

Back Trails

Perspectives on People and Nature

John Bulmer

Snow Journey by Jenna Kerwin

There are nights in winter when the air is so still and the snow falls just right that you're fooled into thinking maybe time has altogether stopped. It usually happens at the witching hour. I used to think it was then that the world fell asleep just so my older sister Laura and I could explore it without anybody bothering us.

When the clock struck ten on wintry Saturday nights, Laura and I would ask our mother if we could go for a late-night walk. Our cozy, "Leave it to Beaver" town in Oneida County had little to be afraid of, and so after giving us an hour's curfew, Mom would smile and nod her head "Yes."

Then, like it was Christmas morning and we were sneaking around our presents, we would quietly don our parents' coats—Laura in my mother's and I in my father's—as if wearing their gear instead of our own somehow made the nighttime walk a grander adventure. We would hold our fingers to our lips and hush each other with smiles as we silently exited the "real world" and slipped into our own, almost magical winter wonderland.

Snow falling against the glow of the street lamps always reminded me of something Norman Rockwell might have painted. As our feet carried us through the powder, we whispered and quietly laughed about things most teenage sisters do. The houses along our journey were mostly dark; the streets were deserted—the world was ours to explore.

Our conversations were only occasionally interrupted by a rare, late-night car making its way home. Once in a while our footprints were met with the small ones of a rabbit or, if we ended up on the



golf course and knew where to look, the feather imprints of a bird of prey and vanishing tracks of a small animal.

I remember once, as Laura and I were talking, our cold hands in pockets too large for us, she suddenly gasped and hushed

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me. There, a few yards in front of us, was a cottontail sitting motionless in the snow. Its ears appeared to twitch and move with the fall of every snowflake. Before the rabbit hopped into someone's backyard, the three of us stood in each other's company, sharing the quiet, winter scene.

If it had been daytime with other people around, it wouldn't have felt quite the same. Walking in the snow with Laura late at night was always different; it was as if everyone else fell into a deep slumber just so we could be alone. There was something magic about those nights. Our town always felt as though it had been suspended in time: the air smelled cleaner, sweeter; the silence was a quiet, winter symphony.

Though Laura and I haven't been on a nighttime winter walk in several years, I often think back to the times we ruled our "winter wonderland." We might have been out for only an hour at a time, but our snow journeys are forever frozen in my memories.

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