

Wafting winter away

by BROCK WEIR

'Grab some toilet paper,' she said.

'Why?' I replied somewhat taken aback 'after all, I had only met her mere minutes before.

'Just grab some toilet paper,' she repeated, firmly, but with a friendly smile on her face.

Since I was in a brand-new place, I just adopted a 'When in Rome?' mentality.

I was a 17-year-old first-year university student who had just finished the first phase of unpacking in a brand-new dorm room, and I was unfamiliar with the ice-breaking ritual of revealing a factoid about yourself, however banal, according to how many squares of Charmin or Royale you happened to yank off the roll.

Apparently, I bit off a bit more than I could chew as the Residence Assistant held the roll. Speaking as someone who finds such ice-breakers not far removed from torture, my unlucky spin, which yielded me no less than 12 squares, was setting me up for failure.

My heart sank as the rules of the game were read out and I discovered when you're pressed to share something about yourself in a socially-awkward setting, you're damned if you can come up with something interesting right off the bat 'despite the fact that everyone is interesting.

I'm afraid in my quest for 'interesting' I served up more than my fair share of weird, but by the time square eight or nine came around, they would have done little to help me wipe the sweat off my brow as I began scraping what I thought was the bottom of the proverbial barrel.

'Well,' I began, hesitatingly, 'I love the feeling of going outside in the winter, still warm from a shower, and feeling the inside of the nostrils freeze just a little bit on first contact.'

If a photo can say a thousand words, I wonder how many tomes could've been generated by the blank stares that greeted this revelation.

Weird? Yes. Memorable? Perhaps. Something that sets the tone for the year? Unfortunately, yes.

Yet, it wasn't wrong.

As a child, winter was my favourite season. In addition to the aforementioned nostril frost, my love of the season was also about the perfect crunch underfoot when the snow the night before fell in just the right way. There's also the cold-warm feeling of rosininess gathering on one's cheeks, which I always found revitalizing, keeping me grounded in the moment. Yes, I feel somewhat alone in this. Then, when I was older, there was the feeling of tiny icicles forming on the beard 'such as when covering a Santa Claus parade over a decade ago where flash blizzard hit, and, unable to do anything about it, came back to the car icier than that time Lucy Ricardo got locked in the freezer. Uncomfortable? Sure, but what a reminder of being Canadian!

Yet, in recent years, the love affair with winter has somewhat waned.

As I settled into adulthood, I don't know just what it was, but I finally had my summer 'switch' flipped. Suddenly I 'got it' and saw beyond the wall of mugginess that was previously my overarching idea of our hottest season.

There was no turning back and each year takes me further and further away from whatever remnants of Northern European that still lingers in my veins.

And yet, that trend has hit something of a personal speedbump ? even as spring has well and truly sprung.

Perhaps it is the state of the world these days, but did you ever have the feeling that the ?winter that was? was just a little bit darker, a little bit drearier than in winters' past, a bit harder to tease out a few strands of tinsel-like silver linings that are part and parcel of the season? Maybe it was just me.

This time around, I found myself counting down the days of the winter solstice, excited to know that every day thereafter, at least until the Summer Solstice, would be just a little bit longer than the last. From there, it was a brief sprint to the holidays before the bona-fide countdown began. No, not towards 2025, but counting down the days towards this month's time change.

Ah, the joys of archaic customs! But at least we were moving in the right direction.

And yet, as we move into the future, one that has true spring and a full summer almost within reach, I can't help but find myself almost (ALMOST) looking for a do-over to make the most out of the season that was.

Maybe that's because we're now in a season of rebirth and it's high time to think differently about many things, including the most contentious season of all!

As we cracked and destroyed heat records this summer, a particular meme circulated on social media which made me chuckle ? at least at first. Then, realizing the so-called ?truth bomb? it represented, the chuckle led to a furrowed brow.

This particular meme featured a vignette of Homer and Bart Simpson.

As the original scene went, a plaintive Bart whines to his father, ?This is the worst day of my life?

An oblivious Homer responds to his son, ?The worst day of your life SO FAR,? complete with a friendly, if unlikely grin.

The meme in question, however, subbed the word ?worst? with ?hottest? (or, in some variants, ?warmest?) and the simple truth of that certainly made me pause.

If we exclude the significant snow storms that punctuated winter's last month, we didn't have it all that bad when it comes to the dreaded white stuff. We were well into the latter half of winter before we had to truly put our backs into shovelling or adopt our reflexive gait to safely walk across icy terrain.

We enjoyed the mildness, revelled in being outdoors just a little bit more without that nostril freeze and without the cheeks getting too ruddy.

Jokes about the so-called benefits of Climate Change, but more often in day-to-day banter, ?global warming?, abounded with degrees of enthusiasm both genuine and mock. But, really, it's no laughing matter.

While I look forward to spring getting well and truly underway, the grass getting greener, flowers popping out to add a splash of colour to the landscape, and birds providing the perfect soundtrack to all this, I do wonder when what we've come to love, hate and grapple with when it comes to winter will be little more than a memory ? and this could apply to all the seasons as well.

As we wake ourselves out of the doldrums of winter, and we've all earned it, let's be mindful not to wish it away the next one, whatever it has in store for us, completely. And this is a sentiment I am happy to share without a single square of toilet paper in my hand demanding it so.