

# 'Flake Brain' syndrome

When it snows, Baltimoreans come down with selective amnesia



Last weekend's snowfall inspired families out to enjoy the outdoors. Here, a father gives his daughter an assist in Federal Hill. (Colin Campbell/Baltimore Sun )

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By Patricia Schultheis

We Baltimoreans are a diverse lot, enjoying varying preferences for food, music, literature, modes of dress and entertainment. However, after observing our behavior over many winters, I have come to believe that we share one peculiar trait: We all are afflicted with Flake Brain.

Now, I do not have a medical degree, so my evidence is unscientific, but to me Flake Brain appears to be a condition whereby any recollection of a previous snowfall is erased immediately upon the announcement of a subsequent storm. The result being that each snowfall is experienced as a unique phenomenon, an event without precedent. We behave almost as if we were a city of lotus eaters from Djerba, the “Isle of Forgetfulness” off the coast of Tunisia. It’s as if somehow, over the course of a winter, we’re transported to the North Pole where we stand agape and aghast at the white fluff falling from the sky, experiencing each snowfall anew.

Lacking any memory of how we coped in previous storms, the mere mention of the “s” word by a local forecaster triggers Flake Brain’s early symptoms. All a-tizzy, we set off on a frenzied shopping spree for the Baltimore basics: bread, milk and toilet paper. Why these three and not the de-icer, scraper or shovel we may actually need? Who knows? Perhaps, some atavistic skewed wisdom arising from Chesapeake’s primordial ooze has imprinted onto our collective subconscious that we will only be saved by bread, milk and toilet paper alone. As for the de-icer, scrapers and shovels we really should get, how can we be expected to remember them when we have no recollection of having experienced snow before?

And so, fortified by the essential three, we hunker down and await the first flake. And when that flake is followed by another, and another and so forth, we enter Flake Brain, Stage Two — a stage characterized by a deep lassitude. Like somnolent inmates, we wander from window to window to gaze at the strange and wondrous transformation taking place. Inch by accumulating inch, we witness our dreary winter landscape being made fresh. And the tediously familiar cityscape becomes a lovely, peaceful scene.

Lulled by the sight and growing more deeply forgetful, we don’t remember to reply to a coworker’s snide memo. And we forget that we meant to give

our child's teacher a piece of our mind about that last "can-do-better" report card or that resolution to lose 10 pounds we made less than a month ago. Nor do we remember our guilt over those highly priced, but totally unwearable, boots languishing in our closet or the holiday cards we never got around to addressing or the sweater we regifted our sister-in-law. And, so we enter Flake Brain, Stage Three.

Nature abhors a vacuum, and the brains of us Baltimoreans are no exception. Into the lacunae created by our vanished memories rush other recollections. And suddenly we recall the taste of hot chocolate made with real milk — turns out that frenzied trip to the grocery store was not for nothing. And we remember, too, where we stowed that last, unopened tin of Christmas cookies. And, recalling the art of the belly flop, we get our sled and demonstrate for our children; their look of triumph upon reaching the bottom is something we'll never forget. And, then, perhaps best of all, we recall the restorative powers of the midwinter, midafternoon nap. Oh, the luxury, when gentle-fingered dreams massage our fevered brains and all life's worries truly are forgotten.

Doubtless, somewhere in the bowels of Baltimore's esteemed medical institutions, researchers are laboring to discover a cure for Flake Brain. And when they find it, one by one, we'll be inoculated. And then all Baltimoreans will react to a forecast of snow as if we were stoic Norwegians or resigned Siberians. That is to say: We will react to snow as if we were sane.

But I hope not. And I have my reasons why, too. And I would tell them to you, only at the moment I can't recall what they are. Maybe I'll remember after I take a nap.

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