

Village View

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Capricious is the weather these last days of August. Not so, of course, for there's always a reason for whatever weather comes our way.

Whether heat and humidity or fine clear days are our lot, behind each change are the forces of the universe. Just as fogs develop when warm moisture-laden southwest winds collide head-on with colder airs drifting down from Canada, those very winds and airs are propelled by changes in other parts of the earth's atmosphere, pushing them along a predictable path.

Weather patterns provide meteorologists their careers. You'd think the predictability of these paths would make weathermen infallible, but we know it's not true. Even predictable weather patterns can take unexpected changes in course.

Behind a change in wind may be changes in temperature; behind a change in temperature may be slight differences in the size and shape of an arctic storm, or a tropical one. Or a hurricane.

Some hurricanes are born in the Caribbean; others spawn off Africa's west coast. And the hardest thing to predict is what a hurricane will do.

Between September, 1938, when Cape Cod was visited by the first major hurricane to strike our coast this century, and September, 1960 when Hurricane Donna roared through, we've made the acquaintance of several of these stormy ladies. Yes, hurricanes are capricious, although it's too tame a word for the awesome forces of such storms.

Without modern communication you might think we'd be completely unprepared for a hurricane's approach, but to those who watch the skies and seas, the signs are there, well ahead of time. Even without a weather report, the warnings can be interpreted.

Hurricanes develop in the fall, in August through November. Tropical storms that may become hurricanes pump a lot of hot moist air into the northeast, and in August we expect the weather. On hot humid days, the weatherwise keep an eye peeled for other storm signals.

Unlike tornadoes that can descend suddenly when two powerful weather systems collide and thunderheads boil, and can as quickly disperse, the life of a hurricane is usually two weeks or longer.

Sometimes hurricanes are preceded by phenomena called sun dogs, golden sun-like glows, smaller, seen fairly near the sun itself. If a sun dog is visible, we know the earth's atmosphere contains tiny ice crystals and a good deal of moisture. Sometimes there are two sun dogs. These are halo effects, similar to rings around the moon that often foretell stormy weather.

There's no guarantee sun dogs will appear before a hurricane, nor is one's presence a guarantee a storm will strike soon. If, however, you see sundogs as well as other warning signs, you might store the patio furniture.

Other warning signs? We who live within a few minutes of the ocean may get clues watching the water. A major storm spreads its influence across miles and miles of open sea. In a fluid medium, action in one part sends waves traveling in all directions. When you drop a pebble into a quiet pool, the ripples travel in an expanding ring to shore.

When a hurricane is roaring up the Atlantic coastline, large waves precede it. If you've a suspicion a big storm is coming, go down to the beach and watch the waves. If the swells come rolling in with deep troughs between them, if you see long heavy waves breaking in measured intervals, crashing on the beach with unusually slow cadence, as though driven by a powerful engine, go home and store away in the cellar or garage anything that might blow around in a high wind.