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Brutal Teens on Long Island

By Andrew Malekoff

The title of this month's column is likely to evoke associations of murder and mayhem. However, don't be misled; this is not a tale of teens gone bad. It is about *our* winter of discontent. And, I am not talking about NIFA taking over Nassau County's finances.

So why the title, you may be wondering. It all started with a series of annoying television messages scrolling across the bottom of the screen. One of them read "...brutal teens on Long Island." It was a partial message that required the viewer's waiting for the next scroll-go-round to get more details.

I anticipated reading a horror story about violent or victimized teen-agers. But, when the script scrolled back around, the story flipped and the full message read: "Temperature reaches brutal teens on Long Island."

So, don't go any further if you were expecting to read about stabbings, shootings or lunchroom riots. But, do read on if you are interested in spending a few minutes reflecting on our record-breaking Long Island winter.

Let us begin with a psychological phenomenon known as *seasonal affective disorder*, which is appropriately known as SAD. This is a more serious problem than ordinary "winter blahs" or "cabin fever." SAD only occurs during the winter and is characterized by depression; decreased energy and concentration; carbohydrate or sugar cravings; decreased interest in work or other activities; increased appetite and sleep; excessive weight gain, and social withdrawal. Although you can seek counseling for SAD or hook up one of those special lamps to mimic sunlight, the good news is that SAD symptoms commonly get better with a change of seasons.

But that's enough psychobabble from me. This winter stinks! I have never experienced such consistent snowfall in my life. If I wanted to live among the flakes I would have moved to Vermont or Colorado (or to L.A. for the other kind). I don't dislike snow. It is pretty. I admire the beauty of snow-covered trees on the Taconic and mountains on the New York Thruway as much as the next guy. It makes me happy to see kids sledding, skating, building snowmen, having snowball fights and shoveling snow to make some fast cash - all things that I loved to do as a kid.

On second thought, maybe the extreme snowfall this winter is not so bad. After all, we are all in the same boat. Rather than isolation and withdrawal, excessive snow accumulation and the inconvenience and hardship it creates encourages a sense of community. We commiserated with one another about our cars being plowed in, icy walkways and roads, broken wrists and dented vehicles and, in time, the filthy soot-covered mountains and roadside ridges of snow.

Snow brings us together as a people. We help one another dig out, we lend a hand to frail and elderly neighbors by cleaning their walks and we greet red-faced youngsters with dripping noses with cups of hot cocoa after they spend a pleasurable day of frolicking with friends in the snow. I guess this has been a really joyous winter, after all.

Not!