

## **A TRUE WINTER'S TALE**

By Cynthia Crisp

It was the winter of '92. I was a single mom then with a very active seven-year old. I lived in Manhattan on the upper Westside during the week, where I worked as a private massage therapist and spent weekends at an old country house two hours away. I had stayed in town that Saturday, seeing a VIP client, because I was desperate for the money. Single parenting had not been my first choice.

It got dark early and the weather was cold and snowy. I had decided to drive up to the house even though the roads looked ominous. Something in the back of my mind kept saying, "You've got to leave now and get up there." It was an urgent voice. I didn't even question it. I was going, no matter what. Around 4:00 I grabbed my old black cat, Charlie the standard poodle, some food, the laundry and set off with my son. This was traveling light.

There was a lot of snow on the roads. This was before the day of cell phones, so I had no way of knowing what lay ahead of me. I pulled out along West 73<sup>rd</sup> Street and tried to get to the West Side Highway, but all the entrances were closed. The traffic report on the radio said, "Stay off the roads!" Right! Riverside Drive was not moving, so I crawled up Amsterdam in my '87 Buick station wagon. Cars were stopped everywhere along the way, some caught in high snow drifts, others struggling on black ice. I just kept turning this way and that, along side streets, managing to get up to the GW Bridge. It took me one hour and 20 minutes to go 100 blocks. It took another 45 minutes to cross the upper level of the bridge. Visibility was close to none. Was I out of my mind?

A couple of times I almost turned back. I thought, "Why am I doing this? This is crazy. I might never make it. How bad is it on the Palisades? Will I be able to get up the driveway if I make it home?" In spite of these worries, I overrode my instinct for self-preservation, being compelled to go no matter what. So, on I drove, feeling stubborn and strangely quiet. It really wasn't so bad after I got 20 miles north of the city. The highway cleared and I finally made good time. I arrived with a sleepy kid around 9:00 P.M. Five hours to go 110 miles. Whew! I was thoroughly exhausted. I unpacked, carried William to bed, fed the animals and turned in. I felt relieved to be "home."

It got really cold that night, probably 5 degrees. The windows of my bedroom were frosted over. I felt safe curled up under my down comforter, in my old flannel pajamas. I fell asleep almost immediately, which was quite unlike me. I entered the darkness of sleep and dreams. All I heard was the endless silence of winter.

Several hours later, around 3 in the morning, I was awakened by a strange noise. It was a howling or groaning sound. It must have been loud enough to wake me, but when I looked out my window facing the abandoned lake hotel, I couldn't see anything. It sounded almost human, but I was sure it was an animal. I was quite a ways from the road, yet the noise seemed to come from right outside the house. Then it stopped. I listened as hard as I could but all was quiet so I thought I had imagined it. After all, it was the middle of the night and I was in the middle of nowhere. So I got back into bed. What an imagination!

Then it started again. AAAUUUHHH! AAAUUUHHH! There were no streetlights, and the moon's reflection off the lake was no help. I couldn't see anything. AAAUUUHHH! I opened the window to get a better view, and, there across the road from me about 200 yards away, was a man, lying on the ground, howling and screaming. He sounded drunk or hurt or crazy. I quickly

turned off my lights. I didn't want him coming to the house. I lived outside a village on a lonely county road all by myself. Charlie hadn't even stirred. I was scared. What was I supposed to do? I couldn't go down there by myself and I couldn't leave him there to...God knows what. AAAUUUHHH! AAAUUUHHH!

We didn't have 911 then. There were no signal towers. But I managed to find the number of the local state police in an office 10 miles away. They told me to hang up immediately. Then they called me back, I guess to see if I was for real. They said they would be there within 6 minutes. I asked them to call me back and let me know what had happened, who he was, or whatever. I stood, in the dark, alone, watching and listening to the agony of that stranger, in the freezing cold, lying there, groaning and stumbling and rolling around. And sure enough those patrolmen got there pretty damn quick. I saw them get out and check on him. They wrapped him in a blanket and waited for an ambulance to come.

When they called me a little while later, they told me if I hadn't heard him and called that he would be dead. Evidently, he had been beaten up and robbed of his clothes and his money and left along the road to die. He was pretty close to over-exposure and hypothermia when they got there. He would have been dead in another 10-20 minutes, they said.

Whoa. Wait a minute. Dead? In the middle of night... after a snowstorm... in front of *my* house? This was hard to believe! Was that why I had heard a voice inside my head, telling me, pushing me, forcing me to drive up here, despite terrible conditions? And if I hadn't listened, that man would have died? Where did that voice come from? Why me? So many questions flooded my mind through the rest of that night and on into the next morning. And to this day I still wonder what would have happened if I hadn't obeyed those words inside my head that day.

But I did and that has made all the difference. I've learned many times over to listen to the omens, to the warnings, to the messages from Spirit, to the wisdom from the elements. And that *has* made all the difference.