

SUNDAY, JULY 2, 2006

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Lessons Along Rock Creek

Despite a flooded basement and the threat of more showers, I had to see what last week's rain had done to Rock Creek Park. At Boundary Bridge on the Maryland-District line, I looked for a familiar trail — but there was no trail. Instead, I bushwhacked through a wet jumble of flattened spicebush, pawpaws and bladdernut trees. River birches and ironwoods leaned far into the creek at life-threatening angles.

The park that usually hummed with hikers and tail-wagging dogs was an alien landscape. Fish swam in places that were dry land a day before. The horizontal shrubs and small trees went on for acres. I touched the trunks of the tall tulip trees, ashes and sycamores that were still standing and that had seen massive flooding before. But how would they fare if flooding became a regular occurrence, as many climate change models predict?

Sopping wet from climbing through limbs and fording temporary streams, I meandered down toward "my" meditation rock. On many sunny mornings I have sat on this rock and marveled over the way the reflected light plays on the undersides of the leaves of two beech trees. The trees reach out from each side of the creek and touch in the middle. Often, a great blue



BY MELANIE CHOUKAS-BRADLEY

Damage in swollen Rock Creek last week.

heron will land on the nearby shore, or a pair of wood ducks will silently paddle downstream.

But there would be no more limb-touching light shows, because the beech on the opposite shore had been uprooted and had fallen into the creek. I could just make out my meditation rock under the rushing muddy water, and the beech on my side of the creek still stood.

As I drove home to another round of bailing water out of our basement, I was filled with conflicting emotions. Storms have always fascinated me, and who could be numb to their power? But the knowledge that our climate-altering way of life may be stealing our children's future is now inescapable.

On Tuesday night I heard a slight pickup in the intensity of the rain falling on our skylight and I was able to anticipate new flooding and begin bailing in time to avert it. With a little observation, it's easy to adapt and learn how to keep your basement dry. But how will we adapt to the larger challenges brought on by the unpredictability of climate change? Or better yet, what can we do to lessen those changes and pass on to our children a recognizable map of the world?

— Melanie Choukas-Bradley
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