

Filling Your Cup: Calm After the Storm

By: Nirupama Madduri, MD



Living in Southern California, in addition to devastating wildfires, earthquakes, and various car-mageddon events, atmospheric rivers flow through, bringing rain, wind, and floods. As we ended 2025 and began our journey in 2026, rain arrived, left, and arrived again. This reminded me how we confront storms frequently throughout our lives. When they come, there is darkness, rain, thunder, lightning. They seem as though they will never end. It is almost oppressive, when there is a large storm cloud preventing any light from entering our visual field.

While visiting my father in my hometown of Poplar Bluff, Missouri, I had to drive to St. Louis to catch my return flight home. I planned my start time with the hopes of avoiding a predicted thunderstorm. However, plans change constantly, and the storm cloud quickly found me. Darkness ensued, followed by a torrential downpour. When we confront a storm in our lives, we have options. We can wait it out or we can go into it.

The storms where I waited were always frightening. I experienced challenges in my work life, in my home life, with friends and family members. Life is supposed to be sunshine and rainbows every day. When the dark cloud covers the light of the sun and the cascade of rain descends upon us, we do not always have our raincoat and rain boots. We are essentially unprepared, as our protective tools are not with us. This is the time folks choose to wait out the storm. We may choose alcohol, food, and ultimately, avoidance. It is easier to stop, and allow the storm to pass by, especially when we are without the proper protections. We pull over, wait, and watch. We notice how hard the rain falls. We listen to how loudly the thunder roars. We see how deep the puddles are. We watch how others walk or drive in the storm, admiring their rain gear. We wait for the storm to pass, so we can return to sunny days.

After watching how everyone else manages subsequent storms, we learn a few lessons. We start carrying an umbrella with us. We know what the weather will be, and we bring our protective raingear. This is the time we go directly into the storm. When I was driving, I continued to drive during the storm. Visibility was poor and the wind was an additional hazard. I remembered what I learned from years of driving. I drove slowly, stayed focused and patient, and made it out of the storm. I was present, and did not worry about how long I was there or worry about what was behind and what was ahead.

The beauty of a thunderstorm is that after the chaos and uncertainty, I always see the sunlight. After this storm, I was fortunate enough to see a rainbow. Everything is always so colorful and vibrant, and there is a serene moment. We spend more time in these calm and beautiful moments. However, it is the storm that shows us what we

need to know and teaches us lessons we need as well. In the words of the inimitable Rabindranath Tagore, “Clouds come floating into my life, no longer to carry rain or usher storms, but to add color to my sunset sky.”