



What is a Chinook and How Does it Help Us Psychologically?

By Dr. Linda Hancock

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled “All Psyched Up” for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of “Life is An Adventure...every step of the way” and “Open for Business Success” is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email office@drlindahancock.com

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When people from warm countries hear me mention that I live in Canada, I am usually confronted about questions regarding winter and freezing temperatures. It seems that those who have not been to my country assume that all of Canada experiences the weather that is often portrayed in movies for being extreme conditions that greatly limit mobility.

I remember a trip to Florida where a lady innocently asked, "Do you travel by dog sleds?" and I jokingly replied: "When the weather's good".

I live in Medicine Hat, Alberta. It is a city of about 60,000 residents which is approximately 20 minutes' drive from Saskatchewan and an hour's drive north of Montana.

I was born and raised in Saskatchewan and dreaded the winter months when temperatures would drop to 30 degrees below zero for days on end. We would still walk to school, play outdoors during school recess, and participate in activities such as skating and building snow structures. Despite this, I always wished that I could escape the winter weather and live in a location that was less harsh.

"Chinook" is an old Indian name that means "snow eater". Warm air from the Pacific Ocean rises to cross the Rocky Mountains and then drops right on Medicine Hat. This wind can result in temperatures rising as much as 30 degrees in a matter of hours.

I moved to Medicine Hat, partially because of the chinooks. How fascinated I was to learn that even when snow falls it likely will be a temporary condition. Psychologically, the citizens watch for the chinooks. Everyone knows that even when there is ice and snow or cold snaps, there is a promise of melting and warmth that will follow.

Over the past dozen years, I have had very few opportunities to wear my boots or winter coat - until this month. This year we have had several days of ridiculously low temperatures as well as several snowstorms that have left icy streets and snow drifts to slow mobility. I have watched the moods of my clients and friends who are so disgusted with the unusual conditions. Mood changes with weather and those who suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder are not the only ones who are affected by situation.

It is hard work to add layers to fight the weather and drive in less than ideal conditions. It is also discouraging to have day after day of weather than is cold and dreary.

Part of the problem lies in expectations. We are never disappointed unless we have expectations - and those in Medicine Hat tend to expect the chinooks to arrive. They haven't - for some time - and that's disappointing.

But...the hope lies in the fact, that we won't have to wait as long as Saskatchewan to experience spring-like weather. It's only a matter of time until the chinook arrives. I can hardly wait!