

By the Way

At some point a few years ago, I started counting the number of swans I saw on my walks. My all-time record was 212.

There are less in the summer; they spread out, and some go further north. In the winter they come together, like ships packed into a tight harbour, maneuvering in whatever water remains as the ice advances ever further.

Part of the reason they stay is that the water near the nuclear power plant is warm. It's not a romantic reason, but there you go: it's the truth.

Even the power plant can be beautiful, though. On cold days a line of steam stretches out from it over the water. On a dark and still night its lights can almost seem friendly and warm.

("Excuse me!")

"Yes?"

"Can you walk here? I just bought a house in the neighbourhood. Can you walk here and, like, ride bikes and stuff?"

"Of course, lots of people do; there are paths in both directions," my good side replies.

"Oh? You mean? On the paths? Like everyone else is doing right now?" my bad side responds.)

Being outdoors is supposed to reduce stress.

It's a trend. Everyone seems to like the outdoors now; it was a pandemic thing, I think; it remains as a vestige from a time when no one wanted to talk to each other, but everyone wanted to be in public.

(Two people walk past with carbon fibre racing bikes and the latest equipment.

"I don't know why anyone would buy a watch that just tells time," one says to the other.

Both my good and bad sides have decided that this event should be related in every possible conversation.)

I think we are lucky to live in Pickering, to live in a city on Lake Ontario, a lake so wide that, like the ocean, it has no horizon.

You can stand on our beaches and see the Scarborough Bluffs and the CN Tower.

("You look warm!")

My good side laughs. "I try to be!"

My bad side is unimpressed. "The wind is stronger at the waterfront. You walk to the end of the pier and see for yourself. I'll wait.")