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Dr. Wyatt has been Board Certified in Internal Medicine since 1994. She has an interest in the prevention and treatment of chronic disease including heart disease, diabetes, women's health, as well as acute illness and injuries. Her focus is on wellness and preventative medicine, including the mind/body/spirit connection.

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viewpoint BY MADELEINE VON HOLZEN

Under the Umbrella

Why the horrible wet spring makes us happy

Since we arrived in Eugene from Switzerland in January, we have noticed something very peculiar and apparently linked to this place: a shift in the seasons. We were first told that the nice days would start, after a rainy spring, in May or June. As we went into February and very humid March, the beginning of the sunny weather was planned, but constantly moving, for two or three weeks later. A few days ago, we finally understood. "The first of July, there is a click and the showers suddenly stop" a friend told us. This being said, we now know that August and September are the greatest months and that October is still so nice and warm.



Discovering your town in spring 2011 (yes, we have heard that this year is really the worst for so long and we do understand that it normally rains much less) and living here for a few months leads you to develop theories about the weather. Ours is: There is a link between the amount of water falling from the sky and the kindness of the people, as we have never met so many nice people as here. This is why.

Being happy in a sunny and warm place seems really easy, whereas staying smiling and positive in a dreary climate requires other qualities. You have to be strongly optimistic, be capable of developing faith in the future and renew it every single day, and find another interest in life than wearing nice summer shoes. So there must be, here in Eugene, a high concentration of this specific type of people (some moved from arid and consumerist California, didn't they?): the ones who care less about Fahrenheit degrees than about others; people happy to show you around, willing to help you, to do everything that can be done so that you feel good.

Then of course, Eugene weather gets people to communicate. It is well known that meteorology is the first topic of conversation between us humans. But here, it has to be explained and discussed. Being a newcomer, you are honestly trying to understand what is happening. And locals are sincerely happy to help out, looking sorry for you as if they could do anything about the sky's behavior. And there is a lot to say. The ocean, the mountains, the silver waterfalls and biodiversity, the lovely variety of green here, opposed to other yellowish uninteresting places. You learn to contemplate the humid and dripping nature. Very helpful as you can feel lost looking outdoors every morning or when you read about this record dry and warm spring in your own European country.

We must say that the umbrella – which happens to be a great place to meet – helped us a lot. Eugene people very rarely seem to have one of those instruments, as if this awkward protecting thing was created for tourists. Well, if you have an umbrella, especially if it is enormous and has two decks (never seen those gigantic objects elsewhere), you can get closer to the natives. You can host a family and wait together for the rain to stop. Of course, parents dressed for their daughter's soccer game as if they were going fishing don't need you, but then, that's a great occasion to learn about fly fishing. You will discover how eager Eugene people are to share their passion, even with some Swiss guys who have no idea how to catch – and then release – a trout going by in a river. No way a stranger would get invited to an introduction to downhill skiing in Switzerland just because he was chatting under an umbrella.

Last but not least, the (few) sunny days, when they arrive, become "fantastic" and impact on the way you exchange with others. "With this great weather" starts any dialog and gives a bright tone to everything. And you, Eugene habitants, are so good at laughing about it ("What is that thing up there?" when the sun shines).

So honestly, yes, it has been a dreadful spring here and we can't wait for the summer to start. But we are convinced that we would not have met all these incredibly nice people elsewhere than in wet Eugene. Which makes us really happy.

Madeleine von Holzen is a Swiss journalist living with her family for seven months in Eugene through a house trade.

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