

Looking out my office window here in Washington, DC, I observe that most of the snow from the weekend's storm still lingers in shaded areas. It's interesting, from this Wyoming boy's perspective, how 8 inches of snow snarls this city to a halt. Heck, it's almost paralyzed if a half inch of snow hits the ground! Paralysis by Mother Nature instead of politicians. And, no one knows how to drive!

It's also interesting to me how people raised in this area consider temperatures less than 40 degrees to be terribly cold!

I recall, as a kid, the weeks after Christmas when my dad would run the hose in the backyard, and the temperature dropped at night to almost 20 below. The water would freeze and spread across the backyard and, with subsequent irrigations, spread even further.

If we were lucky, a flurry would dust the ice just enough so that the next morning my brother and I could scoop circuitous paths across the ice (he was my younger brother, so he did require my critical supervision). That chore being complete, we'd get on the telephone and call the neighbor kids to grab their skates and come over because it was warming up, and we'd soon be at 5 degrees.

What followed was pure joy! Flashing (or so we thought), around the icy paths at a furious pace in game after game of fox and geese, pausing only for cups of hot chocolate. Then, back at it again even though the daytime temperature only got up to 10.

If we were lucky, the wind would come up over the next night and blow the snow off the ice. This set the stage for hockey matches the next morning. Hockey sticks and pucks were not to be had. However, a gnarled cottonwood branch and a rock always did the trick.

Those days were a lot of fun! As I look back across the years and the 1,500 miles or so there was something else involved in all that cold and expenditure of energy. We knew the ice wouldn't last forever. In fact, underneath the ice and snow and wind and cold lay something else.

That something else was the promise of spring.

Growing up in a rural community, you're very tied to the seasons. You see the buds on the trees starting to push and see the winter wheat sprouting up through the snow. The farmers fuss about getting equipment ready, anxious for the ground to thaw and dry up enough to get out in the field.

You felt the days growing longer and it wasn't quite as dark walking home after basketball practice. And then, the farmer firing up his tractor across the street roused you from sleep because he'd had his coffee and he was ready to go. It was better than any alarm clock.

As the days warmed, the pace in the community picked up and the energy of my neighbors did too. The hills greened from the winter's moisture and neat symmetrical rows filled the fields after plowing, discing and floating, as seed was put in the soil. Winter was being shaken off and, with care and nurture, lush crops would burst forth.

And so, as I look out my office window, I smile. Where my colleagues might see white icy drifts giving way to sloppy, slushy muck, and for them a feeling of brutal, bitter cold. I see and feel something else.

Spring is always a promise kept. And, it's on its way.