

Bruce Littlefield's Dinner Party Talk

Serving up a plateful of conversation.

You watched, right? Sunday night an estimated 111 million of us sat in front of our TVs with our beer and chips (okay, vodka and popcorn at my house) to see the *Green Bay Packers* best the *Pittsburgh Steelers* in that big football thingy. I must admit I did get so caught up in the excitement of the commercials that I forgot to flip back to the *Puppy Bowl*, so you'll have to ask one of the other 8.2 million people who watched that if one of those shelter dogs pooped on the field.



ported: a 45-year-old man was caught bippity, boppity, booping himself while watching the *America's Best Championships Cheer & Dance Competition* at the Fair & Expo Center; another man was searched after a traffic stop and found to have a "small bag" of crack cocaine hidden in the foreskin of his summer sausage; and Kentucky's forward thinking Senate Education Committee approved a measure to move along a bill that would teach Bible classes in public schools. Yep, that's what they need! Bible classes.

Not guilty! (Well, at least according to her.) *TMZ*, the most trusted name in news, reports that *Lindsay Lohan*, my favorite TAP (Troubled American Princess), is being charged with felony grand theft. I don't know what to say, except maybe she should move to Kentucky.

Speaking of poop. During her wild runs, pop star *Christina Aguilera* fumbled the words of the National Anthem and the Twitterati went berserk. Um, let me remind you that *Michael Bolton* had trouble with the same line in 2003 and was lucky there weren't any Twits around then to harangue him about having the words written on his hand! (Is that called "Pulling a Palin?")

He's back. Fox debuted the first teaser for *X Factor*, *Simon Cowell's* new talent show that will be on our TVs this fall. Anyone over the age of 12 is eligible to audition, but the big news is that the winner will take home a \$5 million record deal, the largest grand prized ever promised for a TV show. "Doe, a deer, a female deer; Ray, a drop of golden sun; Me, a name I call myself..." Don't worry, I'll be ready.

He'll be back. *Keith Olbermann* has signed on to *Current TV*, the *Al Gore* cable network that you've never watched. He'll be the Chief News Officer and have his own show... as soon as he cashes that last MSNBC check.

Sorry Keith. Since your MSNBC departure, I've turned to other news sources. I'm now a news junkie for *WLKY*, Louisville, Kentucky's CBS affiliate. This week they re-

Literary stars. It was announced this week that *Bristol Palin* is working on her memoir. While I'm waiting for that intellectual tome, I'll bide my time reading *Jersey Shore's Jenni "JWoww" Farley's* dating guide, "*The Rules According to JWoww*." Yes, following in the high-heeled steps of *Snooki's* masterpiece, *JWoww* is out with romance advice, like this winner: "Stop Drinking If You Vomit. If you puke it up, don't put more in. Vomiting is a signal that your body can't take the amount of alcohol that you have consumed. Call it quits for the evening and go clean yourself up at home." Could this be the best self-help book of all time? I just checked Amazon and it is currently #1 in "Non-fiction - Culture."

Speaking of books. My new book with *Barbara Corcoran* is out: "*Shark Tales: How I Turned \$1000 into a Billion Dollar Business*." So, while you're in the bookstore grabbing *JWoww* and pre-ordering *Palin*, buy a copy of my book. If it doesn't inspire your life, I'll personally sign a copy of the *Situation's* abs for you.

The Local Weather Girl. High Falls cutie *Priscilla Pomerantz* has made international news this week due to a very serious allergic condition the 9-year-old has to cold!

Priscilla, who has been diagnosed with cold urticaria, gets hives from head to toe and has trouble breathing when she is exposed to temperatures less than 68-degrees. But *Priscilla* looks on the bright side. She told the *Today* show's *Matt Lauer* that there are some advantages: no snow shoveling or walking the dog in winter! So, stop your whining people! It's cold in February.

The Local Academy Award Nominee. *Melissa Leo*, the *Meryl Streep* of Stone Ridge, is an indie actress who has now stepped into the mainstream. After stellar performances in *21 Grams* and *Frozen River*, her role in this year's *The Fighter* has earned her deserved high praise and numerous awards, including a nomination for the Best Supporting Actress Oscar. This week she's taking heat for placing her own "For Your Consideration" ads in the trades. For all those Hollywood types poo-pooing the move, I say, "Get a life! What's wrong with a girl believing in herself and having a little fun?"

Speaking of local girls. Congrats to *Jenny Apuzzo*, the first openly gay person who worked in the White House, who recently had Kingston's LGBT center named in her honor. The article in this paper last week celebrating the occasion left out one of the best nuggets from the event. When asked how she arrived at her success, she told the crowd, "I'm a big dyke with a big Italian mouth." I love a girl who shoots from the hip.

Sign of the times. There's so much snow the "Shovel It!" signs in Stone Ridge got buried, but boy, aren't the sidewalks shoveled nicely?

Valentine's Tip. Don't tell your date you picked the restaurant because you wanted to use the 2-for-1 coupon before it expires.

Now, kiss your love and eat your dinner!

Rondout Valley resident *Bruce Littlefield* is a best-selling author and American culture expert. He appears on the *Today Show*, *CBS Early Show*, and *The View*. Find fun everyday at brucelittlefield.com.

Nature's Bounty

By JJ Murphy

Winter Wilderness Overabundance



JJ Murphy

It's extraordinary to realize that after a summer of extreme heat and drought, we're now experiencing extreme cold and precipitation. I suppose it's another way to look at nature's bounty.

On the plus side, I've had more opportunities to cross-country ski this winter than I have since I bought my skis in the mid 1980's. Tracking in snow reveals details of animal movement not easily observed in other substrates. The abundant moisture has mycologists dreaming of a hearty morel season. It helps me to keep these images in mind when dealing with the down side of winter.

I woke up on a bitter cold morning and turned the faucet to discover my pipes were frozen. One benefit of my wilderness survival classes is the confidence that I'll have what I need to handle any situation. There was a large base of snow in my yard. I'm told that 10 inches of snow is equivalent to one inch of water. I lost count of the number of trips I made between my yard and my kitchen.

It took me about three hours to gather enough snow for 2-3 gallons of water. I had been toying with the idea of making a quince, but am glad that I had access to pristine snow. My responsible landlord has a plumbing service on call. Still, it took three plumbers over ten hours to defrost the pipes.

Two days later, the air temperature rose just enough to ensure that the next storm delivered sleet, freezing rain



Junko track in the snow.

Photo by JJ Murphy

and rain, instead of snow. The skeletal trees were covered in shimmering beauty until their branches released the icy coating that encased them. While snow provides opportunities for snowshoeing and cross-country skiing, ice drives people, animals and birds indoors.

Once the danger of being pelted with ice shards passed, a few brave squirrels and a small flock of juncos ventured out in search of birdseed buried under the icy snow.

Woodchucks are the only true hibernating mammals in the Hudson Valley. Bears, raccoons, chipmunks and others go into a state of torpor in frigid weather and will emerge if the air temperatures warm up enough. As I write, every living creature is bracing for the next round of storms.

I pray I will not have to chop chunks of ice from my doorstep, driveway, car and deck between now and the time winter releases its grip. This winter is a lot like the winters I experienced growing up on our family farm. Snow often coated the ground by Thanksgiving and there was no sign of spring before March, when a few bare spots of earth pushed the snow aside. Some years there was snow on Easter Sunday.

When I'm stuck indoors, I eat the dehydrated and frozen foods as rewards for my foraging efforts the rest of the year. Fresh morels are tasty, but the flavor of dried morels soaked in milk or cream (I have not tried this with soy, almond or rice milk) is more satisfying than chocolate. There are few foods in my world better than chocolate. I feast on the most exotic foods on the worst weather days - fiddleheads, wild leeks, wine-cap mushrooms, wild hazelnuts and shagbark hickory nuts. In anticipation of spring migration, I dig out my "Birding by Ear" tapes and view the bird identification videos from the Cornell Ornithology Lab.

As for education, I've now received invitations to no less than six mycology events. This year, my priority is to further my knowledge. I'm poring over the mushroom forays (three-day mushroom events), classes and seminars being presented in the 2011 season. I cannot possibly afford to attend them all. This year my priority is to expand my skills. My choices are polypore studies at "Mushroom University" sponsored by the CT-Westchester Mycological Association, and a one-week seminar entitled "Mushrooms and Other Fungi," sponsored by the Humboldt Field Research Institute in Maine. I have no experience looking at the fungi world through a microscope; I also hope to improve my fungi photography skills when we are in the field.

Once the thermometer moved from a negative number to a positive two-digit number I ventured out for a look at animal tracks in snow. This week's storms brought the heavy, dense snow I usually associate with mid-March storms; at least it's not ice. As I get ready to submit this column, the air is again opaque with snowfall.

*Writer and naturalist JJ Murphy offers creative nature curriculum, wild food recipes, fiction, poetry, articles and writing services for individuals, entrepreneurs, small businesses and ecologically aware companies. Check out JJ's portfolio at www.WriterByNature.com, *Giving Nature a Voice*.*

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