

Snow Day

One writer finds the Hudson Valley most lovable during the winter. Call her crazy.

GROWING UP AS A KID IN LONG ISLAND, NY IN THE LATE seventies, it was always exhilarating to wake up to knee-deep snow on a Monday morning knowing that I wouldn't have to deal with elementary school angst that day. My weather compulsion didn't really start until I became a Hudson Valley resident in 2004. Pre-smartphone in 2002, when my husband and I moved into our Woodstock rental on November 15th we woke up to the season's first snowfall. Today, checking the next day's weather forecast on my smartphone is part of my bedtime ritual.

My pulse rate goes up when I see a bright red number 3 hovering over the "severe" tab. A few times a year, I may even see "Tornado Watch" which puts me in an altered state of consciousness even though my chances of seeing a tornado in the Hudson Valley are pretty slim. I have a better chance of seeing a black bear! I love it when a soothing country song is followed by repetitive loud beep of an important update from the National Weather Service in Albany. I thought I was alone in my weather obsession until I started talking to other weather nerds. Meteorologist Steven DiMartino, owner of NJ NY PA Weather (NYNJPAWeather.com) thinks that the greater reach of weather information has created more "weather junkies" like me.

One late August night foray on Facebook led me to weather enthusiast and Kingston resident Alex Marra's new Hudson Valley Weather Page where a hundred or so weather buffs were trading weather news, rumors, gossip, helpful info, and posting detailed descriptions of the weather, and commenting on Marra's forecasts. It is a social media weather love fest! In the week leading up to Hurricane Irene, word of mouth traveled fast and Hudson Valley Weather's Fan Page number of 'likers' spiked to over 4,000. I have a feeling these fans share the same habit I have of checking the iPhone for weather updates when awakened mid-sleep by a loud clap of thunder. Marra has been tracking the weather since he was 7 and even has a weather journal from 4th grade. He is self-taught weather enthusiast, and has read over 50 books on weather, climate change and Meteorology and took a college course on

climate. Most of his forecasts are spot on. "I wanted to come up with a way I could talk everyday about what I love and people would actually care to listen, so I created "Hudson Valley Weather" on Facebook," says Marra.

"When Hurricane Irene was targeting the Hudson Valley it was natural for me to want to dedicate every hour I could to tracking the storm and helping people stay safe. It felt great to see the page grow and the response I got," recalls Marra. The weather and helping people are two things that Marra loves the most so he kept everyone posted about the storm all the while feeling a large range of emotion as the area he loves so much was being devastated. Friends, family and strangers alike were losing all they had. "It was a life changing experience that taught me a lot about myself and the heart of the Hudson Valley," adds Marra who is thinking about going back to school to make weather his career.

Things I hate about Hudson Valley winters? I don't like dealing with black ice, power outages, snow storms that fall on important days like birthdays or hard-to-book doctor appointments, below-zero wind chill factors that turn us into weekend hermits, mice that seek shelter behind our walls. This year, I got smart and adopted a cat so I rarely see mice these days. No live ones anyway.

The Hudson Valley is at its most lovable during the winter. I love the reassuring roar of the snow plow truck gliding down my quiet street, the pre-blizzard buzz at grocery stores, the sore thighs that come from hours of sleigh riding with the kids. Snow storm dinners. Hunkering down. Keeping my socks on in yoga class. Ordering the firewood and then watching my husband and a few neighborhood kids stack it. I love how a good blizzard can clear your mind.

Last year, a server at a local restaurant told us that we needed to brace for a hurri-blizzard – a blizzard with hurricane force wind gusts. I ordered a margarita.

I asked my 99-year old friend and poet Anne Porter what her favorite season is. "I don't really have a favorite season.

I like the transitions," she said. Maybe I should try to savor the transitions a little more. Could that be a key to longevity? But what is there to love about the transition of Halloween to Thanksgiving? When the clocks change I need something to get me to the start of the holidays. An early snow season is welcome!

For meteorologists significant snowstorms become their own kind of holidays. "There was the super storm of 1993 that created major havoc throughout the New York City metropolitan areas. Then there was the 2003 severe thunderstorm outbreak in Oklahoma where I chased my first tornado. As a meteorologist, every storm is special because it's like a major new challenge - a super bowl and world series wrapped in one, and you want to be the meteorologist that got the storm right. For meteorologist, there is very much a competition as to who got the forecast

right," says DiMartino.

So, what kind of winter are we in for this year? "The fact is we don't know exactly how strong La Nina will get. We still have to monitor the snow pack development in Siberia and northern Canada as well to determine the potential strength of polar air masses. Basically, there are a lot of wild cards that will become much clearer in the next few weeks. I do expect an active winter given the developmental characteristics of this La Nina, but whether that means a lot of snow or just a lot of rain, I'm not sure just yet," says DiMartino. Rest assured though, Hudson Valley, chances are it will not be dull.



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