

EDITORIAL

with Hartley Coles

Winter's other side

December's abundant snowfall, 56 centimetres (or about 22 inches) according to Environment Canada, created a lot of back problems, slippery driving and hermits who would not venture out into the month's wild, windy weather. Although motorists may curse, pedestrians rue the time they stepped outside, winter, especially those with a lot of snow, have a picturesque side. The trees of town and the countryside turn into veritable fairylands after a deep snowfall.

Picture postcards come alive as snow blankets the ground in flakes and coats trees with downy cotton, evergreens bowing in reverence before the shimmering landscape. New Year's Day the sun emerged after days of gloomy weather creating a bright blue sky and tranquil fields criss-crossed by snowmobile tracks in no discernible pattern, noted the presence of humans in the endless landscape.

Rural homes nestled in the glistening snow, a curl of smoke rising from chimneys, indicating all is snug inside and people can well cope with the crisp weather.

When the sun on its short winter journey drops below the horizon in a blaze of red, a lantern-light moon takes over, creating ideal twilight and evening sleighing and snowmobiling conditions. The snow crackles under foot.

Lights flicker on in homes that line rural routes. In town the street lights burst into flame highlighting roads on which snow plows have been active and driveways bordered by piles of snow indicating snow shovels and blowers have been active, too.

Winter, it only lasts a few weeks, but leaves an indelible mark on us, both physically and aesthetically.

Those gasoline prices

Although business analysts predicted gasoline and oil prices would increase to as high as one dollar a litre before the winter was over, they've done the opposite in the last few weeks. Tuesday of this week gasoline was being advertised for as low as 61.9 cents a litre, which is a steep slide from the 75.9 cents and higher of two months ago.

Predictably, the oil cartels were talking about lowering output so they could keep prices at current levels. Some of the countries depend on high oil prices which can account for as much as 80 per cent of national revenues.

OPEC raised output four times last year to keep prices between \$22 and \$28 (US) a barrel. But they fell below \$22 a barrel last week, a trend analysts, doing the proverbial flip flop, predicted would continue unless output was cut.

There has been tremendous pressures on OPEC to increase their oil output as prices at the gasoline pump rose by as much as 50 per cent. US President select George Bush, who represents the country which consumes the most oil, has blamed high energy prices for contributing to the business slowdown in the States.

Those who believe oil prices are decided by the free market rather than supply and demand surely had their eyes opened in the last few months. Although prices are still higher than they were last spring we bet OPEC is keeping a keen eye on a new cleaner hydrogen technology which would dramatically reduce the use of gasoline. Ford unveiled its first hydrogen-fueled car in December and promise production in two years, a lead other companies will follow.

The day may soon be here when OPEC can no longer hold the world in an economic headlock. The trick will be to make sure the new technology does not fall into few hands and we trade one master for another.



MEMORY LANE: The entire student body and staff of Acton Continuation School gathered for this photo in the 1939-40 school year on the old stone school's grounds. There are many familiar faces in the photo, loaned to The New Tanner by Pat McCutcheon. Principal Malcolm (Duff) Leitch is in the back row. Recognize anyone else?

So long, but not goodbye!

The beginning of a new year is commonly a time to pause and reflect as well as to plan for the future. Add the beginning of a new century and a new millennium and January 1, 2001 was definitely a time for plans and memories.

Memories like the publishing of my first column - in 1958 in the old Acton Free Press. It was actually an essay on hopes and reflections for a new year which our English teacher persuaded the paper's editor to publish. That was more than half a century ago and should have provided a huge hint as to where my future lay. But I'm slow apparently so it took another 20 years for me to get the message.

My family too, has had its new year's moments. I've never been the partying type so my husband and I spent the first New Year's Eve of our marriage at home alone. The consequences of that celebration arrived with perfect timing the following October 7 and never ceases to amaze me. Most recently in addition to changing careers and moving her family into my father's place she has introduced me to my future son-in-law, more step-grands and the first great grandchild in my already overflowing extended family of eight step-kids and 23 (24 in January) grandchildren.

I know I'm head of the clan now. I recently broke down and placed my first order for something with a senior's discount. My stamina is so shot I had to do my four hours of shovel-



Petro Points
By Maggie Petrushevsky

ling the driveway in segments because I couldn't finish it all at once. My eyebrows have been mostly white for years and my curling iron regularly finds silver streaks when I try to gussy up. With one half of the family still needing hedge trimmers to tame the mop at 90 even though they're snow white before they're 30 and the other half retaining hair colour into their 80s but going bald before they're 35 I'm lucky I'm not bald with a white fringe!

Even so Jessica, I'm not ready to be a great grannie yet no matter how sweet 19-month-old Emily may be!

January has always impacted my career favourably too. My last full time teaching job began in January 1965 when I finished the year for a teacher who left at Christmas. My first reporting job began with the old Halton Hills Herald in January 1977. Then, when I took over the Guelph Mercury's Acton Bureau, I began working in January, 1980. Even the New Tanner started up in mid January, 1998.

Probably that's why I decided to modify my career starting in January. I need time for me. And most importantly, for my writing. I began writing fiction when I was 14 and always knew that was where my heart lay. But grandiose ideas of being a writer don't actually make you one. Nor do they pay the bills for a single parent. Journalism did. It also taught me much about myself, about humanity in general and about the down and dirty slogging required to finish a promised project - on time. Hopefully the intervening years of professional writing have taught me how to market so that I can turn my novels into the career I envisaged many years ago.

Originally I thought a clean break would be best. I'd just retire and take that time I want for my crafts, my house and my family. But Ted - and an understanding of my hermit tendencies - has changed my mind. I will continue to be the Tanner's Rockwoodstringer - at least for a while. I am in the Guelph phone book (827-1624), have e-mail (maggiiep@sympatico.ca) and will work from home. Since Sterling tends to garble messages in translating from cat to people, I must ask contacts to leave messages on my answering service if I'm gallivanting when they call. Since the winter in Arizona and the cruise to Vosstock are both on hold my absence probably means I'm having a wild and crazy time of it in the driveway with my snow shovel entertaining my neighbours as I fall

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