

What Are the Colors of Winter?

By Irv Sternberg

What are the colors of winter? For me, the answer lies with time and location. As a child growing up in Newark, New Jersey, I recall the winters as being mostly white when the streets, rooftops and trees were covered with snow. But white is not a color; it is the absence of color. So my childhood winters were mostly colorless, perhaps gray in sunless New Jersey, except on special occasions.

Growing up in a Jewish household, there were no colorfully-wrapped Christmas presents and no multi-colored Christmas trees. Because my birthday was on Dec. 24th, however, I was always treated to a feast of colors that wrapped my birthday presents on Christmas Eve. Of course there was the colorful celebration of Hanukkah, often the same week as Christmas, along with the nightly burning of Hanukkah candles in the Menorah for eight days. And sometimes Dad would drive us to the affluent suburb of Montclair where my younger sister and I would "ooh and ah" at the luxury homes bedecked with beautiful red, blue and white bulbs, lifelike reindeer, rotund Santa Clauses, and myriad nativity scenes. Of course, many colors were visible even earlier in the floats and marching bands of the annual Thanksgiving Day Parade.

Another color I associate with winter in my childhood is black. As in coal black, although technically black is *not* a color either. Along with all our neighbors, we heated our homes with coal purchased from vendors who periodically sent the chunks of black from their trucks down chutes into the coal bins in our basements. Each morning, my father or mother would descend to the basement to scoop several shovels of coal into the furnace. But one time, my parents had insufficient money to fill our coal bin. So I was sent to a vendor in our neighborhood to buy a small amount of coal which I attempted to haul back to our home in a cart. However, it snowed that day and I got stuck halfway home – until some men came along to assist me.

Some twenty years later, I was stationed in southern California with the Marine Corps and experienced another type of winter, one with absolutely no snow at all. But, this being gaudy California, there was lots of color everywhere – from the movie posters produced by Hollywood to the multi-colored bathing suits displayed on the beaches, not to mention the pastel-hued houses that lined so many streets. California did not let winter interrupt its year-long celebration of every color in the rainbow.

Fast forward to Colorado which has been my home for the last fifty years. The winters here have always offered a treasure trove of colors – from the glorious annual artistic decoration of City Hall and this year the inclusion of Union Station – to the fireworks on New Year's Eve.

Beginning in early November, the stores begin their annual sales promotions with a display of color designed to catch the attention of everyone walking by. And this winter, our first at Windsor Gardens, my wife and I are delighted to see the Christmas lights and decorations that have turned our neighborhood into a wintry wonderland.

But my favorite non-color is the shower of light snow, falling softly at night from the Denver skies, while being illuminated by street lights and automobiles, followed by a serene silence

until the first rays of the morning sun welcome the start of another magical day.