

The beautiful season



PHOTO BY EMILY MCELLIGOTT

The lake is ever-changing in winter, depending on the skies and light of the day. It's one of the things that makes the season magical to our writer.

by Marci Diehl

I have to make a confession: I like winter.

At one time, I lived by the ocean in north Florida, where there are (maybe) two seasons—sweater weather, and unbearably hot and humid. The best thing about winter was the fog that would roll in, so thick that visibility was four feet or less, like a whiteout of snow at home. My homesick Yankee heart would lift.

To be in Canandaigua in the winter is a joy to me. I wake in the dark and bundle up to walk my dog in the peace and stillness of early morning. Streetlights illuminate the wet, inky outlines of tree branches. Lights are on in kitchens and living rooms; here and there, a car is warming in a driveway. We meet some fellow “dog friends.” A few silent runners go by, hoods pulled up like monks on their way to matins.

It feels good to come back into a warm house, kick off my boots and make breakfast as the sun rises in streaks of orange and fuchsia to the east over Gorham and Hopewell.

I think our winter skies are beautiful—

ever-changing, full of mood and drama, studded with whipped-cream clouds that glow in the pale winter sun or as blue as the hydrangeas sleeping in the ground at Sonnenberg. Just as I once watched the Florida skies change the Atlantic from navy to blue-green to steel gray, so winter changes our lake. The wooded hills that surround it are stripped of foliage, sloping in shades of brown and charcoal. The water looks moss-green one day, blue-gray another, nearly black the next.

The lights at Bristol Mountain glow in the night to the southwest, bouncing off the white ski slopes. The towns sparkle with lights, and even on the most miserably wet and cold day, there are hot meals waiting in little cafés from Victor to Naples; lots of cozy places full of friendly people.

And the holidays ... Lights are laced through the trees on Main Street and deck storefront windows. Wreaths hang from lampposts or festoon docks on the lakeside. On my dark morning walks, I admire the outdoor lighting artistry of neighbors and catch glimpses of Christmas trees winking

happily within. It feels like being in a movie set to walk into local shops to find the perfect little gift—but this most happy place is real!

The Christmas tree sales pop up in churchyards, manned by Scouts and their hardy parents (when we lived in Florida, we bought a live tree trucked in from the north—in the hot parking lot of a shopping center by the beach). Across the countryside, fields rest and steam rises off the backs of dairy cows in the milking barns of Phelps, Manchester and Bloomfield. Rows of empty vineyards line the hills overlooking the lake, like bars of music waiting to be written again in the summer. The skeleton stems of thistle and chamomile poke through frozen mounds along the roadsides while brown trout, perch and bass sleep in the deep lake.

It's time for fleece mittens and flannel sheets. Gingerbread and hot chocolate. Sledding down a little hill with my grandson. Watching the pure joy of my dog catching a snowball...

It's time to love winter again. ■