

IS THE GREY SKY SUCKING THE LIFE OUT OF YOU?

As I write this, February is on the horizon, one of the bleakest months in Prince Edward County. In past years I've written about a mid-winter feeling, calling it "Pictonitus" or "Milfordosis". It's a sense that grips us this time of the year, one of restlessness, irritability, ennui, futility and darkness. In Northern Canada they call it cabin fever. In Quebec they say you're "bushy". In Maine, they call it going "woods queer". In prison, "stir crazy."

Today, of course, there are more scientific names for it. They call it SAD, or Seasonal Affective Disorder. More recently, experts term it "the greydoms", which is quite descriptive because it describes the lusterless landscape as well as the listless mind state. Lack of sun inhibits the creation of serotonin, a feel good chemical, so our bodies are not in balance...so they say. Some scientists say pets are affected by this, too, and my anecdotal observations bear this out. Last month, when it was raining, my dog Bob was in a sour mood, and when I let him out he just sat down in the snow and sulked. "Yes, I know I have to urinate and defecate," he was saying, "but damned if I like it in this wet moldering weather. You try it. See if you like it."

When I worked in the north woods of Canada, almost fifty years ago now, I met men who were bushy and woods queer. These were men who rarely had human contact. One lived in an abandoned lumber camp with his horse, coming out of the bush only to buy cases of sardines and condensed milk. Others were trappers, who lived in the woods nine months of the year and came out to civilization only in the summer. I believe they left the bush for three reasons: One, to sell their furs. Two, to re-provision, and three, to get away from the smell. They were very stinky guys, and littered outside their cabins were often the ripe, decaying bodies of the animals they had trapped and skinned. Pew! People who manned fire towers were crazed too. All these guys were "woods queer". They did not have enough human contact, so they talked to themselves and adopted strange habits and mannerisms because there was nobody to correct them.

Bathing and showering are pretty much out of the question if you're woods bound during the winter. I suppose a person could heat up a stock tank full of water and slip into it, but none of the guys I met would have considered carrying an article like that into the outback. Besides, why take a sponge bath when the only person to smell you already resides in your skin? I worked in Northern Ontario one summer, and the only opportunity to bathe was in Lake Superior. I'm telling you, Lake Superior is very close to ice all year round. Crossing the inflow creeks along the shore while toting your boots and pants

was purest agony. The feet would go numb in time, yes, but for several minutes before that the icy water injected cramping, agonizing pain through the pedal appendages. I ask you, would you bathe in that? When we had an opportunity to visit some form of civilization, we would soap up, then dash in and out of the water in a millisecond. This bathing regimen removed live bugs but little else. I can recall another summer, leaving the bush and passing through Dawson's Creek. I stopped off for a haircut and the barber refused to cut my hair. It was too dirty. A barber in Dawson's Creek! That's what happens we you get "woods queer".

So now I'm looking out over frozen Smith's Bay, with the wind whipping waves of windblown snow the length of it. There are no ducks, no gulls, no kingfishers, no ospreys, nothing. Just white. We haven't seen the sun in weeks, except for maybe a peek now and then. We wake up in the dark, and eat our dinner in the dark. The sun has left us, and we peer out on a landscape of denuded trees, frozen roads, and grey snow.

What's the cure? Experts have recommended that you "colour you home with flowers", or "get indoor projects done." One expert suggested, "do your spring cleaning". Jeez, are these people crazy? Doing spring cleaning brings *on* depression, it doesn't relieve it. To drive

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