

A Day of Hope and Sunshine

a true story by Jane M. Martin

“Kids! Come! Quickly! *Come here right now!*”

I called to my young children as I opened the door from the living room to our enclosed front porch. Corinne, age 5, and Harrison, 2, left their places at the kitchen table and scurried to the front of the house.

“The sun’s out! Hurry!”

When I had first moved to Holland, Michigan, I was told by natives that here the sun is, simply, barely seen in January. Of course, I didn’t believe such a thing. After all, I grew up in Chicago where the winters are cold and snowy. Michigan was in the same Midwest, on the same Lake Michigan, so this thing they were saying—this “no sun” thing sounded ridiculous to me. It just couldn’t be.

What I didn’t understand was that in mid winter the cold, dry air mass moves from the north / northwest across the lake, gathering moisture along the way. Once they reach the shore the clouds become stalled over the warmer land, releasing the moisture they have gathered on the way. It is not unusual for it to snow non-stop, for days and days on the lakeshore. Sun and clear roads might be only five miles inland, but near the lake its cloudy. In the long month of January, on the lakeshore, time of sunshine is not measured in days, or hours, but sometimes in just minutes. The meteorologists told us that one year not long ago there was 17 minutes of sunshine in the month of January. That’s just 17 minutes in all of 31 days.

So I learned. And then, nine dreary Januarys later after I moved to Holland, I found myself in a big old wonderful, fixer-upper house working my first shift for the day as Mom – until I went to my other job as respiratory therapist from three to eleven-thirty pm and often later. Yes, my life was full, very full, and I was tired, very tired, but too badly needed – and too broke – to sleep. I would sleep some other time. Some other year. Some other decade.

That January morning I was cleaning in the living room. My children were at the kitchen table in the back of the house, playing with Play-Doh. Then it came. The sun. Emerging from an opaque gray sky, heavy in the West with the next big snow, *it came*. And as if some great angel had flown by, unzipping this thick ceiling, this dull daytime sky, sunlight poured out upon us, and the foot deep snow blanketing our world. Suddenly the world was sparkling – brilliant – and a million glittering specks twinkled on the snow’s crusty surface.

“Ahhhhh...Isn’t it beautiful?” I tossed back my head to take in the warmth streaming through the south and east facing windows of our old unheated front porch. We stood there, the three of us, no thought to how cold we were, soaking in the sunshine, as rare as it was, as if through every pore its beauty infused us with comfort and light.

My children’s tiny fingertips blanched as they grasped the white painted windowsill. Little Harry stood on tip-toe, his nose pressed against the icy window pane. The kids stood silent, their wispy white blond hair illuminated as if to form halos, their blue / green pupils large with light and pleasure, taking in the scene.

Then it was gone. After five grand and marvelous minutes of sunshine we were left again for five days with, again, dull and dirty white-gray earth and road, milky gray sky, and brown barren trees. But the fleeting time of sun was more than we had most January days. *It was simply – what we had*. We noticed it, we appreciated it, we treasured it.

Not long after this happened I relayed this experience to a friend in another region of the country saying, “Pretty pathetic that here we have to drop everything and run to the window when the sun comes out, huh?”

Reflecting later on my own words, though, I realized that sometimes when you *don’t* have something, when you are without it, you develop a much greater capacity to appreciate it.

Pulmonary patients have often described to me the amazing, liberating experience, sometimes following treatment, medication, or even surgery, of being able to take in that wonderful, full, deep breath. They say, “I felt myself taking a big deep breath like I hadn’t been able to in such a long, long time. It was an incredible feeling! You know, people who don’t have breathing

problems just don't have *any idea* what it is like. They can't possibly understand how good it feels. They take their breathing for granted.”

Rare, fleeting, sometimes simple pleasures can hold great meaning to us, especially because of their rareness, their brevity, their simplicity.

Dear friends, do your best to seek joy in every day. Find it, take note of it, cherish it, celebrate it! Life with pulmonary disease is about opening the doors of ourselves to invite joy to enter, to stay awhile, to live within us as much as possible – and ultimately to help carry us through the dull gray sky days of life.

My hope is that you will find a way to learn how to make it through your bad air days, your blue days, and hard times. That no matter where you live you will find Sunshine in the cold and dreary January days of your life, and Hope for your waiting and willing heart.