

Guest Post: Ann Getman on Winter...Fun????



Violation?

Didn't winter used to be fun?

I've had enough of winter, haven't you? My Cambridge cul de sac looks like a medieval walled city, with snow banks 4-6 feet on all sides. I'm blessed with great neighbors who help to dig me out, but still, it's cold, slippery, wet, slidey, and I miss the light of a clear sky.

Didn't winter used to be fun? How long ago was that? Didn't we look forward to it and make plans to sharpen skates and sled runners, wax toboggans, waterproof boots and get out the snow tires? I could skate, cross country ski, sled and snowshoe! I didn't, very often, but I could, and that was invigorating.

I first moved to Boston in 1966 and thought it was wonderful to see the city from a trolley or a subway bridge. I was wowed by how the Public Garden and River paths were cleared for walking, how the sidewalks were shoveled out and business went on as usual. What did I care if school was closed, I could get the bus to work downtown. I could take a trolley to Jamaica Plain and explore the Arboretum. I could hike around Fresh Pond, climb up into the shagbark hickory trees and listen to the absolute hush broken only by birdsong.

When I got my first car, a winter-worthy Volvo, it came with

snow tires- heavy, studded and ferocious. I lived in an apartment building with no storage, so they were kept at my parents' house in CT between April and September, but I had a real sense of pride and mobility knowing I owned snow tires. I felt invincible! I could get to Concord or Lincoln or Sudbury, or drive around Quabbin for a real taste of winter!

During the blizzard of 78, I was living in Oak Square, Brighton, near the end of the trolley line, in a three-decker in a family neighborhood. Kids were eager to make some money shoveling out my car, and they'd stop by with sleds on their way to the grocery store, 10 blocks up the hill in "town" (Brighton Center), to see what their neighbors needed. We all had to wait a week for the National Guard to dig out the street, and as they came through with an amphibious rescue vehicle followed by a snow plow, I was right out there on my second story porch to cheer them on, whooping and swooping down with hot coffee to thank them.

I haven't even heard of snow tires for years. This winter snow plows are as much to be dodged as to be followed and applauded (and I've done both in the last week). Most two-way streets are reduced to a single travel lane, adding wait time to everything from getting out of the driveway to making a turn. With every snow, one more parking space on the street is lost. In my neighborhood we don't respect or reserve a dug-out spot; move it and lose it seems to be our motto, and shallow spaces be darned. But the narrower streets, wider vehicles, and high snow banks make that 3-point turn into my 45 degree angle driveway comical, when it's possible at all.

Winter driving is a different challenge: the low angle of the winter sun makes it painful to the eyes to be outside after 2 PM. Walking to the bus or subway, from the house I chose because it's close to buses and the T, requires a lot of slippage, splashage (it should be a word) and boot leakage along sidewalks and across curbs. This week I went outside in tights, leggings and sweatpants; a turtleneck, fleece jacket

and parka, with two hats, gloves and mittens. One wet foot sent me right back inside. That's when I heard myself say out loud, "Didn't winter used to be fun?"

If I'd only thought to get my wood-burning stove's chimney pipe inspected last fall, and stock in some firewood. If I'd kept up cross country skiing or bought a bobsled at the hardware store instead of another snow shovel. If I'd only made snow sculpture in the front yard or started a friendly snowball fight with a neighbor or taken the Red Line to Braintree to see how other neighborhoods cope with snow, or, or, or...

Wait a minute... That's what used to make winter fun! When it was playful to slide around, and silly to fall down, not scary. When cold and wet were always paired, and closed schools meant a free day to explore and have adventures. When we lay down in our snow gear at the edge of the pond to watch the fish moving, or made snow angels in the parks. When a nighttime tour to see Christmas lights so garish they could be seen from outer space was always done on foot. When just the change of season was something to celebrate and experience fully.

Next winter I want to have winter fun again. I'm not ready to move indoors, worry about bruising my shins or landing on my tookas, or to move to the high desert (yet). Next year I will get some cold- and wind-proof clothes, strap on my yak trax and get out there in the weather: winter revels will mean reveling in winter! Maybe I'll get some really solid snow- and water-proof winter boots (even if they're ugly), look for snowshoes or even look around for snow tires! Life may be getting shorter, but winter's too long not to be fun!

But this winter's got me beat, so for whatever is left of it, if I can drive there, and there's a dry place to sit and a hot beverage involved, I'll meet you there. We can reminisce and plan ahead!

Ann Getman
Cambridge. MA