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Autumn Weather

As we approach the end of summer, all the little reminders have been badgering us with subtle changes that lessen the impact of having to admit that it is truly over. We have had the ominous sprinkling of brown leaves on the grass and paths, days that promise hours of sunshine but which turn less pleasant by mid-morning, and the realisation at the end of August that chilly October is only a few weeks away. This last one brings the inevitable question, will September side with August and be kind and warm, or cruelly take sides with October against our hopes and wishes? Officially autumn (or fall) begins on the 21st of September, but as far as I am concerned it is all about the weather, and what it allows us to do comfortably (or not) and with what clothing or precautions.

This summer in the UK has had several hot spells but also a few periods of heavy stormy rain, so there has not been a time when the fine weather has continued long enough for us to entirely forget that we are living in chilly Britain. I welcome the rain as it makes for a green and healthy garden, cleans the paths and the greenhouse glass of accumulated debris, and swells the apples and pears on my trees. Summer rain here is not particularly cold unless it is also windy. The fish in the pond love it, as they find flies washed into the water, or at least they get the entertainment of patrolling the pond, as the rain pelts down on it, looking for these goodies sent from above, much as we go round hunting for unexpected bargains in the shops and markets.

The first day of cooler breezes is always noticeable, as I find myself out and about miles from home without a jumper, and the prospect of waiting for the bus or train wishing that I had brought one. That is the first reminder that the weather gives us a limited number of carefree months to play with, and that they are nearly used up. I spent my early years determined to be always prepared for the cold and generally went about

encumbered with mostly unnecessary coats and jumpers "just in case". As I now travel round the city and suburbs more than I did in the past, I have taken the opposite point of view, and become determined not to be carrying more stuff than I need. The answer to this is the "Kag In A Bag" a kagoule (thin nylon rain jacket) that rolls up to fit into a small drawstring bag.

It is easy to concentrate too much on these minute details of home life and comfort, but as I write we are seeing the devastation and destruction caused by two hurricanes, Harvey and Irma, in quick succession, sweeping over the islands of the Caribbean and onto mainland Florida. Our television screens are bringing us images of the damage caused and overflowing rivers cascading violently through city streets. It is easy for city dwellers to be more distanced from natural forces and, in the busy-ness of daily life, to forget that they are not far away and can wipe out our creations in a short space of time. In our favour we have extensive monitoring and forecasting capabilities, and the ability to travel large distances rapidly, although evacuation may not be available to those living in the islands or in poor areas.

During these events we definitely do not want to see a reporter broadcasting their piece live from the sea front or riverside, with the storm surge piling up behind them. Northern Britain has more storms than we do in the south but nothing remotely on that scale. The last big and widespread storm we have had in southern England was in October 1987, which stripped the leaves from the trees and we went from the green of autumn to bare winter overnight. Being in full leaf, many trees fell, which would not have happened if the branches had been bare. The constant howling of the wind, without variation or gusts, was quite strange and unforgettable, especially as the electricity was also out, and is something that we hope we will not hear again. (713 words)