



Ma Nature reminds us who is boss around here

By Rob Zaleski

Dear Ma Nature,

All right, you win.

We surrender.

And, yeah, you're right about something else, too. We deserved it.

We committed the cardinal sin of life in Wisconsin.

We got smug.

No, smug is too mild. We got fat. Arrogant.

We were gloating.

We began to think we could look you in the eye and laugh. We had our sophisticated snow blowers and our new four-wheel-drive cars and trucks—and we thought we could take anything you threw at us.

And, hey, why not? It's been a good three years since you last humbled us, since you last brought us to our knees.

No excuses, but the simple fact is—we forgot.

In fact, let me tell you what smug is.

Just a few days ago, I was toying with the idea of golfing—assuming I could find a course that was still open—on the morning of Dec. 24. And having someone take a picture of me on the first tee so I could send it to my brother-in-law in Naples, Fla.

I figured, what the heck. I can still golf when it's 40 and sunny. I'll just wear an extra sweater.

Smug is throwing out your old winter boots two years ago and not bothering to replace them. It's leaving for work at 7:30 a.m. in the midst of Monday's blizzard without so much as a hat or scarf—with only a pair of penny loafers on my feet.

Smug is—if you can believe this—not even having an ice scraper in my car.

But then it all came back to me.

It came back to me late that afternoon when my front-wheel-drive Mercury Tracer got stuck in a snowbank

just outside The Capital Times and an angel named Don Vohs appeared out of nowhere in his pickup truck and yanked me out with a chain.

It came back to me 20 minutes after that when I got stuck a second time just a block from my house and my neighbor, Randy Smith, had to slip into his snow gear and push me out.

Smith, gentleman that he is, didn't say a thing.

But I could tell what he was thinking: "There's 17 inches of snow out here and this guy's running around in penny loafers?"

And it came back to me when I finally had to park my car a block away and walk, because my own street—Mayhill Drive—is always the last one in the city to get plowed.

So there I was, trudging through 4-foot high drifts—frozen tears stuck to my face, my pants legs stiff with ice, the feeling long since gone in my toes—and I began to hallucinate.

So help me, for a few moments I began to think back to the tragic Donner expedition in the 1840s.

And I began to wonder if this was how it was all going to end—that sometime next March some little runt on his Big Wheel was going to run over my corpse. And then he'd run into his house and shout, "Hey, mom, you're not going to believe this, but there's a frozen dead body on our sidewalk."

"And the weirdo's wearing penny loafers."

So, yeah, you're right, Ma Nature. We got cocky, and we have only ourselves to blame.

And as I'm sitting here in my kitchen at this very moment—my feet in the oven—I'll confess that I'm in the process of revising my Christmas list. Scratch the Kouros cologne and the new A.J. Liebling boxing book. Sub-

stitute the long johns and wool-lined boots from Eddie Bauer.

But in the spirit of the season, Ma Nature, I'd like to ask a favor.

I mean, you've already made your point. So I'm asking for a little compassion.

You see, I really didn't expect to tee up on Dec. 24.

But I just put up this basketball hoop in my driveway and I'm dying to try it out.

Preferably before Memorial Day.

Warmest regards,
Rob

*EDITOR'S NOTE: It may well be that for this issue of **The Grass Roots**, the FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY feature should be called FROM ACROSS TOWN because of its author. That notwithstanding, I thought you'd all enjoy this feature written by a golfer after a snowstorm. It appeared in the December 5, 1990 edition of **The Capital Times**.*

*Rob Zaleski has been writing feature columns twice per week for **The Capital Times** since 1984. Prior to that point, Zaleski used to have "real jobs." He was the sports editor of the **Los Angeles Times Valley** bureau, sports editor of **The Capital Times**, a reporter with the **United Press International** in Madison and sports editor of the **Green Bay Daily News**.*

Zaleski, 43, also has worked at newspapers in Florida and Idaho. He and his wife, Cindy, have three daughters. He is an avid golfer who scored his first hole-in-one last autumn at Odana Hills. The Randy Smith he mentions in this story is the one we also know!

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