

A Winter Wonderland

It is winter. There is new fallen snow on the ground. Everything is white and fresh and clean. The sun has come out and the snow is sparkling. The temperature has warmed up to 27 degrees. There is no blustery wind today. There are small animal prints in the snow from the squirrels and the birds, but no human has ventured onto the property to walk the grounds. Perhaps they are all busy shoveling snow. There are no school children walking hurriedly across my property because the schools are closed. The grave markers, chapel, mausoleums, and the trees seem to wear permanent caps of snow.



There have been many snowfalls this year, with an early one in November. The November snowfall, as the first of the season, was exciting to see with anticipations of Christmas soon to come. However, the early snow came when the leaves were still on the trees and bushes, and the heavy, wet snow snapped small limbs that couldn't support the weight. The snow quickly melted. Unfortunately the wet, soggy fallen leaves made raking and vacuuming very difficult.

After many snowfalls since November, the snow has begun to pile up everywhere. Outside my wall on Market Street, there is so much snow, the neighbors don't know where to pile it in order to park their cars. Soon my workers will be out shoveling off my long, long, sidewalk. With three city blocks from 12th Street to 15th Street, it is a strenuous job requiring many man hours. They have a snow blower, but heavy snow or layers of snow and ice make it impossible to use the snow blower. Even with a light snow, the uneven sidewalk makes it difficult whether snow blowing or shoveling. When it gets too high and heavy from several snow storms back to back, my trustees have to hire a person with a bobcat to remove it. Market Street is a snow emergency route and the snow is quickly plowed; but the road has now turned slushy with ugly grey snow. However, here inside my wall, the snow is still untouched and pristine. Norm K. plows the asphalt roads on my property, but I think he has the easier job, sitting inside his nice warm cab.



While I consider myself quite beautiful after a new fallen snow, I am equally stunning after a winter rain has fallen and the freezing temperature has turned everything to ice. The ice and icicles dazzle in the brilliance of the sun when it comes out, and some even cast a rainbow reflection. There may be icicles hanging off the gutters of the chapel and some may even be hanging off the mausoleums, and off the urns and other accessories that adorn some of the monuments. It can be lonely on days like this because no one comes to see my brilliant light show. The ice, like the snow keeps visitors and school children off my property. And it's a good thing, because my roads and paths are slick with ice and no one should be driving or walking on them. I hope there isn't a funeral and burial during this icy time, because it makes grave digging very difficult to accomplish even with heavy equipment. And it becomes extremely hazardous, if not impossible, to have the family hold the service at the burial site or even in the chapel.

On other winter overcast days, a high wind chill factor might cause many people to consider the day as dismal, depressing, and even frightful, but I can be enchanting. There may be a light fog or vapor coming off the pond from the difference in land and air temperature. If the pond has water in it, it will be frozen. If there is any loose snow that is not frozen or packed down, the winds swirl it over the markers and dance it along the roads and paths.

The squirrels, with windblown fur and tails askew are racing from tree to tree looking for their acorn stash; the winter birds are searching for food; the groundhogs are underground in hibernation. The branches of the trees are flailing and whipping overhead, and some of the large, old trees appear to be groaning and moaning as the wind howls through their branches. If snow occurs with the gusting winds, a blizzard or white-out hides grave markers and trees alike, as it plays a hide and seek game of now you see me, now you don't.



This is one of the most vulnerable times for me because the weight of the snow and ice coupled with a heavy wind can break or damage the tree branches. While these weather conditions are indeed dreary and few persons venture out, the wildness and exuberance of the wind and snow rushing over and around the markers, buildings, and trees makes it a magical place of distortion and deception as things appear and disappear again.

Sometime in March when the weather seems to be getting a little warmer and some of the snow may be melting, Frank Snyder, DCNR, and Joe Orlowski, Shade Tree Commission, will visit me and prune some of the low hanging tree limbs. They use my property and my trees to offer an educational one-half day seminar on how to care for and prune trees. The session is free and open to the public and to the municipalities.



The Pottsville High School Ecology Club also attends the session, as does the cemetery workers. Since it is easier to see the limbs and the trunks of the trees in the winter, Frank and Joe will take the time to walk the property to identify dead and diseased trees that may have to be cut down and removed during the year. The removal of dead trees and the planting of new trees on Arbor Day is part of my tree replacement program that was initiated in 1999 to preserve and protect the natural environment of my garden cemetery.

You may think that I am dead or asleep in hibernation during the winter months with barren trees, frozen grounds, and cold winds; but look closer, I am alive. I am a garden cemetery of brisk winds, deep or swirling snow, glittering frost and ice, sparkling sunshine and sometimes dreary, damp, and chilly days, leafless trees showing many limbs and forked or gnarled trunks, snow capped grave markers and shimmering evergreens, peace, quiet, and solitude, at one with the cold harsh elements. If you look closely at me in the winter time you see my stark inner beauty, what lies beneath when the lush green grass, leafy and flowering trees and shrubs, and the multitude of birds of summer are stripped away. If you haven't visited me or walked my grounds, then I invite you to come and walk with me in the winter season of my life.

