

The View Over the Pasture

This month's view is a strange one. I am writing from our Venice home, where down the street there is a holiday display unlike anything I've ever seen. In, under, around, and through a huge purple frame of an igloo surrounded by flashing lights are plastic penguins. Dozens of them. Penguins waving, penguins on a carousel, penguins twirling in circles, and penguins just standing around bobbing in the night breeze. There's even a manger scene complete with penguins herding penguin sheep, penguin royalty, penguin angels, and yes, a penguin baby Jesus. This is right next to penguins huddling around a flashing menorah contained in a sleigh pulled by penguins. The whole display looks like something you might see after eating a really questionable fish. Or mushrooms.

It has become something of a tradition to visit this growing display every year and watch the cars slow down and finally stop in the middle of the road while the inhabitants gawk. But it's occurred to me that in the six or so years I've enjoyed this I've never met the person who is responsible. It takes up his entire front yard and must cost a fortune to install and maintain. So why am I not curious enough to ring the doorbell and ask what he's thinking? I don't do this because I'm afraid of what I'll find. I'm afraid that he's ordinary guy with too much time and money on his hands and is simply indulging in his penguin obsession. What I want to find is a crazy person: a person who is driven mad with joy and hope and generosity and is expressing it in a way that makes other people giggle and shake their heads in wonder. I want to find a holy fool. Or maybe what I'm really afraid of is that I won't recognize the holiness in this – and all forms of foolishness -- when I see it. Whatever the reason, I think I'm going to give in to irrational acts of exuberant foolishness more often in the new year. And I hope you'll join me.

Rev. Janet Onnie

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