

The news from Lake Okeechobee

As we look north to our fellow IBMers this quarter, we Floridians wonder what all the fuss is about. We ask, what's this "winter" that you speak of? And more importantly, how'd we get on the Lands' End catalogue mailing list?

I'm not saying we're totally clueless about winter. It's just that we have a different name for it, a re-branding if you will; Summer Lite. You see, on at least two long, grueling nights a year the jet stream rushes down, down, down the continent, coloring the weather map with bands of purple, ice blue and (when it's below zero!) pink. It reaches us with spiky blasts in the 40s and 30s, not to mention those wacky upper 20s. We ask, could this be the mythic force behind those images of snowpersons, pink-faced children and inconvenienced barnyard tabbies you keep spamming our in-boxes with? Because, we're not sure if we like it.

Summer Lite is a whimsical time of year where the whole world is air conditioned for our delight. But its beauty is deceptive. Unsuspecting, we walk into a matinee movie and emerge two hours later, finding that our poor, sandaled toes are lain bare to freezing elements. With naive optimism we try our luck at the glamorous world of layering, only to discover that once indoors and in public you can get arrested for taking them off. We cry out, who is this cruel stranger and why does it force us into sock-dom? Ah northerners, how do you do it?

One night, to the alarm of Central Floridians (all orange farmers, night-shift marathon runners or tent dwellers, of course) the local news announced the temperature would drop to 29 degrees... *sometime* between midnight and dawn. Filled with hope, I left the watering can half-full on the lanai (a term immortalized by iconic Floridian Blanche Devereaux). At four a.m. I rushed out of bed and peered into the can... but the water wasn't frozen! Once again, this proves my theory that ice forming outside of the freezer is simply impossible.

You see northern friends, we Floridians are a different breed. We're a strain once or twice descended from you, but mutated by intense gamma radiation and citric acid. The follies of long johns and heated car seats are lost upon us. But, we "get" what's up with this "winter" stuff. We can tell you, 62 degrees feels just like 23 when you count the wind chill. We simply don't choose to live in igloos and endure your harsh lifestyle. Why? Because it isn't possible for humans to survive it. In fact, FSU scientists say that folks who live north of the state line may actually be bears enchanted to look human, perhaps by Santa Claus. As humble folk, we are content to nod politely at your insistent refusals that this is ridiculous.

While we don't pretend to understand your love of nutmeg, Summer Lite is the season where we welcome you to our tables, be they at the Golden Corral or at a cantina in Little Havana. But we make one request. Please, please refrain from defiling our sacred symbol of lazy warmth—the flip-flop—with knee socks. And that's the news from Lake

Okeechobee; where the birds are mosquitoes, swimsuits are formal wear, and the children are all por encima de tipo.