

This is Lieutenant Roger McCort of The Salvation Army in Eureka with today's Community Comment.

Way back in the early days of my youth I thought the voices I heard from the radio were very tiny people living inside of it. Back then you had to turn a knob to power the radio on and there was always a loud CLICK when you did it. I figured that was the sound of the lights going on inside the receiver, waking the people up so they could start talking, singing or playing music. I was glad I wasn't stuck inside that dark little box.

When I went to college the first time around, I began studying a science called electron microscopy. We used special microscopes which harnessed charged particles to take pictures of things too tiny to be seen with the naked eye. Think of those black and white close ups of bacteria or the facets of a bug's eye and you'll know what I'm talking about. At the time, the technology we used required us to sit inside a small, windowless room next to a pillar of electronics which could, if mishandled, spring a leak and irradiate the user. It was a confining field of study and one I left after a year for a curriculum which allowed more time outside.

Not being a particularly quick learner, a few years later I accepted a job at a photo lab. It was at a large central processing center, back when people needed such things to get their photos printed. I was in the negative room, a four by six unlighted cubical where we worked with film so sensitive to light that we weren't allowed to open the door except for lunch and to go home. I lasted about six months there before I found myself looking for a job – any job! – that gave me access to a window.

Why do I bring up these decades-old experiences now? Well, it's January, and the rains have come down for what seems a month straight and I'm starting to get that same trapped-in-the-dark feeling each of those situations created in me. I am at risk of letting cabin fever get the better of me.

Countless Americans chafe at the restrictions winter weather imposes on us during this time of the year. About ten million of those actually fall victim to Seasonal Affective Disorder, a mental issue brought on by prolonged exposure to shorter, colder days. Symptoms of S.A.D. include irritability, overeating, a desire to sleep more, and even outright depression. And, you guessed it, it affects people here in northern California at a slightly higher rate than most of the country. If I had to guess why, I'd say that we are an outdoor kind of people who aren't quite right when we can't get out on a hike every once in awhile.

Fortunately, there are ways to treat this sense of creeping claustrophobia, most of which are pretty simple, once you convince yourself to get out of bed. Doctors say that getting more exercise is key, so when there's a break in the clouds, get out there, even if only to walk around the block. Stick to a regular schedule to get plenty of sleep, but not too much. Take in more vitamin D through healthy eating or added supplements.

Finally, you could always do what I do at this time of year when I start to feel trapped: Start planning a vacation. Thinking about heading into the great outdoors under the sunshine can pick up even the darkest of spirits.

Grace and peace to you. This has been Lt. Roger McCort for KINS Community Comment.