

## Guess Again

### The Summer Loved By All

We are a few weeks past the autumnal equinox and the barn swallows have started their long trek back to Argentina and all points south, although a few still remain and seem reluctant to go.

The Queen Anne's Lace and blue-flowering chicory that was blooming so profusely along the roadside on my way to Danville a few weeks ago, is now waning and has almost spent its cycle. Goldenrod, purple asters, lythrum and various wild sunflowers are still exhibiting some of their luster, but relatively few others. Milkweed is about ready to burst open their silvery green pods, and strew seeds to the wind. And green acorns hang on the oaks, soon to be released for harvest to the squirrels. Yes, summer slipped away.

I am sure most everyone in our area would agree, that it has been a good summer. Except for some isolated spots, we've had adequate moisture and tolerable temperatures, and definitely a contrast to last year's dry and very hot summer. We should not have any reason for complaints this year.

But as certain as death follows birth, we will soon complain about snow and frigid temperatures, which are bound to follow as seasons make their changes. And soon someone will say, "Yes, but we haven't had Indian Summer yet".

Who came up with the words, Indian Summer, is a mystery. It seems that the Indians did not coin that title, and from what I have read, do not take credit for it. They probably enjoyed the season, much like we do, and it gave them balmy days and time to harvest their various crops in comfort.

There doesn't seem to be a fixed date for Indian Summer. We all know it comes in the fall, and that's about as close as anyone can come. Sometimes it comes early, and sometimes late. Sometimes it waits for the first hard frost — the black frost or "killing" frost, as some call it. And, sometimes it will settle in real early and it's believed to be a lost and lingering summer day. There are some "old timers" who claim it can never come early, but, neither do they have the answer as to when it should appear. It isn't on a calendar season; like Easter, Thanksgiving or Christmas. It makes its own rules.

Now and then — and this, too, can be argued — it comes twice in a year, both early and late. Such years are memorable. Maybe, this could be one of those years. God knows, after the summer we had last year, with drought and excessive heat, we deserve two spells of Indian Summer this year. I'll take the early one gladly, in any case, and hope for more before I make my trek south for the winter.

The evening TV weather forecasters said last night there was a 60 percent chance of rain, today. This morning's Chicago Tribune gave the same report — a 60 percent chance of showers. But, guess what? It was a most beautiful day, and not a drop of rain. Sixty percent? Come on. Perhaps we should go back to the old way.

On the farm my Dad would arise early, look up to the sky and, check the cows, chickens and the birds. Then wet his finger and stick it in the air. He could tell how much humidity was in the air by how fast his finger dried and, of course, which way the wind was coming from.

When the birds weren't rehearsing their symphony or were unusually quiet, he knew that inclement weather was on the way, and referred to it as the, "lull before the storm". And, if the crows seemed to be flying erratic, it was certain to storm shortly.

If the cows huddled in a group close to the barn, a thunderstorm was inevitable, and on its way. Also, one of his many quotes (all in Plattdeutsch, the Low German vernacular language of his ancestral northern Germany heritage) was, "When cows chase flies with their switching tails, a thunderstorm to drive them away, never fails".

And if the chickens were reluctant to leave the hen house, "donner and blitzen" would soon announce the coming of rain from the dark approaching clouds.

His consolation to hot days and muggy uncomfortable evenings was, "When the winds blow over the stubble of harvest fields, the hot days to cooler evenings will have to yield". And some of his other quotes were, "A sun of morning red, I can tell, will put water in the cistern and the well". Or, "A evening sun, red, bright and clear, will tomorrow bring hope, relief and cheer".

His prediction for Ground Hog Day was, "If he doesn't see his shadow there or here, it will be for farmers a super corn year". And of hoarfrost (or white-frost as he called it) on the ground, plants and roofs, he would say, "Rain will wash away, Jack Frost's work and play". And, on a dewless summer morning his comment would be, "Lack of dew on stalks of corn, will be refreshed by tomorrow 'morn". And he was right more often than he was wrong.

And there were always the pesky flies. Now, let me tell you, those little rascals knew hours ahead of time it was going to rain. They would hang around the windows and doors and stick to one's self, and sting and bite with the voraciousness of a piranha. A sure sign of rain.

And whatever meteorology information my Dad couldn't get from the animals, he was filled in by my Mother's corns and bunions, or the hired hand's rheumatism. As I recall, he was right 90 percent of the time.

Now, maybe it's because the weather service guys and TV weather seers, don't have access to animals and flies to observe. Or, maybe they don't eat the right kind of breakfast or something. But, with all their modern equipment, not to mention satellites, it seems to me they could at least come closer than 60 percent. My Dad sure did.