

Winthrop Valley Life: Livin' the Dream

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When the universe (or at least the troposphere) presents us with an opportunity to revel in the glory of existence at the 48th parallel, we surrender en masse, not just out of necessity, but because we have an obligation to keep up appearances for our friends in temperate climates. They have a rosy vision of rural life in a winter wonderland, and it goes something like this:



It is either the tinkling of gently falling snowflakes or the rooster's dulcet notes that rouses us from our slumber after Thursday's wee-hours snowstorm: the dawning of another day in paradise.

We open our front doors to take stock of the glittering white two-foot thick blanket Mother Nature has so charitably deposited upon the land.

Slipping our bare tootsies into felted slippers we have crafted from three shrunken cashmere sweaters scored at the Senior Center for \$1, we step outside.

Fetching the DIY shabby chic rulers we fashioned out of ruler fragments uncovered from the rubble of the old Allen Elementary School—where would we be without Pinterest?!—we insert the instruments into the snowpack. The rulers vanish without a trace into the depths like slender alpinists slipping into a crevasse. Farewell, foot-long friends; we'll see you in the spring.

Prosaic but functional measuring tapes provide us with the final snow depth. Like everything else on the frontier, the number is supersized, calculated not in inches but in feet. Oh joy—we are assured of many rewarding hours of winter merriment ahead!

After snapping a photo of the new snowfall, posting it on social media, and also texting it to everyone we know in case they missed it on the internet, we suit up in anticipation of a core-strengthening workout consisting of manually relocating several tons of snow while singing Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah."

Two cups of locally roasted single-origin coffee and a piece of artisan ancient grains avocado toast later, we are ready to face the elements. Today will be filled with moments to live authentically—to work with our hands and prove our rural grit. It will also be a day filled with like-worthy photo ops, so we make sure to wear our pom-pom hats and Bernie Sanders mittens, but only ironically.



We summon our mantra for the day—a line from a William Stafford poem. "Winter and I understand each other," we chant, bowing our heads namaste-like, submitting to Winter's undisputed authority. Channeling the moxie of our pioneer forebears, we step into the maw of the gale with intention.

We grab our heirloom shovels, passed down from homesteader generations but retrofitted with shafts hewn from the reclaimed core wood of a hophornbeam miraculously untouched by the Cub Creek Fire, and enter a trance punctuated only by the shovels' scrape and the silky sounds of champagne powder trickling down the snowbanks that soon tower above us.

Mid-morning we pause to take the plow guy a cookie, which he unironically refers to as “lunch,” since he has already been on the job for 12 hours. We make a mental note to take him something hearty later for “dinner,” towards the end of what will be a 22-hour stint behind the wheel of a bucket loader. These country boys—you just can’t get them off their heavy machinery!

Posing for a final selfie with our hands making a heart shape framing the setting sun over the 8’ high banks we have spent the day creating, we go back inside, light a hand-dipped beeswax candle, and lie in savasana pose on the living room floor, rejuvenated by the daily rigors of livin’ the dream.

