

Shirley Whittington



Around here we are having an old-fashioned winter and everyone I know has mastered the Canadian winter one-step. That's the little jig we do in the water-spotted vestibule, with one boot on and one boot off.

An old-fashioned winter is when rooftops hide under blankets of snow; when driveways turn into tunnels and sidewalks become trenches. Old fashioned winters produce crunchy snow that squeaks under your boots as you walk out in the morning, sharp air that bites into your lungs, chimney smoke that rises straight up into the frosty air. Mornings hum with the sounds of skidoos and snowblowers and spinning tires.

I love winter. It is so good to go out and play in the snow—to ski or skate or toboggan—and then to come into the warm, gasping with cold, with fingers and toes numbly solid and cheeks burning. It is so cheerful to cuddle up to someone or something warm and to enjoy a hot drink and dry socks.

Canadian winters are fun, healthy, invigorating and picturesque as all get out. They can also be deadly—as lethal as a sandstorm in the Sahara. Frosty Lady Winter can blind you with her smile, then suddenly scowl and howl and show you who is boss. (She is.)

We skied last weekend in a wilderness provincial park near a friends' cottage. The cross-country trails led us through the bush, where we admired nature in her winter dress. Tiny wild footprints dotted the snow in neatly parallel seams; fungus mounted the trunk of a tree like a stairway to the sky; white snow formed stark patterns against ancient stumps.

There was a good choice of trails angling off here and there. We struck out on the ones that seemed silkiest, fastest, most remote and beautiful. And we agreed that winter in the silent forest is beautiful.

At one point we circled a beaver pond where the open water rippled blackly against the icy bank. We looked into the inky depths and shivered. Cold. We took some pictures, and thought about the pot of chili awaiting us back at the cottage. It was time to retrace our steps.

It seemed a long way back, uphill and chill, now that the sun had disappeared behind clouds. A few snowflakes drifted down. I was glad I'd worn a hat.

At every little trail intersection or crossroad, we paused for orientation, chose the direction that seemed right, and plunged ahead. After half an hour of this we knew we

A winter's tale

were lost. Where was the tree with the interesting fungus? Where was the landmark log with the obscene lump? We'd missed a turn somewhere. The park seemed very big, and that pot of chili seemed as distant as Mars.

A hydro line crossed our path, set in a wide swath that angled across the bush in a purposeful way. Hydro is not random, we reasoned. It goes somewhere, and comes from somewhere. We abandoned the meandering ski trail and followed the hydro cut. Which direction? Hard to tell. By now the sky was uniformly grey. One of us noted that we had about an hour of daylight left.

The snow was deeper here and not so beautiful as it seemed out on the ski trail. The surrounding bush no longer looked friendly. We looked for buildings and saw none. We listened for traffic noises, and heard none. Snow came down in heavy clots.

Headlines began to flicker through my brain. "Skiers perish in provincial park." Things like that. As a newspaper person I took grim comfort in the fact that my frosty demise would be recorded on the film in my camera. Should be great black and white (and blue) shots, I thought.

We wondered what we would do if we got too tired to continue. We had no matches for a fire, no candy bars for refreshment, no tools to cut boughs for a shelter. I felt a short stab of fear, like an icicle in my heart. Didn't say a word though. Stiff upper lip, Canadian calm and all that.

Then a dark shape loomed through the trees ahead—a snow-covered cabin. There was another, and another and soon we bumped up against the high snowbanks of the concession road.

We whooped like a couple of 10-year-olds and high-tailed it for home.

I hope I'm not over-dramatising here. This was no life and death situation—not quite. But if we'd taken the wrong turn on that hydro cut and headed instead out into the blinding blizzards of January Georgian Bay, the story might have ended differently. And somebody else would have written it.

The next morning the radio told us that the temperature had skidded down to 20 below the night before. Lucky us.

We still love winter.

We also respect it, and from now on, we'll carry matches.

Bill Smiley



One of the deepest satisfactions in writing a column of this kind is the knowledge that you are getting into print the angers and frustrations of a lot of other people, who have no recourse for their resentments, and consequently take them out on the old man or the old lady.

How do you know this? Well, because people write you letters cheering you on to further attacks, and other people come up to you, perfect strangers, shake hands warmly, and say, "By the Holy Ole Jumpin' Bill, you really hit the nail on the head."

This can be a little disconcerting, as you are never quite sure which nail they are referring to. If the congratulator is a woman, I smile weakly and change the subject. Because sure as guns, though she thought you were one of nature's noblemen for your assault on male chauvinism last week, she'll turn on you like a snake when she reads tomorrow's paper, with the column exposing female chauvinism.

Speaking recently to a class of potential writers in a creative writing course, I tried to pass along the personal satisfaction one gets from this type of personal journalism.

I emphasized the "personal" satisfaction, because there's a lot more of that involved than there is of the other kind, financial satisfaction. Columnists and freelance writers have no union working for them, nor any professional association, as have doctors,

lawyers, teachers.

They have only their own talent and wit and perseverance with which to penetrate the thick heads and thicker skins of editors and publishers.

But it's a great feeling when you vent your wrath, say, about the rapaciousness of mechanics, and you are button-holed six times in the next three days by people with horror stories about mechanics you can scarcely believe.

Trouble is, they all want you to write another column about mechanics, and put some real meat into it. This means, in effect, that they would happily stand in the wings and applaud when you were sued for libel.

Some readers would like you to be constantly attacking whatever it is that they don't like. Capitalist friends are aghast when you refuse to launch an assault on capital gains taxes. Welfarist friends think you are a traitor and a fink when you won't attack the government for not providing color TV for everyone on the take.

I am not by nature an attacker, and I think there is nothing more boring than a writer of any kind who tries to make a career of being a "hard-hitting" journalist.

Once in a while my gently bubbling nature boils over. Throwing caution and syntax to the winds, I let my spleen have a field day and try to throw some sand in the grease with

That's what life is all about

which many aspects of society are trying to give us a snow job. And that's one of the finest paragraphs I've ever written, if mixed metaphors are your bag.

Fair game for the hardhitter are: garage mechanics, plumbers, postal workers, supermarkets, civil servants, and politicians. Most of them can't hit back, and everybody hates them, except garage mechanics and their wives, plumbers and their wives, etc. etc.

Smaller fry are doctors, lawyers, teachers, used car salesmen. They all squeal like dying rabbits when attacked, but nobody pays much attention to them except doctors and their wives, etc. etc.

There are a few areas that even the hardest-hitters avoid. When have you, lately, read a savage attack on greedy farmers, callous nurses, or unloving mothers? And yet, there are lots of them around.

One of these days, perhaps, one of these hardhitting writers will muster enough guts, after about five brandies, to launch an all-out attack on the audacity of women, thinking they're as good as men. Boy, that fellow will learn what real hardhitting is all about.

Personally, I can't stay mad at anybody long enough to be a voice of the people, or a public watch-dog, or any of those obnoxious creatures who try to tell other people how they should feel.

The only constant in my rage is the blatant manipulation of self-seeking politicians who will twist and warp and wriggle and squirm and bribe for self-perpetuation in office. Best example of the moment is the Tory government in Ontario, which has called a totally unnecessary election in that province through sheer hunger for greater power.

Otherwise, I get a great deal more joy from touching the individual life than inflaming the masses. When I get a letter from an old lady in hospital, crippled with arthritis, who has managed to get a chuckle out of my column, it makes me feel good.

Recently, I got a letter from a young Scot who has immigrated to Canada. He says: "I have learned more about Canada and Canadians through reading your column than all the accumulated wisdom from the Canadian newsmagazines, novels and TV programs I have absorbed."

Now there is a man with his head screwed on right. If I, as a newcomer, tried to get my impressions of this country from newsmagazines and TV programs, I'd catch the first boat or plane home.

So, I guess I'll just try to go on talking to people, getting sore, having some fun, looking for sympathy in the war between the sexes. That's what life is all about, not plumbers and politicians and other horrors of that ilk.

Travel news, views



Paramount Holidays has released a 60-page color brochure on its spring/summer/fall program of escorted and independent tours of Europe. Prices of all packages are lower than last year's rates, with saving of up to \$210 per person, due to the strength of the Canadian dollar against European currencies.

The tours are operated by American Express and are from eight to 29 days. They come in three categories, tourist class, mid-priced and first class. Countries included in the tours are Britain, France, Switzerland, Italy, Austria, Germany, Holland, Belgium, Monaco, Spain, Greece, Egypt, Israel, Morocco, Portugal, Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Norway, Sweden and Norway. For copies of this brochure, call in at

your local travel agent.

CHEAP SCANDINAVIA

It's only a few years ago that Scandinavia was tagged as the most expensive destination of Europe, but low inflation and falling Scandinavian currencies have produced a remarkable turnaround.

The British magazine Business Traveller recently did a survey of costs of hotels, meals, taxes and service charges and rated Denmark as the cheapest country, followed by neighbor Sweden.

With England being the benchmark with a rating of 100, Denmark came in at 78, Sweden was 79, Brazil 80, France 84, Belgium 84, Spain 88, Italy 90 and Finland 91. Switzerland had the same cost as England while the more

expensive countries were West Germany 102, Canada 103, Holland 114, Norway 114, Australia 130, United States 136, Japan 150, Jamaica 152 and Trinidad 162.

SUMMER CRUISES SET FOR BCL'S VERACRUZ

The 1984 summer itinerary for Bahama Cruise Line's Veracruz are now available. From June 9 to Sept. 22 '84, the ship will offer seven and 14-day sailings of the St. Lawrence, Nova Scotia and New England. Departures will be from New York and Montreal on alternate Saturdays.

Ports of call include the Saguenay Fjord, Halifax, Cape Cod Canal, Fall River (Massachusetts), Newport (Rhode Island), New Bedford, Sydney, Bonaventure Island and Quebec City. BCL continues to accept Canadian dollars at par for cruise fares and port taxes. Rates begin at \$875 per person for the seven day sailings. For Senior Citizens a five percent reduction is offered on sailings from Montreal between June 16 and 30 and between Sept. 8 and 22 '84.

For passengers taking a two week cruise aboard the Veracruz, the second week is offered at a 10 percent reduction.

Deadline for submission announced

George Taylor, MPP for Simcoe Centre announced today that he had been advised by the Minister of Citizenship and Culture that the deadline for submission of applications from eligible groups for Wintario Bicentennial Grants under the Ministry's Celebration Ontario Grants Program is April 30, 1984 for projects taking place between Aug. 1-Dec. 31, 1984. The previous deadline had been Dec. 30, 1983 for projects from April 1-July 31, 1984.

Taylor said he wishes his constituents to participate in the Bicentennial and wanted to draw their attention to the criteria governing the Celebration Ontario Grants Program.

Wintario grants are available for special Bicentennial projects over and above the regular, ongoing programming and operating responsibilities of the applicant organizations. Events or projects must have a significant artistic, heritage, cultural and/or multi-cultural sharing theme or purpose.

Grants may cover up to 50 percent of actual eligible costs to a maximum grant of \$3,000. The grant is intended to match private and/or municipal funds only. Applications will be ranked by the Ministry of Citizenship and Culture.

Priority will be given to applications which indicate the involvement of two or more community groups. Priority would also be given to projects which have a strong element of audience participation.

"For further information on Wintario and assistance in making applications, the Regional Services consultants of the Ministry of Citizenship and Culture should be contacted", Taylor said, "and in Simcoe Centre that is Mr. Marc Duval at 728-1984".

Taylor said he was delighted with the response so far to the Bicentennial in his riding and he hoped more groups would avail themselves of the opportunity to participate in this celebration.