

Small Town, Big World: Wondering Through Winter in the Forest

By Britt Benson Steele

It's winter in our community, and we've had our fair share of seasonal rain, but we've also had some delightful snow. Having grown up in Minnesota, snow feels like home. It slows me down and gets me thinking about how life asks different things of us in different seasons. For me, when it snows, I am often carried back in my mind to a particular travel experience — not overseas, but in our very own "back yard," Crater Lake.

About fifteen years ago, I went with a friend for a weekend trip to Crater Lake National Park in the mountains of Southern Oregon. We decided to take a snowshoe tour, as it was a bright and sunny day. About twenty minutes into our tour, the ranger stopped and turned to our group, "Do you see all those evergreen sprigs in the meadow?" He waved his arm in the direction of a large clearing. I squinted to see that every 20 feet or so there was a two foot sprig standing on the snow. Someone said, "I bet squirrels or some other critters drag them out in the sun to eat the pine nuts out of the cones." "Nope,"

the ranger shook his head and smiled a little. "Any other ideas?" A woman in the back said, "Perhaps those 75 mile per hour winds you were talking about break off the boughs and blow them out there?" Again, the ranger shakes his head. He says, "Do you know what the average snow fall is per year



in these parts?" A man's voice responds, "I've heard that you get more than 30 feet up here." The ranger nodded and motioned us closer to tell us the secret of the evergreen sprigs. His face animated, he leaned in and said in a loud, eye-brow raising whisper, "Those 'sprigs' you see are not actually sprigs at all. They are the tops of 20 and 30 foot tall living trees that are

buried beneath the snow. That which looks like a clearing, or a meadow, is actually a forest of young evergreen trees."

We were standing on top of a forest. The trees were living through the cold, dark, winter, with just their tiny little tops getting nourishment from the sun. They could do nothing but surrender to the cold. As far as we know, they didn't complain. They didn't lament the "good times." They waited, and in their own way, they took full advantage of the darkness.

Now, we aren't trees, but we are affected by the seasons, and it is my sense that we can get ourselves into trouble when we expect energy and affect to be the same every day. We too have "winters" on the inside. Winter is when the body longs to rest more, eat slow-cooked, deeply nourishing foods, and revel in stillness and reflection. This isn't a "bad" thing. It's actually a "natural" thing. And it just may be nature's way of reminding us that we are more connected to the natural world than we ever imagined.

Where Do You Read The Voice?



Above: Henry Langmaid took time out from hitting the slopes at Ski Sundown in Hartford, CT to catch up on the news from home.

Below: Janine Manny, a loyal Voice reader from Clatskanie, took the December 17 issue with her to Haiti in January. "I go every year on a medical mission, and had a friend snap a photo of me reading Vernonia's Voice at Wahoo Bay when we took a break from clinics." Thanks Janine!



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