

village view

by Andrea Leonard

There's something about summer -- in spite of the humidity, in spite of the heat, in spite of plaguing mosquitoes, in spite of ticks on children and dogs, in spite of wood roaches that find a way into our houses -- there's something about summer that's special.

There's something about summer. In spite of the traffic, in spite of the neighbor's noisy lawn mower, in spite of sunburns and poison ivy, crowded stores and beaches, and the extra loads of laundry, there's something about summer that tops any other season of the year.

Maybe it's the opportunity to make the out-door world our own milieu without extra preparation. In summer you just open the door and you're surrounded by your natural environment. No need for sweaters, jackets, coats; no need for boots, mittens or mufflers.

If the sun's too hot, you take a few steps and cool off under the shade of a tree; if the breeze is a bit cool in the shade, you step into the sun and are comforted by the sudden pervading warmth.

Perhaps it's partly the long hours of natural light. The sun is up when we awake and for many of us twilight of a July evening is enough to see us to bed without electricity.

And possibly part of our pleasure in summer is a residual one, emotions generated in our school days when we looked forward to the long vacation from classes and studies. Even though now we're working the same hours we do in winter, these working hours seem shorter because there remain more hours of daylight in which to pursue recreation or other activities we might choose.

Summer offers -- at least on the Cape -- many forms of recreation we can't enjoy in winter. Swimming, golf and tennis; sailing, fishing, and gardening; strolling, cook-outs, -- and laziest of all -- sunbathing. All are available to us, if the inclination is present, in summer.

There are also concerts, plays, fairs, lectures, shows, sales laid before us in an almost bewildering crazy-quilt of entertainment. Although many of these are planned to attract tourists -- and tourist dollars -- there's nothing to prevent year-round residents from participating too; many cost no more than the time and transportation to reach them.

Years ago, summer didn't seem to start as early as it does now; when our season began on the Fourth of July and ended Labor Day weekend, we had but ten weeks of it. Nowadays, regardless of the calendar and almanac, summer comes with the first warm weekend in late May or early June and lasts clear through October.

Still, the calendars and almanacs do define the season; even now, as the days of August pass too quickly, there's a hint of fall in the air. The sun's rays shine at a greater angle and are cooler than in mid-June; dawn breaks later, and sunset blazes earlier in the western sky than in mid-July.

The tender green of new leaves on the trees has changed, without our noticing, to a darker, more mature shade, and we catch a glimpse, now and then, of a tinge of bright color in the foliage. The woodbine winding up a pine tree trunk shows scarlet though no finger of frost has touched the vine since last April.

No longer are we wakened to the music of mating birds; mornings are still and quiet as our feathered friends are busy teaching their fledglings to fend for themselves and store up strength and energy for the autumn migration to warmer climes.

The foliage debris of spring-flowering bulbs has disappeared from the gardens; the wild roses have faded; now the orange-red seed cases, or hips, ripen amid the thorns. Peonies and daisies give way to phlox and asters. Soon brilliant chrysanthemums will parade and dance to celebrate the season's end.

As another summer begins to slip away to a shadowy past, tourists thin out, summer residents start thinking about packing it in for this year and heading back to the city or resuming their routines wherever they live during our cold months.

Year-rounders, as we do each September, begin planning trips to the mountains. We feel the need of a week or so away from the Cape, a change of pace, a change of scene. Much as we love our seaside home, we yearn for the view-from-the-top that comes for us only when we gaze at the heights of the great mounds of rock rising majestically from the valleys of our neighboring states to the north.

Some will venture as far as Nova Scotia and Cape Breton Island; others will book passage for a cruise on the St. Lawrence. Many will content themselves with the combination of returning college-bound youngsters to campuses and a leisurely return.

After the hot days, the busy days, the fun-filled work-pressed summer, come the invigorating days of September and the bracing days of October. There's something special about those, too.

Ane we wonder, as August hurries along, whether this year, like some in the past, there'll be hurricanes, real or threatened. We hope, this year as every year, we'll be spared the impact, the destruction, the tearing torment of high winds and water, driven seas, broken trees, eroded beaches.

The special things about summer -- its softness, its gentleness -- are what make it a treasured season. There's ease, there's freedom, there's a take-it-easy feeling about summer, even for those who count it their busiest season.

Fall inspires us to increased activity, has a get-up-and-go atmosphere; winter pits us against the harsher elements and drives us to shelter ourselves near warming fires; spring entices us, flirts and promises, but seldom satisfies us Cape Codders, for spring's an ephemeral flimsy, a yearned-for but an always-tip-toeing-just-out-of-reach time of year.

This summer, like decades of summers past, is swiftly coming to a reluctant end. We count our remaining holiday hours, fill them brimming full with sunshine; we harvest the sun now, as we harvest fruits and vegetables from the gardens.

When it's over, we have our memories to cherish and the coming months of anticipation to carry us through til June rolls round once again.

Ah, summer...