

Even in darkness, there is light

By Ruth Ostrow

*Sunshine on my shoulders makes me happy
Sunshine in my eyes can make me cry
Sunshine on the water looks so lovely
Sunshine almost always makes me high.*
John Denver

"MUM, is it bad luck to have such weather on your birthday?" my little girl asks as we drive through squalls under black clouds, and as huge hailstones pelt the windscreen.

It is perhaps one of the darkest days I've ever seen, black except for the brutal streaks of lightning flashing on the horizon. On the Gold Coast, just north of us, they are experiencing what will be reported later in the news as the most violent storm in two decades.

"No. It's actually good luck," I say, as the hailstones get bigger, one almost shattering the glass in front of me. The stones lie on the road like a mat of white. The car is skidding from its efforts to grip the unrippable, the windscreen is beginning to fog up from the heat of our fear and the cold of the wind.

"Why is it good luck?" my daughter asks, desperate to be at the beach with friends.

It's a black afternoon all around. Dark moon in Scorpio. A time of deep witchery and ominous portents.

The time just before new moon -- dark moon -- is a time in folklore of vampires, werewolves and mysterious creatures who inhabit the in-between world. It's a time when anything can happen.

My cat knows it, pressed against the wall in fear, his fur standing on end, well before the storm.

"Mum ...," my daughter begins as I think of the irony of this situation. It's customary on her birthday that I sing her the song I sang to her when she was first born.

Possibly because I was deranged from hormones, sleep-deprived from breastfeeding, brain-damaged from watching infomercials, but those first nights after I brought her home from hospital, I couldn't get John Denver's song *Sunshine on My Shoulders* out of my head for a second. I would sing it over and over while rocking her to sleep, often weeping with joy as I gazed at her sunny little face:

*If I had a tale that I could tell you
I'd tell a tale sure to make you smile.
If I had a wish that I could wish for you
I'd make a wish for sunshine all the while.*

"Mum, why is it good luck to be storming on your birthday?" "Because it is a powerful time, a black time, a time of passion and pain and sacred things, of deep creativity," I say, trying to navigate the emotionally slippery terrain.

"Because it's part of the natural world, which is full of sunshine but also blessed with winter and dark moons and storms. These are all beautiful, exciting things." I have spent an eternity locking horns with my mother over this very point. "I just want you to be safe and happy," she'd say as I struggled to run with the wolves. "I wish for you only good things." "But Mum, I don't want only good things.

I don't want to be wrapped in cotton wool.

I don't want candy-coated happy ever after. No growth comes from being immunised against life." "When you're a mother you will understand," she predicted. But I still don't.

When Jews break a glass they say mazeltov (good luck) as things shatter. When mystics draw the death card in tarot they are relieved because it means rebirth, a new start, death of parts of ourselves that need to be cut away. In Eastern traditions the dark night of the soul precedes enlightenment. In mythology storms are the stuff of climax and clarity.

There can't be days filled with endless happiness and sunshine, and it would be a boring old existence if there were. "Storms are lucky," I say to my nine-year-old daughter, who is deep in philosophical thought in the back seat. "So does that mean you'll let me buy that Eminem CD today? That would be cool luck." In bed that night, stroking her hair, I sing Sunshine and I cry as I always have, and always will, in gratitude for her life. And then I tell her the truth. I do not wish her sunshine all the while any more.

Singer-songwriter Joni Mitchell said in a recent documentary that her greatest work, her deepest insights, her profoundest, richest life experiences and wisdoms have been born of pain.

And so when I get to that line in the song, I offer my child the wish of all the richest weather possible: sunshine, rain, hail, cold, searing heat, freezing winds, passionate sandstorms, exhilarating tempests, balmy nights on tropical islands, Indian summers, Siberian winters, golden autumn days that go on forever. May they all be your teachers all the while.

The thunder still cracks overhead. My daughter smiles at me with her ancient eyes, knowing at her deepest core that she got lucky with Eminem after all. And that in our house all experiences, all things under the sun -- good and bad -- are sacred.

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First published in The Weekend Australian SAT 08 NOV 2003