

RANDOM REFLECTIONS: A Taste of Spring!

By Kathryn Wishlow

The anticipation I feel every year for any signs of maple syrup production has never faded with age. Thanks to a school trip when I was in grade three in Orillia, my classmates and I were treated to a tour and talk about what happens in the spring when the sap starts running. Like most of my school trips, that whole process stuck in my memory and is still triggered by the smell of maple anything, including maple walnut ice cream.

I am by no means an expert, but as I may have mentioned before, my son and two good friends are still in yearly production. It only takes a few days of above zero temperatures for the sap to start running. They have already tapped the trees, hung the tin buckets and are checking regularly. When the collected sap fills their boiling pans, the fires are lit and the process begins.

Admittedly, the sap itself is full of nutrients and minerals like manganese and zinc and could be used just as a sweet drinking water. Being a totally natural product in any form, we are indeed fortunate that our original native cultures shared this important, nutritious item with us. After boiling the sap for hours and hours, the water evaporates and we are left with the

thick, sweet syrup. The longer it boils, the darker and stronger the taste, as my son and his wife learned the first year. One of their batches looked more like black strap molasses and quickly crystallized in the jars.

For me, no waffle, pancake or piece of French toast is palatable without a good dose of maple syrup. Frankly, I love it drizzled over banana slices and nuts on top of vanilla ice cream, too! Whether healthy or not, I sure hope everyone has a good enough run this year to share. Just thinking back to the times I trudged through the bush and was able to help, I truly appreciate all of the hours of hard work that go into smaller operations.

The spring equinox came a bit early this year on March 20th. My 92 year old neighbour reminded me that the two equinoxes are the days when we have equal amounts of light and darkness. Of course, the spring equinox is my personal favourite as I look forward to the evenings staying light longer and longer. For some reason, my motivation levels increase with the light and I can get more and more accomplished in a day. Likely, we all feel that way?

My sister has already seen her first robin. I have heard more birds singing in this last week, but hope the robins stay south a bit longer. The ducks and geese are definitely returning and their impatience has them swimming in tiny open areas on lakes where the ice has now melted.

That last warm spell reduced the snowbanks to mid-hip height that were previously over my head. The higher temperatures and bare pavement in my driveway made me think that I should reserve a time to get my snow tires off. I was advised that my trips south to Peterborough or Belleville were very hard-wearing on snow tires when temperatures are up in the twenties. But, I will not be fooled just yet by this current taste of spring! There are still a few more snow days to come.

(Kathryn Wishlow belongs to White Pine Writers Inc., a local group of like-minded authors who encourage and support all facets of publishing literary efforts. Follow them on FaceBook or www.whitepinewriters.ca)