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# This was my first snowy winter, and I found something I didn't expect

Jan 11, 2017

arleen spenceley



Courtesy of Joel Andre  
Correspondent Arleen Spenceley clears snow from her car with a dustpan.



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I found something of value in the recent snow.

Something I didn't expect, but appreciated.

But let me backtrack.

TBD is all about the stage of life people in their 20s and 30s are in – the transitional phase that feels both adult and not adult.

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Before the storm hit, I packed a bunch of clothes, a computer and a book and drove from Virginia Beach, where I live, to my boyfriend's parents' house in Port Norfolk.

There, I planned to do something I never had before: wait for a blizzard.

That's because I'm a Floridian, born near Tampa in 1985. I was raised in a suburb called Spring Hill. I never thought I'd leave.

Then I fell in love with a man I met on Twitter — a man who lives in Portsmouth.

So in August, after nine months of long-distance dating, I ditched the Sunshine State for Virginia. That meant I would swap a nearly endless summer for all four seasons. One of them, winter, worried me a little.

Before I moved, most of my Florida friends and family warned me.

"Virginia has snow," they said. "Do you even own a coat?"

I do, thank you very much — and an ice scraper, which an aunt in Illinois sent when she learned what I used on my windshield on the rare occasions when it froze in Florida. (A spatula, straight outta the kitchen).

I appreciated the concern. Shared it, even. A snowy winter is an unknown. But that doesn't mean I dislike snow.

In fact, the handful of times I've been in it, I've enjoyed it. I saw my first flurries in Queens in third grade, the day before Thanksgiving. I made my



Arleen Spenceley  
| For The Virginian-Pilot  
Arleen Spenceley and her boyfriend, Laurent Andre, take a selfie in Port Norfolk.

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first snow angel in Des Moines at age 30. I stood in 1-degree weather with a smile on my face in the same place, last year.

But I've never lived in it. I've never acclimated to it. And while Florida technically has winter, weather is relative.

Your 10 degrees is like a Floridian's 25. I've never driven in snow, or on ice, and I'm terrified at the thought. So, I had a response for the folks who warned me about winter: "I don't want to talk about it."

Then, last week, I had to face it. The weather app on my cell phone finally showed snowflakes. So, I beat the storm to Port Norfolk, where – once safely off the road and in pajamas – I waited for it to hit.

The clock struck midnight before I noticed any flurries. But when I woke up on Jan. 7, what I saw excited me.

Snow.

A thick, white, powdery blanket covered houses, cars and trees. And it still was pouring from the clouds.

Despite the wind and cold, my boyfriend and I prepped to explore the outdoors. We covered our socks with plastic wrap (a first for me) and put on our hats and scarves, boots and coats.



Courtesy of Laurent

When we ventured out into the snow, I unintentionally found something I always act too busy to seek.

Andre  
Pilot correspondent  
Arleen Spenceley, A  
Florida native, is living  
through her first snowy  
winter.

Silence.

No people, no cars, no planes.

Snow fell but it felt like the world stopped. Like I could be alone with the God I believe created it. Like what I long eluded turned out to be a gift – a cosmic pause button.

Snow is an invitation to stop what we're doing and enjoy each other's company. An opportunity to choose to collect ourselves, hear ourselves think and disconnect from whatever distracts us.

When the snow stopped, I wondered why I feared it in the first place. I remembered as soon as I tried (and failed) to move my car on the icy street.


But next time snow and ice hits, I intend to take advantage of what it gives us outside of driving: a break.

And I hope you will, too.

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