

August Almanacs and the Weather

Farmers in my neck of the woods (northeastern Pennsylvania) were familiar with the *Farmer's Almanac*, which began in 1792 and contained yearly observations about weather conditions, crops, the moon, animals, superstitions, and folklore. One example, "Own a rabbit's foot, especially if the rabbit was killed in a cemetery by a cross-eyed person at the dark of the moon," might contribute to some people having a rabbit's foot on their key chain for luck.

Of course, for farmers, the planting and harvesting of crops was weather-dependent, so there were many comments about it, such as, "The north wind doth blow, and we shall have snow," or "If a cat licks its fur against the grain, a hailstorm is coming; if it sneezes, rain is on the way." And when "hawks fly high, there will be a clear sky; when they fly low, prepare for a blow." Even the cows could help: "If a cow stands with its tail to the west, the weather will be fair," but "If a cow grazes with its tail to the east, the weather is likely to turn sour."

Today, we are given regular and "up-to-date" comments on the weather, with forecasters moving clouds, winds and hurricanes along gigantic TV screens. In any half hour local news account, there will be at least 4 reports about the weather: temperatures, allergy and wind-conditions, humidity levels, chances of it not raining in Central Texas, tornadoes, lightning, and so on, all with vivid color maps depicting ranges of severity. Forecasters are eager and determined to make even the most common day's weather sound exciting because it can change quickly, and we must be prepared.

In the Papua New Guinea highlands, I too was a weather watcher. If one of our single engine planes was headed out our way from the aviation center over an hour away, the pilot needed to know the weather. I would report on the radio about cloud coverage, rain and the possible wet condition of the airstrip, which was located at a mission station some 8 miles from us. Often the clouds hung around the ridges and made it difficult for the pilot to see the small airstrip and sometimes, due to sudden storms, the flight would have to be aborted. On many occasions our supplies were off-loaded somewhere until later, when there was better weather at our location. Consequently, I learned something of weather patterns in the Highlands and made sure it was safe for our pilots to land at the mission airstrip.

When a major storm was coming, I could hear the rain beating heavily on the jungle trees as it came over the mountain near our house. It was awesome and wonderful at the same time.

My favorite views were the sunrises and sunsets—living near the Equator the times were always the same: 6:30 in the morning and 6:30 at night. Bright red flames of sunshine were sometimes embedded in large cumulus clouds and I would think "*Before you created the hills or brought the world into being, you were eternally God and will be God forever*" (Ps 90:2).

In the two villages where we spent several years, the average annual rainfall was between 120 and 150 inches. There were times when it rained all day, and although the sound of rain on a grass roof is soothing and pleasant, hiking in the mud is no fun. Slipping and sliding, falling in

the mud, sometimes with leeches sucking blood from your legs (which you don't feel or realize until you see the red trickle on your leg), it is not the glorious life of the missionary. And if you are inclined to recite Romans 10:15 about the "beautiful" feet of those who bring the message, picture them dirty, calloused and with fungus under the toenails.

But we are in the U.S. in early August, and it is as hot as a "Texas mailbox." (I made that up.) Nevertheless, August, like every other American month, has many international days, such as:

National Raspberry Cream Pie Day
National Root Beer Float Day
National Fresh Breath Day
National Wiggle Your Toes Day
National Relaxation Day
National Lemon Meringue Pie Day
National left-hander's Day

It is obvious that August is full of possibilities, even if we must spend most of our time at home wiggling our toes and relaxing with a root beer float.

Returning to the weather, Jesus noted that people observed it, but not spiritual conditions, so he said, *"When you see a cloud coming up in the west, at once you will say that it is going to rain—and it does. And when you feel the south wind blowing, you say that it is going to get hot—and it does. Hypocrites! You can look at the earth and the sky and predict the weather; why, then, don't you know the meaning of the present time?"* (Luke 12:54-56).

A good question for us to ponder as well.

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Weather watchers