, the inevitable comparisons with earlier blizzards began to pour forth from the radio and TV.

The day wore on and snow continued to fall heavily. The wind increased, making it difficult to determine how much of the swirling snow outside was due to falling snow versus snow blowing off the roof or from the ground. Drifting snow eventually began to cover several windows, making it more difficult to observe what was obviously a great storm. As the drifts grew, it became impossible to open the front door, and by evening, the cars parked on the street appeared as white swells in the sea of snow that

¹ Paul J. Kocin

covered the street. Tremendous gusts of wind whistled through the house and actually seemed to shake the foundation.

The snow finally ended in the middle of the night. About 18 hours had passed since the time the early forecasts indicated that the storm would cease. By morning, the only sound heard was that of an overworked snowplow. Radio reports now documented the extent of the storm. The entire New York City metropolitan area was paralyzed. As several hundred cars became stranded, scores of motorists spent a harrowing night on the Tappan Zee Bridge north of New York City. Many other motorists met similar fates on the myriad of roadways throughout the metropolitan area that were littered with stranded cars. Thousands more were stranded at airports that remained closed anywhere from 1 to 2 days following the storm. Food was airlifted by helicopter to Kennedy Airport to feed the weary travelers. Schools closed on Monday and many didn't reopen until Thursday, Friday, or even the following Monday. Snow-clearing equipment was slow to be deployed in parts of the New York City area and couldn't keep up with the storm. Some city streets remained unplowed many days after the storm, creating a public furor. Dozens of deaths and several hundred injuries were attributed to the storm while millions of dollars were lost due to delayed or lost business.

This particular snowstorm, and other similar storms during the late 1950s and 1960s, provided the motivation for the monograph that follows. Questions concerning how these storms develop, what weather patterns provide clues that foretell such events, and what factors delineate snow/no snow situations, have challenged forecasters and researchers alike. This study is our attempt at describing a phenomenon that has stirred our curiosity, and provided countless hours of speculation, entertainment, and, for those numerous false alarms, profound disappointment. The disappointments (i.e., those storms that changed to rain or veered harmlessly out to sea) will not be highlighted here. The greatest snowstorms to affect the northeastern coast of the United States during the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s will be explored in the following chapters.