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MY VIEW Winter Woes, Summer Revels

My husband and I moved to Western New York a year ago in June. Our heads had been filled by our Massachusetts friends with stories of Buffalo winters – snowstorms without end, constantly fighting the elements, lives driven by the weather. So when I started hearing about garden tours, not just in Buffalo but in many surrounding communities, it seemed at odds with this image of Buffalo in my mind. When garden tour time came last summer to Hamburg, where I live, I decided to take a look. To be honest, based on what I'd heard about the weather, I thought it best to keep my expectations low. After all, what can you expect from an area that's supposed to be mostly winter?

But as I walked the streets of the village, following the garden map from home to home, my expectations were dashed – and replaced by happy joy. The gardens I saw were not just beautiful, they were creative, whimsical, thoughtful. Adorning their yards with flowers and shrubs, fountains and fairy statues, bird feeders and houses, these gardeners embraced life and nature, in all their glory. Then they opened their yards for all to see and partake. *The summer may be fleeting, they seemed to say, but life right now is very, very good.*

These gardens were acts of devotion, labors of love. Some were places of quiet contemplation, full of waterfalls and shaded benches. Some were a riot of colors, filled with plants I'd long known and some I'd never seen or even heard of. Others were centers for gatherings of family and friends, places where loved ones could join together surrounded by beauty.

I was exuberant at having a chance to see the gardens so many of my neighbors had created. But I have to confess, a little perplexed that my paltry expectations had been turned topsy-turvy. I tucked that thought in the back of my mind, a little bit of me wondering. Why?

Summer turned to fall, and the end of the year loomed. Winter was long, but to my surprise, not especially snowy. I tried hard not to gloat when the New Englanders who had sounded dire warnings about Buffalo weather were themselves pummeled by blizzard after blizzard; I know next year the situation could be reversed. Mostly winter seemed endlessly gray, day after day after day. Toward the end of it, I found myself craving sunshine. Instead, we got rain, rain and more rain. Trying to mow the lawn was like trying to mow mud.

But then finally, inevitably, came the sun. Oh, to feel the warmth on your face again was a wonderful comfort. Now, a year from our arrival in Western New York, I see people once more in their gardens.

I thought back to the prior summer, when my expectations about the garden tour had been set on their heads. And a glimmer of understanding is emerging. Gardening is not about the short growing season. It's not about how quickly the snows will come again. It's about feeling the pure delight in the sunshine and flowers we have right now.

Sometimes, what makes something dear to us is a reflection of our understanding just how precious it is, how fleeting it may be. When we've been ill, we relish every day we are well. When a loved one is away, we cherish the time spent with them when they return. When we lose our jobs, we feel gratitude for a new job found.

After months of gray skies, Western New Yorkers revel in the warmth of the sun, feel a surge of joy at the sight of lilies blooming, are dizzy with the smell of roses perfuming the air.

Sure, in a matter of months, the days of snow and gray will reappear. Winter will come again.

But then again, so will the spring.