

Another Game Day

By Meredith O'Brien

It was game day.

I had tickets to see my beloved Red Sox play at historic Fenway Park. They were in the hunt for a Wild Card playoff spot.

But I couldn't attend the game.

Again.

Why? Because it was going to be hot and humid. Because the weather conditions - not the spate of uneven Red Sox performances - would make me ill. Because multiple sclerosis has caused damage to the area of my brain that controls my temperature and, when I'm in hot and humid conditions, that damage causes me to, essentially, short-circuit.

I was able to attend a game in early June after I was fully vaccinated. I came prepared for the weather -- low 80s, with moderate humidity. I had a soft cooler bag which I'd shoved inside my purse. Initially, security wouldn't let me in because they said the bag was too big to be allowed into the park. Then I whipped out my accessible parking placard, and as I was about to explain what was in the cooler bag and why, they waved me in. That bag contained several ice packs, a wet cooling cloth, and my hideous cooling vest. By rotating through these items and pressing a series of cold beverage containers to my neck and face, I was able to enjoy my first in-person baseball game since 2019.

But in the last days of August, the heat and humidity were too intense.

A few days beforehand, I'd used that accessible placard to park close to a grocery store entrance, so I'd be outside for as little time as possible. But when I was loading my groceries into my car, I grew weak, lightheaded, and began retching violently. (When my heat sensitivity is intense, I actually vomit, my legs buckle, and my vision is impaired.) Just walking out to the mailbox at the end of my driveway a few days later, in the same kind of weather, sparked a similar reaction.

When my husband first told me he'd gotten tickets for the game, I crossed my fingers that the weather would be either in the 70s or there'd be low humidity (ideally with both). However, with the daytime temperature nearly 90 and the humidity slated to spike as the evening wore on, I acknowledged reality: I had to give my ticket away.

I try not to get too bummed about missing things like games, picnics, outdoor parties, concerts, and the like because the weather conditions will make me sick. The last time I saw my neurologist, I asked him when he and his colleagues would figure out a way to fix this heat sensitivity thing and repair the damage to the nerves that control my body's response to these conditions. He laughed, made an empathetic face, and then fell silent. Science isn't there yet, he said.

I try not to panic when the weather forecast calls for intense storms with high winds that could knock out power (like this past weekend's would-be hurricane) because knocking out power means I won't have air conditioning, the only thing that prevents me from becoming sick when it's hot and humid. Yes, I could retreat to my basement until power returns, but that would only help with the heat, not with the humidity. Without refuge from those twin conditions, I'll be rendered a listless pile of flesh and bones lying on the floor.

I try not to catastrophize when I see the bright red graphics showing how the Earth has been getting undeniably hotter; how even the regions my husband and I have joked about moving to so I won't have to deal with heat and humidity, have been experiencing historic, deadly heat waves; and how I feel like vulnerable prey to the unrelenting global warming.

I have to work hard not to dwell on the things over which I have no control. It's best for me to try to focus on looking forward, on focusing on the next time I'll be able to cheer for the Red Sox in person. There'll always be another game.

Meredith O'Brien is a Boston-area writer and the author of four books including a memoir, *Uncomfortably Numb*, about the life-altering impact of a multiple sclerosis diagnosis. She teaches journalism at Northeastern University and creative nonfiction for Bay Path University's MFA program.

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