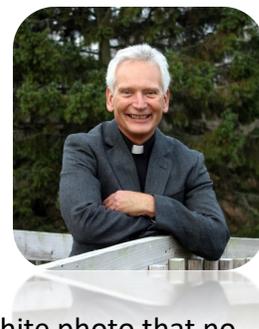


A NOTE FROM FATHER PHIL



My year would be diminished without winter. It is one of the four seasons and I like them all. Although, I will have to admit, in my perfect world, each season would be three months long. Spring and Fall always get gyped.

I like the simplicity of winter. It has a beauty all its own, like a striking black and white photo that no color print could capture.

I like the relative quiet of winter, especially in the evenings.

I sleep better during the winter. I am sure the cold and longer nights have something to with it. I curl up under a mountain of blankets, quilts, comforters and afghans. Can't do that in the summer.

I appreciate the birds that stay in Michigan with me during the winter months especially the cardinals that add a little color to the backdrop of whites and grays. The other day, I heard one singing from the top of my neighbor's TV antenna. It cheered me up.

I like the comfort foods of winter especially hearty soups and stews. For breakfast, a bowl of oatmeal with some raisins and walnuts is a favorite. A cup of Hot Chocolate is always a welcome treat.

I like to cross country ski. Near my house is a trail that runs along the Grand River. Beautiful. I usually have the trail to myself. That is a good thing, because I never learned how to stop when going down a hill. Thankfully the trail is mostly flat.

In the winter I can tell when Chum, my nutty friend, has stopped by for a treat. His little tracks are right outside my backdoor or on my window sill.

When it is snowing at night I like to look out at the streetlight across from my house. I find the scene calming, sometimes mesmerizing, like waves on the Big Lake or flames in a fireplace.

I love a snow day. It is an unexpected gift. An opportunity to catch up on a few things or simply to relax. Snow days remind me of my childhood when my brother, sister and I would listen to Bruce Grant on WOOD radio. The announcer would read through all the school closings. Sometimes it was a long list and took up much of his show. I remember wishing I went to school at Saint Sebastian's because it closed more often than Blessed Sacrament where I went to school.

I enjoy watching kids build snowmen, play snow tag, make snow angels and wage a friendly snowball fight. Sometimes I join them. I recall when my godson came over one afternoon and we did all of those things. When his dad came to pick him up he said, "Father Phil, I wish I could be 11 forever and play with you in your backyard." Darn kid made me choke up. Winter reminds me of that magical afternoon.

I find that shoveling snow is good exercise. Maybe too good. Like when the mounds at the end of the driveway are taller than I am. It's a bit much for this old man to be throwing snow over my head. I always manage to lose a few pounds during the winter. Odd, I know. Maybe snow shoveling has something to do with it.

Once a friend of mine called and asked if I wanted to go to Florida with him at the end of January. I managed to convince him that going to Quebec for an ice sculpting festival would be more fun. I don't know if he's ever forgiven me. Other winter vacations have really been winter vacations: Sweden, Norway, Iceland, China. I must be wired differently.

While I do not like driving on icy roads, I do like winter. For me, It really does create a wonderland!