

The cold of winter

Snowflakes

Snowflakes spill from heaven's hand

Lovely and chaste like smooth white sand.

A veil of wonder laced in light

Falling gently on a winters night.

Graceful beauty raining down

Giving magic to the lifeless ground.

Each snowflake like a falling star

Smiling beauty that's spun afar.

Till the earth is dressed in a robe of white

Unspoken poem the hush of night.

~ Linda A. Copp ~

Doesn't a poem like this make winter more bearable and create an appreciation for the beauty of snow?

Snowflakes form inside a cloud when droplets of water freeze around tiny particles of dust, salt, bacteria or some other substance. These icy specs bump into other crystals and freeze together eventually making the flake so heavy that it begins to fall toward the ground. Snow appears to be white because visible sunlight is white and snow crystals reflect this light.

When the ground has a thick layer of fresh fluffy snow, sound waves are absorbed at the surface of the snow. If the surface becomes smooth and hard as it ages or from strong winds then the surface will actually help reflect sound waves and sounds may be clearer and travel further.

This winter the deep snow held a secret, one that would reveal itself when the weather plummeted well into the minus temperatures of freezing. For the first time in decades, we experienced 'frost quakes' or cryoseisms. These are rare, localized seismic events that occur when a sudden drop in temperature freezes the groundwater which then expands and cracks the soil and rock. The crack will release a sudden burst of explosive energy resulting in a loud noise and the shaking of the ground. They usually happen between midnight and dawn.

Around Christmas, many people heard a boom, or several of them accompanied by their house shaking. It was as though a car or plane had crashed into homes resulting in a scary feeling of the unknown. Within a couple of days, the cryoseisms subsided and left the frozen ground silent once again.

The extreme cold weather may prove to be a powerful weapon against invasive species.

Emerald ash borers first arrived in 2002 on wood pallets from China and we're all aware of the devastation they've created on millions of ash trees in North America. Studies suggest the temperature must drop to minus 30 degrees Fahrenheit to achieve

mortality and with the cold we've had so far, scientists and foresters are hopeful there will be an effective die-off of the borer and other invasive insects. Perhaps not a widespread success but enough to try and balance the ecosystem.

We're Canadian, and bred to tough out whatever Old Man Winter throws our way. However, if you're not into outdoor sports like me, I like to watch the big fluffy snowflakes swirl and dance from the cozy, warm indoors while my mind drifts off to plans for the garden in spring.

By Judith Rogers