

Even if August doesn't live up to its name, it's a month for dreaming.

The University of Pennsylvania's Garret G. Fagin writes that the Roman ruler Augustus, who ruled from 27 B.C. to 14 A.D. and for whom the month of August was named, was "at once tolerant and implacable, ruthless and forgiving, brazen and tactful."

If June is two-thirds spring and one-third summer, and September a month that smoothly segues to autumn, and July the simmering, seething apex of the season, then August seems to fall short of its grand namesake.

The month named after Augustus is not the August I know. My August seems more like a giant sweaty guy in a ChiefWahoo T-shirt, frantically dialing Mike Trivisonno's radio show to talk about how liberals have ruined everything except Texas Hold'em.

I want to get away from August as much as I'd want to get away from that guy. That guy would want to get away from me too, so I can only assume that anyone who can get away from August *does* get away from August.

For me, there are two types of people when it comes to August: those who "summer," and those who "stay." Those who summer convert August to a 31-day holiday, but one that's not on the calendar, at least not in the United States.

Those who stay don't go anywhere in August. Oh, maybe a three-day trip somewhere, but the difference between that and summering is the difference between the Indians being in fourth place or on their way to the World Series. August, like Major League Baseball, contains multitudes.

When I hear people talk of spending August on the coast or at the shore (invariably, shabby chic places on the Atlantic Ocean, or maybe not so shabby), or the lake (usually in cool,

blue Canada), I writhe with unenviable envy. Not so much because those places are less buggy and muggy than northeast Ohio, but because summering people go to those places and get away – not just physically, but in their heads. People who summer don't, I'm told, worry about anything while summering.

I hear about summering people that head out sans cell phone and laptop. No info-anxiety for them. My staying imagination shimmers with images of mundane, low-tech pleasures, of a radio that gets one station and a TV that last worked in the Carter administration and, of course, no Internet or cell phone service.

My fantasies tend toward musty lake cabins with rusty water and last year's fire pit littered with artifacts of relaxation – an empty, forgotten bottle of wine, a moldering wool blanket draped over an ancient horizontal tree stump. I imagine myself rising at dawn instead of falling asleep slightly before it,

grabbing the rusted tin can of worms on the paint-peeled back porch and fishing up breakfast.

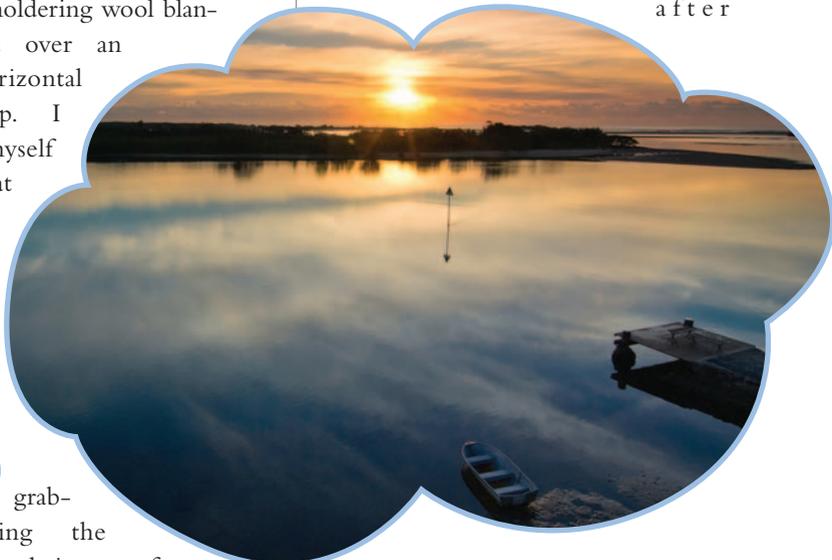
"Trout or bass, gang?" I'd say to my family after a morning's casting from a rowboat. The answer wouldn't matter, though. There'd be enough for everyone, and we'd put the leftover fresh fish in a battered ice bucket on the porch.

I wouldn't even wear a watch while

summering. We'd track the day by the arc of the sun. When the thunderstorms rumbled in the afternoon, we'd head for the bedrooms, where we'd ease into a nap while listening to the rain, and chuckle about the leak in the corner of the bedroom that we intended to fix some day, or not.

Well, not, at least not now. Because back in reality, none of those things are going to happen this year, and the cabin will have to wait. I have, in real life, a new novel on the way. Should the literary gods smile, maybe next year my wife-to-be and I can write a check for the lake cabin or ocean cottage and take a month off from trying to figure out how to navigate our metaphorical rowboat in the rising, roiling sea of this American life.

So maybe I've figured out August for myself, after



all. The month's heat softens the soul enough to allow for dreaming, to which I'm not immune. August is a modest month, but full of gravity, which subtly asserts itself by slowing down life.

For those who summer, and for those who stay, I hope August fulfills your dreams, or short of that, gives you something to dream about. ■

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