

INSIDE AURORA: Groundhog Daze 2017

By Scott Johnston

It was early February, and I was taking what I hoped was one of my last strolls of winter through the Aurora Arboretum. Spying a small figure perched on a bench, I quickly realized that it was Aurora Annie, our Town's weather prognosticating groundhog. As I got closer, I could see she looked depressed.

"Hi, Annie," I said, sitting down next to her. "It's a beautiful day. Why so glum?"

With a sigh, she announced; "It's global warming."

I wasn't expecting this. Climate change seemed a big issue to be occupying the mind of such a small individual.

"Why's that? Are you concerned about potential draughts and the impact on crops?"

"No."

"How about rising water levels and increased flooding?"

"I hadn't thought of that."

Then, she suddenly sat up, eyes wide.

"I live in a hole in the ground."

Jumping to her feet and waving her arms at the surrounding landscape she continued, "This is all flood plain!"

Trying to calm her increasing sense of panic at this new thing to worry about, I quickly changed the subject of a potentially watery future.

"You suggested something else about global warming was on your mind?"

"Yes," she said, sitting down again. "It's my annual weather predictions. They're getting impossible."

"Back in the old days," she explained, "winter would arrive, and that season would be with us for a few months, consistently cold and snowy. Then, it would warm up for good and be spring."

She paused, gazing off with a nostalgic faraway look into seasons past.

"And now?" I prompted, after a long pause.

She shook her head to come back to the present.

"Now the weather see-saws all over the place. This year, December was freezing, with lots of deep snow. Then January was warm with lots of fog and rain, and pretty much melted off all the snow. Now February looks like it's getting colder again."

"I know spring will be here eventually," she concluded, her eyes welling with tears, "but with all these periods alternating between hot and cold, how am I ever supposed to predict if it will be early or late?"

We sat quietly for a minute. I watched the progress of a lady walking her dog on the trail further up the park. Annie sniffed heavily, and blew her nose into a tiny handkerchief.

Then an idea struck me.

"Maybe this is a blessing, not a curse," I said.

She looked over at me.

"Sure. You could use this global warming to your advantage."

"How's that?" she asked, with a pleading look.

"You know, that the new normal is that winter is going to cycle through warm and cold spells."

"Yes."

"So whatever you predict, you'll be right."

"Announce that spring is coming," I continued, warming up to the subject, "and you're covered, as we're bound to get a balmy spell.

Predict we're in for a longer winter, and you know no matter how warm February may get, there will be a coolish dip in temperatures at least once more before it warms up for good."

"You're right either way," I concluded.

"That may work," she said, obviously running the various scenarios through her mind.

"I'm confident that it will," I said, giving her an encouraging smile, and receiving one in return from my furry companion. "You've got nothing to worry about."

Well, maybe she did have to worry about her burrow flooding in the spring thaw. But now that she'd finally cheered up a bit, I wasn't going to remind her about that.

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