



Mixed signals. They confounded my mental processes while driving through a local small town one day last week. (Not that it takes all that much...)

The mixed signals were relative to exactly what seasonal state I should be in.

Hanging overhead, at neatly spaced intervals on light poles along the town's streets, were green and red Christmas banners. And interspersed at several homes along the same street, wafting gently back and forth in the light breeze, hung red-hearted Valentine flags.

Droplets of water splattered across my car's windshield from each car passing in the opposite direction, meltout from the icy-slush mountains of snow, which had been pushed up on curbs and corners in the wake of the area's recent spate of mid-winter storms. Although I'd just run the car through a local car-wash, it was rapidly recoating itself with a layer of that road-melt salt and chemical mix which dries to a gritty, grayish, paint-destroying residue.

Snow stretched across the lawns and the fields just behind the single row of small town homes, evidence that winter was very much still in residence. But it remained beautifully pristine where not marred by the passage of plows, salting trucks and the endless parade of cars, giving the landscape that Currier and Ives look which we traditionally associate with the Christmas season and the town's celebratory banners.

A pack of heart-shaped stickers, paper reproductions of the classic "message" candies which turn up in the stores during February, lay in a bag on the backseat with other Valentine goodies for the kids in our lives. Our grandsons had begun celebrating the "love" holiday a few weeks early, making cards and related projects. Several of them in fact, bedecked the utilitarian white doors of our refrigerator and dishwasher, blessedly drawing eye attention away from the floor streaked with snow-melt footprints.

Mentally, I associate cold and snow with the Christmas holi-

days, but not necessarily Valentine's Day. Makes no sense, really, since it's much more common to have snow hanging around in mid-February than in late December in our particular part of the world. So the culture clashing of these seasonal banners to my mindset might be confusing, but is pretty normal.

Then I was brought up short with the bright color from a flag hanging outside of yet another house, in stark contrast to everything else within sight.

This flag was paintbox pretty, bright with butterflies and blooms in pastels of pinks and blues and lavenders. I couldn't help but grin at its obvious message of optimism.

Someone, in this house, was defiantly hanging out a protest sign to the weather.

Spring-silently shouted that lovely flag-has to be right around the corner. Or, maybe, just under the ten inches of icy white stuff then spread across the landscape in all directions.

Exposed by the since-melting piles of snow in the yard, early daffodils hold tiny, tight buds in the center of their clumps of spiky foliage. Dandelions are ready to sprint into bloom on our south-sloped lawn, gaining an extra boost of encouragement from the moisture trickling down from the snowmelt.

And the leafbuds on our lilac bush opposite the calf nursery swell fatter with each sunny, warming day, ready to burst

with just the slight encouragement of a warm, south breeze.

Just the thought of spring cheered me up the rest of that afternoon, further encouraged by bright sunshine which pushed through the slightly chilly breeze. Then, just as I stepped onto the basement

porch at dusk, a section of the melting snow on the roof above let loose its grip on the sloped metal, right onto my head.

A pointed reminder from Mother Nature not to get too carried away just yet.

Join in the optimism rally. Hang out those spring flags.

Stress Management Workshop For Child Care Providers

TOWANDA (Bradford Co.)—"How to Take the Stress Out of Caregiving" is the topic of an upcoming workshop for child care providers.

Sponsored by Penn State Cooperative Extension in Bradford County, the workshop will be held on Thursday, March 2, 2000, from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. at the Extension Office, Bradford County Annex, 701 South Fourth Street, Towanda. Anyone who cares for other people's children is invited to attend this free informational program. Interested parents and grandparents are also welcome to attend.

The workshop will focus on recognizing the signs and symptoms of burnout and how to deal with it, learning on-the-spot relaxation techniques, and how caregiver stress affects children.

It will be telecast live via satellite from Penn State University throughout the U.S. Experts on the subject of child development and care will be the featured presenters. Participants will be able to call in questions to the experts and there will be time for local discussion.

All workshop participants will receive a certificate of attendance. Licensed child care providers who attend will receive credit for two training hours.

Persons planning to attend are asked to register by February 28 by contacting the Bradford County Extension Office at phone (570) 265-2896. The workshop will be held in the second floor meeting room. If you would like to attend, but are unable to use the stairs, please contact the Extension Office by February 18.

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