

Transition to Winter Storms

By Gloria Hildebrandt

The dogs and I are just back from a week away from home, so early this morning I took them out for a walk around the back. A few inches of snow were on the ground. Around the house there were rabbit tracks everywhere. Normally, I guess they're kept away by the dogs barking at the windows. I saw squirrel tracks as well, and canine tracks leading under the wire fence at a property line, but I can't tell coyotes from foxes or dogs. The tracks under the fence weren't from my dogs, because there wasn't snow when they were last there.

Thomas, my little dog, is not a good hunter or naturalist, because his extremely loud barks of excitement at a scent trail frighten everyone far off. He races back and forth, tracking and sounding like bells ringing.

Sounds in Silence

Early on the walk, in the cedar forest, I heard separate rustlings and then whirs, probably of Ruffed Grouse, although I didn't see anything. I heard the clear chirp of one of the smaller woodpeckers, although I can't distinguish their calls. In the far corner of the property, beneath an apple tree that hangs over a path, the snow was completely churned up, likely by deer, possibly by coyotes, both of whom eat apples, as you can tell by the scat. Dogs do not produce such fruity scat. My dogs were very interested here, their noses deep among the snowy leaves.

At the pond I sat a moment on a bench and took in the

silence. While walking even quietly, I can make a huge noise crunching through the snow. Punctuating the silence was a sound I couldn't identify, likely a bird, but sounding like a drill. Not the rapid hammer of a Pileated Woodpecker, but a faster buzz or "brrr."

It looks like winter has set in. The snow shows no sign of melting. I won't be able to do my warm-weather outdoor chores, and it's difficult to think of what to do instead. Of course, cold temperatures mean I can't spend hours outside anyway. Winter work is more about maintenance.

I have to keep the woodbox stocked with firewood from the stacked pile outside, and I may have to replenish the baskets of kindling stored on the verandah. There are paths and porches to keep shovelled free of snow.

Work From Home

I'm fortunate not to have to clear the driveway myself, as Mike does it with the snowblower attachment to the tractor. If he weren't around I'd try to find someone who offers the service for a fee, and get on his list. That could mean not getting the drive done until a day or two after a storm, but I'm also fortunate not to have to commute to a job, as I work from home.

I don't usually absolutely have to get somewhere if the weather's bad.

But it looks like I don't have much to do outside in winter. I guess I switch to more activities indoors, like reading, cooking, watching TV. Maybe this winter I can do more housekeeping and decluttering. It's a time for crockpots and baking, candles and puzzles.

I'm not good at change, even of the seasons. At least when winter turns to spring I'm eager to get out and start mucking about. The transition to winter requires a more deliberate shift in focus.

"It's a time for crockpots and baking, candles and puzzles."

First Storm

A week or so later, we're having the first storm of winter, and it's been snowing for two or three days. Yesterday after doing some errands in town, I was so cold and tired when I got back that I got under the winter sleeping bag on the couch by the fire in the woodstove, and slept for an hour.

Today after lunch I had to refill the woodbox. That meant shovelling the snow drift off the tarps covering the woodpile, removing the boards that hold down the tarps, unwrapping the large, frozen, heavy plastic tarps while the wind tugs at them, filling the wood sling and carefully manoeuvring the

uneven steps into the laundry room where the wood box is kept. I have to carry the sling full of firewood about 10 times to fill the box.

The wind was whipping snow squalls around me as I did this. The dogs were soon eager to get back inside. Thomas was shivering. When I had filled the woodbox, I called them back outside so we could have a bit of a walk. They love to run outside and I wanted them to be able to toilet and stretch their legs in the warmest time of the day. All I could manage was a big loop around the yard and into the front door. It is seriously dangerous outside when going into the back yard is an Arctic expedition.

I remember when I was young, hearing of farmers in storms getting lost between their houses and barns, needing to have a rope tied between the two, glad of a light on outside the barn or even a candle burning in a window at home.

Someone in Toronto was recently complaining about the price of hydro. I'm just grateful to have electricity. It means I have heat from the oil furnace, water in the pipes, the ability to flush the toilet, have a hot bath, and easily cook or bake. Without power, these conveniences are gone and everything becomes extremely difficult.

When the weather is dangerously frigid, having a snug house to retreat into, and soup on the stove or water boiling for tea, can keep you alive. I don't take it for granted.

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