



## health

# DON'T LET THE SUN CATCH YOU CRYING

Should the sun ask where I've been lately, you can tell him I'm sticking to the shadows

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by John Stark | Sunday, October 20, 2013

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Who doesn't love the sun? I always worshiped it in the most delicious, but unhealthy ways, especially when I was young. My altars were rooftops, beaches and convertibles. I always dreaded the end of daylight saving time, when it was shockingly dark at 5 p.m. (It takes place this year on Sunday, Nov. 3, at 2 a.m.) I didn't like spending the next six months as the sun's jilted lover, waiting for it to come crawling back to me from Rio, or wherever it had run off to.

When I was growing up, I wasn't told about the sun's deadly side. Most people didn't know that it had one. My family had a speedboat, and we'd go waterskiing from Memorial Day to Labor Day. My mother would bring along the coconut-scented Coppertone in her beach bag. We'd slather it on our bodies like Imperial margarine. First we'd burn, then we'd bronze.

When I was in my twenties, I loved soaking up the rays on my roof deck in San Francisco. In my thirties, I spent summer weekends at the beach on Fire Island. In my forties and fifties, my passionate love for the sun cooled a bit. It became more of a careless love. Although I knew UV rays were toxic, I still didn't wear hats while gardening or taking my dog on hikes.

A routine doctor's visit last May revealed I had a basal cell skin cancer on my forehead. I had to undergo Mohs surgery. It was successful, though it did take a few diggings to get rid of all the cancer. After, my dermatologist gave me a lecture on staying out of the sun, covering myself up at all times and putting sunblock on my face every morning after brushing my teeth.



"Break up with summer" was his message. It's an abusive relationship, even in small doses. I couldn't disagree — a sun-loving neighbor of mine, who was my age, had just died of melanoma. If I wanted to spend a day in the sun, I'd have to dress like a mummy or a beekeeper. Better I stick to the shadows.

Giving up the sun wasn't as difficult as I had imagined. Modern technology has made staying indoors on a gorgeous day quite pleasurable. It was Henry James who said, "The two most beautiful words in the English language are summer and afternoon." I used to feel that way too. But now I say it's "Netflix and Hulu." I spent last Sunday afternoon watching political documentaries, and catching up on "Modern Family" episodes.

I may not be outside, smelling the roses. I'm inside, smelling the popcorn.

Here's another reason I'm avoiding the sun, and welcoming the end of daylight saving time. It has to do with my vanity. An older face is not so pretty in bright daylight: Just take a look at Robert Redford's in "All Is Lost." Sometimes when I'm shaving, my ears will be backlit by the morning sun in my bathroom window. It's then I notice the scary hairs growing on my ears, including black, wire-like ones that resemble cockroach antennae. You can't see them in the dark. Better I limit my socializing to when the sun goes down.

Should the sun ask where I've been lately, break the news gently. I've found a new lover. When I was at Ikea the other day, I bought sheers for my bedroom window. I got rid of the heavy shade that was there. Now when I'm lying in bed at night, I can see the moon. It's so beautiful, in all of its stages.

Maybe I need to be careful, though.

My Brooklyn grandmother used to warn me about the moon's effects when I was growing up. She said that if you stayed outside at night for too long, you could go loco. She knew, too. Her first husband, who was Cuban, liked to sit on their fire escape on hot summer evenings. If he didn't come in after a while, he'd become "moonstruck," she told me. He'd start singing and dancing and saying crazy things to her.

Beats cancer.

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