

Knee-Deep and Deeper

By Susan Vaughan Moshofsky

I know the lack of precipitation is killing the ski industry, and I know we'll pay later for all these dry days. But after the darkness and drizzle of winter, I crave blue skies and sunshine. Okay, I know—we won't have enough water. We should be praying for rain.

But I hate the rain. I admit it. I'm not a native Oregonian. I can't stand the continuous, gray drizzle that falls nine months of most years. I know our green surroundings need rain just as my lungs need air. But in a typical Oregon winter, the rain keeps on—past need, it seems. Like an aging relative repeating a story for the fifth time, like a child insisting on his parent's attention beyond the point of patience, the rain persists.

Portlanders claim there is something special about our rain: its softness, the gentle change of mood it brings. My native-born daughter welcomes the rain every time it falls. But I don't. There's no passion in Portland's rain, not like that of the wild, stormy Florida rain I grew to love at my grandparents' house.

My grandfather, Pa, was a simple man. He wore gray-blue coveralls or weathered jeans and a plaid flannel shirt softened by more years of wear than it was intended to have. He didn't graduate from college. But he had a wisdom and patience I long for. Pa used to say the way to prepare for rain was to listen to the evening songs of the frogs.

“Tee-table, tee-table,” he warbled in a small, high-pitched voice. “Hear it? That's the song of the little frog. That means the rain's a-comin', but it'll be little and small.” On a late-summer Florida evening in my

childhood, Pa and I stood on the back porch of the 70-year-old house he'd built. Our feet were planted on the cement floor he himself had poured, and our eyes squinted into the night sheltered by a corrugated metal roof. One arm wrapped around me, he pointed into the blackness with his craggy, work-roughened hand and continued his legend of the frogs.

“Knee-deep and deeper, knee-deep and deeper,” he sang, his voice at its usual pitch. This song, he explained, was a portent of the strong, hard rain so characteristic of Florida's late summer storms, the kind of rain that surprises Oregonians on the few times it falls here that heavily.

But a real storm was forecast, Pa said, not by a college-educated weatherperson in a suit on TV, but by a frog's booming, deep-throated call. “Jugga-rum, jugga-rum,” he rumbled. This call forecast the Florida rain that blinds drivers on the Interstate, that carves trenches along graveled, country roads, that sends tourists running for cover.

Perhaps I should borrow some of my grandfather's wisdom and appreciate rain the way I do on these glorious clear days. Maybe a corner of my soul, in spite of me, ought to gather a bit of native-Oregonian, mossy love for rain. Maybe rain isn't just nourishment for the earth and its green inhabitants, but is designed to feed our souls as well.