

Looking for kindness when the weather isn't kind

by SHERALYN ROMAN

There's no denying that Canadian winters are hard. Well, harder for some of us that is! Those of us who don't ski, dislike the cold, don't own snowshoes or who otherwise don't treat every snowfall like some kind of a special gift from mother nature tend to find winter dull, dreary and damp. We sometimes find it challenging to wake up in the morning, or indeed, to even know if it IS morning between cloud-filled skies and time changes that make discerning day and night difficult.

For us non-skiing enthusiasts, we find the thrill of de-icing the car, shoveling the driveway and walking the dog in minus 18-degree weather just so we can then drive to work in the dark, very, very unmotivating. It seems just lately however, the more I chat with people, it's actually kindness that's becoming more prevalent than snow. It's almost as if some of us are actively looking for kindness (and finding it!) even when the weather isn't being kind at all.

I'm not the only one who is noticing that every snowfall seems to be an opportunity for your neighbour with a snowblower to show kindness. How often does this brave soul seem to arrive just in the nick of time, that is - right after the snow plow has just passed and left the bottom of your driveway looking like a particularly craggy and ice-filled section of the Himalayas? It doesn't matter where I've lived in Caledon, the kindness of the snowplowing neighbour is legendary. They are the people who are outside first, stay out the longest and their kindness has shown itself consistently every winter. I count myself as lucky and grateful to be one of the many recipients of such neighbourhood heroes.

People tangling with tangled grocery carts and attempting to push said buggies (never cooperative even on a good day) through slush and ice are another example of what I believe to be a unique brand of 'Canadian Nice.' It's that kind of collective 'snow won't defeat us' attitude that sees complete strangers working together to force those pesky shopping cart wheels up and over the snowbank and into the store. Moreover, I've witnessed (for those stores that make you pay for the privilege of using a cart) the ceremonial passing of a quarter from one set of frozen fingers to another to save people from a cold, mad scramble in pockets and purses for forgotten change. Why? I have to assume it's for no other reason than kindness. Perhaps it's based on the sure and certain knowledge that as one who is finished with a cart and about to climb into a nice, warm car, the least they can do is make someone else's journey into the store a faster one. I've even witnessed these random acts of kindness extend to store employees charged with wrangling carts back into stalls as, on more than one occasion, they've simply unlocked and provided a buggy to a struggling shopper bypassing the quarter altogether.

Doors being held open, fellow dog-walkers warning each other on local Facebook groups about a particularly icy patch on a pathway (protecting both pooches and people), these too are examples of opportunities when our fellow citizens have decided to help, not hinder, our progress as we attempt to move about town safely even as the snow and ice tries to ensure otherwise. It's like we have collectively come together to smile ever more warmly at the frozen grimace of Jack Frost just to let him know that he can huff and he can puff and blow around a whole lot of snow, but he just can't keep us down.

Sure, the sun isn't shining, it's slushy outside and my boots are soaking wet, but a total stranger just offered to help carry a heavy box to my car so that I wouldn't slip and fall! True story (possibly motivated by my gray hair and the fear of watching an 'old lady' fall) but it's the kind of story that should brighten anyone's day!

These past several weeks leading up to and including so called 'Blue Monday,' have been challenging for many of us. It's a fact that we've experienced more gray skies this winter than usual, with Environment Canada recording over 200 hours of fog over just 17 days this past December!

In fact, the EC prognosticators are predicting that 'drizzly, gray weather is expected to continue through January and February.' Blech! That makes, by my reckoning, three full months of gloom and that's pretty gloomy indeed. While looking for a brighter side, upon further research, it seems this prediction of many more gray days to come is unlikely to change even given tomorrow's

status as Groundhog Day.

Current odds that the 'Big Three,' (Wiarion Willie, Shubenacadie Sam and our US neighbour Punxsutaney Phil) will see their shadow are set at 'Nil.' In other words, unless you're a seven-year-old, with a fast toboggan, living near a hill and have no fear of heights or speed, this dreary winter weather threatens to bring us all down with a severe case of seasonal affective disorder. I think as Canadians however, the bright spot is that we're up for the challenge - as recent experiences have shown, look for kindness and I guarantee you'll find it. Look for clouds, dirty snow and slush - I guarantee you'll find that too, but wouldn't you rather try looking for kindness first?