

Chautauqua Watershed Notes
From the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy
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Looking Forward and Remembering Back
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For the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy



Nordic skating on Chautauqua Lake is a thing of the past now that spring has come to the Chautauqua Watershed. (Photo by Sue Weaver.)

What a wonderful time of the year! Spring has finally come to the Chautauqua Watershed. In the span of just a few weeks, we've gone from ice fishing to kayaking on Burtis Bay and from cross-country skiing to hiking with sneakers on the Westside Overland Trail. Nordic roller blading at the Ellery Town Park has replaced my Nordic ice-skating and the snowshoes have gone back in their carrying bag. Pussy willows have popped open and wild leeks are luring the brave into the woods to dig their succulent roots. It's a time of looking forward, but also a time of reflection on the winter as we bid her adieu.

Every spring, I look forward to a bevy of things. One of the most important is the lengthening of the days. When the sun rises earlier and peeks through my bedroom window before the alarm goes off, I get energized. My dog walking is more interesting, too. It's beautiful to listen to the birds harmonizing in the quiet stillness of early morning. You hear a melody of mourning dove "coo, coo, coos," the "chick-a-dee-dee-dee" of the little black-caps and the distinctive trill of the redwing blackbird.

I also enjoy the splashes of color that come with spring. Instead of just brown and white, purple crocuses brighten up dull lawns and ruby-red cardinals stand out as they flit from branch to branch in leafless trees. Green-headed drakes are easily noticed as they court the less flashy female mallards. And if you're lucky, flocks of white tundra swans can be seen silhouetted against the bright, blue sky. Their soft "wooo, wooo, wooo" gives the alert observer a subtle clue to look to the heavens.

Watching for the waterfowl to return to the bay is another exciting springtime adventure. So far we've seen a few buffleheads, hooded mergansers with their unique white crests, a pair of Canada geese, an osprey, and a bald eagle. The skittery red-eyed coots haven't arrived yet, but they will. It's good spring is here, but I'm a little sad to see winter go.

Winter and I have a long-standing friendship. Without a doubt, she can be crotchety, cold, unpredictable and downright unbearable at times, but she's shown me her magical side and I love it. When I was a child, my mother used to bundle me up like Ralphie's brother in the movie "A Christmas Story" and send me outside to play. I'd stay out until my soggy woolen gloves were drooping to my knees and my toes were frozen. I'd be so cold that I would come in crying but I'd be right out there the next day.

Sometimes, I'd grab the pair of old wooden skis, wax them with paraffin, and trudge up the hill by our apple orchard. The skis had a single leather strap that went over your boot and there weren't any poles. I'd start at the very top and ski down to the chicken coop. The first few runs were difficult until you made a path, but after that it was sheer delight and I was hooked for life.

Or, I'd take the only pair of skates in the house and trek down to the creek in the hemlocks where there was a small oxbow. Those skates were ancient. The black leather was as thin as parchment, cracked and worn, and the laces had been broken so many times that the knots made them almost impossible to tighten. But they were golden to me, and with them on, I imagined myself being as graceful and talented as any Olympic hopeful! Was I any good? No, but I was in heaven skating on that tiny patch of ice in the woods. Those wondrous memories still come flooding back every time I don a pair of skates and glide.

Clearly, to the joy of many, spring has finally come to warm our hearts and souls. I am truly grateful for it too, and I'll enjoy the warmer weather, but I will miss winter and our magical moments together.

The Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy is a local 501 (c)(3) not-for-profit, public benefit corporation supported primarily by membership donations. Its mission is to preserve, and enhance the water quality, scenic beauty and ecological health of the lakes, streams and watersheds of the Chautauqua region. Its annual membership campaign is currently underway. For more information or to support these efforts, please call 664-2166 or go to www.chautauquawatershed.org.