



The Bunkhouse Chronicle

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Columnist

Slush

This morning I woke up at 4 a.m. This is earlier than usual but I was prompted by the insistent wet-nose poking of our oldest dog, Buddy, who is nearly blind, mostly deaf, and recovering from a nearly fatal injury to his elbow that was probably my fault. He's 14, and even if the wound manages to completely heal we are, all of us, aware that the long good-night is not so very far away.

In a way, he's become slushy, as hard as that is to accept. But if it's hard, it's also true, and so we indulge him in whatever ways we can, which means that I got the message, rolled out of bed, slipped into my moccasins, and let him outside.

And standing with the door open, with no small

measure of frustration I saw that it was snowing on the porch like a ticker-tape parade.

Again.

I had been tuned out of the weather forecast, having mostly given up on this winter's predictions as just more bad news, and digesting the wildly divergent results much in the same way I have come to view our national politics: entirely too loud, often obscenely wrong, routinely annoying, and completely beyond my ability to influence.

I've been trying, honestly, to embrace the suck with enthusiasm, and to thrive within the available margins, but mostly I've stopped caring too much about either monolithic and impersonal apparatus — the weather or the government — except as they directly affect my efforts to get things done.

And later today, as it occasionally does, the sun came out. The new snowfall melted quickly and took some of the old stuff with it. That was a win for those of us who, by design, maintain long lists of things to do outside. But it's increasingly clear that recently, as a ground-based fact in our local life, and in our national dialogue, that we have done little more than triumphantly

achieve the season of slush.

The problem with slush is that it nurtures a claim to be many things, but really isn't anything. It isn't snow, exactly, it isn't really ice, and it isn't quite a warm puddle on the asphalt. On top of that, it's usually filthy, and backgrounds our daily life like blitzkrieg photos of Polish border towns in 1939. That is to say, it exists entirely in degrees of gray, is uniformly ugly, and deeply conflicted.

I'm really not trying to be dour — though it's possible I'm edging up to a rant — but let's at least be honest about one thing: the "300 days of sunshine" meme was invented in a Bend tourists' guide in the 1930s. It isn't true at all — the "average days of sunshine" trope exists somewhere closer to half of that — and it has likely not been true since the Pleistocene.

"300 Days of Sunshine" is an effective tool for real estate sales, and stocking our local hotels and forests with the paying camper-van and flip-flop set, but it's also propaganda, and this winter has been particularly long and strenuous. Many of us have had slush creeping into the attics and walls of our homes, wrecking drywall, soaking insulation, buckling wood floors, and at least one

family I know is actively pumping a pond out of their basement.

Some of us have even come to embrace the people at Service Master as long-lost cousins — or something. And I feel confident I speak for many others when I say that if I never hear the words "ice" and "dam" used in the same sentence again, I will have lived a fantastic life.

And, however faintly, I can hear the rest of you. It sounds like an admonishment to quit whining. And you would be right about that. It really isn't my style, and rest assured I don't like doing it. But then again, there is a great deal of truth in Gordon Tall's line from Terrence Malick's movie adaption of "The Thin Red Line": "The only time you should start worrying about a soldier is when they stop bitchin'." So, there's that to consider.

In the meantime, we have

the slush. We probably have weeks of it ahead. And mud. Lots of mud. In the grand picture of our Republic it appears likely we have a decade or so before the slush and mud form into something useful. And again, maybe that has always been the case. Maybe that's the quiet lesson history keeps trying to show us, if we can believe those who write it.

So we try to take the lessons, and the temporary hardships for what they are: First-World problems. But for us, here on our slushy little rancho in the pines, with our chickens and horses and gardens, it just keeps coming back to those things we care most about — in this case an old dog whose age has made his mind and his body slushy, who we love and respect without pre-conditions, and who we can just barely stand the thought of living without.

So. Let it snow.

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