

DOWN HOME: Rain, imagination & our agnostic dog

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The weird thing about living in a region that enjoys (endures?) all kinds of climate is what happens to your meteorological imagination.

Here's what I mean: We experience all kinds of weather where I live in North Texas. This summer, the thermometer hit 100 degrees a record number of days. I think it was 80, maybe more. But I don't know for sure, because I'm pretty good at repressing painful memories. Along the way, we missed the record for consecutive 100-degree days by one measly day, when we "cooled" off to the high-90s. But no matter how much we considered changing the names of our local communities to Hell, Gehenna, Sheol and Lake of Fire, all that eventually changed. And this winter, the temperature could dip below zero, and we could skate to work on a sheen of ice.

But when you're busy just trying to survive a run of one kind of weather, it's hard to imagine you'll ever see the other kind again for the rest of your life. You think the cosmic curve of climatology has turned in on itself, and you'll never careen out of the cycle. Like last summer, I felt pretty sure I could ship all my winter clothes to poor Siberian sloth-sloppers, because I'd never need them again. So, imagine my surprise when the temps dipped down almost to freezing, the wind whipped up, and I felt a strange, tingling sensation. What was it? I couldn't decide. Oh, yeah. I was cold.

This year, I've had that same never-gonna-change-til-hell-freezes-over feeling about another weather phenomenon. If you're old enough and have a decent memory, you may recall what I'm talking about. It's called rain. And it happens when water falls out of the sky.

I know. I'm testing the bounds of credibility. But I'm telling you this happens. Dark, puffy things form in the sky. They block the sun. And then they leak. Water falls down to the ground.

This happened the other night. It confused the bejabbers out of our dog, Topanga.

Once dinner is over, Topanga thinks she and I should go for a walk. She's been known to pester the living daylights out of me until I put on sneakers, grab the leash, stuff a newspaper bag in my pocket, and we head down the street.

The other night, she wanted to walk, and I wouldn't do it. Rain was falling, and I was afraid to acknowledge it, thinking the sky might dry up if I acted pleased to receive moisture.

Topanga kept sitting directly in front of me, wagging her tail and whining in the back of her throat. It's a sound that, loosely translated, means: "Please, oh, please-please-please get up out of that chair and take me for a walk. I haven't sniffed a light pole or fire hydrant in 24 hours. Oh, pretty-please with catnip on it!"

I couldn't make her understand we weren't going out in the rain. I think maybe Topanga is an agnostic dog, and she doesn't believe in meteorological miracles.