

Life in Minnesota 9

Hello everyone. Whoa....can you believe the last time you heard from me/us was in August...of last year? This will be a little long on the eyes, so you might want to print this whole thing out, including the attachments before reading it. For some of you, the attachments of my columns and etc., will probably be a repeat, but for most of you, you will not have seen them. For those of you who have, my apologies. I can't remember whom I sent them to or didn't.

Six days ago it was the coldest day of the year, apparently –15 below with a wind chill factor of 40 below. Since we're such neophytes about the cold, we had to call our friends to find out whether or not it was safe to be out in that kind of weather. We have duffel bags (one in each car) full of gear for just such an event, only we forgot about having, in addition, a down sleeping bag in the car in case you get stuck. The things you have to worry about living out here during the winter.

I don't think I have the gene make-up for this weather. Too many cold grey skies. I don't mind the snow that much, to tell you the truth. It's the lack of sun. I guess I do have SAD syndrome (Seasonal Affective Disorder), but I've discovered what to do to deal with the ensuing "cabin fever." And I think it has something to do with a certain part of your brain that you use when you do something with your hands, particularly if it entails detail work –like needlework.

I can't work in the studio because it's too cold so working with glass is out, but doing fine cross-stitching works just fine. Oh... and I've taught myself to knit –two hats, one for How and I using the same yarn, distinguishable only by the huge pom-pom on mine. I've crocheted all my life, but never learned to knit. I want to design some colorful snazzy sweaters for How.

Something one does notice around here is the amount of fabric stores and needlework supplies available. You see quilts everywhere so it occurred to me that since it seems so prevalent in the Midwest probably because of severe winters, women do needlework to deal with depression or the blues. So, I decided to make a Wedding Ring quilt. I'm no doctor, but I bet there's a biological element going on here that serves the purposes of dealing with boredom/depression and having plenty of warm comforters/quilts as a bonus.

But in some ways, it's not enough to deal with the pervasive depression. Too many changes to deal with in too short of time.

Some of you don't know that How got laid off AGAIN in September and because of the holidays and it being a bad quarter all around for everyone, no one was doing any hiring. How is meeting with all these headhunters, but little good comes out of it other than they think he 'walks on water.' That's great! Thanks for the compliment...just shut up and place him somewhere. How has been interviewing, but nothing he's interested in yet to make him jump. There is a possible job on the horizon, but the company interested in How is waiting on signed purchase orders before hiring, but we're not waiting or counting on it.

Fortunately, we have the breathing space (money) to be picky, but that means less money in our retirement account. I don't like that idea, but there it is. Meanwhile, How is taking classes at the university (paid for by the unemployment department) to get certified in FDA requirements and medical device development. He thought it was going to be boring as hell, but to his surprise, it isn't.

And, he's networking going to industry conferences and etc., and is making some valuable contacts in the process. Both the University of Minnesota and the University of St. Thomas want How to do some "adjunct" teaching in their respective engineering departments. He has already done a couple of lectures.

Regarding more changes, we found out that our dear friends, who largely influenced our moving here, has decided to sell the resort they've run for 35 years and move to Bemidji, where we almost landed. So that means bye-bye to our cabin get-away.' Whouda thunk' it was so important to our lives? First, our house and lives in Santa Cruz, now Cry of the Loon Lodge. Strangely at the same time, we're happy for our friends because now they won't have to work so hard. 35 years is enough. But still....it's sad.

I recently terminated sessions with a therapist I was seeing to deal with the depression. I've decided that I'm just going to have to live with it. Besides, I'd much prefer seeing him socially rather than professionally. He's a

real mensch, warm, empathically gifted, affectionate and extremely funny. We were talking one time about aches and pains and he told me his aunt wryly commented, "Getting old isn't for wimps." I nearly fell out of my chair. I found that I was going to see him more to be in his company. He's the kind of rare jewel, a good friend you can count on one hand that I need in my life and there aren't many of those. No surprise to any of you of course that How is one of those rare jewels I can count on.

As for me, I know that in 10 years or so, we will move back. How is happy here; I am not, but that's not important. When it's your soul mate, you have to make sacrifices and it's not a burden to me to do this. Well...let's back that up and say, it will only feel worse during the winter months. I don't like the staid and reserved nature of Minnesotans, who are Minnesota "nice" on the outside, the worst kind of political correctness I think, and Minnesota "ice" on the inside. I know that's a terrible thing to say, but it's not news to self-aware Minnesotans. I thought it was me and the "California thing," but it isn't my imagination.

I don't know what my image of Minnesota was other than every person I met from Minnesota was nice? Would you have imagined, for example, that country music is the radio mainstay? I sure didn't –not that that's bad, mind you, it's just that I thought country was, well....southern style music, you know...south of the Mason Dixon line, not North Country.

I notice that Minnesotans on average drive only American-made cars. Tons of trucks too, but American made. It's very rare to see Toyotas or Hondas or what I call fuel-efficient cars. Everything is big –SUV's, trucks, vans and sedans. Gas is slightly under \$3. How that's manageable given the national average these days is beyond me.

Highway billboards are filled with large cute pictures of babies, but then you catch the fine print as you wiz by and realize that the message is from Pro-Choice America. You want to talk about indoctrination? Do you know that as much as I love children, love them being born and everything, it makes me furious about the subliminal message being pressed upon women about who owns their bodies? But those billboards are everywhere.

I also was not prepared for the enormous Christian content of my cable TV. Remember, we pay for cable, which is called Mediacom, much like Comcast (probably the same company) to the tune of about \$86 per month (I know, that's outrageous), with HBO thrown in. You can scroll through all the cable channels and invariably a Christian service is on those channels and we're paying for it. It feels like indoctrination without a choice. Where are temple services, for example? If you're going to have religious cable stations, wouldn't you imagine you could find one of your denomination or heritage? No can do.

Then there are the images of a very vibrant Muslim community, particularly Somalis working everywhere, driving cabs, being a Starbucks barista, you name it –and I thought California was multi-cultural. There is also a huge orthodox Jewish community wearing *payehs*. *Payehs* in Minnesota? But you see them only in the Minneapolis Metro area.

And this you'll find interesting...a lot of airport cab drivers are Muslim and a debate has ensued about their declining to pick-up customers carrying liquor, or if they're a grocery store cashier, refusing to scan pork products. What do you do? One thing I do like to hear is that because they pray five times a day, some businesses will set aside the lunch room, for example, for prayer gatherings. That's extremely accommodating, but how far is too far?

Oh, the local newspaper in my area, which serves a population of slightly over 100,000? It prints all of my columns pretty much as is, but I can't say "Oh, God" or "damn." They will censor it with another exclamation that sounds like we're still living in the 1950's. I don't call it a newspaper, really. It's the family photo album with Johnny and his sports team and Tiffany and her court in full blown tiaras. Investigative reporting? What's that?... which explains and has a direct bearing upon the lack of any political discourse, stunting a less than informed citizenry. So as a consequence, I don't like their rigged system of politics either.

I don't like the relative non-activism of the Jewish community. Apparently, memories of Nazis marching down main street Minneapolis will never go away or move them to stand up for anything. Sometimes the main Minnesota paper, the Star Tribune, says stupid things that Jews tacitly don't confront. That drives me nuts.

However, when they do speak, it is through one organization, the Jewish Community Relations Council... like the time they complained about Bishop Tutu coming to speak at the University of St. Thomas. Why? Because he made comments about Israel's treatment of Palestinians and the lack of social justice on that score. Are Jews a monolithic people? This man's whole life has been about justice and one speech taken out of context gets skewed as anti-Israel so he had to be uninvited by the college president? What happened to academic freedom? George Orwell once said, "In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth becomes an act of rebellion." Taken together, it's more depressing to think I'm angrier with my Jewish community than I am about Minnesota life here.

A large portion of Minnesotans are of German ancestry, not just Scandinavian. Also, I think perhaps there is something about the cold weather or Minnesota's geographical location that fosters cut-off, reserved behavior. Comprised mostly of Lutherans, none of the churches –or synagogues for that matter, integrates or talks to each other. What's with that? How can you get eleven congregations in Howard Lake to communicate on common ground about a grocery store? That's why I stay in my house or go only to rehearsals/services or shopping for groceries out of town. That's the extent of my own interaction in the community and that's just SO not me as all of you know.

Oh, one other thing. I had a bit of an accident. There is a winding curve around the lake as I leave the house and a huge semi was coming my way, partially driving on my side of the road, so guess what I did? I swerved to the right and proceeded to go down an embankment right into frozen Howard Lake. Yup, bent up a wheel well, but I came out of it relatively unscathed. This will be news to a lot of you who are family members because I didn't make a big thing out of it, although it scared the crap out of How, as you can imagine. Actually, I went about my day as if nothing happened and it felt like nothing happened, but to How and Moana? Moana I think, was ready to fly out, pack me up and bring me home again, "Enough of this foolishness, don't you know." No, I don't talk like that...yet!

Finally, this last Saturday, How and I went to see Barack Obama at the Target center, which holds 18,000 people. They gave out over 20,000 tickets in over a 24-hour period and they said the doors would be open at 1:30pm. We got there at 12:30, thinking we were so clever. Oh, my God...you never saw so many people in your life. Lined up from all directions (north, south, east and west) of the building with lines and lines of people waiting to get in. You'd think the Beatles were town.

Fortunately, we were in the skyway yet stood for 2 ½ hours, got seated with an excellent view of the stage and waited another 2 hours seated before he came out at 4pm and spoke for one glorious hour. If he is nothing else, he's one hell of a motivational speaker. The place was packed literally to the ceiling, well over 20,000 people, screaming at the top of their lungs, clapping on their feet –an absolutely electrifying moment in history, and we were there. He really raised the roof when he told us there is a senate tradition that when you inherit a desk, you as a senator must scratch your name underneath the desk top. Scratched under his desk was the name Paul Wellstone.

He has got to be our next president, but is our nation that lucky? I don't think so. I just hope security (and there were plenty of Secret Service people surrounding him) can keep him alive. I actually worry about that now; what a horrible thing to think about.

Well, I better close this. As an additional treat, enclosed are my latest column(s) and a response I did as a private citizen in the "Letter to the Editor" section because an idiot state representative wrote an article about healthcare being a "personal responsibility" –a treatise right out of the insurance company handbook. I guess they're worried about losing out on the "crack cocaine" habit of private healthcare money they have all become junkies on. I went a little nuts when I read his article. Anyway, I hope you enjoy the read, that is, all of it and let me know how you are doing. In all this snow and grey weather, any news on the home front is a blessing. You do want to help me from going nuts, don't you? ©....Love always, Maria

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