

Danville News Column  
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“Sabbath Snow Days”  
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Yes, we’re going to experience weather tomorrow. We’re going to have weather conditions. Well, of course we are. The question is: which weather? Inclement? Clement?

Surprise! 12 inches of snow. Philadelphia Airport closed. 50 car pile up in Virginia. Storm watch. Time to tune in the National Weather Service Forecast Office. Time for PennDot weather alerts, watches, advisories.

Do you keep a weather emergency kit? When I lived in up-state New York, I learnt to make sure my car was blizzard ready. Folks often got trapped. Sometimes they’d die because, trying to keep warm, they’d crank the windows shut tight. Wrong move. You keep the windows cracked with a sleeping bag handy. Plus snacks, water, a bag of kitty litter, coins for a pay phone, flashlight, jumper cables, flares, ice-scraper, and a snow shovel. It’s cold digging yourself out of a snow drift using a torn off sun visor.

Surprise! You wake to 12 inches of snow, school closings, and it’ll take hours till the crew ploughs your road. It’s a Snow Day Sabbath! The outside world gets suspended. Well, some must work: nurses, electrical linesmen, road-crews. But the rest of us are lucky.

We pack emergency kits for cars. I recommend one for Snow Day Sabbaths. Mine includes something good to sip, a good book, plus groceries for an Eggs Benedict brunch.

Time to shut down, because you’ve been shut off. Friends trudge over. Fire in the fireplace.

These are Etch-A-Sketch days. You’ve been frantically twisting those knobs for weeks, controlling the stylus, dragging it across the screen, forming what designs you must. This tiresome lineography of life: one continuous line, never relaxing the stylus, on and on and on till the whole screen becomes one dark scribble, the patterns indistinguishable, just a mess.

Until arrives a surprising Snow Day Sabbath. Time to turn the Etch-A-Sketch upside down, shake it gladly; the clotted beads smooth out and the aluminum powder refills the screen. Life again comes clean.

Such is the value of less as more. We experience God’s grace more by subtraction than by addition.

Of course, Sabbath days are designed to be 1 of 7. Never a habit, better a respite. Because two days being idle too easily incarcerates into three. Now I'm trapped rather than free.

For some days I feel like an old weathered ship that's stuck in the tidal basin at low tide, growing barnacles, rusting away, decks slippery from the mildew of inertia, algae creeping up the planks. Still a good ship, but it just ain't going nowhere. See the others sailing on. If nothing is done, you're no better than Stan Roger's *Blue Dolphin* stuck in the mud, hungry for a scrap of sail that never will come, gone from "dowdy to derelict."

This ship's seen some seas in its day. You might not guess now but back in the 80's it weathered a hurricane or two. Welds blew, a few bolts too, the decks buckled a bit, but still made it through.

When this ship first set sail, it was something to see. At times scary to watch. It never was content sailing with the fleet. It tossed the sextant overboard and instead chose a star.

Some admire banners and flags, eyes drawn to the flutter, the pretty brass and glass. Those who know, know to look below. This ship split the waves. Dolphins surfed in its wake.

Well now, I bet it still could handle a 40 knot wind. Number 8 on your Beaufort Wind Scale. Sturdy enough yet to handle a gale. Or a full head of steam. Its timbers still got dreams, though the boilers might leak and pipes kick. Even though the wheel may feel a little slack and the rudder doesn't answer quite so quick.

Too many lost souls believe refreshment means skirting, conjuring a little excitement or thrill, when best is that there's just a job to get done. A man just wants to feel worthwhile, not tucked in, snug, safe. That's why there's six for work, one for coming clean. There's plenty to do, if you would just stoke up and get around to doing it. It sure won't happen staring at the computer waiting out the day with solitaire, Facebook, emails.

Erosive here to commiserate, like barnacles and rot fouling the spirit with self-hate. Languor has a way of being toxic, this lying around feeling sorry for yourself, when it's time to start swinging away at life and kiss the blood away from your knuckles.