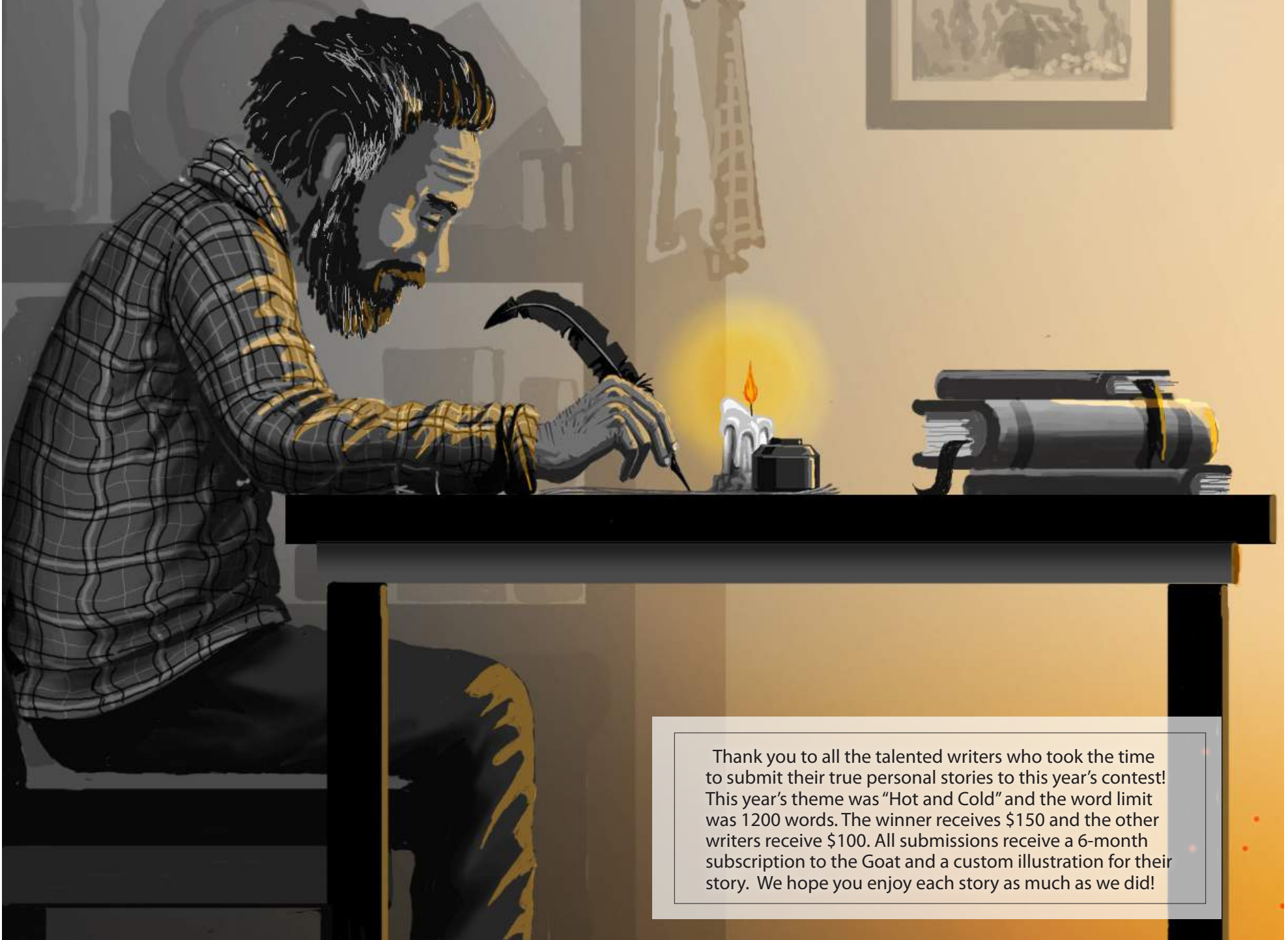


ROCKY MOUNTAIN GOAT'S 2ND ANNUAL
Winter Stories
EDITION

THEME

Hot & Cold



Thank you to all the talented writers who took the time to submit their true personal stories to this year's contest! This year's theme was "Hot and Cold" and the word limit was 1200 words. The winner receives \$150 and the other writers receive \$100. All submissions receive a 6-month subscription to the Goat and a custom illustration for their story. We hope you enjoy each story as much as we did!



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A Winter Reflection

By JULIAN RANDALL

One winter four of us with two dogs decided to venture down the 22 km unplowed winter road to the Ozalenka trailhead on skis. We did not reach the trailhead until the sun was beginning to fail. “Only 8 km up to the cabin,” I said. The brothers were prepared, having sleeping bags, while me and the other friend did not. We had worked our way up the trail on foot to about 2km. By this time, it was almost dark. “What kind of idiots would go on a winter trip with no sleeping bags?” still reverberates in my mind. We had reached the point in our journey where the two wiser and better prepared of the group wanted to bivouac for the night. The brothers were exhausted and did not want to continue. They enthusiastically berated me and the other foolish fellow for not being properly prepared for winter travel. With a borrowed headlamp from our sage superiors, we two prepared to climb the remainder of the trail to the cabin. The seriousness of the situation was not lost on any of us. It was dark, it was cold, and we were about to break the cardinal rule of horror films and trekking in the wilderness by splitting up. My two good friends were left to scabble a camp and fire together to stay warm for the night and then to tackle the trail in the morning.

Starting off was pretty easy going even though it was dark. The trail was snow covered but a good pack underneath. The batteries of the headlamp quickly ran out leaving us without light. I was able to navigate the trail by feel, memory, and the line of the trail in the trees. This worked well until we got further up the trail and started encountering open glades. By this time, we were getting exhausted and giddy. Every time we stopped it was harder to get up and the cold kept biting deeper into our reserves. Our two dog companions would spin circles in the snow before lying down, which I took as a bad sign. The night sky was clear and glittering. We were able to see Orion’s hunt travelling across the sky following our progress. When we reached some of the glades it was very difficult to see the trail. It was like trying to negotiate a tightrope. I would lose it then sink deep into the cold powder floundering with my load and wasting valuable energy trying to find it again. After a few of these episodes I came unhinged. The lizard brain took over and told me we had to make camp. My companion remained calm and let me start a small pathetic fire with the little dry branches from the bottom of a stubby balsam. He knew that our

only real chance was to find the trail again and make it to the cabin. The feeble light from the fire revealed an indentation in the snow nearby. It was the trail. Shaking off the fear and the freezing, we started out again. During this whole trek we kept wondering how our friends were faring. Were they sleeping soundly beside the hot embers of their fire with warm whisky in their bellies? Or were they frozen sausage rolls in their downy sleeping bags? I will never forget the rise of the land that obscured the cabin on our approach. Once over it, we saw the cabin, blanketed and inviting. Oh joy! With renewed energy we had the wood stove cranking out sauna-like temperatures. Stripped down and sweating, we scarfed down instant noodles. The experience of warmth and safety dissipated our numb, tingling, and drained bodies. Although we fixated on the fate of our friends, there was nothing we could do but toast to their health and await the daylight. When we awoke, the fretting and hand wringing began. Should we wait for their arrival? Should we start down the trail to look for them? Are they alive? A glance out the window after a bark from the dogs revealed an icy figure trudging up over the rise. Only one. Elated and anxious we rushed out to greet our lone cold companion. We were soon relieved to hear that his brother had stopped at the bottom of the rise before the cabin. He was exhausted and was ready to call it quits. Thankfully we were reunited, and two extra bodies added to the swelter of the cabin. Laughter and drinks were raised to our perseverance and stupidity. The toast being “What kind of idiots would go on a winter trip with no sleeping bags?”

The next year we knew that the road was not plowed again and we were ready to camp on the trail if needed. The temperatures were slightly milder. The first night we camped off the side of the road. We kept warm by trying to keep a fire going, salvaging what firewood we could find and eating a hot meal. We were toasty, albeit cramped, in a small tent for the night.

After another night on the trail, we made it up to the cabin in the early afternoon, buoyant with sunshine. The next day and two nights were interspersed once again with sauna-like

JUDGE’S COMMENTS

Julian’s story had adventure, suspense, vivid concrete imagery and hit the theme of “Hot and Cold” on multiple levels. We enjoyed the humorous take on a serious situation and how it ended with a heartfelt reflection. Well done, Julian! -RMG staff

conditions of the cabin, trekking and tobogganing the surrounding slopes, playing cards, writing silliness in the log book, and laughing.

I was visited by a disturbing dream on the final night we were there. In it, my mother died and there was a fire in the house where my family and I lived in Dunster. The next morning, I woke with that lingering sense of doom and anxiety that pervades one’s being after a disturbing dream. We made our way down and upon arriving at our vehicles, a vehicle pulled up. I saw that it was my wife and a friend. My stomach dropped and I went instantly cold. Had my mother died? Did the house burn down? My mother is thankfully still alive and healthy today. But while my wife and young son were in town, the house we were living in and everything we possessed went up in flames. They returned to find the smoking ruins of our place. To this day I still have a healthy fear of house fires.

When I was reflecting on writing this story there was a bitter cold snap. I was lounging, covered with a favourite ragged 26-year-old quilt, one of two that was donated to us after the house fire. I recalled the warmth and generosity of people after that devastating event. To this day, it humbles me. My regret is that I feel that I may not have adequately expressed my absolute gratitude for the support that we received. It is heartening to still see these qualities and virtues of support still thriving in our local communities. It is these memories of events, adventures, challenging experiences, the telling of stories, and the people with whom we experience them with, that helps keep out the cold of the world and keeps the warmth of our hearts glowing.



My Four-leaf Clover

By JULIE WILLIAMS



Life hasn't been the best for me. Growing up I was a witness to abuse—verbal and physical. I was shown that when you love someone you give them everything you have—until you're nothing. So that's what I did. Within romantic relationships and friendships, they took everything. I was an empty vessel with nothing to lose. Until I met him. I know you're not supposed to rely all of your happiness on someone, but I did. The second I laid my eyes on him, it felt like I was whole. Of course, the times I didn't have him around felt lonely and I wanted to leave this world. However, I could never bring myself to leave him. My saviour. My four-leaf clover. March 17th, 2017 changed my life and I only hope that one day you will find your happiness. I hope you can turn around what you were put through and change your way of thinking. It's taken me a long time and I still struggle. But I'm learning how to help myself. My life is surrounded with people who love me and would do anything for me. I appreciate everyone that has stuck with me through trying times. I know I haven't been the nicest, but I do love you. Without you and my boy I would have given up a long time ago. Teenage pregnancy was hard, but I got through it. I was blessed with an easy baby and now a beautiful boy. I do not condone teenage pregnancy—our body is not ready for it. However, I am happy that I have a boy that will forever hold my heart.

How I Learned My Lesson of Hot and Cold

By ROD REIMER

It was January 1983 and we had just come up to my trapping cabin "Moose Camp" on Baker (Holliday) Creek. I had come up with my future brother-in-law Billy Mullen and his son Les to celebrate their January birthdays and enjoy some winter camping on the trapline. Just our luck it was 20 below and the tiny one-person cabin was crammed full with the three of us inside. There was barely room in there for all of us with enough room to spare for the little airtight stove cranking out the BTU's in the corner of the cabin. We spent a cramped restless night, most of it with the door open to let out the excess heat to make it bearable inside.

The next morning dawned on my time to deliver on a promise I had made before the trip—that is, that I would hold to my tradition of taking a dip in the pool by the waterfall in the creek in front of the cabin, on every visit, even in winter. As I stepped out of the cabin that frigid -20 morning, I observed the ice and icicles of a nearly frozen

waterfall with only a small pool left ice-free by the bubbling water. "Roddy, are you really going to do it?" asked Billy in disbelief. "I always do," I replied, stripping down. Without a second thought I crow-hopped down to the creek through knee-deep snow, gingerly stepping across the ice to the edge of the pool, where I promptly jumped in. I got out in a second, shouting "Aaah, it's ssssooo ccccold, ccclear the dddoor of the cccabin, I'm cccoming in." In my haste to crawl in the igloo-like doorway, my butt touched a red-hot spot on the cranking airtight stove and sizzled like a slab of Canadian bacon."Yeoow!" I howled as I crawled back outside and started packing the whatever-degree burn with non-stop compresses of snow and ice. All the while my howls were drowned out by Billy and Les's uncontrollable howls of laughter. Eventually the pain subsided enough for me to go back inside the cabin and get dressed and warm up. It hurt bad the rest of the day, but needless to say, that's how I learned my lesson of hot and cold.

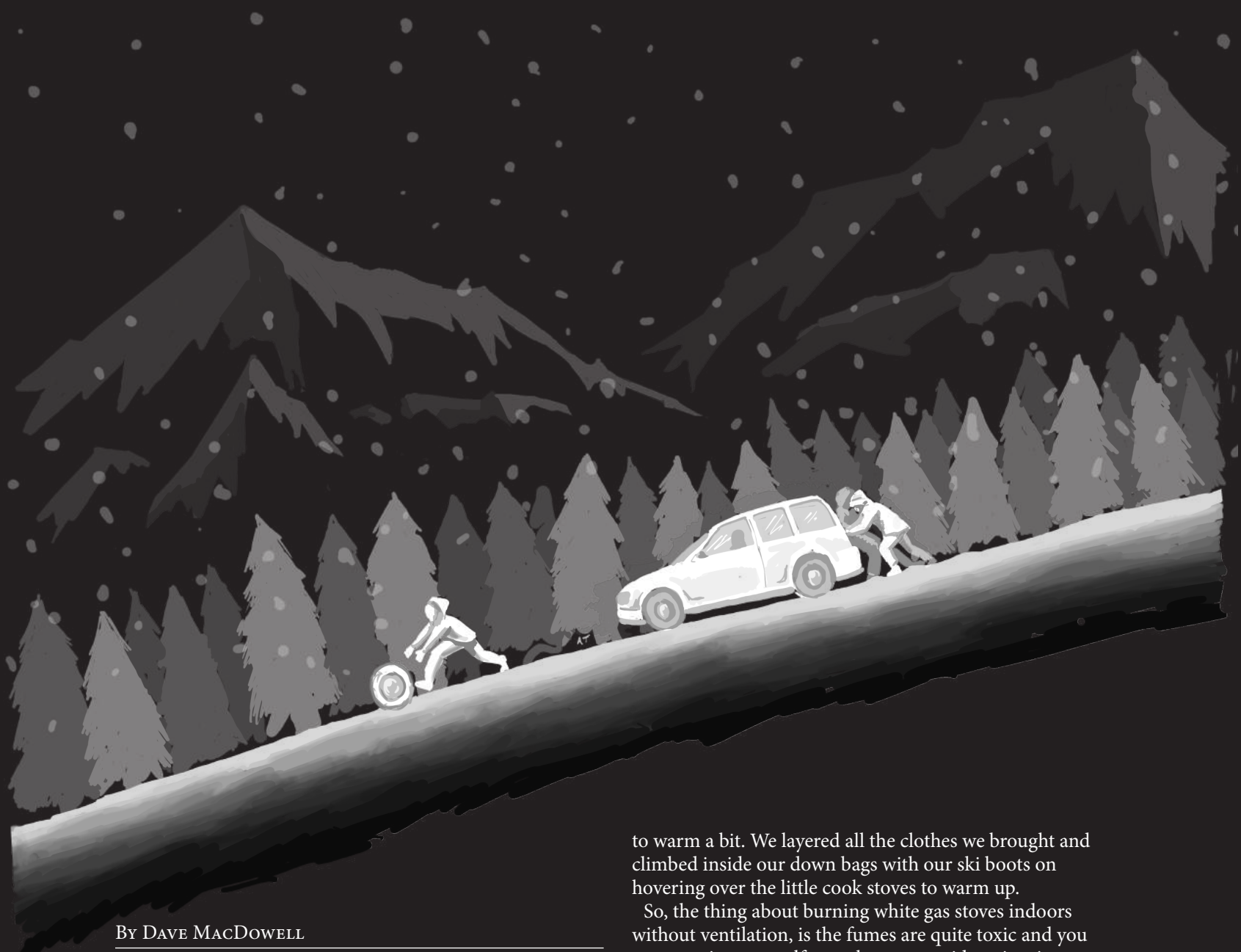


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REGIONAL DISTRICT
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The best laid plans of ice and men



BY DAVE MACDOWELL

We all dream about those trips. A three-day ski touring hut traverse with your buddies on the Wapta Icefields. Everything is planned for weeks and all the gear, food, fuel, or anything else we may need to have a comfy tour is stuffed into our oversize packs the night before. The forecast is calling for a cold snap but hey, we're Canadians and staying in huts so what could go wrong?

After a 2-hour drive, we were greeted at the trailhead with -40 C temps and a blue bird day. Things were moving pretty slowly as we began our 10K ski to Peyto hut and we were already experiencing some unplanned problems. Frozen fingers and toes, some spots of frostbite and several ski baskets cracked and fell off from the cold.

What would normally have been a pretty casual approach to the hut, ended up taking 6 hours and we were all pretty happy to get the first view of our home for the night. Once we arrived and got our gear inside, we quickly realized this night wasn't going to go as planned. The temp inside the hut was -38 C and to our surprise there was no heater!

We assessed our options and decided to hunker down rather than attempt a ski out in the dark. With 2 stoves and 3 liters of fuel the plan was to get both going to melt snow for tea and hot soup plus maybe get the inside temps

to warm a bit. We layered all the clothes we brought and climbed inside our down bags with our ski boots on hovering over the little cook stoves to warm up.

So, the thing about burning white gas stoves indoors without ventilation, is the fumes are quite toxic and you are exposing yourself to carbon monoxide poisoning. While we did manage to get the inside temps up to -18 C for a couple of hours, we spent the night between shivering in our bags and running outside to puke from the fumes. As soon as dawn broke, we packed up our frozen bags and hit the trail without food or water as we had used all our fuel through the night.

The ski back to our car seemed to take an eternity and we were all so relieved to arrive at the trailhead safely.

This relief was short-lived when we realized the car was completely frozen and would not turn over and our only hope was to push it onto the road and use a long downhill to get it going. Unfortunately, as soon as we started pushing, one of the solid tires rolled off the rim and we spent another hour trying to change the wheel with iced hands. We finally managed to roll downhill until it turned over and cranked the heat on for the drive home.

What we all learned from our frozen night was you need to approach winter trips with a measure of flexibility. Don't get stuck on your trip plan and be open to rescheduling if conditions don't cooperate. No matter how well prepared you "think" you are, there's a good chance that things can go sideways pretty fast. Oh ya, and if you're going to burn a camp stove in a small hut all night, open a window!

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Six Summers

BY NICOLE SCIANARO

I could feel the beads of sweat trickling down my spine.

It was one of those hot September days that made you lust after a summer that was rapidly retreating in the rearview. One of those hot September days almost convincing enough to make you believe summer was far from over, that a bitter winter wasn't fast approaching.

I could still see the tan lines on your face from where it had creased in laughter and your hair was still tufted from the last time I ran my fingers through it. Now my fingers intertwined with yours as we walked towards the end of our summer.

We started as most summers do; rose colored and illuminated. But somewhere along the way the season I had once longed for now suffocated me with its barren heat. As we approached a park bench, breath hot in the stale air, I thought back to the beginning while we neared the end.

I fell in love with you six summers ago and those moments from our first summer cling to my memory as I once clung to you. I saw oceans in your eyes, and as the thick heat pressed down upon me, I wanted to swim in them. You were not convinced, and you hesitated. Back then my morals changed as quickly as the seasons and you weren't sure for how many I would stick by you. And that first summer, as many times as I lay my hand on your cheek or made promises with my eyes or whispered honeyed words into your ears, I was cast aside by you.

The second summer I went far away, determined to drown the sorrows you had created in deep glasses and empty glances. You called out to me once in those fall winds, twice through winter chills and three times in spring's bloom, but I was too busy trying to forget you to remember to answer.

When I returned, I accepted that none of the moments I created had mattered, as the moments with you cried louder in my head than the thoughts that tried to hush them. Thus, when the third summer arrived, I was ready to embrace you with the heat. Condensation dripped from my eyes as it did off the side of my cold glass as I discovered, over time and all at once, that you were now calling through the seasons to someone else. And even though you would still invite me into your ocean and let me swim with you, it was merely just to cool off, temporarily, before leaving me shivering and alone.

The fourth summer was quiet, and all I could hear through the deafening silence was the sound of my self-pity. In some moments I prayed you



would hear it. I would imagine myself crying out to you outside your window, but I had never been there and could not begin to find my way even in my own fantasies. You had never shown me your window, you had never invited me in. Had we ever even met, or were you just another dream I had wished to be reality? I pleaded to wake up back at that first summer, to look around and not find you and never know you. But my pleas went unanswered and those few cruel seasons left me in my lonesome nightmare.

On the fifth summer you decided my morals held up to your standards and I needn't drown any more of my sorrows and you called out to only me and I answered, with an open heart and short shorts. I beamed like the sun at your return to me, but the cloudless sky and green pastures could only veil those years of anguish so long. As the harsh cold began to settle in, so did my envy. Envy for a life that was devoid of you; summers I could have spent wallowing in emotions of my choosing and not ones you had manufactured.

With those realizations the wool I had pulled over my eyes when I accepted you with loving arms began to lift. It wasn't all frozen hands and hearts; when I could push my thoughts of resentment to the back of my mind as I once pushed thoughts of you, I could enjoy our time together with a sweet ignorant bliss. But I started to tire of your comfortable attitude; after all, the distress you caused had torn years away from me,

and those thoughts began to bleed from my pores and stain our relationship beyond repair.

We entered our sixth summer with a heaviness, the humidity drained the moisture from the air as we drained each other. I spent those heated days hoping I would stop reminding myself that love wasn't enough to continue on. Eventually, you proved to me that I no longer needed a reminder.

On that hot September day on that park bench, I said goodbye to you, to this summer and to the ones that have passed.

Maybe if we hadn't wasted so many; if you hadn't wasted so many, convinced we would fail, we would have had a lifetime of summer together. Through each season our love could have kept us warm. But you let too many pass us by and, somewhere in those too many, I decided I couldn't forgive you for making my summers cold.

Now, in my most isolated moments, I still feel uneasy over my farewell. What will my summers be without you as my focus? The cold rushed in the day our love rushed out and although the sun peeks through the clouds every once and again it never feels as hot as it did when I was with you. But I look forward to feeling the sun on my face again and watching it shimmer over my browning skin, and while I bask in its splendor, I will think of everything, and nothing, and no longer be thinking of you.

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Settling in the Mountains

BY NANCY TAYLOR

I spent my first winter here when I was 25, in 1974. I was following a man who had a dream to work as a ranch hand. He found a job on a dairy farm outside of town. He was so enthusiastic he agreed to work seven days a week. Along with \$500 a month salary, we got an old farmhouse to live in, all the milk and beef we could use, firewood for heat and manure for the garden. One day he brought home a holstein heifer calf and eventually we learned how to raise our own livestock and milk our own cow.

The old farmhouse took some fixing up. A bachelor farmer was the last person to live there. He died and no one had cleaned up much after him. There was a blue granite-wear roasting pan containing a brittle slab of fat and grey strings. It once held a roast beef. I assumed it was the last supper

off the kitchen and a big glassed-in veranda on the front. It had a pantry with a trapdoor in the floor that opened to the rootcellar below. The quaint upstairs had a dormer in the roof leading to a small balcony. You could tell someone once loved this place. It was their palace, but now it was in ruins. There were overgrown shrubs covering the windows facing west in the living room. They blocked the stunning pink and mauve winter sunsets. Sawdust insulation leaked from the walls and paint was peeling off the water-stained window frames. The congoileum rug that once covered the floor was now faded and worn. I flashed back to my childhood when I saw similar imitation persian rugs in the Eaton's catalogue. These folks had illusions of grandeur, yet a musty, dead-mouse smell wafted through the house now. Would I be able to live here?

The farmer next door said "It's not

through the single pane window across the kitchen table. We scraped it off as the fire in the cookstove took off and the kitchen thawed out.

Those chilly mornings in the old farmhouse stick in my memory. By 5:00 a.m. our body heat had warmed the bed. My guy would fly out of it, jump into his work clothes and head down the road to the milking barn. He would be back for breakfast by 7:30. Having the bed to myself I would stretch out and snooze until the nagging responsibility of making food for him would wake me up. Hurriedly I would dress in warm layers and go downstairs to light the fires—one in the cookstove and the other in an old Ashley heater. It didn't take long to get the house warm and the coffee on.

I provided a lot of good food for that hard working farm hand. The smell of fresh coffee met him when he arrived at the door after milking. Breakfast

needed the calories; I didn't.

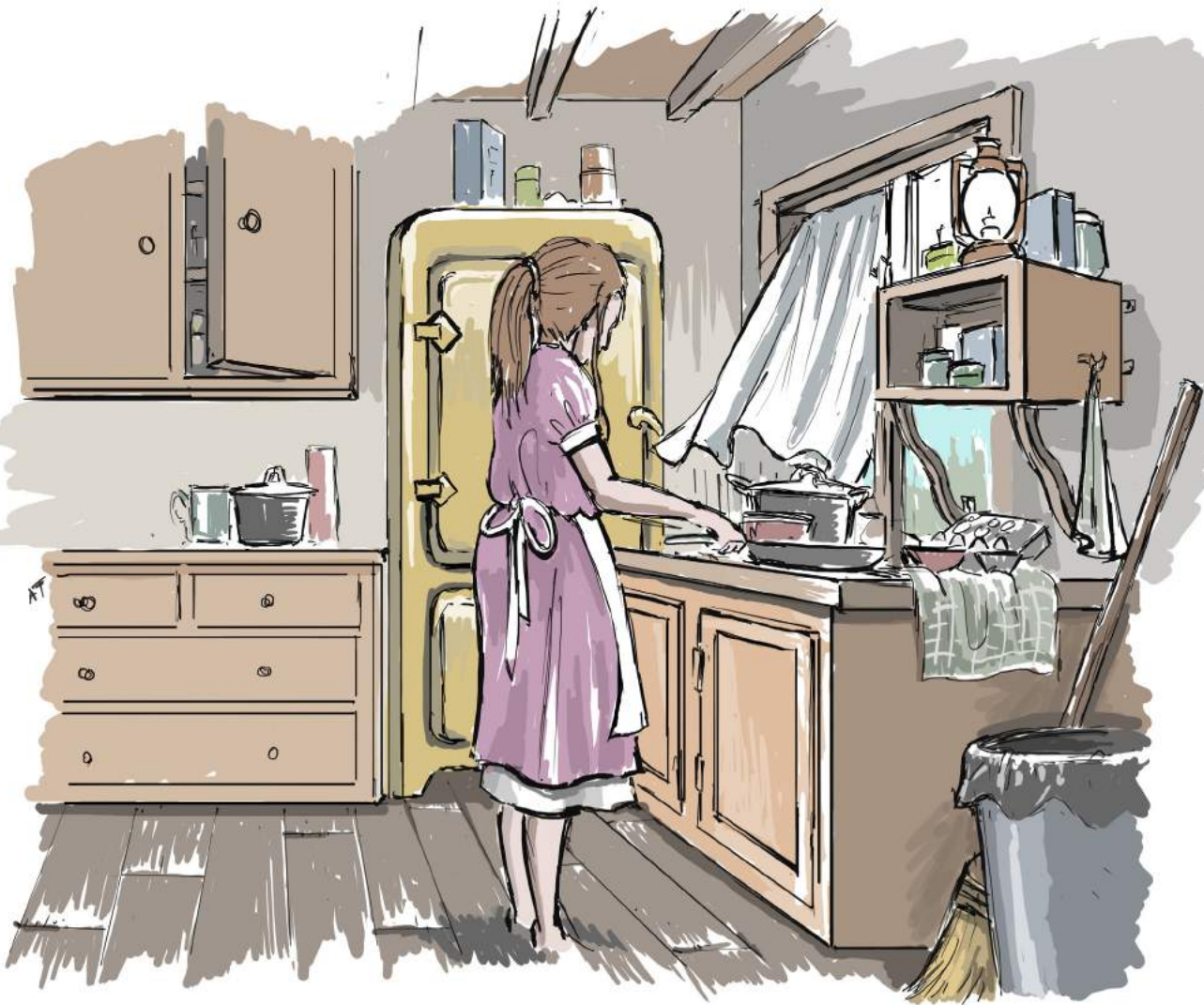
I wondered how many women followed a man to this valley, to fulfill a pioneer dream of survival on the land. Would I find meaning through hard work and sacrifice like he did? I felt unsettled and lonely at first. He spent most of his time working. I didn't really know what to do with myself. To cope with the isolation, I made curtains, quilts and pot holders. His socks needed darning and his jeans patching. A rusty wheel rim became a loom for a woven floor mat made from recycled baling twine. I read John Steinbeck and kept a journal. The restlessness I wrote about began to disappear when I bought my first pair of cross-country skis. I took a few lessons and made a few friends. And when I got chickens, and then the calf, I wasn't so lonely.

Eventually we moved further east down the valley closer to our homestead at the mouth of the Kiwa. I would drive past the old farmhouse on my trips to town and often felt nostalgic for the fresh idealism of our first winter there.

And then one day I noticed the house was gone. The outbuildings were gone, the homesite had been totally cleared away. The land was all plowed up, now part of the surrounding fields. I wondered how they got rid of it. I imagined a machine digging a big hole, a bulldozer pushing the house over, shoving the sections together and then pushing it all into the hole and burying it – treasures for an archeologist.

Then in a conversation with the farmers I learned that they had burnt it down, burnt it down and cleaned up the site. Burnt it down, all those memories of snow and wind, seasons of planting and harvest, the work of wood and water, gone. I thought about the fears of house fires I inherited from my mother, fears that would keep me awake at night in that old house, listening to the well-stoked fire crackling away in the Ashley. I could see the house engulfed, the roaring flames, the smell of toxic smoke, the fracturing of dry wooden beams and the whole structure crumbling into ashes. An audience of farmers ready to clean it all up.

Looking back over the past 47 years it's remarkable how ill-prepared I was for settling in the valley. Being here so long was not a dream of mine. Yet, that first winter began my transformation from suburban young lady to earthy countrywoman. I am no longer following a man. Like the house full of nooks and crannies, he is long gone. While some things have disappeared, others have become more obvious. Clearly I have put down roots in this place; this is where I belong.



because it still remained on the dining table. Before I could start dealing with it and other remnants of the past inhabitants, I had to haul water and split wood. Once the stove was going I could heat the water and get to work. The daily rhythm of water and wood soon became familiar. Every nook and cranny in that ramshackled house needed my attention.

I became enamoured with that house. I imagined the family that built it and once lived there. It reminded me of prairie farmhouses with a bedroom

so bad as long as you remember to tie the covers down before you go to bed." The wind howled from the east, out of the Beaver River across the empty fields. I would warm up our bed with a hot water bottle for a while before we crawled in. I tossed it aside as I drifted off. The next morning I found it leaking over the edge of the bed. Shivering, I felt an icicle from the spout to the floor keeping the hot water bottle propped upside down. Good thing we had each other to stay warm. One morning we woke to fingers of snow drifting

started with a cup of Nabob and a steaming bowl of oatmeal topped with brown sugar and rich cream skimmed off the milk jar. While he savoured the first course I would scramble up three eggs whipped with more cream. I toasted bread on the top of the cookstove. The aroma of toasting nutty grains and the perking second pot identified the hearty fare I served. There were always berry jams and jars of canned Okanagan fruit in the pantry and homemade yogurt staying cold on the porch. It was a veritable feast. He



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Whatever It Takes

By RANDY PRUDEN

There are so many things that go on behind the scenes to host the first World Cup Downhill events of the season in Lake Louise. November is typically cold and low on natural precipitation in the Rockies and the event typically relies almost 100 per cent on man-made snow to create a racing surface. Some years the cold temperatures arrive late, but they always arrive. In November 2009 with less than three days to our first training run, the warm fall temperatures had hampered the snowmaking efforts and we barely had enough snow to cover the vegetation in the first 1500m of the race course.

There are three weeks of racing in Lake Louise and the course sees upwards of 6,000 passes down it from the volunteers, racer inspections and race runs over that time. In years of low snow cover or low-density snow, we water inject the surface (think pressurized upside down lawn sprinkler) with tens of thousands of gallons of water to create a surface that is about 20 per cent harder than glacial ice to get a “firm” surface to race on. Ideal temperatures are about -10 C as the humidity vents off and leaves “grippy” snow for the athletes to turn on; colder temperatures cause the surface to freeze and seal too quickly trapping humidity and make “slippery” pond ice type surface.

This particular injection day was brought to mind with this month's Polar Vortex. As I cursed my nerve damaged finger and the large divots tender divots on three toes that ached with the cold, my thoughts turned back more than a decade to that day. It started a seasonal -15 C in the alpine zone at 6:00am with winds gusting to 40km/h with the approaching cold front, and forecast temperatures dropping to -35 C by the end of the day. Injection day needs a small army as there are hundreds of metres of firehose and multiple pieces of equipment to be dealt with, holding charged hoses back on slopes up to 60 degrees in angle, walking gingerly in your crampons when a misstep could rupture a fully charged line, and a fumbled hydrant connection change or line switch could result in hoses or equipment freezing solid from the super-cooled water drawn from the Bow River. Did I mention it's like an upside down sprinkler? The injection bars are six metres long and it takes four bars to prepare the width of the run. The water gets reduced from a two-inch fire hose to a series of 42 nozzles per bar with an opening about the size of a wire coat hanger. This pressure creates a needle jet of water that pierces its way into the snowpack and if timed and moved properly creates little cylindrical columns of ice with a hollow snow center, it actually looks like a big tray of donuts once it freezes.

With the rapidly cooling temperatures and wind, those of us on the injection bars were only wet for an hour or so, and by that time acquired a coating of ice from head to toe insulating us from further weather. The process is slow and precise, moving only 10-15 cm down the slope, every 10-15 seconds with



the more demanding race turns taking up to 30 seconds before the next little move. The movement can be timed, or done by sound. We typically used the sound the snow made—it was not unlike the noise of a two-litre pop bottle filling under a wide open tap. It was a noisy operation requiring hearing protection and all the commands had to be shouted as if in a military operation.

Water injection is one of those backwards things where the more experience and knowledge you have puts you in a wetter, colder, position leading the process and you end up using a piece of coat hanger wire to clean out the nozzles when they plugged up with debris leading to damaged fingers. The safety of the athletes depends on the consistency of the race surface at speeds approaching 145km/h. If it's too hard there is no control to make the turns; if it's too soft the edges bite deep and the athlete may find themselves off balance or line and in danger of crashing.

The product in 2009 did not come out as good as we would have liked. Due to the rapidly dropping temperatures this was our only chance to prepare the slope for the season opener only 72 hours away and with colder temperatures forecast we went for it. We knew it would probably come out too hard and icy, but we also knew we didn't have enough snow on the ground to get through this series, let alone the next two events. Lake Louise is a very

important stop on the World Cup Tour as it is the only venue in the world that consistently succeeds in hosting a downhill event on the last weekend of November to start the season off. The injection program was almost 14 hours long that day—we looked like snow-ghosts at the end of it all. Many of the 60-plus volunteers and staff suffered cold injuries, myself included. Frostbitten noses, cheeks, fingers, toes, earlobes, tingling numbness that took weeks or months to go away.

The frosty beverages were being consumed before the boots were off and as we were thawing and dripping, laughter began and stories and tall tales that were gripping. I told the crew, “Thank you for your efforts today, and who wants to help tomorrow and inject the training course on Camerons Way?” All the hands went up. We didn't end up doing Camerons Way—a water main burst in the snow making system at the hill that night, and about 15 kilometres of the mountain's snowmaking hose froze solid when the pressure stopped. The ski race happened. There was some noise about it being a “bit” icy. I could barely move on the surface in crampons and they were railing turns at over 100km/h! I never remember much about the racing and results from over the years, but the memories of those long cold days doing “whatever it takes” in a like-minded community will last a lifetime, and are totally worth the discomfort now that comes with an occasional cold snap.

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The Sailor Bar Tunnel



BY ERNIE SHERGOLD

By the time we arrived in Cache Creek it was dark and cold. Greyhound buses lined the parking lot, not that I had enough money for a ticket. "Ronnie, let's get some soup," I said, "And get some warmth in our bones." Ronnie knocked snow off his boots, "Agreed," Ronnie said. They don't get much snow here, not like Brookmere B.C. where the snow piles up to the roof gutters.

We had left Fountain Valley only about 90 minutes ago on a whim. "Let's go to Vancouver," sounded good at the time. Like clockwork we made it to the bus out of Lillooet going to Cache Creek, like magic we only waited for about ten minutes for the eight passenger van and here we were going for soup at the hotel cafe. I was bored with my cooking, especially with brown rice and veggies. I opened the hotel cafe door to heat and good smells. "I hope they have a beef soup," I said.

"They have a beef barley," Ronnie noted.

"Oh boy, that's the ticket," I said. Four packages of crackers and the soup made me sleepy, but onward and upward.

We piled out of the cafe and into the cold dark night ready to get a ride to Vancouver.

Once again we were lucky—the third car is pulling over for us, we are on the move once again. Ronnie took the front seat. "How far are you going?" "Burnaby," replied the driver. "How about you fellows?"

"Vancouver, Gastown," Ronnie said, "But anywhere close is good."

"We live in Fountain Valley," I called out.

"That is a good place," the driver said. "Good fishing. What do you do there?"

"Not much of anything. Playing music mostly," I said. The driver spun around to see who he was talking to and lost the road. The wheels of the car hit gravel on the roadside bringing the driver back into focus on the road. "What do you think?" the driver said, "Two hours?"

"About that," I replied.

Once out of Cache Creek the driver started to speed up. We were passing Ashcroft in no time. "Maybe an hour and a half travelling at this speed," I shouted from the back. "My name is Ernie and this fellow in the front is Ronnie," I said trying to slow this manic guy down. That

didn't work as we seemed to be going faster.

"The roads are pretty icy aren't they?" Ronnie said.

"They are a bit slick," the driver said and introduced himself as Sam.

"Thanks for stopping to pick us up, Sam," I said.

"I am coming from Blue River," Sam said. "I figure you guys may help me stay awake."

"We could sing songs. We know a bunch," I said.

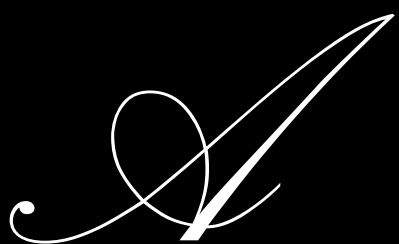
"Great," Sam replied. "How bout Ghostriders in the Sky?"

"Sure, I know that one," Ronnie exclaimed.

We didn't get to the second verse before Lytton, boy we were moving. Of course I am a pokey driver, I like to see the scenery. The road has some twists and turns and here we are going down Jackass Mountain. It being pitch black outside, I could not see how high we were or the sharp drop to the river below—just as well. It is a straight downhill to Boston Bar and we slowed down for the town speed limits. Once out of Boston Bar we twisted around the curves of Highway #1 until we were into the tunnels. Sam sped up going through the first tunnel. We made the first tunnel, then we came to the Sailor Bar tunnel. Sam drove even faster going through the tunnel. Oh boy, I thought, We are in the soup now and it's not beef barley on the other side of this tunnel. All of sudden the car rolled to a stop. The engine had died.

When we got out of the car, I found it hard to stand because of the black ice. Pushing the car out of the tunnel was precarious—the car kept sliding to the right. Lucky for us there was no traffic. We got the car out of the tunnel and off to the side when a big truck with a long trailer comes up, heading north and the back end of the trailer is swinging towards me. It is happening so fast. I am caught on the driver's side of the car. The trailer didn't squish me but hit me at an angle where I went flying like a clown out of a circus rocket into a snowbank.

The truck never stopped. Sam took us to the hospital in Hope. I could not walk, a cracked hip was the diagnosis. The hospital in Hope was nice, very quiet and very hot with all the winter gear I was wearing. I forgot that when we left Fountain I put plastic bags around my socks to keep my feet dry. The nurses got a laugh out of that.



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Winter's Depression



BY ALICIA MORNEAU

I can feel the harsh push of winter's depression lingering through my still room, past the hums of my heater, washing over my body like waves off the ocean. I was maybe 11 when I learned about the different types of depression: seasonal affective disorder, manic, chronic... it had been over a year of being pushed onto antidepressants and medications I couldn't even pronounce. I already had thoughts of suicide and self-harm, and was a zombie towards my family and peers. I don't think anyone really understood the consequences, and it's something I ruminate over from time to time. If I told you opening my eyes will be the hardest thing I do today, would you believe me? Forcing a smile on my face so nobody knows. I remember being told when I was younger to just "get over it." I think coming from a generation who also didn't quite understand mental illness, it was hard for my grandmother to give me any advice and that's okay. Tears would run down my face before I finally got the courage to lift my head from my pillow, dreading silently what would be coming. Sometimes it's a lot harder to fake that smile, or to pull yourself out of the dark cloud that gnaws at the back of your mind, blending in with the background noise. I was sitting in the women's bathroom in the children's psychiatric ward with a girl I had just met a little after I had turned 12. From her I learned that I can create this facade to trick people into thinking I am somewhat normal. I remember all I could think about was how scary it was knowing someone else knew the pain I was in. That little girl I had met was lost, but would I be? Sometimes I think about what others fighting the same heavy cloud would do. Who was there for them? I found yesterday was easier, it wasn't as hard to find the energy to get out of bed. These are the hot and colds of mental health. The constant push and pull of whatever chemical imbalance your brain seems to want to dance with that day. Then you get those days

where you think to yourself "wow I can do this!" Those are the thoughts we long to have, but it can't always be like that. The next day it's the same thing all over again. That silent struggle that I never wanted to share with anyone else. That burden I feel when I try to explain to my loved ones why I always appear to feel this way. But that's okay. Sometimes we are able to choose our paths, and sometimes we aren't. Super heroes have these catchphrases, things they say that everyone else recognizes; mine is the mental health catchphrase "It's okay not to be okay." I find myself saying this to myself daily. It took a long time to pull myself out of the blackness, to convince myself I deserve to see the light of day. It's okay to take a break from the world. But I hid my pain inside myself, far away from anyone else, away from anything for many years. We live in a world where you don't have to be alone—a world of understanding. It wasn't as easy when I started struggling with my mental illness. Over the years I have lost people who have lost their voice, not knowing there were people out there they could reach out to. I've lost loved ones and strangers, family and friends. I know people who have lost daughters and sons to the everyday struggles of mental health. Before, they didn't tell you how you were supposed to deal with mental health. The past mental health was misunderstood. If they didn't see it, well, it wasn't there. I'd like to ask the readers, who took time to read my story, about this everyday struggle that I and many other people will have for the rest of our lives, to think about someone you know that struggles with mental illness. I want to share my story so maybe I can get to one person and let them know that it IS okay not to be okay. Even if it's providing someone the access to the British Columbia Crisis Intervention & Suicide Prevention line (604) 872-3311, or the Canada Suicide Prevention line (833) 456 4566. You could be saving a life by pointing someone in the right direction.

Everyone deserves a fighting chance. All I ask is that you fight with me.