

SENIOR SCAPE: Baby It's Cold Outside

By **Jim L. Abram**

Oh, the climatic vagaries of nature.

A wet fall, cold temperatures in December lingering into early January, compounded by heavy snow accumulation and a devastating ice storm were flummoxed by Mother Nature.

I learned a new weather term this winter. 'Frost quakes'. What the hell are frost quakes? How come this is the first time in sixty years I've ever heard of such a phenomenon? Surely it gets cold in the winter year after year, but I've never, ever heard of this until now.

What you heard was the result of a weather phenomenon called a cryoseism, often referred to as an 'ice quake or frost quake.' The boom is caused when water in the ground expands in extreme cold.

Seniors are particularly vulnerable to weather extremes as experienced by the ice storm. My parents are in their mid 80s and they lost power for over a week, as did many seniors in Aurora.

It goes without saying that this is very disruptive and dangerous to our lives. My parents had to go to my sister's house because people north of St John Road were spared the loss of electrical power.

They lost all the food in their refrigerator and freezer. They also lost the normal routines in their day-to-day lives.

Aurora's seniors had to deal with many hazards. Slippery surface conditions made walking or driving relatively impossible. The dangers posed by downed power lines were evident all over town where overhead wires serve us. Then there were the tree limbs crashing down.

I woke up at 3.30 a.m. to the sound of a loud crash. I thought to myself 'there couldn't be lightning could there?'

I took a look out my window only to see my 80 foot ash tree that was on my boulevard now lying across my driveway. Take that, Emerald Ash Borer! No food for you!

Then more crashes as most all trees along the street and many trees in the ravine behind our house came crashing down. The ice storm brought out the best in our neighbours as they chipped in (not a pun) and cleared debris blocking the street and driveways. Special thanks to all who helped, especially Paul, Severio and John just to mention a few.

My friend, Hildegard, also a valued member of the Aurora Seniors' Centre, lives in a seniors building in town. Through condo fees, among other services, they pay for snow to be removed from the parking lot and sidewalks.

Hildegard tells me it was very sad to see seniors out in the parking lot with a shovel in one hand and a cane in the hand, clearing the snow that the plow had piled behind their vehicles in the parking lot.

That being said, many snow removal service providers worked many hours to enable our mobility and good, quality service is very appreciated.

Cold weather can pose serious health hazards to older adults. Falls and other accidents, hypothermia and depression are more common as the temperature drops. The key to safety is prevention. Here a few wise tips.

Watch out for ice and snow! Wear sensible footwear. Don't shovel more snow than is reasonable given the risk to your health. We still need you around after the snow stops! Keep warm too. Arthritis, diabetes, poor circulation, paralysis caused by stroke and many other conditions can cause lack of feeling, especially in the extremities. A diminished response to cold can put seniors at risk for hypothermia.

Be prepared for an emergency. Winter storms can mean power outages and resultant loss of heat, water and telephone services.

Inclement weather can mean difficulty going out for necessary supplies. Be prepared for emergencies: Stock up on food and fresh water. Chats provides frozen emergency food packs that can be heated. Keep batteries, candles, flashlights, Sterno fuel, extra blankets and a battery-operated radio on hand.

Keep your spirits high! Perhaps the most devastating threat to seniors in wintertime is depression. Inclement weather can restrict activities and opportunities to mingle with others. The isolation and loneliness that afflict many seniors become even worse when the weather is harsh. Shorter days mean less sunlight, which can also contribute to depression. To prevent depression socialize at the Aurora Seniors Centre!

Jimmy's last word: If you have an elderly neighbour, check on them.

For more information on the Aurora Seniors' Centre and all it has to offer, drop by 90 John West Way, visit the web site

www.auroraseniors.ca, email auroraseniors@rogers.com or call 905-726-4767 between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. Monday to Friday.