



Query

My vacation starts in a day.

One day. My vacation.

It's only a week, but it's mine, all mine, and I'm taking it, and I'm not looking back.

Plans? Just fishing with my daughter on the Saint John River. And swimming at the pool. And making some desultory stops at museums. A few back-forths on river ferries. Nothing, really. A whole lot of nothing. Nothing, intentionally. No, wait. I will do one thing intentionally. I'll buy and read a Sunday paper. Yes, I'll do that.

One thing I won't do, intentionally. I won't think of what will happen while I'm gone, I won't fret about my flock, I won't worry about how much work will pile up until my return. You see, I've learned a little secret: the world turns without me. People will get sick without me; they'll get better without me; and I'll only be gone a week.

One week. I'm giddy.

What to pack? No pager. No stethoscope. No lab coat. No dress shoes. No belt! Yes to shorts and golf shirts. For I have decided, for my vacation, that the weather will be fine, nice, exemplary. It's an occasion, my vacation. It deserves sun. I believe this so firmly that I've resolutely decided not to check the forecast. What good will it do? If it rains, it rains. But it's not going to rain — it's my *vacation*.

I'm going to go somewhere, but it's not going to be anywhere. I'm going to, in the self-help vernacular, "take care of myself." I'm not going to have one medical thought. No diag-

nosing ailments among shoppers at the local grocery store (an unfortunate hobby of mine), no medical magazine perusing, no obsessive checking of the on-call pager to make sure I haven't missed a page. No. None of this. Just breakfasts at noon, and evening swims, and Sunday reads.

There was a time in my life when this would seem empty, or at least idle. No more. I'm embracing torpor. I need it. Slow slow slow. Perhaps I've finally taken the advice I've dispensed ad nauseum to countless stressballs; I'd tell them to eat right and exercise, but also to try to stop juggling so many things at once and, yes, to take care of themselves. First. Before anyone else.

That's me, right now. Taking care of myself all the way up the Saint John, a river that begins rather modestly in Maine and empties rather magnificently in southern New Brunswick. Why do I know this? Because it's important to me right now that I know it. Not the red flags of dyspepsia, not the differential for secondary hypertension. I need to know about a boat, and how I'm going to get on it, and how I'm going to operate it. Knowing the water a little bit, knowing its origin and its mouth, helps the process. It's like knowing the patient — the context of the illness sometimes reveals the illness itself.

But that's far too medical a thought. Must stop. Must bring along books like Lisa Moore's *Alligator*, like Austin Clarke's *Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack*, like Seamus Heaney's *North*, like Pauline Kael's *Kiss Kiss, Bang Bang*.

Holiday reading. Reading for pleasure. My vacation.

— Dr. Ursus