

Let it snow

Global warming...what a rip-off. For years now we've been hearing how an accumulation of pollutants in our atmosphere is gradually turning the planet into a giant hothouse along the lines of our gas-wrapped, boiling hot sister planet, Venus. One does not dispute that, and global warming is only one of many reasons for which we should reduce pollution, but the whole concept of global warming still seems a bit unreal to the layman when one considers the sort of weather we've been treated to in the past few seasons. In fact, many sun-worshippers feel cheated by the fact that global warming has seemingly yet to bring with it the eagerly anticipated side effect of balmy weather. Much of this past summer was cool and wet, and the national whining over that still rings in the ears as we prepare to enter spring with heaping piles of wintry white stuff looming about us while we dig out from the latest round of snowstorms. What does one expect, though? Canada and snow go together like macaroni and cheese, and neither of those familiar old combinations are hard to swallow if you develop a taste for them. Snow has gotten a bum rap. It's white and it's fluffy and it's a natural part of our life on Earth, so there's really no reason to out-and-out hate the stuff; to paraphrase those incessant cereal commercials, snow's nothing but flakes.

Approaching it philosophically, things could be worse. Far more nasty things have been known to descend from the heavens: volcanic ash, hailstones, tornados, meteors...when you think about it P.E.I. is a fairly sheltered slice of real estate. Snow may fall, but it doesn't do much apart from that. As sky-spawned nemeses go it's rather harmless, in moderate quantities. It sits there and minds its own business, cool and quiet, a benign if not benevolent presence, not unlike our former Premier, Joe Ghiz.

Granted, snow can, in large amounts, be rather tiresome. Those of you with automobiles have probably spent more than a few mornings of chiropractic torment shovelling your driveways so that you can get out and work after having already thoroughly exhausted yourself getting there. Those of us who walk have spent more than a few mornings wading through drifts that look like frozen tidal waves, floundering about in a vain attempt to find the sidewalk and hoping that we're not struck by

some careless motorist or ironically buried by the backlash of a passing snowplow. Snow can make life difficult, but there's a positive side to that. It makes more work for us but that means unemployment for such beloved individuals as snow removal workers (snowplow operators and the rest of their seasonal ilk). It may be precipitation from Hell to you, but to them, it's gainful employment.

Besides, snow builds character, or so our elders would have us believe. Trudging to school through snow-covered sidewalks, shovelling your way out of your own home, braving blizzards to get the groceries...these are the sorts of things you can spring on your kids years later when you tell them how in your day you walked hundreds of miles to school through drifts up to your neck, and this of course is what formed the foundation of your rugged, self-sufficient personality. Sure, they'll snicker at you and go back to eating overly sugary cereal while watching overly violent cartoons and ignoring you, but you'll know in your heart the extent to which Old Man Winter forged your pioneer spirit. Perhaps that's how television weather people like Cathy-Ann Molnar develop their impressively perpetual optimism (one suspects Miss Molnar could remain vacuously perky no matter what was falling from the sky). You haven't really lived until you've survived a Canadian winter...if you do survive one, you obviously have the will to live.

Snow can also, in sufficient quantities, provide a break from the monotonous routine of life. A significantly heavy snowfall can gum up transportation to the extent of work and school being called off, and it has long been a common phenomenon to see students, at the first sign of snow, reduced to hovering over their radios in hopes of hearing that classes are cancelled. Snow, then promotes both work and play.

Snow is so much a part of our lives that it is an essential part of the Canadian identity. Snow is generally the first thing our American neighbours think of when they contemplate the possible existence of this mysterious "Canada" floating somewhere above their northern border, and Canadians themselves often seem to regard their homeland as a kinder, gentler, snowier America. We even seem to take a sort of perverse pride in the adverse weather conditions we've grown accustomed to, as if it really were indicative of a fundamental strength in the Canadian character. One thinks back to the snowstorm of the past week-end, heralded for days as the worst storm of the century. It did some impressive damage in the States but petered out by the time it hit the Maritimes, and the top news story for a day or two was how unimpressed Maritimers were with the so-called "storm of the century" since it had, for a change of pace, vented most of its wintry spleen in the U.S.A. However much we may complain about our yearly blizzard-fests, it seems we've come to expect them. Perhaps, somewhere deep in our souls, some masochistic little portion of the Canadian psyche actually wants to be snowed into oblivion. That being the case, Canadians' bizarre love-hate relationship with snow may be the result of a deep inner kinship: it takes flakes to love flakes.

*Sean McQuaid
Editor-in-Chief*

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