

Peroxide penguin doesn't want to appear again

Tuesday, Jan. 7, 2014 – circle the date in your daily diary.

Statistical information claimed it to be the coldest day in 20 years.

For me, it was the coldest day ever.

En route to my crossing guard post at Stouffville's Millard Street and Glad Park Avenue, the car's thermometer registered a bone-chilling -23C. Figuring in the wind-chill only made it feel worse – a tooth-chattering -35C. That's what I call c-c-c-cold!

Can't say we weren't warned. Tom Brown, CTV's usually reliable weatherman issued the prediction the previous Monday. But, like so many, I didn't take his advice seriously. "Minus 23," I said to myself, "can't be." But it was as I so quickly discovered on inserting the ignition key. The engine groaned. That's when reality set in.

I immediately retraced my steps, hauled on a pair of longjohns, two extra sweaters, a wool tuque and earmuffs, a heavier coat and two cowhide mitts with charcoal hand-warmers tucked inside. Admittedly, while strutting my stuff from corner to corner I took on all appearances of a peroxide penguin. But who



Roaming Around

with Jim Thomas

er conditions while many adults would rather complain. Such was the atmosphere – smiles and laughter that literally melted the ice mask covering my face. While suffering minor frostbite on my cheek and nose, these irregularities didn't matter. "If the children can take it, so can I," I inaudibly spluttered. And I did. Likewise, so did 10 other school guardians across town.

While children often see snow as an enjoyable challenge, this also, in many instances, brings out superlatives in parents. One mother wound down her car window and handed me a cup of coffee. Another loaned me a scarf and yet another called out "good job, Jim."

That's snow-struck Stouffville at its best.

In the nine weeks of winter we have left, it's unlikely we'll ever experience anything close to a day like Jan. 7. Hopefully never.

What was that?

Abnormal cold as with excessive heat can create conditions like we've never experienced.

So it was Jan. 6, the night before the day we'd like to forget.

My wife, Jean, and I were pretty

much in readiness for a quick escape under the covers when suddenly a loud boom occurred comparable to a colossal clap of thunder.

"Holy moly," I said, "what was that?"

"Sounds like the roof caved in," Jean responded. "Better go outside and have a look."

Gingerly I did, thankfully discovering the shingled exterior still intact.

"All seems OK," I said. "I'll check again come morning."

We didn't need wait till then. The 11 p.m. news revealed this nerve-racking reverberation had occurred not just in urban Stouffville and rural Whitchurch but across much of the GTA.

The broadcaster, obviously experienced in terrain phenomena, referred to the incidents as frost quakes. They occur when rainwater seeps into the ground and freezes. The resulting ice expands, putting so much pressure on the soil that it sometimes cracks with a loud bang.

So now you know. It wasn't a thunderstorm or an earthquake. It didn't shake the house or clatter the dishes. But it sure rattled my nerves.

Rink battles elements

When will Cedarena open? That's what Stouffville and area skaters are asking.

This winter paradise, located on Reesor Road/Tenth Line, south of Hwy. 7 at Cedar Grove, has been a favourite open-air arena more than 75 years. But recently it's fallen out of favour with the weatherman. The last two seasons have been too mild to maintain a solid surface for any length of time. This winter, however, the hold-up is related to a different source – freezing rain.

"The weather over the past few weeks has been dreadful," says Betty Burkholder, a passionate rink supporter. "The recent ice storm was the clincher." Hydro lines leading into the property took a serious beating, she says. Repair expense must be borne by the local community club.

Rink manager Gary Mount is hopeful the cleanup can be completed in time for normal operations to commence this weekend.

Jim Thomas is a Stouffville resident who has written for area newspapers for more than 60 years.

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