

January, 2009
Loving January

The frivolity of the holiday season is over; sparkling outdoor lights have disappeared leaving us in darkness once again. Snowstorms and floods are behind us, for the moment, as we rush to make sure we're prepared for the next storm. It's still too early to pay attention to those daffodils poking their heads up. The garden's resting, and so am I. January is a time to reflect and restore. Loving January is an acquired taste as Davi Walders tell us in her poem:

To Love January:

*I clasp January to me giddy
with hope for its newborn
cry that clears away the worn
out year like so much tinsel*

*carted off to storage. I love
January's uncluttered room, its
freshly laundered calendar innocent
and white beneath a pure blue sky*

*grazed by bone-clean trees. To love
January is an acquired taste,
like learning to let the tongue
curl around the slow, sweet burn*

*Of Tuaca's golden fire.
I do not want to wait for April
to fall in love, July to run with
a salty sea, October to be crowned*

*in color. I want to drink it all
in now when everything is possible
and I and the world are infants again
babbling, listening for birdsong.*

A new year brings hope and new beginnings. There's a brand new calendar just waiting to be filled--blank pages of possibility. We have a new president who reminds us we have a responsibility to our country and asks us as Americans to do what we can for our fellow citizens and to make an ongoing commitment to our communities. He invites us to rise to the occasion telling us, "Never has it been more important to come together in shared purpose to tackle the common challenges we face."

There's hope in small doings. Small actions can make a huge difference. We can't fix the whole world at once, but we can do what is within our reach. A smile, a

kind word to a neighbor, an offer of help, a loving gesture, a word of encouragement—these small doings can work for a much larger and nobler cause. A writing student tells me she hasn't been writing, but that the time she's spent in my workshop when she was brave enough to read aloud gave her such satisfaction because for a moment she was heard. "Some people go an entire life without being heard," she tells me. I hear from a photographer in Australia I met while traveling in India. He thanks me for the success of his writing career because of a tiny nugget of writing advice I gave him years ago. A neighbor allows her dog to drop by our home for regular visits. Bailey's enthusiasm lifts our spirits and helps heal our hearts after the loss of our own dog. Small doings.

Seed catalogs continue to pour in with promise for that sunny corner spot in the garden, plants to attract butterflies and hummingbirds, the perfect specimen of tomato. From one catalog I learn that average Americans spend about 15% of their annual income on food. With rising food costs, it makes sense to grow some of our own groceries. During World War II, 40% of the nation's produce was grown in home gardens. Gardens helped them through tough times, and can do the same today. A packet of lettuce seed for \$2.95 with 400 seeds in it can provide 320 heads of lettuce. Even if the only thing we grow is fresh herbs, at least we know where they came from.

Anything can happen in winter. It's the one season when we feel called to get ready. It's early, and there are probably more storms around the bend before we can even think spring. Still, just last week I saw a large grouse the size of a pheasant, in the Serviceberry bush. The bird book says they feed upon newly opened leaf buds in spring. Spring? Maybe the grouse knows something I don't. Ah, but then I read that the ruffed grouse grows bristles on its feet during the winter to serve as snowshoes. And this one definitely had snowshoes on.