

Marrying the Weather

By Carolynne Hutter

The Italians say when you marry a man, you marry his family. I say here in the Washington, DC area, you marry his profession. And being married to meteorology, my husband's profession, has taken me into uncharted territories.

Before I married Steve, I had an urban lifestyle, living in Adams Morgan, and my relationship with weather was simple—directly connected to my clothing selection. It's going to be hot, better put on a cotton dress. It's getting colder outside, better bring along a sweater. The relationship never got much deeper than that.

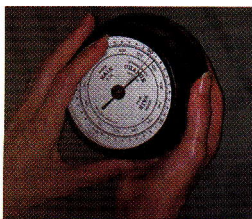
After I married Steve, I moved into his house in Silver Spring, Maryland, and experienced a sort of meteorological shock treatment. Although it appears like all the others on this quiet suburban street, ours is actually a miniweather station. We have two digital thermometers to measure the outside and inside temperatures, a barometer to assess air pressure, a NOAA radio to listen to 24-hour weather information, an anemometer on the roof for wind speed, and a rain gauge in our yard. We're all weather, all the time.

Two thermometers? You might think we had a large dwelling to need two thermometers. Actually we live in a small, one-story house, but Steve felt it would be reassuring for us and our visitors to know the precise temperature at all times. None of those messy vague pronouncements about outside conditions: looks like it's in the 60s. From all corners of our home we know it's exactly 66.3 degrees outside (and 74.5 inside).

Of all the weather measuring devices in our house, the rain gauge has become the object of most importance. After it rains, Steve and I will look at each knowingly, then try to outfox the other one in guessing the amount of rainfall. Three-quarters of an inch, I say. Half an inch, he says. We run to the yard, pull out the rain gauge, and huddle close as we carefully examine it. No, we were both wrong. It's a whopping nine-tenths of an inch! What a way to add spice to a marriage.

Our interest in rainfall goes beyond the rain

gauge. Steve faithfully keeps detailed records of the rainfall for our area, alerting me to when we're in times of feast or famine. Invariably, I will be at a party and someone will say what wonderful sunny weather we're having (perhaps thinking that this is a safe topic compared with politics or other Washington interests). To which I will point out that we've gotten only 1.4 inches of rain for the month, well below the average for this time of year. Technically we're in a drought! They always excuse themselves politely before moving on to the next person.



During hurricane season, I become a hurricane widow, similar to football widows. I often lose my husband's attention to Danielle, Edward, or whatever the latest hurricane is called, as it hurls itself across the East Coast. Hour

after hour, he watches its every move, as it teases him with its capricious ways . . . Danielle was heading inland, but now it's off to sea. When one of these badly behaved creatures dies, we have a reprieve. Unfortunately it's usually just a matter of time before another one forms deep in the bowels of the tropics and Jim is back to watching the colorful blobs flickering on the computer's radar screen.

Sometimes I think that perhaps I'm not cut out to be married to the weather. I still can't identify the clouds, tell you which ones are altocumulus. Or explain why fog occurs. Besides, where's the glamour? A doctor's wife has a certain cachet, in an old-fashioned way. But a meteorologist's wife? That sounds like something from a Sebastian Junger book.

The other day I was wondering what life would be like if my husband had a typical profession, say law or medicine. Would we have a more normal lifestyle if we didn't monitor the movements of every storm in our area? Does it matter when we're technically in a drought, as long as the sun is shining? Wouldn't it be nice if weather became again a safe, noncontroversial party topic?

Then I admitted to myself: I've grown accustomed to this heightened awareness of the elements. It is curious that my first novel is called *Rain*, a title I came up with years before I met Steve. Perhaps it was my destiny to marry a weatherman.