



Skin Cancer Made Me Love Summer Even More

When I was told I could not go out in the sun this year, I had to renegotiate my summer contract

By [John Stark](#) June 17, 2013

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Henry James described “summer afternoon” as “the two most beautiful words in the English language.” Many people would agree with him, me included.

But like most boomers I've had to change my relationship with summer. It's still beautiful, but in different, more interesting ways.

In Minnesota, where I live, we yearn for summer, which officially begins on Friday.

We talk, dream and fantasize about it all through the winters that keep us housebound and poor from paying furnace bills. This year we were still having snowstorms in May.

We cherish summer here because it's so short. By Labor Day it's already folding its tent.

Summer in the Upper Midwest demands your attention. Sometime in spring the frozen ponds and lakes suddenly thaw, like ice cube trays left on the counter. By July their icy waters have turned warm and soothing — perfect for swimming or floating on your back in the sun.

Nature expands and intensifies in this greedy serving of time. The days lengthen. Clouds are whiter and bigger. Wildflowers, doused in perfume, are electric in their

colors. Grass is greener. Foliage is lush. Tomatoes and corn are sweeter. Birds chirp louder, I swear they do.

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Even the extreme weather teases my senses. "Are you crazy?" my friends in California yelled at me when I stood on my patio holding my cell phone in the air one dark and stormy August afternoon. I wanted to share with them the wailing of the tornado sirens.

But I recently got some news that I wasn't keen on sharing. I had a [basal cell skin cancer tumor](#) on my forehead. I had to undergo [Mohs surgery](#) in my dermatologist's office. The painless procedure took a few attempts to get rid of all the cancer. Afterward, my doctor gave me a lecture on staying out of the sun, covering myself up as much as possible, and putting sunblock on my face after I brush my teeth in the morning.

In other words, I had to break up with summer. Get a divorce.

My mood darkened. No more cooling off in the Mississippi River with my dog as she barks at the passing paddle-wheel boats that are filled with wedding parties.

Then I came to my senses: Renegotiate the terms.

Summer, when you're older, may not be as sexy as when you were younger, but it can be a wonderful companion.

(MORE: [Protect Your Skin to Look and Feel Better](#))

I don't need to lie on a beach all day, or on my roof deck for hours. No more investing my precious time trying to get the perfect tan. I prefer to sit in the shade reading a book or my New Yorkers. I've earned that privilege.

As for summer nights, I rewrote that clause years ago. I can't stay up as late, not like I once did. But as exciting as those days of all-night partying and drinking were, they came with a big price, physically and mentally. I love going to bed on a summer night

with the window open. I'll let the sheers do the dancing in the moonlight. I want to wake up energized.

Sorry, old girl (I'm talking to my dog). I won't be able to join you in the river this year. But I'll be close by, wearing a straw hat and sitting under an old oak tree whose gracious but gnarled roots extend deep into the water. It's known many beautiful summer afternoons.

I can't wait.



By [John Stark](#)

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