

A personal view

Those lazy, hazy, crazy days

by Meg Peterson

Why do I feel so relieved when September rolls around and I put the summer clothes away, detach the garden hose, and hang up the lawn chairs in the garage? Why at the first hint of early frost, do I rush to gather all the green tomatoes, put the storms in place, and dig up the geraniums—even though I know Indian summer is just around the corner? Battened down, and ready for the onslaught of winter, I soon find that by noon on most days it's colder inside my house than out. But that doesn't alter my behavior. It's summer I'm trying to get rid of—summer, my favorite season.

As a kid I used to really love summer—blessed freedom from the same old routine and the restrictions of the long, cold winter. School was out, and sun was in, and expectations were high. As an adult, expectations are still high, but no matter how carefully I plan, I can never cram enough into those two glorious months.

The pressure starts building in January when I get a phone call from my older sister, who is the unofficial doyenne of scheduling at the cottage my two sisters and I own on Lake Winnepesaukee in New Hampshire.

"The time has come, again," she chirps cheerily. "Which three weeks do you prefer? You get first choice this year."

"Anne, it's still ski season. I can't think of summer yet!" I say.

And her response invariably is: "You mean, you don't want to think of summer yet, but my kids have to plan vacations, and Frank has to tell his partner..."

"My kids may not even have vacations this year!" I interrupt. "Besides, I've been thinking of just being alone at the cottage—or going to a conference next August in Helsinki. But that means I'd have to take the first three weeks of July...not my favorite time. Oh, Anne, please don't do this to me. I just got over New Year's!"

All of a sudden I'm fraught with indecision and ambivalence over this most coveted part of the summer—my vacation. When shall I go? Shall I spend the time alone? Shall I include the children? If I'm alone, it can be lonely. With the children, it can be chaos. And this is my vacation; it has to be paradise on earth.

Everything I want to do at the lake or in the surrounding mountains must be done in those three precious weeks. If I want to extend the climbing—my favorite pastime—I schedule it around my allotted time. This entails researching available campsites by early March, making reservations, and gambling that the weather will be clear. But I'm a spontaneous last minute sort of person, who dislikes meticulous long-range planning.

And before I know it, summer—the two months I look forward to all year long—has become a monstrous scheduling headache!

As the season approaches, catalogs pile up: EMS, REI, North Face, Kelty. My mountain equipment has to be inventoried and updated, and suitable climbing partners found—now that my kids are grown and prefer not to drag Mother behind them.

Brochures about music festivals bombard me—Caramoor, Waterloo, Chattaqua, Mostly Mozart. I pore over the dates, trying to squeeze in my favorites without exhausting both me and my pocketbook—keeping in mind that summer is for relaxing.

By the end of June, New York City is alive with street musicians, sidewalk artists, and Shakespeare in the Park. And outdoor cafes make you feel that you're back on the Continent, but at a much better price. How can I pass up these singular moments?

With the heat of July comes my annual outdoor bash. What better time to pay back all my social debts, since I have a large group of friends, a large backyard, and a small house? The presence of my neighbor's pool is an added attraction, but it's always a hassle to schedule just the right weekend, and after all the planning and cooking, what if it rains?

To complicate matters there are forces at work conspiring against the full enjoyment of these carefree, fun-filled days. First, I'm a writer, so I'm supposed to write. And when I don't, I feel guilty. But how does anybody sit inside for hours when the birds are singing, and the lake or pool are beckoning, and the sun stays bright until well after dinner? I'm amazed that people in California or Florida ever work. How can they pass up all that sunshine? Bach could never have written his fugues or Flaubert his novels if they'd been faced with endless summer.

Then, there are the tasks I

promise myself to do as soon as the weather turns warm: clean out the garage and organize the clutter for a garage sale; ride my bike to help strengthen my legs and shed the winter pounds recently covered up by layers of clothing; and do something about the garden. Gardening is fun in the spring—watching each flower poke its head out to greet the new season—but by summer it's all maintenance: weeding, watering, and building rock fortresses to keep the deer and rodents from devouring everything green. (Fortunately, the dog next door killed the ground hog in the spring, so I only had to deal with rabbits and deer this year.)

Now the crisp days of autumn are here, and the time has passed to do all the things that can't possibly get done in two short months. I thank God that summer's over...and I can enjoy a respite from relaxation! Then why do I feel a touch of melancholy when I think back, remembering the sunsets exploding behind the distant hills and fading into the darkening sky? The hours spent swimming out to the old spar early in the morning, just as the sun peeked over the giant pine trees. And the wind nearly catapulting me off Mt. Washington as I fought my way through the fog to the summit...

Perhaps it's not as easy as I thought—getting rid of my favorite season.

Meg Peterson is a freelance writer who lives in Sherman, Conn.