

A MIDGE ENCOUNTER

I met him on a long weekend while renting a house with my extended family on the shore of Lake Ontario. The house manager warned us not to open the porch door at night. It faced the water and the midges would come swarming in the house. They don't bite. They just annoy. And even though midges only live 3-5 days, they can make a mess when the house becomes their final resting place.

Well, sure enough, one of the grandchildren opened the door and one got inside, flew around the living room, and landed on my knee. I raised my newspaper to finish him off when he yelled, "Stop". Now, I know bugs don't talk to humans, but his story was so intriguing I forgot about the obvious.

He explained that when midges emerge from their larva stage, they don't know it, but they only have a short time to live. Most midges come out with wings flapping and can't believe what's happened. They panic. They start flying in all directions, usually towards the first lights they see, but they don't know why. Some just go it alone and do what they think is right in their own eyes. Others form swarms, packs of midges that just go with the crowd. They assume they will be around forever. They don't realize the clock has started on the few days they have on earth.

He talked like he had somehow gained more wisdom than can be acquired in 3-5 days, so I asked how long he had left on his clock, and here's the thing. He said, "I've been around for over 2 months now." For some mysterious reason, he hadn't died like the others and there was no indication his end was soon. Every other midge he'd met had been eaten or squashed, or simply ran out of time. He expected to go when he saw the others fall, but he just kept flying, day and night, night and day, he'd kept going. "It's not natural!" he said. Well, I'd read Tuck Everlasting and seen Ground Hog Day, so my first thought was that it was something like that. We kept talking. I asked: "Why do you think you are still alive? Do you have a special purpose?"

Obviously, he had gained some perspective with age. He'd seen the folly so many had fallen into and felt he should try and share his new found wisdom with the younger generation. He told them that life was short and they needed to do things that mattered. He warned them about traps and dangers that seemed attractive at first. He tried to show them how to care for others, listen, and not to insist on their own way. Build friendships, even with other species. Use your short time on earth wisely.

Incensed, he blurted out, "Did they listen? No. They don't have time for that stuff. Midges just want to have fun."

When he finished the story, he said he had to go out to the water and meet up with some new midges, still hoping some would listen. I opened the door that faced the lake and he flew out.

I've told many people about meeting the Midge this summer, but they don't want to think about how short life is and how to value the time you have. People just want do what they feel like doing. They don't have time to think about a purpose for life. They say they don't have the time and I tell them they don't have time not to.