

Banishing the winter blues

Long, cold winter is getting the best of us, but there's help

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Psychologist Christine Ziegler is director of the Hudson Valley Center for Cognitive Therapy in Nyack.

I have a 20 percent off coupon for Bed Bath & Beyond that I'm thinking of using toward one of those happy lights that promise to boost your mood.

Before this winter, I didn't know anybody who felt down during the colder months, when the days are shorter. But lately, everybody seems to be complaining of the winter blues — including me.

Exercise is known to be a mood lifter. The challenge is overcoming the urge to drive straight home after work, since stopping at the gym requires getting out of the car.

A "happy light" — at Bed Bath & Beyond, they sell one for \$99.99 — aims to lift your spirits with light therapy, a technique used for conditions ranging from jet lag to malaise and depression. Psychiatrists recommend consulting with a doctor before using any sort of light therapy, particularly if you are on medication.

Psychologist Christine Ziegler, director of the Hudson Valley Center for Cognitive Therapy in Upper Nyack, suggests these tips for beating the winter blues, including one that involves natural light.

Try them — and remember that spring is just a few weeks away. Maybe I'll save my 20 percent coupon for a flower pot.

» **Go into the light:** Exposure to light has been found to boost mood. Try to go outside for at least a small amount of time each day. If it is just too cold, spend some time sitting near a window.

» **Go back to basics:** This is the time of year when it is easiest to neglect caring for yourself. Make it a point to

eat healthy foods and maintain a regular sleep schedule. Exercise is also very important. If it's too cold to walk outside, walk the mall or try a new indoor physical activity, such as yoga.

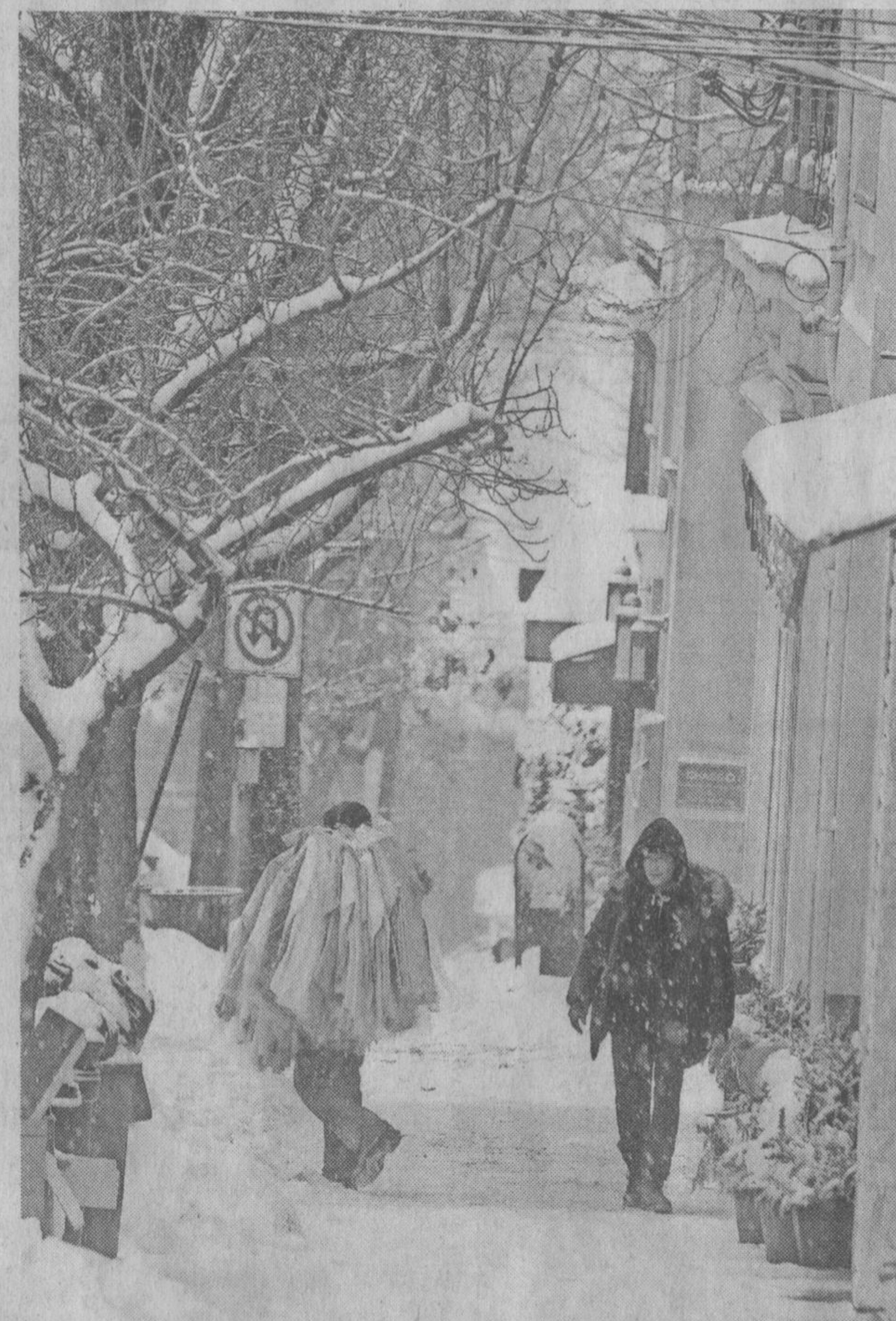
» **Shift your focus:** Try to reframe the way you're perceiving winter. Acknowledge that, for most people, this winter has felt very long and difficult, and accept that for what it is. Reduce the amount of time you devote to complaining or lamenting about the weather. Consider starting a journal in which you write a few things for which you are grateful each day. This helps shift your focus to the positives in your life.

» **Plan social activities:** Most of us have many more social events planned in the warmer months, leaving much more free time in the winter. Plan outings with family and friends, or invite people to your home, as socialization typically boosts mood and energy.

» **Start a new hobby:** Another way of shifting focus is to challenge yourself to try something new. You might start knitting, write a blog, try some new recipes, start a new exercise routine at the gym or even learn a new language. Stimulating your mind can help boost your mood.

» **Seek help:** If your mood is so low that it is interfering with your daily functioning, you should consider seeking professional help. There are well established treatments available that are effective in combating depression. One such treatment is cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). For more information about CBT, call Ziegler at 845-353-3399 or visit www.hvcct.com.

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SETH HARRISON/THE JOURNAL NEWS

By now even the most fervent lovers of cold weather may be feeling the winter blues, but there are ways to combat it.