

## WISHING YOU SOME GRAY WINTER DAYS

BY DANNY HEITMAN, *FORUM* EDITOR



Some months ago, one of my readers signed off her email by wishing me a great day – or at least that’s what she *intended*

to do. A hiccup at the keyboard scrambled her closing line somewhat, slightly altering its meaning.

“Have a gray day,” the parting sentence read.

I took no offense, and it occurred to me that a gray day, not so popular a commodity among weather watchers, might be just the thing I needed.

The email and its eye-catching typo had reached me in the middle of July, just as a record heat wave swept my part of the world. We’d had weeks of ruthlessly unclouded skies, each day’s sun training its heat, with the methodical intensity of a blowtorch, on every living thing. As our zinnias wilted and the pavement sizzled and the lawn glowed with an odd yellow glaze, I crossed my fingers and wished for at least one gray day to arrive.

What I was hoping for, I suppose, was a small taste of winter, the season

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when, in many places, gray days reign supreme. I wouldn’t want gray days all the time, although they do have their uses, as I discovered in another lifetime as a young newspaper reporter who often wrote about local gardens.

Photographers who accompanied me on those outdoor assignments liked a few clouds in the sky when snapping pictures of prized roses or a bed of daisies. Direct sun tended to bleach out everything, but a cloudy cast to the light allowed subjects to be seen more clearly.

I’ve found that gray days can sometimes allow me to see more clearly at an emotional level, too. While sunny days point me outward, toward the crowded beach or bustling park for which flawless blue skies are made, a gray day nudges me inward.

It’s why the grayness of winter goes hand in hand with introspection, a natural stage for taking stock and making New Year’s resolutions. One couldn’t imagine such a sober ritual unfolding in the overdone brilliance of a summer day.

In the winter of 1993, foreseeing big changes in my life, I spent a few vacation days in Seattle, a place known for its gray days. During a week of ashen skies and misty rain, I walked the city alone, sorting out who I was and wished to be. I flew home and proposed to the woman who’s been my wife for three decades now, a life’s companion through sun and clouds alike.

I have that string of gray days still vivid in memory for helping to set my course. “Have a gray day” isn’t so bad a wish for anyone, I’ve learned. I hope this winter brings you a few gray days, too.

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