

The Summer of Our Discontent

Written by Margaret Evans, Editor



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Lately, producing this column feels like squeezing that last bit of dry, crusty toothpaste from the tube you should have thrown out a week ago. There's nothing much left in there, but you're too lazy to shop and teeth must be brushed.

This often happens to me during the dog days. I call it Summer Brain Drain. The heat, humidity, long days and lax schedule conspire to turn my mind into mush. I currently have a head full of oatmeal. Mental porridge.

So it's Friday, and I'm sitting, staring listlessly at my computer, while my daughter's on the sofa scrolling through TV channels. She, too, has Summer Brain Drain. While she scans the TV Guide screen, looking for something to waste another hour on – because those Summer Reading assignments must be avoided at all cost – I'm scanning my Facebook newsfeed, looking for something to write about.

My friend Collin, who lives in Munich, has just posted: "We are safe. Pissed off, but safe."

Oh no. What now? I google "Germany" and up come the headlines about Munich. At least six are dead at a shopping mall. Gunmen (one or more) still on the loose.

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I tell my daughter what's happened and she reluctantly flips from some home makeover show to CNN, where full coverage is in progress.

"Mom, why does this happen all the time? It's, like, *every week* now."

What do you tell a fourteen-year-old? What do you tell yourself? The flags have been at half-mast all week – we know this, because we've been Water Festing in the park – and it seems possible they may never fly at full staff again.

The New Normal. That's what everybody's calling it. And I hate that phrase. I hate the way we've all become accustomed to it. I hate that my first response to my Munich friend's FB post was, "What now?" – as if terrorism were just some irritating nuisance, like no-see-ums at the party or a deer in the tomato patch.

I don't want to get used to this.

After watching the news for a while, I return to my computer and Amelia to her home makeover show. Apparently, it's over – "Thanks a lot, Mom!" – so she heads back to the TV Guide, where she learns that *Frozen* is about to air on the Disney Channel. Her heavy-lidded eyes light up a bit as she shares this news.

"Come watch it with me, Mom! Please..."

I'm so tempted. Tempted to curl up with my girl, escape to the sparkly world of Elsa and Ana and ice castles and "Let It Go." It's hot outside, and it's been hot for so long, and yes, *I wanna build a snowman* . . .

"I can't, sweetie," I reply. "I've got to work. I'm on deadline and I still don't have a column idea. I'm glad you're watching *Frozen*, though. I didn't even know you liked that movie anymore."

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“Oh, yeah... I love it! We all do. We watched it at Tessa’s sleepover the other night.”

This casual revelation almost brings me to tears. It also brings me to something I find endearing – but strange, and maybe a little sad – about my daughter’s generation of teenagers. They are deeply, oddly enamored of children’s movies, children’s TV shows, and corny sitcoms from bygone eras.

My daughter would rather watch reruns of *Full House* and *That Seventies Show* than almost anything else on television. She loves watching old episodes of *Hannah Montana* and *Wizards of Waverly Place*, and is always happy to spend time with *Sponge Bob Square Pants*.

She is almost fifteen years old, a rising sophomore, and an Eagle Scholar at Beaufort High.

When I was around Amelia’s age, my friends and I were *not* watching cartoons and hokey sitcoms. We were trying to sneak into R-rated movies. We were begging our parents to let us watch *Saturday Night Live* and *Saturday Night Fever* and *Halloween*.

When videos came along, we were hell-bent on renting *The Exorcist*.

In middle school, we were passing around a dog-eared paperback copy of Judy Blume’s *Forever* and, later, it was *Valley of the Dolls*.

□□□□□□□□ We were young innocents desperate for a dose of danger . . . or at least a smidgeon of experience.

I fear my daughter and her friends are exactly the opposite. Born in 2001, they don’t remember a world before 9/11. They don’t remember a world before regular school shootings

and frequent terrorist attacks. They've never known a world without 24/7 news coverage, or raging Twitter wars, or peer-pressure-y Instagram posts, or group texts that beep and buzz all night long. A world without *Real Housewives* or *Toddlers in Tiaras* or *Pretty Little Liars*. Heck, they've never even known a world without Kardashians.

Is it any wonder they romanticize the simple, sappy antics of Bob Saget, John Stamos and the Olsen twins?

(Okay, it's kind of a wonder. But I think you get my point.)

My daughter and her friends recently spent a week in the mountains of Virginia at Young Life camp. She tells me her two favorite things about camp were: #1) Having her phone confiscated for a week; and #2) Fifties Night.

"I wish I'd lived in the 50s, Mom; things were so nice back then. No smart phones. No social media. And I love the clothes. And the music."

Well, it's two weeks later and the kids have all returned to their phones, their music, *and* their contemporary clothing (which, in the case of the girls, is practically non-existent during the hot months. Thanks, Kardashians.).

They have also returned to Baton Rouge and Dallas and Nice and Munich. To BlackLivesMatter and BlueLivesMatter and ISIS and Brexit and protests and riots and funerals and political conventions where everybody shouts. It's all swirling around them, all the time.

But not to worry. They're currently distracted by the Pokemon Go craze. This wildly popular game – played on their phones, of course – actually forces them to get off the couch and go out into the world, where they search for Pokemons (Pokemen?) to add to their virtual collection. While there, in the world, they might encounter a library or a flower or maybe even another human being. Who knows?! This is why parents grudgingly like the game. The kids like it for its nostalgic aspect. Pokemon Go harkens back to the 1990s, those halcyon days of yore. That golden era of *Full House*. The age of innocence.

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In this, the summer of our discontent, I'm not about to disabuse them of that sentimental fantasy. Play on, kids. Pokemon forever.

Margaret Evans is the editor of Lowcountry Weekly. (Read more of her [Rants & Raves](#) here or visit her blog at

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