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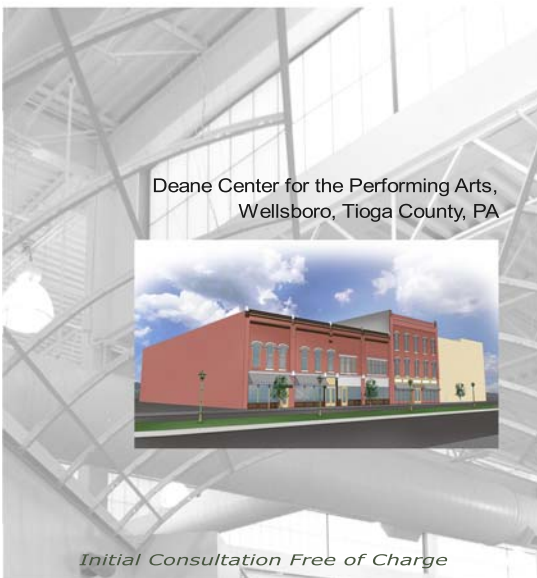


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Someplace Like Home

Dave's Downfall

Dave Milano

Two years ago about this time, the homestead was firmly encased in ice. Every building, tree, blade of grass—everything—was covered in an absurdly thick and shimmering shell, simultaneously strange, beautiful, and silently menacing. I hurried out into the sparkle on a midweek morning with a bucket of salt, eager to clear the porch steps before leaving for work. The ice caught me gawking instead of watching my footing and sent me suddenly, stupidly, falling, bouncing downward with plenty of Dagwood Bumstead swoosh, connecting intimately and specifically with each of our six concrete steps. In the seemingly slow-motion moments, my eyes somehow locked onto the sky as feet, hands, and hat alternately came into view and disappeared, then the bucket, spinning gracefully into the air, ejected its contents over me like wedding-day rice.

After a stiff fall one tends to lie still for a few moments, for damage inventory. Head, hands, elbows, knees, back—amazingly the checklist this time was clean, and with only a few regions of embarrassed soreness, I was able to crank myself up to guarded near-standing. The flying bucket, I noticed, had done a not half-bad job of spreading the salt, leaving unsprinkled only a homicide-detective outline at the bottom of the steps. I brushed off into the outline, grabbed the bucket, and climbed tentatively back into the house, keenly recalling a friend's recent sidewalk skid which had resulted in two broken wrists. My harmless fall and her venomous one mixed together into the season, along with the heaving sidewalks and the car accidents and the power

outages, and of course the startling, screwball beauty of an ice-coated landscape.

Now two years later we are in another mini ice age, with all the elements again in place. Slick, translucent, and fearsomely enchanting facades coax me out of good sense, lure me into forgetfulness, beckon to me, like Homer's sirens, to draw near. I seem incapable of getting through a good ice storm without making some sort of up-close inspection. Often these include a mild slip or two, or sometimes, if the ice has its way, a good whacking fall. I am especially vulnerable when ice is melting, backlit perhaps by a low, setting sun, scurrying droplets reflecting and refracting into countless glistening stars, and the world becomes abruptly slipperier than a Philadelphia lawyer.

It is, I suppose, one of the ways God balances the scales. Lying on icy ground with a blooming pain in the backside, one looks up to see an arresting, astonishingly extravagant crystalline mantle, and can't help but note that this place is not malevolent at all, but immensely charitable—a characteristic that must have been until this moment concealed by ... what? Nearsightedness?

So in the icy season I tend to rise from a fall feeling oddly rejuvenated, wounded maybe, but not down, with my perspective jolted as much as my body, suddenly and curiously grateful for a bald misfortune that smartly interrupted the endless daily routine of chasing more and better; grateful for a calamitous event that slowed me down, just long enough to refocus my vision. 🌨️

Dave Milano is a former suburbanite turned part-time Tioga County farmer. You can contact him at someplacelikehome@mountainhomemag.com.