

Losing My Cool

Written by Margaret Evans, Editor



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Life as an independent publisher has many rewards, but they're not always monetary. When both adults in a household toil in that noble field for a living, much of that household is likely to be held together with duct tape. The situation can be humbling, but it can also be an exhilarating test of your resourcefulness!

How many ways *can* you recycle that dress? How many times can you trim your own hair before you need a professional? How can you lobby the state of South Carolina to adopt the barter system as its primary economy? How many things that most folks call "necessities" can you recognize as luxuries and live without?

Lots! And that's a fact.

But here in the Lowcountry, a working air conditioner is not one of them.

Last week, after many years of dedicated service, and following a prolonged illness, our AC motor passed away. The dear little trooper had been on life support for some time, but my husband â Master of the Jerry-rig â thought we might be able to nurse it through the rest of the summer. Over the past few years, we'd developed all sorts of clever tricks, most of them involving a hose and a stick. This summer, the fan had taken to shutting off more frequently, and we'd been banging it back into action several times a day with whatever was handy; Jeff often used the knife sharpener, I preferred the end of my dust mop. We knew this was only a temporary tactic, not a long-term strategy â that the day of reckoning was fast upon us. We'd just hoped it would happen in late October, giving us 'til late April to deal with it.

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Alas, our hopes were dashed last week when the Little Motor that Could finally . . . couldn't. It coughed and sputtered through its death throes for a couple of days first â the temperature in our house slowly rising, along with our dread â as we awaited the arrival of its replacement, which had to be ordered from somewhere far, far away. (That's what happens when you have an AC system that they stopped making in the Pleistocene Age.) Unfortunately, our elderly, long-suffering motor gave up the ghost before said replacement had arrived, leaving us with no AC whatsoever for 36 hours.

In August.

Let me say, first, that Air Conditioning is a particularly well-named product. During the course of our AC-less ordeal, we discovered that it's not so much about the temperature of the air in your home . . . it's about the *quality* of the air in your home: its "condition," if you will. Eighty-five degrees is a pleasant enough temperature when you're outside under the clear blue sky, breathing God's good clean air. When it's 85 degrees inside your house â with no AC to dry things out â the air is stagnant and stinky and utterly oppressive.

When you lose your cool, it's easy to lose your cool . . . even with the ones you love. (Especially them.) You have to be careful to preserve family morale.

So we did what we always do at our house when the power goes out or the microwave breaks or what have you: we pretended we were pioneers! Incidentally, this approach works much better when your child is eight than when she's thirteen. Still, Amelia bore up admirably (her iPhone was still working, after all), and the adventure was not without its charm.

Around 5:30 the first evening, in an attempt to raise my own spirits â and forgetting, momentarily, that I was a pioneer â I took to Facebook with the following post:

"Our AC is broken, it's August, and I've just run out of wine. I know there are people with real problems in the world, but I could use a little love, y'all."

Well, you would not believe the response! And not just words of encouragement â€” some heartfelt, some just hilarious â€” but displays of generosity that truly took my breath away. All I'd hoped for was some distracting FB banter . . . a little company in my misery. But before an hour had passed, I'd received several private messages â€” some from people I don't even know that well â€” offering us everything from guest cottages to empty houses to window units to dinner that night (with wine!). I was deeply touched. In case you had any doubt, people, Beaufort *really* steps up when there's an emergency. And, apparently, most Beaufortonians view a broken AC in August as exactly that. An emergency.

Of course, we didn't take anybody up on their offer. Jeff is a Stoic and believes everyone else should be, too. I am a Southerner and would rather endure intense pain and suffering than "put y'all to any trouble." So, we stayed home and sweated it out. Literally.

It was a long, dreadful night. As one of my FB friends so perfectly phrased it, "There's nothing worse than spending an August night in the Lowcountry under the ceiling fan, pretending it's not that bad."

During those terrible, sleep-defying, soul-destroying hours, I had time â€” lots of time â€” to reflect on every mistake I've ever made, the hapless trajectory of my life, the meaninglessness of my existence, and the hopelessness of the human condition. When that got boring, I started thinking about AC.

How in the world did my parents, both Southern born and bred, survive their childhoods without it? Ask them, and you'll hear sepia-tinted stories about iced tea and drawn curtains, whirring fans and sleeping porches, shade trees and mid-afternoon naps. It all sounds very languorous and romantic, and maybe it was. Maybe they were happy in that slower, less frenetic time, when children walked home from school for lunch and grown-ups took naps and families cooled off after supper with homemade ice cream. If you'd never known AC, would you miss AC? I doubt it.

But it's a moot question. Like so many modern inventions we were just fine without, now that we've got it, we can't live without it. When our new motor finally arrived late the next afternoon, Amelia had gone off to spend the night with a friend. (She's neither as stoic as her dad nor as southern as her mom. That's natural selection at work, I suppose.) Around 9 pm, I texted her and said, "You won't believe this. It's 79 degrees here!" At this point, anything under 80 seemed like a flat miracle.

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"Really?!?!" she texted back.

"Yep," I replied.

"Yay!!!!!" she responded.

Who says texting is an inferior form of communication? I felt her jubilation from all the way across town. Or maybe it was my own.

We're still deep in the dog days, my friends, so take a lesson from me. AC is not a luxury, it's a necessity. Be good to yours and it will be good to you. And if it's not, try beating it with a stick.

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