

My Life as a Transplanted Northern Mainer

A Typical Day In My Life

At 6:15 in the morning my little battery-operated digital clock begins to tweet softly. As the faint tweeting/chirping sound starts building toward a crescendo, I smack the Snooze button, and quiet ensues once again – but only for a few minutes. That’s when the alarm system on my laptop kicks in. “Ta-Da! Ta-Da! Ta-Da! Ta-Da! Ta-Da! Ta-Da! Ta-Da! Ta-Da! Ta-Da! Ta-Da!” it proclaims loudly and proudly as it announces the start of the new day. (I’m a sound sleeper and a slow riser in the morning. I need two alarm systems to ensure I really do wake up and get out of bed when I’m supposed to.)

After a few more stabs at the Snooze buttons on both alarm systems, I sit up slowly and try to clear my head a little. Is the sun out? I glance toward my bedroom window. Is there new snow? I listen to the sounds of the morning. I can’t see outside from where my bed is positioned in the room, but the sounds made by vehicles speeding past my house tell me whether we got an accumulation of new snow during the night. The sound of a moving vehicle on the snow-covered road is completely different than the sound a vehicle makes if the road is dry.

If the road is snowy, I wonder, “How much snow?” Some mornings before I get out of bed I hear the unmistakable sound of the state snow plow with its big orange blade that’s shaped like the prow of the Titanic. The rhythmic singing of the plow’s huge tires heralds its impending arrival, and the plow delivers a muffled “whoosh” sound as it sweeps white stuff into a neat, tidy, perfectly straight pile on the road’s shoulder. If I hear that sound I know for sure I’ll be doing some shoveling today.

If there’s no new snow, or if there’s just a dusting of new snow, I lie back down and rest quietly in bed for another ten minutes or so; but if there’s an accumulation of new snow, I force myself to get up – I’ll need extra time to clean the snow off the Jeep before driving it.

I tie my heavy bathrobe around my shivering self and begin my morning ritual: Raise the mini-blinds on each of the nine windows in the house, straightening out the curtains if they’ve been set askew by my wrestling with the blinds. Turn the thermostat up to 70 degrees. Make the bed. Unplug the laptop, carry it downstairs, and put it on the desk in my office. Down my dose of morning meds and arrange the med containers in a particular way that signifies to me I’ve taken the required dosages. (My mind is a sieve sometimes, and I don’t trust myself to remember whether I’ve taken my meds each morning, so I’ve devised this simple little system to compensate for my poor memory, not unlike millions of other baby-boomers whose capacity for short-term memory isn’t as keen as it used to be.)

Now I need to decide whether I want to eat breakfast before or after showering. Strangely, I wrestle around with this little decision almost every morning. Maybe it’s because I’m still bumbling my way toward developing daily routines for my solo life after being married for more than two decades. So, I either shower, make a small breakfast, and eat it – or I make and eat a small breakfast and then shower. Wash and dry the breakfast dishes and put them away. Coax my hair into some semblance of a hairstyle. Apply makeup. Click the remote starter to start the Jeep so it can warm up for a few minutes before I get into it. Brush my teeth. Poke my head out the door, assess the severity of coldness and windiness, and decide how many layers of clothing I’ll need for my morning walk with my four friends (we are a group of five women that walk two to three miles every Monday through Friday at 8:00 AM). Pull on multiple

layers of clothing: typically leggings, jeans, undershirt, T shirt, turtleneck, sweater, leg warmers, and snorkel jacket. Take my cell phone out of the kitchen drawer and turn it on. (I don't have a cell-phone signal at my house. It's one of the downsides of living in a very rural location. Since there's no signal, I keep the cell phone turned off when I'm home. If I leave the phone turned on, it runs itself ragged searching for a signal, and I end up with a dead battery.) Stuff my keys, mace canister, and now-live cell phone into the big, deep pockets of my snorkel jacket. (I carry the mace canister everywhere I go, as protection against any wild animals that might cross my path in the boondocks and also as protection against any dangerous humans I might encounter anywhere. I've been carrying the mace canister since my move to Maine three years ago. I've never had to use it, but someday I might be glad I have it.)

I'm almost out the door at this point. I turn the thermostat down as far as it will go; shove my feet into my big, puffy Kamik boots; sling my backpack over my shoulder; snatch up a collection of hats, mittens, and ear muffs; and head outside to the Jeep. If the Jeep is snow covered, grab the snowbrush and clean it off. Hop in and drive the five miles to the starting point for my morning walk with my friends.

We begin our walk at the home of one of the women in our group of walkers. It's a farm with 70 chickens, two peacocks, two cows, two pigs, and nine alpacas. When I arrive, a few spunky alpacas are always prancing around inside their little corral near the driveway. The alpacas provide good entertainment as we wait for the full contingent of our group to arrive. We're a pretty punctual bunch, so we don't need to wait very long: on most days all of us arrive within a space of five minutes or so. We don hats, ear muffs, scarves, and mittens and head off down the road.

Conversation flows easily: the weather, a pretty view, shopping, school schedules, meal preparation, car repairs, hair styles, home décor, health issues, husbands, ex-husbands, children, dieting, work, road conditions, glitches in Internet service, church events.

We walk briskly. Our route takes us down a road with rolling hills and then back over the same road, in the opposite direction. We can cover three miles in under an hour; we don't mess around!

After returning to our starting point we confirm plans for our next scheduled walk, say our goodbyes, and go our separate ways.

Back at the house, I turn off my cell phone and stash it in a kitchen drawer. I check my e-mail and then begin my workday – unless we got an overnight snowfall, in which case I stick a cordless phone into a pocket of my jacket so I won't miss any business calls (I operate a software company from my home office), and I go outside to shovel the snow off my driveway and front deck and to clear an area in front of my mailbox so the mail carrier won't have trouble getting close to it. Clearing the driveway, deck, and mailbox area usually takes anywhere from an hour to about three hours.

Sometimes, while I'm shoveling, Mike (not his real name) the mail carrier arrives and deposits mail in my mailbox, and we exchange a little banter.

Late mornings can be difficult. The morning rush is over, and if there's no immediate and urgent task or deadline looming, my mind can easily start thinking black thoughts about regret, heartbreak, and guilt related to the breakup of my marriage. I try not to allow myself to give in to the black thoughts. I tell myself: "Don't let the day get away from you. You're never going to get this day back." Sometimes I

take a short walk of a mile or so; usually this enables me to coax my brain back into an acceptable, functional state.

Now I'm getting hungry, and I prepare a tasty and healthy meal of some kind. Usually it's a salad or a sandwich made with gluten-free bread. If I want something sweet, I finish off the meal with a plum or a tangerine or maybe a few dried cherries. No cookies, cake, or ice cream for me – I rarely keep such things in the house. I love sweet, rich desserts, but I'm not good at eating them in moderate quantities, and my body and brain don't handle sweets very well. Although I'm still adjusting to living alone, I do like the fact that I don't have to be bothered with the challenge of exercising self-restraint because somebody else brought yummy but unhealthy foods into the house!

TO BE CONTINUED...