

Viewpoints

Autumn impressions, winter approaches

Halloween is sure a big deal around here. Well, it's a big deal in California too, but not to the extent Minnesotans use their creativity and freedom to express it.

What sets them apart are the brilliantly staged outdoor presentations or elaborate displays some folks put out on their front lawns or porches.

For example, on a walk through Golden Valley's neighborhood one day, we came upon a standout "confection" that was in a small park nestled inside of a very large and ritzy cul-de-sac. We are talking multi-million dollar homes here. It was worthy of a Hollywood set, spectacularly and splendidly adorned, and no doubt, pricey. But hey, what a feast for the eyes it was. I have seen magnificent Christmas crèches that pale by comparison.

The entire scene was coordinated entirely in fall colors, browns and greens, oranges and yellows with the smattering of black witch hats and loads of overhead dangling bats. There were semi-stacked and strewn bales of hay, full sized straw men and women in large straw hats, with pitchforks and other farm implements in hand, wearing overalls and gingham shirts, and country style dresses and aprons. They even had real shoes on their feet.

Garnished with horns of plenty (plastic, but authentic looking) that framed the scene, there were wooden wheel barrels brimming with Indian corn, dozens of carved pumpkins, stuffed gunny sacks, dancing ghosts holding hands in billowing white sheets (don't ask me how they did it), tons of candles and swags of amber colored leaves on fall branches strategically placed like you might see in department store windows.

This had a designer's touch to it, a salute to the Halloween and Thanks-

Musings of a transplant Maria Stolz Howard Lake

giving season.

It wasn't just in this area that was bodaciously outfitted and fun; these were typical presentations you saw everywhere you went walking the neighborhoods or driving in your car. Howard Lake was no exception. They were clever, whimsical and full of artistry. Your cheeks just ached from all the smiling.

I told my husband that there was no way such displays would survive the virulent graffiti, vandalism, if not outright theft expected in some California neighborhoods. California's young people could learn a thing or two about Midwestern manners.

What an extraordinary thing it is to realize that you can do such wonderfully staged expressions of holiday celebrations, and leave it all out for the entire world to see and rest assured it will remain relatively intact and unscathed. I now know that fall in Minnesota is my favorite season.

Can you feel the crisp cold air in your face? Winter is right around the corner. You can almost feel it. The snow flurries and then full snow will be here, maybe within days before Thanksgiving. My husband said he is actually looking forward to it.

You can literally see the color of the landscape draining out of sight, leaving behind brown branches devoid of leaves with grey overcast skies.

I guess it should be no surprise that I feel a dampening of spirit coming on. We have not been through a full winter in Minnesota yet, so it will be

interesting to see if I am one of those people who get sad or depressed when there is little sun. They call it Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). How appropriate, an acronym that says what it means.

One good thing, however, that is likely to occur is that I will become an obsessive baking fool. Something about cold weather makes you want to bake bread all day.

When we had days of cold rain in California, I would whip out my recipes and bake wheat bread, meat filled buns, challah (Jewish egg bread), torts, pies, cookies, you name it. Enough carbohydrates to put you in a diabetic coma, but who's counting?

Another cold weather inducement will be getting reacquainted with my PFAFF 1471 computerized sewing machine. It does everything but my laundry. Thankfully, there are enough fabric stores around to shop at. In California where we lived, they are as rare as asparagus in winter. When I discovered Mills Textiles, I thought I died and went to heaven. Quilting anyone?

In any case, I don't feel as bright or cheery these days. I hope it's a passing phase because we have spring to look forward to, right? As poets talk about winter as the dying of things that forge the hope of things to come, let me leave you with this thought:

A little four-year old boy's dog died and his parents were worried about how he would deal with the loss. As they tried to comfort their son, the boy said, "People are born so that they can learn how to live a good life, like loving everybody all the time and being nice, right?" The four-year old continued, "Well, dogs already know how to do that, so they don't have to stay as long." Now does that make your day or what?