

Summertime in South Florida is not just another season. Mother Nature flexes her muscles this time of year, showing us who is really in charge. Regardless of what we say, I don't think that those of us who remain rooted here this time of year are accustomed to the heat, the humidity, the storms and the bugs (I've been waiting 55 years to get acclimated)... we basically just accept it and go about our business. Well, what there is left of it after many of our friends and neighbors head back up North. But for all the negatives that one can think of about Southwest Florida summers, there is a strange duality to this time of year because there are also some remarkable and wonderful things that occur as well.

As a child growing up here, I knew that the coming of summer meant long uncomfortable nights spent with no air conditioning, waiting for a breeze that never came, but it also meant that when the summer rains came the temperature would immediately (albeit very briefly) drop 20 degrees and the air would smell clean, sweet and alive. That first rumble of thunder for the season sounded strange and wonderfully welcome after 8 months of dry season and it still does. School was also out, just in time to play in the puddles that accumulated outside the house.

Although I spent most of my waking hours working with my dad, there was still time to swim in the cool, clean waters of the river or play in the 90 degree Gulf water at the beach that was so salty a skinny kid like me could actually float. The dead grass everywhere would come back to life with a vengeance and tropical storms will soon visit us. But even with the inherent danger, damage and destruction that these storms can bring, I've always felt like their passing brought in cleaner air and are nature's way of trimming up the vegetation and weak trees. (and my fence!)

Memories of chasing fireflies, the taste of watermelon, the soothing sound of a distant whip-poor-will, clouds of dragonflies, the sound of thousands of tree frogs praying for rain, the smell of charcoal lighter fluid, watching heat lightning at night in the distance, the sound of heat crickets singing during the hottest part of the day, the smell of fresh cut grass, the feeling of salt drying on my skin after a dip in the gulf.

Now, 40 years later, it doesn't take much more than a slight smell, a sound, or taste to take me back to that time. But as different as things are now, they somehow remain the same. The river still will start to grow now, until it overflows its banks (hopefully not too much). Its coffee colored waters cooler and cleaner than you would ever expect. The young boy inside me will guide me to the river with my wife and some friends and our kayaks and that evening we will sit together on the porch and wait for the sound of the whip-poor-will to take us back. I really love this place!