

View from Menzies Mountain
By Bruce Menzies

“The Stars and the Silence”

Starting into a new year is like heading into strange country with no map to show you what's around the next turn in the trail or what lies behind the hills. December is a season of rest, for this month almost everything in nature is asleep and storing up strength for the job that must be started when spring comes. Many of the animals are dozing away the winter deep in their burrows under rocks or in nests in trees where the squirrels go. A strange and wonderful thing is this winter sleep they call hibernation.

The plants that grew last summer and scattered their seeds to carry on their kind have died, and now January will be shredding all those fallen leaves (that once drifted by my window) and dead grass with icy knives to make new soil to blend with the earth in the spring and nourish the plants and the living trees. That is the way nature works up her own fertilizer and if she didn't, there wouldn't be any forest.

February is about the stars and silence. Menzies Mountain is a good place to sit and listen to the sounds of a great night storm. From the darkness high overhead comes a deep rumbling. It is not the souging of the winds blowing lonely in the oaks and it's not the sound of the gale beating down on my cabin. But every now and then in such a storm there's a lull. Suddenly the wind stops as if someone has shut a great door, and the snow that was streaking horizontal across the window will drift straight down in dead silence for a little time.

Darkness comes early this time of the year. Did you ever walk out on a February night in the woods when the moon is bright? You can actually read by its light and the outlines of hills miles away can be clearly seen. The stars are sparkling blue-white. It makes you think of diamonds flashing, hanging in the beautiful designs on a dark background. The quieter it is the harder you strain your ears without knowing why you're listening. But when the hush is suddenly broken by a sound—the bark of a dog far away, the sound of a big-rig laboring up a distant highway, or maybe the scream of a wild animal, you realize that in the still clear air the range of your hearing has increased tenfold.

It's a very pleasant thing indeed to sit here on Menzies Mountain with Twyla, the woman I've loved for 43 years, on a winter's night, when the wind is fingering at my cabin's window, and listen to the kettle singing to itself over a slow fire. Whenever I boil water the song of the kettle is a song of peace and contentment and home.

So here we go again into another winter season. How many winters have you seen in your lifetime? I've experienced 65 of them—not counting the winter I was born in back in 1948. As wintertime signals the end of a calendar year let's review some of the significant events of this past year. Did any of these things happen to you? A new grand or great-grand baby; received your Medicare card in the mail; changed addresses; applied for your first E-mail address; suffered a major health crisis, laid to rest a spouse or immediate family member—maybe even a favorite pet. All these life events can affect us in significant physical and emotional ways. It's a good reason this winter we need to stay strong in body and strong in faith.

For years songwriters have used the months and seasons of the year as poetic metaphors that compares them to a person's life span from birth to death. Sinatra pined that he was in the "autumn of his years" in *It Was a Very Good Year*. In the song from the Broadway musical, "Knickerbocker Holiday" Weill and Anderson wrote, "It's a long while from May to December, and the days grow short when they reach September." I think we get the picture here—many things in life are time-wasters and when you reach September it's not that far to December—and *we both know what that means!* So, before the days dwindle down to precious few, let's heed the warning of the songs and the Scriptures: "Making the very most of the time, buying up each opportunity." "Don't waste your time on useless work, mere busywork." "Use every chance you have for doing good, because these are evil times" (Ephesians 5:16 AMP, MSG, NCV versions).

Until we meet again on this page in the spring, have a nice winter.

—Bruce Menzies.